

# Chauvinism and National Question: Canada in Perspective

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#### Abstract

The contemporary conflict between the province of Quebec and the federal government in Canada has become a global focus. Quebec is inhabited by a majority group of French speakers whose ancestry is rooted in Quebec, whose historical religion is Roman Catholicism, and who are known collectively (in French) as Quebecois. The conflict involves Quebec's claim to special recognition as a separate entity- nation or a distinct society with Canada, this claim clashes with the rights of individuals to express themselves in the official language (French or English) of their choice and also puts in the idea of a national Canadian identity. Secondary sources of data which are from the literature of various sources were carefully reviewed. Group theory was carefully selected and deployed for the purpose of analysis. Findings show that the advent of the Europeans annihilated and swallowed the minority tribe who were the original inhabitants of Canada. The study recommends among other things: introduction of singular secular system, put an end to linguistic oppression and an abolishment of bill 101.

Keywords: National Question, Quebec, Chauvinism, British Canadians, French Canadians.

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#### Introduction

Since Canada today is still a country under the imperialist domination of the Canadian bourgeoisie, it's not surprising that it's also a "prison of nationalities". Canada is composed of many nationalities oppressed by the bourgeoisie: the Quebec nation, Indians, Inuit, Metis, Acadians, Afro-Canadians, and all the others.

According to Onah (2010), the people of all the oppressed nationalities have an interest in overthrowing the bourgeoisie, which is responsible for their oppression and building socialism. In order to make a revolution in Canada, we must build the broadest possible united front, under the leadership of the working class, including its allies, all working people, and all the oppressed nationalities. The Quebecois nation is a crucial reserve for the socialist revolution. The most burning of all the national questions today is the Quebec national question. It is one of the three most important contradictions in Canada. The principal contradiction is between the bourgeoisie and the Canadian proletariat, and the other is between the Canadian people and the two superpowers.

The economic crisis which is hitting Canada also sharpens national oppression. The political crisis which is rocking the country and threatening to divide it and set back the proletarian revolution is directly linked to Quebec's national oppression. A correct position on this national question is therefore essential for the working class's revolutionary strategy. For all these reasons, we must arm the proletariat with a sharp and clear-cut line on the question. This is the goal of the following resolution. Stalin (1930) maintained that over a hundred years, the Quebec nation has been an oppressed nation in Canada. The Quebecois people have suffered all manifestations of national oppression. They have been denied their fundamental right to self-determination, up to and including separation, first by British colonialism and then by the Canadian bourgeoisie. The political crisis, brought on by the election of the PQ to office in Quebec on November 15, 1976, has aggravated and sharpened the Quebec national question. T oppression of the Quebec people by the Canadian monopoly bourgeoisie is essential for it to rule

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the country, and its loyal agents, the Liberals in power as well as the Conservatives and the NDP, continue to refuse to recognize Quebec's right to self-determination.

But the Quebecois people continue to resist this oppression. The proletariat in Quebec is fiercely militant in the struggle against daily exploitation (look for example at the millworkers' struggle in Montreal, at the Commonwealth Plywood strike, and at occupations like Iron and Titanium). And the people are mobilizing to fight for their national rights.

But the Quebec national movement is now led by the Quebec nationalist bourgeoisie, a fraction of the Canadian bourgeoisie, and every bit as reactionary, anti-worker, and anti-people as the rest of the bourgeoisie. The PQ established its hegemony over this movement with the aim of taking power in Quebec by profiting from the crisis and the anger of the Quebec workers' movement towards the Canadian bourgeoisie, national oppression, and the Quebec Liberal Party (Levitt, 1970). As long as the resistance to Quebec's national oppression is channelled and manipulated by the nationalist bourgeoisie, it is doomed to failure and will weaken the proletariat's cause. The proletariat and its party must take the leadership of the Quebec national movement against oppression by the Canadian bourgeoisie. The national question can only be solved by overthrowing the bourgeoisie and establishing socialism in Canada.

The oppression and exploitation of some people by others, and the struggle for liberation, began in slave-holding societies and continued under feudalism. The national question became fully developed in the period of the decline of feudalism and the rise of capitalism when nation-states and multi-nation states were being formed. The question still exists and is manifested in the struggle against national oppression and in intrastate relations between nations and peoples. For Marxists, after the victory of communism throughout the world, the national question would wither away completely with the merging and disappearance of all nations. (Lenin, 1913).

National Question is the totality of political, economic, territorial, legal, ideological, and cultural relations among nations, national groups, and nationalities, in various socio-economic formations. National questions can easily be found in countries with multicultural, multilingual,

national question in non-socialist states or nations.

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multiethnic and multi religious groups. Such countries like Russia, USA, India, Switzerland, Nigeria, Canada, Brazil, Germany, China, Israel etc. have one form of National Question or another. Another school of thought holds the view that National Question is a term used for a variety of issues related to Nationalism, which can easily be seen in socialist thoughts and doctrines. However, this idea cannot be sustained because there have been more instances of

According to Lenin (1913) 'self-determination of nations cannot be interpreted to mean anything else but political self-determination, i.e., the right to secede and form a separate state'. He goes further to say that within the frontiers of Russia, several nations with distinctive economic and social conditions, like other nations are unbelievably oppressed by the Tsarist monarchy. (Lenin, 1913) From this assertion, one can see that there is an element of oppression when it comes to national question. A group or a nation, or an ethnic group or a religious group is in one way, or another being oppressed by those superior to them in all fronts of human endeavor.

The significance of national question for the socialist movement worldwide was underscored in this era by the growth of modern imperialism and colonialism--the carving up of the globe into "spheres of influence" and colonial possessions by the "great powers" such as Britain and France, and secondarily, Germany, the U.S. and Belgium. It was the rivalry amongst these countries which culminated in the outbreak of the First World War. (D'Amato. 2014), Hence, one can understand what the British colonialist did to some African countries, especially Nigeria, by forcing the people to imbibe Ture at the detriment of their own culture. Some native languages are almost gone due to the fact that they must always speak the white man's language to be able to do any meaningful thing in Nigeria as well as other African countries. Hence, Adilieje and Ekwenugo (2010) posit that colonialism came to Nigeria with its capitalist and racist ideology.

Lenin understood that real international working-class unity could not be built merely by proclaiming it. Because the oppression of small or weaker nations by larger or stronger ones is a reality, the division of workers by nation, their mutual national mistrust, and the national and

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chauvinism that bind them to their own ruling classes' interests cannot be overcome merely by calling for international solidarity. (D'Amato . 2014)

Hence, D'Amato (2014) further asserts that political independence--the formation of an independent state--should not be confused with economic independence, which naturally was impossible in conditions of modern imperialism. Secondly, he asks the question, 'since when did socialists gear their demands based on what was "realistic" or "practical" in regard to what was immediately achievable? Thirdly, he further posits that "If, in our political agitation, we fail to advance and advocate the slogan of the *right* to secession, we shall play into the hands, not only of the bourgeoisie, but also of the feudal landlords and the absolutism of the *oppressor* nation" and yet not achieve independence, which naturally is impossible in conditions of modern imperialism.

## **Historical Background of Canada**

Before the advent of the Europeans in Canada, the Paleo – Indians had already arrived and settled there. The original inhabitants of Canada had settled there thousand years ago, with their unique spiritual beliefs, styles of social organization and trade networks. In the 15<sup>th</sup> Century, French and British explorers colonized and fought over a lot of domains in Canada and other North Americans. According to IRCC (2017),

"When Europeans explored Canada, they found all the regions occupied by native people they called Indians because the first explorers thought they had reached the East Indies. The native people lived off the land, some by hunting and gathering, others by raising crops. The Huron-Wendat of the Great Lakes region, like the Iroquois, was farmers and hunters. The Cree and Dene of the Northwest were hunter-gatherers. The Sioux were nomadic, following the Bison(Bufalo)herd. The Inuit lived off Arctic wildlife. West Coast natives preserved fish by drying and smoking. Warfare was common among Aboriginal groups as they competed for land, resources and prestige". (IRCC,2017)

IRCC (2017) further posits that the Vikings from Iceland were among the first European settlers in Canada. They colonized the Greenland for 1000 years. They also reached to Labrador and



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Newfoundland. The early European incursion into this part of North American was dated back to 1497. The colony of New France was established in 1534. However, this territory was lost to the Britain in 1763 after Britain defeated France in seven years war. Subsequently, the colony was ceded to the United Kingdom. This colony which was later named as Quebec was divided into upper and lower Canada in 1791. In 1841, it was unified. Through confederation, the province of Canada was joined with two other British colonies of New Brunswick and Nova Scotia in 1867. These provinces later metamorphosed to Canada as a self governing entity. This entity later expanded by incorporating other parts of British North America with Labrador and Newfoundland as the end product in 1949. On the whole, Canada has ten (10) provinces, namely; Ontario, Quebec, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, Newfoundland, Manitoba, Alberta, Saskatchewan and British Columbia. (Wheare, 1953)

Although a government had existed in Canada as at 1848, however, Britain continued to set its foreign and defence policies after the end of the First World War. Canada became co – equal with United Kingdom in 1931, with the passing of Statute of Westminster. The constitutional amendment of 1982, saw the last huddle of legal dependence on Britain removed. Hence, the British Parliament ceased to make laws for Canada.

"Between 1534 and 1542, Jacques Cartier made three voyages across the Atlantic, claiming the land for King Francis I of France. Cartier heard two captured guides speak the Iroquoian word kanata, meaning "village." By the 1550s, the name of Canada began appearing on maps". (IRCC, 2017).

As century passed, by French, British and later other immigrants with their varied customs and traditions have all cumulated to form the Canadian culture. This was seriously affected by its language, location, and economic neighbor, the US. After the Second World War, Canada had been involved with a lot of multilateralism abroad and socio-economic development domestically.

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**Conceptual Clarifications** 

**National Question** 

This has its origin from nation and nationality. It is concerned with a total wellbeing of a group

of people irrespective of their language, culture, ethnicity, religion, and socio – economic way of

life. From the review of various literatures, I found that whenever there is a crossbreed of

cultures, languages, ethnicity and religion, the issue of national question must arrive. Refer to the

introductory part of this work for further details on national Question.

Quebec

The word, Quebec is a French term which applies to the settlers in that part of North America,

after the defeat of the aborigines, otherwise known as the original settlers. After the French had

come from Europe to fight the original inhabitants and defeated them, they established their

colony there. These people are otherwise called the Quebecois. They are mainly French speakers

with little English minority, and they are predominantly Catholic by religious affiliation.

Chauvinism

This is being discriminatory or bias. It is biased devotion to any group, attitude, or cause such as

in religion. It is also a belief that one sex is inferior to the other and therefore deserves less equal

treatment or benefit. It also means national supremacy and glory.

**French Canadians** 

These are Europeans who migrated from France to Canada. They fought the original settlers who

are Indians and won them and colonized the area called Quebec. They settled there, established

their own church, which is Catholic Church, their own school and conducted social services in

their native French language. They and the English minority in Quebec are known as Quebecois.

353



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#### **British Canadians**

These are the Europeans who migrated from the United Kingdom to Canada. When they arrived in Canada, they fought the French Canadians who had already established there and set up their own government. Apart from Quebec, the remaining nine provinces in Canada were under the rule of the British Canadians. They had initially administered Quebec as part of the British territory. However, after an act of Parliament, they were only restricted to the remaining nine provinces. The remnants in Quebec are seen as minority because of their insignificant population.

## Methodology

Qualitative data gathering, otherwise known as secondary source of data was deployed as the major means of data gathering. In doing this, books, journals, articles, newspapers, and other publications were thoroughly reviewed. Online and internet sources were also used. The study was analysed using content analysis techniques.

### Theoretical framework.

Truman. It originated from Sociology, from the earlier writings on pluralism. Pluralism is the recognition that society is made up of diverse collectivity. According to this theory, a society is an aggregate of many different groups. The society is not homogenous. There are different forms of diversity such as ethnicity, religion, culture, language, geography and landscape. They posit that everything that happens in a society is principally concerned with the interaction of all the groups. Hence, the study of various components groups that make up a society is the main thrust of the group theorists. According to the group theory, society is made up of the groups that compose it. A group is defined as a collection of individuals with shared attitudes and interests on the basis of which certain claims Sand demands are made upon other groups in the society for the establishment, maintenance and enhancing preferred value. (Onah, 2010). Therefore, for one

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to do a critical analysis of any given society, one must come to terms that there are various groups of people that exist in that society. It is also pertinent to note that for a set of individuals to be called a group, they must share some common interests. These interests define the group activities. Hence, we conclude that for every interest that emanates in a given society, a group must be responsible. Every group pursues their interest through the political system. They assert that it is these various groups within a society that made the society what it is.

### **Data presentation and Analysis**

## The Subjugation of Quebecois

The Quebec region in Canada known to be French speakers and also Catholic by religion, wants to be recognized in a special way and to be given special status in Canada. They have their root in Quebec. However, these Canadians also have minority English speakers and will like to express themselves either in English or French, but they are all called Quebecois.

The British conquered the Quebec region in 1759 and the Britons, especially the elites settled there. After the war, Britain renamed Quebec province. These are the French speaking, Catholic people, known as' habitants' or 'Canadiens', fought to keep their way of life in the English – speaking, Protestant – ruled British Empire. They made Quebec region bilingual (French and English) as against their original or traditional French language. Nine provinces of French speakers who are also minorities lost their language.

Canada became a country under British North America act in 1867. A known French Catholic school in Ontario province was made to instruct in English only, thereby denying the people access to French language due to Religious superiority war. In Manitoba province a law in 1890 that established bilingualism was ignored for English language. This was on till 1979. Apart from the New Brunswick which was declared as a bilingual province with about 33% or more French speakers, the rest of the provinces were declared as English speaking in 1982.



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The ruling elites in Quebec who were mainly Protestants allowed the Catholic Church to provide social services and to teach French in the schools; however they dominated the province, especially in Montreal which is the hub of business, commerce, and banking. In the 1960s, the original French speakers found it difficult to be employed in all these sectors neither enumerated above nor got promoted for those that had already been employed. In the various companies and factories, they were forced to speak English.

In the 1960s the British – Canadians who spoke only English earned more than their counterparts who were French – Canadians who speak both English and French. In the 1980s the Quebecois earned poorly and there was high unemployment rate among them, compared to the people in Ontario and other Western provinces. In 1960s there was increased urbanization in Quebec. A modern University system that would train people in French to run their bureaucracy cropped up. However, these people who were trained found it difficult to get private jobs from the British – Canadian dominated business environment. There was decreased in birthrate. There was increased influx of non-French Immigrants, mainly English speakers. This period was known as the 'Quiet Revolution' among the Canadians. Quebec was going through the process of modernization.

### Quebecois Rise to Power and the Marginalization of English Quebecois

From 1963 – 1970, two hundred bombs were exploded in Canada, in what can be called political terrorism. Some of the prominent places that were bombed included the Montreal Stock Exchange. Some officials of the government were killed. They included a non-nationalist Cabinet minister. During this period of political terrorism, a British Trade Commissioner was among those kidnapped, while twenty-seven people were injured.

The Quebecois formed a political party called the *Parti Quebecois*. The ideology of the party was to ensure political sovereignty for the Quebecois. In 1976, it garnered 41% of the total votes and with that gained ascendancy to power. It expended the Quebec government through its social



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welfares' programs. It provided jobs for the educated Canadians. It started institutional reforms that would ensure that French speakers were employed. It ensured that more immigrants moved to the French speaking parts rather than English speaking side. The Language Bill 101 which was the main instrument for this reform was passed into law in 1977. French was declared as the only language in Quebec government and courts. The law also required children of immigrants to attend only French schools and parents were no longer required to send their children to English schools. Nevertheless, English speakers were guaranteed the right of English as their language for social services. People were equally allowed to be communicated in English both at government places and at the courts. The English system was retained at school and people were allowed to communicate in English at workplaces. English was retained as a minority language but not as to make Quebec a bilingual province.

In 1980 a referendum was passed as to make Quebec a political sovereign state, while at the same time retaining economic association with the rest of Canada. However, the referendum was defeated. In 1984, the *Parti Quebecois* lost power to the *Provincial Liberals*. The *Liberals* were non separatist provincial party. One of their policies was to maintain French language as an official language for the survival of the Quebecois.

In 1982, The Canadians adopted a constitution which ensured their rights and freedom. The *Parti Quebecois* which was in power during this period refused to assent to the new Constitution. Nevertheless, all other provinces assented to the new constitution except Quebec. As a consequence, the Quebecois felt excluded from the Canadian Constitution.

The 1982 Constitutional amendment nullified Bill 101 of 1977, which declared that French should be the only language of communication, both in government circle, as well as in Quebecois Court. This amendment affirmed the Supreme Court judgment of 1980, which nullified Bill 101 and brought back Bilingual mode of communication as Canadian official Language in Quebec and other Provinces. The 1982 constitutional amendment was irrespective of the 1981 Amendment, with a clause that allows any province to change an aspect of the constitution in perpetuity, for a renewable period of 5 years.



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The ban on public signs on any language except French was nullified by the Supreme Court in 1988. The court ruled that French language should be written in bold, while other non-French languages on all public signs should be written in small letters. After this, the liberal government in Quebec invoked the 'notwithstanding' clause banning all non-French language outdoor advertising in Quebec. With this French became the official language both at public and workplaces. Nevertheless, the minority right of language was also protected, such as English speakers in Quebec. They were all permitted to advertise their goods in their own language.

There was a very serious debate over the Meech Lake Accord in 1990. The aim was to make Quebec to append its signature to 1982 Constitution and Charter of rights and freedom. Quebec Liberal government gave its conditions for re-admissibility which were five in number in 1987. The most prominent among them was to recognize Quebec as a separate entity. The original agreement was signed by the Prime Minister of Canada in 1987 with 10 provincial heads or premiers. However, three provinces later pulled out as their various successive governments revoked the agreement. Due to their inability to meet the deadline for its ratification which was 23 June 1990, the accord was defeated. This accord raised some key questions with regard to the place Quebec Province if it decided to remain in Canada. It asked if Canada was to remain a bilingual country or country made up of unilingual provinces and the central government was ready to relate with every province in their own language.

Canada was made a bilingual country in 1968 during the reign of Pierre Elliot Trudeau as the Prime Minister. He declared that federal services must be in these two languages. The central government declared Canada a multicultural society in 1978 with the influx of immigrants from diverse cultures. With Meech Lake accord of between 25 to 30 percent of the immigrants to Canada in order to preserve a good number of those that speak French language, the rest of the multicultural society in Canada became apprehensive that the number of Canadian immigrants would reduce, with French speakers controlling a large proportion of 25 to 30 percent. Thus, 1990 Meech Lake debate reopened the issue of national question.



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## **The Real National Question**

In 1989, there was a proposal in Montreal Catholic school to separate cultural Quebec children from non-Quebec French speakers. This led to a great controversy. Eventually, it was dropped. Also in early 1990, the issue resurfaced with an attempt to enforce every child in French school to speak French as the only language of communication, due to the fact that some non-Quebecois preferred to speak English outside the classrooms. It took the intervention of the Quebec Human Right Commission to halt this trend. Notwithstanding the language clause, with regards to the language of the signs in Quebec, the government of Quebec preferred the group right to be respected as again the individual minority rights.

With the entrenchment of minority rights in all the provinces, both French and English speakers were adequately protected. However, the other minorities that found themselves in Canada, as well as the aborigines, (the original natives of Canada before the European incursion) had both their languages and cultures submerged with the superior French and British culture and languages. These people don't belong to either English speaking Canadians or French speaking Canadians.

#### **Conclusion**

Even though that Canadians have come to the reality of the importance of making the country a Bilingual State, as well as recognizing the minority rights of the citizens in all the ten provinces, however, we did not hear any further thing with regard to the whereabouts of the original inhabitants. In other words, the aborigines, who were Indians that migrated from the West Indies, were 'swallowed' by superior British and French cultures. Hence, from our various data we only heard about the British or French Canadians, vis-a-vis how they fought each other either by force, political means or by using instrumentality of power to gain ascendancy to the top echelon of government thereby enforcing the right or their various nationalities at the detriment of

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others., which culminated to the recognition of both languages as the official languages of Canada and the recognition of the minority right.

We can conclude that the aborigines (the Indian Canadians) who are the original owners of Canada were subjugated and submerged in the British/French power play which culminated in equal recognition of both languages as the official languages of Canada. The Government of Canada should find an adequate compensation for the aborigines. Ordinarily, just like in the case of Switzerland where three major languages were recognized as their national languages, the Canadian government ordinarily ought to have included India, English and French as their national languages.

The last but not the least was the issue of oppressive labour laws which at certain time, when the British were in total domination did not allow the French speakers to gain employment or get promoted for those already employed. Further empirical evidence did not state if after the necessary laws were passed to recognize Canada as a bilingual state and allowing minority rights to prevail in all the provinces, if these people who suffered this inhuman bizarre treatment were later compensated for the years, they stayed unemployed or for the years they stayed working without promotion or adequate working benefits and compensation.

On a general note, Canadian examples abound in various countries with all forms of agitations of marginalization by minority ethnic or religious groups, of which Nigeria and some nations are good examples, particularly in Africa. This is also inherent in various workplaces as some of the retrenchments done in some corporate organizations reflected these ethnic and religious biases. What of appointments to governments' offices? Even with federal character principle in Nigeria, yet all the above enumerated biases still reflect in government recruitments and appointments into the various arms and organs of the government. As a point of departure, I suggest that all these countries should borrow from the Canadian case study, even though not holistically implemented, however has passed good mark in entrenching good governance and other good indices of democratic development.

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#### Recommendations

From the data presented and analysed, the study recommends thus.

- 1. There should be an end to linguistic oppression: this oppression dates from the conquest and is part of the attempt to assimilate the Quebecois and to eliminate their language.
- 2. Introduction of a singular secular public school system for Quebec; the right of all minorities to education in their language in no way implies a separate system or even a separate school. This should depend on concrete conditions of the given minority.
- 3. Abolishment of bill 101 (The French language charter). This maintained the privileges of the English-Canadian minority (school system) but does almost nothing about the right of the Quebecois to work in French. Bill 101 also denies minorities their right to communicate in their language with government, health, and justice system

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