

The Dominion Government as Gatekeeper to the Canadian Ethnic Mosaic:

The Case of Quebec, 1867-1885

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Introduction

Social scientists concerned with the study of ethnic relations have made use of many concepts to describe the forms ethnic interaction have taken. In the vast American literature on the subject; assimilation, prejudice, discrimination and pluralism have had the longest history (Wirth: 1956; Rose: 1968; Simpson and Yinger: 1972). Criticisms of all these approaches are bountiful, but need not concern us here since this essay will address itself to only one of these processes, namely, the dynamics of ethnic pluralism as it has historically manifested itself in Canada between the two "charter groups" (For a definition of "charter group", see Hughes (1952: 23)).

We begin with Louis Wirth's classic statement on minority aims entitled "The Problem of Minority Groups" (1956: 237-60). Wirth defined minorities as objectively occupying a disadvantageous position in society (1956: 238). Their subordinate status within society translates into "their unequal access to educational opportunities and in their restricted scope of occupational and professional advancement" (1956: 238). As to their social origins, Wirth noted that most minorities were indigenous or earlier arrivals to the territory than were the dominant group. Through conquest the dominant group achieved its position of power in the society. In referring to Canada, Wirth remarked that "the earlier French settlers are a minority in relation to the more recent English migrants. In almost all colonial countries it is the "foreigners" who are dominant and the indigenous populations who are subordinate" (1956:239). Therefore, any discussion of ethnic relations must begin with the differential access to power and resources as experienced by different ethnic groups within the nation-state. What is more, when analysing power relations between ethnic groups, we must also admit the significance of powerful individuals and

M.G. Smith (1965) and L. Kuper and M.G. Smith (1969), Derck Smith emphasizes "that conflict or confrontation within the plural society is between distinctly separate, culturally differentiated sections each pursuing its own institutional arrangements and, at least in the extreme limiting case, have no value consensus between them or common participation in core institutions of the society as a whole (1975: 16; emphasis added mine).

The important point to note in Smith's summary is the significance of internally generated forces for change. What we wish to add is any concrete situation can give rise to structural strains whose cause may be isolated in a sphere other than the economic and political. As a result, there may well be political and economic consequences to both the dominant group and subordinate minority.

A word or two should be mentioned concerning our acknowledgement of the significance accorded to political and economic factors for any analysis of social change. What is more, these factors can be analytically divided into external and internal influences on the total social system. Our concern for the moment though is to stress the importance of one internal factor to a rural based social system - demographic change within the subordinate ethnic group.

To summarize, pluralism denotes one way in which different ethnic groups have created their own sets of institutions in the face of an assymetrical allocation of resources within a particular nation. In colonial societies, the indigenous population is likely to be located in a structurally subordinate position vis-a-vis the dominant ethnic group. Within the subordinate ethnic, population change can have significant repercussions for the total social system.

families that make up the elites within ethnic communities (Schermerhorn: 1970; Rex: 1970; Blauner: 1972).

Further on in the article, Wirth divides minority aims into four types; assimilationist, secessionist, militarist and pluralist (1956: 245). Assimilation is the aim of a minority when its members desire absorption and like treatment with the dominant ethnic group. But, in order for such a strategy to be even moderately successful, the dominant group must accept their (ie. minority) participation in the society at large. Secessionist aims are characterized by Wirth as the struggle for cultural and political independence from the dominant group. A minority that seeks domination over a one time dominant group is defined as militant. Finally, pluralism "is the conception that variant cultures can flourish peacefully side by side in the same society" (1956: 245). The operative verb in that sentence is "can". The effectiveness of "peaceful co-existence" between dominant and subordinate ethnic groups is contingent on numerous circumstances such as the size of the ethnic minority, the differences in race, language and/or religion between the dominant and subordinate ethnics and the nature of the social relationship between the dominants and the subordinates such as master-slave or exploiter and exploited. One must remember that the balance is precarious and can collapse at any particular moment. Wirth's typology is exhaustive but does not explain under what circumstances minority aims can change.

A contemporary Canadian writer on the subject of ethnic pluralism, Derek Smith, began his investigation by cataloguing pluralism into two general types - pluralism as a political theory of 'open' or democratic societies and an anthropological theory stressing culture contact and conflict. Basing his analysis of conflict in plural societies on the works of Furnival1 (1942;1948).

Population decrease could lead to cultural or linguistic assimilation into the dominant group. Population growth would result in structural pressures toward the expansion of occupational and social service institutions within the community. Population growth within the subordinate ethnic group will put pressure on the minority elites to seek ways of expanding its political, economic and social frontiers. These demands will lead to conflict between the subordinate minority and the dominant ethnic group. Demands for a greater share in jobs, services or even physical space caused by population growth will be interpreted by the dominant group as a threat to their own appropriation of these resources and services. We base this hypothesis on the assumption that at any particular historical moment, power contests are a zero-sum game.

This essay then will be concerned primarily with the internal structural and historical factors that account for the loss of dualism in Canada as a whole but resulted in the Quebec provincial boundaries becoming the sole territorial and political domain within which linguistic and cultural rights for French-Canadians could be effectively guaranteed. In other words, we are addressing ourselves to the processes that have led to the isolation of the province of Quebec as the "patrie" for French-Canadians living within Confederation.

What we are about to describe represents one of the necessary conditions from which an analysis of the contemporary secessionist movement in Quebec can be understood. Hopefully, this essay may also provide some indicators as to how plural societies can give rise to secessionist movements.

Ethnic Pluralism in Quebec

Hubert Guindon (1964;1968) argues that ethnic pluralism in Quebec historically has taken the form of "self-satisfying, self-segregated institutions" in all spheres of social life except at work and in politics. Yet, even in the work-world, "ethnic contact was established (only) with the introduction of industrialization" in rural Quebec (1968: 56). Previous to this period, which Guindon benchmarks with Confederation, the rural French-Canadian was "busily involved in reproduction and parochial settlement (1968: 52). Guindon argues that as a rural society, Quebec, by the third quarter of the nineteenth century was faced with a structural crisis. "The stability of the (rural) system" had been maintained "by handing down the family farm to one inheriting son" which meant that "the system required an ever expanding geographical base in order to absorb the surplus population" (1968: 43-44; emphasis added mine). A rural system based on (1) a single-son farm inheritance scheme and (2) the availability of enough arable land within a given territorial unit proved to be an unstable arrangement. Once arable land became a scarce resource in the equation, the traditional society was faced with an internally generated source of strain. Unless suitable farm land outside of Quebec could be found and colonized under the leadership of the traditional elites - the political leaders and the Roman Catholic Church, or new means for rural surplus population absorption found inside Quebec, the system faced a structural crisis. According to Guindon, by Confederation the rural system was faced with surplus rural population seeking arable land (1968: 53).

Ethnic Pluralism Outside Quebec

By accepting Guindon's explanation of ethnic pluralism and the basis for structural strain in Quebec society for the period leading up to Confederation, we might well ask what happened to this surplus rural population since we know that the rural system 'survived' until well into the mid-twentieth century. Industrialization "from above" by "foreign" capitalists has been one explanation offered to account for the source of rural surplus population absorption.

Anglo-Saxon industry moved into a society faced with an acute population surplus, a distinctive political and religious elite, and a developing set of institutions anchored in the rural parish . . . They could invest their capital, open industries, and be supplied with an abundant source of unskilled labour seeking employment. The managerial and technical levels were filled, with no protest, by the incoming group, who also brought along their own set of institutions servicing their own nationals . . . Industry was relieving the economic burden of the demographic surplus of French-Canadian rural society. The local elite's leadership was not being challenged (1968: 56-57).

Industrialization "from above" though did not have a sufficiently profound impact on rural Quebec society until well into the second decade of the twentieth century. What happened to the surplus population in the years between Confederation and the First World War?

Geographic expansion became the only alternative open to both the traditional elites and the young men and women seeking land on which to settle. The routes that could be taken were (1) westward into the Canadian Prairies, (2) south to the industrial towns in New England and the American Mid-West, or (3) internally generated efforts on the part of the Catholic Church towards colonizing new lands in the Quebec hinterland.

Quebec, the Manitoba Act and the Louis Riel Rebellion of 1885:
Ethnic Marginality in the Canadian Prairies

The worst option for the traditional elites (political and religious), but an excellent opportunity for the rural sons and daughters was to work in the industrial towns of New England (MacDonald; 1966: 183-85). Writing in 1891, P. Hamon estimated that over 400,000 French Canadians had become workers in American factories (1891: 173). The number of emigrants from Quebec between 1875 to 1890 had tripled (1891: 174). Nathan Keyfitz has reported that by 1921 a conservative estimate of emigrants from Quebec to the USA was 1 and 3/4 millions (Wade; 1960: 136-37). We can summarize that from 1891 to 1921 over 1 1/4 million French Canadians emigrated to the U.S.A. The lack of sophistication in these statistics due to the fact that neither the Canadian nor the American government kept accurate emigration records still does not erase the trend that a remarkable number of French Canadians left Quebec during the decades from 1880 to 1920. We might conclude that many more people left during this forty year period than in the previous 120 years. This trend was also evident in English Canada, especially Ontario. Donald Creighton, quoting from the Toronto Mail in 1887 states that 'there is scarcely a farm house in the older provinces where there is not an empty chair for the boy in the States' (1957: 354). Even though this trend can rightly be seen as a phenomena that gripped all of Canada, the seriousness with which it was greeted in Quebec was as a crisis of the social system. The social basis from which an important segment of the traditional elite, the Roman Catholic Church drew its authority was located in the farming communities of rural Quebec. Any threat to the social stability of the rural system would at the same time directly jeopardize their authority and indirectly affect the power base of

the political leaders.

What conditions precipitated this option over emigration to Manitoba or colonizing isolated regions within Quebec? What forces were responsible for such a vast exodus of French Canadians out of the country? In part, I am sure that the lure of a better standard of living in the United States contributed to this exodus. Certainly, this ideological factor cannot be seriously treated as the necessary and sufficient condition that explains the location of French-Canadian emigration. Well-established classic sociological tradition holds that ideological and cultural formations can only be adequately understood by reference to the material structures of society. Besides, the Depression of the seventies and the eighties did not result in repatriation to Quebec or to Manitoba. What structural factors can we begin to isolate that may provide a fuller picture?

We could begin by concluding that a lack of historically developed links between the Quebec elites and the population towards the Canadian West would have eliminated this alternative for the rural Quebecers. Norman Macdonald has made the opposite point in that:

"the lure of the West had been in the blood of the French Canadians ever since the days of the fur traders, and the Metis figure prominently in its colourful history. In the hope of arresting their exodus to the U.S.A., Sir John A. MacDonald and George E. Cartier favoured extensive settlement in the West and it has been hinted that 'the Manitoba Constitution was purposely made bilingual in the hope of deflecting the French Canadians from the United States to the West' (1966: 189-90).

The West appeared as an attractive alternative to the overpopulated parishes of rural Quebec. We turn to the history of colonization in the Canadian West up to Confederation in order to get a clearer picture of its ethnic composition and how the settlers viewed their colonies.

The first settlement in the territory was the Selkirk colony founded in 1818. Over 2/3 of the original settlers were Scottish. The remainder were French Canadians. In time, the French Canadians equalled the number of Scottish and English settlers and "because of this ethnic mixture the colony was described as 'un petit Quebec'" (Wade; 1955: 393). The ethnic division of labour in the colony was divided into three tiers. The most influential group were the English who dominated both trade and government, followed by a homogeneous Scottish agricultural group and the more numerous French Canadian and Metis groups who followed an agricultural and semi-nomadic hunting life. Chester Martin has observed that "the policy of building up a smaller Quebec upon the Banks of the Red River had been patiently and successfully pursued for more than fifty years" (1920: 366). Quoting Sir Stafford Northcote at the time of the Manitoba Act, Creighton records that "the French are earnestly bent upon the establishment of a French and Catholic power in the North-West to counteract the great preponderance of Ontario". Their purpose was to fix the character and institutions of the new province at a time when French-speaking Roman Catholics formed a large part of its population, and therefore at the most favourable moment for preparing defences against the approaching influx of Protestant, English speaking settlers" (Creighton; 1969: 6; emphasis added mine).

Let us take a closer look at the MacDonald-Cartier proposal for a bilingual Manitoba. Referred to by Norman MacDonald as "deflecting French Canadians from the United States to Canada", it may be recalled that the Manitoba Act ensured equality for the English and French languages in the legislature and the courts and provided for separate or confessional schools in the newly created province.

To the claim that the provisions of the Manitoba Act of 1870 represented the westward extension of the philosophy of "cultural compact", Creighton in his important article entitled "John A. MacDonald, Confederation and the Canadian West" (1969: 1-9), counters with the argument that the bicultural and bilingual clauses of the Act which dealt with equality of the English and French languages in the legislature, courts and separate (confessional) schools, resulted from Riel's "dictatorship", from the necessity of a quick settlement at Red River and security for Canada's continental destiny. They did not represent, he says, "the carrying out of a solemn commitment to biculturalism which had been made at Confederation". They were imposed by an "exceptional and transitory" set of circumstances and not by an ideal conception of what Canada should be, (1969: 6-7).

What were some of the measures that MacDonald and the Conservative federal government took to insure that the West would never become "un petit Quebec". In 1873, only three years after the Manitoba Act and in the same year as his French-Canadian partner George E. Cartier died, Sir John A. MacDonald introduced a bill into Parliament which founded the North West Mounted Police. In July 1874, three hundred men set out for the northwest. The "fundamental purpose" of the police and the government officials who were soon to follow "was to make ready the land of the west for the coming of settlers. The older order was gone forever" (Creighton; 1957: 360).

What was meant by "the old order"? Which settlers would be enticed to come and would be welcomed in Manitoba? Were the N.W.M.P. sent to Manitoba simply to 'protect' the Indians and Metis from bootleggers or were they also sent as the extension of the federal government whose aim was to inaugurate "a new order" in which the French Canadians living there would become

marginal to the political life of the province? Creighton's interpretation of MacDonald's concessions to the Red River rebels can be understood as a temporary hindrance to the overall policy of immigration from outside Canadian borders. An immigration policy that would emphasize the English-fact in Canada, especially that part of Canada west of Ontario, was to be the tacit design of the Canadian federal government. Obviously, for such a scheme to be successful emigration from Quebec to Manitoba would not be encouraged.

And yet there were men who could read the true intentions of the federal government. One such man was Bishop Taché. As early as 1869, this Roman Catholic leader of the Metis and the French-Canadians living in Manitoba on his return to Rome recorded his bitter feelings on the imminent disappearance of the French fact in the Northwest and the role of the Canadian government as contributing to the demise of French-Canadian society in that territory west of Ontario. Writing to George E. Cartier, he laments his having

always feared the entrance of the North West in Confederation, because I have always believed that the French Canadian element would be sacrificed; but I tell you frankly it had never occurred to me that our rights would be so quickly and so completely forgotten (Martin; 1920: 367).

We turn to the colonization efforts by French Canadian political and religious elites to locate French Canadian settlers in Manitoba. What obstacles did they face? The efforts of one man, Senator Girard, are instructive in this regard.

In March, 1875, the federal government awarded Girard as head of the Colonization Society of Manitoba, four townships in the Red River. There was, however, a major condition: within two years seventy settlers must be located

on them. Girard ran into trouble immediately when he attempted to relocate expatriate French Canadians who had been living in New England onto this Manitoba soil because

"so many Orangemen had settled on its reserve that in one township (alone) there was no room for anyone else, with the result that sixty French Canadians repatriates were reported to have returned to New England. The Society accused the Orangemen of indulging in a racial and religious war, in order to disrupt its work of repatriation".

No matter how many protestations were made by the Society to the federal government "the Orangemen were left in possession of the field" (MacDonald; 1966: 190).

Indications of a policy of foreign immigration into Manitoba as the preferred policy can be gleaned from the account of the government and CPR's efforts to attract southeastern European to Manitoba. From the years 1880 to 1885, the Canadian Government had spent thousands of dollars in vain to entice settlers from South-eastern Europe to come to Canada. In the spring of 1885, agents of the Canadian Pacific Railway in the United States discovered a Hungarian nobleman named Count Paul O de Esterhazy who was more than willing to use his influence to attract his compatriots living and working in the United States to come to Manitoba. Most of these immigrants were under contract labour to work in the Pennsylvania coal mines. But, the U.S. had abolished contract labour in 1882 so that these immigrants could freely move, if they so desired. Esterhazy believed that his countrymen would be well disposed to the idea of settling in the Canadian west as farmers instead of the status of poorly paid mine workers in the United States. Andrew Marchbin records the first encounter between representatives from the Canadian government and Count Esterhazy.

The Canadian Pacific Railway, greatly interested in the colonization of the Company's lands in the West, invited Esterhazy to the Dominion . . . After a personal audience with the Governor-General, Esterhazy made his formal request on May 9, 1885, for the formation of military settlements in the Canadian West; settlements which would be colonized with Hungarians then living in the United States, who, while being trained farmers had also had military experience and could be used in case of rebellion or invasion to defend British interests. The proposal was highly interesting to the government and especially to the Minister of Agriculture the Hon. F.H. Pope. The Department was willing to extend some financial assistance as its officials had long been interested in finding suitable settlers for Manitoba and the North West Territories. (1934: 112; emphasis added mine).

Why would any one man make such a proposal unless he believed, especially after having spoken with the Governor-General, that such an idea would be appealing to certain influential members of the Canadian Federal Government? Why would men within the Federal government approve of such a plan unless they felt that the danger posed by French-Canadians in Manitoba was not only a serious internal matter but contrary to their vision of the west as a unilingual territory.

Had the federal government not been influenced by considerations of ethnicity and language (i.e. an English-speaking nation), the logical decision would have been to invite (and even subsidize) Quebec farmers to settle the west. For what better way of appeasing the anxious Red River Valley French Canadians than by forging a cohesive nouveau Quebec, and alleviating Quebec's over-populated parishes as well? The Canadian Government had clearly not favored such a development.¹

¹ The first successful settlement was called Hun Valley which was under the leadership of Geza de Dory who "not only showed them how to break the land and level the forest but also taught them the English language" (1934: 115).

The Quebec Reaction

How did Quebec view the Red River Rebellions and the Manitoba Act of 1870? Laurier Lapierre has succinctly captured the feeling of Quebec during the years immediately following Confederation when he says:

"In spite of Cartier's presence, French Canadians had begun to experience the pangs of political and racial insecurity almost immediately after 1867. Viewing with alarm the agitation (in Ontario) over the granting of an unconditional amnesty to the French-speaking Metis who had participated in the Riel insurrection of 1869-70, many French-Canadians wondered if Confederation was not already a failure. They became even more concerned when in 1871 the government of New Brunswick ended government subsidies to Roman Catholic schools in the Province. In both cases all attempts to force the federal government to redress what French Canadians considered infringements on their rights failed. Tarte echoes these sentiments 'L'on serait tente de croire qu'il y a une immense conspiration contre la race francaise dans la Dominion'" (1962: 9).

Cartier had died in 1873, the same year MacDonalld founded the N.W.M.P. and many French-Canadians at the federal level now felt uncertain as to the degree of their political influence. Such concerns were soon to lead the French-Canadian elites to a drastic change in political alignments.

The main concerns of many French Canadians in both the Liberal and the Conservative Parties prior to 1885 was to forge a co-operative effort at the federal and provincial levels in order to arrest the emigration of French-Canadians from their parishes in Quebec. As we have seen, the attempts to settle repatriated French-Canadians on western soil could not be considered a success. Lapierre echoes the concern of the French-Canadian political elite when he remarks "only seven years after Confederation (1874), French Canadian politicians of every persuasion were viewing the position of their province with dissatisfaction and alarm" (1962: 19).

The Riel Rebellion of 1885 was to seal the fate of French-Canadian aspirations of westward expansion into the Canadian Prairies. It forecast the demise of French-Canadian political influence at the federal level.

The reaction in Quebec was at once quick and decisive and "increased in intensity after Riel was captured and French-Canadians increasingly saw his fate as an indication of their own hope of national survival" (1962: 148).

The federal government was now faced with the "dual problem of choosing between the demands of Quebec and those of Ontario and then of reconciling Quebec to its decision" (Lapierre; 1962: 146).

The consequences of the hanging of Riel were such that "the (French-Canadian) political leaders would not forget the limit of their power which the affair had revealed. The French-Canadian ministers had not been able to influence their colleagues" (Lapierre; 1962: 169). George Stanley also remarks that as a result of the "crisis of 1885, the most conservative province in Canada swung over to the Liberal party, a position which was consolidated by the selection of a French-Canadian, Wilfred Laurier, as leader of that party in 1887" (1960: 381). In the autumn of the same year (1887), five provincial delegations from Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Quebec, Ontario and Manitoba, four of whom were Liberals, met in Quebec to work out proposals for increased provincial powers (Creighton; 1957: 365-66).

Conclusion

The social history of ethnic pluralism in Canada as it affected French-Canadians reveals the emaciation of their society and confinement to the Quebec provincial boundaries. The hypothesis explored in this essay suggests that the events leading up to the Riel Rebellion of 1885 represent the watershed in the westward expansionary hopes of French-Canadians. We have also noted that the federal government's role can be interpreted as one of complicity in the outcome.

This essay has argued that the increase in Quebec's population is a singularly important factor in the relations of a subordinate ethnic group (the French) to the dominant 'charter' group (the English). Whereas the Quebec elites - the Roman Catholic clergy and hierarchy in particular - attempted to influence les jeunes francais to remain within the Dominion and within the established French Roman Catholic Church in Manitoba, the English political elite deemed otherwise.

The death of Riel signalled the end of ethnic dualism, not only in Manitoba, but in all the western provinces. The finality to the process came with the enactment of the Manitoba School Act of 1916 which established English as the sole official language and created a secular public school system for the province. Only in Quebec would the principle of ethnic dualism be enshrined in law and in fact.

The Quebec reaction to the role of the federal government in guaranteeing French-Canadian rights in the nation as a whole from Confederation to the Rebellion of 1885 was one of uncertainty but hope. As we have pointed out, the Manitoba Act of 1870 represented a temporary political compromise. The federal government had been caught off-guard and therefore had to submit to the Rebels'

demands until such time as it could extend and consolidate itself in the western hinterland. The CPR and NWMP represented such structural links. The only recourse left to the political and religious elites in Quebec was to turn inwards. The political elite would demand greater provincial autonomy from the federal government. The claims for more provincial autonomy which it held in common with the other provinces who sought greater freedom of action gave it added strength to realize these demands. The Roman Catholic Church also turned inward and began to sponsor colonization efforts in the hinterland regions of the province. (Ryan: 1966).

The internal demographic factor - the surplus Quebec population - confronted both the dominant and minority group. The political elite of the former effectively prevented dispersion of French-Canadian institutions and culture within the Dominion. The latter political and religious elites have pushed respectively for increased provincial autonomy and up to the Second World War fostered the migration of surplus population within Quebec itself as one way of alleviating the internally generated structural crisis.

The intransigence of the Federal government towards a preferred British and unilinguistic Manitoba was carried to that province with the election of Thomas Greenway as Premier in 1888. Greenway ended the use of the French language in government and stopped public support to Catholic schools. T. Peterson has convincingly argued that Manitoba took on a decidedly British character in the period from the Riel Rebellion until well into the twentieth century (1972: 69-115). As a direct consequence of these historical forces the French-Canadians outside Quebec would be relegated to a marginal position in the political sphere. The power of numbers and the Roman Catholic Church as a pressure group would be the only countervailing factors that the French-Canadians outside Quebec could

count on to help preserve their cultural and linguistic rights.

What is more, these historical forces set in motion a collective feeling of distrust by French-Canadians within Quebec towards the Federal government. They also evinced the conviction that only by effectively manipulating the provincial against the Federal political structures could a form of "special status" for Quebec be realized. Unlike the other provincial governments where the demand for increasing autonomy was rooted solely in economic motives, such a demand from Quebec was also linked to cultural and linguistic survival and would be aggressively pursued throughout the twentieth century.

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