

## Jules Deschênes, C.C., MSRC (1923-2000)

Past President



On June 5, 1990, the Royal Society of Canada elected its 102nd president. The Honorable Jules Deschênes brought to the presidency of the Royal Society of Canada the experience of a remarkable legal career; indeed, his reputation as an eminent jurist is known throughout Canada and the world.

Born June 7, 1923, in Montreal, of Wilfrid Deschênes, notary, and Berthe Bérard, Jules Deschênes completed grade school under the supervision of les Clercs de Saint-Viateur and classical studies under les Messieurs de Saint-Sulpice. He fondly remembered his student years "when his intellect and imagination were constantly being challenged, when everything was being done to modernize teaching, and when discipline was maintained less in order to punish than to buttress a framework conducive to efficient study". Thus writes Jules Deschênes in his autobiography, *Sur la ligne de feu*, published in 1988 by Les Éditions Stanké.

Upon graduating, he enrolled at the Faculty of Law of the Université de Montréal, where he won both medals of the Governor-General of Canada and of the Lieutenant-Governor of Quebec. Admission to the Quebec Bar in 1946 opened for him the door to courtroom litigation and an unknown future; yet he had chosen law without hesitation as though "he had been ordained to it since the beginning of time".

From 1946 to 1960 Jules Deschênes saw his time being divided between his career and his family. On June 26, 1948, he took for his bride Jacqueline Lachapelle at the church of Saint-Pierre Claver in Montreal. Their marriage was blessed with two daughters and three sons. In 1960 he became senior partner of his law firm. On November 17, 1961, he was named Queen's Counsel. In 1962 he was elected to the Council of the Montreal Bar. The same year Jules Deschênes began to teach private international law at the Université de Montréal. In 1963 he was elected member of the General Council of the Quebec Bar.

On January 8, 1964, the Attorney-General of Quebec, the Honourable René Hamel, asked Jules Deschênes who accepted, to prosecute at the Commission of Inquiry formed to investigate the famous Coffin affair. In 1965 he founded the Quebec Interprofessional Council, of which he became the first president. Between 1966 and 1972 he devoted much time and energy to fulfilling a number of mandates of public interest. During the same period he was president of the Montreal Port Council and of the Quebec Advisory Council on Justice. On March 5, 1972, Jules Deschênes was sworn in as Justice of the Quebec Court of Appeal, exercising this office until August 1973, when he was offered by Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau the position of Chief Justice of the Quebec Superior Court. He sat as Chief Justice for ten years: "the most exciting and productive years of my life", he wrote.

From the moment of his appointment to the Quebec Superior Court, Jules Deschênes devoted himself to improving the efficiency of its operations. He was responsible, among other things, for the creation of the family division and the expertise service, which today operate throughout the Province of Quebec. He also successfully sought an increase in the number of judges sitting on the Superior Court. Within ten years, the number of active judges went from 92 to 120.

1977 saw the election of Chief Justice Deschênes as a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada's Académie des lettres et des sciences humaines; he was elected president of the Académie in 1982. In the same year he was elected member of the Council of the World Peace Through Law Center, headquartered in Washington. For six years from 1977 Jules Deschênes was a member of the Executive Committee of the Canadian Judicial Council. In 1984 he became a member of the Executive Committee of the Canadian branch of the International Law Association. From 1984 to 1987 he sat on the United Nations Sub-Commission on the Prevention of

Discrimination and the Protection of Minorities, based in Geneva. In February 1985 he was asked by the Federal Government to head a Commission of Inquiry on alleged war criminals in Canada. He submitted his Commission's findings on December 31, 1986. The same year the Canadian Institute for the Administration of Justice awarded him its gold medal "in recognition of the signal services rendered by him in the advancement of justice". Jules Deschênes was the first individual to be so honoured.

The Honorable Jules Deschênes was awarded honoris causa degrees by McGill and Concordia Universities. In 1988 he received the annual prize of the Canadian Bar Association and was elected President of the Admission School of the Quebec Bar. In the following year he was awarded the medal of the Quebec Bar. As of 1989 he chaired the Commission of Inquiry set up by the International Labour Organization on Rumania and he was a member of the Extraordinary Challenge Committee which was formed pursuant to the Canada-U.S. Free Trade Agreement. In 1989 he was also appointed an Officer of the Order of Canada.

Concurrently with his legal interests, Jules Deschênes actively pursued a writer's and a speaker's career. He authored or co-edited ten books, including an autobiography, and published a large number of articles. He was invited to speak in over twenty Canadian cities as well as in several foreign centres: Beijing, Boston, Cambridge (U.K.), Caracas, Jerusalem, Madrid, Manila, New Delhi, New York and Vienna.

From his writings, speeches and judgments emerge the fundamental characteristics which are the hallmarks of his career: the progress of law, the improvement of justice, the championship of human rights.

June 1990

The Honorable Jules Deschênes died in Laval (Québec), on May 10, 2000.