



MARITIME Series

MONOGRAPHS

The Robichaud Era, 1960-70

Colloquium Proceedings



INSTITUT CANADIEN DE RECHERCHE SUR LE DÉVELOPPEMENT RÉGIONAL
THE CANADIAN INSTITUTE FOR RESEARCH ON REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The

Robichaud Era,

1960–70

MARITIME Series

MONOGRAPHS

The

Robichaud Era,

1960–70

Colloquium Proceedings



INSTITUT CANADIEN DE RECHERCHE SUR LE DÉVELOPPEMENT RÉGIONAL
THE CANADIAN INSTITUTE FOR RESEARCH ON REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Publications in the Maritime Series are available on the Web at
www.umoncton.ca/ICRDR/Collec.htm

Graphic design : Raymond Thériault
with the assistance of Anne Jourdain

© Institut canadien de recherche sur le développement régional/
The Canadian Institute for Research on Regional Development

ISBN 0-88659-067-1

Legal deposit : 1st quarter 2001
National Library of Canada
Printed in Canada

Acknowledgements

We would like to express our sincere thanks to the Charles Bronfman Foundation for its financial support of this project.

The Canadian Millennium Partnership Program also provided financial support for the project. We are very grateful to the Millennium Bureau of Canada for this support. It goes without saying that the opinions expressed in this book are those of the authors and should not be attributed to the government of Canada.



Millennium Bureau
of Canada

Bureau du Canada
pour le millénaire



**A Review of the Work
of the Honourable Louis J. Robichaud,
Premier of New Brunswick, 1960-70**

Congratulations to the Université de Moncton on the publication of this volume outlining many of the accomplishments of the Honourable Louis J. Robichaud. This pivotal figure in Canada's development has set an example for linguistic, social and economic well-being that continues to guide us.

My first years as a Member of Parliament coincided with Mr. Robichaud's tenure as premier of New Brunswick. I was mightily impressed by his achievements: under his government, New Brunswick became an officially bilingual province; the Université de Moncton was established; and the program for equal opportunity was set in place. Mr. Robichaud himself played a pioneer role in promoting cooperation among the Maritime provinces, unity across Canada and the development at the international level of La Francophonie.

In subsequent years, I have had the privilege of working more closely with Mr. Robichaud, who became a Senator in 1973. I have come to know and admire him for his outspoken commitment to New Brunswick and to Canada.

The Government of Canada is proud to support this review of Mr. Robichaud's work with a financial contribution through the Canada Millennium Partnership Program. Appearing as it does at the turn of the millennium, when we contemplate our past and reflect on the type of society we wish to create in the years ahead, this publication is timely. It is sure to inspire readers to act in the spirit of our national millennium theme, "Sharing the Memory, Shaping the Dream."



The Hon. Herb Gray, M.P.
Deputy Prime Minister



Source: Photograph by Chuck Mitchell, courtesy of CP Picture Archives.

Contents

Preface, <i>Donald J. Savoie</i>	15
Introduction	
<i>Roger Ouellette</i>	17
1. The Programme of Equal Opportunity: An Overview	
<i>Robert A. Young</i>	23
2. The Robichaud Period and Politics in Acadia	
<i>Joseph Yvon Thériault</i>	37
3. Modernizing New Brunswick's Public Administration: The Robichaud Model	
<i>Pier Bouchard and Sylvain Vézina</i>	53
4. Culture and Official Languages	
<i>Robert Pichette</i>	67
5. The State as the Engine of Development: Louis Robichaud and New Brunswick	
<i>Maurice Beaudin</i>	87
6. Louis Robichaud and Frank McKenna: Two Approaches to the Francophonie	
<i>Chedly Belkhadja and Roger Ouellette</i>	109
7. The Right Responds to Change: Opposition to the Robichaud Reforms in New Brunswick	
<i>Chedly Belkhadja</i>	121
8. The 1967 Municipal Reform in New Brunswick	
<i>Georges Cyr</i>	135
9. Louis Robichaud and the Constitutional Debate	
<i>Wendell Fulton</i>	159
10. Education Reforms in New Brunswick, 1960–70	
<i>Alcide Godin</i>	173
11. The Robichaud Legacy: What Remains?	
<i>Michel Cormier</i>	187
List of Figures and Tables	199

Preface

It is fitting that the Canadian Institute for Research on Regional Development, located at the Université de Moncton, should choose as its millennium project the celebration of the Robichaud years. Louis J. Robichaud was the first Acadian to be elected premier of New Brunswick, serving the province throughout the tumultuous 1960s and introducing sweeping measures to modernize its economy and society. Not only did he bring in the Programme of Equal Opportunity, but he also passed the province's Official Languages Act, modernized its public service, and established the Université de Moncton.

Robichaud is also distinguished for his firm stand against the powerful political and economic forces that sought to preserve the provincial status quo. In fact, many observers view his ability to face down the entrenched economic interests that ran New Brunswick in the 1960s as his single greatest accomplishment. In doing so, he was able to change the province's political and economic destiny. In addition, he overcame New Brunswick's linguistic barrier with his Programme of Equal Opportunity, which was designed not solely for Acadians but to assist the poor and disadvantaged of all backgrounds and to revitalize the underdeveloped regions of the province.

To prepare this review of the Robichaud years, a team of writers was assembled who are familiar with New Brunswick politics and economics. Professor Roger Ouellette of the Department of Political Science here at the Université de Moncton, who graciously consented to lead the team, consulted widely before finally choosing the issues to be reviewed, and we applaud his efforts. In the end, we believe, these were the issues that were instrumental in shaping the Robichaud years.

The team met at Le Vieux Presbytère in Bouctouche in September 1999 to review the papers in draft form. We also invited a number of ministers who served in the Robichaud cabinet, an extremely wise decision in hindsight as the discussions were both insightful and invaluable to the authors. The ministers who participated in the

Boucrouche meeting included Henry Irwin, Bernard A. Jean, Wendell W. Meldrum, B. Fernand Nadeau, and Norbert Thériault.

I want to thank a number of people for making the initiative a success, the most important being Louis J. Robichaud himself. His contributions to New Brunswick and its people are well documented not only in this book but elsewhere as well. He also showed at the Boucrouche meeting that his passion for defending the rights of the less fortunate is undiminished. I am deeply grateful to him for his cooperation and support throughout the project. I should also like to thank Roger Ouellette for taking on the leadership of the team, and the authors for their willingness to be part of it. My thanks are also due to Ginette Benoit for handling administrative matters, retyping the manuscript, and making the Boucrouche meeting the success it was. Finally, I would like to thank the Canada Millennium Partnership Program for its support.

Donald J. Savoie
Executive Director

Introduction

Roger Ouellette

Department of Political Science
Université de Moncton

Many people were surprised when a young lawyer from southeastern New Brunswick, Louis J. Robichaud, led the Liberal party to victory in the provincial election of June 1960. In so doing, he became the first Acadian to be elected premier of the province since its creation in 1784. During his decade in power, he launched a series of major reforms that modernized the province and prepared it for the challenges and opportunities of the last quarter of the twentieth century. Forty years later, the benefits of those reforms are still being felt.

On 8 and 9 September 1999, the Canadian Institute for Research on Regional Development brought together a dozen speakers to discuss the achievements and impact on New Brunswick of the Robichaud regime's ten years in power. Accompanied by some of his former ministers and colleagues, Senator Robichaud listened with keen interest to the papers given at the colloquium. This volume contains most of the ideas presented during the colloquium and provides an overview of the immense contribution made by Louis Robichaud and his team to the political life of New Brunswick and to Canada as a whole.

In the first chapter, Robert Young surveys the major accomplishments of the Programme of Equal Opportunity, which was implemented following recommendations made by the Royal Commission on Finance and Municipal Taxation, chaired by the lawyer Edward Byrne. He analyzes the origins of the program, which he identifies as the government's own aims, the economic and fiscal inefficiencies revealed in the Byrne Report, and the growing increase in transfer payments from Ottawa targeted at economic development. Young then examines the various dimensions of the massive institutional and fiscal restructuring carried out by the Robichaud government. Lastly, he briefly evaluates the impact of the Programme of Equal Opportunity and reflects on a period when government expansion,

the redistribution of wealth, economic efficiency, and growth complemented rather than conflicted with each other.

Joseph Yvon Thériault examines the Robichaud period and Acadian politics. In his view, the Robichaud period epitomized the deep trends and inherent contradictions in Acadian society at the time. According to Thériault, the election of the Acadian premier in 1960 marked the beginning of a genuine integration of Acadians into provincial politics, but it also reflected the refusal of Acadians to remain marginalized and their desire to gain greater institutional autonomy, in keeping with their “national” history. Thériault portrays the Robichaud period as a turning point in Acadian socio-political history. He suggests that Louis Robichaud embodied, at least for a time and not always consciously (sometimes even against his will), the aspirations and contradictions of a historical community — Acadia. Thériault argues that despite his own oft-expressed wishes and those of the Liberal party, which created his political persona, Louis Robichaud never fully succeeded in becoming a premier for all New Brunswickers. In a way, Acadian society imbued his political career with a quality which ultimately resulted in making his time in office an Acadian period in New Brunswick politics.

Pier Bouchard and Sylvain Vézina address the issue of the modernization of public administration in New Brunswick under Louis J. Robichaud. They base their analysis on two modes of exercising power that are specific to modern societies, modes that both complement and contradict each other — democracy and bureaucracy. The authors first turn their attention to how Robichaud’s approach contributed to the democratization of the administration of public affairs. They maintain that the concern for democracy was an essential element of government actions under Louis Robichaud. The changes brought about through the Programme of Equal Opportunity illustrated this concern to involve as many people as possible. Bouchard and Vézina then discuss a potential stumbling block on the road to the modernization of public administration — bureaucracy. Efficiency, effectiveness, and neutrality became the core principles of the modern management of governmental affairs, which then made competent, nonpartisan civil servants seem indispensable. The increased power of non-elected bureaucrats thus posed a significant challenge to democracy. According to Bouchard and Vézina, the fate of the Byrne Commission’s major recommendation to create administrative commissions, and particularly Robichaud’s views in this regard,

demonstrated the premier's ability to manage the dilemmas posed by democracy and bureaucracy in the context of modernizing the public service.

Robert Pichette explores the subject of official languages and culture under the Robichaud administration and how they were affected by government action. Louis Robichaud personally oversaw the adoption of a law governing the use of official languages in the province's public administration. Concurrent with the Programme of Equal Opportunity, the Robichaud administration set about laying the foundations for a comprehensive cultural policy with the creation of the Cultural Affairs Branch, which reported directly to the premier. The Provincial Archives of New Brunswick and the Historical Resources Administration were created under Robichaud's administration. Although no actual Department of Cultural Affairs was established during his tenure of office, an embryonic cultural policy was developed, the tangible results of which are still being felt today.

Maurice Beaudin focuses on the question of the state as the engine of development — that is, Louis J. Robichaud's struggle to industrialize New Brunswick. According to Beaudin, Robichaud arrived on the political scene in New Brunswick at a time when Keynesian economic theories were in fashion. These theories sanctioned state intervention in the economy in order to maintain the level of demand and stimulate regional economies experiencing problems adapting. Inspired no doubt by the prevailing mood of optimism in the early 1960s, the young Premier Robichaud seized the new opportunities to propel his province into the industrial era, even when it meant offending the industrial establishment and committing the province to risky industrial projects traditionally reserved for the private sector. Beaudin provides a social, political, and economic context for the Robichaud government at the dawn of the 1960s and then gives an objective account of the government's various accomplishments in the field of industrialization, assessing their impact using a number of widely recognized key economic indicators.

Chedly Belkhodja and Roger Ouellette consider New Brunswick's actions within the institutions of the Francophonie, from the Robichaud period to the francophone summit held in Moncton. They examine why New Brunswick got involved in the Francophonie as well as the content of its discourse and how did it evolved. As regards the Francophonie, Belkhodja and Ouellette hypothesize that two fundamental interests, the Canadian unity issue and more recently the

adjustment to the post-cold war international setting, influenced the evolution of the provincial discourse. They point to two complementary factors: first, Acadianism did not seem to predominate in the discourse of the 1960s, and, second, the end of the cold war (1989–91) significantly changed the notion of *foreign policy*, thereby facilitating the emergence of subnational actors such as the provinces. The economic dimension took on particular importance under the pressures of trade globalization, particularly during Frank McKenna's time in office. The authors point out, however, that globalization has also fostered a resurgence of identity politics.

In the following chapter, Chedly Belkhodja analyzes the sometimes virulent reactions to the Robichaud government's reforms. He claims that an anglophone minority in New Brunswick quite simply opposed the idea of change, developing a reactionary discourse that was closely akin to the trends of the radical right wing, which in many democratic societies categorically rejected progress. In the New Brunswick context, Belkhodja argues that a radical Right existed and that it mobilized strongly against the Robichaud program. He suggests that this hypothesis is supported by two factors: first, opponents of the reforms made use of a classic, radical right-wing argument, the critique of state-led centralization; second, some anglophones denounced the recognition of new rights for the Acadian minority.

Georges Cyr examines the 1967 municipal reform in New Brunswick. Drawing on the recommendations of the Royal Commission on Finance and Municipal Taxation, the Robichaud government undertook a reform that was to change the face of the province's local institutions. According to Cyr, however, the primary focus of the government's Programme of Equal Opportunity was not really municipal reform but rather economic development and social justice, and these two objectives could not have been achieved except by redefining municipal government powers and provincial-municipal relations.

Wendell Fulton focuses on the constitutional debate. In his opinion, even though Louis Robichaud (as premier, attorney general, and senator) contributed to this debate, he never saw the issue as a dominant feature of New Brunswick politics. Premier Robichaud was more concerned about equal opportunity, health, education, welfare, the administration of justice, regional disparities, high unemployment, and the protection of minority rights for all Canadians. Success in these fields depended on federal financial support and thus

on federal-provincial negotiations over programs, not on constitutional amendments. Nevertheless, Louis Robichaud represented New Brunswick for a decade at federal-provincial and constitutional conferences, both as premier and attorney general. According to Fulton, Robichaud considered the constitutional discussions to be useful in some fields, particularly in the area of language rights.

Alcide Godin's contribution to this volume focuses on the education reforms carried out in New Brunswick from 1960 to 1970. Godin maintains that inspired by socialist principles of equal opportunity and social and economic equity, Robichaud's Liberal government passed a whole series of laws that had an enormous impact on the school system and on postsecondary institutions. Godin provides an overview of the various education reforms that were implemented during Robichaud's tenure as premier. Centralizing the financing of education made it possible to achieve reforms at both the primary and secondary levels. At the postsecondary level, universities were merged and the Université de Moncton was created.

Michel Cormier's epilogue examines the question of Louis Robichaud's legacy. To this end, he assesses the impact of the Robichaud government on the political culture of New Brunswick. The social equality program, the creation of a modern provincial state and of a professional public service, and the Official Languages of New Brunswick Act were so important in Cormier's view that they changed the province's social contract. A new political equation between Acadians and anglophones also emerged under Robichaud, one which had to be taken into account by all of his successors for them to remain in power. According to Cormier, this is the most intangible dimension of Robichaud's legacy. Finally, the author examines the choices that Louis Robichaud would have had to make had he been confronted with the debt crisis of the 1970s and the challenge of cleaning up public finances in the 1990s.

