

The Anderson Amendments and the Secularization of Saskatchewan Public Schools

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During the first quarter century of its history Saskatchewan was preoccupied with the school question, a complex phenomenon that had many variations depending on time and circumstance. The polemic had originated in the latter part of the territorial period and it had centered on confessional schools. In the early years of provincial status, it had focused on separate schools and foreign language instruction. In the 1920's, however, the separate school question was over-shadowed by a controversy surrounding alleged sectarian influences within the public school system. This theme would arouse even greater passions and prejudices because the public school was regarded as the ideal instrument with which to mould the different ethnic groups into responsible British subjects.

Sectarianism had many facets but usually it took the form of "foreign" language instruction and the presence of religious emblems and symbols and it was generally associated with public school districts where Catholics, especially French-speaking Catholics, were in the majority and, hence, exercised a dominant influence on the local school board. Fervent Protestants were aggravated by the fact that members of religious communities were engaged as public school teachers in some districts under the direction of Catholic trustees. If the thought of a nun, dressed in the garb of her order and employed as a public schools teacher were enough to offend Protestant sensibilities, the fact that some public schools were being conducted in premises rented from the Catholic Church added insult to injury. In addition to nuns and convent class rooms, Protestants regarded the presence of the crucifix and statues and pictures of saints to be equally obnoxious reminders of the influence of Rome.

In itself this alleged sectarian influence might not have provoked so much passion had it not been for the presence of a very small number of Protestant children attending public schools controlled by Catholic ratepayers. In the 1920's these children were depicted as martyrs for the cause of religious freedom and toleration by ultra-Protestants and their press. Examples were often cited,

though never corroborated, of Protestant children in Saskatchewan being forced to recite Catholic prayers, kneel before Catholic symbols and cross themselves in the Catholic manner.

It was in the midst of this ferment that the Ku Klux Klan established itself in Saskatchewan to direct the forces of righteousness against the powers of darkness and superstition. The sectarian issue had obvious political implications because the Conservatives had been in the political wilderness since 1905 and had attributed their lack of electoral success to the manipulation of the Catholic and foreign vote by the Liberals. This atmosphere of paranoia and frustration climaxed in the provincial election of 1929 as Klansmen, Orangemen and Conservatives mounted a crusade to prevent Saskatchewan from falling under the domination of Rome and Quebec. The Liberals, under James Garfield Gardiner, failed to secure a majority on June 6 and, when the legislature met in September, they were defeated on a motion of non-confidence. The Conservative, Progressive and Independent members formed a ministry known as the Saskatchewan Co-operative Government with James Thomas Milton Anderson as Premier and Minister of Education. As leader of the provincial Conservatives, Anderson had committed his party to a programme of educational reform designed to promote greater conformity to Anglo-Protestant norms. As Premier, he redeemed these electoral pledges by enacting two major amendments to the School Act. In 1930, legislation was brought down to prohibit the display of religious garb and emblems in public schools and the following year, in 1931, the use of French as a language of instruction in grade one was suppressed.

The Anderson amendments have been the object of much controversy, notably in French-Catholic circles where Anderson has been equated with anti-Christ. One Quebec journal, for example, carried a cartoon of a burning school with Anderson beside it. The caption described the Premier as a political canker and an abominable fanatic supported by the Orange Lodge and the Ku Klux Klan.¹ Father Tavernier, O.M.I., of the editorial staff of *Le Patriote de l'Ouest* in Prince Albert, described the Lodge and the Klan as Anderson's "mamelukes" and argued that these two organizations had placed Anderson in power to secularize Catholic schools and impede French language instruction. Tavernier noted a parallel

¹ *L'Action Libérale*, Vol. 1, No. 2, cited in *House of Commons Debates*, 1930, pp. 2131-2132.

between Anderson's actions and those of Freemasonry in republican France.² *L'abbé* Lionel Groulx reminded those who denounced Hitler's despotism that the concordat signed between the Third Reich and the Holy See in 1933 accorded more national and religious privileges to minorities than did Anderson's legislation.³

Is this an accurate picture of what took place in Saskatchewan? The issue is complicated by the fact that the Co-operative government left no ministerial records. These were allegedly destroyed after the administration's crushing defeat in 1934. Furthermore, the accounts of Anderson's supporters are even more biased than those of his detractors. The purpose of this paper is to re-assess the impact of the Anderson amendments and to ascertain whether or not Catholics were being persecuted.

When the Anderson government came to power, those who had been speaking out against sectarianism and non-Anglo-Saxon influences rejoiced because they felt that the millenium was at hand. The administration's early actions won the admiration of its dedicated supporters. On September 27, 1929, the Premier announced that the exchange of teaching certificates with the province of Quebec would be suppressed because Quebec certificates were inferior to those granted in Saskatchewan.⁴ In December, the Deputy Minister of Education announced that, henceforth, religious instruction would have to be conducted in the English language.⁵ In an address before the Sir Sam Hughes Loyal Orange Lodge in Regina, Anderson reiterated his intention to remove sectarianism from public schools and to prohibit the use of church property and convents for public school purposes. The Premier stated that this could be brought about by departmental regulations but that he would incorporate the changes in statutory law "so that no future government can plunge the Public schools of the province into the grip of sectarianism without the public knowing it."⁶

In January, 1930, members of l'Association Catholique Franco-

² R. P. TAVERNIER, O.M.I., *Les Troubles scolaires de la Saskatchewan* (Montreal: l'Œuvre des Tracts, September 1931, No. 147), pp. 11-12.

³ Lionel GROULX, *L'Enseignement du Français au Canada*, Vol. II, *Les Écoles des Minorités* (Montreal: Librairie Granger, 1933), p. 186.

⁴ Saskatoon *Star-Phoenix*, September 28, 1929.

⁵ Regina *Daily Star*, December 14, 1929.

⁶ *The Sentinel and Orange and Protestant Advocate*, November 19, 1929.

Canadienne de la Saskatchewan (A.C.F.C.) and l'Association des Commissaires d'École Franco-Canadienne met with Anderson to discuss forthcoming legislation dealing with the presence of religious garb and emblems in public schools. The Premier "energetically denied" rumors that the government was not only opposed to the attire of nuns but that it also wanted to prevent them from teaching in schools. He said that he did not object to the sisters as teachers and that they were to wear their habit in the street or elsewhere. In public schools, however, they would have to remove their religious emblems and modify their costume so that it could not be regarded as the garb of a religious order.⁷

A short time later in the Speech from the Throne, the Premier announced that legislation would be brought down to maintain "harmony, peace and concord" in public schools.⁸ On February 11, 1930, he introduced Bill No. 1, an amendment to the School Act:

222a (1) No emblem of any religious faith, denomination, order, sect, society or association, shall be displayed in any public school premises during school hours, nor shall any person teach or be permitted to teach in any public school while wearing the garb of any such religious faith, denomination, order, sect, society or association.⁹

During the debate which followed second reading of Bill No. 1, the Premier declared that sectarian influences prevailed in public schools and claimed that forty-two of the forty-five inspectors who had been asked to state their views on the subject favored the prohibition of religious garb and emblems in such schools. He stated, furthermore, that inspectors had "definitely reported" the presence of religious emblems in 161 rooms in 117 schools.¹⁰ According to the Premier, Bill No. 1 was justified by the fact that some "central force or source" was asking school boards to seek the withdrawal of the legislation. He argued that there had to be a complete separation of church and state insofar as public schools were concerned.¹¹

⁷ Papers of l'Association Catholique Franco-Canadienne de la Saskatchewan [hereafter cited as A.C.F.C. Papers], File 67A, Denis to Marois, 24 janvier 1930.

⁸ *Journals of the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan, 1929-30*, [hereafter cited as *Journals*], p. 11.

⁹ A.C.F.C. Papers, File 66, Bill No. 1 of 1930.

¹⁰ *Journals, 1929-30*, p. 474.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 474-475.

For their part, the Liberals offered strong opposition to the measure. Dr. J. Urich, the former Minister of Public Health stated that religious emblems should be removed in those districts where their presence led to complaints. He noted that there were some public schools where no objections could be raised because there were no dissident ratepayers.¹² T. C. Davis, the former Attorney-General declared that the legislation would be the first of its kind in Canada and that it would stand as a monument to intolerance and bigotry. Citing statistics for 1928, Davis stated that there were 8,114 teachers in Saskatchewan and that only 153 of these were nuns. He affirmed that 83 sisters were providing instruction in 30 of the province's 5,000 public schools while 66 were teaching in 13 separate schools. There were no Protestant children in 23 of the 43 schools in charge of nuns and 117 Protestant students attended the remaining 20 schools. Since 31 of these children voluntarily attended Catholic schools when other educational facilities were available, this left only 86 Protestant children under the direction of nuns in districts where other facilities were not available. In view of the fact that 86 of Saskatchewan's 225,000 school children were involved, Davis declared 'that the people could see the immensity of the problem which the government sought to solve by means of the bill.'¹³

For his part, J. G. Gardiner, the Liberal leader, maintained that the Conservatives had introduced this legislation to eliminate the alleged conditions which their propaganda had created.¹⁴ Gardiner moved an amendment that the bill should apply only to those districts where a majority of ratepayers having children attending school objected to the presence of religious emblems or to instruction by people in religious garb. In the event of such a complaint, the Minister should order the removal of such emblems and the suspension of the teacher.¹⁵ This motion was defeated 26 to 33 and the original bill was assented to on March 11.

While the amendment affected all public schools in the province its obvious intention was to bring French Catholic ones into closer conformity with Anglo-Protestant educational and cultural norms. Thus, it was the French who voiced the strongest

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 513.

¹³ *Star-Phoenix*, March 1, 1930.

¹⁴ *Journals*, 1929-30, pp. 485-486.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 504.

opposition to the amendment and who, at first, were prepared to test its constitutionality in the courts. With the exception of J. J. Leddy of Saskatoon, who followed the dictates of conscience rather than political expediency, English-speaking Catholics were predictably silent. There were rumors that English Catholics desired to substitute the Sisters of Service for French Canadian nuns because the former did not wear a distinctive religious costume and they were all English-speaking. It was as a result of such allegations that Anderson was able to declare, before an Ottawa audience, that the Archbishop of Winnipeg, an Irish Catholic, approved of his amendment to the School Act.¹⁶ In the meantime, French, German and Ukrainian Catholic trustees implored the Ordinary of the Ecclesiastical Province of Regina to intercede on their behalf before the Knights of Columbus for financial assistance to have lawyers study the legislation and, if necessary, challenge its constitutionality before the courts.¹⁷ The State Council of the Knights of Columbus categorically refused to adopt a position on the issue on the pretext that the matter was more political than religious.¹⁸

In the meantime, the hierarchy issued no official pronouncement concerning the legislation because the Metropolitan See of Regina had been vacant since the death of Archbishop Olivier-Elzéar Mathieu in October, 1929. Some religious communities had indicated that they would modify their garb if requested to do so by the hierarchy and, in the absence of an ecclesiastical directive, many parishes felt that they were being forced to shift for themselves.¹⁹ It was in the Diocese of Prince Albert, however, that anxiety was felt most keenly. Many French Catholics in the diocese feared that, as a result of pressure from Quebec, Bishop J.-H. Prud'homme might not allow nuns under his jurisdiction to modify their costumes.²⁰ In July, 1930, the new Archbishop of Regina, J. C. McGuigan, met with Prud'homme, Bishop Ovide Charlebois, O.M.I., of Keewatin, and the Abbot of Muenster to discuss the attitude to be taken vis-à-vis the amendment. It was decided that the bishops would protest against

¹⁶ A.C.F.C. Papers, File 75, Le Comité de l'Administration de la C.O.J.C., lettre circulaire, 25 avril 1932.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, File 66, Mémoire à NN. SS. les Ordinaires de la Province.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, File 68E, Denis to Frémont, 27 février 1930.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, File 67A, Kugener to Denis, 31 janvier 1930.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, File 84, Demay to de Margerie, 2 avril 1930.

the “unjust” legislation but that, since it was already in force, Catholics would accept it to avoid creating further complications. The prelates agreed to remove crucifixes from public schools, to teach catechism in French outside regular school hours and to permit the nuns to modify their garb.²¹

The amendment prohibiting the display of religious garb and emblems came into force on July 1, 1930. Most of the religious communities affected by the legislation altered their garb in such a way that it could not be identified as the distinctive garb of their community. In most cases, this was accomplished by wearing a toga to conceal their uniforms and by replacing their headdress with what inspectors were to describe as a “French widow’s bonnet.” While this external alteration complied with the letter of the law, no one knew whether it would be acceptable to the authorities. Anderson himself obviously had second thoughts concerning the scope of his amendment and, on September 24, he asked the Attorney-General’s Office if the clause “while wearing the garb of any such religious faith” was comprehensive enough to prevent a teacher from covering a religious costume by a nearly identical black gown and wearing a headdress that was similar to that worn by members of a religious order.²² The Law Officers of the Crown expressed the opinion that the total or partial concealment of a religious garb by some other garment would make it very difficult to secure a conviction unless it was shown that the religious garb “itself was visible and recognizable as such from time to time.” Furthermore, there was no prohibition against wearing clothing that was similar to that worn by religious communities. The Deputy Attorney-General suggested that the clause be amended by phrasing it in terms similar to those dealing with the wearing of military uniforms.²³

Anderson’s reaction to these comments is not known but it is apparent that in succeeding investigations and reports, officials became more exacting when passing judgment on possible infractions of the School Act. The board of the St. Brieux School

²¹ CARRIÈRE, O.M.I., *Martyr du Devoir*, Vol. IV, pp. 171-172. The author wishes to thank Father Carrière for making portions of this manuscript biography of Bishop Ovide Charlebois available for consultation.

²² Archives of Saskatchewan [hereafter cited as AS], Department of Education Records [hereafter cited as Education], File 38, Blackwood Memo to the Hon., the Attorney-General, September 24, 1930.

²³ *Ibid.*, Rowan to McKechnie, September 29, 1930.

District, for example, was advised that the long black dress and shorter loose gown and veiled cap adopted by the sisters did not comply with the intention of the law and that, henceforth, the district would not be entitled to any grant until all sectarian influences had been removed.²⁴ Trustees in Marcellin School District were advised that since the sisters had kept their headdress, the district would not be eligible to receive grants.²⁵ In November, the inspector in charge of the School Organization Branch issued directives that schools under the direction of nuns were not to receive grants without prior authorization from the Deputy Minister.²⁶ Inspectors were instructed to visit these 28 schools to determine whether they complied with the provisions of the School Act. From the reports that are available, it would appear that only one inspector felt that the provisions concerning religious garb were being violated. Inspector Everts stated that the sisters in Allen School District had modified their costume but it was still readily distinguishable as the attire of nuns although one could not identify it as the habit of a particular community. The inspector felt that, if the intention of the amendment had been to suppress costumes which designated those who wore them as members of a religious order, the legislation was being violated by the practices he described.²⁷

Closely related to the question of religious garb and emblems was the matter of classes being held in buildings not owned by the board, especially those conducted in premises owned by the Catholic Church. Shortly after assuming office in 1929, Anderson had informed officials in his department that the government would insist on public schools being conducted in premises owned by school boards.²⁸ Between December 7, 1929 and January 3, 1930, 35 school districts were advised of the Department's new policy and asked if their respective boards were prepared to undertake the erection of suitable public school buildings in 1930.²⁹ The

²⁴ *Ibid.*, Memorandum re Public School Districts where sisters are teaching, November 26, 1930.

²⁵ A.C.F.C. Papers, File 69E, Le Bel to de Margerie, 12 décembre 1930.

²⁶ AS, Education, File 38, Reid : Memorandum for Mr. Johnson, November 27, 1930.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, Everts to McKechnie, December 13, 1930.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, Special File 34, Anderson : Memorandum for Mr. Reid, November 19, 1929.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, *passim*.

government incorporated this policy into an amendment to the School Grants Act stipulating that after January 1, 1931, no grant would be paid beyond a one year period to schools utilizing buildings not owned by the district.

Departmental records indicate that in 1929, seventeen public school districts operated 39 rooms in buildings owned by the Catholic Church. Twenty-four other school districts rented 28 rooms from various sources including five Protestant churches.³⁰ Statistics prepared by the Department in 1932 show that 24 Catholic public school districts and eight Catholic separate school districts were conducting school in premises not owned by their boards.³¹ In April, 1934, 21 public school districts still rented 41 rooms from the Catholic Church. On the other hand, 46 other school districts conducted school in 54 rooms not owned by their respective boards. Included in this latter category were four districts renting five rooms from the United Church, two districts renting two rooms from the Anglican Church, and one district renting one room from the Pentecostal Hall.³²

It is obvious that the depression made it impossible to enforce the amendments to the School Grants Act. Districts who found it difficult to collect enough taxes to meet teachers' salaries could not be expected to incur the additional cost of constructing school buildings. Upon application, permission was granted to districts who found it necessary to continue using property not owned by the board.³³

Forced by the recession to permit the use of rented property for school purposes, the Department, nevertheless, did not relax its determination to ensure that public schools were kept free of sectarian emblems. In October, 1931, the Chief Inspector of Schools, J. H. McKechnie, issued a memorandum to inspectors asking them to report on the presence of religious emblems in public schools and the number of districts employing nuns as teachers.³⁴ Their responses revealed that religious emblems were displayed on the outside of buildings in four districts and this

³⁰ *Ibid.*, File 34, Return Requested by Mr. Patterson, April 6, 1934, (3).

³¹ *Ibid.*, McKechnie : Memorandum for Dr. Huff, January 26, 1932.

³² *Ibid.*, Return Requested by Mr. Patterson, April 6, 1934, (6).

³³ *Ibid.*, Dep. Min.: Memorandum for Mr. Reid. December 19, 1931.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, File 27 (b) (1), McKechnie : Memorandum for Inspectors, October 1, 1931.

disclosure came as a surprise to the Chief Inspector who asked that these cases be cleared up as soon as possible.³⁵ The question of external religious symbols was referred to the Commissioner of Education, Dr. Huff, who decided that it was not advisable to raise the matter in the case of a rented building. Such premises were temporary quarters and districts had to obtain the Department's permission to use them. Where the cross formed part of the permanent edifice, the Commissioner argued that it would be impossible to have it removed.³⁶ On the other hand, it is interesting to note that in at least one French Canadian district trustees, at the request of the Department, erased the word *école* from the inscription on the front of the school.³⁷

The Department also used other means to make French Catholic districts conform more closely to Anglo-Saxon educational norms. In some French Canadian districts, for example, the Protestant minority not only objected to the presence of nuns and Catholic symbols, but also to the fact that there were no Protestant teachers on staff. Where the Protestant minority was sufficiently large, the Department insisted that a Protestant teacher be hired to redress the grievances of the dissident ratepayers. Under pressure from the government, trustees in the Poirier School District reluctantly agreed to employ one Protestant teacher and this action received the approbation of Bishop J. M. R. Villeneuve, O.M.I., of Gravelbourg who felt that, in the circumstances, the board had acted very wisely.³⁸ In the wake of similar problems in Marcellin School District, trustees informed the Department that they were willing to employ a Protestant teacher and provide a room for the exclusive use of the children of Protestant ratepayers. The board was promptly informed that the Department would not condone the segregation of Protestant children.³⁹

Aware that their grievances would be more readily listened to by a government that had pledged itself to a policy of educational reform, nativists and dissatisfied ratepayers did not hesitate in

³⁵ *Ibid.*, File 27 (d) (8). Chief Inspector to O'Brien, December 1, 1931.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, File 38, McKechnie: Memo for Mr. Reid, December 18, 1931.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, School District Files, Marcellin S. D. No. 1658, McKechnie Memo for Hon. Dr. Anderson, March 10, 1931.

³⁸ A.C.F.C. Papers, File 69F, Carrigan to Denis, 14 avril 1931.

³⁹ AS, Education, School District Files, Marcellin S. D. No. 1658, annotation on Petition of Ratepayers of Marcellin S. D. to Hon. Min. of Ed., n.d.

making their views known. H. Squires, for example, drew the Department's attention to the "gratuitous insult" being perpetrated to the Union Jack and British people in the Zenon Park School District by the "patois speaking Catholic subjects of the Vatican state." He claimed that these "renegades" had surmounted the school flagpole with a cruciform ornament and, hence, every time that the Union Jack was flown, it was subordinate to the emblem of a foreign power. Squires urged the Premier to use his authority to remove this offensive ornament because these "potential rebels" should not be permitted to "insult the flag under which they skulk."⁴⁰ An inspector was sent out to conduct a special investigation into these allegations. He reported that the ornament in question resemble an inverted three-leaf clover and doubted that it could be the source of controversy because it was "solely intended to be ornamental." The inspector also noted that the complainant was not a resident of the district.⁴¹ The Rosetown chapter of the Ku Klux Klan wrote Anderson inquiring whether members of Catholic orders could wear their garb while attending normal school. The Klan hinted that complaints against this practice were being voiced in addition to rumors that the sisters were being given preference over other students.⁴² The Premier replied that there was nothing to prevent the nuns from wearing their garb while attending normal school and that he was confident that no preference was being accorded to them. A copy of this reply was sent to the principals of normal schools.⁴³

The situation in Saskatchewan was not devoid of humor. The secretary of a French Canadian school district, for example, informed the Department of his refusal to accept material sent by the Red Cross because it bore the emblem of an association and, furthermore, the cross was a religious symbol whose presence was prohibited by the School Act. Departmental officials quickly reassured the conscientious secretary that the legislation was not directed against the Red Cross.⁴⁴ When Anderson sent his picture to all schools in the province, *Le Patriote de l'Ouest* did not let the

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, Zenon Park S. D. No. 839, Squires to Dear Sir, June 12, 1931.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, Special Report, June 26, 1931.

⁴² *Ibid.*, File 38, Coulter to Anderson, December 11, 1930.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, File 38, Coulter to Anderson, December 11, 1930.

⁴⁴ A.C.F.C. Papers, File 72B, Rapport de la Tournee de M. Raymond Denis, octobre-novembre 1930, p. 4.

event pass without voicing the appreciation of the French community;:

La place de cette photo est d'ailleurs toute indiquée. Elle remplacera le Christ, que par ses amendements à la Loi scolaire, M. Anderson met en dehors des écoles. Ceux qui s'objectent à la présence du divin crucifié, seront heureux de le voir si avantageusement remplacé par le majestueux profil de notre premier ministre...

D'ailleurs, il n'y a pas à nier que la vue de la photo du premier ministre, remplaçant le Christ sur les murs de nos écoles, sera une source continuelle d'inspiration pour les élèves.⁴⁵

The controversy engendered by the legislation concerning religious garb and emblems was intensified when the attention of the province focused on the status of the French language in schools. In the past, nativists had demanded the suppression of the primary course in the French language to promote and facilitate cultural conformity. Bowing to this pressure the Premier, in May 1930, appointed two members of the normal school staff to conduct an "impartial" inquiry into conditions in French school districts. Despite the serious and obvious limitations of the investigation, the report recommended that the primary course in the French language be abolished because it was an impediment to the acquisition of "an adequate knowledge of English"⁴⁶ Consequently, on February 27, 1931, Anderson brought down legislation to repeal the use of French as a language of instruction in grade one. The enforcement of this amendment created no controversy because the French entertained no doubts concerning its constitutionality. Furthermore, given the vigilance of inspectors and the hard times, school districts were not about to risk the loss of the school grant by continuing to provide French language instruction.

Much of the controversy surrounding the Anderson amendments arose because their impact and political ramifications were not confined to Saskatchewan. Events in Saskatchewan provided Quebec Liberals with a magnificent opportunity to denounce and embarrass the Conservative party at the provincial and federal levels. During the 1929 campaign, for example, Conservative circulars appealing to racial and religious prejudices were reproduced in the Quebec press and there were rumors that the federal leader, R.

⁴⁵ *Le Patriote de l'Ouest*, 14 mai 1930.

⁴⁶ AS, Education, File 10, Brown-Gagné Report, p. 8.

B. Bennett, personally was assisting Conservatives in Saskatchewan.⁴⁷ The Anderson government's decision to abolish the French language primary course caused a great deal of apprehension to federal Conservatives who had not yet recovered from the repercussions of the legislation dealing with religious garb and emblems. On the day that the language amendment received second reading, A. W. Merriam, the Prime Minister's private secretary, telegraphed Attorney-General M. A. MacPherson to state that the legislation would make things very difficult for Bennett and probably result in the downfall of the federal Conservative administration. The legislation would divide the country and Merriam feared that it would result in the immediate appointment of a French Canadian to fill the vacant senate seat in Saskatchewan.⁴⁸ In the House of Commons, it was obvious that members of both major parties were anxious to use Saskatchewan's school legislation to embarrass political opponents.⁴⁹

On the other hand, it was difficult for French Canadians in Quebec to regard the Anderson amendments as anything but an overt attack on their religion and culture. The legislation of 1930 was directed almost exclusively against French Canadian public schools and it threatened the services of religious communities, the most dedicated and devoted teachers of French. The loss of the sisters would be catastrophic because Anderson had already severed the traditional source of recruitment with Quebec. The amendment of 1931 eliminated a vital barrier against assimilation and it seemed to confirm Quebec's suspicion that there was no protection for the French language beyond the frontiers of Quebec. It was only natural that the province of Quebec would regard the French minority in Saskatchewan as "les blessés," a term used previously to describe the Franco-Ontarians in their struggle against Regulations XVII.

As could be expected, numerous French Canadian organizations expressed their solidarity with Saskatchewan's French minority. One of the most influential organizations in Quebec, *l'Association Catholique de la Jeunesse Canadienne* went further and sought

⁴⁷ *Le Soleil*, 23 mai 1929.

⁴⁸ Public Archives of Canada, Papers of the Rt. Hon. R. B. Bennett, Merriam to MacPherson, March 5, 1931, 351718.

⁴⁹ *House of Commons Debates, 1931*, Debate on the Address, see speeches of F. W. Turnbull, G. W. McPhee, W. D. Cowan, J. F. Pouliot, A. Lavergne, M. Dupré, O. L. Boulanger.

Prime Minister Bennett's intervention.⁵⁰ The association also approached other prominent Conservatives, among them R. L. Borden and C. H. Cahan.⁵¹

While appeals to politicians failed to bring about redress, Montreal's *Société St-Jean-Baptiste* provided tangible assistance in the form of a public subscription for Saskatchewan's French minority. To promote this campaign, Raymond Denis, the A.C.F.C.'s president, wrote numerous articles for the Quebec press and made two speaking tours in that province. The Anderson government's staunch supporter, the Regina *Daily Star* took exception to Denis' articles and claimed that they were being written for "consumption in Quebec."⁵² According to the editor, the press reports of Denis' travels made it clear that he had gone to the east to misrepresent the persecution of Catholics in Saskatchewan and, in so doing, he had accepted the "comic opera role of Le Chef de la Résistance."⁵³

While the accusations of the *Daily Star* were to be expected, those of Mgr. Z.-H. Marois, the former Vicar Capitular of the Archdiocese of Regina, came as a surprise. Marois, who was then *curé* of the parish of Ste. Foy in Quebec declared publicly that ninety per-cent of what had been said or written about the school question in Saskatchewan was "exaggerated or false." He claimed, furthermore, that Denis had made "strange declarations" on his recent trip to Quebec.⁵⁴ Quick to render praise where it was due, the *Daily Star* reproduced Marois' statements claiming that he had performed a "valid service for truth and amity" by his "courageous and timely denunciations" of "platform agitators" who had been deluding the simple minded people of Quebec with stories of French Catholic persecution in Saskatchewan.⁵⁵

While Mgr. Marois' comments profoundly shocked many French Catholics, his interpretation was, nevertheless, correct. The administrative records and school district files of the Department

⁵⁰ Public Archives of Canada, Papers of the Rt. Hon. R. B. Bennett, Bertrand to Bennett, 20 décembre 1930, 350953.

⁵¹ A.C.F.C. Papers, File 68K, Borden to Dansereau, February 6, 1931; Cahan to Dansereau, 17 janvier 1931.

⁵² *Daily Star*, April 11, 1931.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, June 19, 1931.

⁵⁴ *Le Patriote de l'Ouest*, 1 juillet 1931.

⁵⁵ *Daily Star*, June 27, 1931.

of Education clearly indicate that Catholics had not been persecuted nor had the nuns been forced out of public schools by the garb legislation of 1930. In September, 1929, for example, there were 96 nuns teaching in 26 public school districts in Saskatchewan. In December, 1933, after four years of “persecution,” the number of nuns teaching in public schools had decreased by three to 93 but the number of districts employing them had increased by eight to 34. The amendment to the School Grants Act did not put an end to the practice of renting property from the Catholic Church for public school purposes. In 1929, there had been 17 public school districts renting 39 class rooms in buildings owned by the Church.⁵⁶ In 1932, 24 Catholic public school districts were renting Church property. In 1934, 20 Catholic public school districts were still conducting school in 41 rooms belonging to the Catholic Church.⁵⁷ While it is true that the nuns who remained in public schools had to modify their habit, the resulting “Anderson garb” which usually consisted of an academic gown placed over their regular costume, might have been warm, it was, nevertheless, not an unbearable imposition on the religious communities. In the end, the sisters abandoned public schools under their direction in only two or three districts where there were only one or two nuns teaching. In all other districts, they retained the custody of the schools under their direction.⁵⁸ In two localities, the convents became private schools although space was rented to boards for public school purposes.⁵⁹

The feeling of persecution was a natural reaction on the part of French Catholics in Saskatchewan who felt that they were being unjustly discriminated against by the Anderson amendments. Throughout the years, the French minority had struggled to maintain its cultural identity and heritage and the French language instruction provided by the dedicated nuns contributed greatly to *la survivance*. Thus, the garb legislation, by threatening the services of the sisters, was a potential mortal blow to the French community. The legislation of 1931 which rescinded the primary course in the French language confirmed the worst fears of French Catholics. These fears were made known to Quebec by means of

⁵⁶ AS, Education, File 34, Return Requested by Mr. Patterson, (1) (3) (4).

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, (6).

⁵⁸ A.C.F.C. Papers, File 70, de Margerie to Cantin, 1 avril 1931.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, File 67A, Mathieu to Denis, 9 mai 1930; File 70, Sylvestre to Cher Monsieur, 17- décembre 1930.

press communiqués, special articles and public addresses and *la vieille province* could not remain oblivious to the plight of its compatriots in Saskatchewan. The facts were distorted, unintentionally by some and intentionally by others and, in the end, persecution became the accepted interpretation of what was taking place in the western province. Raymond Denis, president of the A.C.F.C., himself admitted to a group in Quebec that the term persecution was inaccurate because “il dépasse peut-être la portée de notre situation réelle.”⁶⁰

On the other hand, there was very little justification for the enactment of the Anderson amendments. The evidence clearly indicates that the ultra-Protestant case against alleged sectarian influences was based on passion and emotion rather than concrete facts. The garb-crucifix controversy, for example, affected only 8 or 10 of the province's 4,776 public school districts in 1928-29. Disputes over Catholic Church property used for public school purposes affected no more than six districts.⁶¹ While nativists might question the veracity of departmental statistics, no self-respecting patriot could doubt those put forth by the Orange Lodge. In 1928, the Lodge had appointed a Special Committee to Consider Infringements of the School Act. The following year, in 1929, the Committee reported that it had received only two complaints and that both had since been resolved.⁶² Regardless of their numbers or influence, however, nuns, crucifixes and foreign language instruction in public schools were regarded as disruptive, subversive elements. The intensity of the nativist response to these alleged sectarian influences can be attributed to the fact that zealous Protestants envisaged a total collapse of their conceptual world unless steps were taken immediately to restore Anglo-Protestant values to a dominant status by means of restrictive legislation such as the Anderson amendments.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, File 68M, Denis to Mademoiselle, 22 avril 1931.

⁶¹ *Morning Leader*, June 5, 1928.

⁶² *Report of Proceedings of the Grand Orange Lodge of Saskatchewan*, 1929, p. 43.