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## Discussion following the Remarks of the Hon. Mr. Pierre-Marc Johnson

Discussion

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## DISCUSSION FOLLOWING THE REMARKS OF THE HON. MR. PIERRE-MARC JOHNSON

MR. CRANE: What are the two scenarios?

MR. JOHNSON: I thought Professor King would ask that. I think there are many scenarios. First, there is one where nothing happens. I think that is the predominant scenario. Nothing is going to happen for a while on the Constitutional front. Constitutional fatigue has taken its toll. Québec's place in the Canadian constitution might become central at some point. I say at some point because I do not see this in a near future. People in Québec as well as the rest of Canada have their minds on other things such as the economy, our relations with the U.S., individuals' capacities to find happiness for themselves and their families and the consequences of the market economy and fiscal discipline approach on our social programs.

At some point will come about two potential scenarios. One scenario is a crisis scenario: the accumulation of frustrations and tensions, possibly with a linguistic background, but mostly expressing itself on the jurisdictional front.

For example, a federal energy policy related to climate change might spur confrontations. The interests of Ontario, those of Western Canada and those of Québec are quite different because you have nuclear power in Ontario, hydroelectric power in Québec, and loads of fossil fuels in the West.

Important tensions on this and other issues of an economic or social texture can bring a political dynamic in Québec that is conducive to forcing the status of Québec as an electoral issue.

At this point in time there is absolutely no appetite, or even interest in the rest of Canada to tackle the Québec question. Nevertheless, eventually, the whole debate could open up and give way to a democratic confrontation, with of course in the décor, a Québec sovereignist movement that will be a major actor or have a huge nuisance potential toward another actor in such a debate.

This is where the understanding of the two nationalisms evolution will become critical as it will shed light on how to approach a solution with consistency.

The alternative scenario to a reopening of the debate is based on the good will of Canada (federal government and the other provinces). It could foster fiscal and other administrative changes in a context of an even more decentralized federation. Administrative arrangements could lead the way to a form of asymmetrical federalism.

Whether Quebecers would find satisfaction in these remains to be seen.

PROFESSOR KING: Yeah, I have a question relating to the economic situation of Quebec. What I was concerned about was the uncertainty; in

other words, you have had a lot of independence movements up there. Nobody knows from one end of the election to the next about how strong Quebec is going to drive for independence.

Has that hurt the economic development of Quebec? Has that made a difference where companies do not want to locate there because they do not know what the future is? This continual churning; one minute it is strong, the next minute it's light. What is your opinion on that?

MR. JOHNSON: A very relevant question. When I was in Government, the line was that it has no effect. I am not in Government anymore. Obviously, the political so-called uncertainty around the Constitutional issue is not helping in certain cases, and for a series of reasons.

Firstly, Québec nationalism was often depicted as essentially a leftist movement, a quasi-Marxist movement, because of its roots in the 1950s and 1960s. Yet the reality is very different, but some of these perceptions endure. In Québec, as well as in the rest of the world, most Marxists are repentant. I believe there are more Marxists left in Berkeley than any university in Québec. Another aspect of the cost of nationalist rhetoric and realities in Québec is the astute self-interested behavior of some of our neighbors. Ontario never went out of its way, one would say for the least, to help Québec manage the extremely negative press it was getting in American media and business circles.

Finally, the traditional English speaking elites of Québec witnessed the emergence of an energetic entrepreneurial and financial French speaking class starting in the early 70's. This change of guard was not accepted well by all, and frustrations expressed by some, including the occasional caricaturing of Québec issues abroad contributed to the atmosphere of so-called uncertainty.

Québec remains attractive for capital. It has stable work force, well-educated work force, 4 universities in the middle of a city like Montreal, which has less than 3 million inhabitants in that region, extraordinary growth in the field of new information technologies, pharmaceuticals and aerospace, not counting its huge natural resources assets.

Politically, I do not believe we should worry too much. Look at the amount of money Funds like OMERS, TEACHERS and CALPERS are putting in places like Israel...I mean, the situation in Québec has nothing to do with what is happening in the Middle East. We have been at these debates for more than 2 generations. Moreover; our Supreme Court has serenely contemplated the eventual conditions of Québec secession. The depth of our democratic traditions has shown great resiliency.

MR. ROBINSON: I'm looking for other questions.

I can't believe that a journalist like Giles wouldn't have a question up there in the back, especially when we're talking about business in Quebec,

and you're the new editor of the Report on Business, our national newspapers' business report. Do you want to say anything? You don't have to.

MR. BARRETT: It was - what was described to me, as the motivating force behind Quebec nationalism was the desire to prevent the eventual submersion of French culture and language into the larger English society. Has that, has the nationalist movement succeeded in preserving indefinitely French culture and language in Canada?

MR. JOHNSON: I think it has. That is a paradox. I mean, both because of Federal policies and what happened in Québec society; and I think highly of the quality of government that Quebecers have had over two generations, whether one agrees with certain parts of it or not. Fundamentally, the future is more secure for French speaking Quebecers.

That said, a minority is a minority. Things are endemic sometimes. And it can take a very small thing to spark a very old reflex of survival. As I said, nationalism can be irrational, even though it can be apprehended by the mind serenely.

And I'd say the paradox is that the successes we've had, and the fact that we've gone from poor, ill-educated, and a population in bad health and discriminated against at the end of Second World War to a population which looks like most mainstream North America takes the carpet from under the feet of a certain nationalist rhetoric.

There is no place anymore for outrage and indignation. There was a lot of place for outrage and indignation when I was a kid. I mean, I remember I was in college, and we would go on Saint Catherine Street in Montreal - 80 percent French speaking - we could not get a cup of coffee served in French in restaurants of Downtown Montreal. We would enter 25 at the same time; we would sit down, have a coffee and leave French/English, English/French dictionaries as tips for the owner. We have come such a long ways from then.

And in that sense, all these progress, as I said, take the bite out of what nationalism was about.

We have also constructed powerful instruments of government. The importance of these successes is dear to our people. Yet, compare the Globe and mail and read *Le devoir*, and you will have the impression we live in two fundamentally different worlds.

Now, do the profound cultural differences between Québec and the rest of the country lead inevitably to the independence of Québec as the only possible political outcome of this differentiation? I do not believe so. It could lead to a better-reasoned accommodation of Québec's differentiation. However, for that to happen, people would have to be listening in the rest of the country, and they are not.

MR. SMITH: I was very interested - Brad Smith from Ottawa. I was very interested in your remarks about the 1950s and so on. And, of course,

the Johnson family, in the form of your father, came not too long after that. And there's been this tremendous change that you have described.

Moving from a society where the church and certain groups such as lawyers and so on were the elite of society to a situation where the elite became the Union leaders, the teachers, and so forth, and moving on now to a society where the leaders seem to be the mercantile class, or might put it that way, what I would like to know whether you have any further comments on what you just said a moment ago about the - I wouldn't call it the lower part of society, but the rest of society, not the elite, where are they at this point in time?

MR. JOHNSON: Polls still say that 45 percent of Quebecers would vote yes at the question of the last referendum. Therefore, I would say that nationalism is not the affair of elite.

MR. ROBINSON: That leaves me about 30 seconds before I thank the speaker.

To follow up on that, on Pierre-Marc's comment about the resentment going down, by giving you a little anecdote that helps put this in a context especially for Americans, there are actually three languages spoken in Quebec, three principal languages. There's French, there's English and there's Joul, which is kind of like a sort of dialect.

In the bad old days, if you tried to make an effort to bring your high school French to Montreal and speak it in restaurants and shops and whatever, you would be answered in English, because they resented the fact that you spoke this Parisian type French to the shopkeepers, waiters, whatever.

That has changed. If you make an effort now to speak French no matter how bad your accent is and how it doesn't sound like somebody from east end Montreal, they will be patient with you and speak to you in French. And that's real progress, because they won't do that in France.

So I think we have to thank our speaker. This is an extraordinary effort he's made. Pierre-Marc flew in especially from San Francisco for this, and has to fly back tonight.

(Session concluded)