
A Note on Simultaneous Candidacies in the Québec Legislature

by Jacques Carl Morin

Candidates in an election for the Québec National Assembly can choose to run in any riding, even if they have never lived in that riding or do not have an office there. However, a potential member of the National Assembly must choose a single riding, which means that simultaneous candidacies are prohibited. In other words, a candidate cannot run in more than one riding during the same general election. A look at history shows that this was not always the case.

In 1867, with the proclamation of the *British North America Act*, Québec was granted its own parliamentary institutions. The first election to choose the 65 members of the new Legislative Assembly took place in August and September 1867. Nineteen candidates ran unopposed, including lawyer Edward Brock Carter in the riding of Montreal Centre.

The First Simultaneous Candidacy

Carter ran for re-election in the 1871 election. Nominations were held on June 30 at the Montreal courthouse in front of 300 to 400 people. Carter wrongfully assumed he would once again be re-elected by acclamation. But he did not have the right profile. In fact, the newspaper *La Minerve* reminds us that when Montreal Island was split into three ridings, there had been an understanding that the representative for Montreal Centre would be chosen from among the merchant class¹. He was put against Liberal Luther Hamilton Holton, the former finance minister in the pre-Confederation Macdonald-Dorion government (1863-64) and owner of the newspaper *The Herald*. Holton had also been the member for Châteauguay in the House of Commons since 1867. At the time, representing two ridings was not prohibited.

One person was allowed to run for a seat in the Legislative Assembly and the House of Commons, be elected and sit in those two parliaments.



Edward Brock Carter
Public Archives of Canada
(Collection: Assemblée nationale du Québec)

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Table 1: Simultaneous Candidacies in the Quebec National Assembly

Election	Candidate/Party	Riding and Result		Notes
1871	Edward B. Carter Cons.	Montréal Centre Châteauguay	Defeated Defeated	
1892	Edmund J. Flynn Cons.	Gaspé Matane	Elected Elected	On June 6, 1892 he chose to represent Gaspé
1897	François-X. Lemieux Lib.	Bonaventure Lévis	Elected Elected	On November 13, 1897 he resigned both when he was appointed judge of the Superior Court of Arthabasca.
1908	Henri Bourassa Ligue nationaliste	Montréal number 2 Saint-Hyacinthe	Elected Elected	On March 11, 1909, nine months after his double victory, Bourassa chose the riding of Saint-Hyacinthe
1908	Lomer Gouin Lib. Premier	Portneuf Montreal number2	Elected Defeated	
1908	Louis A. Taschereau Lib. Minister of Labour and Public Works	Charlevoix Montmorency	Defeated Elected	
1912	Joseph E. Caron Lib. Minister of Agriculture	L'Islet Îles-de-la-Madeleine	Defeated Elected	
1912	Charles R. Devlin Lib. Minister of Colonisation, Mines and Fisheries	Nicolet Témiscamingue	Elected Elected	On November 14, 1912 he resigned as member for Nicolet
1912	Lomer Gouin Lib. Premier	Portneuf Saint-Jean	Elected Elected	On November 14, 1912 he resigned as member for Saint-Jean
1912	Armand Lavergne Ligue nationaliste	Montmagny Montmorency	Elected Defeated	
1912	Jean B.B. Prévost Lib.	L'Assomption Terrebonne	Defeated Elected	
1923	Joseph E. Perrault Lib. Minister of Colonisation, Mines and Fisheries	Abitibi Arthabasca	Elected Elected	On September 27, 1923 he resigned as member for Abitibi to allow Hector Authier, a pioneer of the region to enter the legislative assembly
1931	Camillien Houde Cons.	Montréal Saint-Jacques Montréal Sainte-Marie	Defeated Defeated	

A riding name in bold indicates that the candidate was the incumbent in that riding

In the 1867 and 1871 elections, the nominations and elections were not held on the same date in all 65 ridings, and the vote was held over two days by open vote. In Montreal Centre, the vote was held on June 22 and 23. On

the first day, Carter held a very small lead of one vote, which disappeared the following day. Holton, the Liberal, won by a majority of seven votes.

Less than one week after the upset over the former member for Montreal Centre, rumours were circulating that he would enter the race in Châteauguay². June 30 was chosen as the nomination date. The incumbent, Dr. Édouard Laberge, was once again in the running. Carter was also forced to run again³, but was absent when it came time to register nominations in Sainte-Martine⁴. Dr. Laberge received the support of the federal member in the area, Luther Hamilton Holton, the same man who had defeated Carter in Montreal Centre. The vote was held on July 10 and 11. Laberge won with a significantly smaller majority compared to the previous election. That was the end of Carter's political career in Québec; he moved to the federal stage to represent the people of Brôme. As for Holton, he was re-elected in Châteauguay in the 1872 federal election. He stepped down from his position as member for Montreal Centre in the Legislative Assembly on January 16, 1874, when representing two ridings was prohibited.

In the end, the first attempt at a simultaneous candidacy in Québec was a double failure for the candidate—a rare outcome, as we will see. In fact, can this truly be called a simultaneous candidacy, since the candidate did not run in more than one riding at the same time? Carter would no doubt not have run in Châteauguay if he had retained his seat in Montreal Centre.

Other Simultaneous Candidates

Table 1 shows the other individuals who ran simultaneous candidacies over the next six decades.

With the exception of Carter in 1871, simultaneous candidacies were used by prominent figures, premiers, party leaders, ministers, former ministers, and nationalist leaders.

Of the thirteen simultaneous candidacies, eight were Liberals, three were Conservatives, and two were nationalists. Lomer Gouin was the only individual to run in two ridings on two occasions. Eleven of the thirteen candidates were incumbents. The other two, Flynn and Bourassa, had government experience. The former in Québec, as surplus minister, and the latter in Ottawa.

Of the incumbents, seven retained their riding but were defeated in the second riding. Two were defeated in the riding they had represented, but won in the other. Two incumbents lost their seat and were unable to win a seat elsewhere.

In all, six candidates won in both ridings, five won in one of the ridings, and two were defeated in both.

Of the six candidates who won in both ridings, two decided to continue to represent the voters of the riding they had represented in the previous election, one opted

for the other riding, and another resigned from both seats in order to be appointed as a judge. Of the two candidates who had not been members in the previous legislature, one (Flynn) chose a riding he had previously represented, and the other (Bourassa) chose Saint-Hyacinthe, where he had family ties, although his win there was far from convincing.

The time period between the date of the general election and the date the candidate decided which riding he intended to represent, and the time period between the date that decision was made and the date the by-election was held to fill the vacant seat, shows that Flynn made his decision in less than three months, while Bourassa took nine months to make his choice. The subsequent by-elections were held from one month to nearly a year after the member made his choice.

The seven by-elections necessary to fill vacancies, including the double resignation of François-Xavier Lemieux who was named to the bench, resulted with two exceptions in the victory of the party which had won the seat in the general election.

The last person to run a simultaneous candidacy was Camillien Houde, who had been mayor of Montreal since 1928. During the 1931 general election, he announced that he would run in two ridings.⁵ He ran in Sainte-Marie, which he had represented since the by-election in 1928, and which he had represented from 1923 to 1927; and in Saint-Jacques, where he had been courted to run against Irénée Vautrin, who had been paying close attention to him for three years.

If he were to win in both ridings, Houde would give his seat to a minister. Rumours were going around about fast-track negotiations that if Houde were elected in both ridings, he would give up his seat in Saint-Jacques to Ésiouff Patenaude, who would also become the official protector of the interests of Lord Atholstan, head of the newspaper the *Montreal Star* and friend of the financiers of St. James Street and other similar large companies.⁶

The great crash of 1929 and the presence of a Conservative government in Ottawa could have been beneficial to Camillien Houde and his party. The Conservative leader travelled the province and led a consistent campaign. The message went largely unnoticed; the Conservatives won 9% more votes than in 1927, but Houde never did not catch on enough to help them gain power. The Liberals won 79 seats and the Conservatives won just 11, two more than in 1927.

This was a failure across the board for Houde, who was defeated by 806 votes by Vautrin, and by 515 votes by Gaspard Fauteux. Houde legally contested the validity of the election in 63 ridings in Québec, on the grounds of irregularities committed by the Liberal candidates. In



Camillien Houde
(City of Montréal Photographic Archives)

order to do so, he had to pay a \$63,000 surety bond. The government countered by passing the *Dillon Act*⁷, which made the dispute more difficult, because it required the petitioner to pay the \$1,000 surety bond using their own money. The legislation was retroactive to include disputes already underway.

That was it for the little guy from Sainte-Marie. Houde became the first candidate to run in two ridings at the same time without winning. This failure opened the door of the leadership of the Conservative Party to Maurice LeNoblet Duplessis.

This was also the last simultaneous candidacy in our history, since an amendment was made to prohibit them in the *Election Act* in 1952.⁸

In the years preceding the passage of this act, simultaneous candidacies had already lost popularity. The amendment of the *Election Act* led to a wonderful exchange between Premier Maurice Duplessis and the leader of the official opposition.⁹

Mr. Duplessis: "Another article of the legislation aims to prevent an individual from running in two ridings at once. It does not affect the absent leader (Georges-Émile Lapalme, leader of the Liberal Party since May 20, 1950) since he is afraid to run in a single one, but it affects the candidates of the Union Nationale. They are so popular that they are being courted everywhere. We are in favour of a democratic principle: 'One man, one vote,' and we want to be rid of this archaic legacy."

Mr. Marler: "I find this provision to be completely satisfactory, because I thought the premier would run in Trois-Rivières and elsewhere in order to ensure he would be elected; I see that he is giving that up."

Mr. Duplessis: "I am in demand in all the ridings, and I can assure the leader of the opposition that if I ran in those ridings, the province would make \$200 per riding. I urge the leader of the opposition to come and see for himself the effects of what he is wishing for."

Mr. Marler: "I accept that invitation. I will surely go to Trois-Rivières."

Mr. Duplessis: "You will be very welcome. And you must bring your party's leader. My opponent will not have many votes."

Mr. Marler: "I am in no way worried about the results of the next election. As for this provision in the legislation, I think it is reasonable, and such a decision has already been made elsewhere, for example at the federal level in 1919."

One might wonder why the Québec Parliament passed this legislation when simultaneous candidacies were a thing of the past. Was it simply to harmonize its *Election Act* with federal legislation that prohibited this type of candidacy since 1919.¹⁰ Or simply to avoid having candidates tempted to copy what was going on in other jurisdictions by running in more than one riding? In Great Britain, simultaneous candidacies were never prohibited by law. In 1880, Charles Stewart Parnell was elected in the three ridings in Ireland where he had run. Today, these candidacies are mainly seen with fringe political parties. Indeed, during the 1992 general election, Screaming Lord Sutch, leader of the *Official Monster Raving Loony Party*, ran unsuccessfully in three ridings: Huntingdon, Islwyn and Yeovil. In 2005, Rainbow George Weiss of the *Vote for Yourself Rainbow Dream Team* ran, and was defeated, in 13 different ridings.

Notes

1. *La Minerve*, June 16, 1871.
2. *Le Journal de Québec*, June 27, 1871.
3. *Le Journal de Québec*, July 4, 1871.
4. *La Minerve*, July 3, 1871.
5. *L'Action catholique*, August 14, 1931.
6. Camillien Houde as reported by Hector Grenon, Montréal, Stanké, 1979, p. 169.
7. *Loi modifiant la Loi des élections contestées de Québec*, S.Q., 1931-1932, chap. 20.
8. *Loi modifiant la Loi électorale*, S.Q., 1952, chap. 19, art. 2.
9. *Le Devoir*, January 9, 1952.
10. See the *House of Commons Act 1919*, Statutes of Canada, chapter 18, art. 1.