

Quebec Nationalism

Activity 1.2

FOREIGN INVESTMENT AND PRESERVATION

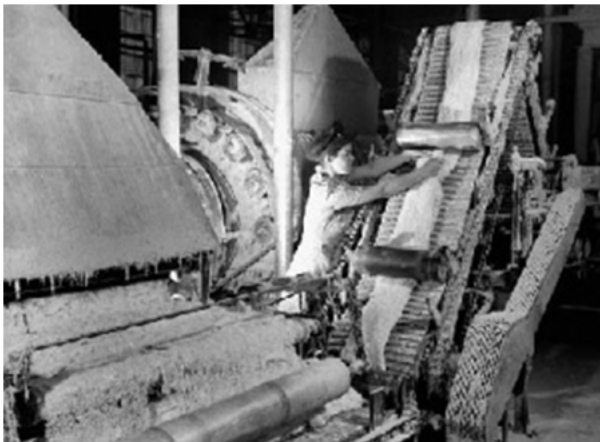
Maurice Duplessis and his Union Nationale Party ruled in the province of Quebec **for most of the 1940s and 1950s**.

Duplessis invited the United States' investments into Quebec, while attempting to preserve the province as a conservative, rural, and Catholic region.

The Asbestos Strike of **1949** demonstrated discontent with Duplessis' policies. The 142-day strike against an American-owned company highlighted the fact that Francophones could stand up for their rights. This feeling of French Canadian togetherness and pride can be described as French Canadian nationalism.



Maurice Duplessis, leader of the Union Nationale Party in Quebec
CBC/National Archives C019526



Female operator Clemanace Gagnon watches a machine carding asbestos fibre for spinning and processing at the Johns-Manville factory.
Library and Archives Canada/Credit: Harry Rowed/
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THE STRIKE OF ASBESTOS WORKERS IN QUEBEC IN 1949

Asbestos is a fibrous and non-combustible mineral found in the Eastern Townships of the province of Quebec. The largest asbestos mining company in the world in **1949** was a Canadian company: Johns-Manville (CJM), a branch of an American-owned multi-national firm. The 9000 people who lived in the company town of Asbestos depended on the company for their livelihood. In **1949**, 2100 persons were employed by CJM.

Among the requests of the workers were the following: elimination of the disease-causing asbestos dust in work areas, a 15-cent increase in pay to \$1.00 an hour, the Rand Formula (the rule that a worker in a union workplace will have union dues deducted from his/her pay cheque), and increased pay for overtime work.

The workers argued that the company was making healthy profits while the workers' wages were lower than those in comparable industries.

CJM offered the workers an increase of 5 cents an hour. As a result, in **February 1949**, the Asbestos workers went on strike.

TROUBLEMAKERS OR VICTIMS OF TYRANNY?

The provincial government of Premier Maurice Duplessis called the strike illegal and condemned the union leaders as “trouble-makers.” Duplessis sent one hundred provincial police officers to Asbestos to guard the company’s property.

CJM refused to negotiate until the workers returned from their “illegal strike.” The company brought hundreds of strike-breakers into the plant and gave them a ten-cent-an-hour wage increase, and it threatened to evict hundreds of strikers from company-owned homes. The strikers tried to prevent the strike-breakers from entering the mine and the provincial police responded by arresting and intimidating some of the strikers.

Public and newspaper opinion favoured the striking workers. A number of Catholic religious authorities had made statements of sympathy and support for the workers. Archbishop Joseph Charbonneau of Montreal declared that “it is the duty of the Church to intervene and speak out against tyranny” and called for Sunday collections to aid the strikers. Archbishop Roy of Quebec City made a similar appeal. Many other unions in Quebec sent food and money to the strikers and their families.



Monseigneur Joseph Charbonneau,
Archbishop of Montreal 1940-1950.
(Jules Alexander Castonguay/Library and
Archives Canada/PA-804435)

BETTER WAGES AND A NEW PERSPECTIVE

In early May, Asbestos attracted worldwide attention as violence between the police and strikers escalated. Two hundred strikers, including four leaders, were arrested.

With the help of Archbishop Roy, a settlement was finally reached **on July 1, 1949**, almost five months after the beginning of the strike. The strikers received a ten-cent-an-hour increase and four paid holidays a year. But the company retained the strike-breakers and not all of the strikers were rehired. An arbitration board ruling **later in the year** gave the union the Rand formula and two more annual paid holidays.

The workers gained a large psychological victory for themselves and their supporters in Quebec. The strike showed that francophones could bring about changes themselves. It showed that francophones could stand up to the “foreign” control of their industries. It showed that there was more to the Quebec economy than agriculture.

LESAGE AND LÉVESQUE

Maurice Duplessis 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.



Jean Lesage, Premier of Quebec during the Quiet Revolution.
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René Lévesque on provincial election night at the Paul Sauvé arena, October 29th, 1973.
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REASONS FOR DISCONTENT IN FRENCH CANADA

- 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.

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.



Pierre Trudeau at the Liberal Leadership Convention, Ottawa, Ontario, April 6, 1968.

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Rt. Hon. Pierre Elliott Trudeau making a statement concerning the release of Mr. James Cross.

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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

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.



Four Prime Ministers: Pierre Elliott Trudeau, John Turner, Jean Chrétien and then Prime Minister Lester B. Pearson following Cabinet changes in 1967.
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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.



Peter Lougheed, Premier of Alberta, and René Lévesque.
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Learn more about Lévesque's Separatist Fight at the CBC Archives
http://archives.cbc.ca/politics/parties_leaders/topics/870/



Bilingual road signs in front of Parliament buildings.
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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 MEECH LAKE

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.



Mr. Brian Mulroney and Mrs. Mila Mulroney speaking to Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau at the gala event for the swearing-in of Governor General Jeanne Sauvé, held at the National Art Centre.
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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 QUÉBÉCOIS

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.



Prime Minister the Rt. Hon. Pierre Elliott Trudeau and Mr. Jean Chrétien, minister of Justice, during Constitutional Conference. Chrétien's involvement in Canadian politics spans five decades.

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