

# “Franglais” — the other Canadian Metis

Par Lorne Abramson avec l'aide de M. Alain Meuse, editeur du "Yarmouth Vanguard" et M. Herbert Marx, Professeur à l'université de Montreal.

All the activity in Quebec in recent weeks has brought to light the problems of French Canadians living in Canada, and the difficulty they are having in preserving their language and culture within the federal set-up.

In a teach-in on Quebec at Dalhousie, Daniel Latouche, professor in the French Canada Studies Programme at McGill University suggested that perhaps the rest of Canada would get on better if Quebec were separated. The bilingualism and biculturalism, of which Canada is so proud, is good in theory, but not in practice. As a matter of fact, a French-Canadian outside of Quebec and New Brunswick, has, at best, a 15 per cent chance of preserving his mother tongue. (See chart)

### DENIAL OF LANGUAGE RIGHTS

During Manitoba's centennial, Franco-Manitobans might well be mourning the 90th anniversary of the loss of their language rights in that province.

When Manitoba joined Canada in 1870, its act of confederation contained a section protecting English and French language rights to the same extent as the British North America Act guaranteed equal rights in Quebec and on the federal level. This was not surprising, as half the population in Manitoba in 1870 were French-speaking.

However, in 1890, the Manitoba legislature enacted a law entitled, "An Act to Provide that the English Language shall be the Official Language in the Province of Manitoba." Since that time, French has not had an official status in that province.

Eminent Canadian constitutional jurists have suggested that the Manitoba law unilingualizing that province contravenes the BNA Act. Among these authorities are Frank Scott, professor at McGill and Dalhousie, Pierre Elliot Trudeau (before he entered politics) and Bora Laskin (before he was appointed to the Supreme Court of Canada.)

Even at this late date, if the Supreme Court of Canada decides that the 1890 law is ultra vires or unconstitutional, Manitoba

would revert to an officially bilingual province.

It is interesting to note that the Parliament of Canada has necessarily considered Manitoba to be on an equal footing with Quebec concerning language. For example, the Rules of Private Bills in the Senate requires that notices "when published in the Provinces of Quebec and

Province	French Canadian By Ethnicity %	Mother Tongue French %	French Speaking Only %	% of French Mother Tongue Speaking French only
Newfoundland	3.8	0.7	0.1	16.5
Prince Edward Island	16.6	7.6	1.2	15.4
Nova Scotia	11.9	5.7	0.8	15.0
New Brunswick	38.8	35.2	18.7	53.2
Quebec	80.6	81.2	61.9	76.0
Ontario	10.4	6.8	1.5	22.4
Manitoba	9.1	6.7	0.9	13.1
Saskatchewan	6.5	3.9	0.4	10.9
Alberta	6.3	3.2	0.4	13.1
British Columbia	4.2	1.6	0.2	9.8

Manitoba shall be in both the English and French languages." The Criminal Code too provides for mixed-language juries in Manitoba, as well as in Quebec.

The status of the French language in New Brunswick and even in Alberta has come before the courts. But as yet, there has been no legal challenge to the status of French in Manitoba, although it would not be difficult to set up a test case to challenge the validity of the 1890 ruling.

The situation of Manitoba is of vital interest to both Quebec French unilinguists and English-speaking Quebecers. For, if Manitoba can constitutionally become a unilingual province then it is not inconceivable that Quebec might abrogate the official status of the English language. Ironically, one can envisage those fighting for a unilingual French Quebec hoping that the 1890 Manitoba law is constitutional, while English-speaking Quebecers were hoping

for the reverse.

The official status of French in Manitoba could be easily settled if it were presented to the Federal Supreme Court. However, of almost equal importance would be the educative value such a review would have for Canadians, and the vivid portrayal of the iniquities of Canadian history that remain today.

### THE ACADIAN STORY

Two years ago, discussions in Halifax French circles conceived the idea of a provincial French-Acadian federation which would involve Acadian ideas and ideals on a province-wide basis. One of the leaders of the movement was Father Léger Comeau, former president of the Holy Hearts Seminary.

From these and subsequent discussions, the Francophone Society of Nova Scotia was born.

The idea of an Acadian association wasn't unique. In 1890, Church Point was the site of a Maritime Acadian convention, which resulted in the formation of la Société Nationale de L'Assomption. This was changed in the 1950's to La Société Nationale des Acadiens.

Preservation of the French language was an important plank in all these associations, but language was always linked to the provincial education system, so Acadians in different provinces always faced different problems.

Now, the Francophone Society has assumed the responsibility of trying to protect the rights and culture of Acadians in Nova Scotia.

Gerard d'Entremont, a public relations man for College Ste. Anne, the Federations current president, described the aims of the group.

"The idea of the Francophone Society is to find out what Acadians from all walks of life in Nova Scotia need and want."



GERARD d'ENTREMONT — The new president of the Francophone Society of Nova Scotia. (Alain Meuse Photo)

mind. The decision whether these will be implemented is then up to them. If they agree with the program, then they'll financially back it. If the program is rejected, then we're out of luck."

The proposed meeting of the French Acadian teachers this spring in many ways could determine the success of the Francophone Society.

The education system in Nova Scotia is unilingually English. French, for many years, was a "foreign language" and in many ways still is. Regardless of the fact that schools in a number of villages in the municipalities of Argyle and Clare had enrollments of 100 per cent French Acadians, the majority of text books were and remain English to this day.

This means French is spoken in the homes, on the school yards and church services, but English is the rule in the schools.

What this has produced is not a bilingual student. Rather, it has given birth to a Metis, a half-breed, a 'Franglais' who, in many instances, cannot address himself or herself properly in either language.

This, of course, brings up another problem. The teacher's college in Truro at the present time doesn't produce bilingual public school teachers. Where would these teachers come from?

At the meeting of the French Acadian teachers this spring, the question of the feasibility of a new program will probably determine the success or failure of the proposed new community college for southwestern Nova Scotians.

At present, one of the basic qualifications for entrance to this institution is that a student must be bilingual. As the present Nova Scotia school system does not produce such an animal, this seems to be another problem. But the Francophone Society is working towards providing that answer.

D'Entremont made this point clear. "The Francophone Society recognizes that the French Acadians are a minority in Nova Scotia. Our aim is not to make our French Acadian students unilingual, but bilingual in the fullest sense of the word."

The Society is a federation of groups which include a majority of Acadians in their ranks. These include teachers' unions, Lions Clubs, Knights of Columbus, school boards and various others.

Each associated member elects three delegates to the Society. Although not stipulated, the Society would like to see a representative of youth, a worker, and a professional among the three delegates. "In this way we will be able to find out the ideas at all levels of French Acadian society," M. d'Entremont said.

The Federation was formed with the idea of uniting Nova Scotia Acadians for socio-cultural purposes. The group has no affiliations with other organizations outside the province.

So far, they have sponsored a youth seminar, and are in the process of bringing in French cultural groups to entertain in the various French regions of the province.