Quebec Separation Essay, Research Paper

Quebec as a separate nation was fine until the British conquest, now as time has passed Quebec is trying to shift toward separation again but with financial problems, government trauma and the twenty- first century approaching rapidly separation is an unattainable feat for Quebec.

The year is 1667 and New France now known as Quebec is living in peace as a separate nation. New France was living under a system called the seigneurial regime and this was a system that was derived from the homeland in France. The seigneurial system gave pieces of land to censitaires (farmers) who worked on that land growing agriculture and developing a sense of independence for themselves, the censitaires would then pay dues to the landowners who were called seigneurs (see Fig.1- Pg 5). In the early stages of the seigneurial system dues were not expected because a lot of the early settlers were very poor and if dues were expected the farmers would head off into the forest and begin a life of fur trading and this is not what the New France government wanted because their goal was social order and social order only came with a good settlement (1). Life was running quite smoothly in New France until the British conquest of Quebec began in the fall of 1759 and finally ended in 1763 and that is when the independent life of the peoples of New France also came to an end. The conquest did not totally wipe out New France’s way of life, they still had their seigneurial system of land-holdings and a large amount of French- speaking people who helped distinguish their heritage but the Catholic church they so heavily relied on could no longer accept clergy or royal subsidies from France which was a harsh blow to the way of life in French Canada. The French government in Canada was abolished and was now run by the British Imperial authorities until 1867 when the British North America Act was put into place and handed over full ruling of Canada to Canada which included Quebec who in the end of it all still didn’t regain independence (2).

The financial problems are increasing rapidly in Quebec and it shows. Quebec is not considered one of the wealthy provinces in Canada and when Quebec posts numbers of their national debt from 1989 to 1996 it shows just exactly how they will not be able to survive as a separate nation (3) (see Fig.2-Pg 5). When looking at the numbers you see that Quebec has a national debt of nearly $75 million and that is higher than every other province except Ontario but Ontario is one of the wealthier provinces so it is not uncommon for them to spend more money. The real scare comes when you take a look at the debt per person in Quebec where the population is 6.5 million people(4) and the debt per person has been above $10,000 the last five years. If Quebec really wants to separate, they are going to have to make some drastic changes to their spending habits. The perception of separation is that is going to happen overnight but that is false, it takes time and money, money the Quebec government doesn’t have, it also takes a majority vote of 65%-70%(5) and past votes on separation have proven that the majority vote is nowhere in sight. The major cause of a lot of the problems for Quebec has come from the present and past leaders of Quebec who have taken the province on one hell of a roller-coaster ride over the past fifty years.

Maurice Duplessis started the whole independence revival campaign with his complete overhaul of the Quebec government back in 1948. Duplessis chose the fleur-de-lis as Quebec’s official provincial flag because he felt it identified Quebec as a homeland, separate from the rest of North America. The Duplessis period was a time when Quebec was establishing a sense of independence, it was an independent time for Quebec because Duplessis did not allow Quebec universities to accept federal grants, he turned down tax arrangements from Ottawa and he did all this because he was determined to establish Quebec as a separate nation once again(6). Duplessis merely got the wheels rolling on independence, it was Jean Lesage who really distilled the independence into the province of Quebec. Rene Levesque one of Jean Lesage’s close friends and the man who helped Lesage reform Quebec into its independence coined the motto of maitres chez nous which means masters in our house, with Jean Lesage as the premier of Quebec, this is exactly what his Liberal government was, masters of the province of Quebec. The Lesage government reformed Quebec by striving toward strong religion, French language and French families, these components brought together the province of Quebec and really made the province live and work as a separate state while still having a strong title as a hard-working province that is part of the great nation of Canada. The next major leader of Quebec was Rene Levesque who continued reign of Lesage until he called a referendum in 1980, the 1980 referendum was a disaster for the Levesque government because they lost greatly with a 59% “no” vote. Rene Levesque did not thoroughly plan this referendum, and it showed because this is when Quebec’s national debt really soared and it was all thanks to a referendum that didn’t need to happen. In 1985 Rene Levesque resigned as the premier of Quebec because his government was slowly backing away from the issue of separation and this discouraged him from continuing as premier(7). Jacques Parizeau was the next major leader of Quebec, and his party was the Parti Quebecois. The PQ’s were a strong separatist group who put up a real fight for separation and in 1995 Mr. Parizeau ordered a referendum. This referendum also failed but not by as much, the vote tallied in at 50.6% of the Quebec population voting no to separation, Parizeau almost had what he wanted but instead he lost, he lost millions of dollars for the province of Quebec and quickly resigned as premier due to the discouragement of the referendum and all of the blame he was about to receive for ruining any chance of independence for Quebec. Lucien Bouchard was next in line for the task of premier and he too was a part of the Parti Quebecois. Lucien Bouchard is striving toward making Quebec a separate nation but he really has no clue of what to do, Bouchard is not sure of the people want and if he is not sure of what the people want than what is he doing as premier of Quebec. Separation is not an achievable goal for Quebec when the premier has no idea of what decisions he should be making and with the next millennium right around the corner he should be thinking of ways to help Quebec establish a stronger tie to Canada.

The twenty-first century is approaching rapidly and the only thing Lucien Bouchard and his government are worried about is when to call the next referendum, a referendum is not what Quebec needs. Quebec needs to focus on their major exports and worry about generating some kind of a cash flow, with a heavy debt already putting pressure on them, they need to think about positive changes in the new millennium and not a costly and what could be damaging separation. A separation from Canada would only hurt Quebec more than it would benefit them, a referendum comes with very high price and if they did separate they would not be able to survive because they would have no money to get their “country” going, they would fail as a country and ask to come back to Canada, Canada would say no and Quebec would be really stuck because they would have no money and a lot of angry citizens. A separate Quebec would damage their trading as well as the rest of Canada’s trading because foreign countries would view them as selfish and Canada as unstable because we weren’t able to keep Quebec as part of our country. Lucien Bouchard must concentrate on developing a good relationship with Ottawa because one of these days he is going to ask for the help and Ottawa is going to turn him down.

Quebec as a separate country from Canada is unthinkable because Quebec is heavily in debt and can’t afford to separate, Lucien Bouchard and past leaders have disrupted the feelings of the people of Quebec as to what decision they want to make regarding their future and Quebec cannot function properly as a province, so what makes them think they can work as a country.

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