

The Battle of the Plains of Abraham Lives On

By Lindsay Logie

On September 13, 1759, the face of Canada was forever altered. The Battle of the Plains of Abraham was not only a deciding factor in the outcome of the Seven Years War, but in the fate of North America itself. Not only did that battle effectively end French rule on the continent, influence the American Revolution, and shape a new country that would one day be called Canada, but it continues to affect our national politics and culture to this day. Québec separatism continues to be a powerful dividing force in our country. If we are not careful, the 'temporary' Canada that was created by the Battle of the Plains of Abraham may one day be destroyed by the very same forces that caused the battle itself.

As a nation, Canada is still feeling the effects of the war. As of the 2008 federal elections in Canada, the *Bloc Québécois* holds 49 of the 308 seats in Parliament. They account for approximately one sixth of our federal government – their primary goal being the sovereignty of Québec. Two hundred and fifty years later, the conflict still rages on – no longer on the battlefield, but within the seat of our democracy. In February of 2009, the federal government was forced to cancel a re-enactment of the Battle of the Plains of Abraham planned by the National Battlefields Commission amid violent threats and protests from Quebec. The severity of the threats ranged from throwing golf balls at participants to setting fire to tents. Clearly, the people of Quebec are still nursing their wounds from 1759.

It is true that the defeat on the Plains of Abraham did not mark the beginning of a happy period for French Canada. From 1763 to 1774, Quebec suffered under British assimilation policies, forbidding them to hold public office, recruit Catholic priests, and shutting down their schools. Under pressure from the looming American Revolution, the assimilation policies were dropped and the Quebec Act was passed in 1774. This act recognized French law, the Catholic religion and the French language in the colony. Nonetheless, English-speaking upper class continued to dominate their economy and politics. This led to the rise of Quebec nationalism in the period from 1791 to 1840. The more that nationalism gained popularity, the more the British government tried to assert its authority over the French systems. This served only to further entrench Quebec in its positions. With a history filled with such tension and power struggling, how could one expect Québec to be anything but defensive? In contrast, efforts have been made to acknowledge and protect the unique cultural contribution that Quebec brings to Canada: in 1969, French became Canada's official second language. Under Québec's language and policy law in 1977, English education in Quebec became restricted, French replaced English as the working language in courts, business, and other public institutions, and even went so far as to rename English streets and places with French equivalents. Though these efforts succeeded in protecting French language and culture within Québec, it also undeniably reinforced the isolation of French Canada from its English counterparts.

