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JEAN CHARLES BONENFANT

Jean Charles Bonenfant was born in Saint-Jean, on the island of Orléans. He was educated at the Seminary of Quebec and at Laval University, where he studied law, philosophy, and the humanities. He was called to the bar in 1935. First a journalist, he entered the Library of Parliament at Quebec in 1939 and was its director from 1953 to 1969. He was a professor in the Faculty of Law at Laval University, a member of the Royal Society of Canada, the Société des Dix and the Arts Council of Canada. As well as numerous articles he published *Les Institutions politiques Canadiennes* (Québec, 1954), *Thomas Chapais, textes choisis* (Montreal, 1957) and *La Naissance de la Confédération* (Montreal, 1969). He died in 1977.
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At the time of the birth of Confederation, the French Canadians formed a homogeneous group of almost a million inhabitants, representing not quite a third of the total population of the four provinces that were to form the Dominion of Canada. There were nearly 900,000 of them in Quebec, and already some 150,000 in Ontario, New Brunswick, and Nova Scotia, though the latter exercised very little influence. The French Canadians of Lower Canada were nearly all Roman Catholics and the great majority of them lived in the country. Especially since 1840, they had developed their scholastic and municipal institutions; they had numerous newspapers and possessed an embryonic literature as illustrated by the Quebec literary school of 1860. What would be their reactions when faced with the events which would take place from June 1864 to 1 July 1867, and which would constitute the genesis of Confederation?

Before 1864

For a century, theoretical projects to unite the British North American colonies in a federal union had been widely propounded. In general the French Canadians had known very little of these projects, which came for the most part from their political opponents, and, to the French Canadians they often signified legislative union. However, as early as 1847, Le Canadien wrote, on 8 September, that "they (the French Canadians) confidently anticipate a greater freedom of action in a federation." In 1858, a French Canadian, Joseph-Charles Taché, published the last and one of the most complete of the theoretical schemes of federalism, entitled Des provinces de l'Amérique du Nord et d'une union fédérale, a slightly revised version of thirty-three articles which he had written in his newspaper, Le Courrier du Canada, the preceding year. At the time of the debate on the Quebec Resolutions, in the 1865 session, the member for Lévis, Dr. Joseph S. Blanchet, quoted Taché abundantly in order to declare, with a little friendly exaggeration, that "in the division of powers between the local governments and the central government, the plan of the conference was almost word for word the work of Monsieur Taché." It was also in 1858 that Joseph-Edouard Cauchon edited in brochure form some articles which he had written in his Journal de Québec. As the federal system became less and less a theoretical one for the inhabitants of the British North American colonies, the French Canadians became interested in it, but they were not really called upon to make up their minds until the question became the object of political decision.
Political Federalism

Federalism began to become a political possibility in August 1858, when Alexander T. Galt demanded acceptance of his project of confederation before he would enter the Cartier-Macdonald ministry. George-Etienne Cartier was then converted to the idea of confederation, an important development considering the authority that he exerted over a large number of his French-speaking compatriots. However, the mother country did not take the project seriously, and only with the political crisis of June 1864 did federalism really cease to be an academic problem. Under the patriarchal direction of Sir Etienne-Paschal Taché who had agreed to come out of retirement in the preceding March to become premier of a Conservative government of which John A. Macdonald and George-Etienne Cartier were the real chiefs, a kind of sacred union was formed, due to the entry into the ministry of the Upper Canadian Liberal leader George Brown and some of his colleagues. The only important group which remained outside the coalition were the Liberals of Lower Canada, the "Rouges", to whom must be added some French-Canadian Conservatives who broke away from their party on this occasion, and an English-Canadian Conservative of stature, Christopher Dunkin. These Liberals were French Canadians except for a few, including two leading figures, Luther Hamilton Holton and Lucius Seth Huntington. The serious opposition to Confederation in the united Canadas, then, was that of the French-speaking Liberals of Lower Canada, led by Antoine-Aimé Dorion, and next to him his younger brother, Jean-Baptiste Eric, the impetuous and radical enfant terrible, who died suddenly on 1 November 1866, and so was spared the sorrow of witnessing the realization of Confederation.

The first act of the opponents of Confederation was to attack the coalition and to ridicule the Conservatives for becoming the friends of Brown, whom they had heretofore denounced as the greatest enemy of the French-Canadian Catholics. The struggle did not become clearly defined, however, until after the government had entered into relations with the other colonies at Charlottetown at the beginning of September 1864, and especially after the plan of federalism had been enunciated in the Quebec Resolutions at the conclusion of the Quebec Conference which was held in October. From the social point of view in particular, the latter event was steeped in the French atmosphere of the city, but the deliberations were carried on exclusively in English and with all the pragmatism of the British. Of the thirty-three delegates who met at Quebec, only four were French-Canadian: Etienne-Paschal Taché, who presided over the conference; George-Etienne Cartier, Jean-Charles Chapais and Hector Langevin. Cartier himself seems to have been rather silent during the conference,
though he must have put forward his ideas inside the cabinet of the united Canadas, which prepared the propositions which John A. Macdonald then submitted to the delegates.

Dorion's Manifesto

By the beginning of November, although there had been no official announcement, numerous speeches and newspaper articles had made known the essential elements of the propositions adopted by the Quebec Conference, and, on 7 November, Antoine-Aimé Dorion considered it necessary to denounce them in a manifesto 'addressed to his constituents in the county of Hochelaga. The text of this manifesto, together with the speech which Dorion made during the winter of 1865 in the Canadian legislature at the time of the debate on the Quebec Resolutions, and the Manifeste des vingt of 1866, constitute a basic documentation of the struggle against Confederation in Lower Canada.

Dorion wondered, first, what independence the provinces would retain "if they were deprived of the right to regulate their own criminal and commercial laws, and if they could modify their civil and municipal laws, laws concerning public instruction and other similar questions, only with the approval of the central government?" Theoretically Dorion was correct, for if the rights of reservation and disallowance which were written into the constitution had worked as John A. Macdonald desired at the outset, it would have been a veritable legislative union that had been created. In Dorion's eyes, the necessity of settling the problem of representation by population in the united Canada was not a sufficient reason for creating a Confederation. He argued that it would have been better to grant some extra members in the assembly to Upper Canada, while preserving the equality between Upper and Lower Canada in the Legislative Council. In Dorion's opinion, the entry of the Maritime provinces into Confederation would only increase the financial drain on Upper and Lower Canada, without any compensating commercial advantages. The defense of the country would become more difficult when New Brunswick and its 500 miles of frontier with the United States were added. The Legislative Council, that is to say, the Senate, "composed of a fixed number of members appointed for life by the Crown, could impede the wishes of public opinion and paralyze all progressive legislation." And Dorion concluded with the argument which, until 1867, remained the most serious of those formulated by the opponents of Confederation when he said, "In whatever manner one views the proposed changes, there is one point on which there can be no difference of opinion, and that is that when we are concerned with nothing less than the remaking of the constitution, and
the creation of new foundations for the political edifice, the people whose interest and posterity are affected, should be consulted.” Although the government never succeeded in defending its attitude adequately, it was never to permit the people to express their opinion. The government claimed that it did not fear a popular consultation, but that it was unnecessary because in a number of elections the government candidates had been successful.

After Dorion’s manifesto, at the end of 1864 and the beginning of 1865, the people formed ranks for battle. Meetings were held, especially in the counties of Rouville, Verchères, Iberville, Laprairie, Drummond and Arthabaska, Jacques Cartier, Chambly, Bagot and Saint-Hyacinthe. On 7 January 1865, Le Pays asserted that the people were waking up in earnest and that soon the movement would embrace all of Lower Canada.

Since the present ministry, added Le Pays, “does not intend to ask the people for their opinion on the constitutional changes which it is preparing for us, the people must take the initiative and prove that they are not inclined to sign this sort of death sentence without examining it very closely. Therefore, let the mayors of each village, let the prefects of each county, all set to work, and let Lower Canada, by means of public assemblies, pronounce its opinion on the plan of Confederation which is to be submitted to her representatives in Parliament in the very near future.

The assembly held at Verchères on 27 December was regarded by Le Pays in its edition of 29 December as “a perfect anti-Confederate triumph.” The newspaper published the resolutions of the meeting, one of which was a very good summation of the arguments of the participants who were opposed to Confederation:

1. Because the new system would be expensive and complicated;
2. Because it would imperil the institutions and the religious faith, as well as the autonomy, of the French-Canadian nationality, guaranteed by solemn treaties and Imperial statutes; 3. Because it would impose on this province pecuniary obligations which were incumbent exclusively and by law on the other provinces of British North America, and very onerous material sacrifices, such as direct taxation, without procuring in return in this region any real or tangible benefit; 4. Because it would very probably instigate, sooner or later, throughout the said provinces, and particularly in this region, civil troubles and perhaps very serious ones.

Thus public opinion had been awakened when, at the beginning of February, the Upper and Lower Houses of the united Canadas began to study the Quebec Resolutions.

Debate on the Quebec Resolutions

Even though Premier Taché sat in the Legislative Council, it was in the lower chamber that the principal speeches were made to praise
the project as well as to fight it. Among the French Canadians, the
most fervent partisans of Confederation were George-Etienne Cartier
and Hector Langevin, both members of the Cabinet, and Joseph-
Edouard Cauchon, who was a backbencher, but who exercised con-
siderable influence over his fellow citizens through his newspaper, the
Journal de Québec.

Antoine-Aimé Dorion, by virtue of his position as leader of the
opposition, intervened several times, but on 16 February, he made
his greatest speech, which may be regarded as the summation of the
arguments of the French-Canadian adversaries of Confederation.
Once again he took up the arguments of his manifesto and he defended
himself successfully against the charge of having recently been in
favour of a federal solution, as the Conservatives charged, when he
declared that he was only “in favour of a Confederation of the two
provinces of Upper and Lower Canada, but a real Confederation, giving
greater powers to the local governments, and only a delegated authority
to the central government.” As for the problem of defense, to which
was linked the construction of the inter-colonial railroad uniting
Canada with the Maritime provinces, Dorion considered it impossible
to regulate by means of Confederation. “What it would be better
for Canada to do,” he added, “would be to remain peaceful, and not
give our neighbours any pretext for war.” Dorion claimed also that
the British railway magnates, desiring to restore the state of their
finances, were the secret artisans of Confederation. He ended his
speech with the words: “I greatly fear that the day when this Confed-
eration is adopted will be a dark day for Lower Canada . . . I consider
it one of the worst measures which could be submitted to us and, if it
happens that it is adopted, without the sanction of the people of this
province, the country will have more than one occasion to regret it.”
Eric Dorion added almost nothing to the arguments of his brother,
though his style was more dramatic. After showing that the coalition
of June 1864, and the project of Confederation which resulted from it,
were only a manoeuvre of the Conservative party to remain in power,
his repeated over and over again, “I am opposed to the project of
Confederation because . . .”

Among the other French-Canadian opponents of Confederation
were Henri-Elzéar Taschereau, Conservative representative from
Beauce, who broke with his party on this occasion because, he said,
he was not convinced that the proposed constitution contained “in
itself sufficient guarantees for the protection of our rights” and Joseph-
Xavier Perrault, member for Richelieu, who in a very long speech,
after more serious arguments, took the time to revive memories of the
persecutions against the Irish, the expulsion of the Acadians, the
constitutional struggles of Lower Canada, and made the assertion that
on the island of Mauritius, England had not respected the clauses of
the treaty which ceded that colony to her — all this to prove that the
new constitution was a threat to the French Canadians.

Several votes were taken. The most revealing was that of
10 March, when the government proposal was approved by 91 votes
to 33. The vote may be analyzed as follows: in Upper Canada, 54 in
favour of the measure, 8 opposed; in Lower Canada, 37 in favour,
25 opposed; among the French Canadians, 26 in favour, 22 opposed.
A proposal to appeal to the people before submitting the project to
the Imperial parliament was rejected by 84 to 35, the great majority
of the latter being French-Canadian members. The Liberal newspaper
Le Pays wrote on 14 March that the night of 10 March, the night of
the most important vote, had seen "the most iniquitous act, the most
degrading act, which parliamentary government had witnessed since
the treason of the Irish deputies who sold their country to England
for positions, honours, and gold." In an obviously different tone, the
Conservative newspaper La Minerve had written on 11 March: "The
vote in the Canadian legislature marked an important date in the
history of Canada... The union of the colonies is the consecration
of our political and national existence and the guarantee of our future."

In the Legislative Council on 20 February, the Quebec Resolutions
had been approved by 45 votes to 15, the latter including 8 councillors
from Lower Canada. Seven of these had been elected and consequently
could claim to express the sentiments of a fairly large group of public
opinion. The French-Canadian voters of Lower Canada could not
express their views on the project of Confederation before it was
adopted, but the fact remains that a large number of their representa-
tives in both houses were opposed to it.

From the approval of the Quebec Resolutions by the Canadian
parliament to their study at the London Conference in December 1866,
the plan of Confederation continued to be the object of political
discussions between its partisans and its adversaries. At the beginning
of March 1865, it suffered a severe blow when the government of New
Brunswick, which favoured Confederation, was defeated in a provincial
general election. In spite of the affirmations of Cartier and his
supporters, the project seemed to have broken down and during the
autumn of 1865, many people, including newspaper editors, wondered
whether it might not be necessary to replace the plan for the wider
union with one for the federation of the two Canadas only. However,
ew elections were held in New Brunswick in 1866, which returned the
Confederation party to power. This made possible the London Confer-
ence in December of the same year, and finally, in 1867, the drafting
and the adoption of the British North America Act.
The Session of 1866

During this waiting period, various problems deriving from Confederation, of particular interest to the French Canadians, were discussed, and solutions were found for them during the last session of the assembly of the united Canadas in the summer of 1866. The most important debate concerned the resolutions providing for the constitutions of the future provinces of Quebec and Ontario. John A. Macdonald did not want an Upper House in Ontario, but Cartier demanded one for Quebec. The government had some difficulty in explaining this anomaly. According to Cartier, Lower Canada wanted "to give more dignity to legislative institutions" but there were further reasons for the creation of a Legislative Council. In reality, the Council was thought necessary to protect the Anglo-Saxon minority against possible legislative action by the Lower House.

At the birth of Confederation, the English and Protestant Canadians of Quebec did not wish to risk their position. They represented nearly a quarter of the population, but their real power was more considerable than their number, for, in the cities of Quebec and Montreal, they were the masters of industry, commerce, and finance, and they dominated the Eastern Townships. They were afraid that, under the new constitution, they would lose their privileged position, and that they would henceforth be at the mercy of the French-Canadian Catholic majority in the future local legislature. Their leader, Alexander T. Galt, tried to reassure them in a speech made on 23 November 1864 in the city of Sherbrooke, for which he was the member in the Legislative assembly. He rejected the idea that the French Canadians could one day deprive their compatriots of a substantial representation in the legislative assembly, but even so, he had the prudence to have twelve privileged electoral districts constituted, which could not be interfered with without the consent of an absolute majority of the members who would represent them.

Galt also tried to ensure better protection for the schools of the Protestant minority in Quebec. In 1866 he was unsuccessful in his attempt to have the Legislative Assembly adopt a measure to this effect, and he resigned from the government, but, as a delegate to the London Conference, he obtained approximately what he wanted in the final text of the British North America Act.

The problem of education for minorities at the time of Confederation, it should be remembered, was always presented from the religious viewpoint and never from the linguistic. That was no disadvantage to the Anglo-Saxon minority of Quebec which was then identical with the Protestant minority. In the other provinces the French-Canadian
population belonged to the Catholic minority, and it was only as such that it was protected. George-Etienne Cartier went so far as to say in 1866: "Upper Canada is inhabited by only one race; the same is not true of Lower Canada." Hector Langevin had made the same point in 1865: "Upper Canada has a homogeneous population professing different religions." In fact, there were nearly 75,000 French-speaking Canadians in Upper Canada, but for their compatriots of Lower Canada they were only a sort of avant-garde whose future was viewed as quite hazy. As for the Acadians, it is revealing that, during the debate on the Quebec Resolutions in the Canadian legislature, their expulsion was mentioned only twice. It was solely as Catholics that they received a meagre protection, and furthermore they were to be deprived of this protection on the morrow of Confederation. In reality, the struggle surrounding the problems of education, before as after Confederation, brought two different philosophies face to face: that of the Catholics who favoured separate schools, and that of the Protestants who, in spite of appearances, more easily accepted schools which were for all practical purposes public schools, in which the question of a specific religion was not seriously raised.

The Final Opposition

A final assault against the project of Confederation was launched at the end of October 1866 by the drafting and publication of a manifesto signed by twenty members of the Legislative Assembly and sent to the Colonial Secretary, Lord Carnarvon. Coming after more than two years of struggle, when the die was definitely cast, the manifesto did not present any new arguments. It summed up events from the first official step towards Confederation, taken by Cartier, Ross, and Galt in 1859, to the decision which had just been made by Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and the Canadas to send delegates to London to establish the Union. The signatories concluded:

We have striven to prove that the initiative for the project of Confederation, and all the subsequent steps to have it adopted, are due to exigencies of the parties and not to a spontaneous and general desire of the people to make radical changes in their institutions or in their political relations.

Lord Carnarvon was unmoved by the protests which were presented to him. During the debates in the House of Lords and the House of Commons on the proposed British North America Act, the problem of the opposition which had been manifested in Nova Scotia was raised, but that of the Liberals of Lower Canada was not. Lord Carnarvon contented himself with declaring on 22 February that in the case of Upper and Lower Canada, the delegates in London had the most complete powers. For the British government, the approval of
the Quebec Resolutions in 1865 constituted a definite acquiescence on
the part of the two sections of united Canada. The manifesto received
considerable attention in the newspapers of Lower Canada, but it left
the mother country indifferent.

**The First of July 1867**

During the winter of 1866-67, Lower Canadians attentively
followed the events which were taking place in London, even though
the newspapers were often several weeks late in reporting the news,
because the newly-inaugurated transatlantic telegraph provided very
little information about the conference. In the spring, the text of the
act, which Queen Victoria had sanctioned on 29 March, was sent to
Canada and was immediately translated into rather inelegant French.
On the first of July, which was a Monday, Confederation was born,
and the day was marked by great public rejoicing in the new province
of Quebec. Of course its Liberal opponents accepted the new regime
without enthusiasm, but it is probable that the following lines from
the editorial of the Courrier du Canada represented more than the
partisan sentiments of a Conservative newspaper:

One hundred and six years, eight months and eighteen days ago
yesterday, M. de Vaudreuil, the last of the French governors of New
France, concluded a capitulation which delivered forever to his secular
enemies "the most beautiful, the most French, and the most neglected"
of the colonies that France possessed... Who would have been able
to foresee, we shall not say a hundred years ago, fifty or twenty-five
years ago, but seven or eight years ago, who would have been able to
foresee that Lower Canada, the cradle of the French-Canadian nation-
ality, would be, in the very near future and without ceasing to be
a colony of England, governed by a French-Canadian Catholic?

**The Causes of Confederation**

Even if the opposition to Confederation in Lower Canada was
considerable, it cannot be assumed that the new regime had been
brutally imposed on the population. Both profound causes and
immediate motives led a good proportion of the French Canadians to
be favourable to it.

In the birth of Confederation, several causes were intermingled,
but they can be conveniently classified in this way: the economic
exigencies of the time; the necessity of constructing the Intercolonial
and of re-financing the railway system already in existence; fear of
the United States and at the same time, to a degree, a desire to
imitate them; the needs of defense; the birth in the different colonies
of a common national sentiment; the consent of the mother country;
and finally the desire of the Canadian government to be free of the difficulties which had for some time paralyzed the working of its political institutions.

The transformation of the economy of Great Britain in the middle of the nineteenth century considerably damaged the commerce of the colonies. A grave crisis followed and some of the discontented English Canadians even advocated annexation to the United States. Less bound to business and industry, the French Canadians generally remained outside this movement. The Reciprocity Treaty, signed in 1854, brought a temporary prosperity to the colonies, a prosperity which became even greater during the American Civil War from 1860 to 1865, when Canadian exports increased and agriculture profited. However, the Canadians feared that the treaty would be abrogated and this in fact happened in 1866. The partisans of Confederation claimed that the problems associated with the termination of Reciprocity would be corrected by the increase in commerce between the reunited colonies. Facing the economic difficulties of the time, aggravated by poor harvests, particularly in 1864, and foreseeing the greater hardship which the end of reciprocity would bring, Canadians had seen a certain degree of salvation in the new system. The French Canadians shared this hope. When in a speech to the Legislative Assembly on 9 March 1865, Eric Dorion drew a somber picture of the farmer in the fields of Lower Canada, he was obviously exaggerating, as any opponent of the government would, but all the same his testimony revealed a recurring situation which led the people to look for a new solution, a solution such as Confederation.

Most of the French Canadians, except for some of their leaders like Cartier, were not so bound to financial and railway interests that the necessity of building the Intercolonial influenced them directly to favour Confederation, but, even so, on 1 August 1867, the Conservative newspaper Le Courrier de Saint-Hyacinthe wrote:

There is no doubt... that the Intercolonial Railway will bring wealth to the part of the country through which it runs. Its first effect will be to stimulate commerce and to favour colonization greatly. The counties of Temiscouata and Rimouski which it crosses are very fertile, the immigrant will find good land there, and abundant facilities for communication with the centres of commerce.

Moreover, the construction of the Intercolonial was only one important aspect of two other factors: the fear of the United States and the necessities of defense.

Rightly or wrongly, between 1860 and 1870, the French Canadians feared annexation to the United States and viewed Confederation as
the only way to prevent this. While it is true that English-Canadian politicians and newspapers sometimes invoked this argument, few attached as much importance to it as the French Canadians. Several of their political leaders and several of their newspapers presented the alternative: "Confederation or annexation." At that time, all Canadians had serious reasons to fear the United States, and particularly the northern states who emerged victorious from the Civil War. England had shown sympathy towards the southern states and it would have been normal for the North to take its vengeance on the British colonies of North America. Besides, the fear of the United States took a concrete form in the Fenian menace, which the politicians did not fail to exploit. In 1866, the Fenians, Irish fanatics who had been organizing in the United States and had taken advantage of the Civil War to acquire military training, attacked New Brunswick at Campobello, Upper Canada on the Niagara peninsula, and Lower Canada at Frelighsburg. On 28 June 1866, on the occasion of the feast of Saint-Jean-Baptiste, Le Canadien published a poem by Arthur Cassegrain entitled "The Fenian Invasion" in which he launched the appeal:

Aux armes ! fils de Jean-Baptiste
Entendez le canon ! . . .
Que votre patron vous assiste !
Pensez à Carillon.

Moreover, the general problem of the defense of Canada was one of the important influences on the birth of Confederation in French Canada as well as elsewhere. Their politicians had made this a debating point and on 13 February 1865, La Minerve wrote: "It is to assure ourselves a force and sufficient means of defense that we desire a union of all the provinces destined to march under the same flag in case of war."

Several politicians and newspapers also emphasized that, at the time of Confederation, a new country was being born. The French Canadians do not seem to have been preoccupied with this idea except in so far as it concerned their survival as a group, or the possibility that union would permit them to avoid annexation. In opposing the new regime, the French-Canadian Liberals claimed, of course, that it endangered the survival of French Canada, but the Journal de Québec seems to have represented a large part of public opinion when it wrote on 17 December 1864:

We want to be a nation one day, and as that is our necessary destiny and the goal to which we aspire, we prefer the political condition of which we will be a vital element, and in which we will still be in existence, rather than to be thrown into the midst of an
immense people, like a drop of water lost in the ocean, where in a few years we would lose our language, our laws, and even the memory of our glorious origins.

It should be added that, at the birth of Confederation, French Canadians were happy that legal recognition was given to the use of their language in parliament and in the courts, where French had previously had only de facto recognition.

Finally, an examination of the causes which led to Confederation reveals that action was precipitated by the desire to escape from the political difficulties of the united province. The Union of 1840, by creating equal representation in the Lower House for Upper and Lower Canada, became eventually unjust to the Anglo-Saxon element and made representation by population one of the most important themes of political life in the united Canadas. This problem was one of the principal causes of ministerial instability and to resolve it, federalism seemed the best solution. This was what Cartier understood, and this is what he succeeded in making a large portion of the population understand. La Minerve summed up the situation on 16 July 1864 when it wrote:

Representation by population in Confederation is a completely different question from representation by population in the existing Union, since in the first case it is a safeguard and guarantee of independence and in the second case it is an infallible means to servitude and degradation.

Several days before, La Minerve had underlined the fact that Lower Canada could not be an obstacle to Confederation and consequently could not oppose another factor which determined the course of events, the will of London. The Conservative newspaper wrote:

For a long time, people in England have been talking of uniting all the British possessions in America under the same legislative government. When a general movement towards Confederation develops and when this movement is perfectly motivated, can we allow ourselves to stand in the way like an insuperable barrier, at the risk of bringing about their ruin and our own?

The Catholic Clergy

"Without Cartier and the Catholic clergy of Quebec, it would have been impossible to accomplish the union of 1867," wrote the journalist and historian, Sir John Willison. The Conservative party which advocated Confederation was of course on better terms with the Catholic clergy than was the Liberal party which opposed it. The bishops and curés still exercised an influence over the electorate in political matters which they were not to lose until the victory of
Laurier in 1896. Moreover, much importance was attached to the opinion of the clergy. Cartier declared in the House during the winter of 1865:

I will say that the opinion of the clergy is favourable to Confederation . . . In general, the clergy are the enemy of all political dissension and if they support this project, it is because they see in Confederation a solution to the difficulties which have existed for so long.

Perhaps not all the bishops and curés were as favourable to Confederation as Cartier said. At least, this is what the Liberals claimed, but as they had never been on very good terms with the Catholic church, it was difficult for them to boast of interpreting the sentiments of its representatives.

However, it can be affirmed that from June 1864 to the spring of 1867, the Catholic clergy, while generally favouring the Confederation project, refused to commit themselves and even felt some fear of facing the unknown. But after the new political system had been adopted by the British parliament, the five bishops of Lower Canada published pastoral letters in which they left their flock little liberty to vote against the constitution. For them, of course, it was the recognition of a fait accompli, the traditional acceptance by the Catholic hierarchy of established power and authority, but it was also an almost morbid fear of annexation to the United States, and a consequence of the game of bipartisanship. In effect, not to approve Confederation would have been the same as allying themselves with its opponents, who for the most part were Liberals who had broken with the clergy. Thus the bishops were only expressing publicly sentiments which they had already held for a long time, and which the public knew. The Conservatives shamelessly took advantage of this, especially during the elections which followed Confederation; the Liberals suffered from it and allowed their anger to burst forth violently in the autumn of 1867.

The French-Canadian bishop who seems to have shown the greatest enthusiasm for Confederation was Monseigneur Charles Larocque, who became bishop of Saint-Hyacinthe in March 1866. In his pastoral letter of 18 June 1867, after saying that “In our opinion, Confederation does not appear to be a danger to be feared at all,” he wrote:

Republican institutions do not suit us any better than they suit the great people from whom we are descended, the French. And the fate which would be awaiting us, if God suffered us at some future date to enter the great American republic, would be exactly comparable to that of so many tributaries which come to be swallowed up in the great, deep St. Lawrence, where they disappear without leaving the slightest trace of their existence.
After listening to such remarks, it was rather difficult for anyone who was accustomed to obeying his bishop to oppose Confederation and to vote in favour of its opponents.

George-Etienne Cartier

Without a doubt, the great artisan of Confederation in Lower Canada, the one who succeeded in channeling all the latent forces, was George-Etienne Cartier. He was not a theorist and, if he made himself the apostle of Confederation, it was not to bring about the triumph of the system. It was because he believed that it was the only way out of the situation, favourable to Lower Canada but unjust to Upper Canada, which had been created by equal representation, and perhaps also because he was to some extent associated with railway interests. To these motives may be added the natural desire of a politician to play a role on a higher stage, and an almost morbid fear of the United States and their republican institutions. In the great speech which Cartier made on 7 February 1865 in favour of the Quebec resolutions, he declared: "The question is reduced to this: we must either have a British North American federation or else be absorbed into the American federation." When Cartier feared annexation, it was not only because it would mark a change of allegiance, but also because of something more important: Cartier, as a monarchist and a Conservative, feared republican institutions. Cartier has sometimes been criticized for not ensuring sufficiently the protection of his compatriots, and particularly for forgetting the French minorities living outside Quebec, but we must not judge a politician in the light of events which have occurred in the intervening century and which he could not have foreseen. In the sometimes difficult circumstances in which he found himself, at grips with an artful colleague like John A. Macdonald, Cartier sought concrete solutions. At the most, one can reproach him, like many others politicians after him, for having had a conception of federalism that was too simplified and too optimistic. He expressed it in 1865 in these words:

Under the federal system, which leaves to the central government the great questions of general interest in which racial differences are not concerned, it will not be possible that the rights of race and religion fail to be appreciated.

The Elections of 1867

In attempting to understand the attitude of the French Canadians at the time of the birth of Confederation, it is necessary finally to see what happened in Quebec when the first elections were held, at the beginning of September, to elect members to the House of Commons
and to the Legislative Assembly of Quebec. The Conservatives tried to transform the vote into a sort of plebiscite in favour of Confederation. At least it was easy for them to claim that their Liberal opponents, who were opposed to the new regime, were hardly likely to make it function. In another connection, as we have seen, after the new system had been adopted by the British parliament, the bishops sent out the pastoral letters in which they left their flock little liberty to vote against Confederation. The Liberals, directed by Antoine-Aimé Dorion, formed an organization not to fight against Confederation, but to "neutralize the effects of the new system." This was the Reform Association of Lower Canada, which consisted of moderate Liberals, as opposed to the young radical Liberals, often annexationists, who followed Médéric Lanctôt. As often happened at the time, the arguments of the two principal groups of opponents crystallized into two brochures, entitled, respectively, *La Confédération, couronnement de dix années de mauvaise administration* and *La Confédération, c'est le salut du Bas-Canada*.

The federal election ended in a resounding victory for the Conservatives and consequently for the supporters of Confederation. In the whole country they won 101 seats out of 181, and in Quebec, 45 out of 65. The Conservatives were also victorious in the elections for the Legislative Assembly.

*The First Session*

The first session of the new federal Parliament opened on 7 November and, at the very beginning, a minor incident seemed to indicate that the French Canadians who feared Confederation and claimed that it would not easily permit the realization of Canadian duality, were right. After Macdonald and Cartier had proposed James Cockburn, a Conservative member from Ontario, and a Father of Confederation, as speaker, the member from Montcalm, Joseph Dufresne, opposed this choice "because Cockburn did not understand the two languages which were to be on equal footing in the House of Commons." *La Minerve* itself, while favourable to the government, did not hesitate to write: "Perhaps it was wise to present openly the rights of the French Canadian minority in Confederation as soon as Parliament opened." This was the beginning of the difficulties which French-speaking Canadians would often meet in their attempts to participate freely in political life at the federal level, difficulties which would impel them to develop the autonomy of the province of which they would be masters because they constituted the majority.
For the moment, they felt a certain pride in possessing their own institutions. When the Lieutenant-Governor, Sir Narcisse Belleau, opened the first session of the provincial legislature on 28 December 1867, he could declare:

The constitution has entrusted you with great interests but has imposed serious obligations on you, concerning the administration of justice, public instruction, the patronage of science, the humanities, and the arts, the exploitation of public property, including our vast forests and our mines that are so important, the development of our social resources, immigration, colonization, the police, and in general, civil law and property law.

For better or for worse, the die was cast, and the legislative machinery of Confederation began to function.

Conclusion

Although we have no mathematical proof, it seems likely that the majority of French Canadians were favourable to Confederation during its formative stages from 1864 to 1867, and while they possessed most of the characteristics which, since the principle of nationality had developed, had led people in Europe to dream of independence, nevertheless it can be affirmed that at this time, even though the French Canadians wanted to preserve their identity, they never seriously thought of independence as a solution.

On the other hand, it appears that they understood that the political system created by the Union of 1840, even if it had become on the whole favourable to them, had to be altered because the English-speaking Canadians of Upper Canada could not agree indefinitely to a refusal of representation by population. At the time there was certainly a strong temptation towards annexation to the United States, or at least the impression that this annexation would be inevitable some day, and that, after all, it would serve no purpose to fight against geographical, economic, and political imperatives, but George-Etienne Cartier and the Catholic clergy succeeded in convincing the population of the dangers which annexation would entail for them. Besides, they could believe that annexation was inevitable without wishing to take definite steps which would facilitate it.

While accepting federalism as inevitable, the French Canadians did not have a very advanced theoretical vision of it, and they would have been incapable of discussing most of the problems it poses today. They did not even suspect these problems. It could not be expected, for example, that they could imagine all the furore that lay in Paragraph 13 of Section 92 on property and civil rights. They could
not have suspected that judicial interpretation would give this article such importance. They could not know all that was hidden in the words "public lands, timber and woods" of Paragraph 5 of Section 92.

The French Canadians were forced to make the best of pragmatic solutions and to foresee as well as possible the difficulties these would create. Events must not be judged in the light of later developments, with an insight which contemporaries could not possess. The French Canadians seem to have understood fairly well the powers it was necessary to entrust to the provinces so that Quebec could remain master of its institutions at the time. They thought that provincial power would be so much developed, especially in the case of Quebec, that they gave little thought to the possibility of a genuine Canadian duality at the federal level. However, it must not be forgotten that Confederation was accomplished at a time when Canada was an Anglo-Saxon colony and when the best government was the one which interfered to the least possible degree in the life of its people. It was therefore much less serious a hundred years ago that the federal government was almost completely Anglo-Saxon, because Canada had no international status, the state did not intervene in economic life, and there were, as yet, practically no social security measures.

However, the French Canadians of Lower Canada can be reproached for not really understanding the situation of the French minorities in Upper Canada and the maritime provinces, who from a political point of view, were not represented. At the time, the problems of education were much more centred on religion than on language and thus the protection which was claimed for the minorities depended on the former rather than on the latter.

A majority of French Canadians favoured Confederation a hundred years ago because it was the only realistic solution which presented itself to them, and even those who opposed it were content to say that it was premature but did not offer an alternative solution. Confederation was achieved because the English Canadians needed to have the French Canadians in it, and the French could not then become independent. The great majority of nations have been formed, not by people who desired intensely to live together, but rather by people who could not live separately.
BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

The historians who have written about the birth of Confederation have taken into account the participation of the French Canadians in the events and have briefly analyzed their attitudes, but no thorough study has been devoted to this subject as a whole. French-Canadian historians have also neglected the study of this period. The only work on the subject written by a French Canadian is La Confédération canadienne (Montreal, 1918), by Abbé Lionel Groulx, which the author himself admits was written too quickly, and declares "that these studies make absolutely no claim to being a definitive work." He also published in L'Action française (XVII, May-June 1927, pp. 282-301) a study entitled "Les Canadiens français et l'établissement de la Confédération." A chapter on the birth of Confederation is to be found in the Cours d'histoire du Canada by Thomas Chapais, vol. 8, 1861-1867, Quebec, 1934. It is unnecessary here to repeat a bibliography which is to be found at the end of P.B. Waite's book, The Life and Times of Confederation, 1864-1867 (Toronto, 1962), but a reference may be added to Walter Ullmann's article entitled "The Quebec Bishops and Confederation," published in the Canadian Historical Review, vol. XLIV, 1963, pp. 213-234. The present study has been written with the aid, in particular, of contemporary newspapers and the Débats parlementaires sur la question de la Confédération de l'Amérique du Nord, printed by order of the Legislature in 1865, which have been more easily consulted since 1952, thanks to the Index aux Débats sur la Confédération, 1865 (Ottawa, Public Archives of Canada, 1952).

Since the first printing of this booklet in 1966 two works have shed new light on the participation of French Canadians in the birth of Confederation: Hector =Louis Langevin, Un père de la Confédération canadienne, by Andrée Désilets and the thesis of Henry Best, George-Etienne Cartier.