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French Canada under Confederation

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FRENCH CANADA UNDER CONFEDERATION

BY SENATOR N. A. BELCOURT

Sixty years is the average length of the life of man. In the first sixty years of their existence nations, even the best endowed and equipped at the start, have barely time to organize their national life and set it in successful operation.

For the Canadian Confederation the task was unusually difficult, slow and labourious. Formed as it was by provinces widely scattered, differing greatly in its elements, in culture, training and achievement, with divers and even conflicting interests, handicapped by a powerful and richly endowed neighbour, the new Dominion was confronted with a most serious problem, in fact, it appeared to many altogether too complex and too audacious.

Looking back to 1867, whilst remembering that Canada has advanced but very slowly and quite insufficiently towards the establishment of real and pregnant national unity, one cannot help wondering that so much has, notwithstanding, been accomplished.

Certainly it is not in a half hour's speech that one could cover the ground adequately, even within the narrower limits assigned to me—"French Canada under Confederation."

I think I shall have done the best in my power in discharging my present duty if I content myself with showing what was, at the time of Confederation, the relative position of the two great ethnical groups which formed it, and if I add to that a few statistics concerning the period which has elapsed since 1867 and in particular those appertaining to the first quarter of the present century, the century which one of our most illustrious statesmen predicted would be "Canada's Century."

I shall endeavour to treat the subject without any desire and certainly no intention to criticize or to find fault and with strict impartiality.

No proper appreciation of the share taken by the French Canadians in the development of the Canadian federation can be had unless one bears in mind the tragic history of their "débuts", the constant loss of their best men in the long, cruel and devastating wars which raged from the very first days of the foundation of the colony to its capitulation and the resulting departure for France of so many of the more prosperous and best educated among them.

Let us remember that for more than three-quarters of a century, up to 1841—they were deprived of any organized system of education and of all practical means and opportunities to profitably participate in the commercial, industrial and financial activities of the country; that, in fact, they were obliged to apply all their energies to the restoration of their ruined farms and establishments, the very labourious and perilous occupation of opening new fields to colonization, to hewing down the forest for the benefit mainly of the Anglo-Canadians who secured from the Crown almost exclusively for themselves grants of immense farming and timber lands, out of which many huge fortunes were made. It was by the sweat of the brow of the French Canadians that so many of these fortunes were obtained. Great numbers of the pioneers thus became and were compelled to remain for a long time, in reality and in name, "hewers of wood and drawers of water."

Others not so occupied had to continue to spend their time and their energies in carrying on the fur trade which, after all, was the greatest enemy of colonization and real progress in Canada. Some, under great difficulties, in a very small way and against the keenest and most powerful rivalry, devoted themselves to the retention and restricted exploitation of a few of the industries which existed prior to and survived the Conquest, such as, shipping, iron mining and smelting, and fisheries. These and those engaged in the fur trade were the principal victims of the wanton waste of natural resources which has been so marked a characteristic of this hemisphere and especially of its northern half. The spirit of adventure, so typical of the French Canadians, especially the "coureurs des bois" and fur trappers, as well as their knowledge of the country, experience and energies, were fully exploited by the great monopolistic corporations, colonization, lumbering and other companies. As one instance only, let it be remembered that the men who really discovered the MacKenzie, who brought the great explorer to it and should have had the credit of this and other discoveries, were men of French Canadian blood. History has preserved the name of some of them: Etienne Lucier, Joseph Gervais, Louis Labonté, Pierre Bleques who, with many other compatriots, were life employees of the Hudson Bay Company.

The principal "Seigneuries" with their divers establishments and the best of the ten individually owned farms were acquired almost immediately by the new colonists at ridiculously low prices.

In 1774—ten years after the Treaty of Paris—Sir James Marriott stated in Parliament "that as many as ten of the principal Seignories had passed from the French to the English", at panic prices (Cavendish, p. 317). Not less than twenty million acres of the richest farming and timber lands of the colony were granted by the Crown to Army Officers, soldiers, public officials, traders and to the men who left the United States after the American Revolution, to settle in Canada and to land grabbers and speculators, all for very small or no consideration at all. Of these lands 15,000,000 acres, situated in what is now Ontario, were granted to speculators or to "members of the Council or their friends," (W. L. Grant, *History of Canada*, p. 182).

From 1796 to 1814 the Crown conveyed, for no consideration in nearly all cases, to 96 persons 1,457,209 acres, one Nicholas Austin receiving for himself 62,621 in the Township of Bolton. These grants were the results of frauds in which the members of the Executive Council shared and by which they largely profited. Sir Robert Shore Milne, one of our early Governors, allowed the lands of the Crown to be given away, himself taking 62,621 acres of the most fertile fields in the Eastern Townships. All the grantees, with the exception of 4, were Anglo-Saxons recently arrived. Some instances; in 1810 the Ellice family got 25,592 in Godmanchester township and 3,819 in Hinchinbrooke. In 1815 Governor Lord Drummond gave to the Hon. John Richardson 29,800 in Grantham and to the Hon. Thomas Dunn 11,050 acres. Great Imperial Officers participated in despoiling the Canadian Crown domain. Of his own accord the Duke of Portland gave to Governor Sir Robert Shore Milne 48,062 acres and to the members of the Executive Council constituting the Land Commission which had made the extravagant and scandalous concessions up to that date, 12,000 acres each.

It was from the Imperial authorities directly that The British American Land Co. obtained in one grant 800,000 acres in the Eastern Townships.

A Committee appointed by Lord Durham in 1838 showed that 105 individuals had been granted 1,404,500 acres outside of the Seignories, most of which were purchased from the Crown for a mere song. In this list 4 or 5 French names only can be counted. (Crown Lands Report for the Province of Quebec 1763 to 1890. Printed by order of the Legislature).

Under the Treaty of Paris Great Britain received from France \$680,000 which were paid almost entirely to Anglo-Canadians (H. Heriot, *Travels through the Canadas*, p. 127).

During all these years the French Canadians received no help either in men, money or land, whilst the English colonists were favoured with an ever growing number of emigrants from the British Isles, as well as abundant financial means, and were thus enabled to take and retain the absolute control of the trade, commerce and industry of the country.

In the 19th Century \$1,500,000,000 was invested in Canada by Great Britain, which remained in the hands of the Anglo-Canadians. (Hopkins, *"The progress of Canada in the Century"*, p. 342.)

Think that hardly one dollar of the \$2,400,000,000 which England put into the industrial life of Canada has gone into French Canadian enterprise. (Beckles Wilson. *"Quebec and the Laurentian Province"*, p. 11.)

All the money derived from time to time from the British Treasury for public works or uses in the New Colony, amounting often to huge sums, was placed in the hands of the newcomers and history tells us that it was not always spent for the purposes for which it had been obtained. Let me mention but one instance. For repairs and additions to the Fortress of Quebec no less than \$35,000,000 were from time to time granted by the Imperial Government. There is nothing to show how much of the whole of this sum was used for the purpose stated. No contract for any of these works was awarded to a French Canadian.

The essential industries and the means of transportation, by land and by water, the importation, distribution and disposition of the commodities and necessities of life were wholly carried on by Anglo-Canadians. The St. Lawrence was monopolized by them. Public utilities were treated likewise. The French Canadians were constantly and systematically deprived of all positions of trust, profit, honour or dignity. For a very long time they were the main victims of a powerful and most egotistical bureaucracy. Lord Durham spoke in bitter terms of the "system of extortion which prevailed all over the colony".

In short, at the time of Union, it can be truthfully said that the French Canadian was in the position of "le parent pauvre et ignoré", having no one but himself to depend upon for comfort, support or advancement inside and outside of the country.

The century which elapsed between the Conquest and Confederation afforded the French Canadians no addition to their population except that derived from their own native element. French immigration to Canada, with the Conquest, immediately and forever ceased.

During this period of relative peace the literature, historical, poetic and journalistic of the French Canadians began to emerge out of its infancy and to more adequately reflect their ideals and acquire firmity and independence. It is a transitory period in which the public mind was unfortunately much absorbed by racial and religious rivalries, when French Canadians received but scant consideration at the hands of an arrogant bureaucracy and when their best men carried on almost alone the struggle for responsible government. As a consequence, and notwithstanding their desire and determination to promote the interests of Canada,

they found it impossible to accomplish anything really remarkable except their marvellous increase in population. They also suffered the further handicap of being confined and their activities restricted to the territorial limits of what is now the province of Quebec.

It was only after Confederation, upon acquiring the control of their destiny and of their province, that they were enabled to give their attention and apply their strength to the realization of their ideals, and this they always did, as they now do, without in any way prejudicially affecting or interfering with the rights and activities of the English speaking minority.

It must be remembered that the French Canadians had to overcome the handicaps to which reference has been made before they could be on a footing of equality with the Anglo-Canadians in the pursuit of industry and commerce, and it is quite evident that the odds being so much against them they have not as yet been able to secure equal opportunities. Remember, for instance, that with regard to the lumber industry, they never had the means or influence to secure any of the large and very rich timber limits which fell into the hands of their English compatriots. The owners of these timber limits have, in almost every case, built up very large fortunes because of the tremendous and perilous labours, the energy, the long experience and adaptability for such work of the French Canadians, all of which were paid for with a mere pittance.

Is it to be wondered that under such conditions there began in 1830 and has since continued the deplorable exodus of the French population to the United States, to the great detriment of Canada as a whole and more particularly to the French element?

In 1830 also commenced the migration of the French Canadians from the Province of Quebec into the Province of Ontario along the neighbouring counties, first, Prescott, Russell, Glengarry, then up the Ottawa River, and more recently into Northern and New Ontario and along the Canadian National Transcontinental Railway. There are but few statistics available concerning the great development that they have undertaken and are now proceeding with. We know, however, that they have proved their incomparable capacity for colonization and that they are now wonderfully succeeding and without any Government support. Their number now exceeds 300,000 and they are already exercising considerable influence in the conduct of public affairs in this province.

It is only within the last forty years that French Canadian farmers have taken up land in the prairie provinces where they have formed many permanent and flourishing establishments containing a population of at least 100,000.

Again, may I repeat, if we compare his situation at Confederation with that which he holds to-day in the country, one cannot do otherwise than respect and admire his vitality, determination and courage, as well as the success which he has achieved in the heavily handicapped race he has had to pursue. There is no field of human activity in which he has not striven for progress and everywhere he has brought into play the best and most enduring qualities of the race from which he springs.

In the domain of education he has progressed in a marvellous way and it is my belief that nowhere in the world is there a system of education superior to that which is in operation in the Province of Quebec. The subject of education was a long time ago taken and always since kept out of politics. It has been carried on in strict conformity with and complete regard for the religious and ethnical convictions and traditions of the

different elements of its population. It stands as an example to the whole world for its respect for properly constituted authority, for freedom of conscience and perfect equality.

May I now refer to some of the statistics relating to the province of Quebec?

The statistics for that province concerning industrial, commercial and financial operations do not distinguish between the two groups which form the population of the province, whilst those concerning the educational, charitable and public institutions are easily apportioned. It is well known that the Anglo-Canadians, who number between three and four hundred thousand, control in a much greater proportion than the French Canadians the industrial, commercial and financial establishments and operations and that their aggregate as well as individual possession of wealth is much in excess proportionately to that of the French-speaking citizens; though in the agricultural industry the latter hold a much larger proportion than the Anglo-Canadians. And so it is with regard to public and educational institutions, hospitals, religious holdings.

The statistics to which I shall refer are taken from the records of the Provincial Statistician, Year Books, etc. There are no detailed statistics available for the French Canadian groups outside of the Province of Quebec.

POPULATION

The population of Quebec in 1861 was 1,100,566, in 1921 it was 2,361,199, an increase of 1,250,000 in sixty years.

Quebec thus holds second rank after Ontario, whose population is 33 per cent of the whole country and Quebec 26 per cent. The French population of the province of Quebec exceeds 2,000,000; that of all others being about 400,000. In the other provinces it is as follows: Ontario, 300,000; New Brunswick, 124,000; Nova Scotia, 55,000; Prince Edward Island, 12,000; Saskatchewan, 40,000; Manitoba, 35,000; Alberta, 28,000; British Columbia, 12,000, Yukon and Territories, 2,000.

TERRITORY

At the time of the recent judgment of the Privy Council Quebec had 703,653, square miles. The loss of Labrador has reduced this by 112,000. Out of the 200,000,000 acres in Quebec, before the annexation of New Quebec, in 1912, the extent of the agricultural land was about 30,000,000 acres. Only about one-twentieth, namely, 25,215,416 acres is comprised in organized municipalities; there are nearly ten millions ploughed; a little more than three millions not improved, but cleared; nearly ten million acres still in forest, the rest probably untillable.

AGRICULTURE

To the extreme poverty of the French agricultural centres of 1867 there has succeeded a general competency; the average wealth of the Quebec farmer is above that of his neighbour in the New England States. In 1867 the harvest in Quebec consisted of 23,864 bushels of cereals. In 1926, with seven million acres under cultivation valued at \$1,500,000,000 there was a production of \$150,250,000. The result is due in a very large measure to the constant effort of the provincial Government to improve the condition of the farmers, more especially in the exchange of farm products, the building of new highways and bettering the methods of cultivation.

The clearing is regularly increasing from year to year. In 1901 the harvested superficies was 4,704,396 acres. Last year it had risen to 6,867,200 acres. This does not include pasture land.

This development has been specially marked in the region of Lake St. John, of Gaspé and that north of Montreal, in Temiscamingue and Abitibi. A large number of French Canadians have migrated into Northern Ontario where they have established and are now establishing prosperous and permanent groups, as well as in the prairie provinces.

The province is endowed with 20 Experimental farms, 50 domestic schools, 28 stations exhibiting improvements in the cultivation of fruits, 23 fields of demonstration, 6 orchards for demonstration, 350 co-operative societies, 25 horticultural societies, 15 farm clubs, 1 Union of Farmers; it has 100 scientific agronomists and inspectors are constantly at the disposal of all farmers.

HIGHWAYS

At the time of Confederation there was not a single improved road in the province. To-day there are 7,560 miles of them and at a total cost estimated by the provincial statistician at 75 million dollars. These roads are permanently maintained by the province. They have largely contributed to the great tourist traffic from the United States and other parts of Canada, all of whom agree that the system adopted for the circulation and to prevent danger is well nigh perfect.

DAIRY INDUSTRY

This industry was properly organized about 1880 and practically all the rural parts have adopted the new methods. In 1901 there were 2,000 dairies of different kinds; in 1925, 1,599. At first sight this would seem to be a decrease. The contrary is the truth because the adoption of merging small factories, for the sake of general improvement and reducing cost of operations, has been resorted to. The proof is that in 1901, the total amount of butter produced was 24,625,000 pounds and in 1925, 49,128,804. Contrarily, the production of cheese has diminished. The production in 1901 was 80,630,000 pounds, whilst that of 1925 was 51,761,908. The increase in the dairy industry is also shown by the fact that in 1901 the total number of pounds of milk delivered at the factories was 809,172,000; in 1925 it had reached almost 2,000,000,000 pounds and this without taking into account the large quantity of milk and cream exported to the United States. The production of milk and cream disposed of in the cities of the province is estimated at 19,000,000 pounds yearly. For ice cream alone there is sold in the cities 1,000,000 pounds yearly. The milk production of 1925 was valued at \$89,449,634.

FOREST INDUSTRY

This is carried on over 125,000,000 acres or 200,000 square miles, partly owned, but none of it operated by the Government and partly leased by the Crown, only 9,000 square miles being held by private interests. The annual cut is used for building or for conversion into pulp for paper. No figures are available before 1908 when the annual production consisted in 690,135,000 feet board measure and this had risen in 1926 to 1,681,481,652 feet board measure; the value in 1908 being \$10,828,600, in 1925, \$42,301,755. In 1908 the pulp industry was just at its commencement, 201,450 tons

being produced, and in 1925, 1,370,303 tons. In 1912 there were 21 pulp mills; in 1925, 50 mills. Of all the Canadian provinces Quebec produces the largest quantity of pulp. In 1910 the province prohibited the exportation of wood for pulp cut upon Crown lands in order to promote the establishment of pulp mills and thereby also provide additional work and revenue for the people of the province.

MINES

In 1900 the total mineral production was valued at \$12,546,076 and in 1925 at \$23,824,912. The province can evidently look forward to great development in this branch of industry and within a short time.

FISHERIES

Since 1922 only the provincial government has had the control and administration of its maritime fisheries. There are 102 industrial establishments to handle the fish. The province maintains at different points, among others, at Gaspé, Port Daniel and Tadousac, fishing stations for the breeding of salmon and lobster and restocking many lakes.

WATER-POWER

Of all the provinces Quebec has made the most substantial progress in the development of hydraulic power.

In 1910 the Commission of Conservation of Canada estimated that in the province of Quebec there were then developed 300,153 horse-power, not including the electrical energy produced by the Ottawa river.

In 1925 the province headed all the others in hydraulic development. It then had installed turbines producing 1,915,443 horse-power, Ontario at the same time having 1,798,588 horse-power. With the power now being developed on the Gatineau river and in the discharge of lake St. John into the Saguenay, and not counting other smaller but very important developments, the total hydraulic power of the province will certainly obtain at least 3,000,000 horse-power. Lines of transmission have been erected to carry the force developed to facilitate the establishment of industries and for traction purposes.

MANUFACTURES

There were in 1924 in the province 6,847 Manufacturers with a capital employed therein of \$1,044,113,696 and producing \$776,232,244 and paying \$162,379,284 in wages.

There are many other fields of industry concerning which figures would be interesting but, again, time will not permit of dealing with them.

EDUCATION

In 1867 the province had 3,355 schools, 190 academies, 2 special Model schools and three universities, frequented by 212,837 students. In 1926 there were 8,104 primary schools frequented by 583,905 pupils, with nearly 22,000 teachers. The mean attendance was 8 per cent above that of other provinces. Provincial grants that were \$256,762 reached four million in 1926 and the total cost of education in the province was \$28,980,565.16. Seventeen Normal schools, an Institute of Pedagogy, 21 classical colleges for young men, about as many convents for girls, 4 universities, 7 different chairs of Applied Science at polytechnic schools, schools of superior education, 6 technical schools, 2 fine arts schools, schools of art and manufactures, night schools, agricultural and dairy schools, domestic science schools. Scholarships of many kinds are given to enable the most successful students

to complete their studies in Europe and the United States. Six hundred thousand students attend schools in the province, about one-quarter of the whole population. In 1925 the Quebec Government granted \$1,800,000 to its two Catholic Universities and \$1,000,000, to its Protestant and English University—McGill. There are 65 hospitals and maternity homes, 115 asylums and orphanages, 6 public sanatoria and numerous homes and benevolent institutions.

LETTERS AND ARTS

It is difficult to determine when French-Canadian literature was born. The French Canadian always wrote and sang from the earliest pioneer days. Their literary efforts have on repeated occasions received the flattering approval of the French Academy and distinguished writers of France.

Their traditional artistic sense, notwithstanding the extreme paucity of leisure and means, has enabled them to produce remarkable works in painting, sculpture, architecture, sociology, science, romance, music and journalism.

FINANCE

In 1867 the province had two banks; in 1926 it had 11 and 1,138 branches. Their aggregate capital in September, 1926, was \$2,886,707,070; paid-up capital, \$117,124,011 and their reserve \$125,441,200. Joint stock companies, 24 in number at the time of Confederation, are now 700, with a total capitalization of \$150,000,000.

Quebec since 1901 has known nothing but surpluses in its governmental administration, the smallest being \$24,492 in 1902 and the largest, \$5,033,419, in 1922. It still has a public debt but it is being gradually reduced. In 1925 it reached \$81,944,926, giving a per capita debt of \$33.52, which compares favourably with the banner province whose debt in the same year was \$277,045,257, or \$89.28 per person. Its per capita debt is the lowest of all the other provinces, with the exception of Prince Edward Island. It is the second richest province, holding 25 per cent of Canada's wealth as against 33 per cent for Ontario.

Quebec has a financial institution particularly her own, having a very solid basis, which has met a real demand and very successfully, "Les Caisses Populaires." It was founded in 1906 and has since carried on the principle of credit co-operation. There are now 46 Caisses Populaires, having in 1925 a total of 23,527 associates and assets of \$8,261,513.36. Up to 1925 the amount loaned by these small co-operative banks to their members was \$3,827,642.03 and they had realized a net profit of \$439,261.19. They have greatly contributed to the economic stability of the province.

The fact that there are now over 30 French Canadian millionaires in the province and many others holding fortunes varying from \$100,000 to \$1,000,000 will give a fair idea of the individual financial progress they have made in recent years. Many French Canadians have substantial holdings in commercial and industrial corporations operating under English names.

LABOUR

Time will not permit me to go into details. I should like, however, to refer to another element of economic stability, that resulting from the Catholic National Syndicates. Canada is the only country in the world where the labouring element receives its direction from abroad. It is in order to obviate this intolerable situation that were founded the "Catholic

National Syndicates" of the province of Quebec. The object of these organizations was to assure the establishment of justice by the respect of mutual obligations and the accomplishment of reciprocal duties.

It is interesting to note that these syndicates, while Catholic in name, admit Protestants as members. Founded in 1911, it has 50,000 members. The work done at the annual meetings and the support they have given to certain legislation show that they have exercised and continue to exercise a great moral influence in the settlement of the difficulties which inevitably arise between employers and employees. Since their foundation these Syndicates have prevented many strikes and largely contributed to industrial peace.

CONCLUSION

The French Canadians take a legitimate pride in the life and achievements especially in the French province and the groups established throughout the country. Whilst they are loyal and will remain loyal and firmly attached to Great Britain and British institutions, they have steadfastly resisted and will ever resist every attempt to denationalize them.

Their contributions to the progress and stability of Confederation are entirely due to their own labours, tenacity and endurance, as well as their faith in the future of the Dominion. They have succeeded in spite of great difficulties and handicaps, and notwithstanding unjust and sometimes tyrannical treatment; there is absolutely no phase of their existence which has not shown some progress. They have adapted themselves to the exigencies and difficulties of the times. Never dominated by the materialistic idea, they have remained attached to the soil and to their traditional conception of life. There is no part of Confederation where the two races are better united whilst preserving intact their national characteristics. Nowhere in Canada is to be found greater harmony, more friendly rivalry and emulation, than in the Laurentian province—nowhere do the two races show greater respect and consideration for liberty of thought, of inspiration and of action, no where is there to be found a larger measure of peace, of contentment and "*Joie de vivre*."

Quebec is not only the pivot which determines the proportional representation of the Dominion but it is in reality its balance wheel. Its language and its people, as was said by Lord Dorchester, if I remember correctly, and his words were quoted this morning, are the best bulwarks of British institutions in Canada.

That we have made but small progress towards substantial Canadian unity, as I have already stated, needs no special demonstration. We have not expurgated our national life of repeated errors and grievances; certain conflicts of spiritual and material character have not been appeased and they still endanger our future.

Speaking for myself, I have no wish and no intention, in this Jubilee year, to in any way emphasize our shortcomings and our derelictions. I would rather insist upon the hopes for the future which we may be permitted to reasonably entertain.

Perfect national unity has never been attained anywhere and presumably shall never be. The diversities of origin, of culture, of temperament and mentality, of traditions and achievements, will ever survive. After all, Confederation was predicated upon their survival. The Fathers of Confederation evidently did not consider that these diversities would at any time seriously hinder or delay national unity and these difficulties they would not have done so if the spirit and intentions of the founders of the

Dominion had always prevailed. There is no need to amend our Constitution. The only condition necessary to a united future is a true and just interpretation of the spirit and a sympathetic application of its dispositions.

I am indeed very happy to seize upon this occasion, in this often maligned city, to express my sense of gratitude and gratification because of the very marked change of opinion and disposition towards the province of Quebec and the French-speaking groups outside that province and for the sympathetic consideration of their appeals for justice and British fair play on behalf of provincial minorities, as well as their generous and effective co-operation in the task of creating better understanding, harmony and unity. May I be permitted to specially refer to the indefatigable efforts made and results secured by The Unity League of Ontario and the many distinguished men who compose its membership, its president and its secretary and last, but by no means least, the very distinguished president of this society. No better work was ever as unobtrusively and successfully accomplished as theirs.

The celebration of the 60th Anniversary of Confederation will be but an ephemeral event of little or no consequence unless it is made the occasion for the forming and proclaiming of a firm resolve by all to adhere to and to inculcate in the minds of all our citizens of whatever race and creed, the true spirit and purpose of our Constitution and to put them into constant application, in accordance with the will and hope which inspired the great and wise men who made the Canadian Federation.