

AFTER THE QUEBEC ELECTIONS

Special Correspondence

Montreal: The political pot keeps boiling in Quebec. Last Wednesday afternoon witnessed the swearing in of the new Duplessis "Union Nationale" Government. On Thursday morning Camillien Houde, who preceded Mr. Duplessis in the leadership of the Conservative party, resigned as mayor of Montreal. These were two major political events.

Mr. Duplessis had hardly taken the oath of office when he was faced with a revolt in the ranks of his party. He leads a mixed following of Conservatives, dissentient Liberals, and French-Canadian Nationalists with Fascist tendencies. Including himself, the Cabinet consists of nine Conservatives and five Liberals. He followed custom in naming an English-speaking Provincial Treasurer and an Irish minister without portfolio. In addition he named another English member to the Cabinet without portfolio. But he found no room in the Cabinet for Mayor J. E. Gregoire of Quebec, or Dr. Philippe Hamel of the same city, both leaders of the extremist wing of the "Union Nationale." Hence the revolt.

The victory of the Union Nationale forces—which they had supported—had been hailed by the extremist organs as a step towards the break-up of the "English trusts," the secession of Quebec from Confederation, and the establishment of a French-Canadian Roman Catholic republic on the banks of the St. Lawrence. When Mr. Duplessis failed to name extremists to the Cabinet and actually appointed three English-speaking representatives, he caused disappointment in nationalist circles. The organized mobs of youth in the city of Quebec, who, during the last session of the Legislature, had crowded the public galleries of the Legislative chamber and the sessions of the Public Accounts Committee in order to denounce the Taschereau regime and to support Mr. Duplessis, now turned against the new Premier. They met immediately after the new Cabinet was named, heard speeches by their leaders and by two of the new Union Nationale members of the Legislature denouncing the English "influence" and the "trusts," and demanding the appointment of Dr. Hamel and Mayor Gregoire to the Cabinet, and then marched in a body to the Premier's hotel to make their demands. Mr. Duplessis refused to meet them.

On the following morning a mob of two thousand stormed the Parliament Buildings; some took possession of the Legislative Assembly chamber, and listened to harangues by their leaders. They finally retired when the Premier declared that he would not be blackmailed by extremists. Mr. Duplessis insisted that he would be the leader of his party and that he would not be influenced by pleas based upon racial prejudices and personal ambitions. His attitude has won him widespread support in all, except nationalist, circles. His firmness has given a setback to the rabid separatists.

The effect of this revolt will probably be a break in the ranks of the "Union Nationale." Mr. Duplessis' majority is large enough to allow him to expel a few of the "rebels." Even if he fails to do so, it is likely that a group may withdraw their support and constitute themselves a separate party. Their number in the Legislature will be small, and their nationalist aims will in effect represent the views of Mr. Paul Gouin and his "Action Libérale Nationale," who are presently in political retirement. If such a separation occurs, Mr. Duplessis will breathe more easily.

The "Union Nationale" victory also explains the resignation of the mayor of Montreal. A dynamic political figure Camillien Houde, as leader of the provincial Conservative party, conducted a vigorous campaign to overthrow the Taschereau regime. He failed in 1932, and was replaced in the leadership by Mr. Duplessis. Since that date he has refrained from active participation in party politics, but between him and Mr. Duplessis there is mutual hatred. He was re-elected to the majority in 1934 with a record vote of almost one hundred thousand. As mayor, Mr. Houde was able to co-operate with the Liberal Government. He realized, however, that personal feelings, as well as political division in the Montreal City Council, would render such co-operation with the new Government exceedingly difficult. Municipal elections take place in December, and a bitter fight is in prospect. The Union Nationale will sponsor its own candidate. The provincial election will be fought all over again. Mr. Houde did not relish this prospect. He resigned because he felt that, with the election of Mr. Duplessis, his own mandate had terminated.

In his official statement, the Mayor points to the nationalist movement in Quebec. Since his political career is by no means at an end, it is of interest to note his views:

"Ever since April, 1934, there has been growing in the Province of Quebec a spirit of intense nationalism which complicates the situation gravely, and which is found to have serious consequences for the French-Canadians in the near future. I have taken no part in a movement which I consider dangerous, particularly in a cosmopolitan city like ours. Those who are out to fight me all belong to that school of thought, and the verdict of the people in the last provincial election makes it plain that the trend is in that direction. I could not, in a forthcoming contest, particularly if it were held in December, move with the current state of mind.

Our administrative difficulties are sufficient, both in Quebec and in Montreal, without unnecessarily adding racial problem to them. I leave to those who have undertaken responsibility for the orientation of my people, and I feel that I cannot follow them onto ground which leads straight to the secession of Quebec from Confederation."

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