

Confederation: Benefit or Threat for the French-Canadian “Nationality”?

A Benefit

“The delegates from all the provinces have agreed that the use of the French language be one of principles on which the Confederation would be based.” – “There are no winners or losers here... We now have a constitution under the aegis of which all British subjects are now in a situation of absolute equality, with equal rights in all domains: language, religion, ownership, and personal rights.”

John A. MACDONALD, Prime Minister of the first Federal government.

“We see [in the new constitution] the recognition of French-Canadian nationality. As a distinct and separate nationality, we form a State within a State, with the full possession of our rights, and the formal recognition of our national independence.”

La Minerve, 1867.

For Henri Bourassa, Confederation was a “compact” between two nations, two founding peoples.

“The basis for Confederation is the duality of races, the duality of languages, guaranteed by the equality of rights.” – [This compact] “was to put an end to the conflict of races and of Churches and ensure that everyone, Catholics and Protestants, French and English, had a perfect equality of rights throughout the whole of the Canadian Confederation.”

Henri BOURASSA, 1912, 1916

The “compact” thesis was reiterated by Lionel GROULX and cited by many, such as Richard Arès and the Tremblay Commission (1956), etc.

A Threat

“What is said to be the compact of the Québec resolutions is without historical or constitutional foundation.”

Norman McL. ROGERS, future Canadian Minister, 1931.

“[...] the alleged Confederation compact does not exist.”

William F. O’CONNOR, 1938.

[Confederation is]

“the grave of the French race and the ruin of Lower Canada.”

Wilfred LAURIER, attorney in Arthabaska at the time of the Confederation.

“the fatal blow to our nationality which had stated to take root on this land of North America.”

Henri-E. TASCHEREAU, deputy from 1861 to 1867.

After Louis Riel was hanged in 1885, Honoré MERCIER, Premier of Québec, declared of Confederation: “We have been deceived, we have been betrayed.”

When French Canadians saw Manitoba and Ontario adopt legislative measures against the language of their French minorities, while Québec was entirely respectful of the language of its English minority, this feeling of betrayal and dissatisfaction over Confederation would only intensify.

“The artificial unity of Confederation did not solve the problem of race.”

André SIEGFRIED, 1906.

“The Canadian Constitution, in its entirety as in its Articles 91, 92, 93, and 133, articles which are essential to the life of a province such as Québec, will remain far too subject to the interpretation of the Federal Parliament, that is to say, of the Anglo-Canadian and Protestant majority.”

Lionel GROULX, *Histoire du Canada français*.