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Moncton's Student Protest Wave of 1968: Local Issues, Global Currents and the Birth of Acadian Neo-Nationalism

Joel Belliveau

Joel Belliveau : Professeur adjoint

Abstract :

When Acadian students put forward a new, left-leaning brand of nationalism at the end of the 1960s, most observers concluded that it was simply a "spill-over" effect of Quebec's "Quiet Revolution". This paper will put forward the case that Acadian *néo-nationalisme* had a lot more to do with global currents of ideas than with *Québécois* nationalism. It is through a New Left inspired analysis of regional inequalities that Acadian student militants became aware of disparities between the province's linguistic groups, and through the loose adoption of an anticolonial viewpoint that they reconciled themselves to the idea of nationalism. Moreover, at all times, these actors felt and imagined their struggle to be part of a broader progressive movement.

1. Introduction

In Canada, the year 1968 conveys a multiplicity of meanings and brings back contrasting memories. On the one hand, the year was a time of hope and optimism, in the image of the previous decade, a year which inherited the excitement of 1967, Canada's centenary, marked by Montreal's fabulous "Expo '67". This feeling was notably harnessed by the new leader of the governing Liberal Party, Pierre Trudeau, who won the year's election handily by clamouring that "Canada must be a *just* society", triggering a phenomenon dubbed "Trudeaumania" among the country's youth. Yet the year is also remembered as a turning point for the Canadian New Left, a year of hardening positions, in which the movement nonetheless managed to maintain impressive levels of support within the population. It was witness to mounting protests and occupations at dozens of post-secondary institutions, the most spectacular of which occurred at British Columbia's Simon Fraser University and in Quebec's network of CEGEPs[1]. Finally, the year evokes the breakthrough of Quebec's independence movement into the mainstream, with René Lévesque, a well known, intellectual yet charismatic former television journalist and cabinet minister, managing to merge three smaller groups into the *Parti Québécois*. The stage was set for the epic constitutional battles of the next 30 years. In short, 1968 was an exciting time, and also a moment of contradictory forces at work: faith in liberal reformism through the state vs. hope inspired by more radical protest; and a new Canadian nationalism competing with Québécois *indépendantisme*[2].

At the same moment, these various forces were also at work, on a slighter scale, in New Brunswick, a small province on Canada's east coast. It is the province in which one can find the largest linguistic minority in the country in relative terms: in the 1960s, 35% of its population had French as its mother tongue; the figure is now about 32%[3]. Because of its linguistic makeup, New Brunswick is sometimes considered a microcosm of Canada. Logically, then, when Acadian students brandished a new, self-confident left-leaning brand of nationalism at the end of the decade, most observers

concluded that it was simply a "spill-over" effect of Quebec's *indépendantisme*. This paper will put forward the case that, despite appearances, the Acadian *néo-nationalisme* had a lot more to do with the global New Left than with *Québécois* nationalism. Acadian youth felt and imagined their struggle as part of a broader progressive and anti-colonial movement, as did nationalist militants from dozens of other minorities around the Western world at this point in time. Thus, as we will see, Acadians' return to a nationalist state of mind is part of the larger (up until now ignored) global nationalist wave of the 1960s and 1970s that is at the heart of this publication[4].

The most important student protests in the history of francophone New Brunswick happened in February of 1968. The Student Union at the Université de Moncton (l'Association des Étudiants de l'Université de Moncton, or AEUM) orchestrated a strike to denounce an imminent hike in tuition fees. The same week, an independent group of students organised a protest rally at City Hall. About 2000 people – mostly university and high school students – marched in the street while a delegation of four students addressed the council and requested the implementation of a measure of bilingualism in the city's administration. It was the first protest march of this size in the history of Moncton. The following week, another demonstration was organised, this time in Fredericton, the provincial capital. This time, the objective was lower tuition fees. About 1200 of the protesters were francophones from the Université de Moncton or from the Collège Sacré-Coeur, a smaller institution in northern New Brunswick affiliated to the U. de M. The AEUM delegation was received by the provincial cabinet. A few days later, two full weeks after it began, the strike came to an end[5].

One could not say that these events are little known. Most of them were filmed and showcased in a widely distributed National Film Board (NFB) documentary – *L'Acadie, l'Acadie?!?*[6] – and they quickly lodged themselves in the Acadian memory as a symbol of a new type of collective self affirmation. Also, many scholars and journalists have analysed these events in their writings[7]. However, while doing a thorough review of the movement's historiography, I was struck by its "Acadian-centeredness". The existing analyses, despite putting forward many important explanations for the movement, understood it as being essentially a product of the *region's* political, social and economical context, and to a lesser extent, of neighbouring Québec's "Quiet Revolution". Along the way, a passing nod was made to worldwide student mobilisations. This seemed too little, as there are few events that are generally considered to be more global in scope than the protests of 1968, which occurred in places as varied as Paris, Montreal, Chicago, New York, Mexico, Prague and Tokyo, but to name a few[8].

I therefore wondered up to which point – and how – the Moncton protests were linked to the world-wide wave of student rebellion, and undertook the task of replacing the said Acadian events, and especially their discourses, in the global context.

2. A bit of context

2. 1. Acadian political life during the postwar years[9]

Because of their distinct history, the region's "francophones" – as French speakers began to be called in the 1960s – did not consider themselves to be "French Canadians", but rather "Acadians". "Acadia" had been a distinct colony of France and had fallen to the British in 1713, fifty years before the Saint-Laurence colony. Its inhabitants had suffered a massive deportation at the hands of the

British in 1755, at the outset of the Seven Years' War. Along with a few geographical considerations (the proximity and importance of the sea, for example), these elements of history convinced the region's the French-language 19th century "nation builders" to represent the Acadians as a distinct people, rather than as part of the French-Canadian nation[10].

Halfway through the 20th century, Acadians came to an invisible crossroads. The large-scale socio-economic transformations of the 1940s and 50s – the war economy and the post-war boom, government infrastructure expenditures and the first programs of the Canadian welfare state – deepened Acadian New Brunswick's integration into the North American market economy. These changes posed an ideological challenge for the Acadian elite and its "national" ideology. This discourse, which traces its origins to large "national conventions" held at the end of the 19th century, was one of withdrawal, relatively devoid of demands towards the political system. It did not aim to give Acadians, as individuals, equal rights within the province or country, but rather to develop an autonomous, almost separate sphere of Acadian life. This ideology was akin and related to the French-Canadian ideology of "survivance" (but distinct in its symbols concerning identity and geographic attachment) and was not devoid of messianic interpretations: Acadia was to be a simpler, rural, agricultural society, isolated from the evils of urbanisation and capitalism as well as from the dangers of Protestantism[11]. However, in the face of the transformations of the 1940s and 1950s, this discourse's credibility was wearing increasingly thin.

In the progress-obsessed, booming postwar years, however, the approach of the Acadian elite and its associations seemed insufficient to more and more Acadian leaders. Across the western world, social and economic progress increasingly was seen as something that could only result from state planning and intervention. The state was growing; so were its resources. Shouldn't the Acadians get out there and get their fair share?[12] For this reason, during the postwar period, progressive members of the elite were slowly coming to the realisation that increased participation in provincial and national political affairs could be beneficial to Acadian society, and the content of the nationalist discourse began to change. Through non-stop toiling on the part of the elite's most progressive fringe – present in the colleges, in the provincial capital, at the "national" newspaper, *L'Évangéline*, and in "national" associations – the ideal of Liberalism was thrust into the Acadian psyche. A new discourse based on the ideas of "participation" and "integration" took form during the 1950s. Participation in the political and economic spheres, co-operation with English-speaking neighbours and integration into the state apparatus became the new political ideal. This ideal was firmly liberal in its philosophy, since the only thing it expected from the state (and the only thing believed to be necessary in order to achieve equality for all) was an identical treatment of all citizens, without any attention being paid to their particularities – cultural or otherwise. This rising "integrationist" discourse became dominant around the beginning of the 1960s[13]. This is especially true after Louis Robichaud's Liberal party surprised everyone and formed the provincial government in June of 1960. It was the first time an Acadian had been elected premier of the province, and ultimate proof, it seemed, that Acadians could claim their rightful place in public affairs[14].

Traditionally from rural areas to the north and on the east coast of the province, Acadians had been steadily flowing into the cities of the province's south since the end of the 19th century, especially into Moncton, located in south-east New Brunswick, between traditionally French- and English-speaking regions. In 1963, Robichaud's reform-minded government chose to place the only modern French-language university, the Université de Moncton, in that city. It is the story of this

university’s first cohorts that we will examine here.

2.2. The first student movement of a liberal nature... in Acadian New Brunswick as elsewhere

Despite its absence in the historiography, a structured and mobilized student movement existed in Acadian New Brunswick well before 1968, and as early as 1964. Its vigour is substantiated by numerous militant articles and manifests, as well as by a few large protests. This “first” Acadian student movement had clearly already rejected adult authority (the Acadian “national” cultural elite, the provincial government, the university administration) and had already plainly stated its intention of playing a political role in society.

Contrary to what was until recently widely believed, these first signs of student activism were not of a nationalist nature. One could even say that, contrary to its successor, the movement of 1964-1967 was resolutely anti-nationalist and fundamentally liberal[15]. Firstly, one should note that its preferred topics were not linked to the “national question”. Among the causes that mobilised Moncton students at this time, the most important were opposition to the war in Vietnam and participatory democracy within University administrations. When it did come to comment on things Acadian, its discourse put forward the ideal of modernisation and the rejection of tradition. It also suggested that the socio-economic backwardness of the Acadian population was due to its own traditionalism. This first wave of student militants gave little importance to the idea of Acadian autonomy (which had long been the main ambition of Acadian civil society), and preferred extolling a new ideal: that of an increased participation of Acadian individuals in the wider, modern world. In this regard, as we can see, this first student discourse shared many ideas with the Acadian cultural elite of the day as well as with Louis Robichaud’s Liberal provincial government.

However, and just as importantly, one can also note many similarities between this “first” Acadian student movement’s discourse and that of other North American student movements, most of which are also in the middle of a liberal and optimistic phase during the same period. The Students for a Democratic Society (1962), Berkeley’s Free Speech Movement (1964), the Union générale des étudiants du Québec (1964) and Canada’s Student Union for Peace Action (SUPA, 1964) all have in common an idealistic yet pragmatic approach and a fundamentally reformist ambition. Despite their loss of faith in their respective “establishments” these movements of the “first wave” were of a fundamentally liberal philosophy[16].

3. The arrival of the “1968 moment” in Acadian New Brunswick

It will be argued here that the important Acadian student mobilizations of 1968 are largely attributable to the widespread erosion of postwar optimism, a transformation of the Western ideological context that occurred at the end of the Sixties. This phenomenon, that we could call “the mood of 1968”, represents a profound and widespread change in the political, social and even aesthetic atmosphere in the Western world. Particularly sensed by elements of youth[17], it is essentially a romantic backlash that is spread, in part, by the independent media and organisations that students had put in place since the end of the Fifties. This groundswell brought about a multiplication of student mobilisations during the later part of the Sixties and also nourished the emerging counter-culture. It severely questioned the dominant ideas according to which “progress” and “development” could be brought about through the state’s technocratic management.

Many events and issues nourished this new scepticism vis-à-vis government, such as the perpetuation of the nuclear arms race, the Vietnam quagmire, and the slow progress of the black American civil rights movement. The emergence of this ideological movement can be interpreted as a logical consequence of any blatantly optimistic public discourse. The prosperity of the postwar period and the development of the welfare state had created very high hopes and expectations. If one had been to believe the triumphant dominant discourse of the Fifties, all social, economic and political ills were on the verge of being eliminated. When most of the promised reforms materialised, but were judged as being imperfect, progressive students and idealists of all ages reacted with a collective: “that’s it??” Of course, social needs were still aplenty, and perfect justice had not been attained. Disillusion rapidly followed.

From this point on, progressives, including millions of students, became jaded with the idea of *reformism* and espoused revolt, which manifested itself in thousands of protests, occupations and other actions against the “system”. “Reform is dead, make way for revolution” sums up the spirit of the time. Of course, this shared disillusion and outrage gave way to differing results in different locales. Students and militants everywhere applied the mood of the moment to local issues and causes, which, in itself, modified the nature of the movement. This must be seen as an essential feature of the “1968 moment”. Sean Mills has recently demonstrated, for example, how Montréal radicals of the time – francophone, Anglophone, white, black, men, women – *all* adapted decolonisation theory to their causes in one way or another, which illustrates the fact “that theory can travel and be interpreted in a completely different location than its home of origin [and] cross linguistic and ethnic boundaries »18. He concludes that “Montreal’s political upheavals of the 1960s [must be placed] within a framework of global dissent […] they cannot be adequately understood outside of this larger context”19. The same can be said of the simultaneous Moncton student movement, which represents a good example of peripheral milieus acting in synchronicity with larger social and cultural trends. Of course, the issues and the stakes vary from one place to the next.

3.1. A local incarnation of a global phenomenon

The Université de Moncton students’ rapport with the state evolved, in many ways, similarly to that of their colleagues of other regions. Of course, Acadian students had their own, particular reasons to be disillusioned. The “modernizing participation” ideology’s very success can in part explain this situation, in the sense that it had essentially fulfilled its mandate. In 1967, the seven-year-old Robichaud government had realised most of its election promises. And some progress was clearly visible: francophones were playing a larger role in government than ever before, the province’s post-secondary education system had been modernised, and most importantly, a large fiscal and administrative reform of “equal opportunity” had levelled out the playing field for citizens of all regions, harmonizing rates of taxation and quality of service in the various parts of the province20. Yet, as of that very moment, the ideology that brought about those changes lost much of its value, since it promised nothing new.

Like their colleagues around much of the world, students in Moncton asked: “Is that all?” In their eyes, there remained many important problems in the province, not the least of which were French-language school governance, the “catching up” of French-language post-secondary institutions and the economic development of the Acadian heartland21. The political squabbles that followed reinserted the linguistic question on the political agenda at this precise point in time, after a decade

during which it had been avoided as much as possible by government and Acadian civil society alike. We will see that during the first few months of 1968, the themes of language and economic development provoked a near complete disillusionment amongst a large number of the Acadian university students, and pushed them to thoroughly rethink their philosophy.

As on many North American campuses, the progressive disillusionment with postwar values gave way, in 1968, to feelings of injustice and revolt. And, like every other place, disruptive events had to take place for this feeling to transform into concrete mobilisations. In Moncton, the table was set during the last quarter of 1967, which was witness to an inflammation of the antagonism between the province of Quebec and the federal government. First, in October, René Levesque, a prominent media and political figure, left the Quebec Liberal Party and espoused the separatist cause. A month later, an interprovincial conference titled “The Canada of Tomorrow” underlined the extent of the misunderstandings between French and English Canada22. Finally, and especially, in December, the federal *Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism* published its first report. Its detailed and empirical description of the socio-economic weakness of Canada’s large francophone minority provoked indignation and anger23.

Up to this point, student activists in Moncton had remained loyal to their usual – read liberal – preoccupations and state of mind. They were fixated on the imperative of breaking Acadian society from tradition and thus they mobilised around themes that were common to the whole generation. The only demonstration in the fall of 1967 had been one opposing the Vietnam War. In January of 1968, however, three local events, happening in quick succession, enflamed the campus and unleashed a chain of events that would ultimately dramatically change the student movement’s ideology, moving it towards the affirmation of a renewed Acadian nationalism.

The first disruptive event was the announcement, by the University president, that tuition fees would rise again in autumn. This statement was immediately criticised by the student union as well as the student newspaper. After a whole decade during which there had been much talk of the possibility of free education, a rise in tuition fees, would do nothing to reconcile the students with the Liberal government, the technocratic state in general or the idea of reform through dialogue.

Then came the Moncton mayor’s hostile reaction to a “diplomatic” visit paid by four Acadian notables to France. The “Société nationale de l’Acadie” was received by French president Charles De Gaulle in order to sign a formal accord on cultural cooperation. The visit instigated a feeling of pride among many Acadians, including students, but Moncton mayor Leonard Jones soon rocked the boat severely with a terse statement asserting that such cultural cooperation with France would “jeopardize” the “harmony” between the city’s linguistic groups. The mayor’s attitude was certainly shaped in part by the fact that this voyage of cultural cooperation took place a mere six months after De Gaulle infamously cried “Vive le Québec libre!” from the balcony of Montreal’s city hall. Nonetheless, on campus, many students were irritated by the mayor’s impulsive and negative reaction. Immediately, the AEUM’s president, Ronald LeBreton, addressed an open letter to the mayor, informing him that the student association “formally and categorically opposes” his declaration and that it did not share his “vision of what constitute harmonious relations”.

Finally, choosing their moment very poorly, the English-speaking administrators of Moncton’s formally bilingual school district 15 fanned the flames of linguistic strife by proposing the construction of a new common High School Complex for both francophone and Anglophone students. The anticipated facility would have separate classes for the two linguistic groups, but the

gym, cafeteria and laboratories would be “common amenities”. Most of the Acadian educational milieu reacted very negatively to the proposal, judging it to be a reversal of a new trend towards the principle of separate, linguistically defined educational structures. The district’s new proposal, it was felt, endangered the emerging consensus, and thus represented a dangerous step backward. Parent-teacher associations, the French daily, *L’Évangéline*, and students all promptly expressed their discontent24.

After a tense autumn on the Canada-Quebec scene and those three disruptive events in local politics in January, the Université de Moncton’s campus was filled with a new kind of tension. It was then that Roger Savoie, a self-exiled progressive theologian and former professor at the university, added fuel to the fire. Giving a conference before hundreds of students at a local bar, he put forward the idea that the two linguistic groups of the province were not equally treated, and that a new wave of national affirmation on the part of the Acadians therefore was necessary.25

The message was not fundamentally different than the one Savoie and his former colleague, sociologist Camille-Antoine Richard, had presented to students and youth a few short years back, at 1966’s “Rally of Acadian Youth”. Students then had given short shrift to the idea that any sort of “national affirmation” was necessary, while gobbling up the professors’ parallel calls to break from tradition and religion. Something must have changed in the atmosphere within the ranks of the students in the years since, however, because this time, Savoie’s call hit a nerve. The conference received “warm, excited applause”, and a few minutes later, discussing the conference, a group of students decided that a strike was in order26. The Université de Moncton’s second student movement was born.

3.2. A priviledged moment of reflexion: language and social inequality as a single issue

In contrast to the student movement of 1964-1967, the one that would stir up 1968 and 1969 adopted a resolutely neo-nationalist posture. The January events spawned strong criticism vis-à-vis the Anglophone population of New Brunswick. This was triggered by Mayor Jones’s comments on the Acadian cultural elite’s cooperation with France and by the city council’s follow-up on the subject: a renewal of all councillors’ oath of allegiance to the Queen in order to “dispel the tension that currently exists between the various ethnic groups [in Moncton]” 27. As it did periodically[28], part of the Anglophone establishment was asserting the dominance of English culture and language in the province’s public sphere.

The provocation of 1968 was not “objectively” more outrageous than at some other moments in the past. However, because of the particular atmosphere of 1968, its consequences would be very different. The events of January convinced students that there existed a linguistic problem not only in Quebec, but also in New Brunswick. Their faith in the redemptive powers of “progress”, in the “rational” and “impartial” management of the technocratic state as well as in the ideal of participation in the governance of public affairs came out shaken: how could these ideals prevail if prejudice continued to exist29? Disowning the reformist discourse that had been theirs up to then, militant students started asserting that a certain amount of work had to be done on *mentalities* regarding linguistic themes before harmonious integration of the two linguistic groups could be possible.

A group of students decided to organise a protest march on City Hall on the night of the proposed

swearing of allegiance. Steps were also taken so that a student delegation be allowed to address the council. It was planned to give council a copy of the Laurendeau-Dunton commission’s first report on bilingualism and biculturalism. In short, it was decided to respond to symbolism by symbolism. The mobilised students succeeded in exorcising the fear of linguistic protest that existed up until that point: between 1500 and 2000 people took part in the march.30 It was not immediately a clear victory for the students, however. Hecklers jeered in the street, and the delegation was received coldly by council. The mayor categorically refused to allow the students to address the assembly in French, and onlookers in the public gallery and among the staff coughed noisily while the students laboriously made their presentation in English. The first magistrate concluded the meeting by asserting – in a tone that suffered no contradiction – that bilingualism would cost too much, and paternalistically advised the students that they should concentrate on their studies and leave politics to the adults[31].

The students left humiliated, but the events of the night were broadcast by a local CBC affiliate and promptly caused consternation amongst the public, giving the students a certain moral victory. Moreover, the news item travelled around the country[32]. Their cause’s newfound fame fanned the flame of student unrest, and confirmed the militant youth’s impression that relations between francophones and Anglophones were neither “normal” nor egalitarian in New Brunswick. “It pains us to say it”, the delegation wrote in a follow-up open letter to the mayor, “but one has to admit that the French element is hardly tolerated here in Moncton, not to say ignored”33.

As of that moment, the militant students started looking for the *causes* of French’s symbolic inferiority, a situation that they – like everyone else – had tried hard to ignore during the hegemony of the “modernising participation” discourse. Certain professional Acadian milieus entertained a somewhat masochistic idea on the subject: French’s inferiority was the Acadians’ own fault, since most did not make the effort to speak “proper” French. This idea incidentally fed the cultural elite’s influence, since it limited the right to speak to those who could do so “properly”. The students, unable to ignore this prevalent idea, chose to reclaim it while giving it a new form. This, after all, was an idealistic generation, fully committed to the ideals of liberty and justice. It therefore had very little affinity with the idea of *culpability* – especially when it should be applied to weak or “dominated” groups such as Acadians or students. The young activists therefore acknowledged that Acadians suffered from “cultural bastardisation”, but they simultaneously “pathologised” the condition. This state, they argued, was not of their own doing, but rather the “system’s” fault, since it did not provide the Acadians with the conditions that they needed for the blossoming of their culture. In other words, they argued, their linguistic situation stemmed from their political state: that of a colonised population34.

The “realisation” that Acadian culture and language were in a sad state quickly led to a conclusion: other, better, less “colonial” conditions would be necessary if one hoped to see a strong and healthy francophone culture thrive in New Brunswick, or even to see individual francophones attain personal fulfilment. This idea would be very present during the duration of the student unrest of 1968-1969, and beyond. Personal fulfilment, the *leitmotif* of the wider, Western student movement seemed to have specific linguistic requirements in New Brunswick.

The march in favour of bilingualism and the linguistic soul-searching that followed paralleled another of the students’ struggles: the one against their university’s rising tuition fees. These two issues were theoretically distinct. In fact, the organisers of the march as well as the coordinators of the strike initially took great pains to assert that these mobilisations were completely separate.

However, as the heady days of February passed, the issues intertwined, and ended up being seen as the two sides of the same coin. Moreover, the conclusions reached by the students with regards to this second theme closely resemble those that were reached on the linguistic file.

After the AEUM's and the student paper's initial negative reaction to the hike in fees, students mobilised quickly on the issue. Wednesday, February 7th, a course boycott was organised, during which a strike vote was taken and a "teach-in" held. Friday, the results were announced: 90% of students had voted, of which 84.5% favoured going on strike. It started the following Monday[35]. During the first week's teach-ins and meetings, the student union and the professorial association worked hand in hand to write briefs for the provincial government, which was seen as the only entity able to halt the rise in tuition costs. Once the documents were ready, the two associations asked for a meeting with the Premier and the Minister of Education. To their surprise, they were told that the cabinet of ministers was willing to meet with them, separately, the very next week. On that Tuesday, 800 student protesters escorted the AEUM delegation to Fredericton, joining 1400 students from other universities – mostly Anglophones – who participated in the protest in the name of accessible education. However, the francophone students from Moncton were no longer as interested in the idea of protesting for abstract, universal principles as they had been since 1964. During the strike's first week, they had come to see the tuition hike as a problem particular to New Brunswick francophones or, at least, of particular importance to them.

This vision was laid out at length in the briefs submitted to the government by the Université de Moncton students and professors. Both texts were written in collaboration: the students are thanked in the second and the professors in the first. The briefs depict the province not so much as a single polity in which citizens can participate directly, but rather as an entity made up of two fundamental "communities". Those communities, they argue, are distinguished by their languages, but also by their socio-economic conditions. Biculturalism became, in their authors' eyes, the province's primary feature. Furthermore, these communities were not seen as equal. The briefs could not have been clearer on that point:

[Our] hypothesis : the constitution of New Brunswick's population in two culturally and linguistically original groups […] generates profound disparities. [… We are witness to] a situation of inequality that suggest economic exploitation and alienation[36].

But the briefs went further. Beyond the communication of hypotheses, they undertook the task of demonstrating the inferiority of the francophones' status. The demonstration was straightforward in style and empirical in substance, limiting itself to shining light on some important statistical disparities between counties with a majority of francophone inhabitants and counties with a majority of Anglophone inhabitants. Using data from the 1966 census, they showed plainly that the former had a smaller active population (50.7% vs. 56.6%), a higher proportion of individuals having worked less than 40 weeks in the year (54% vs. 25%), and a significantly lower average salary ($2.408 vs. $3.172), among other things[37]. The authors then linked those socio-economic disparities with another set of measured inequalities, namely those in the socio-cultural sphere, describing how the francophone counties *also* had a lower level of school enrolment, a higher dropout percentage between the 9th and 12th grade (22.5% vs. 15.8%) and a lower level of adults with more than a 9th grade, among other things. Therefore, they argued, education had less chance of being valued among those regions' families and, as a result, their population had every chance to stay under-qualified for generations to come. The authors came to the conclusion that there was

a vicious circle at work here: in francophone regions, socio-economic and socio-cultural disparities fed off one another. Since 75% of the students at the Université de Moncton came from those regions, they concluded, that institution had a vital role to play in the reversal of that nefarious cycle[38].

In short, the students and their professors aimed to establish the existence of important social and economic inequalities between the province’s two “linguistic communities”. They did for New Brunswick the equivalent of what the Laurendeau-Dunton Commission did for Canada: they rendered the francophone population’s inferior status palpable, objective and seemingly irrefutable. These conclusions differed fundamentally from the dominant political discourse in Acadian society. In a clear break with the ideology of “modernising participation”, which put very little emphasis on differences between linguistic groups, the militant youth from university were reaffirming the Acadian community’s specificity. Ironically enough, after the setting aside of traditional Acadian collective myths during the very liberal early Sixties, it is through empirical observation that a new generation reaffirmed the existence of “Acadie”. Interestingly, the students were very conscious of the important role played by sociology in the genesis of their new perspective[39].

The similarity of the wording used by the student movement in these two parallel debates is striking. Whether they were speaking about the place of the French language in New Brunswick’s public space or about the Acadian population’s socio-economic and cultural situation, they spoke of the impossibility of “personal fulfilment” for members of the francophone “community”, of their “alienation” due to the Anglophone community’s “domination”, as well as of the need to correct the situation by bringing about new “social conditions” to end Acadians’ “colonised” status. Many conversations recorded by filmmaker Pierre Perrault illustrate the fact that at this precise moment, many students adhered to the strike briefs’ central claim, according to which the linguistic and socio-economic struggles were, in fact, the same[40]. For the first time, Acadians were “decompartmentalising” the themes of language and socio-economic development. At the same time, they rejected the idea that the Acadians were at fault for either of these types of problems. Consequently, the question became: how could social conditions in the province be modified to enable the flourishing of its underdeveloped francophone culture and community[41]?

It is thus that, without being fully conscious of it, the student militants of 1968 provoked the reappearance of the idea of a “national project” for “Acadie”. Given their allergic reaction to the “traditional” nationalism of their fathers, however, they were resolved to create a new type of cultural affirmation. For them, Acadia was not so much a heritage to preserve, but more of a society waiting to be built, a social and political project, a way to bring personal fulfilment to generations who might otherwise be alienated. Despite this difference, it must be acknowledged that the context of 1968 managed to transform fundamentally liberal activists into convinced nationalists. Acadian New Brunswick, it seems, fits the scenario identified by Tudi Kernalegenn, in which minority cultural groups seize the opportunity given by 1968 to redefine what is legitimate (or not) and reinvent social and cultural norms[42].

During the liberal, “modernising” early Sixties, most militant students at the Université de Moncton saw the province’s Anglophone majority as being well intentioned but ill-informed of the Acadian communities’ situation. They held the Acadian cultural elite responsible for this state of affairs, accusing it of being “disconnected” and of thus doing a bad job of representing the “real” Acadians. The events of 1968 succeeded in changing this perception. As of February of 1968, much of

Moncton's student movement – influenced by decolonisation discourse – held that the Anglophones' political, economic, cultural and social "dominance" had to be considered at least partly responsible for the Acadians' "disastrous" economic situation. They thus put into question the popular idea that the Acadians' economic woes were due to their own *cultural* particularities (indigenous causes) and put emphasis on *structural* problems that prevented the occurrence of substantial economic and social development (extraneous causes). As one student put it: "One thing is important here [...] there is a dominant element and a dominated element here [...] It's important that people realise this." 43

Such a change of perspective with regards to the Anglophone majority was inevitably accompanied by a corresponding new rapport with the state. During the liberal early Sixties, the students had been convinced that cohabitation was not only possible, but also beneficial to all concerned. As of 1968, they were increasingly sceptical, even cynical, with regards to institutions that are shared by the two linguistic groups44. This mistrust on the students' part vis-à-vis the state was a generational phenomenon in Acadian New Brunswick. The cultural elite's newspaper, *L'Évangéline*, certainly did not follow the students' lead in criticising the Robichaud and Trudeau governments for their supposed "complicity" with an "oppressive" Anglophone majority. This tendency, however, was also part of something much more broadly-based than the provincial student movement. It participated in a wider anti-modernist backlash that was an intrinsic part of the ambiance of 1968. This mood was palpable in the period's youth culture, everywhere on the continent. Simply, fortune had it that, in Moncton, local conflicts amplified this mood as early as January of 1968. Thus the Acadian incarnation of this wide-spanning movement started early.

The faith that young Acadians had placed in the state's technocratic reform – like their counterparts everywhere in the West – had definitely lost its lustre once the events of February, 1968 came to pass. The coolness felt by the students with regards to the English-speaking majority and their mistrust of the state were not unconnected from the more general decline of faith in progress during the postwar period. Simply, the immediate causes for student unrest were not the same in New Brunswick as, say, in Vancouver. Nor were the results. Yet the general inspiration was the same.

4. Conclusion: the appearance of neo-nationalism as a particular response to the spirit of 1968

4.1. The advent of Acadian neo-nationalism...

The 1968 students' re-evaluation of the Acadians' place in the world immediately produced a new type of political demand. This new logic was expressed for the first time in the briefs submitted to the government in February, whose conclusions proposed a meaningful shift in provincial public policy. In order to "contribute to the social, economic and cultural *recovery* of New Brunswick's francophone community", the university should benefit from additional funds45. Students and professors alike used three distinct arguments to justify this idea. Firstly, they put forward the idea that moneys were due to the university so that it could "catch up" for lost time. Secondly, they claimed that the francophone community's *particular situation* justified – even required – that the province afford it a unique treatment. Finally, pushing the new logic one step further, students and professors argued that the university should receive a percentage of post-secondary funding equivalent to the proportion of francophones in the province's *population*, rather than to

the proportion of the province’s *students* that it served. Those arguments reveal a fundamentally new way to see the university. It was no longer held as a *public* (i.e. provincial) institution like all others, but rather, as the *community’s* institution, that thus deserved the community’s share of post-secondary funding.

These positions represented a whole new way to consider the province. They were a novelty in the Acadian political discourse, and outlined a potential new political programme. In essence, the students suggested that the Acadians henceforth participate differently in public affairs. They should no longer compromise, as the “traditional” elite had done between the 1880s and the 1950s. Nor should they bet on acquiring of individual rights, as the “modernist” elite had done in the 1950s and early Sixties. Henceforth, Acadians’ political demands should be made from the perspective of *collective rights*. In essence, the programme outlined in the 1968 briefs conferred value not only to individual rights and interests, but also to the cultural group in itself, which deserved public policies that were adapted to its needs.

This discourse quickly gained a following in the coming months and years. A growing number of Acadians came to consider that the “equality of opportunity” for all individuals, promised by the Liberal Robichaud government, was nothing but a sham unless it was accompanied by concrete measures aimed at bringing about a real equality between the provinces’ two linguistic communities. A growing number of Acadian political groups began to use this new political language in their quest for influence, and that logic was applied to a variety of subjects, from school governance to regional development funds. It spread through Acadian civil society so much that, by 1973, it was the dominant discourse of the linguistic group’s two main (and new) mouthpieces: the Société des Acadiens du Nouveau-Brunswick[46] and the Parti acadien, a left-leaning political party which, for a while, advocated the creation of an “Acadian province” by separating New Brunswick in two[47]. Moreover, this discourse significantly influenced provincial policy during the 1970s. Among the policies that espoused a “communitarian” view, there was the adoption, in 1974, of the principle of “duality” in the educational sphere, whereby the province’s educational system was split into two autonomous, linguistically defined administrations. There was also Bill 88, a law recognizing the “equality of New Brunswick’s two linguistic communities”, which was adopted in 1981. Thus, it can be said that the 1968 student movement’s new vision of the province had real effects on the kind of political demands put forward by the Acadians, and further, on the evolution of New Brunswick polity.

4.2. … as the result of a globalised social movement

There is a very ironic element to this story. The Acadian student activists of 1968 created an openly *collective* ideology as a result – in good part – of their preoccupation with their own *personal* fulfilment. The ideas of collective rights, of a special treatment for the minority, of recognising the province’s intrinsic “cultural duality”… they all proceed from the desire of these Acadian youths to “be themselves”, to be “authentic”, to reach higher levels of self-development. To reach those goals, which are common to the whole youth generation of the late Sixties, it was necessary not to be “cultural mongrels”. That is in essence why the students of 1968 reconciled themselves to nationalism.

This last point touches upon this study’s second main conclusion: while the neo-nationalist ideology that was created by the Moncton students was particular to Acadian New Brunswick, the tone

and the mood of the protests in which they were born were not. That is to say that the sudden change of the Moncton student movement's aims and aspirations was due, in large part, to the evolution of student discourses in the Western world. At that precise moment, many other movements that had also thus far been largely liberal, moralistic and humanistic in tone– in the USA, in "English Canada", in Quebec, in France and elsewhere – became radicalised as well. Like their Acadian counterparts, they turned towards theories that were more and more global and reached conclusions that were increasingly critical of the *status quo*. All of these movements rejected the "naive" quest for progress of the postwar period; all mistrusted the state, and all gave much importance to the question of personal fulfilment. Simply, they did not all adopt the same alternative ideology. In Acadian New Brunswick, the moment's new utopia was neo-nationalism. Elsewhere, it was – depending on the individual – Maoism or Trotskyism, anarchism, libertarianism, new age spirituality, communal "back-to-the-landism" or even drug-induced revelation. (Of course, all of these new counter-discourses were also present in Acadie.) Acadian neo-nationalism was one way among many that student militants from around the world tried to reinvent community in the post 1968 years[48].

We have seen how distance and linguistic barriers could not stop the global student uprising of 1968 to develop a local incarnation in Acadian New Brunswick. Moreover, we were able to see that there was no time-lag in this development, despite the said barriers. Our case study even permits us to demonstrate that this synchrony was not the result of simple imitation, since the Moncton protests occurred before most of their more famous equivalents (Paris – May, Chicago – August, Montreal – October, etc.)

The Moncton case also allows us to identify the conditions that facilitated the spread of ideological currents into a particular cultural milieu. Moncton became one of the Canadian hotspots of 1968 student protest because conditions were optimal for it. Recent radical transformations of the political structures by the reformist Robichaud government had weakened the strength of the *status quo*. High hopes among the population had been dashed. The existence of left-leaning yet influential adults had weakened the coherence of the Acadian elite's discourse. Finally, mounting tensions on the linguistic front of the federal and Quebec scenes helped place of language on everybody's mind. These are a few factors that facilitated the arrival of the 1968 student uprising in Moncton.

Finally, the Moncton student experience illustrates the nature of the relationship that exists between "generic" currents of ideas and their particular incarnations. Even while participating in a civilisation-wide phenomenon, the Moncton movement displayed a certain originality. How? Why? Local issues and resources moulded the movement in surprising ways. In short, these Acadian students adopted the new student ideal of revolting in favour of personal fulfilment and social justice, applied it to local issues, and came out with a new, neo-nationalist ideology. Elsewhere, that same wave created other political projects. The spirit of 1968 thus arrived in Acadian New Brunswick at the same time as in the rest of North America, but took on a distinct "flavour" in this particular context.

Notes

1 Acronym for Collège d'enseignement général et professionnel, known officially in English as a "General and Vocational College", whose diploma (DEC) is required for university admission.
2 Much exciting work has been produced about Canada's 1960s recently, including: PALMER (B.),

Canada's 1960s: The Ironies of Identity in a Rebellious Era, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2009 ; WARREN (J.-P.), *Une douce anarchie : les années 1968 au Québec*, Montréal, Boréal, 2008 ; MILLS (S.), *The Empire Within: Postcolonial Thought and Political Activism in Sixties Montreal*, Montréal and Kingston, McGill-Queen's University Press, 2010.

3 LEPAGE (J.-F.), BOUCHARD-COULOMBE (C.) and Chavez (B.), "Portrait of Official-Language Minorities in Canada: Francophones in New Brunswick", *Statistics Canada*, Catalogue n°. 89-6 42-X – N° 005 (available online).

4 See Tudi Kernalegenn's introductory article.

5 Other important protests occur in January of 1969, when, frustrated by the failure of 1968's movement, a small group of students occupied an important building on the Université de Moncton's campus in a bid to secure federal funding for the Université. In this article, we will deal only with the events of 1968.

6 PERRAULT (P.) and BRAULT (M.), *L'Acadie, l'Acadie ?!?*, National Film Board, 1971.

7 Among others, there are HAUTECOEUR (J.-P.), *L'Acadie du discours : pour une sociologie de la culture acadienne*, Québec, Presses universitaires de Laval, 1975 ; CIMINO (L.), *Ethnic nationalism among the Acadians : An Analysis of Ethnic Political Development*. Thesis (Ph.D., anthropology), Duke University, 1977, p. 134-140, 144-147, 156-170 ; OUELLETTE (R.), *Le parti Acadien, de la fondation à la disparition*, Moncton, Chaire d'études acadiennes, 1992, p.22-24 THÉRIAULT (J.-Y.), «Naissance, déploiement et crise de l'idéologie nationale», in *L'identité à l'épreuve de la modernité : Écrits politiques sur l'Acadie et les francophonies canadiennes minoritaires*, Moncton, Éditions d'Acadie, 1995, p. 229-233 ; WARREN (J.-P.) & MASSICOTTE (J.), «La fermeture du département de sociologie de l'Université de Moncton : histoire d'une crise politico-épistémologique», *Canadian Historical Review*, 87, 3 (sept. 2006), p. 463-496.

8 For a striking illustration of the global nature of 1968, see DUBINSKY (K.), KRULL (C.), LORD (S.), MILLS (S.) and RUTHERFORD (S.) (eds.), *New World Coming, The Sixties and the Shaping of Global Consciousness*, Toronto, Between the Lines Press, 2009.

9 On the dominant political discourse within Acadian New Brunswick during the first part of the 1960s, see BELLIVEAU (J.), "Acadian New Brunswick's ambivalent leap into the Canadian Liberal Order" in FAHRNI (M.) and RUTHERDALE (R.) (dir.), *Creating Postwar Canada: Community, Diversity, and Dissent, 1945-1975*, Vancouver, UBC Press, 2008, p. 88-128.

10 For a recent overview of Acadian history in English, see LAXER (J.), *The Acadians: In Search of a Homeland*, Doubleday Canada, 2006.

11 This nationalist discourse of course had never been an accurate reflection of reality. Despite their relative isolation, Acadians always had been influenced by outside cultural, economic and political factors, as social historians pointed out clearly during the 1980s. (See for example the articles presented in COUTURIER (J-P.) and LEBLANC (P.), *Économie et société en Acadie,* Moncton, Éditions d'Acadie, 1996.) However, nationalist discourse served as a filter, denying these outside realities and creating an "imagined community" in which, it was believed, "l'Acadie" had an autonomous existence. (See ANDERSON (B.), *Imagined Communities : Reflections on the origins and spread of nationalism*, London, Verso, 1983.)

12 CIMINO (L.), *op. cit.*, p. 64-67.

13 THÉRIAULT (J.-Y.), "Domination et protestation : le sens de l'acadianité". *Anthropologica*, 23, 1 (1981) 39-71., p. 56 ; HAUTECOEUR (J.-P.), *op. cit.,* p. 30-31.

14 Robichaud held power from 1960 to 1970. An excellent political biography was written by STANLEY (D.), *Louis Robichaud, a decade of power,* Nimbus Publishing, 1984.

15 A large quantity of empirical evidence brought me to this conclusion. We do not have the leisure of going into much detail here, but consider the overt rejection of the Acadian national

symbols (flag, etc.) by the delegates at the 1966 “Ralliement de la jeunesse acadienne” (RJA) and a poll conducted in 1965 in which 68% of Université de Moncton students said they were in favour of a unification of Canada’s three “Maritime provinces” despite the fact that such a union would radically decrease the percentage of francophones in the polity, from 35% in New Brunswick to less than 15% of the new, larger province. See BELLIVEAU (J.), *Entre le social et le national : le moment 1968 et la réinvention de l’Acadie*, Ottawa, University of Ottawa Press, 2013 (forthcoming).

16 On these various student movements, see LEVIT (C.), *Children of Privilege: Student revolt in the Sixties: a study of student movements in Canada, the United States, and West Germany*. Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1984, p. 7-47.

17 Jean-Philippe Warren speaks of «un alignement particulier des planètes, c’est-à-dire […] une conjoncture historique plus favorable à ce genre d’engagement des jeunes». WARREN (J.-P.), *Une douce anarchie : Les années 68 au Québec*, Montréal, Boréal, 2008, p. 240.

18 MILLS (S,), *The Empire Within. Postcolonial Thought and Political Activism in Sixties,* Montréal and Kingston, McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2010, p. 7&9.

19 *Ibid*., p. 9.

20 YOUNG (R.), “The programme of Equal Opportunity: an Overview”, *The Robichaud Era, 1960-1970 – Colloquium proceedings,* Canadian institute for research on regional development, Moncton, 2001, p. 23-36.

21 Despite the economic prosperity of the decade, the industrial expansion promised with great fanfare by the young Robichaud government never fully materialised in this peripheral province. In particular, growth in rural and northern regions, promised by the new federal Department of Regional Economic Expansion (DREE) and by a federal-provincial accord on rural planning, remained elusive. See SAVOIE (D.) and BEAUDIN (M.), *La lutte pour le développement : le cas du Nord-Est,* Sillery & Morton, Presses de l’Université du Québec, 1988, p. 45-59.

22 STANLEY (D.), op. cit., p. 176-178.

23 DION (L.), *La révolution déroutée 1960-1976,* Montréal, Boréal, 1998, p. 194-220.

24 BOURQUE (C.), «Un ou deux complexes scolaires?», (editorial), *L’Évangéline*, 22 janvier 1968 ; CADIEUX (L.), «France, Acadie – Université», *L’Insecte*, 26 janvier 1968, p. 2.

25 My translation. Unless stated otherwise, all English language citations from students or professors are translations. Here is an excerpt: “[If the] provincial government […] did carry our most profound interests, it would not be so timid in promoting the Acadians’ rehabilitation in a way that respects their specificity and their difference. […] Serving everything up in the same dish as they do […] will lead straight to cultural mediocrity”. The conference was titled «Un peuple improvisé». The full text can be found at the Centre d’études acadiennes in Moncton (CEA 1024). Long segments can be heard in Radio-Canada’s online archives (*D’un océan à l’autre* de la radio de Radio-Canada, 17 février 1968 – section : «Politique et économie», «L’éveil de l’Acadie»).

26 AUL, Pierre Perrault Fonds, P319 D8,5. File 2, section 131 (audiovisual recording – Irène Doiron).

27 «Nouveau serment d’allégeance», *L’Évangéline*, January 31st 1968, p.1.

28 For example, during the Laurendeau-Dunton’s passage in Moncton 1964, and during the city’s 75th anniversary in 1965.

29 DOIRON (I.), ARSENAULT (Y.), GAUVIN (B.) and SAVOIE (C.), «Lettre ouverte au Maire Jones», *L’Évangéline*, 25 janvier 1968 ; «La délégation est dégoûtée», *L’Évangéline*, 17 février 1968.

30 *L’Évangéline* and the *Times* of Moncton, January 15th 1968.

31 Parts of the march and of the proceedings can be viewed in the documentary *L’Acadie, l’Acadie*

!?!. See also CORMIER (M.), *Louis J. Robichaud : la revolution acadienne*, Montréal, Leméac, 2004, p. 275-277.

32 They received coverage by the *Globe and Mail*, *Le Devoir*, *La Presse* as well as by dailies from Victoria, Vancouver, London, Trois-Rivières, Summerside and Halifax, but to name a few. *L’Évangéline*, February 13th 1968.

33 «La délégation est dégoûtée», *L’Évangéline*, 17 février 1968. (Irène Doiron, Yolande Arsenault, Bernard Gauvin and Claude Savoie), My translation.

34 See Gauvin (B.), «Le portrait d’un vieillard?», *L’Insecte*, April 1968, p.11 or the retranscription of a discussion at the student paper office (November 1968) in AUL, Pierre Perrault Fonds, P319 D8,5. File 2, sections 144 (audiovisual recording verbatim), See also File 1, sections 43-44.

35 Two subsequent votes were taken to extend the strike, the first on Wednesday the 14th, the second the next Monday.

36 EVEN (A.) *et al.*, for the APUM, «Mémoire des professeurs», *La revue de l’Université de Moncton*, May 1968, p. 42-50, My translation.

37 EVEN (A.) *et al.*, for the APUM, «Mémoire des professeurs»… They also had a third category of counties, the linguistically mixed ones, which had, on every count, results in between that of the other groups.

38 The students’ and professors’ briefs adopted a very similar thought structure to arrive at similar conclusions. Only the type of data used varied, with the students’ document insisting more on students’ financial difficulties. AEUM, «Mémoire des étudiants», *La revue de l’Université de Moncton*, May 1968, p. 60-61.

39 See the open letter in *L’Évangéline*, 3 avril 1969.

40 See for example November 1968 quotes from DOIRON (I.) and BENOÎT (C.): AUL, Pierre Perrault Fonds, P319 D8.5, File 2, section 189c ; and File 1, section 41 ; and File 1, section 206.

41 See for example the article «Manifeste», in *Rappel 1969-70* (Student yearbook), p. 76.

42 See Tudi Kernalegenn’s introductory article.

43 AUL, Pierre Perrault Fonds, P319 D8,5. File 2, section 193d. (audiovisual recording verbatim – Bernard Gauvin).

44 See CORMIER (R.) «La colonne de gauche : Et c’est suspendu», *L’Insecte*, April 1968, p. 2. or « La grève n’a pas donné de résultat concret », *L’Insecte*, April 1968, p. 4. («Eusèbe L’Assimilé»). See also AUL, Pierre Perrault Fonds, P319 D8,5. File 1, section 141. (audiovisual recording verbatim, November 1968 – Jean Cormier.)

45 AEUM, «Mémoire étudiant…». See also AUL, Pierre Perrault Fonds, P319 D8,5. File 1, section 41 (audiovisual recording verbatim – Carmelle Benoît and Blondine Maurice)

46 Formed in 1973, it essentially replaced the old “Société nationale des Acadiens”, confirming a new generation’s hold on the community’s representative associations.

47 Formed in 1972, the party aspired to hold the balance of power in the provincial legislature. It never garnered more than 8% of the votes in the Acadian regions, but nonetheless had an influence on provincial politics. OUELLET (R.), *Le parti Acadien…*

48 PIOTTE (J.-M.), *La communauté perdue : petite histoire des militantismes*, Montréal, VLB, 1987.