

HISTORY OF GAMBLING IN QUEBEC (1882-1970)

Fact sheet n° 3 - October 2015

1882-1892 RELIGIOUS INFLUENCE

Context

Gambling was prohibited by the Federal government unless overseen by a charitable organization. As a general rule, Catholics were more tolerant of gambling than Protestants.

Significant events

■ In 1882, Father Antoine Labelle, commonly known as Curé Labelle (see portrait to right; *Le Curé Labelle vers 1880, n.d.*), established a national lottery to fund the Société de colonisation du diocèse de Montréal which strove to establish Montreal as a French colony. His project was accepted by the Provincial Assembly, but rejected by the Legislative Council. Regardless, the first draw took place in 1884.



■ In 1888, the Liberal government under Honoré Mercier recruited Curé Labelle, and in 1890, a new lottery was established, this time to benefit the Saint-Jean-Baptiste Association, a Quebec nationalist group.

■ In 1892, the House of Commons, influenced by Christian moralist groups, enacted the Canadian Criminal Code in which gambling was formally prohibited except in the cases of horse racing, lotteries for art pieces, and wheel of fortune games at agricultural fairs.

1892-1929 PROHIBITION

Context

Christian moralists made use of the Criminal Code to prosecute those who had sinned by gambling, especially newcomers. However, their influence diminished over time.

Significant events

■ In 1905, Quebecer notary Alphonse Huard published an article in which he proposed extending the scope of the temperance movement to include gambling.

■ World War I led to a proliferation of patriotic themed raffles and lotteries. It became common for veterans to gamble when they returned from active duty without concern for Christian judgement.

■ The Great Depression of 1929 made it clear to Quebecers that the capitalist economy is not based on work and savings as taught by Christian doctrine, but rather on speculation.

Approaches to the regulation of gambling in Quebec have oscillated from moral condemnation to acceptance in the name of charity or in the interest of profit. Authorities have, at various times, legalized, prohibited, and turned a blind eye to gambling.

1930-1946**INFLUENCE OF IMMIGRANTS****Context**

During the 1930s, non-Protestant immigrants (Irish, Italian, Jewish, Chinese) established illegal gambling houses that would eventually become Montreal's Red Light District, centered around the intersection of Sainte-Catherine and Saint-Laurent streets. Profits allowed them to establish solid infrastructures, adapt games to technological advances, and to fund other illicit activities. During the 1940s, magazines such as Liberty and Maclean's estimated annual gaming revenue to be \$100 million.

Significant events

- Several countries such as France, Spain, and Australia legalized lotteries in the 1930s. Quebec politicians, including then mayor of Montreal, Camillien Houde, were unsuccessful in their campaigns to follow suit.

- Irish Hospitals' Sweepstakes became popular in Quebec.

- In 1946, Louis Bercowitz assassinated gambling magnate Harry Davis and turned himself in to the police. Five days later, Arthur Taché, head of the Montreal Police Service, resigned in response to allegations made against him. Pacifique Plante was then appointed as head of the police "morality squad" (see image above; Montréal Sous le Règne de la Pègre/Pacifique Plante, n.d.). These events heralded the beginning of the end of the Prohibition era.

**1946-1957****THE TIPPING POINT****Context**

Gambling was no longer perceived as a sin, but as a source of revenue for organized crime, and was therefore viewed as responsible for corruption.

Significant events

- Pacifique Plante declared war on illegal gambling, going so far as to threaten priests who organized bingo games to benefit their parishes. Despite the efficiency of his actions, his employment was terminated in 1948 for political reasons. He responded by writing a series of articles denouncing the police and the municipal government for protecting organized crime. In 1950, the Public Morality Committee (later renamed the Civic Action League), led by Pacifique Plante

and Jean Drapeau, launched the Caron Inquiry, known as the investigation of the century, to examine the activity of Montreal police officers, and blaming the heads of the Montreal Police Department for being tolerant of organized crime. Jean Drapeau became mayor of Montreal in 1954.

- In 1956, the Joint Committee of the Senate and House of Commons on Capital Punishment, Corporal Punishment and Lotteries tabled a report recommending stronger federal laws against gambling.

- In 1957, the psychoanalyst Edmund Bergler published a book on the subject of pathological gambling; it was the first contemporary academic publication on the issue.

1957-1969**GOVERNMENT REGULATION****Context**

According to 1955 Gallup polls, 69% of Canadians supported the legalization of lottery, with 23% opposed. The same poll in 1969 recorded increased support to 79% versus 14% opposed.

Significant events

- In late 1967, Pierre-Elliott Trudeau, then Minister of Justice under Lester B. Pearson, introduced the Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1968-1969. The omnibus bill modified several of the Criminal Code's moral transgressions, either by decriminalization (e.g., homosexual practices between consenting adults), or conditional legalization (e.g., medically necessary abortion and lotteries). After becoming leader of the Liberal party, Trudeau made this amendment project the cornerstone of his successful 1968 federal election campaign. The bill was passed on May 14th, 1969 and came into effect on January 1st, 1970. The amendment authorized provincial governments to operate lotteries.

- In 1968, Montreal mayor Jean Drapeau established a form of public lottery known as the "voluntary tax" as a fiscal tool to decrease the city's fiscal deficit. The Supreme Court of Canada declared it illegal on December 22nd, 1969.

- On December 23rd, 1969, Quebec adopted the Lotteries and Races Act. On March 14th, 1970, Quebecers participated in the first draw organized by the Société d'exploitation des loteries et des courses du Québec (Loto-Québec). Two immigrants shared the \$125,000 jackpot.

REFERENCES

- Bergler, E. (1957). *Psychology of Gambling*. New York, NY: Hill & Wang.
- Brodeur, M. (2011). *Vice et corruption à Montréal: 1892-1970*. Quebec, QC: Presses de l'Université du Québec.
- Campbell, C. S., & Smith, G. J. (2003). Gambling in Canada: From vice to disease to responsibility: A negotiated history. *Canadian Bulletin of Medical History*, 20(1), 121-149.
- Chaffey, D. C. (1993). The right to privacy in Canada. *Political Science Quarterly*, 108(1), 117-132.
- Cellard, A., & Pelletier, G. (1998). Le Code criminel canadien 1892-1927: Étude des acteurs sociaux. *Canadian Historical Review*, 79(2), 261-303.
- Gadbois, J. (2012). *Ethnologie du Lotto 6/49: Esquisses pour une définition de la confiance* (Doctoral dissertation). Université de Laval, Québec and EHESS, Paris.
- Guay, J.-H. (n.d). Présentation du premier tirage de Loto-Québec. Retrieved from <http://bilan.usherbrooke.ca/bilan/pages/evenements/20059.html>
- Labrosse, M. (1985). *Les loteries: De Jacques Cartier à nos jours: La petite histoire des loteries au Québec*. Montreal, QC: Stanké.
- Morton, S. (2003). *At odds: Gambling and Canadians, 1919-1969*. Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press.
- Osborne, J. A. (1989). *The legal status of lottery schemes in Canada: Changing the rules of the game* (Master's thesis). University of British Columbia, Vancouver.
- Roy, J.-P. et al. (1983). *Dossier Loto-Québec*. Montreal, QC: Loto-Québec.

IMAGE SOURCES

- (n.d.). *Le Curé Labelle vers 1880* [digital image]. Retrieved from <http://grandquebec.com/gens-du-pays/biographie-labelle/>
- (n.d.). *Montréal Sous le Règne de la Pègre/Pacifique Plante* [digital image]. Retrieved from http://www2.ville.montreal.qc.ca/archives/democratie/democratie_en/expo/crises-reformes/pegre/piece1/index.shtm



FACULTY OF
ARTS AND SCIENCE

Research Chair on Gambling

RESEARCH CHAIR ON GAMBLING

Concordia University
2070 Mackay St.
Montreal, Quebec, Canada H3G 1M8

Phone +1 514 848.2424 ext. 5398
Web Site www.concordia.ca/research/lifestyle-addiction
Email lifestyle.lab@concordia.ca