



CANADA: CAN WE SURVIVE?

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Biographical Note: Author of numerous books and articles on the Canadian constitution, Professor Cairns is ideally qualified to assess Canada's future. Past President of the Canadian Political Science Association, former Chair of the UBC Political Science Department, an emeritus professor at UBC since 1995, and recently a Visiting Professor at the University of Toronto and Queen's, he was twice President of the Vancouver Institute. He has long argued that Canadians are ill-prepared for the possible break-up of Canada — the subject of his address to The Institute. Professor Cairns is the recent recipient of the Governor General's International Award for Canadian Studies.

Seventeen years ago I spoke to the Vancouver Institute on the then view of our never ending constitutional crisis — I talked on the Pepin-Robarts Report. Two years ago when I was President of the Institute, Angus Reid spoke to the Institute pretty well on the same subject, and in general I think it's fair to say he was quite optimistic about the evolution of Quebec public opinion, believing that certain demographic factors were strengthening the "no" rather than the "yes" forces. And, in between, I'm sure there have been other talks on our constitutional discontents. In my more concerned moments I'm reassured by a former colleague of mine, the late Donald Smiley, who used to say that whatever bad things the constitutional crisis has done for Canada, it has been extremely good for political scientists. On the other hand, whether the political scientists have been good for the constitutional crisis remains a question open for future examination.

Now about the survival of Canada I'd like to be clear from the beginning. I don't actually mean the survival of Canada as it presently exists. I mean the survival of Canada if Quebec votes "yes"

and if Quebec leaves; that is, what will happen to the rest of us if what we tried to prevent does happen, and a referendum produces a decisive enough Quebec “yes” that we accept the result.

So the question to which I will try to give an answer is: “How can we outside of Quebec prepare for the fact that we will be unprepared to respond intelligently to the reconstitution of the rest of Canada should Quebec vote a convincing “yes” in the next referendum?” Putting that in another language: given the fact that we will really be almost completely unprepared to respond to our own crisis situation — that is, can we live as a separate people after Quebec has gone — how can we prepare for our lack of preparation?

I will have to make a few observations on what has come to be known as Track 1 and Track 2 or Plan A and Plan B. Plan A is really the renewal of Canada focus, and we can say that this is a focus or an orientation which has been in existence in the contemporary period at least since the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism of the sixties. That commission, as you recall, said in 1965 that Canada was in a state of crisis. Since then we have had a succession of Plan A proposals up to the 1992 Charlottetown Accord. But up until the recent Quebec referendum, Canadians outside of Quebec essentially only had a Plan A. We did not have a Plan B or a Track 2. The territory that Plan B tries to encompass is: what should we do if Quebec votes yes? That is, instead of concentrating all our efforts on trying to prevent Quebec from voting yes, although efforts would still continue on Plan A, we now ask ourselves the supplementary question, “How can we prepare ourselves for the outcome that we do not wish?”

Now formerly Plan B was taboo territory. We were not supposed to discuss Plan B on the ground that to discuss it meant we were indicating a high probability that the “yes” forces would win. Thus we were facilitating the “yes” forces in Quebec by letting them know we thought the momentum was on their side. So up until very recently, to operate in Plan B territory, even to talk about it, was off limits. That is no longer the case. One of the most important transformations in our constitutional public discourse is that Plan B is now vigorously discussed, although one could not argue that there is

a coherent program which occupies all the territory which a comprehensive Plan B should include. So, Plan B from a taboo topic has become a topic that is now actively pursued and considered by Canadians and their governments.

But why has this policy focus moved out of the "let's not talk about it" category to one where it now attracts significant attention? There are two essential reasons. The first reason is the regrettable but undeniable record of constitutional reform failures that has been our experience since the 1980-1982 discussions culminating in the Constitution Act of 1982. Although that Act was in one sense a success, it was not a complete success because the government of Quebec refused to "sign on" -- as the phrase went -- and later turned their non-participation into "The Great Betrayal." All subsequent efforts, Meech Lake and Charlottetown, have failed to produce a package which could be implemented. We now tend to think of the amending formula as almost unworkable. And so, we, in a sense are saying that Plan A territory is territory which we're less and less optimistic that we can successfully operate in.

And secondly, there is the decisive psychological impact on the way we view our future of the October 30, 1995 referendum result. Charles Taylor, a distinguished Quebec philosopher, in discussing the impact of the failure of Meech Lake on the Quebec population, said that something snapped in Quebec after the defeat of Meech Lake. He meant that when the Quebec people, especially the federalists, became aware that what they viewed as a modest package of constitutional change could not get through the amending process, something snapped. They recognized that it would be almost impossible for them to achieve the kind of renewal of federalism that they, the Quebec federalists, thought was desirable.

I would argue that after the October 30 referendum in Quebec, something snapped *outside* of Quebec. We realized that we, too, lived in a different world. And our different world was a world in which we had to begin to accept the possibility that maybe this country might not survive.

Before I get to the particulars of the kind of intellectual conundrum that we find ourselves in as a result of this new recognition

of our realities, I'd like to take you through three asides which the lawyers in the audience would call three *obiter dicta*.

Firstly, and a point that tends to be overlooked, surprisingly, because it is extremely obvious, is that Quebec has had both a Plan A and a Plan B for decades. That is, ever since the formation of the Parti Quebecois in 1968 — to take an obvious starting point — Quebec has always had one set of social forces in that province and one political party which aimed for the renewal of federalism, and another political party that has aimed for some version of the break-up of Canada, under various titles, Sovereignty Association being the most recent one. So Quebec has, for the last thirty years, operated on two fronts at the same time and it has vigorous actors in both camps simultaneously. In that sense when we now say, “we too, are going to have a Plan B,” we are simply catching up to what they have been doing all along.

My second point, which underlines the complexity and difficulty of our situation, is that Plan B — that is, the response of Canadians outside Quebec to how they might respond to a “yes” vote in Quebec — tends to divide the federalist forces in Quebec from the federalist forces outside Quebec. Plan B tells the citizens of Quebec that the rest of Canada is thinking of an outcome in which the federalist forces in Quebec will have lost. And they will have lost in a way much more decisively than the federalist forces outside Quebec, because the latter have another country, now called “the rest of Canada,” to retreat to. So Plan B is the plan which includes Chretien saying: “There's got to be a clear question;” Chretien saying: “Maybe fifty percent plus one is not enough;” Stephane Dion saying: “Maybe the partition of Quebec might be an item on the agenda;” and the Department of Justice submitting a reference question to the Supreme Court asking what the legality is, in terms in both domestic and international law, of a Quebec unilateral declaration of independence.

So these are the questions which are much more relevant to federalist forces outside Quebec than federalist forces inside Quebec, and thus there is tension now between Mr. Johnson, the Quebec Liberal Leader, and the federalist actors in Ottawa and elsewhere in the country.

The third aside I'd like to draw your attention to is the difficulty we are having in playing both games at once. It's worth noting that it's easier to play both games simultaneously in Quebec than it is outside Quebec. The reason for that is that in Quebec two parties play the game. One party plays the Plan A game — i.e. the renewal of federalism in Quebec — and a different party plays the Sovereignty Association game, the break-up of Canada game, possibly followed by various kinds of partnership links. The fact that there are separate actors means that they don't get in each other's way; but for the rest of us, we have only one actor, since the federal government is the leader in this enterprise and has to play both games at the same time.

And that's difficult for a whole lot of reasons. First of all, it's psychologically difficult, because each game requires a different view of the person to whom the game is directed. Plan A — the renewal of federalism game — is directed to our fellow citizens in Quebec. Plan B — the response to a Quebec "yes," — is devoted to those future "foreign" citizens in a neighboring country that is no longer part of our Canadian community. So we relate to the Quebec population in a very different fashion, depending on whether we're thinking of Plan A, i.e. "fellow citizens," or Plan B, "you have destroyed our country," and it's psychologically difficult to juggle both games. I realize the federal government is not a single homogenous actor, but even so it's not easy for a kind of multiple actor, such as Ottawa, simultaneously to keep both of these definitions of the situation in play and play both constitutional games equally vigorously at the same time.

In addition, it is difficult to play Plan A and Plan B simultaneously from outside Quebec, because you give a lot of weapons to your opponents. The Sovereignists in Quebec in particular can say that 'we' only pretend to be playing the renewal of federalism game seriously, because, they observe, that simultaneously we are preparing for the break-up of this country.

Well, the reality is that our preparation is limited. You would probably think that one of the items that should be included in that large Plan B territory would be the preparation of the rest of us for an

independent future after Quebec has gone. In other words, there should be in Plan B a preparation for a new constitution of a Canada that does not include Quebec. But Plan B does not include any attention to the reconstitution of Canada without Quebec; it pays no attention to how we might survive the departure of Quebec. Why is this so?

The federal government both won't and can't prepare for that unsought future. You notice that what the federal government mainly includes, in what we have now come to call Plan B, is a series of proposals which tell Quebecers that if they go the risky route of independence they are getting into very, very dangerous territory, because we -- on the other side of the table -- are going to be tough bargainers; we're not going to be push-overs; we're going to insist that Quebecers take their full share of the debt; we're going to require a clear question; we might pose the issue of the partition of Quebec, and so on. So, when we really look at Plan B closely as it emerges outside of Quebec, we find that it very frequently is an indirect attempt to reinforce the "no" side in Quebec by talking about the high costs that the attempted independence of Quebec, especially by UDI, will bring in its wake.

Well, to focus on the reconstitution of the rest of Canada carries no threat to Quebec; in fact it does the reverse. It tells Quebecers that we are getting ready for the outcome that the sovereigntists forces are seeking. That's one reason the federal government won't or cannot act in this territory. But, in addition to this, there's another more fundamental structural or logical reason. The federal government cannot begin to prepare for a future for "the rest of Canada" without Quebec because it is not the government of the rest of Canada. The federal government is now and will be until midnight, until the Quebec departure happens, the government of all Canada. Until that point the Quebec government and the Quebec people are part of Canada. So the federal government cannot make public preparations for a future from which Quebec is excluded while Quebec remains part of Canada.

There is a psychological factor also at work. Psychologically the federal government will not plan for its own defeat, be-

cause to vigorously talk about and to publicly try to educate Canadians about a future without Quebec is to anticipate that the battle has been lost. So the federal government is not going to be a key educator of the future we will have to try to work out should we lose Quebec. And the provinces will do very little. Whatever they will do will be backroom, and therefore will be a particularistic provincial perspective and will not educate their citizens in how those citizens should respond should the country break up.

The reality then is that if Canada is to break up after a “yes” referendum vote in Quebec, there will be an almost total lack of preparation by those of us outside Quebec, including governments and citizens, for this devastating reality. And in thinking about our dramatic lack of preparedness, it’s useful to contrast that hypothetical future moment with what it will probably look like within Quebec.

Now I don’t wish to give the impression that I believe the social-political-economic reality in Quebec will be in any sense peaceful; that it will be an easy situation for the then government of Quebec to handle. In fact, I think Quebec will be a profoundly, deeply divided society. One has the suspicion that it might be quite difficult to even maintain law and order. Having said that, there will remain a fundamental distinction between how Quebecers will be ready for Canada’s breakup and how we will not be.

For example, Quebecers have been socialized, emotionally and intellectually, to see this as a desirable outcome for 30 or 40 years. Further, when it happens, it will have happened as a result of a referendum which presumably will have mobilized, 60 percent plus of the Francophone population. They will be moving into a future which they will feel they have chosen, for which they have become emotionally and intellectually prepared, at least to some extent. In addition to that, the Quebec population will enter this new future with what we could call “institutional framework continuity,” by which I simply mean that the Quebec government, now the government of a province, will fairly quickly and easily simply become the government of an independent Quebec. And thirdly, Quebecers will experience this outcome, at least the majority that was in favour, with a sense of pride, a sense of joy, a sense of exhilaration, that the

nationalist goal that the full sovereigntists, at least, have been seeking -- has finally been achieved.

So let us contrast the reaction of the rest of us with those three realities.

Will we have been emotionally and intellectually prepared to occupy, to inhabit, to live in this new country, from which Quebec has gone? No. There'll be almost negligible preparation. Can we guarantee institutional continuity? We don't know. We don't know whether a Canada without Quebec will survive as a single entity. Will we be proud? Will we think this is an achievement? No, we'll be resentful, we'll be bitter, we will feel wounded, we will feel the country that we wanted kept together has been taken from us. So in every one of these three orientations, Quebec and its population is in a much more privileged situation with respect to their future than we will be with respect to our future. So there is, therefore, a crucial difference between the two Plan Bs. Quebec's Plan B is a sovereignty option. Canada's Plan B is not a sovereignty option for the rest of Canada. It is, rather, a response to the possibility of Quebec sovereignty and therefore to the bargaining that will follow. So, desirable as it is, it does not cover a very important part of the large bag of questions that we will have to grapple with at that time.

Well, we might say that's not too important because what will happen to the rest of us is, so to speak, fairly predictable, it's in the nature of things. That is, there are social forces, there are institutional factors, such that the outcome if Quebec leaves is fairly easy to anticipate if you have a good sort of theoretical sense of how institutions and societies interact with each other. And therefore, you might say, if that were to be the case, a lack of preparation doesn't really matter because the lack is compensated for by the fact that it's going to work out in a particular way because there is no other alternative.

Well, if you look at the literature, what you find is that those who try to discern the future of Canada without Quebec are literally, if you will pardon the expression, all over the map. First of all, there is a group that we could call the "break-up" group; that is, those who feel that Canada without Quebec will not survive as a single actor.

This includes John Crosbie, the late Robert Bourassa, and Charles Doran, a prominent American academic who published a recent paper in the prestigious American journal, *Foreign Affairs*. It includes a number of well established Canadian academics, such as Peter Leslie of Queen's University.

So there's a significant group of knowledgeable people who feel that those of us outside Quebec will not hang together as a single country after Quebec leaves. On the other hand, there's another group, and that includes Philip Resnick at the University of British Columbia, Maureen Covell at Simon Fraser University, and a number of other scholars, whose names may not be well known to a non-political science audience, who feel that Canadians outside of Quebec will more or less continue with suitable modifications of the institutional structure they have inherited; that we will not fragment. And in fact, the most important and impressive analysis of the future of Canada without Quebec by the University of Western Ontario political scientist, Robert Young, is quite categorical that we, outside of Quebec, will survive as a single people under one government.

Nevertheless, even those who think we will remain together admit that break-up is a very serious possibility. Thus, we might say that behind their facade of optimism, the optimists conceal a deep grain of pessimism. They're not sure we'll pull it off. They think we will, but they're not sure. In addition, those who look at the future of Canada without Quebec and think we will stay together nevertheless disagree on the kind of Canada without Quebec that will survive. For example, citing two analysts, Gordon Gibson, a local constitutional commentator, believes that Canada without Quebec will be a very decentralized country. And in some of his writings, he's not even clear that we will survive as a single country. By contrast, there's a very distinguished political economist at Queen's University who feels that we will not only survive, but we will eventually move towards a unitary state. This is economist Dan Usher and he believes this because he thinks that the only significant factor that makes us federal is the presence of Quebec. And that when Quebec goes, the natural forces of unification will push us all towards a unitary state, in which the provinces will have disappeared.

Now as a general proposition, what we could call the “survivalists” -- that is those who think we will continue as a single country -- tend to stress what I would call sociological or cultural identity factors. They, in other words, say that beneath the federal divisions of those of us outside Quebec, we really are one people. We are knit together by common values; we have the Charter, a common instrument with which we identify; we share a common history; we’re proud of the Canada from which Quebec will have foolishly left. And therefore, we will remain a single country. The “break-uppers,” or the massive decentralizers, by contrast, when they say we will not survive or we will be profoundly decentralized, don’t talk of sociological or psychological identity factors, they tend to talk of institutional factors. And they stress two phenomena. The first is the “shattering defeat of the central government,” which will be prostrate after Quebec leaves, on the ground that it will have failed in the fundamental *raison d’être* of any central government of a country -- keeping the country together. In addition to that, it is the central government, we must remember, that loses territory, that loses population and, of course, will lose ministers. It will be battered and demoralized. The election of a new party government will probably be necessary. The provincial governments, by contrast, will not experience that sort of shattering institutional blow to their identity at all. They’re still here in exactly the same way they were before. So the decentralizers, the break-uppers, say that when the battle to re-fashion our future takes place, the actors that will be powerful at the table will be the provinces, not the central government. And when they say the provinces, they mean Alberta, British Columbia, and Ontario -- the three ‘have’ provinces. So they tend to provide an institutional explanation for why we will not remain together. By inference they’re suggesting that the underlying sociological unity which the optimists say will keep us together is insufficiently deeply rooted to overcome these institutional pressures towards fragmentation.

Well, what is my conclusion to all of this? I really have three. The main conclusion is that we do not at all know what will happen to the rest of Canada after a “yes,” because those who have most

vigorously tried to examine the situation are in profound disagreement. Now you could ask, "What does Cairns think?" but that's not the issue. My point is that when you look at all those who have tried to figure it out, they give very, very different answers. So the reality is that we don't know what will happen, and that's a profoundly important statement. It means that when we confront this situation — and I'm operating on the basis of an hypothesis, of course, that Quebec has voted "yes" — we will be moving into an area in which the most fundamental reality we see in our future vision is a huge question mark. So we have to prepare for the fact that we will be literally completely ignorant of how the post-"yes" scenario for the rest of us is going to evolve.

My second point is that it is impossible for us to prepare in advance for this reality, because, as I have already indicated, our governments will not and cannot prepare. And so, although there may be some preparation by think-tanks and we will probably -- by the time it happens, if it does happen -- have a fairly impressive couple of shelves of books and articles by academics looking at the issue -- this is not really preparation. This is not the preparation of citizens outside Quebec to take charge of their future. This is a useful bit of intellectual capital that will be available when that event takes place, if it does. But it will not really prepare governments and the surviving Canadian people for the outcome. Some will say: "Well why don't we do something about it?" And I'm saying we can't and we won't. And we will, therefore, end up with this question mark of who are we, and can we stay together, confronting us.

My third conclusion is that following a definitive "yes" there will be massive uncertainty outside Quebec; inside Quebec too, but that's not my focus. There will be fear, there will be panic, there will be anger. And remember, the public will be almost completely unprepared for this outcome. And this, then becomes a very volatile and dangerous situation. It is a situation that is ripe for demagogues.

So what should we do, given that this is one of the two possible futures that confront us, the other being that we stay together because we have renewed the federal system. What are we to do?

Well, in a way, what I'm about to suggest sounds rather trite.

Some things that are trite are important and profound, some things that are trite are simply trite. My suggestion is that we continue for an interim three to five year period with the existing constitutional structure without Quebec. Just excise Quebec in all the areas from which they have to be taken out — Supreme Court, House of Commons, Senate, all the boards and commissions, and the legislation, which is aimed at Quebec — and then we carry on for this interim period, and in that interim period we then attend to the reconstitution of the rest of Canada. That is what I call Plan C, the reconstitution of the rest of Canada. What kind of people do we wish to become if Quebec leaves?

Now it's important to keep in mind what I'm *not* discussing. I am *not* discussing the immediate post-"yes" bargaining situation with Quebec. I'm discussing the situation after Quebec has gone. The bargaining situation is itself sufficiently complicated, that it would require another and a very, very different lecture.

Why should we opt for this stratagem that I'm suggesting, to continue with the existing constitutional structure with Quebec gone. There are many reasons for delay.

First of all, I think it would be tremendously psychologically reassuring to Canadians to know that the country without Quebec is going to carry on. It's going to carry on for some transitional period. And in that transitional period we're going to figure out how we wish to carry on after the transitional period is over. It also seems to me that the knowledge and the reality that we're going to carry on will be very reassuring to various international actors — the other states in the international system, and to the international financial community. A tremendous body-blow will have been struck at and wounded Canada, but the country will still be there. Bloody, but unbowed, one might say.

Second, it does seem to me that there is a very profound psychological and intellectual difficulty in thinking about the future of Canada while Quebec remains. That is, even if one could argue that it would be possible for governments and peoples to engage in a massive kind of public education program to prepare for the possibility that Quebec might leave — so that we would be ready if that

event were to happen — I think that it is extraordinarily difficult for intellectual and emotional reasons to do so, because that is not an outcome that we seek. And it's very difficult for us to give up on a vision of a Canada that includes Quebec and concentrate whole-heartedly and positively on a version of Canada that excludes Quebec whilst it's still, we hope, possible to retain Quebec within Canada. In other words, I believe that serious thinking of a Canada without Quebec cannot take place until Quebec has left Canada — that the break-up of the old paradigm is a psychological prerequisite for examining a new paradigm in which the hole between Ontario and New Brunswick is not just imagined, but it is real. This will be a kind of reality shock which will force us to think fundamentally and seriously about what it's almost impossible for us to think about prior to Quebec's departure.

And third, unless we agree to continue, unless we agree to delay our reconstitution, our choice of a future will be driven, I fear, by panic, by insecurity, by a lack of preparation, and by a kind of frantic search for quick security. And in those circumstances the danger, as I see it, is that the most available option will simply carry the day because people will want something onto which they can cling in this crisis situation.

So to move quickly — if you accept my argument that we would be unprepared — that is almost a guarantee that we will be decisively influenced by ephemeral factors. And there are many ephemeral factors and many scenarios that we could examine. Let me just look at two. The first one is the scenario that the decentralizers envisage. That is the one that says that after Quebec goes, the shock of Quebec's departure will leave us with a ravaged central government, weakened, prostrate, and incapable of playing the leadership role. Confronting that weakened central government, at the time of our reconstitution if we try to act quickly, will be a rampant provincialism led, as I have already said, by the big three: Ontario, Alberta, and British Columbia. And the reality, if we stay together at all, then will be a profoundly decentralized Canada responding to the momentum and the inertia of those particular forces which by accident happen to occupy the stage.

Or one might visualize an alternative scenario, one in which the break-up of Canada with Quebec leaving, induces a powerful surge of loyalty and identification with the central government. That is the government to which Canadians would automatically direct their search for security because it's the one which is, in a sense, responsible for law and order, responsible for our safety in an inter-dependent world. It is possible that the central government in that circumstance might act very decisively, that it might very successfully, and in our self-interest, efficiently handle the bargaining process with Quebec. We might then come out of that immediate post-"yes" situation with a lot of very positive attitudes to the central government for having handled a very difficult situation with tremendous aplomb and success. And if that is the case, and if we reconstitute in the light of that context, then we may end up being much more centralized, because the government in our immediate past that will have played such a strong and effective role will be Ottawa. And the federal political elite will use that triumph to push a reconstituted Canada — this hypothesis would suggest — in a centralist direction.

Now my perspective is that I'm opposed, not to either of those outcomes in particular — although I do prefer one rather the other — but I am opposed to the possibility that what we will become, after Quebec leaves, will be decisively influenced by the accident of the manner of our break-up. It does not seem to me to be reasonable or desirable that the kind of country we would become should be so overwhelmingly influenced by unpredictable, fortuitous events that attend Quebec's departure, followed by one or more governments profiting from the ambiguities and panic and having a disproportionate impact on our future. So, I do not wish our post-Quebec constitutional future, including whether we stay together, to be determined by the accident of how we happen to break-up.

My argument is that we must delay decision-making. We must delay until we can get some kind of level playing field, until the dust has settled, until the anger, probably a great deal of anger outside of Quebec has been, at least to some extent, left behind. But most importantly, we should delay so that we can give reason a

chance, so we can take time for discussion, time to educate us for the kind of future that we will not have been educated for prior to the break-up. In other words, my argument is that we have to do *after* the country breaks up what Quebeckers will have been doing for thirty years prior to the break-up of the country, namely preparing for a separate existence.

An additional reason for delay is that it will give us more information about our international environment. We will be in the atypical situation for Canadians of having two foreign neighbours on our borders for the first time. An independent Quebec will be a foreign Quebec. We will no longer treat Quebec with the kind of empathy and sympathy and feeling of belonging to the same community that applied when they were part of Canada. They become a foreign country and will be treated entirely in the light of our self-interest when that occurs. If we delay, we will have more knowledge of what that new foreign actor is like. We will have had more time to adjust to the reality of the international context of our independence.

The largest reason, of course, for delay is that we will confront an incredibly momentous task. Our task will be to create a new country and to create a new people. Since we will not be ready to do that at the time of break-up, we should give ourselves time to do it thoroughly, and intelligently, and in a way which involves citizens and governments in a profoundly difficult, but important educational process.

I would be less than honest if I did not conclude by also noting that there are very significant disadvantages to delay. So let me underline some of these disadvantages. Clearly the transition period will be very stressful. The main stress will be because of the transitional nature of the structure that I'm suggesting should continue, the old Canada without Quebec; the same Parliament without Quebec members, the same Supreme Court, the same Charter of Rights, the same nine provinces and two territories, the same laws and legislation. This will provide a certain security, but clearly there will be a kind of limited legitimacy to the continuing structure and continuing policies because we will know that we are in a transition period.

We will know that as well as the ongoingness of the old structure without Quebec, there will be another constitutional process taking place in which we are trying to figure who we wish to be. To the extent that the discussions and arguments and projections of who we will be in that other process depart significantly from the old structure, then by definition that old structure will look more and more illegitimate. The old structure will be there, but it will be kind of hollow if it looks that we're going to reconstitute ourselves in a way fairly different from that old structure. So there will be a kind of ambiguous period in which the old is still there and it's turning over, so to speak, but the new is being born beside it, and that will make the old look like less and less of an actor in which we're willing to put our hopes.

Very few major policy initiatives will be possible for that transitional government for the obvious reason that it cannot bind the future when we will not even know if we are going to survive as a people. So it will be a kind of a caretaker operation. The old policies will be there, of course, except for those that have to be decisively modified to respond to the departure of Quebec. We will not, however, undertake significant new policies, except for ones to do with the crisis situation that we will be in.

It also means — whether this is a disadvantage or an advantage I don't know — that this transitional situation will limit the response we're able to make to Quebec until we figure out who we are. That is, there'll be certain inescapable arrangements that we will have to make with Quebec just because of the ongoingness of our co-existence on the northern half of this continent. However, any suggestion by an independent Quebec for arrangements that speak in terms of partnership or of jointly operating institutions of the association they seek will be rejected. We will reply: "We cannot respond to that, because we do not know who we are going to be. We may not even end up being one people, and therefore we cannot enter into these arrangements until we've settled our own identity problems." So we'll say, in effect, "You may have thought it was going to be very easy for you to get us to bargain on those issues and agree to come to terms which would be mutually advantageous, but we are

telling you that we will not be ready, and you will simply have to wait until we are ready.”

Also in this period there will be federal and provincial elections. Some may be destabilizing — it could not be otherwise — because they will focus on the constitution. It’s impossible to visualize elections taking place in a transitional crisis situation such as this, in which the competing parties do not debate with each other about the contending futures or alternative futures that they are trying to get their supporters to line-up behind and to support. So this too will be destabilizing; but it’s a kind of necessary destabilization. It is part of our necessary education in this new unsought situation.

Well, probably the most obvious question that will be asked of someone who makes the kind of proposal that I am making for this transitional continuity will be: “Am I either unconsciously, slyly, or subtly trying to privilege the status quo? Am I trying to privilege the centre? Am I trying to give the federal government an advantage in that reconstitution scenario that I am saying we otherwise will be unprepared for?” Well, I think my answer to that would honestly be “not necessarily,” because it depends on which post-“yes” scenario would evolve if we decided on our future in haste. If that post-“yes” scenario were one in which the central government manages to attract the loyalty and identification of Canadians in this crisis period and bravely handles the bargaining situation with Quebec and appears to have served the interests of this smaller Canada, I would still say, “No. Let us delay. Let us not reconstitute ourselves now. I want the dust to settle, and the provincial governments to be strong players in our reconstitution.” On the other hand, if the other scenario were to triumph, and the provinces, especially the big three, take charge, then clearly my scenario is designed to allow time for the central government to re-establish itself, for the trauma of the break-up to be overcome and for the confrontation between rival actors to operate on the level playing field that this transition period is designed to produce.

My proposal does reduce the possibility that we will not survive as a single people. It works against that possibility by precluding a provincial take-over of the reconstitution agenda at a time when

the federal government might be too weak to guarantee its own survival. My purpose is to support the interpretation that provincial governments, especially the big three, would be acting unfairly if they were to take advantage of the situation and follow Quebec's example when the other country-wide vision of Canada, for temporary reasons, happens to be decisively weakened.

So, my response therefore to my initial question of: "How do we prepare for the fact that we will be completely unprepared for Quebec independence should it happen?" is that we continue with the old order, with Quebec gone, for this transitional period of three to five years. The purpose of doing this is to give us time to think about a new order as one or more peoples and to set in motion a reconstitution process which will allow us, rationally, and with reasonable time, to improve our understanding of the new situation, and to decide who we wish to be. And it would be helpful if this understanding that we will continue as we are without Quebec could have broad public support before a possible 'yes' vote. In particular, it would be very helpful if some leading politicians or opinion leaders would say: "That is the way we view the future of Canada without Quebec for this transitional period." That would be an immensely reassuring kind of statement to come from our political leaders. And for those of you who say that my message is not a happy one, I have two replies: "Don't shoot the messenger," and also, "Do you have a better alternative?" I don't.