

# Canada Weekly

ACL

Volume 3, No. 36

September 3, 1975



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## A conference to determine the state of the French language in Canada

*The first Biennial Conference on French Canada, held in Chicoutimi, Quebec, August 10 to 17, was convened "to determine the state of the French language in Canada...by examining the everyday living of French-speaking Canadians", said Environment Minister Jeanne Sauvé, addressing over 1,000 delegates from all parts of Canada. By assessing the present situation, she continued, and pooling experience, "we can lay the groundwork for any possible improvement".*

*"...In today's society, we must create an open culture, authentic, capable of attracting young people and fostering in them a love for cultural legacy," Mrs. Sauvé stated. "The solution to the needs of these young people is directly related to what is commonly known as the cultural explosion, to which French Canada is inescapably tied...." Passages from her address follow:*

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Canada's dynamic qualities are manifested in a high standard of living, vigorous population growth and, especially, an enterprising spirit in all fields of endeavour, particularly the political, industrial and cultural. Canada's French-speaking population is no exception; it often embodies this national spirit and drive in an energetic and vigorous fashion....

These youthful and dynamic qualities are reassuring. Sparsely populated, multicultural, and characterized by two linguistic groups, Canada is faced with quite a challenge: to harmoniously combine its various characteristics, while developing a national identity and lifestyle.... Identifying the state of this essential facet of the Canadian scene is a primary indication of participation in Canada's progress and, consequently, a contribution to the advancement of its citizens.

### Evolution of French language

Discussing French Canada is somewhat synonymous to reflecting on the status of the French language in Canada. Linguists like to discuss languages in terms of esthetics. By this, they mean any examination of the conditions under which a language must evolve to maintain its beauty, its original purity. According to them, a language must remain in a state of constant evolution. However, this evolution must not permit a language to lose certain fundamental traits or

characteristics that constitute its distinctive quality or essence, as it was called in the past....

I don't believe it would be going too far to speak of a certain French-Canadian estheticism, where the idea of linguistic evolution takes on some importance. The delegates should, therefore, use the procedures of these linguists to a certain degree and examine the conditions under which the French language must evolve in Canada, particularly in the North American context.

To carry the comparison further, certain linguists propose to revive a language by leaving it open to contributions from modern civilization, thus allowing it to be rejuvenated and enriched. Reminiscent of the period in history we now refer to as the Renaissance, this proposal would update and illustrate a language, "neo-French" for example, until its base is broadened to a point where it can be ranked alongside all other modern languages. The objective of these linguists is to perfect a language of scientific and technical expression, yet retain its literary, artistic quality.

Aren't we faced with the same situation with regard to the French language in Canada? Isn't one of this Conference's objectives to determine what new elements are liable to enrich the French language in Canada? Like the linguists, the delegates must define the terms of wholly Canadian use of