

Is There A Future For The Montreal Jewish Community?

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. . . Bergson noted that in history there are "eternal recurrences". Is Quebec separatism a recurrence whose effects preclude the survival of Montreal Jewry and pluralistic democracy which enabled them to flourish as a once dynamic and resplendent community?

On November 15, 1976, with 41 percent of the popular vote, the electoral victory of the Parti-Quebecois exploded in Canada with megaforce Future Shock. Despite last minute attempts by federalists to stem this tide of separatism, the opponents of this divisive force failed. To the dismay of the anglophones and allophones, the P.Q.s or pequistes discarded their good government platform and set in motion a series of draconian statements and socio-economic laws and regulations that have resulted in external and internal flight by many who see themselves as Canadians as well as Quebecers. The new reality of French Quebec seemed to be fulfilling the worst fears of minorities and other citizens concerned with human freedom and civil rights.¹ And for those with a sense of history, events in Quebec suggest a reverse swing of the pendulum toward outmoded 19th Century political and social patterns.

Like other minorities, Montreal Jews are drifting today, in dread, especially in reaction to the outpouring of repressive regulations of the P.Q. government's bills, such as in the language law, Bill 101 and its Official Language Police, which, for example, encourages citizens now to delate on businesses which do not meet the regulations of French-only signs in advertising and business and to expose "illegal children" attending English schools in violation of restrictive language rules.

To all intents and purposes, ethnic survival for non-francophones—who once comprised 18 percent of the population of six million Quebecers, mostly residing in the city of Montreal in 1976—in a monolingual, monolithic French Quebec now and in the future will be precarious at best. It appears that the future freedom of choice in education, work and sectarian communal survival as autonomous

units is dim, if present pressures continue toward complete francization, Quebec Independence and the consequent balkanization of Canada.²

Cultural pluralism in Quebec is disappearing, a relic of the unleashed French Quebec cultural imperialism that resembles other nationalisms throughout North America, Europe and the Third World.

The Quebec version of "national socialism" is particularly pernicious because it has achieved electoral control of the legislature or National Assembly for the legitimate enactment of laws which compel the forced acceptance of francization on penalty of prison and fines in the public, economic, social, cultural and educational sectors of society. Which is to say, in Quebec it is French *uber alles*.† To all of which the previous federal liberal government reacted with diffidence and often ambivalent response to verbal and legal pequiste secessionism. The question may be thus rephrased: If Jews conform and adapt to Quebec francization, what kind of a future society will they have to live in?

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¹ Rene Levesque. *An Option for Quebec*. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1968.

Leon Dion. *Quebec and The Unfinished Revolution*. Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 1976.

² Douglas H. Fullerton. *The Dangerous Delusion: Quebec's Independence Obsession*. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1978.

† In 1977, the Parti-Quebecois government issued its Language Charter which spells out the global as well as specific intentions to give French hegemony in all spheres and sectors of Quebec society. The procrustean rules of Bill 101, a product of this

What is happening in Quebec is similar to that occurring in other countries since 1945 in which emerging nationalism and socialism triumphed or became renascent. In Quebec, the effect has been traumatic on political, economic and social structures; the impact of cultural controls is to condition minority residents and corporate groups either to conform to the new model, accept the restrictions of a unilingual society or choose alternatives of flight and emigration. Will Montreal Jewry decide to remain in French Quebec and forfeit the dreams of an open, equal opportunity society which brought their immigrant progenitors to resettle here more than 200 years ago?

The problems of the anglophone and allophone minorities in Quebec have already captured the attention of the popular media and some of the more serious journals in the United States.³ Living in the eye of the Quebecois hurricane puts Montreal Jews under severe stress in their personal, social, business, professional and communal relationships.** Official leadership in the Jewish community chose a very low profile ever since Charles Bronfman dared on election eve of '76 to issue warnings against possible P.Q. victory. To speak out for unity in public is considered either heretic, stupid or unusually courageous. Freedom of speech by opponents of the pequistes and parental choice in

Charter, creates anomalies and ironies even among francophone institutions like the daily newspaper, *La Presse* and the Provincial Bank, both of whose managements refused to accede to the Q.F.L. to establish a head office francization committee in view of their obvious French status that existed for previous generations. Roger Lemlin, publisher of *La Presse* has accused the separatist government of "Iranizing" Quebec.

³ R. Wisse and I. Cotler, "Quebec's Jews: Caught in the Middle," *Commentary*, Sept., 1977 and *Response*, Jan. 1978. More than ever, Jews are immersed in the "exquisite dilemma," as Alan Rose of the Canadian Jewish Congress typifies the crisis caused by francization.

** Symptomatic response to this stress follows the characteristics of powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, self-estrangement and isolation de-

education in the public services for the English population are about as rare now as a bilingual traffic sign.

The subliminal purpose of the pequistes in power aims also to condition their franco-phone constituents (and resistant non-franco-phones) to accept the pequiste interpretation of historical necessity, namely that restitution be made for the humiliations and disadvantages that for 300 years have kept the French Quebecois majority in an inferior "have not" position until 1976.⁴ This is not the first instance of contrived history as other groups have demonstrated elsewhere.

This pequiste reconstruction of "French Canadian" (an identification now discarded in favour of "French Quebec") history leads to inevitable secession from Canada and the establishment of a sovereign state locked into a corporate French republic. In 1968, the Liberal federal government of Prime Minister Trudeau, then embraced by the Two Solitudes as a mediator par excellence, sought to solve this dilemma by a policy of enlightened but forced bilingualism in the public services. But in Quebec this policy only fanned the fires of Quebecois separatism, not linguistic parity.

The pequistes' planned social and political changes represent the diminution of freedom of choice for individuals and corporate groups. Cultural group autonomy for minorities is subjected to a spurious Quebec

scribed by M. Seaman, "On the Meaning of Alienation," *American Sociological Review*, 24: 1959. Among Montreal Jews and minorities, stress and dread are expressed in countless ways. And the government pressure is relentless on parents and schools who disregard rules for attendance in English, or the ration of instruction in French in Jewish parochial schools, or the threat of the government to nationalize the Asbestos Corp. at a forced price. How safe are personal savings, or retirement funds, and access to one's capital? . . .

⁴ Pierre Vallieres, *White Niggers of America*. With Laurier Lapierre Introduction. Joan Pinkham trans. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1971.

Mason Wade, *The French Canadians, 1760-1967*. Toronto: Macmillan, Volume 1: 1769-1911, revised edition, 1975. Vol. 2: 1911-1967 revised edition, 1975.

collectivity which thereby, it is argued, will redeem history as well as afford the guarantee of the future survival of the North American French Quebec island of five million French people surrounded by an English ocean of 240 million.

The unanswered questions are whether the countervailing forces for Canadian unity among the English majorities outside Quebec will disrupt Canada. There are struggles for regional priorities and provincial control of resources between western provinces and the Federal Government as well. The inevitable impact of contemporary events in the world caused by OPEC and other conflicts affecting political and cultural traditions and authority, may lead toward further national dissensus, and perhaps violence, a state of affairs hinted at in the campaign scenarios presented to the population by both contending powers for unity and separatism in the Federal Elections of May 22.⁵

The uncertain results of the May 22 Federal elections found Canada in a renewed stalemate. The Progressive Conservatives squeaked into power with a minority of 135 seats. The defeated Liberal Party, which lost its majority, won only 115 seats, mostly in Quebec. On June 4th, the P.C.'s led by 40-year-old Joe Clark will attempt to effect a conservative program of decentralization of power, reverse the nationalization of petroleum and other resources, and generally be more conciliatory in leadership especially toward Quebec. The question of whether Clark's conservative government will stand up to or against the Parti Quebecois thrust toward secession remains critical and unpredictable.

In Quebec the Liberals received an overwhelming popular vote, winning 67 out of the 75 seats in the House of Commons. Clearly the defeated Prime Minister Pierre Elliot Trudeau had persuaded his fellow Quebecers to his campaign priority of unity and strong leadership. Quebec separatists in the Sacred Party won only six seats, and were repudiated by the

electorate. The fact that the P.S.'s could only garner two seats also could be interpreted as proof of the split between English and French Canada, or as proof of the West-East regional power split, or any other type of polarization. Pundits and plebians remain puzzled, and the exquisite dilemma for minorities caught in the separatism turmoil is only intensified.

Meanwhile the score of businesses and manufacturing plants leaving Quebec now stands at 350. By 1985, some 240,000 jobs will have been lost to Quebec workers because of the exodus. The impact of such losses has already unbalanced school populations, social and cultural associations.

The imminent P.Q. referendum seeking a mandate for Sovereignty-Association will generate further uncertainty if not worse erosion by emigration. Clark's minority government will probably last no more than 18 months before the country goes to the polls looking for strong leadership and solutions to Quebec's secessionist disruption of Canada's security and survival. It appears that a direct Quebec move to leave Canada in the present situation might lead to an almost wartime coalition of the P.C.'s, Liberals and N.D.P. National Parties to face this threat.

In this context, therefore, and the continuing impact on the economic security and civil rights of Quebecers, the question of Jewish communal survival in Montreal becomes very acute. Before the overt, intimidating attacks of Bill 101 (and the other government White Papers on Education, Leisure, Culture, Publishing, the Arts and Science), Quebec Jews had started to emigrate. The terrifying violence of the Quebec Liberation Front (FLQ) in 1970 did much to arouse Jews and others to the threat and implications of forced change and expropriation in Quebec's liberation movement, some of whose fringe elements were responsible for British Trade Commissioner, James Cross' kidnapping and the Pierre Laporte murder during the October '70 crisis and are now returning from a ten-year exile in France to be received in Quebec as popular heroes.

The FLQ Manifesto of 1970 issued while the

⁵ Ramsey Cook, *French-Canadian Nationalism: An Anthology*. Toronto: Macmillan, 1969.

country was under martial law named a number of very important Jewish and anglo-phone leaders and their corporate enterprises as enemies of French Quebec. This may account for the fears behind the removal of head offices and capital of Establishment leaders from Montreal, despite titular participation in communal life. This emigration of wealthy individuals and/or their assets out of Quebec was not lost sight of in the newspapers, and for that matter, by members of the entire non-francophone as well as francophone population.*** All these are actually lessons in living out the human aspects of the exquisite dilemma in Montreal, Quebec and Canada.

If the present political situation is not reversed or corrected, Montreal Jewry is likely therefore to become a residual group under severe constraints, to say the least. For example, the Jewish communities of Quebec City and Sherbrooke, which were once fairly large, have already become since 1947 miniscule in number and in power. The few Jews there behave like an updated adaptation of the Spanish Marranos of the 15th century, although the sword that hangs over them is cultural racism, not religious fanaticism.

What troubles Montreal Jewish leaders and members is whether it will be good for Jews and their institutions to accept the price of ghettoization in French Quebec. This question is more unsettling than the internecine conflicts and struggles surrounding the proposed merger of Montreal's two major community organizations, the fund-raising body, the Allied Jewish Community Services, and the public relations forum and spokesman for Jewry, the Canadian Jewish Congress.

*** To quote part of the FLQ Manifesto: "We live in a society of terrorized slaves, terrorized by the large owners like Steinberg, Clark, Bronfman, Smith, Neapole, Timmins, Geoffrion, J.J. Levesque, Hershorn, Thompson, Nesbitt, Desmarais, Kierans. . ." The three Jewish magnates named by the FLQ have not forgotten this warning, nor has the Jewish community and its lay and professional leadership, with the inevitable sense of alienation and dislocation by the Jewish population and its leaders, whose influence and power in Quebec have become negligible.

In 1977, they sponsored the elitistic creation of the Jewish Community Research Institute (J.C.R.I.). It undertook research and study into Jewish population moods and attitudes in direct response to the pequiste victory, a response which most of the Jewish community hardly perceived as appropriate or relevant to the oppressive and manipulative acts of the government in power. The dissension caused by the J.C.R.I. within the Jewish community led to open strife between the executive officers and the impeachment in 1978 of Dr. M. Schwartzben, president of the Eastern Region, Canadian Jewish Congress and led to the J.C.R.I.'s dissolution in April '79. Jewish folks' opinion about the J.C.R.I. due to its imperviousness to their fears was about as low as the pequiste official indifference to Jewish priorities and goals.

The opposition Liberal Party leader, Claude Ryan, has already stated that he will modify some of the rules in the P.Q.'s present francization program if elected to power, albeit on a low key and more liberal basis—whatever that means. It is too early (or too late) to estimate Ryan's moderating effect on francization regulations even if he rejects separatism for Quebec.

What is emerging in Jewish communal institutions is the reality of cultural assimilation and political francization. *Le Fait Francais* has caught up with Montreal Jewry.⁶ Except for most Montreal rabbis, so far,[†] none of the Jewish social-cultural-health service institutions can expect to recruit professional leadership or practitioners from other parts of Canada or the United States.

There are several reasons for this fact: first, the health and social service institutions are

⁶ B.G. Sack, *History of the Jews in Canada*. Montreal: Canadian Jewish Congress, 1945.

[†] Until now mainly American-trained rabbis have served in Montreal's synagogues and temples. In Feb. 1979, the Sephardic community brought its Chief Rabbi, David Sabbah, from Morocco to preside over its religious enclave. This step suggests the possible sources for Montreal Jewry's lay and professional manpower in the future, if the dangerous rate of intermarriage among North African youth does not destroy the enclave.

now "public establishments," no longer sectarian and selective in their policy and leadership. They are under the Quebec government's control since 1973 when the Liberal government of Robert Bourassa in Bill 65, Chapter 48, known as the Act to Establish the Health and Social Services of Quebec, led to their social expropriation.

Despite the window-dressing of local social-economic ethnic boards, the francization of these agencies and the influx of francophone staff on various functional and administrative levels call for a "French-only" approach in dealing with bureaucratic regulations and procedures for budgeting and service developments. The Jewish community itself will be increasingly pressed to find lay and professional leaders who have French language skills as a priority, as well as empathy for, and with, French values and attitudes.

In 1970, for example, when a change took place in the executive leadership of the Baron de Hirsch Institute—Jewish Family Services of Montreal, Solomon Brownstein was recruited from New Jersey. When he left four years later, Mike Yarosky, an indigenous, bilingual McGill-trained M.S.W. director was employed. When the latter became Montreal's official "Man In Quebec" to rebuild contacts and influence with the pequistes,* he was replaced by Leon Ouadkine who received his basic European training in Paris, and was especially *persona grata* to the regional health and social service council of the Ministry of Social Affairs.

When the professional leader at the YM-WHA changed jobs in 1979, an ex-Israeli replaced Harry Kosansky. It is unlikely when the present chiefs of the Maimonides Home and Hospital and the Jewish General Hospital retire that any outsider will come to Montreal. Any professional who wants to relocate in Montreal must now fulfill the language and

professional corporation requirements of Bills 101 and 250, or get special government permission for a limited sojourn of three to six years. His children will be at risk in regard to freedom of choice involving their education and their future careers in Quebec where reverse discrimination is now the vogue.

The question is, would anybody come to Quebec where there are so many social and political crises disaffecting its minorities? And this question applies not only to professionals in Jewish social services. It applies, for example, to the refusal of multi-national corporations to retain their head offices in Montreal because of discrimination in language against English head office staff and excessive income taxes for their managerial and executive personnel. This is only part of the extravagant cure the pequistes have stated they feel is worth paying for Quebecois independence and to redeem their inferiority status once and for all. Double-digit unemployment and cost-of-living rates are escalating as consequences.

Apart from the economic entropy of the pequiste posture, what kind of natural north-south lay and professional continuity of interchange of ideas and social development are possible for Jews or others if the basic orientation now in French Quebec is either isolationist or toward European systems and Third World structures?

It is fair to say that the social-cultural and economic milieu of Montreal and Quebec will never be the same regardless of the change from a liberal to minority federal government on May 22. The subsequent Quebec Referendum on Sovereignty-Association expected in late 1980 probably will be inconclusive, exacerbating and aggravating the exquisite dilemma for Jews and other minorities. The severe decline in the anglophone student population, according to the Protestant School Board of Greater Montreal, seems irreversible. By 1984 the drop in enrollment expected by this English group will be from 38,500 students to 11,000. In the Catholic English community a comparable drop in enrollment is predicted. The resultant brain-drain is and will continue

* Yarosky's appointment to direct the J.C.R.I. and be the community's liaison in Quebec barely survived a two-year effort at rebuilding contacts and pipelines, to no avail. He has recycled himself to direct the Jewish National Fund of Canada.

to be happening among the minority groups.** This anglophone and allophone demographic decline is at a far greater rate than the natural birth rate loss.

The political confrontations which have constantly plagued the public and private lives of Quebecers since November 1976, and the accelerating tensions and pressures for francization of all institutions and lifestyles point to the probability that the Jewish community of Montreal will be reduced to a core of mainly North African Jewish immigrants who are French-speaking,*** and a residual corpus of aged, sick, and poor Askenazi who will be left behind (with a small cadre of businessmen and professionals who are irretrievably rooted for family and personal reasons in Montreal), as the more vital and capable Jewish entrepreneurs, professionals and youth depart to find their careers and security elsewhere.

This pattern of emigration appears to be characteristic of other Quebec minorities, not to speak of vast numbers of middle-class francophones, especially those who have found haven in Miami and other southern climes. The pequiste revolution is not only a cultural one but obviously has a strong economic social thrust that seeks a radical system change and reformation.⁷

As noted, the exodus of head offices from Montreal has proven that the pequistes are not merely concerned about French cultural survival on nationalist grounds; their socialism is open and aggressive toward multinational

** A little known survey conducted by the Research Dept. of the A.J.C.S. in 1978 among Jewish high school, community college and university students in Montreal indicated that over 40 percent did not expect to remain in Quebec on completion of their studies for graduate and career decisions. Professor Robert Keaton of Dawson College's Political Science Dept. conducted a study of community college English students in April 1979, which confirmed the trend in the A.J.C.S. study.

*** Whose youth are intermarrying into the French Quebec milieu at a 60 percent rate, a disquieting trend that bodes ill for the numerical and religious future of Montreal Jewry.

⁷ Rene Levesque, *Op.cit.*

corporations and anglophone businesses that must guarantee French as the language of work, etc., as the very least demanded of corporate behaviour.⁸

The immigration to Canada of Soviet Jews and others assisted by the Jewish Immigration Aid Services indicates that Montreal is not being enlarged as in the past by such settlers. Soviet Jews and others concerned with human rights are by-passing Quebec.† When Jewish and other immigrants and private interests avoid Montreal for resettlement and investment, these are very critical indicators of the kind of Jewish community survival that may be predicted.

At present almost all former sectarian health and social services institutions belong to the Quebec government. Soon legal steps may be initiated in the National Assembly to take control of the sectarian social-cultural recreational agencies and programs since these constitute a major factor in the overall cultural francization ideology of the government. Jewish institutions have been francized to such an extent that Askenazi and English-speaking Jews may soon have to turn again to the synagogue for counselling and other services in order to sustain their communal and personal survival in Montreal.* In this respect the early 19th Century model of Montreal Jewry's structure may be replicated. Then, except for lay leadership, there were no professional or religious leaders in Montreal, except for

⁸ D.H. Fullerton, *Op.cit.*

Leandre Bergeron, *The History of Quebec: A Patriot's Handbook*. Toronto: New Canada Publications, 1975.

† At the same time, the Parti-Quebecois have assumed more and more control of immigration into Quebec, another de facto concession the Federal government has made to appease francophone hubris.

* Of the three Montreal Reform synagogues, two are in deep trouble as memberships decline seriously and mortgages and maintenance costs soar with aging members unable to cope. Mergers are in the wind. In Sherbrooke and Quebec City, religious and ritual functionaries are imported from Montreal because of the total erosion of a Jewish communal infrastructure.

visiting or transient functionaries from cities like Philadelphia, New York and London.

The emerging pattern for future Jewish communal survival in a closed enclave in Montreal is suggested by Professor Joshua Prawer of the Hebrew University.⁹ In an historical survey of the way in which Jewish communities have adapted their structures, leadership and priorities over 2000 years of resettlement in the Diaspora, Dr. Prawer indicates the radical and political dynamics involved in cultural and community changes when they coincide as well as conflict historically: the adaptive strength of the Jewish community has always been in its ability to either live with, adjust to or react by special arrangements with the majority in order to function, until literal survival occasioned by an inquisition, expulsion or pogrom forced Jews to flee to other lands.

The communal model that Montreal Jewry may opt or be forced into in the future is clearly suggested when Prawer reviews the response of French Jews to Napoleon's Revolution and Emancipation: "A new system of reorganization was effectively introduced by Napoleon and approved at the meeting of the Sanhedrin in 1807. The basic idea was that originally announced at the beginning of the Revolution: the Jews would abandon any claims to separate nationhood; as human beings they could enjoy civic rights and *it was only their specific religious needs which would remain the realm of Jewish bodies*, like the newly created Consistoire. A Chief Rabbi and the religious services would be financed by the state, as it was done for other denominations. Thus, in a sense, the community aims were thrown back on the synagogue, the ritual bath and the cemetery. *The old community with its own vital functions ceased to exist.*" (Italics added)

Applying Prawer's analysis to the present and future destiny of Montreal Jewry, it may be asserted that the 1807 French Consistoire

pattern may well be the ultimate social adaptation for those Jews who will remain in Quebec regardless of its separation or continuing turmoil. Not only is the Consistoire pattern appearing in French Quebec's approach to its minorities, but also some of the other grim aspects of the *Ancien Regime* of the past can be perceived in its official policies and proclamations.

Ironically, two French proverbs are apt in this respect: "The more a thing changes, the more it becomes itself." The more we observe pequisite actions, the more it becomes plain that the free society Quebec Jews sought to build and live in for the past two centuries will be foreclosed. Can there be a viable Jewish society without its own infrastructure and English as a mode of social and cultural intercourse with fellow Jews in the rest of North America and the world?

As the shrewd leader of the pequistes, Rene Levesque, has observed, "The appetite (for power) grows as it eats." Levesque may have the last word at this juncture of Montreal Jewry's exquisite dilemma. But Jewish history has not come to an end in Quebec, whether it chooses or is forced to devise a neoConsistoire communal lifestyle and function as less than equal to their French Quebec fellow citizens. The proposed merger of the A.J.C.S. and C.J.C. will fulfill this Consistoire pattern for efficiency purposes and for survival as a religious enclave as the Jews survived in the Middle East.

Future probabilities may be somewhat more pleasant than this scenario suggests. It was a French Jewish philosopher, Henri Bergson, who noted that in history there are "eternal recurrences." Is Quebec separatism a recurrence whose effects preclude the survival of Montreal Jewry in a pluralistic democracy which enabled them to flourish as a once dynamic and resplendent community?

⁹ Joshua Prawer, "The Jewish Community As A Force For Jewish Continuity: An Historical Perspective," *Journal of Jewish Communal Services*, Vol. LV, No. 1, 1978, p. 41.