

Slected extracts from the book *Un Québec fort dans une nouvelle Confédération* by Jean Lesage, Prime Minister of Québec, June 1965.

[Translation]

••• **The basis of the Quebec attitude**

But what, indeed, forms the basis of our attitude?

First of all, we share two facts that are obvious to any casual analysis. The first is that the French-Canadian group that constitutes the vast majority of our province, is nonetheless only a minority when compared with the rest of the Canadian population. Obviously, it is an important minority that has been settled in this country for many centuries, which in turn bestows on it specific rights and obligations. The basic right, which it demands be preserved, is the maintenance of its traditions and cultural characteristics. Its main duty, as a group French in language and culture, is the well being and development on the American continent of the human heritage for which it is responsible and is its custodian. [...]

The second fact to which one must continuously refer if we wish to understand the meaning of our current demands, is that Quebec - the political expression of French Canada - exists and evolves within a specific political regime. Quebec exists within the tangible reality of daily life and this reality influences it in its behaviours and attitudes, as would be the case for any group of human beings. Yet Canada, of which Quebec is one among its ten provinces, has a confederative regime that guarantees - and anyone requiring further convincing need only consult the British North America Act - that guarantees, I repeat, to the minority whom we are the respect for the rights to which I have alluded.[...]

From our standpoint in Quebec, one of the purposes of the confederative regime - one that is implicitly found in our Canadian Constitution - is to make it possible for ethnic groups to maintain and especially develop their inherent characteristics. Had this not been the case, it can be said with certainty that the French Canadians in 1867 would have never accepted to join in the Canadian Confederation.

To satisfy its purpose, the confederative regime presupposes a distribution of powers and responsibilities. As such, in our country, significant sectors requiring action have been set aside for the provinces since it has been deemed that for various reasons provincial autonomy in such areas would allow the French-speaking group and the English-speaking group to develop more freely. The fact that other provinces have joined Confederation since then does not change this initial objective at all. And as I just stated, the French Canadians of 1867 saw in this provincial autonomy one of their primary demands.

All this explains why today, Quebec objects each time it notes that the central government has moved into areas of activity that, from our standpoint, belong under provincial jurisdiction. Quebec sees in these trends a serious danger in gradually losing some of the guarantees that it demands be found in the confederative regime to which it agreed to live in 1867.

Quebec fears that in the end, the rules of the game will in some way be changed unilaterally. And then, we would be in a situation that was not foreseen in 1867 and that is not acceptable at this time.

This is why we must exercise continuous vigilance. No one in Quebec believes that one specific measure - assistance to municipalities, the contributory retirement program, or federal assistance for education,

for instance - will by itself lead French Canada to assimilation into the English-speaking majority. No one either believes that one of these measures would be such as to threaten our entire cultural heritage. Yet we must systematically oppose any federal initiative whatsoever that does in fact reduce or diminish the provincial field of jurisdiction. We absolutely cannot, even in the case of apparently secondary issues, remain passive to federal initiatives that we deem are harmful to the exercising of powers entrusted to the provinces. In fact, it is the aggregate of these measures that must be considered and it is each and every one of them that makes up the whole that we must oppose, because each one of them thwarts in some way the provinces' autonomy, an incursion that constitutes a precedent that one tends to invoke thereafter to justify other, even greater, incursions.

•• The Five Principles

I now want to state - quite briefly - a few of the principles that guide us. I think that they provide all the needed answers for those who today, either because they do not agree with us, or because they fear that our current momentum will falter, or simply because they are afraid, watch us act and question what we are doing.

To begin with: **the first principle.** We believe that Quebec is the political expression of French Canada and that it plays the role of the homeland for all in our country who speak our language. I have probably made this observation a dozen times everywhere throughout Canada.

As such, **the second principle** is that our province has its own traits of character, its own personality, that it must preserve and that it is entitled to promote. As for this specific personality, the Prime Minister of Canada has himself recognized it. Likewise, I have spoken clearly in these terms how many times I don't know.

The third principle. We live in a constitutional framework which, through evolution and self-improvement, must enable our community to achieve alone and by its own suitable means the objectives that it has freely set for itself. This possibility for self-achievement was recognized at the time of Confederation in 1867 and it must be carried on, even if this means that to do so, the constitutional regime of Canada must adapt to new conditions.

The fourth principle. Quebec today must possess and control insofar as possible the economic, social, administrative and political levers that alone will allow it to make materialize its legitimate aspirations as an adult people.

The fifth principle. Actions undertaken in today's Quebec must be carried out in peace and justice while taking into account the North American reality in which it lives, the ordinary and desirable bonds that link it to other French-speaking nations and the economic and commercial relations that it maintains not only with the rest of Canada, but also with many other countries worldwide.

Source: Jean Lesage, *Un Québec fort dans une nouvelle Confédération*, ministère des Affaires fédérales-provinciales et Office d'information du Québec, 1965, p. 26-29 (which reproduce extracts from speeches given in Fredericton on October 10, 1963, and in Montréal on September 20, 1964).