

Prologue

(René Lévesque: The Fascinating Life of a Separatist Icon)

Thousands of people gathered at the Paul Sauvé Arena in east end Montreal. They chanted, clapped and waved fleur-de-lis flags. The crowd was united by an electrifying sense of joy.

The impossible had happened. The Parti Québécois (PQ) a new political party that promised Quebecers a chance to build their own nation, had just won the November 1976 election. René Lévesque, the driving force behind this dream, was the new premier of Quebec.

A group of students began to sing Gilles Vigneault's nationalist refrain: "*Gens du pays, c'est votre tour, de vous laisser parler d'amour....*" Then, one by one, more people joined in until the entire sports centre resonated with the sound of more than 5000 voices. Some people were so delirious with happiness that they spontaneously hugged complete strangers.

René Lévesque had just finished a rousing speech at the Taillon riding headquarters and he was on his way to Paul Sauvé Arena with a police escort. He had hoped that the Parti Québécois would win a few more seats than during the last provincial election, but he had never imagined that the PQ would form a majority government. Lévesque was still in shock from the sudden victory.

Lévesque entered the arena to thunderous applause. Quebecers were incredibly proud of this charismatic *Gaspésien*. As he attempted to make his way to the stage, supporters tried to embrace him, congratulate him, or merely touch him.

Finally, Lévesque reached the stage and walked towards the microphone. People cheered and chanted so loudly that it was almost deafening. Lévesque motioned with his hands for quiet—and he began to speak.....