

## **Quebec's Unending Stream of Alienation from English Canada**

*Dan Kellar, beingthechange.ca,*

Alienation of the French speaking population of Canada, in its various states of evolution, started in New-France with the *les habitants*, moved onto Lower Canada and Canada East and *Les Canadiens* and the Métis of Manitoba/Red River and continuing still with the Quebecois of present day Quebec. False promises, outright attempts and achievements in oppression, racial intimidation, and lies mark the relationship with the governing powers of Canada and the French of Canada ever since they were abandoned by France in 1763 with the Treaty of Paris which ceded France's North American colonial claim to the English empire. This paper will review the past incidences which have left the French Canadians feeling persecuted and will dive into more contemporary issues that have furthered the alienation.

With the end of the War of the Conquest in Canada 1760 and the Treaty of Paris in 1763, France ceded Canada to the English. Quebec City was “naught but a heap of stone and other debris”<sup>i</sup> at this time and hundreds of houses along the St. Lawrence had been destroyed. Britain's first Proclamation, that of October 7<sup>th</sup> 1763 changed the way in which Canada was governed. Already feeling the spiritual desolation of defeat the French-Canadians now had to deal with English law, and their church, while still free to preach, lost its guarantee of authority and its right to collect the tithe. Also the continuance of religious orders for men were not guaranteed. These new rules and regulations though harsh were to be expected, what truly left the *Canadiens* with a feeling of alienation with their new rulers was the fact that “only Protestants could hold office or vote for assemblymen or sit in an assembly...and there were only a few hundred of them out of a population of some 80 000.”<sup>ii</sup>

The second topic where mass alienation of the French population occurred was when in 1755 the British proclaimed again that the Acadians of Nova Scotia (a population of French descent) must convert from their beloved Roman Catholicism or face expulsion. When many Acadians did not comply with this conversion to Protestantism the British went along with the “forcible deportation of virtually the entire Acadian population, estimated at about 10 000 people.”<sup>iii</sup> The Acadians were moved to Cape Breton and to the southern British colonies. This movement of French people had a huge impact on the population; trust in their new rulers was permanently damaged with such a heinous act.

By 1837 the *Canadiens* were showing outward frustration with the English. Having lost their ability to sit in office, and having their commercial enterprises all but eliminated through unfair competition and British favoritism the French-Canadians were on the edge of rebellion. While amassing rebellious forces in 1837, British troops preemptedly attacked and crushed the rebels. Fighting continued for some time afterwards but by 1839, the rebels were subdued.<sup>iv</sup> The rebellion showed clearly how oppressed the French were feeling at the time. Combined with an uprising in Upper Canada the French Rebellion of 1837-1838 led into some governmental change and the Union period.

On the way to responsible government in the Union period French Canada had reached a new low. “The seigneurial system could no longer hold the growing population, the economy lagged, the problems of education had reached such an impasse that the schools were closed, and the old civil code no longer applied.”<sup>v</sup> Changes had to be made as far as the French were concerned. Their English rulers had let them down

and feeling of alienation was running high. At this point in time (1839) the Durham report was released. Lord Durham, who had visited Canada to study and conclude on what should be done in the colony, released his report which called for a “locally autonomous legislative union, in which immigration was to be used to swamp and absorb the French.”<sup>vi</sup> The French were not happy to be assimilated and believed that since they made up the majority of the population at the time they should be in power, at least in their own province. Eventually all this led to Confederation where once again the French were feeling short changed. The English were advocating a representation by population in the federal legislature which would mean English control. What came into being was equal representation of the two provinces. Of course, English in Canada East gained control of a few seats and added to complete dominance in Canada West, took control of the legislature. The French were once again put into a second class role though they did now have a provincial legislature, albeit one with limited powers. Even though Canada was now united, and all peoples were supposed to be equal (the French language did gain official status in the courts and in parliament), the French were still feeling unappreciated.

After confederation, in 1869, the Hudson’s Bay Company sold Rupert’s Land to Canada. The inhabitants of Red River were never consulted about this transfer and the largely Métis (people of Cree and French ancestry) population felt very taken advantage of. The Métis, led by Louis Riel took on the Canadian government and on December 8<sup>th</sup> 1869 released the Declaration of the People of Rupert’s Land and the North West which argued that “the people of Rupert’s Land were free to govern themselves because they had been abandoned by the Hudson’s Bay Company and could not be sold to Canada

without their consent.”<sup>vii</sup> The Métis were not to stand for the annexation of their lands and their rights. Though the Canadian government did yield to the demands of Riel and granted them their own land, the Métis were still not content. Within a few years the Métis realized that the promises made by Canada were not all coming true. 1885 comes in and Riel and his Métis start another revolt. Canada crushes it with a cross-country military deployment, Riel is hanged and French people nation wide are inflamed. Riel’s murder is seen as an attack against all French Catholics. “but they (the Métis) were also victims of federal neglect, intolerance, and fanaticism, and that could not be forgotten...the acquittal of Jackson, an English Métis, seriously compromised the North-West Troubles...(this) revolting act of partiality, and a show of defiance not only towards ore Métis compatriots in the North-West, but towards all French Canadians.”<sup>viii</sup> French-Canadians nation wide were feeling this intimidation and alienation that would continue on for the rest of the century and into the 20<sup>th</sup>.

World War One brought on conscription that left the French feeling used as they did not want to fight the War. When World War Two broke out, and as a tool to gain support for war, the French of Quebec, and all people of Canada were promised that conscription would not be instituted. As war dead mounted and volunteers dried up, the Government of Canada asked to break its promise, and won the vote so they could institute conscription. Once again, French Canadians were outraged and by the end of the war they could look at this incident “as yet another item in a negative legacy of oppression and insensitivity.”<sup>ix</sup> The government of Canada had again let them down.

Now that the history of alienation has been looked at we may now look into more contemporary times. Post 1945 the government of Canada had a difficult task; they had

to find a way to regain the trust of Quebec after the conscription lies of the war. Starting with the quiet revolution of the 1960's Quebec's leaders began transforming Quebec's social institutions: new classes were added to universities, Hydro Quebec took over the industry and Quebec set up its own pension plan; Ottawa was in full support of all these projects. No matter how much the provincial Liberals gained from Ottawa, it was never enough. The goal for this new breed of Quebecers, the Quebecois, was independence from Canada where finally Quebec could have full autonomy in their actions. "Loudly some proclaimed that only an independent state could preserve French Canada's distinctiveness formed by history, Catholicism, and the French language" only an independent state could guarantee an economic future free of foreign presence where complete control over the political and economic spheres was possible.<sup>x</sup> Of course, Ottawa would appease Quebec in their increased role within the province but would not allow Quebec to be fully sovereign. The nationalists twisted the issue declaring that Ottawa would not give Quebec control of their nation and cited the history of oppression. This wave of nationalism swept through the hearts of most Quebecois, and a new era truly began. For years to come calls for full sovereignty from an oppressive government we heard and spread all through Quebec. Though their situation was improving Quebecois were now more than ever unhappy with their situation, feelings of alienation and oppression were everywhere.

The FLQ crisis of 1969 was another pivotal point in English-French relations. Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau invoked the war measures act in Quebec, stripping the rights of most Quebecois and enraging many. This along with all past grievances was the platform on which the party Quebecois, a gathering of the most ardent nationalists,

formed from the ashes of the quiet revolution, ran their 1976 election campaign. The platform's main focus was the call for sovereignty. By 1980 they had managed to infuriate the people of Quebec enough, reaching out to their nationalistic pride, to hold a referendum on independence. On May 20<sup>th</sup> 1980, the federalists won the vote with 60% support for Quebec to stay with Canada. Though many in Quebec felt alienated, they still wished to remain under the umbrella of Canada. For the years to come Quebec's focus shifted to changing the constitution for their betterment.

Throughout the 1980's a new focus on uniting Canada was tabled by Ottawa. The Constitution Act was established after Quebec rejected the revised constitution. Quebec introduced language laws for signs, and were fighting to be recognized as a distinct society. The Meech Lake Accord was written up and included what Quebec wanted, there was inclusion of a distinct society clause. Opposition to this clause ran high though English-Canada. When the Meech Lake accord died because the provincial legislatures of Newfoundland and Manitoba would not ratify it, all the progress made in French-English relation also died:

“Thus in their opposition to the Meech Lake Accord and Bill 178 many English Canadians seemed to be rejecting basic principles upon which over the last thirty years a rim consensus had developed in Quebec: the specificity of Quebec as a distinct society, even a nation, and the pre-eminence of French in Quebec. Certainly, many Quebec Francophones perceived English Canada to be opposing these notions. As a result, the felt a sense of rejection by the rest of Canada they had not experienced since the conscription debates of the two world wars, if ever.”<sup>xi</sup>

This rejection of Quebec's uniqueness was felt throughout the province. The further alienation of the Quebecois had taken place. All of Canada, or so the feeling was, were rejecting them and their culture. After this incident, events in Quebec once again turned towards separation.

In 1994, the Quebecois, feeling thoroughly alienated elect Jacques Parizeau as premier and bring in the party Quebecois to rule. Running with a referendum platform, the new government is quick to set the ball rolling. The closet vote yet is held on October 30<sup>th</sup> 1995, showing obvious discomfort with the rest of Canada, but once again the separatists are defeated with 49% of the vote. Ottawa realizes how strong the feelings of the separatists are and how fragile the relationship is with Quebec; a new program is created it heal the wounds. The new program of course is the ill-fated sponsorship program designed to lift up Canada's image within Quebec and show how friendly and co-operative the two can be. As is well known the program turned into an enormous scandal that threatened to topple the Federal Liberals. Quebecers once again felt used as they watched proof come out about the attempt to by their friendship, and about the millions of their tax dollars wasted on the attempt.

Recent polls (ipsos-reid, May 5<sup>th</sup> 2005) indicate that 54% of Quebecers would now vote to separate<sup>xii</sup>. The feeling of alienation is just as broad now as it was when the treaty of Paris was signed. Clearly something must be done to curb this indignation or Quebec could very well separate from the rest of Canada. The pattern of alienation and oppression of the French speakers of Canada is clear and has been seen for 250 years.

---

<sup>i</sup> Miquelon, Dale. *The First Canada: to 1791 Special Edition*. McGraw-Hill, Toronto, 1998. Pg 78

<sup>ii</sup> *ibid* pg. 79

<sup>iii</sup> Fergusson, Bruce C. *The Expulsion of the Acadians*” from *Dalhousie Review*, Vol. XXV, No. 2 pp 127-135, Halifax Review Publishing Company, 1955.

- 
- <sup>iv</sup> Greer, Alan, “1837-1838: *Rebellion Reconsidered*” from *Canadian Historical Review*, Vol. XXVI, No. 1 pp127-135, University of Toronto Press, 1995.
- <sup>v</sup> Monet, Jacques. “*French-Canadian Nationalism and the challenge of Ultramontanism*” from *Reprisals 2<sup>nd</sup>*, pp 462-477, Prentice-Hall, 1996
- <sup>vi</sup> Martin, Ged. “*The Influence of the Durham Report*” from, *reprisals*, pp 450-461, Prentice-hall, 1996.
- <sup>vii</sup> Flanagan, Thomas. “*Louis Riel*”, The Canadian Historical Association Historical Booklet No. 50. Ottawa, 1992.
- <sup>viii</sup> Silver, A.I. “*The Riel Affair*” from the *French Canadian Idea of Confederation 1864-1900*, pp. 150-180, University of Toronto Press, 1982.
- <sup>ix</sup> Horton, Donald. “*War and Conscriptioin, 1939-1942*” from *French Canadian Nationalist 1912-1968*, pp 89-111, Oxford University Press, 1992.
- <sup>x</sup> Trofimenkoff, Susan Mann. “*Noisy Evolution*” from the *Dream of Nation*, pp 298-315, Gage 1983.
- <sup>xi</sup> McRobertts, Kenneth. “*Postcript*” from *Quebec:Social Change and Political Crisis*, PP 441-461,McClelland & Stewart, 1993.
- <sup>xii</sup> Ipsos-Reid <http://www.ipsos.ca/reid>

## **Bibliography:**

1. Fergusson, Bruce C. *The Expulsion of the Acadians*” from *Dalhousie Review*, Vol. XXV, No. 2 pp 127-135, Halifax Review Publishing Company, 1955.
2. Flanagan, Thomas. “*Louis Riel*”, The Canadian Historical Association Historical Booklet No. 50. Ottawa, 1992.
3. Greer, Alan, “1837-1838: *Rebellion Reconsidered*” from *Canadian Historical Review*, Vol. XXVI, No. 1 pp127-135, University of Toronto Press, 1995.
4. Horton, Donald. “*War and Conscriptioin, 1939-1942*” from *French Canadian Nationalist 1912-1968*, pp 89-111, Oxford University Press, 1992.
5. Martin, Ged. “*The Influence of the Durham Report*” from, *reprisals*, pp 450-461, Prentice-hall, 1996.
6. McRobertts, Kenneth. “*Postcript*” from *Quebec:Social Change and Political Crisis*, PP 441-461,McClelland & Stewart, 1993
7. Miquelon, Dale. *The First Canada: to 1791 Special Edition*. McGraw-Hill, Toronto, 1998. Pg 78
8. Monet, Jacques. “*French-Canadian Nationalism and the challenge of Ultramontanism*” from *Reprisals 2<sup>nd</sup>*, pp 462-477, Prentice-Hall, 1996
9. Trofimenkoff, Susan Mann. “*Noisy Evolution*” from the *Dream of Nation*, pp 298-315, Gage 1983.
10. Ipsos-Reid <http://www.ipsos.ca/reid>