

Sovereignty-Association

'Sovereignty-association' is one manifestation of Quebec separatism. It calls for political independence and an ongoing economic partnership with Canada. Conceptualized by René Lévesque, 'sovereignty-association' was the centrepiece of the Parti Québécois' (PQ) secessionist platform during the years Lévesque led the party (1968-85). 'Sovereignty-association' was intended to increase the strength of the independence movement by calming fears that a political divorce from Canada would deliver tough economic times to the people of Quebec. Lévesque's political instincts were shrewd. In the 1970s Quebec public opinion polls consistently reported that people were more likely to support political independence if it included maintaining an economic partnership with Canada.

A mandate to negotiate 'sovereignty-association' was the subject of the 1980 Quebec referendum, the first Quebec referendum on sovereignty. Premier Lévesque sought majority support from Quebec voters to negotiate the terms of 'sovereignty-association' with Canada. The results of those negotiations would be put to the public in a second referendum.

In a 1979 position paper the PQ stated that sovereignty-association should include free trade between Canada and Quebec, common tariffs against imports, and a common currency. New joint Quebec-Canada political institutions were proposed to govern these economic arrangements. Various English Canadian political leaders declared that they would not negotiate an economic association with a sovereign Quebec. These declarations generally are conceded to have contributed to the decisive defeat the separatists suffered in the 1980 referendum.

In the 1990s, the idea that an economic association with Canada must be a condition of Quebec independence waned in popularity. The question posed in the 1995 referendum only stipulated that Quebec should offer a new economic and political partnership to Canada before declaring independence. Canada's acceptance was not a prerequisite for sovereignty. Unlike in 1980, the separatists lost this second referendum by the narrowest of margins (50.6 percent to 49.4 percent) (see secession).

Sources:

- K. McRoberts, *Quebec: Social Change and Political Crisis* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1988).
- K. McRoberts, *Misconceiving Canada: the Struggle for National Unity* (Don Mills: Oxford University Press, 1997).
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