

THE QUESTION

The Debate on the Referendum Question, Quebec National Assembly
March 4-20, 1980

Edited by: Marie-Hélène Bergeron
Douglas Brown
Richard Simeon

Translated by: Sheila Fischman

Institute of Intergovernmental Relations
Queen's University
Kingston, Ontario

Documents of the Debate 1

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Preface

This is the first publication in a new Institute series, Documents of the Debate. It is designed to collect and present to readers some of the critical documentary materials relating to the debate on the future of the constitution and the federal system. It thus brings together and organizes scattered materials not easily available otherwise.

Document 1, The Question, represents the only existing translation of the historic debate in the Quebec National Assembly on the wording of the question put to voters in the referendum of May 20, 1980. The debates are edited so as to represent as fully as possible the major themes and arguments put forward. The sole responsibility for the selection and presentation rests with the Institute of Intergovernmental Relations.

More than the usual number of persons assisted in the process

Introduction

In March of 1980 the Quebec National Assembly conducted a

criticism of the existing federal system and the failure of past efforts at constitutional reform to respond to Quebec's demands, to a sharp critique of the proposals of Claude Ryan's Quebec Liberal Party, set out in the "Beige Paper."

The opposition seemed somewhat less effective in the

the significance and intensity of the debate in the province. They
have not realized what profound questions are at stake. This selection

.4.

THE QUESTION:

THE GOVERNMENT OF QUEBEC HAS MADE PUBLIC ITS PROPOSAL

THIS AGREEMENT WOULD ENABLE QUEBEC TO ACQUIRE THE EXCLUSIVE
POWER TO MAKE THE LAWS LEVY THE TAXES AND ESTABLISH REGULATIONS

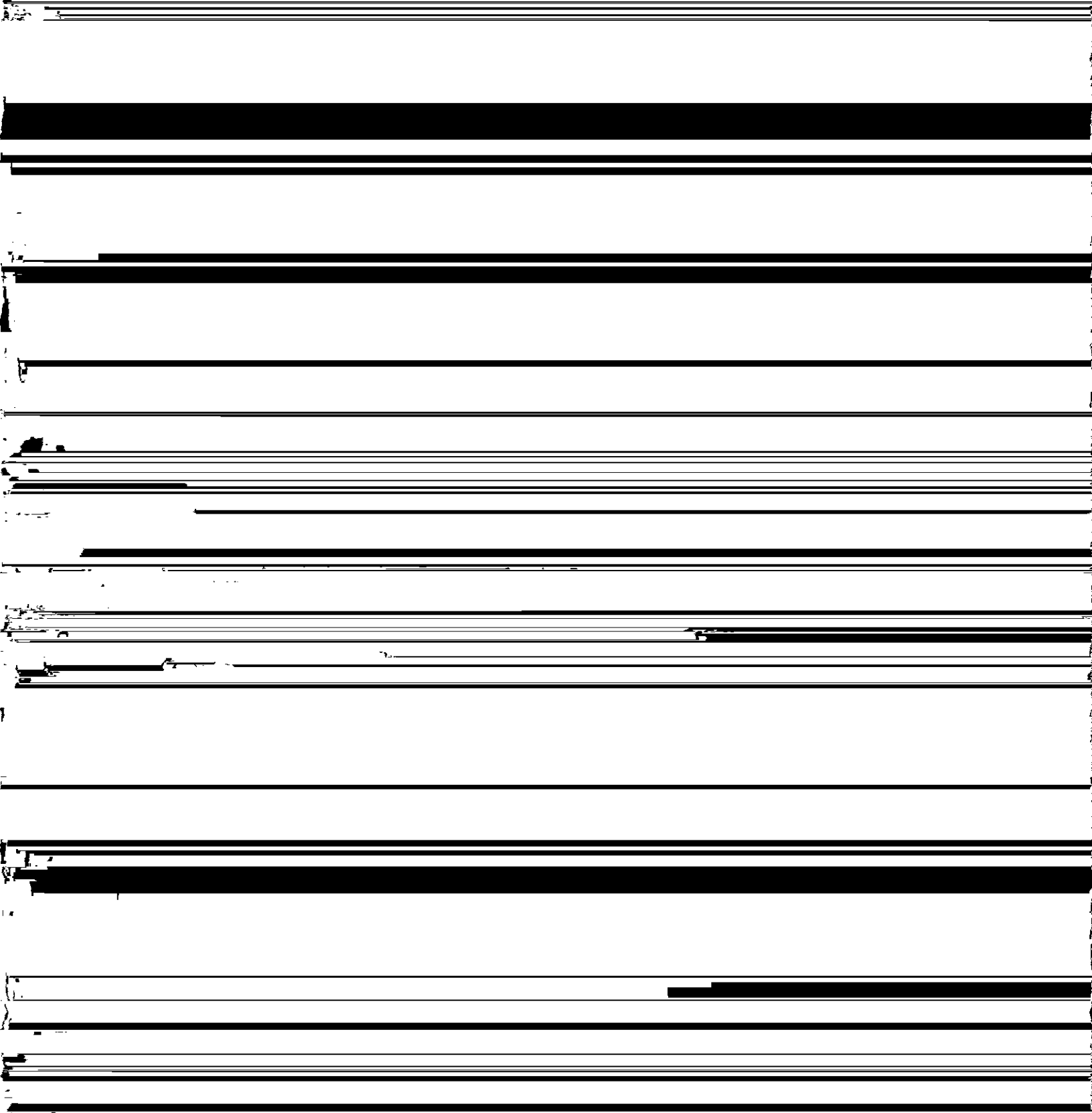
I. The Leaders Speak

A. René Lévesque, Prime Minister of Quebec

This memorandum is what we tried to say on the first page of the

kept harping away that we wouldn't be able to pull it off: that was beyond

Now this means we can get a lot of things in a minute which



goal was "cultural sovereignty". While I mention these for the record, I would like to look a little more closely at the very concrete statements put forth by the Laurendeau-Dunton Commission, which dates back to 1963. Nothing written in the intervening seventeen years has been able to match them for vigour or for clear-sightedness.

In that preliminary report, André Laurendeau and Davidson Dunton maintained, along with their colleagues, that in the drama unfolding at that

it or not, from French Quebec and English Canada. The conflict was the

and expressions of sympathy which were half-hearted and basically embarrassed. Beyond the diversified interests of the provinces, and regionalism which can be more or less aggressive depending on the circumstances, the English Canadians too have their aspirations with regard to certain basic questions;

Indeed, the only way in which we can hope that this will come to pass within a new equilibrium - and how many years now have events been

of the committee for the "no" vote laid bare his gloomy convictions as to nothing less than the end of Canada.

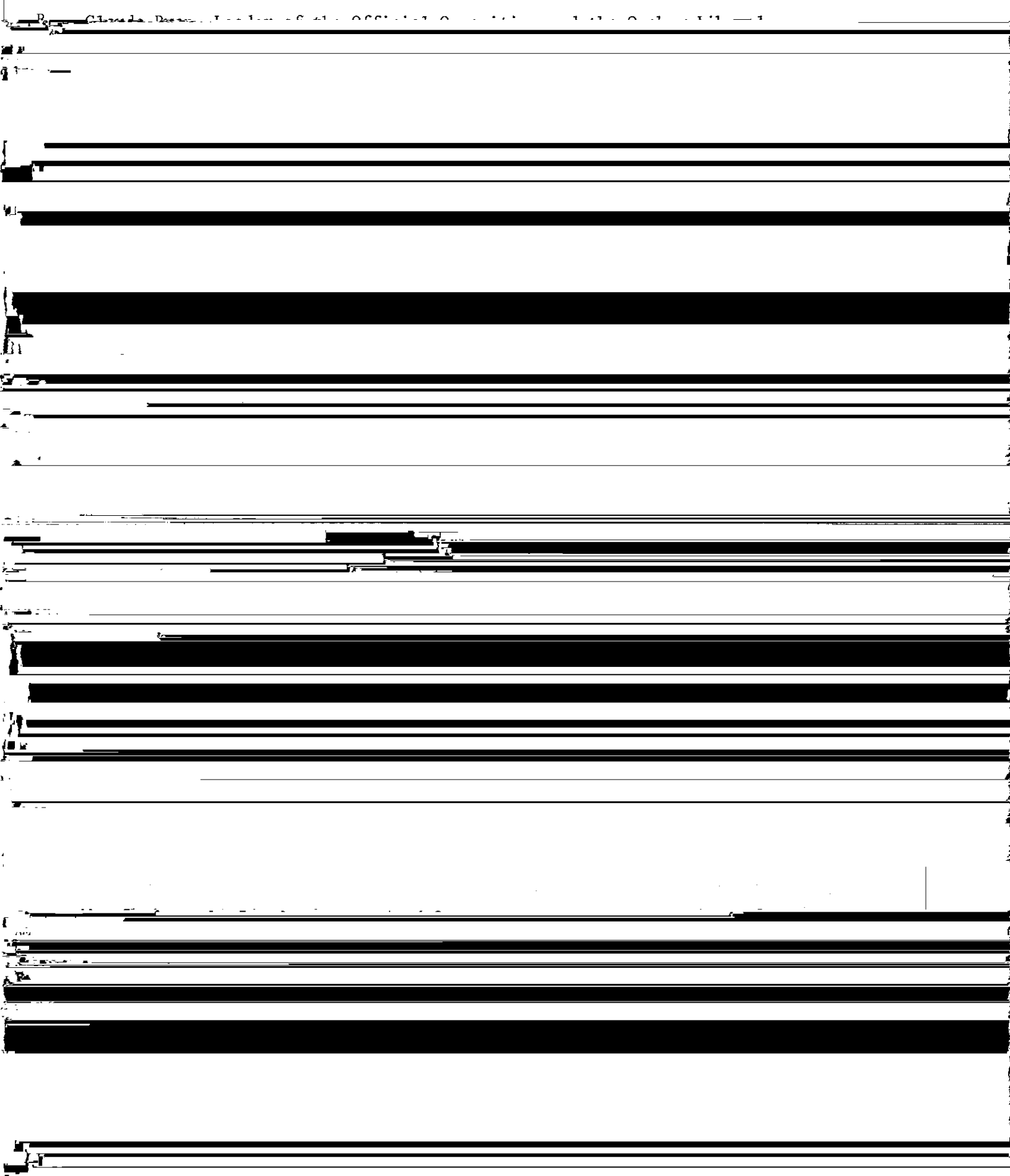
He told how for the past ten years we have been doing everything

Yes I also stress in closing that if we are to break this vicious

flourish in a political arena cluttered with old parties, and which has tried for the past three and a half years to provide Québec with as good

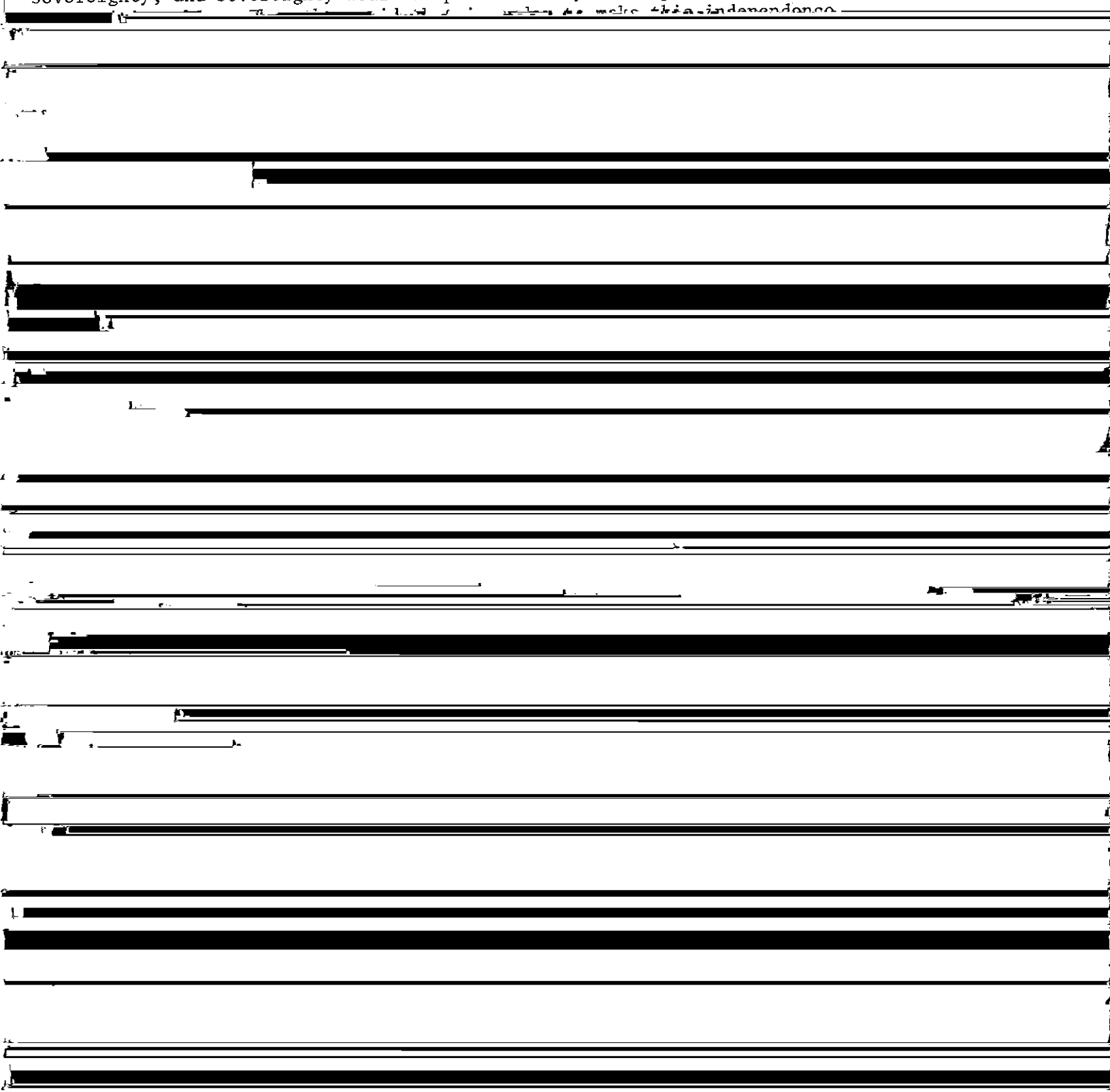
will continue to do so until the end of its present term.

But given this commitment, which by reason of its weighty consequences for the entire population we consider non-partisan, this commitment which constitutes the referendum, we shall move heaven and earth to forget



Earlier, the Premier touched on the economic concerns that are at the root of the Canadian federation. He was quoting us, so his summary

a referendum: once a Parti Québécois government had come to power it would undertake to put into immediate operation the procedure for accession to sovereignty, and sovereignty would be proclaimed by a law passed in the



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clearly separate: they respected the most elementary rules of logic; they

Any person has the right to change his mind, but when you change your mind too often, one may question the stability of the last opinion expressed.

Conclusions of this quick survey. The deep underlying design

1905

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Second, the question carefully avoids picking out the essential elements we wish to submit to the judgement of the voters. In one of his very first political programmes, Mr. Chairman, I believe it was the one in 1971 -- could my neighbor, the Member for Bonaventure, locate it for me while . . . in any case I am going to quote it to you correctly, don't worry -- the Parti Québécois said this. it's very interesting. This

is the first time there was mention of a referendum in the history of the
Parti Québécois. I have it here

MR. LAVOIE: The currency.

by polls paid for with the taxpayers' money: We're going to keep

I have a whole series and I don't want to dwell on them because
of the precedents that were held.

he had conducted a poll inside the Parti Québécois that showed that nearly 61% of the people thought the question was honest. If I were Premier I would be ashamed that 39% consider it dishonest.

~~I think I leave it to you Mr. Chairman to determine if this is~~

their operation, some of which need to be revised, but to their underlying foundation, that is to the federal principle. We are attached to the role Canada has played in world affairs over the past 40 years. We want this role to continue and even to be enlarged.

_____ b. 5. 1. _____ of _____ makes it quite

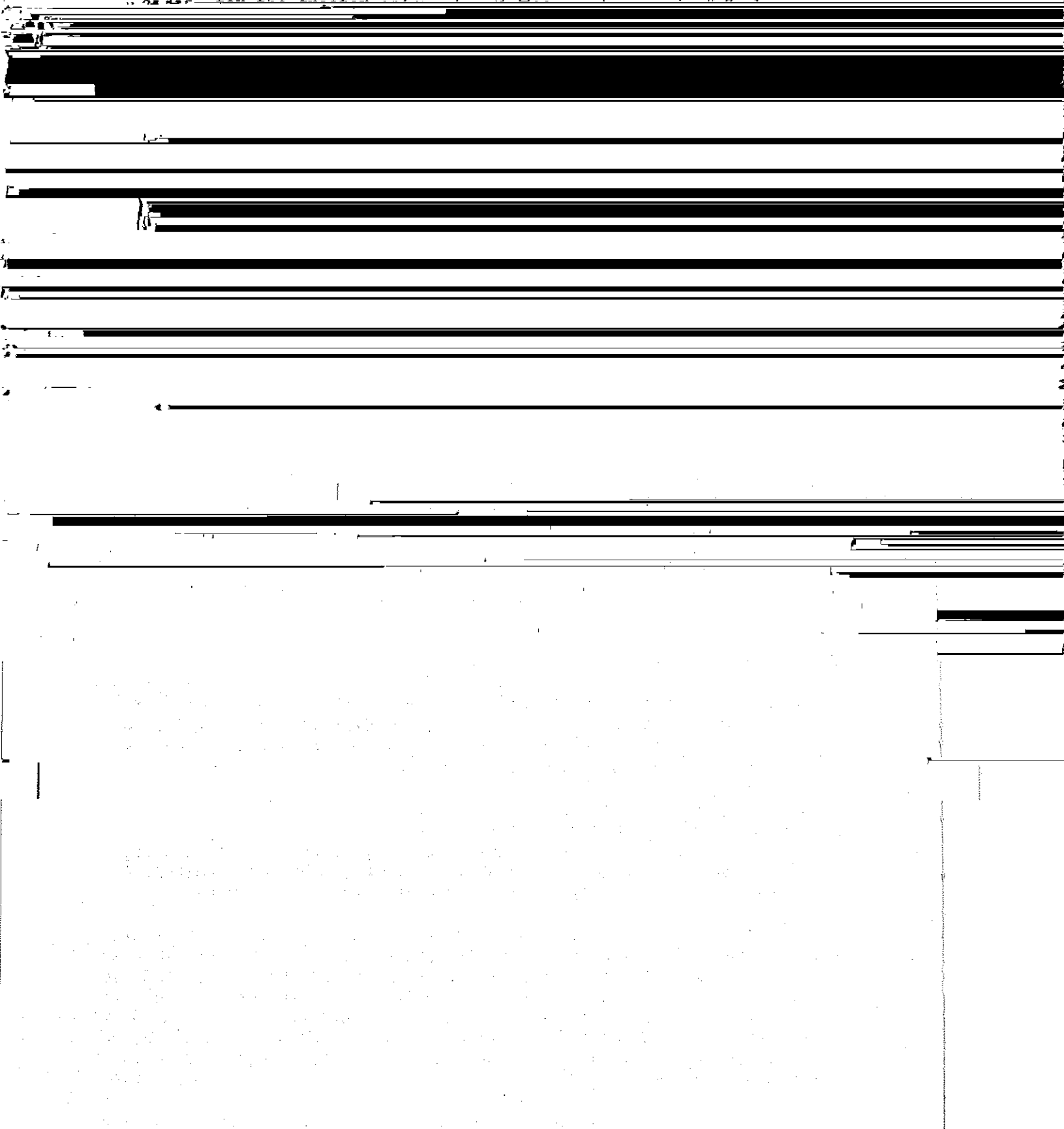
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party in power at the present with 41% of the vote, and does not take into account at all the preferences and convictions of the other parties, which represent in this House 59% of the votes cast on November 15, 1976, and 65% of the votes cast in the seven by-elections held in the past 18 months? How do you explain that the question has been conceived by the party in power alone, with supreme contempt for the opposition parties, with no sort of warning or advance notice with an attempt to give the opposition parties a chance to be heard?

considerably the present long and weighty preamble so that it suggests

[REDACTED]

announced; we will meet you half-way in the formulation of the question and whichever party wins the referendum, we will be good sports on both

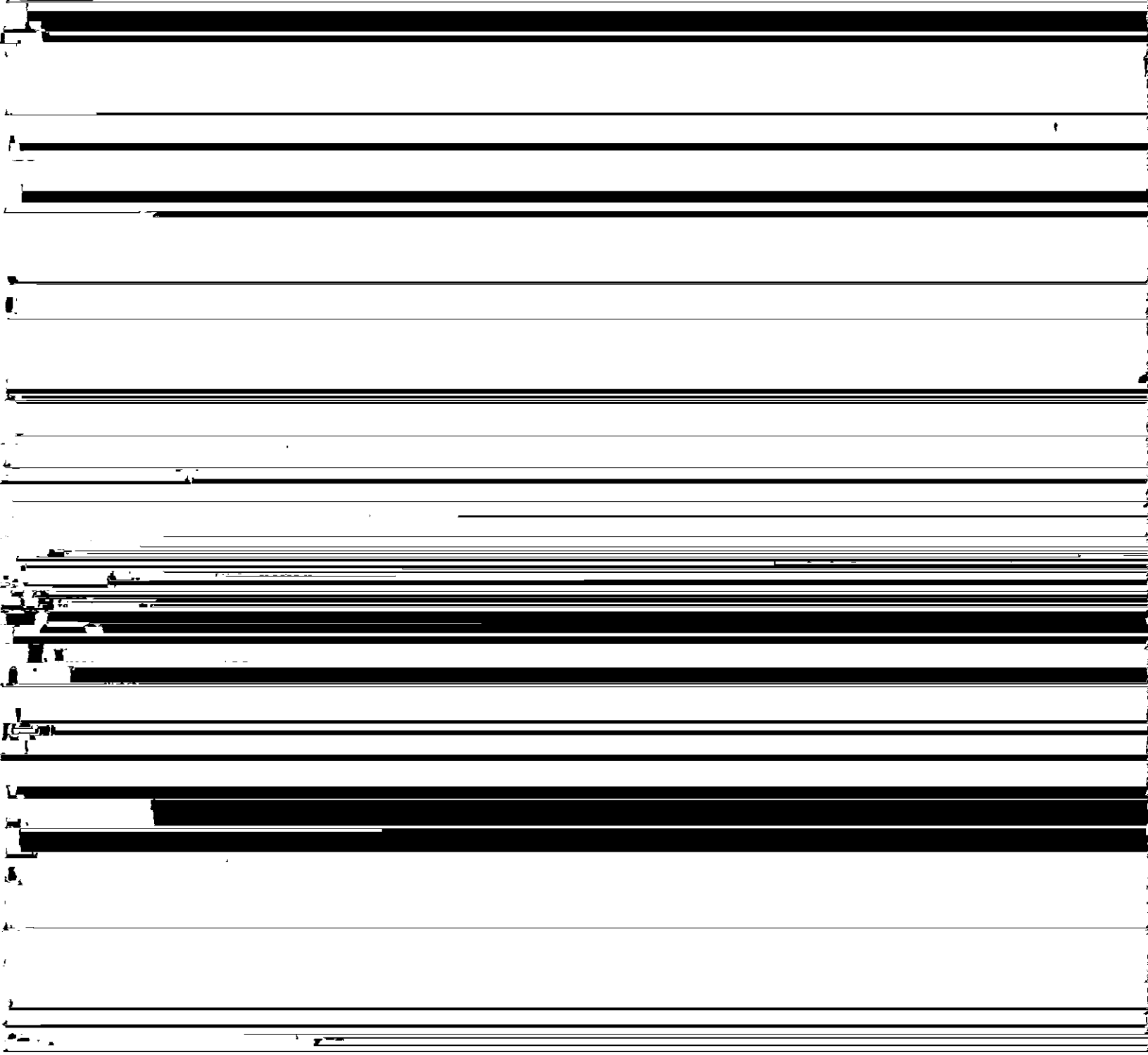


C. Statements by Independents or Minority Parties:
March 4, 1980.

Michel Le Moignan, Interim Leader of the Union Nationale

The Union Nationale today, as in the past, is attached to two

principles which, far from opposing one another, are totally comple-



suggest the following amendment. The third paragraph of the referendum question reads as follows: "Any change in political status resulting from these negotiations will be submitted to the population through a referendum". I would like this paragraph -- and this is my amendment --

to read as follows: "Any change in political status resulting

II. Debate on the Wording of the Question

The debate on the wording of the question was, more than any other issue, dominated by the strategy of the federalists. As demonstrated

rest of Canada?
YES. NO.

That's too simple. It's too close to what you've proposed.
Why have you come here with a question filled with ambiguities and
confusion? You will get a reply that's equal to the question.
The quality of the reply will be equal to the quality of the
question.

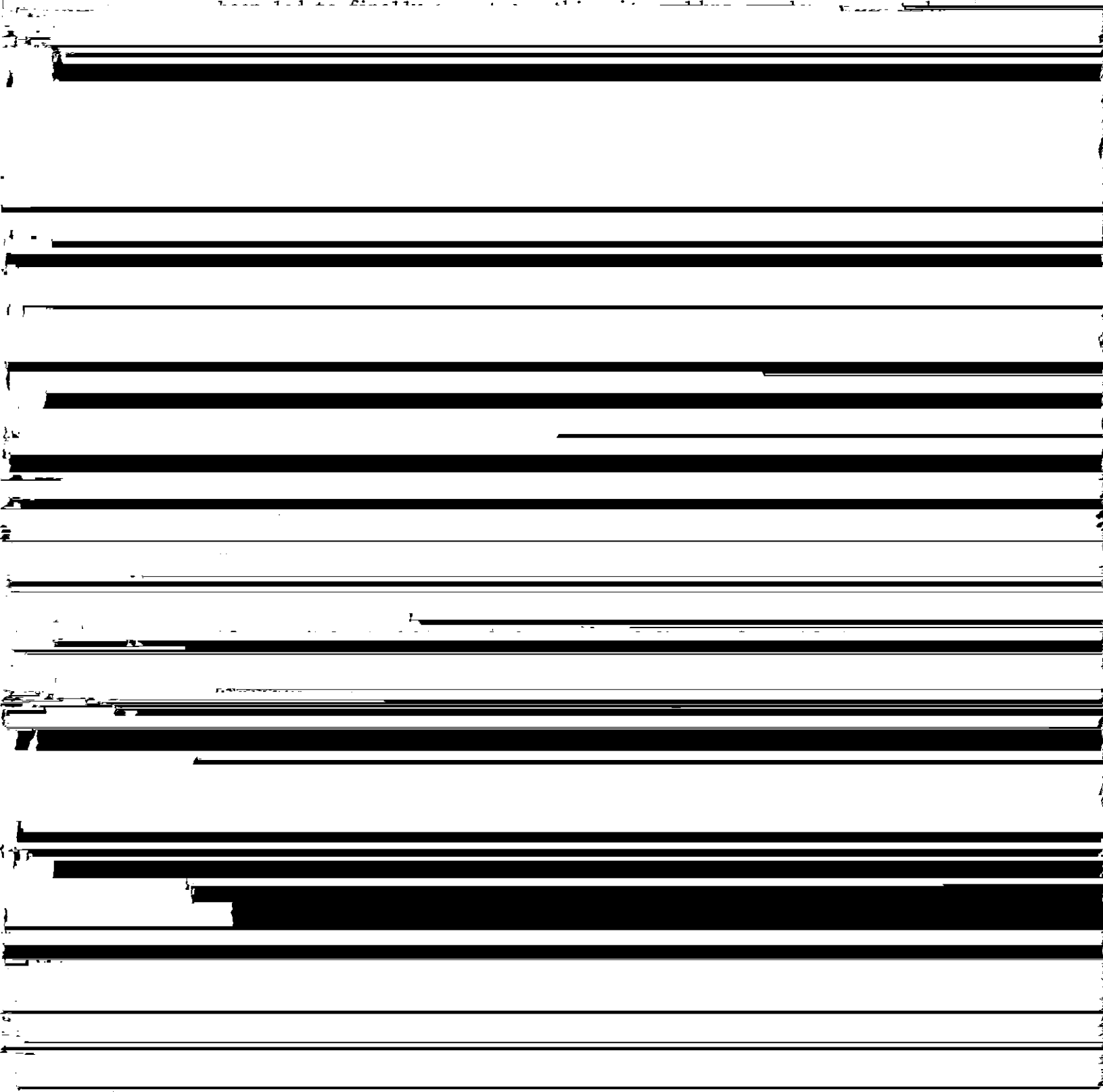
G rard D. Levesque
(Liberal - Bonaventure)

B.

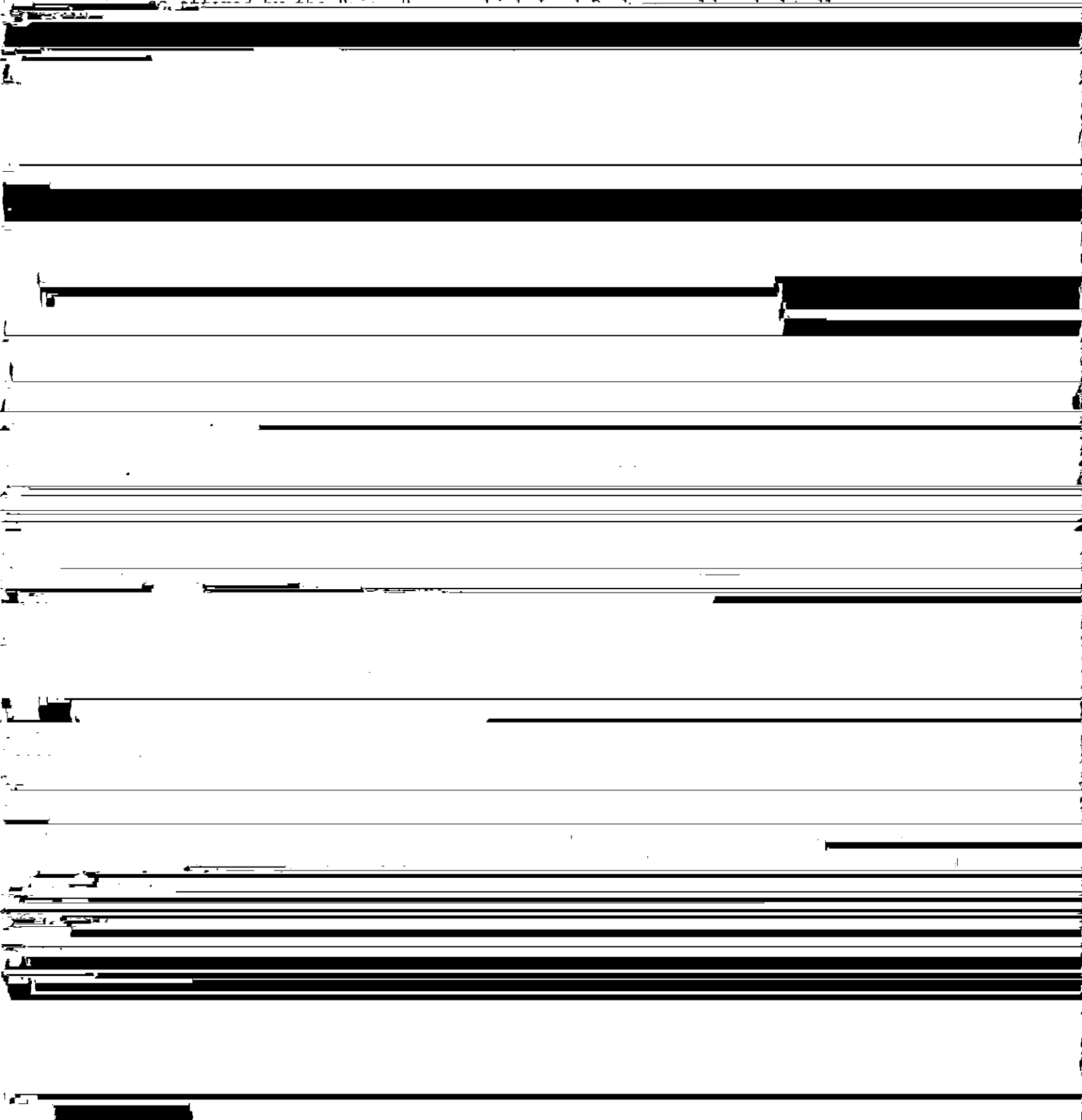
Verger et al. v. The Queen, [1976] 1 S.C.R. 1076 (S.C.C.)

D.

Through this strategic conditioning the population has gradually



don't let themselves be directed into extremist positions such as resignation, submission or -- sooner or later -- to disappearance



III. The Merits - and Demerits - of Federalism

The Parti Québécois government used the televised debate in the

National Assembly to deliver a sustained and systematic attack on the

federal system. Much of the debate on the "Question", thus became a "pro" and "con" rebuttal on the merits of federalism. Each PQ cabinet minister, in turn, criticized the effects of the system on their policies and, while

B.

Quebecers had decided to be masters in their own house and despite the flood of prophets of doom -- and the Premier could certainly speak more eloquently about them -- today we can see, with the unbelievable success of Hydro-Québec, that

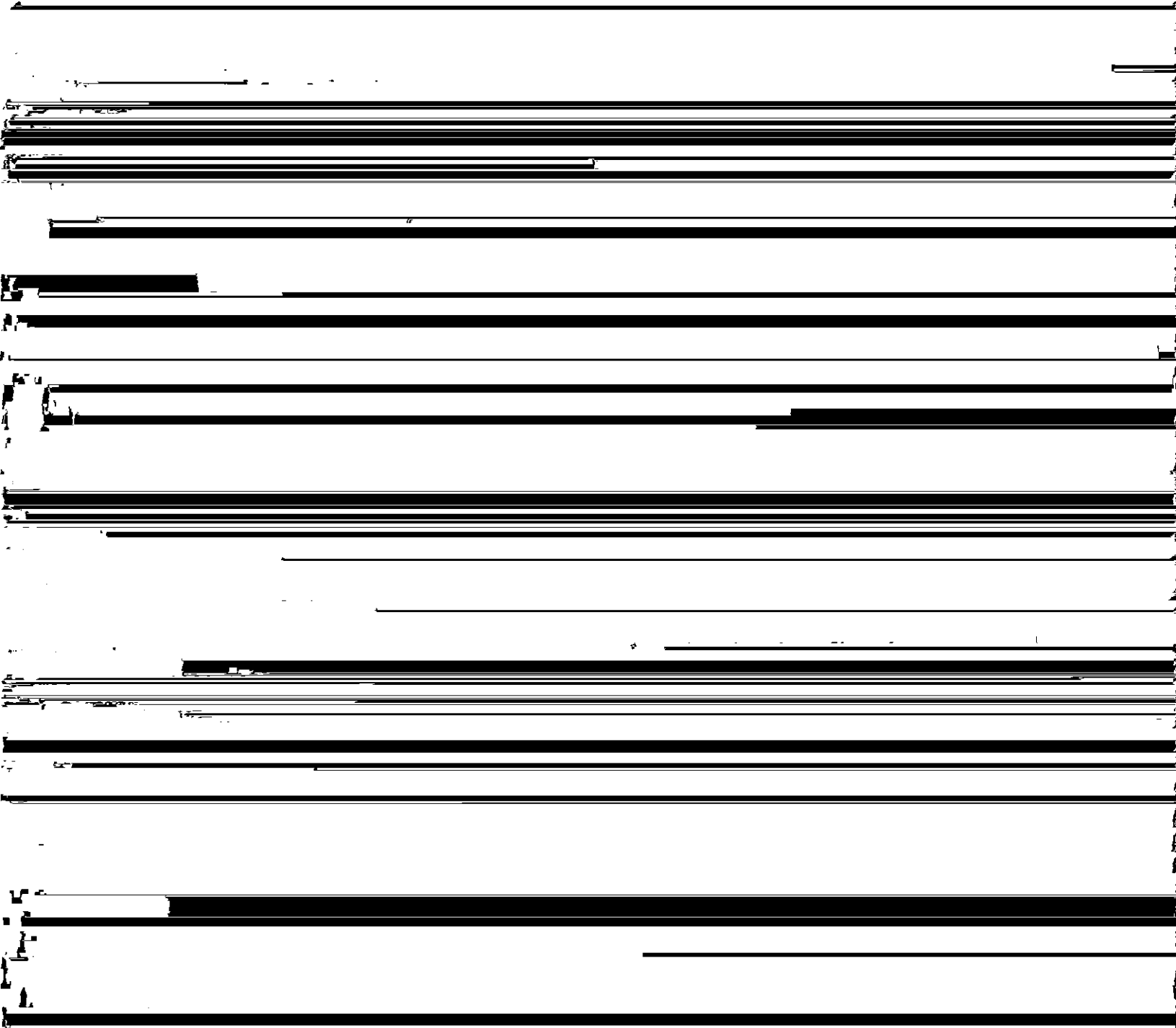
Quebecers can do. It's true for Hydro-Québec and it's also true when you look at the

equipment

Federalists:

A.

I listened with interest to the speaker before me when he referred to the wealth Quebecers have accumulated. I'm glad he gave us these examples. because this wealth was accumulated within



2. Confederation and the francophone minority:

~~protection of minority rights~~

A. It's true, Mr. Chairman, that Quebecers have perhaps believed

B.

majority we had until the middle of the last century -- a majority whose will was broken by force when it was judged necessary -- we have gone slowly but surely -- despite our high birth rate, which is now only a memory -- to the state of a decreasing minority within Canada. I fear that if we don't accept the question as presented by the government, we will remain forever in the state of a decreasing minority.

Jacques-Yvan Morin
(Minister of Education)

Federalists:

A.

The central question today is the same as it has been since 1760: Is it in the interests of the French people, the French society

The federal government for its part is responsible

believe that everything comes down to a nation, a nation. The Canadian problem is much more complex than that, and with the base you're suggesting, you're heading straight for failure and confusion.

Everytime you relate whatever is synonymous with federal institutions to foreign realities, you falsify reality, you sow prejudice in people's minds and you reduce the horizons of our own people to frontiers that don't correspond with true reality

In both cases we have been elected by the same sovereign, free voters, in democratic elections. When a decision is made by the federal Parliament, it is taken for us as much as the others. When you try to make us believe and try to make the Quebec public believe that in Ottawa it always comes down to one nation, the other nation, that is absolutely false.

Claude Ryan
(Leader of the Opposition)

D.

Must we recall, Madame Chairman, that for 100 years, 113 to be

part of Canada will insist that during the negotiations that would lead to the establishment of this new country, those of us who want to remain in Canada. our territory. will be recognized.

(Independent, Pointe-Claire)

3. The "balance sheet" arguments of what Quebec

gets out of the system.

Parti Québécois

A.

From 1961 when the first calculations were made, until 1973 inclusive, the picture, as I have often had the opportunity to emphasize in the House, is very clear: Quebec pays more to Ottawa


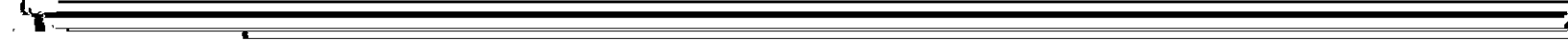

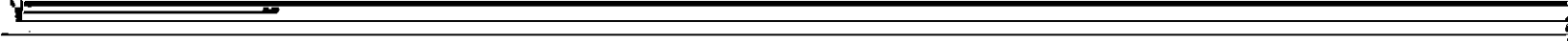



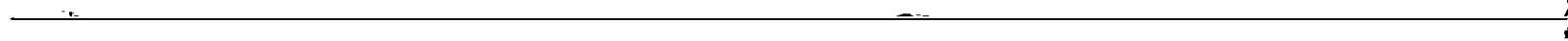
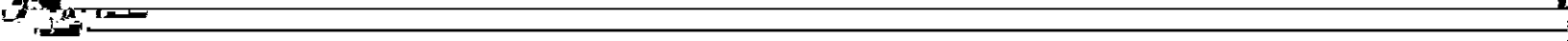

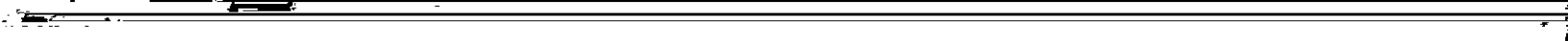


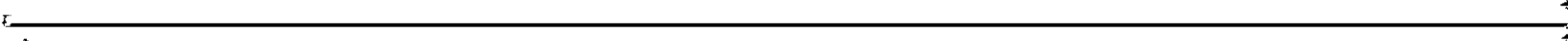





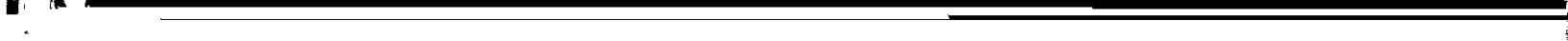






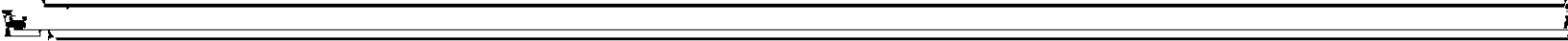



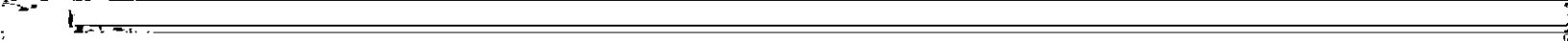
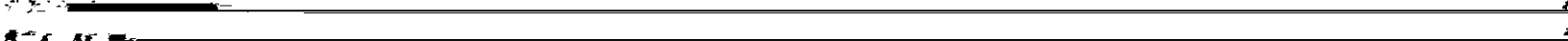
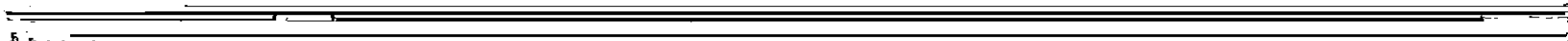







C. In fact, Madame Chairman, the true picture is as follows:
of the federal expenditures that are job-creating in the whole

A.

I prefer to tell you and I know I won't be contradicted

C.

I also know -- and there's never the slightest allusion to it



B.

Don't you think it's ridiculous that a country like Canada has two Departments of Immigration? That candidates for immigration

5. Industrialization

A.

On the other hand, Madame Chairman, federal policies do not always correspond to the type of industries appropriate for

What worries me more is that in the last federal election campaign, Mr. Trudeau stated right in Windsor, in Windsor, Ontario, that he was prepared to subsidize Chrysler of Canada for an investment, presumably, in Ontario, which is following tradition.

Yves Duhaime

C.

If Ontario profited from the Canada-U.S. auto pact, it's because, as they said at the time, they had the steelworks to supply the steel used in making cars and trucks. Now that the

beef, yet they fail to mention that we export pork and milk.
They say that we should reclaim all our taxes from Ottawa. yet

more here than they take in taxes. They say that the unemployment

rate is higher in Quebec than in Ontario yet they fail to show

These few figures, I believe, give a good illustration --

the same: i.e., the federal government's systematic under-investment in the transportation infrastructure of Quebec compared with the other provinces in Canada. In fact, our taxes in general, in the area of transportation, have been used to enrich the infra-

The same Minister of Transports forgets to mention, however.

I'd like to give the example that seems to me the worst:
that of food aid to underdeveloped countries. From 1963 to 1979

people in the other provinces, \$1,750,000,000 in food aid to
underdeveloped countries; not all sorts of aid, just food. It's
normal to do that; just as you help your neighbours, countries have
to help out the ones that are underprivileged. And for that Quebec
had to pay almost \$425 million in taxes, almost a quarter, in those

B.

Why do we, in Quebec, produce 133% of our milk consumption? Very simple. Ottawa would rather see us produce milk than beef or grain. The Western market has to be protected, you see: The federalists will tell you: Yes, but we give subsidies of \$2.66 per 100 pounds of milk. That's true, but what they don't say is that for Ottawa to pay \$2.66 per 100 pounds of milk for three

Madame Chairman, if we in Quebec have an Agricultural Credit

Program which has a commitment made in satisfying a whole range

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

8. Energy and Resources

Parti Québécois

A.

But independently of us, because of historical circumstances, our physical heritage, it has been our lot among the peoples of the earth to have at our disposal, for our development, the fantastic

Federalists

A.

I say No because I am not prepared to sacrifice the energy security need so badly in today's world, with the international

IV The Meaning of the Referendum

As many commentators of the referendum debate suggested throughout the campaign, whichever side succeeded in having Quebecers interpret the meaning of the referendum from their perspective, would likely go on to win the vote. The next two large sections summarize the meaning of decision from the two camps of "yes" and "no". Unlike the previous chapter, it was not as easy to juxtapose point-by-point rebuttals - the concepts and perspectives are fundamentally different on both sides. To the Parti Québécois the referendum was an historic decision to affirm the "equality" of the Quebecois, to gain "bargaining power" for the Quebec government, and to end the constitutional impasse between Ottawa and Quebec City. To the federalists, the referendum was, rather, a critical choice for Quebecers between renewed federalism and independence. The excerpts below illustrate the various shadings of each of these two large arguments.

THE MEANING OF THE REFERENDUM

The Parti Québécois

1. as an affirmation of equality

A.

after 1867. Ottawa. I say that a Yes in 1980 will make it

If the majority of Quebecers votes Yes we will arrive, necessarily, at a change of system. That's what we want: a system that suits us. But this system will be the fifth one we've experienced in the 220 years of our history. The difference is that we're the ones who will decide on this system by negotiating, between equals, with our partner. The other four times we have changed system

it was imposed on us from outside.

Marcel Leger

I will take some time to show that our ancestors were against the Act of Confederation and that if they had been consulted, if they had had to choose between the system of Confederation and sovereignty-association, they would certainly have opted for sovereignty-association.

Jules Boucher

(P. O. Division de la Loi)

E.

To be master in one's own house while showing the greatest

respect for the rights of others, both great and legitimate?

Quebec will vote Yes, Madame Chairman, for it prefers equality to subordination, dignity to being ground down, liberty to trustee-
~~ship — a forward leap to a backward step — no date for legislation~~

association is a political formula to be sought, if not utilized,
to obtain real changes coming directly from our

Jean-Pierre Charbonneau
(P.Q.-Verchères)

H.

If we really want to get things moving, if we really want to change -- the first thing to do is say Yes to change, Yes to modifications.

I don't know why the members of the official Opposition are so worried about a possible negotiation with the federal government,

J.

The question asked by the Premier aims at having the people of Quebec intervene in a blocked negotiation that has been destructive for the two nations. The people of Quebec alone can resolve the matter, but by intervening they will demand a new deal because the people are sovereign. This is why the spiders of the old system who have found their happiness in the dust of the old deal are rising

up and striking back. They can catch all politicians of all colours in their webs, but they recognize that the weight of the people is a determining factor.

If the government of Quebec obtains this mandate, if the weight of the people henceforth has a role to play in this negotiation for

N

HQ30 Mr. Chairman in summary are some of the conclusions

I have come to over the years. First, English Canadians -- you

B.

Every man needs a country and a home. My country is Canada and

E.

If, Madame Chairman, the French Canadians of Quebec decide to vote Yes in reply to the elitists who are suggesting that No is a form of capitulation we must point out that a Yes will never give the

H.

The conclusion should be clear enough for everyone: That famous "mandate to negotiate" leads nowhere. It is not and cannot be anything but a political and electoral marketing gimmick, and that's how we should treat it.

Rodrigue Tremblay
(Independent-Gouin)

I.

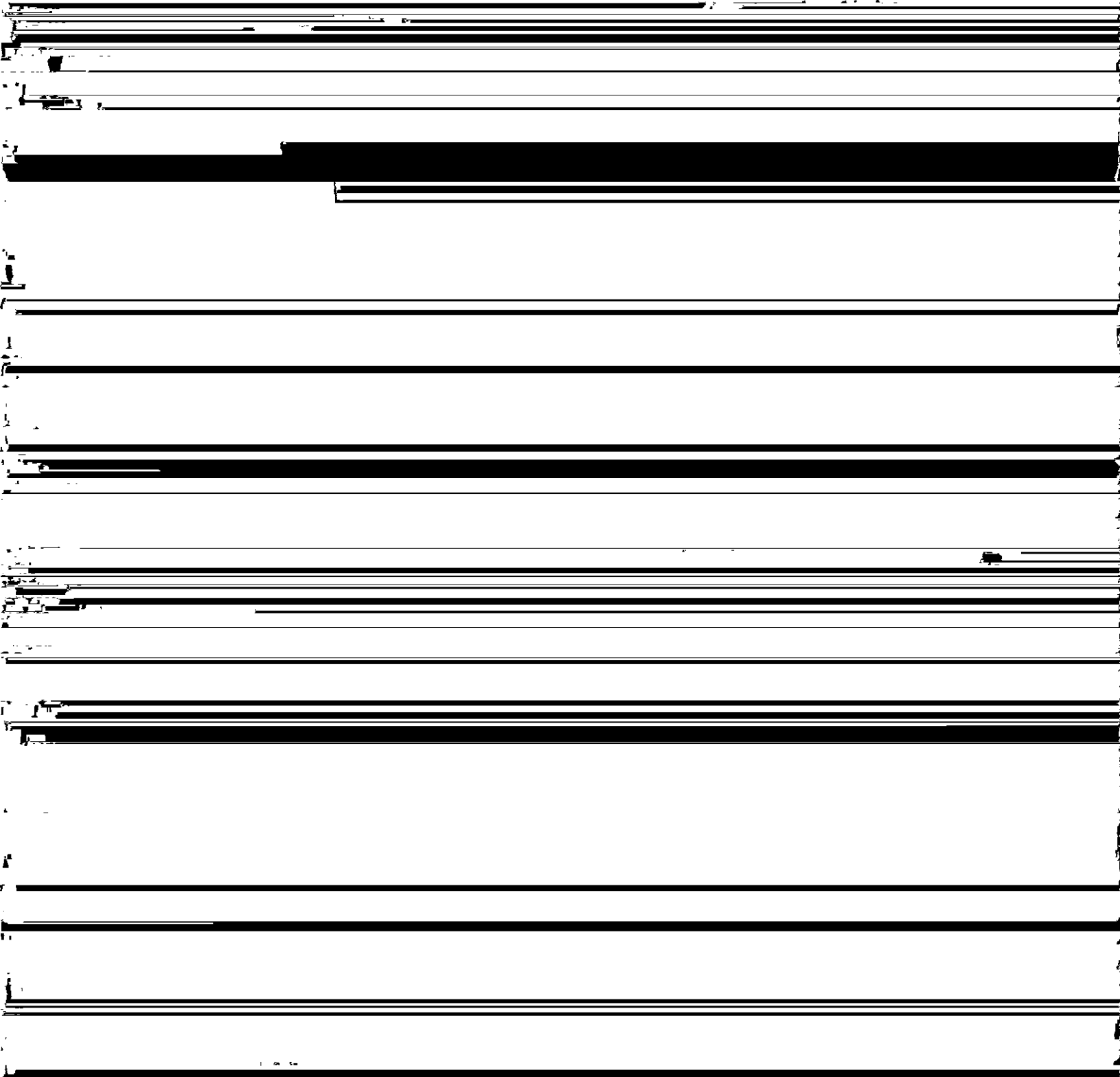
... in this House and outside that a Yes in

K.

The question Mr. Chairman is not to establish whether or

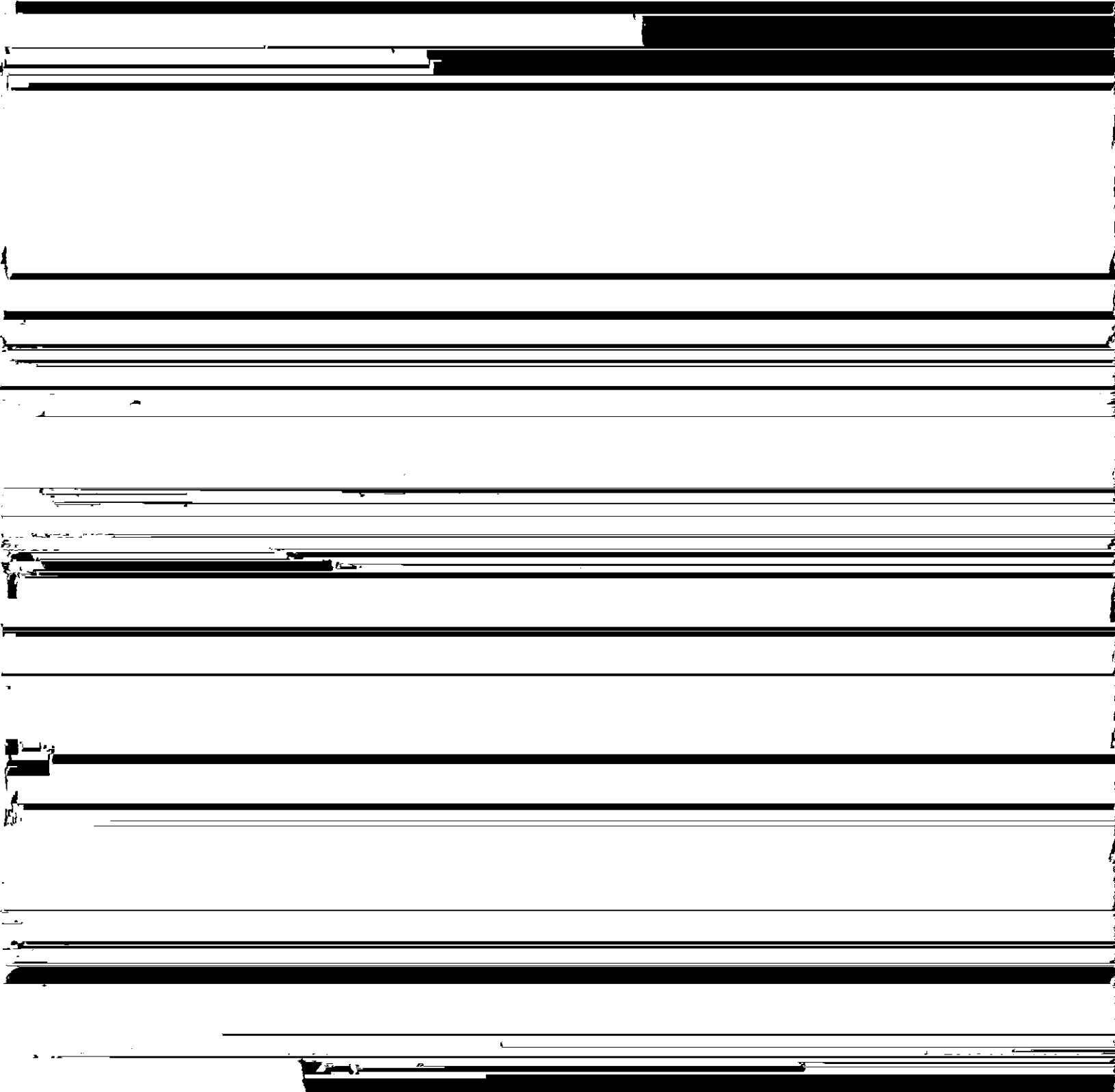
not we're Québécois by voting one way or another. Every citizen
of Quebec is a full-fledged Québécois and to claim otherwise

M.



While the Parti Quebecois government did not place as much stress on the details of their own option - compared with criticisms of the federal regime and their concept of the meaning of the referendum -

Second question. We know that Quebec's tax yield is lower than the national average. This fact, at the present time, is made up for by equalization payments to the government of



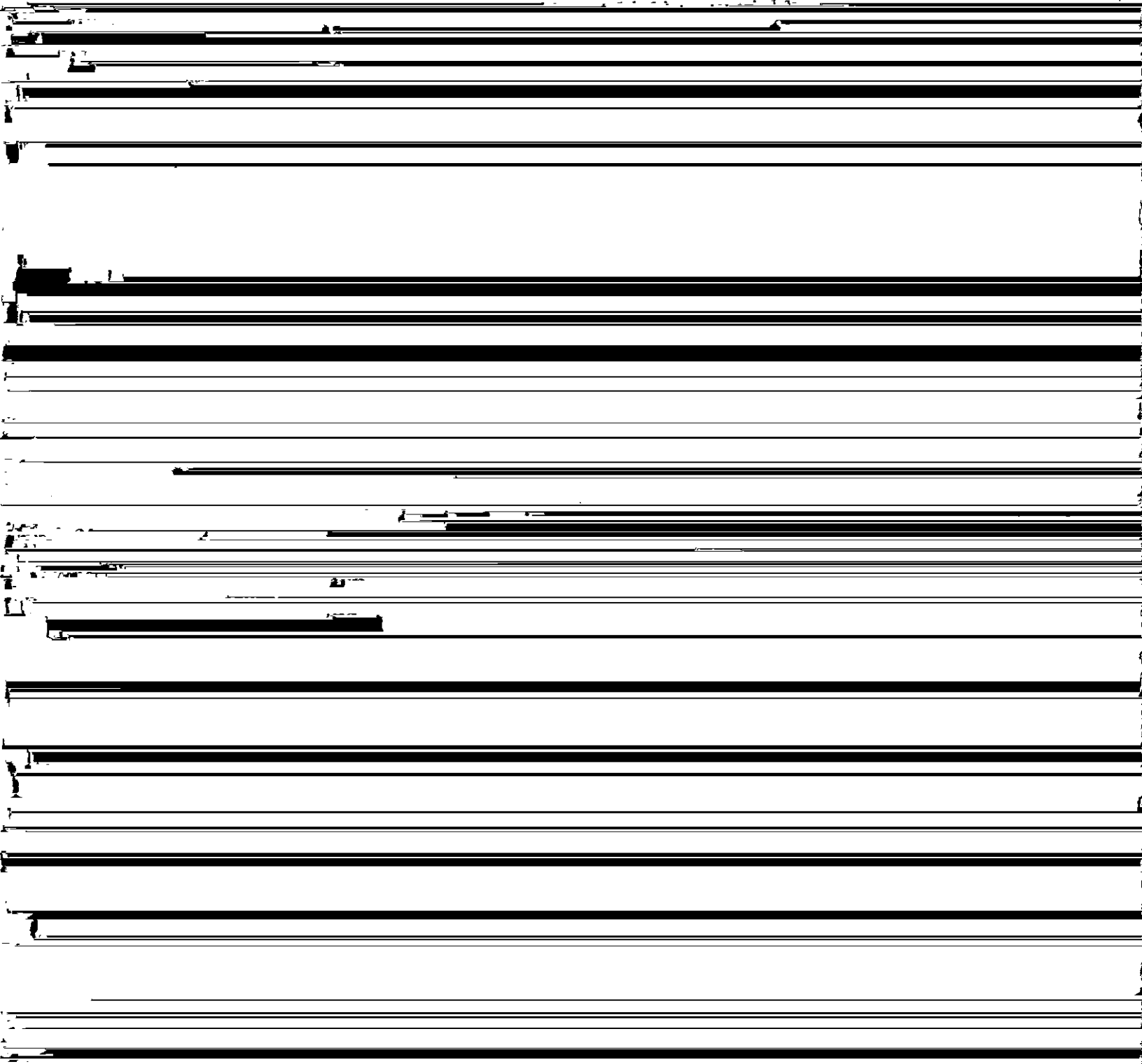
Seventh. Let's try and figure out what's in the proposed system of association. What's in it? For instance, does the bill call for us to keep the present federal corporations?

You must accept that the morning after a declaration of

Printed in the United States of America

F.

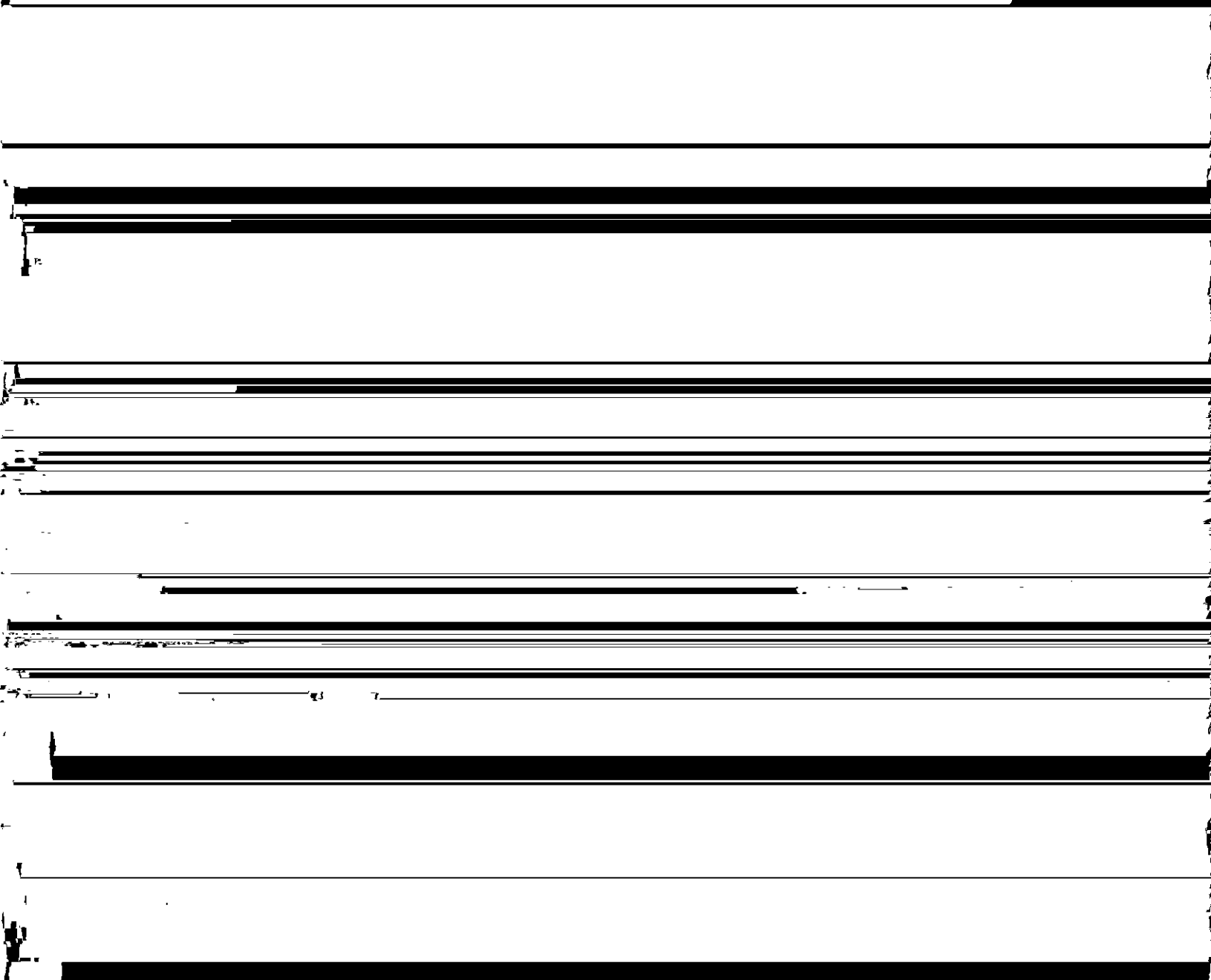
He wanted to prove that if a country as small as Switzerland



He forgot to mention, however, that the Swiss have, from an industrial and financial point of view, a tradition going back several centuries, whereas we Quebecers are barely beginning. He also forgot, and this is unforgivable, that in Switzerland there are four

H.

I listened attentively as the Premier told us that sovereignty is a normal outcome for any developed nation. He should have added, to get to the bottom of things, that for many nations this sovereignty is acquired at the price of tremendous sacrifices and that, unfortunately, it often comes about and is maintained to the detriment of the citizens' ~~most sacred individual rights~~ ~~who had thought that the nation's~~



B.

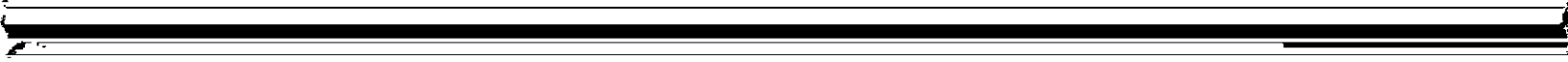
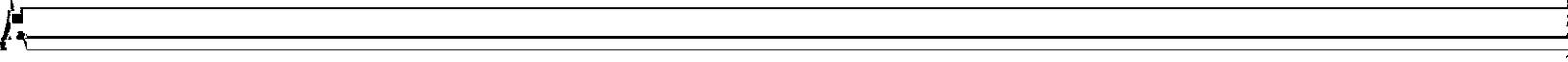
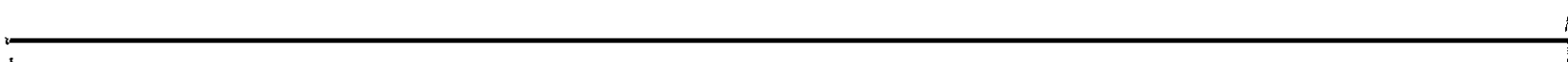
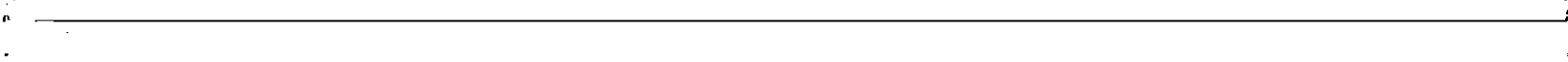
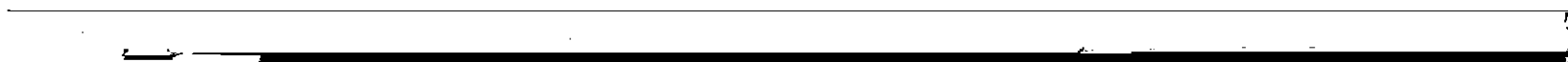
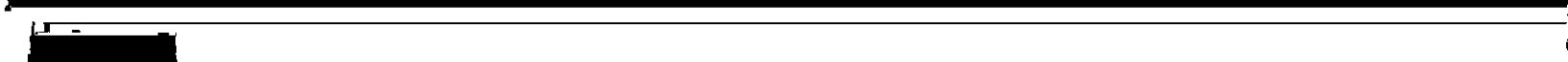
. . . We have succeeded in Canada in throwing our own affairs

to administer. Governments are made to govern, not to fight among themselves and cancel out one another's actions. Quebec is largely responsible for this state of affairs. In a quarter of a century successive governments here have done almost everything to prevent Canadian Federalism from operating properly.

E.

When you look at the map of the world, and in particular at the four small countries with populations scarcely larger than Quebec's . . . that are at the top of the list of countries from the point

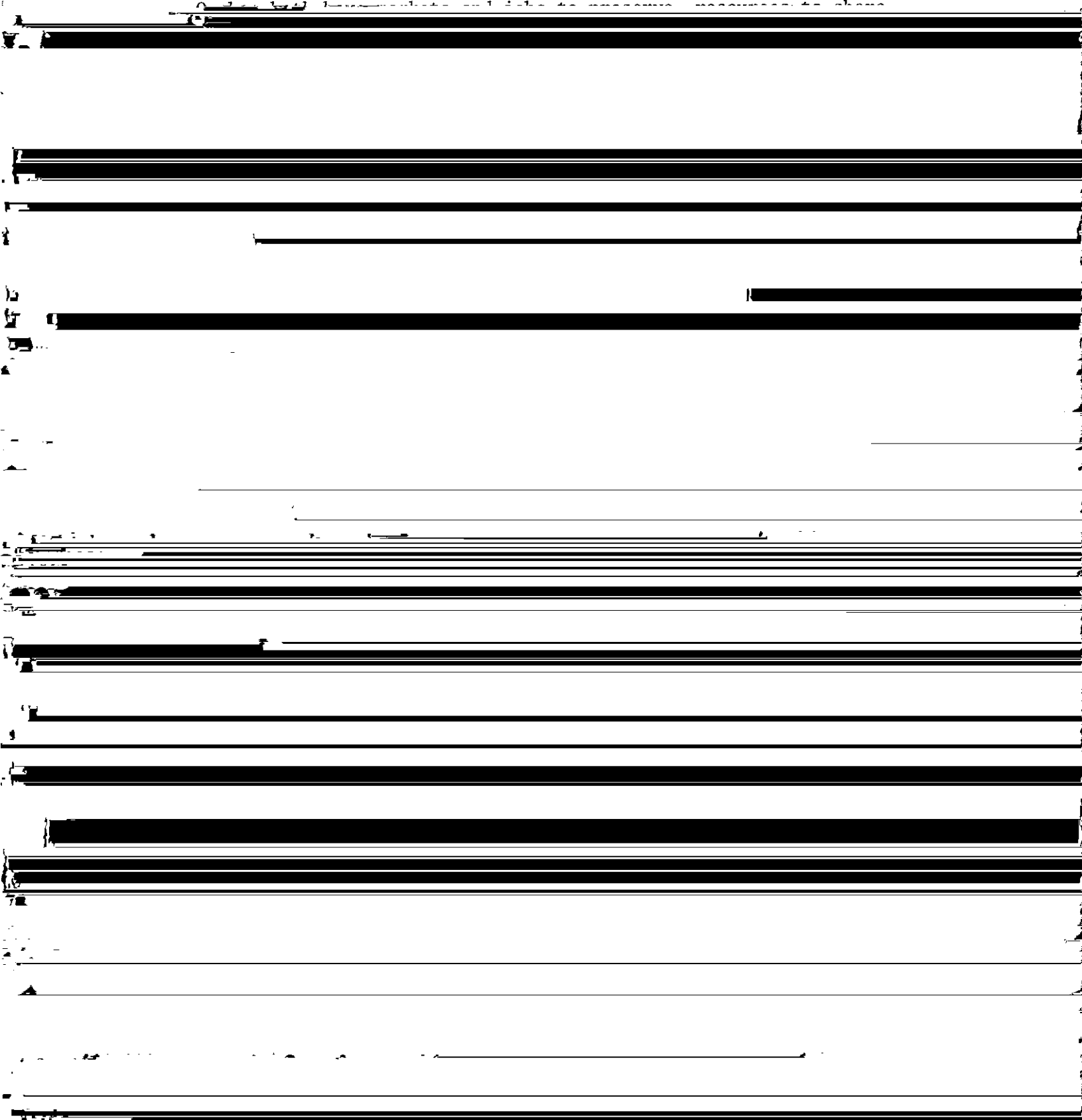
~~of view of the level of living at the present time you find at~~



F.

The European Community has existed for a quarter of a century now. There is no supranational authority over Europe and the European economic space has been preserved completely, contrary to what the Leader of the Opposition thinks and is peddling.

In addition, Mr. Chairman, let's be realistic: Canada and



L.

In the name of the government of Quebec, I want to say here, solemnly, that we commit ourselves officially to see to it that if the Yes comes about, old people to whom, collectively, we owe some catching up, if we have any sense of humanity at all, will

only will those who who are entitled to it continue to receive their pension supplement cheques, not only will they continue to receive their pension supplement cheques but in addition we commit

N.

The day when, through the new deal foreseen in the question, we have repatriated 100% of our taxes, it is clear that the government of Quebec will be able to elaborate coherent social policies. By putting an end to waste there is no doubt that we will be able to ensure for old people and those who obtain an allowance from the federal government, a pension that will be at least equal to if not

the Quebec Liberal Party's "Beige Paper"

Finally, these last two excerpts demonstrate the tenor of the few comments in the debate on the main alternative to the PQ option of sovereignty-association. The P^équistes were, in the actual debate, made numerous criticisms of the Beige Paper seeing it as a retreat from the traditional positions of Quebec. Liberals, for the most part did not take the opportunity to reply, lest they fuel the debate into and not on the question at hand

... referendum question and its consequences for Quebec.

B.

What we find in the Beige Paper is not a project for the future. It is a hypothesis for collective suicide.

This document breaks with the historical continuity of Quebec

What is being proposed to Quebecers is supreme detachment, self-negation. In the face of English Canadians' incapacity to give any evidence of imagination and good will in constitutional matters, the Beige Paper takes over and tries to do the job in their place. Quebec would become a province like the others. Its minority status would be inscribed in texts and consecrated in such institutions as the Federal Council. Our future would no longer be in doubt. No more uncertainty. We would be an official minority, waiting to become a vanished minority. But we would have one consolation, that of having -- in the words of the Member for Maisonneuve -- "contributed to the greater glory of Canada."

Louis O'Neill
(P.O. -Chauveau)

POSTSCRIPT

It is clear that you will have asked yourselves as they saw the arguments