

Sovereignty Association: Economic Realism or Utopia?

by Adalbert Lallier. Oakville, Ontario, Mosaic Press, Pp. 87.

In this mini academic treatise, Adalbert Lallier sheds some additional light on the ongoing debate concerning Quebec sovereignty. An instructive feature of this book is its extensive footnotes which provide legal opinions on many of the constitutional issues involved in the economic and political dissolution of a province from the federal government.

Lallier provides a useful summary of the theory of economic integration. He catalogues the five stages of integration ranging from the lowest and simplest to the most advanced and complete - free trade area, customs union, common market, economic union, and economic integration - with the two most complete requiring some form of political union. His brief survey of the European literature on customs unions is of interest as is his discussion of the peacefully negotiated breakups of four 19th century customs unions.

Lallier's main contribution, however, is his presentation of the theory of economic disintegration and its application to the Parti Québécois proposal for sovereignty association. Lallier asks the important question - why economic disintegration? He

improves our understanding of the phenomenon with his discussion of the material economic, political and social factors that lead to disintegration. His analysis is directly applicable to the evolution of the Canadian federation over the last forty years.

The four stages of economic disintegration, according to Lallier, are: "decentralization" or "devolution"; "disaggregation"; "dissociation"; and "dissolution" or "separation". Lallier argues that Premier Bourassa's declaration after Meech Lake that he would only negotiate directly with Ottawa and would take all immigration matters into Quebec's own hands puts Canada already dangerously in the dissociation stage. He dubs Canada's current condition "co-sovereignty-association" which he views as in essence "sovereignty-association."

Lallier suggests that "sovereignty-association" is a misnomer for the fourth stage of disintegration which is the ultimate objective of the Parti Québécois. He submits that the term "sovereignty-association" was chosen, not for logical consistency, but to reassure the public and to gain support. In his view "souveraineté-dissolution" or "indépendance" would be a more intellectually honest moniker for what the PQ is really seeking to do.

Sovereignty-association is correctly portrayed as a "wasteful economic exercise" given the "remarkable degree of (decentralized) sovereignty and the benefits of specialization, division of labour and free trade in Canada. Lallier argues that Quebec's distinct identity has been reinforced within Confederation and its culture has bloomed to an unprecedented degree.

The most important point made by Lallier is the high degree of risk involved in breaking up a country and moving into the fourth stage of economic disintegration. This can not be said too loudly or too often. While the message should be obvious, it is unfortunately not getting through.

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