

La Defense (Windsor)

Publication Dates

1918: Mar. 7 (Vol. 1: no. 1) - 1920: Dec.?

Frequency

Weekly

Online Holdings

1918: Mar. 7 (Vol. 1: no. 1) 8p.

Source of our Online Holdings

Leddy Library, University of Windsor microfilm

Other Potential Holdings

University of Ottawa. Centre de recherche en civilisation canadienne-française (CRCCF):

1918: Mar. 7 – 1920: Dec.?

Essex County Library: 1918: July – 1920: Sept. on microfilm

Description

La Defense was an 8 page, weekly, French language newspaper that appeared from March 7th, 1918 to December ?, 1920. It was published in the wake of the blockades, the riot and the boycott at Notre Dame Du Lac church in Ford City (August-September 1917), and the provocative actions of Bishop Michael Francis Fallon. It was a product of part of the broad francophone outrage at the Ontario Ministry of Education's regulation 17 (1912/1913), which greatly limited the use of French as a language of instruction in bilingual schools. Its aim was to inform the French speaking population of southwestern Ontario and to promote and re-invigorate the nationalist cause.

The motto of the newspaper: "Vivre pour defendre l'Eglise, ma race et ma langue" was a saying of Lucien Beaudoin, the nationalist parish priest at Notre Dame Du Lac church, whose death on August 19th 1917 touched off the main unrest. The prospectus for La Defense calls it "une arme de combat" or rather "une arme defensive". The first issue of March 7th, 1918 does indeed report on the struggles surrounding the French language, education, and culture, but still within a stated context of deep respect for the Catholic Church and a patriotic attachment to Canada. In subsequent issues, readers are kept apprised of the ongoing, local situation and reminded of the rationale behind the boycott of the new priest, F. X. Laurendeau (Prayers, Petitions, and Protests by Jack Cecillon: page 166). In truth, the majority of the first issue, at least, was devoted to the standard newspaper content of the time: some local news, a lot of mainstream national and international news, poetry, prose, and advertisements.

The owner and publisher was Antonio Lussier (1892-1967); the editorial staff included Joseph de Grandpre, Joseph Gregoire, and Gustave Lacasse, with support from others such as Damien and Tancrede St. Pierre, and Albert Leblanc, who worked for Seguin Brothers Printing. Originally, the offices were located in the LaBelle Block, on the southwest corner of Ouellette Avenue and London Street (now University Avenue). Later, they moved to 16 Pitt Street West, shared offices with the newspaper, Le Progres, and actually bought this paper. The early issues of La Defense, volume 1: numbers 1-41, were apparently printed in Ottawa (University of Ottawa. CRCCF), and then in Windsor, thereafter. On June 8, 1920, Antonio Lussier incorporated the printing company: L'Imprimerie Franco-Canadienne, Limitee. He received financial support from L'Association Canadienne-Francaise d'Education d'Ontario.

In early 1921, Seguin Brothers Printing may have bought La Defense, but it did not survive. The collapse of the boycott did not help. Also, the French speaking population of Essex and Kent counties was somewhat suspicious of the owner and editorial staff of La Defense, because they were all relative newcomers to this area. Some local francophones did not share their views on the use of French in schools; many others were indifferent about the issue; the community was not united. Antonio Lussier left Windsor in 1922 and went to work for La Presse in Montreal. However, one of the editors, Gustav Lacasse, remained, and later founded La Presse-Frontiere (1921-1922) and the more successful Feuille D'Erable (1931-1958).

Updated: Katharine Ball, April 2022