

# Acadians faced with

What follows below are excerpts from a JOURNAL/ GAZETTE interview with Paul Comeau, student president of the Acadian College Ste. Anne in Church Point, near Yarmouth.

The College, with about 140 students, 90% of whom speak French, is the only institution of higher learning for Francophones in Nova Scotia. In the interview Comeau discusses the problems of the College and Acadians in southwestern Nova Scotia.

by the JOURNAL/ DAL GAZETTE  
News Staffs

What is it like to be a french student in N.S.?

COMEAU: First of all, I don't know if there is such a thing as being a French student in Nova Scotia. We start off school, we go to an English high school — all our courses are in English, or most of them are in English — so we get an English training. We get here to College Saint Anne which offers both French and English courses. If we come here for first-year college, it's mostly French. You move along in college, and you have the choice. What happens really due to our lack of training in the French language, we tend to take most of our courses in English, I would say.

At this time, it's been under study for the past year or so, what's happening to the French language in the French speaking districts, what are we going to do about it. We have to change the system somewhere, and the place to hit is the high schools, the elementary schools. We have to get some legal status for the teaching of the French language, which we haven't got. They may refer to our "French schools" but they're not French schools. They might have French professors, but still they are asked to teach their courses in English.

ANOTHER STUDENT: You might say you have a class of 35 and everybody there is French except, let's say, one student. That course doesn't necessarily have to be taught in English, but if one or two students want the course to be taught in English then they'd have to teach it in English, even if 90% of the students are French.

Has this changed any since the languages bill went through?

COMEAU: No it hasn't. The Federation Francophone de la Nouvelle Ecosse has appointed a committee to look into this to get some kind of legal status from the government. This would give the school boards in any French-speaking district the authority or the right to ask from the schools that these programs be given in French.

There's one thing everybody has to understand. You can't live in Nova Scotia and be thoroughly unilingual. Say I'm French and I'm going to be educated in French, take up the French ways of doing things, I can't do it. You have to talk about bilingualism. If you don't you might as well leave the province and go to Quebec City or what have you. I guess every student accepts this and recognizes this. So that's why we're talking so much about bilingual institutions for the southwestern part of the province at this time, and why they're planning to change the college language policy.

Up to four years ago, the courses were uniquely taught in French here.

New programs are going to start in September '71. That was one thing we were asking from the government. Finally we have it. But somebody has to do something about it. Somebody has to go ahead, and nobody at this time feels they have the authority to go ahead and do it.

Now, one thing they're waiting for before they start recruitment, and I don't know what, would be the finalizing plans to affiliate with Acadia and Université de Moncton. If we haven't got this, they can't do anything about recruitment, because we can't get people to come here and start a junior program, and say we don't exactly know where you're going after because we haven't made any arrangements with another university somewhere.

That's about it. Both documents we received this week are very interesting, but still the government will appoint a new board of directors, or some kind of legal corporation, to take this in their hands and appoint a

new administration for next year, and their duty is to help us right now.

We don't know what we're offering right now. What we're suffering right now is strictly arts, and majors in sociology, history, French, English, which is not normal for a college or some place of higher learning that wants to be respected.

Are the new programs that you're hoping to be offering in September going to be branching out into the sciences, etc.?

COMEAU: It will be a rebirth, I hope, of science arts, commerce, we're talking about commerce right now. All these programs existed once — arts, commerce, science — but they have degenerated so much in the past few years due to the poor leadership of the administrative body and all this, no push, no recruitment.



Dr. Alphonse Gaudet, head of the planning commission for College Sainte Anne, talks to GAZETTE and Journal reporters about his job. Unfortunately his taped conversation did not turn out.

We've only been receiving provincial help for the past maybe six years, less than that. For something like 75 years, this was a private institution. The Eudists did what they could with private contributions from here and there and help from France and Quebec, which kept this place going. But the minute we asked the government to help us, because we were sinking, and sinking really fast, they said, oh my god, we have to find out about this institution.

I'd say this is one of the most studied institutions in Canada, because we've had so many people come down here — the Garneau report, the Tremblay report, the Munro report, the commission, the university grants committee — it's unbelievable. It's ridiculous. And every time somebody came up with a solution they said, "We won't accept this, we'll get another commission to study what that commission decided upon."

Are the Acadians going to be able to maintain their culture, their language? Are we going to reach a point where we say all right let's forget about the French language and just assimilate with the English people?

This could happen. In fact it has been going on for quite a few years. You can see the movements.

Now if you take the area here, some places like Digby, which were almost all French-speaking, are now all English-speaking. They can't speak French any more. You will find places like this all over Southwestern Nova Scotia.

In addition, those who have become successful, for the most part don't want to stay in the area. It almost breaks my heart to see some of these people go, people that we really need. There is nothing to keep them here, in the teaching profession. They are going where the opportunities are. There are no opportunities here. There is no reason why and there is no place really for a guy who has a Ph.D. Those who do stay are rejected by the community. I am referring to Dr. Alphonse Gaudet. He went away and then came back. He was rejected by the majority in the Clare area, and from the Yarmouth area where he was rejected too.

As president of the planning commission, he had to

go around and foster support and meet people...and I think he failed — he did not succeed in doing this.

Moi, je pense que le docteur Gaudet se laisse tromper par plusieurs personnes. C'est impossible que les anglophones voudraient bien devenir bilingues. Ils voudraient bien une institution...mais...de leur demandes faire un effort de prendre le tiers de leurs cours en français ou quelque chose de même, moi je pense pas qu'ils ne sont pas prêts à le faire.

Premièrement, c'est presque impossible. Ils n'ont pas la base pour faire ça. Ils ne peuvent pas. C'est presque impossible.

Moi je pense que le Dr. Alphonse Gaudet se laisse trop influencé par les rapports qu'il a reçu après avoir passé une enquête...et puis il a été ébloui dans la manière que les résultats rentrées pour la première question: "Voulez-vous devenir bilingue?"