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Article abstract

During most of the 1960s, the CSN was both an advocate of provincial autonomy and a defender of federalism. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, however, a majority of its militants came to favour separatism. In 1980, the CSN gave its critical approval to a yes vote in the referendum. Yet the labour union central did not officially endorse independence, mostly because its leadership feared internal divisions and disaffiliations. In addition, the CSN expressed its disappointment with the governmental record of the Parti québécois which had come to power in 1976.

The Confédération des syndicats nationaux (CSN), the Idea of Independence, and the Sovereignist Movement, 1960-1980

Ralph Peter Güntzel

IN EARLY JUNE 1979, the CSN, Québec's second-largest labour union central, held a special convention on the national question. The one thousand delegates were to discuss a variety of issues related to Québec's constitutional status and the socio-economic condition of francophones in Québec. On the third day of the convention, several high-ranking CSN officers led by the central's vice-president, André L'Heureux, proposed a resolution in support of independence for Québec. A long and intense debate ensued. In the end, only one quarter of the delegates rallied behind the pro-independence proposal.¹ This vote did not mean, however, that the CSN endorsed federalism. Quite the opposite: in early April 1980, the CSN recommended to its members to vote yes in the referendum in order to permit the Parti québécois government to negotiate sovereignty-association. On the eve of the Québec referendum, the CSN position on the issue of separation was ambiguous. To explain this ambiguity one has to go back in CSN history to the time of the Quiet Revolution.

The evolution of the CSN position on the independence question during the 1960s and 1970s can be divided into three phases. From 1960 to 1966, the CSN opted for federalism and provincial autonomy and rejected separation. From 1966 to 1972, most CSN leaders and many rank-and-file members came to favour independence. As a result, the CSN gradually moved away from its federalist stand and became increasingly sympathetic toward independence. In 1972, though, this process came to a halt. For the remainder of the decade the union central avoided any clear-cut stand. This paper seeks to cast light on the rise of separatism within

¹CSN, Procès-verbal, congrès confédéral 1979, 131-2; Louis-Gilles Francoeur, "Indépendance: La CSN ne s'avance pas." *Le Devoir*, 4 juin 1979, 3; Laval LeBorgne, "Une résolution prônant l'indépendance est défaite: La CSN refuse tout appui au PQ," *La Presse*, 4 juin 1979, A12.

Ralph Peter Güntzel, "The Confédération des syndicats nationaux (CSN), the Idea of Independence, and the Sovereignist Movement, 1960-1980," *Labour/Le Travail*, 31 (Spring 1993), 145-73.

the CSN after 1966, as well as its hesitation waltz during the 1970s. Both phenomena can only be understood with a prior knowledge of the ideological radicalization which the union central underwent between 1960 and 1980. Hence, I will first give an account of the CSN's socio-economic outlook, and then discuss its stance on constitutional questions. Although this study does not pretend to be a comparative analysis, the experiences of Québec's other union centrals are considered briefly as well.

I.

THE CONFÉDÉRATION des travailleurs catholiques du Canada (CTCC) was founded in 1921 under the influence of the Roman Catholic Church. For a long time it adhered to Catholic social doctrine and defined as its goal the defense of traditional French-Canadian values, particularly against such adversaries as the international, religiously neutral unions. In pursuit of this goal, the CTCC opposed state intervention in the social and educational fields, and advocated collaboration with the business community.² It was only in the 1940s and 1950s that the CTCC leadership's socio-economic outlook began to change. Gradually the idea of preserving traditional French-Canadian society was supplanted by the ideology of 'catching-up.' The central now wanted Québec to copy the institutions and standards of other Western societies. CTCC demands aimed at parity with Ontario in terms of salaries, work-conditions, labour relations, health services, and the education system.³

Many of the proposals aired by the CTCC-CSN were to be taken up during Québec's Quiet Revolution. Between 1960 and 1966, Premier Jean Lesage and his Liberal government implemented the ambitious reform program that was at the heart of the Quiet Revolution. The team around Lesage advocated planning the economy to avoid such disturbances as those Canada had experienced during the

²Louis-Marie Tremblay, *Le syndicalisme québécois: Idéologies de la CSN et de la FTQ, 1940-1970* (Montréal 1972), 30; Bernard Solasse, "Les idéologies de la FTQ et de la CSN, 1960-1978." *Idéologies au Canada français*, éd. par F. Dumont et al., (Québec 1981), tome 1, 223; Leo Roback et Louis-Marie Tremblay, "Le nationalisme au sein des syndicats québécois," *Canadian Review of Studies in Nationalism*, 5 (1978), 239. Older accounts often associate the CTCC with timid unionism avoiding confrontation. See for instance Harold A. Logan, *Trade Unions in Canada: Their Development and Functioning* (Toronto 1948), 579-603; Charles Lipton, *The Trade Union Movement of Canada, 1827-1959*, 4th ed. (Toronto 1978), 224-5. Jacques Rouillard, however, has shown that the practice of the CTCC was more militant than its ideology and that the relatively low strike-rate of the CTCC in the 1920s was not so much the result of its ideology as of its incohesiveness and the large proportion of non-specialized workers affiliated with the CTCC. See Jacques Rouillard, *Histoire de la CSN 1921-1981* (Montréal 1981), 83-6, 94-5.

³Roback et Tremblay, "Le nationalisme au sein des syndicats québécois," 239-42, 245. The ideological evolution of the CTCC found its symbolic expression in a change of name: in 1960 the CTCC became the Confédération des syndicats nationaux (CSN).

first post-war depression, 1957 to 1961. It wanted to render the workplace more humane, and to make systematic provisions for the aged, the unemployed, and the sick, as well as for an efficient, highly-skilled, and professional labour force. Inspired by institutions and standards in other Western societies, the Quiet Revolution's reforms vastly expanded state intervention in the economy, in social, health, and welfare services, and in the educational system. An economic planning council was created, and various provincial capital pools, such as the *Société générale de financement* and the *Caisse de dépôt et placement*, were set up. All private hydroelectric companies were nationalized. New hospital insurance benefits gave Québec residents free access to hospital and diagnostic services. The health-care and educational systems, formerly largely administered by the Church and private organizations, now became subject to state control.

The CSN was important in the coalition supporting the Liberal reform drive.⁴ The union central also benefited from many Quiet Revolution measures, most particularly the reform of Québec labour relations. With the new labour code of July 1964, Bill 5 in June 1965, and the Civil Servants' Act in August 1965, the right to strike — except where essential services were in jeopardy — was given to workers employed by hospitals, school commissions, and municipalities, to teachers, and to civil servants. It should be noted, however, that extending the right to strike to the public sector had not been among the Liberal Party's original intentions. Rather, it was the demands and pressure of organized labour which led to the new legislation. According to labour historian Jacques Rouillard, these laws placed Québec in the vanguard of North American labour legislation. "Pour la première fois, l'enthousiasme issu de la Révolution tranquille porte les conquêtes sociales au-delà du modèle proposé par les autres sociétés nord-américaines."⁵

All the aforementioned reforms and others, such as the replacement of the spoils system by the merit system, and Bill 16 including the equalisation of spouses in marriage, were introduced within a short time. While the reforms of the Quiet Revolution rapidly followed each other, they gave the population the impression of witnessing not only radical change but even the dawn of a new era. Since all those reforms had a distinctly progressive character, they helped heighten expectations. Many intellectuals, students, and labour union militants expected the reforms to herald a more just and egalitarian society in which wealth would be distributed more equally.⁶ Some of them joined radical political movements such as *Parti pris*, *Révolution québécoise*, and the *Parti socialiste du Québec (PSQ)*. They

⁴Carla Lipsig-Mummé, "The Web of Dependence: Quebec Labour Unions in Politics Before 1976," in Alain Gagnon, ed., *Quebec: State and Society* (Toronto 1984), 297, 300; Henry Milner, *Politics in the New Quebec* (Toronto 1978), 178; Raymond Hudon, *Syndicalisme d'opposition en société libérale: la culture politique de la CSN* (Québec 1974), 81.

⁵Jacques Rouillard, *Histoire du syndicalisme au Québec: des origines à nos jours* (Montréal 1989), 301.

⁶*Ibid.*, 409-10.

could do so without being marginalized because the Quiet Revolution had created a new openness in intellectual life and thereby laid the basis for the free expression of radical ideas. It was in the last phase of the Quiet Revolution, during 1965-66, that radical political movements became increasingly prolific. At the same time, disappointment with the achievements of the Quiet Revolution started to set in. Unemployment rates remained higher and average incomes lower in Québec than in Ontario. Moreover, the instability and insecurity of the economic situation did not change in the least. During the late 1960s and early 1970s, the economic situation deteriorated and unemployment rates began to rise dramatically.⁷ At the same time, government debts accumulated. The expansion of the public sector had led to an increase in costs and taxes. Yet while taxes went up the standard of living did not rise.⁸

The disappointment about the results of the Quiet Revolution was particularly pronounced within the CSN. This was largely due to the evolution of public-sector negotiations from 1965 onwards. The rapid rise of unionization in this sector created a situation in which the state and the CSN found themselves to be opponents at the bargaining table and in industrial conflicts. Unlike other employers, the state disposed of legislative powers which it used to enact special back-to-work legislation. Moreover, numerous court injunctions prevented or ended public sector negotiations on the ground that essential services were in jeopardy. Under those circumstances, striking, the classical weapon of unionism, proved to be no longer effective.⁹ The multiplication and aggravation of these conflicts during the second half of the 1960s increasingly frustrated and radicalized the CSN. Disappointed with the results of the Quiet Revolution, and more particularly its newly established system of industrial relations, more and more rank-and-file activists and union leaders — particularly in the public sector — started to reassess the power structures of existing society and redefine the character and the form of union activities. They soon concluded that the Québec state was inherently hostile to working-class interests, no matter which party held power.¹⁰ For them the obvious explanation of this hostility was the state's dependence on the business community.¹¹ In addition they considered it necessary to create new forms of unionism,

⁷Gérald Bernier et Robert Boily, *Le Québec en chiffres de 1850 à nos jours* (Montréal 1986), 238.

⁸Michael Smith, "The Transformation of Labour relations in Québec: An Analysis." *Work in the Canadian Context: Continuity Despite Change*, in Katherina Lundy and Barbara Warne, eds., (Toronto 1981), 369.

⁹This became apparent in the hospital strike of 1966, the teachers' strike and the strike at Hydro-Québec in 1967, and the conflict at the *Régie des alcools* in 1968-1969. See also Claude Lemelin, "Les deux prochaines années seront loin d'être facile pour la CSN," *Le Devoir*, 17 octobre 1968, 18; Rouillard, *Histoire du syndicalisme québécois*, 408.

¹⁰Solasse, "Les idéologies de la FTQ et de la CSN," 227.

¹¹For example, see Marcel Pepin, "Une société bâtie pour l'homme," CSN, Procès-verbal, congrès confédéral 1966, 15, 20-1.

since the traditional ones had become insufficient.¹² Towards the end of the decade, they came to analyze the market economy from a Marxist viewpoint without, however, employing Marxist terminology. From there they went on to advocate a socialist society and to politicize union activities accordingly.

In the early 1970s, a variety of events reinforced this ideological radicalization. In April 1970, the Parti libéral du Québec came to power. Led by Robert Bourassa, the new government embarked on a pro-business course of which the most prominent features were a disregard for state interventionism and support for private enterprise.¹³ Half a year after the provincial elections, the October Crisis and the invocation of the War Measures Act took place. About one quarter of the people arrested during the crisis were labour union activists. This infringement on citizens' civil liberties evoked the wrath of many CSN leaders and rank-and-file members. In the wake of the October Crisis, the CSN became more hostile towards the state apparatus. According to historian Jean-François Cardin, "[la CSN] ne craint plus d'attaquer directement l'Etat et son rôle d'appui à la bourgeoisie dans l'exploitation des travailleurs."¹⁴ The early 1970s also witnessed several dramatic industrial conflicts, such as the strike at *La Presse* in 1971. This dispute crested on 29 October of that year, when police violently broke up a demonstration supporting the strikers, leaving behind one dead and several wounded. Thirty-seven militants were arrested on this occasion. Seven months later, CSN president Marcel Pepin and the presidents of Québec's two other labour union centrals, were sentenced to jail for one year on the grounds that they had encouraged the illegal public-sector strike of April 1972.¹⁵

In the aftermath of the Quiet Revolution, the left within the union central underwent both a considerable radicalization and an increase in numerical strength. As a result, the left was able to exercise an ever-growing influence on the CSN's general orientation. In its quest to dominate the central, the left was pitted against a group of more moderate or conservative activists, the most of whom belonged to private-sector unions. It would be simplistic, however, to equate the left with the public sector and the right with the private sector. In fact, most public-sector union members were no more radical than their peers in private-sector unions. Most professionals adhered to elitist attitudes and held the average worker in disregard.¹⁶

¹²For example, see also Marcel Pepin, "Le deuxième front," CSN, Procès-verbal, congrès confédéral 1968, 12-42.

¹³Rouillard, *Histoire du syndicalisme au Québec*, 410-1.

¹⁴Jean-François Cardin, *La crise d'octobre 1970 et le mouvement syndical* (Montréal 1988), 261.

¹⁵On the strike at *La Presse* see Marc Raboy, *Movements and Messages: Media and Radical Politics in Quebec* (Toronto 1984), 81-4. On the public sector negotiations and strike in 1972, see Diane Ethier, Jean-Marc Pottle et Jean Reynolds, *Les travailleurs contre l'Etat bourgeois, avril et mai 1972* (Montréal 1975).

¹⁶Claude Lemelin, "Les deux prochaines années seront loin d'être faciles pour les dirigeants de la CSN," *Le Devoir*, 17 octobre 1968, 18; Michel Sabourin, "Congrès de la Fédération des

A 1970 poll of CSN-organized teachers showed that most of them did not think that unions should get involved in political activities.¹⁷ The poll confirmed the findings of the CSN political action committee report presented at the 1968 confederal convention. The report stated that most CSN members were neither politicized nor willing to join the political activities of the labour movement. Quite similarly, in its report to the 1972 confederal convention, the Committee of the Twelve, an *ad hoc* committee on ideological issues, pointed out that Québec's political parties and their ideas exercised a dominant influence among the CSN membership.¹⁸

While the CSN general membership was unwilling to fundamentally change the socio-economic system, the central's active membership became increasingly radical between the mid-1960s and the early 1970s.¹⁹ The rise of the left was greatly helped by the dynamic personality of Marcel Pepin, president of the CSN from 1965 to 1976. Pepin's determination and leadership qualities were unmatched by those heading the right wing of the central.²⁰ He was surrounded by a group of intellectuals to which belonged Richard Daigneault, Pierre Vadeboncoeur, André L'Heureux, and Michel Rioux. This 'think tank' was sensitive to the wave of protest sweeping through Québec in the wake of the Quiet Revolution, and favoured the radicalization of the union central. Due to its close relationship with the president, the group wielded enormous informal power within the CSN. Its influence on decision-making processes paralleled that of the elected officers. Thus its opponents on the right referred to the group as 'le pouvoir parallèle.'²¹ Pepin and his collaborators were pushed forward not only by the general atmosphere of post-Quiet Revolution Québec, by public-sector militants, and union councillors emerging from the student movement and socialist organizations, but also by a radical faction within the CSN's own left wing. Led by Michel Chartrand, the radical left

ingénieurs et cadres: 'Nous sommes bien payés, petits-bourgeois, mais des travailleurs quand même' — Jean-Guy Rodrigue," *Québec-Presse*, 3 juin 1973, 8.

¹⁷Bernard Chaput, "Faudra-t-il s'en mêler un jour?" *Nouveau Pouvoir*, 1 mai 1970, 2.

¹⁸CSN, Procès-verbal, congrès confédéral 1968, 272-3; CSN, Procès-verbal, congrès confédéral 1972, 93.

¹⁹'Active members' are those who participate in the activities of their union body on a regular basis. In the case of the CSN, this group was only a minority. On the problem of rank-and-file passivity in the CSN, see Jean-Luc Duguay, "La CSN instituerait une enquête sur la désaffection des conseils centraux," *Le Devoir*, 9 décembre 1970; CSN, Procès-verbal, conseil confédéral, 17-20 novembre 1976, 27; André Lauzon, Serge Demers, Pierre Martin, "Nos pratiques syndicales," *Unité ouvrière*, avril 1979, 9-12; Hudon, *Syndicalisme d'opposition en société libérale*, 354-7.

²⁰Pierre Vadeboncoeur, "Marcel Pepin: Un nouveau départ," *Nouvelles CSN*, (30 mars 1990), 11-2; Evelyn Dumas-Gagnon, "Que se passe-t-il à la CSN? 2: Au delà d'un conflit de personnalité," *Le Devoir*, 28 décembre 1967, 1, 24.

²¹Evelyn Dumas-Gagnon, "Le départ de Sauvé provoque un débat d'une rare violence," *Le Devoir*, 2 décembre 1967, 5; "Une clique d'intellectuels anarchiques," *Québec-Presse*, 4 juin 1972, 9.

in 1969 conquered the Conseil central des syndicats nationaux de Montréal (CCSNM), a CSN suborganization which represents all unions in the Montréal region. Under Chartrand's presidency, the CCSNM made ideological commitments which were pathbreaking for the CSN as a whole. In 1970, the CCSNM proposed the CSN should officially reject capitalism and endorse socialism.²²

Since Pepin and his followers were afraid to jeopardize the unity of the central, relations between the radical faction and the more moderate faction within the left were often characterized by tension and mutual suspicion.²³ Relations between both factions were rendered even more difficult by the personal animosity between Pepin and Chartrand. In 1971, however, all elements of the left joined forces in order to give the CSN the socialist orientation advocated by the CCSNM. The debate on the official ideology of the union central finally erupted in open conflict between the left and right.²⁴ Aggravated by dissent over which strategy to adopt in the 1972 public-sector negotiations, this conflict split the movement. Being in a minority situation, the right wing decided to leave the union central. The CSN lost about 70 thousand members, which equalled one-third of its membership. Many of those who left the CSN went on to found a new, non-political union central, the Centrale des syndicats démocratiques (CSD).²⁵

After the departure of the dissenters, almost all leaders of the CSN were partisans of socialism. They agreed on the need for fundamental socio-economic change. They thought the economic activities of society should be planned and aim at fulfilling the needs of the population. Furthermore, they endorsed the principle of collective ownership of the means of production, and of workers' participation in the economic decision-making process. Yet within the framework of these principles, they had different visions of socialism. Some CSN socialists wanted the collective ownership of the means of production to be comprehensive, while others wanted to limit it to certain key sectors such as natural resources. For the latter

²²"Le conseil central de Montréal (CSN) propose une déclaration de principe," *Québec-Press*, 1 février 1970, 9A.

²³For example, see Jacques Lafrenière, "Chartrand: une 'philosophie politique': La CSN veut canaliser la contestation de ses membres," *La Presse*, 25 janvier 1969, 10; "L'affrontement Pepin-Chartrand a eu lieu dans un climat de liberté d'expression," *Québec-Press*, 18 janvier 1970, 5; Jean-Luc Duguay, "Marcel Pepin à l'ouverture du congrès: La CSN éclatera si elle se lance dans l'action politique partisane," *Le Devoir*, 7 décembre 1970, 1.

²⁴Jacques Kaëble, "'Ne comptons que sur nos propres moyens': Marcel Pepin: 'L'état d'insécurité des travailleurs est très grand'," *Québec-Press*, 24 octobre 1971, 15; "Yvon Valcin critique la direction de la CSN," *Le Devoir*, 4 décembre 1971, 2; "L'exécutif du Conseil central de Québec est contre le manifeste de la CSN," *Québec-Press*, 16 janvier 1972, 18; CSN, Procès-verbal, conseil confédéral, 23-25 février 1972, 12-5.

²⁵Gabriel Gaudette, "La culture politique de la CSD," *Recherches sociographiques*, 17, 1 (1976), 35-72. See also Pierre Richard, "La CSN perdra 27 000 membres: les fonctionnaires: La désaffiliation acquise de justesse," *Le Devoir*, 26 septembre 1972, 1, 6.

group, the expansion of the cooperative sector and workers' co-ownership were preferable to the nationalization of the entire economy.²⁶ CSN socialists took positions somewhere between those of social democracy and communism. In some instances their positions bordered on those of classical social democracy committed to minimize differences of wealth and to nationalize some sectors of the economy. Unlike social democrats, however, CSN socialists were prepared to go much further to eliminate private ownership of the means of production and principle of profit. What made CSN socialists different from communists was their insistence on democratic planning and decision-making. CSN socialists did not envisage a leading role for the Communist Party, nor a proletarian revolution. CSN socialists agreed that socialism should be attained peacefully, but remained unclear on how it should be brought about.

In October 1972, the confederal council — the CSN's highest decision-making body between its confederal conventions — adopted almost unanimously a declaration rejecting capitalism and endorsing socialism.²⁷ The resolution, though, failed to define socialism and instead called for "la poursuite d'une étude dans tout le mouvement visant à définir le contenu d'un socialisme québécois et les étapes de sa réalisation."²⁸ This hesitance to take a definite stand not only reflected the varying interpretations of socialism among CSN radicals, but also the insecurity these radicals felt toward the rank-and-file majority of their organization. The fact that the central's leadership was left-leaning did not mean that the right was now absent from the ranks of the CSN. A large number of militants, and a majority of the rank-and-file membership were opposed to any fundamental socio-economic change, but they remained faithful to the CSN despite its socialist orientation. They found its services satisfactory and distrusted the risk of joining a small, newborn central. Although the members of the confederal council appeared courageous in October 1972, the CSN leadership was deeply affected by the defections. The socialist CSN leaders were well aware that they had to anticipate the reactions of their largely anti-socialist constituency if future disaffiliations were to be avoided. Therefore they decided not to pursue elaborations on official CSN ideology. All plans to discuss the definition of the CSN version of socialism, and the steps required to attain a socialist society, were postponed. Instead, priority was given to the political education of the membership.²⁹

In the end, very little energy was devoted to political education since the CSN underwent yet another crisis from 1973 to 1976. The enormous rise of the cost of

²⁶The different visions of socialism are discussed in Comité des Douze, CSN, Procès-verbal, congrès confédéral 1972, 81-7. See also the internal working paper *Ne comptons que sur nos propres moyens* (Montréal 1971) and Marcel Pepin's reaction to the working paper in Jacques Kaeble, "Ne comptons que sur nos propres moyens": Marcel Pepin: "L'état d'insécurité des travailleurs est très grand", *Québec-Presse*, 24 octobre 1971, 15.

²⁷CSN, Procès-verbal, congrès confédéral 1972, 101, 176.

²⁸*Ibid.*, 176.

²⁹CSN, Procès-verbal, congrès confédéral 1974, 101-3.

living led many unions to try to force employers to reopen collective agreements in order to increase salaries. Walkouts and illegal strikes multiplied. The CSN strike fund rapidly became exhausted. This period was characterized by internal struggles about moves to raise per-capita contributions to the strike fund. In the public sector unions were resentful of fee increases. In this sector, strikes were normally ended by special laws and court injunctions after only a few days. However, strike-fund benefits were disbursed only after two weeks of striking. About 20 thousand members, mostly nurses and professionals, refused to pay the increases and consequently were forced to leave the CSN.³⁰

While the union central was recuperating from its most recent losses over the fee-increase issue, several factions of Marxist-Leninist militants started to make their presence felt. They belonged to a variety of political organizations, the most important of which were En Lutte! and the Parti communiste ouvrier (PCO). They all agreed on the need for a revolutionary overthrow of capitalist society, but were fiercely opposed to each other on various theoretical issues. Although their organizations were tiny, due to their devotion, training, and discipline, the Marxist-Leninists began to exert considerable influence within the CSN. They were most successful in public-sector unions and regional CSN suborganizations such as the CCSNM.³¹ With the rise of the communist far left, ideological division within the union central became even more pronounced. In the latter 1970s, despite having lost a large number of members due to ideological differences, the CSN was ideologically less-homogenous than ever. In these circumstances, the CSN leadership found its margin of maneuverability extremely limited. It was constantly faced with the threat of internal divisions and renewed disaffiliations. Norbert Rodrigue, who succeeded Marcel Pepin as CSN president in 1976, was highly sensitive to this problem.³² His leadership aimed at consolidating the movement, while cautiously pursuing the socialist education of its membership. Rodrigue avoided new disaffiliations, but made little or no headway regarding the spread of socialist thinking.³³

³⁰Louis Favreau et Pierre L'Heureux avec la collaboration de Paul Michel, *Le projet de société de la CSN de 1966 à aujourd'hui: Crise et avenir du syndicalisme au Québec* (Montréal 1984), 112-3; Rouillard, *Histoire du syndicalisme québécois*, 331, 415.

³¹Interview with union councillor Peter Bakvis, Montréal, 29 May 1990; Interview with ex-CSN vice-president Francine Lalonde, Montréal, 19 June 1990; Interview with union councillor Marc Lesage, Montréal, 5 July 1990; Jacques Benoît, *L'extrême gauche* (Montréal 1977); Irène Ellenberger, "L'action politique syndicale dans les années 1970: Témoignage de Irène Ellenberger, ex-présidente du Conseil central de Montréal (CSN)," RCHTQ, *Bulletin*, 40 (Hiver 1988), 23-43.

³²Pierre Dupont et Gisèle Tremblay, *Les syndicats en crise* (Montréal 1976), 101-2.

³³In many unions the CSN's socialist discourse met with disinterest or opposition. See for instance: [Paul Cliche, Ginette Galameau, Fiore Fionda,] "Rapport préliminaire concernant la campagne de consultation sur la question nationale en vue de congrès des 1er, 2 et 3 juin 1979." 17 mai 1979, 4. Archives de la CSN, Dossier "Question nationale 1976-1980," 370 (2-2-2-3); "Les travailleurs face à la question nationale: Quelles questions devons nous nous poser?," *Le Travail*, avril-mai 1979, 9.

When he stepped down in 1982, the internal debate on socialism had not taken place. His successors discontinued the socialist discourse without any hesitation.³⁴

As is suggested by the example of the Centrale d'enseignement du Québec (CEQ), Québec's third-largest labour union central, the CSN was not the only union central to experience ideological radicalization and factional strife. Originally called Corporation des Instituteurs et Institutrices catholiques, the CEQ was renamed Corporation des Enseignants du Québec in 1967 before it received its present name in 1974. It was only in the late 1960s and early 1970s that the CEQ transformed itself from a professional association into a labour union central. Teachers continued to dominate the central's membership, although the CEQ began to organize non-teachers in 1971. Like the CSN, the CEQ adopted a radical discourse in the early 1970s. Propagating a Marxist analysis of Québec society, the central continuously attacked the state as the defender of the capitalist class. Yet the CEQ did not propose any alternative to the capitalist system. Unlike that of the CSN, the discourse of the CEQ was void of any reference to socialism. The CEQ leadership intended to elaborate upon a vision of society after an internal debate among the rank-and-file membership. Since a large part of the rank-and-file membership did not share the leadership's radicalism, the debate was continuously postponed and eventually dropped. Many CEQ members were sympathetic to social democracy and to the idea of gradual change within the parameters of the market economy. Toward the end of the 1970s the moderates made their presence more strongly felt, and in the early 1980s CEQ radicalism came to an end. The central dropped its Marxist analysis and the language of class struggle.³⁵

Unlike the CSN and the CEQ, the Fédération des Travailleurs du Québec (FTQ), Québec's largest union central did not experience any significant ideological radicalization. Dominated by such social-democratic leaders as Louis Laberge, Fernand Daoust, and Jean Gérin-Lajoie, the FTQ showed remarkable ideological consistency during the 1960s and 1970s. Apart from a brief period of more-radical discourse in the early 1970s, the FTQ was content to criticize the market economy, but not to fundamentally oppose it. Advocating state interventionism, economic planning, and the nationalization of certain sectors of the economy, the FTQ favoured a reformist course of gradual change. The central's leadership had little regard for Marxist analysis. As Jean Gérin-Lajoie put it:

³⁴This rupture with ten years of CSN radicalism has not yet been the topic of systematic analysis. The best account to date has been provided by a group of CSN socialists: Favreau et l'Heureux, *Le projet de société de la CSN*, 167-81.

³⁵Rouillard, *Histoire du syndicalisme au Québec*, 362-70.

Ce qu'on défend, c'est une action sociale-démocrate [...] L'analyse de classe n'a rien à voir avec la réalité sociale; c'est un concept livresque qu'on n'a pas adapté des endroits d'où elle provient. C'est un outil d'analyse qui n'a aucune valeur sur le plan de l'action.³⁶

During the 1960s and the 1970s, organized labour in Québec spoke with a social-democratic and a socialist voice. More than anything else it was the following three phenomena that forged its ideological outlook: first, the experience of the Quiet Revolution which had brought with it high expectations and bitter disappointments; second, the constraints of public-sector negotiations where employers could frustrate strikes by back-to-work legislation; and third, the climate of protest and criticism that swept through Québec and other Western societies in the late 1960s. Whether more-moderate social democrats or more-radical socialists provided the leadership for the various union bodies, was to some extent a personality question. More important, however, were the experiences in industrial conflicts and the disposition of rank-and-file activists. A social-democratic leadership prevailed in the FTQ, which represented mostly private-sector workers. The CSN and the CEQ, on the other hand, recruited most of their members from the public sector. Frustrated by the course of the disputes in the public sector, many CSN and CEQ rank-and-file activists had become increasingly radical. By the early 1970s, both centrals had a socialist leadership.

The CSN and the CEQ were most comprehensive in their critique of the market economy. Yet they were hesitant to elaborate upon any alternative vision of society. This reluctance resulted not from any lack of zeal on the part of the leadership, but from the ideological heterogeneity of the rank-and-file membership. While many of the most active rank-and-filers were sympathetic to radical socio-economic change, the majority of them, including in particular the more passive members, opposed any such notion. CSN leaders, such as Pepin and Rodrigue, were aware of this gap between the leadership and a large part of the rank-and-file membership. In the 1970s, the CSN presidents hoped to close this gap by adjusting the outlook of the rank-and-filers to their own. Having witnessed the schism of 1972, they were very cautious, however, in their attempts to bring about this adjustment.

II.

FROM ITS FOUNDATION up to the 1950s, the CTCC adhered to a double nationalism which was both French-Canadian and pan-Canadian. The linking idea which enabled the central to combine, two seemingly-contradictory national allegiances was that of 'the pact between two races.' Canada was perceived as a country made up of French Canadians and English Canadians, both of whom were separated by language and religion as well as by legal arrangements necessary for the preserva-

³⁶Jean Gérin-Lajoie in an interview with Gisèle Tremblay. Dupont et Tremblay, *Les syndicats en crise*, 120. See also Rouillard, *Histoire du syndicalisme au Québec*, 318-22; Solasse, "Les idéologies de la FTQ et de la CSN," 228-48.

tion of their respective traditions. In order to preserve French Canada's heritage, the CTCC advocated a high degree of provincial autonomy. Regarding Canada as a shelter for traditional French-Canadian culture, the CTCC continuously demanded full equality between French Canadians and English Canadians, bilingualism and biculturalism, and — since the 1940s — the repatriation of the constitution and the transformation of Canada into a republic.³⁷

On the eve of the Quiet Revolution, however, the CTCC's constitutional outlook became more ambiguous. On the one hand, the central continued to defend provincial autonomy, since it exercised more influence on the provincial than on the federal government.³⁸ Yet on the other hand, the rise of intellectuals such as Jean Marchand, Gérard Pelletier, Marcel Pepin, and Pierre Vadeboncoeur made the CTCC increasingly critical of French-Canadian nationalism. For this group of union leaders and councillors, French-Canadian nationalism was responsible for the backwardness of Québec's socio-economic institutions.³⁹ They led the CTCC to reject the idea of conserving all traits of traditional French-Canadian culture. Instead, the central came to advocate the modernization of the province of Québec along the lines of other Western societies.

As has been seen, in 1960 the Lesage government set out to modernize Québec institutions. Yet unlike the CSN, which merely wanted to reform the socio-economic system, the Liberal government also pursued a nationalist agenda. Lesage's *équipe de tonnerre* aimed at ending the economic inferiority of Québec's francophone population. Its goal was economic and social equality between the province's francophone majority and anglophone minority. To do so, the Lesage team sought to transfer economic decision-making processes into francophone hands. The provincial government intervened in the economy in order to help expand the tiny francophone business community. It hoped that the existence of a strong francophone business community would ultimately make French-speaking Québécois *maîtres chez eux*. Lesage's neonationalist programme stimulated French-speaking Québécois' national pride. Unlike traditional French-Canadian nationalism, the neonationalism of the Quiet Revolution had nothing static and submissive about it. It challenged existing power structures in a province where social-class divisions coincided almost identically with divisions between ethnic groups.⁴⁰

³⁷Louis-Marie Tremblay, *Le syndicalisme québécois: Les idéologies de la CSN et de la FTQ, 1940-1970*, 30-2, 41.

³⁸*Ibid.*

³⁹"La CSN et le séparatisme," *Le Travail*, décembre 1961, 5.

⁴⁰Kenneth McRoberts, *Quebec: Social Change and Political Crisis*, 3rd ed. (Toronto 1988), 132; William Coleman, *The Independence Movement in Quebec, 1945-1980* (Toronto 1984), 92, 99; P.-A. Linteau et al., *Histoire du Québec contemporain: tome 2: Le Québec depuis 1930* (Montréal 1986), 394; Rouillard, *Histoire du syndicalisme au Québec*, 294; Alain Gagnon and Mary B. Montcalm, *Quebec Beyond the Quiet Revolution* (Scarborough, Ontario 1990), 9, 18, 25, 45.

Quiet Revolution neonationalism also constituted a conscious break with French Canada's hapless past. Francophones in Québec no longer perceived their collectivity as 'la nation canadienne française' but as 'la nation québécoise.' French-Canadian identity turned into Québécois identity. At the same time, an increasing number of francophones questioned the status of Québec within Confederation. Among the numerous separatist organizations created in the early 1960s, the Rassemblement pour l'indépendance nationale (RIN) was by far the largest one. Like various other separatist parties and movements, the RIN perceived French-speaking Québécois as a colonized people. As Marcel Chaput, co-founder and second president of the RIN wrote, French Canada "a été conquis par les armes, occupé, dominé, exploité, et [...] encore aujourd'hui son destin repose, dans une très large mesure, entre les mains d'une autre nation qui lui est étrangère."⁴¹ Chaput and the RIN wanted to end Confederation, because for them it meant both the political and economic domination of Québec.⁴²

Headed by Jean Marchand, CSN president from 1961 to 1965, the union central rejected the idea of separation. CSN leaders saw no need for such a change. More importantly, like their FTQ peers, they feared the possible economic repercussions of independence, including a decline of the living standards and increased unemployment.⁴³ In addition, Marchand, Pelletier, and many others were unwilling to distinguish between traditional nationalism and neonationalism. They regarded separatism as just another facet of reactionary French-Canadian nationalism.⁴⁴

In 1964, the CSN leadership created a special committee to study of biculturalism, joint programs, self-determination, and separatism. In early 1965, the committee asked Pierre-Elliott Trudeau to draft a memorandum on Québec's constitutional status. Trudeau accepted and produced a document in which separatism was entirely discarded. According to Pierre Vadeboncoeur, Trudeau's text was nothing less than "un pamphlet virulent contre l'indépendance du Québec."⁴⁵ The memorandum was favourably received by the leaders of the CSN, the FTQ, and the Union des cultivateurs catholiques (UCC), who intended to present it to the Constitutional Committee of Québec's National Assembly. Vadeboncoeur and André L'Heureux, who had become separatists in 1963 and 1962 respective-

⁴¹ Marcel Chaput, *Pourquoi je suis séparatiste* (Montréal 1969), 19.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 27, 33.

⁴³ "La CSN et le séparatisme," *Le Travail*, décembre 1961, 5; Gabriel Gagnon, "Pour un socialisme décolonisateur," *Parti pris*, septembre/octobre 1966, 49. For the FTQ see, Rouillard, *Histoire du syndicalisme au Québec*, 323; François Cyr et Remi Roy, *Elements d'histoire de la FTQ: La FTQ et la question nationale* (Montréal 1981), 67-9.

⁴⁴ In June 1964, the CSN monthly *Le Travail* published a manifesto by Pierre-Elliott Trudeau, Marc Lalonde and others which clearly stated: "Nous croyons au fédéralisme comme régime politique au Canada [...] le séparatisme québécois nous apparaît non seulement comme une perte de temps, mais comme un recul." "Pour une politique fonctionnelle," *Le Travail*, juin 1964, Appendix, 5-6.

⁴⁵ Pierre Vadeboncoeur, "Geoffrey: Une conscience," *Nouvelles CSN*, 2 mars 1990, 11.

ly,⁴⁶ were shocked. They approached Pepin arguing that it would be premature to take a definitive stand on the issue, since public opinion was still evolving. Only after long and difficult discussions — involving Vadeboncoeur, L'Heureux, constitutional expert Jacques-Yvan Morin, and Marcel Pepin — was Pepin finally convinced that Trudeau's text should be revised.⁴⁷

In September 1966, the CSN, the FTQ, and the UCC jointly submitted the memorandum to the Constitutional Committee of the Québec National Assembly in 1966. The memorandum came out in favour of "[un] fédéralisme adapté à la réalité actuelle." The most important of its numerous suggestions to reform the federalist system were: a charter of rights and liberties to be included in the constitution; a supreme court to interpret the constitution; the equality of the two languages on the federal level; bilingualism in those provinces where there was a linguistic minority exceeding 15 per cent of the population or half a million people. The memorandum also wanted the provinces to acquire full responsibility in the cultural, educational, and welfare sectors. In addition, it called for a mechanism to harmonize provincial welfare policies. The document rejected a greater centralization of powers in Ottawa as detrimental to the interests of Québec. It also opposed the concept of associated states as well as the independence option. Any radical change of the constitution was to be avoided. In addition, the memorandum considered Québec sovereignty to be "une hypothèse et non une thèse; une hypothèse insuffisante pour permettre non seulement l'adhésion mais une discussion objective de quelque importance."⁴⁸

Although the CSN membership had no say in composing the memorandum, the CSN 1966 confederal convention did not hesitate to endorse the document retrospectively. It was not long thereafter, though, that the constitutional vision of the CSN leadership was challenged from within the union central.

III.

IN THE 1966 PROVINCIAL ELECTIONS, the Lesage Liberals were defeated and Québec separatists gained about nine per cent of the public vote. In the provincial elections four years later, the separatists would win one quarter of the public vote. The significant increase of support for the sovereignty option was largely due to the general disappointment with the immediate results of the Lesage government's economic nationalism. As has been said, the neonationalism of the Quiet Revolution was dynamic and expansionist, establishing the economic reconquest of Québec as its ultimate goal. Creating high expectations among French-speaking

⁴⁶*Ibid.*; André L'Heureux, *Sécrtariat d'action politique*, Montréal, janvier 1976, 45. Archives de la CSN, Dossier "Question nationale" 430 (1-9-1-3).

⁴⁷"Une grosse vulgarité," *Parti Pris*, février 1965, 18; Vadeboncoeur, "Geoffrey: Une conscience," 9-11.

⁴⁸"Mémoire sur les problèmes constitutionnels présenté conjointement par la CSN, le FTQ et l'UCC," CSN, Procès-verbal, congrès confédéral 1966, 459-64.

Québécois, its immediate results were meagre. Throughout the 1960s, the expansion of the francophone business community made little headway. As anglophone control of the private sector remained largely unchanged, francophone mobility in the private sector continued to be limited. The francophone community did not significantly improve its socio-economic status relative to other ethnic groups.⁴⁹ The ensuing disenchantment with the continued socio-economic inferiority of francophones directly benefited the separatist movement. Towards the end of the 1960s, more and more francophone Québécois became convinced that the well-being of the francophone collectivity could only be brought about with the help of an independent Québec state.

The rise of separatism in post-Quiet Revolution Québec also affected the CSN. During the period 1966 to 1972, sympathies for independence within the CSN were most pronounced among the professionals, teachers, provincial and municipal civil servants, and public sector-workers in general.⁵⁰ Regardless of which sector they belonged to, separatists within the union central were divided into two factions: first, the moderates who wanted to attain independence to end the minority situation of Québec within the Confederation, and to allow francophones to be economically successful; second, the radicals who saw independence as a precondition for the creation of a socialist society in Québec. It was the latter group of socialist separatists who became dominant in the CSN during the 1970s. Originally, this group was formed by union militants and councillors, who previously had been members of the PSQ that was dissolved in 1966. In 1963 the PSQ had been founded by disenchanted New Democratic Party members from Québec. They opposed the centralism of the NDP which, according to them, disregarded the fact that Québec was a nation of its own.⁵¹ Former PSQ members, such as Michel Chartrand and André L'Heureux, no longer saw any viable prospects for cooperation between the left in Québec and the left in Canada. This attitude was most clearly expressed in the following 1972 statement by the Chartrand-led CCSNM:

Il n'y a plus à espérer, comme le démontre abondamment l'histoire, qu'un mouvement politique populaire né dans l'ouest du Canada puisse gagner efficacement les provinces de

⁴⁹This situation was highlighted by the *Report of Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism*, published in 1969, which stated francophone Québécois ranked twelfth among fourteen ethnic groups with respect to average income. *Report of the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism*, Volume 3A (Ottawa 1969), 23.

⁵⁰Ralph Güntzel, "La FPPSCQ, la CSN et la question nationale depuis 1964," *Travail, Profession et Société*, 1:1 (printemps 1990), 4; "La CSN refuse d'enquêter sur l'opinion constitutionnelle de ses 225 000 membres," *La Presse*, 27 janvier 1969, 10; "Les dirigeants montréalais de la CSN appuient le PQ," *Québec-Presse*, 22 mars 1970, 3; FNEQ, Procès-verbal, congrès fédéral, 27-29 novembre 1970, 39-40.

⁵¹André L'Heureux, Secrétariat d'action politique, Montréal, janvier 1976, 45. Archives de la CSN, Dossier "Question nationale" 430 (1-9-1-3).

l'Est, et inversement [...] Dans un pays comme le Canada, l'impérialisme et le capitalisme n'ont pas à diviser pour régner, vu que les divisions sont déjà profondément inscrites dans la géographie, les cultures, l'histoire, les traditions, les mentalités et les intérêts particuliers entre le Québec d'une part et les provinces anglophones d'autre part.⁵²

Under these circumstances, the installation of a socialist government in Ottawa appeared to be only a remote possibility. The creation of a socialist Québec, therefore, necessitated the separation of Québec from Canada. Chartrand, L'-Heureux and other militants on the left of the CSN, knew that independence would not automatically lead to socialism. They thought, though, that only independence could make socialism possible.

While forming only a tiny group at the end of the Quiet Revolution, by 1972 the number of separatists among the CSN membership had increased enormously. The growing popularity of separatism was greatly helped by four phenomena: the failure of all CSN efforts to expand into other provinces and into sectors under the jurisdiction of the Canadian labour code in the mid-1960s; the appeal and credibility of the independence option due to René Lévesque's personality and the progressive image of the Parti québécois (PQ); the language debate beginning in 1969; and the invocation of the War Measures Act in October 1970.

During the mid-1960s, all CSN efforts to expand into areas under the jurisdiction of the Canadian Labour Code failed. All international and interprovincial companies in areas such as communications, including radio, TV, telephone, and transportation, fell under the jurisdiction of this code. Negotiating units in these sectors were Canada-wide. In 1965-66, the CSN tried to win over railway workers in East Angus and Pointe St-Charles, as well as the francophone employees of Radio Canada. In all cases, the workers in question belonged to unions affiliated with the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC). Although enjoying the support of the workers concerned, the CSN was unable to form new unions. This was due to the veto of the Canadian Labour Relations Board, on which the CLC held three seats and the CSN only one. Having met with such disappointments associated with the federalist system of labour relations, many CSN activists and officers began to see federalism more critically.⁵³ Not long afterwards, the CSN initiative to expand beyond the province of Québec came to nothing.⁵⁴

⁵²"Construire par la base une démocratie socialiste au Québec," *Le Travail*, mai 1972, 3; CCSNM, "Résolution pour l'indépendance du Québec, 14e congrès du CCSNM, avril 1972"; Louis LeBorgne, *La CSN et la question nationale depuis 1960* (Montréal 1975), 196-8.

⁵³Claude Larivière, "Les libertés syndicales et le pancanadianisme," *L'Action nationale*, LV, 9-10 (1966), 1125-8.

⁵⁴CSN, Procès-verbal, congrès confédéral 1966, 368-9; CSN, Procès-verbal, congrès confédéral 1968, 64-5.

With the founding of the Mouvement Souveraineté Association (MSA) in November 1967, public debate about Québec's constitutional status intensified significantly. The new importance of the independence option was reflected in the CSN monthly *Le Travail*. Having ignored the issue in previous years, in early 1968 *Le Travail* started to discuss the national question.⁵⁵ The fact that this discussion could now take place in the CSN mouthpiece was partly due to René Lévesque's "tremendous personal popularity among workers and trade unionists."⁵⁶ As a minister in the Lesage cabinet, he had won the sympathy of organized labour with social-democratic proposals such as complete unionization, free education, and economic planning.⁵⁷ In addition to Lévesque's personal prestige, the PQ's social-democratic program created sympathy for the new party among CSN members and officers. Moreover, in its early years, the PQ appeared to be open to progressive proposals, and even courted workers to join its ranks. Not surprisingly, the PQ came to be seen as the party of political and social change.⁵⁸ Lévesque's takeover of the leadership of the independence movement and the founding of the MSA-PQ made the sovereignty option more attractive and more credible. Unlike other separatist leaders, such as Marcel Chaput and Pierre Bourgault (Chaput's successor as president of the RIN), Lévesque had experience in holding political power. The addition of new, distinguished members to the PQ also increased the party's credibility. In autumn 1969, *Cadres*, the journal of the professionals organized within the CSN, commented on Jacques Parizeau's arrival in the ranks of the PQ:

Personne ne peut [...] contester la compétence économique de Parizeau [...] Avec l'entrée en scène de Parizeau, la notion d'un Québec séparé prend une dimension nouvelle. L'indépendance devient une option politique valable, qui se discute au mérite. Lévesque lui avait donné son caractère sérieux qu'elle n'avait jamais eu. Avec Parizeau, elle cesse d'être une aventure.⁵⁹

The fierce debates on the language issue late in the decade were another reason for the rise of separatism within the CSN. By the end of the 1960s, Québec nationalists demanded government action to make French the language of work in order to ensure greater social mobility for Québec francophones. In addition, they wanted the government to reform the educational system so that immigrants would be forced to integrate into the French-speaking community. They hoped thereby to

⁵⁵See, "L'avenir du Québec, c'est surtout l'affaire des salariés," *Le Travail*, janvier 1968, 18-9; "Un statut particulier dans un fédéralisme nouveau," *Le Travail*, mai 1968, 18-9.

⁵⁶Leo Roback, "Quebec Workers in the Twentieth Century," in W.J.C. Cherwinski and Gregory S. Kealey, eds., *Lectures in Canadian Labour and Working Class History* (St. John's 1985), 179-80.

⁵⁷Vera Murray, *Le Parti québécois: de la fondation à la prise du pouvoir* (Montréal 1976), 217.

⁵⁸Favreau et L'Heureux, *Le Projet de société de la CSN*, 102.

⁵⁹Mario Cardinal, "Enfin un débat des adultes," *Cadres*, septembre/octobre 1969, 12.

ward off the perceived threat of the assimilation of francophones. The CSN quickly became involved in the language debate. In January 1969, the central came out in favour of French as the language of the workplace. At the same time the CSN adopted a declaration of principles regarding instruction and culture, which stipulated that the Québec educational system should be founded on language.⁶⁰

During the October Crisis, the CSN again joined the camp of Québec nationalists. As previously mentioned, many of those arrested were labour union militants, the most prominent being Michel Chartrand. In a Common Front with René Lévesque and the PQ, the CSN denounced the invocation of the War Measures Act for its infringement on citizens' civil liberties. An improved relationship between the CSN and the PQ was not the only result of the October Crisis. Equally important was the fact that a significant number of Québécois, within or outside the labour union movement, came to resent the federal intervention. This resentment in many cases led to a questioning of the federal system as such.⁶¹

Ever since the end of the Quiet Revolution, CSN militants had become involved in a highly-animated and controversial debate on independence. In 1967 the Syndicat professionnel des enseignants criticized the CSN leadership for the 1966 memorandum, and took a clear stand in favour of independence.⁶² The teachers' union was supported by the Syndicat des fonctionnaires municipaux de Montréal which demanded that the CSN hold an internal referendum on the independence question.⁶³ The CSN leadership, however, tried to avoid any formal discussion of the issue, and especially any internal referendum. CSN president Pepin was a diehard federalist who believed Québec could become socialist without having to leave Confederation and who cherished the ideal of anticapitalist solidarity from coast to coast.⁶⁴ In addition, he and other CSN leaders did not want any internal divisions about this issue to become evident. In April 1968, the CSN executive committee proposed to conduct an opinion poll instead of an internal referendum. In January 1969, when called to decide on the issue, the confederal council could not come to an agreement and dropped the proposal despite dissent.⁶⁵ Yet, the separatists within the central continued to pressure the leadership to hold an internal referendum and to change the CSN position on the national question. Slowly, the power relations within the CSN changed in favour of the separatists. Even before

⁶⁰CSN, Procès-verbal, congrès confédéral 1968, 517; "La CSN adopte un programme d'action axée sur la nécessité d'un 2e front," *Le Devoir*, 27 janvier 1969, 3.

⁶¹Jean-François Cardin, *La Crise d'octobre 1970 et le mouvement syndical* (Montréal 1988).

⁶²CSN, Procès-verbal, congrès confédéral 1968, 535.

⁶³*Ibid.*, 521.

⁶⁴Jacques Keable, "'Ne comptons que sur nos propres moyens': Marcel Pepin: 'L'état d'insécurité des travailleurs est très grand'," *Québec-Presse*, 24 octobre 1971, 15; Marcel Pepin, "Un camp de la liberté." CSN, Procès-verbal, congrès confédéral 1970, 26.

⁶⁵CSN, Procès-verbal, conseil confédéral, 16 et 17 avril 1968, 4-5; CSN, Procès-verbal, congrès confédéral 1968, 335, 513, 515, 521.

the departure of the right in 1972, various CSN bodies, particularly in the public sector, had taken a pro-separatist stand.⁶⁶ With the departure of the largely federalist right, the CSN separatists finally found themselves in a position of strength among CSN leaders and militants alike. The union central, with the votes of the separatists, decided in October 1972 that a formal debate and referendum on the independence issue was to be launched among the membership in order to establish a new CSN position.⁶⁷

The experiences of both the FTQ and the CEQ during the late 1960s and the early 1970s resembled that of the CSN. In both organizations, an increasing number of members came to support separation. As in the case of the CSN membership, this increase was largely caused by the new credibility that separatism enjoyed after the arrival of René Lévesque and the creation of the PQ, by the debates of the language issue, and by the ramifications of the October Crisis. The official discourse of the FTQ and the CEQ reflected the new popularity of the idea of independence. The 1969 FTQ convention discontinued the practice of denouncing separation which dated back to 1963. The 1972 CEQ convention even took a stand in favour of independence. The convention resolved, however, that this endorsement was not to be regarded as the CEQ's official position and that an internal referendum ought to take place in order to establish such a stance.⁶⁸ As will be seen, several years were to pass before either CEQ or CSN followed through on their 1972 decisions.

IV.

UNTIL 1976 (for the remainder of Marcel Pepin's presidency), no internal debate of the national question took place. The leadership shelved the national question since it wanted to consolidate the membership, and avoid the risk of internal division over the independence issue. In addition, continued financial problems and the debates on fee increases absorbed all energies. Despite the absence of dramatic events, the number of adherents to the idea of sovereignty continued to increase. Separatism now gained popularity among members of private-sector unions. At the same time, on the far left, a group of determined federalists emerged. The Marxist-Leninist militants opposed separation which they thought would

⁶⁶See for instance, FPSCQ, Procès-verbal, congrès fédéral 1971, 13; FNEQ, Procès-verbal, congrès fédéral, 27-29 novembre 1970, 39-40; CSN, Procès-verbal, congrès confédéral 1968, 535; "Construire par la base une démocratie socialiste au Québec," *Le Travail*, mai 1972, 3.

⁶⁷CSN, Procès-verbal, congrès confédéral 1972, 173-7; Pierre Richard, "Optant pour le socialisme: La CSN organisera un référendum sur l'indépendance," *Le Devoir*, 5 octobre 1972, 1.

⁶⁸On the FTQ, Rouillard, *Histoire du syndicalisme au Québec*, 324-5; Cyr et Roy, *Éléments d'histoire de la FTQ*, 95-140. On the CEQ, Rouillard, *Histoire du syndicalisme au Québec*, 369; Louise Clermont-Laliberté, *Dix ans de pratiques syndicales: La CEQ 1970-1980* (Québec [1980]), 85.

alienate Québec workers from the Canadian working class, and thereby benefit their common class enemy, the Canadian bourgeoisie.⁶⁹

In July 1976 Norbert Rodrigue succeeded Pepin as CSN president. For the first time in CSN history, its six-member executive committee had strong separatist leanings. The new CSN president was known to favour the idea of independence. Furthermore, vice presidents André L'Heureux and Francine Lalonde had been very vocal supporters of separation since the early 1960s. (The latter even became a minister in René Lévesque's second cabinet.) Only five months after the CSN leadership change, the PQ came to power on the promise of holding a referendum within four years. Rodrigue concluded that the union central could no longer avoid an internal debate and referendum concerning the CSN stand on the Québec national question.⁷⁰ In September 1977, an orientation committee headed by Rodrigue, and including 20 of the central's most influential leaders, was formed. Its function was to conduct and analyze the internal debate on the national question. Most of the committee members were sympathetic to independence.⁷¹ Yet only a minority of committee members, such as Francine Lalonde, André L'Heureux, Michel Bourdon, and Robert Tremblay, wanted to make the propagation of independence the committee's priority. Led by Norbert Rodrigue, the majority of committee members had two other goals in mind: to avoid internal divisions and renewed disaffiliations over the independence issue, and to instill carefully a socialist spirit into the movement.

The committee's preliminary report to the 1978 confederal convention bore witness to this dual aim. The document stated that the CSN "comprend dans ses rangs des travailleurs de différents niveaux de conscience, de différentes sensibilités et allégeances idéologiques et politiques." Inspired by Rodrigue's goal of consolidating the membership, the report proclaimed the necessity of establishing a lowest common denominator position that could be shared by the entire membership. Since the CSN enjoyed no consensus on the issue of separation, the committee considered it premature "de chercher à répondre par un oui ou un non à l'indépendance du Québec."⁷² The report also declared openly the committee's second priority:

Le débat sur la question nationale [...] doit être pour nous l'occasion de poursuivre [...] le débat plus global que nous menons sur notre projet de société [...] Cette démarche de

⁶⁹Yves Taschereau, "Ils sont fous," *L'Actualité*, novembre 1976, 50; Benoît, *L'extrême gauche*, 102, 114.

⁷⁰CSN, Procès-verbal, conseil confédéral, 17-20 novembre 1976, 26.

⁷¹Interview with Peter Bakvis, Montréal, 29 May 1990; Interview with Francine Lalonde, Montréal, 19 June 1990; Interview with Marc Lesage, Montréal, 5 July 1990.

⁷²CSN, Procès-verbal, congrès confédéral 1978, 185.

réflexion sur la question nationale pourra [...] exercer une capacité d'attraction afin que plus de travailleurs se retrouvent dans les positions de la CSN.⁷³

The document stated that Québec francophones had far less access to better-paid jobs than anglophones. Unlike the neonationalists and the advocates of independence, the CSN orientation committee did not propose to remedy this situation by the expanding francophone businesses under the guidance of the Québec state. Instead, the CSN leaders maintained that there was an economic system in existence which provided a structural base on which exploitation might take the form of national oppression. The committee did not yearn for change merely on the character and composition of the business community. Its aim was to end an economic system based on the antagonism of employer and employees. Hence, the committee report urged Québec workers to combine the struggle against national oppression with the struggle against capitalism.⁷⁴

In winter 1978-79, the CSN finally embarked upon its vast internal debate and referendum on the national question. The tone of the debate and the outcome of the referendum were significantly influenced by the deterioration in CSN — PQ relations which the 1970s had witnessed. These relations had become visibly strained after the PQ had attained power in 1976. The earliest tensions, however, had appeared in the early 1970s. Unlike the CSN, the PQ never had envisaged any fundamental change in the socio-economic system. Thus the PQ leadership had little sympathy for the ideological orientation the CSN had adopted in 1972. René Lévesque had never hidden his disregard for radicals on the left, whom he denounced as "les missionnaires de la table rase qui grenouillent dans les chapelles marginales de la révolution miracle et de l'ultra-gauchisme doctrinaire des anarcho-patriotes."⁷⁵ At a meeting with CSN militants in 1973, Jacques Parizeau criticized the CSN for having chosen "une option politique qui n'est pas la nôtre." He then went on to reject "une transformation totale de la société et des choses comme la nationalisation des terres qui a un sens à Cuba mais pas ici et dont personne ne voudrait ici."⁷⁶ Since 1971-72, the PQ leaders took care to distance their party from the CSN so that the public would not associate the PQ with the labour central's radicalism.⁷⁷

⁷³*Ibid.*, 150-1; see also, "Éléments pour une discussion de masse: Document de travail," présenté au Comité d'orientation CSN, le 21 décembre 1978, 6-7. Archives de la CSN, Dossier "Question nationale 1976-1980," 370 (2-2-2-3).

⁷⁴CSN, Procès-verbal, congrès confédéral 1978, 181.

⁷⁵"La peur de faire peur," *Le Devoir*, 20 mai 1980, 9.

⁷⁶"Les travailleurs sont toujours seuls: Marion et Forget vs. Parizeau," *Le Travail*, octobre/novembre 1974, 19.

⁷⁷Claude Masson, "Pépin joue le tout pour le tout: Face aux dissensions internes à la CSN, il engage une lutte à finir avec Bourassa," *La Presse*, 14 juin 1972, A5; Lipsig-Mummé, "The Web of Dependence," 305.

Despite the growing gap between the CSN and the PQ, the PQ continued to claim numerous supporters among the CSN membership. Many union members appreciated the PQ's commitments to bring about sovereignty and to implement various social-democratic reforms.⁷⁸ Rank-and-file support for the PQ was so noticeable that the CSN executive committee became concerned about it. On the eve of the 1976 provincial election, the CSN executive declared:

Il importe de mettre nos membres en garde contre l'illusion que le PQ pourrait changer fondamentalement la condition des travailleurs [...] S'il est important de donner une leçon au Parti libéral, il faut être bien conscient qu'au lendemain de l'élection, même si le PQ prenait le pouvoir, nous serions placés devant une autre gouvernement qui, de gré ou de force, serait asservi à la classe dominante.⁷⁹

Once in power, Lévesque's PQ government chose to ignore many aspects of its social-democratic platform in an attempt to gain support from the business community and more-conservative voters.⁸⁰ The Lévesque administration, however, did implement several significant social reforms. It raised the minimum wage to the highest level in North America and, until 1979, indexed this to the cost of living. Moreover, it introduced free dental care for children under age 16 years, and set up a public system of automobile insurance against personal injury.⁸¹ Other noteworthy social legislation included Bill 45 which revised the Québec labour code. The bill permitted a unionization vote if more than 35 per cent of the employees had signed union cards, and obliged an employer to rehire a striker after the end of a strike. In principle, the bill prohibited the employment of scabs, but permitted an employer to hire workers during a strike in order to safeguard essential services and protect his or her property.⁸² Although the bill was "more progressive than anything existing in any other North-American jurisdiction,"⁸³ the CSN execu-

⁷⁸ *Québec-Presse*, 29 avril 1973, Supplement 1er mai, 28; "Un million de québécois," *Le Travail*, janvier 1974, 26-31; "C'est comme ça qu'on est," *Le Travail*, 27 juin 1974, 6; CSN, Procès-verbal, congrès confédéral 1978, 163.

⁷⁹ Comité exécutif de la CSN, "Votons pour renforcer notre capacité de lutter." Document soumis au bureau confédéral de la CSN le 31 octobre 1976. CSN, Procès-verbal, bureau confédéral, terme 1976-1978, 34.

⁸⁰ Don and Vera Murray, "The Parti québécois: From Opposition to Power," in Hugh G. Thoburn, ed., *Party Politics in Canada*, 4th ed. (Scarborough, Ontario 1979), 245, 251; John Fitzmaurice, *Québec and Canada: Past, Present, and Future* (London 1985), 198-9; Favreau et L'Heureux, *Le projet de société de la CSN*, 132; François Demers, *Chroniques impertinentes du troisième Front commun syndical, 1979-1980* (Montréal 1982), 97.

⁸¹ McRoberts, *Quebec: Social Change and Political Crisis*, 267-8; Linteau et al., *Histoire du Québec contemporain: tome 2: Le Québec depuis 1930*, 658.

⁸² Rouillard, *Histoire du syndicalisme au Québec*, 424.

⁸³ Reginald A. Whitaker, "The Quebec Chauldron: A Recent Account," in Gagnon, ed., *Quebec: State and Society*, 83.

tive severely criticized the bill for enabling the employer to hire scabs under the aforementioned conditions. To the CSN leadership, Bill 45 proved that the PQ government was by no means favourably disposed towards the workers.⁸⁴

Bill 45 was not the only piece of PQ governmental policy that met with CSN criticism. Cuts in social services and education budgets cost the PQ government much sympathy within the CSN.⁸⁵ At the central's confederal convention in June of 1978, its leadership launched a general attack on the Lévesque government. It criticized the government for having restricted the budget for social affairs; for having failed to introduce legislation regarding maternal leave, abortion, and the application of the principle equal pay for equal work; for having failed to introduce legislation to promote health and security in the workplace; for not having fought against inflation, unemployment, the closing of enterprises, and poverty in general; and for having displayed anti-labour attitudes in the field of industrial relations.⁸⁶ The harsh criticisms were only partly inspired by the PQ government's failure to live up to the expectations of CSN socialists. The CSN leadership also wanted to mobilize the rank-and-file membership for the public-sector negotiations which were to be held in 1979.

The 1978 convention took an emotional turn after violence erupted between convention delegates and the provincial police. The clash occurred when about 200 delegates demonstrated at Sainte-Thérèse to express their solidarity with the strikers at the Commonwealth Plywood factory. Several CSN militants were injured on the occasion the most well-known of them being vice-president L'Heureux. Some militants were arrested; others fled. Those who evaded arrest returned to the convention floor. Many wore bandages, and all had horrifying stories to tell. Feelings ran high, and CSN delegates were quick to denounce the PQ government which they held responsible for the actions of the police. Several CSN delegates ostentatiously destroyed their PQ membership cards on the floor of the convention room, receiving applause from those who had always mistrusted the PQ government.⁸⁷ After the incident at Sainte-Thérèse, PQ supporters within the CSN became even more marginalized.⁸⁸

The CSN referendum held in the winter 1978-79 had several noteworthy results. About 4 380 members — 2.8 per cent of all 155 704 CSN members — participated in the internal debate and referendum.⁸⁹ Only half the participants wanted the CSN

⁸⁴ CSN, Procès-verbal, congrès confédéral 1978, 6, 47-60.

⁸⁵ Interview with Peter Bakvis, Montréal, 29 May 1990.

⁸⁶ CSN, Procès-verbal, congrès confédéral 1978, 156-66.

⁸⁷ Pierre Vennat, "La CSN de retour devant la Commonwealth avec 'son' système d'ordre: 'Cette attaque sauvage est un coup monté'," *La Presse*, 8 juin 1978, A3; Interview with Peter Bakvis, Montréal, 29 May 1990.

⁸⁸ Interview with Francine Lalonde, Montréal, 19 June 1990.

⁸⁹ CSN, *Rapport sur la consultation sur la question nationale* (Montréal 1979), 4; Bernier et Boily, *Le Québec en chiffres*, 316.

to take a stand on the independence issue.⁹⁰ There were four reasons why so many opposed such a stand. First, some did not want the CSN involved in political activities at all. These members advocated a purely economic unionism limiting CSN activities to collective bargaining.⁹¹ Second, many were opposed to separation. Fearing the potential economic repercussions of separation most of these federalists were particularly concerned with the prospect of job losses and a decline in the standard of living.⁹² Less numerous, but very vocal, were those federalists who defended the thesis that separation would divide workers in Québec and Canada to the class enemy's benefit. Third, a large group did not want the CSN to endorse independence because they considered this to constitute an automatic endorsement of the PQ. They either regarded the PQ as a party defending the interests of the business community or did not want to diminish the bargaining power of public and para-public sector unions.⁹³ Fourth, a good number of militants were afraid of internal divisions and renewed disaffiliations which might be the result of a CSN stand in favour of independence.⁹⁴

Faced with the ambiguity of its membership and unwilling to take a stand that could be interpreted as an endorsement of the PQ, the majority of the CSN leadership decided to drop the issue of an official stand on the independence question. Led by André L'Heureux and Michel Bourdon, a minority of CSN leaders maintained that the CSN should endorse independence since it was a precondition for ending the national oppression of French-speaking Québécois and for creating a socialist society. Yet, their recommendations were defeated by the orientation committee, the confederal council, and the special confederal convention on the national question of June 1979.⁹⁵ Instead, the special convention resolved in favour of "une démarche d'appropriation par le peuple québécois des pouvoirs et des institutions politiques, économiques et culturels."⁹⁶ Failing to specify the number and exact

⁹⁰*Rapport sur la consultation sur la question nationale*, 4.

⁹¹For example, see Response of the *Syndicat des travailleurs de Roberval*. Archives de la CSN, Dossier "Question nationale," 1696 (23-3-4-3) and response of the *Syndicat des employés des Aciers Atlas*. Archives de la CSN, Dossier "Question nationale," 370 (2-2-2-3). The orientation committee did not ask the participants to explain their stand. Yet some of the ballots returned to the committee did give reasons under the heading "other remarks."

⁹²Interview with Peter Bakvis, Montréal, 29 May 1990; Marcel Pepin, "Pourquoi les travailleurs hésitent devant la thèse péquiste," *Le Devoir*, 19 juillet 1980, 2.

⁹³*Rapport sur la consultation sur la question nationale*, 5; FNEQ, Procès-verbal, conseil fédéral, 24-27 mai 1979, 10.

⁹⁴For example, see Response of the *Syndicat national des employés de soutien de la commission scolaire du Cap-de-la-Madelaine*, Archives de la CSN, Dossier "Question nationale," 370 (2-2-2-3) and Response of the *Syndicat national des employés de Garage de Rimouski*. Archives de la CSN, Dossier "Question nationale," 370 (2-2-2-3).

⁹⁵CSN, Procès-verbal, conseil confédéral, 3-5 mai 1979, 398-9; CSN, Procès-verbal, congrès confédéral 1979, 131-2.

⁹⁶CSN, Procès-verbal, conseil confédéral, 1979, 147.

nature of the powers and institutions mentioned, the resolution perfectly reflected the varying opinions of the CSN membership.

The orientation committee report presented at the 1979 convention amounted to a full-fledged attack of the PQ government. The document argued that Québec needed to curb foreign control of the Québec economy and develop its weak secondary sector on the basis of advanced technologies.⁹⁷ Having established these parameters, the CSN leaders severely criticized the PQ government for its incoherent development strategy and its unwillingness to challenge the hold of American capital on the Québec economy.⁹⁸ Despite its wordy condemnation of the separatist leaders, the orientation committee report did display an inherent separatist logic. Under the federalist system only the federal government possessed the powers to restructure the Québec economy. As the CSN leaders well knew, the federal government always had been tied intimately to the Ontario business community, and therefore could not be depended upon where Québec economic development was at issue.⁹⁹ The provincial government, however, would be overburdened with such a task since its powers were too limited. Hence, to develop Québec's secondary sector and to attack the foreign domination of the Québec economy would necessitate a massive transfer of powers from Ottawa to Québec. If anything, the CSN project was even more comprehensive than René Lévesque's sovereignty-association.

Since the 1979 special convention on the national question had neither rejected nor endorsed independence, the issue remained far from settled. With the referendum of 20 May 1980 approaching, internal debate intensified. On 11 April 1980, the confederal convention held a special meeting to discuss the CSN's stand on the referendum. While many militants did not want the organization to adopt an official position, both the executive and the orientation committee were determined to endorse a 'yes' in the referendum. As Norbert Rodrigue pointed out, during the previous years the CSN had managed to establish a critical distance from the PQ and its vision of society. Consequently, nobody could mistake a CSN stand in favour of the 'yes' side as an unqualified endorsement of the PQ. Rodrigue also pointed out that Québec needed to appropriate political institutions and powers since this would create better conditions in the workers' struggle for a socialist society.¹⁰⁰ Following Rodrigue's recommendations, the confederal council with an overwhelming majority, came out in favour of a 'yes' in the referendum.¹⁰¹

Like the CSN, the FTQ did not formally endorse independence but took a stand assenting to the negotiation of sovereignty-association. Unlike the CSN, FTQ support

⁹⁷*Ibid.*, 74-5.

⁹⁸*Ibid.*, 61-7.

⁹⁹*Ibid.*, 37-51.

¹⁰⁰CSN, Procès-verbal, conseil confédéral, 11 avril 1980, 927-8.

¹⁰¹"La CSN décide de rallier le camp du OUI," *Le Devoir*, 12 avril 1980, 7; Laval LeBorgne, "Le conseil confédéral de la CSN vote Oui," *La Presse*, 12 avril 1980, A2.

for a 'yes' in the referendum failed to ignite protracted discussion. Since the early 1970s, relations between the FTQ and the PQ had been cordial. Their respective visions of society were not as far apart as those of the CSN and the PQ. In the provincial election of 1976, the FTQ had endorsed the PQ. After the PQ had come to power, relations between the FTQ and the PQ government were harmonious. The FTQ leadership was pleased with the PQ governmental record (including Bill 45). Meanwhile, the CEQ was unable to take a stand either on Québec's constitutional status or on the referendum question. The CEQ's ability to make political commitments had become a casualty in the struggle that deadlocked CEQ moderates and radicals. After the PQ had taken power, the moderates were no longer willing to denounce the Québec government as an agent of capitalist interests. When the central's radicals proposed a resolution that supported independence and rejected the PQ's vision of society, the moderates refused to fall in line. The resolution fell through. Furthermore, since the moderates expected the radicals to use the referendum campaign as an occasion to launch an all-out attack on the PQ government, they opted against CEQ participation in the referendum campaign.¹⁰²

As this brief look at the FTQ and the CEQ shows, on the eve of the referendum, none of Québec's three large labour union centrals took a stand in favour of independence. In the CSN and the FTQ, too many rank-and-file members remained partisans of federalism. Furthermore, many CSN members, and most of the central's leaders, wanted to avoid a gesture that could be interpreted as support for the PQ government. This consideration also played a role in the debates within the CEQ. Since its membership consisted almost entirely of teachers who enjoy a high degree of job security, the CEQ was the only union central that potentially could have mustered overwhelming support for independence. Yet the CEQ radicals were determined to link a resolution in favour of independence to a condemnation of the PQ, while the moderates were equally determined to prevent any such condemnation. The same mechanism also made it impossible for the CEQ to take a stand on the referendum question. For the FTQ and the CSN it was less problematical to take such a stand. Dominated by social democrats, the FTQ simply followed up its earlier policies of support for the PQ government. The CSN, on the other hand, was dominated by radicals who faced no significant opposition from moderate social democrats. Thus they could combine a ringing denunciation of the PQ with a recommendation to vote 'yes' in the referendum.

V.

QUÉBEC SOVEREIGNTISM and the radicalism of the CSN shared the same roots. Both phenomena were products of the enthusiasm that accompanied the Quiet Revolution and the disenchantment that followed it. Although both concepts challenged

¹⁰²On the FTQ see, Rouillard, *Histoire du syndicalisme au Québec*, 325-7; Cyr et Roy, *Éléments d'histoire de la FTQ*, 155-98. On the CEQ see, Rouillard, *Histoire du syndicalisme au Québec*, 369-70; Clermont-Laliberté, *Dix ans de pratiques syndicales*, 86.

the status quo, their ultimate goals were different. CSN radicalism aimed at fundamental change in the socio-economic system and the replacement of the market economy by a socialist economy. Sovereignism, by contrast, sought fundamental change in Québec's constitutional status and the transformation of the province into a sovereign nation-state. As abstractions, sovereignism and socialism are not inherently incompatible. It fell to those propagating the two concepts to decide on the degree of compatibility they would have in real life. In the event, the Lévesque-led sovereigntist movement opted for a market economy, while the majority of CSN radicals favoured independence. The CSN radicals did so for two reasons: first, they felt that cooperation between the left in English Canada and the left in Québec was impossible; second, they perceived Québec society at that time as more progressive. PQ sovereigntists and CSN socialists shared the idea of Québec independence. They disagreed in their visions of society: one group advocated the market economy, the other one socialism. Thus their relationship was bound to be discordant.

Ideological dispositions were not the only determinants of the relationship between sovereignism and socialism in Québec during the 1970s. To a large extent, this relationship was determined by the relative popularity both options enjoyed. In the wake of the Quiet Revolution, sovereignism flourished much more rapidly than did socialism. Sovereigntist parties had already been in existence when the PQ was founded in 1968. The CSN embraced socialism only five years later. Both sovereignism and socialism had a high profile in Québec political culture during the 1970s. Neither of them, though, was a complete success by the end of the decade. Although it may have been less attractive than the status quo in 1980, the sovereigntist option certainly was more popular than the socialist one. The defense of French Canada and Québec's autonomy were issues deeply rooted in Québec. The sovereigntist movement could benefit from those traditions, while the socialist movement did not have any such base in the Québécois' collective mentality.

The popularity of sovereignism was felt even within the ranks of the CSN. Among many rank-and-file members, René Lévesque was more popular than the CSN leaders, and the PQ enjoyed a degree of credibility that surpassed that of the CSN. Many CSN members subscribed to the PQ's vision of society rather than that of the CSN socialists. Consequently, the socialist option lost potential sympathizers and activists. Many of those who had the idealism to invest their time and energy to challenge existing socio-political structures were drawn to the sovereigntist movement rather than the socialist one. By comparison, the group of socialists was small. Since the sovereigntist movement recruited its followers from the pool of potential socialist activists, the CSN socialists saw Lévesque's PQ as a dangerous competitor. The only way to stand up to this competitor was to denounce it continuously and vociferously.

The coexistence of sovereignism and socialism was tainted by the continuous attacks from the socialists. This type of coexistence could have improved had the PQ made an effort to reach conciliation. Representing only a small constituency, the CSN socialists were only minor players in Québec politics. The fact that the CSN

carried little political weight did not endear its CSN socialism to the PQ. Instead of conciliation, the PQ put demarcation on the agenda. With pride, René Lévesque stated:

Our hands are not in any way tied as far as the unions are concerned [...] We owe not a cent, not a dollar, to the employers, or to the unions [...] We have no organic ties, which means that we can be the government of all the people without being a puppet to any one sector.¹⁰³

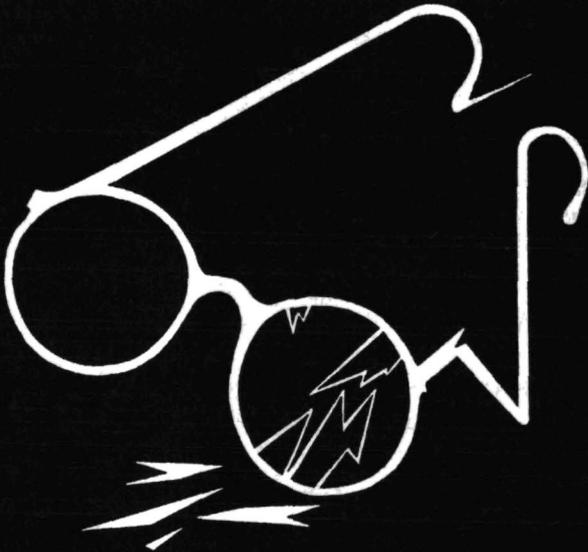
The relationship between the PQ and the CSN was characterized by ideological differences, denunciations, and neglect. It is hardly surprising that sovereigntists and socialists rarely joined forces.

Despite ideological differences and mutual disregard, a sovereigntist triumph was in the best interest of the CSN socialists. Once they had come to the conclusion that cooperation with the left in English Canada either was impossible or undesirable, the CSN socialists automatically narrowed their framework to Québec. In order to implement radical socio-economic change within that framework, they needed to patriate all major decision-making processes to Québec. This reasoning would have been invalid only if Québec society had been considerably more conservative than English Canadian society. This clearly was not the case. Furthermore, as long as the majority of progressives in the province were preoccupied with the cause of sovereignty, socialism was condemned to take a back seat. Only after independence would those idealistic energies be available to take on other struggles. Of course, sovereigntist triumph would not have guaranteed the subsequent triumph of socialism, but only independence could have made a socialist society possible. The CSN socialists could only arrive in the cock-boat in the wake of the sovereigntist man-of-war.

The thought of endorsing an idea identified with the much-criticized Lévesque government certainly made many CSN socialists ill at ease. This uneasiness, though, did not prevent the socialist CSN leaders grouped around Norbert Rodrigue from realizing that the success of socialism depended on the success of sovereigntism. Yet the CSN socialists could not impose their will on the entire CSN membership. The CSN was not a political party; its members shared economic concerns, not political ideologies. As the internal debate of 1978-79 revealed, a large group — possibly one half — of the rank-and-file membership was opposed to a formal endorsement of independence because they were federalists, or because they did not think it proper for the CSN to concern itself with political issues. The long list of disaffiliations during the 1970s had made the CSN leadership very sensitive to rank-and-file opinions. Thus, more than anything else, it was opposition emanating from the rank-and-file membership that prevented an official CSN endorsement of independence in 1979-80.

¹⁰³ René Lévesque, *My Quebec* (Toronto 1979), 45.

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