

## Federal-Provincial Relations in Canada

role in the development of the province's economy.

In the 1860s, when Canadian political leaders, Anglophone and Francophone, as well as the British Imperial authorities, recognized the need to unite all of the British North American colonies for defence and economic purposes, cultural duality was one of the first facts that had to be recognized. The new constitution, enshrined in the British North America Act, offered this recognition in two fundamental ways. In the first place it was recognized that only a federal, as distinct from a unitary, system of government would be acceptable to the French Canadian minority. The newly created provinces were therefore granted powers over, among other things, matters that were deemed necessary for the preservation of cultural distinctions. These included power over education and most matters touching upon those religious and charitable institutions which provided the relatively restricted public services of the time. Quebec, in contrast to the other provinces, retained its own distinctive system of civil law, and the French and English languages were given equal status in the government and courts of the province. Protestant schools, chiefly for the Anglophone minority in Quebec, were also given recognition alongside the Roman Catholic system which was designed largely for Francophones. In short, Francophone Quebecers were given a provincial state in which they would be a majority and therefore empowered to defend the distinct cultural life of their society. The central government also recognized the distinctive character of the French culture in Canada by making French, along with English, an official language in the federal parliament and its records, and in courts established by the federal government. For the first time, in 1867, the French language was guaranteed a constitutional status, though it was limited to the province of Quebec and federal institutions. No province other than Quebec was bilingual, though limited and often precarious French language education opportunities were available, notably in Ontario and New Brunswick.

Though the founders of the new federal system apparently believed that the British North America Act's provisions would put an end to cultural conflicts between French and English Canadians, their optimism proved unwarranted. Be-



*Montreal, the economic centre of Quebec, is the second largest French speaking city in the world.*

tween 1867 and the conclusion of the First World War, several incidents took place which increased the French Canadians' sense of insecurity and caused them to look increasingly to their provincial government as the protector of their culture. The first problem arose over the rights of French-speaking minorities outside of Quebec. English Canadians, on the whole, appear to have believed that only in Quebec should the French language have an official status in education. Though the French language and Roman Catholic schools had been provided for in the constitution of the new province of Manitoba in 1870, by 1890 the Anglophone majority had decided that a single language and a single state school system should replace the existing dual structure. When Saskatchewan and Alberta were established in 1905, a similar pattern was followed. And by the second decade of the century Ontario, where limited educational rights existed for the Francophone minority, also took steps to restrict the expansion of bilingual schools.

To many French Canadians the reduction of minority rights in the Anglophone provinces was a betrayal of what they believed to have been a "cultural compact" which recognized the equality of the two cultures as part of the federal agreement. Henri Bourassa, a leading Quebec public figure in the early years

of the century, expressed this conviction when he wrote that "the Canadian nation will attain its ultimate destiny, indeed it will exist, only on the condition of being biethnic and bilingual, and by remaining faithful to the concept of the Fathers of Confederation: the free and voluntary association of two peoples enjoying equal rights in all matters." If the "compact" was broken, and French Canadians were threatened with assimilation outside Quebec, then they would have to build a stronger constitutional bastion for the province where their rights were guaranteed by their voting majority, the province of Quebec. This tendency to look to the province as a garrison of defence for minority rights was further stimulated by two incidents which emphasized the weakness of French Canadian power in federal politics. The first was the decision to execute Louis Riel, the French-speaking Métis leader of two rebellions in Western Canada, in 1885. Riel, who was part French Canadian and part American Indian, was convicted of treason but clemency had been urged on grounds of his mental instability. Though many French Canadians identified with Riel's cause, the federal authorities allowed his hanging to be carried out. That was the apparent will of the Anglophone majority. The First World War produced a more serious rupture over the