

Ideology and Institutions in Quebec.

The Public Charities Controversy 1921-1926

by B.L. VIGOD*

During the years immediately following the end of the Great War, Quebec's time-honoured system of institutional charity found itself threatened by a severe financial crisis. While private revenues of hospitals, asylums and refuges (creches, orphanages and night shelters) rose minimally if at all, the demands on these institutions were increasing dramatically. As soon as the war ended, grave concerns were expressed about the state of public health in the province. Then in late 1920, a brief but severe recession found almost all of these institutions unable to receive and care for a deluge of indigent or otherwise helpless individuals. Alexandre Taschereau, succeeding Sir Lomer Gouin to the Premiership in July 1920, pledged his Liberal Government to an extensive campaign of disease prevention, directed initially at tuberculosis and infant mortality.¹ This commitment was, of course, universally applauded, as were a series of significant measures enacted in subsequent years designed to fulfill it.² No such unanimous enthusiasm, however greeted the Government's response to the problem of financing charitable institutions, revealed in the Public Charities Act of 1921.

This law seems eminently sensible in retrospect, and served as the statutory basis of welfare organization in Quebec for forty years.³ Yet it provoked the most violent political controversy of the decade in Quebec provincial politics, leading one observer to suggest that memory of the reaction discouraged Taschereau and successors from further systematic reforms in the field.⁴ Also, it has been assumed that the controversy, stemming from the state's intervention in a sphere previously reserved to the Church, was almost exclusively ideological in nature.⁵ Michel

* Department of History, University of New Brunswick.

¹ Archives nationales du Québec, Fonds Louis-Alexandre Taschereau, "Discours-programme", 27 juillet 1920.

² These included hygiene education, sanitation laws, cancer research, temporary removal of children from homes struck by tuberculosis, an attempt to control venereal disease, and the creation of local health units. Legislation in 1922 established a Provincial Bureau of Health far more powerful and effective than its predecessor, the Council of Hygiene. *Statutes of Quebec*, 12 Geo. V (1922), c. 29.

³ Serge MONGEAU, *L'Évolution de l'Assistance au Québec* (Montreal, 1967), p. 45; QUEBEC, *Report of the Study Committee on Public Assistance* (Quebec, 1963), p. 108; Nicolas ZAY, "Assistance Publique et Service social", *Service social/Social Service* (nov.-déc. 1961): 66.

⁴ Guy ROCHER, "Évolution des rapports entre le secteur privé et le secteur public", *Service social/Social Service* (juillet 1964): 13.

⁵ Robert RUMILLY, *Histoire de la Province de Québec* (Montreal, 1952-3) tomes XXV-XXVII *passim*; Antonin DUPONT, *Les Relations entre L'Église et L'État sous Louis-Alexandre Taschereau, 1920-1936* (Montreal, 1973) pp. 72-108.

Brunet, for example, considered it a classic manifestation of *anti-étatisme*, one of the three retrograde ideologies whose prevalence in French Canadian society he bemoaned.⁶ This article offers a review of the events of the controversy, an analysis of the ideological content of the debate, and finally a dose of revisionism in the form of a suggestion that ideological factors alone do not explain the clash. The last point implies a more general need to provide an institutional as well as an ideological dimension for analyses of Church-State relations in Quebec.

* * *

The postwar financial malaise of Quebec's charitable institutions was first revealed in their financial reports for 1919, which in spite of *ad hoc* provincial subsidies totalling \$81,000, showed a deficit of \$250,000.⁷ Spread over about 165 institutions this was not in itself a staggering figure, but it represented merely the tip of an iceberg. For one thing, thousands of indigent clients and patients were already being refused for lack of facilities.⁸ Nor did this deficit yet reflect the full impact of the recession: increased indigence and decreased private contributions. From 1920 to 1921, the number of man-days spent in refuges of various kinds rose more than twenty percent, from 3,582,510 to 4,329,639. In the same period private contributions to these institutions fell more than fifteen percent, from \$628,178 to \$525,976.⁹ Some municipal governments were facing bankruptcy, a fact which severely limited the effect of a recent measure in the English poor law tradition requiring local councils to pay for the care of their own indigents.¹⁰ In the case of hospitals, there was a crying need for modernization as well as expansion.¹¹ Finally, the incidence of financial distress was far from even, with Montreal institutions bearing the brunt of what was primarily an urban crisis. A prime example was the Meurling Municipal Refuge, which provided night shelter and also sought jobs for employable clients. During 1919 it sheltered 2,971 persons for an average of nine days each; in 1920, 882 persons for ten days each; in 1921, 4,300 persons for an average of twenty days each; in 1922, 3,231 for twenty-eight days each. As an indication of the source of this additional pressure, the average age of clients declined from 53 years to 42 years in 1920-1921.¹² Evidently, men in the prime of their working lives were being reduced to dependance upon public assistance. The city was doing its best, especially under the provincially-imposed Administrative Commission

⁶ See Brunet's review of two Rumilly volumes in the *Revue d'Histoire de l'Amérique française* (juin 1953).

⁷ *Le Devoir* 14 avril 1921, citing figures supplied by Taschereau.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ QUEBEC, *Sessional Papers*, "Benevolent Institutions" (1921 to 1925).

¹⁰ MONGEAU, *op. cit.*, p. 44; Rumilly, *op. cit.*, tome XXV, pp. 111-112.

¹¹ QUEBEC, BUREAU OF PUBLIC CHARITIES, "Director's Report" (15 December 1923), p. 9. See also Public Archives of Canada, C.A. Fitzpatrick Papers, W.H. Dobell to L.-A. Taschereau, 28 April 1921.

¹² MONTREAL BOARD OF HEALTH, *Annual Reports* (1919-1923).

whose chairman gave personal direction to the Board of Health, but whose resources were not limitless. By 1920 so many institutions were making direct appeals to the Province¹³ that existing legislation could provide neither the administrative apparatus nor the spending authority necessary for an adequate response.

The government's legislative procedure in dealing with the problem proved to be both a symptom and a cause of the mutual distrust which later characterized the Public Charities controversy. The Throne Speech of 11 January 1921 had indicated that the Legislature would be called upon "à rechercher les meilleurs moyens... de pourvoir aux charges croissantes que les circonstances imposent à l'assistance publique et à nos hôpitaux", but nothing specific was indicated and the item did not seem to be a priority for the government.¹⁴ The matter was not raised by either the premier or the leader of the opposition during the Throne Speech debate, and was discussed at length only in the "Catholic press" over the next two months. Then suddenly, in the very last hours of the Session, a fourteen-page bill was distributed; given second and third reading and rammed through the Liberal-dominated Legislative Council. The normal practice of permitting interested parties to appear before the Public Bills Committee of the Legislature was ignored. The bill's sponsor, Provincial Secretary Athanase David, attempted to justify the steamroller tactics by arguing that the legislation was so well intentioned that no reasonable person would oppose it. Such arrogance was not typical of David himself, but the tactics were fully consistent with the reputation of the government which he had recently joined. Quebec City's religious daily newspaper, *L'Action catholique*, had warned at the outset that the public might be presented "aux dernières heures de la session, de ces mesures d'une extrême importance dont personne n'avait entendu parler auparavant, et qui sont alors expédiées à la vapeur, souvent au grand détriment du bon sens et de l'intérêt public".¹⁵ It may well be true that the government, foreseeing the controversy which would arise, preferred criticism of its procedure to a long debate over the substance of the legislation. But judging from statistics such as those cited for the Meurling Refuge, it is clear that Taschereau and David could also have felt confronted with a genuine emergency in the midst of that winter of 1920-1921. As late as February 2, Taschereau informed the Lieutenant-Governor that the legislation was still being drafted.¹⁶

The Public Charities Act established a cost-sharing formula for the care of indigents within public charitable institutions recognized by the Lieutenant-Governor in Council: one-third each by the institution, by the municipality of residence and by the Province. For the purpose of determin-

¹³ Fitzpatrick Papers, Fitzpatrick to Henri Bourassa, 8 août 1921.

¹⁴ *L'Action Catholique*, 12 janvier 1921.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Fitzpatrick Papers, Taschereau to Fitzpatrick, 2 février 1921. Further evidence of urgent need can be found in the haste with which many institutions took advantage of the new law. See below, note 31.

ing the *per diem* cost of such care, the institutions were classified into fourteen categories and sub-categories. Both traditional sources of revenue (the poor tax and a duty on parimutuel betting) and a new ten percent amusement tax were to be collected by each municipality and then shared equally with a newly established Provincial Charities Fund.¹⁷ Municipalities, many of whose finances the Province had already begun to oversee because of large debts, were authorized to promote the building of new facilities or the expansion of existing ones.¹⁸ Finally, the Act created a Provincial Bureau of Public Charities with broad powers "de mettre à exécution les dispositions de la présente loi et [de remplir] les autres fonctions qui peuvent leur être assignées, de temps à l'autre, par le lieutenant-gouverneur en conseil". Giving effect to the terms of the Act specifically included verification of financial requests and overseeing the expenditure of funds granted.¹⁹

II

The parliamentary opposition led by Arthur Sauvé, which often reflected episcopal opinion in such matters, appeared stunned and asked above all for delay in consideration of the bill. But *L'Action catholique* and Henri Bourassa's *Le Devoir* were quick to formulate more substantive criticism, with Bourassa re-issuing his own editorials, the text of political speeches and a copy of the Act itself in a separate pamphlet called *Une Mauvaise Loi*. No one denied that government leaders "ont obéi à un sentiment généreux et tenté de remédier à un mal réel".²⁰ Insisted Bourassa, "Des 'bonnes intentions' du premier ministre je ne doute pas plus que de celles du Secrétaire provincial. Que l'un et l'autre, et d'autres de leurs collègues... n'aient pas eu l'intention formelle et réfléchie de 'laïciser la charité' je le crois sincèrement." But good intentions did not guarantee satisfactory consequences, and for this reason Bourassa concluded that dangers inherent in the legislation made it unacceptable. Provisions of the Act stated clearly that the Province could do much more than subsidize private charitable institutions.²¹ It could dictate the policy and supervise the daily operation of religious houses to the point of challenging diocesan and ordinal control. Its invasion of this once exclusive preserve of religious organizations would upset a satisfactory balance of Church and civil

¹⁷ *Statutes of Quebec* 11 Geo. V (1921) c. 79. Two important additional sources of revenue were later authorized: a restaurant meals tax for the municipalities and an annual transfer of \$1,000,000 from Liquor Commission profits into the Provincial Fund.

¹⁸ Although most attention was initially focused on the *per diem* subsidies accorded to charitable institutions, capital grants, loan guarantees and the actual funding of some municipal debts soon involved a comparable financial commitment on the part of the Province. By 1930, for example, it was underwriting \$12.6 million in loans and actually paying interest of \$400,000 on loans contracted by institutions and municipalities. *Quebec Statistical Yearbook 1931* p. 188.

¹⁹ Articles 4, 5, 29 and 30 of the Act.

²⁰ *L'Action Catholique*, 18 mars 1921.

²¹ *Le Devoir*, 28 mars and 15 avril 1921.

authority in French Canadian society and afford a precedent to anticlericals and "atheists" intent upon a systematic erosion of religious influence. Even David, added *L'Action catholique*, was arguing in defense of the measure that "'la charité d'aujourd'hui est technique et elle est devenue une science'. Pardon. La charité est une vertu. C'est même une des trois vertus théologiques; une des vertus qu'un chrétien digne de ce nom ne pourra jamais ignorer, même sous prétexte que la loi pourvoit. Et elle restera une vertu."²² In other words, the law challenged a fundamental Catholic precept that acts of charity were themselves morally and socially necessary quite apart from the physical welfare of the recipients. Moreover it threatened thereby to reinforce that growing selfishness and neglect of filial responsibility already worrying Catholic leaders in French Canada.²³

In contrast to the speed with which Catholic journalists criticized the Act, the Roman Catholic hierarchy of Quebec delayed formal protest for nearly a year, by which time the Act had been proclaimed and the Bureau of Public Charities was operational. Even when the Bishops and Archbishops finally wrote to the Premier, they treated the Public Charities Act as only one of three political issues of legitimate and pressing concern to the Church, the others being taxation of ecclesiastical property and female suffrage. Nor was there anything new in their comments about the Act; they merely summarized, in very moderate language, the two major arguments developed by *Le Devoir* and *L'Action catholique*. Private charity was morally preferable to reliance upon the state, and the degree of state interference in the affairs of religious communities was both unnecessary and unacceptable. In proposing alternatives, however, they did go one step beyond the earlier critics. Their more elaborate scheme involved creation of a "non-political" body analogous to the Council of Public Instruction through which public funds could be channelled without destroying the sectarian basis of social welfare organization. If this was impossible, then religious communities should at least require the approval of their ecclesiastical superiors before subjecting themselves to the conditions imposed by the Act.²⁴

Initially the Government defended itself in moderate though admittedly self-congratulatory terms. David had anticipated many of the objections when he introduced the bill, while Taschereau dealt specifically with Bourassa's arguments in a speech before the Young Liberals of Montreal. The Premier attempted to demonstrate that the terms of the Act would not destroy the independence of either private institutions or municipalities. Nor was the Act "statist" in spirit; rather, it was designed precisely to preserve the voluntary and religious basis of welfare organization. Only through the financial support now being made available, he argued, could the traditional structure hope to survive, and if the contrary effect were ever demonstrated the government would withdraw the Act.²⁵

²² *L'Action Catholique*, 18 mars 1921.

²³ See also *Le Devoir*, 18 avril 1921.

²⁴ Fonds Taschereau, Archbishops and Bishops of Quebec to Taschereau, 12 janvier 1922.

²⁵ *Le Devoir*, 18 avril 1921.

Bourassa's fear that the Act afforded a dangerous precedent, Taschereau said later, was fear of "la perversion hypothétique des générations futures", and that was no basis upon which to reject the present good. "Parce qu'on pouvait abuser de la charité à une époque indéterminée, va-t-on bannir du parlement tous les actes de charité?"²⁶ Belief in the virtues of private charity was commendable, but so was realism. "Voyez par vous-mêmes toutes les affreuses misères à soulager, et dites-moi si le gouvernement n'a pas le devoir impérieux de venir en aide à nos institutions pour leur permettre de réaliser leur œuvre."²⁷

Taschereau was again polite yet forthright in replying to the bishops' letter of January, 1922. The legal advice on which they had based their alternative proposal, he suggested, "porte plutôt sur l'aspect religieux ou social de la loi que sur son aspect légal." Thus he would ignore the technical flaws contained in the proposal and address himself to the fundamental problem. The government could demonstrate by its past record that it had no radical intentions; in such a field as social assistance, however, one had to realize that "nous vivons dans un pays mixte. Il y a des susceptibilités qu'il faut ménager et des opinions qu'on ne peut ignorer. Autrement la vie politique devient impossible, et c'est à y renoncer."²⁸ Compatibility with the doctrine and institutions of Catholicism could not, in other words, be the sole criterion for legislation. The government had no desire to interfere with the autonomy of religious communities or weaken hierarchical authority but it was required by law to oversee the expenditure of public funds. This alone, he insisted, accounted for the limited surveillance which it intended to practice over charitable institutions. Amendments could be contemplated but no essential challenge to the system other than its complete abandonment, "laissant la responsabilité des misères qui en résulteront aux critiques de cette loi".²⁹

Following this exchange of letters, however, the debate, hitherto a reasonable affair, degenerated into a demeaning quarrel. It is not clear which side was primarily responsible for beginning this deterioration, but certainly each side contributed to it. Taschereau claimed that he had consulted the clergy in advance about the Act and received the enthusiastic endorsement of at least one bishop.³⁰ Since he had been acting in response to appeals from religious communities in the first place,³¹ he felt he had

²⁶ Parti Libéral, *Le Gouvernement Taschereau* (Quebec, 1923), p. 88.

²⁷ *Le Devoir*, 14 avril 1921.

²⁸ Fonds Taschereau, Taschereau to Mgr. P.-E. Roy, 20 janvier 1922.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ The bishop was undoubtedly Mgr. Ross, whose new diocese of Rimouski was poverty-ridden. Among leaders of religious communities, Taschereau's former classmate, Mgr. François Pelletier of the Quebec Seminary was the most prestigious to support the law publicly. RUMILLY, *op. cit.*, tome XXVI, p. 237; *Le Soleil*, 16 mai 1921.

³¹ The rush of institutions to register with the Bureau of Public Charities substantiates this claim. Montreal institutions applied in particularly great numbers within weeks of the first opportunity. Dates of affiliation are in the second "Director's Report" (1924), Appendix B. See also Fitzpatrick Papers, Supérieure provinciale des religieuses de Notre Dame de charité du Bon Pasteur to Fitzpatrick, 31 janvier 1931; and J.-J.-B. Derome to Fitzpatrick, 1 septembre 1921.

further reason to assume episcopal approval. Instead, the sincerity of his government's commitment to traditional French Canadian values was being questioned in the Catholic press, and Sauvé was scoring political points partially because of the leaking of confidential correspondence and the refusal of Church spokesmen to deny the substance of his accusations. During the 1923 provincial election campaign, the Public Charities Act figured prominently in a virtual war between the Liberals and *L'Action catholique*, which although not technically an official spokesman, was closely tied to the Archdiocese of Quebec. Taschereau was accused of intimidating the aged Cardinal Bégin as a means of silencing the journal, and two of his ministers sought damages from its publisher. Action Sociale Ltée., for printing a libelous campaign leaflet. Never very tolerant of personal criticism from any source,³² Taschereau may well have felt he had a legitimate grievance in this case. Once convinced that religious authorities had initially assented to the Act, he would naturally suspect that the bishops had been goaded into reversing themselves by Bourassa, editor Jules Dorion of *L'Action catholique* and their own ultramontane colleagues such as Bishops Cloutier and Labrecque, and then manufactured objections to the Act in order to justify their new position.

On the other hand, the course of events raises questions about how accurate and comprehensive a preview Taschereau actually gave the hierarchy, or whether he advised them how soon the Act would be passed. The Catholic press had not been forewarned by their usual sources within the Church, and the Conservative opposition, to which defense of Church prerogatives had often been entrusted in the past, seemed totally unprepared. Before granting royal assent to the Act, moreover, Lieutenant-Governor Fitzpatrick had felt it necessary to consult Cardinal Bégin privately.³³ Finally it appears that the committee of bishops appointed to study the legislation did so only after its passage. There followed a epidemic of broken confidences and veiled threats during which the Premier of Quebec was unable or unwilling to negotiate reasonable compromises with the hierarchy; negotiation on the Government's behalf was left to Fitzpatrick and David.³⁴ Not even the conclusion of the 1923 election campaign and the passage of an amendment which gave individual bishops the power to veto the registration of institutions within their diocese laid the controversy to rest, even though Taschereau had been promised that the latter would be sufficient.³⁵

Taschereau began the escalation by publicizing Bégin's confidentially-tendered advice that Fitzpatrick should sign the bill. This forced the Lieu-

³² While the Public Charities controversy was in progress, Taschereau was having the Legislature jail a scandal-mongering newspaper editor and even threatening to silence the man's lawyer. *Canadian Annual Review* (1922), pp. 711-715; RUMILLY, *op. cit.*, tome XXVI, pp. 165 and 173.

³³ Fitzpatrick Papers, Fitzpatrick to Bégin, 4 août 1921.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, Fitzpatrick to Roy, 14 janvier, 1922; Fitzpatrick to Rev. Père Calmein, 1 août 1921. David actually negotiated amendments to the Act with Mgr. Ross. RUMILLY, *op. cit.*, tome XXV, p. 237 and tome XXVII, pp. 203, 289-291.

³⁵ Fonds Taschereau, Taschereau to R. Villeneuve, 9 janvier 1936.

tenant-Governor to protest that "je n'ai jamais prétendu que l'approbation du cardinal-archevêque du Québec constituait une adhésion à la loi des autorités religieuses³⁶." One can imagine Bégin's anger since he appeared to have pre-empted the work of his own committee of bishops studying the Act and since his advice to Fitzpatrick did not really imply that he personally approved of contents. The premier was in turn the victim of betrayed confidence when the contents of the bishop's formal protest were leaked to *L'Action Catholique*. No longer able to argue in the Legislature that the hierarchy approved of the Act, Taschereau began to quote testimonials received from lower clergy whose charitable works were made possible by public assistance. The Catholic press responded by accusing him of extorting these testimonials.³⁷

Fully two years later, the monthly *L'Action Française* was able to provoke a new exchange by claiming that the hierarchy was still opposed in principle to the Public Charities Act. Taschereau threatened to withhold financial support from a nursing community and Mgr. E.-A. Deschamps for the building of a new hospital unless Archbishop Gauthier of Montreal repudiated the claim. Gauthier strongly insisted that he had no obligation to confirm or deny journalistic speculation just because the men behind *L'Action Française* happened to be clergy of his diocese, and that in any case he could not speak for the entire hierarchy.³⁸ Here and in still later episodes Taschereau was ruthless in holding the needy for a political ransom, and insensitive to the Church's embarrassing predicament — that is, an internal division between clergy engaged in charitable work, and those more concerned about the broader implications of state intervention. Yet the bishops were also guilty of some insensitivity, for while accepting the financial benefits of the Public Charities Act, they were tacitly endorsing an accusation of anti-clericalism against the government carried on in the Catholic press.

III

The distrust and the provocations on both sides well illustrate the intensity of the Public Charities controversy, but of course they do not entirely explain it. To determine what lay beneath the surface is a more complicated problem. Clearly it contained the elements of a classic ideological confrontation between Church and State, and publicly at least, the Act was attacked almost entirely on ideological grounds. True, *L'Action*

³⁶ Fitzpatrick Papers, Fitzpatrick to Bourassa, 24 août 1921.

³⁷ *La Patrie*, 22 octobre, 1922, quoting Taschereau in the Throne Speech debate. Some testimonials do in fact sound considerably exaggerated. Besides that of Mgr. Pelletier (*Le Soleil*, 16 mai 1921), see Fitzpatrick Papers, Supérieure de l'Hôtel Dieu de Montréal to Dr. L.-A. Lessard (Director of the Bureau) 8 septembre, 1922; RUMILLY, *op. cit.*, tome XXVI, p. 178, and the 1923 "Director's Report", p. 33.

³⁸ *Action Française*, juillet, 1924; Fonds Taschereau, Taschereau to Mgr. Gauthier, 15 and 29 août, 1924; and Gauthier to Taschereau, 21 août and 9 septembre, 1924; and Deschamps to Taschereau, 22 août 1924.

Catholique warned of the cost of "laicizing" charitable institutions, citing the higher expenses incurred by Protestant institutions which had no unpaid clergy among their personnel.³⁹ But this argument simply ignored the government's case without refuting it: if Quebec's system of private and local assistance was to survive, it needed provincial subsidies in addition to the services and facilities provided by religious communities. In any case critics were more often preoccupied with the alleged incompatibility of this law with Catholic doctrine, enunciating clearly ultramontane claims about the responsibilities of Catholic legislators. Bourassa's bitter portrayal of the smooth-talking "môssieu L'État" seducing the innocent Superior of a religious house with the promise of great riches constitutes a striking illustration of the *anti-étatiste* ideology described by Brunet.⁴⁰ Moreover his articles strongly suggest that the publisher of *Le Devoir* was as much disturbed by the principle of state intervention as by provisions of the particular Act in question. The same conclusion may be inferred from a survey of the other issues which preoccupied Catholic journalists in the early 1920's: at home, a succession of provincial initiatives deemed objectionable; abroad, the anti-clericalism of postwar governments in Czechoslovakia, Poland and Italy.⁴¹ The pattern in Quebec seemed all too familiar, especially if one also took note of the prewar French experience wherein anti-clericals and freemasons consciously attacked the Catholic faith by usurping the social functions of the Church. No one expressed this more succinctly than curé E.-V. Lavergne, in a series of articles following the 1923 election campaign. One of them cited a French author on "les trois étapes de l'anti-cléricalisme" in politics. "A son origine, l'anti-cléricalisme apparaît comme une réaction insurrectionnelle contre la domination maternelle de l'Église. Dans son développement, il se produit comme une élimination successive et comme un écartment systématique des maternelles influences de l'Église."⁴²

It is also conceivable that the critics' professions of faith in the good intentions of the *present* government were not entirely sincere, and that they believed that traditional *rouge* anti-clericalism was thriving within the Liberal Party once more. As Fitzpatrick reminded Bourassa, it did not make sense to oppose the Public Charities Act simply because it afforded a precedent for anti-clerical regimes of the future: any subsequent administration determined to reduce the influence of the Church could achieve its aims without appealing to precedent.⁴³ David and Taschereau

³⁹ *L'Action Catholique*, 11 and 18 février 1921.

⁴⁰ *Le Devoir*, 19 avril 1921.

⁴¹ On domestic issues, see DUPONT, *op. cit.*, *passim*. On international affairs see *L'Action Catholique* throughout February and March 1921, and for a fuller analysis of this newspaper, Richard JONES, *L'Idéologie de l'Action Catholique, 1917-1939* (Quebec, 1974), pp. 35-190.

⁴² *L'Action Catholique*, 19 février 1923. See other formulations, *ibid.*, 21 avril and 3 mai 1921; and L.-A. PAQUET, *Études et Appréciations: Thèmes Sociaux* (Quebec, 1922) pp. 290-311. John McMANNERS, *Church and State in France, 1870-1914* (London, 1972) would not quarrel with the interpretation of French events. The problem is of course whether it was reasonable to impute similar motives to Quebec legislators.

⁴³ Fitzpatrick Papers, Fitzpatrick to Bourassa, 8 août 1921.

had not themselves ever championed *rouge* causes, but the Provincial Secretary's father, Senator L.-O. David, had certainly done so and Taschereau had been a tormentor of ultramontanes ever since his student days. Beyond this Catholic newspapers were evidently sensitive to anti-clerical sentiments "fashionable" in the social circles from which Taschereau, David and other political leaders were drawn.⁴⁴ One militant (and therefore unofficial) Liberal organ stirred things up by attributing opposition to the Public Charities Act to the fear that unhealthy conditions prevailing in charitable institutions operated by religious communities would be exposed by government inspectors.⁴⁵ Bourassa claimed to know of a self-confessed anti-clerical already retained by the Provincial Government as a medical inspector.⁴⁶ In short, some critics at least appeared to believe that they were already fighting against anti-clericalism, and not merely defending religious principles against some future onslaught.

In defending the legislation, Taschereau was thus forced to define his own ideological position. This he did by distinguishing between ultramontane pretensions, which he rejected on the incontrovertible authority of his uncle, the former Archbishop of Quebec, and the responsibility to preserve French Canada's Catholic heritage and character, which he accepted fully.⁴⁷ If the existing system of welfare organization was to survive, he repeated, the Province had to provide heavy financial assistance. But if the Government failed to discharge its constitutional responsibility to oversee the expenditure of public funds, non-Catholics within the province would be justifiably disturbed and other Canadians confirmed in some of their prejudices about Quebec.⁴⁸ Echoing the message though not the style of Laurier's 1877 speech on political liberalism, Taschereau scorned the philosophy of a "Catholic" party:

... avez-vous remarqué comme nos adversaires ont recours à ce vieux reproche, qu'on voudrait pourtant voir bien mort, que le parti libéral est celui de l'anti-cléricalisme, que son programme est la mainmise de l'état sur l'instruction publique, la charité et les œuvres sociales, qu'on se dirige inconsciemment vers des abîmes, que la laïcisation de tout ce qui n'est pas de notre domaine est à l'affiche, mais que heureusement le parti conservateur, détenteur des bons principes, dispensateur du royaume des cieux et de la félicité éternelle, est sur la brèche pour nous sauver du naufrage et assurer notre salut.⁴⁹

Unfortunately for Taschereau, neither demonstrations of the virtues of the particular Act in question nor general protestations about the innocence of Quebec liberalism could terminate the controversy. No doubt some journalists and clerics sincerely believed that state intervention in the realm of social assistance was by definition anti-clerical, and could be so obsessed with ideological considerations that they lost sight

⁴⁴ *L'Action Catholique*, 21 février 1921.

⁴⁵ *Le Pays*, cited in DUPONT, *op. cit.*, p. 81.

⁴⁶ *Le Devoir*, 16 avril 1921.

⁴⁷ RUMILLY, *op. cit.*, tome XXVII, pp. 158-159.

⁴⁸ Taschereau's reply to Mgr. Roy, cited above, was repeated publicly in a speech to the Montreal Reform Club. *Le Devoir*, 26 avril 1926.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

of the practical implications of their positions. But it does not seem plausible that senior Catholic officials would have acted on the basis of such considerations alone. Even the aged and conservative Cardinal Bégin is said to have recognized the dilemma in advising the clergy in charge of overburdened institutions, "Eh bien, faites-le [register with the Bureau] mais n'en parlez pas."⁵⁰ A small minority in the hierarchy were in fact militant ultramontanes, and most bishops knew from experience that genuine anti-clericals were not in control of the Liberal Party.⁵¹ Historically, the strategy of the Roman Catholic Church in French Canada had always been to co-operate with political authority, at least to the extent of avoiding public confrontations and seeking practical compromises. Dissenters from this tradition normally found themselves in conflict with other religious authorities as well as with the state. Even while the Public Charities controversy raged, Church and State reached a number of compromises in the attempt to modernize Quebec education.⁵² The Catholic journalists predictably railed against these changes, but they received little if any public support from the hierarchy. The amendment of a controversial adoption law was also negotiated peacefully in 1924, despite provocative newspaper commentary.⁵³

If accommodation was possible on other issues concerning Catholic doctrine and influence, then what made the Public Charities Act exceptional? The most conclusive form of evidence, the internal correspondence of religious authorities, is not yet open to researchers. Still, it may be fruitful to seek an explanation in the character of both Church and State as institutional rather than merely ideological forces.

In dealing with the evolution of social welfare, the modern observer can too readily adopt a present-minded or idealistic conception of the state. We know how social assistance "must" be organized in a modern industrial society. The state is an agency which protects the economically weak in a variety of ways. Private and local organizations have a role to play, and voluntary action is considered worthwhile for all concerned. Yet only the state can really command and organize the redistribution of wealth on a massive scale. Thus it is natural to condemn or ridicule those who stood against "progress", forgetting that they may have judged the state not as an abstract model but by the reputation of its most immediate manifestation. Apart from any suspicions that it wished for ideological reasons to lessen Church influence, the Quebec Government of 1921 was not an organization to which anyone would confidently entrust responsibility for a problem which he considered "moral" as well as social and economic.

⁵⁰ RUMILLY, *op. cit.*, tome XXV, p. 123.

⁵¹ Radical critics of Quebec's educational system had achieved little in their most recent campaign, and the moderate *rouge* T.-D. Bouchard had allegedly been denied reelection to the Legislature in 1919 primarily because of his views on the taxation of ecclesiastical property. *Ibid.*, tome XXIV, p. 89.

⁵² B.L. VIGOD, "Qu'on ne craigne pas l'encombrement des compétences": Le Gouvernement Taschereau et l'Éducation 1920-1929", *R.H.A.F.* septembre 1974.

⁵³ DUPONT, *op. cit.*, pp. 109-115.

Taschereau had been Premier for less than a year when the Public Charities Act was introduced, but his party had been in power since 1897 and built up a remarkably strong patronage system. Hardly a sphere of government activity was not manipulated for partisan advantage, and the practice could be ruthless.⁵⁴ It was not even pretended that the provincial civil service was a meritocracy,⁵⁵ and Bourassa quite justifiably scorned the Government's promise to appoint only "des hommes d'une haute valeur morale" to positions within the Bureau. "C'est excellent, c'est admirable, c'est même touchant; mais de la coupe de l'idéal aux lèvres de la réalité il y a parfois loin — surtout quand la politique et le patronage s'en mêlent... Il arrive plus souvent qu'autrement que la 'valeur morale' cède le pas à l'intrigue, au brocantage, au favoritisme, à mille considérations qui n'ont rien de 'haut' ni de 'moral'."⁵⁶ The attempts described earlier to extort political support, later pressure on the Director of Public Charities to bend rules for institutions favoured by political leaders and Taschereau's promise to reward the favourite charity of an influential newspaper publisher through the Bureau all confirmed fears that the law "crée, aux mains de l'État, un instrument commode de patronage, de nouveaux moyens d'empiétements sur l'initiative privée, de nouvelles méthodes de domination⁵⁷."

The Premier also had a personal reputation for impatience and intolerance which cast doubt upon his ability to accept the restrictions of a genuine partnership, the "co-opération intime et effective conjointement avec les œuvres d'assistance publique" promised by the Act.⁵⁸ Could a government which rushed such important and sensitive legislation through the House in a few hours be trusted to administer it with due regard for the legitimate interests and feelings of those outside its ranks?

Even without sharing Bourassa's wild fantasy in which anti-clerical bureaucrats harrassed religious establishments with midnight visits,⁵⁹

⁵⁴ The most extreme example was agriculture Minister J.-E. Caron, whose control over existing farmers' organizations was partly responsible for the formation of the anti-government Union Catholique des Cultivateurs in 1924. Often the favouritism was directed by the Ministers themselves through departments and agencies, but it was also the means by which Government backbenchers maintained their local power and status. I have been able to cite numerous cases, as well as evidence of contemporary awareness of the problems in "Responses to Social and Economic Change in Quebec: The Provincial Administration of Louis-Alexandre Taschereau 1920-1929" (unpubl. Ph.D. dissertation, Queen's 1974). See especially pp. 19-21, 47-48, 67-70, 191-193, 232-3, 245-8, 410-412.

⁵⁵ The Provincial Civil Service Board was abolished in 1926, *Statutes of Quebec* 16 Geo. V (1926), c. 14.

⁵⁶ *Le Devoir*, 16 avril, 1921.

⁵⁷ Fitzpatrick Papers, Vol. 32 is filled with examples. The publisher was Lord Atholstan of the Montreal *Star* and the Charity was the Child Welfare Association. *Ibid.*, Howard Faulk to Fitzpatrick 15 August 1921 and W.A. Styles to Fitzpatrick 22 October 1921. Taschereau was doubly fortunate that this episode never became public, because he had declared the intention not to support interdenominational agencies. The quotation is from PAQUET, *op. cit.*, pp. 324-325.

⁵⁸ Article 5 b.

⁵⁹ *Le Devoir* 15 avril, 1921. Once again there seems to be an unstated comparison with the French experience under Emile Combes. See Albert GUERARD, *France: A Modern History* (Ann Arbor, 1969), pp. 362-364.

Church leaders could be understandably disturbed by the thoroughness of some regulations included in the Public Charities Act. Article 10, requiring the Bureau of Public Charities to evaluate "les mérites de l'œuvre, son but, sa nature, sa fin et sa manière de disposer des octrois reçus", might easily tempt an underpaid and unscrupulous inspector to hint that he expected a bribe.⁶⁰ Articles 24 and 27, in requiring documentation of a patient's indigence, could in theory compromise the confidentiality of his relationship with a priest. In principle the state must oversee the expenditure of public funds, but was this really necessary in the case of the Church? Or was it, as *L'Action Catholique* commented, an insult to the religious orders which had been serving French Canadian society for three centuries, and to individuals who contributed generously without feeling it necessary to check up?⁶¹ In short, the reputation of the Quebec Government blinded many people to less sinister and more plausible explanations for the extent of regulations: that Taschereau really was anxious to avoid stirring up an anti-clerical backlash or reinforcing English Canadian prejudices by appearing to hand the Church a blank cheque; or that he feared a drain on the Provincial Treasury which his Government would be powerless to plug once grants became "automatic" and costs rose.⁶² *Anti-étatisme* unquestionably influenced political developments in early twentieth-century Quebec, but this was an attitude sustained as much by practical experience and observation as by ultramontane, laissez-faire or other abstract theories.

Alongside understandable suspicion of the state as an institution, Church leaders appear also to have been suffering from uncertainty about the future character of social welfare itself. The Church embraced, and the Public Charities Act purported to endorse, a concept of indigence ill-suited to the urban, industrial setting. The unfortunate or unwise individual, utterly destitute and abandoned, was no longer the typical welfare case as he had been in the countryside. Postwar Quebec had to confront the problem of general economic weakness — insufficient wages, sporadic employment and lack of compensatory resources such as home-grown food, the extended family and mutual aid which counted for so much in the rural milieu. *Ex-muris* treatment, income support and non-monetary forms of social assistance such as counselling and supervised recreation had not yet been integrated into the concept of "charity".

While some sociologists in the late Duplessis era marvelled at the adaptability of the Quebec clergy to changing circumstances, particularly their ability "to occupy successively all strategic posts of the society",⁶³

⁶⁰ The leadership of the Catholic Labour movement was extremely critical of such conditions in labour inspection. See *Le Soleil* 20 juillet 1920; *La Vie Syndicale* avril 1926; [M. FORTIN], *Mémoire sur le Syndicalisme Catholique au Canada* (Montreal, 1927), p. 14.

⁶¹ *L'Action Catholique*, 15 avril 1921.

⁶² This fear was partially responsible for the Taschereau Government's resistance to federal old age pension and farm credit schemes during the 1920's.

⁶³ Hubert GUINDON, "The Social Evolution of Quebec Reconsidered," and Jean-Charles FALARDEAU, "The Role and Importance of the Church in French Canada," both in M. RIOUX and Y. MARTIN, eds., *French Canadian Society* (Toronto, 1963). See especially pp. 152-159, 352-357.

it was far from clear in the early 1920's that this would happen quickly enough in the realm of social assistance. It was equally possible that the Public Charities Bureau, even if sincerely intended by the government only to support traditional forms of public assistance, would prove to be the embryo of a vast, competing bureaucracy. New services demanded by society, which the Church had been slow to organize, would be provided by state employees who would thus displace the clergy in a critical function. Outwardly, Church and State were debating the classic question "Whose jurisdiction is it?" but the Church's real crisis was over the question "What is to be done?" If confident of answers to the latter question, and of its ability to act quickly on the basis of those answers, the Church may not have felt so threatened by a plan for state support. The Catholic hierarchy might even have given stronger support to later demands for the reform and expansion of social assistance in Quebec.⁶⁴ After all, the programmes of personal income support advocated in the 1930s and 1940s did not necessarily imply the nationalization or secularization of institutional charity. As early as 1926, Catholic Union leaders in Quebec saw no ideological obstacle to Quebec's participation in the federal Old Age Pensions scheme.⁶⁵

All available evidence⁶⁶ suggests that Church leaders suffered from this kind of insecurity. Quebec's most respected charitable agency, the St. Vincent de Paul Society, was just beginning to review its work in light of modern conditions when the postwar recession struck. For the remainder of the 1920s it struggled just to "keep up" with new problems, and never formulated its master plan.⁶⁷ Partly as a result, local chapters naively undertook responsibilities beyond their capacity during the depression of the 1930s.⁶⁸ It is also clear that defenders of the traditional system of social assistance against the alleged dangers of the Public Charities Act never formulated positive proposals for the adaptation of an essentially rural system to the urban environment. From the rapid increase of lay personnel in Church-operated charitable institutions, moreover, one can surmise that by the close of the First World War there had not yet been trained a corps of administrators and specialists within the Church to provide necessary new services.⁶⁹ For rhetorical purposes some op-

⁶⁴ That is not to ignore other forces in Quebec which resisted such reforms, notably the philosophy of individual politicians, the pressure of business interests and widespread popular prejudice against all taxation, especially in the countryside. On the last phenomenon see Stewart BATES, *Financial History of Canadian Governments* (Ottawa, 1939), pp. 146-149 and Everett C. HUGHES, *French Canada in Transition* (Chicago, 1963 edition), p. 172.

⁶⁵ Confédération des Travailleurs Catholiques du Canada, *Procès Verbal 1926*, pp. 34-35; *La Vie Syndicale*, février 1928; *Canadian Annual Review 1929-1930*, p. 206.

⁶⁶ Further evidence should appear once archdiocesan records are accessible for this period (in fifteen to twenty years, under present regulations), and more specific institutions and categories of assistance receive scholarly attention.

⁶⁷ Robert RUMILLY, *La Plus Riche Aumône: Histoire de la Société de St. Vincent de Paul* (Montreal, 1946), pp. 134-148.

⁶⁸ RUMILLY, *Histoire de la Province de Quebec*, tome XXXIII, pp. 69, 150-154.

⁶⁹ Staff salaries (excluding doctors' fees) in charitable institutions were rising astronomically, more than doubling to \$881,232 in hospitals and nearly trebling to \$423,664 in refuges between 1916 and 1922. *Sessional Papers 1925*, "Benevolent Institutions".

ponents of the law warned that it was part of a conspiracy against Church influence, but the dearth of specialized clerical personnel was a far more practical and logical reason to fear that a mere scheme of provincial subsidization would lead to a secularization of social services. In this connection it should also be noted that urban parish priests were the most energetic opponents of what few specialized agencies did begin to appear, and that their opposition dissipated only when they felt certain of a place in the new welfare structures.⁷⁰ Finally, French Canadian Catholic leaders cannot have failed to notice the growing acceptance of the lay social worker and the nondenominational agency (albeit private) among their English-speaking co-citizens in Quebec.⁷¹

Thus it appears that the Public Charities Act provoked a major controversy not only because it violated an ultramontane interpretation of Catholic principles, and was suspected of being inspired by anti-clerical sentiments and designs. Reservations about the manner in which the Province might administer public assistance were too well founded in practical experience, and the terms of the Act too conducive to abuse for opposition to be dismissed as "ideological". At the same time, the period in question should be recognized as one of considerable apprehension within the Church as an institutional structure as well as an ideological force. New developments in Quebec education, public health and labour organization all were posing challenges to the social role and influence of the clergy. In many cases the Catholic press issued dire warnings and a few clergy resisted compromise or adaptation. But almost always clear programmes of adaptation were formulated by which the clergy could hope to maintain their influence. Preoccupied with positive tasks, they left intransigent opposition to a vocal but small minority. In this sense the Public Charities Act was an exceptional challenge and threat, and the resulting tension could only be heightened by the apparent insensitivity of civil authorities to this fact.

Despite the controversy, the Public Charities Act accomplished its immediate objectives. Under the competent direction of Dr. Alphonse Lessard, it helped many institutions survive their postwar crisis and later in the 1920s supported the expansion of existing facilities and the creation of new ones. By 1930 there were 207 institutions registered with the Bureau, serving 141,000 clients during the course of the year. Their annual budget was nearly \$15,000,000, almost five times the 1919 figure; the direct provincial contribution was \$2,738,608, an increase of \$1,702,438 since the first full year of the Bureau's operation.⁷² During the 1930s, when statutory sources could not begin to finance relief costs, the Public Charities Fund was permitted to draw upon ordinary provincial revenues. The only major structural defect proved to be the power of municipalities to define indigence, for as in the case of educational and other reforms of the period,

⁷⁰ MONGEAU, *op. cit.*, pp. 49-50; HUGHES, *op. cit.*, pp. 104-105.

⁷¹ André M. GUILLEMETTE, "Welfare in French Canada," in *Canadian Welfare*, Jan.-Feb. 1966.

⁷² Above, notes 16 and 17; *Quebec Statistical Yearbook* 1932, p. 173.

many rural councils used their prerogatives to avoid expenditure and so frustrate the intentions of provincial authorities. Fortunately, no major urban councils behaved in this way.

Ultimately, however, the conservative forces seem to have won out. Although other factors were undoubtedly involved, political leaders declined for almost 40 years to undertake a systematic reform of Quebec's social welfare structure. Advances came only in the guise of unwelcome federal intrusions and *ad hoc* responses to domestic pressures. Invariably these were schemes of direct payment only and never represented a desire to broaden the philosophy or modernize the administration of social service.