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**“Des Paroles en L’Air”: Quebec, Minority Rights and the New Brunswick Schools Question.**

In 1867 the Acadian population of New Brunswick was drawn against its will into the new Canadian confederation. Once the British North America Act was a “fait accompli”, however, the Acadians were hopeful about what they might expect from the new nation and especially from Quebec:

Une nouvelle phase de notre existence comme peuple acadien, apparait aujourd’hui, c’est celle de l’union intime qui devra exister entre le Canada-Français et l’Acadie-Français. Dorénavant notre sort sera le même que celui de nos compatriotes . . . Soyons donc unis et travaillons ensemble à notre propre préservation.<sup>1</sup>

No longer able to resist confederation, the Acadians hoped some positive good might come from it and expectations were indeed high. The “spirit of confederation”, the respect for denominational schools embodied in the constitution, the recognition of the French language might all be extended to l’Acadie. Leading Québécois politicians in Ottawa might take the Acadians under their wing and provide not only political support but also that much needed patronage to this subsistentlevel community. The Acadians, culturally strong but numerically weak,<sup>2</sup> could possibly even hope for a repeat of the Madawaska experience where there “arrivent continuellement des immigrants canadiens qui renforcent d’année en année la population française.”<sup>3</sup>

The Acadians, lacking effective leaders capable of dealing with the larger New Brunswick and Canadian polity, still believed that “outsiders” could fight their battles for them. They looked to Quebec for fraternal support in their continuing struggle for survival. The French Canadians, however, rarely lived up to these expectations. The few occasions on which Quebec promoted the Acadian cause involved only issues of minor importance such as political appointments. When major issues were involved, Quebec was rarely dependable, as the Acadians eventually recognized:

ces turbulentes professions d'amour fraternel et de dévouement inaltérable qu'on réédite si souvent, surtout en temps d'élection, ne sont que du vent, des paroles en l'air, n'ayant aucune signification, du beurre et de la colle, en un mot, pour nous servir de la locution populaire.<sup>4</sup>

Politicians, journalists and clerics in Quebec felt a responsibility only to Quebec and neither inconvenienced themselves nor endangered their own security to protect Acadian interests. The actions of the French Canadians through the decade following confederation strongly indicate the geographical narrowness of their cultural and national concerns. It is quite clear that Quebec in the nineteenth century was less concerned than historians in the twentieth with the fate of French-Catholic minorities outside of "la patrie". The "pact of confederation", a notion so popular with Henri Bourassa and many of his admirers, initially seemed to apply only to Quebec. That province's practising politicians and its politicized prelates failed even in the 1870's to fight for a Canada which would insist upon cultural and religious toleration.

Quebec's lack of interest in the Acadians became evident almost before the ink on the B.N.A. Act had dried, before the optimism surrounding confederation had waned. Late in 1870, the New Brunswick government resolved to modernize the province's antiquated educational system and in the process alienated completely its substantial Catholic minority, both Acadian and Irish. The resultant controversy convulsed much of Canada for the next half decade. In the end the New Brunswick Schools Question provided the Acadians with an object lesson in the value of self-reliance, since they received only minimal support of a concrete nature from their compatriots in Quebec.

New Brunswick was the first colony in British North America to publicly subsidize education, and by 1858 it had developed a system which adequately met the unsophisticated needs of its entire population. Operating under the Parish School Act of that year,<sup>5</sup> Roman Catholics were able to establish a *de facto* separate and denominational system of schools. The French-Acadian portion of this population could go even further; Onésiphore Turgeon, a teacher at Petit Rocher, claimed that he enjoyed "tous les privilèges au sujet de . . . l'enseignement du française à un aussi haut degré que j'aurais pu exercer dans la Province de Québec même."<sup>6</sup>

However, by the late 1860's the professional educators with the Board of Education felt that the situation in the province's schools was becoming chaotic. There were too many religiously-oriented sets of schools, services were duplicated, attendance was low, teachers were inadequate-

ly trained, and so on.<sup>7</sup> In response the provincial government and the New Brunswick Assembly, "amidst bacchanalian songs, slamming of desks, and other demonstrations of great intelligence and love of learning",<sup>8</sup> passed the Common Schools Act.<sup>9</sup> The Act's object was to provide "a well equipped system of Free Public Schools, in which the instruction given shall be open to the children of all, the poor and rich alike."<sup>10</sup>

Irish and Acadian Catholics in New Brunswick, for once united, immediately and violently opposed the new Act because it stipulated "That all schools conducted under the provisions of this Act [i.e. receiving public funds] shall be non-sectarian."<sup>11</sup> The Common Schools Act was a harsh blow to all Catholics, but it affected none more severely than the Acadians who had just begun to show an interest in education. Their most promising facility, the Collège St. Joseph in Memramcook, lost the government grant it depended upon. Although the college managed to survive, most primary schools did not. With very few exceptions, Acadian parents were not able to offset the government's policy by supporting private schools.

Catholics in New Brunswick issued urgent pleas for help to the courts, to the Privy Council, to the Queen, the Governor General, and Parliament itself. Quite erroneously they believed themselves protected by the British North America Act and, as Abbé Belcourt wrote, "les ministères de la Puissance interviendront et ne souffriront pas la législation d'un tel pillage de la part d'un fanatisme éhonté."<sup>12</sup> Their petitions inundated Ottawa. One, having over 500 signatures, admitted that in the past Catholics had enjoyed certain "privileges". Nevertheless they felt the provincial Act should be disallowed since "if allowed to go into operation, [the Act] would destroy or greatly diminish the education privileges which the Catholics of this Province enjoyed at the time of the passing of the British North America Act." Most Catholic parents, it continued, could not afford to support two school systems and since contributions to the public one were mandatory their children would be doomed "to grow up in ignorance".<sup>13</sup> In response, Sir John A. Macdonald enunciated a position which he maintained consistently throughout the debate, and one which later would be confirmed by the Law Officers of the Crown. He sympathized with the New Brunswick Catholics but felt that their only recourse was through appeals to the local Assembly because education was exclusively within provincial jurisdiction.<sup>14</sup>

There is no need to detail what subsequently transpired in Parliament and in the courts.<sup>15</sup> What is at issue here is the support which the Acadians did not receive from their compatriots in Quebec. Pious words

abounded; for example *La Minerve* (Montreal) assured the Acadians that "nous ne sommes pas prêt à le laisser battre en brèche au Nouveau-Brunswick sans élever la voix et demander le redressement des griefs des catholiques."<sup>16</sup> In reality however these promises of support "ne sont que du vent". Quebec's politicians, journalists and clerics meekly watched events unfold and were unwilling to risk their own province's security. For the sake of political expediency, because of partizan affiliations and because of Quebec's narrow view of French-Canadian rights, the Acadians never received the support they so urgently required.

In Acadian minds, Quebec owed them this aid because Quebec was to blame for their present predicament. During the negotiations leading to Confederation, Archbishop Connolly of Halifax had tried to obtain constitutional guarantees for separate denominational schools in the three Maritime colonies, but he had been frustrated in his endeavours by the Quebec delegates to London.<sup>17</sup> In 1866 Cartier and Langevin ignored any responsibility they had for their Maritime brethren, preferring provincial autonomy and a secure Quebec to religious and linguistic equality in all of Canada. Maritime Catholics never forgot and at one point Bishop Rogers of Chatham tersely wrote the Archbishop of Quebec that,

We respectfully claim such fraternal sympathy from the Province of Quebec, because the objections of the Quebec delegates in London . . . defeated the Archbishop of Halifax's efforts to have this question settled by that Act of Confederation.<sup>18</sup>

At the beginning of the crisis in 1871 the Acadians expected Quebec to make amends for past neglect. *Le Moniteur Acadien*, edited by a Québécois and anxious to cement the ties between the two cultures, confidently anticipated the "appui actif de nos co-religionnaires de Québec" in the affair.<sup>19</sup>

The Acadians were soon disappointed. Macdonald was known to be sympathetic although unwilling to intervene. George-Etienne Cartier was another matter however. Surely he had no intention of permitting the Acadians to be oppressed "en violation directe de la constitution du pays."<sup>20</sup> In fact, although Cartier probably sympathized with them also, he was primarily a politician of the Macdonald style, seeking the possible where the ideal was unattainable. His sympathies and his alliance with the church could not overcome his basic conservatism and his firm belief in the law. The constitution had been promulgated and now was inalterable, almost sacrosanct.

During the successive debates on the schools question, Cartier's task was onerous. Macdonald, as during the confederation debates, could readily rally his Protestant following to a non-interventionist stance. Cartier meanwhile had to keep in line the many Quebec M.P.'s who sympathized with the plight of the New Brunswick Catholics. In Parliament, Cartier spoke more to his own party than to the opposition, warning of the dangers of disallowance. The House of Commons, he asserted with impeccable logic, could not alter provincial legislation which was clearly *intra vires*. If it did, Quebec itself might feel the consequences:

. . . if the motion was right with regard to the Catholic minority of New Brunswick, the Protestant minority of Lower Canada might come and say 'Repeal the last education law passed in Quebec'.<sup>21</sup>

In a legalistic sense, and Cartier was a lawyer, he was of course correct. Even Edward Blake, perhaps the keenest legal mind in the House, concurred in Cartier's fears:

the rights and interests of the Provinces would not be worth the paper on which the constitution was written if it could be said that all rights could, as a matter of course, be altered or changed on addresses alone . . . no more dangerous error could be fallen into. The proper mode would be . . . to ask the Local Government to take action.<sup>22</sup>

But the Catholics of New Brunswick found no solace in these arguments, regardless of their validity. There remained for them only a deep feeling of disappointment in Cartier.

Quebec's second ranking Minister in Ottawa was Hector Langevin, and it was to him that John Sweeny, the Bishop of Saint John (1860-1901), Father Lefebvre and others appealed for aid. Ask him, Lefebvre wrote Pascal Poirier,<sup>23</sup> to use his "influence auprès du gouvernement de Frédéricion afin de l'éviter à traiter les catholiques de N.-B. avec plus de justice."<sup>24</sup> Langevin however was virtually born and bred a conservative, coming from a prominent "family which had begun to cooperate with the English almost before the ink on the treaty had dried."<sup>25</sup> Quebec and Canadian society had been generous to Hector Langevin's generation; he was a Cabinet Minister, one brother was a bishop, another a vicar general, and a third a clerk in the Senate. By background as well as politics, Langevin sought to maintain the *status quo*, valuing Quebec's security above all else. Always in the shadow of other more flamboyant French-Canadian politicians, Langevin worked quietly but diligently to ensure the continued success of the Conservative

Party in Quebec because it was under this banner that French Canada's future lay secure. Langevin would never permit the constitution to be tampered with because "c'est le palladium de nos libertés provinciales. Ceux qui par son vote y portera atteinte portera dans l'histoire une responsabilité que je n'entends pas assumer."<sup>26</sup>

Langevin's image is that of a capable though uninspiring administrator, lacking the prestige of Cartier, the dynamism of Mercier, or the popular appeal of Chapleau. Langevin revealed his talents in the backroom, in caucus, and to him fell the task of keeping the Quebec M.P.'s in line on successive critical motions. In 1873 Cléophas Beausoleil, in Ottawa for the ultramontane *Nouveau Monde*, discovered that Langevin, while still enjoying the confidence of Bishop Sweeny, was working against "Catholic interests". He was successfully convincing those Quebec members who in 1872 had voted for disallowance that the very future of the Party, of Canada, and of Quebec depended upon the defeat of the latest remedialist motion. Langevin's effectiveness was undermining whatever Quebec resolve existed to support the Acadian and Irish Catholic minority:

Il est évident que . . . dans quinze jours des catholiques de Québec auront prouvé que pour eux il est beaucoup plus important de sauver le ministère . . . que de sauvegarder les intérêts de leur coreligionnaires et le grand principe de la liberté de l'Eglise.<sup>27</sup>

According to Claude Beausoleil, Langevin was to blame. Langevin had impressed upon the Conservative M.P.'s the need for party solidarity.

Being subject to Langevin's cajolings, the Quebec M.P.'s were a vacillating group, wavering between their duty to the church and their duty to the party. At one point, in May of 1873, they were responsible for the passage of a resolution urging disallowance.<sup>28</sup> When the government refused to act, an optimistic John Costigan, the minority's Parliamentary leader, returned to the offensive. During the 1874 session, he planned to introduce another bill and arranged for a Quebec M.P. to amend it so as to obtain an "act establishing separate schools in N.B. as in Quebec and Ontario."<sup>29</sup> Involved with Costigan was Alphonse Desjardins, another Quebec M.P. and the editor of *Le Nouveau Monde*. Desjardins wished to "come out pretty strong on the question" but would do nothing until he had conferred with Bishop Bourget of Montreal and determined "with him on some line and policy to be pursued." Bourget meanwhile, Costigan assured Sweeny, "will be governed entirely on your Lordship's wishes." Costigan added that something dramatic had to be obtained during this session of Parlia-

ment because "a large number of Catholics, particularly among the French, will get discouraged if nothing is done."<sup>30</sup> Sweeny recognized the importance of French-Canadian support<sup>31</sup> but nevertheless ignored Costigan's sage advice and, at the last moment, decided to await the judgement of the Privy Council before proceeding in Ottawa.

Even if Sweeny had been more forceful, the faithfulness of the French-Canadian M.P.'s was doubtful. Louis-F. Masson,<sup>32</sup> the deputy from Terrebonne who appeared steadfast in his support of denominational schools, had doubts about the efficacy of Parliament dealing with the issue. Sounding much like Cartier, Masson wrote Sweeny that

it was in the interests of the Catholics of New Brunswick to be prudent, and not uselessly irritate the Protestant feeling of that Province by any further attempt to coerce the majority by means of the Federal Parliament . . . .<sup>33</sup>

The bulk of the French-Canadian M.P.'s were equally irresolute. First and foremost they were politicians aligned mainly with the Conservative Party. They owed their support and, in many cases, their positions to this party. Claude Beausoleil of *Le Nouveau Monde* recognized this problem and added that in order to obtain "toutes les concessions que Langevin leur a refusées," most would have to desert the Conservative Party.<sup>34</sup> This they were not willing to do. In May of that year, Sweeny found himself stymied by the same reticence. After organizing a caucus of Conservative M.P.'s from Quebec, he presented for their signature a petition demanding disallowance of the New Brunswick legislation. If the government did not comply, the M.P.'s were to threaten to side with the Opposition on a vote of non-confidence. However Sweeny's manoeuver encountered unanticipated opposition—MM. Baby, Ross, Ryan, Fortin and even Masson,<sup>35</sup> all supposedly strong remedialists, announced that they did not intend to compromise their party's leadership. The result was a disillusioned and bitter Sweeny who expressed his anger through Beausoleil:

Voilà donc les hommes à qui les clergé a eu confiance, qui ont vécu de la religion, qui ont exploité l'influence ecclésiastique et qui en retour de vingt ans de services et de pouvoir ne savent que reculer et trahir les intérêts dont ils se disaient les conservateurs; voilà des hommes qui le clergé a élus et qu'il élira encore sans doute dans cinq ans en récompense de leur zèle et de leur dévouement religieux.<sup>36</sup>

Political allegiance had proven to be the most powerful inspiration of all, something the Rev. James Quinn, a confidant of Sweeny's, recognized when Catholic educational rights were irrevocably lost on the political level in 1875; "some Catholic members would sooner see Catholics forever deprived of their rights . . . than see governments embarrassed."<sup>37</sup>

Since the party whip was so intimidating, the Catholics of New Brunswick attempted to apply political pressure, hoping to force a reconsideration of the problem. The Quebec press, largely sympathetic to the Catholic minority, could best exert this pressure. However the province's newspapers were divided according to the political or politico-religious philosophy of their owners. Most of the Quebec journals were affiliated with one or other of the major political parties and endorsed approaches consistent with that affiliation. Since both the Liberals and the Conservatives enjoyed power during the five-year history of the schools question, the editors, except during the election campaigns of 1872 and 1874, were basically conservative. They recognized the difficulties and dangers inherent in this sort of controversy and sought to remove the question from the realm of public passion. Any efficacious compromise was acceptable to them, hardly the support expected by the Acadian of their Canadian compatriots.

In contrast to the partizan press, *Le Nouveau Monde*, a Montreal weekly, was a fervent defender of Catholic rights. Edited by Alphonse Desjardins, a confidant of Mgr. Bourget, and by F.-X. Trudel, later a leading "Castor", this newspaper adhered to a rigidly ultramontane position in all religious and political matters. Appealing to a substantial audience in Quebec,<sup>38</sup> it asserted that the Catholic Church, even in predominantly Protestant New Brunswick, had rights which transcended those of the State. These superior rights included the field of education and hence it became the most adamant of the Quebec journals on the schools question.

This self-proclaimed "Journal Catholique" concerned itself with the schools "sans Dieu" issue earlier than the other Quebec newspapers (in April of 1871) and immediately assured the New Brunswick minority of "toutes les sympathies des catholiques du Canada entier."<sup>39</sup> It claimed that the Common Schools Act subjected Catholics to double taxation and was "une injustice monstreuse". The Act was "une violation directe de la constitution" since, the editors asserted, Section 93 of the B.N.A. Act protected Roman Catholics in all parts of Canada. When Sir John A. Macdonald rejected this assertion in the House of Commons, *Le Nouveau Monde* responded angrily, claiming that he was hiding behind



legal technicalities in order to appease Protestant fanaticism. The journal then expressed its astonishment that several Quebec ministers and M.P.'s could have supported the Prime Minister.<sup>40</sup>

Regretting that this issue had become one of Party rather than of principle,<sup>41</sup> *Le Nouveau Monde* soon attacked Sir George Cartier for his fallacious position, dismissing his arguments as weak and inconsequential. Cartier was unfavourably compared with Bellerose and Masson and, at one point, Chauveau, the true defenders of the French faith in Canada. The latter were

les représentants des vrais principes conservateurs et ils savent, quand les principes sont en jeu, tout sacrifier pour leur maintien, sachant qu'ils importent plus à la société que n'importe quel homme ou quel parti.<sup>42</sup>

Following the defeat of Costigan's first efforts in May of 1872, the ultramontane press set out to punish those responsible in the coming elections.<sup>43</sup> *Le Nouveau Monde* attacked Cartier ruthlessly, hoping that his defeat would frighten others:

Si, fidèle au drapeau du parti conservateur, il eut marché droit dans la voie droite, s'il eut adhéré jusqu'au bout aux principes de la nationalité française et du catholicisme dont il s'était constitué le champion, il aurait pu continuer encore de longues années à conduire les affaires du pays et à jouir la considération et de la confiance de ses concitoyens.

Admittedly the newspaper condemned Cartier for his alliance with the Sulpicians against Bishop Bourget but still his main fault had been that

Il a préféré nous sacrifier, nous catholiques, nous canadiens, à la popularité de Sir John; il a été entraîné par l'appât du pouvoir . . . [By appeasing Protestant fanaticism] il s'est moqué des canadiens qu'il a crus assez moutons pour le suivre, les yeux fermés, même après une trahison.<sup>44</sup>

*Le Nouveau Monde* continued in this vein throughout the election campaign of 1872.

Situated between the messianic fervour of the ultramontane press and the dogmatic partizanship of other newspapers, there were several independent journals, the most important of which was a Montreal weekly, *L'Opinion Publique*. Edited by L.-O. David, a liberal-nationalist, this journal remarked upon the schools question only after it had been raised in the House of Commons. Avoiding polemic, the journal dissected the different approaches available to the politicians<sup>45</sup> but

unlike most, clearly recognized the basic problem in this controversy; "Mais la majorité protestante du Nouveau-Brunswick, qui la forcera à rappeler son acte de la dernière session?"<sup>46</sup>

*L'Opinion Publique* was refreshingly calm in its approach to the problem. It regretted that such a vital issue had become politicized. The law was "injuste, inique, athée et violente-t-elle la conscience catholique" and the journal condemned the "tyranneaux imbéciles" who had imposed it upon the New Brunswick minority. However most politicians in Quebec and in Ottawa agreed on this; the differences lay in the resolution of the problem. Other than requesting the queen's intervention, the House of Commons had witnessed three different approaches—disallow the legislation (Costigan motion), revise the constitution (Chauveau amendment), or finally to seek a judicial interpretation of the Act and consequently postpone the issue (Mackenzie amendment). Similarly there were two types of solutions, the ideal and the possible, and it was the latter which *L'Opinion Publique* sought, giving up on the former since "En politique on compte avec les passions et les faiblesses des hommes."<sup>47</sup>

Initially the Conservative press in Quebec, of which *La Minerve* (Montreal) was the leader, was able to assume a position which supported the Catholic minority in New Brunswick. Although uncertain of its facts—it claimed that the Parish School Law was passed in 1855—*La Minerve* nevertheless maintained that Catholic schools had been recognized before 1871 and that the Prime Minister was wrong to adopt a legalistic approach.<sup>48</sup>

However, this degree of independence ceased once the Liberal and ultramontane parties seemed to be profiting from the affair. *La Minerve* became much more adamant in its defence of the government for the 1872 election campaign. At one point it even praised certain aspects of the Common Schools Act<sup>49</sup> although it saved its most lavish praise for those Quebec M.P.'s who had never deserted the government. Quebec's status in Ottawa, it explained, could be protected only "Si nous tirons ensemble" behind one party or one strong figure such as Cartier. Without this sense of loyalty "les organisations politiques sont absolument impossible."<sup>50</sup> Cartier and Langevin had been confronted by Protestant intransigents led by Leonard Tilley and could not be blamed for their actions:

Du moment où les députés protestants mettent de côté les intérêts de partis pour s'unir contre eux [Cartier and Langevin] il est évident qu'ils ne peuvent plus rien. Ils ne peuvent alors que songer à couvrir leur retraite.

Their only option would have been to resign, leaving Quebec leaderless and provoking "une agitation générale, des troubles par tout le pays, puis l'isolement de notre province."<sup>51</sup>

According to another Conservative newspaper, *Le Journal de Québec* (Quebec), the House of Commons could not legitimately interfere in the schools question and consequently "il fallait donc accepter le fait accompli . . . les députés des Communes ne sont aucunement responsables de cette injustice et . . . ne sont tenue de la réparer." Cartier's arguments for non-intervention, it continued, were absolutely correct since Quebec itself had

bien des institutions qui ne sont pas de goût de la majorité fédérale . . . [French Canadians must be] assis sages pour respecter dans les autres provinces ce que nous ne voudrions pas voir attaquer chez nous. Notre situation particulière dans la confédération nous fait un devoir de pratiquer la non-intervention, afin qu'on la pratique à notre égard.<sup>52</sup>

As in 1866,<sup>53</sup> the Quebec representatives had to ensure the security of their own "patrie" even if that entailed deserting the Acadian or Catholic minority in another province.

Obviously the Quebec newspapers, taken as a whole, had not pressured the government in a sustained manner, preferring political allegiance to the protection of a Catholic minority. This is confirmed by the results of the 1872 election. The campaign was fierce with many issues being discussed yet the Conservatives still won thirty-eight of sixty-five seats. Two ultramontane favourites, A.B. Routhier and P.O. Trudel, were both defeated while Hector Langevin, vilified by *Le Nouveau Monde* and facing opposition for the first time since 1864, won his seat with a respectable majority. The one major victim of the campaign, and his defeat was by no means due entirely to the schools question, was George Etienne Cartier.<sup>54</sup> In all it was apparent that the Quebec public was somewhat less concerned than *Le Nouveau Monde* with New Brunswick's Acadian minority.

If the Quebec public proved irresolute, so too did another group which should have been more aloof from the government and more determined in its stand—the religious hierarchy of Quebec. The bishops consistently promised their support to the New Brunswick minority; on behalf of Bishop Bourget, Rev. Lamarche wrote Bishop Sweeny that "il nous semble impossible que Dieu ne bénisse point vos efforts. Un jour ou l'autre vous triompherez." He also placed Alphonse Desjardins and *Le Nouveau Monde* at the disposal of Sweeny.<sup>55</sup> Acadian travellers such as Father Richard always seemed to find in the episcopal palaces of Quebec "beaucoup de sympathie".<sup>56</sup>

But in truth the New Brunswick Catholics got little from Quebec's bishops. During the 1872 election campaign, the government was in serious trouble owing to the mounting ultramontane pressure. Seeking to calm the storm, Hector Langevin appealed to his brother, the bishop of Rimouski, for political support.<sup>57</sup> The bishop responded vigourously, entering the fray against the bishops of Montreal and Trois-Rivières. Early in July the Conservative press publicized a strongly-worded circular which Mgr. Langevin had distributed to the priests in his diocese:

Aujourd'hui, à l'approche de nouvelles élections, les mêmes journaux, s'intitulant la *presse catholique* [his emphasis] à l'exclusion de tous autres, prétendent encore dicter aux catholiques du pays entier la conduite qu'ils auront à y tenir . . . Que la constitutionnalité du dit [N.B.] Acte, et l'à propos de provoquer l'intervention du Parlement Impérial . . . sont du nombre des questions libres au point de vue de la conscience, et que nos Législateurs catholiques pouvaient, sans blesser les principes religieux, voter dans un sens ou dans l'autre.<sup>58</sup>

Shortly afterward, *Le Nouveau Monde* consulted a Catholic theologian in Rome, Mgr. De Angelis, and interpreted his nebulous opinion to mean that all those who had not supported the Costigan-Chauveau-Dorion motions "se trouvaient par le fait condamnés par l'église."<sup>59</sup> This provoked Archbishop Taschereau of Quebec into angrily issuing a circular of his own:

Je crois devoir protester contre une pareille exagération qui renverse toutes les notions de la hiérarchie ecclésiastique, en donnant à un théologien . . . une autorité égale à celle du Souverain Pontife.<sup>60</sup>

Taschereau also confirmed that while all Catholics must condemn the New Brunswick legislation, each remained free to choose the means of reparation which to him seemed most efficacious, keeping in mind "la paix religieuse du pays".<sup>61</sup>

These bishops, and even the normally uncompromising Bishop Bourget, feared the result of an uncontrolled anti-Conservative swing in Quebec. The Liberals, still perceived as "Les Rouges", might be even less receptive to clerical opinion than the Macdonalds, Cartiers and Langevins of the Tory party. "Soyens prudent" Bourget finally advised late in the 1872 campaign.<sup>62</sup>

This concern with politics again became evident in the new year. In May of 1873, the House of Commons approved a motion calling for the disallowance of new "anti-Catholic" legislation passed by the New

Brunswick government. When the Macdonald government refused to recommend such a course to the Governor General, it almost invited denunciations from the Quebec M.P.'s and episcopacy. These never came however. The Quebec bishops could criticize the government but never to such an extent that a reasonably pliable Conservative government might be replaced by a less sympathetic, Ontario-dominated Liberal administration. Bishop Rogers of Chatham later confirmed that his Quebec colleagues, "while sympathizing with us and disposed to help us, were unwilling that the Government be overturned on that question." The Quebec bishops were also unwilling to intervene too openly in the affairs of another ecclesiastical and political province, fearing that "such action might excite a fanatical counteraction injurious to the peace and harmony among citizens especially in the Maritime Provinces"<sup>63</sup> but also in Ontario where any backlash would affect Quebec itself. Much like the politicians of the day, the bishops feared for Quebec's security and were unwilling to expand their realm of responsibility. The very close alliance, in sentiment and in blood, between the Macdonald Conservatives and the hierarchy of Quebec was reconfirmed, leaving the Catholics of New Brunswick with nothing other than pious pronouncements.

Bishop Sweeny and the Maritime Catholics were bitterly disappointed; ". . . la province de Québec était le seul secours humain sur lequel il [Sweeny] avait cru pouvoir compter et que si elle l'abandonnait il se confierait à lui seul."<sup>64</sup> They ceased looking to Ottawa, Quebec or Montreal for remedial action and concentrated on New Brunswick itself. Here events were hardly more encouraging. Catholic priests and laymen were being incarcerated for non-payment of school taxes; the belligerent King administration, in 1874, won re-election after an acrimonious campaign based on "le cri religieux d' à bas la papauté' ";<sup>65</sup> and in Caraquet the tense atmosphere engendered by the campaign resulted in an unfortunate riot during which two men were killed and over forty arrested.<sup>66</sup>

The atmosphere in the province was electric. According to Pascal Poirier

*Tout le Nouveau-Brunswick fut secoué par un frisson de haine religieuse. Protestants et catholiques allaient, pour l'amour de Dieu, en venir aux mains dans une lutte inégale où les Acadiens se serait fait massacrer.*<sup>67</sup>

Fearing the consequences of continued passion, by 1875 both the King government and the Roman Catholic hierarchy decided to seek a

mutually satisfactory solution. Negotiations commenced and a compromise was soon reached. Catholic children, it was decided, might be grouped in the same school; Catholic clerics were not obliged to attend the Normal School although they did have to write the provincial examinations in order to be licensed; Catholic nuns could wear their religious garb or religious symbols while teaching; care would be taken to remove or edit books objectionable to Catholics; the regular school day would be shortened so as to permit religious instruction at the end of classes; and finally school trustees could rent a building owned by the church for use as a school while still permitting it to be used after regular school hours for clerical purposes. The compromise permitted Catholics to retain, in practice if not by law, separate schools while receiving public funds.<sup>68</sup> The Catholics would have preferred a more generous settlement but "in the interests of peace . . . we have no alternative but to cease the active opposition . . . [and] simply tolerate what we cannot prevent."<sup>69</sup>

Quebec accepted the compromise in an almost indecently brief period of time. Two weeks after the government's offer, *Le Nouveau Monde* published the details of the compromise and noted the reserved yet generally favourable response of the Saint John *Freeman*. It also reprinted the unrestrained approbation of *Le Bien Public* (Montreal), a Liberal newspaper which had supported the Mackenzie government's stand throughout the controversy. *Le Nouveau Monde* itself refrained from editorializing on the subject until the Quebec and New Brunswick religious hierarchies had committed themselves.<sup>70</sup> Before it ever did offer an opinion, this newspaper, as well as many of the others in Quebec, became engulfed in the purely Quebec question of "Catholic Liberalism." Since Quebec issues, as always, took precedence, the Catholic acceptance of the government's offer went unnoticed. The Catholic minority paled in comparison to Liberal "heresy" and was put aside.

The New Brunswick Schools Question was an important lesson for the Acadians. Since Confederation they had talked of steadfast Quebec support for their endeavours. This controversy, however, clearly revealed that Quebec's interests lay within its own borders; that French Canadians would not aid them if it in any way threatened Quebec's own security; that the fate of the Acadian Catholics was not a pressing issue in an emotionally-narrow Quebec. The Acadians took heed of this lesson and in the future tempered their actions accordingly. The French Canadians' behaviour during this controversy stimulated the autonomist sentiments so evident during the "Conventions Nationales Des Acadiens" and the entire "Acadian Renaissance."

Quebec, as in the 1890's during a similar affair in Manitoba, had failed to respond to an urgent appeal for help. It failed because its sole concern was its own security and well-being. Quebec Ministers in Ottawa, thinking only of their province, placed more value on provincial autonomy than on equal rights. Conservative, French Canadian Members of Parliament, as well as the partizan press, worried more about the continued electoral success of their party than about the principle of a free and equal society. The Catholic hierarchy in Quebec, supposedly concerned with morality and justice, proved to be little different. Its primary concern was its own security, something which might be endangered either by aroused Protestants or by a Rouge-Liberal victory at the polls.

The French Canadian failed to take advantage of a great opportunity, an opportunity to insist that Canada be based upon the principles of cultural equality and religious toleration. In effect the French Canadians were stating that only in Quebec itself, only in this geographically narrow "Patrie", could French Catholics develop as they chose. If other French Canadians, or Acadians in this case, wished to survive as a distinct entity with their own culture, language and schools, then let them relocate in Quebec, the true French Canadian "nation." The cynicism of René Lévesque is well rooted in the Quebec tradition.

#### Notes

1. *Le Moniteur Acadien* (Shediac, N.B.), July 8, 1867.
2. According to the *Census of Canada* for 1871, there were 44,907 Acadians in N.B. or less than 16% of the total population.
3. Rameau de St. Père to Israel Landry, Jan. 8, 1868. Reprinted in *Le Moniteur Acadien*, July 31, 1868.
4. *Ibid.*, Feb. 6, 1902.
5. 21 Vic., Cap. IX, 1858.
6. O. Turgeon, *Un Tribut à la race acadienne, Mémoires 1871-1927* (Montreal, 1928), p. 8.
7. New Brunswick, *Journal of the House of Assembly*, 1869, 1870, 1871. "Report of the Chief Superintendent of Schools."
8. *The Morning Freeman* (Saint John), May 2, 1871, p. 2.
9. 34th Vic., Cap. XXI, 1871. Passed May 17, 1871.
10. N.B., *Journal of the House of Assembly*, 1871, "Annual Report of the Chief Superintendent of Education, 1872," p. XI.
11. Canada, *Sessional Papers*, 1873, Vol. VI, No. 44, A1873, "Returns and Message Relative . . . to the Common Schools in New Brunswick," p. 17.
12. Abbé Belcourt to Rameau de Saint Père, June 7, 1872. Rameau Collection, Centre d'études acadienne (hereafter C.E.A.) 2.1-12.
13. Canada, *Sessional Papers*, 1873, Vol. VI, No. 44, A1873, pp.18-19.
14. *Ibid.*, pp. 19-20.
15. For studies of this issue, see K.F.C. MacNaughton, *The Development of the Theory and Practice of Education in New Brunswick, 1784-1900* (Fredericton, 1947); P.B. Waite, *Canada, 1871-1896* (Toronto, 1971).

16. *La Minerve*, n.d., "Les Droits Des Minorités," Reprinted in *Le Moniteur Acadien*. July 28, 1871.
17. For details on this question, see M. Spigelman, "The Acadian Renaissance and the Development of Acadian-Canadian Relations," (Dalhousie University, 1975), pp. 71-76.
18. Bishop Rogers to Archbishop Taschereau, May 1873. Rogers Correspondence, Archives of the Diocese of Chatham.
19. *Le Moniteur Acadien*. July 21, 1871.
20. *Ibid.*, Feb. 2, 1872.
21. Canada, *Debates of the House of Commons*, 1872, May 20, 1872, cols. 706-07.
22. *Ibid.*, May 29, 1872, cols. 904-06.
23. Father Lefebvre was the Director of the Collège St. Joseph and probably the most important leader in Acadian society at this time. Pascal Poirier was an Acadian civil servant in Ottawa who later helped spark and lead the "Acadian Renaissance."
24. Rev. C. Lefebvre to P. Poirier, Feb. 15, 1873. Poirier Coll., C.E.A. 6.1-1.
25. B. Fraser, "The Political Career of Sir Hector Louis Langevin," *C.H.R.*, XLII, No. 2 (June, 1961), p. 93.
26. H. Langevin to J. Langevin, June 22, 1873. Cited in A. Désilets, *Hector-Louis Langevin* (Quebec, 1969), p. 238.
27. C. Beausoleil to Alphonse Desjardins, April 14, 1873. For text of letter, see L. Groulx, ed., "Correspondance Autour De La Question Scolaire Du Nouveau Brunswick, 1873," *Revue d'histoire de l'amérique français*, IV, No. 2 (September, 1950), p. 271.
28. Canada, *Debates of the House of Commons*, 1873, May 14, 1873, p. 179.
29. John Costigan to Bishop Sweeny, May 3, 1874. Costigan Papers, P.A.C. Vol. 1.
30. *Ibid.*
31. Bishop Sweeny to John Costigan, May 7, 1874. Costigan Papers, P.A.C., Vol. 1.
32. L.-F.-R. Masson (1833-1903) had a distinguished public career in Quebec serving as an M.P. (1867-1882), a Cabinet Minister (1878-1880), a Senator (1882-1887 and 1890-1903) and Lieutenant-Governor of Quebec (1884-1887).
33. L.-F.-R. Masson to Bishop Sweeny, March 17, ? (probably 1873). Sweeny Correspondence, Archives of the Diocese of Saint John, No. 1912.
34. C. Beausoleil to A. Desjardins, March 10, 1873. Published in Groulx, "Correspondance Autour De La Question Scolaire Du Nouveau Brunswick," p. 274.
35. Louis-F. Baby, M.P. for Joliette, 1872-1880; John J. Ross, M.P. for Champlain, 1867-1874; M.-P. Ryan, M.P. for Montreal West, 1868-1874; Pierre Fortin, M.P. for Gaspé, 1867-1874; and 1878-1887.
36. C. Beausoleil to A. Desjardins, May 12, 1873. Published in Groulx, "Correspondance Autour De La Question Scolaire Du Nouveau-Brunswick," pp. 569-70.
37. Rev. J. Quinn to John Costigan, March 19, 1875. Costigan Paper, P.A.C., Vol. 1.
38. *Le Nouveau Monde* (also known as *Le Monde Canadien*) had a circulation of over 14,000 by the end of the century. The circulation of *L'Opinion Publique* was 12,000 in 1874; of *La Minerve* was 4,5000 in 1892; of *Le Courrier* was less than 1,000 in 1892. See J. Hamelin & A. Beaulieu, eds., *Les Journaux Du Québec* (Quebec, 1965), p. 118, p. 132, p. 116 and p. 185 respectively. For a study of the philosophy of *Le Nouveau Monde*, see Gérard Bouchard, "Apogée et déclin de l'idéologie à travers le journal *Le Nouveau Monde*, 1867-1900," in *Idéologies Au Canada Français, 1850-1900*, ed. by F. Dumont, J.-P. Montminy, and J. Hamelin (Quebec, 1971), pp. 117-49.
39. *Le Nouveau Monde*, April 18, 1871.
40. *Ibid.*, Feb. 6, 1872.
41. *Ibid.*, May 28, 1872.
42. *Ibid.*, May 23, 1872.
43. See *ibid.*, May 27, 1872, p. 2, "La Vraie Question."
44. *Ibid.*, June 1, 1872.
45. *L'Opinion Publique*, May 9, 1872.
46. *Ibid.*, May 30, 1872.
47. *Ibid.*, June 6, 1872.
48. *La Minerve*, April 24, 1872
49. *Ibid.*, Oct. 31, 1872.
50. *Ibid.*, May 27, 1872.



51. *Ibid.*, June 3, 1872.
52. *Le Journal de Québec*, n.d. Reprinted in *L'Opinion Publique*, June 20, 1872.
53. See *supra*, footnote 18.
54. For the election's results see Canada, *Journals of the House of Commons, 1873*, Vo. VI, "Return of the Members Chosen," pp. XII-XX; *Le Courrier du Canada* (Quebec), Aug. 2, 1872; J.M. Beck, *Pendulum of Power* (Scarborough, 1968), pp. 12-21. Other issues of importance in Quebec were the government's handling of Riel's Manitoba, the Treaty of Washington in which Canada's interests were supposedly sacrificed for those of England, the generous terms given to British Columbia, and the Cartier-Sulpician fight with Bishop Bourget.
55. Rev. Lamarche to Bishop Sweeny, Feb. 28, 1875. Sweeny Correspondence, Archives of the Diocese of Saint John, No. 1380.
56. Rev. M.-F. Richard to Bishop James Rogers, May 8, 1875. Richard Coll., C.E.A., file "1875-76."
57. See Désilets, *Hector-Louis Langevin*, pp. 241-42.
58. *Le Courrier du Canada*, July 17, 1872.
59. Circular Letter of Bishop Jean Langevin, July 1, 1872. Printed in *La Minerve*, July 17, 1872, and then in *Le Nouveau Monde* and *L'Opinion Publique*, July 25, 1872.
60. Mgr. E. Taschereau, "Circulaire au clergé," July 18, 1872. In H. Têtu et C.-O. Gagnon, *Mandements, lettres pastorales, et circulaires des évêques de Québec*, I, p. 118. Cited in Désilets, *Hector-Louis Langevin*, p. 243.
61. *Le Nouveau Monde*, July 24, 1872, p. 1, "La Circulaire de Mgr. L'Archêvêque de Québec."
62. *L'Opinion Publique*, Aug. 1, 1872. See also *Le Nouveau Monde*, March 12 and April 9, 1875. With time it had moderated its position substantially.
63. Bishop Rogers, Circular, March 19, 1891. Reprinted in Toner, "The New Brunswick Separate Schools Issue" (unpub. M.A. thesis, U.N.B., 1967), p. 83.
64. C. Beausoleil to A. Desjardins, May 12, 1873. Published in Groulx, "Correspondance Autour De La Question Scolaire Du Nouveau-Brunswick" pp. 569-70.
65. Placide Gaudet, "Notes on the School Law," n.d., Gaudet Coll., C.E.A. 1.34-10.
66. For accounts of the riot, see G.F.G. Stanley, "The Caraquet Riots," *Acadiensis*, II, No. 1 (Autumn, 1972), pp. 21-38.
67. P. Poirier, "La Question des Ecoles" (Ms., n.d.). Poirier Coll., C.E.A. 6.3-18.
68. "New Brunswick School Act," an undated three-page report in the Sweeny Correspondence, Archives of the Diocese of Saint John, No. 1909.
69. Bishop Rogers to Rev. M.-F. Richard, Jan. 7, 1876. Richard Coll., C.E.A., file "1875-76." Similar sentiments were also expressed in a public Circular released by Rogers on Jan. 3, 1876.
70. *Le Nouveau Monde*, Aug. 19, 1875.