CANADA: ONE NATION OR TWO?

Events: Canada is a federation comprising ten provinces and three territories, the former enjoying wider political autonomy than the latter. Almost 24 per cent of Canadians are francophones, who speak French as their first language and largely live (85 per cent) in the Atlantic province of Quebec. Since the 1970s, Canadian domestic politics has been dominated by the issue of Quebec's relationship to predominantly anglophone Canada. The paramilitary Quebec Liberation Front, was active during 1963–70; the separatist political party, Parti Québécois (PQ), won power in Quebec in 1976; since 1990, PQ has operated on a federal level through the Bloc Québécois (BQ). Referendums on independence for Quebec were held in 1980 and 1995, but both failed, the latter by a margin of 1 per cent. Attempts to address the challenge of Quebec nationalism through constitutional reform, notably through the Meech Lake Accord of 1987, also failed. However, the principles of multiculturalism and biculturalism have been enshrined in law through section 27 of the 1982 Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the 1988 Canadian Multiculturalism Act. In 2006, the Canadian House of Commons passed a motion recognizing that the 'Québécois form a nation within a united Canada'.

Significance: The nationalism of the Québécois in Canada raises important questions about both the nature of nationalism and the circumstances in which it rises or falls. From the mid-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century, Quebec nationalism was distinctively cultural in orientation, being shaped by conservative clerical allegiances, centred on the Catholic Church, and reflecting the rural and familial values of a historically agricultural territory. However, by the 1960s, this elite version of society was being unsettled by trends such as urbanization, secularization, Americanization, and the spread of liberal and progressive values. In this context, Québécois identity started to be re-articulated, becoming more self-confident and assertive, and expressing itself increasingly through political demands, especially for independence. Political factors also facilitated this process. The introduction, in the early 1960s, of the so-called 'Quiet Revolution' by the province's Liberal government promoted social and cultural modernization and, by increasing the power of the provincial government, sparked the growth of popular demands for secession. Similarly, under the premierships

of Pierre Trudeau (1968–79, 1980–84), the Canadian government attempted to satisfy Quebec nationalism by making concessions in terms of language rights and by adjusting both Canada's and Quebec's constitutional status, which strengthened the tide of nationalism, rather than containing it.

However, despite the transition from cultural concerns to political demands, language remained central to Quebec nationalism, and, in some respects, became more important. This occurred both because of the perception that French was being threatened by the spread of English (and other languages) due to growing immigration (Canada has one of the highest per capita immigration rates in the world), and because language was increasingly equated with identity, and thus became part of a politics of politico-cultural self-assertion. Nevertheless, following the failure of the 1995 referendum, the tide started to turn against secessionist nationalism. In the 2007 provincial election, PQ was defeated by both the Liberals and the conservative Action démocratique du Québec (ADQ), marking the first time since 1973 that the party did not form either the government or the official opposition. The reasons for this include a growing recognition of the economic benefit of remaining within the Canadian federation, and the fact that progress in securing Quebec's cultural and language rights has, over time, weakened the sense of threat and injustice that had once helped to fuel secessionist politics. In many respects, multiculturalism (see p. 167), rather than nationalism, has proved to be the solution to the 'Quebec problem', especially as, since the 1990s, Canada has acknowledged the territorial and self-government rights of its so-called 'First Nations'.