

September 3, 2018

Dear candidates in the riding of Mont-Royal-Outremont,

I am writing on behalf of the Committee for the Enhancement of the History Curriculum – Quebec (ComECH-Quebec) to request a clear articulation from you as to your position with respect to the controversial reform of Quebec’s history curriculum that was implemented beginning in fall 2016.

ComECH-Quebec is an ad hoc committee created by the English Parents’ Committees Association (EPCA), Quebec Anglophone Heritage Network (QAHN), the Quebec Federation of Home and School Associations (QFHSA), and the Quebec Association of Geography Teachers. The Committee is chaired by Westmount High School teacher Robert Green.

Back in May 2017 ComECH-Quebec wrote to your party seeking support for our statement and online petition “Pour un programme d’histoire inclusif / For an inclusive history curriculum”. The statement called for an inclusive history curriculum that responds to the Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and reflects the positive contributions to Quebec society of its minority communities.

Our statement was also very clear about what we were NOT demanding. Here is an excerpt:

- **We are not asking for the ‘denationalization’ of the program.** References to the Quebec nation and various forms of national consciousness existed in the program prior to this reform and should continue to do so.
- **We are not asking for the program’s focus to be anything other than Quebec’s Francophone majority.** To say that we want a program that is inclusive of ethnic minorities and Indigenous communities does not mean that we want them to be given equal weight to the Francophone majority.
- In suggesting that the diversity and positive contributions of the Anglophone community be acknowledged, **we are not in any way suggesting that the various negative actions of the British Regime and the English merchant class should be omitted or minimized.**

We did not receive a response from your party regarding this statement.

With an election fast approaching it is essential that voters have a clear idea of where candidates stand on a curriculum that demonizes Anglophones, omits much of the history of Quebec’s Black community, reinforces negative stereotypes about Muslims and whitewashes Quebec’s history of xenophobia, antisemitism and racism. Those parties seeking the votes of Anglophones and members of other minority communities should strongly consider joining us in calling for a curriculum that is actually based on the values of an inclusive democratic society rather than the divisive values of ethnic nationalism.

To this end, ten of the specific problems with the program and its textbooks are listed below. For each, we would like you to indicate in an email response whether you agree that it is a problem. We also ask that you indicate whether you intend to work for a more inclusive history curriculum if elected. **Please be aware that failure to respond to this letter by September 17, 2018 will be interpreted as support for the status quo and reported as such during the press conference we intend to hold in the fall of 2018.**

1. I find it acceptable that Anglophones are depicted as a monolithic block of elites. For example, in the descriptions of the first and second waves of industrialization the textbook makes a point of mentioning that the factory owners were Anglophone, but neglects entirely to mention that a large percentage (in Montreal the majority) of the first industrial workers were impoverished English speaking immigrants from the British Isles. Nor is any mention made of the role Anglophones played in Quebec's earliest labour struggles. (See documents 1 & 2)
  - No, I believe that the curriculum must show an accurate picture of Quebec's English community, including its diversity and its positive contributions to Quebec society.
  
2. I find it acceptable that in a textbook section entitled "The Rise of Xenophobia", the only examples of xenophobia provided are from Western Canada. This despite the fact the time period being described was one in which Jewish Quebecers were being excluded from public institutions and Italian and Greek Quebecers were struggling for acceptance in Quebec. (see document 3)
  - No, I believe that it is important for students to learn about Quebec's own history with xenophobia, antisemitism and racism.
  
3. I find acceptable that the descriptions of the first Montreal Canadians teams makes mention only of the team's Francophone players rather than describing the teams composition as reflecting the ethnic and linguistic diversity of Montreal's working class. (see document 4)
  - No, I believe that descriptions of the early Montreal Canadians teams should accurately reflect the ethnic composition of those teams.
  
4. I find it acceptable that the entire secondary 4 textbook makes reference to only two black people and the only thing students learn about Montreal's Little Burgundy neighbourhood is an association with jazz music. (see documents 5 & 6)
  - No, I believe that a textbook making reference to only two black people is woefully inadequate. The curriculum should shed light on both the struggles against racism Quebec's black citizens have had to endure and the positive contributions to Quebec society made by members of this community.
  
5. I find it acceptable that the textbook refers to antisemitism as a global phenomenon without providing a single example of its manifestation in Quebec. (see documents 7 & 8) For example, I believe that there is no need for students to learn about anti-Semitic quotas in universities or understand why Montreal has a Jewish General Hospital.
  - No, I believe that Quebec's history of antisemitism must be included in its history curriculum.
  
6. I find it acceptable that a description of the 1995 referendum that includes a brief biography of Jacques Parizeau neglects to mention anywhere his infamous "money and the ethnic vote" comments following the narrow defeat of the 'yes' side. (see document 9)
  - No, I believe that these comments, that were so disturbing for members of minority communities, should not be written out of the history we teach our children.

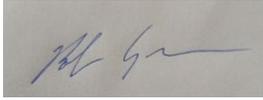
7. I find it acceptable that in a section of the textbook entitled “The Threat of Terrorism” the only example of terrorism given are an Islamist terrorist organization and a Muslim country. Neither the FLQ nor Marc Lepine are described using the word terrorist. No mention of the efforts made by Quebec’s Muslim community to work with authorities to counter terrorism. (see documents 10 & 11)
  - No, I believe that it is essential that the textbook not reinforce the Islamophobic stereotypes that have done so much harm to Quebec’s Muslim community.
  
8. I find it acceptable that in a two page section entitled “The Contribution of Immigration” the only two contributions mentioned are ‘revitalizing the provinces labour force’ and ‘offsetting the effects of a declining birth rate’. (see documents 12a & 12b)
  - No, I believe that the curriculum should teach students the myriad ways that immigration serves to enrich Quebec society culturally, socially, politically and economically.
  
9. I find it acceptable that the textbook presents the debate on ‘religious neutrality’ in an extremely one-sided manner, informing students that “some Quebecers” believe that certain religious accommodations are “contrary to the values of Quebec society”, but nowhere informing them about those who believe that inclusion and respect for religious freedom and human rights *are* Quebec values, enshrined in Quebec’s own human rights charter. Nor is any mention made of the dramatic rise in xenophobic hate crimes that occurred throughout Quebec during the period the PQ was promoting its Charter of Values. (see documents 13a & 13b)
  - No, I believe that if a societal debate is to be taught in schools, students should be exposed to both sides of that debate and should be made aware of any negative consequences (such as a rise in hate crimes) that accompanied this societal debate.
  
10. I find it acceptable that the textbook’s portrait of contemporary Quebec omits recent census data illustrating the increasing economic precarity of Quebec Anglophones who now experience lower median incomes than Francophones and higher rates of unemployment.
  - No, I believe that the curriculum’s portrait of Anglophone Quebec should accurately reflect the most recent census data.

Finally, if you are elected we would like to know if you will take concrete steps to reform the history curriculum so that it includes the contributions of Quebec’s minority communities and reflects the values of an inclusive democratic society.

- Yes, I will work to reform the history curriculum so that it reflects the values of an inclusive democratic society where the contributions of all of its citizens, including ethnic and linguistic minorities, are valued.

We look forward to receiving your response on this very important matter.

On behalf of ComECH-Quebec,



Robert Green

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History Teacher – Westmount High  
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Enclosures: Documents from Secondary 4 Textbook Reflections.qc.ca; Quebec's Secondary III & IV  
History Curriculum: In Need of Change

A similar letter was sent to each of the following: Philippe Couillard, Jean-François Lisée, Gabriel  
Nadeau-Dubois, Manon Massé, Alex Tyrrell; candidates from the five major parties in several ridings.