

Québec's Reactions to the 1920 Manitoba Mennonite Search for Land

Charlotte McCallum, *York University, Toronto*

Introduction

After the creation of Manitoba in 1870, the Dominion Government of Canada continued to actively recruit agricultural settlers for both the new province and the territories to the west under the *Dominion Lands Act* of 1872. In acknowledgement of their agricultural competence and acumen, Mennonite colonies in southern Russia were approached and offered land grants. Many of these communities welcomed the offer since Russia was no longer prepared to uphold the *Privilegium*, an agreement between government and Mennonites that contained the privileges and exemptions which sustained their distinctive religion, German language, and separate, communal settlement organization within the Russian state. Among the entitlements given to the Mennonites was freedom of local self-government, exemption from military conscription, and freedom to educate their children in German, in their own schools, according to their religious beliefs.

Following the visit of the Dominion's representative, the Mennonites sent a delegation to Canada in 1873 to examine the proffered lands. They ultimately accepted the conditions of settlement, including certain exemptions from the *Dominion Lands Act* that enabled compact villages to be formed, *en bloc*, within

two large reserves in southern Manitoba. This and their subsequent settlement history have been well documented by E.K. Francis (1955), John Warkentin (1960) Frank Epp (1974; 1982) and Anna Ens (1996), among others.

For many years following their arrival in Manitoba, the Russian Mennonites believed that they had been guaranteed the same privileges they had once enjoyed in Russia, including autonomy regarding establishment of their own German language schools. They based this understanding on a letter written in 1875 by John Lowe, Secretary in the Dominion Department of Agriculture. This letter was a positive response to a list of requests submitted to the Dominion Government in 1873 very similar to the *Privilegium*.

Education, however, was a provincial jurisdiction under the *British North America Act*. As Manitoba began to exercise its own provincial competence, it rejected any legal authority for autonomous schools inferred by the Mennonites in the Lowe letter of 1875. As summarized next from Francis' (1955) work, a troubled era ensued that had major repercussions on Western Canada's Mennonite experience.

Manitoba, like Québec, had adopted a Protestant and Roman Catholic denominational school system. With a large existing French-speaking minority and the influx of many immigrants from Europe, an increasingly diverse and multilingual population was growing up. To encourage a more cohesive society, the *Manitoba Public Schools Act* of 1890 endorsed state-controlled, secular and tax-supported schools. This action provoked a major crisis in French/English relations in Canada. It also highlighted resistance among some Mennonites to integration and renewed efforts to retain control over their schools.

A Liberal Manitoba government elected in 1916 then launched a plan to assimilate minority groups into a larger national social vision which, except for Québec, was essentially Anglo-Saxon. The public school system would be a major agent of acculturation. The *School Attendance Act* of 1916 made English the sole language of instruction in all public schools in Manitoba and required compulsory attendance at either a public or an acceptable private school. In 1918, with the standards of their education degenerating, all private Mennonite schools were deemed unacceptable under the terms of the *School Attendance Act*.

The Mennonites experienced other ethnic tensions after the start of World War I. Although their creed already precluded participation in elections and civil life, they, with other German-speaking people and conscientious objectors, were formally disenfranchised by the *Dominion Elections Act* of 1916.

Never monolithic in terms of practice or doctrine, Mennonites fractured along lines dividing conservative traditionalists from those more willing to integrate with wider society. In 1919, Manitoba's decision to enforce the *School Attendance Act*, and similar action in Saskatchewan, led several conservative groups of Mennonites to search for a more tolerant civil jurisdiction where they could live according to their beliefs and customs. Once again, delegations were sent out, this time to various states in the United States and Latin America to search for suitable farmland and a government receptive to their requests. Frank Epp (1974) has described this quest

by the Reinlaender, Sommerfelder and Chortitzer Mennonites.

In August of 1920 one such delegation arrived in the province of Québec to explore the possibility of settling in its Abitibi region. This area was part of the Great Clay Belt straddling Québec and northern Ontario. As a new agricultural frontier it offered a short growing season but reasonably fertile soils. The Taschereau government of Québec was seeking settlers and/or investors for this area in support of two general social and economic projects. One was to promote investment in and modernization of the boreal resource industries of forestry, mining and hydro-electric development.

The other aim of attracting settlement was to contribute to an older agrarian colonization movement. Heavily supported by both government and Church, this had begun in the nineteenth century and was firmly linked to an ethnic nationalism that promoted the traditional agrarian, rural and religious values of early Québec society. Accounts of this long colonization movement are given by Drapeau (1863), Pelland (1908), and in *Les Semaines Sociales du Canada* (1944).

An initial exchange of correspondence between Québec officials and the Mennonites led Mennonites to believe that their requests, including freedom of education, would be granted. The Québec delegation abandoned its search, however, when land was obtained by another in Mexico. Between 1921 and 1930 about 6,000 members of conservative Mennonite groups, or about one-third of the total, moved from the Canadian West to settle in Latin America.

The exodus from Manitoba to Mexico has been well chronicled but the record contains few details of the 1920 visit to Québec. Francis (1955) briefly describes the trip, making reference to Québec's generally tolerant reception of the idea of Mennonite immigration. He gives an English version of five privileges the Mennonites requested of the Québec government. These were evidently a variant of the same *Privilegium* awarded to the Mennonites but ultimately rescinded by Russia and repudiated, in part, by Manitoba. As of this writing, the location of the Mennonite's original brief to the Québec government is unknown, nor is it obvious whether it was written in German, English or French before its public release. The text of this brief varies among secondary English sources and again in my translation from French given below.

This essay gives a direct description of the 1920 visit and examples of contemporaneous local and wider provincial reaction to the Mennonite delegation and its aims. Three articles have been translated from the newspaper *L'Abitibi* (after 1922, *La Gazette du Nord*) describing the visit and reaction to it. This weekly newspaper supported the on-going colonization movement in the Middle North. It was published from Amos, Québec and served francophone readers in both northern Québec and *Nouvelle Ontario* (i.e. northern Ontario).

These translations are followed by brief sketches of the personalities involved. Finally, I offer an interpretation of the visit within the historical context of French Canada's competing visions of national and territorial identity. A liberal vision expressed by the sitting Taschereau government was intent on modernizing and enriching the province by industrializing the north. Another was a traditional,

ethnically-based vision of nationalism associated with the long-standing agrarian colonization movement which relied on a close partnership between the Church and the provincial government. This ethnic nationalism remains present in the modern province, though it is not politically-correct, and is based on the linguistic, and other cultural attributes of old-stock French Canadians.

The analysis offered here may help explain the deliberate and decidedly cold response one influential journalist gave to the Mennonites' quest for sanctuary, and the protective and nationalistic stance displayed in the wider provincial press to the still largely unsettled agricultural territory of northern Québec. This was an area of both new agricultural colonization and industrial development.

Both tendencies were involved in what we now perceive as a complex evolution of the territorial identity of French Canadians. This once included all of Canada, but, at least as far as Québec is concerned, is now concentrating in a territorial national homeland in Québec where a distinctive *québécois* identity has emerged. First arising in the nineteenth century, various competing nationalistic movements have swept the province and continue to this day. Some have been liberal in political and economic philosophy and pan-Canadian in scope, such as the progressive nationalism of Louis-Alexandre Taschereau, premier from 1920 to 1936, and the government of Henri Bourassa before him. As described by Vigod (1986), the Taschereau administration was associated with the industrialization and exploitation of the province's wealth through promotion of foreign investment in the forest, hydro and mineral wealth of the northern forests.

A long period of interior agrarian colonization is associated with a rather exclusionary ethnic nationalism such as that advanced by the *Action Française* movement, of which nationalist historian and cleric Lionel Groulx was an influential member (see e.g. Trofimenkoff, 1975). Esther Delisle (1998) has recently re-opened this era to modern scrutiny in her heavy critique of the anti-semitism and other instances of xenophobia expressed by Groulx. There is little in the record presented below, however, to suggest that in the social and national ferment of the times, ethnic hostility *per se* played any substantial role in the cool reception of the Mennonite visit revealed in the regional and provincial press.

The Local Record

The first report, "Mennonites in the Abitibi," appeared on the front page of *L'Abitibi* on Thursday, August 26, 1920.

Numbering five, delegates of more than a thousand Mennonite families from Manitoba and Saskatchewan who want to immigrate to the province of Québec arrived in Amos last Friday [i.e. August 20, 1920], conducted by Mr. Gravel of the Forest Service.

Mr. Hector Authier, land agent, received them and paid them a visit Friday

afternoon in Figury Township and La Ferme with the view of showing them how our settlers know how to operate their lands. They seemed very interested in the country, in the fields of grain in Figury and in the gardens of La Ferme, through which Mr. Pascal Fortier generously led them.

The Mennonites are a religious sect with quasi-patriarchal beliefs whose principles we discuss below. They want to leave the western provinces because they cannot send their children to neutral public schools, as their conscience would wish. Good farmers, they live in plenty on their farms in Manitoba where they are noted for their peaceful and industrious character.

They would require 300,000 to 400,000 acres of land to transplant themselves and their large families. They prefer land with few trees – land that can be easily cultivated.

Therefore, Mr. Authier had them visit the burnt-over land in our townships north of lakes Obalsi and Castagnier and the Township of La Morandière.

Before coming to the Abitibi these delegates had had an interview with the Premier of the province at Québec and they submitted to him a brief describing their principles and the purpose of their trip to the province.

The Honourable Mr. Taschereau received them accompanied by the Honourable J.E. Perreault, Minister of Colonization and Mr. J. N. Miller, secretary of the Catholic Committee of the Council of Public Instruction. After attentively listening to their declaration, the Premier said to the strangers that they were at complete liberty to visit the province and its colonization districts and to study its legal system. He gave them an outline of our educational regime and our civil legislation.

The secular members of the delegation left for Abitibi while their religious colleagues went to Ottawa in order to visit the federal authorities. The officials of the provincial administration have taken no steps to induce these strangers to come and settle here. The Mennonites are here at their own initiative and the provincial government has had nothing to do with it.

The Premier has been so kind as to send us a copy of the document submitted by the delegation. This text was dated August 13, 1920. It was drafted in Reinland, Manitoba and states in its foreword that the Mennonite congregations of Reinland, in Manitoba, and near La Haye, as well as those of Wymark, in Saskatchewan have taken upon themselves to submit to the gracious consideration of the government, the various concessions which they hope to obtain. It is the fear of not being able to conserve their customs and their religion which motivates them to look elsewhere for safe shelter.

Here is a summary of Mennonite beliefs as revealed in the brief submitted to the provincial authorities.

"We believe in God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, creator of the Universe and all it contains. We believe that God will judge after their death the inhabitants of the Earth; that good works will be rewarded and that the bad will receive eternal punishment.

That is why we require ourselves to live a faultless life in the eyes of God and Men. Our Church is under the spiritual direction of Bishops, of Deacons and of Preachers and is under the civil guidance of Elders [in the original, Gérants, i.e. Managers].

We never carry our differences before the halls of Justice. Our Church settles them, without imposing fines or corporal punishment. Our code consists entirely of the law of God. Our sect does not oblige anyone to become a member.

However, whoever does join with us must bend to our customs on pain of exclusion and excommunication.

We recognize that a country's government is conferred on men by a higher authority and that a nation deprived of vigorous governance will never endure. It follows from these convictions that we require acquiescence to the civil powers in everything which does not contravene our duty to our conscience. Revenge is forbidden to us, as taught by Jesus Christ. We may no longer shed blood in war; even if legitimate, although we do recognize that one may find many cases where the struggle is legitimate.

We have been told that in your province there is an abundance of land open to colonization. It is our intention to continue our craft as farmers, in which we can without boasting claim success.

But that which is of capital importance in our eyes is the free exercise of our religion which we believe we may find here among you. We are obliged, in conscience, to conserve our beliefs, to pass them to our children and to inculcate them from their earliest age. In this aim we seek to maintain our separate schools. Our children also learn agricultural sciences.

They learn to read, write, and the rudiments of arithmetic. It is our custom to not accept any grants from government for the maintenance of our schools. In our opinion, higher education kills rural life, even though

required for those who want to enter the professions or politics.

Experience clearly shows us that a very educated person no longer has a taste for the prosaic life of a farmer. The city attracts him. Rather, as we want to remain attached to the land we are satisfied with rather elementary instruction.

We take no part in politics, through the vote or by other means. We do not even accept any civil service post. Our only desire is to live in the country under the protection of government.

These then are the considerations which prompt us to respectfully request that you accord to us in perpetuity, under the law, the following privileges.

"The assurance (or the ratification of this clause by the government in Power) that we will be exempt from all military service.

2) The right to affirm or deny by a "no" or a "yes" in legal instance without having to swear the usual oath.

3) The most complete religious freedom without any intervention on the part of the State.

4) The right to build and direct at our expense separate schools and to instruct our children in our faith and in our language, which is German.

5) The ability to administer our goods and especially those of our widows and orphans, following our financial system, with no restrictions whatsoever.

6) The permission to establish ourselves in your province, with the understanding of the above mentioned rights"

The delegation represents about 12 thousand Mennonites.

H.A.

The next week, on September 2, 1920, *L'Abitibi* carried the following reply to the article above, written by one J.H. Paré. The reply, entitled, "Mennonites in the Abitibi" also appeared on the first page.

I strongly doubt that the government of the province of Québec would be inclined to distribute to them land in our province if it meant guaranteeing to them all the requests they have asked.

I admit that they are good farmers, tireless workers; that they are mild, peaceful and good-living; that they would be good settlers, although I doubt that, as such, they would be as good as our French-Canadian settlers.

I concede that the establishment of a colony of four, five or ten thousand Mennonites in some townships north of Abitibi, that their clearing two or three hundred thousand acres of land, would greatly contribute to improving our climate, would reduce greatly the amount of farm products that we are forced to import from the parishes in the Lowlands; that our merchants would increase somewhat their business with the arrival of this population who could do no other than to buy from them certain indispensable articles.

But if it is certain material advantages that we could obtain from their settlement among us, serious inconveniences of a completely different kind would result, especially if the privileges they ask are granted.

Would it be sensible for us to involve ourselves in a "Mennonite" question concerning cultural and educational conflict in our province? We live in harmony with our English-speaking co-citizens; our school system with its two public instructional committees functions very well. It is true that our Mennonites do not want government grants for their schools but are we to acknowledge that a province like ours should suffer a considerable number of its inhabitants to be condemned forever to huddle in an ignorance which they would impose upon themselves? Is it appropriate that our laws protect this slavery disguised under the erroneous pretext that education kills the moral life, this slavery of conscience and intelligence of those among these men who might feel the divine breath of aspiring to a higher, a deepening of their intellectual faculties?

No, a government may not tolerate such an order of events; we would have to intervene to resolve this Mennonite education problem; the thornier of the lot.

None of the privileges that they ask to be conferred is either just or reasonable. They take no part in politics; they accept no place in the civil service; but they ask for the protection of government; they want no military service; they may not shed blood, but they ask for protection – that is, that we shed ours so that they may live peacefully here with us!

Perhaps we would have to forego the religious freedom which we would accord them! It is dangerous to protect error; I don't know enough to discuss whether what they practice is heresy, but one remembers the troubles brought to us in the past by similar sects.

Finally, is it suitable to amend our civil code on their behalf? Is their word more believable than ours that we should exempt them from swearing testimony in all legal matters?

Is it suitable that we should allow them to administer in their fashion the property of their orphans and their widows? Because, in the end, it could be that we would then be obliged to patronize theft and dishonesty.

No, we do not want a state within a state; let us not forge chains. These strangers (should not) live among us if they do not want to submit to our laws.

The Mennonite delegation was arousing interest in Québec beyond the fairly isolated region in which they hoped to settle. One week following the above rebuff came this reprint of an anonymous and undated article from Montréal's major French newspaper, *La Presse*. It was entitled "Let us seize the land," and was featured in *L'Abitibi* in the September 9, 1920 issue.

One hears a lot these days about the Mennonites, who, discontented with the school laws of the Western Canadian provinces, where they established a colony forty-seven years ago, want to emigrate to the province of Québec and transplant themselves in a single block in the Abitibi. A double interest guides these people: the love of liberty and covetousness of a fortune honestly acquired in one of our best colonization areas.

Under the guidance of our tolerant laws, they hope to gain the assurance that they may practice the customs of their native land to thrive and grow under the salubrious climate of the Abitibi, to find, as in Manitoba, in Saskatchewan and in Alberta, a land fertile and propitious, and further, enjoy the great and inexhaustible forest and mineral resources etc.

The Mennonites can give us, without much doubt, a lesson in wisdom and patriotism. They teach us to better appreciate our province, to fix ourselves to it rather than search under other skies for the means of existence.

We have in the Abitibi and Temiskaming millions of acres of still unoccupied

land, waiting for those who would clear it to come and produce a super-abundance of harvests. These lands are in large measure covered by tree species which command enormous prices on all the world markets, a single fact which makes them a precious means of subsistence for new settlers as they wait for the land to begin to produce crops. Several founders of now prosperous villages have advanced themselves as if by magic through the superb Transcontinental railroad, from Nottaway in the east to La Reine west of Abitibi and have realized enviable fortunes in the last ten years; most of the others live happily at ease with their lot; rare today are those who complain of financial difficulty and misery since all useful services have been so well developed, and are held closely by all, so that there is no longer any isolation of the settlers and, therefore, no longer any distress to fear.

Good passable roads link the main business centers of the region; one can move about at high speed by cars on our improved roads in the old parishes of the province, while the Minister of Colonization puts at the disposition of those who settle in the townships substantial grants for the upkeep and improvement of their communication routes or for the opening of new ones.

The same encouraging situation exists in Temiskaming where colonization, now forty years old, has naturally had an advantage in surrounding itself with even more comforts. For the same reason, agricultural progress there is markedly more advanced and suffers nothing in comparison to any province in the Dominion. The Townships of Duhamel, Fabre, Mazenod, among others contain vast areas in culture, covered throughout by bountiful harvests. Only hay is lacking, as elsewhere, because of the great drought of last spring, but there will be enough forage for winter and the surplus cereals are already sold at prices which defy all competition on the Montréal market.

In the two regions of Abitibi and Temiskaming, one meets good municipal organizations, spacious schools, well-appointed hotels, well-stocked stores, banks, boarding houses, restaurants, even amusement halls. One then finds there a life as generous and easy as in the old parishes, and more, a healthy climate and a variety of picturesque landscapes of incomparable beauty.

All these things have not escaped the keen observation of the Mennonites; they jump to the attention of these newcomers; we alone seem to regard them with indifference and, strangely, let them pass into other hands rather than our own.

The Players

The first article, its writer identified only as "H.A.," was published in the year the newspaper began. It was undoubtedly written by Hector Authier, one of its founders and editors. Authier was also active in the Abitibi as a land agent and likely lived there at this time. The submission is a straightforward account of the Mennonite visit and list of the terms contained in the brief they presented to government.

The second article responds to these terms of settlement. It was written by J.H. Paré, another one of founding directors of *l'Abitibi*. Printer and publisher as well, Paré was well-known in Québec journalism, editing *Le Pionnier Canadien* during the winter of 1904-1905, and was owner and editor of *La Justice* and co-owner of *La Compagnie d'Imprimerie générale*. At the time of the Mennonite delegation to Québec, he sat on the governing body of *La Minerve*, an influential journal of long standing in the province, famous for its nationalistic leanings.

The third, anonymous, article from *La Presse* is an effusive hymn to the northern colonization movement and its region. While not averse to the purpose of the Mennonites' visit, it gives an oblique commentary on the suitability of their migration to the province. Its faintly scolding message urges French Canadians to support the nationalistic project of internal colonization. It is very typical of similar accounts extolling the virtues of agrarian life and the promise held by the new lands.

The High Stakes of Colonization in Québec

The Abitibi-Temiskaming region, which spans both Québec and northern Ontario, was one of the last to be opened to agricultural settlement under several programs by the federal and provincial governments. For Québec, however, this northern frontier was also the last in a long social project of internal colonization within Canada which extended from the Gaspé to Alberta (Pelland, 1908).

During the nineteenth century, French Canada had become sensitive, defensive and inward-looking after various attempts by government, business and cultural interests to assimilate them to British or American values, language and customs. Beginning in the first decades of that century, the colonization project became a social movement and a major expression of French Canada's long resistance to assimilation into an alien Anglo-American sea rising around it.

With scant immigration from francophone countries to counterbalance wave after wave of other immigrants arriving in Canada, French Canada watched its former numerical majority and political influence decline under the British regime and afterwards. Cultural survival was then, as now, a central concern of this society and its leaders. Cohesive social customs and reliance on the Church, schools, its particular civil legal regime, and other social institutions became crucial to cultural

survival. A strong defense of agrarianism accompanied this resistance which included extolling the virtues of rural life and farming that would protect the people from dangerous urban and foreign influences.

The crowded St. Lawrence Plain offered no new land for farming. The first major aim of the colonization program was to stem a massive exodus of French Canadians to the cities, or to the United States. There, they were not only rapidly assimilated and lost to Canada, but were exposed to the supposed evils of Protestantism, city life and exploitative industrialists. Government involvement in the form of the internal colonization project was a means of protecting and fostering a growing national identity and extending the territorial presence beyond the St. Lawrence Lowlands (see Drapeau, 1863; Semaines Sociales du Canada, 1944 for accounts of this colonization movement).

A large part of the national identity derived from the deeply-rooted agrarian culture of self-sufficiency which many believed was threatened by the corruption of city life. This agrarian tradition fostered a great emotional attachment to the land and to farming as a way of life, although it was not strongly-developed commercially. This agrarianism was often celebrated in literature (e.g. Lacombe, 1846; Gerin-Lajoie, 1962; Hémon, 1916), and vigorously propagandized by many among the province's religious and social elites. Francophone elected officials, militant churchmen, administrators and other civic leaders such as educators and influential journalists led the crusade of national survival. Therefore, a second goal of the agricultural colonization project was to uphold this agrarian identity under the rallying slogan of *emparons-nous du sol!* (*let us seize the land!*). An example of the use of this slogan is given in the article from *La Presse* above.

Many farm families from the overcrowded seigneurial lands on the St. Lawrence Plain were settled on the newly surveyed and forested uplands, which were also being aggressively developed by the forest industry (Séguin, 1980). Roman Catholic parishes were rapidly established as true colonies, reproducing many of the institutions and social habits of the simple but adequate lifestyle of the "old parishes" in the St. Lawrence Valley. A long procession of zealous missionary/colonizers assisted government land agents in this settlement, often staying to minister to their spiritual needs. Many were trained agronomists, and not a few acquired legendary reputations for their work.

This long agrarian-based colonization movement came to an end only in the late 1940s in Québec. During the Depression years of the 1930s, the ideals and traditions of agrarianism could still be galvanized by clerics and government to settle unemployed and poverty-stricken urban workers on farms in the province's peripheral areas, but by this period with generally dismal results.

As the province urbanized and modernized during the twentieth century and especially during the Quiet Revolution of the 1960s, Québec's intellectuals repudiated the rural and agrarian roots of their identity. However, today a kind of rural renaissance is occurring in the province, and once again the agrarian tradition with its co-operative, collective social values is valorized (Laplante, 1995). Now, after several decades of radical restructuring, modernization and change, successful

commercial farming is both encouraged by Québec and remains active in the cool, wet but productive Abitibi region, where land is still abundant and still cheap.

Analysis

Rapid exploitation of the forest resource and the capture of urban industry by outside interests contributed to the economic, political and cultural marginalization of French Canada in the nineteenth century (Lower, 1936; Bernier and Salée, 1992). With it grew resentment of foreign, generally anglophone, dominance of their ancient and beloved land and its untapped resource potential. This resentment nourished a strong nationalism, especially in rural and remote areas such as the Saguenay, and a defensive and possessive posture towards the land itself as the territorial homeland of a distinct ethnic entity. The influence of nationalist social and government leaders in Québec, particularly clerics and journalists, has always been strong in fanning these sentiments. Countering this tendency has been a powerful appeal to reason, compromise and conciliation with English Canada, held by equally charismatic liberal leaders. The introversion and defensiveness of Québec towards the land and incursions by outsiders, especially regarding development in the north, is sometimes associated with an exclusionary ethnic nationalism. We may ask if the visiting Mennonites were victims of this attitude in the negative response given in the examples above. The following anecdote suggests not.

Ernest Laforce (1944) relates the history of Josephat Jean, a missionary/colonizer who worked in the Lac Castagnier region visited by the Mennonites in 1920. He had earlier been active in a Ruthenian mission in Western Canada but then went to Bosnia during World War I to minister to Ukrainian refugees there. On his return to Canada, he conceived the plan of bringing these Ukrainians to Western Canada. This initiative failed, (through government intransigence, according to Laforce) and Jean then approached the province of Québec for help. Here, the government put several townships in the Lac Castagnier region of Abitibi at his disposal for this purpose. Jean's scheme to settle the Ukrainians in the Abitibi was not achieved, but Laforce, himself closely associated with many of the missionaries and land agents, had no doubt that they would have met with great success in Abitibi. He spoke highly of their endurance, industry and skill as agriculturalists and was convinced that they would easily integrate and blend into "*la nationalité canadienne*," and by this he meant the French Canadian nation.

This incident displays no inherent xenophobia and the story illustrates an important point. It indicates Québec's openness, in principle, to wider colonization of its new agricultural frontier, as long as settlers were willing to adapt to Québec society, its laws and customs. Nor is there any hint of ethnic hostility in editor and land agent Hector Authier's straightforward description of the Mennonite visit. Neither is there any in nationalist intellectual J.H. Paré's cold rejection of the Mennonites' list of privileges.

His article does, however, contain many elements of French Canada's long resentment and suspicion of those who would usurp the land and its resources, impose a foreign language, intrude on its distinctive civil code, itself a mainstay of cultural identity, or interfere with the denominational and linguistic educational truce which had been achieved in the province. Attacks on French schooling from the Manitoba school question and Ontario's notorious Article 17 were still open sores in Québec. French Canadian resistance to the "English war" during the Conscription Crisis of World War I may have put the edge on Paré's mistrust of Mennonite pacifism. Even though the Mennonites *apparently* were not interested in the forest lands of the Abitibi, the article from *La Presse* corroborates resentment of outsiders' domination of the forest resource and exhorts its readers to, literally, seize the land, exploit it, and colonize it.

It appears likely that if the Mennonites had pursued their mission to establish a colony in the Abitibi they would have ultimately met with opposition and disappointment there as they had elsewhere where they had sought to live their own way of life and educate their children in their own German schools. However, it seems that it would not have been through the ethnic hostility they had felt in Manitoba and perhaps through Canada's suspicion of German speakers during World War I. Taschereau's liberal government was prepared to welcome other ethnicities for settlement in the Abitibi, for purposes of economic development. It was a liberal vision which not all in the province shared.

Québec's northern settlers and the conservative Mennonites would have recognized many similar traits in each other; they were all peaceable, family-oriented, pious agrarians, whose simple, unassuming and co-operative lifestyles were closely bound to the land on which they lived in self-sufficiency, separated from a wider urban society. However, for French Canadians, this attachment to the land and an agrarian life was not only inextricably bound to their own cultural survival, but to their national aspirations as well. To many of French Canada's leaders these have always taken precedence over all other attributes of identity. If the Mennonites had not abandoned their attempt to settle in Québec at this stage, resistance to their requests for privileges seems more likely have been in defence of a still-precarious separate legitimacy within an encroaching industrial, materialistic and anglophone society.

Acknowledgments

The author is grateful to *Journal of Mennonite Studies* reviewer, Prof. David Burley of the University of Winnipeg, for an incisive contribution to this discussion. Thanks also to David Wood for his kind encouragement to pursue this work and especially to John Warkentin for his stimulating discussion of and critical commentary on an earlier draft. Both are Emeritas Professors of York University, Toronto, where this work was written.

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