

Federal-Provincial Relations in Canada

culture with the provincial state of Quebec grew stronger after 1960 when Quebec entered a period which has come to be known as "la révolution tranquille (the quiet revolution)". In summary, Quebecers, concerned about their culture's ability to survive the impact of modern technology, began a process of re-evaluating the goals and institutions of their society. Increasingly secular, urban and industrial, many Quebecers concluded that their survival depended upon their provincial government taking a strong initiative in reforming education, health, welfare industrial relations and in promoting economic changes that would improve the position of Francophones in an Anglophone dominated economy. The emphasis was on reforms already familiar in most industrial countries, but the goal was to strengthen the Francophone culture of Quebec and therefore was nationalist as well as social in intent. The cost of these new programs brought Quebec into a series of sharp conflicts with the central government over tax sharing and areas of jurisdiction. In their campaign to reduce or prevent federal activities in such areas as portable pensions and urban planning Quebec provincial politicians appealed to the nationalism of Francophone Quebecers insisting that Quebec, not Ottawa, should be the focus of French Canadian power and pride.



Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau, whose government moved to establish equality for the French language within federal institutions.



René Levesque, elected Premier of Quebec in November 1976, advocates full political sovereignty for Quebec accompanied by a form of continued economic association with the rest of Canada.

Initially this conflict took place purely within the context of differing views of the manner in which the powers in the federal system should be distributed. During the late 60s and early 70s certain modifications were made in federal government policies which increased both provincial jurisdiction and taxing authority though many issues remained in dispute. At the federal level the Government of Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau moved to establish greater equality for the French language within federal institutions and to increase the role of French speaking Canadians in the federal bureaucracy. A series of constitutional conferences were held in which a wide variety of proposals for change were discussed. At Victoria in 1971 a new constitutional "charter" was drawn up and accepted by the Federal government and all of the provinces, except Quebec, which finally decided that it did not provide all the guarantees it felt it needed for its security, especially at a time when the Francophone proportion of the population was beginning to decrease.

At the same time there developed an increasing polarization of views about the future within Quebec. On the one hand the French-speaking federalists led by Prime Minister Trudeau contended that the federal system could be reformed to

give French Canadians greater equality while preserving for them the economic and international advantages of participating in a united country. Many Quebec nationalists, on the other hand, insisted that Quebec's security depended upon the achievement of full national sovereignty, at least in political matters, and on developing a unilingually French culture. In November 1976 the *parti québécois*, the party advocating Quebec independence was elected to office on a pledge to consult the electorate of the province on the issue of the future status of the province. Premier René Levesque, the new Government's leader, has urged the people of his province to support a plan which calls for full political sovereignty accompanied by some form of continued economic association with the rest of Canada. Prime Minister Trudeau and most of the premiers of the other provinces have already indicated that while they are prepared to negotiate a new constitution including entrenched rights for the French language and a new division of powers, they do not believe the sovereignty-association proposal is a workable one.

At present, then, relations between the federal government and Quebec, in the field of constitutional change, have reached an impasse. Until the referendum on Quebec's future, which the Premier of Quebec has indicated will be only advisory rather than binding, has been held it seems unlikely that any fundamental changes will take place. Shortly after the election of the *parti québécois* government Prime Minister Trudeau summed up the issue that must now be resolved:

"Quebeckers, like citizens of other provinces, are proud. They seek personal fulfillment in a free and independent way. The central question is whether growth of freedom and independence is best assured by Canada, or by Quebec alone. Canadians must think about this brutal question now. Not only think of solving it in words, but by deeds and through their attitudes. In the area of the language problem, of course, but also in the very important areas of regional disparities and social justice . . . I believe that Canada cannot, indeed that Canada must not survive by force. The country will only remain united—it should only remain united—if its citizens want to live together in one civil society."