 Anxiety Grows in Ottawa Over Quebec's Threat of Secession

**By William Clabonne**

**STANFORD SUMMER SESSION**

Ottawa, March 6, 1992

Anxiety is growing in this 134-year-old capital city over Quebec's threat to hold a second plebiscite next October if its demands for greater autonomy are not met by the federal government.

Many here feel that instead of being a monument to the cultural duality of the Canadian federation, the national capital that stretches from Ottawa, in Ontario province, across the Ottawa River to the city of Hull, in Quebec, could become a pawn in a bitter dispute over the settlement of property and jurisdiction.

If Quebec separates from Canada, the move would be most severely felt across the river in the predominantly French-speaking region known as the Outaouais, where nearly a third of the workers could lose their federal jobs. Moreover, the Canadian government would find some of its important federal offices and prestigious national museums located in another country.

"The very thought of separation has shaken families and neighbors and friends," said one local official. "The shadow of separation is acutely felt here. When people look over the precipice, it's frightening," said Jean B. Pigott, chairman of the National Capital Commission, the official property steward for the capital region.

Incidentally, Pigott and other officials said, the Quebec side of the river was deliberately developed in the 1970s to give Hull an equal share of the real estate and commerce fronted from the city across the river to a capital region shared by the French and English cultures.

Beginning in 1949, more than 20,000 public servants were moved across the river, federal buildings were erected, and roads and other services were installed to assure the bilingual character of the burgeoning town. Since 1971 to 1981, 46 percent of all new jobs created on the Quebec side were in the federal public service.

"This is where the two cultures come together. Even if Quebec doesn't separate, there will have to be a rationalization of the duplication of services, a de-worsening," Pigott said, referring to the insistence of some staunch federalists that Canada's 1982 constitution be referred to transfer many federal responsibilities to the country's 10 provinces.

"A cygnet frequently cites the artificiality of Ottawa as a capital city, noting that Queen Victoria in 1858 selected what had been the rough-and-tumble lumber town of Bytown to be the Dominion's seat of government because it was halfway between Montreal and Toronto, then fighting for dominance," the study said.

Ottawa remained an undistinguished, predominantly English domain until Prime Minister Mackenzie King met the noted French-country planner, Jacques Gréber, in 1937 and invited him to lay out a new capital plan.

Currently, the capital region's population is over 800,000, including about 200,000 on the Ontario side and 600,000 on the Quebec side. About 100,000 people are in public service, a third of Canada's federal employees.

"There have been a flurry of studies designed to forecast the impact of Quebec separation on the capital region. One, conducted by the National Capital Commission, said a continuation of the present federal-provincial relationship would benefit the French side and intensify its French character. However, the study predicted that a modified confederation, with more powers being given to the provinces, would result in a reduction of federal departments in Hull. The Quebec side would face a major task of restructuring its economy and could lose some population," the study said.

The third option studied — outright separation of Quebec — would drastically reduce the federal presence in the Outaouais and would require an overhaul of the Hull region, according to the study. The City Council of Hull, which frequently in a forum for militant Quebec separatists, has advocated the formation of a common-market relationship between Canada and Quebec if a majority of voters in that province demand independence.

**By Sharon LaFrenere**

**WASHINGTON POST**

The rap on William P. Barr before he became attorney general was that he had too low a profile. Certainly no one would accuses him of that now. Barr has moved from working behind the scenes to setting a clearer agenda after years of being a good soldier with a broader view of his responsibilities to the country's 10 provinces.

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