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Changes in the Teaching Profession

The past decade witnessed a great number of changes in the teaching profession in Quebec. Numbers increased, qualifications improved, and there was a trend toward the laïcization of the profession. Teachers now enjoy security, salaries, fringe benefits, rights of consultation, and working conditions that were only dreamed of by their predecessors in the fifties. Yet there remains a deepening malaise in the profession. Some of the factors contributing to this malaise were the recommendations of the Parent Report, changes in the characteristics of the teaching force, centralization of negotiations and its impact on teacher organization, financial stress, and the rapid bureaucratization of the Department of Education. A brief consideration of these factors may give some insight into the present status and future direction of the profession in the Province.

the parent report

There is no denying that, for its time, the Parent Report represented a promising blueprint for genuine reform in public education in Quebec. Nevertheless, when the Commissioners came to the topic of the teaching profession in their fifth volume, there appears a total lack of originality. Throughout the first four volumes there is a reiteration of the theme of the importance of the teacher in the proposed reforms but in the fifth volume, the tone is condescending, even patronizing, and chapter XII could have been written by any paternalistic administrator of the preceding decades.¹ Nowhere in the Report does one detect an empathy for the power-

ful discontent of teachers. For example, in their treatment of the idea of a profession, the Commissioners quote the characteristics of a profession as set forth in an N.E.A. publication of 1948, years before that body became the militant teachers' organization that it was in 1966 and is today. There was no recognition of the conditions impelling teachers' associations, in Quebec no less than in the United States, to stress what they claimed to be their rights over what management had traditionally cited to be their responsibilities.³

In the fifth volume, the Commissioners made nine recommendations; that elementary and secondary school teachers belong to the same organization; that there be a code of ethics; that teachers be officially represented at all levels; that salary negotiations be at the provincial level; that salary be the same regardless of sex or civil status; that teachers have better tenure; that teachers help formulate teacher training programs; that one per cent of teacher salaries be earmarked for staff development; that the minimum pension be \$2,000. These recommendations appear not so much to arise from the prose preceding them in the chapter as to reflect what the Commissioners perceived the teachers to want and what seemed, by and large, harmless to recommend. The recommendations do not appear to add up to the global recommendation that teachers be trusted as other responsible, professional adults in society generally are.

changes in the teaching force

Meanwhile, changes which were taking place in the teaching profession elsewhere had their parallel in Quebec. In sheer numbers, the profession grew from 54,000 in 1963 to 71,000 in 1971, an increase of 30%. But the changes in quality were no less significant. In 1963, 83% of the teachers in the Province had less than fifteen years of education; in 1971, only 44% of the teachers were in this category. This upgrading of qualifications was accompanied by a rise in experience; in 1963, 42% of the teachers in the Province had less than five years' experience and by 1971 this had dropped to 18%.³

The proportion of the total teaching force which was composed of members of religious orders declined in less than a decade from 38% in 1960 to 14% in 1967.⁴ During the same period there was a slight decline in the per cent of male teach-

ers (from 31% to 28%) even though the actual number of male teachers doubled. There are no data on the average age of the teaching force, but it certainly dropped in the past decade, and the new recruits were more in tune with the themes of democratization and participation than their predecessors, as well as more confident of their competence.

teacher organization

The most salient development in the profession in the past decade has been its rapid and universal unionization. While in 1959 there were few associations of teachers holding labor certificates, in 1972 there was virtually no association which was not unionized. In 1959 two or three large city organizations negotiated with the large boards in Montreal and Quebec City and 1,500 other small boards dictated policy more or less unilaterally to the remaining 20,000 unorganized teachers. Today, three monolithic provincial organizations of teachers negotiate together across a common table with the Provincial government, with representatives of school board associations in attendance.

The three teacher organizations are: La Corporation des Enseignants du Quebec (CEQ), comprising about 70,000 teachers, including some English-speaking teachers employed by Catholic boards; the Provincial Association of Protestant Teachers (PAPT), comprising about 7,100 English teachers, including some Catholic teachers employed by Protestant boards; and the Provincial Association of Catholic Teachers (PACT), comprising about 5,600 English-speaking teachers employed by Catholic boards.

While the three parent bodies negotiate a framework agreement at the Provincial level, ninety-six local associations sign agreements with their respective boards. All teachers in the Province pay fees to the provincial organizations by virtue of the acts incorporating these organizations; these fees range from a flat forty dollars to one and one-half per cent of salary, relatively modest amounts compared with many large industrial unions.

The CEQ employs forty-seven full-time professional staff; PAPT six, and PACT three. One of the major difficulties common to all these organizations both at the provincial and local levels, is the establishment of a cadre of leaders with long-range commitment to the organization. Previous leaders have

gone on to careers in the provincial government, school boards, universities, and politics. It is probably safe to say that none of the present professional staff has ten years' experience in the organization he works for, and nearly as safe to say that few of the present leaders will be with their organizations ten years hence. Marc Lapointe, a leading labor lawyer with over thirty years of experience with teacher unions in several provinces, finds this one of the greatest weaknesses of the movement. He believes that unions will remain relatively powerless until they have a stable group of leaders who understand the distribution of power and who have acquired experience in negotiations and tactics.⁵

development of syndicalism

Until the late fifties, the organizations were not particularly militant and did not have the right to strike. However, in 1960, the Federation of English-Speaking Catholic Teachers and the Alliance des Professeurs de Montréal signed a collective agreement with the Montreal Catholic School Commission. In addition to introducing salary schedules based on qualifications and experience, this agreement included articles on pupil-teacher ratios, sick leave bank, insurance, consultation and appeal mechanisms, and provided leave of absence and security for teachers to work full-time on union affairs. This agreement rapidly became a model for others in the Province. More importantly, the full-time staff released by the agreements now had time to elaborate upon them, to prepare for the next round of negotiations, and to become involved in the agitation for the right to strike. Teacher unions proliferated over the next four years and contributed to the build-up of the central bodies.

Two events of immense importance to teachers occurred in 1964. The first was the creation of the Department of Education with the passage of Bill 60. The second was the amendment to the Labor Code giving teachers the right to strike.

Between July 1, 1960 and May 1, 1969, twenty-one of the twenty-six teachers strikes in Canada occurred in Quebec.⁶ In the beginning, when the unions negotiated with local boards, the strike was an effective bargaining weapon. But as teachers' salaries rose, boards repeatedly had to turn to the newly-created Department of Education for help in meeting their increasing costs. Initially the Department's response was a

flexible one. It made general rules governing what a board could be expected to spend. Expenses outside those norms were termed "inadmissible". If the board could not meet its costs within these limits it was allowed to impose a surtax of 10% of the normal tax rate on property for the inadmissible portion of its expenditures. If it still could not meet the costs, then the Department undertook to pay one half of the balance remaining. In the short span of five years, the Government's contribution to the costs of schooling rose from 30% of 237.7 million dollars in 1959-60 to 51% of 509 million in 1964-65 and continued to rise until it amounted to 964.3 million in 1970-71.' In June 1966, many collective agreements between Catholic teachers and their boards expired. The powerful trend-setters, the Federation of English-Speaking Catholic Teachers and l'Alliance des Professeurs de Montréal began negotiations with the Montreal Catholic School Commission. In October of that year, the Minister of Education, Jean-Jacques Bertrand, announced, seemingly out of the blue, that norms would go into effect placing a ceiling on teacher salaries, and that school commissions were required to submit salary offers to the Department of Education for approval. Departmental approval would also be required before going to arbitration. Any financial over-commitment on the part of school boards would have to be financed by an increase in property taxes. The net effect of these decisions by the government was to render negotiation between boards and unions meaningless.

bill 25

By December, 9,000 Montreal Catholic Teachers decided to strike and their lead was soon followed by teachers elsewhere. About 13,000 teachers were involved, affecting almost 300,000 children. The Protestant teachers could not legally strike but joined their colleagues in protest. In the face of this massive opposition, on February 17th, the Government acted by passing "An Act to Ensure for Children the Right to an Education and to Institute a New Schooling Agreement Plan," better known as Bill 25. The aims of the Bill were: to force striking teachers to return to the classrooms, to remove the right to strike until June 30, 1968, to establish a province-wide salary scale, and to prepare the way for bargaining at the provincial level. The parties, on one side were the Government, the Federation of Catholic School Commissions and the

Quebec Association of Protestant School Boards, and on the other side, the three Provincial teachers' associations. The school boards appeared content with this removal of their own right to negotiate, perhaps not knowing, or not concerned, that the cherished value of local control of education would be passing into the mists of history.

The teachers' organizations, as well, were subject to considerable change following this legislation. The previously strong local associations had to adapt to a subservient role as the negotiating process was centralized. A wave of apathy followed these events and teachers began to sense that something profound had happened to the profession. It had. They were now civil servants. This new status was officially confirmed four years later, in July 1971, with the passage of Bill 82 amending the Civil Service Act to include those in positions ". . . in any body when, by law, the government is a party to the negotiation of provisions of collective agreements . . ."

The Superior Council of Education dealt with the problem of teacher unrest in its typically muted way⁸ and the Government embarked on an expensive "information" campaign with which it intended to convince the public that Bill 25 would usher in ". . . a peaceful climate and permit the active participation of interested bodies in the expansion of dynamic structures to assure prosperity to Quebecers." Of course, no such peaceful climate has prevailed and at the time of writing, the teachers are once again involved in a harsh confrontation with the Provincial government and making preparations to become more immediately involved in the political arena. The operative word in the quotation is "prosperity"; fundamentally the problem was and remains a financial one.

the financial problem

There is little doubt that the Provincial government had to control the burgeoning costs of education. Since teachers' salaries comprise 60% of expenditures, it was also logical that the government make its attacks through the salary schedule. The new financial arrangements were not expressions of niggardliness, but an attempt at rational control.

In the decade preceding Bill 25, operating costs for school boards had increased in all provinces but nowhere as much as in Quebec. Between 1956 and 1966, per pupil costs increased

in Quebec by 260%. The corresponding figure for Ontario was 104% and for British Columbia was 84%. Furthermore, in 1966 Quebec ranked sixth among the provinces in ability to finance education as measured by personal income per person, but first in educational effort in relation to this ability, spending \$473 per pupil from a personal income base of \$5,830 per pupil, while Ontario spent \$504 per pupil from a base of \$8,256.*

So it was that this combination of increased costs, low ability to pay, and high effort imposed well defined limitations on the growing power of the profession.

the bureaucratic problem

The problem of classifying teachers for salary purposes according to their educational background was crucial to the solution of the financial problem and the solution appeared all too typical of the growing bureaucratic approach of the government. A regulation was made by the Department of Education defining a year of study (Regulation Five). Then a committee composed equally of representatives of the three teacher organizations, the Department, and the federations of school boards, was established to apply the regulation. When the committee failed to reach agreement, the Department issued its own decisions to school boards and "advised" they be applied. The legality of the procedure is presently being tested in the courts and the problem remains a stumbling block in current negotiations. The Regulation, ambiguous and complicated, remains on the books.

Other regulations, directives, and decisions of the Department are perceived by teachers to be arbitrary and are a source of widespread discontent. Through Regulation Number Four on the preparation of teachers, the Department instituted a system of probation for beginning teachers. Badly publicized and badly explained, it has been received coolly by the teachers on the grounds that they have no control over entry into the teaching profession. Regulation Seven, among other things, lengthened the school year for teachers, triggering further strikes and raising the legal question of whether collective agreements reached in good faith could be overridden by orders-in-council.

Other, more nebulous, but no less real concerns affect teach-

er morale in the Province. The sheer size of comprehensive high schools is disquieting for a great many teachers. The falling elementary enrolment and consequent decline of positions is another. The perceived imposition of behavioural objectives, programmed budgeting, detailed courses of studies, and new management systems, all contribute to a free-floating anxiety that provides a climate unhealthy for good teaching and learning. The English teachers, in addition, are seriously concerned about the effects of Regulation Six which may eventually transform English schools into bilingual schools. French teachers are concerned about the drift of students to English schools, brought about by Bill 63 which gave parents the right to choose the language of instruction for their children. All of these developments are intimately interwoven with the profound transformation of Quebec society, and the future of teachers and their organizations is no clearer than the future of Quebec generally.

conclusion

The sixties have seen the teachers in Quebec transformed from the servants eloquently described by Jean-Paul Desbiens¹⁰ in the late fifties to the not-so-civil servants we have seen in action in recent years. The source of the problem no doubt arises partly from the rapid growth and hardening of the provincial bureaucracy. If this is so, what is in store may be indicated by Crozier in his observation that:

Crisis is a distinctive and necessary element of the bureaucratic system. It provides the only means of making the necessary adjustments, and it therefore plays a role in enabling the organization to develop and, indirectly, for centralization and impersonality to grow.¹¹

There are a few rays of hope for the improvement of the profession. Beside the rapid improvement in the education of teachers, which is bound to have an effect on their general behaviour as employees or organization members, other developments lead one to hope for better relationships in the future. M. Lapointe, in a conversation already referred to, reminds us that negotiations in industry have gone from a highly centralized to a decentralized system. Bill 27 places the duty of negotiating teachers' salaries and working conditions at the board level. The expectation is that these boards will be large enough to have the organizational resources to effectively carry out these negotiations.

Before becoming too sanguine, however, one would do well to ponder the findings of Rosenthal that teachers, in all aspects of their role are the least powerful of the participants in education, whether in salary determination, personnel policies, curriculum matters or the organization of the school system.¹² We may also ponder the conviction of Shanker that

“Power is never given to anyone. Power is taken and it is taken from someone.”¹³

For the teaching profession in Quebec, the crisis of adjustment is not yet resolved.

references

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