

Quebec in the Canadian Federation

Increasing international attention is being given to Canada's efforts to review its federal structure in a way to meet the aspirations of both French and English-speaking Canadians. The centre of French Canada is in the province of Quebec. The following is a historical survey, prepared by Professor Ramsay Cook of York University in Canada, of Quebec's place in the Canadian federation, which explains the background to the important domestic issues faced by Canadians today. The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of Professor Cook.

The Canadian federal system, as it was designed in 1867 and has since evolved, reflects the two most fundamental features of Canada: regional diversity and linguistic duality. The regional diversity of the country arises from economic, social, historical and cultural distinctions. Ontario, for example, has always been the most industrialized and most heavily populated province. The Atlantic provinces have grown economically more slowly even though they were settled before Ontario. The prairie provinces, though no longer exclusively agricultural, comprise the main grain farming areas and they contain a highly varied ethnic population. British Columbia, separated from the rest of the country by the Rocky Mountains, has been more dependent on the extractive industries, mines, forests and fisheries, than other regions. Finally, and most strikingly, has been Quebec, approximately eighty percent of whose population has been, and remains, culturally and linguistically distinctive. Once distinguished by its French, Roman Catholic and largely rural character, the Quebec of to-day, though secular and urban, has lost none of its determination to preserve its cultural identity.

Every region and province of Canada has been anxious, in the past as in the present, to achieve two general goals. One has been to retain its local historical identity. The other has been to share the economic, political and international benefits of a wider union by working for the development of a united country. The tension between the desire to preserve local identities and the



Jules Leger, the Governor General of Canada, is a native of Quebec Province. Canada's cultural duality is demonstrated by alternating the appointment of Governor General between English and French speaking Canadians.

need for wider unity has been the very essence of the Canadian political experience, and it presents a renewed challenge to virtually every generation of Canadian public men and women.

At least until recently the Canadian federal system has proven highly flexible, allowing those accommodations which have been repeatedly necessary as the definition of Canadian priorities shifted and expanded.

While every region of Canada has manifested a desire to retain something of its distinctiveness, none has been more understandably persistent in the pursuit of that goal than Quebec. At the time of Confederation, and since, the great majority of French-speaking Canadians inhabited Quebec. Only about twenty percent lived in the other provinces with the largest numbers found in those areas contiguous with Quebec, New Brunswick and Ontario. Quebec is thus the historic homeland of the French Canadians, their settlements along the St. Lawrence River dating back to the seventeenth century. In 1763 this French colony was ceded to the British as part of the settlement of the Seven Years' War and over the next century French Canadians expanded demographically and developed their own social, economic and religious institutions and their own political leadership. The English language minority, about twenty percent of the population, played a dominant



The Canadian Parliament in Ottawa, where federal legislation is enacted. The province of Quebec elects 74 out of 264 members to the House of Commons.