

LANGUAGE AND SCHOOL CONFLICTS IN THE WINDSOR BORDER REGION, 1882-1920

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In spite of its image as a peaceful, law-abiding society, Canada has been wracked by a series of ethnic and religious disputes since the Conquest. From the Manitoba Schools Crisis to the more recent issue of public funding for private religious schools in Ontario, ethnic and religious disputes have characterized our history. Such was certainly the case in the province of Ontario. Disputes over the Clergy Reserves in the nineteenth century fueled rivalries between various Christian denominations hungry for public financial support of their institutions. One of the most acrimonious of public debates in Ontario, however, has centered upon the issue of French and Catholic education

Historians have chronicled the ongoing dispute over Catholic education with a particular focus on the Confederation constitutional debates, French language schools in Manitoba and Ontario in particular, and the struggle for full funding in Ontario's denominational schools at the secondary level. While much of the dispute has focused on the confessional nature of these schools and whether they had a right to public support, rivalries within the separate system have also attracted attention. Ontario historians have looked at the French language education issue and the ongoing dispute over the right of parents to instruct their children in such schools. However, the principle focus of these works has targeted the eastern and northern regions of the province, where the vast majority of the francophone population only began to settle well into the nineteenth century.

In his work, *Language, Schooling and Cultural Conflict*, Chad Gaffield illustrates that the conflict over French language schooling in eastern Ontario surfaced in the late 1870s. Focusing on Prescott County, the author demonstrates that a combination of forces, beginning with an economic downturn and an increased participation of French-speaking children in the school system fueled cultural tensions. Gaffield argues that the French-Canadian children of Prescott faced numerous obstacles in their road to an education in

their language. The sheer lack of French language schools and qualified teachers, the farm family economy, the resistance of anglophone trustees to anything but an English language education, the persistent hiring of anglophone teachers, and the supervision of schools by unilingual anglophone superintendents all set the stage for problems.¹ Out of this social analysis of the conflict, Gaffield denotes the emergence of a distinct Franco-Ontarian identity for the French-Canadians of Prescott. The arrival of these newcomers to Prescott and the appearance of French language and bilingual schools were new phenomena that provoked a response from Ontario's English-speaking Protestant majority. Under public pressure, the provincial cabinet issued Regulation 17 in 1912, severely restricting the use of French as a medium of instruction in the province's elementary schools. This legislation targeted these new settlers from Quebec who flooded communities near the provincial border and in the northern mining towns.

The French-Canadians of the Windsor Border Region did not follow the same pattern of settlement. This area had been home to a permanent francophone population since the foundation of Fort Detroit by Antoine de la Mothe Cadillac in the summer of 1701. Unlike Eastern and Northern Ontario, the border region had a longstanding tradition of French language education. Missions were set up at Isle aux Bois Blancs (Boblo Island) and in the tiny settlement of Assumption by 1748 to instruct the local Huron population in the Catholic faith. With regard to concrete evidence of the teaching of French, records indicate that Assumption parish (in present-day Windsor) supported a program of French instruction for local children that dated back to at least 1786, five years before the birth of the province of Upper Canada.² For about a century, English and French speaking inhabitants of the region lived in relative peace. The isolated nature of most francophone villages in Essex and Kent counties limited the contentious issue of language and religion in the area schools. Beginning around the 1830s, the French speaking population received reinforcements from Quebec, when migrant workers settled in the southwestern corner of Ontario to assume jobs clearing the land. These newcomers, from the Montreal, St. Maurice, Joliette and Maskinongé regions of Quebec among others, eventually purchased farms of their own and intermarried with the

¹ Chad Gaffield, *Language, Schooling and Cultural Conflict* (Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1987), 100-101.

² E.J. Lajeunesse, *Windsor Border Region* (Windsor, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1960), 294-295.

established old stock French families.³ Together they formed new communities east of Windsor. For decades to come, a traditional French-Canadian lifestyle prevailed, gravitating around the cultural center of the parish. The decline in available land, and the appearance of industry in the border cities of Windsor, Ford, Walkerville and Sandwich attracted the farmer's sons to the English-speaking ways of the larger community. With urbanization came a series of challenges that created a crisis for the French-Canadian population.⁴ Conflicts broke out over language in the city parishes, with disagreements focusing on the amount of French used not only at mass, but at schools as well. Such tensions flared and subsided for decades. However, latent hostility finally bubbled over with the advent of Monsignor Michael Francis Fallon as Bishop of the Diocese of London. Fallon's clumsy management of French-Canadian nationalist priest agitators triggered unprecedented strife in the Catholic parishes of Essex and Kent counties. Such tensions eventually culminated in the explosive riot in the border city of Ford, near Windsor, in September 1917. While the roots of the language and school conflict can be traced back to troubles in previous decades, and while many factors did indeed contribute to the outbreak of violent protest among local French-Canadians, Bishop Michael Francis Fallon was a principal catalyst that exacerbated the latent tension.

The Windsor area's French language community has a long heritage of education disputes that date back to the second half of the nineteenth century. French schools in this region struggled to survive the geographic isolation and the penury of qualified educators. In the era before the construction of the Grand Trunk and Great Western Railways, few farming families felt that schooling was a necessity of life. In spite of this, while the records are fragmentary, there is evidence to support the enduring survival of an all girls' French school from the late 1700s to the 1820s.⁵ The French-

³ Madeleine Leal (ed.), *La Paroisse Saint-Joachim*, (Windsor: Chamberlain Press, 1982). This work identifies Quebec migrants from other counties, including Lotbiniere, Rimouski, and Beauport. The first migrants to actually purchase farms and settle permanently did so in Saint-Joachim in the early 1850s. Many of these settlers began by working in lumber camps or on the railroad later on or before buying land.

⁴ Jack Cecillon, "Turbulent Times in the Diocese of London: Bishop Fallon and the French Language Controversy," *Ontario History*, December, 1995, 370-395.

⁵ *Le Progrès*, 17 July 1884. *Le Progrès* was a French language weekly newspaper published by Aurèle and Gaspard Pacaud, active members of the local Canadian Liberal party affiliate. The newspaper was initially published

Canadian community would not be a stranger to disappointment and failure with regard to its schools, however. According to Aurele Pacaud, the editor of the local French newspaper, *Le Progrès*, religious and community leaders had difficulty maintaining a reliable French language system until the late 1840s. Not even the stature of two charismatic brothers, Fathers Nicolas and Pierre Point, could reverse the downward spiral towards cultural assimilation in the border cities.

Il y a une trentaine d'années, l'instruction était à peu près nulle; la nouvelle génération, livrée à l'ignorance, isolée de notre grand centre français, et serrée de plus près par l'élément anglo-saxon, oubliait rapidement sa langue et ses traditions pour adopter la langue et les habitudes des nouveaux venus. Les pères jésuites qui desservaient alors Sandwich et les missions environnantes, déploraient, sans pouvoir y remédier, cet état de choses, et s'alarmaient devant l'avenir sombre qui se préparait.⁶

This fear of Anglicization would become a theme of constant repetition for generations to come in the French-speaking community.

On April 5, 1851, a local controversy erupted in Sandwich township when school trustees requested permission to employ a Frenchman by the name of Gigon as a teacher. The man in question, although a certified teacher, could only speak French. Consequently, the Essex County Board of Examiners declined to grant him a certificate of qualification. The Sandwich trustees appealed to their local superintendent who conveyed their grievances to the Provincial Council of Public Instruction. At its meeting of April 25, 1851, the members discussed the issue of language of instruction. They agreed to add a clause to the qualification guidelines for school teachers outlining that a knowledge of French or German grammar could be substituted for a knowledge of English and certified accordingly.⁷ Once this had been accomplished, the Council informed the County Boards of Canada West that no guidelines in

in Detroit and later on in Windsor for the French speaking communities on both sides of the Canadian-American border from 1881 until 1912. A rival Conservative newspaper, *Le Courrier d'Essex* appeared briefly in 1884 and 1885, and resurfaced in 1908.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ C.B. Sissons *Bilingual Schools in Ontario* (Toronto: J.M. Dent and Sons, 1917), 22.

the School Act could prevent the engagement of a qualified teacher. Subsequently, the board hired Mr. Gigon.

In the early 1880s, a series of incidents surfaced suggesting that the language of instruction was beginning to create tension within the general population. The first such incident appeared in the village of Belle River, twenty-five kilometers east of the border cities in 1881. Here, the school board officials were promoting an English-only curriculum. *Le Progrès's* editor offered his thoughts on the situation, suggesting that the school syndics of Belle River had used deception to ban the teaching of French, under the pretext that they could not find a teacher qualified to teach both proper English and proper French. The board argued it was justified in hiring a fully qualified English teacher, given the circumstances. Of some note here, was the fact that Belle River was a village with a substantial French-speaking majority. It raises the question as to whether the local population preferred the merits of an English education or was simply indifferent to the issue of school altogether. The editor of *Le Progrès* declared (incorrectly) that local Francophones had a right to be indignant, since the federal constitution guaranteed French-Canadians in Ontario the right to their language and their schools. This theme would be uttered again and again.

For most of the nineteenth century, however, harmony on the education front was easy to maintain since most francophone farming communities in Essex and Kent counties were a fair distance from the border cities of Sandwich, Windsor and Walkerville, where a minority of Francophones did reside. Poor roads, the slow nature of horse power, and the high cost of transportation on the new railroads made it easy for these cultural enclaves to preserve their heritage. Large numbers of recently arrived Francophones from Quebec lived in relative isolation around the farming villages of Pain Court, Grande Pointe, Pointe-aux-Roches, Saint-Joachim de Ruscom, Belle-Rivière and Tecumseh to the east and northeast of the Border Cities. The more established old stock French farming communities of LaSalle, McGregor and Rivière-aux-Canards could be found to the south and south west of this urban center. French-Canadian social life centered around the parish, with Catholic priests ministering to their congregations for decades without fear of being transferred. French-Canadian farm life was anchored in stability. However, by the turn of the century, a shortage of farmland compelled many young men to leave the countryside in the quest for permanent employment in the Border City factories and businesses of Sandwich, Windsor, and Walkerville.

The growing urbanization of the French-Canadian population naturally brought new challenges to their cultural survival. To cope with this adjustment, the substantial French-speaking component of

the Border Cities gravitated around three parishes: Assumption in Sandwich, St. Alphonse in Windsor and especially Notre Dame Du Lac in what was to become the border city of Ford. Each of these parishes relied upon the services of francophone priests. Nevertheless, French-Canadians now had to share their churches and schools with other families, such as the Irish Catholics, who only spoke English.

Anxiety over the state of French language education led to a regional convention in Windsor, on June 25, 1883, a full two years before the Mowat government introduced the first of its restrictions on French language instruction. The convention ended with a resolution that clearly indicated the growing concern of the community to their fate

Que, vu que la langue française est la langue de nos ancêtres, et que sa conservation parmi nous est une des principales sauvegardes de notre religion et de nos traditions nationales, le plus grand encouragement lui soit accordé surtout dans nos écoles et de la part de nos hommes d'État de notre origine.⁸

As Chad Gaffield effectively illustrated with regard to the eastern Ontario scene, southwestern Ontario was becoming an area of growing agitation to preserve French as a medium of instruction by the early 1880s. Such anxieties would serve as a precursor to the language and school conflicts of the decades to come.

Disputes over the French language continued in the schools and eventually the parishes throughout the 1880s and 1890s. Among the concerns expressed involved the instruction of French in the schools of Windsor, with no satisfactory resolution until the turn of the century. Much of the reason for the failure of this initiative was the division within the community as expressed in the Liberal newspaper *Le Progrès* and the Conservative newspaper *Le Courrier*. The former advocated the reestablishment of a bilingual education, while the latter insisted on the establishment of a French only curriculum for children under the age of 10.⁹ Language issues also

⁸ "Proposition de M. F. X. Meloche, appuyé par H. Girardot", as quoted from O. Lalonde dans "Origine, but, préparatifs et organisation, CEFCO, p. 41, and cited in René Dionne's "Une Première Prise de Parole Collective", *Les Cahiers Charlevoix*, 1: 42.

⁹ The political dispute between Aurèle and Gaspard Pacaud of *Le Progrès* and Hippolyte Girardot, editor of the short-lived *Le Courrier d'Essex* finds its roots in an earlier business partnership that turned sour. Girardot was a previous editor of *Le Progrès* but had a falling out with the Pacaud brothers. Consequently, Girardot set up a rival newspaper, *Le Courrier d'Essex* with

embroiled local Catholic parishes, most notably St. Alphonse in Windsor, where parishioners petitioned the bishop for more French at Sunday masses. This problem would resurface sporadically between the 1880s and early 1900s. Similar troubles erupted at parish schools and churches in Tilbury, Saint-Joachim and Walkerville.

For French-Canadians of the Windsor border region, language and religion became a continuous source of controversy and conflict as their society and personal realities became integrated in a larger urban and industrial society. The isolation of the French-Canadian farming community around Notre Dame du Lac was disrupted with the establishment of factories on the Detroit River. Parents struggled to provide adequately for their children while working long hours at home or in such factories as Hiram Walker's Distillery in Walkerville. Some families failed to see the continuing need for French when the language of money, business and employment was English. Still other families determined to maintain their culture in this new milieu and turned to the schools to ensure that their children learned to speak both English and French adequately.

The issue of the French language as a medium of instruction was not the only point of controversy involving the region's bilingual schools. Indeed, trouble had been brewing over the caliber of education being provided in such institutions for some time. In July, 1881, Théodule Girardot, the regional school inspector, published a report on the state of bilingual schools in Essex County. In essence, his report was cautious, praising the dedication and hard work of the majority of schoolmasters and schoolmistresses. Nevertheless, Girardot illustrated that these schools faced significant problems long before Monsignor Michael Francis Fallon called for drastic reform:

Nous en avons un bon nombre d'excellents, sous tous les rapports, d'autres sont médiocres, mais de bonne volonté; d'autres enfin, en petit nombre il est vrai, sont de véritables mercénaires, passez-moi l'expression; ceux-ci n'ont rien de qualités, je dirai des vertus indispensables aux maîtres de la jeunesse. Je souffre de leur présence et j'appelle instamment toute l'attention de Messieurs les syndics pour le choix qu'ils ont à faire chaque année, d'un maître ou d'une maîtresse.¹⁰

Conservative political stripes. Editorials in both newspapers often consisted of vicious attacks on the character of these former colleagues turned rivals.

¹⁰ *Le Progrès*, 7 July 1881.

Girardot, a native of France, did not attribute the presence of poor quality teachers to the certification program alone, although he did indicate that many French-Canadian candidates did experience more difficulties than their English counterparts in passing second-class certification tests. However, he noted the continued improvement in the caliber of candidates coming out of the new high school system, identifying the growing number of bilingual students being admitted to this institution¹¹. Girardot added, though, that there existed still another motive for the disappointing character of some of the school teachers. He pointed his finger directly at the local school boards,

Je leur demande comme grâce de ne point s'arrêter au taux du salaire demandé, et de se tenir en garde surtout contre les engagements à ~~produit~~ produit, assurés qu'ils peuvent être, que les maîtres à bon marché sont rares, et par conséquent, généralement trop chers.¹²

In short, Girardot accused some local boards of being responsible for the problem, by exhibiting excessive stinginess. No board could expect to attract good teachers if it refused to offer decent salaries. In addition, Girardot challenged board syndics to crack down on lazy teachers who shirked their responsibilities and lacked the passion to do their utmost. On this issue, Girardot left no doubt that he believed that such figures still haunted the bilingual schools,

Il faut avouer que de tels maîtres, de telles maîtresses, si rares qu'ils soient, sont trop nombreux encore; il ne sont pas à leurs places; ils sont trop chers, et partout ils devraient être impitoyablement rejetés du corps enseignant. C'est à Messieurs les syndics qu'il appartient de nous en débarasser;¹³

Girardot suggested that monthly tests for students and regular notices to the parents with regard to the results might bring greater accountability among the teaching profession. In an effort to attract quality educators from Quebec, the local school commission advertised in newspapers in the hopes of luring enthusiastic young teachers to the Windsor border region.¹⁴

¹¹Girardot did not specify what growing number meant; numbers were proportionately lower on a consistent basis for FC candidates in Essex-Kent counties.

¹² *Le Progrès*, 7 July 1881.

¹³ *Le Progrès*, 7 July 1881.

¹⁴ *Le Progrès*, 23 March 1882.

The concern of local French-Canadians for bilingual instruction became more urgent in the mid 1880s, when a growing chorus of voices in Queen's Park began to call into question the continued existence of such schools in an English-speaking province. Changes to regulations referring to the bilingual schools established a well-defined list of prescribed French books to be read by all students. The ministry also raised the standards with a new insistence on English as the language of instruction in the schools. With this, the use of French as a language for teacher certification was to be replaced by English-only. By 1889, the province took a further step and established a strict list of mandated bilingual books for the classroom to which all bilingual teachers were expected to adhere. As a result of these changes, many teachers with third-class certificates trained in Quebec as well as in Ontario, encountered difficulty in meeting the new standards.¹⁵ Thus, the Windsor border region, like other areas such as Prescott County, experienced a sudden decline in the number of qualified teachers, which in turn threatened to transform the bilingual schools into English-only institutions. The local Liberal member of provincial parliament, Gaspard Pacaud, wrote to Inspector Girardot and members of the local Catholic clergy to see if anything could be done to rectify this troubling development.

Pacaud indicated in his open letter in *Le Progrès* that he had received numerous complaints from aspiring French-Canadian teachers regarding the increasing difficulty of certification exams for a diploma in teaching. Pacaud indicated that the current situation might indeed represent a growing injustice both for budding French-Canadian educators and for French-Canadian communities in general. Consequently, he requested that the inspector determine the truth "d'une manière impartiale". Pacaud inquired as to whether certification exams should be modified for the benefit of French-Canadian candidates. Secondly, Pacaud asked Girardot to explain whether such modifications would have a consequential effect lowering the overall quality of instruction. Third, he requested to know whether such changes would affect the quality of English instruction in the French schools. And lastly, Pacaud wished to know whether such modifications would adversely affect test scores and the overall learning of students.¹⁶ Pacaud was to receive two

¹⁵ Dionne, "Une Première Prise de Parole Collective", *Les Cahiers Charlevoix*, 1: 40; Robert Choquette, *Language and Religion* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1975), 56-57.

¹⁶ *Le Progrès*, 14 February 1889

responses to his letter. The first came from a Reverend Fr. Marseille, a member of the local school board, who indicated that he did not believe the new requirements had put bilingual teachers at a disadvantage with their English counterparts. Marseille indicated that bilingual candidates, being required to master two languages, were subsequently exempted from several other subjects and their exams. In addition, Marseille asserted that the local inspectors and examiners “se montrent très indulgent pour tous les instituteurs canadiens français qui font leur possible.”¹⁷ In response to Pacaud’s inquiry into a relaxation in the certification standards, Marseille declared firmly,

Je ne pense pas qu’il serait prudent et sage de diminuer encore le niveau d’instruction de nos Instituteurs après les exceptions notables actuelles en leur faveur. Ce serait plutôt les placer dans une condition par trop inférieure aux Instituteurs anglais et, qui serait au détriment des écoles françaises, aussi bien que les Instituteurs vis à vis le public et leurs supérieurs et maîtres dans l’enseignement.¹⁸

For Marseille, any movement to water down the standards of certification for bilingual school teachers would leave the entire system in a state of institutionalized inferiority.

School Inspector Theodule Girardot also responded to Pacaud’s letter, echoing the refrain of Reverend Father Marseille. Girardot suggested that the letters of complaint that Pacaud had received were most likely from unsuccessful candidates. The Inspector urged these disappointed participants to apply some old-fashioned hard work and perseverance to achieve their dream of becoming teachers. In addition, Girardot indicated that his office had tried to show considerable generosity towards the French candidates. He wrote that he showed a certain latitude towards established teachers with good reputations, allowing them time to prepare and re-write their exams. Nevertheless, Girardot was categorical in his rejection of Pacaud’s request that the examination standards be relaxed.¹⁹

Girardot’s commentary raises questions about the quality of bilingual education in the Windsor border region, and does lend credence to allegations that such schools were struggling to meet the minimum standards. It is significant to note the staggering fact that,

¹⁷ *Le Progrès*, 28 February 1889.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Le Progrès*, 28 February 1889.

according to Girardot's letter, not one single teacher in the area's bilingual schools had succeeded in earning the provincial requirement of 700 points. Girardot warned that any lowering in the standards of testing with regard to certification exams would only hurt the bilingual schools, and strip bilingual educators of the respect and confidence needed to accomplish their onerous task. Girardot warned that the consequences of such a perception were already being felt in the area schools.

Déjà une partie de nos syndics d'écoles les croient inférieurs aux Anglais. Je regrette de vous dire que cte année dans deux de nos meilleures écoles françaises, les syndics ont engagé des maîtres anglais, les croyant supérieurs aux nôtres.²⁰

Girardot summarized his arguments with a three-point conclusion as to why he would oppose any effort to water down admission standards for teaching certificates. First, such a move would discourage those teachers who had worked hard to earn their diplomas. Second, such an approach would encourage negligence and ignorance on the part of those who were currently preparing for the examinations. Lastly, such a development would lower the French-Canadian nationality in the eyes of strangers.²¹

Girardot's written response to Pacaud is timely in that the information hit the pages of the local newspapers while a growing debate was raging in Queen's Park over the bilingual schools of the province. William Meredith, the Leader of the Opposition, had become an outspoken opponent of such schools, and of the Catholic separate system in general. Consequently, provincial officials in the Mowat government had been forced to a degree onto the defensive. In the September 19, 1889 edition of the local French newspaper *Le Progrès*, Pacaud published a school inspector's report prepared for the commissioners of each school in the region. The findings of the report suggested that Pacaud's bold pronouncement about the bilingual schools of Essex-Kent counties was a bit optimistic. According to Girardot, sixty percent of the schools were achieving satisfactory results, while an alarming forty per cent were not.²² In the midst of reports across Ontario regarding the questionable quality of bilingual education, provincial Conservatives pursued a crusade against the bilingual schools through two dismal election campaigns,

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ *Le Progrès*, 28 February 1889.

²² *Le Progrès*, 19 September 1889.

only to face crushing defeat on both occasions at the hands of the redoubtable Oliver Mowat. As a result, in spite of the questionable caliber of many English-French schools, the provincial government did not move to abolish them. However, it did introduce legislation to limit the use of French instruction in the schools beyond the first form, except for cases where the student was unable to understand. This loophole gave such institutions considerable latitude to continue French instruction.²³

The questionable quality of instruction in the English-French schools of the Windsor border region threatened the sustainability of such institutions. To compound the situation further, these schools were plagued by another social affliction: truancy. The school commissioner for Sandwich East identified poor attendance to be a contributing factor in poor school performance. "Quelques élèves firent très bien tandis que d'autres qui n'avaient pas été régulièrement assidus à l'école, firent beaucoup moins de progrès."²⁴

An earlier report in the *Le Progrès* suggested that some parents did not consider attendance to be a priority, as pointed out in the rudimentary statistics provided by the paper. Inspector Girardot's 1881 report illustrated the alarming rate of truancy among school age French-Canadian children. Accepting the fact that such numbers might not be reliable, they still shed light on attendance trends that appear within the northern section of Essex County outside of the border cities. For the towns of Maidstone, Sandwich, Tilbury West and Amherstburg, and the townships of Sandwich East, and Sandwich West truancy rates appeared to hover around ten per cent. However, for the township of Rochester, which was perhaps populated with the most significant concentration of French-Canadians, truancy rates soared to approximately fifty percent.²⁵ Girardot attributed the lack of attendance to the indifference of some parents and the sporadic, seasonal participation of many farm children taken away from their studies by chores and the harvest. He recommended that the ministry apply the truancy laws more severely to compel parents to ensure their children received the benefits of a sound education.

Hence, it becomes clear that the bilingual schools of the Windsor Border region suffered from a number of afflictions. First, these schools often failed to provide an adequate program in the French

²³ Robert Choquette, *L'Ontario français historique*, 170-173 as quoted in Dionne, 40.

²⁴ *Le Progrès*, 19 September 1889.

²⁵ *Le Progrès*, 7 July 1881.

language and therefore became a source of frustration for French-Canadian parents. Some parents found their children being anglicized at institutions that they had hoped would preserve their culture. Secondly, these schools were accused of a lesser quality education, since school inspectors raised concerns about the caliber of the pupils' spoken and written English. Lastly, school inspectors identified a considerable percentage of school age children who attended classes sporadically if at all. The first two problems drew considerable fire from the public, while, surprisingly, the last problem failed to attract any lasting attention.

In the midst of these disputes, the French-Canadians of the Windsor border region were adapting to a series of social changes brought upon them by urbanization and industrialization. Some of them recognized the benefits of English, but many held strong emotional ties to their French heritage. Local parish priests wrote countless letters lamenting the growing drift towards assimilation over the course of the first decade of the twentieth century. The arrival of Michael Francis Fallon as the new Roman Catholic Bishop of the Diocese of London would have a significant impact on the evolution of the French-Canadian communities of the Windsor Border region from 1910 onwards.²⁶ Michael Francis Fallon was an educator and an advocate for the abolition of bilingual education. Fallon's experience at the University of Ottawa convinced him that the students of the bilingual system lacked an adequate foundation in either French or English. Consequently, he believed that French-Canadians were doomed to live lives of ignorance and poverty.

Fallon's arrival in London ushered in a period of swift changes to the province's bilingual schools. The new bishop lost no time moving to derail the demands of an Ottawa convention of French-Canadians to extend the bilingual system to the secondary level. Fearing that such demands would threaten the survival of publicly funded Catholic education, and infuriated that an informal agreement to extend new funding to Catholic schools was to be indefinitely delayed as a consequence, Fallon made his opposition to the bilingual schools known to the Minister of Education. The Minister's secretary W.J. Hanna, reported his meeting with the Bishop:

Fallon had determined so far as in him lay to wipe out every vestige of bilingual teaching in the public schools of this Diocese.

²⁶ For the period from 1902 to 1918, the local French language press was sporadic at best, and no known issues remain from this time, with the exception of *Le Courrier d'Essex* from 1908 to 1909 and *Le Clairon*, which existed for less than a year from 1912 to 1913. Much research remains to be undertaken, especially for the first decade of the twentieth century.

The interests of the boys and girls for whom he was in part responsible demanded that it should be discouraged and prohibited, that he was assured that in certain sections of the County of Essex there were children today going to the public school who could not speak English, and this after three generations of their forefathers in that county. Surely nothing more should be necessary to make it clear that the teaching of English had been entirely neglected among the French in that section.²⁷

The bishop's vocal critique of the system of bilingual schools planted the seeds for the upcoming provincial language restrictions that would be imposed.

Fallon also enunciated his worries regarding the dangers posed by bilingual schools to the Catholic system to officials in Rome, "Let us not put too great faith in constitutional guarantees. Our school system rests largely on the good will, the sense of fair play and justice that animate the majority of our non-Catholic fellow-citizens. We cannot outrage these sentiments with impunity."²⁸ The bishop continuously reiterated the looming Protestant threat to the separate school system. He saw this threat as a force that had already deprived Manitobans of their Catholic schools, and denied Ontarians a better funding arrangement for their Catholic schools. Fallon believed that legal protection would not be enough if Catholics lacked the political will.

It cannot be too emphatically declared that the Catholics of Ontario hold their schools in virtue of the good will of their Protestant neighbours, and while we possess by constitutional enactment the principle of Catholic schools, it is recognized by everybody that the Parliament of Ontario, without in the least infringing on our constitutional rights could make it impossible for us to maintain our schools."²⁹

Ever present in the minds of many Catholics, including Fallon, was the dreadful memory of the Manitoba schools crisis. Bishop Fallon

²⁷ Archives of the Diocese of London, F M Fallon Dossier Correspondence with Pyne, Hanna to Pyne, 23 May 1910 as quoted in Pasquale Fiorino, "Bishop Michael Francis Fallon: The Man and His Times", Doctoral Dissertation, Vatican City, Pontificia Universitas Gregoriana, 1992, 110.

²⁸ Memorandum, "Commisso Divinitus Nobis", Archives of the Diocese of London, 24 January, 1917, as quoted in Fiorino, 110.

²⁹ Monsignor Fallon to P. Stagni, Apostolic Delegate from the Vatican in Ottawa, 26 May, 1913 as quoted in Fiorino, 115.

worried about the potential damage that Ontario Protestant resentment could bring upon the separate schools of the province. Like other bishops, he feared that the French Education Conference of 1910 demanding equal recognition of bilingual schools could only heighten tensions and threaten Catholic education. In what appeared initially to be a united front, the Ontario bishops met in Kingston in August of that same year to draft a resolution to respond to these demands.

That we are alarmed for the future of our Catholic Educational System in Ontario, because of the agitation that culminated in the French-Canadian Congress, at Ottawa, in January, 1910, AND that the Right Reverend, the Bishop of London, be delegated from this meeting to interview Sir James Whitney, Prime Minister of Ontario, and represent to him our entire opposition to the educational demands of said Congress.³⁰

Local French-Canadians had their own fears regarding education. Many were apprehensive about the appointment of Fallon as their Bishop and the ramifications this would have for the bilingual schools of the Windsor region. Such fears seemed to be confirmed in September of 1910, when religious orders in the border cities of Ford, Walkerville and Windsor all suspended instruction in French. When the curé of Ford City's Notre Dame du Lac church, Lucien Beaudoin confronted the teachers to demand why they had stopped teaching French, the Mother Superior informed Father Beaudoin that the Bishop had given them direct orders. Beaudoin and his fellow French-Canadian priests were stunned to learn the news.

The priests lost no time in expressing their outrage. One of them immediately leaked news of the oppressive conditions in the bilingual schools to Quebec's French language press. The Bishop was roundly condemned for his unjust behaviour and widely accused of bigotry. Fallon denied the accusations of an alleged intervention. He declared,

"I have never issued, nor caused to be issued, directly or indirectly, verbally, by writing or in any other way, any order or even expression of opinion concerning the teaching of French or any

³⁰ *Statement of the Right Reverend Michael F Fallon, Bishop of London, Ontario, 29 March, 1911, as quoted in Fiorino, 118.*

other language in accordance with the laws of the Province of Ontario.”³¹

However, Fallon did go on to condemn the state of education in the bilingual schools, and pointed out the alarming rates of illiteracy in these schools, warning of the potential damage this was doing to the future livelihood of French-Canadian children. Fallon pointed out that only ten of 2000 children passed the 1910 entrance examination for admission to high school in Essex County. He emphasized that the poorest performance came from the bilingual belt of the diocese. In a letter to Roman officials, Fallon also betrayed a sense of resentment that his fellow bishops had left him holding the proverbial bag:

When in October, 1910, the matter became public, I bore the burden of misrepresentation and abuse without disclosing the fact that my colleagues were equally committed in the matter with myself. I am quite ready to still bear the burden of that misrepresentation and abuse, but I am not prepared to see myself compromised with the Holy See, as though I alone was responsible, and I insist that my rights and character as a Bishop, acting for and in the name of my brother bishops, be properly safeguarded, and I likewise insist that the other Bishops of Ontario accept their share of praise or blame as the case may be.³²

Fallon's zeal for quality education also led to attacks on a number of English schools in the London area for girls. In more than one instance, Fallon replaced religious orders that merely prepared girls to make a good marriage. Nevertheless, his arguments against the bilingual schools of Essex-Kent, in 1910 were refuted by the local school inspector.

Essex County Inspector, David Chenay, suggested that the real reason for the high rate of illiteracy was not the system per se, but rather the high rate of truancy in the countryside, where children were often kept from school to work the fields, gardens, or do manual labour in the canning factories. Chenay added that parental ambivalence and apathy towards education were also contributing factors. He admitted weaknesses in the system but accused the Bishop of unfairly exaggerating the state of affairs in the bilingual schools, however sincere his intentions might be. Perhaps the most

³¹ Quoted in “ACFEO report on Bilingual Schools”, 6 pp., Centre de Recherches en Civilisation Canadienne Française as cited in Jack Cecillon, “Turbulent Times in the Diocese of London, *Ontario History*, December 1995, p. 372.

³² Fallon to Stagni, 26 May 1913, as quoted in Fiorino, 125.

significant portion of Chenay's letter of rebuttal referred directly to the state of language instruction in the bilingual schools.

It is claimed that English is not taught enough in our schools, but I do not think that this claim is justified. Along the river front the French schools are just as good as the English schools in our neighbourhood. I have no hesitation in saying that our best French schools will compare favourably with the best English schools. The fact is that our bilingual schools are becoming largely English. In this district (Essex), I do not think there are more than six departments in which French is taught more than English. At Belle River, very little French is taught, except in the case of young children, and that is a purely French village.³³

Chenay's remarks serve as a follow-up to earlier comments made by school inspector Girardot about the state of education in the bilingual schools in 1889. At that time, the bilingual schools did not appear to be providing students with the basics in English. Clearly, by 1910, it appeared the situation had evolved. Chenay's observations also referred back to the situation in Belle River where parents had protested the relative lack of French instruction in their village school back in 1882. In spite of a considerable francophone majority, Chenay found that the school system operated primarily in English with the tacit knowledge of the parents.

Inspector Chenay findings also disputed Fallon's claims that only ten students in a bilingual system of 2000 had passed high school entrance examinations that year. In an interview with the *Toronto Globe*, Chenay declared,

To begin with I do not admit that his figures are correct. Bishop Fallon would have you believe that the failures to pass the entrance examinations are confined to the French schools. Why I could take you to an English school seven miles from here where three teachers with normal school certificates are employed, and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, in ten years, only one pupil of that school has passed. I do not say it is the fault of the teachers. They do their best under the circumstances, but I simply point out that there is a school where not a word of French is taught.³⁴

The Merchant Report of the previous year confirmed Chenay's allusion to the complexities of the school controversy. The report

³³ *Toronto Globe*, October 21 1910.

³⁴ *Windsor Evening Record*, October 21 1910.

pointed out that the high rate of truancy and child farm labour contributed to the disappointing high school admission test scores. It added that the sheer lack of qualified bilingual teachers further contributed to the problem.³⁵

In the flurry of attention from the newspapers on the bilingual schools issue, Bishop Fallon set his sights on silencing the man he believed to be behind all of the French-Canadian agitation against his leadership. Fallon notified Rome in an open letter that Father Lucien Beaudoin of Notre Dame du Lac, Ford City, was the source of much of the trouble in the diocese. He intimated that Beaudoin was behind the leaks to the Quebec press that had proven so divisive to the Canadian Church. In addition, he accused Beaudoin of neglecting his English-speaking parishioners, and showing a disturbing disobedience to his Bishop. Lastly, he argued that Beaudoin's motives stemmed from the fact that he was merely trying to cover up his own incompetence in the English language.³⁶ Fallon's correspondence with Roman officials would trigger a significant backlash.

Through their own contacts in Rome, the priests of the Windsor border region learned of Fallon's controversial letter. French-Canadian priests in Essex and Kent counties assembled to sign two petitions to Rome. The first objected to Fallon's accusation that Fr. Beaudoin was incompetent in the English language. The second, and more serious petition objected to Monsignor Fallon's accusation of disobedience against Beaudoin. The priests asserted that, on the contrary, Beaudoin had a long record of obedience, with but one exception: Beaudoin refused to obey Fallon's order forbidding the instruction of French to French-Canadians.³⁷ In the Bishop's eyes, the second petition held within it the most serious of accusations: the priests were disputing the Bishop's earlier denials of similar accusations by the Quebec press. In other words, they were asserting that the bishop had lied. Fallon's situation grew more precarious when, in the summer of 1912, the Ontario government introduced Regulation 17 effectively restricting French instruction to

³⁵ F. W. Merchant, *Report on the Condition of English-French Schools in the Province of Ontario*, The Legislative Assembly of Ontario, Toronto, 1912, 70-71.

³⁶ Bishop Fallon to the Holy Roman Rota, as quoted in letter, N.D. St-Cyr to Pope Pius X, 8 August, 1914, Centre of Research for French-Canadian Civilizations, Centre de recherches des civilisations canadienne-françaises, Université d'Ottawa, (CRCCF), C2/220/1.

³⁷ Declaration signed by Meunier, Langlois, L'Heureux, Loiselle, Emery, Saint-Cyr, Landreville, Corcoran, Muga, et al, CRCCF, C2/220/2. (undated)

the first two years of schooling for those students who lacked a proficiency in English. This new provincial policy further fuelled suspicions in French-Canadian circles that Fallon's vocal opposition to bilingual education was largely responsible for the oppressive changes.

Monsignor Fallon moved swiftly to crush this apparent rebellion among his priests and restore his soiled reputation. In the autumn of 1913, he assembled a tribunal of four priests and summoned each French-Canadian priest signatory involved to appear before the court and furnish written proof of their accusations against him. One by one, the French-Canadian priests of the country appeared before the court. The first to appear was Monsignor Edouard Meunier of St. Alphonse of Windsor. Meunier's signature was particularly embarrassing, since he had served on two occasions as acting Bishop before Fallon's arrival in London. Under threat of suspension, Monsignor Meunier agreed to withdraw his signature. Three priests however, Father L'Heureux of Belle-Rivière, Father Loiselle of Rivière-aux-Canards, and Father St. Cyr of Pointe-aux-Roches refused to sign the retraction, furious that Monsignor Fallon sat not only as the plaintiff in the case, but as prosecutor and chief presiding judge as well. The bishop suspended Fr. L'Heureux and Fr. Loiselle and expelled the sixty-five year old Fr. St. Cyr from the diocese altogether, leaving him without a pension after twenty-two years of service in the Diocese of London.³⁸ In the spring of 1914, Fallon went about his tour of Essex county doing confirmations. His visit to Belle Rivière and Rivière-aux-Canards cast a glimpse on the trouble to come. Fallon was confronted by angry mobs who demanded that he reinstate their beloved pastors. In both instances, the suspended priests intervened to protect the bishop and calm the crowds. In return, the bishop and disgraced pastors agreed to compromise, with Fallon reinstating the priests in return for signed retractions which recanted their accusations against him regarding French language education.

The bishop continued his crusade against the remaining signers of the petition against him. From parish to parish, congregations sat in shock as he belittled their pastors for disobedience from the pulpit. The bishop was sowing the seeds of a bitter harvest. At last, Fallon turned his attention to Father Lucien Beaudoin of Ford City. In March 1915, the bishop summoned Beaudoin to appear before his diocesan tribunal to retract his accusations.

³⁸ N.D. Saint-Cyr to Benedict XV, 8 August, 1914. Father Saint-Cyr wrote many of his parishioners soliciting donations to sustain himself.

Fallon and Beaudoin had a history of disagreements. Most of these related to bilingual education and the teaching of French in the parish schools. One other issue, however, added to the bitterness of their relationship. Shortly after arriving in London, Fallon moved to reprimand Beaudoin for allegedly leaking news to the Quebec press leading to his public vilification. The bishop divided Beaudoin's parish of Notre Dame du Lac in two, creating the English-only parish of St. Anne's in Walkerville, and depriving the priest of the wealthiest part of his parish as well as a school he had funded with seven thousand dollars of his own savings. The bishop did this on the pretext of a petition signed by just thirty five people who complained that Beaudoin had neglected to use English at his Catholic masses.³⁹ As a result of Fallon's action, Beaudoin was left to continue paying the mortgage on a parish school he no longer controlled. Beaudoin determined to challenge Fallon in the Roman courts on the parish division, and the personal losses he had incurred supporting the parish school of St. Edward's of Walkerville.

When Beaudoin was finally scheduled to appear before Fallon's diocesan tribunal, a decision from the Roman courts was still pending over the parish division. On this pretense, Father Beaudoin refused to appear. In response, the bishop's court ruled in Fallon's favour and ordered Beaudoin to retract all accusations he had made against the bishop and admit that he had opposed Fallon's authority on more than one occasion. In addition, he was to pay all court expenses incurred in connection with the trials. Beaudoin was given ten days to comply with the court's ruling or face suspension. Beaudoin stalled for time and telegraphed his lawyers in Rome. On the fateful tenth day, Rome stepped in and telegraphed the Bishop, ordering him to put a stop to his persecution. By setting up his own diocesan court to prosecute Beaudoin, Fallon was overstepping the bounds of his legal jurisdiction as Bishop.

The events of the spring of 1915 left a lasting impression on the French-Canadian parishioners of Ford city. First, the Roman court handed down their ruling on the division of Beaudoin's parish. Fallon, the court ruled, did have a right as Bishop to divide the parish. However, the court also argued that Beaudoin did have cause for compensation for the mortgage payments he had made on St. Edward's school. To the Bishop's embarrassment, the Roman court ordered him to remunerate Beaudoin to the tune of \$7000. Fallon

³⁹ Petition to Bishop Fallon, August 20, 1911, as quoted in Robert Choquette, *Language and Religion*, (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1975), 134.

refused to abide by the second part of this court decision. Both Fallon and Beaudoin claimed a moral victory in the ruling. Nevertheless, the stress of scandal surrounding Father Beaudoin had ruined his health and left him physically broken. Parishioners noticed the decline in their beloved pastor's health. They grew to resent Fallon even more. In addition, they came to label the only French-Canadian judge on Fallon's notorious diocesan tribunal, Father Francis Laurendeau, a traitor to the nationalist cause and a lackey of the bishop.

The Parish of Notre Dame du Lac seemed to settle back into a normal pace once the Roman courts applied the leash to Bishop Fallon in 1915. However, changes in the surrounding community were having a profound effect on the townspeople. The migration of landless farmers to the border cities fuelled population growth. Within a decade, Notre Dame du Lac parish in Ford City welcomed a stream of newcomers. Russians, Romanians, Ukrainians, Serbians, Italians and Irish all along with a few Quebeckers began to move into this increasingly urban, industrialized and working class society. While a number of traditional family farms remained in the hands of older French-Canadians, the smokestacks of Ford Motor Company overlooked their fields and orchards.

Father Beaudoin disparaged the growing use of English among the French-Canadian children of the parish. The overzealous nationalist priest frequently chided the errant altar boy who lapsed into speaking English within the walls of Notre Dame du Lac church, with a firm tug on the ear lobe. The pressure of the outside world, with its urbanization and industrialization had accelerated the socio-cultural transformation around the parish by the first World War. To make matters even worse, cries for conscription embittered relations between French and English-speaking Canadians of the area. The continuing strife brought on by the Ontario Schools Crisis poisoned the remaining good will that existed in the overall community. French-Canadian parishes were thrown into despair with the ruling of Benedict XV in 1916 instructing the faithful to put the survival of Catholic schools before all linguistic concerns. Fallon appeared to be winning the battles on all fronts.

In the midst of crisis, the parish of Our Lady of the Lake had always turned to the steady hand of Father Lucien Beaudoin for guidance. Now however, the situation had changed. Father Beaudoin was seriously ill. Crippled by phlebitis, Father Beaudoin made his rounds on crutches until he suffered a stroke in the summer of 1917. Forced to convalesce in a hospital in Montreal, Beaudoin died suddenly in August 1917. The stage was set for an emotional confrontation.

Monsignor Fallon played a leading part in the drama that subsequently unfolded. On August 22, 1917, as parishioners organized a requiem mass at the parish of Notre Dame du Lac for the late Father Beaudoin, they were shocked to discover just before the mass that the new pastor would be Father François Xavier Laurendeau. This priest was none other than the man who had served as a judge on the tribunal that had attempted to suspend Father Beaudoin. During the mass, a flustered congregation whispered its discontent. As the mass concluded, a group of renegades rushed to the rectory, seized Fr. Laurendeau's bags and hurled them into the street. They then proceeded to form a human blockade around the residence to deny their new pastor's entry. Fr. Laurendeau and the other officiating priests were left with the humiliating task of casting off their vestments outdoors, since the entrance of the church had subsequently been obstructed. The parishioners informed Father Laurendeau that he would not be welcome in the parish. Some accused him of being opposed to French instruction in the schools. When Laurendeau attempted to respond to the accusations, the crowd jeered him.⁴⁰

The parishioners organized a twenty four hour blockade of the church to prevent the new pastor from slipping into his new quarters. The bishop responded to the parish blockade with an ultimatum: parishioners were to abandon the barricade of the church and rectory and accept Fr. Laurendeau, or the church and rectory were to be permanently closed. The parishioners refused to back down.⁴¹

For two weeks, Bishop Fallon and the French-Canadians of Ford City exchanged a series of verbal shots across the pages of the Windsor-Detroit newspapers. Finally, on September 7, a peace emissary approached the blockade leaders, Dr. Damien St. Pierre, parish elder Stanislas Janisse, and lawyer Joseph de Grandpré, and asked them to reconsider letting Fr. Laurendeau take charge of the parish. The men were unmoved. Later that day, the parishioners were alarmed to see Fr. Laurendeau and Fr. O'Connor of neighbouring St. Alphonse parish scout out the church grounds from their car and then drive off. The blockade leaders put parishioners on alert for trouble.⁴²

On Saturday, September 8, 1917, at 1:30 p.m. Dr. Damien St. Pierre sped up in his car to warn the parishioners on watch that the

⁴⁰ *Windsor Evening Record*, August 23 1917.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² Marc Bontront to Reverend Charles Charlebois of the ACFEQ, 7 September, 1917, CRCCF, C2/201/1.

police were planning to take possession of the church. St. Pierre's father, perched in the belfry, began to ring the bells. Within moments, parishioners swelled onto the church grounds. At 2:15 pm, four police officers arrived by automobile at the church escorting Fr. Laurendeau and Fr. O'Connor. They turned around upon seeing the crowd that had gathered. Word spread throughout town that something was set to happen. At three o'clock, four police cars returned, filled with constables and the two uneasy clerics. The crowd numbers approached three thousand.

The gathering formed a barricade around the church grounds blocking the passage of the police. Through a show of their billy clubs, the police cut a path through the throng. Tension mounted, and amidst the pushing and shoving, yelling and general confusion of the moment, someone struck the first blow. A full scale riot erupted. Stones, bricks, chairs, shovels and other debris were thrown by the crowd as the police anxiously pressed towards the rectory. Upon their arrival at the veranda, they encountered their fiercest adversaries: a small band of French-Canadian women who, in the words of one journalist, "shared the will of the Russian Regiment of Death." When the dust settled, a number of people were left nursing head wounds, including two women in their seventies, and the chief of police himself.⁴³ To maintain order, a company of one hundred soldiers was dispatched to the church grounds. The Quebec press pounced on the incident and turned it into front page news. The scandal of the injuries served as a major embarrassment to Bishop Fallon. To make matters even worse, the parishioners held a mass meeting the day after the riot on a nearby farm, and resolved to boycott the parish and appeal to Rome for the removal of Fr. Laurendeau as their pastor. Local parish relations had degenerated into a prolonged stalemate.

For over a year, the parishioners boycotted their church, awaiting a decision from Rome. At the beginning, the boycott celebrated a show of solidarity. Few complained about walking an extra half hour to attend mass at a neighbouring parish during the Indian summer of 1917. To reinforce their compatriots, French-Canadians in Essex and Kent counties staged several massive rallies in the months to come denouncing the Bishop and calling for justice in the Roman courts. Local nationalist leaders were impressed at the overwhelming turnout at such rallies, with the demonstrations at Pointe-aux-Roches

⁴³ *Windsor Evening Record*, 10 September 1917.

and Tecumseh attracting several thousand people.⁴⁴ The Ford City Riot seemed to awaken a largely passive population, leading to a new sense of national identity. However, as the cold of winter intensified, the resolve of many parishioners crumbled. As legend would have it, a few extremists resolved to deal with Monsignor Fallon once and for all. A small group of local people planned an automobile accident involving the bishop. The would-be kamikaze chauffeur was to intentionally plunge the vehicle into the icy waters of Rivière-aux-Canards to kill the bishop. In the end the bold plan fell apart on the nerves of a driver who had a sudden change of heart.

Matters continued to worsen for the boycott leaders when parishioners returned in droves to Notre Dame du Lac to do "their Easter duty". The boycott had begun to split upon cultural lines, with many old stock French-Canadians of the area returning to the church, while the boycott leaders, St. Pierre and de Grandpré, from Cornwall and Montreal respectively, tried to convince the congregation of the error of their ways. Sensing the urgency of their plight, the two men launched a new French-language newspaper, *La Défense* to reinvigorate the French-Canadians' waning spirit. Each issue was filled with stories to inspire the local population to maintain the national struggle. In October, 1918, parishioners were disappointed to learn that Pope Benedict and the Roman courts directed them to accept Father Laurendeau and return to their parish under threat of excommunication.⁴⁵ The parishioners submitted to the orders of the Holy Father. A standoff had ended.

The struggle for French language education however, did not die. People responded to Ontario Regulation 17 in many parts of Essex and Kent county, by refusing to submit to the government inspectors. Led by the Reverend Father Alfred Emery of Pain Court, the parish school children successfully defied the Protestant chief inspector's entry into that village's school for seven years until 1919.⁴⁶ In Windsor, some French-Canadians responded to the suppression of bilingual schools in 1920, by organizing two private French language schools, which at their peak, boasted over 200 students and four over-worked teachers. Nevertheless, these efforts do not mirror the success enjoyed in other parts of the province. Most schools

⁴⁴ Notes on speech delivered by Joseph de Grandpré, at Stoney Point (Pointe-aux-Roches) Ontario, September, 30, 1917, CRCCF, C2/201/1, original text in English; *Evening Record*, September 24 1917, October 1 1917.

⁴⁵ *Border Cities Star*, 15 October 1918,

⁴⁶ Victor Simon, *Règlement XVII et son application à travers l'Ontario*, (Sudbury, Les Presses universitaires de Sudbury: 1977).

eventually allowed inspectors to ensure children received proper instruction in English. Only after widespread calls for good will (*bonne entente*), with the provincial changes to Regulation 17 in 1927, did bilingual education begin to reappear in the Windsor border region.

While Bishop Fallon's opposition to bilingual education and French-Canadian nationalist agitation appeared to triumph publicly, Roman officials privately rebuked the man's methods. The pope's secretary, Cardinal De Lai strongly urged Fallon to resign as Bishop of London and assume a position in the United States, citing his insensitive handling of the bilingual schools issue. "If you are persecuted in one city, flee to another."⁴⁷ Consequently, Fallon toned down his confrontational approach with his French-Canadian congregations, allowing the most turbulent episode in the history of the local Catholic church to fade slowly into memory.

A number of factors led to the local turmoil which climaxed in the Ford City riot. Nationalist agitation for French in the schools and the parishes of the Windsor border region predated the arrival of Michael Francis Fallon by at least three decades. Tension between English- and French-speaking locals over the language of the schools spawned conflict as early as the 1880s, when urbanization forced the two linguistic groups to share their schools and, for Catholics, their churches. An uneasy truce appeared to have been established in the first decade of the twentieth century when Monsignor Fallon arrived on the scene as Bishop of London. Fallon's outspoken stance on bilingual schools so soon after his arrival effectively opened a Pandora's box. In a few short years, Fallon found himself at odds with many of his French-Canadian priests and a significant number of French Catholic parishioners. While the bishop appeared to show concern for the educational well-being of French-Canadian Catholic children in his attack on the inferiority of the bilingual schools, his solution would necessarily strip this people of their cultural institutions and over time, strip them of their identity. It was Fallon's support of Regulation 17 that did irreparable damage to his relationship with his French-Canadian Catholics. His fear for the future of Catholic education undermined his ability to effectively minister to a large portion of his congregation. Furthermore, Fallon's arguments against bilingual schools, publicized just one month after his arrival in the diocese, while clearly exposing deficiencies within the system, lacked credibility when measured against the measured rebuttal of David Chenay. Chenay, the county school inspector who had more than thirty years of experience in the classrooms of Essex

⁴⁷ DeLai to Fallon, Fallon Papers, as quoted in Choquette, *Language and Religion*, 152.

county, suggested that student deficiencies could not be held against the bilingual system per se, but rather should be attributed to social realities afflicting rural Essex. Likewise, at no point did Fallon ever advocate improving bilingual schools, and this refusal further weakened the credibility of his claims that he was working in the best interests of the French-Canadian Catholic population.

One cannot blame a single individual for the troubling incidents that gripped the Windsor border region during World War I and culminated in a riot at Ford City. The process of urbanization and industrialization had heightened tensions by compelling French-Canadians to adapt to the English-speaking ways of the factory and the city. The arrival of a wave of immigrants from the turn of the century onwards forced Francophones to share their schools and churches with others, thus contributing further to the decline of French as the common language spoken, especially among the younger generation. When one adds to this the school troubles, the conscription crisis, the death of Fr. Beaudoin, and the callous act of replacing him with Fr. Laurendeau in Ford City in particular, it is easier to understand the reasons for the riot.

In essence, Monsignor Fallon served as a catalyst for the troubles that erupted throughout Essex and Kent counties. Latent problems that had existed for decades were exacerbated when Fallon vocally opposed the bilingual school system. When the Bishop clumsily moved to crush the agitation of his clerical adversaries, he infuriated a substantial portion of the French-Canadian community. Some nationalist leaders in Montreal, Ottawa and locally secretly welcomed Bishop Fallon's outspokenness. They attributed his awkward handling of the language crisis to a reawakening of local French-Canadian cultural pride.⁴⁸ To the surprise and delight of many nationalist leaders in Ottawa, the Ford City riot spawned a series of mass rallies against the Bishop and Regulation 17 across Essex and Kent Counties. Fallon had inadvertently come to personify

⁴⁸ The appearance of *La Défense* in 1918 was significant for it represented the reappearance of the French language press in the Windsor border region after a five year absence, following the failure of *Le Clairon* (1912-1913). By the early 1920s, the French-Canadians of the Windsor border region were enjoying a modest cultural renaissance with the appearance of theatre companies, concerts and poetry recitals. Such events were recounted in *La Défense* (1918-1920) and its successor, *La Presse Frontière* (1921-1922). In 1927, Senator Gustave Lacasse of Tecumseh established *La Feuille d'Erable*, which endured well into 1954. All three of these newspapers appeared during the episcopal reign of Michael Francis Fallon as Bishop of London.

everything that was anti-French. Although this image grossly oversimplified a series of social problems plaguing a French-Canadian society in transition, nationalists effectively exploited it to rally a substantial portion of the population in opposition to the province's school legislation restricting instruction in the French language. Even when the Roman courts ordered the French-Canadians of Notre Dame du Lac to submit to the authority of the bishop, much of the area population persisted in defying the school law by resisting inspections or by launching independent French schools. Bishop Fallon, ironically, contributed to the affirmation of the French-Canadian identity in the Windsor Border Region.

