

Roger Magnuson.
A BRIEF HISTORY OF QUEBEC EDUCATION from New France to Parti
Québécois.
Montreal: Harvest House Limited, 1980.
147 pp. \$6.95.

The present book is not the first work written by Dr. Magnuson on the same subject. It was preceded by *Education in the Province of Quebec* (U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare, Washington, D.C., 1969), and by the same book with an additional chapter on Education in Quebec in the 1970's (Copyright 1974 by the author. Printed by McGill University Printing Service).

A comparison with the previous publications shows differences in volume and perspective. The study made for the U.S. Office of Education was rather descriptive/informative, in line with that Office's policy of publishing short reports, to inform the public in general and the academic community in particular of educational developments outside the United States. The version published by McGill University Printing Service was an updating of events, with an additional chapter on the cultural changes in Quebec in the 1970's. Both versions describe the administrative structure of public education, its character, its organization and finance, school programs, teacher education, and other aspects of the dual nature (Roman Catholic and Protestant) of Quebec education. The present work does not deal at all with the administrative structure of public education, but widens the historical perspective. Though it comes back to the same historical landmarks in Quebec education (New France: 1608-1760; Transition to Nationhood: 1760-1867; Canadian Confederation 1867, etc.), these landmarks are no longer presented in short paragraphs and in almost telegraphic style, but rather in a descriptive/analytic form, mentioning certain events, emphasizing others, developing the theme in a kind of crescendo, and so leading the reader through the avenues of the history of Quebec education, which is in fact the history of the people of this province.

Being a fervent advocate of the cultural approach to the history of education, the author adopts it too, this time. Master of his subject, he walks freely through the intricacies of time and events. We follow him in a voyage which takes us through three centuries of history. We visit with him the Collège des Jésuites (1635) and the Ursuline convent school. The apparent paucity of education in New France at that period may be attributed to the lack of a printing press in the area, though a few Jesuits and some individuals had their own libraries.

After the British victory in 1760, we meet the *habitant*, the lawyer and the priest, though the population at large is destitute of the skills of reading and writing. The period 1760-1867 is distinguished by the clash of the two cultures. Following the political uprisings of 1837-38, Britain dispatched Lord Durham to

the colonies to investigate the situation. The result was his famous Report, of which the main objective was to make the colony a truly British one. The common school, or the melting-pot for the whole population, which was suggested following his Report was meant to assimilate the French Canadians into the English majority then in formation. However, the whole idea was doomed from the start, since the clergy were quick to condemn it as “très dangereuse pour les Catholiques”.

Since the 1840's, Catholics and Protestants went their separate ways. As for the French Canadians, their resistance to secularistic tendencies as a way of self-defence, led to the triumph of the clericalism (1867-1900). A guardian of Québec's language and culture, the Catholic Church continued to play a dominant role in education. This situation — coupled, by the force of circumstances, with a resistance to the tenets of industrialization and urbanization — left education backward on many counts. Furthermore, shaken but not completely moved by the challenge of modernization, school and society had to wait for the Quiet Revolution in the 1960's, to experience enormous changes.

Having lived in Quebec since the beginning of the Quiet Revolution (early 1960's), the author was a spectator of the social drama unfolding in Quebec: the rapid decline of Roman Catholicism and the growing of educational and linguistic nationalism. Furthermore, the victory of the Parti Québécois and the passage of Bill 101, the new language act which makes French the official language of the province, carry it beyond the secularization and stabilization of the school system toward the forging of a distinct nation. The author had emphasized the veritable revolution at all levels that education has undergone. Within a period of several years, three hundred years of educational tradition have been shattered by events outside school. Due mainly to the Quiet Revolution, like a pendulum, society has gone from extreme to extreme, from a priest-ridden to a national and anticlerical society, committed to the values of modernity. In other words, it was switched from a monolithic to a pluralistic society. Though the author wished to avoid “the tyranny of the present,” or the pitfalls of writing about the present, it should have been mentioned that in parallel to the social drama unfolding in Quebec, the crescendo of teacher militancy seems to shock many of those concerned with the educational endeavour. This and other events underline the *malaise* which school and society are going through.

One criticism of the book is that it has not insisted enough on the economic background of the French-Canadian population, which could explain much of its poor educational record until 1960. In the book this dimension suffers alongside the description of the triumph of clericalism and of the events which have occurred in the first half of the twentieth century. Napoleon once said, “L'armée marche sur son ventre”. Indeed not on culture alone depends the development of a community. That is why Marxist historians emphasize the economic history of nations.

Coming back to Quebec, it is clear that English dominance prevented French Canadians from using the levers of economic decision, private or public. Furthermore, thinking like Weber in "The spirit of Capitalism" that French Canadians are Catholics, hence not capitalistic-minded (not that the author puts it that way), while the Protestant English-Canadians are, is a very simplistic proposition. However, more economic analysis on Quebec would have shown that the under-representation of French Canadians at the control level of the economic activities of the province and the country is not a function of a value system less congruent with "The Spirit of Capitalism," but rather of the place reserved to French Canadians in this country, first by the British colonial conquest, and then by the creation of the Federation. By enlarging the territorial limits of Canada, the Federation transformed the French-Canadian majority in Quebec to a national minority. These political arrangements had an impact on the economy of French Canadians, which in turn greatly affected their system of education.

A second criticism to be directed at the book is its brevity. Though its title, *A Brief History of Quebec Education*, prepares us for it, some paragraphs are "crammed" with names, events or episodes, making the historical development difficult to follow. Some additional information and analysis would eliminate these "short-cuts" in the historical sequences.

Having talked with one of my university colleagues about the book, his question was, "How objective can an English Canadian be in writing the history of Quebec education?" When I pointed out that Dr. Magnuson is American by origin, living in Quebec since the early 1960's, he reacted with less scepticism.

Indeed, the book is written with a good deal of objectivity, in a fair and balanced way, and with a hidden sense of humour. The text is well annotated and contains a select bibliography for those interested in further research. This work will answer the need for an English-language reader on the history of Quebec education, as most of the existing literature is in French or represents translations from the French. Dr. Magnuson should be complimented for his efforts.

Avigdor Farine
Université de Montréal