
Geoffrey Ewen

Recent publications show that early 20th century Canadian teachers either shunned the American Federation of Teachers and its links to blue collar workers, refusing to do as American teachers had done, or, as Western Canadian Teachers' Associations did, moved on their own to bargain collectively. I propose to challenge these views by investigating teachers' collective identity as workers/professionals — asking why and when men and women teachers have shown solidarity with the labour movement — and considering the role of the Quebec Catholic Church in shaping labour relations at a crucial juncture in Canadian labour history.

On Friday 25 November 1920, Paul Bruchési, Archbishop of Montreal since 1897, rose before a large crowd to declare that the city's underpaid Catholic school teachers demanded a wage increase and had a right to do so. His assembled audience burst into spontaneous applause. The Archbishop thus closed the first Semaine sociale, a week of lectures on the 1891 papal encyclical Rerum Novarum ["On the Condition of the Working Classes"]. Bruchési's final words dealt with the union of Montreal's public Catholic school teachers, the Association de bien-être des instituteurs et institutrices de Montréal (ABE), then locked in bitter conflict with the Montreal Catholic School Commission. Despite his expressed sympathy, Bruchési went on to ask teachersto abandon organizing or collective bargaining.

The Association de bien-être des instituteurs et institutrices de Montréal, because, unlike private sector workers, it left it unstated that a teacher union then had a role in education.

Canadian teachers had occasionally for collective bargaining between 1917; most shunned any identification with as professionals socially superior to significant exception to these generalizations. They affiliated with the American Federation of Labor organization, and. In the post-war years unions, the Trades and Labour Council, had a role, teacher unionists needed solid allies as the Commission.

Montreal's teachers unionized in changes to the city's school system. In municipalities and thereby 22 school parish, many heavily indebted. Rapid growing. Many parents had difficulty paying. Progressive middle class reformers and centralized oversight. They hoped better education would reduce costs and the teaching body, whose salaries were 20% of the Commission's budget. Montreal's.


3 Ruth Frager examines the issue of cooperation between men and women in the labour movement in Sweatshop Strife. Class, Ethnicity and Gender in the Jewish Labour Movement of Toronto, 1900–1939 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992).

4 On the origins of the Catholic labour movement and for discussion of Archbishop Bruchési see Jacques Rouillard, Les syndicats nationaux au Québec de 1900 à 1930 (Québec: Presses de l'Université Laval, 1979).


5 For other teacher unions formed during this period, see Marjorie Murphy, Teachers Organized. The American Federation of Teachers in Canada, 1919–1925 (Toronto: Gage, 1991), and in Allan Seager and David Roth, "Bronislaw Chance," ibid., 252.


7 Fragmentation" in Heron, op. cit., 283.

8 On the American Federation of Teachers during this period, see Marjorie Murphy, Teachers Organized. The American Federation of Teachers in Canada, 1919–1925 (Toronto: Gage, 1991), 168.


School Teachers, 
Archbishop Bruchési: 
de bien-être des 
Institutrices, 
1919–20

Ewen

In the post-War years unions, particularly those affiliated with the Montréal Trades and Labour Council, had a reputation for strength and combativeness, and teacher unionists needed solid allies as they confronted formidable opponents on the Commission.

Montréál's teachers unionized in the wake of far-reaching administrative changes to the city's school system. Montréal had annexed several surrounding municipalities and thereby 22 school boards by 1917, some no larger than a single parish, many heavily indebted. Rapid population growth meant serious overcrowding. Many parents had difficulty registering their children for school.1

Progressive middle class reformers pushed for school board amalgamation with centralized oversight. They hoped business-like management of Catholic public education would reduce costs and establish efficient administrative control over the teaching body, whose salaries made up the largest non-capital expense in the Commission's budget. Montréal's international unions had long since championed


2 For other teacher unions formed during the years 1916 to 1920 in Canada, see Ian McKay and Suzanne Morton, "The Maritime: Expanding the Circle of Resistance," in Craig Heron, ed., The Workers' Revolt in Canada, 1917–1925 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), 50, 57; and in Allan Seager and David Roth, "British Columbia and the Mining West: A Ghost of a Chance," ibid., 252.

3Spall, "Fields of Disappointment," 25; Craig Heron, "National Contours: Solidarity and Fragmentation" in Heron, op. cit., 285.


compulsory attendance, textbook uniformity, school board amalgamation, an
elected school board, and establishment of a provincial ministry of education.

With capital and labour advocating parallel reforms, opposition to change came
mainly from the Church, whose preeminent role in Catholic education was symbol-
ized by the fact there was no provincial Minister of Education. It was a decentral-
ized system whose boards chose their own texts, requiring religious teaching orders
to use texts approved by the Catholic committee. From parish priests through
Montreal Archbishop Bruchesi, the Church hierarchy condemned unification as a
threat to local control, and opposed election of any Commission members.

On 1 July 1917, 23 previously independent boards were incorporated into the
Montréal Catholic School Commission’s jurisdiction throughout Montréal and the
suburban municipality of Maisonneuve. The amalgamated school board became
the largest in Canada, with 160 schools and an enrolment of almost 75,000. During the
1919–20 school year, it employed 2,146 teachers. Over two-thirds of classrooms
were staffed by members of the Church’s teaching orders, some 581 brothers and
889 sisters. The 676 lay teachers—333 men and 343 women—were mostly franc-
ophone.

A central seven-member appointed board now controlled finances, including
teachers’ salaries; otherwise the city was divided into four districts with individual
six-member boards responsible for hiring and pedagogical matters. Between 1917
and 1925, the Archbishop, the Provincial Government, and the City of Montréal
each made one appointment to the central board, and two each to the district
boards. Each district commission chose a representative (who could not be a
layman, usually an ex-priest). From parish priests through
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threat to local control, and opposed election of any Commission members. 

This redistribution of power increased the presence of laymen at the expense
of the clergy. The Commission president, until then always a cleric, would hence-
forth be a layman, usually an ex-priest. Most importantly, the recom-
mission presidents would be close
day: Judge Eugène Lafontaine, the very close to Premier Lomer Gouin.

The Commission had always had
annexed municipalities who had previ-
ously found themselves disenfran-
chised by barring Montreal’s mayors
and Church officials opposed working
with the real labour movement’s support of
and the Trades and Labour Congress of Canada; see Céline Bastien, “Les syndicats internationaux
eurionales au Québec (1900-1930),” unpublished M.A. Thesis, Université de
Montréal, 1997.

All of Québec’s Catholic bishops sat on the Catholic public instruction committee along
with an equal number of laymen, all prominent members of the bourgeoisie. Unlike the lay
members, the bishops could designate a delegate to sit in their absence, ensuring their
domination.


Wayne State University (WSU), Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, American Federation
of Teachers (AFT), Series VI, Box 18, Local 130, Eudore Gobeil to F.G. Stecker, 6 March 1920;
Anglophone students made up eight percent of the total student body; Robert Gagnon, Histoire
de la Commission des écoles catholiques de Montréal: le développement d’un réseau d’écoles publiques
en milieu urbain (Montréal: Boréal, 1996), 102, 120.
the presence of laymen at the expense of a provincial ministry of education. It was a decentralized hierarchy condemned unification as a reduction of almost 75,000. The over two-thirds of classrooms teaching orders, some 581 brothers and 343 women—were mostly francophone now controlled finances, including divided into four districts with individual and pedagogical matters. Between 1917 and 1918, the City of Montréal’s real board, and two each to the district as a representative (who could not be a cleric) on the public instruction committee along with members of the bourgeoisie. Unlike the lay tagate to sit in their absence, ensuring their presence—when a layman, usually an experienced administrator from outside the Commission. Most importantly, the reform marked the beginning of a period when Commission presidents would be closely tied to the provincial government of the day: Judge Eugène Lafontaine, the first lay president, was a former Liberal MLA close to Premier Lomer Gouin. Although the province retained control of school boards’ property tax rates, clerics presided over three of the four district boards, and the president required the support of the Archbishop.

The Commission had always had an appointed board, but residents of the annexed municipalities who had previously elected their school commissioners now found themselves disenfranchised. The new Act further distanced the Commission by barring Montréal’s mayor and elected councillors. Progressive reformers accepted a completely appointed body as free from machine politics and the corruption of municipal political life, but the new Commission did not include a single representative of the working-class and lower-middle-class parents whose children attended its schools. It was dominated by French Canadian middle-class reformers, businessmen and professionals who sent their own sons and daughters to private Church-run institutions. Schools had a central role in defining French Canadian national identity, with Catholicism a core element of that identity.

Workers were occasionally given token representation on non-educational government bodies, but during the immediate post-war years, in view of the Montréal labour movement’s support of far-reaching educational reform, government and Church officials opposed working class representation in educational governance. Consistent with the position of the provincial government, the Québec Catholic Church, and Catholic intellectuals alike, no women were appointed to the Commission or to any other body overseeing Catholic education.

As even Bruchesi had admitted, teachers’ chief motive for unionizing was to win better salaries. Teachers in other Canadian cities were much better paid, as were Montréal’s Protestant teachers. Catholic teachers’ earnings depended on sex, level of certification, sacerdotal status, length of service, and (men’s) marital status, producing galling contrasts. For instance, in 1917 the starting salary for men was reduced from $700 to $600. By 1919 married men received a minimum of $1,000 and a maximum of $1,400 to $1,700, depending on certification; for laywomen the minimum was $500 and the maximum $600 to $800. Rampant inflation had severely reduced real wages, but the Act of 1920 maintained the distinction in salaries. Women received a salary of $700 to $800, depending on certification; for men the minimum was $1,000 and the maximum $1,400 to $1,700. Despite these disparities, the new Act maintained the distinction in salaries; for women the minimum was $500 and the maximum $600 to $800. Rampant inflation had severely reduced real wages, but the Act of 1920 maintained the distinction in salaries; for women the minimum was $500 and the maximum $600 to $800. Rampant inflation had severely reduced real wages, but the Act of 1920 maintained the distinction in salaries; for women the minimum was $500 and the maximum $600 to $800. Rampant inflation had severely reduced real wages, but the Act of 1920 maintained the distinction in salaries; for women the minimum was $500 and the maximum $600 to $800. Rampant inflation had severely...
eroded teachers' standard of living. Many long-term employees earned far less than the maximum because increments were awarded arbitrarily. In 1919 the average for men, including principals, was $1,205. At the Protestant School Board of Montréal, women's salaries ranged from $850 to $1,250 in 1919. Those for men started at $1,000 and could reach $2,700 to $3,000. Protestant teachers also enjoyed a better pension plan.18

Commission salaries were kept down partly because of a fiscal crisis in education. Already heavily in debt, the Commission was under pressure to build new schools to relieve overcrowding and provide more and better levels of instruction. The main source of revenue, municipal property taxes, seriously disadvantaged the maximum because increments were awarded arbitrarily. In 1919 the average for men, including principals, was $1,205. At the Protestant School Board of Montréal, women's salaries ranged from $850 to $1,250 in 1919. Those for men started at $1,000 and could reach $2,700 to $3,000. Protestant teachers also enjoyed a better pension plan.18

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The main source of revenue, municipal property taxes, seriously disadvantaged Catholic education, since Protestants were on the whole richer in property. Only the provincial government could raise taxes, and in a city where 80% of working class families were tenants, the Association des propriétaires opposed any tax increase.19

The proposed enlargement of the school system was attractive to teachers hoping for career advancement. As with teaching positions, access to promotions was limited by clerical teaching orders, although lay men and women could become principals. In 1915, 6 of 61 mixed or girls schools were run by laywomen, at a time when lay women constituted more than one quarter of the female teaching force.20

Teachers resented authoritarian treatment almost as much as they did limits to advancement. Provincial legislation permitted school boards to fire teachers, or to refuse to rehire them, without cause. Teachers charged school principals with using their powers in an arbitrary and abusive manner. They complained of nepotism, of political interference, of patronage in the allocation of promotions and of intimidation. Amalgamation and the institution of a two-tiered school board structure meant teachers faced a new layer of bureaucracy which distanced teachers from their employer.21

If some hoped for career advancement, most male teachers were concerned simply to keep their jobs. The Commission had maintained the practice of hiring men to teach boys and women to teach girls. But the idea of replacing the men who taught younger children in the first three years of school with women at

lower rates of pay had been under consideration. The jobs of 238 of 333 laymen

Earlier teachers' organizations could not respond to these interests. From 1857, men teachers could de la Circonscription de l'École Normale et des Écoles Normales de Montréal du Collège de Montréal, affiliated with Mgr. Jean-Baptiste. This gave them a link to political power and patronage in the allocation of promotions and social activities. Francophone women in Québec (section Montréal), affiliated with the Catholic school board. They also complained of nepotism, of political interference, of patronage in the allocation of promotions and of intimidation. Amalgamation and the institution of a two-tiered school board structure meant teachers faced a new layer of bureaucracy which distanced teachers from their employer.21

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22 It was being discussed in 1918 when they first attempted to form a Catholic union.
23 Pierre Dionne, "Une analyse historique de la Corporation des enseignants du Québec
(1836–1968)," M.A. Thesis, Université Laval, 1969, 13, 17, 46; Marise Thivierge, "Les institu-
trices laïques à l’École primaire catholique au Québec, de 1900 à 1964" Ph.D. Thesis, Université
Laval, 1981, 280; MSFC Archives, District Centre, Deliberations, vol. 32, 9 December 1918, 264;
Bureau Central, Délibérations, 27 May 1919.
24 L'Enseignement primaire, December 1918, 254; Labor World, 7 December 1918; Archives
de la Chancellerie de l'archevêché de Montréal (ACAM), Mgr. Bruchési lettre book, vol. 7, 369,
Mgr. Bruchési to M.N.E. Gobeil, 24 November 1918.
The astonished commissioners balked at what Commission president Lafontaine described as a "menace impertinante."23

On 3 October 1919, some 400 Montréal lay Catholic school teachers met to form the Association de bien-être. By discreetly affiliating with the American Federation of Teachers, they could join the Montréal Trades and Labour Council and the Trades and Labour Congress of Canada. Fearing the reaction of the Board, and remembering Mgr. Bruchési's 1918 veto, a small group met secretly several times before calling a public meeting for all lay teachers.26 Québec workers contended they could be good Catholics and good international union members, and Catholic school teachers believed they had a right to organize without falling under suspicion of being anti-clerical or freethinkers. After all, some American Catholic bishops actively supported international union membership. Bruchési nonetheless denounced international unions as foreign bodies27 and ABE promoters, accepting their work would not receive clerical approval, simply contended Bruchési should not deal with their demands.28 As financial control rested principally in the hands of Commission laymen.

The ABE was organized by a core group of ten men and one woman, including N. Eudore Gobeil, J.J. Fahey, H.G. Meloche, Antoine Maltais, and Mary Hoey. Gobeil and Meloche had been leaders of the Catholic union; Gobeil was also a member of the comité des intérêts matériels; Hoey was secretary of "The Montréal Catholic Lady Teachers' Association," which received Bruchési's blessing and a chaplain in February 1919. It was the same core group of organizers that requested an American Federation of Teachers charter.29

Although the ABE aimed to organize all teachers, impetus to join an international union came initially from men. By late November the ABE claimed 230 of 322 eligible men were members. Men held all the executive positions. Women organized an associate committee with a separate leadership. At first the male leadership's demands maintained the gender-based salary differential, but ABE members voted for equal pay, effectively making elimination of the differential a central union demand. The men quickly deferred: an end to wage discrimination would in any case remove the incentive to replace men with women in the earlier grades. An authentic alliance had been forged: leaders of the women's section spoke regularly at ABE meetings and the ABE membership voted to join the local labour council as a union. The ABE was organized by a core group of men and women, including N. Eudore Gobeil, J.J. Fahey, H.G. Meloche, Antoine Maltais, and Mary Hoey. Gobeil and Meloche had been leaders of the Catholic union; Gobeil was also a member of the comité des intérêts matériels; Hoey was secretary of "The Montréal Catholic Lady Teachers' Association," which received Bruchési's blessing and a chaplain in February 1919. It was the same core group of organizers that requested an American Federation of Teachers charter.29

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25This was during a dock workers' strike in 1903. See Joseph Levitt, Henri Bourassa and the Golden Calf: The Social Program of the Nationalists of Québec, 1900-1914 (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1972), 100-1.
26La Patrie, 20 October 1919; Chartrand, Une certaine alliance: 60 ans... et après? (Montréal: Alliance des professeurs de Montréal, 1980), 18.
27It was these eighteen members who requested the charter. WSU Archives, AFT, Series VI, Box 18, Local 130, see the charter issued 7 November 1919; ACAM, Mgr Bruchési lettrebook, vol. 7, 385, Mgr Bruchési to Miss M.T. Hoey, 10 February 1919.
Montreal's Catholic teachers were remarkable in seeking direct links to the labour movement, joining the American Federation of Teachers. Established in 1916, the Federation received considerable financial and organizational support from American Federation of Labor president Samuel Gompers. By 1920 the Federation had 10,300 members in the United States. It encouraged ABE leaders to join the local labour council as this strategy had proven effective in American cities. Contact with Montreal labour leaders, however, predated the decision to join an international union. It was Aurèle Lacombe, the president of the Montréal Tramway Union, who wrote to the Federation supporting the request for affiliation.

Membership in the Montréal Trades and Labour Council and legitimacy in the local international labour movement may have been the main reasons for joining the American Federation of Teachers. Teachers turned to the secular international unions because in the late war years and in 1919 they had won a number of important disputes. From 1916, there were more strikes, larger confrontations, and more success. During the war, a sense of injustice grew, as did a desire for more economic security and the post-war expectation of more democratic relations in society and on the shop floor. Membership now included workers with little previous experience in the labour movement and women, immigrants, and the less skilled were welcomed.

Now at last, labour organization extended to include public sector workers, most notably municipal workers. Teachers noted the advantages won by recently organized public sector unions, and how they surmounted faced fierce opposition to their right to organize. In Montréal one dramatic confrontation was a two-day strike in November 1918 by municipal workers, including police and firefighters, against provincially-appointed trustees administering the city's financial affairs. The trustee had to make important concessions, as the unions won collective agreements. Montréal's municipal unions furthermore declared independence from religious authority in declining an offer from Archbishop Bruchési to mediate the dispute.

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10La Patrie, 11 October, 11, 17, 22, 28 November, 6, 11 December 1919.
11Urban, Why Teachers Organized, 134–5; Murphy, Blackboard Unions, 86, 99; WSU Archives, AFT, Series VI, Box 18, Local 130; FGSto Eudore Gobeil, 7 November 1919; Labor World, 7 August, 4 December 1920; WSU Archives, AFT, Series VI, Box 18, Local 130A. Lacombe to Chas. B. Stillman, 5 November 1919.
shortly before the strike. If police and firefighters could organize and bargain collectively, then why should teachers not have the same rights?

There may be another reason why Catholic teachers turned to the labour movement. For men salaries were falling behind those of unionized public servants. They noted that after five years service, recently-organized police and firefighters received annual salaries of $1,468, several hundred more than the average for male teachers. Their earnings also compared unfavourably to private sector blue collar workers at the Canadian Pacific Railway Angus Shops, and in some construction trades. As wage differentials disappeared, a middle class life style became less likely. Teachers may have hoped a union would lead to earnings that would secure their status as professionals. Also, their low wages encouraged identification with manual workers even more than they had done before the War. In ABE documents, all explicit comparisons were with unionized manual workers and emphasized the common ground they shared as breadwinners. This underscored male teachers' loss of middle class status. ABE made no such comparisons with women in other occupations, although women teachers' wages compared unfavourably to those of office workers, but instead invoked the example of women who worked for other school boards in Montréal and elsewhere. Catholic lay women's salaries were so low that most probably lived at home.

Australian scholar Andrew Spaull suggests most Canadian teachers refused to join the American Federation of Teachers because, as Anglo-Celtic immigrants, they preferred organization on a British model, and favoured a strong central union of teachers in a province. Montréal's lay Catholic school teachers would have been almost exclusively Canadian-born, with little prior experience of unionism; for them the most visible example was the local labour movement and its strong American ties. Spaull also suggests a latent nationalism in English Canada resisted American influences. By contrast, workers and professionals of all classes in Montréal were forging organizational links across the border.

If teachers elsewhere were reluctant to identify with organized labour because of its militant or radical image, Montréal teachers embraced international unionism. Indeed, by affiliating with the Montréal Trades and Labour Council, Catholic teachers allied themselves with a movement that had long called for educational reforms—reforms the Church hierarchy considered inimical to clerical control of the school system. Unions advocated instruction cheaper and more accessible controlled by international union. Compulsory education became the first line of defence to a particular hardship on working class families

...
the school system. Unions advocated a wide range of measures to make public instruction cheaper and more accessible. When the Québec Labour Party, closely controlled by international union leaders, was established in 1899, free and compulsory education became the first plank in its platform: monthly fees were a particular hardship on working class families with several children. In 1904 the Party added establishment of a ministry of education and uniform free textbooks to its list of reforms, so that families moving from one school district to another in the middle of the school year would no longer have to buy new books. In 1910 the Montréal Catholic School Commission eliminated student fees and adopted required texts. In 1916 Montréal Trades and Labour Council leaders not only favoured amalgamation, meaning textbook uniformity over a larger area and an end to the levy of fees by smaller boards, but as well advocated election of school trustees, a direct challenge to clerical control.36

Free and compulsory instruction was, unsurprisingly, the most prominent feature of the Québec Labour Party platform. Québec Labourists saw education as key to a more democratic society and a fairer voice in government for workers. The present school system prevented working class electors from making choices based on their class interests. Better public education would lead to more active, informed, and independent political activity.37 Education gave workers a means of social mobility. Abbé Phillippe Perrier, a former sœur ecclésiastique at the Montréal Catholic School Commission, argued that higher levels of public education benefited the working-class and some members of the petite bourgeoisie. Working class representatives before a 1926 commission pleaded passionately for improved access to higher grades. At the time blue collar apprenticeship opportunities were declining, as factories required only a general education and a minimum of skill for most workers.38 The decline of skilled labour, the greater importance of unskilled or semi-skilled work, and the rising number of white collar and lower level managerial jobs motivated workers to seek more education for their children.

Of all labour demands, educational reforms most alarmed the clergy. State intervention directly threatened Church control over Catholic schooling. Compul-

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The labour movement sought an egalitarian and democratic society through greater state involvement, whereas the Church upheld a hierarchical view of society in which education and social services were managed by religious authorities. Catholic union promoters described the international unions and the Labour Party as socialist, attacking such measures as old age pensions and state health insurance: the Church considered social welfare its prerogative. The Labour Party advocated replacing private banks with a public financial institution and nationalization or municipalisation of all public utilities; the Church denounced these threats to private property.

It was threats of educational reform as much as fear of socialism that prompted the Québec Church to establish a separate Catholic labour movement to rival secular international unions in the post-War period. The Church provided funds, organizers, buildings, moral support, and a network reaching every parish in the province. Montréal’s Catholic teachers were joining international unions just as the Montréal Archdiocese readied a massive campaign against these religiously neutral organizations.

The importance of education for the Church was emphasized in 1918 at the first conference of the growing Catholic labour movement. The leading resolution expressed delegates’ opposition to educational reforms, including free, compulsory education and uniform texts. With organized labour divided on these issues, Catholic unions effectively cancelled out pressure for reform on the provincial government until as late as 1943.

For their part, teachers claimed to be concerned only with wages and working conditions. Like their counterparts in the United States, ABE leaders avoided “inflammatory language.” Prominent Catholic public figures, including Eugène Lafontaine and most of Montréal’s lay Catholic school commissioners, circulated a petition in 1919 calling for compulsory education, but teachers played no role in this campaign.

The ABE’s demands included a salary scale for men and women starting at $1,200 to a maximum of $2,500; an immediate across-the-board increase of $400 dollars, with annual increases thereafter of $100; and clear rules and regulations to govern promotions determined by length of service, under a committee of two members of the Commission (which would together name a regulation permitting the Commission to argue that teachers with two years’ experience in the school board as it was not motivated by a spirit of revolt, an ultimatum, and that there was no state School Commission Chair encouraged teachers to sign this petition).

From the start, many school commissions, including the Commission des écoles de Montréal, a career administrator who had risen to the post of director of the school board as it was not motivated by a spirit of revolt, an ultimatum, and that there was no state School Commission Chair encouraged teachers to sign this petition.)

School Commission Chair encouraged teachers to sign this petition. Even the Association des propriétaires de l’instruction publique (CSN) and the Catholic unions were ready to counter these threats to private property.


Footnotes:
41 Urban, Why Teachers Organized, 139.
42 This petition was signed by many senior public figures and respectfully submitted to the Catholic committee of the Conseil de l’Instruction publique through the offices of Mgr Bruchési. ACAM, 871.050 Bureau du surintendant générale (1899-1925) Mgr. Bruchési to R. Dandurand, 30 January 1919.
govern promotions determined by ability, merit, and seniority. Lay-offs were to be determined by length of service, and all firings to be referred to arbitration under a committee of two members of the ABE and two chosen by the Commission (who would together name an impartial fifth). Objecting to the provincial regulation permitting the Commission to fire teachers without cause, unionists argued that teachers with two years' experience should be fired only for incapacity, insubordination, or immorality.

During the ABE's membership campaign teachers gained support in the labour movement, in the daily press, and in public opinion. For example, the Montréal daily La Patrie encouraged teachers to strike if their demands were not met. For a petition demanding an increase in the property tax to finance better salaries, the ABE collected over 10,000 signatures, a quarter of them from property owners. Even the Association des propriétaires was prepared to accept a tax increase for this purpose.

From the start, many school commissioners and administrators viewed the ABE with hostility. Teachers from one sub-district were warned away from a meeting. When the ABE attempted to present demands in October 1919, Commission president Lafontaine refused to meet them without Archbishop Bruchési's approval. On the other hand, the ABE had an advocate on the Central Board: J.M. Perreault, the directeur général des écoles for the Commission from 1908 to 1916, a career administrator who had risen from the ranks of the teachers to the highest position in the school board as it was before 1917. Perreault insisted the ABE was not motivated by a spirit of revolt, that it had made no threats nor issued any ultimatum, and that there was no question of a strike.

School Commission Chair Eugène Lafontaine explained his objections in detail when he addressed the annual joint meeting of the Central and district school commissioners in the autumn of 1919. ABE salary demands were excessive, and unworkable without a provincially-authorized property tax increase. As to equal pay, Lafontaine argued men who taught younger children in the first three grades were doing women's work and should get women's pay. He contended restrictions on hiring and firing would make it impossible to get rid of undesirable teachers. Under such rules a teacher


4See the proposed collective agreement in MISC Archives, Associations syndicales et autres, Association du bien-être des instituteurs et institutrices de Montréal, Généralité, 1919 à 1920.

4La Patrie, 8, 9 October 1919; Eudore Gobeil to Montréal Catholic School Commission, nd. in MISC Archives, Associations syndicales et autres, Association du bien-être des instituteurs et institutrices de Montréal, Généralité, 1919 à 1920; Manifeste, 10.

4WSU Archives, AFT, Series VI, Box 18, Local 130, Eudore Gobeil to F.G. Stecker, 6 March 1920; La Patrie, 29 October 1919; MISC Archives, Bureau Central, Délibérations, 25 November 1919.

un anarchiste ou un bolchéviste, il pourrait entretenir, pratiquer et propager n'importe quelle opinion, aussi subversive et aussi destructive de l'ordre de la famille et de la société... et les enseigner et propager en dehors de l'école ou dans l'école même, et prendre part à n'importe quel mouvement contre la religion, l'ordre, le gouvernement et la société...

For Lafontaine, atheists, anarchists, and bolshevists were lumped together with international union members. He suspected a larger agenda behind teachers' demands:

On veut mettre la main sur nos écoles.... Or, l'école est un sanctuaire auguste, divin, à la pureté duquel il faut veiller avec vigilance et fermeté. Mieux vaut mille fois ne pas avoir d'écoles que d'en avoir de mauvaises.47

This, he argued, was a question not just of content in public education but of control, and therefore a religious matter. Teachers allied with organized workers would identify with the labourers' "cause," and teach differently. They would abandon the hierarchical view of society upheld by the Church and provincial government leaders in favour of social change as promoted by organized labour. Lafontaine definitively rejected any legitimacy of unionisation for public sector intellectuals. To perform their duty to society properly, teachers must not submerge their identities in a union. Their real need was for prestige and individuality—qualities associated with professional workers.48

Middle class reformers and provincial government leaders insisted teachers were not workers but professionals. When ABE leaders met with premier Lomer Gouin, they had to defend their ties to the labour movement.49 A high level Montréal Catholic School Commission administrator stated "Les professeurs manqueraient à leur dignité professionnelle, s'ils se mettaient à coudoyer les travailleurs organisés en unions,"50 a clear message for teachers to keep their distance from organized workers. The international unions' parliamentary representative to the provincial government, Gustave Franco, describing his efforts on behalf of the teachers, explained that the school commissioners and most members of the provincial legislature believed "that teachers could not be compared to workers" and made it clear that "in their opinion I was meddling in a question that did not concern Organized Labour and that my interference was resented."51

In 1919, governments, employers, and the secular and Catholic press ascribed labour militancy to socialist subversion. ABE members were accused of bolshevism—a potent weapon against teachers who aspired to respectability. One school commissioner reproached a teacher that "Vous êtes un bolchéviste: vous êtes entourés par les membres des Unions Internationales qui sont à base de
socialisme, d’hommes comme Lacombe, M.P., et le Maire Martin. 52)  

Ironically, neither figure cited by the commissioner fitted this description. Mayor Médéric Martin was a Liberal Member of Parliament who supported the teachers’ right to organize and to bargain collectively; Aurèle Lacombe, president of the Tramway Workers’ Union, had recently been elected to the Québec legislature as an independent but immediately sat with the governing Liberals. ABE president Édouard Gobeil declared meetings open to non-members to show teachers had nothing to do with bolshevism or socialism. School principals and trustees countered that no American organization should interfere with Québec education. Facing such arguments, the ABE tried to keep its American Federation of Teachers affiliation a secret. 53

Catholic clerics were particularly hostile to the ABE. Mgr Bruchési’s recently appointed representative, Father René Labelle, declared “que les instituteurs ont mis la Commission au pied du mur.” 54 Another cleric, Abbé J.-O. Maurice, argued that a collective agreement “bouleversera l’ordre établi.” 55 Addressing a meeting of the ABE, school inspector Abbé Dupuis recommended his auditors show due respect for established authority. 56 When senior clergy accused teachers of disrespect they spoke with a moral authority beyond their role as employers or high level administrators. To disregard such advice left teachers open to the accusation that they were bad Catholics, and school board officials questioned the faith of teachers who joined a religiously neutral organization. ABE president Édouard Gobeil felt it necessary to declare its members had given “des preuves éclatantes de notre esprit chrétien et catholique.” 57 It had been precisely to appease clerical suspicions that teachers first attempted to form a Catholic union.

As a practical response to the union’s wage demands, Commission President Lafontaine proposed to replace the 238 men who taught boys in the first three grades with women at lower wages, using the savings to pay higher salaries to the few remaining men. With Perreault dissenting, the board passed this motion, but a public outcry forced the board to modify its policy. Rather than being fired at the end of the school year, the laymen would be replaced gradually as they retired. 58

Administrators and a small group of cooperative employees now sought to undermine ABE salary demands. On 11 November 1919, executive members of

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52 Labor World, 21 August 1920.
53 La Patrie, 20 October 1919; WSU Archives, AFT, Series VI, Box 18, Local 130, Édouard Gobeil to F.G. Stecker, 6 March 1920.
54 La Patrie, 29 October 1919.
55 MSCC Archives, Association syndical et autres, L’Alliance catholique des professeurs de Montréal, Généralité 1919–1921, Alliance catholique des professeurs de Montréal, Réunion 19 December 1919, 7.
56 La Patrie, 3 November 1919.
57 Ibid., 11 December 1919.
58 MSCC Archives, Bureau Central, Délibérations, 2–3 July 1918, 26 November 1918, 17 October 1919; La Patrie, 15 October 1919; Factum, 5.
the Association des Instituteurs de la Circonscription de l’École Normale Jacques-Cartier presented the Commission with a brief earlier rejected by its own membership. Anti-union members of the AICENJC’s *Comité des intérêts matériels* asked for salary increases of $100 for men and $75 for women, with the smaller bonuses already granted considered part of this amount. This small concession was immediately granted.\(^9\) The ABE petitioned for an immediate general assembly of the AICENJC, but AICENJC leaders delayed the meeting until the small increment was secure. When it finally met, the AICENJC censored the leaders, forcing them to resign.\(^6\) The *Comité des intérêts matériels* then notified the Commission that only the ABE represented the teachers, and disbanded.\(^4\)

Shortly afterwards 125 men and women teachers thanked the Commission for the increase and announced they wanted nothing to do with the ABE. Within days a rival organization, the Alliance catholique des professeurs de Montréal, was formed by the same principals and assistant principals who had lost control of the AICENJC. The Alliance opposed collective bargaining and membership in any professional association not officially recognized by the Commission. No Alliance member could also belong to the ABE.\(^6\) As ABE president Gobeil later wrote, the Alliance’s motto was “Destroy the Bien-être.”\(^6\) At its first open meeting on 5 December, the directeur-secrétaire of the North District Board, assured the audience that they had the support all the district commissioners. The Alliance was quickly and officially endorsed by Archbishop Bruchési.\(^6\)

The provisional committee of the Alliance was officially recognized by the Commission at its next meeting on 10 December 1919, where it asked for higher wages without specifying a scale, declaring its opposition to affiliation with any organization lacking Church support. (An ABE delegation was admitted to this meeting, presumably to give the appearance of equitable treatment.) Responding to ABE demands, Lafontaine asserted the board had done all it could to raise salaries, claiming (dubiously) that under the school act the commission could not sign a collective agreement, and urged the provincial government.\(^6\)

Leaders Gobeil, Fahey and Malheur of the Provincial Cabinet, asking for legislation to permit the board to impose an additional tax specifically to fund the Premier Gouin to see that the teachers get a raise. Their reception was not very flattering to decent salary increases. The ABE demanded questioning the absence of official Church support from an independent body composed of Catholic teachers.

A variety of dirty tactics were used. Letters discredited a school inspector and school principal admitted to being an ABE member.\(^6\) By the end of the year the ABE supporters had abandoned for the Alliance a terrible fight ... most of our members frightened [sic] to the utmost to lose the Federation of Teachers affiliation leaders.\(^6\) Of 400 members at the start of the March 1920.\(^7\) Union leaders retained the Federation of Teachers could do little to a "confidential ABE charter.\(^7\)

The severest blow came at the end of the year that had been rehired automatically each year were required to sign a new collective agreement, and urges the provincial government.\(^6\)

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"They presented their case in person and ministers’ reactions see *La Patrie*, 17, 20 December 1919.

"*La Patrie*, 6 December 1919.

"*La Patrie*, 14 November 1919.

"*WSU* Archives, AFT, Series VI, Box 18, Local 130, Monthly Report, December 1919–January 1920.

"*WSU* Archives, AFT, Series VI, Box 18, Local 130, Monthly Report, December 1919–January 1920.

"*WSU* Archives, AFT, Series VI, Box 18, Local 130, Monthly Report, December 1919–January 1920.

" Archives de l’université Laval, Fonds de l’Alliance des professeurs de Montréal, Assemblée générale 1919-1939, Procès-verbaux, 5 December 1919; *MCSC* Archives, Association syndicales et autres, L’Alliance catholique des professeurs de Montréal, Généralité, 1919-21, "Les Instituteurs forment une nouvelle association appelée ‘L’Alliance catholique des Professeurs de Montréal,’” na, nd; Bureau Central, Délibérations, 22 December 1919.

\(^{6\text{th}}\) MCSC Archives, Bureau Central, Délibérations, December 1919.

\(^{6\text{th}}\) They presented their case in person and ministers’ reactions see *La Patrie*, 17, 20 December 1919.

\(^{7\text{th}}\) *WSU* Archives, AFT, Series VI, Box 18, Local 130, Monthly Report, December 1919–January 1920.

\(^{6\text{th}}\) MCSC Archives, Bureau Central, Délibérations, December 1919.

\(^{6\text{th}}\) They presented their case in person and ministers’ reactions see *La Patrie*, 17, 20 December 1919.

\(^{7\text{th}}\) *WSU* Archives, AFT, Series VI, Box 18, Local 130, Monthly Report, December 1919–January 1920.
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... sign a collective agreement, and urged the ABE to present its case instead to the provincial government.

Leaders Gobeil, Fahey and Maltais did indeed present their case to the Provincial Cabinet, asking for legislation to allow the Commission to sign a collective agreement and to permit the Montréal Catholic School Commission to impose an additional tax specifically for higher salaries for lay teachers. Gobeil urged Premier Gouin to see that the teachers received a $400 increase before the end of the year. Their reception was mixed. Premier Gouin and his ministers expressed sympathy for decent salaries but grilled Gobeil about the ABE, questioning the absence of official Church support. Gobeil defended the ABE as an independent body composed of Catholics.

A variety of dirty tactics were used against ABE sympathizers. Anonymous letters discredited a school inspector who defended union members. One school principal admitted trustees had forced him to file a complaint against an ABE member. By the end of the year threats of dismissal convinced demoralized ABE supporters to abandon it for the Alliance. Gobeil wrote, "We are having a terrible fight ... most of our members influenced by our Catholic clergy ... are frightened [sic] to the utmost to lose their positions." Word of the American Federation of Teachers affiliation leaked out: "We are surrounded by spies and traitors." Of 400 members at the start of the campaign, only 75 remained in March 1920.

Union leaders retained the support of most male teachers, however: at the May 1920 regular annual elections of the AICENJC, ABE leaders again won control.

The severest blow came at the end of the 1920 school year. Previously teachers had been rehired automatically each year. For the first time the Commission required individual contracts. All Commission teachers were sent dismissal notices, together with reapplication forms for the following September. In this way 68 active union supporters were let go.

The ABE turned to the labour movement for support. The distant American Federation of Teachers could do little to mobilize public support because of the confidential ABE charter. AFT leaders raised the matter with American Federation...
of Labour President Samuel Gompers in view of the upcoming June AFL convention in Montréal, but Gompers did little on the teachers' behalf. Finally the AFT suggested that organized labour in Montréal should assist the ABE.

There was a move at the AFL convention to improve relations with Montréal's ecclesiastical officials. American cleric Father Peter E. Dietz worried that the growing Catholic labour movement would undermine his work to bolster an anti-socialist bloc in the AFL. Gompers and many other AFL union leaders refused to participate in a discussion that involved religious views. Undeterred, Dietz persuaded Bruchesi to receive a delegation from the international unions, but the meeting did little to ameliorate Church hostility towards the AFL.

The AFL convention was followed within days by the Semaine sociale on Rerum notarum, meant to bolster the burgeoning Catholic labour movement, and the first major Catholic union offensive against their rivals in Montréal. International unions were attacked directly by Mgr Bruchesi in his opening and closing addresses. There were groups, he said ominously, with dangerous programmes. He expressed concern over resolutions passed at recent labour conventions. He claimed there was "continuellement... des menaces de guerre entre le capital et le travail, entre les patrons et les ouvriers," a reference to the large number of recent strikes. Bruchesi was particularly alarmed by work stoppages by municipal workers: "la greve de ceux qui par etat, par devoir et par conscience, sont charge de proteger la vie, la propriete de leurs concitoyens." This was a reference to the 1918 disputes involving police and firefighters, and to a January 1920 strike by waterworks employees that left large parts of Montréal without water for ten days. Bruchesi called for legislation with severe penalties to prevent public sector strikes since secular labour organizations were responsible for these excesses, he urged their replacement with Catholic unions and hoped the AFL would restrict its activities to the United States. Bruchesi asked Montréal's workers to abandon the AFL.

Bruchesi's strongest specific condemnation was reserved for the ABE, which had no right to organize or bargain collectively, let alone to strike. These were legitimate actions only for private sector employees who worked to enrich their employers; teachers worked for the public and the nation. The school Commission could not raise salaries without a tax increase; such legislation would be opposed by property owners. Teachers should resolve the dilemma by placing their trust in those who "protected" them: the school commissioners, directors, inspectors, bishops, and superintendents of instruction publique.

Bruchesi asked the school council not to fire any teachers; in practice, this was impossible. His Council could not afford such a general strike proved anathema to Council and operate its own schools. The Council could not afford such an open and operate its own schools. The children boycott school until the welcome this kind of action, and in places such as the 2,500 member Sainte-Marguerite at the Canadian Pacific Railway opposed by Gustave Francq, a firm argued a boycott would only hurt crowded schools. Despite a radical industrial legality and had a history of case he argued trustees were within the fundamental structures. Francq opposed others, such as the Fur Workmen's Association than mere protest was needed to The leadership of the Montréal Trades and Labour Council in Canada playing a key role in Militancy in Montréal depended...
of the upcoming June AFL convention on the teachers' behalf. Finally the Montreal should assist the ABE.\textsuperscript{71} to improve relations with Montreal's Father Peter E. Dietz worried that the Montreal should assist the ABE.\textsuperscript{71} The Montreal Trades and Labour Council identified itself closely with the policies of the TLCC and the AFL and was among the least inclined to consider radical or innovative tactics. During the labour revolt Montreal Trades and Labour Council leaders were among the more conservative in Canada playing a key role in limiting the strike wave of May and June 1919. Militancy in Montreal depended more on the strength of individual unions, on inspectors, bishops, and superintendent who constituted the provincial \textit{Conseil de l'instruction publique.}

Bruchesi asked the school commissioners to forget what had happened and not to fire any teachers; in practice, of course, this meant bowing to his authority. District commissions in fact only rehired teachers willing to sign declarations they would not join an international union.\textsuperscript{74}

Into the summer of 1920, the ABE solicited support from prominent labour leaders, union meetings, and labour clubs tied to the Labor Party but which included unorganized workers. Moral support came from the Metal Trades Council, the bakers' union, and the Club Ouvrier Notre-Dame des Victories. A particularly strong promoter of the ABE was Tramway Union president Aurèle Lacombe, a member of the Provincial Assembly who sat with the governing Liberals.\textsuperscript{79}

The Montreal Trades and Labour Council investigated the dismissal of teachers, gathered affidavits to support intimidation charges, and concluded union activity was the sole reason for firings. Delegates considered three courses of action. A general strike proved anathema to Council leaders. A suggestion that the Council open and operate its own schools, like Russian soviets,\textsuperscript{40} was rejected because the Council could not afford such an undertaking. The Fur Workers union proposed children boycott school until the teachers were reinstated. President Maltais welcome this kind of action, and it pleased the city's largest and strongest unions, such as the 2,500 member Sainte-Marie Lodge of the Brotherhood of Railway Carmen at the Canadian Pacific Railway's Angus shops. On the other hand, it was opposed by Gustave Françoq, a figure of immense prestige in the Council, who argued a boycott would only hurt children already being turned away from overcrowded schools. Despite a radical reputation, Françoq promoted a narrow view of industrial legality and had a history of opposition to unruly strike tactics. In this case he argued trustees were within their rights and that labour should not destroy fundamental structures. Françoq swayed the majority to opt to lobby for redress but others, such as the Fur Workers' Albert Foucher in particular, objected that more than mere protest was needed to win public sympathy.\textsuperscript{81}

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\textsuperscript{71}Bruchesi's remarks on this issue were not published in the \textit{Semaine sociale}, 1920, 206. There is a full report of his remarks to teachers in \textit{Le Devoir}, 26 June 1920; \textit{Labor World}, 9 October 1920.

\textsuperscript{74}\textit{Labor World}, 17, 31 January, 14, 28 August 1920; \textit{La Patrie}, 24 October, 12 November 1919.

\textsuperscript{80}\textit{Labor World}, 7, 21 August 1920.

\textsuperscript{81}\textit{Labor World}, 28 August, 3, 4 September 1920.
formal and informal alliances among labour organizations, and on rank and file pressure than on action taken by the council.

The Council lobbied the Québec government, whose provincial secretary Athanase David referred them back to the school Commission as authority over personnel matters. At the Commission Central Board, board president Lafontaine claimed only district commissions hired and fired, and denied that any teachers were dismissed for union membership rather than incompetence. Council delegates were again stonewalled at the district commissions. Western district commissioners claimed their oath of office prevented them from discussing the matter. The Chair of the Central district admitted fired teachers had not breached any offence punishable by dismissal as stipulated in the school act, then refused to answer questions. The Council returned to the provincial government to request a Royal Commission investigation of the firings. The government refused an inquiry, arbitration, or any right of appeal. Lamely, the Council declared a flagrant violation of right of association. 82

By the opening of the 1920 school year, about 20 holdouts had signed individual contracts. By August 1921, with hiring completed for the following school year, about 30 ABE members had not been rehired. In the end they were forced to renounce the union or leave Montréal for positions elsewhere. 83

Some teachers still hoped for a union, and tried to persuade Bruchési to grant a Catholic union in mid-1920, but the Archbishop would not budge. The Alliance ignored a request to help establish the first Catholic labour council in Montréal. This invitation indicated that some Catholic unionists believed teachers should be part of the labour movement. Absorbing the Association des Institutrices, which grudgingly became its Section Féminine, the Alliance remained a company union. Not until 1936 would it move in the direction of effective labour organization. 84

Ultimately the ABE proved no match for the combined forces of the school Commission and the Church. Destruction of the teachers' union was one of the first setbacks for the international unions and a major blow to the Montréal labour movement. The summer of 1920 marked the beginning of a recession that deprived workers of bargaining power. This was the start of a period of union decline, as union membership dwindled, locals disappeared, most strikes were lost and the majority of organized workers faced wage cuts. Unions entered a period of retrenchment and consolidation, one marked by increasing caution and a reluctance either to organize or engage in new tactics.

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82 MSC Archives, Bureau Central, Délibérations, 7 September, 4 October 1920; Labor World, 11 September, 6 November 1920, 12 February 1921.
83 Labor World, 9 October 1920; TLCC Proceedings, 1921, 125; Chartrand, Une certaine alliance, 25.
84 UQAM, Archives de l'École Normale Jacques Cartier, Correspondance avec divers particuliers et organismes 1919-21, Anonymous mimeographed circular, 2 June 1920; L'Enseignement primaire, September 1921, 41; Chartrand, Une certaine Alliance, 26–45.