

The Quiet Revolution: Changing a Country Through Words Not War

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“The issue is not anymore to position ourselves as perpetual opponents to federal policies... What is important for the time being is that faced with federal initiatives we would always be ready to propose an alternative that safeguards our rights.”

-Jean Lesage

The Quiet Revolution was a time of advocacy for French language rights and modernization, in Quebec's government and greater Canada. During the 1960s and 70s, conflict over French rights, education, government secularization, and openings for French Canadians in higher skilled jobs took place. As a result of this time of conflict, bills were passed such as Bill 101, making French the primary language of Quebec, and the Official Languages Act, which made Canada a bilingual country. The Quiet Revolution led from conflict over French rights to new laws strengthening French culture, higher skilled jobs, and education for people all across Quebec. These compromises helped to keep Canada united and continue impacting the economy and culture in Quebec today.

For most of the 1600s and 1700s Quebec City was a French settlement. In the late 1700s, France and England fought over lands in North America in places such as Quebec. In 1759 British forces attacked French forces on the Plains of Abraham outside Quebec City. British forces won the battle, taking over Quebec and the rest of Canada. This change in power would affect Quebec and Canada throughout the decades until the Quiet Revolution. In the years following the battle on the Plains of Abraham, revolts by unprepared and badly trained French nationalists were easily defeated by the British Canadian forces. Tensions between anglophones (English speakers), and francophones (French speakers) in Quebec continued growing. Throughout the 1800s and early 1900s, Quebec's government was mostly conservative and dominated mainly by Anglophone politicians. Most French Canadian citizens lived isolated in impoverished rural communities that had strong ties to the Roman Catholic Church. Into the mid 1900s many citizens and politicians across Canada and worldwide were unaware of the underdeveloped and undereducated conditions of most French Canadians in Quebec.

“Quebec is the original heart, the hardest and deepest kernel, the core of the first time. All round, nine other provinces form the flesh of this still-bitter fruit called Canada”

-Anne Hebert, Canadian Poet

In the late 1950s and early 1960s many French Canadians were moving into Quebec's major cities, urbanizing the province. This era of change revealed Quebec's unstable economy and the divides that had been separating the people. In 1959 the premier of Quebec, Maurice Duplessis, died ending an era of conservative rule under his party, Union Nationale. Many people in Quebec were ready for change because of a lack of economic growth. Parti Liberal candidate, Jean Lesage, ran for

Premier under the campaign slogan, "C'est le temps que ça change," meaning, "It's time for a change." This slogan won the hearts of many voters. The following year, the General Assembly election in Quebec voted in Parti Liberal under Jean Lesage, the first party other than Union Nationale to be elected in over two decades. This election led to government secularization making Quebec more relevant to the modern society of Canada. The election of Parti Liberal brought forward the goals of modernizing Quebec and uniting the province for a more equal society. This election would change the history of Quebec, paving the way for the Quiet Revolution.

"If ever Confederation fails, it will not be because Quebec - the political voice of French Canada - has separated from it. It will be because the way to keep Quebec in it has not been found."

-Jean Lesage, leader of Parti Liberal

During the time after the election many French Canadian citizens started speaking their minds about French language rights due to the new political climate. This drew worldwide attention to the growing tensions in Quebec. Many people protested for their rights as citizens with French heritage, citizens known as Québécois. They went by the slogan "Maîtres Chez Nous," or Masters of Our Own House. They protested to restore French language and culture along with the modernization of Quebec's economy and educational system. They believed that losing their culture would be losing who they were as Québécois. The Quiet Revolution, named for its mainly peaceful protests and marches, promoted French language rights, better education and higher skilled jobs for French Canadians, throughout Quebec and Canada. Due to these rising conflicts, many anglophones started moving out of Quebec to other provinces, such as Ontario and Manitoba. The growing divides between anglophones and francophones became referred to as the two solitudes, and the paths of the two groups grew further and further apart. In 1962, Hydro Quebec, a hydroelectric company, was the first major business to allow French, as well as English, in the workspace. The company hired more french speaking and bilingual workers in management jobs, jobs that had usually been occupied by English speaking workers. This compromise helped to secure the role of both the French and English languages in Quebec. This compromise also supported the idea of restoring French culture, in the end spurring more conflict. In 1969, The Official Languages Act was passed by Canada's Parliament as recommended by the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism which was established in 1963 in response to the protests of the Quiet Revolution. Pierre Trudeau, the Premier of Canada during this time, supported this act in part because he had grown up in Quebec and understood the conflict. The Official Languages Act made French the official language of Canada along with English and worked to recognize both the anglophone and francophone communities in Canada. These compromises would start to bridge the gap between the two solitudes in Quebec, as well as make Quebec a strong hold for French culture in Canada.

The growing French nationalist movement in Quebec, a result of the Quiet Revolution, raised the question of Quebec's sovereignty. Political parties such as Bloc Québécois and Parti Québécois led the separatist efforts. In 1977, Bill 101 or The Charter of French Language, was passed by the Parti Québécois government under Rene Levesque. This bill stated that all public schools in Quebec had to be taught in French however all citizens of Quebec whose parents had been educated in English were given the choice to go to English public schools. This bill also stated all government operations were

to be conducted in French. The bill was quickly revised over six times to include more anglophone rights. Three years later in 1980 Parti Québécois, led by René Lévesque, proposed a referendum for the sovereignty of Quebec. The people of Quebec were given a chance to vote to “negotiate a new constitutional agreement with the rest of Canada, based on the equality of nations,” as written in the referendum draft. The result of the vote was 60% “no” and 40% “yes.” Although most Canadians thought the vote would lean toward “yes,” many people in Quebec were proud to be Canadian. In 1995 the new premier of Quebec, Jacques Parizeau, former leader of Parti Québécois, promised his supporters to propose a referendum of separatism after the failed efforts of the former premier. The 1990 referendum to secede from Canada ended with thin margins--the “yes or oui” side at 49.42% and the “no or non” side at 50.58%. In the end Quebec voted not to secede from Canada, ending an era of separatism.

Quebec has changed in many ways since the Quiet Revolution. Due to the integration of French speaking Canadians in the higher skilled work place and the modernization of the government, the economy has improved. Although many anglophone businesses left Quebec in the 1960s and 70s because of the strong push for French language rights, Quebec's economy has still grown and has improved since. One of the biggest compromises of the Quiet Revolution was the Official Languages Act of 1969. Since then, the number of Quebec citizens who are fluent in both English and French has grown significantly. People who are fluent in both French and English have had the highest growth in income. Today not speaking French in Quebec is almost impossible. Everything from restaurant interactions to business transactions is in French. Quebec's license plates say, Je Me Souviens, or I Will Remember, to symbolize the importance of their French heritage. The 1960s Quiet Revolution rose out of the conflict between anglophones and francophones in Quebec. Since then Quebec has changed and reformed. The compromises achieved by the Quiet Revolution set new goals for cultural respect and unity in Quebec and greater Canada.