

Are Jews Of Quebec An Endangered Species?*

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Résumé

Saul Hayes se demande si depuis le 15 novembre 1976 les Juifs du Québec constituent un peuple en danger. Reprenant la suite des événements qui ont porté le Parti Québécois au pouvoir l'auteur souligne la double objection juive au nouveau régime: opposition directe à l'idée du séparatisme (très compréhensible pour ceux qui connaissent la perspective historique) et antagonisme envers un changement du libéralisme en socialisme. Saul Hayes se sert d'un certain nombre de parallèles historiques pour illustrer la complexité du problème. Ainsi bien que son étude s'appuie sur des statistiques sûres il finit par qualifier la situation de "très fluide". Aussi les conseils des intellectuels juifs ne doivent ni allarmer la communauté ni être trop optimistes. Il s'agit en somme d'être alerte et de ne pas devenir, comme dans d'autres situations historiques les victimes . . .

On November 15, 1976, the electorate of the Province of Quebec, Canada's second largest in population, spoke unequivocally from fishing village to mining areas, from small towns to large urban centres, and unmistakably turned away from the Liberal Party. It accepted the Parti Quebecois, a relative newcomer, and gave it 40% of the popular vote and 71 of the 110 seats comprising Quebec's Legislative Assembly. The polarization was at once evident. The victors received only a small percentage of the Anglophone votes but much to the surprise of many analysts triumphed overwhelmingly in the overall situation.

Rather oddly, the issue presented by the Liberal Party in justification of an election, which was the patriation of the constitution, was not brought up during the entire election period. Le Parti Quebecois, which submerged the issue of separatism, was attacked by its opponents on the issue it did not raise. The Liberals' strategy, which backfired, was evident throughout and the wisdom of the Parti Quebecois strategy was vindicated by the pre-electoral and post-electoral polls which indicated an anti-separatist attitude. Indeed, even the election results themselves showed a large majority opinion voting for federalist option apart from the analysis of what the Parti Quebecois voters themselves favoured, which was defeat of the Liberals and against separatism.

*This paper was originally presented to the Institute of Jewish Affairs, London, England.

The Jewish community of some 115,000 people, the largest in Canada, reside principally in Anglophone constituencies and are almost wholly against separatism, against the Parti Quebecois and afraid of radical social changes which it anticipates the Party will engender.

The Jewish community of Montreal being a very non-homogeneous people have one thing in common: anticipation of disaster. History has been unkind to them and the memory of abuse, degradation, pogroms lingers on.

Salo Baron several times characterized Jewish history as being lachrymose.

Now, at this juncture in Quebec's history where anti-Semitism is at a very low level, where the Jewish issue never appeared in pre-election slogans, in election rallies, etc., the community is not solaced. It fears the unknown to a greater degree than perhaps do other ethnic elements of the population. In company, however, with other Canadians it is apprehensive about the economic situation, the uncertainty of inflationary rises, the one-sidedness of our vital economy where prosperity depends wholly on the maximum success of a buoyant export market. When all of these ills coincide with the election of a party whose aims and objectives include separation, then the concatenation of all forces, even though many predate November 15, 1976 by a decade or more, makes Quebec Jews a very unhappy people.

To borrow a witticism, that though they know that every silver lining has a cloud, some clarity and precision will soon replace the murky atmosphere of guess work, imagination, emotional distress. Quebec is still a mighty civilized place.

Immediately before November 15, and certainly since, the Jewish community of Quebec (99.5% live in greater Montreal) lived up to Phillip Guedella's witty, if sad observation, that every morning Jews immediately feel their pulses.

While the initial excitement of post-November 15 excitement has somewhat abated, the mood can still be described as highly emotional, at times one of panic, and among groups whose provenance was Nazi-dominated Europe, fear-stricken and apprehensive that it can happen here!

But first, it is useful to describe some of the salient demographic composition of Quebec Jewry. It exists in a milieu where 25% of the over six million people are non-French Canadian. 65% are native born, circ. 75,000; 15,000 are victims of Nazi persecution; 9,000 are Yordim who left

Israel from 1960 and on; 12,000 are Francophones from the Mediterranean littoral — mainly Morocco; the remainder are from the United States of whom quite a number are academics and people in senior executive positions in industry. The aging population of those 65 years of age and over constitute 12% of the population though the comparable figures of the general population is assumed to be about 8%. 20% are at, or below, the poverty line, i.e., taking the accepted governmental figures of annual income of what constitutes poverty. There are many well-to-do citizens, including millionaires, and a great number in the professions. Immigration to Canada has declined in recent years. Statistics of emigration as a result of the November 15 election are difficult to estimate since emigration has always been a feature of Jewish (indeed, general) Quebec life, be it the brain-drain of intellectuals and doctors, dentists, or those who leave for the southern United States because of the harsh winter climate of Montreal or for various other reasons of which aliyah to Israel is by no means a significant factor. There has been, since the November election results, a flight of capital, which phenomenon the Jewish community shared in common with the French Canadian, Anglo-Celtic and other ethnic groups. There has also been among big business, mostly controlled by American and Quebec's Anglo-Celtic population, a cessation of normal business expansion which the Jewish entrepreneurs share. Some non-French Canadian businesses have shifted their plants to Ontario or New York State but it is difficult to assess how much of this is due to the rise of the Parti Quebecois, since it has been going on long before the Fall of 1976. Indeed, outside of Quebec, mainly Canadian businesses or new capital have migrated to the United States due to generally sluggish business activity in Canada.

One must be cautious, at this stage, of generalizations. One just does not know how many people are moving themselves, or their businesses, out of Quebec nor, of the ones known, what the motivations truly are.

While the Jewish facet of Quebec's troubled times is fastened on the issue of an imposition of French language and apprehension of troubles in the future because of the fear of a growing and more militant French Canadian nationalist movement, it is not out of place to review some history of the consistent lack of unity in Canada's political history. One can almost paraphrase Jeremiah's lament that there is no peace by encapsulating Canada's history as "unity, unity and there is no unity".

It is interesting to recall that apart from the rebellion of 1836-7 (in what is now Ontario) led by William Lyon Mackenzie, and that (in what is now

Quebec) led by Papineau, there have been other serious separatist movements. A very active movement for annexation to the United States was fostered mainly by Anglophone Montreal merchants in the middle of the last century. Nova Scotia and New Brunswick considered Confederation a disaster and the rumblings against it have not been entirely stilled with the passage of time. These are only of historic interest since the final quarter of the twentieth century in no way mirrors the nineteenth, but people should be reminded that the Canadian experience has not been one long passionate love affair interrupted only by the fretting complaints of French Canada.

In the climate of fear, the Jewish community forgets that all western industrial societies (yes, even Sweden) are facing tremendous tasks over some of which they have no control (e.g. the price of oil). It is also becoming increasingly clear that many of the future difficulties of Quebec — an increasingly aging population, an alarming emigration of the younger element (pre-dating calls for separatism), a declining birth rate, relatively low productivity, loss of a work ethos (noticeable also in many other societies), very poor worker-employer relationships, are not capable of being solved by decree. Nor would the results have been obviated by the defeat of the separatist party.

What will not disappear is the determination of a group of respected intellectuals and professionals to advocate that the management of these problems be programmed in an independent Quebec. No one should question the honesty of those who believe this nor those who are convinced it will worsen matters. The duty right now is to recognize the unequivocal mandate given to the Parti Quebecois to govern a province of Canada. Separatism is indeed a very serious issue of enormous magnitude but those who disbelieve in it and disfavour its aims will not defeat it by preventing the widely acclaimed “people’s choice” the chance to prove its worth as a Government.

The Jewish community leadership is certainly facing a difficult situation but certain postulates can be advanced.

1. Anti-Semitism has never been at a lower ebb and the Parti Quebecois leadership are for the most part a very civilized group with great intellectual attainments and standards of decency.

2. Quebec has a very advanced Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms.

Individual and minority human rights actually have been legislatively protected in Quebec since long before Confederation (1867). In 1975,

Quebec Human Rights legislation was codified and extended in the Quebec Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms (Bill 50). In this Charter, the National Assembly affirmed in the preamble that "all human beings are equal in worth and dignity, and are entitled to equal protection of the law."

Article 10 provides that "Every person has a right to full and equal recognition and exercise of his human rights and freedoms, without distinction, exclusion or preference, based on race, colour, sex, civil status, religion, political convictions, language, ethnic or national origin or social conditions. Discrimination exists where such a distinction, exclusion or preference has the effect of nullifying or impairing such right."

As well, Article 43, "Persons belonging to ethnic minorities have a right to maintain and develop their own cultural interests with the other members of their group" which explicitly entrenches minority rights in Quebec. This Article of the Code provides collective rights alongside individual rights. However, history justifies cynics who assert that unless a community continuously respects law then what is given today may be removed tomorrow.

3. It is much too early to offer even an educated guess as to whether Quebec's separation from Canada is inevitable and if it be, the question immediately arises of the future for the Jewish community in an independent sovereign state. It is not Sinaitic revelation and there are no historical experiences to prove that Jews can live peacefully and prosperously only in Anglophone countries.

4. It is much too early to be certain at all of the future of the separatist movement. Jews are not alone in deploring its possibility as are — so far, the majority of French Canadians.

5. It is by no means a foregone conclusion that because the Parti Quebecois won an election that it will win the next one.

6. Experts disagree as to whether Quebec as a sovereign republic would be economically viable. It is hazardous to pursue this and to then ask even if it is an economically viable state whether the peculiar Jewish occupational classifications in which Jews find themselves will necessarily flourish. But this question worries many Jews and the individual answers to it will decide what individuals will do. The question may be premature but many members of the Jewish community are now both asking and replying to it.

7. Jews who are nationalists to the core find it difficult to deny French Canada its feelings for the retention of its culture and its dread of being

lost as a "nation", i.e., in the French meaning of the term (common origin, common language, inhabiting the same territory).

Some of the principal issues facing the Jewish community, qua community, are presently confounded in an unreal atmosphere.

LANGUAGE

The Government has not yet pronounced itself on the language issue except in very general terms in which most Jews concur, i.e., French must be the language of official communications and of work. It is indeed presently the only official language of Quebec (however, some very respectable constitutional law experts believe this law is ultra vires Quebec's power and if challenged could be so decided).

By the time the reader sees this article, the Quebec Government will have presented to the Legislative Assembly (Quebec's Parliament) its views on language in a White Paper.

After the White Paper is presented it will invite the entire Quebec community to present views and oral, or written submissions. After briefs have been examined the law will be passed.

The Jewish community will present a brief through the Canadian Jewish Congress reminding the Government that the members of the Montreal Jewish community, except for the French, are the most bilingual section of the population. It will probably warn the Government that nevertheless, in general, the larger the business, the easier language changes are to effect; the smaller the business, the more difficult it becomes.

Consequently, the Government, in drafting its proposals regarding the language of business, should make this necessary distinction, and exempt small businesses from the necessity of making changes rapidly, especially in those cases where there would be little significant effect upon the ultimate goals of the Government.

SOCIAL SERVICE

The Montreal Jewish community fears that, consonant with the new Government's priorities, diminution of services will affect all social agencies, non-Jewish, Jewish, Catholic, Protestant, Greek, Ukrainian, Italian — in short, all.

AGING POPULATION

The most serious social problem facing the Jewish community is the disproportionate number of the elderly population. This has necessitated a major emphasis on community services to the aged — both preventive and institutional. Montreal Jews have developed major recreation and other

ambulatory services for the well aged, or comparatively well aged, but the critical problem is related to those who are chronically ill. In a previous report submitted to the Ministère des Affaires Sociales, the Allied Jewish Community Services referred to the hundreds of individuals who are awaiting admission to Maimonides Hospital and Home for the Aged, the largest community institution. In addition to the intensive medical and nursing care given at Maimonides, there is an urgent need for nursing home type services. The urgency of the need is indicated by the fact that the Montreal Jewish community is currently spending \$350,000.00 annually in purchasing services from private nursing homes. This situation would be relieved by using a centrally located former Veteran's hospital to unify services.

FOSTER RESIDENCES FOR SENIOR CITIZENS

As an alternative and a supplementary resource to the large apartment buildings, which require considerable time to build, there is great need for development and support of foster home accommodation for older people in private homes.

POVERTY

A study conducted for the community by the Allied Jewish Community Services in 1972 indicated that more than 15% of the Jewish population of Montreal lives below the poverty line. The report indicated a growing trend, which was validated by an independent study recently conducted by McGill University, which showed that there is now 20% of the Jewish population who are in the poverty cycle. (The Jewish population of Montreal comprises approximately 115,000 individuals.) The poor people are largely elderly and unattached individuals, or low income families, all of whom are having great difficulty in managing on their present resources. They require a variety of communal health and welfare services. (Data on Social Services derived largely from AJCS memorandum).

JEWISH EDUCATION

The prevalent universal doctrine in North America whether it be founded on Church and State philosophy, or a democratic order, is not to favour denominational or any private schools. Quebec Province because of a long and traditionally based educational system run by the clergy found it relatively easy without sacrificing democratic principles to pass legislation favouring private schooling by subventions out of school taxes.

There is very little church influence left and most, if not all, of the classical (French clerically manned schools with a highly Christological content) colleges were victims of Quebec's Revolution tranquille of the 1960's. There does remain an historic foundation for private schools being financed out of school tax revenue. As a result, since 1968 the Jewish Day Schools received about 60% of their budget for secular education from School Taxes and thus resulted in what is easily the highest proportion of children of school age in North America in attendance at Jewish Day Schools. It is perhaps close to 50% in the early stages of primary education and averages 35% of the total Jewish population of school age.

When Bill 37 was adopted a few years ago, it provided the possibility for private schools to enjoy an Associate Status with existing school boards. The Jewish Day Schools entered into such an agreement with the Protestant School Board of Greater Montreal as well as with other Protestant School Boards in the Montreal region. To those unfamiliar with the unique crazy-quilt pattern of public education in the Province of Quebec one can simplify matters by stating that "Protestant" has by now come to mean all non-Catholic schools. Following the adoption of the Private Education Act (Bill 56), Jewish schools were informed that the Associate Status would be progressively phased out, and the Jewish Day Schools would have to apply for grants under Bill 56 which recommends which private schools are in the public interest and thus able to enjoy subventives from tax revenues. Under the Associate Status Agreement, i.e., Bill 37, there was little interference with the internal operation of Jewish schools by the contracting board and none from the Service Général de l'Enseignement Privé. At the elementary level, kindergarten, grades 1, 2 and 3 are under the Private Education Act while grades 4, 5 and 6 are still under Associate Status with the Protestant School Boards. At the high school level, grades 7, 8 and 9 are under the jurisdiction of the GEP and grades 10 and 11 are under the Associate Status with the Protestant School Boards. Some of our newest schools are totally under the Private Education Act.

Dealings with the Service General have, however, been difficult at times. But the difficulties predated by years the advent to power of the Parti Quebecois.

Many matters are being left to the discretion of public servants and it is sometimes difficult to explain to them the "raison d'être" of the Jewish Day School Movement. This difficulty is augmented by the fact that Montreal's Jewish community has been basically an anglophone com-

munity for 150 years. Nevertheless, it has always had a high competence in French programming and is now dedicated to a bilingual program in order to render its students proficient in the French language and enable them to make contributions within the French milieu as significant as those they have already made within the English milieu.

In a recent meeting arranged by the Canadian Jewish Congress with Premier-Elect Rene Levesque there were indications of some understanding. He was apprised of these positions.

1. Given the existence of a confessional school system on the island of Montreal and the apparent desire for its retention, the status of the Jewish Day School under the law should be respected and should not be tied solely to the discretion of the Ministry of Education.

2. The acknowledgement by Jewish schools of the reality in Quebec is sincere. It is reflected in the French programming which Jewish Day Schools are adopting. It will improve with the training of adequate linguistic teachers and more experience in programming.

3. The submission further requested that some demand of permanent financial structure be guaranteed enabling schools fully to develop their potential and their programming on a long term basis.

Though the Jewish schools might be described as private schools in a highly technical sense, one would be led into semantic error in applying to them the general connotation of private schools.

Such schools are the public Jewish school system and no selection is made in accepting students. Every member of the community who desires to enter the Jewish school system, regardless of his ability to pay, is enrolled.

NORTH AFRICAN JEWRY IN MONTREAL

How does the important Jewish Francophone community respond to the changes in the political climate? A former Moroccan, well educated and successful in business, puts it this way and he may well represent the preponderant Francophone population.

"An immigrant and a Francophone originating from Morocco, I have lived through similar upheavals in my country of origin but I would like to make my feelings known as a Jew and as an active member of the community.

"It is obvious and clear to me that we are going towards a new Quebec which is not the Quebec we have known until now. How it is going to be shaped, in what political context, I am unable to describe today. But one

thing I know is that we must not disregard this problem, nor must we be panicky or fight the sentiments of Quebecers, which would only make us their enemies. Jews have been living in Quebec for many generations and have been blessed with an easy and quiet life mainly because of the good relationship with both the political parties and the politicians. It would therefore be foolish to try to fight the sentiments of a legitimate majority.

“A change in regime, a change of political parties, is the way of life the world over and the Jewish community has always paid the price whenever they found themselves on the losing side. Even in Russia where the Jews espoused the revolutionary ideal to escape Czarist oppression, they paid a heavy price in the long run. In France, Leon Blum’s Popular Front gave rise to a vicious anti-Semitic reaction. In Morocco, where it would have been better to fight against independence, to retain the French protectorate, Jews were careful not to take sides and were in a better position when the independence was proclaimed.

“It is, therefore, incumbent upon us to study the situation and to follow developments of the new Government. Each member of the Jewish community will find a solution to his own situation. As leaders, we have to counsel and guide the members of our community without giving them grounds for fear nor false appeasement.”

HOW DOES ONE SUMMARIZE A VERY FLUID SITUATION?

I — There exists fear that minority rights or customary attitudes may be eroded, not by vendetta or prejudice, but by the positive manifestations of Quebec nationalism guided by the Parti Quebecois. Jews and other minorities are comfortable with federalism and don’t want a leap into the unknown.

II — There exists a haunting suspicion that the election results are a prelude to socialism. Even if the Jews don’t know that history is replete with examples of what Judd Teller called “Anti-Semitism: The Scapegoat of Revolution.” They are not solaced by examples of Sweden, the U.K. all with Labour governments at many stages and for decades at a time. They do not analogize with Israel although the French Canadian national socialists used it as a model.

III — Jews have long memories and a very expensive education remembering Amalek by whatever name he bears. But in the short run the memory fails to acknowledge that practically all of Quebec’s ills as they affect the total population and are troublesome particularly to Jews (profound changes in social welfare, indecisiveness by authorities on the

private school financing in which Jewish Day Schools are a part, plans for making French the regnant language — francisation — other language issues) all predate the November 15, 1976 election by ten years and some by two or three.

IV — Jews are apprehensive about their children's future even when they accept their own. A very large number of Jews will remain even if their reading of the future spells radical changes. Their motto is *J'y suis, J'y reste*. But their children and grandchildren are restless and those in the process of career making are very ambivalent at this moment. If a trickle of youth becomes a flood, Montreal will become a city of older and old people.

V — Patterns of life do not change as rapidly as legislation. Jewish Montreal is in the mainstream of an anglophone world. Its connections are preponderantly with other communities of Canada and the United States and not with the francophone world.

VI — In the present uncertainty, emotional stimuli are replacing attitudes based on known facts and educated guess work. It seems that there is little comfort in the fact that most problems of dislocation and economic instability affect the total population. If it is normal to be guided by a *sauve qui peut* reaction, the Jews of Montreal show no abnormality.

It is impossible to purchase unclouded crystal balls to reply to such questions. Will French Canada itself defeat the Parti Quebecois at the next election? In the interim will irreparable damage be done to Quebec's economy? Will the hot heads and emotionally-charged members of the Parti Quebecois be a spent force as the Government faces the inexorable laws of economics and realise the coping stones of their separatist movement are lodged in sand and romanticism? Will the community leadership of Jewish Montreal be prudent but wise, be sophisticated but effective, illustrate stability and not spread panic?

Perhaps all articles on the predictions of the future of Quebec Jewry are reckless exercises and can do no more than capture a mood at the moment the words are written.

Meanwhile, the community's leadership exists and does what it deems cogent, always remembering that in such a card game, minority groups do not hold many trumps.

This writer is convinced that the Jewish community will not rewrite Psalm 137 to read, "By the rivers of the St. Lawrence, there we sat down, yea we wept".