The inequality of political representation in Quebec and the

adoption of bill 112: the exception that confirms the rule?

Presented by

Pascale Dufour

Political Science
University of Montreal

E-mail : pascale.dufour@umontreal.ca

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Résumé

Cet article propose de comprendre le processus politique ayant conduit à l'adoption de la loi 112 à l'automne 2002 au Québec, loi visant à lutter contre la pauvreté et l'exclusion sociale. Après avoir formaliser la structure normale de représentation au Québec, selon six dimensions, l'article montre comment la mobilisation autour du Collectif pour un Québec sans pauvreté, a permis un renversement temporaire de cette structure. Deux éléments apparaissent, à cet égard, particulièrement importants : l'investissement de l'arène législative par le Collectif et la production par les personnes pauvres elles-mêmes des solutions mises de l'avant dans le projet de loi.

Abstract

This paper is an attempt to apprehend the political process that resulted in the adoption of Bill 112 (Autumn 2002), the Quebec law against poverty and social exclusion. The first part of the paper describes the "normal" structure of representation in Quebec society along six dimensions. In the second part, the discussion demonstrates how the mobilisation of the Collectif pour un Québec sans pauvreté successfully (although temporarily) modified the political process. Two elements appear central: the fact that the Collective entered the legislative arena and the fact that poor people themselves were involved in the production of the political solution.

In December 2002, the Quebec National Assembly voted unanimously to adopt a law aimed at combating poverty and social exclusion. Bill 112 instituted a "national strategy for the fight against poverty and social exclusion," including a consultative committee, an *Observatoire* and a fund to finance new social initiatives. Presented as the first of its kind in North America, the new law made the fight against poverty a priority for the Quebec government. Reputedly initiated from below through the influence of civil society, the Bill was the culmination of a strong and relatively long-term mobilisation of social actors. In this article, rather than focus on the merits of the law, its potential impact on the lives of the poor, or more recent developments, our analysis will concentrate on the mobilisation of civil society actors (from 1995 to 2002) as an integral aspect of the process which led to the adoption of the law. In doing so, we will present two main points. First, we suggest that the political process that resulted in the adoption of Bill 112 differed from Quebec's 'normal' political process. Secondly, we argue that this rupture was made possible by the re-orientation of the anti-poverty movement's strategies toward the new terrain of legislative action, as well as toward the construction of alternative representations of poverty and the poor. In order to demonstrate the validity of these two propositions, we first define, using the concept of structures of representation, the 'normal' manner by which political decisions are reached in Quebec. In the second section, we present an analysis of the process that led to the adoption of

Bill 112. In concluding, we observe that although the majority of the changes that were achieved are at risk of lasting only for the short term, the reforms achieved at the level of social representations of poverty have a greater likelihood of durability, at least with regard to the community sector.

Quebec's Method of Formulating Policy

The literature concerning the 'Quebec model'[1] is both abundant and passionate, providing us with an interesting point of departure for defining what we call, 'Quebec's method of formulating policy'. Without entering into the debates regarding the existence or lack-there-of of this model, its merits, or whether it is corporatist or social-democratic, we will attempt to draw out a relative consensus within the literature concerning the distinct characteristics of Quebec's public policy-making. This will allow us to construct a theoretical reference point (a Webberian ideal-type) in relation to which it will be possible to analyse our case study.

Without reifying the 'Quebec model', it can be stated that during the past 18 years the political project of the *Parti Québécois* (PQ) (in power between 1976 to 1985, and 1994 to 2003) has become increasingly institutionalised through the policies of successive governments.[2] The project is no longer only the idea behind the nation

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[1]To mention only the most recent work on this subject, see Yves Bélanger, Gilles Bourque, Robert Comeau, Métivier Céline, and Alain-G. Gagnon.

[2] It is important to note that the Liberal (PLQ) government (1985-1994) did not fundamentally reverse the course of the previous government.

building project, but has become an 'objective' reality with which we all must live.[3] It is in reference to this period of relative stability, from the 1970s until the present day, that we agree that Quebec is distinguished from the rest of Canada by its particular method of policy formulation.[4]   However, we propose an analysis of the Quebec method of policy formulation that moves beyond the notion of the 'Quebec model', one that provides a wider perspective for the examination of the nature of the process of public decision-making in Quebec since the 1980s, as well as the State society relations that were produced during this period.   In order to accomplish this goal, unlike those authors who analyse this issue through the lens of the public policy networks perspective, we construct an ideal-type for the policy-making process by anchoring it in an understanding of society based on structural relations of power and inequality.

The Typical Structures of Representation in Contemporary Quebec

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[3] Since Spring 2003, the Charest government has become increasingly aware of the repercussions this political project has had on the functioning of Quebec's political system.

[4] Brian A. Tanguay. 1984. "Concerted Action in Quebec, 1976-1983: Dialogue of the Deaf." In Alain-G Gagnon (ed.). *Quebec : State and Society*. Agincourt: Methuen Publications; Gilles L. Bourque. 2000. *Le modèle québécois de développement. De l'émergence au renouvellement*. Montréal: Presses de l'Université du Québec; Yves Comeau, Louis Favreau, Benoît Lévesque, and Marguerite Mendell. *Emploi, économie sociale et Développement local: les nouvelles filières,* Sainte-Foy: WHO IS THE PUBLISHER? 2001; Benoît Lévesque and Marguerite Mendell. 1999. "L'économie sociale au Québec : éléments théoriques et empiriques pour le débat et la recherche." *Lien social et politiques,* 41, Spring.

In any given society there exists a 'structure of representation' that determines the influence actors within the policy-making process. This suggests that there is, for a given society during a given historical period, a certain permanence in the method of decision-making that can be uncovered through analysis. The concept of structures of representation, developed by Rianne Mahon in 1977,[5] designates the totality of relations that are produced and reproduced according to largely stable (though not unchanging) relations between selected central political actors situated within the State. In considering the structures of representation of the totality of society, rather than only those actors within the State, we adopt an expanded and more flexible perspective. In order to formulate this expanded notion of structures of representation it is necessary to determine the privileged relations – those that are reproduced within a given period – that exist in a given society between State and non-State actors. Our conception is also more flexible in the sense that we consider the structure of representation to be in constant transformation. In other words, even if structural effects have a tendency to attempt to identically reproduce relations between actors, one time period is always different from the next, and therefore, the question of the relations between actors and structures in each period must be addressed empirically. In order to fully demonstrate

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[5] Rianne Mahon. 1997. "Canadian Public Policy : The Unequal Structure of representation." In Leo Panitch (ed). *The Canadian State : Political Economy and Political Power*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

the nature of the structure of representation in Quebec, we characterise it along six dimensions.[6]

1) As has been well demonstrated in the neo-corporatist literature, in Quebec there exists a particular State-society relationship organised around dialogue between certain collective actors or 'social partners' – unions and business organisations. Historically, an argument can be made that the development of the Quebec State was accompanied by a parallel development of 'intermediary organisations', in particular unions.[7]   The element that makes this case distinct is not the existence of unions (although the rate of unionisation is higher in Quebec is higher than that of Canada as a whole) and business organizations (business groups exist across Canada, and those in Quebec are not more unified than those elsewhere[8]), but the particular relationship between the 'social partners' and the Quebec State.

Two aspects distinguish the relations in Quebec from those in other Canadian provinces. The first aspect concerns the idea that the provincial level is *the* appropriate level of government for social partners to direct their actions, independent of the

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[6] Here it is not a question of setting in stone a method of analysis, as other dimensions do exist, but rather to construct a point of reference for the discussion.

[7] Mona-José Gagnon. 2003. "Syndicalisme et Classe Ouvrière. Histoire et Évolution d'un Malentendu." *Lien Social et Politiques*, 49, Spring.

[8] Julien Bauer. 1976. "Patrons et patronat au Québec." *Revue Canadienne de Science politique,* 9(3), September : 473-491; William D. Coleman and Tim A. Mau. 2002. "French-English Relations in Business-Interest Associations, 1965-2002." *Administration publique du Canada,* 45(4), Winter : 490-511.

division of powers between the federal and provincial levels of government.[9] The second distinct aspect concerns the practices of dialogue regarding employment relations, that, as well as being very decentralised, are also controlled by the State and specific legislation.[10] This form of interaction is different from lobbying (although it does not exclude lobbying), as it does not only involve the defence of private interests against the State, but also involves the implementation of methods for the co-ordination of divergent interests; mechanisms that occupy a central place within the State.[11] In particular, since the 1970s, the 'Socio-Economic Summits' have brought together the government and its social partners in order to decide upon the grand orientations of economic and social policy. The role of the Summits is of course limited, as the dialogue involves only general policy directions and very rarely concerns specific policy measures. Thus, the State remains the director of public policy. In recent years, social partners have been closely involved in decision-making in certain areas of public policy. Similarly, in certain cases (such as employment training) they have been entrusted with aspects of the management and implementation of programmes. This increase in the

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[9] Peter Graefe. 2003. "State Restructuring and the Failure of Competitive Nationalism: Trying Times for Quebec Labour." Paper prepared for the conference *Quebec and Canada in the New Century : New dynamics, New Opportunitie*s, Institute of Intergovernmental Relations, Queen's University, October 31-November 1st.

[10] François Delorme, Régis Fortin and Louis Gosselin. 1994. "L'organisation du monde patronale au Québec : un portrait diversifié." *Relations Industrielles*, 49(1), Winter: 9-38.

[11] Éric Montpetit. 2002. "Pour en finir avec le lobbying : comment les institutions canadiennes influencent l'action des groups d'intérêts?" *Politique et sociétés*, 21(3): 91-112.

involvement of social partners has led to a deepening institutionalisation of the mechanisms of dialogue.[12] Nevertheless, beyond certain exceptions, in Quebec there are no tripartite institutions such as those in France or Germany, where social partners are involved in the management of programmed such as unemployment insurance. The establishment of Quebec's system of unconstrained dialogue thus remains dependent on the willingness of the government in power, and is limited in scope due to the division of powers between the provinces and the federal government. Rather than a neo-corporatist model, it is more correct to speak of a non-institutionalised, and thus discretionary practice of recurring dialogue, one that nonetheless offers social partners significant space in which to move.[13]

2) The second element of the structure of representation in Quebec is the particular relationship between the State and community organisations, or more generally, between the State and social groups.[14] It is on the sectoral stage that Quebec's

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[12] Gilles L. Bourque. *Le modèle québécois de développement*, op.cit, p. 194.

[13] Gilles Paquet. 1994. "Québec Inc.: Mythes et réalités." In Filip Palda (ed.). *L'État interventionniste : le gouvernement provincial et l'économie du Québec*. Vancouver: Fraser Institute; Micheal R. Smith. "L'impact de Québec Inc., répartition des revenus et efficacité économique." *Sociologie et Sociétés*. 36(2): 191-110. It is also imporant to note that dialogue does not exclude the conflictual relations that may exist between major unions and successive governments of Quebec. See Roch Denis and Denis Serge. 1992. *Les syndicats face au pouvoir. Syndicalisme et politique au Québec de 1960 à 1992.* Vermillon: Ottawa.

[14] This characterisation could equally include the strong regionalization of decision-making in Quebec, which is without a doubt a central element in the form of decision-making, but is not very pertinent to our analysis.

form of decision-making appears most distinct. The progressive installation of sectoral consultation offers, in effect, a space where dialogue with groups occurs on more than a sporadic basis, and where its effects are more evident. Furthermore, consultation at the sectoral level constitutes a true attempt at dialogue between the State and social groups.

During the 1990s, however, such efforts at dialogue did not occur only at the sectoral level. Community groups increasingly worked together on trans-sectoral and multisectoral files involving issues such as housing and poverty. Unlike at the federal level, where interests are hierarchically organized "into local chapters of provincial and federal umbrella organizations" with little contact outside of their specific field of activity and where little multisectoral consultation exists,[15] cross-sectoral consultation constitutes a major characteristic of Quebec's contemporary structure of representation. As Laforest's work demonstrates, analysis of policy formulation must not only involve public policy networks but also 'civic networks' that involve the relations between various civil society actors, in fields including, but not restricted to public policy. Furthermore, these networks must be addressed in a consistent and well-designed manner.[16] Although, their relation with the Quebec State is central for these groups (as it is at the provincial, rather than the federal level that they make their demands), relations with other civil society actors is also significant, as networks allow for the

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[15] Rachel Laforest. 2003. "The Times they are a Changin': Quebec Politics under the Liberal Government, a New Era." Paper prepared for the Institute on Intergovernmental Relations Conference, Queen's University.

sharing of information between actors with different resources, the organization of common protests involving cross-cutting issues (such as poverty or social justice), and, at certain times, they provide civil society actors with the potential to become a veritable counter-power. During the 1990s, the Quebec State's recognition and support for the role of the claims of community groups confirmed the centrality of these groups within the process of policy-making in Quebec.[17]

These first two characteristics, particularly when considered jointly, constitute the body of Quebec's 'structure of representation'. Thus, just as it would be somewhat naïve to suggest that relations between unions and community groups are fixed, it would also be a mistake to consider each actor in isolation from the other. There is no simple differentiation of tasks between unions and other social actors. Community groups are also engaging in some issues, such as the reform of employment regulations, that have traditionally been the focus of unions.[18] Furthermore, in other issue areas, such as poverty, unions have become very involved. It is within the conflictual collaboration between unions and community groups that a specific aspect of Quebec's

[16] Rachel Laforest. "La consultation publique et l'action Collectif." *Politiques et Sociétés*, 19(1).

[17] Deena White. 1997. "Contradictory Participation: Reflections on Community Action in Quebec." In M. Elague and B. Wharf. *Community Organizing Canadian Experiences*. Oxford, U. Press; Jane Jenson. 1998. "Les réformes des services de garde pour jeunes enfants en France et au Québec : une analyse historico-institutionnaliste." *Politiques et Sociétés*, 17(1-2): 183-216.

[18] Such as *Au-bas de l'échelle*, a group for the defence of non-unionised workers.

structure of representation can be found.[19] In short, unlike in the case of neo-corporatist societies, the Quebec 'partnership' is not between three actors, but between four.

3) In Mahon's conception, inside the state, the structure of representation is unequal, with one hegemonic class and one subordinate class that has a 'room' inside the state but a pre-defined room.[20] Although Mahon speaks only of interests within the State, we examine the whole of the political system in order to determine that within a given system there exists a hierarchy of legitimate representation of interests, one that is this usually related to the possession of capital. Therefore, during a 'normal' period,[21] certain groups have privileged access to the State, with the possession of capital largely influencing this degree of accessibility.

To be more precise, during 'normal' times, the representatives of business have a greater opportunity than groups such as the Common Front of Social Assistant Recipients of Quebec (*Front commun des personnes assistées sociales du Québec*) or the Quebec Federation of Labour (*Fédération des Travailleurs du Québec*) to have their voices heard, independent of the government in power. As Graefe has demonstrated, even if

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[19] Jean Panet-Raymond. "Community Groups in Quebec: From Radical Action to Voluntarism for the State?" *Community Development Journal*, 22(4): 284.

[20] Rianne Mahon. 1984. *The Politics of Industrial Restructuring. Canadian Textiles.* Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

[21] According to the regulation theory of economics, a 'normal' period for a given system is characterized by relatively stable relations between the various parties within the system permitting the relations to be reproduced in a quasi-identical manner.

the Parti Québécois and labour unions together engaged in a mobilization around the issue of the national question, and thus shared a common outlook, the gains made by unions during the 1990s were largely symbolic.[22] While this hierarchy between actors is primarily economic, it can also fluctuate depending on other contextual variables, such as the privileged access women have had to the State at some points in history.[23] Thus, this unequal structure of representation is not fixed in time, and through struggle and collective action it is possible to modify the hierarchy of interests within the system.

4)   The fourth element again involves the formal and informal modes of State-society relations in Quebec that modulate access to the process of decision-making and contribute to the formation of windows of opportunity for groups.

In Quebec, parliamentary commissions (both permanent and non-permanent) are the favoured space for the expression of social interests both during and outside of election time. Moreover, community groups are more established within this space than within the political system where they occupy a more marginal position.   Although one could state that within the Canadian political system, commissions, particularly Royal

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[22] Peter Graefe.   2003. "State Restructuring and the Failure of Competitive Nationalism: Trying Times for Quebec Labour."   Paper prepared for the conference, *Quebec and Canada in the New Century: New Dynamics, New Opportunities*, Institute of Intergovernmental Relations, Queen's University, October 31-November 1st.

[23] Dominique Masson. "Repenser l'État. Nouvelles perspectives féministes," *Recherches féministes*, 12(1): 5-24.

Commissions, have become a space of political innovation where political parties act only as brokers,[24] the form of representation within commissions is largely limited by institutional constraints (who invites who and how) and by the indeterminate influence they have over political decisions. For example, in Quebec, despite the overwhelming majority of groups and individuals opposed to the income security reform law (1997-2000), few of the claims made by these groups were accepted in policy.

Aside from parliamentary commissions, other less formal channels of representation exist, such as the previously discussed Summits. The Socio-Economic Summits are distinguished by a particular practice of dialogue, acting as both a foil for the government and an opportunity for other political actors to enter into the political process. This characteristic is particularly evident in the case of the two Summits of 1996, during which community groups officially made their entrance as one of the major political players at the same time as the Bouchard government attempted to construct quasi-unanimous support for its zero-deficit project.

In Quebec there exists a 'practical' form of dialogue. This has the advantage of being able to offer considerable flexibility in the relations between the State and social actors (as it is only loosely institutionalised). However, it also has the disadvantage (from the perspective of those wishing to enter the political process) of being easily reversible, as we will demonstrate in the second part of the paper. Thus, within this

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[24] Neil Bradford. 1999. "The Policy Influence of Economic Ideas : Interests, Institutions and Innovation in Canada." *Studies in Political Economy*, 59, Summer:

practical form of dialogue, relations between the State and social actors are not fixed in a rigid institutional framework, but constructed by constantly evolving practices. During the past twenty years, relations between the State and community groups have been transformed in several important ways. During the 1960s and the 1970s, there existed a relationship of confrontation with community groups adopting more radical positions. In comparison, in the 1980s and more so in the 1990s, a greater degree of co-operation emerged with community groups becoming veritable partners of the Quebec State in the implementation of public policy,[25] in particular in the relation to the social economy.[26] During the 1990s, therefore, a more consensual relationship and form of negotiations existed between State and non-State actors - whose subversive potential was relatively weak despite the continued existence of some radical actors. The Summits that took place in the middle of the 1990s perfected this process of progressive inclusion of social actors in public consultations.

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[25] Jean Panet-Raymond examines this phenomenon at the end of the 1980s. See Jean Panet-Raymond. 1987. "Community Groups in Quebec: From Radical Action to Voluntarism for the State?" *Community Development Journal,* 22(4), October : 281-286.

[26] For both better and for worse. Yves Comeau, Louis Favreau, Benoît Lévesque and Marguerite Mendell. 2001. *Emploi, économie sociale et Développement local : les nouvelles filières,* Sainte-Foy : Presses de l'Université laval ; Peter Graefe (1999) on the social economy in "Repenser l'économie sociale face à l'État." *Lien Social et Politiques*, 41.

5) The fifth element concerns the State's methods of knowledge-gathering. As opposed to the other traits that have been examined, Quebec's form of knowledge-gathering does not distinguish it from other Canadian provinces or from the federal government. As with most western States, including the Canadian federal State, the Quebec State has, since the beginning of the 1980s, made increasing use of external experts in the creation of public policy.[27] During the 1990s, this practice did not disappear, but diversified slightly. Not only private firms with their expertise in commerce, but also academics (both on an individual level and as members of expert committees), and increasingly social groups became designated as 'experts'. For example, as Masson has demonstrated, during the 1990s, women's groups became seen as technicians of 'women's issues' by the government and the civil service, rather than as potential sources of protest.[28] Such development of expertise has had a significant impact on the manner in which civil society groups are perceived within the State. Expertise has become a new channel of access to the State for these groups (which renders obsolete the idea of an airtight border between the State and civil society, as 'networks of experts' exist both within and outside of the State). This change in status has also modified relations between the State and community groups, as experts are not supposed to create turbulence within the system, but rather, are meant to serve to reinforce it. The possibility of attaining this new status within the State undoubtedly

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[27] André Bernard. 1982. "Les 'experts' et le pouvoir." *Politique*, 1: 47-61.

resulted in a reorientation of strategies of collective action in Quebec during the 1990s. Moreover, the influence of certain experts may have been determinant in changing the way that policy debates were framed in certain sectors, thus largely influencing the repertoire of possible solutions that were considered.[29] The growing utilisation of expertise external to public institutions, although only a recent development in the decision-making process in Quebec, appears to have profoundly modified relations between the State and 'civil society'.

6) Finally, beyond the 'objective' relations between social actors, the system of representation involves an ideal structure of representation in which certain discourses are dominant, others admissible, and others excluded.[30] For an actor to have an impact on the political process they not only require access to the decision-making process, but it must also be possible for their discourses to be heard within the ideal structure. To engage in dialogue or negotiation, those involved in the discussion must share a common set of social representations, or, in other words, a common outlook on the

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[28] Dominique Masson. 2001. "Gouvernance partagée, associations et démocratie : ;es femmes dans le développement régional." *Politique et Sociétés*, 20(2-3): 89-116.

[29] See, for example, the report by Camil Bouchard concerning the period of the 'experts', *Un Québec fou de ses enfants*, 1991.

[30] Here we use an idea developed by Jane Jenson and Bruno Jabert. See, for instance, Bruno Jabert. 1995. "La fin de l'État tutélaire." *Cahiers de recherche sociologue*, 24: 107-125. Jane Jenson. 1995. "Mapping, Naming and Remembering: Globalization at the End of the Twentieth Century." *Review of International Political Economy*, 2(1), Spring: 96-116.

world and its problems.[31]   Without a common set of social representations discussion cannot occur and discourses will have a tendency to develop parallel to one another without any point of convergence.

Although one must always be careful of generalizing when discussing the question of dominant ideas in a given society, one must be able to agree that, during the 1980s and 1990s, two central (although in some aspects contradictory) ideas dominated the public debate (aside from the national question which remained central and highly conflictual). The first, and principal idea promoted the necessity of Quebec becoming economically competitive at the global level. The second, more nuanced idea targeted the construction of a typically *québécois* solidarity.

During the 1980s, Quebec exited the realm of protectionism, choosing instead to promote free-trade with the United States and the rest of the world. While support for free trade had been the position of the Liberal Party of Quebec since the beginning of the 1980s, in contrast to the rest of Canada, it was also the supported by the progressive wing of the *Parti Québécois*.[32]   Incrementally, the notion developed that an intensification of relations with the United States would guarantee the autonomous development of Quebec that was seen as vital for secession from the rest of Canada. By the end of the 1990s, the arguments for economic autonomy became increasingly tied to those of

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[31] Alain Faure, Gilles Pollet and Philippe Warin, (eds.). 1995. *La construction du sens dans les politiques publiques. Débats autour de la notion de référentiel.* Paris : L'Harmattan, Logiques politiques. 49-68.

political autonomy which stated that Quebec would have to make its voice heard in the 'concert of nations'. Both instrumental (in selling the sovereignist argument) and ideological (in the sense that the majority of PQ supporters subscribed to the idea), the PQ's position with regard to free-trade became, by the end of the 1990s, a contentious subject among allies in the national debate.[33] Moreover, as a result of the free-trade debate the principal economic actors and the PQ government found a basis of understanding, even if a different rational was used by each side. In other words, during the period under consideration (1980-2000), the economic modernisation of Quebec was the common principal objective of the dominant economic and political actors. After the 1995 referendum, this objective imposed itself on Quebec society as a constraint to which Quebec had to submit, even at the risk of sacrificing the second principle idea, that of solidarity.

During the past twenty years, social justice has not been in the foreground of political debates in Quebec.[34] However, the notion of social justice did not disappear from public discourse.[35] Even during the period of retrenchment, the preservation of *québécois* 'generosity' remained in the dominant discourse, supposedly representing a

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[32] Jules Duschatels. 2003. "De libre-échangists, les Québécois sont-ils devenus antimondialistes?" *Annuaire du Québec 2004*. Montréal: Fides. 65-75.

[33] Free-trade became the new battle field for unions and women's groups who suddenly found themselves at odds with their PQ allies.

[34] Gilles Bourque and Jules Duchastel. 1996. "Les identités, la fragmentation de la société canadiene et la constitutionalisation des enjeux politiques." *Revue internationales d'études canadiennes*, 14, Autumn.

characteristic element of the famous Quebec model. To a greater extent than in the rest of North America, in Quebec the idea that one had to maintain a certain degree of solidarity served as a structural constraint that, according to the terms used by the social actors, 'limited' the damages of cutbacks.[36] In brief, the degree of degradation of social protection in Quebec was on a smaller scale than elsewhere.[37] This also holds for the field of family policy.[38]

According to this analysis, the method of making policy decisions in Quebec that developed during the 1970s remained relatively stable throughout the 1980s and 1990s. The structure of representation in Quebec during this period can be characterised as relatively inclusive, increasingly involving more social actors, while at the same time maintaining a system of unequal access to the decision-making process. The form of this interaction, as we have seen, was more closely related to practices rather than institutions, and, in this sense, remained dependent on the will of the State (see the table below).

State-'social partner' relations	Relative consultation

[35] Michel Husson. 2003. *Les cassuers de l'État social. Des retraites à la sec : la grande démolition*. Paris : La Decouverte.

[36] Interview of François Saillant, FRAPRU, October 2002.

[37] Gerard W. Boychuk. 1998. *Patchwork of Purpose : The Development of Provincial Social Assistance Regimes in Canada*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press.

[38] Beauvais, Caroline and Pascale Dufour, "Articuler travaille et famille : Le contre-exemple des pays dits 'libéraux '," *Les politiques sociales*, 3-4, 2003: 13-27.

	The State remains the project director
State-community relations	Progressive inclusion
Unequal relations	Hierarchy of the representation of interests
Channels of representation	Rather than through a certain order, through the political process
Source of knowledge and information	Becoming external to the State; increasingly the role of experts
Ideal structure of representation (since the 1980s)	Economic modernisation and the preservation of a certain degree of solidarity

This unequal structure of the representation of interests, although stable, is in perpetual transformation, providing the possibility of 'exceptions' to the rule.

Given this description of the process of decision-making in Quebec, the probability that Bill 112 was the result of an initiative 'from below' appears very weak. Not only would this require a reversal of the structure of representation, as the social actors involved in the mobilisation for the law were not privileged partners of the State, but the principal behind the law (the fight against poverty) was also contradictory to the ideal structure of representation. We suggest, nevertheless, that without the popular mobilisation initiated by the *Collectif pour une loi sur l'élimination de la pauvreté* (hereafter referred to as the Collectif) Bill 112 would not have been developed or passed into law. Therefore, it is necessary to analyse how, and to what extent the structure of representation was modified by this group's initiative.

The Innovation of the Mobilization of the Collectif

The Origins of the Mobilization

In providing a brief outline of the origin of Bill 112, we will begin, during the 1990s, with the Quebec women's movement's organization of the Bread and Roses March of 1995. This march, considered a success by the women's movement, constituted the first mobilisation against women's poverty in Quebec. Among the new claims that were presented at that time, six aimed to correct specific inequalities, and three addressed more general issues, including the demand for an increase in the minimum wage, wage equity, and the creation of a public network of affordable, quality daycare centres.[39] The march was followed by the creation of a consultative committee on the social economy, and a substantial increase in the minimum wage.[40] Furthermore, it became the political point of departure that eventually led to the creation of Quebec's program of affordable daycare.[41] Even if the success of the march was to a large part attributable to certain political circumstances (a pre-Referendum context in which the *Fédération des Femmes de*

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[39] Peter Graefe. 2002. "The Social Economy and the State: Linking Ambitions with Institutions in Québec, Canada." *Policy and Politics*, 31(2): 247-262; Pierre Graveline. 1995. "Du pain et des roses.", *Le Devoir*, 9 March: A6.

[40] Benoît Levésque and Marguerite Mendell. 1999. "L'économie sociale au Québec : éléments théoriques et empiriques pour le débat et la recherche." *Lien social et politiques,* 41, Spring.

Québec (FFQ), the principal organizer of the march, adopted a clear position in favour of sovereignty), it also marked the first step in a struggle against poverty that would continue to grow throughout the following years. The claims presented by the women's movement in 1995, notably the demand for an increase in the minimum wage and the level of social aid, were aimed at aiding all those in a situation of poverty, both men and women.

The Bread and Roses March was followed by the creation of the *Collectif pour une loi sur l'élimination de la pauvreté* (which today is known as the *Collectif pour un Québec sans pauvreté*). Although it had begun to take form in 1996 at the Summit for the Economic and Social Future of Quebec, through a rapprochement between two central actors: the *Fédération des femmes du Québec* and the *Carrefour de Pastorale en milieu ouvrier* (CAPMO)[42], it formally created in January 1998. Since Autumn 1996, the vast majority of community groups have enthusiastically supported CAMPO's proposition of 'zero poverty', the progressive compliment to the famous notion of 'zero deficit' so dear to Lucien Bouchard. It is precisely on this proposal that the seeking consensus will failed, some groups leaving the table the last day of the meeting.

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[41] Jane Jenson. 1998. "Les réformes des services de garde pour jeunes enfants en France et au Québec: une analyse historico-institutionaliste", *Politique et Sociétés*, 17(1-2).

[42] The leaders of these two groups were Françoise David et Vivian Labrie, respectively.

Following this, the Collectif[43] circulated a petition that called for a law for the elimination of poverty. By the end of 2000, they had recorded more than 200 000 signatures. At the same time (1998-1999), the Collectif undertook a large process of consultation that permitted them to develop the propositions that would eventually become the first version of the law against poverty. Debates over these propositions occurred during numerous 'popular assemblies', with the propositions ultimately adopted, in 2000, in a modified version (conforming with a traditional legal project) by the more than 2000 people who had gathered in front of the National Assembly in Quebec City for a 'Street Parliament'. On 22 November 2000, three deputies, each representing one of the three major parties of Quebec, introduced the petition to the National Assembly. However, it was only with the resignation of Bouchard in January 2001 and the arrival of Bernard Landry at the head of the government that the poverty dossier was afforded any attention. The Landry government demonstrated an evident willingness to develop a 'strategy for the fight against poverty'. In June 2002, the government presented its Bill, which was eventually adopted.

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[43] The ten founding organizations of the Collectif include, among others, CAMPO and other Christian organizations, the *Front commun des personnes assistées sociales du Québec*, the *Confédération des syndicats nationaux* (CSN), the *Centrale de l'enseignement du Québec* (CEQ), and some anti-poverty groups. For greater detail, see Alain Noël. 2002. "Une loi contre la pauvreté : la nouvelle approche québécoise de lutte contre la pauvreté et l'exclusion sociale." *Lien social et politiques*, 48, Autumn: 103-114.

The mobilisation of the Collectif, combined with political factors, permitted the feasibility of a law against poverty to be contemplated at the highest level of the State. Out of the many possible elements enabling this to occur, we present two that are intrinsically linked. The first element concerns the growing necessity for the PQ government to reassure the left constituency of its electorate. According to the actors involved in the process of the adoption of Bill 112, appealing to this constituency became a determinant factor in the PQ's approach to the election, even if the subject of poverty had, in general, a weak electoral appeal. In other words, outside of the context of the election, it is very probable that the law would never have seen the light of day. The second element involves the political personalities of the two heads of the governments. While Lucien Bouchard was very reticent to the idea of legislation relating to poverty, Bernard Landry was more favourable to the cause. Thus, without the presence of Bernard Landry and his Minister of Finance Pauline Marois, the probability of the existence of the law would be small. That said, these elements do not sufficiently explain the adoption of Bill 112. We suggest that without the mobilisation of the Collectif, a law against poverty would not exist, as the actors in power would never have developed the ideas behind such a law.

According to our argument, the success of the mobilization and its consolidation in law, adopted, before all else, the characteristics of the mobilization itself. On one hand, in entering the legislative arena, the Collectif created a temporary rupture in the

unequal structure of representation. On the other hand, in choosing to address the social representations of poverty, the Collectif modified the ideal dominant structure.

The formation of a coalition of actors mobilising community groups and unions is not a novel element of Quebec politics, as comparisons can be made between the experience of *Solidarité Populaire Québec* at the end of the 1980s, and the Collectif, in terms of the diversity of actors involved, the scope of mobilisation, and the duration of the mobilization.[44] The repertoire of tactics used by the Collectif between 1997 and 2002 appear more or less to be part of the 'classical' repertoire of Collectif action[45] in the sense that the actions undertaken by the group are not particularly distinct from those of other groups in Quebec during recent years. The Collectif used the strategy of lobbying both those in political office (The Minister of Finance, the Minister of Social Solidarity), as well as high-level bureaucrats responsible for the administration of programmes such as income security.[46] Furthermore, the group undertook actions involving a substantial mobilization of the population, such as the petition, as well effective utilisation of the media. If it is impossible to measure the importance of one of the strategies employed in comparison to another, the interviews conducted as part of the research undertaken for

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[44] Solidarité populaire Québec. 1998. *Le Québec qu'on veut bâtir : analyse de la situation*. Solidarité populaire Québec: Montréal, February; Interviews, 2002.

[45] For the notion of 'repertoires of collective action', see Charles Tilly. 1986. *La France conteste*. Paris: Fayard. The repertoire designates the "established methods that certain groups use for the advancement or defence of their interests."

[46] Interviews of high-level bureaucrats, Government of Quebec, Autumn 2002.

this article[47] suggest that the work carried out by the Collectif with the goal of increasing the receptivity of their message to the upper-level bureaucrats and Ministers was central, marking a long-term strategy that demonstrated a deepening knowledge of the manner in which the bureaucratic machine and the political process function. This close collaboration provided essential resources for groups that did not occupy a privileged place within the State.

On the other hand, other innovative aspects of the process of mobilisation also explain its success. In the remainder of the paper two of these aspects will be discussed: the entrance of the Collectif into the legislative arena and the fact that it was the poor themselves who produced the content of the claims.

Investment in the Legislative Arena: The Strategy of the Production of a Law

In a parliamentary regime, the deputies and the bureaucracy have the ability to form laws. Other political actors may attempt to pressure legislators into addressing their particular concerns or attempt to introduce certain issues in the hope that they

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[47] The following people were interviewed (Autumn 2002): Vivian Labrie. Collectif pour un Québec sans pauvreté; Vivian Barbot. Fédération des femmes du Québec; François Saillant. Front d'action populaire en réamnénagement urbain; Esther Paquette. Au-bas de l'échelle; Jean-Yves Desgagné. Front commun des personnes assistées sociales du Québec; François Lamarche. Confédération des syndicats nationaux; Alexander Molly, Union des forces progressistes; Responsible du Mouvement autonome et solidaire des sans-emploi; Marc Bellemare. Fédération des travailleurs du Québec.

eventually enter into the public debate. It is rare, however, that a social movement or a coalition of actors encroaches on the terrain of the legislators to produce law.

According to Neveau, an arena is "an organised system of institutions, procedures and actors, in which social forces can make themselves heard, and use their resources to obtain responses to the issues that they raise."[48] An arena is both a space in which an issue can be presented as a social problem (as undoubtedly was the case for poverty), as well as a channel for the attainment of resources, as the goal of entering into an arena is the acquisition of resources or powers that one did not previously possess. Other arenas can, and historically have been invested by actors, such as the judicial arena (by the *Front commun des personnes assistées sociales du Québec*, or by organisations promoting the defence of rights, such as *Au bas de l'échelle*, both members of the Collectif). The Collectif could have been content with acting within the arena of social conflict, from which they first emerged, challenging the public authorities and public opinion on the issue of growing poverty. They also could have simply maintained their activities within the proper 'space for dialogue' in Quebec, as an expert on poverty and an ideal partner of the State. Thus, their entrance into the legislative arena was a risky process and was a subject of debate within the Collectif, not only before but during the mobilisation for the law against poverty. From the perspective of the more radical actors in the Collectif (such as FRAPPU, *Front commun des personnes assistées sociales du Québec*, and others) the strategy of producing a legal framework had weak subversive

potential, representing a risk of losing the potential to create the conflictual relations they viewed as necessary for negotiating.[49] For those actors who willingly positioned themselves at its margins, involvement in the political game was problematic. Thus, while investment in the legislative arena had a strong reformatory potential (and was thus eventually adopted), its adoption came at the expense of important resource mobilisation. In this context, for the member organizations the failure of the mobilisation was not conceivable. The mobilization had to be viewed as a successful enterprise by the members of the Collectif in order to legitimate the time and energy that had been devoted to the project. Embarking on an adventure to create a law against poverty, all members had an interest in making this 'slightly crazy' project succeed.

By presenting themselves as a political actor, rather than as simply an expert on poverty issues, the Collectif's entrance into the legislative arena proved to be a major advantage for them (although this conclusion could not have been determined *ex ante*). As was stated earlier, the women's movement, and along with them the community movement as a whole have tended to become experts in the field poverty. The Collectif's acquisition of this status likely played a role in legitimating their claims, particularly given the support they received from other experts (such as Camil Bouchard). Nevertheless, on its own, this element was insufficient to explain the Collectif's success. The Collectif's inclusion in the decision-making process was not only

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[48] Érik Neveu. 2002. *Sociologie des mouvements sociaux*. Paris: La Découverte. 16.
[49] Interviews, Autumn 2002.

as a result of their position as a 'counsel to the prince' but as a result of their strategy of proposing a law. The State (the government and the bureaucracy) was no longer the sole actor responsible for establishing the terms of partnership, but was faced with a true competitor who possessed legitimacy derived from more than simply either its expertise or the electoral system. This specific positioning of the Collectif forced the State (and other related actors) to recognise the collective voice of the poor, to recognize poverty as a social reality (rather than an individual problem), and finally, permitted a temporary rupture in the unequal structure of representation.

The Production of Claims by the Poor

Within the unequal relations that existed between the various actors in the Collectif the poor themselves emerged as a new militant actor. They aimed to contribute to the orientation of the group's demands in regard to both material claims and the social representation of poverty.

In regard to the development of Bill 112, several aspects of the Collectif make it distinct from other social actors. The first distinct aspect of the Collectif was its ability to make the poor, a traditional non-actor on the political scene, into a significant political actor. Those within a situation of poverty traditionally do not represent a civil society

group, even less so a mobilisation.[50] Not only has there been great difficulty in creating

a valorisation of the status attached to poverty, but those caught in this situation are

generally extremely isolated and posses few of the resources necessary for mobilising.

Making further difficult any attempt to construct a common project for the poor is the

extreme heterogeneity of their individual situations. Yet, the Collectif was able to gain

both legitimacy for the 'lived experience' and the practical knowledge of the poor, as its

goal was not to act as a spokesperson for the poor, but instead, to construct a project

together with the poor. Undeniably, without an alliance with union organizations there

probably would not have been a follow-up to the initial FFQ-CAPMO collaboration.

However, despite the extremely unequal weight of the members involved, the Collectif

was able to conserve an autonomous existence and did not simply become an annex of

the union organizations. This retention of autonomy was made possible by both the

politico-economic context of the period of the mobilization, in particular the weakness of

union organizations as a social force, as well as by the nature of the mobilisation itself.

Not only were all of the Collectif's decision submitted to the 'grassroots' for approval,

but it was the 'grassroots' that constituted the principal force behind the proposition of

alternatives, with the poor being able to aid the other actors within the Collectif through

their knowledge of poverty.

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[50] Isabelle Sommier.   2001. *Les nouveaux mouvements contestataires*. Paris: Flammarion.

As a consequence of the involvement of the poor, the Collectif worked not only to propose a law against poverty, but also to educate all its members about the 'reality' of poverty. This educational project was met with substantial opposition, both by unions (who were not accustomed to being receptive to the positions of those excluded from the work force), and social workers (who perceived the poor more through a lens of 'victimisation' than as potential legislators).

The Collectif declared the three basic principles of the proposed law:

> The elimination of poverty is a priority; the amelioration of income for the poorest fifth of the population takes precedent over that of the richest fifth; and those in poverty, as well as the organizations that represent them are at the heart of the implementation of the programme.[51]

Thus, the Collectif not only demanded that measures must respond to the material distress of those living in poverty, but also that the poor should be included in the management of programmes. These propositions inspired a transformation of the ideas of both the political elite and the general population, inverting the ideal dominant structure in which the goal of economic modernisation had prevailed over the objective of solidarity. Not only did the political decision-makers agree to listen to the Collectif, but they listened to the extent that the solutions retained in Bill 112, although quite different from the initial proposal of the Collectif, at least marked a substantial

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[51] Collectif pour une loi sur la pauvreté. 2000. *Proposition pour une loi sur l'élimination de la pauvreté*. http://www.pauvreté.qc.ca/prop0420.pdf

difference in public policy regarding poverty (Interviews, 2001 ; Noël, 2003). Without entering into a discussion of the details of the law, its definition of poverty as a structural problem involving the whole of society, its removal of the punitive approach to poverty, and its recognition of the necessity of 'citizen participation' should be noted as significant.

The Collectif's investment in the legislative arena and its education of decision-makers, the general population and its own members largely contributed to the adoption of a law against poverty, an idea that many had initially considered absurd.[52]

Conclusion

While the adoption of Bill 112 was intrinsically linked to the window of opportunity provided by the elections of Spring 2003, this factor does not alone explain the adoption of the law. Without the work of the Collectif,[53] no political actor, nor high-level bureaucrat would have proposed the notion of a law against poverty. For Bill 112 to exist a modification of the terms of public debate was required (an inversion of the ideal

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[52] Among the reactions initially provoked by the work of the Collectif, the reaction of one Minister stands out: "Why not a law against rain?" (Interview, Vivian Labrie, Autumn 2002).

[53] Who made possible the dynamic history of the relationship between the community and the State in Quebec that the formlization of our analysis has had a tendency to erase.

structure of representation), and the unequal structure of representation had to be temporarily upset. These two ruptures were made possible by the particular form of mobilisation undertaken by the *Collectif pour un Québec sans pauvreté*.

Although the Collectif was able to garner the support of the political parties for its legal project, and the Quebec State demonstrated an openness to its propositions, the 'objective' structure of representation was not altered in the long-run. Representatives of business spoke out against the project, and those receiving social assistance have not seen any material improvement since the adoption of the law. Thus, while the community movement, as a policy expert (and not only as a technical expert on poverty) has gained a new status within the structure of representation, this achievement is fragile and, as the events of 2003 in Quebec have demonstrated, under the Liberal government such gains appear highly reversible.

On the other hand, long-term reforms have been obtained in relation to the social representation of poverty. Between 1995 and 2002, the terms of debate were modified. Poverty came to be viewed as a collective issue involving the whole of society, and as an issue that had to be addressed through the adoption of specific legislative tools, rather than through sectoral measures aimed at aiding those individuals confronted with personal problems. Although it is possible that these alterations may disappear from the dominant political discourse, it will be more difficult for a government to ignore the

existence of the law. Moreover, these changes in perception will be difficult to erase in the locations from which they emerged: unions and community groups.

The experience of Bill 112 demonstrates that the unequal structure of representation is not fixed, that it can, under certain conditions, be temporarily modified and that it can initiate subsequent changes. From this perspective, it will not be possible to turn back the clocks and act as if nothing has happened in regard to the question of poverty in Quebec.