

THE NEW HATE
IN
NEW
BRUNSWICK



Toronto Daily Star

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 12, 1966

CANADA'S DALLAS

By ROBERT REGULY
Star staff writer

FREDERICTON, N.B. — An American psychologist, one of the few dispassionate observers hereabouts, sees this normally-comatose provincial capital as teetering on the brink of violence.

Dr. George Larimer, assistant professor of psychology at University of New Brunswick here, thinks Fredericton could become another Dallas.

Not that Premier Louis Robichaud is another John F. Kennedy. But the seething hate-mongering here parallels conditions in Dallas just before Kennedy was assassinated in November, 1963.

Unlike the French Canadians of Quebec, the French-speaking Acadians of New Brunswick have remained relatively passive in this officially-unilingual (English) province.

But their long-neglected political strivings cautiously bloomed with the 1960 takeover by Acadian-born Premier Robichaud.

Coincidentally, an Acadian educated elite began to emerge. Around it the backwoods Acadians' yearnings "polarized" against the domination of the "English" south.

And among the "established" English-speaking New Brunswickers, a new antagonism has developed.

With a "hate-French" attitude now focussed on the premier, Prof. Larimer thinks a vicious propaganda campaign could trigger some nut into taking a shot at the premier.

Surely not in Canada? Yes, says the professor.

As a specialist in attitude measurement, he studied the conditions in Dallas. And he insists it could happen here.

In a province hidebound by economic and social feudalism, Fredericton represents the merchant class, the Loyalists who revere the status quo in a world where the status quo is an evanescent thing.

'ATTILA'

And running the province from this Protestant-English Tory bastion is a Catholic-French-Liberal premier.

"The people in Fredericton," says a local member of the Legislature press gallery, "look on Robichaud as Attila the Hun."

"They hope they'll wake up tomorrow and find he's retreated back across the banks of the Miramichi with his Mongol hordes and that good old Hugh John Flem-

ming is back in power."

Robichaud, who defeated Tory Premier Flemming in 1960 to become the provinces' first Acadian premier, says Flemming is a gray eminence behind some of the opposition's tactics.

The Acadians, representing 40 per cent of the 626,000 population, occupy a boomerang-shaped crescent across the north and dipping down the east coast to Moncton.

Robichaud, the five-foot-five "Daniel" in the lions den of Fredericton has received threats by phone and letter.

One of the letters delivered to the premier's office stated: "The KKK will get you." And there was an active Ku Klux Klan Klavern here less than a generation ago.

Robichaud's four children have been harassed by taunting English playmates. His jittery wife has received obscene phone calls.

In an interview, the worried-looking premier said he was aware of feelings against



Premier Robichaud

him and the whooping campaign that goes with it.

WORRY

Robichaud has reason to worry. In his giant legislative program revamping the province, he has taken on the controlling business interests. Nobody has done that here and survived politically.

On the surface, the furor is over Bill 118 — the Assessment act.

It's the key for 130-odd bills being fed into the legislative hopper for what Robichaud calls his "Program of Evolution."

The program, also called "Equality of Opportunity," takes over from the municipalities full responsibility for education, welfare, health services and justice.

The province will look after the assessment of all

property — taxing it at \$1.50 of market value, leaving the municipalities to collect 50 cents per \$100 for their remaining services.

It will do away with county councils, eliminate 77 local municipalities, disband school boards with 2,455 school trustees, reduce the chaos of 574 local taxing authorities. Some localities tax cars, chickens and furniture.

Its biggest impact will be on education. The province has 420 school districts to serve 150,000 pupils. There are more than 500 one and two-room schoolhouses. The idea is to concentrate them into better regional schools.

With a population roughly equivalent to the city of Toronto, New Brunswick has 175 secondary schools (compared with Toronto's 21) that require consolidation.

In all, it will mean a better bres for the bleak "have-not" Acadian northern area where functional illiteracy is widespread.

The opposition to the program is perhaps summed up in a letter from Rev. William Hart printed in the Saint John Evening Times-Globe: "Is it right to rob Peter to pay Pierre?"

But so blatant a theme was not adopted in the red-carpeted Legislature. There, the opposition Conservatives were filibustering the Assessment Act with cries of "centralization" and dictatorship.

Opposition Leader C. B. Sherwood, an undertaker, hammered away at the theme the program would switch so much local power to the provincial government that it would be a wide-open invitation to patronage. Even teachers would be provincial employees.

FILIBUSTER

The Conservative tactic in filibustering was to force the government to invoke closure and call a general election.

Robichaud ruled out any chance of an election, saying he is installed in power, until April, 1968.

Speaker Bernard Jean, in silk top hat and cutaway, had a hard time enforcing the rules as he sat on a dais flanked by giant portraits of King George III and his queen, Catherine.

The Conservatives presented the Speaker with a petition carrying 31,000 names, demanding the bill be withdrawn.

HOAX

Robichaud replied the petition was largely a "hoax," that even some school children had signed it. He said Flemming helped plot it.

The petition wasn't the runaway success it was hoped to be. The "Independent

Committee on Legislation" had prepared 17,000 petition forms, each with space for 20 signatures.

Nominal head of the committee was wealthy Fredericton realtor J. A. Rioux, an Acadian from the north. Some see him as a natural to take over the Conservative leadership, giving the party a name appeal for French voters.

None of the 20 Conservatives in the Legislature represents a French-speaking riding. The 31 Liberals (one resigned five weeks ago) represent all the French ridings and about a dozen "English" ridings.

"English" Saint John, the merchant capital, opposed the bill because it will have to pay a lot more in taxes. The sales tax is to be doubled to six per cent, bringing in \$20 million.

More than one-third of the 20,000 population of Fredericton signed the Conservative petition. Businessmen and home-owners, their properties assessed at well below market value, will have to pay higher taxes.

But the real reason for much of the formented opposition lies in a part of the legislation that will hurt the tycoons: Tax concessions provided to industries by some municipalities will be eliminated.

BACKROOM

This has caused a tremendous backroom fight, with heavy pressure on the government to back down.

The special deals given some industries are remarkable: a pulp mill, for instance paying less taxes than a home in the community.

But, the main value of the tax concessions to industry lies in the way they help growth of monopolies.

For example, one industry in Saint John has a fixed tax payment. This applies to all the property of the industry.

So that industry has been gobbling up land around, removing it from tax rolls. The industry's taxes remain the same.

In this issue, the government has backed down a bit. Instead of elimination, it announced each tax concession will be "renegotiated" with the companies involved.

Despite this, Premier Robichaud may have taken on political death when he locked horns with industrialist K. C. Irving.

To an outsider, New Brunswickers have a forelock-tugging, cap-in-hand attitude toward K. C. Irving. The more cynical call the province "Irvingville."

Irving has parlayed a single gas pump in the village of Buctouche into an empire of gasoline, mining, pulp and paper. His worth is estimated at about \$350 million. And

he has some dandy tax concessions.

What hasn't helped Robichaud in this fight is his friendship with John D. Park, Jr.

RIVAL?

Park was brought from California to Saint John to run the new Irving oil refinery, rose in the Irving system to become his right-hand man.

About a year ago, Park was "relieved of all his responsibilities" by Irving.

Since then, shrewd, dynamic Park had become a director of Atlantic Sugar Refineries, a rising industrial power — and a potential rival to Irving.

Like a western town of yore, New Brunswick isn't big enough for both Irving and Park. And Robichaud stands identified with Park.

This battle is reflected in the Legislature and in the newspapers. Of the five English-language dailies in the province, four are owned by Irving.

The fifth, The Fredericton Gleaner, is owned by British Brig. Michael Wardell, a former aide to the late powerful native son, Lord Beaverbrook.

The five papers, are in full cry after Robichaud — particularly The Gleaner.

BACKLASH

A reporter for a Quebec newspaper, after touring the Acadian areas, said the violent "English" campaign against the bill is engendering a French backlash.

"The French in New Brunswick are in the same stage today as we were in Quebec just before the 1960 election," the reporter said.

Premier Robichaud has gone too far to back down completely in his "Program of Evolution."

The opposition may have some valid criticism in that it was not told where the greatly increased financing needed will come from. The sales tax increase won't be nearly enough.

Plainly, Robichaud is hoping the federal government will come to his aid.

And several big projects for New Brunswick are being debated in Ottawa.

The biggest is a proposed giant scheme to pump \$150 million into the province under the Agricultural and Rehabilitation Development Act (ARDA).

Another is a Tennessee Valley Authority-type of development for the \$120 million Mactaquac power project now a building on the St. John River north of Fredericton.

The third is an experimental federal program of teaching via television in isolated areas.

Meanwhile, the premier is fighting for his political life.