

Tory hopes in Quebec ride on a leader

OTTAWA

Possibly the most important and enduring of Robert Stanfield's contributions to his party has been the complete overhaul of the federal Conservative organization in Quebec.

It is also his most speculative investment in the future. Unless the party can find a commanding figure to lead it in Quebec in the election expected this year, it is unlikely that Stanfield will reap the full benefit of four years of intensive work in the province.

Despite the Conservative leader's claim in Montreal last month that "it doesn't matter to me whether it's one man or a group," the party's search for an impressive and identifiable Quebec "lieutenant" is not only continuing but intensifying.

The man most frequently mentioned is still Judge Claude Wagner, one-time attorney-general in Jean Lesage's Liberal cabinet in Quebec and a contender for the Liberal leadership in Quebec against Robert Bourassa only a few years ago.

Short-term problem

The party's inability to find the right man for the top job in Quebec is its most pressing problem in the short term. In the long run, it is a relatively minor aspect of Stanfield's reorganization and reform of the party apparatus in Quebec.

This effort started immediately after the debacle of June, 1968, when the party succeeded in winning only four Quebec seats and when Real Caouette's Creditistes came within sight of overtaking the Conservatives as the second most important federal party in Quebec.

There were many explanations for the Tories' disastrous showing that year. First of all, there was Stanfield himself, a unilingual Maritimer with little apparent understanding of Quebec. The party became identified with a "two nation" constitutional philosophy which was a liability in English-speaking Canada and produced no discernible benefits in Quebec.

This philosophy was elegantly propounded by Marcel Faribault, Montreal lawyer and trust company executive who displayed all the characteristics in 1968 of a great Quebec leader of the 19th century. Finally, there was the



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fact that the Conservative-oriented Union Nationale party had been in power in Quebec since 1966 and was in the process of preparing its own defeat in 1970.

The Conservatives' Quebec campaign in 1968 was a six-week affair directed by an ad hoc organization working out of temporary quarters on Notre Dame St. in the old section of Montreal.

"We worked our hearts out but we just didn't have it," recalled one veteran of that campaign the other day.

The party, in thin condition, was almost supine for the coup de grace administered by Pierre Trudeau.

"That vast, bloody wave," as the 1968 campaign veteran remembered it.

In the wake of the election, it was an obvious decision for Stanfield to order his Quebec people "to start from scratch." Those were the words he used in the summer of 1968 and he promised to give the Quebec wing of the party unusual access to his own time and energy in the coming four years.

The results are evident today.

Paid-up party membership, at \$2 a year, has increased from 3,000 in 1968 to 26,000 by last November, according to figures supplied by the party and said to be accurate. The annual \$50-a-plate fund-raising dinner addressed by Stanfield, which started in 1968 with the sale of a few hundred tickets, produced a sale of 1,800 tickets last December.

Part of this money has been used to support permanent secretariats in Montreal and Quebec city. The Tories claim that the Liberals outspend them six-to-one on administrative budgets for party headquarters in Montreal, but the establishment of a permanent party bureau in Montreal is a new and symbolically important achievement for the Conservatives.

Since 1968, under the guidance of Claude Dupras, a 41-year-old Montreal consulting engineer, the party association in Quebec has been decentralized and structured to enable it to "pyramid" this spring.

At the top of the structure is a troika of three men: Dupras and two Montreal lawyers, Claude Nolin, the "old man" at 48 years of age, and 32-year-old Brian Mulroney. Beneath them is a 13-member executive committee and 10 regional organizers. This central structure is to be duplicated in each of the regions and finally at the riding level.

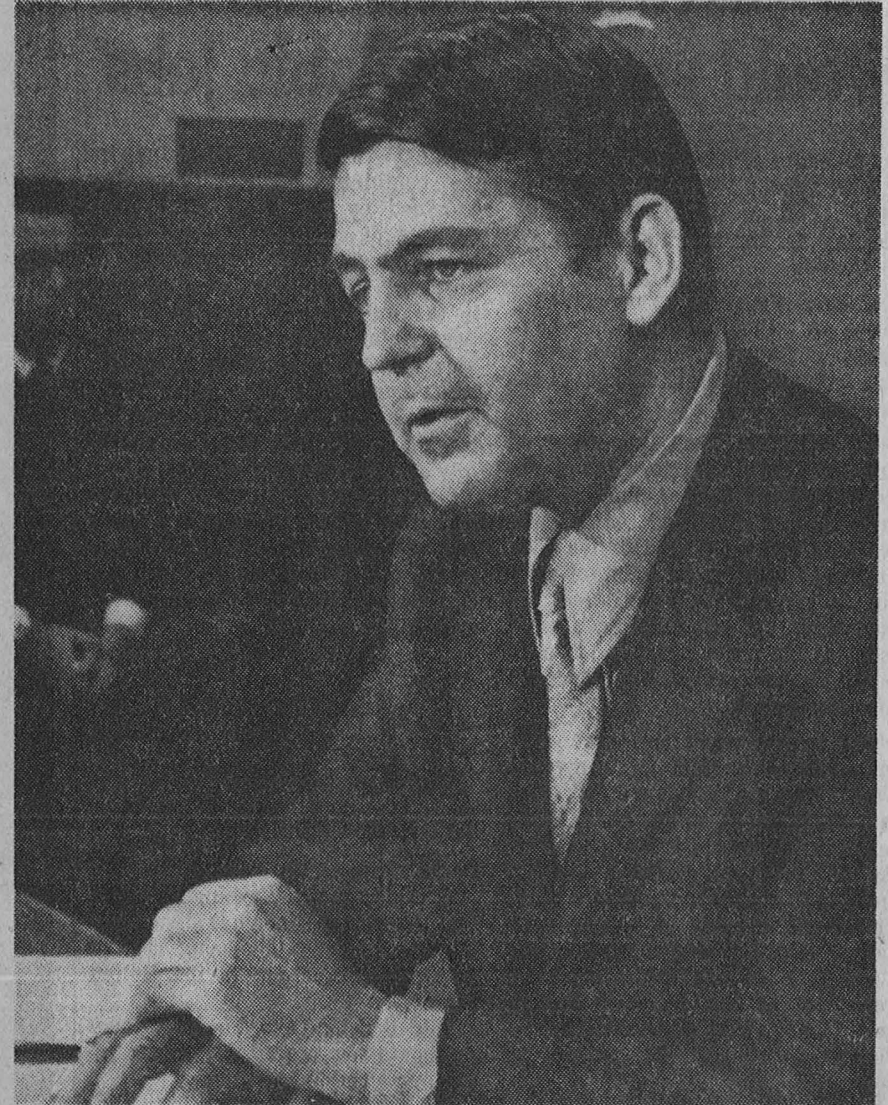
The central 26-man structure was exhibited publicly by Stanfield in Montreal in mid-January, when he officially launched the party's 1972 campaign in Quebec. By the middle of March, this cadre will have grown to 3,000 people—the "officer corps" for the army of workers needed for the election which the party now expects in June.

French-speaking now

More important than this technical reorganization is the fact that the party now operates in French at all levels in Quebec. Even in 1968, the Conservatives in Quebec were influenced strongly by the remnants of an old English-speaking hierarchy. It was common for the party leader's office in Ottawa and party officials in Toronto to deal with party affairs in Quebec through these bilingual English-speaking Conservatives in Montreal. The party now claims that this pattern has been broken once and for all.

The only "English" name among the 13 members of the troika and executive committee today is Brian Mulroney and he is far from being a typical member of Montreal's English-speaking establishment. He grew up in Baie Comeau on the north shore of the St. Lawrence River, learning French almost at the same time as his mother tongue. After graduating from St. Francis Xavier University in Nova Scotia, he acquired his law degree at Quebec's Laval University.

The new treasurer of the executive committee, 52-year-old Jacques Courtois, president of the Canadiens hockey club and the vice-president of a bank, is typical of the important recruits that



FORMER QUEBEC justice minister Claude Wagner, unsuccessful candidate for the province's Liberal leadership, is now being wooed by the Tories.

Stanfield has attracted in four years of constant private meetings and quiet persuasion in Quebec.

Key people in the party in Quebec don't believe that these changes will automatically produce results this year. In their optimistic moments they sometimes talk about repeating the kind of upset victory that the late Daniel Johnson engineered for the Union Nationale in 1966. Realistically, this is the way they look at it:

"The Liberals have never fought an election in this province with us.

They've had to fight the Creditistes and where they have fought the Creditistes, they've lost ground.

"They have won every election in this province by tradition and default. Our only commitment this time is that we're going to make sure that if a Liberal wins a seat against us, he's going to have to work for it."

But the crucial question, which the party will soon have to answer, remains: Who will march at the head of Stanfield's new army in Quebec in 1972?