

Inside Canada by Pierre Beaudry

Education under attack in Quebec

Trudeau's new constitution feeds linguistic strife as students rampage over new pedagogical regime.

A few weeks after the Queen of England gave the Canadian constitution to the Queen of Canada, Ottawa's plan to take over the legitimate French language rights in Quebec is already being activated as English-language residents of the province are organized against Quebec's Charter of French Language, Bill 101. Simultaneously, "outside individuals" have been reported organizing violent student protests against the Quebec Education Department's new pedagogical regime, which is aimed at upgrading the educational system for the whole province.

Systematic actions are being planned by the Montreal-based Positive Action Committee, a Trudeau front, to use children as political bait in the fight to challenge Quebec's Charter of the French Language, Bill 101, using the newly proclaimed federal constitution. The chairman of the PAC, Alex Paterson, blatantly told the *Montreal Gazette* on May 8 that "the children are pawns in a political free-for-all."

The first legal challenge comes on June 14 in the Quebec Superior Court, when lawyers will file a motion against the Quebec Minister of Education, Camille Laurin, the architect of Bill 101, and the Quebec Attorney General. The case involves five families who claim that, under the new constitution, their children have a right to an English education in Quebec. These are exceptions to the Quebec law which

restricts access to English-language schools for children whose parents have not been educated in English in Quebec.

On the other hand, the federal Charter, proclaimed without the consent of Quebec, extends that right to children whose parents were educated in the English language anywhere.

Although Bill 101 allows for "any reciprocity agreement" with another province in extending the scope of this right, the real issue here is the republican right to protect French language and culture for 6 million francophones of Quebec.

As *EIR* has documented, it is the principle of nation-building which Trudeau wants to destroy in Quebec by attacking its critical nerve: education. That is why Trudeau has already promised full federal financial support for all such court challenges against the Quebec government.

On May 5, Quebec Justice Minister Marc-André Bedard introduced a bill in the Quebec Assembly, invoking a constitutional provision that allows the Quebec legislature to retain its powers to override certain sections of the federal charter. Yet, unfortunately, the Parti Quebecois leadership has failed thus far to identify Trudeau's operation for what it is, and has chosen to fight a trench war instead of counterpunching.

This strategy of attrition has been outlined by Education Minis-

ter Laurin: "I expect that certain groups will try to use the courts to get their children into English schools," he said. "It would only prove that the Canada Bill constituted an important block to the flowering of our identity. The more such cases, the bigger Quebecers will consider the block."

While Minister Laurin is defensively upholding French education rights on the legal front, his new pedagogical regime for secondary schools has been used as the pretext for violent student protest. On May 4 and 5 more than 30 high schools were closed in the Montreal area, leaving more than 20,000 students out of class. According to the chairman of the Montreal Catholic School Commission, Luc Larivée, the situation was "much more dramatic" than reported by the media. The protests, he stated, had been spurred by "outside individuals," who paved the way for further trouble by leaving behind them "long chains, hunting knives, and jack-knives."

The reportedly "military-like" deployments were aimed at the Education Department's proposal to raise the passing grade from 50 to 60 per cent starting next September. Minister Laurin told students on May 10 that the 60 per cent passing grade will be introduced into the school system over a period of several years.

But even if the Parti Quebecois government is using all available legal measures possible to "retain" whatever sovereignty it has, and is attempting to patch up an already half-destroyed education system it inherited from previous Liberal governments, its present "defensive" attitude will not be enough to stop Trudeau.