

Quebec and the Rest of Canada

When looking at the development of the relationship between Quebec and the rest of Canada, it is necessary to understand that it is a long and complicated history. The tensions between French and English Canada have been evident throughout our history, and in this course. If you remember back, in World War I and II, conscription was a key issue that divided English and French Canada: French Canada was against conscription while English Canada supported it.

But this is not the only issue that Quebec had with the English-speaking regions of Canada. Since its establishment in the 16th century, Quebec certainly has developed separately, but still in conjunction, with English Canada. Even with the *BNA Act* of 1867 and then the *Constitution Act* of 1982, French Canada has always been given certain distinctions within the federal system that highlight and acknowledge its unique place in Canadian history. Our goal today is to examine the development of Quebec since the end of World War II and how this has impacted its place in Canada today.

Lesage, Levesque, and “The Quiet Revolution”

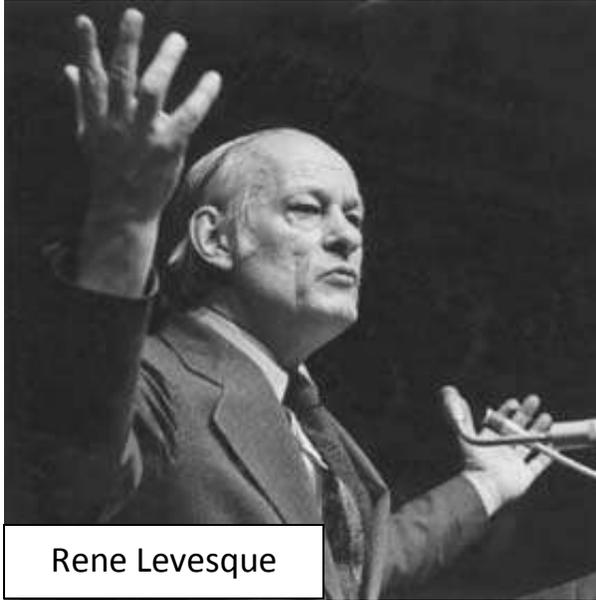


Jean Lesage

Maurice Duplessis, the Premier of Quebec who had ruled since the 1940s under the Union Nationale Party, died in 1959, and in 1960, the provincial Liberals swept to power. With the election of Jean Lesage (1960-1966), Quebec underwent the "Quiet Revolution". This meant that, through changes in laws, there were large changes in Quebec society. The government reformed education, pension, and labour laws. Quebec's economy shifted from its agricultural base and the influence of the Catholic Church declined.

During the Quiet Revolution, Quebec's separatist movement grew - and became less and less quiet. The Separatists believed that Quebec should separate from Canada and become an independent country. In 1963, the

Front de Libération du Québec (FLQ) formed underground to fight for Quebec independence. It used increasingly violent terrorist tactics - bombings, robberies, kidnappings, killings - against Federal and British targets.



In the 1960's, journalist René Lévesque became an outspoken leader for independence. Unlike the FLQ, Lévesque and his followers planned to achieve independence by peaceful means. In 1968, they formed a new provincial party - the Parti Québécois (PQ). The goal of this party was to achieve Quebec sovereignty or independence by means of majority vote.

Throughout the 1960s, there were various reasons for discontent amongst Quebecers:

- Most businesses (80%) were owned by Anglophones (people whose first language is English).
- Francophones (people whose first language is French) were forced to speak English at work.
- The unemployment rate in Quebec was one of the highest in the country.
- The wealthiest people in the province of Quebec were Anglophones.
- Among all ethnic groups in Quebec, francophone workers were among the lowest paid.
- Infant mortality rates (number of children per 1000 who die before the age of 2) were higher in Quebec than the rest of the country.
- As the birth rate in Quebec dropped in the 1960's, fear increased about the continuing existence of the French language and culture.

As the 1960s came to a close, however, there would be a major shift in the power structure in Ottawa and the federal government. Quebec would gain more national prominence and power within the federal government, and would be given additional rights that would allow its traditional French culture and language to thrive nationwide. During this time, however, there would also begin much tumult and further discontent at the role and place of Quebec within Canada.

Official Languages Act, 1969



In 1968, Pierre Trudeau succeeded Lester Pearson as Liberal leader and Prime Minister. The 49-year-old bilingual lawyer from Montreal won the election that year on a wave of Trudeaumania. This describes an emotional outpouring of affection for the political newcomer, somewhat similar to the 1960's phenomenon of Beatlemania.



In 1969, Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau passed the Official Languages Act. This made French and English Canada's two official languages and it made the Federal public service and judicial systems bilingual.

With official Federal bilingualism, many provinces improved the educational and language rights of Francophone minorities. In the same year, New Brunswick, with a third of its population Francophone, became Canada's only officially bilingual province. While Francophones across Canada generally welcomed bilingualism, many inside Quebec saw it as an empty gesture that did little for French Canadian nationalism.

The October Crisis, 1970



When the FLQ kidnapped a Quebec Cabinet Minister and the British Trade Commissioner in Montreal in October 1970, the October Crisis erupted. After the Quebec government asked for Federal help, Prime Minister Trudeau invoked the War Measures Act. This Act gave the Federal Government emergency powers to use law enforcement, and to arrest anyone without legal procedures. Tanks rolled on Montreal streets, and over 400 people were arrested on the suspicion of being FLQ sympathizers.

By the time the crisis was over, the FLQ had murdered the kidnapped Quebec cabinet minister, Pierre Laporte, and released the other hostage, James Cross. The vast majority of Quebecers rejected violent, terrorist acts. The organizers of the kidnappings were arrested or exiled, and the FLQ disappeared into the pages of history.

The Parti Québécois Victory and Bill 101

In 1976, the Parti Québécois, under its leader René Lévesque, shocked most Canadians by winning that year's provincial election. With the goal of making Quebec "as French as Ontario is English," the PQ passed Bill 101. This made French the official language of Quebec.

The use of any other language in the workplace and on outdoor signs was strictly regulated. Employers needed to communicate with their workers in French only. On outdoor signs, French was the only language permitted. Only children with at least one parent educated in an English school in Quebec could be educated in English. Immigrants were forced to send their children to French-language schools.

In the 1970's, the Francophone birthrate in Quebec, once the highest in Canada, had become the lowest. The vast majority of immigrants to Quebec were electing to speak English. Bill 101 was designed to protect the French language and the French culture in Quebec. In that sense, Bill 101 was an expression of French Canadian nationalism.

The 1980 Referendum

During the 1976 election campaign, the Parti Québécois had promised not to separate from Canada until it had received support in a referendum (a yes-no vote) on the issue of separatism or sovereignty.

Before the 1980 referendum, public opinion polls showed that the 20 percent of Quebecers who were non-Francophone would not support separation, and that about 20 percent of the population was strongly committed to separatism. The remaining 60 percent were undecided.

The phrasing of the referendum question became a hot political issue. Voters were asked to vote "yes" or "no" to giving the PQ permission to negotiate "sovereignty-association" with the government of Canada.

The question asked only for permission to negotiate. Sovereignty would not be total. Sovereignty would maintain economic association with Canada, including a common currency. Even with these qualifiers, the referendum attracted a "yes" vote of only 40 percent. The majority of Quebecers decided in the referendum vote that they wished to stay in Canada.



Language and Education Rights in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms



Encouraged by the referendum result, the federal government under Pierre Trudeau continued to work to make French speaking persons feel at home in all parts of Canada. The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, in 1982, further guaranteed pre-existing language rights and education rights for official-language minorities.

Section 23 of the Charter states that each community in Canada (where reasonable numbers are present) has a right to a minority official-language school at both the elementary and secondary level. In the spirit of Section 23, many communities in Ontario provide French language schools.

Prime Minister Brian Mulroney and the Death of the Meech Lake Accord

When the Canadian constitution came home from Britain in 1982, Quebec did not sign the new Constitution Act. Premier René Lévesque rejected what had been created by his rival, Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau.



In 1987, Progressive Conservative Prime Minister Brian Mulroney tried to get Quebec to sign the constitution. At a conference centre at Meech Lake, Mulroney got all provincial leaders to agree on a constitutional accord that recognized Quebec as a “distinct society.” Quebec nationalists were open to this, because it recognized Quebec as being different from the other provinces. Critics feared that future judicial interpretations of “distinct society”

could give Quebec greater power than other provinces.

Trudeau attacked the accord, saying Quebec’s extra powers were unnecessary and that provincial demands for extra powers would destroy Canada. Aboriginal leaders, excluded from discussions, attacked the accord for failing to recognize their collective rights.

To be enacted, the accord had to be ratified by the legislatures of all ten provinces within three years. In 1990, Cree MLA Elijah Harper refused to approve the accord in Manitoba’s Legislative Assembly. The Meech Lake Accord was dead.

The Formation of the Bloc Quebecois



At the time of the Meech Lake accord, Progressive Conservative cabinet minister Lucien Bouchard resigned from the Mulroney government.

With several other Quebec Members of Parliament, in 1990, he formed the Bloc Québécois, a federal party dedicated to Quebec sovereignty. Under Bouchard, the Bloc won 54 of Quebec's 75 seats to become the Official Opposition in Ottawa, in 1993.

The 1995 Referendum on Sovereignty Association

In 1994, the provincial Parti Québécois returned to power, and Premier Jacques Parizeau sought another referendum on Quebec sovereignty. The 1995 referendum again proposed sovereignty-association.

This time Quebec nationalism almost triumphed: 49.4 percent of Quebecers voted "yes." Parizeau blamed the loss on "money and the ethnic vote," and resigned as Premier. Soon after that, Bouchard resigned from the Bloc.

Quebec nationalism seemed to decline for the rest of the 1990's. In the federal election of November 2000, the Bloc Québécois won only 38 seats. In 2003, the provincial Liberal party won a huge majority, ending almost a decade of PQ governments. Quebec nationalism, however, runs deep. In 2004, the Bloc won 54 seats in the Federal election and in February 2006, 51 seats.

Quebec and the Rest of Canada Questions

Please answer the following questions about Quebec and its place within the larger Canadian context and hand them in during the next class.

1. List four reasons for discontent in French Canada in the 1960's.
2. Explain the meaning or historical significance of each of the following items:
 - a) Francophones
 - b) Anglophones
 - c) Front de Libération du Québec (FLQ)
 - d) Parti Québécois (PQ)
 - e) Official Languages Act, 1969
 - f) October Crisis, 1970
 - g) War Measures Act, 1970
 - h) Bill 101
2. What question was asked of voters in the 1980 Quebec referendum? What was the percentage result of the YES vote? of the NO vote?
3. What educational right is given in Section 23 of the Canadian Charter of Right and Freedoms?
4. Explain what happened to the Meech Lake agreement.
5. What is the Bloc Québécois? Who was the first leader of the Bloc Québécois?
6. What question was asked of voters in the 1995 Quebec referendum? How was it different from the question asked in 1980? What was the outcome of this referendum?