



STATEMENTS AND SPEECHES

INFORMATION DIVISION
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CANADA'S GREAT CHALLENGE

No. 63/21 Address by the Honourable Maurice Lamontagne,
President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada,
to the Canadian Club, Toronto, on November 4, 1963.

We will celebrate in 1967 the centennial of Confederation. This first century has been marked by great achievements and also at times by serious crises. The Riel incident, the school question in the West and in Ontario, our participation in war and the conscription issue have divided our two main ethnic groups and threatened our national unity.

Those successive crises have followed a common pattern. They resulted from action initiated in English-speaking Canada and the ensuing reaction of French-speaking Canada. The most acute manifestation of those crises was always the sharp conflict which opposed Ontario and Quebec. Each time, sooner or later, Ontario won its case and Quebec had to retreat and to adjust.

We are now going through another serious national crisis. But this time, a new pattern has appeared. The current crisis is the result of actions taken in Quebec and it comes at a period when there is, especially in Ontario, a much better understanding and appreciation of the "French fact" than in the past. The emergence of this unique crisis has bewildered a great number of English-speaking Canadians. And in their astonishment, they ask questions: "What is happening in Quebec? Why this sudden outburst when real efforts were being made to understand the French Canadians? What does Quebec want?"

Evolution of French Canada

It is impossible to understand what is happening in Quebec today without some knowledge of the main trends of its past evolution. Indeed, the present discontent has deep historical roots. It is a feeling as old as the French-Canadian people itself, although it has been expressed recently in new and stronger terms.

The whole history of the French Canadians has been characterized by a constant reality - foreign domination - and by a perpetual dream - complete liberation. The basic conflict between the dream and reality has resulted in frustration and discontent.