

**The Politics of Routine and the Functionality of Canada's Two Solitudes  
by Daniel Drache with Blake Evans\***

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Markets in reality rarely level the playing field.<sup>1</sup> Instead, asymmetries are likely to grow in periods of intense integration, and when public authority is diminished, political drift rather than political purpose takes command. It is in these circumstances that what we call 'the politics of routine' becomes the norm. These politics of routine are visible when our political leaders shy away from innovation, and instead prefer system maintenance. There is nothing inherently wrong with the politics of routine; they always disappoint a citizenry with democratic expectations because they are neither innovative, nor do they build long-term alternatives to deep structural problems.<sup>2</sup>

Since the collapse of the Charlottetown Accord and the Quebec referendum of 1995, Canada has been in the grips of the politics of routine. This has taken the form of one-offs, ad hocery, deal-making, and a general retreat from the high road of the politics of vision. Nor has economic integration proven to be much of a nation-builder. Instead, Ontario remains a distant shore on Quebec's horizon, and Quebec is at best little more than a phantom presence in the provincial imagination of Ontarians.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Dani Rodrik, *Has Globalization Gone too Far?* Washington, DC: Institute for International Economics, 1997; Joseph E. Stiglitz, *Globalization and its Discontents*. New York: W.W.Norton, 2003.

<sup>2</sup> Philippe C. Schmitter. *How to Democratize the European Union – And why Bother?* New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000.

<sup>3</sup> Gilles Bourque et Jules Duchastel (avec la collaboration de Victor Armony). *L'identité fragmentée. Nation et citoyenneté dans les débats constitutionnels canadiens, 1941-1992*. Montréal: Fides, 1996.

The question of Canada's solitudes has been much written-about, but has been the subject of very little systematic analysis. Conventional thinking says that solitudes are dangerous, anti-social, and indicative of Canada's failures<sup>4</sup>. However, this paper argues, counter to conventional wisdom, that despite their imperfections, the solitudes have been a functional and effective form of political accommodation in Canada. We will begin by measuring the social indicators of our solitudes in order to assess how deeply they run. We then evaluate the degree of cultural interaction at the level of Canadian elites, civil society, and governments. We will then explain the politics of routine and seek to explain how they impact Canada's economic and political union. Lastly, we will explain how the solitudes have an undeniable functionality, and that this functionality forms the core of the politics of routine. While these politics of routine are not be the ideal political arrangement for either side, they do form a basis upon which to build.

### **Social Indicators of the Solitudes**

Solitudes can be studied, analyzed, critiqued, and measured, and the social indicators of Canada's solitudes tell a powerful story. Increased bilingualism and intercultural dialogue have not created the kind of momentum or familiarity that would transform small everyday contact, the politics of routine, into something much more.

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<sup>4</sup> Hugh McLellan's novel *Two Solitudes* set in Montreal against the background of Canada's two 'cultural divides' explains the 'failure to communicate' and overcome this deep structural barrier. The actual quotation is from Goethe and reads: These template words describe the fragile state of Canada's federal union and fault line better than anything else since. see Hugh MacLennan. Two Solitudes. Toronto: Willian Collins Sons and Co. Canada LTD, 1945.

Federal bilingualism is one of the crown jewels in Canada's national unity strategy, and was meant to correct the linguistic imbalance documented by the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism<sup>5</sup>. It was also meant to lessen the divide between Canada's two solitudes. While bilingualism has increased on both sides of the Quebec/Ontario border, clearly it is not entirely a two-way street. As of 2001, 43% of francophones were reportedly bilingual, compared with only 9% of anglophones. Similarly, the bilingualism rate in Quebec rose to over 40%, while the rate outside of Quebec has been virtually stuck at 10.3% since 1996. Ontario ranked slightly better than average outside of Quebec, with 11.7% of Ontarians listed as bilingual<sup>6</sup>. In short, the level of bilingualism, as well as the rate of its increase, is highest in Quebec.

While Ontarians and Quebeckers are now more apt to understand each other, bilingualism has not significantly deepened our relationship, nor has it forged a common identity. What's more, it would appear that Quebeckers and not Ontarians are the ones making major strides towards bilingualism.

Even more troubling is the many barriers to interprovincial educational mobility, such as tuition fee differentials. When fully bilingual Ontarians do send their college-aged children to Quebec, they go to McGill, rather than to Université du Québec à Montréal – not to mention Quebec's university network outside of Montreal.

Several government programs at both the provincial and federal levels attempt to promote intercultural dialogue through such means as language and

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<sup>5</sup> Kenneth McRoberts. *Misconceiving Canada: The struggle for national unity*. Don Mills: Oxford University Press, 1997. p.109

<sup>6</sup> "Profile of Languages in Canada". English-French Bilingualism. Statistics Canada. 2002. <http://www12.statcan.ca/english/census01/Products/Analytic/companion/lang/bilingual.cfm>

education exchanges, and work-programs. Heritage Canada estimates that in all, 9000 young Canadians participated in their programs aimed at promoting “a greater appreciation of linguistic duality” in 2001-2002<sup>7</sup>. While summer work exchanges have become more popular<sup>8</sup>, they remain disappointingly underutilized. Another example is the Canadian Unity Council’s “Summer Work-Student Exchange” program, which exchanges roughly 500 high school students and 200 university students each year between Ontario and Quebec<sup>9</sup>.

The world of academia is similar. Few Quebecers attend the Learned’s Conference of the Humanities; only 745 of the approximately 7044 delegates, or just over 10%, were from Quebec<sup>10</sup>. By the same token, few English Canadians attend the annual Association francophone pour le savoir (ACFAS) convention. In fact, ACFAS’s publication, *Découvrir*, has only 6% of its total distribution to Ontario, and 3.3% to other Canadian provinces<sup>11</sup>. This is because in general, Canadian academics and researchers in the social sciences don’t closely follow Quebec intellectual life, infrequently have close colleagues in Quebec, and rarely read their books and articles. Those who do maintain interprovincial contacts most often do so in an ad hoc manner, rather than in an institutionalized one.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> This number refers to the sum of participants in the Young Canada Works in Both Official Languages program, the Summer Language Bursary program, and the Official Language Monitor program in 2001-2002. “Second language instruction”. Heritage Canada. [http://www.pch.gc.ca/progs/lo-ol/pubs/2001-2002/ra-ar/11\\_e.cfm](http://www.pch.gc.ca/progs/lo-ol/pubs/2001-2002/ra-ar/11_e.cfm)

<sup>8</sup> Summer-Work Student Exchange [http://www.summer-work.com/en/frames/fr\\_main.html](http://www.summer-work.com/en/frames/fr_main.html)

<sup>9</sup> Correspondence with Ercole Perrone, Summer-Work Student Exchange Ontario Regional Director, June 10<sup>th</sup>, 2005

<sup>10</sup> Correspondence with Donna LeLièvre, Congress Administrative Officer and Registrar, June 20<sup>th</sup>, 2005.

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.acfas.ca/decouvrir/>

<sup>12</sup> The lack of cross-referencing is due in part to the fact that in all social sciences Francophones and Anglophones have separate academic journals in geography, political science, history and sociology. Only a small minority publish in both. An exception is the area of constitutional law and federalism where the language divide has diminished because Quebecers publish in English scholarly journals and websites.

Similarly, Montreal's *Le Devoir*, the intellectual flagship of Quebec's elites, has a tiny daily circulation of below 5000 outside of Quebec, representing around 16% of their circulation, much smaller than the Anglophone Montreal Gazette or the less influential *La Presse* or *Journal de Montréal*<sup>13</sup>. In comparison, the *Globe and Mail* and *National Post* weekday editions have a circulation in Quebec of almost 23 000, or 7.2% of national circulation<sup>14</sup>, and 19 000 or 6.4%<sup>15</sup> respectively.

One of the single largest divides is rarely commented on: rural citizens occupy sharply divergent spaces in Quebec and Ontario. Thunder Bay native Mike Harris and his Common Sense Revolutionaries were able to connect the 905-area, suburban Toronto, and vast rural Ontario to ride a wave of popular discontent to power<sup>16</sup>. Suburban Quebec City is similarly conservative, providing a home to the fledgling right-wing Action Démocratique du Québec (ADQ), but has failed to connect with more social democratic regions in Quebec. These rural Quebec regions form the electoral base of the PQ, and are largely progressive, social democratic, nationalist and most importantly, increasingly secular<sup>17</sup>. Small-town rural Ontario remains the home not simply of Protestants but also of a socially conservative Pentecostal movement, which forms a small though virulent strain of anti-French, anti-Quebec and anti-Catholic popular opinion.

These separate silos are also visible among the business elites. Quebec's Conseil du Patronat (CPQ) and the Canadian Council of Chief Executives

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<sup>13</sup> Canadian Newspaper Circulation Factbook, 2000. Audit Bureau of Circulation, p.14

<sup>14</sup> Correspondence with Ponce Padua, Globe and Mail Circulation Statistics Supervisor, June 17<sup>th</sup>, 2005.

<sup>15</sup> Correspondence with David Klimek, Montreal Gazette Research Manager, June 17<sup>th</sup>, 2005.

<sup>16</sup> Diana Ralph, André Regimbald, and Nérée St-Armand (eds). Open for Business, Closed to People: Mike Harris's Ontario. Halifax: Fernwood, 1997.

(CCCE), may share an ideological bias, but they do not share a lobbying focus. While the CCCE does include Quebec enterprises, these businesses look to the CPQ, as their main voice in Quebec City, just as they look at Quebec City as the main terrain for their neo-liberal policy proposals<sup>18</sup>. In terms of cultural interaction, businesspeople now have to spend a lot of time going back and forth between Toronto and Montreal. On most weekdays, Air Canada offers over twenty flights from Toronto's Pearson airport to Montreal's Trudeau International<sup>19</sup>. Nonetheless, business holidays means going somewhere else altogether. Montrealers flock to Florida, New York, Maine and Vermont. The Toronto bourgeoisie enjoys skiing outside of Montreal, but weekend jaunts to Mont Tremblant do not constitute the basis for intercultural dialogue.

If our elites are not of one mind, what of civil society?

### **Are our Civil Societies “Bowling Alone”?**

Quebec and Canadian anti-globalization movements see the need for their own organizations, programs, goals and strategies. They co-operate when they must but it is largely episodic and ad hoc; this is also reinforced by the very nature of these movements. Specific event-oriented mobilizing committees and action groups are sporadic, and often don't survive past the event which they are protesting. They also often focus upon local events, and only cooperate across borders on the occasional larger action. As such, while they may form the basis

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<sup>17</sup> John Saywell. The Rise of the Parti Quebecois 1967-1976. Toronto: University of Toronto Press: 1977. p.124

<sup>18</sup> Gilles Taillon. “Rendre l'état performant”. Conseil du Patronat du Québec. 2001-11.

[http://www.cpq.qc.ca/extranet/dossiers/finances/dep-prov/200011\\_etatperformant.pdf](http://www.cpq.qc.ca/extranet/dossiers/finances/dep-prov/200011_etatperformant.pdf)

<sup>19</sup> [www.aircanada.com](http://www.aircanada.com) See Search for Flights

for important interprovincial networks, they lack the institutionalization necessary to form longer-lasting bases for cooperation.

Even larger institutionalized coalitions often focus on only one side of Canada's solitude divide. For example, the Council of Canadians, a group which is very active on the issue of Canadian sovereignty, is largely absent from Quebec. Of their 70 chapters across Canada, only two are in the province of Quebec<sup>20</sup>. At the same time, coalitions such as the Réseau Québécois sur l'intégration continentale, are active in similar debates and use similar discourses from Quebec's perspective<sup>21</sup>.

Student groups tell a similar story. Canada's major student group, the Canadian Federation of Students, represents 450 000 students at over 60 colleges and universities across Canada. However, only three of their locals are in Quebec, and none represent francophone educational institutions<sup>22</sup>. Nor did this organization play a major role in organizing or supporting the recent student strike in Quebec, which saw the biggest mobilization of students in Canada in decades. Instead student groups operating solely in Quebec, such as the moderate Fédération étudiante universitaire du Québec and the Fédération étudiante collégiale du Québec (FECQ), and even more importantly the more radical Association pour une Solidarité Syndicale Étudiante (ASSÉ) played far more integral roles<sup>23</sup>. In fact, the Quebec strike went largely unreported in the

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<sup>20</sup> "Quebec Chapters". The Council of Canadians. [http://www.canadians.org/display\\_document.htm?COC\\_token=23@@e665be7bf301a73509a91d0951210d2&id=675&isd=1&catid=7](http://www.canadians.org/display_document.htm?COC_token=23@@e665be7bf301a73509a91d0951210d2&id=675&isd=1&catid=7)

<sup>21</sup> Réseau Québécois sur l'intégration continentale. <http://www.rqic.alternatives.ca>

<sup>22</sup> "Member Local Students' Unions". Canadian Federation of Students. [http://www.cfs-cfee.ca/html/english/about/member\\_locals.php](http://www.cfs-cfee.ca/html/english/about/member_locals.php)

<sup>23</sup> "Quebec students rally to protest funding cuts". CBC Ottawa. March 16<sup>th</sup>, 2005 <http://ottawa.cbc.ca/regional/servlet/View?filename=ot-students20050316>



media outside of Quebec. This is because as well as being different sites for organization, the two solitudes also have their own mobilizations and actions.

While labour is organized provincially across all of Canada, Quebec labour organizations have a degree of autonomy and self-organizing which other provinces do not have. For example, the Quebec Federation of Labour has held a special autonomous status within the Canadian Labour Congress since 1974, and has operated within an arrangement of “Sovereignty-Association” since 1993<sup>24</sup>. Similarly, the Canadian Autoworkers National Executive Board includes the Quebec Director and the President of the Quebec Council, a luxury no other province or region even comes close to being given<sup>25</sup>. The labour movement has long recognized Quebec’s particular place within Canada, and has responded by allowing for Quebec-specific organizing.

The women’s movement is equally aware of these differences. Feminists outside of Quebec, under the leadership of the National Action Committee on the Status of Women, have long identified the federal government as the prime focus for their lobbying efforts around equity issues and social policy. Quebec feminists groups such as the Fédération des Femmes du Québec have no hesitation in lobbying Ottawa when need be, but they have largely been oriented towards Quebec’s provincial government as the government with constitutional authority over areas such as social policy. In fact, this difference in orientation came close to tearing the movement apart, though NAC’s eventual adaptation of a three-

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<sup>24</sup> “Les Grandes Dates”. Federation des travailleurs du Quebec. <http://ftq.qc.ca/ftq/suite.asp?aid=487>

<sup>25</sup> “CAW Constitution”. Canadian Auto Workers. <http://www.caw.ca/whoarewe/CAWconstitution/cawconE.pdf>

nations approach to Canada did eventually allow for the movement to reconcile conflicting outlooks<sup>26</sup>.

Canadian civil society often reflects Canada's solitudes. Amnesty International's Canadian Section, for example, maintains separate organizations, administrative councils, and secretariats for English- and French-speaking Canadians.<sup>27</sup> Other groups, ranging from CUSO to the Red Cross to the Civil Liberties Union to the Boy Scouts to Development and Peace<sup>28</sup>, all to a certain degree have differential arrangements with their Quebec chapters.

Civil society groups are by their very nature heavily networked, but these networks are parallel and not integrated between provinces. Canadian federalism has not created a lot of common spaces or institutions, and civil society groups have mirrored this reality. As such, jurisdictional issues have often complicated attempts at forging pan-Canadian initiatives.

Almost every major civil society group has come to recognize the necessity of giving Quebec special status. Canadians don't bowl alone, but they do maintain separate and parallel leagues. What is comforting is the fact that, despite our differences and despite institutional impediments, citizens and civil society do cooperate where they have common interests.

## **The Politics of Routine**

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<sup>26</sup> Janine Brodie. "The Women's Movement Outside of Quebec: Shifting Relations with the Canadian State". in McRoberts, Kenneth. Beyond Quebec: Taking Stock of Canada. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1995.

<sup>27</sup> see A propos d'AI – La section canadienne francophone. <http://amnistie.qc.ca/a-propos/index.htm>

<sup>28</sup> "Constitution". Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace. [www.devp.org/Constitution\\_e.pdf](http://www.devp.org/Constitution_e.pdf). Many bodies, such as their National Council, give preferential consideration to Quebec, and also contain references to linguistic duality.

Liberal governments now blanket central Canada, and occupy the corridors of power in Ottawa, Quebec City, and Queen's Park for the first time since the Second World War. Despite being of the same political colour, these governments are firmly entrenched in the politics of routine. While they have learned to cooperate with each other minimally, interprovincial cooperation occupies very different spaces on the imaginations of Canada's two solitudes.

Because intergovernmental relations are about elite accommodation, they are rarely the stuff of high politics for the Ontario public. Language and constitutional rights are high risk issues for Ontario politicians, and the pay-offs are minimal. John Robarts, David Peterson, and Bob Rae have all paid political prices at home for their roles in larger, national constitutional debates; debates which pitted cosmopolitan Toronto against the most conservative elements of Orange Ontario.

In Quebec, interprovincial relations are heated and far surpass in importance many other issues. Quebeckers have been fighting since the Quiet Revolution for a Canada based upon the principles of national self-determination, cultural recognition, and mutual respect<sup>29</sup>. For Quebeckers, battles over jurisdiction are about sovereignty, identity and the Quebec model.

The politics of routine are a result of a constitutional impasse. Innovative and imaginative solutions have been necessitated by having to meet the high political standards of balancing Ontarians' demands for national programs with an opt-out clause for Quebec. Small steps seemed all that was possible, but the

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<sup>29</sup> Charles Taylor. *Reconciling the Solitudes: Essays on Canadian Federalism and Nationalism*. Edited by Guy Laforest. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1994.

cumulative unintended consequences were much bigger than the sum of their parts.

Many of the intergovernmental agreements are unexceptional and do not create dense institutional linkages. Our governments have negotiated technical and administrative agreements covering a wide variety of areas, from correctional services and policing, to public procurement, labour market management and power rental. On social policy issues such as child care, community health, and social economy, Quebec is already far ahead of the rest of Canada. Indeed, one of the reasons why social Canada's entitlements has been so slow to be developed and upgraded is because Quebec governments of all stripes have opposed federal programs which encroach into areas of provincial jurisdiction. The politics of routine have adapted by putting a brake on national program development, and by instead relying on interprovincial accords.

However, each side's experts have a very different understanding of these achievements and of their significance. While Quebec needs partners to rein in Ottawa, Ontario seeks partners to force Ottawa to act and to spend. Quebec governments want more money for their own programs; Ontario supports national programs often with less concern about jurisdictional invasion by Ottawa.<sup>30</sup> For example, Canadians outside of Quebec expect Ottawa to build more public housing, to reinvest in the social safety net, and to help their municipalities. However, even progressive Quebecers are happier to support Alberta's demands for decentralization rather than Ontario's demands for

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<sup>30</sup> See most recently Ontario and other provinces' willingness to allow federal intrusion into areas of provincial competences in the Social Union Framework Agreement. Alain G. Gagnon and Hugh Segal (eds.). The Canadian Social Union Without Quebec : Eight Critical Analyses. Montréal, Programme d'études sur le Québec de l'Université McGill and Institute for Research on Public Policy, 2000.

national standards. This is because the primary issue for Quebeckers is that their own government be in charge of those very programs.

With so much deadlock and impasse built into Canada, how do we ever accomplish anything? How is it that we have managed to build social programs at all, let alone programs which are the envy of progressive Americans? Paradoxically, the politics of routine have proven to be highly functional for citizens, and not just for bureaucrats. Despite constant gridlock, almost every major social program has had its origins in the social policy wars between Quebec and Ottawa<sup>31</sup>. Health care, publicly-funded daycare, pensions, and regional adjustment programs were all in products of the politics of routine.

Even the idea of the nation as an economic unit is far from dead. Despite international trade and increased competition, Canada's economy is more integrated and more interdependent than ever.

### **Do Good Trading Partners Make for Best Friends?**

Many commentators and boosters of international economic integration ignore the importance of interprovincial trade, which has been increasing steadily in Canada. Ever since the MacDonald Commission on the Economic Union and Development Prospects for Canada<sup>32</sup>, federal and provincial politicians have sought to build a stronger economic union by dismantling barriers and regulations, and most recently by adopting an Internal Trade Agreement<sup>33</sup>.

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<sup>31</sup> Richard Simeon. Federal-Provincial Diplomacy. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1972.

<sup>32</sup> Donald MacDonald. Royal Commission on the Economic Union and Development Prospects for Canada. Canadian Government Publishing Centre, 1985.

<sup>33</sup> Doern, G. Bruce, and MacDonald, Marc. Free-Trade Federalism: Negotiating the Canadian Agreement on Internal Trade. University of Toronto Press, 1999.

These moves also had a political dimension: a stronger economic union is intended to strengthen Canada's political union<sup>34</sup>.

Canada's economy is indeed more integrated, and Ontario and Quebec are likewise more economically interdependent, though the process has been an uneven one. From 1992 to 1998, interprovincial trade in Canada grew by an average of 4.7% annually, a large amount, though not as large as international trade<sup>35</sup>. By 1998, interprovincial trade in Canada was worth \$177 billion<sup>36</sup>.

Though less significant than net international trade, interprovincial trade forms a very important part of both Quebec and Ontario's economies. 51.4% of Ontario's GDP is made up of international trade, as opposed to 22.8% being made up of interprovincial trade. Similarly, 36% of Quebec's GDP is composed of international trade, compared to 22.4% for interprovincial trade<sup>37</sup>. In 2002, interprovincial trade amounted to 49\$ billion in Quebec and 89.3\$ billion in Ontario<sup>38</sup>.

Ontario and Quebec are certainly each others' best trading partners within Canada, and the economic effects of their trading relationship are extremely important not only to them but also to Canada's economy as a whole. Each rely heavily on the other's exports, and their trade route accounted for over \$51 billion in 1998, representing 29% of Canada's interprovincial trade.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Editorial. "Trade pact designed as show of national unity". The Vancouver Sun. Vancouver, BC. : July 18th, 1994. p.A1

<sup>35</sup> Transport Canada. "Transportation in Canada 1999". Transport Canada.  
<http://www.tc.gc.ca/pol/en/Report/anre1999/tc9908be.htm>

<sup>36</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> Marjorie Page. Provincial Trade Patterns. Agriculture and Rural Working Papers Series. Statistics Canada. Working Paper no. 58. Statistics Canada: Agriculture Division. 2002

<sup>38</sup> Craig Byrd and Pierre Généreux. "The performance of interprovincial and international exports by province and territory since 1992." Statistics Canada, Input-Output Division.

<http://www.statcan.ca/english/research/11-621-MIE/11-621-MIE2004011.htm#6>

<sup>39</sup> Transport Canada, *ibid.*

## **The New Nationalism**

Nationalism in Quebec remains a complex force, neither strong enough to unilaterally force constitutional change, nor so weak as to be ignored by the rest of federalist Canada. With support for sovereignty now at fifty-four percent among Quebecers<sup>40</sup>, The state of the union has little hope unless it tackles these issues head-on, and comes to terms with the every day reality of our solitudes.

Quebecers are now experimenting with their own neo-liberalism, and have imposed Jean Charest on themselves for many of the same reasons that Ontarians chose to punish themselves by electing Mike Harris. There are many points of convergence between Harris and Charest.<sup>41</sup> Each won significant majorities, both were ideologues of the Right, and each was tarnished by scandal and by apparent incompetence. What remains to be seen is whether neo-liberalism will form a new basis of unity between Ontario and Quebec, or rather whether it will further dissolve our common bonds.

What is important here is that, like social democracy and liberalism before it, if Quebec moves to the right, it will be brought about by internal rather than external forces; by Quebec City rather than by Ottawa.

## **Functionality and the New Solitudes**

The metaphor of 'solitudes' was once used to describe the insularity and formality which characterized relations between Canada's national communities.

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<sup>40</sup> Leger Marketing. "Support for sovereignty remains at 54%".  
<http://legermarketing.com/documents/SPCLM/050516ENG.pdf>

<sup>41</sup> The Harris era is examined by Ralph, Regimbald, St-Armand (eds), *ibid*, 1997.

Each was traditionally seen as stubbornly unaware and blissfully ignorant of the other. However, as Quebec nationalism has become more civic, pluralistic, and outward-looking, and as Ontarians have become more multicultural and open towards Quebec, the solitudes have evolved to reflect these new realities. They have not disappeared, but they have irrevocably changed.

The politics of routine, which characterize these new relations, allow both partners to be confident, flexible, and aware of each other, but also wary of imposing an agenda on the other. While many decry the continued existence of these solitudes, it is this separation which has allowed Canada to continue to exist, and has allowed for Quebec to feel comfortable within Canada. It is the unacknowledged existence of these asymmetries, despite the Charter of Rights and a formal support for the equality of Canada's provinces, which have given Quebec the space which it so desires and given Canada the flexibility it so sorely needs. And it has done so without antagonizing the Rest of Canada (ROC), nor by driving a wedge between Ontarians and Quebecers. Truly the circle is being squared.

The solitudes have not impeded the exercise of power in Canada. At a more practical level, responses to the Gomery Commission are illustrative of how deep the divide is. Gomery has tripled the viewership of RDI and stoked the flames of support for sovereignty and the Bloc Quebecois, as up to 200 000 Quebecers nightly watch the sponsorship scandal in all of its tabloid detail<sup>42</sup>. Meanwhile, the Sponsorship Scandal hasn't been enough to overcome most voters' antipathy towards Stephen Harper's Conservative brand. Indeed, the



most recent numbers show that in the electoral battleground of Ontario, the Conservatives are now in decline, polling below both the Liberals and the New Democrats<sup>43</sup>.

### **Divergence and Centralization**

The overall picture also provides a compelling lesson to the rest of the world on a fundamental point. In a period of neo-liberalism reform, contrary to expectations, economic integration does not necessarily lead to political convergence. Canada is one of the most regionalized federations in the world, and despite this, real influence continues to be concentrated in central Canada<sup>44</sup>. Canada has long been held together, despite centrifugal forces, by a combination of Quebec's political capital and Ontario's wealth. Quebec has produced Canada's most effective politicians such as René Lévesque and Pierre Trudeau, while Ontario has produced the overwhelming majority of Canada's business elite, from bankers to the newly minted investment powerhouses such as Gerry Swartz. Or, in different terms, Prime Ministers, cabinet members, Supreme Court justices, and high-level civil servants are the products of Quebec's political class, while, the power-brokers of Bay Street still keep tight control of the nation's purse-strings.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> "Sponsorship inquiry latest reality show blockbuster in Quebec". CBC News. updated on March 16<sup>th</sup>, 2005. <http://www.cbc.ca/story/canada/national/2005/03/15/GomeryQuebec-050315.html>

<sup>43</sup> "Liberal lead widens, Conservative support sags, and voters oppose forcing an election". Decima Research Inc. June 9<sup>th</sup>, 2005. [http://www.decima.com/en/pdf/news\\_releases/050609-CE.pdf](http://www.decima.com/en/pdf/news_releases/050609-CE.pdf)

<sup>44</sup> Janine Brodie. The Political Economy of Canadian Regionalism. Toronto: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1990.

<sup>45</sup> Canada's regional division of power is such an accepted fact that few scholars study it in detail. see Brodie, 1990. *ibid*.

Interdependence in this case has not led to a rapprochement. Divisions and solitudes persist, but as we have argued, they are far from being absolute negative forces. As well as allowing us to develop an approach unique from the American model, there is a demonstrated functionality to those solitudes. The functional solitudes promote a working relationship which is flexible, responsive, culturally sensitive, and stable. On the other hand, close and very tight institutional ties can be highly intense, can support rigid agendas and can be destabilizing for institutions, communities and individuals. The politics of routine are not pretty, are maddeningly process-driven and ponderously slow to admit any course correction. They are far from perfect, but despite this, they work for social Canada. Economically they have a degree of functionality that cannot be underestimated.

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