

IN QUEBEC:

# A Revolution Cometh?

For those of you who support the cyclical theory of history, this article will serve as both notice and information on a new Quebec phenomenon which bears some watching — the founding of the *Estates General* of Quebec.

The "quiet revolution" which rallied round the cry "maitre chez nous" and swept Quebec in 1960 is due to receive a major overhaul in the months immediately ahead. Forces are being regrouped for the second and not-so-quiet wave of "the revolution."

The two main vehicles which may be expected to instill new life and direction into "the revolution" are the *Estates General*, now in the initial processes of organization, and the *Constituent Assembly*, a body promised by Premier Daniel Johnson in his recent electoral campaign — to be given the power to draft a new constitution for the Province of Quebec. It will be the object of both of these bodies to provide a "grass roots" focal point, in attempting to compile for the first time a comprehensive, written list of the things that "Quebec wants" — both in terms of constitutional law and in terms of their general social condition.

The first, and perhaps the most interesting of the two, is the *Estates General*, which takes its name, philosophy and general organizational structure from an institution of 18th Century France. The *Estates General* of France, as you may or may not recall, was a tricameral legislative body which in some respects vaguely resembled the Parliament of England. It consisted of Nobility, Clergy, and the Third Estate (or commons); and it was all that stood between the King and "absolute power". For those of you who support the "cyclical

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view" of history, it should also be noted that the activities of the *Estates General* of France led directly to the storming of the Bastille and the excesses of the French Revolution.

The present version, the *Estates General* of Quebec, is being organized at the county level throughout the province — the only two conditions of membership being that the groups represented be politically non-partisan and that their one official language be French. Given these two preconditions, the individual county unit or Estate embraces all manner of commercial, fraternal and cultural organizations: Junior and Senior Chambers of Commerce, co-operatives and caisses populaires, union locals, farm and fishing associations, students' and professors' organizations, legal and medical groups, local Saint-Jean-Baptiste Societies, etc. Each county unit is

now in the process of completing or has already completed the selection of ten official delegates and ten alternates to represent them at an organization meeting slated for November 25–27 in Montreal. This November meeting is only an organizational effort, in preparation for an open convention of the whole organization which is scheduled for some time next summer.

At this open convention, each of the county units or Estates will be submitting its list of doleances (resolutions or grievances), which will form the raw material from which the *Estates General* will hammer out the goals and priorities of the "French-Canadian Nation". In writing, will be the comprehensive and detailed "will of the grass roots". It will spell out "what Quebec wants" in terms that even the most plodding of English minds will be able to comprehend — once its been translated of course!

It is obviously too early to accurately project what the stance of the new Estates will be, or to accurately predict its ultimate effect on the policies of the provincial government; but it seems a safe conjecture that their effect will be profound, and their stance, hyper-nationalistic. It will probably mark the beginning-in-earnest of "nonco-operative federalism" and conceivably the end of Confederation.

The idea of a Canadian *Estates General* was conceived and organized by a Montreal-based group of intellectuals and academics — some of the finest minds in Quebec. The interim President of the Estates, Jacques-Yvan Morin, Professor of constitutional law at the University of Montreal, has said of the organization's

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