

BOOK REVIEWS

THE AMERICAN ATTRACTION AND THE ATTRACTIVENESS OF QUEBEC

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BOOK REVIEWED: Alfred Olivier Hero, Jr. & Louis Balthazar, *Contemporary Quebec and the United States*, (Lanham, Md: CFIA Harvard University & University Press of America, 1988) 532 p.

This well-researched survey is written primarily for an American and English-Canadian audience, although readers from overseas, and even many Quebecers, will also benefit from it. It deals as much with Canadian internal political developments as with Quebec-United States relationships. Without being simplistic, the authors use shortcuts necessary to make complex issues comprehensible to readers unfamiliar with them.

The purpose of the book is to expose the perceptions and misconceptions Americans, Canadians and Quebecers have of each other, especially Americans toward Quebec, and to try to correct them, in order to promote better relationships between already close partners. Yet, this has always been a risky business. Efforts at explaining the debates over the status of the French-speaking province within Canada, far from alleviating concerns south of the border, might boost Quebec's reputation as a trouble maker. Moreover, their main argument that intensified trade between Quebec and Northeastern U.S.A. should lead to more demands for provincial autonomy, is, at first glance, threatening, given current assumptions of political stability. But Hero and Balthazar take up the challenge, and set out to

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show, sometimes laboriously, that the economy of Quebec is sound, that its government and people are pro-business as well as pro-American and that they would welcome even more American involvement in the development of their economy.

In the first part of the book, the authors explore the lack of interest in Quebec: Americans do not perceive much difference between themselves and Canadians and Quebecers. Both Canadian and Québécois nationalisms may have sparked some concern in the past, but that interest faded. Now everything seems quiet. This is a deceptive impression, according to Hero and Balthazar. They predict that Quebec will leave the federation altogether if it does not get more autonomy (an hypothesis that current events tend to confirm). They also assert that the cultural and economic influence of the United States compounds that likelihood. However, they maintain that more economic links with Quebec would not be detrimental to American interests and that Quebec independence would not be catastrophic. The authors go on to list the reasons why Americans have such a distrust of Quebec: English Canadian sources of information, the "melting pot" (assimilationist) mentality, a lack of contact with French Canadians (except for the Franco-Americans that have been very slow to integrate), and a lack of coverage in the U.S. media. The result is threefold: an image of Quebec that resembles more the pre-1960 inward-looking traditional society, a vision of the Parti Québécois (PQ) as a radical socialist and separatist party, and an understanding that the danger of secession is past since the PQ is out of power. It is no wonder that even those few Americans who are interested in or somewhat informed about Quebec (typically university educated people of the Northeast) are pro-English Canada in the constitutional debate. Yet, the authors see some hope in the business community. Most companies with branches in Quebec have complied rather easily with the language requirements imposed by the PQ government. In addition, some companies have even increased their investments in Quebec, despite their fear of political instability, in order to be present after independence, despite their fear of instability. Nevertheless, the American business people are pro-Parti Libéral, PQ's federalist counterpart.

Part II, making up one-third of the book, deals with Quebec nationalism. This is no doubt the specific contribution of Louis Balthazar, an authority on the subject, well-known in the U.S.A. Nationalism has long been a feature of Quebec society, but only since the early 1960s have Quebec's relations with the rest of Canada attracted much attention in the U.S.A. Most French Quebecers see themselves as a nation, not an ethnic group. That idea has made its way into certain areas of the English Canadian intelligentsia as well.

Chapter 3 traces the origins of that nationalism in New France (1608-1760) and tracks it to the 1980 referendum on "sovereignty-association." Around 1960, Quebec nationalism changed from a traditional, inward-looking, religious and rural nationalism to a modernist, open, secular and urban nationalism. That new ideology was both the backbone and the fuel of the Quiet Revolution, the modernization of Quebec's social and political institutions. Not only do Quebecers perceive themselves as different, the distinctions, between English and French Canada are increasingly clear. They coincide more or less with the Quebec borders. Linguistic, demographic, cultural, intellectual networks are territorially based. With French Canadians identifying more and more with the province of Quebec, it is hardly surprising that nationalism and demands for autonomy are deeply entrenched, and that the debate among political elites is only about how to achieve an acceptable balance. The authors explain different options and their popularity.

As far as anglophones Quebecers are concerned, it is well known that they oppose Québécois nationalist aspirations, especially legislations of the 1970s that were aimed at protecting the French language. Since most immigrants assimilate into the English community, their perception is likely to be the same. The opinions of both groups, concentrated in the Montreal area, are analysed and their behaviour explained. Ignorance seems to be the main target. The authors are proponents of more contacts between Anglo and Franco-Quebecers, and better integration programs for the immigrants. This is relevant because most sources of informations for the Americans are anglophones Quebecers who may harbor some anger toward the French majority. The more they know each other, the better the image of

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Quebec in the U.S.A.

The final chapter of this section explores various responses by the rest of Canada to Quebec nationalism, ranging from pan-Canadian bilingualism to devolution of powers to the provinces. They briefly explain how institutional bilingualism, apart from having opened the civil service to francophones and bilingual candidates, has failed to stop the demographic trends: francophones assimilate outside of Quebec. In addition, it has been widely resented by the English-Canadian public. On the other hand, decentralization, that is devolution of power to the provinces, sometimes advocated by provincial premiers for economic reasons, is opposed by Canadian nationalists who support a strong central State. In the 1980s, the Canadian trend was toward more centralization, despite the 1987 Meech Lake Accord, which has finally not been ratified.

The following three chapters deal with the "cultural and perceptual links" between Quebec and the U.S. The first chapter starts with an idealized portrayal of Quebec's character as deeply North American. The focus is on the similarities between the two nations: for example, the effect of the "frontier." Quebec is contrasted with France, and Montreal is said to have more in common with New York than Toronto! Moreover, the American cultural penetration, that is the consumption of American mass culture by Quebecers through television, music, magazines and newspapers, whether directly or indirectly (by adaptations, translations, or dubbing) is documented. The authors do not describe it as a threat to cultural survival since Quebec has other sources of culture, and produces its own. Therefore, Quebec, unlike English Canada, does not appear to have a cultural dependency toward the U.S.A. Moreover, after a decade of flirtation with France, from the mid-sixties to the mid-seventies, the "Québécois elites" are more pro-American than ever. The popular attitude is more radical: Québécois prefer free trade and even assimilation to the United States in a greater proportion than other Canadians. They also like American investors more than English Canadian investors. Furthermore, the relatively new francophone business elite is trained according to the American model. Many get their formal training in American business schools, the rest read American maga-

zines, belong to American associations or have American customers :

“They will also grow in diversity and political as well as economic and social power. Their influence on Quebec society, opinion and politics is likely to grow relative to that of intellectual, cultural and public sector elites, where jobs and career opportunities will remain much more limited.”
(p.250)

Hero and Balthazar go on to describe the influence of the new business elite on Quebec's trade strategy, illustrated by the change in the purpose of Quebec's quasi-diplomatic offices. After a decade of pioneering direct provincial representation abroad (marked by fights with Ottawa on the international status of provinces, dubbed the “war of flags”), Quebec has established a network of offices. Relations with France may have had more importance in the sixties, the era of symbols, but now, with the free-trade mentality, the U.S. offices are of greater value.

Finally, Chapter 9 describes the groups interested in Quebec culture in the U.S.A., and finds that Americans of French Canadian origin (Québécois and Acadians), while still interested in their roots, are even more assimilated than French minorities of Canada, despite “refrancisation” programs in which the Quebec government participated. (The authors maintain that Quebec professors were more successful than French or Belgian, because they are North American.) It seems that recent Quebec émigrés to the New South (especially Florida and California) will encounter the same fate. Americans interested in the French culture are a second clientele. However, they are more oriented toward France than Quebec. Now, the policy of the business-oriented governments of the 1980s is to make Quebec cultural products, like TV programs and theater plays, available in the United States.

So, economic relations, the topic of the next section, appear to be the heart of the matter. The first three sections of the book now look like a long introduction to those chapters on “trade potentials” and “investment opportunities” in Quebec. Here are described the

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main ingredients of the U.S.-Quebec pull : the American attraction, and the attractiveness of Quebec. According to Hero and Balthazar, economic relations offer the greatest long-term promise for both parties (the U.S. is already Quebec's biggest trade partner), but they may prove divisive and controversial since they are linked to greater autonomy for Quebec and can also be perceived as a threat to its cultural uniqueness. Then, with lots of data, they describe the strengths and weaknesses of the Quebec economy and point out the present state of American investment and its potential in each sector. The resultant global picture is bleak : the authors are surprisingly pessimistic about the future prospects for everything except that related to energy. Yet, they assert that a stronger economy is needed before Quebec gets more autonomy :

Quebec economy is inextricably and increasingly tied to that of the U.S. Its prospects for progress are internally linked to a further opening to the U.S. economy in trade, investment, and talent transfers. (p.412)

One is led to wonder if their message to the Americans is : "Help us achieve independence by integrating us."

The last section is made up of prognoses for the immediate future. The Meech Lake Accord of 1987 is seen by Hero and Balthazar as symbolic of a trend toward Quebec autonomy as well as an opportunity to be seized. But any further advance on that front must be preceded by economic progress, which is the only effective leverage for negotiations. They are cautiously optimistic for the Quebec economy because of its integration in the continental economy. (A "Free Trade Agreement" between Canada and the U.S.A. came into effect in January 1989.) However, they are not too convincing here, and perhaps in the end the section on constitutional relations will lure more investors by demystifying the Quebec-Canada feud than reams of economic figures would.

Moreover, they believe that Americans must not be afraid of further devolution of powers or even independence both Canada and Quebec will then be able to deal with their problems. In any event,

they maintain that nationalism is not declining, even among the younger generation. They mention a rise of a new business class, increasingly linked to the U.S.A., working for the modernization of Quebec, and somewhat annoyed by the central control of Ottawa, as an argument to support this statement.

Unfortunately, while acknowledging that the “new dynamic francophone business class” will play a role in the new nationalism, the authors generally downplay the class factor, except when they refer to the “Québécois elites.” For them, demographics, ideology and trade patterns seem to be the key to understanding that trend. Those factors may be very important, but structural forces must be translated into historical action through political actors. They should have examined more closely the hypothesis by which the recent movement for autonomy was driven by the growing disillusionment of the Quebec bourgeoisie toward the Canadian federation. Statements from prominent business people show that many former federalist would today reconsider their vote in a referendum on “sovereignty-association.” It has been confirmed by a recent survey (*Revue Commerce*, February 1990). Once again, the key to an explanation may not be the growing attraction of the American market or the decrease of the federal transfer payments to provincial governments, but the origins of that new francophone bourgeoisie that has displaced many anglophones managers. In the 1960s, the Quiet Revolution offered opportunities to the “new middle class” (see Hubert Guindon, *Quebec Society*, Toronto, 1988). It enabled some of them to use the State as a springboard to take over the corporate world, then an anglophone stronghold. Many members of that “garde montante” have been trained in the public corporations and later transferred to the private sector. They owe their success to Quebec City, not to Ottawa, and their loyalty is to the Quebec state. In case of conflict, like English Canada’s refusal of the Meech Lake Accord that would have legitimized the Canadian constitution in Quebec, the new Quebec bourgeoisie sides with the nationalists. However, that phenomenon has not been completely overlooked in the book. Hero and Balthazar were on the right track, but they fell short of a complete explanation.

In *Contemporary Quebec*, surveys, government publications, and

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secondary literature make up the bulk of the sources. Survey data are the main source for the analysis of perceptions, whereas government statistics provide most of the economic assessments and the linguistic picture (many informative tables are found at the end of the book), and numerous secondary sources are used to describe current Quebec-U.S. relations. But for their historical analysis and forecast, the authors often rely on their own experience and opinions, and their arguments sometimes sound like facts. For instance, parallels between the Cajuns or Creoles of Louisiana and Quebecers are rather difficult and artificial. In addition, the view of Montreal as a "linchpin" between North America and Western Europe should be backed up. Finally, in the last chapter, various scenarios as to the future of Canadian provinces in case of breakup of the Canadian federation are pure speculation.

Divisions within the book are generally coherent, despite some overlappings. More space should have been devoted to a summary of the main arguments, and to how all the data displayed relate to them. With a little more organization, the whole subject could have been treated in less than 300 pages.

The ideological backbone of the arguments is clear and is compatible with the ideas expressed in recent years by the leader of the Parti Québécois, Jacques Parizeau, and by former PQ cabinet ministers Claude Morin and Bernard Landry : bilingualism will fail in Canada, and Quebec is the only territory where French will survive in North America ; modern nationalism (i.e. open, secular, progressive) is dominant in Quebec and crosses party lines ; economic growth must precede independence (or more autonomy) and rely primarily on private enterprise ; and finally, free trade with the United States is the first step toward achieving both goals.

A synthesis of the current situation of Quebec accompanied by an assessment of its growing ties to the United States was a much needed exercise, given the fresh outbreak of nationalism and the recent drive for more exports in this era of free trade. That the Quebec Government was involved in the publication of the book is not a surprise. *Contemporary Quebec* is the most complete synthesis of Quebec-U.S. relations so far, and is an excellent introduction to Quebec studies. It

will answer most questions commonly asked about Quebec. More, it should draw renewed attention to the fate of a small but distinct society, a nation within a country.

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