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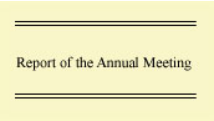

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NATIONALISM IN QUEBEC POLITICS SINCE LAURIER

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THE lifetime of Sir Wilfrid Laurier saw the development of several different concepts of nationalism among the people of Quebec. In the eighteen-sixties he himself was associated with the editors of the Montreal journal, *Union nationale,* and other young nationalists in opposing Confederation. A little later he dreamed of the day when Canada would be politically independent. He was associated with Mercier in the Riel agitations of 1885 and in the electoral campaigns which led to the formation of Quebec's National government in 1887. As Prime Minister of Canada, however, he was accused by many people in his province of having become an imperialist. His policies gave rise to a new nationalist movement inspired by Henri Bourassa, and bitterly opposed to his government. Yet it is generally agreed that he strove at all times for the creation and preservation of Canadian unity. An important instrument for this purpose was his Liberal party, whose policies he endeavoured to define in such a way that no large section of the population would be unable to accept them. In his last election campaign it is true that he obtained a majority in one province only, Quebec. Yet when he died in 1919 he had the satisfaction of knowing that by opposing both conscription and the Union government, he had made it possible for French Canada to continue to support a political party which had been and, with the passing of war-time issues, could again become Dominion-wide in its scope.

The various manifestations of nationalism which characterized Quebec during the career of Laurier have continued to play a part in her politics since his death. Unfortunately they are sometimes not clearly understood in the rest of Canada. The purpose of this brief paper is merely to classify, as objectively as possible, some of the concepts which, growing out of the province's history, continue to be important in determining her attitudes today.

When the nationalist politicians of Quebec speak of the "nation," what do they mean? There are three important answers to this question. Sometimes they have used the word to mean the French-Canadian cultural group; sometimes they seem to refer to the Province of Quebec with all its inhabitants; and sometimes they clearly include the whole of this federal state called Canada.

I

Nationalism of the cultural type is much the oldest of these three concepts, and without doubt is still the most fundamentally important. French Canadians, like their English-speaking compatriots, wish to preserve and develop their own language and characteristic institutions. If a cultural group be considered a "nation," then we are all nationalists. The Anglo-Saxon element, however, whether as the most numerous people in Canada or as the minority in Quebec, do not apply the term to themselves in this sense. The difference is that theirs is a culture which is widely spread throughout the world. It is in no danger of extinction. Admittedly their schools have a habit of glorifying their own race and its achievements, but they are not on the defensive. They do not think of their cultural group

as a "nation," for it is not sufficiently distinct from what exists in the United States or in the United Kingdom, and its survival in Canada is not threatened.

The French Canadian, on the other hand, has stood alone on the American continents and alone in the British Empire. Ever since 1763 he has been worrying about his *survivance française*. The military conquest was accepted, but the struggle to prevent complete Anglo-Saxon cultural domination has gone on. In the political sphere on some critical occasions this has led to the formation of a French-Canadian *bloc,* such as that which made Panet the Speaker of the first Assembly of Lower Canada, and those which in turn backed Papineau and LaFontaine in their struggles for what we now call democratic rights. At the present time, Maxime Raymond, Paul Gouin, and René Chaloult believe that a situation has arisen which can best be dealt with through the formation once more of a *"Bloc populaire canadien."*[1] These *blocs,* however, have never existed as separate political organizations for long after the passing of the specific crisis which they were formed to meet. They have been organized, not for the purpose of isolating French Canadians, but to defend what are considered by their leaders to be fundamental rights which, for the time being, cannot be protected in any other way.

All recent French-Canadian political leaders have, of course, desired to encourage the culture of their race. But there have been important disagreements as to what is involved in this type of nationalism under present conditions, especially in the field of economics. Even at the time of Confederation, men like A. A. Dorion and Médéric Lanctot accused Cartier of selling out to the big capitalists in matters of importance to their race. In the days of Premier Taschereau, similar charges against the Liberal régime were made in vain by the Conservatives under the leadership of Arthur Sauvé and Camillien Houde. These charges became more effective when, during the great depression, some French Canadians within the Liberal party began to argue that unless the social well-being of a people is secure, a healthy cultural nationalism is impossible. This feeling led to the formation of Paul Gouin's *Action libérale nationale* in the 1930's, which, like the *Bloc populaire canadien* again today, advocated extensive economic changes, notably in the sphere of government (or "national") ownership of essential public services.

The *A.L.N.* was *"Libérale"* both in that most of its members were Liberals in federal politics, and in that it adopted a liberal attitude on questions of social reform. It was *"Nationale"* in that it aspired to uplift the people of the French Canadian "nation" and of Quebec. Such a policy, it believed, would contribute to the strengthening of the Canadian nation as a whole.

Most of the *A.L.N.* programme never went into effect. Founded in 1934, its members soon abandoned the idea of "re-liberalizing" the provincial Liberal party from within. On the eve of the Quebec elections of 1935, Paul Gouin and the leader of the provincial Conservative party entered into an alliance known as the *Union nationale Duplessis-Gouin.* Mr. Duplessis had nothing to lose, for in the federal elections a few weeks earlier

[1] *Que devons-nous attendre du Bloc? Conférence de Paul Gouin au Monument National, le 28 avril 1943* (Edité par le journal *L'Union,* 254 est, rue Ste-Catherine, Local 13, Montréal).

only one French-Canadian Conservative had been elected. Mr. Gouin believed that he, also, had nothing to lose because he thought that anything would be better than the Taschereau government. So an electoral agreement was quickly concluded.

Although this combination fell just short of victory in the 1935 elections, it succeeded in forcing another dissolution of the Legislature in 1936. Before new elections could be held, however, the two leaders quarrelled. Mr. Gouin withdrew from the alliance but failed to prevent most of his former supporters from allowing Mr. Duplessis, a "practical politician," to transform the *Union nationale* into a new unified political party under the sole leadership of himself.[2] The Duplessis government which took office following the 1936 elections, carried through some social reforms, but it fell short of the original *A.L.N.* programme. The idea of "National Liberal Action," however, did not die. Mr. Gouin's attempt to revive his movement in 1939 was killed by the electorate, but ever since that year one of its most prominent original leaders, the Hon. Oscar Drouin, has been a member of the Godbout Liberal Cabinet. Mr. Gouin himself is now a promoter of the *Bloc populaire canadien,* of which one of the main objectives is to raise French-Canadian living standards, both through provincial action and through co-operation with people of a similar political and economic outlook in other provinces.

It is worth noting that, in the past, developments such as this have made possible the formation of Canada's great political parties. It has been Canadian experience that English-speaking organizations cannot "convert" Quebec, nor can French-Canadian movements expand far into Ontario. The Conservative party was produced when home-grown *bleus* led by Morin and Cartier joined with the Tories of MacNab and Macdonald—an alliance which, temporarily at least, now appears to be completely broken. Similarly, the union of Dorion's home-grown *Rouges* with Mackenzie's Grit Reformers gave us the modern Liberal party—a combination which, somewhat uneasily, still continues to exist. History shows, therefore, that the appearance of movements like the *Bloc populaire canadien,* far from necessarily being an obstacle, can in the long run become an instrument for the building of Canadian unity. The condition, of course, is that in the other provinces there can be found people with similar attitudes who do not insist on more centralization of power than French Canadians believe to be consistent with their "national" safety.

II

The word "nationalism" is often used in Quebec as though it meant, not merely the French-Canadian cultural group, but the whole province. Canada frequently seems to be regarded as a sort of supra-national state to which the people have voluntarily granted some sovereign powers while at the same time retaining many autonomous rights for the provinces. This attitude is, of course, simply a practical political application of cultural nationalism, Quebec being the largest existing administrative unit in which French Canadians are in a position to deal with problems in their own way. At the same time the fact that the province contains an English-

[2] *Ibid.,* 29-31, prints the text of Paul Gouin's statements of June 18, 1936 ("M. Duplessis brise l'Union"), and of October 25, 1939 ("Allocution prononcée le 25 octobre 1939, par M. Paul Gouin, au poste CBF, à 10 h. 15 p.m.").

speaking minority cannot be ignored. Thus the first National party, founded in 1871 by Louis Jetté and other young Quebec Liberals, included prominent English-speaking leaders. The same was true of Mercier's National party which took office in 1887, and which he presented to the Legislature as "un gouvernement comprenant toutes les classes et toutes les nationalités, et toutes les nobles aspirations du peuple." Shortly afterwards he declared at Saint-Hyacinthe: "le parti national respectera et fera respecter les droits de la minorité protestante de cette province. Nous désirons vivre en paix avec toutes les races, toutes les croyances."[3]

The *Union nationale,* founded in its present form in 1936, revived the use of the word *"national"* in this sense of a provincial political coalition. Honoré Mercier, as leader of the Liberal party in Quebec, had used the Riel affair to persuade a number of *bleus* to join him in a successful anti-Macdonald alliance. Somewhat similarly, the great success of the Quebec Conservative leader, Mr. Duplessis, in exposing scandals connected with the Taschereau régime, enabled him to rally many former opponents to the support of his successful *bleu-blanc-rouge* campaign for the restoration of honest government.

In office from 1936 to 1939, Duplessis continued to imitate, at least on the surface, Mercier's form of nationalism. His movement, too, was strictly provincial. His Cabinet, too, included non-French Canadians. And he, too, placed great emphasis upon provincial autonomy. The reason which he gave for calling the general elections of 1939 was that this principle was being violated by Ottawa under the authority of the federal War Measures Act. His slogan was "co-opération oui, assimilation jamais." Today, in opposition, the main demand of the *Union nationale* is that the government of the province should "recover and guard its complete autonomy." The *Bloc populaire canadien,* however, regards Mr. Duplessis as being as unreliable in this respect as are the Liberals. It points out that there are two ways of undermining provincial autonomy. One is that of which they accuse Mr. Godbout—outright surrender to Ottawa. The other is that of which they believe both Mr. Taschereau and Mr. Duplessis were guilty—insisting upon autonomous powers, and then failing to use them in a way which would meet the needs of the people. If pressing economic and social problems are not dealt with satisfactorily by administrators in Quebec, the principle of provincial autonomy becomes for the majority of French Canadians nothing more than an abstract theory.

Quebec's doctrine of provincial autonomy is based upon the conviction that the French-Canadian mentality and the French-Canadian standard of values differ in important respects from those of English-speaking Canada, and that therefore French-Canadian problems—that is, problems related to the preservation or development of the French-Canadian culture—should be dealt with by French Canadians themselves, in a French-Canadian way. Of all the beliefs of the Quebec nationalist, this seems to be the most difficult for his compatriots in the other provinces to grasp. In general he accepts the British North America Act's statement of subjects which should be reserved for local jurisdiction. It is only in these spheres that he claims the right of provincial autonomy. He wishes to preserve the type of Confederation which was established in 1867. He believes that

[3]Robert Rumilly, *Histoire de la province de Québec;* V. *Riel* (Montréal, 1942), 238, 251.

only if Quebec's complete control of certain matters is maintained, will successful co-operation between our two main culture groups be possible or a strong and united Canada be developed.[4] A Canadian stated before the American Historical Association a year or so ago that the paradox of our history is the fact of "nationhood emerging . . . through the mingling of two opposing elements—autonomy and co-operation."[5] In the view of Quebec nationalism, if this statement is true of the relations of our Dominion with the rest of the Empire, the strength of Canadian nationhood depends equally upon the recognition of the importance of the same paradox in the relations of the province with the rest of Canada—the mingling of autonomy and co-operation.

III

The third important concept of nationalism in Quebec is that of Henri Bourassa, who regards the whole of Canada as the "nation," and desires that she should be completely independent within the British Commonwealth of Nations. He wishes her not merely to assert this independence, but to exercise it through a foreign policy based, not upon sentimental imperialism, even if only subconscious, but solely upon Canadian interests. He began his crusade at the time of the Boer War and continued it with the aid of his paper, *Le Devoir,* through the first World War. Quebec regards conscription as an extreme example of military imperialism. But in 1917 Laurier made it possible for her to register her protest through one of the two traditional Canadian parties, thereby removing any necessity for the creation of a new Nationalist organization.

After 1919, Quebec continued to identify Conservatism and imperialism. She alone of the nine provinces has given a majority to the same party at every federal election since that date. During this period, she has frequently voted differently from Ontario, whose sectional economic interests are similar to her own. A principal reason has been that, for her, nationalism of the Bourassa type could best be expressed by voting Liberal. Had not Mackenzie King, Sir Lomer Gouin, and Ernest Lapointe supported Laurier in 1917? Outstanding examples of unsuccessful Conservative efforts to live down their imperialist reputation were Mr. Patenaude's 1925 campaign, which presented him as a Quebec provincial nationalist with a Cartier-like formula for uniting English-speaking business men and the French-Canadian masses; and then Mr. Meighen's famous "Hamilton speech," delivered later in the same year. After the failure of Mr. Patenaude, whom it had strongly backed, the Montreal *Daily Star* sadly concluded that "there are things which Quebec fears more than Progressive rule."[6]

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[4]The following are a few examples of many statements made by contemporary Quebec nationalists bringing out the distinction between provincial autonomy and separatism: Maximilien Caron, "Y a-t-il un provincialism légitime?" (*Actualité économique,* 15e année, II, mars, 1940); François-Albert Angers, "Faits et nouvelles: Le rapport Sirois" (*ibid.,* 16e année, II, décembre, 1940, 158); Lionel Groulx, *Directives* (Montreal, 1937), 12-13, 178-80, 182-3; Esdras Minville, "Pour former des citoyens canadiens-français. V. Le milieu politique" (*Enseignement secondaire au Canada,* XXII, avril, 1943, 531), and "VI. Le milieu économico-social" (*ibid.,* XXII, mai, 1943, 612).

[5]George W. Brown, "Have the Americas a Common History? A Canadian View" (*Canadian Historical Review,* XXIII, June, 1942, 135).

[6]Montreal *Daily Star,* Oct. 30, 1925. In Quebec the Conservatives made much of the fact that from 1921 to 1926 the King government's majority depended upon the support of the western Progressive party.

In order to win the Lotbinière by-election of 1937, and again to defeat Camillien Houde, by this time Independent in politics, in the Saint-Henri division of Montreal in 1938, members of the federal Cabinet made the most definite promises that the King government's rearmament programme was for the defence of Canada only, and that it would never participate in another overseas war.[7] In view of what the Liberal party had long stood for in the Province of Quebec, it was inevitable that the Prime Minister's "Canada at Britain's Side" policy in September, 1939, should cause dissensions among his French followers. Liberals such as Maxime Raymond and Liguori Lacombe opposed participation in the new war on the grounds of Bourassa nationalism. There were many evidences that, in spite of rationalization, the determining factor in the ministry's attitude was not Canadian, but British sentiment. Otherwise, for example, how could one explain the continued failure even to break off trade relations with Japan, which was certainly as great an "aggressor" as Germany? But Mr. Lapointe's assurances that he had a compact with the representatives of English-speaking Canada to the effect that there would be no attempt to introduce conscription, together with the unpopularity of Mr. Duplessis and Dr. Manion's connection with the Union Government of 1917—these were enough to persuade Quebec to vote Liberal again, provincially in 1939, and federally in 1940.

In 1942, the renewed dissensions within Quebec Liberal ranks over Mr. King's plebiscite policy, Liguori Lacombe's temporary formation of a new Canadian party (note the name), the appearance of the League for the Defence of Canada, the province's 73 per cent "No" vote in the plebiscite in spite of Mr. Cardin's speeches, the revolt of most of the Quebec Liberals over Mr. King's overseas conscription amendment to the National Resources Mobilization Act, the organization of the *Bloc populaire canadien,* and the election of an Independent in the traditionally Liberal electoral district of Charlevoix-Saguenay, were all evidences of the strength of Canadian (i.e. anti-imperialist) nationalism among French Canadians today.

IV

That nationalism has been a major factor in the politics of Quebec since the death of Laurier, as it was during his lifetime, is obvious. The outlook of nearly every French Canadian is *"national"* in some sense, although there are many who do not subscribe to all the concepts listed above. It is important, however, to distinguish carefully between nationalism and isolationism. The two do not necessarily go together. Nor does it follow that because a person was opposed to participation in the present war he knows nothing of what is going on in the outside world. Some of Quebec's most thorough-going nationalists are exceedingly well informed, and exceedingly interested in international affairs. As examples arbitrarily selected from among those who are considered as the most uncompromising nationalists, names like Raymond and Laurendeau of the *Bloc populaire canadien,* or Pelletier and Richer of *Le Devoir,* could be mentioned, to say nothing of Bourassa himself.

[7] A.L., "Mémoires d'outre-tombe" (*L'Action nationale,* XV, mars, 1940, 229-32), quotes extracts from speeches by Mackenzie King (1935), J.-N. Francœur (1937), C. G. Power (1937), Ernest Lapointe (1937, 1938), Fernand Rinfret (1938), and P.-J.-A. Cardin (1938).

Nor do Quebec's nationalists express any desire to isolate their province from the rest of Canada. That they are more interested in their own affairs than in those of other parts of the Dominion is true, but the same may be said of the people of Ontario. This is only natural. No responsible Quebec leader or writer wants a separate state on the banks of the St. Lawrence, and certainly only an infinitesimal fraction of the French-Canadian people has ever seriously thought of such a thing. Among the nationalists of Quebec today, there are many LaFontaines looking eagerly for Baldwins with whom they can co-operate. If it ever seems as though they may isolate their province, this is because they are put in that position by English-speaking Canadians who have not the patience to respect their point of view. Quebec nationalism is, after all, essentially defensive in character. Its proponents wish to preserve their heritage and assist their people, but they have no though of hurting the interests of anyone else either within Canada or beyond its borders. Of course they may be wrong in their ideas about what is best for themselves or for others—but then again it is at least possible that they may be right. Even historians are not always infallible in judging their fellow-men.

DISCUSSION

Professor Trotter said that French Canadians need to abandon the idea that the foreign policy of Canada is imperialistic. It represents the views of English Canadians among whom there are no imperialists left. You have to think hard to find an English Canadian who does not think of Canada first. We are in this war for the survival of Canada as a nation, including the French-Canadian as well as the English-Canadian tradition. In the last two years we have passed through a crisis in the readjustment of French and English relations in Canada, and have found once again that the things which bind us together are stronger than the things which divide us. Each will tolerate the views of the other and all participate in the general war effort. There is the solution to the French-Canadian problem by elimination. It is a problem of life that will go on but the diversities in Canada will be the seeds of a larger life.

Major Lanctot said that nationalism really means to the French Canadian survival and nothing else. He sees it as his duty to himself and to Canada to keep and to preserve French culture and nationality, like the other nationalities for whom we have fought two wars, like the English against the Normans. The English always make the mistake of finding the French Canadian too French in peace and not French enough in war. In fact, they are not French at all but Canadian, having no idea of going back to France. The English Canadians should stop looking at us as foreigners and priest-ridden just as we should stop looking at the English Canadians as imperialists. There will be complete co-operation when the English Canadians grant French Canadians the right of cultural survival. In this war there is much better feeling in French Canada where the enlistments are three to five times greater than in the last war.