

## **“Riding The Protestant Horse” The Manitoba School Question and Canadian Politics, 1890 - 1896**

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André Siegfried, the French sociologist whose perceptive observations on the relationship between race, religion and politics have been compared to Tocqueville's views on American democracy, once commented that the Manitoba school question “lay bare the fundamental assumptions of Canadian society.” The constitutional issue of whether or not the French Roman Catholic minority's rights had been infringed upon or whether or not the federal government had the right or the duty to remove the minority's grievance which had been the basis of two appeals to the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council, Siegfried said, mattered little. Rather, the Manitoba school question demonstrated the existence of a basic dichotomy in Canadian society. It revealed for Protestants their “historic role,” and it was this Protestant identity and not any sense of economic or social class or even partisan politics that had become paramount in Canada in the 1890s.<sup>1</sup>

Although Siegfried was aware of the importance of social and economic class in understanding European society, he regarded it as quite insignificant in Canada. The geographical dispersion of a relatively small number of artisans and their striking differences of origin, language and character led him to conclude that “there really does not exist, properly speaking, any working class in Canada.” Nor did he detect any wide gulf between the industrial artisan and the agricultural labourer. “No one,” he says, “ventures to talk of the ‘Canadian workman,’ for this expression does not convey any precise meaning, covering as it does so many different types of men with nothing in common but the name.”<sup>2</sup> Hence, in his view it was not class interests, but the Protestant religion united against an aggressive, expansive

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<sup>1</sup> In his introduction to the Carleton Library edition of André Siegfried's *The Race Question in Canada* (Toronto, 1966), F. H. Underhill notes that “Siegfried is the Tocqueville of Canada” and he describes Siegfried's work as a “classic” study of Canadian society and politics.

<sup>2</sup> Siegfried, pp. 51-58, 71-73 and 164-167.

Roman Catholicism that formed the dominant character of Canadian society and politics.

Siegfried's observations on the role of race and religion in politics have never been critically examined. Protestant criticisms of Sir John Thompson, our first Roman Catholic Prime Minister and a convert from Methodism, and Protestant opposition in 1896 to the Conservative government's remedial policy of restoring separate schools in Manitoba have been noted, but there has never been any detailed study of the Protestant churches' reaction to an issue such as the Manitoba school question or of the involvement of Protestant leaders in nineteenth century elections. Politicians, however, were quick to attest to the existence of a "Protestant vote" and to contend for the advantage which they thought could be gained by appealing to "Protestant opinion."

This emphasis on the primacy of religion also gave rise in the 1890s to a considerable amount of speculation about the existence and influence in Canadian politics of the "Catholic vote." In 1895, calculations were made by both Liberal and Conservative politicians in order to determine not the major business interests or economic factors, but rather the number of Roman Catholic voters in each constituency. James D. Edgar, a leading Ontario Liberal, was firmly convinced that the Catholic vote in Ontario would determine the outcome of the next federal election in two-thirds of the ridings in the province; Edgar also held with equal conviction the assumption that so aggravated both the Protestant Protective Association and the Orange Lodge – namely, that Roman Catholics vote as a group.

By contrast, some historians have suggested that the Ontario wing of the Conservative party surrendered its principles to win the support of Ultra-Protestant opinion in the province.<sup>3</sup> Two prominent Ontario Liberals, however, believed just the opposite to be true. Sir Richard Cartwright and Sir John Willison were convinced that in the election of 1896 the Liberal party was successful by developing policies which attracted groups such as the Orange Lodge and "solidified the extreme Protestant element in Ontario against the Conservatives and that aided the Liberals in gaining office."<sup>4</sup> Sir Richard, too, had done his calculations about Ontario's electorate and he concluded that "one out of every four voters in Ontario was an Orangemen, and that in Ontario alone the Orangemen numbered well over one-hundred thousand." He also firmly believed that the Manitoba school question had provided just the opportunity that the Liberal party needed to hive off the

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<sup>3</sup> B. Hodgins and R. Page (eds.), *Canadian History Since Confederation* (Georgetown, 1972), p. 261 have described this interpretation as having become the established understanding in "revisionist historiography."

<sup>4</sup> Sir Richard Cartwright, *Reminiscences* (Toronto, 1912), p. 345, and Sir John Willison, *Reminiscences, Personal and Political* (Toronto, 1919), p. 251.

Orange vote for itself.<sup>5</sup>

The decision by the judges at the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council in the Brophy Case in January, 1895 that the Roman Catholic minority had the right to appeal to the Governor-General-in-Council for redress of their grievances brought the Orange Lodge forth in a torrent of denunciations of the influence of the Catholic Church in Canada. The mere threat of the re-establishment of Roman Catholic schools in Manitoba over the expressed wishes of the Protestant majority in that province was a clarion call summoning Orangemen to their posts. Letters to the editor of the *Orange Sentinel* called the brethren to arms. Protestants were required to unite “to prevent the encroachments of Roman Catholics,” and Orangemen were called upon to be aware of “the thralldom of Popery” contrasted to the “marvellous light,” and that “the two cannot exist side by side.” Their “paramount duty” was “to continue the agitation to wipe out these separate schools.”<sup>6</sup> J. A. Donaldson captured the spirit of Orangeism when he remarked to Grand Master Clarke Wallace that “the French are becoming too cheeky and so are the Catholics of Ontario as well as Manitoba. *The Orange Body is the only power to keep them where they ought to be.*”<sup>7</sup>

The Orangemen, however, were not the first to take up the alarm against the possible re-establishment of separate schools in Manitoba. That dubious honor rests squarely with the Liberal party of Ontario. From the beginning in 1889 Liberals in Ontario had responded hastily, warning that on no account could they support any form of federal veto of the Manitoba legislation.

Sir Richard Cartwright had immediately advised the party’s leader, Wilfrid Laurier, that they could never sanction disallowance of the Manitoba legislation. Equally, Sir Richard was certain that the Conservative government at Ottawa, led by Sir John A. Macdonald, would veto the proposed Manitoba legislation. The position of the Liberal party would then be clear: “The Ontario men on our side and, it may be, some of the Maritime members, must vote to support the authority of the province ... the Ontario men must vote against disallowance in any shape.”<sup>8</sup>

Ontario politics were never simple. Even without the influence of the Manitoba school question, J. D. Edgar was convinced that Sir John A. Macdonald would “take the Catholic vote” at the next election.<sup>9</sup> Moreover,

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<sup>5</sup> Cartwright, p. 345.

<sup>6</sup> *Orange Sentinel*, 5, 7 March, 1895

<sup>7</sup> N. C. Wallace Papers (Public Archives of Ontario), J. A. Donaldson to Wallace, 24 June, 1895.

<sup>8</sup> Laurier Papers (Public Archives of Canada), Sir Richard Cartwright to Laurier, 9 August, 1889.

<sup>9</sup> Laurier Papers, J. D. Edgar to Laurier, 1 September, 1889

Edgar believed that certain elements within the Liberal party, namely J. S. Charlton and the *Toronto Globe*, forced the Catholics to support Macdonald. Only D'Alton McCarthy's pronounced opposition to separate schools prevented Roman Catholics from switching over completely to Macdonald. Edgar therefore suggested that the Liberal party ought "to arrange matters" in such a way that "we will largely make Sir John responsible for ... [McCarthy's] bitter language about race and religion." Although he thought that it might be possible to use McCarthy for Liberal party purposes, Edgar did not mislead Laurier into believing that the Liberal party would permit the re-establishment of separate schools in Manitoba. The Liberal party, he explained, was "fundamentally antagonistic to state-aid to education of the slightest sectarian character, let alone separate schools."<sup>10</sup> Thus, the issue was not really provincial rights at all. It was the Liberal party's old antagonism toward separate schools and the inevitable tendency of most Liberals to share the views of D'Alton McCarthy on the school question and to support the actions of Greenway and Martin in Manitoba. The simple dichotomy by which some historians once explained the politics of the 1890s by contrasting a tolerant Liberalism with an ultra-Protestant Conservatism thus requires serious reconsideration.

From the beginning of the unrest over the Manitoba school question, Wilfrid Laurier was especially suspicious and greatly distressed by the anti-French and anti-Catholic feelings within his own party. He, too, regarded the activities of D'Alton McCarthy not as an expression of Ontario Toryism, but of a more general sentiment that had long been growing in Ontario. "Despite all their pride and feelings of superiority for the rest of mankind," Laurier explained to E. J. Hodgson,

There is an appalling amount of bigotry and down right ignorance in the city of Toronto which of course is the centre of the province. Nineteen-twentieths of these people have never been in Lower Canada, have scarcely ever seen a French Canadian, known their ways, habits, modes of life, but that does not prevent them from being filled with animosity towards everything Lower Canadian.<sup>11</sup>

Laurier also firmly believed that it was only the skill and prominence of Sir John A. Macdonald that prevented the latent anti-French sentiments from causing a division within the two political parties. He confided to Hodgson,

You must remember, that, as I said at the beginning, there is a very wide and deep rooted feeling of dislike in Ontario against the French Canadians, a stupid and unreasonable dislike if you like, but still it is there. Sir John

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<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> Laurier Papers, Laurier to E. J. Hodgson, 7 April, 1890.

controls it and keeps it in check, but I do not know of any other living man who could.

Although some Liberals may have seemed to be making an effort to win Catholic opinion in Ontario, Laurier suggested that this indicated merely that they had at last given up attempting to get into power by “riding the Protestant horse” which, he said, “would be more in harmony with their past record.” But, as Laurier was to find out, the past was still very much with the Ontario Liberals.

The combination of Orange dissatisfaction with the Conservative party over the school question, Protestant criticism of Thompson – not merely because of his Catholicism but because he had formerly been a Methodist – and the organization of an independent McCarthyite League opposed the Conservatives, in addition to the growth of the Protective Associations throughout the province, seemed likely to create tremendous pressures on the Conservative party in Ontario. Some Conservatives, however, also believed that the Liberals were using Protestant discontent to cover deficiencies in the Liberal party’s own trade and tariff policies. This became particularly evident in 1894 when the Conservative government introduced a major revision of the tariff designed to aid the depressed rural areas of Ontario and thereby to cut into a traditional Liberal stronghold.

W. Scott of Toronto, a Manufacturer’s Agent for the Samson Kennedy Company, lauded the new tariff. He told Clarke Wallace that the country was expecting Sir John Thompson to make “the speech of his lifetime” in the debate about the government’s new tariff policy. Thompson, he said, should take great care to emphasize that the “Grits,” having been unable to “obtain the confidence of the people on the square issue,” their economic policy, were trying to ride into power on the issue of race and religion. He explained that Thompson should also “deal with the history of the tactics pursued by [the Grits] since they raised the race and religion cry over the hanging of Riel down to the Manitoba School Question of to-day.” A great deal, he said, “will depend on the political exposure of the race and creed tactics of the Grit party.” All of this was contained in a letter to the Grand Master of the Orange Lodge.<sup>12</sup>

Within the ranks of the Liberal party the indefatigable Richard Cartwright was adamant that the Liberal party should do its utmost to gain Protestant support by opposing any suggestion of legislation that might remove the grievances of the Roman Catholic minority:

Some of our friends [he said to Laurier] fail to understand that there is [in Ontario] a *Protestant* sentiment quite apart from the Orangemen. Take for

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<sup>12</sup> N. C. Wallace Papers, W. Scott to Wallace, 3 April, 1894.

instance the Presbyterian body. This is strongly with Manitoba ... and cannot be disregarded. They are very strong and (in such matters) a united body. In Ontario they outnumber the Catholics and are largely with us.<sup>13</sup>

Laurier must have been saddened and disheartened by the existence of such sentiments within his party and by the willingness of both the editor of the Toronto *Globe*, John Willison, and Cartwright to use implicit anti-French and anti-Catholic feelings to gain party support. The claims of the minority in Manitoba appeared to merit no consideration at all.<sup>14</sup>

Not all of the Liberal spokesmen in Ontario agreed with Willison and Cartwright. David Mills, in particular, dreaded that the Willison-Cartwright policy would lead to the creation of the Liberals as a Protestant party, and that the aim of the editor of the Toronto *Globe*, was “to excite Protestant feeling and prevent the men in Parliament from doing their duty.” He appealed to Laurier to intervene and suggested taking a number of Members of Parliament to “work on” Robert Jaffray, the *Globe*’s owner. Surely, Mills argued, it would be possible to attack the government’s rude method of action “without opposing the aim of redressing the Roman Catholic grievances.”<sup>15</sup> But David Mills never seemed to exercise the influence within the party which both Cartwright and Willison did.

Willison, for example, was adamant that the party could not abandon its position – the *Globe* with the approval of *all parties*, said there should be no interference with Manitoba.” There could be no cavil, he said, about the main point at issue, which was simply “whether or not it would be in the general interest of the Confederation that Dominion interference should be exercised.” But there were also political reasons in Ontario which dictated that the *Globe*’s position in opposition to any interference with the school system of Manitoba could not be altered. The *Globe* would have to stand four-square behind the Manitoba government, Willison asserted, for if it were to change, its editors would be subjected to the charge that they had done so “purely and simply . . . out of fear of the Catholic vote.”<sup>16</sup>

In Ontario the “technical argument” that provincial rights were not really any longer at issue, would not be acceptable – even if it were true. On the other hand, if the party could campaign on the old Liberal principle of provincial rights, Willison assured Laurier that they would be certain “to win the approval of the P.P.A. [Protestant Protective Association] without accepting any liability or affirming P.P.A. philosophy.” This was really the point. Everyone knew that by arguing in favour of provincial rights the

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<sup>13</sup> Laurier Papers, Sir Richard Cartwright to Laurier, 25 March, 1895.

<sup>14</sup> Laurier Papers, Laurier to J. S. Willison, 7 March, 1895.

<sup>15</sup> Laurier Papers, David Mills to Laurier, 28 March, 1895.

<sup>16</sup> Laurier Papers, J. S. Willison to Laurier, 3 April, 1895.

Liberal party would garner ultra-Protestant support.

It is little wonder, therefore, that there were Conservative complaints about attempts by Liberals to awaken agitation on the school question among the Orange Lodges and thereby hive off traditional Conservative support. R. W. Pritten told Grand Master Wallace that “the Reformers are doing all they can to play the red flag and the bull with our Brethren.” The Liberals had incited the Orange Lodge to go against the Conservative party before, at the time of the execution of Thomas Scott by Louis Riel, Pritten noted, but he did not think that they would be “as successful this time.”<sup>17</sup>

In the meantime, a much more significant and exciting possibility had come to the fore – a secret Liberal liaison with D’Alton McCarthy. As early as 1894, Sir Richard Cartwright and J. D. Edgar had suggested an alliance with McCarthy on the trade question and the proposal had gone so far that Alex Smith, the Liberal party organizer for Ontario, warned Laurier that Sir Richard Cartwright had given many people the impression that Laurier was “going to give McCarthy a free hand” in some constituencies.<sup>18</sup> Fear of the loss of many Catholic voters and the general weakness of the McCarthyite party had been all that prevented an early coalition. Within a year, however, the Liberal party in Ontario had confirmed with D’Alton McCarthy that they would not contest some twenty seats in the province. As a result of this “arrangement” *La Minerve*, the Conservative paper in Quebec City, publicly charged that the Liberal party in Ontario had created “an infamous alliance among all of the fanatical elements” in the provinces. The Liberal party, *La Minerve* charged, was responsible for “the concentration of Ultra-Protestant fanaticism aimed against all that is Catholic and French in this country.”<sup>19</sup>

What was Laurier’s reaction? Here, at least, is one version. J. S. Charlton had met with the Liberal leader just before the party met in caucus to determine its position with regard to the Conservative government’s remedial bill which had won the general support of the Roman Catholic episcopacy. When the caucus did discuss the Manitoba school question as a *party question*, disagreement among the members was profound. J. S. Charlton had urged Laurier to come out boldly for noninterference and provincial rights.<sup>20</sup> He had assured his chief that “public sentiment in the Protestant Provinces would in the end sweep all opposition to the principle out of existence.” He was convinced that this was the correct decision, for it would remove the doubt and suspicion of Laurier that existed among Protestant electors. Moreover, in his view, it was the only policy likely to

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<sup>17</sup> Wallace Papers, R. W. Pritten to Wallace, March, 1895

<sup>18</sup> Laurier Papers, Alexander Smith to Laurier, 15 and 19 November, 1894.

<sup>19</sup> *La Minerve*, 9 June, 1896.

<sup>20</sup> J. S. Willison Papers (Public Archives of Canada), J. S. Charlton to Willison, 17 July, 1895.

lead the party to power. Although Charlton recognized that the provincial rights policy would be dangerous for Quebec, he frankly believed that it was more important to aim for the solid support of a Protestant Canada than to worry about Quebec. According to Charlton's account, Laurier had said that "his own views would prompt him to take the course that I advised."

Laurier's position as a French Canadian and as leader of the party compounded his difficulties both in Protestant Ontario and Catholic Quebec. To follow Charlton's proposals would ostracize him in his native province and spell defeat for many French Canadian Liberals. Charlton said that he admitted this, and that he lamented it, but argued that "it was useless to try to sail on the same boat with the other party." The question would admit no middle course, and therefore, Charlton suggested, "we would be obliged ultimately to select our ground if Manitoba did not in the meantime surrender and must either be against interference or in favor of it, and it would be better to take our stand now and seek at once to exert our influence upon public sentiment." He added, "I thought the country was beginning to tire waiting for us to formulate a definite policy."

Laurier's own view is the subject of another paper,<sup>21</sup> but his conclusions following a trip to Ontario in the autumn of 1895 are not without interest. He now confided to John Willison:

The impression which I brought back from my late trip was that any such attempt [remedial legislation] must be strongly resented, and that if an appeal came from the Protestants of Manitoba against Manitoba coercion, such an appeal would evoke a tremendous answer from Ontario.<sup>22</sup>

Interestingly, Laurier no longer saw the question in terms of the principles of the confederation compact which earlier had seemed so important to him and to David Mills. Now, the fact that the federal government was determined to go through with remedial legislation appeared merely as "an attempt to make a strong bid for the Roman Catholic vote." He characterized the Conservative argument that the government was "bound by the Constitution to interfere" as "a most preposterous assertion." A most preposterous assertion? Yet at the time of the Privy Council's judgment, he had felt there could no longer be any question that the minority's rights had been infringed upon. Manitoba had refused to act, even to remove proven grievances, and, as he had repeatedly told Willison, provincial rights were not an issue. Was Laurier's fear of a Protestant

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<sup>21</sup> In particular, see R.T.G. Clippingdale, "J. S. Willison, Political Journalist from Liberalism to Independence" (Ph.D. thesis, University of Toronto, 1970), pp. 204-207 and K. M. McLaughlin, "Race, Religion and Politics: The Election of 1896 in Canada" (Ph.D. thesis, University of Toronto, 1974), pp. 50-94 and 309-345.

<sup>22</sup> Willison Papers, Laurier to Willison, 8 November, 1895

reaction justified?

What about the Protestant Churches? Were the politicians right? Was André Siegfried as perceptive as some authors have suggested? Were the politicians correct in their assumptions about an enraged Protestant opinion adamantly opposed to the restoration of Roman Catholic schools in Manitoba? From the beginning of the discussion about the Manitoba school question, there were major theological, regional and political differences within the Protestant churches which cast doubt upon both the unanimity of Protestant opinion and the eagerness with which church leaders sought to use politics to maintain their supremacy over French Catholics. Within the Methodist Church – which Siegfried described as “the centre of anti-French, aggressive Protestantism” and from whence came the cry “No French domination! No Poperty!”<sup>23</sup> – a major split occurred when the Reverend John Potts, Chairman of the church’s Executive Committee on Civil Rights and Privileges, opposed any public action by the church on the school question. Since Potts’ committee would have been looked to by the other conferences for leadership, his opinion was quite important. He was also one of the most prominent Methodists in Canada.

Dr. Potts protested to Albert Carman, the General Superintendent of the Methodist Church, that church leaders ought not to participate in public activities on the Manitoba school question, particularly in view of “the agitation now before the country.” Potts refused to preside at an “anti-coercion” meeting in Massey Hall at which D’Alton McCarthy and Clifford Sifton were present. He explained to Carman that he opposed separate schools “as much as any man,” but that this was “not the question now before the country.” Rather, the issue was whether the rights of the minority had been violated, and he was firmly convinced that the Roman Catholics of Manitoba had a grievance. Hence, Dr. Potts also refused to sign a resolution critical of federal intervention in Manitoba prepared by the committee of which he was chairman, and he deplored the “necessity of the Methodist Church entering the arena of politics at this time of intense feeling over the country.”<sup>24</sup>

In June, 1895, Methodist churches met in their local conferences across Canada to review their activities of the previous year. The reports and resolutions of the committees were published in the *Journal of General Conferences*. The minutes of the various conferences indicate a wide variety of opinion on the school question. Resolutions on the subject were adopted

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<sup>23</sup> Siegfried, p. 57, also notes, “Against the Roman peril the various Protestant sects have felt the need of union ... they seem to have forgotten their mutual and traditional jealousies.”

<sup>24</sup> Albert Carman Papers (United Church Archives), John Potts to Carman, 1 May, 1895.

by the conferences of Toronto, London, Hamilton, Montreal and the Northwest; but the conferences of British Columbia, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island and the Bay of Quinte did not deal with the Manitoba school question. Thus, it was only in the urban centres of Ontario, as well as in Montreal and the Northwest, that the conferences had established committees to study the school question, or had discussed resolutions. These regional differences in attitude are not the only evidence of a division in the Methodist Church. The texts of the resolutions adopted also showed a wide variety of opinions, forcefully demonstrating that the concept of unanimity of sentiment within Methodism merits serious reconsideration.

The Presbyterian Church in Canada gathered in 1895 in London, Ontario, for its 21st General Assembly. They, too, met in a highly charged atmosphere of debate on the school question and the *Presbyterian Record* reported that the school question had dominated the meetings.<sup>25</sup> The *Acts and Proceedings of the Twenty-First General Assembly* reveal very sharp internal dissensions within the church which reached a climax in an open dispute involving Principal Caven of Knox College, Toronto, Principal Grant of Queen's University, Kingston, and President Forrest of Dalhousie University in Halifax, on the attitude of the church toward the Manitoba school question.

Principal Caven began the debate by giving the notice of a strongly worded resolution denouncing Separate Schools and deprecating any attempt on the part of the Dominion government to re-establish them by putting pressure on Manitoba or invading its jurisdiction.

Principal Grant fundamentally rejected Caven's dismissal of the rights of the Roman Catholic minority. He proposed that Manitoba should be asked to reconsider its action in light of the Judicial Committee's judgment. In order to resolve the difficulties, Grant suggested that a full investigation be carried out and that the General Assembly should publicly offer its assistance.

President Forrest was also strongly opposed to Principal Caven's resolution. Forrest, therefore, gave notice that he would present a third resolution on the school question to the General Assembly. Forrest deeply regretted that this question had disrupted the peace and harmony of Manitoba. President Forrest's resolution therefore stated that,

even were it wise or expedient for the General Assembly to express, at the present time, an opinion on this question, the General Assembly declines to give such an expression of opinion as the motion of Principal Caven asks for, inasmuch as, in its judgment, such a course would hinder rather than

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<sup>25</sup> *Presbyterian Record* (Toronto, 1895), p. 174.

promote the satisfactory solution of this question, so eminently to be desired, not in the interests of Manitoba alone, but of the whole Dominion of Canada.<sup>26</sup>

Each of the resolutions offered a dramatically different view of the role of the Presbyterian Church in the political crisis posed by the Manitoba school question. Discussion of the resolutions of Caven, Grant and Forrest raged unabated throughout the sessions of June 18 and 19. Principal Grant, Principal MacVicar, Principal Caven, Professor Bryce, Dr. Sedgwick, President Forrest, and Principal King were heard before an amendment by Principal Grant was put to the House in opposition to the motion of Principal Caven. Finally, Professor McLaren attempted to find a compromise to rescue the church from an open division. He urged that a committee be established to try to bring in a motion “on which the Assembly may unite with some measure of unanimity.”

Thus, on the final day of the Assembly’s meetings a new set of resolutions on the school question was presented. The general preamble discussed the relationship between Church and State and the responsibility of each toward education. The third clause, however, clearly indicated that Principal Caven’s view had won out in the committee, for it stated that:

The General Assembly does not regard the system of separate schools with favor and is strongly opposed to the extension of this system in Canada. The Assembly would, therefore, deplore any attempt to interfere with the freedom of Manitoba in determining and regulating its own educational affairs.

That was the resolution, but it hardly represents the unanimity of opinion suggested by Siegfried and by Sir Richard Cartwright.

Arriving in Manitoba on a pastoral visit in April, 1896, Dr. Albert Carman, Superintendent of the Methodist Church in Canada, provided the kind of rhetoric so often associated with this era. He condemned “the frenzy of a political aggression under the whip of an insatiable ecclesiasticism.”<sup>27</sup> The immediate cause of Carman’s indignation was the presence in Winnipeg of the Dickey, Desjardins, Smith Commission bearing instructions from the Secretary of State to seek a compromise measure that would, in the words of the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council, “satisfy the rights of the minority.” According to Dr. Carman, that minority consisted of “half a dozen in Manitoba and half a hundred in Quebec, who never have been and never will or can be satisfied.”

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<sup>26</sup> *Acts and Proceedings of the Twenty-First General Assembly* [of the Presbyterian Church in Canada] (Toronto, 1895), p. 31.

<sup>27</sup> *Winnipeg Tribune*, 25 April, 1896.

Carman denounced the Conservative government and urged support for Laurier and the Liberal party. He referred to Laurier as:

the man raised in the separate schools [who] is repudiated by the hierarchy because he stands for conciliation, freedom and deliberate legislation, while the men raised in the public schools prove their zeal for their ecclesiastical [*sic*] masters by rushing to enchain a province that claims the right to educate its own youth.

Dr. Carman's outspokenness had increased the religious and racial sensitivities in western Canada so that in June, when he arrived in Winnipeg to preside over the sessions of the Methodist Conference of Manitoba and the Northwest, those Methodists who opposed his political views were prepared to state their case.

In his opening remarks at Winnipeg, Dr. Carman announced that he did not intend to preach politics in any party sense. Nonetheless, he could not refrain from denouncing what he styled as "the attempt to force on us the fetters of a past age, to renew the bondage of the dark ages." All these old tyrannies must be resisted and Methodists, he believed, would only be in the line of duty in preaching such resistance. Carman urged Methodists to stand in their place to break any alliance between Catholicism and the state," and he denounced the Roman Catholic hierarchy's intention to force Roman Catholics to vote as a solid block for the Conservative party.<sup>28</sup>

Despite Carman's presence, the Manitoba and Northwest Conference of the Methodist Church was quite divided about its stand on the school question and about its actions in the forthcoming election. There were those within the church who wanted a moderate, nonparty resolution adopted by the Conference, while others insisted that a strong statement be made against the policy of the Conservative government. The divisions were so intense that a meeting of a special committee had to be called to try to resolve the disagreement. The discussion was to have been held *in camera*, but the debate became so loud that there was "a good deal of information about what the committee did floating about the conference halls." J. A. M. Atkins predicted dire calamities for the Conference, and he argued that "many prominent men would leave the church and conference, and general ruin would follow if a compromise resolution was not agreed upon." After a full afternoon's discussion the committee was deadlocked and a subcommittee had to be appointed "to draw up an entirely new motion that would be satisfactory to all." The new resolution, presented the following day, merely reaffirmed the Conference's former expression in 1895 "touching the school

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<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 5, 6 June, 1896.

question.”<sup>29</sup>

André Siegfried has suggested that Protestants in 1896 “gave themselves up once again to the familiar anti-Catholic and anti-clerical campaign, declaring angrily that the Confederation should be Protestant or nothing.”<sup>30</sup> Siegfried’s hypothesis about the nature of Protestantism and his interpretation of the relationship of religion and politics have never been seriously questioned. It is true that the Manitoba school question brought forth a spate of indignant resolutions protesting against federal intervention on behalf of the Roman Catholic minority in Manitoba. Protestant Ministerial Associations in several cities were united in their criticism of the Conservative Government’s remedial policy. Distinguished churchmen such as Principal Caven of the Presbyterian Church, Dr. Albert Carman and Dr. E. H. Dewart of the Methodists, Dr. Douglas of the Wesleyan Theological College, and numerous individual ministers spoke out against the Conservative party.

Yet, the unanimity of Protestant sentiment brought together by the challenge of the school question never became a reality. In the election those candidates such as the members of the Protestant Protective Association, the McCarthyite League and the Patrons of Industry, who had hoped to succeed on the strength of a strong Protestant reaction against remedial legislation, did extremely poorly. Nor do more sophisticated techniques using a computer analysis to determine the strength of the correlation between Protestantism and voting behavior produce positive results. Only in the constituencies where there is a significant Baptist population and also an Independent Temperance candidate does it appear that any Protestant sect voted as a block for a particular party.<sup>31</sup> Moreover, despite the official resolutions of the Presbyterian and Methodist Churches, the Conservative party won a majority both of the popular vote and of the seats in English Canada.

There were tremendous divisions within the Methodist Church, which Siegfried had identified as the centre of “anti-French, aggressive Protestantism,” and which appeared not just in the minutes of the various Conferences, but also in the pages of the Church’s weekly newspaper, the prestigious *Christian Guardian*. Its editor, newly appointed in 1894 in the midst of the school crisis, was the Reverend A. C. Courtice, who had been selected to reflect the new mood within the Church and who saw the “reforming spirit” of Methodism in social action rather than in disputes with the Roman Catholics. Courtice’s election had, in fact, seen the defeat of the former editor, Dr. E. H. Dewart, who was anxious for the Methodist Church to be active in opposition to separate schools.

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<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> Siegfried, pp. 58, 73, 165.

<sup>31</sup> See Computer Appendices to McLaughlin, “Race, Religion and Politics.”

By the 1890s many Protestants had come to doubt the Papacy's hold over Roman Catholics in Canada. The old struggles and the rhetoric used by Protestant leaders of the 1850s no longer aroused the same emotion. Others recognized that the minority in Manitoba did have a genuine grievance, confirmed by the Privy Council in England, to which they submitted, albeit without great enthusiasm. The school question was also a political issue that divided the Protestant churches from within. The political tradition in Canada, established since the 1830s, also worked to prevent the Protestant churches from coming together to form a political group. Despite some politicians' beliefs and the actions of leading clergymen such as Caven, Carman and Dewart, neither the Presbyterian nor the Methodist Churches were "united to a man" nor entirely with the Liberal party on the school question. The "Protestant horse" was a less valiant steed than many of its supporters believed.