



Back to Red and Blue in Québec

OPINION



The implosion of, not the idea of separatism, but the political relevance of separatism.

The 2018 election of the CAQ and its re-election in 2022 provides compelling evidence of the demise of separatism.

The implosion of, not the idea of separatism, but the political relevance of separatism. Separatism, defined as the political movement seeking to establish an independent state within the present territorial boundaries of Quebec whose government would exercise all legislative, executive, and judicial authority exclusively in the French language, has never been supported by the will of a sufficient majority of people that could justify breaking up Canada.

Because the separatist project is inconsistent with our past and ill-advised for our future. The PQ is no closer today to achieving the goal of creating an independent state of Quebec than it was in 1968 when the party was created. The Québec Solidaire hipster version of the movement fares no better. Intelligent, talented people work for the PQ and Québec Solidaire.

But the root cause of their failure to achieve the raison d'être of their parties is simple. They continue to try to sell what most voters are not interested to buy. The idea of separatism can live forever. But the political relevance of this idea is politically spent.



Back to Red and Blue in Québec... Continued

OPINION

The collateral damage that the clash of the federalist-separatist visions wreaked on the potential of Quebec was tragic and referred to in my third op-ed article written in 2021. Quebec has no business continuing to be a have-not province. The collapse of the political relevance of separatism means that we are back to red-blue politics in Quebec, what Antoine Dionne Charest refers to as the liberal-authoritarian divide, where parties compete for the power to govern by campaigning on the real issues challenging Quebec.

The CAQ government may claim to be focused on creating more wealth for Quebec, but its flagship concerns are language, identity, and the politics of division. No one disputes the imperative of ensuring the vitality of the French language. But we are entitled to disagree on the “how” of attaining this goal contained in Bill 96 without being gaslighted and called disloyal to Quebec. We are similarly entitled to object to Bill 21 as well as the invoking of the notwithstanding clause in passing Bills 21 and 96 to shield the obvious human rights violations stated in those laws from judicial scrutiny. Our constitutional commitment to the rule of law ensures nonetheless our right to contest these laws in court. Those aggrieved by these laws have already begun to do so. It is hardly reductive to consider Premier Legault and the CAQ as a reprised version of Maurice Duplessis and the Union Nationale. The similarities are too obvious to be ignored. In 1937, the Duplessis Union Nationale government passed the Padlock Law. This law authorized the attorney-general to direct sheriffs to shut down meeting places of those suspected of endorsing “communism” or “bolshevism.”

The law was used to persecute Jehovah’s Witnesses, Jews, communists, trade unionists and anyone deemed a subversive.

Though opposed by civil libertarians of that era, the Padlock Law was supported by a majority of Quebecers. Sound familiar?

For some 20 years, the law remained in force, with Quebec lower courts affirming its validity. In 1957, the Supreme Court of Canada declared the Padlock Law unconstitutional. There was no Canadian Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms in 1957. The Supreme Court worked with what it had to abolish that odious law. Maurice Duplessis was Premier of Quebec from 1936 to 1939 and from 1944 to 1959. Duplessis had a good run. But it did come to an end. The Liberal victory in 1960 ushered in a modern era- the Quiet Revolution. Quebec voters have rarely given a political party more than two mandates- no matter how popular the leader. The CAQ is not immune to this reality. Do Liberals really need to be reminded that in the 15 and a half years from April 4, 2003 to October 18, 2018 the Charest – Couillard Liberals held power for approximately 14 of those years? Jean Charest garnered a record breaking three election victories and ranks number 5 out of 32 Quebec premiers in terms of time in office as Premier of Québec. Robert Bourassa ranks number 4. We all know who ranks number 1. In politics, popularity is ephemeral.

Those on the liberal side of this new divide must embrace principled persistence and patience. And be prepared to tirelessly advocate their vision of a more prosperous and inclusive Quebec. Liberals must be inspired by a steadfast faith in the power of their vision to ultimately prevail.

And as we do our work- time is our friend.

Ralph Mastromonaco practices criminal law in Montreal. www.mastromonaco.ca