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**THE POLITICS OF ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS IN A
GERMAN-AMERICAN ROMAN CATHOLIC
SETTLEMENT IN CANADA'S PROVINCE OF
SASKATCHEWAN, 1903-1925**

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Abstract. *Scholars who have studied the political behavior of residents of Canada's province of Saskatchewan conclude that members of minority groups such as Roman Catholics and people of Central and Eastern European background voted Liberal much more frequently than Conservative, at least prior to the 1930s. There is no reason to question this conclusion when voting throughout the province by a specific minority is considered. However, the same is not always found to be true when the voting behavior of a particular minority group in a single constituency is examined. This paper discusses the German Catholics of the Humboldt Constituency of Saskatchewan and shows that, while they initially strongly favoured the Liberal party, they soon became disillusioned with its position on elementary schools and gave clear evidence of their discontent at election time.*

Scholars who have studied the voting behavior of minorities in Canada's province of Saskatchewan usually portray Roman Catholic people of Central and Eastern European ancestry as strongly desirous of preserving their faith and perpetuating their language. Because Liberals are viewed as more willing to respond sympathetically to such desires, members of these minorities are thought to have given more electoral support to the Liberal party than to the Conservative party, at least until the 1930s. Such conclusions seem supported when election results for the province as a whole are considered. However, when the voting behavior of such a minority is examined at the constituency level, a rather different and more complex picture emerges.

Relevant Literature

In his work, "Agrarian Protest in Saskatchewan, 1928-1948: A Study of Ethnic Politics," Andrew J. Milnor (1962:213) concludes that prior to the 1930s "most minority ethnics were either aligned to the Liberal party or they

could not vote” and that they apparently gave little support to the Conservative party. The minority ethnic groups described included Roman Catholic “voters of French, German and Eastern European descent” (Milnor 1962:58). Although the determination of voter motivation was not a purpose of his study, he partly explains why various groups of people voted as they did in specific elections and notes that leaders of the Liberal party were conscious of and took action to benefit politically from ethnic and religious bloc voting (Milnor 1962:47-8).

David E. Smith (1975) reaches similar conclusions, in his detailed examination of the Saskatchewan Liberal party. He states: “As early as the first provincial election [which took place in 1905] a voting pattern emerged which saw Roman Catholics and non-English speaking voters support the Liberals and reject the Conservatives” (Smith 1975:194). He observes that this pattern of voting behavior, extended through the 1920s, and that “anglo-saxon prejudice” tended to reinforce Liberal candidates’ special appeal to non-English settlers. Smith also discusses such matters as what the Liberals did to attract and retain the support of Catholic and ethnic voters and what the Conservatives did to repel them.

Other writers describe the voting behaviour of the Saskatchewan electorate in essentially the same terms, and add to our knowledge of the subject for the intervals they cover (Bocking 1964; Kyba 1968; Calderwood 1973). Evidence considered include party platforms, the words and actions of political leaders and other prominent individuals, the role of organizations in political affairs, and the overall results in provincial general elections. Like Milnor and Smith, the other writers describe Liberal relations with various religious and ethnic groups in broad terms, portray the relationship as friendly and undisturbed at least throughout the pre-World War I years, and seldom consider how members of a particular community within an ethnic or religious group voted.

Purpose and Methodology

The purpose of this paper is to show that relationships between political parties and ethnic and religious groups were not always as described previously by scholars. To do so, it will pose the following questions regarding the political sentiments of the German Catholic community of the Humboldt Constituency. Did any particular event occur soon after these people began arriving from the United States which led them to favor the Liberal over the Conservative party? What did the Liberals do almost immediately to solidify

German Catholic support for their party in the constituency? Did prominent Liberals at about the same time or later either by acts of commission or omission cause discontent with their party to develop among German Catholics? When German Catholics became sufficiently irritated to display their anger with the Liberal party, how did they do so? Put briefly, by examining the actions of the German Catholics of Humboldt Constituency this paper seeks to demonstrate that if we are to understand more fully the voting behavior of the province's ethnic and religious groups, more detailed studies of their relationships with Saskatchewan's political parties will be required.

Why Humboldt Constituency's German Catholics Opted for the Liberal Party in 1905

In 1903 German Catholics from the United States founded and began settling St. Peter's Colony, an 1,800 square mile area in the Humboldt district of what was then Canada's North-West Territories. At the time, the management of Territorial affairs was shared between the national government, headed by Prime Minister Sir Wilfrid Laurier, leader of the federal Liberal party, and the Territorial government, a non-partisan administration led by Frederick Haultain, a man of Conservative persuasion. Whether the federal government's control of matters vital to settlement, including immigration, land apportionment and the promotion of railway construction, encouraged the settlers to look more favorably on the Liberal party than the Conservative party is uncertain. However, an event soon after the German Catholics began arriving in large numbers played a significant role in determining the orientation of their political sentiments.

In February 1905, two new provinces, Saskatchewan and Alberta, were carved out of the North-West Territories. When drafting the legislation to create and endow them with constitutions, Laurier's Liberal government included a school clause which affirmed the right of a religious minority, if large enough and possessing sufficient children, to establish and operate a tax supported Catholic or Protestant denominational school once an area had been organized into a public school district and arrangements had been made to open a public school. This denomination school clause proved to be highly controversial (Dafoe 1931; Lingard 1946; Skelton 1973; Hall 1981).

Immediately after the provincial autonomy bills were placed before parliament, the *St. Peters Bote* (February 28, 1905), the German language weekly newspaper published by the colony's religious leaders who were members of the Order of St. Benedict described the school clause as very

important to Catholics.¹ The following week, the paper reported that although some elements of the national Conservative party and such organizations as the Orange Lodge were critical of the clause, the leader of the federal Conservatives had expressed the hope that differences respecting it would be settled in an harmonious manner (March 7, 1905). However, in subsequent issues, the *Bote* became increasingly anti-Conservative. In March, it stated that Premier Haultain, whom it described as an influential Territorial Conservative, had also come out against the school clause as an unconstitutional infringement of provincial rights (March, 21, 28, 1905). Thereafter, the paper acknowledged that divisions existed within the parties but described Liberals as generally supporting and Conservatives as generally opposing the provisions respecting religious schools (April 4, 25, 1905; May 16, 1905). Finally, when the bills became law, the *Bote* gave grudging acknowledgment that Laurier had done all that anyone could have expected of him (July 11, 1905).

Shortly after the House of Commons passed the Saskatchewan and Alberta Acts, the provincial Liberal and Conservative parties both held conventions, adopted platforms, and began organizing for Saskatchewan's first provincial election. First to do so were the Liberals, who chose Walter Scott, a member of the federal parliament, as their leader, and went on record as approving the constitutional provisions of the Saskatchewan Act. A week later, the Conservatives in convention adopted Haultain's position that the Act violated provincial rights in such matters as education and "transformed themselves into a Provincial Rights party", with Haultain at its head (Bocking 1964:41-2).

On a number of occasions during the interval between Haultain's decision to seek a seat in the Saskatchewan Legislature and the December provincial election, the *Bote* attacked both Haultain and the Provincial Rights party. For example, in July it referred to him as "the enemy of the separate school" and noted that a Provincial Rights organization was being established in the Humboldt Constituency where the greater part of St. Peter's Colony was located. Its local leaders, a number of whom were named, were said to be non-Catholic businessmen, who, while living among Catholics and depending on their patronage, had passed a resolution supporting Haultain and drafted petitions calling for provincial rights in education. It cautioned readers against signing such documents lest their signatures be used to create the impression that numerous Catholics were opposed to separate schools (*St. Peters Bote*, July 18, 1905).

The *Bote* repeatedly made clear which party it favored in the last three weeks prior to the election. On November 23, it stated that "the issue" in the approaching election was the school clause and asserted that Haultain and his followers aimed to remove it from the constitution while the Liberals supported it. Apparently believing that some of its readers were responding positively to Haultain's provincial rights' arguments, the paper went on to explain why it found the arguments to be lacking in substance (*St. Peters Bote*, November 23, 1905).

On November 30, the *Bote* described an attempt by a Conservative paper to elicit statements offensive either to Catholics or Protestants from Walter Scott, the Liberal leader. But the scheme failed and instead presented Scott with an opportunity to assert that the school clause gave Protestants and Catholics identical rights and should therefore not be a source of religious strife. As long as he led the Saskatchewan government, he asserted that he would uphold the provisions (*St. Peters Bote*, November 30, 1905).

The *Bote's* final pre-election issue dealt with what came to be called "the Langevin Affair" in an item entitled "Haultain's Attack on Archbishop Langevin." Louis Philippe Adélarde Langevin, Archbishop of St. Boniface, had issued a memorandum to congregations in the Saskatchewan portion of his archdiocese which described various activities of Haultain's Territorial administration as detrimental to the educational interests of Catholics, and asked how Catholics could be expected to elect him as their premier. Upon learning of the letter, Haultain accused Langevin of misusing his office for political purposes and alleged that leaders of the Catholic Church and the Liberal party were engaged in a conspiracy against public schools. The *Bote* printed Langevin's communication, commented on the ensuing controversy, and urged voters to leave Haultain and his party "out in the cold" on election day (*St. Peters Bote*, December 7, 1905).

Earlier in 1902, a Benedictine member of the German Catholic team which surveyed the Territories seeking a suitable location for a settlement commented on education in the area:

The Catholics at Regina [the Territorial and subsequently Saskatchewan's capital] have a Catholic Separate School. . . . This school, like all Catholic Separate Schools in Canada, is supported by taxation, thus being on an equal footing with the government Public Schools, which system is certainly far more just than the most vaunted school system of our country, where Catholics are

obliged by the state to help support godless public schools and, by their consciences, to support religious schools. (Doerfler 1957: 13)

In the three weeks preceding the election, the *Bote* expressed similar views when it explained why it supported constitutional guarantees for separate schools:

Parents (as opposed to the State) have the first claim to their children, who in reality are God's children. God places children in their parents' care until he see fit to reclaim them. It is therefore the duty of parents to educate their children to lead Christian and moral lives as God wishes. They are morally bound to insure that Christianity is firmly implanted in their children's hearts both at home and in the school and that anything which might have the opposite effect is permitted nowhere near them. In contrast, it is the right and duty of the State to support parents in their God-given task of properly rearing their children; and to that end, it is entirely proper for the State to constitutionally guarantee such things as separate schools. For the State to force parents to educate their children in non-denominational schools would be a tyrannical act, worse than that which the idol Moloch in antiquity required of his worshipers. The sacrifices demanded by Moloch deprived children of only their lives—a State forcing parents to educate their children in non-denominational schools would rob children of their souls as well. (*St. Peters Bote*, November 23, 1905)

The choice for Catholic voters on election day was therefore very simple: they could vote for Premier Scott and his Liberal colleagues, who would maintain a denominational school system, or they could vote for Haultain and his Conservative cohorts, who would deny denominational aspirations in a fashion likely contrary to the wishes of the Almighty (*St. Peters Bote*, December 7, 1905).

While the *Bote* was promoting the Liberal cause among St. Peter's German Catholics, various Liberals also were engaging in activities which would tend to promote victory in the Humboldt Constituency. The first occurred in April, when the federal Department of Interior established a land office in Humboldt so that tasks such as filing for homesteads could be made more convenient. No doubt with the good of the Liberal party also in mind, the Department appointed as its sub-agent a German Catholic, Frank I.

Hauser.² Later that year, Hauser chaired Liberal meetings and frequently spoke in support of the party's candidate throughout the constituency (*Humboldt Journal*, October 26, 1905).

In mid-October, not long before the election was called, Robert Telfer established a newspaper in Humboldt. In his first issue of the *Humboldt Journal* (October 19, 1905), Telfer announced that his paper would support the Liberal party, a not altogether surprising disclosure since he was related to Premier Scott. At about the same time, the constituency's Liberals selected as their standard-bearer, Dr. David B. Neely, Humboldt's first medical practitioner, whose importance to a pioneer settlement could scarcely go unnoticed by the electorate. Finally, it seems that Scott chose December 13 as election day partly on the basis that it would facilitate a victory in the Humboldt seat though D. H. Bocking (1964:95) maintains that selection of that date was determined by negotiations with federal authorities respecting railway construction announcements. However, Scott and his colleagues may also have concluded that a December election was particularly desirable for Humboldt. The first German Catholics to claim homesteads in St. Peter's did so late in fall of 1902. With three years having passed, some of them might have been naturalized as British subjects, thereby entitling them to vote.

When the election was held the Liberals emerged victorious, taking sixteen seats including Humboldt. But their victory in Humboldt was not achieved in the manner they may have initially expected nor following the type of campaign they had prepared themselves to conduct. Among the twenty-five successful candidates, Dr. Neely was the first to be certain he had been elected to office (Saskatchewan Archives Board 1954). The Provincial Rights candidate, W. T. Smith of Quill Lake, who was also his party's constituency president, withdrew from the race minutes before nominations closed, leaving the Humboldt riding to be awarded to Neely by acclamation and its German Catholics without the opportunity to cast a single ballot (*Humboldt Journal* 1982:551).

Why German Catholic Support for the Liberal Party Weakened

Within months of the 1905 election and probably owing as much or more to Protestant actions as to Catholic desires, St. Peter's Germans in cooperation with a few other Catholics established the first Catholic separate school to operate in the colony during the period under examination; and while the difficulties they encountered do not appear to have benefited the

Provincial Rights party, they caused numerous German Catholics to have second thoughts about the Liberals.

By the summer of 1906, a school was clearly needed in Humboldt, a number of children having had no schooling for two years. As a result, Catholic and Protestant ratepayers petitioned the government to establish the Humboldt Public School District. The government promptly gave its approval, setting the stage for the election of a board of trustees. Three Protestant and four Catholic candidates were nominated, and an understanding was said to have been reached that a mixed board would be elected. But voting closely followed religious lines. Of the seventy-six people taking part, only three failed to vote uniformly for either three Catholic or three Protestant candidates. Since Protestant outnumbered Catholic ratepayers forty-two to thirty-eight, the result was an all-Protestant board. Needless to say, Humboldt Catholics, who held over half of the property in the district and would therefore pay the greater part of its taxes, were upset and promptly disassociated themselves from the public school (White 1984:81-2).

Four days after the election, some of the same German Catholics who had led in creating the public school district petitioned the government to erect a separate Catholic school district within its borders, a request which the *Bote* shortly thereafter characterized as a test of Laurier's school clause and by implication also a test of the sincerity of Liberal declarations in that regard (*St. Peters Bote*, April 12, 1906). Under ordinary circumstances, Scott's Commissioner (later Minister) of Education, James A. Calder, may well have quickly approved the request, which he would no doubt have found constitutional, given the documents he possessed concerning both a public and a separate school and how the courts had interpreted the school laws (James A. Calder Papers, 3210, Calder to C.R. Mitchell, July 3, 1911). But owing to the actions of its opponents, he decided to do otherwise.

Scarcely had it become known that Catholics had sent their petition to Calder than Humboldt's Protestants petitioned for the disorganization of the public school district and its replacement by a smaller one, containing no land outside the community's limits, where practically all of the residents were German Catholic. In response, Alfred Mayer, the Benedictine Prior, sent Calder a counterpetition signed by all Catholics in the district objecting to any boundary changes. Mayer also asserted that the constitutional right of Humboldt Catholics to a separate school should be granted as quickly as possible (Saskatchewan, Department of Education, Roman Catholic Separate Schools [RCSS], Mayer to Calder, April 21, 1906). Confronted with the contradictory requests, Calder decided that the situation ought to

be considered by a school inspector. As he would say in a letter to Fred Heidgerken, a Humboldt businessman and German Catholic spokesperson, he had received too many differing opinions to act without study, but "You may rest assured that the Department wishes in every possible way to avoid friction and . . . to deal fairly with all parties concerned." (James A. Calder Papers, 3197, Calder to Heidgerken, July 13, 1906).

Upon completing his inquiry, the school inspector recommended that the district not be altered and that Catholics be permitted to establish their own school (Saskatchewan, Department of Education, Public Schools [PS], File no. 1529, P. McDonald to D. P. McColl, July 17, 1906). In addition, while the investigation was under way, Heidgerken brought to Calder's attention various practical and political matters he would be well advised to consider when deciding what to do. Heidgerken first dealt briefly with what he foresaw as the undesirable effects reorganization would have on education in the Humboldt area. If the existing district was reduced in size, three rather than two schools would have to be established, one rural and two urban, because Catholics would insist on having a separate school. In addition, the two new urban districts would be so small that "neither could afford to have high grade teachers." He then turned to the political benefits Calder's party could expect to reap if the separate school district was approved as proposed:

The writer also wishes to call your attention to the political situation of the *Colony*. All the German Catholics are or will be belonging to the Liberal Party within a year or two unless something is done by the party now in power to check the tide. (At the last election most of our German Catholics could not vote as they were no [sic.] citizens.) You will readily see that this school matter is of vital importance to the Catholic People and to the Catholic Priests of this Colony. The people and the Clergy stand *united to a man* and if the Separate School matter here in Humboldt is turned down by you it will be considered a blow at them by the present party in power and a breach will be created that can never be healed. The crisis is now at hand and the decision as to the Separate school matter at Humboldt will cast the die as far as the political situation is concerned. Our opposition here at Humboldt have the majority in the Village but that is as far as their influence reaches and if turned down will not be able to do any harm. The writer would have never mentioned the aforesaid but for the fact that it appears our

opposition depends on the fact that a few influential politicians will carry their point and bring all their influence to bear on you to defeat us. If you will look into the matter you will find that I have told you the facts, and if you have the good of your party at heart you will act. (James A. Calder Papers, 3195-6, Heidgerken to Calder, July 7, 1906)

Three weeks later, Heidgerken received advice that establishment of the district had been approved in principle. He was also requested to complete and return certain forms, which he promptly did. However, when the department received the documents, it concluded that some of the data submitted was approximate rather than exact and that corrections would have to be made (RCSS, Deputy Commissioner to Heidgerken, July 28, August 13, 1906). Heidgerken complied and on September 22, 1906, the deputy commissioner wrote, informing him that the district had been formally established, but the letter went astray. When Heidgerken learned of what had happened, he asked Calder for a duplicate and went on to make what turned out to be an uncannily accurate prediction that "it appears everything is against us" (RCSS, Heidgerken to Calder, September 24, 1906).

No sooner had a copy of Calder's letter been received and the first meeting of the board held than the Department dropped a bombshell. It advised Heidgerken that, owing to a very recent legal decision, Humboldt's separate school district could not be established until December 31. According to the court, a petition for the creation of such a district could not be drawn up until the assessment roll of the public school district in which the separate school was to be located had been completed, a condition which had not been met at Humboldt. In addition, the court stated that when the assessment roll had been drawn up, all parties on it would have to pay the public school tax. In short, all 1906 taxes of both Protestants and Catholics would go to the public school, leaving the proposed separate school without any such revenue for that year (RCSS, Deputy Commissioner to Heidgerken, October 31, 1906).

The separate school board, while disappointed by this unexpected turn of events, decided that the public school tax should be paid "without protest." However, Heidgerken also informed Calder of the growing gulf between Catholics and Protestants in the community: "Under existing conditions and in view of the difficulties our Catholics have had with the other party they feel they cannot conscientiously [though anxious to have a school] send their children to the public school" (RCSS, Heidgerken to

Calder, November 3, 1906). To deal with the situation as best he could, Father Dominic Hoffman, the Benedictine pastor, ran a temporary private school for two or three months in a dwelling nearing completion.

In his letter concerning the court's decision, the deputy commissioner conveyed the impression that organization of the separate school district would be approved on December 31 and that Heidgerken and his colleagues would at once receive authorization, without further action on their part, to conclude the necessary formalities and begin conducting the business of a school board. When this did not occur, Calder's reputation among Humboldt Catholics plummeted. Early in January Heidgerken again had to bring the separate school to Calder's attention and in doing so stated: "We have been anxiously waiting to receive word from you to go ahead with . . . organization, the people are getting quite dissatisfied and think you are playing them false . . ." (RCSS, Heidgerken to Calder, January 9, 1907). Calder apparently handled the matter promptly, since the new board, which chose Frank Hauser as its chairman and Heidgerken as its secretary-treasurer, held its inaugural meeting one month later (Humboldt Roman Catholic Separate School, Minutes, February 8, 1907).

The first task that the board undertook was to arrange classes for the district's Catholic children. With that in mind, Hauser asked Calder for permission to rent the building where Catholics attended Mass. Calder responded that the department could not approve holding school in the church and that to do so under the circumstances existing in Humboldt would "be inadvisable" (RCSS, Hauser to Calder, February 9, reply, February 18, 1907). This was serious blunder on his part. Hauser immediately informed him that the building was privately owned, that part of it was in use as a general store, and that it was the only suitable facility available. But much more damaging to Calder and the Liberal cause politically was Hauser's next assertion:

the Humboldt Public School District is now and has been using the Presbyterian Church for a school since last summer having rented the building from the Congregation direct, while the building we ask you for does not even belong to the Congregation but is only rented to them for Sundays. (RCSS, Hauser to D. P. McColl, February 23, 1907)

Nor was Liberal popularity aided by the fact that almost another month passed before use of the building was finally approved (RCSS, Deputy Commissioner to Hauser, March 21, 1907).

While the board was arranging for a building and a teacher, it was also seeking a permanent site for a schoolhouse. Having settled on three acres owned by the federal Department of the Interior, it requested that the land be placed on the market. But as with almost everything else, things did not turn out as desired. When the land was put up for sale, the board was outbid by a local Protestant and had to renew its search (*Humboldt Journal*, May 17, 1907). When commenting on the failure to acquire the site, which he attributed to "spite," Hauser indicated that he and his colleagues had underestimated the extent of ill-feelings in the community:

we of course had not anticipated such a move on the part of our Citizens and had expected to buy same at the upset price. . . . You will admit that it is usually customary if land is required for public purposes such as Church, school and town parks & etc. that the private public does not interfere, but in this case the usual courtesy was ignored. (RCSS, Hauser to D. P. McColl, June 7, 1907)

Though he did not mention it, Hauser probably was also irritated by the fact that the Protestant in question was John W. Lowes, a recipient of federal Liberal patronage and, as of October 1906, first vice-president of the Humboldt Constituency Liberal Association (*Humboldt Journal*, November 24, 1905, October 12, 1906; Land Titles Office).

These events in Humboldt did not go unobserved by the *Bote*, whose comments suggest that the Benedictine clergy had come to view Calder and his associates as having treated German and other Catholics unfairly. For example, in March 1907, it advised its readers to note that the community's Catholics had had to wait an entire year for a separate school, and hinted that religious discrimination could have been behind the building fiasco (*St. Peters Bote*, March 7, 1907). Not many months later, both the clergy and the colony's Catholics had an added reason for disillusionment with the Liberals. As noted earlier, Heidgerken had stated in one of his letters that certain "influential politicians" in Humboldt were seeking to prevent approval of the separate school. Lowes was one such person. But a much more prominent Liberal with much easier access to Calder, who was both widely and correctly suspected of doing so, was the constituency's Member of the Legislature. Dr. Neely subsequently admitted publicly that he had been an opponent until the establishment of the school was a foregone conclusion, and Calder had urged him to cease his opposition as the only means to guarantee peace in the community. Though Neely went on to say that he had

been foolish to try to deny Catholics their rights and vowed not to do so again, the individual reporting on the meeting where the admission occurred remarked that Catholics owed Neely nothing as regards the separate school and that members of the Church who considered him a friend rather than an enemy of the separate school ought to be ashamed of themselves (*St. Peters Bote*, August 13, 1908).

Displeased with the delay in obtaining their separate school in Humboldt and attributing it at least in part to such Liberals as Calder and Neely, a number of German Catholics, including Hauser and Bruno Doerfler, who had replaced Mayer as the Benedictine Prior, met in Muenster in June 1907 to discuss what could be done to prevent such difficulties in the future. Hauser stated that St. Peter's and other German Catholic colonies might organize a political party, which would have the two principal goals of insuring that their children received a Catholic education and achieving recognition of themselves as first class citizens. Doerfler had meanwhile reached different conclusions. After stating that German Catholics needed an organization, that matters relating to schools were the most important ones facing them, and that both the State and the Church had rights respecting the education of children, he expressed the belief that a more broadly based organization was preferable. In order to exert as much influence as possible, he believed that German Catholics should ally themselves with German Lutherans and Mennonites in a body which would have political characteristics but not be a political party. In short, he preferred a socio-political organization, which could hold meetings, publish a newspaper, issue leaflets, explain its aims and objectives to people seeking election to government, and exert pressure on the latter to do as the organization desired concerning such matters as schools (*St. Peters Bote*, June 27, 1907). But agreement on exactly what should be done was apparently not reached, since no organization of this type is known to have been created.

Humboldt Constituency's German Catholics and Three 1908 Electoral Contests

Slightly over a year after the Muenster meeting, Premier Scott called a provincial general election for mid-August. The Humboldt Constituency Liberal Association again nominated Dr. Neely, but this time he faced an opponent. While the Provincial Rights party for a second time failed to field a candidate, Neely was challenged by Lewis L. Kramer,³ running as an Independent Liberal. There can be little doubt but that Kramer, a German

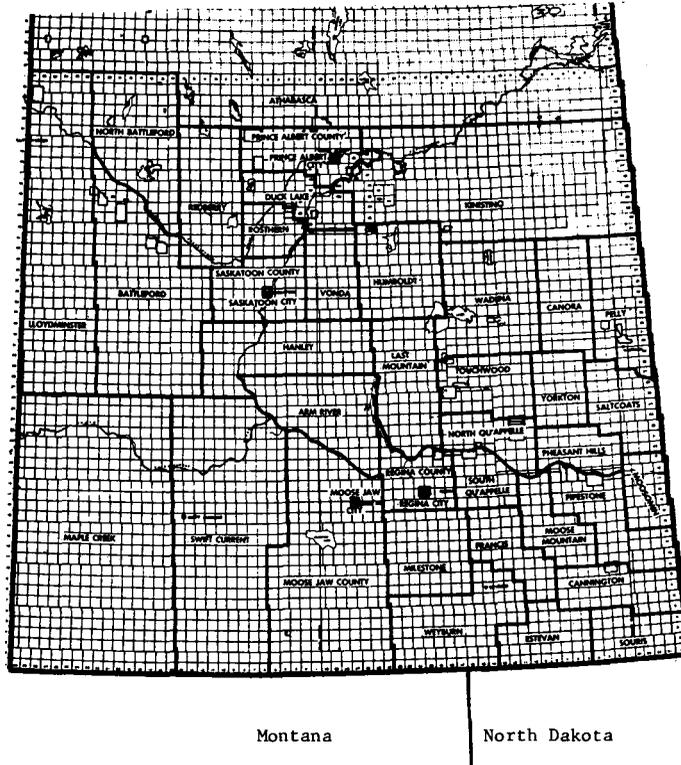


Figure 1. Saskatchewan Provincial electoral constituencies, 1908.

Catholic and principal of a separate school in Regina, was urged to contest the seat by disenchanted Liberals of German background.

When the votes were counted, Neely won 759 to 394, a victory described by the *Bote* as "a great surprise" (*St. Peters Bote*, August, 27, 1908). The number of votes each candidate received in the Muenster area where the majority of the Benedictines cast their ballots strongly suggest that they overwhelmingly supported Kramer (Saskatchewan elections). However, they evidently earlier decided that any overt support they gave him in the campaign would be limited. For example, members of the Benedictine community who produced the *Bote* appear to have taken the position that since German and other Liberals were warring among themselves and since the election of one of their candidates was assured, it was best not to take sides publicly, thereby avoiding the animosity of either group. Such caution emerged in the sole attack on Neely which appeared in the *Bote*. First, it did

government faced. William R. Motherwell, the Minister of Agriculture, who headed the government's most important department, had lost his seat in the Legislature, and a riding had to be found where he could be returned in a by-election. Thanks as much to chance as to planning, Liberal stratagists soon found themselves in a position where they could take steps which offered a solution to these problems.

In September 1908 Prime Minister Laurier dissolved the House of Commons and called a federal general election for October 26. At least partly at the behest of Scott or his colleagues, Neely resigned his seat and stood for election in the much larger Humboldt federal constituency. Neely's resignation created a vacancy in the Saskatchewan Legislature, a safe Liberal seat which Motherwell could fill. Among Saskatchewan constituencies, Humboldt was the only one which the opposition Provincial Rights party had failed to contest in both 1905 and 1908 (Saskatchewan Archives Board 1954). Finally, Premier Scott and his associates would not have been unrealistic to hope that all voters in the constituency in any way sympathetic to their party would line up behind Motherwell. Though German Catholics might view him with some misgivings if they learned that he was a supporter of the temperance movement and Scott once described him as having the political "sagacity of a mosquito" (Smith 1975: 35, 80), it was not unreasonable to expect disgruntled Liberals to see him as a replacement for a discredited individual. In addition, because many German Catholics were farmers, they might also consider him a desirable representative in the government.

Regardless of what plans Scott and his colleagues formulated or what hopes they held respecting the elections, things did not work out as they would have desired. Though Neely won by a substantial majority (Saskatchewan Archives Board 1967), and Motherwell defeated an Independent, Elliott Sinclair, 847 to 373 (Saskatchewan Archives Board 1954:86), evidence shows that a significant number of German Catholics had not been pacified. For example, during the federal election Frank Hauser worked for the Liberal party and as the campaign was drawing to a close appealed to German Catholics for their votes, but scarcely in terms constituting a ringing endorsement of Neely. In a letter appearing in the *Bote*, he stated that the election had received very little publicity and had generated very little enthusiasm, that differences dividing Liberals should be forgotten, and that any wrongs which were believed to have been committed should be forgiven. He then urged readers to unite in pursuit of a common goal—the re-election of the Laurier government—and concluded with three reasons why they should do so: the Liberal party was supportive of Catholics; Laurier was a

good Catholic; and the number of Liberal votes cast in the election would determine the number of delegates the constituency could send to the next federal Liberal convention (*St. Peters Bote*, October 22, 1908). During the campaign, priests attended and spoke at Liberal meetings on at least two occasions. What the first said was evidently not recorded, but the second, Father Chrysostom Hoffman, kept his remarks brief and like Hauser failed to endorse Neely. Rather, he recorded in his diary: "I simply expressed my approval of Laurier and his government to a certain extent" (Hoffman, Day Books, October 5, 1908). Finally, when the *Bote* announced Neely's victory, it merely noted that he had obtained a majority of 1,347, which would probably not exceed 1,400 when the results came in from eight polls which had yet to report (*St. Peters Bote*, November 5, 1908).

Less evidence has been discovered concerning the provincial by-election which followed, but what is known illustrates even more the German Catholics' continuing irritation with the Scott Liberal government. For a time it appeared that Motherwell's nomination as his party's candidate would be contested by John Brinkmeier, a farmer and seven-year veteran of the American Army (Marysburg History Book Committee 1987:195-7). Shortly after the by-election was called, the *Humboldt Journal* announced that both men would seek the nomination (*Humboldt Journal*, November 5, 1908). Even more to the point is a letter written a few days later by Abbot Doerfler to his counterpart at St. John's Abbey in Collegeville, Minnesota: "We now have a German Catholic candidate for the Legislature, Mr. John A. Brinkmeier of Dead Moose Lake. I do not know what his chances are yet, but hope he will get the nomination. I think he is the best man available" (Bruno [Abbot] Papers, Bruno Doerfler to Peter Engel, November 10, 1908). Doerfler obviously preferred a German Catholic candidate to Motherwell.

German Catholic Discontent with the Liberal Party in Subsequent Years

Events surrounding the establishment of the separate school in Humboldt were not the only ones causing German Catholic discontent with the Liberal party. For example, in 1908 a year-long, acrimonious dispute arose in Bruno, the location of a parochial school, when Calder and his officials concluded that the community should also have a public school. Though limitations of space preclude its discussion in detail, it can be noted that the altercation was marked by German Catholic allegations that they were being treated like "dumb foreigners" and discriminated against on the

basis of their ethnicity. They also characterized Calder as a "Turkish Pasha" and threatened not to vote Liberal (Ehrmantraut; St. Bruno, Publications; Hoffman; PS, File no. 1587; James A. Calder Papers, 2396-8).

During the next decade other developments involving parochial and public schools also produced animosity toward and distrust of the party. Most important among them were the examination of a parochial school by a public school inspector in a manner which German Catholics considered "high-handed" and antagonistic toward parochial schools (Bruno [Abbot] Papers, Joseph Wickle to William M. Martin, May 3, 1918); the laying of charges that children were not receiving a proper education against a number of parents whose children were attending parochial schools (Bruno [Abbot] Papers, James O'Brien to Joseph Wickle, March 20, 1918); failure by the Department of Education to grant certification to nuns teaching in parochial schools following what German Catholics viewed as a commitment by William M. Martin, Premier and Minister of Education, that such certification would be forthcoming (William M. Martin Papers 22331-2, Bruno Doerfler to W. A. F. Turgeon, October 18, 1917, R. F. Blacklock to Martin, November 23, 1917); reversal by the government of its policy of permitting limited instruction in German and other non-English languages in public schools; fears that this reversal in policy was but a prelude to other acts detrimental to the educational rights of Catholics; and the more stringent regulation of parochial schools by educational authorities without at the same time providing such institutions with access to public funding (Bruno [Abbot] Papers, Bruno Doerfler to Peter Engel, January 26, 1919). It is reasonable to believe that these matters contributed to the rejection at the polls of the official Liberal candidate in the 1925 election, when numerous German Catholics, following manipulation of the nominating convention by an influential member of the Humboldt Constituency Liberal Executive, supported and succeeded in electing an Independent Liberal to the provincial legislature (Saskatchewan Archives Board 1954:86).

Conclusions

A number of conclusions can be drawn concerning relations between the German Catholics of the Humboldt Constituency and Saskatchewan's political parties. First, German Catholics opted to support the Liberal party rather than the Provincial Rights (later Conservative) party mainly because of matters relating to elementary schools. Soon after they began settling in Canada, German Catholics assessed the words and actions of federal, Terri-

torial and provincial politicians regarding separate schools to find that Liberals were much more willing than their opponents to respond sympathetically to the desires of religious minorities. However, when German Catholics took steps to establish their first separate school, they discovered that not all individuals prominent in Liberal affairs, including their own Member of the Legislature, could be relied upon to adhere to party policy. They subsequently demonstrated their irritation with the Liberals in a number of ways. They discussed establishing their own political party or an organization capable of influencing political decision making. They ran an Independent Liberal against the offending Liberal incumbent and gave that same individual only luke-warm support when he ran in a federal election. In addition, the fact that they considered having Brinkmeyer oppose Motherwell's nomination suggests that they were also displeased by the prospect of having as their representative in the legislature a person selected by party leaders rather than by themselves.

Many events of 1906-08 were the result of a desire by German Catholics to establish a separate school. Soon afterwards as well as in later years, other developments relating to parochial and public schools occurred, which also resulted in animosity toward and distrust of the Liberal party among German Catholics, particularly in the late teens and early 1920s, and which probably contributed to the election of an Independent Liberal in the Humboldt seat in 1925.

All in all, it is evident that relations between the German Catholics of the Humboldt Constituency and the Liberal party were both much more complex and substantially less cordial than scholars have described previously. Indeed, it is quite possible that a significant number of Humboldt Constituency German Catholics voted Liberal or Independent Liberal for lack of a candidate more to their liking. Be that as it may, when third parties appeared in the 1930s, they deserted the Liberals in increasing numbers and in 1938 elected as their representative the first Catholic to sit in the legislature for any party other than the Liberal party.⁵

But as a concluding caveat, political developments such as occurred in the Humboldt Constituency may not have been very common. The background of the German Catholics who settled in St. Peter's Colony differed from those who took up residence in other bloc settlements with which this author is familiar. Approximately 75% came from the United States, where many had been born and grown up. As a result, a large proportion were fully fluent in English, well informed concerning the operation of political parties in a democracy, and able to discern very quickly how the local school system

functioned and could be used in pursuit of their goals. Few other ethnic groups who were drawn to bloc settlements on the Canadian prairies possessed similar cultural and political assets.

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Notes

1. For evidence that St. Peter's Colony German Catholics were more concerned about preserving their religion than their language, see White 1994.

2. Hauser was born in Germany in 1862, attended high school in Switzerland, spent a year in an agricultural college in Baden, immigrated to Canada in 1892, homesteaded near Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, and was appointed a Justice of the Peace in 1898, by which time he had become fluent in English and French as well as German. For a discussion of his life-long career of public service, see Humboldt Journal 1982, 326–27.

3. Kramer trained as a teacher in Ontario, moved to Regina about 1900, and became widely known in Catholic circles through the assistance he rendered to school boards seeking teachers of Catholic background.

4. In ten polls where German Catholics comprised practically all of the voters, Neely received only 178 of 426 votes (Poll by poll results).

5. Joseph William Burton, born in Pittsburg, Kansas, in 1892, was a member of the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation.

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