

4-1-1993

## Separate and Unequal: From a Canadian Political Scientist, Strong Words on the Future of Quebec

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### Recommended Citation

UB Law Forum (1993) "Separate and Unequal: From a Canadian Political Scientist, Strong Words on the Future of Quebec," *UB Law Forum*: Vol. 7 : No. 1 , Article 13.

Available at: [https://digitalcommons.law.buffalo.edu/ub\\_law\\_forum/vol7/iss1/13](https://digitalcommons.law.buffalo.edu/ub_law_forum/vol7/iss1/13)

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# Separate and Unequal

*From a Canadian political scientist, strong words on the future of Quebec*

**T**he federal government during the last two or three decades has assaulted, aggressed and intruded time and time again on the provinces."

"We're not asking to govern the way people conduct themselves outside Quebec — and we ask the same courtesy toward ourselves."

"It's like being married. There are thousands of ways of reinventing a federation."

"Equality of provinces' ensures that Quebec is kept weak. There is a sense of domination, and that breach between the societies has to be resolved.

That's what has to be reckoned with. That's what we have to deal with."

Those strong words, and other arguments just as provocative, set the tone for an April 14 address by young political scientist Alain-G. Gagnon. A political commentator, professor and director of the French Canada Studies Program at Montreal's McGill University, Gagnon spoke at Buffalo's International Institute, which co-sponsored his speech with the Buffalo Council on World Affairs and UB Law School's Canada-U.S. Legal Studies Centre.

Introduced by UB political science professor Monroe Eagles as "one of Canada's fastest-rising political sci-

tists," Gagnon raised intriguing questions before an audience of about 50 people.

"Canadians outside Quebec tend to define federalism and federation in the same way — they don't differentiate between them," he said.

Quebecois take a different view: that federation is a threat to their unique Francophone culture, whereas federalism — an affiliation recognizing Quebec's special right to self-determination — would enable Canadians to co-exist despite their cultural differences.

"Quebec feels that Canada is about two global societies that share a nation-state," Gagnon said. "It's not that the Quebec people don't want to be represented in Ottawa. The name of the game is, when you go to Ottawa, you are one province in discussion with nine other provinces. ... But Ottawa is not Canada. The federal government is not Canada. They don't represent each and every aspect of Canadian life."

Gagnon noted, "There is a very entrenched feeling that the provinces are equal and should have equal influence on the development of the country." But, he said, it is wrong to give equal representation to Prince Edward Island, population 20,000, and Quebec with its 7 million residents. "Quebec, being 25 percent of the population, has only 10 percent of the representation," he said.

He blamed former Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau for much of the current rift between Quebec and Ottawa, saying the federal government imposed its new constitution on all the provinces despite Quebec's resistance. "Obvi-

UB LAW  
FORUM

Summer  
1993



Alain-G. Gagnon, left, and Professor Robert Berger.

# Border Tactics in the Canadian Legal Studies Workshops

ously, if Canada is to survive, that has to be resolved," he said. "Time will not resolve it."

Gagnon also chafed at the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, noting that Quebec has had its own Charter of Rights and Freedoms since 1975. "In fact," he said, "it predates the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and it goes beyond the Canadian one. It has within it a charter of social rights which the federal charter lacks. So why do you want to force on Quebec a Charter of Rights and Freedoms that the Quebec Charter of Rights and Freedoms would be subject to? Obviously, the intent was that Quebec would not be the point of reference, the point of reference would be the Supreme Court of Canada."

A recent proposal by the Canadian government to remove itself from five provincial jurisdictions, Gagnon said, was "pretty arrogant. This was not perceived as an act of generosity from the Quebec viewpoint."

"The federal government was saying: 'We are going to remove ourselves, but this is going to be conditional. You're going to have to respect the national standards. And to add insult to injury, those agreements were to be effective for five years. You have to negotiate them ad nauseam. ... I really tried to search for that concept that allows diversity, and I couldn't find it.'"

Preserving Canada's cultural diversity, Gagnon said, is crucial. "The only way Canada can survive," he said, "is to provide an environment that is conducive to allowing the Quebecois culture to survive." ■

The interplay of environmental and developmental issues, along with an examination of the proposed Canadian constitutional accord, formed the core of the fall semester's Canadian Legal Studies Workshops at UB Law School.

Offered as a three-credit seminar to law students and others under the auspices of the Canada-US Legal Studies Centre and its director, Professor Robert Berger, the Wednesday afternoon workshop series also drew other students, faculty and interested members of the public.

"I think there are many reasons on several different levels to have a greater understanding of what goes on in Canada," said Kerry Mitchell, public affairs officer for the Canadian Consulate in Buffalo.

"The workshop series is really quite broad, and it makes an attempt to focus on many different areas having to do with Canada. It's a particularly good source because they bring Canadian experts in to present their views and their research, rather than relying on American views of Canadian issues," she said.



"I was really impressed," one presenter, Professor Patricia Dirks, chair of the Department of History at Brock University, said of her listeners. She spoke on "Quebec's Distinct Society/Canada's Federal System: The Roots of Canada's Current Constitutional Dilemma."

"They were quite an interested audience, both because of their legal training — they were interested in the whole issue of constitution-making — and they also seemed to be fairly aware of the issues that were dividing Canadians."

Dirks brought a historical perspec-