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ÚALK

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Oh Canada!
Oh Quebec!

REQUIEM FOR A DIVIDED COUNTRY

M O R D E C A I R I C H L E R

Penguin Books

One

NINETEEN NINETY. On a perfect summer day in Montreal, local raspberries in season, two tickets to that night's ball game riding in my breast pocket, I went to meet some friends at a downtown bar I favored at the time: Woody's Pub, on Bishop Street. As I arrived, a solemn middle-aged man was taking photographs of the blackboard mounted on the outside steps. He was intent on a notice scrawled in chalk on the board:

TODAY'S SPECIAL
Ploughman's Lunch

The notice happened to be a blatant violation of Quebec's Bill 178, which prohibits exterior signs in any language but French, and the photographer was one of a number of self-appointed vigilantes who, on lazy summer days off from work, do not head for the countryside to cool off in the woods or to fish; instead, they dutifully search the downtown streets for English-language or bilingual commercial signs that are an affront to Montreal's *visage linguistique*—HIYA! VERMONT BASEBALL FANS WELCOME HERE, say, or HAPPY HOUR 5 TO 7. They photograph the evidence and then lodge an official complaint with the Commission de protection de la langue francaise. Woody was lucky. A chalkboard sign can be erased. However, had he chosen to promote his lunches with an outside neon sign in English only, or even a bilingual one, that would have been something else again. A first offense would get him off with no worse than a warning from one of the commission's inspectors. All the same, a dossier would be opened on him. There would be another visit to his bar and, if he persisted in his obloquy, a letter from a bailiff with a thirty-day warning, and then a period of grace of up to nine months before he might be scheduled

to appear in court, where he could be fined a maximum of $570. Woody could easily spin out the process for a couple of years, maybe longer, behave himself for a month, post another English-only or bilingual sign, and start the ball rolling again. The truth is, we have always done things differently in Quebec, our laws seldom being quite what they appear to be. During the forties, for example, gambling casinos and bordellos were both illegal, but in fact Montreal was a wide-open city. Our cops, a considerate bunch in those days, would unfailingly phone the proprietor before making a raid to settle on an appropriate number of sinners to be booked, and, on leaving, would solemnly padlock a toilet rather than the front door, minimizing inconvenience to the clientele once play resumed. Honoring this tradition, the sign law, ostensibly uncompromising, in practice does not so much prohibit exterior commercial signs in languages other than French as slap a surcharge on them.

In 1990, four provincial agencies, with a total annual budget of $24 million, were in place to deal with our linguistic conundrums: the Commission de toponymie, whose function is to rename towns, rivers, and mountains that have English place-names; the Office de la langue française; the Conseil de la langue française; and the already mentioned Commission de Protection, whose inspectors have been dubbed "the tongue-troopers" by ungrateful English-speaking Montrealers.

According to the 1986 census, Montreal has a population of 2,921,357, which breaks down as follows: 1,974,115 whose mother tongue is French, 433,095 whose mother tongue is English, and 514,147 whose mother tongue is Italian, Greek, Portuguese, or other. In the new nationalist nomenclature the population is also classified as Francophone (a.k.a. the collectivity), Anglophone, or, if their mother tongue is neither French nor English, Allophone.

At Woody's Pub, where a number of us used to gather late in the afternoon to review the day's idiocies, the banter slipping from English to French and back again, we did not suffer from a lack of sustenance in the spring or summer of 1990. The

snows had hardly melted when the zealots who run Montreal's French Catholic school board shocked even the separatist Parti québécois with a demand that immigrant students who were caught shooting the breeze in English in the schoolyards should be severely punished. Then aging nutters out in smalltown Ontario trampled on a Quebec flag, wiping their shoes on the fleur-de-lis for the benefit of TV cameras. Next to be heard from was the Alliance for the Preservation of English in Canada (APEC), an organization whose president, Ron Leitch, a seventy-year-old retired lawyer, claimed 36,000 members.[1] Leitch, in an appearance before a parliamentary committee on the Official Languages Act, objected to this 1969 legislation, which had been introduced by Pierre Elliott Trudeau's government. It stated: "The English and French languages are the Official Languages of Canada for all purposes of the parliament and the government of Canada, and enjoy equality of status and equal rights and privileges as to their use in all the institutions of the parliament and government of Canada."[2] The act, he protested, was an intrusive piece of social engineering that discriminated against long-serving Anglophone civil servants, denying them promotion if they were unilingual. APEC, he had claimed in an earlier appearance before another parliamentary committee, "is not now, nor has it ever in the past, been opposed to bilingualism. Nor have we been opposed to the teaching of the French language as a subject in our schools." But if official bilingualism, imposed by Ottawa, is allowed to continue, he argued, Canada as a nation would be destroyed.[3] Furthermore, there was no point in English-speaking Canada becoming officially bilingual when Quebec had clearly rejected the policy. "In the early to mid-seventies," he said, "by a series of legislative enactments, culminating in Bill 101, the Province of Quebec became unilingually French."

Denounced for his "paranoid and bigoted views"[4] by a member of the parliamentary committee, Leitch insisted he was not prejudiced. He couldn't deny, however, that he had been inspired to found his organization, in 1977, by his reading of *Bilingual Today, French Tomorrow* by J. V. Andrew. Andrew had

once told an APEC meeting that English Canada needed the French language as much as anyone needed the AIDS virus and he anticipated a French takeover of Canada, propelled by a Quebec that has become "an impregnable bastion, breeding pen and marshalling yard for the colonization of the rest of Canada."[5]

Andrew, who served in the Royal Canadian Navy for almost thirty years, retired with the rank of lieutenant commander in 1974. He claims that since *Bilingual Today, French Tomorrow* was first published in 1977—its subtitle *Trudeau's Master Plan for an All-French Canada*—it has gone into ten printings, selling 110,000 copies; this, he says, in spite of timorous book chains refusing to handle it and Trudeau sending out the order to "Government-funded Francophone Associations throughout Canada to buy up the book and destroy it."[6] Certainly the retired sailor is not one to pull his punches. On the very first page, he writes:

> A political conspiracy has been taking place in Canada which, if it continues, will shortly lead to a Canadian civil war. This war will almost certainly involve the United States. Other countries, Russia and China included, will take whatever advantages they can from it. Many lives will be lost, and much of eastern Canada will be laid to waste. When it is finally over, nothing will have been resolved that could not be resolved today, with no loss of life whatsoever.[7]

Interestingly, the solution the virulently anti-French Andrew offers to our national dilemma is exactly the same as that proffered by the Québécois separatist firebrand Pierre Bourgault: separate states, one English, the other French. Otherwise, Andrew wrote in 1977:

> It is my guess that within ten years from now, Canada will have gone through *six* [italics mine] stages, each of which I want to deal with separately. The stages are:
>
> 1. Growing resentment.
> 2. Open hostility.
> 3. Imposition of police state.

4. Civil war.
5. The outcome.[8]

Bilingual Today, French Tomorrow was followed by *Enough! Enough French. Enough Quebec.* in 1988, in which Andrew noted that "English-speaking Canadians in Quebec have no language or political rights whatsoever except the right to vote."[9] Furthermore, he had established that our country was hostage to "a militant and avaricious minority [of Francophones] which is sworn by secret oath to the extermination of English Canada and the English language, province by province, territory by territory, and municipality by municipality."[10]

Gosh.

RESPONDING to the insult to their flag in small-town Ontario, Québécois rowdies in Montreal booed our national anthem at ball games, obviously unaware that "O Canada" had in fact been composed by one of their own, Calixa Lavallée, on his return to Montreal after he had served as a bandsman with the 4th Rhode Island Regiment in the U.S. Civil War. Compounding the irony, it was the St. Jean Baptiste Society, rabidly nationalist today, that commissioned Laval lee to set Judge Adolphe R.outhier's poem *"o Canada! Terre de nos aïeux"* to music.

Even as our politicians, out on the hustings, have traditionally promised one thing in French and another in English, so the song that Parliament officially proclaimed our national anthem in 1980 is an exemplar of our national schizophrenia. The French version, except for the first two words, could be belted out in good conscience by the most uncompromising of Québécois separatists:

o Canada, terre de nos aïeux,
Ton front est ceint de fleurons glorieux.
Car ton bras sait porter l'épée,
Il sait porter la croix!
Ton histoire est une fyopie
Des plus brillants exploits.

Et ta valeur de foi trempée,
Protégera nos foyers et nos droits,
Protigera nos foyers et nos droits.

A literal translation would read:

O Canada! Land of our ancestors,
Your brow is wreathed with glorious garlands.
For your arm knows how to carry the sword,
It knows how to carry the Cross!
Your history is an epic of the most brilliant exploits.
And your courage, blended with faith,
Will protect our homes and rights,
Will protect our homes and rights.

But the official English-language version goes:

O Canada! Our home our native land!
True patriot love in all thy sons command.
With glowing hearts we see thee rise,
The true North strong and free!
From far and wide, O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.
God keep our land glorious and free!
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee,
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.

It should also be noted that in the summer of 1990, CBC-TV's annual soporific, "The Canada Day Special," inexcusably mawkish as ever, surfaced with a sponsor sufficiently patriotic not to worry about the ratings: Toshiba of Canada. And Bryn Smith, a journeyman pitcher who had jumped the Expos to sign with the Cards, found Montreal, its many fine restaurants notwithstanding, a hardship; his wife was obliged to shop across the border, in Plattsburgh, New York, a forty-seven-mile drive, in order to keep the family supplied with Doritos. Then vandals took to the streets spray-painting the inflammatory word STOP on road signs to make it look like "101," as in Bill 101, the French Language Charter. True, nitpickers could argue that "stop" was correct French as well as the internationally recognized designation in France and other French-speaking countries. Never mind. Québécois purists insisted that our street

corners must be cleansed of that lingering reminder of the conquest, the STOP/ARRET sign. So it was ordained that come January 1, 1993, only one word would be legal on the signs, ARRET, even though replacing 11,000 signs would set the City of Montreal back an estimated $600,000.

In the autumn, Ottawa contributed to our linguistic squabbles, creating . . . a candy crisis. A food inspector with the Department of Consumer and Corporate Affairs ruled that jelly babies and fruit pastilles, manufactured by Rowntree PLC of Britain, had to be removed from the shelves of a British souvenir shop in Toronto—the Leicester Square WC2 store—because their names and ingredients were not printed in both official languages. Other provocative British imports pronounced guilty of the same offense included Cadbury's Dairy Milk, Fruit & Nut, Nestlé's Milk Bar, and Fry's Peppermint Cream.[11]

FROM THE VERY BEGINNING Canada's development as a nation, rather than a grudging, constantly bickering coalition of provinces, has been retarded by two seemingly insoluble problems: the language issue, and loyalties that burn brightest regionally. In 1839 Lord Durham, High Commissioner of British North America, published a famous report in London that recommended the shotgun marriage of Upper and Lower Canada—of Ontario and Quebec—and led to the passage of the act of Union by the British parliament the following year. Canada, he ventured, actually comprised two nations warring within the bosom of a single state, and the only thing for it was to anglicize the French. "There can hardly be conceived," he wrote, "a nationality more destitute of all that can invigorate and elevate a people than that which is exhibited by the descendants of the French in Lower Canada, owing to their retaining their peculiar language and manners. They are a people wirh no history and no literature."[1]

In fact they were the first Europeans to settle on this continent, charting its rivers, probing its hinterland, and the names of their explorers still resonate: Carrier, Champlain, La Salle, Marquette, Jolliet, La Vérendrye. It should also be noted in passing that on at least one occasion when the conquerors were in need, it was the ruffians of the north who were sent for. In 1884, when General Lord Wolseley was preparing to set out to rescue Majot General "Chinese" Gordon, who was being held captive by the Mahdi in Khartoum, he asked the Governor-General of Canada, Lord Lansdowne, to "engage 300 good voyageurs from Caughnawaga, Saint Regis, and Manitoba as steersmen in boats for Nile expedition." An account of their exploits by one Sergeant Gaston P. Labat, *Les voyageurs canadiens a*

l'expédition du Soudan, ou Quatre-vingt-dix jours avec les crocodiles, made it clear from the outset that military discipline would be difficult for the Canadiens. Even before the *Ocean King* set sail from Montreal, bound for Alexandria, Labat wrote, "On Saturday evening, when almost all the voyageurs were aboard, a squaw appeared wanting to see her man. Having caught sight of her, he leaped over the side and there he was, in the arms of his better half. This better half, let me assure you, was a complete whole . . . weighing at least two hundred pounds. There they are, then, embracing each other like Daphnis and Chloe, these two children of the forest, when, to put an end to this tender scene, a move was made to bring our man back on board. Since he resisted, she did likewise. . . . Finally . . . the husband's hands disappeared into the corset of the squaw, seeking to find . . . what? . . . shocking! . . . the maneuver being poorly executed, one heard next the sound of broken glass—a bottle of whiskey had struck the pavement. The squaw began to weep, and he as well, to melt into tears. . . ."[2]

Lysiane Gagnon, a political columnist for Montreal's *La Presse,* once observed, "Years before the English conquered Canada, the French there had already formed a society with its own institutions and traditions that was quite different from France."[3] A society that was at risk as early as 1842, only two years after the Act of Union, when Lower Canada's Louis-Hippolyte Lafontaine, rising in the Assembly on September 13 of that year, dared to speak in French, earning an immediate rebuke from one of rhe Upper Canada ministers. Lafontaine replied, "I am asked to pronounce in another language than my mother tongue the first speech that I have to make in this House. But I must inform the honorable members that even if my knowledge of English were as intimate as my knowledge of French, I should nevertheless make my first speech in the language of my French Canadian compatriots, if only to protest against the cruel injustice of the Union Act in trying to proscribe the mother tongue of half the population of Canada. I owe it to my compatriots; I owe it to myself."[4]

Following Lafontaine's speech, French was tolerated by the

Assembly, but it was not officially sanctioned until 1848. Nineteen years later, in 1867, the four Canadian provinces in existence at the time (Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Quebec, and Ontario) were united as the Dominion of Canada, a largely empty space that within three years—once it had been granted title to its northernmost reaches, Prince Rupert's Land—emerged as the second-largest country in the world. However, that booster's statistic, paraded *ad nauseam* by Canadians ever since, is misleading. The truth is that the bulk of our undeniably vast domain remains uninhabitable, and to this day most of us are snuggled within a hundred miles of the 49th parallel, intimidated by the punishingly cold tundra on one side and American pizzazz on the other.

Confederation was authorized in July 1867 by the British North America Act which was passed by the Parliament in faraway Westminster. The House of Commons, three-quarters empty at the time, filled up immediately afterward for a debate on the dog tax bill.

According to Léandre Bergeron, author of the *Petit manuel d'histoire du Quebec,* a best-seller in the province, confederation was imposed by the English exploiters with the primary aim of suppressing the French, who would, with a stroke of the pen, "be reduced to one-third of the population and could not prevent the masters of the country from governing them as they wish."[5] On the other hand, the BNA Act, coddling Quebec as a special case, enshrined its right to its own civil code and the use of French in legislative bodies and in the courts, while also recognizing English as the province's other language. It is important to grasp that Canada, ostensibly self-governing under the terms of the act, could not amend its own constitution in the future without the approval of its nanny, the Parliament of Westminster.

From 1927 through 1971 there were nine attempts to repatriate Canada's constitution, a process almost invariably stymied by obdurate Quebec governments that would settle for nothing less than having their "special status," as well as a veto on any future constitutional amendments, woven into the document.

These endless negotiations, a fascination to our politicians, were an immense bore so far as most Canadians, both English and French, were concerned. All the same, they continued. Then, in 1981, after protracted haggling with ten premiers, most of them provincial in more than name only, Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau rammed through an amending formula that enabled him to bring the constitution home, a hot potato that has led to so much acrimony ever since.

The Constitution Act of 1982, signed by every Canadian province except Quebec, which protested date-rape, did manage to abolish the embarrassing power of the Parliament of Westminster to legislate for Canada. However its Charter of Rights and Freedoms guaranteed us no more, come to think of it, than we have always taken for granted: the right to "freedom of thought, belief, opinion and expression, including freedom of the press and other media of communication."[6] The charter was also undermined by something like a satisfaction-or-your-money-back guarantee. Over the objections of Prime Minister Trudeau but on the insistence of the western premiers, who otherwise refused to endorse the document, it included the "notwithstanding clause." This clause could be invoked by a provincial legislature to override vital sections of the charter that it didn't like for a period of five years, after which it could vote to renew its use of the clause. There was another kicker. The charter recognized English and French as the official languages of Canada, enjoying equality of status, but Quebec, marching to its own drummer as usual, had already ruled French the only official language of the province. In an appearance before a Joint Committee of the House of Commons and Senate on August 7, 1987, Trudeau, who had retired three years earlier, commented on this contradiction. "I do not think," he said, "one has to stretch one's imagination much to see that [Quebec] officials will be inclined to tell immigrants that they are living in a province where there is only one official language, rather than in a country where there are two; and that the Ptovince of Quebec, which constitutes a distinct society . . . is different. I'm not saying they will be taught nonsense, or

that it is a sin; I am simply saying that it seems quite clear that the notion of provincial patriotism will become stronger. The same will apply to Newfoundland and British Columbia, minus the linguistic difference."[7]

Some sixty years earlier, Henri Bourassa, a brilliant parliamentarian and journalist from Quebec, opposed to both lingering colonial ties to Britain and a separate French Canadian state, regretted that there flourished in Canada one distinctive patriotism among people living in Ontario, another in Quebec, and yet another on the prairies. But, he lamented, "There is no Canadian patriotism; and so long as we have no Canadian patriotism, there will be no Canadian nation."

As far as Quebecois nationalists are concerned, not much has changed since Bourassa spoke up. Now as then, they are convinced that they are a nation, and that the rest of Canada is comprised of pseudo-American drifters. The case for the Québécois nation was eloquently put by Rene Lévesque, founder of the Parti quebecois, in 1968.

"We are Quebecois," he wrote.

"What that means first and foremost—and if it need be, all that it means—is that we are attached to this one corner of the earth where we can be completely ourselves; this Quebec, the only place where we have the unmistakable feeling that 'here we can be really at home.'

"Being ourselves is essentially a matter of keeping and developing a personality that has survived for three and a half centuries.

"At the core of this personality is the fact that we speak French. Everything else depends on this one essential element and follows from it or leads us infallibly back to it.

"In our history, America began with a French look, briefly but gloriously given it by Champlain, Jolliet, La Salle, La Vérendrye. . . . We learned our first lessons in progress and perseverance from Maisonneuve, Jeanne Mance, Jean Talon; and in daring or heroism from Lambert Closse, Brébeuf, Frontenac, d'Iberville. . . .

"Then came the conquest. We were a conquered people, our

hearts set on surviving in some small way on a continent that had become Anglo-Saxon.

"Somehow or other, through countless changes and a variety of regimes, despite difficulties without number (our lack of awareness and even our ignorance serving all too often as our best protection), we succeeded.

"Here again, when we recall the major historical landmarks, we come upon a profusion of names: Etienne Parent and Lafontaine and the Patriotes of '37; Louis Riel and Honoré Mercier, Bourassa, Philippe Hamel; Garneau and Edouard Montpetit and Asselin and Lionel Groulx. . . . For each of them, the main driving force behind every action was the will to continue, and the tenacious hope that they could make it worthwhile.

"Until recently in this difficult process of survival we enjoyed the protection of a certain degree of isolation. We lived a relatively sheltered life in a rural society in which a great measure of unanimity reigned, and in which poverty set its limits on change and aspirations alike.

"We are children of that society, in which the *habitant,* our father or grandfather, was still the key citizen. We also are heirs to that fantastic adventure—that early America that was almost entirely French. We are, even more intimately, heirs to the group obstinacy which has kept alive that portion of French America we call Quebec."[8]

Yes, however the *Quebecois pure laine* (not necessarily descendants of the original 8,500 French settlers who established roots in Quebec between 1608 and 1763, but made of the right stuff all the same) were apprehensive. In 1842 half of the people in Canada were of French origin, but by 1990 they had been reduced to something like a quarter of the country's population, and now it was feared that one day they could even become a minority in their own province. The problem is that since the eclipse of the church's influence, there has been a precipitous drop in their birthrate, once the highest in North America, with families of a dozen, even sixteen, children being not uncommon. This punishing level of fertility, which seemed to be

based on the assumption that women were sows, was encouraged with impunity from the sidelines by the Abbe Lionel Groulx, whose newspaper *L'Action française*, founded in 1917, preached *la revanche des berceaux*, "the revenge of the cradles," which would enable French Canadians to become a majority in Canada. In 1990, however, the birthrate among Quebecois women of childbearing age was 1.5, lowest in the Western world save for West Germany, whereas a 2.1 rate is called for just to replenish the existing population.

Immigration, the alternative method of boosting Quebec's French-speaking population, has only exacerbated the situation.

The majority of Italian, Greek, and Porruguese immigrants have understandably wanted their children educated in English, the language of opportunity in North America. In 1968 the Catholic school board of the Montreal suburb of St-Léonard responded by attempting to deny English education to its largely Iralian population. Ugly riots ensued and, a year later, there was temporary respite when the provincial government of the day introduced Bill 63, which allowed parents to educate children in the language of their choice. This, in turn, enraged many of Quebec's increasingly nationalistic intellectuals, spawning a commission of inquiry into language rights, and we were already sinking into that linguistic quagmire that would yield Bills 22, 101, and 178, and a disconcertingly tribal society.

Bill 22, passed by Premier Bourassa's Liberal government in 1974, ruled that the child ten of immigrants had to be enrolled in French schools. "The only exceptions," wrote the late Rene Lévesque, who was premier from 1976 to 1985, "were children who could demonstrate 'a sufficient knowledge' of English. So tests were imposed on little shavers of six and seven years old, isolated from parents who were boiling mad. Without going so far, I wasn't very hot on the plan myself."[9]

In 1975, when the quarrel over Bill 22 was at its height, a senior adviser to Premier Bourassa told a reporter that not much could be done about so-called clandestine schools, "short," he said, "of drastically rewriting the law to flatly exclude immigrant children whose mother tongue is not English from

English schools."[10] And in 1977, a year after Rene Lévesque rode into office, winning 71 out of 110 seats, the PQ introduced Bill 101, the French Language Charter, which went even further than that. Bill 101 ordained that wherever a child came from—another country or even another Canadian province—it had to be educated in French, unless one of its parents had been to an English school in Quebec. It ordered the "francization" of any company with more than fifty employees, ruling that it would soon require a certificate to prove it conducted all internal business in French. It declared that all English, or even bilingual, commercial signs would be illegal by 1981. It established a Commission de toponymie to rename towns, rivers, and mountains that bore English names and so offended the *visage linguistique* of *la belle province.* And it pronounced French the province's only official language, a violation of the British North America Act, killing the two-century-old convention that had endowed French and English with equal legitimacy.

Sure enough, a problem soon developed. According to a clause in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, the child of a parent who had been educated in English at primary level anywhere in Canada was entitled to an English-language education in Quebec. This resulted in a suit brought against the government by the Quebec Association of Protestant School Boards. The case went to the Quebec Superior Court, which ruled, on September 8, 1982, that the Charter took precedence over Bill 101. The Quebec government's argument, said Chief Justice Jules Deschênes, "demonstrates a totalitarian concept of society to which the court cannot subscribe . . . other societies put the collectivity above the individual . . . [but] this conception of society has not yet taken root here . . . even if certain political initiatives seem at times to be courting it dangerously. . . . Every individual in Canada and Quebec should enjoy his rights in their entirety, be he alone, or a member of a group; and if the group has one hundred members, the hundredth has as much right to benefit from all his privileges as do the ninety-nine others. . . ."[11]

The PQ government served notice of its intention to appeal.

Then, in 1985, Robert Bourassa, who had been displaced as leader of the Liberal party by Claude Ryan in 1978 and written off at the time as a burnt-out case, was back at his old job and running for premier again.

Above all, the perpetually vacillating Bourassa is a survivor. Suspected of covert separatist views by many English Quebecers but unloved by French Quebecers, mocked as a wimp by both communities, he belongs to that big band of wearisome but enduring politicians, strangers to wit or charm, of whom it is unfailingly said, "Ah, yes, but the private man, if only you knew him, is an absolute delight." He was first thrust into office when he was a mere thirty-six because he was taken for an economic wizard, somebody who could put the shop in order, and rhere was something in that. Before long, however, he became an object of ridicule, hardly ever seen in public in those days without his gun-toting hairdresser. On the evidence, he had no emotional attachment to Canada, but favored *le fédéralisme rentable,* "profitable federalism," and wanted Quebec to keep its seat at the Canadian table only so it could feast on its share of the country's immense store of natural resources. For all that, in 1985 he was the only real alternative to a divided and no longer coherent Parti quebecois, exhausted after nine turbulent years in office.

If elected, Bourassa promised to amend Bill 101, allowing bilingual commercial signs, provided that the French were predominant. "When I am premier," he said, "I will be able to make tough decisions within a hundred days, whatever the short-term political consequences."[12] However, once returned to power on December 2, 1985, winning 99 out of 122 seats, he had second thoughts. Although he had already told a Montreal *Le Devoir* reporter that "nowhere in the free world is there a country where the minority is prohibited from using its own language on its signs,"[13] he decided that, before relaxing the sign law; he would wait for a decision on its legality from the Quebec Court of Appeal.

Meanwhile, in the dead of that winter, Gilles Rhéaume, an

ardent *indépendantiste*, infuriated because the PQ had temporarily put its sovereignty policy on the back burner, announced that he would march the 158 miles from Montreal to Quebec City, where he would piss on the statue of the conqueror, General James Wolfe, on the Plains of Abraham. On arrival, he also had second thoughts. He decided it was too cold and pleaded with his small band of followers to consider the act done.

That same winter we were astonished to learn that linguistic strife had penetrated the very inner sanctum of Canada's security and intelligence service, as witness the case of *Yvon R. Gingras, Plaintiff. Henry F. Robicheau, Defendant,* heard in the Superior Court, District of Montreal, Province of Quebec (Court No. 500-05-000436-863) on January 17, 1986.

DECLARATION

PLAINTIFF DECLARES:

1. On January 18, 1985, Defendant was present at R.C.M.P. headquarters, Montreal, at approximately 16:45 p.m.
2. Defendant was Regional Director of the Canadian Security and Intelligence Service.
3. Plaintiff was a member in good standing of the service.
4. Without any provocation and in front of witnesses, Defendant proceeded to call him a "Damn pig," a "maudit cochon," and suggested that a committee headed by him was subversive and trying to destroy the service.
5. He also used the word "asshole" and reiterated the word "pig" many times.
6. He said to the Plaintiff, "you and your f_____French rights make me sick."
7. He threatened to hit him and made aggressive gestures.
8. The action of the Plaintiff [sic] constitutes slander and an unjustified attack on Plaintiff's reputation and dignity, contrary to the Quebec Charter of Rights and Liberties.
9. The attack had nothing to do with work and was entirely gratuitous.

10. The damages caused are
    1) loss of reputation $10,000
    2) loss of enjoyment of life, humiliation, distress $10,000
    3) exemplary damages, Quebec Charter $10,000
11. Defendant [sic] attempted to obtain an apology but to no avail.
12. $30,000 is due and owing from Defendant to Plaintiff.
13. This action is well founded in fact and law.

WHEREFORE it may please this Honourable Court
TO ALLOW this action
TO ORDER Defendant to pay Plaintiff $30,000;
- THE WHOLE with interest, and special indemnity of $1,078.00

MONTREAL, January 17, 1986
(signed) Grey Casgrain,
Attorney for Plaintiff.

(As I write, no decision has been made.)

Mind you, the RCMP, the very symbol abroad of Canadian rectitude, has a gift for slipping over its own banana peels. Take the fabled case of a certain RCMP machine, for instance. In the late fifties, wrote John Sawatsky in *Men in the Shadows,* a new evil replaced communism as a potential menace to Canadian security—the homosexual. The better to combat this threat, a machine was brought into play, its mission to unmask homosexuals among civil servants.

> . . . While the project was a secret and remained so, word at the time leaked out within the security community and rumors began flying. The RCMP tried to recruit members as guinea pigs but nobody would submit to the test. "I wouldn't go anywhere near it in case they put the electrodes on me and the machine blew a fuse," quips one Security Service officer. Jokes circulated and soon the device was dubbed the Fruit Machine, and the name stuck. "You'd better be careful or they'll put you in the Fruit Machine," was a popular refrain.
>
> One of the Security Service's homosexual informers voluntarily

took the test and reputedly was treated as a madman. "Keep him in the corner, don't let him get away," the machine's operator reportedly said. The bewildered homosexual, one of the few who did not hide his sexual proclivity, replied: "I volunteered for this. What's the matter with this guy? Is he crazy?" While the incident is undoubtedly exaggerated, and possibly wholly untrue, the story nonetheless made the rounds and soon members of the Security Service believed, as one member put it, that subjects would be confronted with flashing lights shrieking: "Fruit, fruit, fruit!"[14]

Actually there were no electrodes or flashing lights, but work on this machine absorbed some senior government officials and scientists for neatly four years. The research, secretly funded by the Defence Research Board, was supervised by a psychologist seconded from the Department of National Defence, with the help of an outside psychiatrist and psychologist with security clearance. Basically, the machine—a dentist's chair above which were rigged cameras and other equipment—was intended to measure a subject's pupillary responses to photographic stimuli. If, surprised by a photograph of a male nude with an outsize dick, the suspect's pupils expanded, *but failed to register appetite in response to a photograph of a yummy female nude,* then the government shrink, consulting the outside psychiatrist and psychologist, just might pronounce him "a fag security risk." Problems. Unobliging, even shifty, suspected sexual deviants were discovered to be of different heights, with different-sized pupils and different distances between their eyeballs, which made it impossible for cameras to measure their sexual responses accurately. Another complication was that as each new pornographic image was flashed, the amount of light altered, the subject's pupils adjusted accordingly, decreasing for bright images and increasing for dark ones. Then, after nearly four years of work, researchers had to allow that the change in pupil size in response to images was in any case so small that it was all but impossible to measure accurately.

In the end, it didn't matter. The Fruit Machine, like the horse and buggy, was superseded by a superior invention. It was

a device that could be clipped to a subject's cock, measuring changes in width throughout the long day, rendering an accurate report on exposure to which sex prompted it to perk up with interest. Sawatsky, a discreet observer, fails to say whether this instrument was ever deployed among suspects in our civil service. All the same, to this day whenever I'm visiting the bar of the National Press Club in Ottawa and a civil servant drifts in, I check him out to see if he is walking with difficulty. If that's the case, I will accept a free drink, but certainly not an invitation to a candle-lit dinner.

Three

AT WOODY'S PUB, where we were all devoted followers of the Canadian political carnival, it was agreed that 1986 was a vintage year, the Ottawa monkey house yielding a welcome distraction even as we waited for the Quebec Court of Appeal to rule on Bill 178. The silly season was not yet with us when the Mulroney government, which would eventually be swamped in sleaze, surrendered its first tainted cabinet minister: the Hon. Sinclair Stevens.

As an Ontario youngster of nine, Sinc Stevens acquired twenty duck eggs, which he subsequently claimed to have hatched under chickens, and then peddled the ducklings for twenty dollars apiece.[1] Fulfilling his early huckster's promise, ne emerged as Minister of Regional Expansion in the Mulroney Cabinet in 1984. Two years later he was obliged to resign, caught out in an embarrassing conflict-of-interest muddle. What fascinated me, however, was the involvement of Stevens and his wife, Noreen, in what came to be celebrated as the "Christ coin," an ingenious scheme that would reward the devout with both profit and tax advantages for their faith in Jesus.

"This type of concept is what we call our hobbies," said Noreen Stevens. "I guess a lot of people like to talk about weather, we like to talk about this kind of thing. We like to talk about concepts, applications of different financial transactions." Then, by way of further explanation, she added, "We read a lot. We are, I suppose, bookworms."[2]

The Christ coin would have allowed investors to fork out three hundred dollars for a shekel dated 1986, backed by a strip bond with a guaranteed redemption value of one thousand dollars in the year 2000, as we entered the third millennium after

the birth of Jesus. Sinc and Noreen, suffering the little capitalists to come unto them, figured they could move a million coins. Taking the project's religious appeal into consideration, they decided that the obvious sovereign state to mint the currency was the Vatican. So Sinc called on Emmett Cardinal Carter, archbishop of Toronto. Cardinal Carter pronounced the notion "extremely inreresting" and wrote to Sebastiano Cardinal Baggio, president of the Pontifical Commission for the Vatican City, saying, "[Stevens] is well known to me and is a fine gentleman. I find his proposal extraordinarily interesting from many points of view." And, giving Baggio the elbow, he went on to note that it "might be a contribution to covering the deficit of the Holy See which I perceive is getting extremely onerous."[3] But the Vatican had to pass, because their ability to mint coins was restricted by the Italian government.

Next Sinc, unfortunately mixing his pet scheme with government business, submitted his inspiration to the Chase Manhattan Bank in New York. They couldn't go along with it, either.

"I should like to point out," said one of my Gentile friends at Woody's, "that the decision of the Chase Manhattan is not to be interpreted as a lack of faith in *our* Lord, who still enjoys far more market appeal than Moses. The problem was that the Jesus coin didn't offer the same tax advantages in the United States as it did in Canada."

This led us to reflect on other inspired Canadian products that had been undone by American protectionism.

The incomparable vintage wines of Southern Ontario.

The novels of Frederick Philip Grove.

The California Golden Seals entry into the National Hockey League.

Eskimo throat singers.

The RCMP musical horseride.

New Brunswick's Bricklin SV I automobile of blessed memory.

Then the language issue was back with us.

On December 22, 1986, to nobody's surprise, the Quebec

Court of Appeal ruled that the ban on languages other than French on commercial signs was a violation of freedom of expression as protected by both the Canadian and Quebec Charters of Rights. In a second ruling, the Appeal Court judges voted 3-2 that Quebec did have the power to prevent the display of unilingual English signs.

Then Premier Robert Bourassa, wetting a finger, testing for intimidating nationalist winds, had third thoughts, saying the sign law couldn't be revoked until the Supreme Court of Canada had ruled. It fell to the affable Herbert Marx then minister of justice, to argue Quebec's appeal to the highest court in the land, although he was already on record as being opposed to it. In his 1978 Corry Lecture at Queen's University in Kingston, Ontario, Marx said, "the provisions of Bill 101 that require, with some exceptions, language signs to be unilingually French . . . clashes with the dignity of the forty percent English-speaking minority of [Montreal]. The unilingual French sign requirement in Bill 101 is, in my view, less a question of freedom of expression than one of hiding evidence of the presence of an English-speaking minority behind a French facade. Freedom of expression in Canada has traditionally meant freedom to espouse political, religious and social ideas. Selling shoes should not be put on an equal footing with the selling of political ideas. And Bill 101 does permit bilingual or multilingual signs in a number of areas, including the political and religious fields. The issue is rather that the presence of a large English-speaking minority in Quebec, particularly in Montreal, shall not be made invisible."[4]

Marx was obliged to present his case at a time when public opinion polls showed that three out of four Quebecers favored bilingual signs. Mind you, narionalists were also making their feelings known to shopkeepers who had challenged the law in court or simply ignored it. Rocks were thrown through the windows of the McKenna Côte-des-Neiges flower store and Nat's Auto Parts. Firebombs were tossed at one of Zeller's chain Stores, and bomb threats were called into two downtown department stores, Ogilvy and Simpson.

Don MacPherson, the astute Quebec correspondent of the Montreal *Gazette,* our English-language daily, obtained a copy of the sixty-page factum that Herbert Marx was to be armed with for his appearance before the Supreme Court. The factum argued that "freedom of expression does not protect the right to do commercial advertising" and, in any event, Quebec's National Assembly could exempt the province from the provisions of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms by invoking the notwithstanding clause. "Ultimately," the factum noted, "it is the survival of the collectivity that is at stake."[5] Next, the father of Bill 101, the obdurate Camille Laurin, was heard from. Dr. Laurin, a psychiatrist who dyes his hair black, had become head of psychiatry at the Institut Albert-Prévost, in Montreal, after his tour of duty as the PQ's minister of cultural development from 1976 through 1980. Dr. Laurin has been a favorite of mine ever since he published *A Cultural Development Policy for Quebec* in 1978. The report, as I noted shortly after it appeared, complained that a crippling Canadian presence imposed upon Quebec "restrictions that become shackles when it attempts to develop its own values and cultural endeavors." This, incongruously enough, at a time when there was hardly a separatist painter, composer, or writer in Quebec who wasn't on a Canada Council grant or fettered to such federally funded cultural institutions as Radio-Canada or the National Film Board. The report, pondered and debated for months by the brightest and best Dr. Laurin could gather in conclave, abounded in banalities and bromides. Both sex and age, we were earnestly told, were the result of natural laws: "We do not choose our sex, we do not choose to grow old." Women, we were assured, "are people." In Quebec, as elsewhere, the report claimed, "children make great demands on adult energy." We were also asked to swallow whole the notion that "adolescents make up a large proportion of the population."[6]

All these "brief yet thought-provoking" *pensées* came in Volume I, the real illuminations being saved for the heftier Volume II, in which it was revealed that "books have been one

of the most important vehicles of culture for centuries, and will continue to play this role for some time." Then, after pages of reproaches about the smoking and drinking habits of Quebecers, Dr. Laurin, a thinker who can see around corners and then some, ventured that "alcohol becomes all too often a prop, a stimulant or an escape."[7]

Now Dr. Laurin put all of Anglophone Quebec on the couch and pointed out that the banning of their language was shock therapy, and Quebec's English-speaking community had only been discomfited "because they define themselves above all as Canadians who live in Quebec." Futthermore, he said, Bill 101 ended the "scandal" of free choice, whereby immigrants could actually send their children to English rather than French schools.

Possibly Dr. Laurin was unaware that the immigrant problem was already remedying itself.

In August 1987 Alliance Quebec, an English lobbying group, presented a brief to the National Assembly, as Quebec's provincial legislature has been called since 1969. It revealed that since 1972 there had been a net population loss of 293,987 in the province of Quebec. Between 1976 and 1981, some 106,300 English-speaking Quebecers, 19.5 percent of whom held university degrees, had moved out. "The tendency for young adults of childbearing years to be over-represented in this departure," the Alliance brief declared, "has also diminished the capacity of our community to replenish itself demographically. The result is an aging community with fewer children."[8] But so far as Leon Dion, an influential professor of political science at Laval University in Quebec City was concerned, it was the cultural future of *his* community that was being threatened. "If Montreal is left to so-called bilingualism," he told the National Assembly, "this means in less than ten years a kind of English unilingualism."

Liberal Member of the National Assembly (MNA) Reed Scowen, studying the problem from all angles, summed things up in his farewell speech to the National Assembly that summer. "If I follow the reasoning of both sides to its logical

conclusion," he said, "in two generations there won't be a single Anglophone left in Quebec, but everybody will be speaking English."

The following March, Montreal's diminishing English-speaking community learned that the Conseil de la langue francaise had some hanky-panky in mind. A researcher for the Conseil let slip to the *Gazette* that undercover shoppers were to be sent out to make 4,500 visits to local stores to determine whether salespeople greeted their customers in French or the language of *les autres.*

The proposed study by the Conseil had several objectives:

"To verify if the client is welcomed and ultimately served in French in commercial establishments of certain typical sectors of the island of Montreal," that is to say, *dans les voisinages* where English-speaking Quebecers were in a majority.

"To compare the language of approach and service according to the ethno-linguistic origin of the owners of the business and the employees."[9]

The government snoopers were also to snitch on whether an "employee seems by his accent to be a native Francophone or Quebecer," and if, once service in the language of the collectivity is requested, he was "polite or nice, neutral, curt or disagreeable." After the *Gazette* blew the whistle on the proposed undercover op, however, the Conseil backed away from it. So the *Gazette* conducted its own survey, discovering that many shopkeepers, necessarily wary, welcomed customers in a fail-safe combination of English and French, singing out, "Hi, *bonjour."*

Come spring, as we were waiting for the Supreme Court of Canada to pronounce, dissenters within the French communiry began to speak up. An editorial writer for *La Presse* pleaded with Premier Bourassa to allow bilingual signs in the name of fundamental justice. A man who had served as an inspector for the Commission de protection de la langue francaise for nine years retired and wrote letters to the editors of *Le Devoir* and *La Presse* denouncing the sign laws as the mischief of "fanatics" and "fascists." The board of directors of the Conseil du patronat, Quebec's largest employers' group, voted unanimously in favor

of bilingual signs with French predominant, once the Supreme Court had ruled. The most stinging rebuke to Quebec came from another one of their own, D'Iberville Fortier, then the federal commissioner of official languages. In his annual report to Parliament, Fortier said that English-speaking Quebecers had been "humiliated" by restrictions on their language in the province. A livid Premier Bourassa denied the accusation, and when the opposition PQ tabled a censure motion he promptly toughened its wording and then the motion was passed unanimously. It read:

"That this National Assembly firmly denounces the statements made by the federal commissioner of official languages in regard to the English-speaking minority in Quebec, and calls upon the official in question to give an explanation.

"That the National Assembly reaffirms having exercised its linguistic powers always in a fully democratic manner so as to ensure the survival of the French collectivity and check the threat of anglicization."

The banner headline on the front page of the next morning's *Gazette* read like a charge sheet:

ALL ANGLOPHONE MNAS VOTE FOR CENSURE
The 21 help to make it unanimous,
despite the urgings of constituents
to rebel or at least abstain[10]

In October 1988 an estimated 25,000 Quebecois nationalists, anticipating a Supreme Court decision that would declare the sign law illegal, took to the streets of Montreal to protest, chanting, *"Le Quebec aux Québécois!"* and a jittery Premier Bourassa, who could never forget that the nationalists had once burnt him in effigy, began to talk about the need to preserve the "social peace."

At the PQ's convention a month later, the new party leader, Jacques Parizeau, announced that he was resolutely opposed to bilingual signs and, obviously eager to demonstrate that he was made of the right stuff, came out in favor of reducing the number of English radio and television stations in Montreal and of

intensifying the "francization" program, making it apply to firms with ten employees or more.

Ironically, the patrician Parizeau, a committed *indépendantiste*, is also a dedicated Anglophile: he is a graduate of the London School of Economics and an admirer of Queen Elizabeth. On record as an uncompromising opponent of a bilingual Montreal, he insisted on an English-speaking governess for his own children. He is a son of the Quebecois bourgeoisie, a sixth-generation Montrealer, his father having stitched together the city's biggest insurance brokerage. A sybarite of considerable girth, Parizeau seems to have sprung larger than life out of a P. G. Wodehouse novel, his English liberally sprinkled with exclamations of "by Jove" and "jolly good." An inventive economic adviser to several Quebec governments before he ran for office himself, he was instrumental in the creation of the immensely powerful Quebec pension fund, the Caisse de depot et placement. In 1985, he resigned as PQ minister of finance and walked out on the party along with other hard-liners, among them Camille Laurin, when the then leader Rene Lévesque, anticipating an election, swept their suddenly inconvenient independence platform under a rug. Now Parizeau was back, this time as party leader. "The Parti quebecois should be sovereigntist before the election," he said, "during the election, and after the election."

Camille Laurin, returned to the fold, also addressed the PQ's November convention, reminding the faithful that before he had been to the mountaintop and brought down Bill 101 in 1977, Quebec was "still dominated by a foreign power,"[11] that is to say Ottawa, where, at the time, several of our most important Cabinet ministers were Quebecers, as were 75 MPs out of a total of 292, as well as three out of the nine Supreme Court justices, the governor-general, some 35,000 civil servants, and Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau. Thirreen years earlier Trudeau, along with six other French Canadian intellectuals calling themselves the Committee for Political Realism, had published a "Canadian Manifesto" in the magazine *Citélibre*. It

called for social justice, a fairer distribution of the wealth, a revised penal code, and an end to nationalism:

> To use nationalism as a yardstick for deciding policies and priorities is both sterile and retrograde. Overflowing nationalism distorts one's vision of reality, prevents one from seeing problems in their true perspective, falsifies solutions and constitutes a classic diversionary tactic for politicians caught by facts.
>
> Our comments in this regard apply equally to Canadian or French Canadian nationalism. . . .
>
> Separatism in Quebec appears to us not only a waste of time but a step backwards. . . . We refuse to let ourselves be locked into a constitutional frame smaller than Canada. . . . We do not attach to its existence any sacred or eternal meaning, but it is an historical fact. To take it apart would require an enormous expenditure of energy and gain no proven advantage. . . .[12]

When Camille Laurin delivered his sermon to the PQ convention in 1978, Canada appeared to be in no danger of being taken apart. The PQ, seemingly moribund, was badly in need of funds and running low in the polls, the choice of a mere 28 percent of the electorate.