

The Vichy-Free French Propaganda War in Quebec, 1940 to 1942

Paul M. Couture

Volume 13, numéro 1, 1978

London 1978

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/030484ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/030484ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

The Canadian Historical Association/La Société historique du Canada

ISSN

0068-8878 (imprimé)

1712-9109 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer cet article

Couture, P. M. (1978). The Vichy-Free French Propaganda War in Quebec, 1940 to 1942. *Historical Papers / Communications historiques*, 13(1), 200–216. <https://doi.org/10.7202/030484ar>

Résumé de l'article

En juin 1940, l'armée française rend les armes et le maréchal Pétain instaure un nouveau gouvernement à Vichy. La légalité de ce gouvernement est, dès lors, vivement contestée par un groupe rival dirigé par le général de Gaulle qui établit ses quartiers généraux en Angleterre. Pendant les années 1940-1942, ces deux factions vont se livrer une lutte qui eut de fortes répercussions au Canada et qui s'avéra même l'un des événements les plus controversés au pays.

Ces controverses, il faut bien le dire, dépassaient de beaucoup l'opposition Pétain-de Gaulle; elles rejoignaient de multiples dissensions idéologiques, raciales, politiques et diplomatiques, qu'il s'agisse des revendications nationalistes des Canadiens-français, de sentiments pro ou anti-impérialistes, ou encore, du problème de la participation à la guerre. L'auteur a choisi de s'étendre plus longuement sur les diverses réactions qui s'observent au Québec à la suite de la propagande considérable dont les deux factions inondent le pays.

Ce qui frappe, au départ, c'est la sympathie avec laquelle les Québécois ont reçu la nouvelle des événements qui déchiraient la France en 1940. Puis, avec la propagande, vinrent les prises de positions. A vrai dire, sauf quelques exceptions, peu de gens militèrent activement pour l'un ou l'autre camp; cependant, le gouvernement Pétain était vu d'un meilleur oeil. On admirait le vieux maréchal et maints organismes endossaient ses projets de "restauration". De Gaulle, pour sa part, fut assez vite identifié à la campagne pour une guerre totale et, de ce fait, rabaissé aux yeux des Québécois. Malgré ce consensus apparent, la question française n'engendra pas moins d'acertes disputes qui allaient s'envenimant puisqu'elles débouchaient sur des problèmes typiquement québécois. L'occupation de Vichy par l'armée allemande, en 1942, et la rupture des relations diplomatiques entre la France et le Canada vinrent mettre fin aux débats sur la question.

The Vichy—Free French Propaganda War in Quebec, 1940 to 1942

PAUL M. COUTURE

The surrender of the French army in June, 1940, and the subsequent establishment of Marshal Pétain's government in southern France constituted one of the strangest and most complicated episodes in the history of that country for, alongside this new authoritarian regime and challenging its legality, there emerged a rival government-in-exile under General Charles de Gaulle. This dramatic dichotomy also gave rise to one of the more controversial developments confronting Canada during the Second World War.

Although Canadian interests were not directly involved, many Canadians of French origin found themselves in the centre of a storm of controversy and propaganda concerning divided wartime France. The dispute in Canada extended far beyond the debate over the relative merits of Pétain or de Gaulle to encompass ideological, racial, political, and diplomatic questions. The French situation became the focal point for a variety of factions, both in and out of Quebec, and each supported or manipulated the question through posture and propaganda to serve a particular purpose.

Not all the information regarding France was self-serving propaganda, but in many instances divisions were so extreme that the differing factions enlarged the treachery or malevolence of the opposition to the extent that statements of fact became distorted and an imagined part of the propaganda war. Whether it was Quebec's clerical élite, *nationalistes* polemicists, disgruntled Tories in English Canada, French representatives, or other involved parties, all groups brought their own interpretations to bear on the issue of divided France. The propaganda generated by the Free French-Vichy question compounded an already complex situation, confused the basic issues of the war for many French Canadians, and further accentuated English-French tensions within the country. The events of November, 1942, proved fortunate for Canada because, with the Allied invasion of North Africa, Canada's termination of diplomatic relations with France, and the German occupation of Vichy's territory, the most contentious issues were resolved.

If there were any doubts concerning French Canada's continued affections

-
1. Elizabeth Armstrong, *French Canadian Opinion on the War*, (Toronto, 1942), p. 8; André Laurendeau, *Witness for Quebec*, P. Straford, ed. and trans., (Toronto, 1973), pp. 40-1.

VICHY-FREE FRENCH PROPAGANDA IN QUEBEC

for France after a 175 year severance, they were put to rest by Quebec's response to the military surrender of France in June, 1940. Expressions of sorrow and sympathy for the agony of France were universal throughout French Canada.¹ André Laurendeau, editor of *L'Action Nationale*, noted that he was amazed by the shock and pain that was evident among French Canadians:²

I didn't think France represented that kind of reality for them. . . . People were wounded personally; they felt pained, deceived perhaps a little ashamed, for their pride in the name "français" which they bore and loved had been roughly shaken.³

In the weeks to come, there would begin the critical accusations concerning the early British evacuation and the weaknesses of France that led to her collapse, but in those last days of June the dominant mood was only sorrow for her distress.

In addition to this was French Canada's overwhelming sense of isolation as *Canadiens* realized that Quebec was effectively cut off from her cultural and historical roots and set adrift in the English sea.⁴ Moreover, certain English Canadians were quick to accuse France of cowardice and of betraying the Allied cause⁵—an attitude that was bitterly resented by French Canadians and one that only furthered their sense of solitude. This feeling of isolation emerged later as an explanation for Quebec's affinity to Vichy. Many observers believed that so pervasive was this attitude that French Canadians were prepared to grasp at anything that offered the hope of familiarity and stability in those chaotic times.⁶ As English Canada appeared to unite with an irresistible will to go to the aid of Great Britain, Quebec stood alone in glaring antithesis, resigned to its fate, leaderless, and utterly alone.

The unanimity of French-Canadian sentiment that was expressed at the time of the collapse of France was short-lived. As the events of late June faded, French Canadians attempted to assess Pétain's new order in France and his nation's ambivalent relationship with Great Britain and Germany. Word had also reached Canada of a second wartime France under the leadership of General Charles de Gaulle, committed to what seemed to be a quixotic determination to continue the war in the name of the French people. Also to be decided was what position Canada would assume toward France with the termination of Anglo-French relations? Although the domestic and international situation of France was ambiguous enough, the entire situation was further compounded by the emotionalism of wartime and by war's constant attendants, propaganda and censorship. These were the conditions under which French Canadians sought to evaluate the inter-

2. Laurendeau, p. 41.

3. *Ibid.*

4. Armstrong, p. 9.

5. Robert Rumilly, *Histoire de la province de Québec*, tome XXXVIII: *Ernest Lapointe*, (Montreal, 1968), p. 178.

6. Public Archives of Canada (PAC), W.L.M. King Papers, series J4, Vol. 358. Claude Melançon (Deputy Director of Information) to T.C. Davis (Deputy Minister of National War Services), March 15, 1942; Laurendeau, p. 88.

nal developments in France and the new international order. Most importantly, however, the French imbroglio was refracted through the biases peculiar to French Canada. As Quebec Premier Adélard Godbout commented on the sentiments in his province toward de Gaulle and Pétain, "the thing to remember was that the average French Canadian sympathized with one side or another in the French situation more as a reflection of his beliefs and interests in the province of Quebec than as a barometer of his judgement on the actual issues abroad."⁷ Herein resides the essential feature of the Canadian outlook toward divided France, and not one monopolized by French Canada alone.

Numerically, the active Canadian supporters of either the Free French or Vichy were quite small; however, by the summer of 1940, the question of Pétain's government had become one of the most contentious issues dividing the country.⁸ In Quebec, only Jean-Charles Harvey's Montreal-based weekly, *Le Jour*, was totally committed to the cause of Charles de Gaulle, but his constant attacks on Pétain, combined with his campaign to end church control of education and his advocacy of increased English usage in the province, were injurious to his cause and led to his denunciation by Cardinal Villeneuve and the Bishops of Quebec.⁹ Even many supporters of the Free French believed *Le Jour* did the Gaullist movement more harm than good in Quebec.¹⁰ At the opposite pole, only the Jesuits of *l'École sociale populaire* through their monthly publication, *Relations*,¹¹ and *La Droite*, from Quebec City, appeared to give unqualified support to Pétain and his policies.¹² But here activist support ended and, for most concerned French Canadians, the posture assumed toward France reflected more their outlook on political and social conditions within Canada rather than an overwhelming interest in France herself.

From the beginning of Pétain's regime, expressions of support forthcoming from French Canada were widespread and not limited to the conservative nationalist segments of the province. The basis for this was the prestige of Marshal Pétain and General Weygand in Quebec.¹³ Both had been held in high regard by

7. Nancy H. Hooker, ed., *The Moffat Papers: Selections from the Diplomatic Journals of Jay Pierrepont Moffat, 1919-1943*, (Cambridge, Mass., 1956), p. 377.

8. Harvard University, J.P. Moffat Papers, Vol. 17, Personal Correspondence, J.P. Moffat to Amb. J. Grew, July 27, 1940; Marcel-Aimé Gagnon, *Jean-Charles Harvey, Précurseur de la révolution tranquille*, (Ottawa, 1970), p. 190.

9. Department of External Affairs (DEA) Records, file 712-B-40c, S.T. Wood (Commissioner RCMP) to N. Robertson (Under Secretary of State for External Affairs), May 3, 1941; Armstrong, p. 30.

10. Douglas G. Anglin, *The St. Pierre and Miquelon 'Affaire' of 1941*, (Toronto, 1966), p. 65.

11. DEA Records, Wood to Robertson, May 3, 1941; Mason Wade, *The French Canadians*, Vol. II, (Toronto, 1968), p. 956.

12. PAC, P.F. Casgrain Papers, April 20, 1941. *La Droite* was banned by the Secretary of State in April, 1941, for devoting that month's issue entirely to Pétain and his government, an issue which contained numerous anti-British statements.

13. PAC, Privy Council Records, Cabinet War Committee Records, Minutes, September 26, 1940.

VICHY-FREE FRENCH PROPAGANDA IN QUEBEC

French Canadians before the war and their reputation was heightened by the image of their unflinching devotion to France when the "politicians" abandoned her in the disastrous spring of 1940.¹⁴ Georges Pelletier of *Le Devoir* reflected this sentiment and revealed Quebec's hope for France under Pétain's guidance:

La vérité, c'est qu'il n'y a peut-être dans l'histoire de la France ces années-ci figure plus noble que celle du vieux maréchal. . . . Pétain a préservé son pays de la mort en 1940, au prix même de sa propre réputation d'invincible soldat. . . .

L'ère de la Troisième République est close. . . . Un grand peuple survit, un coeur bat, un esprit palpite, une âme frémit, malgré les ténèbres opaques. . . . La clarté de l'aube luira. Le jour renaîtra.¹⁵

With unoccupied France under Pétain's illustrious leadership, together with natural filial sympathies, it was understandable that Vichy was received with general favour throughout French Canada. The propaganda from the Free French and Great Britain soon challenged the support and legality of the Vichy government, but in French Canada there was no question of Pétain's constituted authority for, it was argued, thirty-three states recognized Vichy, not the least of which were Canada, the United States, and the Vatican.¹⁶ Furthermore, in the early months of Vichy rule, de Gaulle's Free French forces in England were little more than an ill-assorted collection of a few thousand accidental exiles.¹⁷

Whereas the French-Canadian outlook toward Vichy France was generally sympathetic, certain elements in French Canada actually found much to admire in particular aspects of Vichy rule. On July 10, 1940, Vichy announced its plans for a "national revolution", a programme intended to put an end to the instability, intrigue, and corruption that Pétain attributed to the Third Republic. It was a programme of *restauration*, designed to re-establish traditional authority in French society and reorganize the state on professional and corporate structures in accordance with the Papal Encyclicals of Pius XI.¹⁸ To an influential group of French Canadians who themselves had long been advocates of a similar social plan, this enhanced the appeal of Vichy France.

The religious aspects of Vichy rule, both illusory and real, were of particular importance to French Canadians, for in certain instances they overshadowed many of the less appealing features of the regime. Pétain's grandiloquent call for a "national revolution" was warmly received by Quebec's clerico-conservative élite, who saw the Marshal as a liberator, saving France from the bonds of liberal capitalism and from the baser aspects of democratic politics.¹⁹ Most religious publications praised Pétain's vigorous leadership, his reinstatement of religious

14. *Le Devoir*, 29 juin 1940.

15. *Ibid.*

16. *L'Action Catholique*, 11 septembre 1940.

17. DEA Records, file 712-B-40c, Report to USSEA, "The Free French Movement in Canada", December, 1941.

18. See *L'Action Catholique*, 11 septembre 1940 and 22 octobre 1941.

19. *Ibid.*, 21 septembre 1940; Armstrong, pp. 8-10.

education in the schools, his advocacy of "Travail, Famille, Patrie", and particularly the policy that "honorait la religion, et déclarait la francmaçonnerie dissoute".²⁰ By the fall of 1940, rumours spread in Quebec of an approaching concordat between Vichy and the Papacy, reinforcing the belief that Pétain's regime was embarked upon a programme to reorganize France on the basis of papal encyclicals.²¹ The appeal, then, for the clerico-conservative élite was the perception of Pétain's government as a dynamic new force, predicated upon Catholic orthodoxy, striving to discipline the national energies of a France which had for so long forgotten her providential mission as the "fille aînée de l'Eglise".

Before the war, church leaders in French Canada had looked to Franco's Spain, Salazar's Portugal, and Mussolini's Italy as model corporatist states but, with the establishment of Pétain's Vichy, France became the paragon of "une démocratie corporative".²² This was evidenced when the Bishops of Quebec paid tribute to the new order in France and echoed Pétain's call for a moralistic "national revolution" during their annual Labour Day message in 1940.²³ It was obvious that the clergy was more than willing to use France as a shining example of God's judgement and mercy. The anti-clerical Third Republic that had "expelled God" from the public schools, confiscated church property, discriminated against religious orders, and confounded liberty with licence had reaped its just reward in June 1940.²⁴ Yet, through Pétain, God was at work to save France.²⁵ Thus, Vichy's programme of *restauration* of traditional Catholic values provided the clergy in Quebec with what appeared to be a classic example of moral and political degeneration and destruction followed by rebirth and new hope. It was a specious model; yet, through the Vichy years it was of great religious significance in Quebec.

While French Canada's Catholic hierarchy emphasized the religious aspects of Vichy France, it never lost sight of the political realities and of Quebec's obligations within Canada. In most pronouncements on Vichy, Cardinal Villeneuve and the editors of *L'Action Catholique* reminded French Canadians that Pétain's government functioned under the surveillance of the Germans, and only through Canadian and British military efforts could France be truly liberated. Villeneuve and the Bishops of Quebec continually condemned Nazi ideologies and emphasized that the Allied war effort was a struggle for Christianity.²⁶ Consistent with its support of the war effort, the Catholic leadership gave passing recognition to General de Gaulle for his fighting spirit and for continuing the battle at Britain's side, although at the same time the Gaullists were usually

20. *L'Action Catholique*, 4 septembre 1940; DEA Records, file 712-B-40c, Report to USSEA, "The Free French Movement in Canada", December, 1941.

21. *Ibid.*

22. *L'Action Catholique*, 22 octobre 1941.

23. Wade, p. 937.

24. Armstrong, p. 10.

25. *L'Action Catholique*, 10 août 1940.

26. *Ibid.*, 21 septembre 1940.

chastised for aggravating dissension within Canada, "thanks to their talent for insinuation and their malicious energy."²⁷

Officially, the church was walking a fine line on the French question, for it vehemently denied "que pour [être] fidèle à la cause Alliée et envers la Grande-Bretagne, il faut être contre Pétain et pour de Gaulle".²⁸ Church leaders argued that admiration for the religious and authoritarian measures of the French government in no way conflicted with the Allied effort to defeat Nazi Germany. Indeed, Pétain was seen as a great liberator in his own right, for he had "attaqué aux cancers qui ont conduit la France à l'abîme. . . ."²⁹ Many members of the lower clergy were less discreet in their support of Pétain's new order, but the general tenor of the church's official position, though more than favourable to Vichy, was never unqualified and usually moderate. If the Catholic hierarchy of Québec had wanted to oppose the war, it was given the opportunity with the emergence of a neutralist, religious France in 1940. This situation was cultivated religiously, but it was not exploited politically. There were, however, important political implications, because the support that Pétain received from the Quebec clergy was a major factor maintaining a favourable image of Vichy in the province.

Besides the religious leaders, there were certain French-Canadian nationalists who looked with great interest at the events in Vichy.³⁰ Unlike the officials of the church, the more active nationalists felt no compulsion to qualify their praise of Pétain with positive references to Canada's participation in the war. Indeed, because of the severe restrictions imposed on dissident publications in war-time Canada, it was apparent that *Le Devoir*, in particular, used commentary on Vichy France as a vehicle through which to express isolationist and anti-British sentiments.³¹

As was the case with the church leaders, many nationalist spokesmen celebrated the Catholic revival which was the purported cornerstone of Vichy's "national revolution".³² Editorials in *Le Devoir* argued that, with Charles Maurras and his *L'Action Française* in support of Vichy, France was now being led by the best elements in the country³³ and that Pétain's government was "le

27. *Ibid.*, 20 août 1940. The attitude of the Catholic hierarchy gradually warmed toward de Gaulle in the later years of the war, but he never received the overwhelming support that was accorded Pétain.

28. *Ibid.*, 20 août 1940.

29. *Ibid.*

30. It is impossible to generalize on matters concerning the outlook of French-Canadian nationalists, because of the diverse perspectives that the term encompasses. For the purpose of this paper, therefore, French-Canadian nationalists refers to those people associated with *Le Devoir* unless otherwise stated.

31. Casgrain Papers, F. Charpentier and W. Eggleston (Censorship Co-ordination Committee) to P.F. Casgrain, June 9, 1941.

32. PAC, Ernest Lapointe Papers, Vol. 24, C. Melançon to E. Lapointe, November 10, 1941.

33. *Le Devoir*, 10 août 1940.

meilleur gouvernement que la France ait jamais eu".³⁴ It was not insignificant that the *L'Action Française* movements in both France and Quebec had espoused similar ideologies in the 1920's—ideologies³⁵ which apparently were being implemented under Vichy rule.

In addition to the attraction of a state organized "sur une base corporative et chrétienne", which had been inherent in some form in every *nationaliste* platform throughout the twenties and thirties, many French-Canadian nationalists were attracted by Vichy's advocacy of a new international order. With Charles Maurras and his *L'Action Française*, Pétain called for the establishment of a Latin bloc—a natural and *soi-disant* Catholic alliance with Spain and Italy, and implicitly with Quebec.³⁶ Such an alliance had been a popular concept in some Quebec nationalist circles in the previous two decades and now, in a time of pernicious international strife, the idea of a Latin bloc offered its own special appeal for a new order.

Yet many of those nationalists who expressed support for Vichy and empathized with Pétain's efforts were not completely enamoured with developments in France.³⁷ Rather, their Pétainist leanings appeared not so much an expression of faith in the Marshal and his revolution, but an indication of French Canada's overwhelming sense of isolation. André Laurendeau noted that "moral adhesion [to Vichy] soon became an error in judgement, but it was an effect and not a cause. . . . The truth was that we felt terribly isolated—we were intoxicated with solitude".³⁸ Furthermore, Pétain represented something beyond the realm of reform and revival that struck a responsive chord in the hearts, if not the minds, of some frustrated *nationalistes*; he had taken France out of the war.³⁹

The collapse of the Third Republic and the pursuant deterioration in relations between Britain and France were interpreted by *Le Devoir* as a justification of its thesis that the war was in reality an imperialistic conflict.⁴⁰ The British attack at Mels-el-Kébir on July 3, 1940, was used by *Le Devoir* to excuse subsequent anti-British statements made by Vichy and to defend Pétain against charges of collaboration.⁴¹ British attacks on France and her territories in the following years became a significant issue to the nationalists of *Le Devoir*, who

34. Casgrain Papers, F. Charpentier and W. Eggleston to P.F. Casgrain, June 9, 1941.

35. See Susan Mann Trofimenkoff, *Action Française: French Canadian Nationalism in the Twenties*, (Toronto, 1975), pp. 18-26.

36. DEA Records, file 2861-40c, C. Melançon to USSEA, November 11, 1941; A. Shea and E. Estorick, *Canada and the Short-Wave War*, (Toronto, 1942), p. 16.

37. Nationalist papers such as *Le Devoir* and *Le Droit* demonstrated a marked decline in commentary on internal developments in France by 1941. For *Le Devoir*, the focus of attention became the international problems of France, particularly regarding relations with Great Britain.

38. Laurendeau, p. 88.

39. *Ibid.*

40. Florent Lefebvre, *The French-Canadian Press and the War*, (Toronto, 1942), pp. 23-30.

41. *Le Devoir*, 13 juillet 1940.

could not accept the argument of "military necessity" to justify hostile actions against a friend and former ally. Léopold Richer, *Le Devoir's* Ottawa columnist, challenged the idea that the conflict was a clash of ideologies, arguing it was in essence a confrontation of rival imperialisms. Britain, Richer claimed, was directing its aggression against France with more vigour than it was toward Germany in order to gain French colonial possessions throughout the world; de Gaulle, rather than fighting for France, was but a pawn of British imperial interests. Richer emphasized that one of the major causes of the French defeat was Britain's military abandonment of the continent in the spring of 1940 and, he said, with France out of the war the struggle between England and Germany was now a contest for European hegemony.⁴² Despite warnings by the Censorship Co-ordination Committee over this and similar statements,⁴³ *Le Devoir* persisted in publishing favourable articles on Vichy that often were as much remonstrations against Canadian involvement in the "imperialist" war as they were commentaries on events in France. Indeed, of the fifty-five specified violations by *Le Devoir* of the Defence of Canada Regulations that the Censorship Co-ordination Committee brought to the attention of the Minister of Justice between April, 1940, and June, 1941, twenty of the most serious dealt with some aspect of Vichy France.⁴⁴

Le Devoir's attention to Vichy France was not a fortuitous circumstance. In July, 1940, Georges Pelletier had approached Vichy officials in Montreal to request copies of French newspapers in order that he might reprint extracts from them and use French sources of information for his newspaper.⁴⁵ This arrangement was readily agreed to and, for the remaining two and one-half years, French consular officials provided *Le Devoir* with an alternative news service. Although Pelletier told the French Consul General that it was his intention to go along with (*complaire*) the new French government,⁴⁶ it would be wrong to conclude that *Le Devoir* was but a mindless echo of Vichy propaganda. Nationalists at *Le Devoir* were aware that, while Canada maintained diplomatic ties with France, the government was obliged to exercise caution when dealing with commentaries on that country, for fear of disturbing further this delicate and controversial relationship. "Tant que le gouvernement canadien n'aura pas opté contre Pétain," Pelletier told a member of the Censorship Committee, "je ne vois pas pourquoi, les opinions du groupe de Gaulle devraient prévaloir chez nous à l'exclusion des autres."⁴⁷ It was a unique situation that government officials reluctantly were forced to concede⁴⁸ and the *nationalistes* were quick to exploit.

42. *Ibid.*, 2 septembre 1940.

43. Lapointe Papers, F. Charpentier to G. Pelletier (Editor and Publisher of *Le Devoir*), September 11, 1940.

44. *Ibid.*, F. Charpentier to E. Lapointe, June, 1941.

45. PAC, Department of External Affairs Records, Inventory Files of the USSEA, M. Coursier (French Consul-general, Montreal) to R. Ristelhueber (French Minister to Canada), July 31, 1940, intercepted letter.

46. *Ibid.*

47. DEA Records, file 2861-40c, G. Pelletier to F. Charpentier, November 24, 1941.

48. PAC, Louis St. Laurent Papers, St. Laurent to J.J. Thorson (Minister of National War Services), June 14, 1941.

Thus, Canada's ambiguous relations with divided France provided *Le Devoir* with an avenue through which it could pursue its anti-war policies. In a climate of censorship and internment camps, with the communications media in Canada being encouraged or cajoled to mobilize their efforts behind the war, *Le Devoir* struggled to maintain its independence and *nationaliste* integrity.

The French-language network of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (C.B.C.) was one more source of pro-Pétain opinion and propaganda. While the Catholic Church stressed the religious aspects of Vichy and the *nationalistes* used divided France for their own designs, the C.B.C. in Quebec offered an overall favourable impression of Pétain and his administration. According to one federal minister, the Quebec network "is not violently pro-Pétain, but it is pro-Pétain" and, thus, reluctant to broadcast any news or commentary critical of Vichy. Consistent with this attitude, the Free French cause received little or no coverage in the province over the national network.⁴⁹

The basis for this Pétainist sentiment was to be found at the senior administrative level of the French-language C.B.C. D'Augustin Frigon, the head of the French-language network, was in sympathy with Vichy's apparent attempts to restore the old order and viewed de Gaulle as a supporter of the anti-clerical Third Republic. The director of programming in Quebec, Jean-Marie Beaudet, held similar opinions and he and Frigon did their utmost to keep Free French supporters off the Quebec airwaves.⁵⁰ By late 1941, this pro-Vichy outlook had provoked Gladstone Murray, the head of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, to establish in the ranks of C.B.C. Quebec a parallel staff of reporters, editors, and newscasters—all of whom were Free French supporters. His intention, of course, was to project a more positive image of the war effort and to counter the Pétainist arguments which were pacifist and, on occasion, more than slightly anti-British. Frigon and Beaudet, however, would not allow Murray's people near the microphones.⁵¹

In March, 1942, Murray attempted to curb the Pétainists by appealing to the federal government to remove Frigon from his post. Frigon, however, was seen as a key man in his province, being the highest ranking French-Canadian civil servant in the country. There was concern in Ottawa that any attempt to fire Frigon would be interpreted in Quebec not as an internal C.B.C. matter, but as a direct attack on Quebec itself. The plebiscite debate was beginning to generate heated controversy and federal authorities had no wish to accentuate ethnic problems by a house cleaning of Vichyites in the C.B.C.⁵² Frigon kept his position.

Ottawa's reluctance to take action on Murray's proposal was indicative of how the Pétain-de Gaulle issue had become inextricably part of the mounting English-French tensions regarding the war itself. While the Free French and their

49. PAC, J.W. Dafoe Papers, G. Dexter to G. Ferguson, April 2, 1942.

50. *Ibid.*; and Gagnon, pp. 152-4.

51. Dafoe Papers, G. Dexter to G. Ferguson, April 2, 1942.

52. *Ibid.*

VICHY-FREE FRENCH PROPAGANDA IN QUEBEC

Canadian supporters decried the Pétainist slant of C.B.C. Quebec, many French Canadians were quick to accuse the national network of being belligerently Gaullist in its news and editorial content.⁵³ It was acknowledged in Ottawa that as emotions increased over the approaching plebiscite many anti-conscriptionists in French Canada were identifying closely with Vichy France. This was an understandable association and one that could not easily be reversed without further alienating an isolated and suspicious Quebec. Finally, the evident pro-Pétain sentiments in Quebec demonstrated just how effective the propaganda efforts had been in maintaining support for Vichy.

The ideological bonds between Vichy and Quebec's conservative nationalists were undeniable in the early 1940's, encouraging some French Canadians to empathize with France as they had never done before. Yet many of the pro-Vichy commentaries produced by *Le Devoir* and C.B.C. Quebec were a response to British, Gaullist, and English-Canadian criticisms of Pétain and his government. From the summer of 1940 to late 1942, Vichy France became the focus of a barrage of critical propaganda which in English Canada often was manipulated to voice traditional racial grievances. Under such circumstances, it was only natural for the *nationalistes* to lead in the defence of all that was *français* in North America. It was after all their *raison d'être*.

As Quebec constituted the largest francophone population outside France, it represented an inviting target for the two opposing French factions during the war, both of whom were struggling to assert their claims as legitimate leaders of the French nation. By July, 1940, therefore, the Pétainists and Gaullists were turning their attentions toward Quebec in order to gain greater international recognition for their respective causes. It soon became apparent, however, that this contest for the support of French Canadians had, in many instances, the opposite result than had been originally intended. As had been demonstrated on past occasions, those who ignored the peculiar sensitivities of French Canada and who attempted instead to encourage foreign values quickly alienated themselves and their cause.

From the outset, the Free French found themselves at a disadvantage when seeking support from French Canada. Certainly, General de Gaulle lacked the prestige of Marshal Pétain, but more importantly the Gaullist cause initially lacked a well-defined purpose other than the liberation of France, a situation which meant to many a restoration of the socialistic and anti-clerical Third Republic. Also, in spite of its shadowy sovereignty, Vichy remained a recognized government with diplomatic ties to Canada. The Free French, however, were little more than a disparate group of political refugees and hangers-on precariously united by de Gaulle's dominant personality. Consequently, the Gaullists in the first years of their existence were confronted with a monumental task in their quest for legitimacy and recognition as the true voice of France. De Gaulle's

53. Rumilly, tome XXXVIII, pp. 184-5. These accusations were directed mainly at the English-language broadcasts; however, the daily national news broadcasts were the same in both languages.

cause was heroic, however, and throughout Quebec there were enthusiastic expressions of respect paid to the youthful general for his resolute determination to continue the war. But for most French Canadians, the destiny of France resided with Pétain, not in the few offices in London that constituted Free France in 1940 and 1941.

Of all the things that militated against de Gaulle's securing support for his cause in French Canada, the most significant was the method which his followers employed. Most French Canadians had come to terms with the necessity of participation in the war and most realized that only a British victory could save France. What was not necessary, indeed could not be condoned, was the vilification of Marshal Pétain and his government. And in this enterprise, the Gaullists were as culpable as the "ultraloyalists" of English Canada and the propagandists of the British Broadcasting Corporation (B.B.C.).

Considering the high regard in which Pétain was held in Quebec,⁵⁴ it was understandable that most concerned French Canadians were angered by the hostility mounted against Vichy. "There had been no disposition to criticize Great Britain" in Quebec at the time of the French surrender, Ernest Lapointe told his cabinet colleagues in September, 1940, "but the violent attacks which have been made upon Pétain and Weygand, since the capitulation, had been bitterly resented."⁵⁵ B.B.C. broadcasts to France were aired in Quebec over the C.B.C. or reproduced in Canadian newspapers and, according to Robert Rumilly, "la cible préférée n'est pourtant pas un Allemand, mais un Français; ce n'est pas Hitler, mais Pétain."⁵⁶ In addition to the British propaganda efforts in Quebec, the Free French, through B.B.C. facilities, were no more sparing in their condemnation of Pétain, to the point where French Canadians realized that they were being pressured to involve themselves morally in the civil war between Gaullists and Pétainists. From the French-Canadian perspective, it was very well for de Gaulle and his followers to uphold French military honour, but it was another matter when they branded Pétain "comme un fantoche, un vieillard sénile, un triste sire."⁵⁷ Thus, to the detriment of their cause in French Canada, the Gaullists became closely identified with what were seen as British attempts to instigate civil strife among the French.

The reluctance of Quebec to become embroiled in the de Gaulle-Pétain issue was made evident by French-Canada's reaction to de Gaulle's personal appeal in

54. Probably the most thorough poll conducted during the war in Quebec was in July, 1942, and the survey revealed that 75 per cent of the French Canadians questioned approved of Pétain and believed that he (Pétain) was supported by the majority of Frenchmen. DEA Records, file 1989-40C, "Quebec and the Present War, A Survey of Public Opinion". Another survey conducted in August, 1942, questioned French Canadians as to "Which of these three men has accomplished most for the people of France?" Response: Pierre Laval 1 per cent, Marshal Pétain 46 per cent, General de Gaulle 45 per cent, undecided 8 per cent. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, Winter, 1942.
55. Privy Council Records, Cabinet War Committee Records, Minutes, September 26, 1940.
56. Rumilly, tome XXXVIII, p. 185.
57. *Ibid.*, p. 179.

VICHY-FREE FRENCH PROPAGANDA IN QUEBEC

August, 1940. "The soul of France seeks and calls for your help, French Canadians," exhorted de Gaulle, "because she knows your importance in the British Empire, because in you a branch of the great French stock has become a magnificent tree, and above all, because your example restores faith in the future."⁵⁸ The response to this call in French Canada was minimal; as Lapointe observed, "the special appeal made by General de Gaulle . . . was a blunder and it is fortunate that more publicity was not given to it."⁵⁹ *Le Devoir* was the only paper that commented directly on the speech, remarking on the absurdity of such sentimental appeals to a patriotism that had not existed for 175 years.⁶⁰ A week after the broadcast, *Le Soleil* criticized the insensitive propaganda campaign of the B.B.C. and, though far from being a supporter of Pétain's government, cautioned the British and Free French:

Les Canadiens français se récusent lorsqu'on leur demande de juger et condamner la France officielle. . . . Ils laissent à l'histoire le soin de faire le partage entre les patriotes et les félons. . . .

La province de Québec est fière des milliers de ses fils qui se sont engagés à combattre dans l'armée anglaise. Elle contribue à la défense du territoire canadien. Elle souscrit aux oeuvres britanniques. On aurait tort de lui demander de se mêler du problème moral qui divise présentement la nation française.⁶¹

The blunderings from London, which did little to assist the Free French cause in Quebec, were compounded further by the actions and attitudes of Gaullist supporters in Canada. The proclivity of English Canadians to support de Gaulle was unexceptional; so too was the view that the Vichy government was but a puppet of Nazi Germany, a collaborationist regime that had turned against the British cause.⁶² Such attitudes appeared to be universal throughout English Canada; however, in certain "ultraloyalist" circles, the French situation was exploited in order to express longstanding racial and ideological biases. Indeed, Prime Minister King in one dark and partisan moment suspected "Toronto Tories" of wanting "to destroy the French in Canada as they sought to do in the last war" and of being likely to welcome conflict between Britain and France as a means to that end.⁶³

Much of the news and commentary on France in English Canada was a repetition of British propaganda. However, Canada's maintenance of her diplomatic relations with France was a particularly controversial point. When Anglo-French relations were terminated in July, 1940, many English Canadians immediately demanded the removal of the French Minister in Ottawa. Initially, these demands were based on the argument that Canada's diplomatic ties with France were inconsistent with British policy, but soon there were accusations that the Liberal

58. Wade, p. 937.

59. King Papers, Lapointe to Ralston, September 30, 1940.

60. Armstrong, p. 13.

61. Rumilly, tome XXXVIII, p. 185.

62. Moffat Papers, J.P. Moffat to Amb. J. Grew, July 27, 1940.

63. King Papers, Diary, November 4, 1940.

government was pandering to French-Canadian and Catholic interests.⁶⁴ In the later months of 1941, ethnic tensions were increasing and in English Canada the question of the Liberal's "coolness" toward the Free French and continued ties with Vichy were cited as glaring evidence of the government's bowing to French-Canadian interests. Within Quebec the opposite interpretation was current with the Gaullist supporters being identified with the ultraloyalist cause, the vilification of Pétain, and the campaign for conscription.⁶⁵

Moreover, many of the reforms of the Pétain government celebrated in Quebec were at times ridiculed in English Canada. Pétain was accused of turning France into a priest-ridden, rural society and his authoritarian legislation was attacked by some English Canadians as an example of Vichy's fascist leanings.⁶⁶ Such insults against Vichy, often intended as oblique criticisms of French Canada, were deeply resented in Quebec.⁶⁷

This propaganda campaign in Canada was not monopolized by Free French sympathizers and the British. In July, 1940, Radio Paris began to transmit daily short-wave broadcasts into Quebec and in April of the following year Vichy began its own broadcasts to North America.⁶⁸ With the facilities of the former station situated in the occupied zone, there could be no doubt that these transmissions were under German control; however, the German role, the occupation, and Nazi ideology were all down-played in favour of stressing the affinity that existed between French Canada and Pétain's new order in Vichy. This approach proved to be more successful in touching salient aspects of French-Canadian sympathies than were the bludgeoning tactics of the Gaullists and British. Not that there was a perceptible shift of sentiment from the Free French to the Vichyards; rather the latter began from an advantageous position and through a sequence of events, including a subtle propaganda campaign, were able to maintain, if not increase, that advantage.

These broadcasts emphasized the legality, autonomy, and popularity of the Vichy administration in France. References were made to the corrupt and degenerate Third Republic that had undermined the vitality of France because of its domination by Jews and Bolsheviks. Great Britain at times was cast in the role of

64. The leader of the Opposition, R.B. Hanson, wrote to the Prime Minister: "I am being inundated with communications and interviews respecting the attitude of the Government of Canada towards the puppet French Government. . . . These questions will not down. . . . People are suspicious and are not satisfied. . . . Now the situation is becoming more tense, and so far as I can observe it is caused by the attitude of certain people in the Province of Quebec." DEA Records, file 712-40c, Hanson to King, September 15, 1941.

65. PAC, Department of External Affairs Records, Inventory Files of the USSEA, Elizabeth de Miribel (Director of Free French Committee of Canada) to T.A. Stone (Director European Section, DEA), May 28, 1942.

66. Rumilly, tome XXXVIII, pp. 228-9.

67. *Ibid.*, tome XXXIX, p. 111.

68. Shea and Estorick, p. 14. The Paris broadcasts concentrated to such a degree on Quebec that Radio Paris came to be referred to as Paris Canada.

VICHY-FREE FRENCH PROPAGANDA IN QUEBEC

the aggressor, with Radio Paris stressing that it was England that had started the conflict by declaring war on Germany and that British aggression now concentrated on France with its attacks on the French navy, its capture of French colonies, and the naval blockade that was causing such distress among the French population. Vichy courted Quebec's favour by praising the unwavering adherence of French Canadians to the traditional values of religion, family, work, and education, values which Vichy now claimed were the guiding force behind Pétain's "national revolution". Radio Vichy fostered Canadian disunity by commending French Canadians for their loyalty to Canada and Britain, but then accentuating the notion that despite this fidelity francophones remained an exploited minority in Canada.⁶⁹ This last approach received particular emphasis throughout the plebiscite debate in the spring of 1942.

The programmes from France were designed to stress the popularity and legitimacy of Vichy France and to build support for Pétain's neutralist position. De Gaulle was portrayed as an *arriviste*, "paid by a foreign government", whereas Pétain was appointed by the French people "by a vote of 600 to 80."⁷⁰ The former director of *la Maison des étudiants canadiens à Paris*, M. Firmin Roz, was employed by Vichy to broadcast propaganda to French Canada. Roz was well known in Quebec's intellectual circles and his messages were widely circulated throughout the province.⁷¹ Similarly, two French-Canadian priests who had been working in France at the time of the occupation were used by Vichy propagandists to inform Canadians of the new religious order under Pétain.⁷²

In addition to the short-wave broadcasts from France, Vichy propaganda was distributed throughout Quebec by the French consuls in Montreal and Quebec City. For the most part these activities consisted of providing transcripts of radio broadcasts and copies of censored French newspapers and journals to interested parties in the province.⁷³ The French consuls also lectured to various social and religious organizations in Quebec on Pétain's new social order.⁷⁴ The Royal Canadian Mounted Police also reported that the French consul in Montreal was involved with the anti-conscription *nationalistes* in the city and that his office had made a sizeable financial contribution to *La Ligue pour la défense du Canada*.⁷⁵ Most Canadians were unaware of these activities, yet radio and press stressed the associations of the domestic and international divisions. By early 1942, just as the propaganda from the pro-de Gaulle people became associated with the "total war" campaign, so too the Vichy propaganda and Pétain sympathisers in Quebec became closely identified with the anti-conscription efforts.

69. *Ibid.*, pp. 14-6.

70. Lapointe Papers, Vichy Radio Broadcast, November 7, 1941.

71. *Ibid.*, C. Melançon to E. Lapointe, November 10, 1941.

72. *Ibid.*

73. King Papers, Robertson to King, March 8, 1942.

74. DEA Records, file 712-40c, F.G. Scott (Archdeacon of Quebec City) to G.H. Lash (Director of Public Information), February 16, 1942.

75. St. Laurent Papers, S.T. Wood to St. Laurent, August 28, 1942.

This propaganda from France combined with the nationalist's manipulating of the Vichy question proved to be very effective in creating confusion about war issues in Quebec.⁷⁶ The Canadian government was aware of this dangerous condition in the French province, but Ottawa found the question of de Gaulle-Pétain propaganda almost impossible to deal with "because of the Vichy angle" and, with only a few exceptions, it remained out of the imbroglio.⁷⁷ The problem for the government was that it could not devise any effective counter-propaganda measures without offending the majority opinion in French Canada.⁷⁸ Gaullist supporters in the country had created an oversimplified "good versus evil" impression of the French question and this left little room for more moderate approaches. Government officials realized that, because of the belligerent tactics employed by the Gaullists, any attempt to promote the Free French movement or to criticize Vichy would be met with much resentment in Quebec.⁷⁹ Finally, it was acknowledged by a number of government people involved with Quebec that the French propagandists had been very clever in their approach to French Canada by directing their appeal to familiar issues. Only a long-term, carefully orchestrated information programme could hope to undo that work.⁸⁰

It would be exceptional for a propaganda campaign to sway a significant proportion of public opinion if indigenous conditions to be influenced by particular approaches are initially absent. Successful propaganda tends to cultivate, encourage, and reinforce those beliefs and expectations of a people previously held to be highly important. Following from this, therefore, propagandists who are sensitive to a group's cultural and social predispositions are going to experience more success than those who merely pursue their own objectives without attending at all to localized peculiarities. Through Vichy's diplomatic representatives in Ottawa and consular agents in Quebec, information on the mood of French Canada was gathered and relayed to France, thus enabling its propagandists to contemporize their broadcasts and address themselves to events that were of primary concern to French Canadians.⁸¹ Concepts such as the "exploited" minority and the interpretation of the war as an imperialistic venture were not revelations to French Canadians; rather, these indigenous views now seemed to be receiving official sanction from the French government. Vichy's pious statements on the religious and traditional nature of its new order, associa-

76. In most government studies of Quebec and the war between 1940 and 1942, there were references to the problems created by direct and indirect Vichy propaganda; for example, see King Papers, C. Melançon to T.C. Davis, March 15, 1942, "Anti-British feeling is growing, fanned by enemy agents, Vichy propaganda and so called nationalists groups."

77. Dafoe Papers, G. Dexter to G. Ferguson, April 2, 1942.

78. *Ibid.*

79. DEA Records, file 712-B-40c, Report to USSEA, "The Free French Movement in Canada", December, 1941.

80. *Ibid.*

81. DEA Records, file 712-40c, R.R. Tait (Director of Criminal Investigations, RCMP) to USSEA, July 3, 1941.

VICHY-FREE FRENCH PROPAGANDA IN QUEBEC

ting familiar and prestigious individuals with Vichy France and implying an approaching concordat with Rome, were all features of a propaganda campaign intended to touch values close to the hearts and minds of French Canadians. When contrasted with the efforts of the Free French, the Pétainists must be considered highly successful, if only in the negative sense that their campaign did not arouse the adverse reaction the Gaullists' did.

The role that Vichy propaganda played in Quebec can be misleading if interpreted as only artificial stratagems created for the purpose of winning support from the French Canadians. The ideological base on which Vichy was predicated revived a bond of sympathy in French Canada toward France that had not existed since 1789. This does not imply that pro-Pétain sentiment was universal throughout French Canada nor, where present, unqualified, but Vichy France offered the promise of a socio-political and religious revival that more closely approximated French-Canadian values than had any French regime since the revolution. The residual ideas and influence of Charles Maurras, the papal encyclicals in favour of the corporate state, economic autarchy, racial intolerance, and the mystic of the Latin bloc, were all features of Vichy France and all could be found among the ideas of French Canada's leading nationalists over the preceding twenty years. The clerico-conservative perspective was on the decline in Quebec, although nothing had yet emerged to supplant it. Thus, with the Vichy experiment came renewed hope in the traditional panaceas for both the *patrie* and Quebec itself.

Despite the evident revival of feeling in Quebec for France during the Vichy period, much of the attention to France must be attributed to the propaganda campaigns that the French question generated. The collapse of France, the Anglo-Vichy breach, together with the civil strife between the de Gaulle-Pétain blocs, exerted great pressure on Quebec. The different factions within the province, the country, and beyond brought their own interpretations to focus on the French dilemma, where in turn each of these partisan positions tended to reinforce or react to the others. Within Quebec the propaganda magnified and distorted the subject of bifurcated France and resulted in one of the first serious rifts between English and French Canadians in the war. The manipulation of the French dilemma raised questions about Canada's role in the war and added another dimension to the conscription controversy. It proved fortunate for the country that time and changing circumstances relieved the tensions. Finally, however, that more serious divisions did not develop attests to the good judgement of the French-Canadian people. In spite of the efforts of the various factions to push their respective causes in Quebec, the *Canadiens* perceived the situation in France as a European problem, and not of direct concern to themselves.

Résumé

En juin 1940, l'armée française rend les armes et le maréchal Pétain instaure un nouveau gouvernement à Vichy. La légalité de ce gouvernement est, dès lors, vivement contestée par un groupe rival dirigé par le général de Gaulle qui établit ses quartiers généraux en Angleterre. Pendant les années 1940-1942, ces deux factions vont se livrer une lutte qui eut de fortes répercussions au Canada et qui s'avéra même l'un des événements les plus controversés au pays.

Ces controverses, il faut bien le dire, dépassaient de beaucoup l'opposition Pétain-de Gaulle; elles rejoignaient de multiples dissensions idéologiques, raciales, politiques et diplomatiques, qu'il s'agisse des revendications nationalistes des Canadiens-français, de sentiments pro ou anti-impérialistes, ou encore, du problème de la participation à la guerre. L'auteur a choisi de s'étendre plus longuement sur les diverses réactions qui s'observent au Québec à la suite de la propagande considérable dont les deux factions inondent le pays.

Ce qui frappe, au départ, c'est la sympathie avec laquelle les Québécois ont reçu la nouvelle des événements qui déchiraient la France en 1940. Puis, avec la propagande, vinrent les prises de positions. A vrai dire, sauf quelques exceptions, peu de gens militèrent activement pour l'un ou l'autre camp; cependant, le gouvernement Pétain était vu d'un meilleur oeil. On admirait le vieux maréchal et maints organismes endossaient ses projets de "restauration". De Gaulle, pour sa part, fut assez vite identifié à la campagne pour une guerre totale et, de ce fait, rabaisé aux yeux des Québécois. Malgré ce consensus apparent, la question française n'engendra pas moins d'acribes disputes qui allaient s'envenimant puisqu'elles débouchaient sur des problèmes typiquement québécois. L'occupation de Vichy par l'armée allemande, en 1942, et la rupture des relations diplomatiques entre la France et le Canada vinrent mettre fin aux débats sur la question.