

## THE STRUGGLE AGAINST CORRUPTION AT THE TIME OF QUEBEC'S QUIET REVOLUTION



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### **Abstract:**

*This paper will examine a critical moment in the development of political corruption in Quebec, when the liberal government of Jean Lesage made it a priority to tackle the issue and to 'clean-up' Quebec's corrupt political practices. The paper demonstrates that, while addressing a number of corrupt practices common in Quebec politics in the decades prior to 1960, the Lesage government turned a blind eye to a number of practices that have been the subject of the recent Charbonneau Commission and that continue to form the core of an elaborate system of political collusion in Quebec politics. The politics of the Quiet Revolution have already been the object of many inquiries that have produced a wealth of useful data and information. Resting on this documentation, this paper will propose a new explanation of current issues related to political corruption in Quebec that is rooted in the electoral politics of the period surrounding the Quiet Revolution. While the Quiet Revolution has often been examined as a historical turning point, from the angles of constitutional politics, nationalism or the emergence of the modern Quebec state, it has not been extensively re-visited from the angle of political corruption. Finally, the study of the struggle against political corruption during the Quiet Revolution also allows us to present a new, more complex and more relevant operationalization of the basic concept of political corruption.*

**Key words:** corruption; government; Québec; politics; elections.

### **Introduction:**

Today, in Canada, political corruption is often seen as a pathology of the political system, a pattern of deviant behaviour conditioned by personal greed that undermines the normal and proper operation of a political system. This view is based on constructing a clear dichotomy between the 'normal' and the 'abnormal', and creates a normative gulf between the good actors who defend public probity, and the bad actors who sacrifice the public good for the sake of their personal interest.

The argument of this paper is that this normative dichotomy is a relatively recent theoretical construction and that its rigid application prevents us from seeing the politics behind the bluster that usually accompanies the fight against corruption, and from gaining a proper understanding of historical as well as current manifestations of political corruption. Beyond the rhetoric, corruption can be a tool of politics, and vice versa. In this context, the dominant North-American and Western-European narrative that presents the fight against corruption as a struggle over principles, plays its role perfectly: it allows some groups to use a strong normative model, in order to better marginalise political and economic opponents in the eyes of the public, to replace one party's system of patronage with another's, and to replace one form of corruption with another.

Outside of North America and Western Europe, the fight against corruption is often seen as desirable but also as a hopeless illusion. It is also understood that those who wage the fight against corruption are often themselves corrupt and make use of the rhetoric of the fight against corruption in order to better discredit and displace their political and economic adversaries.

Why focus on the Quiet Revolution? The year 1960 marks a shift in the public interpretation of corruption in Quebec. From mildly apologetic toward certain aspects and effects of corruption, before 1960, the mood shifted to a generalized condemnation of all corrupt practices, after 1960 (Lemieux et Hudon: 126). This may have been due to the fact that the Liberal Party had been relegated to the role of opposition for 16 years and had resorted to a condemnation of the system of corruption in order to attack the legitimacy of the Union Nationale governments, and it may also be due to the fact that after the 1960 victory of the Liberal Party, the Union Nationale, resentful of the accusations levied against it prior to the election, and eager to sully the reputation of the Liberal government, as the Liberals had sullied theirs, then resorted to the same condemnations of the system of corruption practiced by their Liberal opponents. The condemnation of corruption thus became generalized, from all parties.

Notwithstanding, beyond the rhetoric, the Quiet Revolution also saw a major transformation in the phenomenon of political corruption in Quebec. This transformation was the result of the emergence of a new competitive business class in Quebec (Raynauld, 1974: 85-86). This competitive business class was interested in making use of Jean Lesage's QLP (Quebec Liberal Party) to free itself from the high prices of electricity which it blamed on the control exercised by the monopolistic firms in that sector, and which it saw as a form of rent. This new dominant business class also saw an opportunity to use the QLP to free itself from the bribes exacted by lower-level civil servants. Again, it is worth noting that this new business class had no objection to participating in the emerging system where large contracts that came with the mega-projects of the 1960s were allocated on the basis of political favouritism. So long as political corruption was profitable, improved competitiveness and the bottom-line, no one objected. There thus seems to be a clear dissonance between the rhetoric

of the war against corruption, and the practices of the economic and political elites of the time.

## **1. The Quebec Liberal Party deserted by its traditional business allies**

The Quebec Liberal Party had traditionally been closer to large enterprises, mainly concentrated in the Montreal area, while the Union Nationale had been the party of small business, concentrated mostly in rural areas. However, the Liberal government of Adélard Godbout, from 1939 to 1944 had taken a number of steps that had been received with little enthusiasm by the large firms traditionally allied to the QLP. Thus, Godbout had created a Civil Service Commission whose mandate was mainly to supervise the hiring and firing of civil servants, but also in part to monitor the interactions between civil servants and the public (Lemieux: 62). Godbout's government had created Hydro-Quebec out of the nationalisation of the Montreal Light, Heat and Power (Lemieux: 62). The Liberals under Godbout had also nationalised a number of firms in other sectors, and appeared to favour trade unions by openly promoting the development of the public sector, by creating the Conseil supérieur du travail and the Commission des relations ouvrières, and by abrogating laws that allowed government and firms to circumvent the collective agreements and governmental guidelines regarding the minimum wage (Lemieux: 67). These actions, in addition to placing the City of Montreal under trusteeship (Lemieux: 67), siding with the striking workers during the Asbestos strike of 1949 (Lemieux: 75), the Louiseville strike of 1952 (Lemieux: 65), the Murdochville strike of 1957, and the CBC producers' strike of 1959 (Pelletier, 1989: 188), had convinced many in the business community that the Quebec Liberals could no longer be trusted to guarantee the rights and privileges of the business community and particularly of the large Anglophone and foreign firms that had constituted the traditional business support of the QLP. In fact, it is clear that, starting under the leadership of Adélard Godbout but continuing under that of his successor, Georges-Émile Lapalme, the QLP will redefine itself as the champion of the growth of the public sector, of the development of the emerging industrial sector, and of the expansion of the public sector labour force (Lemieux, 1993: 67; Lévesque, 2013: 101, 667-668, 711).

By contrast, after 1944, the Union Nationale governments of Maurice Duplessis favoured the use of subsidies to firms and municipalities (Lemieux et Hudon, 64), in order to gain a measure of control over their development projects, and to make political allies of mayors and business leaders. Most notably, the Union Nationale will successfully clientelize the large firms that had traditionally been prone to lend their support to the QLP. In contrast with the QLP, the Union Nationale will even assert emphatically that the success of these large foreign and domestic firms is key to the development of the province, and will link the growth of the public sector and of trade unions with the threat of a communist takeover. From 1944 to 1960, Maurice Duplessis

thus succeeded in gathering around the Union Nationale, the rural voters and the small businesses located mostly in rural areas of the province, but also large corporate actors who will henceforth constitute a major source of funding for the Union Nationale.

## 2. The Quebec Liberal Party in search of a new base

Not only had the QLP of Adélard Godbout and of Georges-Émile Lapalme alienated much of the traditional support of the QLP among large corporations and rural elites, but being relegated to the role of opposition also deprived the QLP of the traditional tools of political patronage. Unable to distribute the favours of the government, the QLP lost many of its traditional clients who defected to the party of Maurice Duplessis, drawn by the prospects of contracts, favours and subsidies. In fact, by the late 1950s, few believed that the QLP was still capable of leaving the role of opposition and of forming a government.

By 1958, the Quebec Liberals have been out of office for 14 years. Many of their funders have abandoned them, and according to Michel Lévesque (Lévesque, 2013: 670), the party is then \$300,000 in debt, with no relief in sight. The large monopoly firms that dominate the Quebec economy have long abandoned them in favour of the Union Nationale. As a result, while the Liberals are struggling to fund their operations and their campaigns, the Union Nationale will lavishly spend an estimated 10 to 30 million dollars in the electoral campaign of 1956 (Lévesque, 2013: 669). In the 1960 electoral campaign, they will spend 18 million dollars (Lévesque, 2013: 670).

However, by 1960 things have changed in the province. There is an emerging new business class in Quebec. Raynauld and Vaillancourt describe this new business class as francophone, and note that the share of employment made up by firms lead by Francophones will pass from 47% in 1961 to 55% in 1978 (Lemieux: 109). What is most striking and most notable however is not the fact that Francophones are leading the emergence of a new business class made up mostly of medium-sized and large-sized corporations located mostly in the urban and semi-urban areas. The most important and distinctive feature of these new firms is that, unlike the large foreign and Anglophone monopoly firms that still dominate Quebec's economy and politics in 1960, these new firms are in direct competition with other firms from Quebec, from Canada and from the United States. In many cases, these are industrial or service-sector firms that provide import-substitution goods or compete directly with large American retailers and distributors. However, as the Canadian economy opens to world trade and to competition in the 1950s and 1960s, these young firms are increasingly 'exposed' and vulnerable. Another notable feature of this emerging economic sector is its close ties with the emerging public sector. Many of these firms have grown in parallel with government contracts and subsidies and are dependent on the growth of the provincial state, and on the growth of state services and contracts (Pelletier, 1989: 204-205).

In 1944, the QLP had, through its actions and its rhetoric in favour of the growth of a modern Quebec state and in favour of trade unions, allowed the Union Nationale to build a strong coalition centered on well-established corporations of all sizes and types, and on rural voters averse to paying higher taxes. This coalition had been solidified by the use of corporate subsidies and municipal subsidies, therefore creating a clientele beholden to the Union Nationale (Pelletier, 1989: 35, 47, 134). By 1960, however, the situation has changed. The continued and unavoidable growth of the modern provincial state under Duplessis (Gow: 2), the growth of a larger, better organized and more militant labour force resulting from industrialization and from the economic growth fostered by the Union Nationale governments, and the emergence of a larger and more prominent new business class, provide the bases of a coalition of groups who share a common interest in the continued development of state activities, contracts and employment, and in the continued development of a domestic market, mainly in the urban areas of the province (Lemieux: 126, 128, Pelletier, 1989: 217). While the growing working class and professional class will provide much of the new voters for the election of the QLP in 1960, the campaign funding will come from these new corporations and their allies.

It is these firms, and their allies in liberal professions, who will join forces with the QLP, fund it and lead it to victory in 1960 (Lemieux: 110). Thus, as pointed out by Michel Lévesque, when the QLP finds itself without funds in the middle of the 1960 campaign, it is a group of representatives from this new business class who will borrow \$25,000 on behalf of the party in order to allow the then insolvent QLP to complete the electoral campaign, clinch the victory and form the new government of Quebec (Lévesque, 2013: 658-659 et 670).

The 1960 Quebec election that starts the Quiet Revolution is thus not just the result of a growing discontent with the policies and attitudes of the Union Nationale under Maurice Duplessis. This election should instead be seen as a profound realignment of Quebec politics, based on the emergence of new powerful forces and new interests. If discontent plays a big part in this election, it is the discontent of specific groups strategically positioned to influence the outcome of the election that matters most. Thus, the fast-growing trade unions, their members and their allies, still outraged by the Duplessis governments' handling of prominent labour conflicts, will provide key support for the QLP, especially in urban ridings. (Lemieux: 79) However, it is the new francophone business class that will provide the essential financial resources needed to bring the QLP to victory. As the corporate landscape is transformed, so too is the political landscape of the province.

### **3. The Quiet Revolution and the war against corruption**

The new corporations that lent their support to the QLP in 1960 have interests that are very different from those of the older firms that still dominate the Quebec corporate environment (Pelletier, 1989: 202-205). The large monopoly firms that still

control much of the economy in 1960 generally do not rely on government contracts for their activities. They do, however, depend on government licensing of their monopoly activities, as in the case of the seven remaining large monopoly firms operating in the production and distribution of electricity. They also often depend on the government's willingness to grant privileged and exclusive access to natural resources (Pelletier, 1989: 186). Much of the mining and forestry industries thus operate on the basis of government-granted concessions. Finally, these firms depend on government discretionary action to protect their monopolies. Armed with privileged access to government, and benefitting from discretionary actions by civil servants and government officials, these corporations can successfully keep new entrants out of their respective industries.

This creates a divide within the Quebec corporate world. For the new firms emerging from competitive sectors of the economy, government discretionary action often results in their exclusion from lucrative concessions or activities. Furthermore, these firms suffer greatly from the low-level corruption that is allowed and in some cases encouraged by the governments of the Union Nationale. Every bribe these firms must pay, and every political contribution they must make in order to operate in Quebec or to obtain subsidies, eats away at their bottom line, complicates their operations, undermines their competitiveness, and threatens their existence. For monopoly firms, making a political contribution is a way to pay for the acquisition of a lucrative monopoly position, it is a way to buy profits. But it is also a way to purchase protection from low-level corruption. By contrast, for firms operating in the competitive segments of the economy, being forced to make a political contribution or to pay a bribe, without receiving a lucrative monopoly position in return, constitutes a rent that undermines their bottom line without any apparent benefit.

The divide in interests between government-sanctioned monopoly corporations and competitive firms is best exemplified when considering the electricity sector. While the seven large monopoly electricity companies that still dominate much of the province in 1960 are allowed to make significant profits by gouging their customers, the emerging competitive firms are compelled to pay high rates for electricity, which increases their costs of operation. This is particularly taxing for industrial operations that are electricity-intensive. The profits of one group of corporations constitute costs for the other. It is therefore not surprising that the Lesage government, brought to victory in part by the firms in this emerging competitive sector of the economy will make the elimination of petty corruption, the nationalization of electricity, and the introduction of subsidized electricity prices for industry, prominent elements in its electoral platforms in 1960 and 1962 (Pelletier, 1989: 111, 113).

#### **4. How important was the issue of political corruption in the political debates of the day?**

If we examine carefully the political debates of the period, from 1958 to 1962, we find among the main preoccupations of the day:

1. the accusations of collusion and clientelism in the energy sector;
2. the natural gas scandal of 1958 where members of the Duplessis government were accused of profiting from insider trading in the creation of a monopoly in the natural gas sector;
3. and finally, the political patronage that permeated every level of the civil service and the police (Pelletier, 1989: 238-239).

While issues, like the reform of education and health care, gain prominence in the political and economic debates of the 1950s and 1960s, the issue of corruption and clientelism is endemic to Canadian political debates since before Confederation (Lévesque, 2013: 715-716). No election is free from widespread accusations of patronage, collusion and nepotism. The same is true of the provincial election of 1960. However, what is unprecedented and most notable in 1960, is that the Lesage government, upon taking power on July 5<sup>th</sup>, will almost immediately take substantial steps to address the issue of corruption.

On 19 July 1960, the Lesage government announces a major reform of the Civil Service and restores the powers of the Civil Service Commission, with a clear mission to eliminate patronage in civil service hiring, to promote merit and competition in hiring, and to weed out petty corruption in the civil service (Pelletier, 1989: 195).

- On 13 July, the Treasury Office is created to scrutinize government expenses (Pelletier, 1989: 194).

- On 14 July, the government officially begins its 'offensive' against political patronage (Pelletier, 1989: 194).

- On 15 July, the government accepts the first open-bid for a public works contract (Pelletier, 1989: 194-195).

- On 5<sup>th</sup> October 1960, the Lesage government creates the Salvat Commission, with its focus on attacking and denouncing the links between large monopoly firms and the Duplessis government. The Salvat Commission (La Commission royale d'enquête sur la moralité dans les dépenses publiques) has the stated mission to investigate political corruption and patronage in all sectors of governmental activity since 1944, and thus targets directly, explicitly and specifically the previous governments of the Union Nationale (Lemieux: 101). Central to the work of the Salvat Commission was a denunciation of the system of discretionary subsidies that had been used extensively by the Union Nationale to clientelize both private enterprises, municipal governments and elites;

Finally, in 1962, after months of internal debates and reflections, the Lesage government will gamble its hold on power by calling an election on the issue of the nationalization of the remaining seven large electricity monopolies in the province

(Pelletier, 1989: 245). After winning the 1962 election with an increased majority, the QLP will make the nationalisation of all electricity production and distribution official policy throughout the province (Lemieux: 114). This sector of the economy had been since the 1930s the focal point of accusations of collusion and political corruption, and was widely believed to have benefitted from the protection of the Duplessis governments and to have used this protection to maintain inflated energy prices (Pelletier, 1989: 248).

While the reform of public education had been the star issue of the 1960 electoral campaign, most of the measures to tackle corruption will be enacted, or elaborated, long before the creation of the Parent Commission on Education in 1961, and the creation of the provincial Ministry of Education in 1964. The fight against political corruption and collusion thus quickly takes centre stage in the legislative and regulatory agenda of the new government.

Some of the earliest, boldest and most significant initiatives taken by the Lesage government are thus associated directly with the fight against political corruption. Not only was political corruption elevated as the topic of most political debates in Quebec after the election of 1960, but it clearly comes to occupy a preeminent place in the priorities of the new Lesage government.

## **5. How successful were the Lesage government's efforts to fight corruption?**

In 1960, the Union Nationale of Maurice Duplessis has been in power for 16 years. Réjean Pelletier describes the system of patronage maintained by the Union Nationale as a patrimonial system, where a shameless confusion between the private and the public spheres of activity is maintained (Pelletier, 1989: 59). For Duplessis and his faithful supporters, the discretionary power exercised by those who occupy high public offices is the only tool capable of achieving the public good. For the leaders of the Union Nationale, the apparatus of the State is too removed from society. As a result, it is not capable of understanding and serving the specific needs of the community. Instead, the task of promoting the public good is best left to individuals in positions of authority, specifically to the leaders of the Union Nationale. For them, the game of politics should by right revolve around those individuals who hold the reins of power (Pelletier, 1989: 60, 62).

For the supporters of Maurice Duplessis, patronage is not seen as a form of corruption, at least not in moral terms. As a result, political corruption under Duplessis spreads to all levels of government activity, and takes many forms. To better understand the extent of the phenomenon of corruption under Duplessis, in its various forms, we need a detailed ordinal typology. Allow me to suggest one. In this scale, we find:

1. At the highest level, favoritism in granting large concessions and monopolies, such as those granted in the energy sector of the economy, in mining and in forestry;
2. Lower on our scale, we find favoritism in granting high-level posts in the Civil Service and in Crown corporations; and the system whereby political contributions are made in exchange for large contracts in the mega-projects of the government, thereby conferring on those firms the status of privileged clients of the government party.
3. Lower still on this scale, we find the system of subsidies that made it possible for the Union Nationale to turn both private firms and municipalities into clients of the party (Pelletier, 1989: 150); and the system whereby political contributions would be exchanged for small or medium-size government procurement contracts;
4. Finally, at the lowest level of this scale, we find the attribution of posts at the lower and middle levels of the state apparatus; the favoritism that tainted the attribution of permits; and the bribes paid to civil servants and to the police in exchange for a more lenient application of rules and regulations.

This ordinal typology can be helpful in better understanding the changes brought about by the Lesage government, after their election in 1960. The measures announced by the Lesage government focused on reducing specifically the forms of corruption that correspond to the first (1), third (3) and fourth (4) levels on our scale. Note that the measures taken by the Lesage government address directly and specifically the forms of corruption (1) that had most benefitted large monopoly companies, and that had allowed the Union Nationale to create an extensive and highly effective system of political clientelism. These measures, however, left untouched the government contracts allocated within the framework of large government projects (2) that benefitted those new enterprises that had become the main corporate support and funders of the QLP. Not only were those firms helped by the continuation of the practice of favoritism in allocating large government contracts (2), but the measures designed to reduce or eliminate the other levels of corruption (1, 3 and 4), removed direct irritants that these firms saw as obstacles to their growth and prosperity.

By aggressively attacking different forms of low-level corruption, corruption that is essentially done by the civil servants and the department heads of the civil service, the Lesage government was removing a source of constant irritation for emerging competitive enterprises, a form of economic rent that directly affected their profitability. By empowering the Commission de la fonction publique (the successor to the Commission du service civil), by promoting unionization and job security within the civil service, the Liberal governments of Jean Lesage would shield civil servants, to a certain extent, from undue political pressures and subject them to greater oversight. The Lesage Liberals also targeted the large monopoly companies in the energy sector. For competitive enterprises in other sectors of the economy, the inflated prices for electricity were seen as a form of rent and had been a source of constant complaints. The Lesage government will sell its project to nationalize the large electricity monopolies, in large part by promising lower electricity prices for consumers but also

subsidized rates for industrial employers. Finally, by addressing the system of discretionary subsidies and favoritism in the allocation of small and medium-size government procurement contracts, the Lesage government was creating a level playing field seen as essential by competitive firms.

At the same time, by not addressing the second level in our typology, the Lesage government made an explicit choice to spare those companies and allied professionals who had become the main financial support of the QLP. The practice of granting high-level posts in the Civil Service and in Crown corporations through favouritism; and the system whereby political contributions are exchanged for large contracts in the mega-projects of the government, thereby conferring on those firms the status of privileged clients of the government party, were left largely untouched. Again, these are precisely the forms of favouritism most valuable to competitive firms close to the QLP in the early 1960s.

## 6. The selective war against corruption

As early as 1961 it becomes clear that the liberal government of Jean Lesage has retained many of the practices and attitudes of the preceding government regarding political corruption. Thus, as Vincent Lemieux points out in his history of the QLP, in 1961 the Liberal Federation that then represented many of the competitive enterprises close to the QLP sent a report directly to the Lesage Cabinet asking for the creation of consultative committees in each electoral riding to represent their local interests, and for the purpose of advising the liberal MNAs in matters of favoritism. Their aim was not only to put an end to Union Nationale patronage favouring Union Nationale supporters, but also explicitly to ask that all contracts, subsidies and procurement orders be given to local liberal supporters (Lemieux: 101).

The tone of their report indicates that for a large number of prominent QLP supporters, favoritism continued to be synonymous not only with personal interest, but also with the public good. The two being seen as one and the same. Good politics and favoritism were still seen as correlated. As a result, the fight against low-level corruption was the subject of fierce resistance, even within the QLP and its federation of supporters, once the QLP had gained power.

After 16 years in the opposition, the supporters of the QLP were now animated by hyper-partisanship and by a clear desire to right the perceived wrongs of the past. In their eyes, if corruption was done by the Union Nationale, then it was clearly reprehensible. However, if the same form of corruption was performed by the QLP, then it was seen as just redress, and as a well-deserved benefit. The fundamental culture of corruption was clearly still deeply ingrained, in both major political parties on the Quebec scene.

However, despite this similarity in attitudes toward political corruption, the type of political corruption ultimately favoured by the QLP of Jean Lesage differed

significantly from that favoured by Duplessis and the Union Nationale. After 1960, under the QLP government, the petty corruption that is the work of low-level civil servants and department heads, and that does not directly benefit the leadership of the party, was severely sanctioned and vociferously condemned, while the granting of large contracts, and of important positions within the apparatus of the State and the crown corporations created in the wake of the Quiet Revolution, remained the object of intense patronage and of favouritism. Not only were these forms of corruption tolerated, but they were also actively sought and promoted.

### **Conclusion:**

We can conclude first that in the Quebec of the Quiet Revolution the battle against corruption, when it takes place, is not primarily a battle of principles, it is rather a strategy, an integral part of the political struggle between opposing economic and political interests. Thus, it appears that the Liberals under Jean Lesage wage war against the corruption of the Union Nationale at least in part out of political calculation and interest, and thus end up replacing this corruption with a variant that more effectively serves their own interests.

The case of the war against corruption waged by the Lesage governments, during the Quiet Revolution, appears to validate the central premise of Historical Institutionalism. Events follow a course where past choices create parameters that influence future actions, and condition future options and choices. The actions taken by the Godbout government of 1939-44 allowed Maurice Duplessis to construct a strong and stable coalition of interests that culminated in a well-organised, socially-reinforced and effective system of pervasive favouritism and corruption. Relegated to the role of perennial opposition in a patronage system where opposition parties have few spoils to offer their clients, the Liberal Party of Jean Lesage was forced to adopt the role of crusader against the idea of corruption. However, this crusading spirit was tempered by the necessity to cater to the preferences, interests and desires of those companies and allied professionals who had now become the main financial support of the party. Today, the province of Quebec is still reeling from a major corruption scandal where companies close to the QLP were given lucrative contracts in major government-sponsored construction projects. It is not too far-fetched to see the roots of today's scandal in the specific orientation and limitations of the war on corruption waged by Jean Lesage's Liberals between 1960 and 1966. The events and choices of the past continue to determine the outcomes of the present.

This specific case also seems to confirm the political economy interpretation according to which profound political realignments can result from significant changes to the economy and to the composition of the corporate sector. In this case, the emergence of a new business class operating in a non-monopoly competitive segment of the economy seems to have redrawn the great lines of conflict within Quebec's economic society. The struggle of these emerging competitive firms linked to a growing public sector that was the source of much of their contracts and business opportunities, against large monopoly firms and small local business monopolies, came

to animate much of the political competition between the Union Nationale and QLP in the late 1950s and early 1960s. The QLP of Jean Lesage became the vehicle for the interests of these emerging firms, and for the interests of their public and private sector allies. As these forces became dominant, so did the QLP, and along with it its specific form of patronage. Quebec politics continues to this day to live the effects of this great political and economic realignment. None of this diminishes in any way the importance of the cultural, social, religious and ideological changes that have become emblematic of the Quiet Revolution. These transformations were profound and their impacts are still felt today. However, the story of the Quiet Revolution is not complete without addressing the question of the war on corruption, and the momentous economic changes that lay just beneath the surface.

On a final note, if the Quiet Revolution is to be understood as a profound and pervasive reversal of the ways and practices of the period of The Great Darkness, under Duplessis' Union Nationale, then we must conclude that this reversal is yet incomplete. The fact that some forms of corruption were addressed, but not others, despite the totalizing and principled rhetoric used at the time, and the fact that the morality of corruption still prevails in certain sectors, would indicate that the revolution was only partial, at least in this sphere. The completion of the agenda of the Quiet Revolution is then yet to come. The recent Charbonneau Commission was a brutal wake up call to many. Past corrupt practices have been able to continue and even to flourish shielded from public oversight, in large part precisely because we fell victim to the illusion that we had left the past behind.

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