

# FORUM INTERVIEW

## Québec's Foreign Policy: An Interview with Claude Morin, Minister for Intergovernmental Affairs, Province of Québec

*M. Morin responded in writing to questions prepared by Stephen Davis, a doctoral candidate at The Fletcher School. In doing so, the Minister sought to further define the province's foreign policy course as it heads toward a referendum on sovereignty-association in the Spring of 1980 — a referendum proposed by the present provincial government of the Parti Québécois. For a background analysis of Québec's foreign policy, see Ellen Beth Lande, "Québec's International Personality," Fletcher Forum Vol. III, No. 2 (Summer 1979), pp. 22-45.*

**FORUM:** Defense and monetary policies have often been mentioned by the Parti Québécois as items to be included in an association between a sovereign Québec and Canada. But what aspects of foreign policy are regarded by you as nonnegotiable? What specific interests separate the foreign policy of Québec from that of Canada, and how would these be manifested?

**MORIN:** The right to self-determination and the right of the State of Québec to discuss and negotiate freely with anyone it chooses are not negotiable. The precise make-up of Québec's foreign policy is obviously negotiable, as is true of any country's foreign policy; a country must always consider not only its own interests but also a variety of restrictive factors.

Québec certainly has interests that differ from those of Canada. That is why Québec wishes to become a sovereign state: because it is different from the rest of Canada in ways that its people consider fundamental. For example, we have inherited the French language and a French culture, and this inclines us toward establishing closer relations with other French-speaking countries. From the economic standpoint, Québec is well and truly a part of North America's industrial and commercial structure, and it has no intention of pulling out of or cutting itself off from this structure. Basically, the Canadian situation must be analyzed by region. The maritime provinces and the prairie provinces are much less industrialized than Ontario; they export more raw materials than finished products. Québec is of course industrialized but some sections of its industry are relatively fragile. The result is that Québec's economic interests are not the same as those of Ontario, the richest and most powerful province in Canada. For historic, geographic and political reasons, it has always been Ontario that has managed to shape Canada's international economic policies to its own advantage — I am thinking here of monetary, tariff and trade policies. This situation has arisen because the federal government has encouraged the development of international trade by means of reduced tariffs, without giving sufficient consideration to the repercussions of such a policy on Québec industries that are highly vulnerable to foreign competition — our textile industry, for instance.

Because of all these considerations, the facts must be interpreted politically. I have confidence in the spirit of "fair play" of English-speaking Canadians, and above all in the opportunities provided by democracy and our political institutions for negotiation and agreement; but these opportunities are at the moment limited by a might-makes-right tendency built into the existing Canadian constitutional framework, which is disadvantageous to us. A minority must arm itself in its own defense, and sovereignty is an arm that cannot be bettered.

*FORUM:* What then are the PQ's specific foreign policy goals?

*MORIN:* When the Parti Québécois came to power on 15 November 1976, it was without a specific mandate from the people to declare Québec's sovereignty. During the election campaign we promised to form a sound government and to hold a referendum on the question of Québec's political status. The referendum is still several months away, so there is no question of our starting to behave like a sovereign power on the international scene right now. Nevertheless, Québec does already have a network of delegations in Europe, the United States, Africa and Latin America — the newest one just opened in Caracas. This network allows us to maintain links with the countries that are the

most important to us. We intend to continue developing Québec's representation abroad along the lines laid down by various Québec governments over the past twenty years.

Moreover, inasmuch as the political party now in power in Québec has a specific society as its goal, it is natural that we should try to explain this goal to other governments, whether in Ottawa, Toronto, London or Abidjan. This network appears to me to be no more than an efficient information service, a result of what I am bold enough to call the free play of international democracy. I would especially like to remind you that the Canadian government has at its disposal its own network and the whole diplomatic structure to expound its point of view. Obviously we cannot expect the representatives of the central government to do justice to our position.

*FORUM:* In your recent statements you seem to expect the United States to welcome the emergence of an independent Québec. What precisely do you want and expect from the United States? How might an independent Québec be more in the U.S. interest than a united Canada?

*MORIN:* We hope that the United States will opt for a position of neutrality vis-à-vis Ottawa and Québec City. We hope that it will remain neutral while adhering to the great principles it has espoused in applying its foreign policy — I am thinking in particular of the principle of a people's right to self-determination, which the American government supported when it was adopted by the UN.

In addition, we believe that we have a right to be heard by the government of the United States. The Parti Québécois was democratically elected, and it would seem normal that it be given a chance to explain its position, particularly to those who may be affected by our proposal of sovereignty-association. And yet up to now the American government has turned for explanations of the evolution of Québec's internal political situation to the central government, which is opposed to our ideas!

But neutrality does not mean indifference. The United States has sizable interests in Québec, and naturally it will want to make sure they are protected.

The second part of your question is vital and not easy to answer. At first sight, there is no reason for the U.S. to look forward to a change on its northern border when the status quo has for years been universally cited as an example of "good neighborliness." Don't fool with a winning combination, as they say in sports circles. But I think that the U.S., in its own interests, would be making a mistake if it failed to understand the forces at work in Québec.

Despite the similarities on the economic and cultural planes, the United

States and Canada are actually very different. The U.S. was forged by peoples from many different nations. Assimilation was sufficiently powerful to create a homogeneous society and mold a single nation. This is not true in Canada, where for two centuries two very different societies have co-existed, following paths that are not only not parallel but are in fact diverging ever more widely. These "two solitudes" lie at the very heart of the concept of a sovereign Québec. Hence a new agreement between Québec and the rest of Canada has become an urgent necessity. On this new agreement depends to a large extent the maintenance of stability to the north of the Canadian-American border, and stability is obviously a matter of deep concern to our neighbors south of that border.

*FORUM:* Over the years Québec seems to have grown increasingly dependent on France as its chief international supporter and intermediary. Yet French support has varied from de Gaulle's "Vive le Québec libre" statement to Prime Minister Raymond Barre's recent lukewarm expressions of friendship. To what extent is Québec placing its foreign policy at the mercy of French domestic politics?

*MORIN:* Ever since Jean Lesage's Liberal government in 1961 reestablished Québec's ties with France, that country has never swerved in its support, and has been the only powerful country on the international scene to support Québec openly. Even though a part of our population was not pleased by General de Gaulle's cry of "Vive le Québec libre," it must be conceded that this cry echoed around the world and created an unprecedented interest in Québec's problems.

Since the coming to power of General de Gaulle in 1958, the different statesmen who have governed France have maintained a certain continuity in that country's foreign policy toward Québec. But you may wonder what would be the attitude of the French Left if it came to power? In the 1960s, the French Left paid virtually no attention at all to Québec, and sometimes denied categorically that we had a problem on our hands. This ostrich attitude was caused largely by a lack of information. Since then we have supplied them with the necessary facts and we can now count on support from the whole range of French political parties. I am quite sure that both France and Québec look on their relationship as a tie that no one would ever think of breaking.

*FORUM:* It has been argued that an independent Québec will mean a net loss to French influence on Canada as a whole. Is it not in France's interest to have Québec attain an autonomous — but not sovereign — position vis-à-vis Ottawa

so that France can maintain close ties with the federal government? Could this not explain M. Raymond Barre's refusal to repeat "Vive le Québec libre" on his recent visit to the province?

*MORIN:* The French Government has adopted a policy of noninterference in Canadian affairs — noninterference, but also non-indifference, as that government likes to stress. This policy has been interpreted in a number of ways: there are some who claimed that General de Gaulle wanted to destroy Canada and thereby weaken the United States. Others maintained that France would be able to control an independent Québec, and thereby better penetrate the American market. I have no reason to believe that such calculations were involved when French policy was prepared.

After France was defeated in America in 1760, relations between Paris and the French of Canada were, to all intents and purposes, broken off. Two hundred years later, around 1960, France discovered what had become of the people of Québec — at the same time as the idea of rapprochement of all French-speaking people was going the rounds, spurred on by Senghor, Bourguiba and Hamani Diori.\* Add to this the growth of international cooperation and post-war decolonization, and this can provide some of the background for de Gaulle's "Vive le Québec libre." Since that day, things have changed both inside and outside Québec, so in 1979 M. Barre had no need to repeat the General's cry. Besides, we did not want him to. It is up to the people of Québec to decide for themselves — by referendum — their own political future.

In any event, it seems obvious that given a sovereign Québec, France will still maintain good relations with Canada.

*FORUM:* Let us now turn to Québec's policy toward other countries. As part of its attempt to woo Francophone Africa to its side in the dispute with Ottawa, the PQ had until 1978 portrayed itself as a bridge between the industrialized countries and the Third World. Then, in a reversal of policy, you announced that a sovereign Québec would remain in NATO and NORAD, and that its foreign policy would be closely identified with its developed neighbors. Has this change in direction alienated Québec's political supporters in the Third World, or in any way undermined its image as a link between North and South?

*MORIN:* The Québec Government has in no way changed its attitude toward the Third World countries since the elections of 15 November 1976. I do not feel that in saying we would remain in NATO and NORAD we were changing

\* The presidents of Senegal and Tunisia and former president of Niger, respectively.

our policy with regard to the Third World. These two international bodies were set up to counter the Warsaw Pact countries.

The Québec Government makes no claims to act as an intermediary between the Third World countries and the developed countries. It is, however, in a good position to understand the former, since it too has experienced political and economic dependence. Still, because of its development, it ranks among the industrialized nations. For these two reasons, it is able to cooperate with the Third World countries, who see it as non-imperialist though at the same time industrialized.

*FORUM:* Québec is highly dependent on foreign trade, and the United States is the province's largest foreign trade partner. Last year the PQ's Minister for Economic Development, Bernard Landry, said that Québec would try to establish an economic association with the U.S. in the event that Canada rejects sovereignty-association. Is this a serious proposal, and if so, how do you envision its development and form?

*MORIN:* If the majority of the people of Québec vote in favor of sovereignty-association, we feel that the Government of Canada will have every interest in negotiating with Québec. If Canada, for emotional reasons, were to decide to act contrary to its own interests for a few years — and once again, we are convinced that it will not — we would naturally intensify our economic relations with the United States more quickly than we might have done otherwise.

Economic association is a broad term; it can include ties of various kinds between two or more States. There can be a system of free trade, a customs union, a common market or a monetary union, depending on whether the parties wish to combine free circulation of goods and services with, respectively, a common foreign tariff, common economic policies — especially in matters of manpower, circulation of capital and technology — or a common currency. This stand is theoretical. In practice, as far as the United States is concerned, we shall have to wait and see before we move in any direction.

*FORUM:* It has been reported that the PQ has tripled the size of its Intergovernmental Affairs Ministry and laid the foundation for an active role for Québec on the world stage. Is an independent Québec foreign policy inevitable regardless of whether the province attains sovereignty?

*MORIN:* The Parti Québécois has not tripled the size of the Department of Intergovernmental Affairs. Since 15 November 1976, the number of employees

in my Department has risen from 355 to 427. In 1976 there were 15 Québec delegations abroad, and today there are 22. This growth rate is about the same as that maintained under the previous government.

Québec's international relations have been stepped up since 15 November 1976, but there has been nothing like the change you suggest. When, in fact, can we speak of a State's having a foreign policy? I feel that as long as Québec has no more power than it does at present, and as long as it cannot take any direct part in the principal activities of international life, we would be better advised to speak of international relations rather than of foreign policy. Be that as it may, the Québec Government already enjoys the right to speak within the major organization of French-language governments, the Agence de coopération culturelle et technique; it exercises this right in its own name, independently of the federal government. But Canada has only one vote, which is cast only if Québec and Ottawa are in agreement. This has to be unique.

In any event, Québec's actions thus far provide a general idea of the direction an independent foreign policy would take in the event of sovereignty (French-language countries, development, cultural and technical exchanges, and so on). Both now and in the future, our policy with regard to other countries must correspond to our domestic needs and special characteristics.

*FORUM:* What is Québec's attitude toward Israel and the oil-producing countries of the Middle East?

*MORIN:* Although of necessity this subject has political overtones, the essential part of our relations with these countries and organizations is concerned rather with business, cooperation and development. Québec has no intention of taking sides. At present, we have no say in the matter. Nevertheless, we do intend to become more active in those fields where Québec's constitutional jurisdiction is exclusive or shared, and our activities abroad are a natural extension of this.

In terms of the cooperation which has started during the past four or five years, we are attempting to treat our partners on an equal footing according to reciprocal interests. The more information we exchange, the more we are discovering common interests, particularly in the fields of education and government administration. As for Québec industries and consultants — who have established a fine reputation in this part of the world — we are providing them with technical support through our government services, within the context of free trade. At this time, relations which are purely political fall under the jurisdiction of the federal government of Canada, whose positions can occasionally benefit or hurt some provinces more than others. Given a proposal such as Mr. Clark's plan to transfer the Canadian embassy in Israel to Jerusalem, it

was to Ottawa that we had to voice our concern; we pointed out that Québec should have been consulted before this decision was made. For it must not be forgotten that some Québec firms have sizable economic interests in the Middle East (contracts, etc.). Also, twenty percent of our oil comes from the Middle East.

*FORUM:* Finally, let us turn to a matter closer to home. How does the Québec Government view the Franco-Americans, particularly those of New England?

*MORIN:* Québec is the French-language center of North America. It constitutes a distinct society with its own institutions, history and culture. In the New England states live people of French descent who have become *bona fide* Americans. Many of them no longer speak French, but the fact remains that because of geographical proximity, broader contact has been built up between Québécois and New Englanders in recent years. Of course the Québec Government claims no authority over, nor direct responsibility for, persons outside Québec who speak French. Nevertheless, it does intend to maintain various ties with New England, particularly at the university level. It also takes part in cultural events.

What I have just said about New England can apply equally to Louisiana; however, since Louisiana is much farther away, we decided a few years ago to open a Québec office in Lafayette. This office facilitates contacts and exchange programs with the people of Louisiana. In any event, whether they live in Louisiana or elsewhere, we are always pleased to cooperate with any people who, like ourselves, show an active interest in the French language.