

QUEBEC'S RESPONSE TO THE FAILURE OF MEECH AND CHARLOTTETOWN

In Quebec, one political party — the Parti Québécois — was already dedicated to sovereignty. The failure of both the Meech Lake and Charlottetown accords upset and angered many Québécois. As a result, the sovereignty movement gained even more support.

NEW POLITICAL PARTIES

During the long debate over the Meech Lake Accord, Lucien Bouchard, a minister in Brian Mulroney's cabinet, and several other Québécois members of Parliament were disturbed by the widespread resistance to the idea of Quebec as a distinct society. They left the Progressive Conservatives to form the Bloc Québécois, a federal party dedicated to Quebec sovereignty.

And soon after the Charlottetown Accord was defeated, some disappointed Quebec Liberals left their party to form another provincial party that became the Action démocratique du Québec. The ADQ now supports a form of sovereignty that involves maintaining some ties with Canada.

HP If you had been a Québécois, how might you have interpreted the defeat of the Meech Lake and Charlottetown accords? Explain your reasons.

THE 1995 SOVEREIGNTY REFERENDUM

In response to the failure of Meech and Charlottetown, Québécois elected a Parti Québécois government in 1994 and Jacques Parizeau became premier. Known for his fiery support of separation, Parizeau promised Québécois that they would be able to vote in a sovereignty referendum on October 30, 1995.

When the vote was held, federalists eked out a narrow victory and Quebec stayed in Confederation. But many Canadians were pessimistic about the country's future. A year after the referendum, a public opinion poll by Angus Reid and Southam News revealed that 63 per cent of Québécois and 40 per cent of English-speaking Canadians believed that Canadian unity was threatened.

In the years since the referendum, support for sovereignty in Quebec has gone up and down. At one time, public opinion polls showed that only about 37 per cent of Quebec voters supported sovereignty, but by early 2009, this percentage had risen again — to about 43 per cent.

C&C In 2006, Parliament recognized Québécois as a nation within a united Canada (see p. 37). Does this suggest that Canadians might now be ready to recognize Quebec as a distinct society? Explain the reasons for your judgment.

Should members of the Bloc Québécois, which is dedicated to Quebec's separation, be allowed to sit in the House of Commons?



Figure 2-10 To show respect for francophones, some Canadians have suggested redesigning the flag as shown in this photograph. The red and blue in the “duality flag” symbolize the importance of Canada’s British and French heritage, as well as the country’s official languages, while the maple leaf symbolizes the land and the importance of Aboriginal peoples. Why do you support or oppose this idea?

