

The Empire Within: Montreal, the Sixties, and the Forging of a Radical
Imagination

by

Sean William Mills

A thesis submitted to the Department of History
in conformity with the requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Queen's University
Kingston, Ontario, Canada

November 2007

Copyright © Sean Mills 2007



Library and
Archives Canada

Bibliothèque et
Archives Canada

Published Heritage
Branch

Direction du
Patrimoine de l'édition

395 Wellington Street
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada

395, rue Wellington
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada

Your file Votre référence

ISBN: 978-0-494-37090-2

Our file Notre référence

ISBN: 978-0-494-37090-2

NOTICE:

The author has granted a non-exclusive license allowing Library and Archives Canada to reproduce, publish, archive, preserve, conserve, communicate to the public by telecommunication or on the Internet, loan, distribute and sell theses worldwide, for commercial or non-commercial purposes, in microform, paper, electronic and/or any other formats.

The author retains copyright ownership and moral rights in this thesis. Neither the thesis nor substantial extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without the author's permission.

AVIS:

L'auteur a accordé une licence non exclusive permettant à la Bibliothèque et Archives Canada de reproduire, publier, archiver, sauvegarder, conserver, transmettre au public par télécommunication ou par l'Internet, prêter, distribuer et vendre des thèses partout dans le monde, à des fins commerciales ou autres, sur support microforme, papier, électronique et/ou autres formats.

L'auteur conserve la propriété du droit d'auteur et des droits moraux qui protègent cette thèse. Ni la thèse ni des extraits substantiels de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans son autorisation.

In compliance with the Canadian Privacy Act some supporting forms may have been removed from this thesis.

Conformément à la loi canadienne sur la protection de la vie privée, quelques formulaires secondaires ont été enlevés de cette thèse.

While these forms may be included in the document page count, their removal does not represent any loss of content from the thesis.

Bien que ces formulaires aient inclus dans la pagination, il n'y aura aucun contenu manquant.

Abstract

This thesis explores the wide variety of ways in which radical intellectuals and activists in Montreal used and adapted Third World decolonization theory to build a broad movement of solidarity and anti-colonial resistance from 1963-1972. Beginning in the early 1960s, activists and intellectuals in Montreal began drawing upon the language of Third World decolonization to resituate their understandings of themselves, their society, and the world in which they inhabited. Through their engagement with Third World liberation theory – and the closely related language of Black Power – radical intellectuals in Montreal sought to give new meaning to the old conception of humanism, and they worked to drastically expand the geographical frame of reference in which Quebec politics were generally understood. After analyzing the shifting meaning of decolonization in the period leading up to the late 1960s, this thesis explores the ways in which various groups adopted, built upon, challenged, and shaped the conception of Quebec liberation. Montreal's advocates of women's liberation, the city's Black activists, defenders of unilingualism, and labour radicals were all deeply shaped by the intellectual and urban climate of Montreal, and by ideas of Quebec decolonization. They developed their own individual narratives of liberation, yet linked by the flexible language of decolonization, these narratives all greatly overlapped, forming a vast movement which was larger than the sum of its parts. If the concept of decolonization was extremely powerful, however, it was also highly ambiguous and contradictory, and activists only slowly came to an understanding of the multi-layered nature of colonialism in Quebec. By the early 1970s, the idea of decolonization was slowly abandoned by those advocating radical social change in the city.

This thesis makes three interrelated arguments. First, it argues that radicalism in Quebec in the 1960s cannot be understood outside of the larger international context in which it emerged. Second, it attempts to rethink the ways in which different groups and movements during the 1960s interacted and fed upon each other's analyses and learned from each other. And, finally, by looking at the centrality of Third World decolonization to the development of dissent in Montreal, it hopes to add new perspectives to the growing field of international Sixties scholarship, by insisting that history of the 'West' was profoundly shaped by its interactions with the Third World.

Acknowledgements

This thesis could not have been written without the help and support of numerous friends and colleagues. Financial support from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, the Queen's History department, and the Montreal History Group made the research possible in the first place. Marc-André Lavigne, Benoit Dubreuil, and Dominique Perrault-Joncas first initiated me to political debate about Quebec, and Matt Rankin, Damien-Claude Bélanger, and Louis-Raphaël Pelletier have debated many of the ideas which have found their way into this study. Philippe Fournier has been an indefatigable friend and colleague for over ten years now, and he has helped in so many ways that it is impossible to innumerate them. Sarina Kumar, even from a distance, has offered sage advice and constant friendship, as have Heather Johnson, Matt McKean, Belinda Hewitt, Rob Dennis, Alyssa Tomkins, Gwen Rushton, James Dunlop, Greg Griffin, Stephanie Bolton, Claire Abraham, Kareen Latour, Annie Gagnon and Megan Webster. In my beloved café Utopik, where so much of this thesis was written, I have been able to find my own 'free space' for creativity. Meeting me there and elsewhere have been my fellow travellers, Nicolas Kenny, Liz Kirkland, and Dave Meren. Jarrett Rudy's enthusiasm for history – and for life in general – has helped me focus on the excitement of this endeavour. My sisters Al, Sue, and Jillian have set a standard of academic excellence that I have constantly attempted to attain, and my parents, Alan and Pat, have supported me from the very beginning. Jamie Swift, Bradford Lyttle, Stan Gray, Kari Levitt, Dimitri Roussopoulos, Anne Cools, Robert Comeau, Daya Varma, Fernand Foisy, and Jean-Marc Pottie shared their memories and thoughts about the 1960s. Long meals and conversations with Kari Levitt have clarified my thinking about the Caribbean, politics, and life in general. Intellectuals of her calibre

are a rare breed. Andrée Lévesque has long been an inspiration, and I thank her for her support and encouragement.

Cynthia Wright, Barrington Walker, Susan Lord, and Adnan Husain have helped in many ways, sharing both thoughts and material. Marc Comby sat down with me to discuss Quebec labour. Stéphanie Poirier shared her expertise on the Montreal Central Council of the CSN and, in the best tradition of scholarly collaboration, made all of her files available to me. At the University of Wisconsin-Madison, Jeremi Suri has continually been enthusiastic about my present and future projects. Van Gosse acted as a thorough and encouraging external reader. My Belgian colleagues, especially Serge Jaumain, Anne Morelli, and José Gotovitch, who twice hosted me in Brussels, offered important feedback on earlier versions of this project. Denyse Baillargeon helped me in my initial explorations of Quebec feminism, and Suzanne Morton has followed this project closely, encouraging and helping me throughout the entire process.

The thesis has been written in between – or perhaps on the fault lines – of my two intellectual homes of the past four years, the Queen's History department and the Montreal History Group. I was first initiated to the world of the Montreal History Group when I was still an undergraduate, and I found in it a community of scholars committed to intellectual engagement and scholarly collaboration across the linguistically divided world of the Canadian academy. The Group's members – Denyse Baillargeon, Amélie Bourbeau, Bettina Bradbury, Magda Fahrni, Donald Fyson, Karine Hébert, Daniel Horner, Darcy Ingram, Nicolas Kenny, Liz Kirkland, Andrée Lévesque, Suzanne Morton, Tamara Myers, Lorraine O'Donnell, Louis-Raphaël Pelletier, Mary Anne Poutanen, Jarrett Rudy, Sylvie Tachereau, and Brian Young – have provided material and intellectual support. A special word must be

said for Brian Young, a scholar who embodies a spirit of generosity which represents academics at its best. His encouragement, questioning, and intellectual searching continue to remind me why we are doing history in the first place.

Over the past four years, the Queen's History department has been an extremely exciting and dynamic place to be. During my time there, I have had the opportunity of working with some of the best historians anywhere. Karen Dubinsky combines a sharp and rigorous mind with the human warmth one rarely finds in the university. Ian McKay, who supervised this project from start to finish, has encouraged my intellectual questionings from the very beginning. His intellectual rigour and his commitment to meaningful and honest intellectual work place him in a league of his own among historians. His support and friendship has meant a great deal to me; I have been truly privileged to work with him.

Over the past two years, my fellow students of anti-imperialism and decolonization, Scott Rutherford and David Austin, have undertaken much of this journey with me. In long conversations about the meaning of race and empire, and gender and resistance, they have clarified my thinking and sharpened my focus. Both read the entire product, and their feedback and ideas are very much a part of it.

My greatest debt is to Anna Shea. It has been many long years now since we first began on our parallel yet overlapping projects. Over the years, she has debated every idea and challenged my every word. She not only put up with me during the last months of writing, but, in so many ways, inspired its creation in the first place. For her love, this thesis is for her.

Table of Contents

Abstract	i
Acknowledgements	ii
Table of Contents	v
List of Abbreviations	vi
Note on Language	vii
 1. Introduction	 1
 Part One: 1963-1968 Antecedents	
2. The Project: The Dream of Decolonization	26
3. The Protagonists: Building an Alternative America	54
4. Streets, Cafés, and the Urban Texture of Revolt	89
5. ‘Nègres blancs d’Amérique’: Internationalizing Resistance	126
 Part Two: 1968-1972 Rebellion	
6. Montreal’s Black Renaissance	174
7. Québécoises deboutte!: The Origins of the Women’s Liberation Movement	228
8. The Language of Liberation : McGill français, Bill 63, and the Politics of Unilingualism	275
9. Labour’s Avant-Garde: The Montreal Central Council of the CSN	320
 Part Three: New Horizons	
10. Towards Revolution: Labour, Imperialism, and the New Working Class	360
Conclusion: May Day, 1973	396
Bibliography	413

List of Abbreviations

ASIQ	Action socialiste pour l'indépendance du Québec
CCSNM	Conseil central des syndicats nationaux de Montréal
CEQ	Corporation des enseignants du Québec
CNR	Canadian National Railways
CSN	Confédération des syndicats nationaux
FFQ	Fédération des femmes du Québec
FLF	Front de Libération des Femmes
FLN	Front de Libération Nationale
FLP	Front de Libération Populaire
FLQ	Front de Libération du Québec
FQF	Front du Québec Français
FRI	Front républicain pour l'indépendance
FTQ	Fédération des travailleurs du Québec
LIS	Ligue pour l'intégration scolaire
MIS	Mouvement pour l'Intégration Scolaire
MLP	Mouvement de Libération Populaire
MND	Mouvement pour le désarmement nucléaire
MSA	Mouvement Souveraineté-Association
MSP	Mouvement syndical et politique
MWLM	Montreal Women's Liberation Movement
NDP	New Democratic Party
SDS	Students for a Democratic Society
SSJB	Société Saint-Jean-Baptiste
PQ	Parti Québécois
PSQ	Parti Socialiste du Québec
RSA	Radical Student Alliance
RIN	Rassemblement pour l'indépendance nationale
SPUQ	Syndicat des professeurs de l'Université du Québec
UGEQ	Union générale des étudiants du Québec
UQAM	Université du Québec à Montréal

Archival Collections:

ACSN	Archives, la Confédération des syndicats nationaux
CUA	Concordia University Archives
CWMA	The Canadian Women's Movement Archives
MUA	McGill University Archives
UQAM	Archives, Université du Québec à Montréal
WRDA	William Ready Division of Archives and Research Collections, McMaster University Library

Note on language

Writing in English about movements which operated mostly (although by no means entirely) in French poses significant challenges. To increase possible readership, I have made the difficult decision to translate all of the French-language text within the main body of the thesis. When possible, I have quoted published translations of works, and when I have made my own translations I have included the original French text in the footnotes. For consistency, I have also standardized the capitalization of titles and names.

1. Introduction

When Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* hit Montreal bookstands on a cool fall day in 1961, the cafés near the intersection of Queen Mary and Côte des Neiges, just off-campus of the Université de Montréal, were aflame with debate.¹ The famed Martiniquan-born psychiatrist who had devoted the last years of his life fighting for Algerian independence had become a symbol for the struggles of colonized people, and his works, which both provided a psychopathology of colonial oppression and outlined a path towards human liberation, were translated and read around the world. But it was in Montreal where Fanon's ideas first made their dramatic entry into North America. While it is true that the majority of Montrealers spoke French and were therefore able to read Fanon in the original, Montreal still seems, at first glance, an unlikely location for such a remarkable reception. During the 1960s the city was not only the most populous and economically powerful in Canada, but it had also acted as one of the major centres of North American industrialization and capitalist expansion.

And yet, all throughout the 1960s, the vast majority of those who advocated radical social change drew on Fanon, using his analyses to imagine Quebec as a colony and Montreal as a classic colonial city. Despite the city's relative prosperity, it is perhaps not difficult to see Fanon's appeal. Montreal – first occupied by Aborigines, and then controlled by the French, British, and (many in the 1960s argued) American empires – has a complicated and layered history of colonization and conquest, and, by the 1960s, this history had scarred the city's landscape with distinct geographies of power. Nearly two thirds of the city's population spoke primarily French, yet in the city's wealthiest neighbourhoods, the commercial establishments of the downtown core, and the halls of the most prestigious financial,

¹ Interview with Dimitri Roussopoulos, 16 May 2006, Montreal.

cultural, and educational institutions, English prevailed. Montreal's francophone majority, along with its racial and ethnic minorities, were far removed from the centres of power, living in the poorest and most decrepit parts of town, cordoned off in the impoverished east end or in the 'city below the hill.'

Many reacted to these injustices by advocating a form of nationalism which sought to redress the flagrant differences between the living standards of francophones and anglophones. They hoped to give francophones an equal opportunity to be managers and business executives, technicians and engineers, and to create a modern Quebec nation state based in Quebec City. But there was also another, alternative, and more comprehensive way to imagine overcoming the social injustices of daily life in the city. Beginning in the very late 1950s and early 1960s, dissident writers in Montreal creatively adapted the ideas of Fanon, as well as those of other decolonization thinkers such as Aimé Césaire, Jacques Berque, and Albert Memmi, to develop an alternative to the neo-nationalist project of modernization, an alternative which was premised on the idea that Quebec could join with the nations of the Third World in forming, in Benita Parry's words, "different social imaginaries and alternative rationalities."² It was in the exciting atmosphere of the years following the Second World War that the term 'Third World' itself entered popular language, coined by French economist Alfred Sauvy in 1952 with specific reference to the 'Third Estate' of the French Revolution. Like the Third Estate, the Third World was poised to take its rightful place in the world, poised to demand that the unjust privileges of 'developed' nations be revoked.³

² Benita Parry, "Liberation Theory: Variations on Themes of Marxism and Modernity," in *Marxism, Modernity, and Postcolonial Studies*, ed. Crystal Bartolovich and Neil Lazarus (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 141.

³ As Arif Dirlik explains, "Politically, the idea of the Third World pointed to the necessity of a common politics that derived from a common positioning in the system (rather than some homogeneous essentialized common quality, as is erroneously assumed these days in much

By building on the works of the theorists of Third World liberation, and claiming to be a part of this worldwide emancipatory movement, Montreal's radical writers and activists outlined the theoretical basis of the Quebec liberation movement, a movement inextricably linked with the dream of Quebec decolonization. Throughout the years of activism and intellectual work which followed, decolonization would come to mean much more than merely achieving political independence; it symbolized a rejection of a habit of passive submission to society's dictates, demanded a democratization of market forces, mobilized poetry and cinema, liberated sexuality, and led to a search for an entirely new way of living and thinking.⁴ By the late 1960s and early 1970s, 'Quebec decolonization' had become the rallying cry for the great majority of those concerned with defending social justice and democracy in Montreal. Ideas of Quebec decolonization were appropriated and readapted by a wide variety of political movements representing the interests of previously disenfranchised groups, helping them to draw lines of international solidarity, and spurring a cultural renaissance which irreversibly transformed Quebec culture.

Throughout the 1960s, societies around the world experienced a dramatic explosion of radical thought and dissident political action. The American Civil Rights and Black Power movements galvanized world opinion, students and workers shut down Paris and Prague, and anti-Vietnam War protests significantly challenged the American ruling order. Political activism in Montreal formed part of this larger upsurge. Yet, in North American terms at least, the motivating ideology which fuelled the actions of Montreal's activists and intellectuals remained unique.

postcolonial writing)." Arif Dirlik, "Rethinking Colonialism: Globalization, Postcolonialism, and the Nation," *Interventions* 4, no. 3 (2002): 433.

⁴ Pierre Vallières, *Les Héritiers de Papineau. Itinéraire politique d'un 'nègre blanc' (1960-1985)* (Montréal: Québec/Amérique, 1986), 13.

Decolonization provided individuals with a language within which they would develop new understandings of power and oppression, and of resistance and liberation. Seeing themselves as one part of an international network of resistance, activists in Montreal watched world developments with unprecedented intensity, and they read decolonization theorists voraciously. Ideas developed elsewhere were devoured with seemingly endless energy. Books were poured over, speakers were invited, and a whole slate of activists of international renown passed through the city, staying for days, weeks, or months. Records of Malcolm X's thunderous oratory – unapologetic in its denunciations, uncompromising in its humanist demands for the defence of universal human rights – passed from hand to hand, inspiring many young thinkers and activists who were eager to find ways to fit their struggle into the larger currents of liberation that were sweeping the world. A whole new culture of resistance was being built; poets spoke boldly about how the “new man of the future could not but be an artist,”⁵ and nights of poetic resistance filled major theatres, leaving crowds of people overflowing into the streets below.⁶

And the seeds of revolt kept spreading outwards, reaching more and more fertile ground. Increasingly large numbers of citizens began accepting the premise that Quebec was a colonized society, that it needed to free itself from the shackles of colonial oppression. The crowds in Montreal were at first limited to a few hundred, but, by the late 1960s and early 1970s, thousands of people were regularly taking to the streets, demanding that a society which professed its democratic nature make good

⁵ UQAM, G rald Godin fonds, 81p-010/8, L'Ex cutif du Comit  Provisoire, “Manifeste” *Front commun des cr ateurs du Qu bec*, *Bulletin de liaison*, No. 1 (mars-avril 1973). “[l]’homme de demain sera artiste ou ne sera pas.”

⁶ For an audiovisual recording of “La Nuit de la po sie” that took place on 27 March 1970 at the Th  tre Gesu in Montreal, see Jean-Claude Labrecque, Jean-Pierre Masse, *La Nuit de la po sie 27 mars 1970* (Montreal: ONF-NFB, 1970). It is a testament to the power of cultural resistance that, during the period of profound political repression of October 1970, when civil liberties were suspended and the armed troops moved into the streets of Montreal, poets and singers were arrested alongside activists and political writers.

on its promises, demanding to have at least some control over the major economic and political decisions that affected their world. Collective social movements, Robin Kelley argues, “are incubators of new knowledge,” and new ideas often emerge out of “a concrete intellectual engagement with the problems of aggrieved populations confronting systems of oppression.”⁷ By the late 1960s, each year the crowds in the streets grew larger, the willingness of the protesters to compromise and tolerate repression decreased, and new and creative analyses of the world were being born. New social groups joined the collective revolt, using the language of decolonization to advance new claims of citizenship and democracy. On various occasions, crowds denounced the unequal power relations between French and English, women and men, Blacks and Whites. Crowds of citizens dared to defy a series of undemocratic attempts by Montreal’s municipal authorities to ban public demonstrations, and worked to claim the streets, and through them the city of Montreal, for the ‘people.’ The language of decolonization armed citizens with the conviction that society, rather than being the natural or inevitable result of history, was an active project of creation, and countless individuals began asserting their claim to be the makers rather than just the inheritors of culture.⁸

If the concept of decolonization inspired hopes and kindled dreams, it was not without its own inner contradictions, tensions, and ambiguities. Quebec’s status as a colony was always contested, continually being challenged by both political opponents within the province and by potential sympathizers abroad. How could the descendents of European colonizers, they asked, claim to be fighting the same battle as the liberation movements of Algeria and Cuba? How did Aboriginal peoples fit

⁷ I borrow this concept from Robin D.G. Kelley, *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002), 8.

⁸ I borrow the conception of being the ‘makers of culture’ from Kelley, *Ibid.*

within the larger conception of Quebec decolonization? Even within the dominant radical francophone circles, while nearly everyone on the left agreed that Quebec was thoroughly colonized, there remained many interpretations as to who formed the colonizing power.⁹ It is both ironic and telling that, when the autodidact socialist Raoul Roy copied and circulated, at the doors of Montreal churches and schools, a mimeographed version of *The Colonizer and the Colonized* by Albert Memmi, the famed Tunisian-born theorist of decolonization, he distributed only the half of the book dealing with the portrait of the colonized, leaving the portrait of the colonizer to the reader's imagination.¹⁰ Throughout much of the 1960s, conceptions of Quebec's political colonization by English Canada co-existed with understandings of Quebec's imperial domination by the United States. The advocates of these two different ways of understanding Quebec's 'colonizer' sometimes clashed with one another, but generally peacefully co-existed, contributing to the ambiguity of Quebec's colonial situation.

For those who had developed their ideas of decolonization in the context of French settler-colonialism in North Africa, seeing White descendents of French settlers claiming to be 'colonized' immediately raised questions. Albert Memmi spoke of being a "bit frightened" by the influence that *The Colonizer and the Colonized* was having on those who were not "well-defined colonized people," like "South Americans, Japanese, Black Americans, and French Canadians." And he "looked with astonishment on all this, much as a father, with a mixture of pride and

⁹ André d'Allemagne articulated the ambiguity well when he argued that "Aussi, bien que du strict point de vue politico-constitutionnel le colonisateur soit le Canada anglais incarné dans l'État fédéral, dans les faits le colonisateur c'est l'Amérique anglo-saxonne. Le colonialisme, au Québec, est multiple et confus." André d'Allemagne, *Le colonialisme au Québec* (Montréal: Édition R-B, 1966), 26.

¹⁰ Mathieu Lapointe, "Nationalisme et socialisme dans la pensée de Raoul Roy, 1935-1965" (M.A., Université de Montréal, 2002), 125-27. Also see "Préface à l'édition québécoise de 1972" in Albert Memmi, *Portrait du colonisé. Précédé du Portrait du colonisateur, et d'une préf. de Jean-Paul Sartre. Suivi de Les Canadiens français sont-ils des colonisés?*, Éd. rev. et corr. par l'auteur ed. (Montréal: L'Étincelle, 1972), 7.

apprehension, watches his son achieve a scandalous and applauded fame.”¹¹ After taking the time to learn of the situation in Quebec, Memmi did come to accept the legitimacy of the Quebec liberation struggle, although he always managed to avoid stating categorically that Quebec formed a colony.¹² Another well-known decolonization theorist who supported the struggle for autonomy and self-determination in Quebec, Islamic scholar Jacques Berque, wrote that Quebecers, as the “colonized among the colonizers,” were entangled their exceptions and no longer understood by anyone.¹³ Jean-Paul Sartre, for his part, refused throughout the 1960s to believe that Quebec formed a colony, but suddenly changed his mind during the October Crisis of 1970.¹⁴ And Aimé Césaire, Martiniquan intellectual, activist, and poet, recalls his confusion and surprise when he first learned that radical francophone Quebecers were employing the insights of *négritude* to understand their own identity as the ‘colonized.’ He would later go on write, however, that, even if he still considered it a bit of an exaggeration, Quebec intellectuals had at least understood the concept at a profound level.¹⁵ Because of the ambiguities, challenges, and questions that surrounded Quebec’s status in the colonial world, interpretations of decolonization in Quebec were constantly in flux, never settling into a stable interpretation, continuously melting away before they could ossify.

¹¹ 1965 “Preface” Albert Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, trans. Howard Greenfeld (Boston: Beacon Press, 1967), xi.

¹² In his preface to the Quebec edition of *Portrait du colonisé*, Memmi wrote that “Il est hors de doute qu’on trouve chez les Québécois des traits économiques, politiques et culturels de gens dominés.” And yet, in his reprinted discussion with students at HEC in Montreal, “Les Canadiens français sont-ils des colonisés?”, Memmi refused to come out and clearly state that French Canadians were colonized. Rather, he argued that all forms of domination share similar mechanisms, while each maintains its own particularity. Memmi, *Portrait du colonisé. Précédé du Portrait du colonisateur*, 7, 144.

¹³ Jacques Berque, preface to *Les québécois* (Paris: François Maspero, 1967). “colonisé d’entre les colonisateurs”

¹⁴ During the October Crisis, Sartre argued that it was clear that “the Québécois are not part of Canada, because you are considered to be insurgents and warriors, and then prisoners of war.” “Sartre applauds Québécois,” *McGill Daily*, 21 January 1971.

¹⁵ Aimé Césaire, “Le discours sur la négritude, prononcé le jeudi 26 février 1987,” in *Discours sur le colonialisme* (Paris: Présence Africaine, 2004), 81.

Another problem loomed on the horizon for those who attempted to portray Quebec, and francophone Quebec in particular, as a colonized society. If for the majority of activists in Montreal, 'decolonization' meant Quebec decolonization, this was far from being the only way to conceive either the present or a possible liberated future. Montreal was a city where various understandings of 'empire,' 'colonization' and 'decolonization' collided with one another, becoming the site for not one, but many different movements of resistance and struggle. Already in 1965, at the public hearings of the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism, Khan-Tineta Horn pointed out that, from an Aboriginal perspective, French Canadians were far from being Canada's colonized subjects. Rather, she argued, they should be considered "the first invading race."¹⁶ Horn therefore indirectly articulated a critique of the Quebec liberation movement by turning its language back on itself, and by claiming that francophone Quebecers themselves constituted a colonizing power. At roughly the same time that Horn was defending Aboriginal rights in Quebec, a more sustained alternative understanding of empire, imperialism, and decolonization was being developed by Black Montrealers of West Indian origin who came together to form political organizations of their own.

Caribbean and other Black political groups demonstrated the deep complexity and multi-faceted nature of radicalism in Montreal. As a new openness in Canadian immigration policy was changing the make-up of Canadian society, many immigrants, whether they came to Canada to study or whether they immigrated permanently,

¹⁶ Canada, Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism, "Submission of Miss Kahn-Tineta Horn" *Transcripts of Public Hearings*, 1 December 1965. 4321, 4322, 4323. Seen in Richard Gordon Kicksee, "'Scaled down to size': contested Liberal commonsense and the negotiation of 'Indian participation' in the Canadian Centennial celebrations and Expo '67, 1963-1967" (M.A., Queen's University, 1995), 56.

brought with them new ideas, theories, and understandings of the world.¹⁷ Their very presence demonstrates that during the 1960s the 'west' was not only being greatly influenced by the Third World, but was also significantly composed of many people who had originated there. Exploring the nature of Caribbean and Black politics in Montreal challenges simplistic distinctions between First and Third World revolts, and, by making us reflect upon the dominant viewpoint from which Quebec history has generally been told, compels us to refocus our understanding of the 1960s. Viewed from a West Indian perspective, Montreal, far from being a colonized city, acted as an imperial metropole, a place in which the decision-makers of western capital decided the economic fate of the Caribbean.¹⁸ And like imperial metropolises elsewhere, Montreal became a crucial meeting place for different colonized subjects, a site where they could meet each other and dream of a different future for their beleaguered countries of origin.¹⁹ It is a testament to the power and scope of the Quebec decolonization movement, however, that many of Montreal's leading Black radicals – operating in a distinct yet parallel intellectual tradition – came to accept the premise that francophone Quebecers formed a colonized people, providing the grounds for an intellectual rapprochement between the two movements.

Through a study of the impact of Third World decolonization theory on the development of political movements in Montreal, I hope to demonstrate the way in

¹⁷ While both a Black presence in Montreal and Black resistance to racism stretch back to the seventeenth century, the nature of radical Black activism in Montreal was greatly transformed as a result of increased West Indian immigration in the wake of the revised immigration policies of the 1960s. For a history of Black Montreal, see Dorothy W. Williams, *The Road to Now: A History of Blacks in Montreal* (Montreal: Véhicule Press, 1997). Also see James W. St.G. Walker, *The West Indians in Canada* (Ottawa: Canadian Historical Association, 1984).

¹⁸ As I will discuss later, by the early 1970s Canada's imperial role in the Caribbean was being systematically analyzed and denounced in Montreal's main Black Power publication, *UHURU*. This analysis can also be found in Dennis Forsythe, ed., *Let the Niggers Burn! The Sir George Williams University Affair and its Caribbean Aftermath* (Montréal: Black Rose Books/Our Generation Press, 1971).

¹⁹ For a brief discussion of how imperial metropolises often became crucial centres for the formation of anti-colonial networks, see Elleke Boehmer and Bart Moore-Gilbert, "Postcolonial Studies and Transnational Resistance," *Interventions* 4, no. 1 (2002): 12.

which this theory, generated in very different circumstances and under drastically differing conditions, could be reinterpreted and readapted by people living in the ‘west.’ Like the activists of the Black freedom movement in the United States, radicals in Montreal – who I define specifically as individuals involved in efforts to transform social, political, economic, and cultural structures – drew on the examples and theoretical works of Third World decolonization to reinterpret their own conditions, to re-imagine their place in the world and, ultimately, to reshape their reality. By critically adopting and adapting decolonization theory, Montreal radicals demonstrated by their actions that theory can travel, be appropriated, reinterpreted, adapted, and have its “fiery core ... reignited” in a completely different location than its home of origin.²⁰ In the 1960s, challenges to western dominance developed outside of the west travelled to very centre of the empire, giving individuals the tools and the courage to challenge the truth-claims of western knowledge, the ethnocentric assumptions of its logic, and the civilizing claims of its history.

The language of decolonization had such an appeal partly because of the *lived experience* of unequal power relations in Montreal. Not only were unequal class and language structures powerfully inscribed onto Montreal’s physical landscape, but merely walking in downtown Montreal was enough to convince many that the French language, although first in terms of number of speakers, was second in terms of power and prestige. For alternative narratives and interpretations of the world to order and make sense of material and cultural oppression, alternative means of communication

²⁰ I have borrowed the concept of ‘travelling theory’ from Edward Said. In an imaginative essay, Said demonstrates the way in which Fanon built upon, appropriated, and transformed theoretical insights from Georg Lukács. As Said argues, the “work of theory, criticism, demystification, deconsecration, and decentralization they imply is never finished. The point of theory therefore is to travel, always to move beyond its confinements, to emigrate, to remain in a sense in exile.” “This movement,” he argues, “suggests the possibility of actively different locales, sites, situations for theory, without facile universalism or overgeneral totalizing.” Edward W. Said, “Travelling Theory Reconsidered,” in *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays*, ed. Edward W. Said (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 451-52.

are required. According to Marc Raboy, the “stakes of communication are nothing less than control over the production of social interpretations of reality.”²¹ And in Montreal, the construction of oppositional ideas and the establishment of alternative publications went hand-in-hand. Dozens of reviews were founded, theoretical journals emerged and folded seemingly overnight, new publishing houses published revolutionary literature and theatres produced revolutionary plays. For five years, *Québec-Presse*, organized as a co-operative, acted as a major alternative newspaper reporting both world and on local events. Political messages were conveyed by other means as well, by the stirring speeches of Quebec’s labour leaders and by the political actions and spontaneous manoeuvrings of crowds. It is this vast production of radical publications, published and unpublished political speeches, and descriptions of demonstrations which act, along with the existing archival holdings of the period’s most influential groups and individuals, as the primary sources of this study. Where major gaps exist, I have also sought out a select number of interviews to supplement archival and published records.

This study has three purposes. First, it hopes to point to a new way of thinking about Quebec and Canadian history, one which situates Montreal radicalism within the larger world of global dissent, insisting that its full importance cannot be understood outside of this larger international context. Second, it attempts to rethink the ways in which different groups and movements during the 1960s interacted and fed upon each other’s analyses, learning from each other, even if they did not always admit it at the time. Sarah Evans demonstrated long ago that the roots of the women’s liberation movement could be found in the radically democratic (although practically

²¹ Marc Raboy, *Movements and Messages: Media and Radical Politics in Quebec*, trans. David Homel (Toronto: Between the Lines Press, 1984), 121.

limited) ideals of both the Civil Rights movement and the New Left.²² Her findings, I believe, can be expanded beyond the world of feminism to show that the various movements of the 1960s – and especially those in a city like Montreal – were deeply connected on an intellectual and ideological level. My argument goes further than just trying to demonstrate the connections between different radical movements in the 1960s. I argue that in Montreal, individuals, groups, and their ideas crossed linguistic and ethnic boundaries, learning from one another, benefiting from each other's analyses, and sometimes even joining together in common cause. Historians of Quebec, and especially those who deal with political ideas, have generally written the history of political and intellectual movements in 'French' or 'English' Montreal as if they operated independently of one another.²³ What I propose is a re-reading of the 1960s through a different lens, asking whether there is, or whether there can be, a common intellectual history for a wide variety of dissident political movement in a multi-cultural city. Finally, by looking at the centrality of Third World decolonization to the development of dissent in Montreal, I hope that this study will add new perspectives to the growing field of international Sixties scholarship, a field of study which has, with a few important exceptions,²⁴ remained limited by its near exclusive

²² Sara Evans, *Personal Politics: The Roots of Women's Liberation in the Civil Rights Movement & the New Left* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979).

²³ See, for just one example, Yvan Lamonde, *Histoire sociale des idées au Québec* (Montréal: Fides, 2000). Jean-Marc Piotte's excellent history of Sixties activists in Quebec fails in the crucial respect that he ignores all non-francophone activists in the city (in both fact and conception, as he relates the high rate of activism in the city to the Catholic roots of French Canadians). Jean-Marc Piotte, *La communauté perdue: petite histoire des militantismes* (Montréal, Québec: VLB, 1987).

²⁴ See Max Elbaum, *Revolution in the Air: Sixties Radicals turn to Lenin, Mao and Che* (London: Verso, 2002; reprint, 2006); Kelley, *Freedom Dreams*; Kristin Ross, *May '68 and its Afterlives* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002); Jeremy Varon, *Bringing the War Home: The Weather Underground, the Red Army Faction, and Revolutionary Violence in the Sixties and Seventies* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004). Interestingly, some of the best portrayals of the transnational nature of the 'Sixties' can be found in personal autobiographies. See, for example, Tariq Ali, *Street Fighting Years: An Autobiography of the Sixties* (London: Verso, 2005 [1987]); Stokely Carmichael and Ekwueme Michael Thelwell, *Ready for Revolution: The Life and Struggles of Stokely Carmichael [Kwame Ture]* (New York: Scribner, 2003). Some important reflections can also be found in Fredric Jameson, "Periodizing the 1960s," in *The Ideologies of Theory: Essays 1971-1986, Syntax of History* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988). For some recent works exploring the

focus on connections between movements in North America and Europe. In contrast, I argue that the histories of the ‘First’ and the ‘Third’ Worlds are bound up in one another, are impossible to separate, and cannot be untangled. Many dissident movements which emerged in the 1960s in the ‘west,’ I maintain, are impossible to understand without looking at their connections with struggles and ideas originating elsewhere.

Looking to the various ways in which ‘decolonization’ shaped a variety of political movements in Montreal challenges any notion that there can be one single, coherent ‘story’ of the 1960s. Each movement maintained its own unique and distinct narrative of liberation, but, linked by the flexible language of decolonization, all of these individual narratives greatly overlapped. Together they formed a vast movement that was larger than the sum of its parts, a movement which had remarkable success in challenging dominant ideological structures. The language of decolonization fused with the politicization of other social identities – those of language, sex, race, and class – working to undermine dominant systems of power and authority. By looking at how these different social identities were politicized through the concept of decolonization, I will attempt to demonstrate that they had more in common than is often believed. If the project of ‘Othering’ is essential to any political position, in Montreal, for the broad spectrum of radicals of the late 1960s and early 1970s, this ‘Other’ was, broadly speaking, ‘empire.’ Decolonization, in short, acted as a structure of ideas which gave diverse groups and individuals intellectual resources to understand their own conditions in new ways and, in turn, to creatively

Third World left in the United States, see Laura Pulido, *Black, Brown, Yellow and Left: Radical Activism in Los Angeles* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2006); Cynthia Ann Young, *Soul Power: Culture, Radicalism, and the Making of a U.S. Third World Left* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006).

adapt and reshape those very ideas.²⁵ When a whole array of radical political movements emerged in the late 1960s – women’s liberationists, French unilingualists, Black Power advocates, revolutionary syndicalists – they not only accepted the terms of the decolonization debate, but worked to stretch its bounds outwards, to make new space within it for a larger conception of democratic politics.

Exploring the unique and complicated ways in which international theories and ideas were interpreted, applied, and built upon by intellectuals who were situated in Montreal, and therefore affected by its unique linguistic and cultural characteristics, requires an open and non-reductionist understanding of culture. Cultures and political ideas are, by their very nature, shared and borrowed, necessarily hybrid and mixed. As Edward Said demonstrates so elegantly, “the history of all cultures is the history of cultural borrowings”; no culture is impermeable, all cultures are heavily “involved in one another.” Cultures and political ideas therefore constantly defy patriotic nationalisms that insist on the fundamental differences between peoples.²⁶ If we accept that culture generally, and political and intellectual ideas more specifically, are porous and are forged through an interaction of internal and external influences, then the history of Montreal radicalism takes on entirely new dimensions. Publicly expressed ideas can never be the jealously guarded property of one group or another; in Montreal, as elsewhere, the ideas of Black Power were never the sole property of Blacks, conceptions of women’s liberation had an important influence on many men, class oppression could be understood by sympathetic writers who emerged from the bourgeois class, and, as so many non-francophones demonstrated in the Sixties, the

²⁵ I am drawing here on the innovative work of William Sewell. Sewell argues that structures can be transposed – not just transferred, but slightly modified when applied in a new setting – from one location to another. These structures provide a set of resources for different groups and individuals. See William H. Sewell, *Logics of History: Social Theory and Social Transformation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

²⁶ Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), xxv, 217.

cultural and material alienation of francophone Quebeckers could be understood and opposed by those whose roots did not go back hundreds of years to the founding of New France. It is this complicated mixing of ideas and movements, this constantly mutating and metamorphosing counter-hegemonic language of decolonization, that constitutes the history of Montreal's radical imagination.

Democracy begins when people can imagine different futures, and when these visions work to relativize the present, inspiring citizens to work to build and shape the world in which they live. And, despite all of their differences, all the various elements of Montreal radicalism imagined a future in which the intellectual and political structures of Quebec society would be re-founded. In other words, French-Canadian identity based on tradition and the Roman Catholic Church needed to be cast aside, replaced by a new, modern, 'Québécois' identity. 'Quebec' society needed to be invented, imagined, dreamed – and *created*. This project presupposed the freeing of the imagination, the ability to imagine what Aimé Césaire called "the yet undared form."²⁷ Through their appropriation of a language of Third World decolonization, activists in Montreal looked to Africa, Asia, and Latin America for inspiration, yet they were fully aware of their North American reality. They dreamed of forging, along with racial and ethnic minorities throughout the continent, an 'Other America,' an America which would be built on the bases of equality, respect, and human dignity, and in which racial and ethnic minorities would overcome a condition of psychological inferiority, becoming the responsible and active creators of the world around them.

Walking through the streets of Montreal today, the effects of this turbulent period still inescapably haunt us. The political energy of the period altered the nature

²⁷ Aimé Césaire, "Notebook of a Return to the Native Land," in *Aimé Césaire, the Collected Poetry* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 67.

of the city itself, redefined both Quebec and Canada, and changed the lives of countless individuals. The unique nature of political activism in the city inspired the hopes and sparked the imaginations of individuals across North America and Europe. The story of Sixties activism in Montreal is one of many contradictions, many false starts, many errors, and I make no attempt to glorify the period, or to erase the all-too-often anti-democratic nature of those who professed to defend democracy at all costs. Despite their shortcomings and mistakes, however, it was their freedom to think, their feeling of urgency in the necessity to do something in the face of the tragic human problems that surrounded them, and that still surround us, which demand remembering.

Part One of this study, which covers the beginning of the 1960s to 1968, details efforts to build and construct a new vocabulary and language of dissent in Montreal. Chapter Two outlines the alternative and radical nature of the project of Quebec decolonization, and Chapter Three introduces the historical actors, groups, and organizations which were its most important early architects. Chapter Four then attempts to explore the importance of Montreal in the construction of this radical and oppositional language. I argue that Montreal was important as a symbol – in the minds of many young writers, Montreal’s distinct settlement patterns resembled Fanon’s description of a classic colonial city – and as the physical location where writers and activists of many different backgrounds and origins met one another, discussed, protested, and formed political organizations. In Montreal’s avant-garde cafés and meeting places, activists of various stripes argued and debated; together they began to shape the outlines of an alternative vision for their city, their province, and humanity as a whole. Chapter Five then explores how this alternative vision for

Quebec – forged in the cafés and on the streets of Montreal – interacted with international ideas and movements. Activists and intellectuals in Montreal looked to France for inspiration and for ideas, but, often left frustrated and disappointed, they focused their sights on the example of the Cuban Revolution. While Cuba helped them to understand the interrelated nature of anti-imperialist struggles, however, radicals ultimately looked to the Black Power movement in the United States when striving to reconceptualize themselves and their place in the world.

After part one explores the conditions and circumstances which led to the conceptualization of Quebec liberation, part two proceeds to examine the various ways in which the concept of decolonization fused with different social identities – those of race, gender, linguistic origin, and class – to give birth to a variety of political movements which, while distinct from one another, were also deeply connected. In 1968, as mass protests and rebellions erupted around the world, students in Quebec's newly instituted junior college system were enraged over their crowded conditions and limited prospects at finding university spaces. In the fall of 1968, major student strikes and occupations broke out across the province. One of the main student demands was the construction of a second French-language university in Montreal. Students were coming to an increasingly clear realization that their specific demands would need to form part of a much broader movement of social change. The major protests in the fall of 1968 therefore began fuelling anger and resentment – centred around questions of education, but having implications which stretched to all facets of life – over the power relations between the English and French languages in the province. At almost exactly the same time, Black activists in Montreal organized the Congress of Black Writers, a major gathering held at McGill University which brought many of the world's most important activists and writers – including C.L.R.

James and Stokely Carmichael – to Montreal. Both the struggle to oppose structural racism, and attempts to challenge the cultural and economic power of the English language – each of which rested on conceptions of decolonization – exploded in the spring of 1969.

First came the revolt over race. When students at Sir George Williams University determined that their charges of racism against a biology professor were being inadequately addressed, they staged an occupation of the university's computer centre. After lasting roughly two weeks, the occupation ended with the blows of riot police, the arrest of nearly 100 activists, and the destruction of two million dollars of property. An intense backlash against Montreal's Black activists (although roughly half of those arrested were White) swept across the city. Chapter Six describes how, in the aftermath of the 'Sir George Williams Affair,' a vast cultural renaissance took place in Montreal's Black community, one which witnessed the birth of new media, new forms of community action, and new interpretations of race and racial oppression. Uniting in the face of a larger racial backlash, Montreal's Black activists drew on their own readings and interpretations of Fanon and decolonization, but they also moved closer, both ideologically and politically, to advocates of Quebec liberation. The two movements, which had previously been separate, learned from one another and dramatically changed the course of each other's trajectories.

The very next month after the Sir George Williams affair, in March 1969, 15,000 students, workers, and activists staged the first mass street demonstration demanding French unilingualism. The protesters marched towards McGill, demanding that the university, the traditional bastion of anglophone privilege, be transformed into an institution which would serve the francophone working class. In the build-up to and the aftermath of the protest, radical intellectuals used the language

of decolonization to advance new claims in defence of the French language, challenging the unquestioned power of English in economic life. Chapter Eight maintains that arguments about linguistic alienation and cultural domination were inextricably intertwined with analyses of capitalism and colonialism in Quebec. For the activists and thinkers of the McGill français movement – activists who came from all backgrounds and linguistic origins – having more French-speaking managers and technicians would do nothing to ameliorate the conditions of Quebec workers. Only a holistic program of social change could bring about the required transformation in power relations. And this was the ultimate effect of the McGill français movement: the popularization of an argument about language and linguistic rights that, in drawing on larger universal values of justice and human dignity, succeeded in appealing to those concerned with social justice, regardless of their personal linguistic or ethnic origins.

While the various organizations, movements, and individuals spoke about the multiplicity of power and the intersection of different forms of exploitation and alienation, they remained remarkably blind to a central form of oppression which reached right into the heart of their very own organizations. Learning from movements throughout the world that rhetorically, metaphorically, and actually excluded women from any meaningful political roles, activists in Montreal almost always portrayed decolonization as a job for males, and the process of decolonization was seen as a crucial way in which colonized subjects could overcome an emasculation wrought by colonialism. In the fall of 1969, women, learning from both the nascent women's liberation movement in the United States and from the larger language of radical democracy, began organizing consciousness-raising groups, discussing their oppression as women and the necessity to join together in an

autonomous political movement. Before long, the Montreal Women's Liberation Movement had been organized and, in November 1969, English- and French-speaking women joined together to take to the streets in chains to denounce a new 'anti-protest' law passed by Montreal's municipal authorities. In the aftermath of the protest, the two groups joined to form the Front de Libération des Femmes (FLF), a hybrid organization which situated the liberation of women within the larger world of Quebec liberation. Chapter Seven therefore charts the formation and development of women's liberation in Montreal, arguing that, by drawing on both an international language of feminism and on ideas of Quebec decolonization, Montreal's theorists of women's liberation did not operate in opposition to the larger world of the left, but rather worked from the inside to deepen and widen its horizons.

During the tumultuous year of 1969, Black activists, advocates of French unilingualism, and women's liberationists all dramatically burst onto the political scene. But they were not alone. Chapter Nine argues that it was also during 1969 that the radical wing of Quebec labour – represented most clearly by the Montreal Central Council of the CSN – decisively entered the ranks of radical oppositional movements in Montreal. When long-time radical labour activist Michel Chartrand was elected as president of the Central Council, an organization which represented the 65,000 CSN workers on the territory of Montreal, the lines which separated labour and the left began to melt away. From that moment on, labour would be situated at the very heart of the larger movement. The Montreal Central Council opened its doors to the great diversity of different groups and organizations operating in Montreal, offering its assistance and opening its meetings to groups of all ethnic and linguistic backgrounds, and building a sense of unity between the various scattered groups of dissidents in the city. By providing its services – including office and meeting space – to a wide

variety of dissident organizations, the Central Council became the very nerve centre of activism in the city. The Montreal Central Council participated in the development of grassroots institutions, including the founding of an alternative mass newspaper, *Québec-Presse*. And it hosted teach-ins and worker education sessions, including Léandre Bergeron's popular education courses on Quebec history. With his notes from these courses, Bergeron published the enormously successful *Petit manuel d'histoire du Québec*, a book which reinterpreted Quebec's colonized past while keeping an eye on the possibilities of its liberated future.

Through the efforts of the Montreal Central Council, ideas of decolonization entered the labour movement, transforming it in the process. It was during the October Crisis of 1970 that the mainstream of the labour movement began following the Montreal Central Council in demanding radical change of the system. The 'October Crisis' refers the dramatic period of October 1970 when, in response to the FLQ's kidnapping of a British diplomat and a Quebec cabinet minister, the federal government sent the army into Montreal and suspended civil liberties by enacting the War Measures Act. While the FLQ was limited in scope and small in scale, the magnitude of the state's response reveals much about the government's fear of the larger world of extra-parliamentary opposition in Montreal. In the face of the state's brutal crackdown, during which hundreds of activists were arrested and the homes of thousands searched, few movements or organizations dared to publicly voice their opposition. In the face of this repression, Quebec's three main labour unions, the Confédération des syndicats nationaux (CSN), the Fédération des travailleurs du Québec (FTQ), and the Corporation des enseignants du Québec (CEQ) came together in a historic meeting to denounce the repression of civil liberties, marking a new era of inter-union solidarity.

The opposition of the unions to the War Measures Act prefigured a new alliance which would – after working to create a new language of class and anti-imperialism – paralyze the province and nearly topple the provincial government. During a viciously divisive strike at North America's largest French-language newspaper, *La Presse*, rank-and-file labour militants demonstrated that the radicalization of labour did not just come from above, but was being actively forged from below. And then, only a few months later, in the spring of 1972, Quebec's public and para-public sector workers, pitted in a fierce struggle with the provincial government, staged a general strike which lasted until the government passed back-to-work legislation. When a judge sentenced the three union presidents – Marcel Pepin, Yvan Charbonneau, and Louis Laberge – to one-year prison sentences for having advised that workers ignore injunctions limiting their right to strike, workers throughout the province, in both the public and private sectors, spontaneously walked off the job in the largest general strike in North American history. In part three, I argue that the May 1972 general strike resulted from the explosive interaction of local grievances and a language of dissent which had now spread far beyond the confines of Montreal, and which identified the Quebec Liberal government as the defender of American imperial capital. The strike therefore acted as the most spectacular manifestation of anti-imperialist activism, and exemplified its greatest possibility.

And yet, by the end of the May 1972 strike, it was clear that the language of decolonization was losing ground, becoming less and less appealing to those concerned with social justice. The very moment of conceptual unity, then, was also the moment of its undoing. Radicalism certainly did not die down in Quebec in the 1970s, and activists and intellectuals who pointed to the power of American imperialism still abounded, but the 'movement' began heading in many differing

directions. While not completely disappearing, decolonization had lost its hegemonic ground on the left. The reasons for its decline are many: the shock of the October Crisis destroyed any faith (only ever held by a small minority on the left) that 'armed propaganda' could be an effective political weapon, the reformist Parti Québécois began occupying more and more space around the national question, Marxist-Leninism began flourishing on the far left, and the radical wings of the major union centrals began prioritizing class struggle over decolonization. There are also other reasons for the lost appeal of decolonization. The ability to control language and narrative is, of course, a form of power which articulates its own politics of inclusion and exclusion, and by the late 1960s and early 1970s, many began denouncing certain key elements of the dominant oppositional language. Decolonization, from its very beginning, relied on a heavily gendered language that appealed to a robust masculinity, a language which, while attempting to empower marginalized people, excluded women from any active political role. And it also relied on metaphors of race and of victimization, metaphors which were, on the whole, unsustainable when faced with the rise of Black Power activism in Montreal and Aboriginal activism throughout the continent. At least partly because of its reliance on gendered and racialized concepts, the language of decolonization was inherently unstable, revisable, and, ultimately, disposable.

Part One: 1963-1968

The Intellectual Antecedents

Chapter Two

The Project: The Dream of Decolonization

Come, then, comrades, the European game has finally ended; we must find something different.

Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 312

Few eras of the past live in the present like the 1960s. In 2007, the French presidential election campaign was fought almost entirely around the legacy of the decade, activists in the United States who had come together to resurrect the Sixties-era Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) were staging protests and holding national conventions, and the eyes of the world were fixed on the failing health of Cuba's Fidel Castro, one of the most iconic figures of the period. For the political right, the decade of the 1960s marks the moment during which morality and authority gave way to permissiveness and disorder. For the left, the 1960s, a time when great hopes collapsed into bitter disappointment, was a last fleeting moment of optimism before a steady spiralling decline.

In Quebec the memory of the 1960s has received somewhat different treatment. Loosely referred to as the Quiet Revolution, the 1960s are primarily remembered, at least in popular representations, as a 'success,' as a time when a traditional and religiously dominated society underwent a massive and intense period of modernization, and when francophones, making use of the Quebec state, gained economic and cultural control over their own society.¹ Not only did the Quebec state grow massively to become the primary instrument defending and maintaining a distinctive Quebec culture, but a new 'Québécois' identity, one centred on territory and language rather than on religion and ethnicity, was born. Historians have worked to nuance this celebratory portrait: many have produced detailed and persuasive studies arguing that the 1950s were neither as entirely repressive nor the 1960s as wholly transformative as is often portrayed, yet scholars have had little success in altering a firmly anchored popular perception.²

¹ Some, of course, would argue that while many gains were made, the legacy of the Quiet Revolution will remain unfulfilled as long as Quebec has not achieved political independence.

² For a look at popular memory in Quebec, see Jocelyn Létourneau and Sabrina Moisan, "Mémoire et récit de l'aventure historique du Québec chez les jeunes québécois d'héritage canadien-français: coup

The prevailing narrative of the 1960s can be contested on the grounds that it exaggerates and amplifies the changes of the period, marking it as a profound ‘rupture’ when it was really just an accelerated period of change. More importantly, the narrative of the Quiet Revolution needs to be challenged for what it ignores, suppresses, and pushes to the margins of historical memory. Seeing the 1960s in Quebec only through the lens of capitalist modernization is to succumb to what Kristen Ross has called “a teleology of the present.”³ From this perspective, the roots of Quebec’s society of today can be found in the social and political movements of the 1960s. Looking back vertically from the perspective of the present downplays the alterity of the past, suppressing the vast creative potential of the moment and the endless energy that went into imagining alternative possible futures. Montreal’s radical intellectuals and activists were propelled by a deeply emancipatory vision which helped them to re-imagine Quebec, resituate its past, rethink its present, and dream about its potential future. Before going on to sketch the outlines of this vast and ambitious political project, and of the protagonists who created and reshaped it, it is first necessary to briefly outline the dominant narrative of modernization which they so vehemently opposed.

‘Maîtres chez nous’ – Quebec’s Quiet Revolution

No understanding of the radical political movements of the 1960s in Quebec can be understood without reference to what came before: the repressive years of the

de sonde, amorce d'analyse des résultats, questionnements," *Canadian Historical Review* 85, no. 2 (June 2004): 325-56. For a controversial but stimulating look at twentieth-century Quebec historiography, see Ronald Rudin, *Making History in Twentieth-Century Quebec* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997). An important historiographical overview of how Quebec historians have written about the 1960s can be found in Paul-André Linteau, "Un débat historiographique: l'entrée du Québec dans la modernité et la signification de la Révolution tranquille," *Francofonie. Studi e ricerche sulle letterature di lingua francese* XIX, no. 37 (Autunno 1999): 73-87.

³ Kristin Ross, *May '68 and its Afterlives* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 6.

1950s. The 1950s in Quebec were complicated and contradictory times, years of vast economic expansion and chronic poverty, restrictive moral codes and all-night jazz clubs. Politically, however, they were dominated by the figure of one man, Maurice Duplessis. Duplessis's conservative Union Nationale party first came to power in 1936, was defeated in the 1939 election three years later, and returned to power in 1944 where it remained until the 1960 provincial election (Duplessis died in 1959). While his rhetoric was that of classical liberalism,⁴ Duplessis ruled the province with an iron fist, relying on political corruption to ensure re-election while opening the province's natural resources to a flood of American investments. The government made use of restrictive labour laws to intervene in labour conflicts, using the provincial police to protect the rights of property, the interests of capital, and to crush the resistance of striking workers.

While the government's power was maintained by a bloc of interests, including monopoly capitalists and the traditional petite-bourgeoisie, the hierarchy of the Catholic Church wielded its enormous influence to maintain the conservative nature of Quebec's intellectual and institutional structures.⁵ Duplessis himself spoke in the language of traditional French-Canadian nationalism, emphasized the rural roots and Catholic nature of the French-Canadian people, and defended Quebec's autonomy in the face of the federal government. "At a time when there was no more than a handful of communists in the entire province of Quebec," Susan Mann writes, "Duplessis postured as the protector of Quebec against communism, materialism,

⁴ Gilles Bourque, Jules Duchastel and Jacques Beauchemin, *La société libérale duplessiste, 1944-1960* (Montréal: Presses de l'Université de Montréal, 1994).

⁵ Michael Gauvreau has recently demonstrated, however, that many lay Catholics worked to change and 'modernize' Catholicism from within the church. See Michael Gauvreau, *The Catholic Origins of Quebec's Quiet Revolution* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2005).

atheism, and class warfare.”⁶ Through a well-oiled system of patronage and favouritism, the use of a highly gendered language of female domesticity, and political repression, Duplessis became the powerful *chef* of the province. And he became the most prominent defender of the ‘nation.’

According to his critics throughout the 1950s and thereafter, Duplessis worked to maintain a power structure that systematically discriminated against French Canadians, keeping them in inferior positions at all levels of Quebec society. The widely cited statistics of the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism – a commission established by the federal government in direct response to the nationalist agitation of the 1960s in the province – provided statistical proof of the discrimination which francophones had been feeling for years. In 1961, a 35% difference in average income separated anglophones and francophones, and statistics which correlated income with ethnicity found that francophones ranked 12th of 14 ethnic groups in the province. The French-language daily newspaper, *La Presse*, reported a suppressed study of the Royal Commission which found that people of British origin who spoke only English actually earned more on average than those who spoke both English and French (\$5,502 to \$4,350). It almost goes without saying that unilingual people of British origin had salaries significantly higher than all categories of French Canadians, be they bilingual (earning an average of \$4,350) or unilingual (with an average salary of \$3,099).

Although francophones comprised the vast majority of Quebec’s population, they controlled only 20% of its economy. And the province – which represented 27% of Canada’s population – contained 40% of the country’s unemployed workers. Because English was the language of power and opportunity, immigrants chose to

⁶ Susan Mann Trofimenkoff, *The Dream of Nation: A Social and Intellectual History of Quebec* (Toronto: Gage, 1983), 272.

assimilate to the English-language community 95% of the time, and ambitious French Canadians needed to learn English to get ahead.⁷ Although these statistics were released in the 1960s, they reflected long-standing power relations which were lived and felt on a daily basis by francophones in the province.

If the 1960s are primarily remembered as the moment in which these injustices, and the structures of power which maintained them, were powerfully and dramatically challenged, the seeds of opposition can be found in the 1950s. In the midst of the stifling political atmosphere of the post-war years, oppositional forces began to take shape, forming the bases of two distinct intellectual and political movements which would play an important and lasting role in Quebec life.⁸ The first group, comprised of liberal intellectuals who held vaguely social democratic ideals, coalesced around the journal *Cité Libre*. The writers of *Cité Libre* argued that if Quebec was to fully integrate into the mainstream of North American modernity, it would need to overcome the immense handicap of clericalism and the reactionary ideology of nationalism. Quebec society needed to secularize. Its health and education systems needed to pass from the control of the Catholic church to the control of the state, and the province needed to rid itself of the destructive nationalist impulse that favours ethnic ties over universal values. By overcoming both clericalism and nationalism, writers argued in *Cité Libre*, Quebec could become a modern pluralistic democracy, one founded on the rule of law and based on the liberal rights of the individual.

⁷ Louis Fournier, *FLQ: Histoire d'un mouvement clandestin* (Outremont: Lanctôt Éditeur, 1998), 17-18. Peter Allnutt and Robert Chodos, "Quebec: Into the Streets," *Radical America* 6, no. 5 (September-October 1972): 36-40.

⁸ For an in-depth look at the formation of these two different intellectual traditions, see Michael D. Behiels, *Prelude to Quebec's Quiet Revolution: Liberalism versus Neo-nationalism, 1945-1960*, 366 ed. (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1985). The next two paragraphs draw from Behiels's work.

The second major intellectual movement which began to crystallize in the 1950s, this one centred around the newspaper of the French-Canadian intelligentsia, *Le Devoir*, and around the journal *L'Action nationale*, worked to oppose a traditional and conservative French-Canadian nationalism with a new, modern, updated – in short, a neo-nationalist – vision of Quebec and its potential future. This new elite privileged Quebec's urban rather than its rural experience, and advocated the building of a modern Quebec nation-state in which Quebec City would become a national capital. The neo-nationalists advocated, in Michael Behiels's words, a secular state "devoted to the socioeconomic, cultural, and political aspirations of Quebec's francophone majority." Rather than socialism, neo-nationalists promoted the development of a mixed provincial economy "with an increasingly francophone-dominated private sector working in cooperation with an interventionist state."⁹ From the 1960s through to today, all provincial governments of Quebec have been deeply shaped by various shades of neo-nationalism, and their ideological outlooks are crucially indebted to the teleologies of its modernizing logic.

When Maurice Duplessis died in 1959, and when the provincial Liberal party came to power the following year, a wave of pent up anger was channelled into a vast movement of reform, unleashing a tide of energy and optimism across the province. Newly released books attacking traditional social structures caused sensations. In the highly controversial *Pourquoi je suis un séparatiste*, for example, Marcel Chaput dared to argue that for francophone Quebecers to really control their own society, they needed to form an independent state.¹⁰ And Jean-Paul Desbiens – a teacher and member of a religious order who wrote under the pseudonym 'Brother Anonymous' – penned a stinging and irreverent attack on the Catholic-dominated Quebec education

⁹ Ibid., 274.

¹⁰ See Marcel Chaput, *Pourquoi je suis séparatiste* (Montréal: Les Éditions du Jour, 1961).

system. The book, *Les insolences du Frère Untel*, described in vivid detail the cultural deprivation of francophone Quebecers and the decrepit state of the French language in the province. It sold over a hundred thousand copies.¹¹ The vast sweep of reform had an impact which stretched far beyond the political sphere, but it was in politics where some of the greatest changes were felt. Within a matter of a few years, the provincial Liberal party had instituted hospital insurance, passed new labour legislation, re-established a Ministry of Education, and, declaring that the era of economic colonialism had come to an end, nationalized hydro-electric power.¹² Rallying around the concepts of *Maîtres chez nous* (becoming masters in our own house) and *rattrapage* (catching up), the Liberals worked to create a modern Quebec society in which francophones would be given an equal opportunity to attain North American living standards. Theoretically at least, the Liberals argued that the benefits of the continent's prosperity would be made attainable to all.

By the time that the Liberals lost power in the 1966 election, an election which saw them replaced by the Union Nationale, a party which had conservative roots but which was now speaking in the language of neo-nationalism, a new narrative of Quebec's modernization had been firmly established. In a series of important articles, Jocelyn Létourneau has critiqued this portrayal of the Quiet Revolution by pointing to the narrative structures that it employs. The Quiet Revolution, for Létourneau, is inseparable from its narration, and the history of the period has been written by a technocratic elite that came to power in the wake of the Liberal election victory of 1960 and assumed control of society's dominant communication structures. In their

¹¹ Jean-Paul Desbiens, *Les insolences du Frère Untel* (Montréal: Éditions de l'homme, 1960). For discussion, see Ramsay Cook, *Watching Quebec: Selected Essays* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's Press, 2005), 36.

¹² For a look at the way in which one of the most important Liberal ministers used the language of colonization and decolonization when speaking of hydro-electric power in Quebec, see René Lévesque, *Memoirs*, trans. Philip Stratford (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1986), 168-78.

efforts to portray themselves as thoroughly modern, Létourneau argues, the technocrats crafted a vision of pre-1960 Quebec as a dysfunctional, oppressive, and alienated society afflicted by illegitimate and arbitrary rulers. Against this past, the technocrats reasoned, Quebec in the 1960s symbolized the forces of progress, modernization, competency, and democracy.¹³ The power and scope of this narrative resided in its ability to order and make sense of the transformations which seemed to be affecting all aspects of people's lives. During the 1960s, observers pointed out, Quebec's birth rate declined dramatically, its rate of church attendance plummeted, and the expansive provincial state, operating on the logic of neo-nationalism, not only took over the traditional role of the Catholic church in health care and education, but also began assuming many new responsibilities. If the neo-nationalist narrative of the Quiet Revolution speaks to a certain truth, however, its implicit teleology has so deeply shaped popular memory that the oppositional and transnational nature of the era's radicalism has been obscured.

Writers both within and outside of Quebec have argued that all of the various oppositional political movements of the 1960s followed a similar nationalist logic. Marc Levine's *The Reconquest of Montreal: Language Policy and Social Change in a Bilingual City* argues that francophone Quebecers succeeded, although it took at least twenty years, in reconquering Montreal and establishing French as the working language of the city. For Levine, the reconquest of Montreal "is the fascinating story of how an economically disadvantaged and culturally threatened linguistic community

¹³ According to Létourneau, the key to understanding the 'technocratic' representation of pre-1960 Quebec is Pierre Trudeau, *La grève de l'amiante* (Montréal: Les éditions Cité libre, 1956). See Jocelyn Létourneau, "La grève de l'amiante entre ses mémoires et l'histoire," *Journal of the Canadian Oral History Association* 11 (Fall 1991): 8-16; Jocelyn Létourneau, "La mise en intrigue. Configuration historico-linguistique d'une grève célébrée: Asbestos, P.Q., 1949," *Recherches sémiotiques, Semiotic Inquiry* 12, no. 1-2 (1992): 53-71; Jocelyn Létourneau, "Le 'Québec moderne': un chapitre du grand récit collectif des Québécois," *Discours social / Social Discourse* IV, no. 1-2 (1992): 63-88; Jocelyn Létourneau, "Québec d'après guerre et mémoire collective de la technocratie," *Cahiers internationaux de Sociologie* XC (1991): 67-87.

mobilized politically and used the state to redistribute group power in a major city.” English was still in the dominant position in the 1960s, Levine argues, but the political movements of the decade succeeded in that they dislodged anglophone power, leading to the establishment of Montreal “as the metropole of French-speaking Quebec.”¹⁴ Levine is certainly correct in many respects. Yet, writing from the vantage point of the present, he reduces all of the “street demonstrations, fiery speeches, terrorist violence, and riots” of the late 1960s to questions of “linguistic unrest,” arguing that, by 1970, the “city’s French- and English-speaking communities were ... polarized in ways that seriously threatened social peace.”¹⁵ In so doing, his narrative suppresses both the social nature of activists’ demands and the importance of non-francophone participation to the larger radical upheaval.

For Jocelyn Maclure, discussions of Quebec identity in the years since the Quiet Revolution “are dominated by the perennial opposition between melancholic nationalism and liberal and cosmopolitan anti-nationalism.” “From the often acrimonious debate between *Cité libre* and *Parti pris* ... to the epistolary exchanges between ministers Stéphane Dion and Joseph Facal, the confrontation between melancholic nationalism and anti-nationalism seems to occupy a preponderant position in the history of thought in Québec since the 1950s.”¹⁶ The political exchanges of today can therefore be *read back into the 1960s*, with *Parti Pris* – the main architect of a political language which defined itself in opposition to neo-nationalist modernization – becoming the paradigmatic expression of neo-nationalism! Maclure, in his conflation of groups with different ideologies and perspectives into a singular nationalist logic, is joined by anti-nationalist historian

¹⁴ Marc V. Levine, *The Reconquest of Montreal: Language Policy and Social Change in a Bilingual City* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990), 2, 40.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 87.

¹⁶ Jocelyn Maclure, “Narratives and Counter-Narratives of Identity in Québec,” in *Québec: State and Society*, ed. Alain-G Gagnon (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2004), 33-34, 43.

Ramsay Cook, who believes that the various groups of the 1960s were merely re-adapting the traditional nationalist trope of *la survivance*. In its more radical forms, he argues, nationalists expressed views “stretching all the way from a tiny fringe of terrorists, through Marxist anticlerical, to clerical corporatists on the far right,” and these movements, “despite effusive democratic professions,” verged “on a totalitarianism enforced on them by their commitment to nationalist absolutes.”¹⁷ Perhaps most revealingly, even *Parti Pris* co-founder Jean-Marc Piotte, writing in the heated atmosphere of the late 1970s – a time when the language of class struggle predominated on the left – argued that in the 1960s the journal acted only as the extremist wing of petit bourgeois nationalism.¹⁸

I believe that we cannot reduce all of the political movements of the 1960s to the same nationalist rubric, and that radicals in Montreal throughout the 1960s were fuelled by another logic, another narrative which, while looking to the nation, also looked far beyond its horizons in the direction of universal human emancipation. As Jean-Christian Pleau has recently argued, the ‘Quiet Revolution’ has, by force of repetition, almost completely lost its paradoxical meaning: Who remembers that, “before becoming a useful historical label, the ‘Quiet Revolution’ was first and foremost a contradiction in terms?”¹⁹ Montreal’s radical activists and intellectuals, living, protesting, and thinking on the shifting ground of the changing landscape of Sixties Montreal, worked to imagine various alternative visions of a modern future, visions which stood in opposition to the liberal project of capitalist modernization that was in the process of transforming their present. Unlike the liberal nationalism of their present, the left envisioned a national project that would propel Quebec along a

¹⁷ Cook, *Watching Quebec: Selected Essays*, 11.

¹⁸ Jean-Marc Piotte, *Un parti pris politique* (Montréal: VLB éditeur, 1979), 17.

¹⁹ Jean-Christian Pleau, *La révolution québécoise : Hubert Aquin et Gaston Miron au tournant des années soixante* (Saint-Laurent, Québec: Fides, 2002), 8. “avant de devenir une étiquette historique commode, la ‘Révolution tranquille’ fut d’abord une contradiction dans les termes?”

path of an *alternative modernity*, one leading through national consciousness to internationalism and human liberation. Transcendence took precedence over survival, and national liberation over nationalism. In other words, it was the ‘Quebec Revolution,’ and not the ‘Quiet Revolution,’ which fuelled the activity of an entire generation of radical writers.²⁰

The Dream of Decolonization

The study of the 1960s in Quebec, like elsewhere, has generally been written in the context of the historical development of the province of Quebec. Seen from this angle, the stifling atmosphere of the 1950s and the particularities of Quebec society provided the conditions for the explosion of political activity in the 1960s. Although this form of interpretation speaks to an important dimension of the political activism of the period, I propose that we shift the angle of vision slightly to look horizontally across nations and borders, to situate political developments in Quebec as forming part of a larger global movement of resistance. When young leftists in Montreal began reading and interpreting Marx and Freud, the works of French existentialists and the advocates of women’s liberation, they did so alongside young intellectuals and activists throughout North America and Europe.

In the 1960s, just about everywhere in North America and Europe, cultural mores were overturned, political truths challenged, and the demographically massive and incessantly demanding baby-boom generation loudly burst onto the political scene. While many countries experienced an upsurge of militant unionism in the 1960s, images of White middle-class student radicals dominated representations of the decade. The international student movement, which saw itself (often in

²⁰ Ibid., 9.

conjunction with the working class) as the new centre of revolution, was a central driving force of the New Left. The New Left, characterized by its rejection of American imperialism and the ‘actually existing socialism’ of the Soviet Union, and by its desire to end both individual and national alienation, became the hegemonic force on the left in many western countries. While activists in Montreal shared much in common with New Left activists across North America and Europe, they remained, in many ways, distinct. Like other North American New Leftists, Montreal radicals sympathized and supported struggles taking place elsewhere, and were greatly affected by the Vietnam War. Unlike many largely White middle-class students, however, they worked to situate themselves within a larger worldwide movement of decolonization.²¹ Radical Montreal intellectuals, like radical Blacks in the United States, saw a direct correlation between their conditions and those of the peoples of the Third World. Looking laterally across nations, therefore, Pierre Vallières and his *Nègres blancs d’Amérique* – by far the single most important radical book published in Montreal during the period– can be better understood as part of a tradition including *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* and Eldridge Cleaver’s *Soul on Ice* than as part of the Quebec literary canon.

Decolonization generally refers to the dramatic period, in the decades following the Second World War, when colonized nations in Africa and Asia began achieving political independence, demonstrating to themselves and to the world that they would no longer accept the exploitation and humiliation wrought by colonialism.

²¹ It should be noted, of course, that revolts in the ‘west’ were themselves directly connected to movements of Third World liberation. As Frederic Jameson pointed out long ago, “the two First World nations in which the most powerful student mass movements emerged – the United States and France – became privileged political spaces precisely *because* these were two countries involved in colonial wars.” Fredric Jameson, “Periodizing the 1960s,” in *The Ideologies of Theory: Essays 1971-1986, Syntax of History* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), 180. As many historians have recently pointed out, resistance to empire was at the core of New Left thought and action. See, for example, Ross, *May '68 and its Afterlives*; Jeremy Varon, *Bringing the War Home: The Weather Underground, the Red Army Faction, and Revolutionary Violence in the Sixties and Seventies* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).

The spirit of revolution infused the air, bringing with it new words, new concepts, and new perspectives. The term ‘Third World’ became commonplace during this period, referring, as Vijay Prashad reminds us, not to a geographical place, but to a political project. Caught between the polarized sides of the Cold War, he argues, “the peoples of Africa, Asia, and Latin America dreamed of a new world.”²² New bodies of writing and theory flowed out of the various liberation movements, creating a moment in which intellectuals situated in the ‘west’ were forced to recognize that both theory and revolutionary ideas were being generated from the ‘margins.’²³

The claim that Quebec formed a colonized society rested on two possible interpretations of history. In the first version, more prevalent among radicals throughout the early 1960s, French Canadians became colonial subjects when Great Britain defeated France on the Plains of Abraham in Quebec City in 1759. After the Conquest, the story went, British settlers assumed key roles in the administration of the colony, relegating French Canadians to second class citizens, a relationship which was merely perpetuated and formalized by Canadian Confederation in 1867. But the Conquest of 1759 was far from being clear proof of French Canadians’ colonial status; before 1759, after all, New France was itself composed of Europeans and European descendents who had settled on previously occupied land. This contradiction mattered little in the early 1960s and, by the second half of the decade, references to the Conquest had declined dramatically as radicals increasingly began pointing to the grip that American imperialism held over the province. In this, radicals shared certain points of analysis with more mainstream nationalists, but they did not share their objectives. All radicals agreed that francophone Quebecers demonstrated the traits of a colonized people, and that only a Third World-inspired

²² Vijay Prashad, *The Darker Nations: A People's History of the Third World* (New York: The New Press, 2007), xv-xvi.

²³ Ross, *May '68 and its Afterlives*, 84.

liberation movement could overturn the cultural, economic, and political alienation from which they suffered.

The radical potential of Third World nationalism differed greatly from its European form. If it is true, as Benedict Anderson argues, that anti-imperial nationalisms of the twentieth century had a “profoundly modular character,” drawing inspiration from earlier forms of nationalism,²⁴ it is equally true that they differed from earlier models in important respects. “Forged in opposition to imperialism,” Prashad explains, “this nationalism created a program and agenda that united people on a platform of sovereignty in all domains of life.”²⁵ Of all the various writers involved in Third World liberation, radicals in Montreal looked above all to Albert Memmi and Frantz Fanon.²⁶ Memmi, in his most well-known work, *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, speaks of the ways in which colonialism created insurmountable divisions between human groups. To justify their superiority, Memmi argues, colonialists systematically devalued the colonized, rejecting their culture, stripping them of their language and their history. The colonial situation works to “manufacture” the colonialists and the colonized, isolating them into “airtight colonial groupings” from which they could not escape. Memmi therefore both echoes and anticipates Fanon by arguing that colonization not only occurs on the political and economic levels, but that it reaches deep into the psychological realm; racism, he argues, becomes internalized by the colonizer and the colonized alike.

Memmi articulates the categories established by colonization, but his own position as a Jew, “a sort of half-breed of colonization,” revealed in the book’s very preface, serves to denaturalize the Manichaeism which he outlines so vividly. If

²⁴ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991; reprint, Revised Edition), 135.

²⁵ Prashad, *The Darker Nations*, 86, 88, 217.

²⁶ French scholar Jacques Berque also had an important influence on Montreal thinkers, but I will discuss his specific relationship with Montreal in chapter four.

Memmi dissects the colonial situation so well, the path towards liberation that he envisions remains somewhat unclear.²⁷ For this, radicals turned to the works of Frantz Fanon. Activists in Montreal found in Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* the theoretical means to reconcile their feelings of national and cultural alienation with their socialist convictions, and through their engagement with the book they were able to articulate the necessity of resisting neo-nationalist narratives of modernization. Fanon's work operates on the terrain of the nation, outlining the cultural degradation wrought by colonialism, but it goes much further, warning of the disastrous consequences of an outlook that remains purely national in scope and does not proceed to a deeper project of human emancipation. While *The Wretched of the Earth* is a hybrid text which combines philosophy and imaginative story, argumentative essay, psychological case study, and nationalist allegory, it also acts, as Edward Said points out, as a "visionary transcendence of history." The work begins by dramatizing a Manichean split between the settler and the native, then proceeds to chart the birth of an independence movement, and finally moves on to outline the transformation of "that movement into what is in effect a trans-personal and trans-national force."²⁸

The opening chapter lays out in vivid detail the trauma and violence of colonization. In contrast to traditional Marxist understandings of capitalism, in which power is lived in the temporal sphere by workers who spend an increasing amount of their labour-time producing for the profit of the capitalists, Fanon describes

²⁷ "1965 Preface," Albert Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, trans. Howard Greenfeld (Boston: Beacon Press, 1967), xii, xvi. Memmi argues that he did not conceive of his book as "a search for solutions," but he does hint towards a larger project of emancipation. "The liquidation of colonization," he argues, "is nothing but a prelude to complete liberation, to self-recovery" (145-151).

²⁸ Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 269-70.

how power relations in colonial societies are lived spatially.²⁹ Natives live in the dark and cramped quarters of the colonial city, physically removed from the decadent neighbourhoods of the colonizer. The colonized are cordoned off, hemmed in, removed from their land and subjugated not only as workers, but also as a subject race. Through the process of colonization, cities are segregated and spatial lines of demarcation drawn between natives and settlers. And the spatial divisions only highlight the limitations of orthodox Marxism when confronted with the colonial situation. Understanding the social struggle as one between capital and labour alone, Fanon writes, cannot do justice to the particular forms of oppression caused by colonialism: “When you examine at close quarters the colonial context, it is evident that what parcels out the world is to begin with the fact of belonging to or not belonging to a given race, a given species. In the colonies the economic substructure is also a superstructure. This is why Marxist analysis should always be slightly stretched every time we have to do with the colonial problem.” Unlike the capitalism of European societies, colonialism ruled through absolute violence, without the mediation of legitimating cultural institutions. And, in the face of and in response to this violent subjugation, the natives respond with a violence of their own. Decolonization, according to this initial sketch, is nothing more than “the replacing of a certain ‘species’ of men by another ‘species’ of men.”³⁰

Almost as quickly as Fanon builds up his portrait of the absolute Manichaeism dividing colonial society, he begins to undo it, to deconstruct it, to draw a more subtle and complex portrait of the colonizer and the colonized. If an initial reading of the colonial situation pointed to two undifferentiated categories of the colonizer and the

²⁹ On this point, and in the next few paragraphs in general, I am deeply indebted to Ato Sekyi-Otu’s brilliant reading of Fanon. See Ato Sekyi-Otu, *Fanon’s Dialectic of Experience* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996). I have also drawn insights from Said, *Culture and Imperialism*.

³⁰ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (New York: Grove Press, 1963), 40, 35.

colonized, Fanon proceeds to demonstrate that the ‘colonized’ society itself is made up of differing interests. The activist struggling for independence begins to realize that, “while he is breaking down colonial oppression,” he is simultaneously “building up automatically yet another system of exploitation,” a system which rests on the class divisions within the colonized themselves. The activist comes to understand that the interests of the national bourgeoisie, and the limited independence which it advocates, are not her own. The bourgeoisie of a colonized country, a bourgeoisie which, lacking the capital to initiate local economic development, does not even fulfil its function in the development of capitalism, works towards a narrow independence which preserves the colonial structures of the past under the new guise of neo-colonialism. The poverty-stricken people, Fanon writes, begin to realize the hollowness of a political independence that does not radically alter power relations, of a nationalism leaving colonial hierarchies in place while achieving only formal sovereignty. In other words, they “pass from total, indiscriminating nationalism to social and economic awareness.” As the categories and dichotomies break down, the colonized begin to realize that the previously airtight categories of colonial Manichaeism do not hold true, that many colonizers take side with the natives, and that many of the “sons of the nation” sacrifice the common good of the people for their own personal gain.³¹

The simple nationalist narrative, rather than leading in the direction of liberation, therefore merely reinforces and furthers imperialism’s hegemony. Fanon goes on imaginatively to chart the rich possibilities of a counter-narrative of liberation, one “set in motion by fugitives, outcasts, hounded intellectuals who flee to the countryside and in their work and organization clarify and also undermine the

³¹ Ibid., 144-46.

weaknesses of the official narrative of nationalism.”³² By leaving the city behind, renegade intellectuals come into contact with the people, learn from them, and put their technical and intellectual capacities at their service. This ‘true’ liberation movement attempts to forge a ‘national consciousness’ – which Fanon insisted was not nationalism – “the only thing that will give us an international dimension,” a prerequisite for “the assumption of responsibility on the historical scale.” Because the building of a nation “is of necessity accompanied by the discovery and encouragement of universalizing values,” “it is at the heart of national consciousness that international consciousness lives and grows.”³³ This process of national liberation relies upon the active participation of the colonized who, through a massive collective act of refusal, develop new ideas and outlooks, becoming the active agents in the construction of a new world. Rather than seeking a national hero or a great leader, Fanon insists that radical intellectuals need to work with the people in a project of political education, a project which would work to open minds, awaken spirits, allow the birth of intelligence and, drawing here upon the words of Césaire, “to invent new souls.”³⁴ A new postcolonial society would only be sovereign if it was made up of free and responsible individuals: “Yesterday they were completely denied responsibility; today they mean to understand everything and make all decisions.”³⁵ A transformation of colonialism could therefore only come about if it were inextricably intertwined with a transformation of individuals. In other words, new subjects need to be born.

³² Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, 272-73.

³³ Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 204, 45-48.

³⁴ Ibid., 197. In *A Dying Colonialism*, Fanon charts how, through the struggle for liberation, a colonized people could reinvent itself, undoing patterns of sexual oppression, learning to adopt and appropriate technology and language to further the process of liberation.

³⁵ Ibid., 94. I have adopted Sekyi-Otu’s revised translation Sekyi-Otu, *Fanon’s Dialectic of Experience*, 207.

The power of Fanon's liberatory imagination – an imagination which charted and dramatized the way in which a movement of national liberation could ultimately lead to the founding a new and radical humanism – proved to be immensely seductive. From the moment that *The Wretched of the Earth* was first released in 1961 to the joint declaration, penned over a decade later by the leaders of Quebec's three major labour unions proclaiming the book's relevance for understanding power relations in Quebec,³⁶ Fanon's ideas stood at the very heart of radical activism in Montreal. They helped radicals to draw lines of demarcation between themselves and more mainstream nationalists, assisted them in understanding the internalized feelings of inferiority of colonized people, and inspired them to outline a new vision of freedom and solidarity. But writers in Montreal were aware that they needed to adapt decolonization theory creatively to the realities of their society, and that they could not mechanically transfer experiences and theory developed elsewhere to their local conditions. Fanon had argued that the true revolutionary class of a colonial society resided in the countryside, and that the urban proletariat, having been pampered by the colonial regime, could not be relied upon to lead a movement of liberation. Because the source of capital in a colonial society came from outside, class corresponded to one's proximity to the centre of colonial privilege rather than to one's relationship to the means of production. Yet in Quebec, for reasons that I will explain below, anti-colonialism was almost entirely an urban phenomenon, and was a structure of ideas which emerged out of the unique nature of Montreal society. Far from being discarded, the urban working class always remained, at least theoretically, at the very centre of the movement.

³⁶ See Louis Laberge, Marcel Pepin and Yvan Charbonneau, postscript to Robert Chodos and Nick Auf der Maur, eds., *Quebec: A Chronicle 1968-1972* (Toronto: James Lewis & Samuel, 1972), 147-52.

Anti-colonialist and anti-imperialist ideas in Quebec did not, of course, remain static. By the late 1960s and early 1970s most authors began taking a much more active interest in economic and structural explanations of imperialism, drawing heavily on André Gunder Frank and others. Even though Fanon's psychopathology of colonialism was perhaps losing some of its influence, his emancipatory vision of a radical democracy, free from alienation and organized by an active and responsible citizenry, consistently informed the ideas of movements and organizations. Like anti-colonial writers around the world, intellectuals in Montreal drew on Marxism to help them understand their own oppression. Refusing orthodoxy, they saw Marxism as a flexible body of ideas that needed to be continually renewed and reshaped according to the needs and aspirations of the colonized. According to Robert Young, the Marxism of anti-colonial movements "emphasized what one might call the untranslatability of revolutionary practices, the need for attention to local forms, and the translation of the universal into the idiom of the local."³⁷ This 'Third World Marxism' needed, therefore, to be adapted, refashioned, and renewed by Quebec's specific historical circumstance and by the unique logic of its realities. In response to Pierre Trudeau, who continually argued that Quebec was neither Cuba nor Algeria, and could therefore not draw on their examples, Montreal poet and theorist Paul Chamberland argued that the authors of the Quebec liberation movement understood Quebec's particular and unique nature better than anyone. What Trudeau refused to recognize, he wrote, was that, "by applying them to our situation, we are transforming the very meaning of the terms 'colonization' and 'decolonization.'"³⁸

³⁷ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Colonialism and Neocolonialism* (London: Routledge, 2001), 169. For important insights, also see Robert J.C. Young, preface to Sartre, *Colonialism and Neocolonialism*, ix.

³⁸ Paul Chamberland, "De la damnation à la liberté," *Parti Pris*, no. 9-10-11 (été 1964): 83. "nous transformons, en l'appliquant à notre situation, le sens des termes 'colonisation' et de 'décolonisation.'"

In the maelstrom of the international upheaval of the 1960s, Montreal leftists drew heavily on world decolonization movements, but their understandings of these movements were largely read through the prism of French existentialism, and especially the works of Jean-Paul Sartre. In the crisis-ridden atmosphere of post-war France, Sartre emerged as a larger-than-life figure, advocating individual responsibility in the face of human tragedy. According to Sartre's particular formulation of existentialism, existence preceded essence; in other words, human action was guided by the particular choices of free individuals rather than some pre-existing essentialist notion of human nature. The individual therefore "is not fixed but in a constant state of self-transformation and self-production, playing an active part within the masses as a conscious collection of individuals who make history."³⁹ By emphasizing freedom and responsibility, by maintaining that meaning could only be forged through human action, and by attempting to outline a new and radical vision of humanism, Sartre encouraged and fostered a sense of optimism that individuals, despite the serious limitations of their particular circumstances, could actively create and shape the world in which they lived.⁴⁰

All throughout the 1960s, activists and intellectuals drew on Sartre and worked to actively create a culture of resistance. And in their efforts they took elements from both New Left and Third World movements, adapting them and shaping them according to their own needs, forming a hybrid mixture of ideas and movements. As a perceptive article pointed out in 1964, "French Canada dances on a

³⁹ Robert J.C. Young, preface to Sartre, *Colonialism and Neocolonialism*, x.

⁴⁰ For some of the most-read works by Sartre during the period, see Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness* (New York: Washington Square Press, 1953); *Colonialism and Neocolonialism*; *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, trans. Alan Sheridan-Smith (London: Verso, 2004); *Nausea*, trans. Lloyd Alexander (New York: New Directions, 1964); *Sartre on Cuba* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1974 [1961]). Also widely circulated was Sartre's famous 1946 lecture, "The Humanism of Existentialism." For a riveting account of post-war French politics, and of Sartre and his life companion, writer and philosopher Simone de Beauvoir, see Simone de Beauvoir, *Force of Circumstance* (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1968 [1963]).

tightrope, oscillating between the two types of societies and nations to which it simultaneously belongs.” From a socio-economic perspective, Quebec was clearly an advanced capitalist society; from a political and cultural perspective, Quebec was colonized. Here, the authors argued, resided both the originality of Quebec as well as its ambiguity.⁴¹ But this ambiguity of Quebec decolonization, this mixture of shared and unique experiences, has yet to be explored by historians. The explosion of leftist activism in Montreal during the 1960s and early 1970s was neither typical nor inconsequential; the city’s unique blending of linguistic and cultural groups, and its imagined geographical position of sitting at both the centre and on the periphery of empire, created a laboratory in which both New Left and decolonization ideas flourished, acquiring their own colours and contours. But why were Montreal’s particular configurations so explosive? And what were its particular characteristics?

Montreal circa 1960

For young radicals coming of age in the 1960s, the language of Quebec decolonization, with its emphasis on Quebec’s cultural and economic alienation, provided a new framework within which they could understand their own anxieties, experiences, and dreams. While much has been written about the new artistic and theoretical conjuncture that surfaced in Quebec in the 1960s, few have recognized the central importance of the relationship between intellectual ideas, street politics, the city, and resistance. Montreal acted as the site for the vast majority of political confrontations, and it was home to nearly all of the young intellectuals and artists who worked to develop new radical interpretations of Quebec society. Political groups,

⁴¹ Emile Boudreau et al., "Matériaux pour la théorie et la pratique d'un socialisme québécois," *Socialisme* 64, no. 1 (printemps 1964): 7-8. "Le Canada français danse sur une corde raide, oscillant entre les deux types de sociétés et de nations auxquelles il appartient à la fois."

even those purporting to be ‘national’ in scope, often scarcely existed outside of Montreal. In Montreal, unlike many other parts of Quebec, bookstores were scattered throughout the downtown, ensuring that journals such as *Parti Pris* could achieve widespread distribution.⁴² Both the concentration of highly politicized intellectuals and activists and the blending of linguistic and ethnic groups created an explosive political climate in the city that, although spreading outwards to other locations, was not reproduced elsewhere.

Montreal was linguistically and ethnically divided, and these divisions were represented, although imperfectly, in its geography. The centre of Montreal was dominated by Mount Royal, on which stood the stately colonial buildings of the prestigious English-language McGill University. To the west of McGill, but still high on the mountain, was the predominantly English-speaking Westmount, a neighbourhood which had become a symbol of anglophone domination. In Westmount’s imposing mansions lived industrialists and financiers, bankers and professionals, and the neighbourhood was dotted with beautiful parks and well-kept lawns. Heading straight down the mountain from Westmount, one entered the completely different world of the predominantly working-class and francophone neighbourhood of Saint-Henri, a neighbourhood which had become immortalized in Gabrielle Roy’s famed novel *Tin Flute*. In Saint-Henri, located in close proximity to the factories and smokestacks that lined the Lachine Canal, apartments were crowded and cramped together, and green space hard to find. Further still down the hill, on the other side of the Lachine Canal, was the ethnically diverse but uniformly poor working-class neighbourhood of Pointe Saint-Charles. And along the close-by rue

⁴² Throughout much of Quebec outside of Montreal, books were commonly sold on newstands, and bookstores were few. As a result, journals like *Parti Pris* lost a potentially large audience. See Malcolm Reid, *The Shouting Signpainters: A Literary and Political Account of Quebec Revolutionary Nationalism* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Limited, 1972), 255.

Saint-Antoine, adjacent to the headquarters of the Canadian Pacific Railway, lived Montreal's Black population. Black Montrealers, many of whom worked as sleeping-car porters or domestic servants, were segregated from the rest of Montreal by discriminatory housing and employment practices.⁴³

Saint-Laurent Boulevard ran down the centre of the city, separating the largely francophone working-class east from the more affluent and largely English-speaking west, although these divisions were by no means absolute. The street itself, colloquially called 'The Main,' became the home of many successive waves of immigrants and, for much of the twentieth century, had come to be closely associated with Montreal's Yiddish-speaking Jewish population. In addition to Westmount, west Montreal also consisted of the middle-class and largely English-speaking neighbourhood of Notre-Dame-de-Grâce. To the north of downtown, on the other side of the mountain from Westmount, sat the bourgeois neighbourhood of Outremont. Home both to the French-Canadian bourgeois class – a class composed mostly of professionals, doctors, lawyers, and notaries – and many members of Montreal's Jewish elite, the tree-lined streets and spacious houses of Outremont stood second only to Westmount in their grandeur and opulence. Outremont contrasted sharply with the francophone neighbourhoods of east Montreal where, in districts like the Plateau Mount Royal, Hochelaga Maisonneuve, and Rosemont, chronic poverty and unemployment cast a shadow over the daily lives of their residents.

While the spatialized living patterns often seemed static and fixed, Montreal was a city in constant motion, a city which was both expanding and undergoing a process of dramatic transformation. Although in retrospect it is clear that during the post-war period Montreal was slowly losing its place as the Canadian metropole, as

⁴³ See Sara-Jane (Saje) Mathieu, "North of the Colour Line: Sleeping Car Porters and the Battle Against Jim Crow on Canadian Rails, 1880-1920," *Labour / Le Travail*, no. 47 (Spring 2001): 9-41.

financial transactions, head offices, and people all moved west to Toronto, during the 1960s Montreal remained the most populous and high-profile city in Canada.

Montreal mayor Jean Drapeau personified the many contradictions and possibilities of the era. According to historian Paul-André Linteau, Jean Drapeau presided over the decline of Montreal at the same time as giving it the illusion of grandeur.⁴⁴ And, while working to give Montreal an international profile, he ruled over the city with an iron fist, remaining insensitive to the many communities disrupted by his drive for urban development.

It had taken three hundred years for Montreal's population to reach a million inhabitants, but only thirty years for the metropolitan region to double in size, achieving a population of just over two million by 1961. The dramatic increase in the population resulted from migration from Quebec's rural countryside to the city, a significant post-war baby boom, and a massive influx of new immigrants, mostly from Europe. Immigrants played an increasingly important role in Montreal society, changing the very way in which this society came to see itself. In 1951, 12% of the city's inhabitants were born outside of the country, and this figure had risen to 17% by 1961. By the beginning of the 1960s, 64.2% of the metropolitan region of Montreal was made up of people of French origin and 17.9% of British origin, with Jews and Italians making up the largest minority groups.⁴⁵

From the years following the Second World War until the late 1960s, the city also experienced significant economic growth. In the 1960s, this growth fuelled a vision of grandeur on the part of city planners and municipal authorities, and massive construction projects, like the building of an extensive metro system and the

⁴⁴ Paul André Linteau, *Histoire de Montréal depuis la Confédération*, 2e ed. (Montréal: Boréal, 2000), 540.

⁴⁵ In 1961, Italians made up 4.8% of the population, and Jews 3.5%. The numbers for the city itself (rather than those for the metropolitan region) follow roughly the same pattern. In 1961 those of French origin made up 66.6 %, those of British origin 12.4 %, Italians 6.7 % and Jews 3.9%. Ibid., 427-65.

construction of a site for the 1967 world fair, symbolized and incarnated this atmosphere of unlimited possibilities. As author Hubert Aquin would state in 1963, Montreal was characterized by the fact that it was a city “being transformed at a staggering pace.”⁴⁶ In the 1960s city planners had forecast that the city’s population would reach 4.8 million by 1981, and they built and destroyed with these predictions in mind.⁴⁷ Montreal was undergoing an unprecedented period of prosperity, but many felt that they were excluded from its benefits, that this modernization was headed in the wrong direction, and with the interests of only a tiny segment of the population in mind. It is indicative of the tensions and ambiguities opened up by Montreal’s expansion that the city’s many building sites acted not just as symbols of capitalist modernization, but also as stocks of explosives for the Front de Libération du Québec (FLQ), the terrorist wing of the Quebec liberation movement.⁴⁸

The changes in the physical and human makeup of the city greatly affected the nature of French-Canadian cultural and intellectual life. If the countryside acted as the mythical home for earlier generations of French-Canadian nationalists, the new forms of nationalism of the 1960s found their expression in the urban environment of Montreal. Cities, of course, act not only as empty spaces in which historical actors operate, but their structures, institutions, and urban landscapes actively contribute in the production of knowledge, ideas, and culture. Between 1931 and 1961, the number of francophones living in the city doubled, and the city’s drastic growth quickly made it a crucial cultural venue in which French-speaking artists could both meet one another and reach out to a mass audience. According to one author, these changes created “an *ébullition culturelle*, a surge in cultural activity marked by the launching

⁴⁶ Hubert Aquin in “L’équipe de LIBERTÉ devant Montréal: (essai de situation),” *Liberté* 5, no. 4 (Juillet-Août 1963): 278. “se transforme à un rythme fantastique.”

⁴⁷ André Lortie, ed., *The 60s: Montreal Thinks Big* (Montréal: Canadian Centre for Architecture, 2004), 77.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 107.

of new French-language literature, theatre, music, journalism, and critical analysis that turned Montreal into a city of Francophone intellectual excitement and creativity.”⁴⁹ In the city’s cafés and meeting places, young intellectuals and artists came into contact with one another, encountering ideas and collectively shaping new lines of thought. Writing in the literary journal *Liberté* in 1963, Luc Perrier argued that Montreal acted as a common language; the city’s streets and buildings were not important because of their beauty or historic value, he wrote, but because they existed as the physical spaces in which the city’s inhabitants interacted, as the locations of friendship and solidarity.⁵⁰ And, as cultural alienation and marginalization were grafted onto the urban landscape of Montreal, an important goal of radicals was to transform the city into a space of liberation. The goal of radical intellectuals and activists was therefore not the ‘reconquest of Montreal,’ the transformation of the city from a place in which economic and social power would be transferred from an English-speaking elite to a French-speaking one. The city’s radicals had a different goal in mind. To achieve it, it would first be necessary to build a mass movement of resistance.

⁴⁹ Levine, *The Reconquest of Montreal*, 43.

⁵⁰ Luc Perrier, "Connaissance d'une ville," *Liberté* 5, no. 4 (Juillet-Août 1963): 339-41.

Chapter Three

The Protagonists: Building an Alternative America

Quebec is a country that is at once colonized and industrialized. In this, it is unique... The revolutionary class will therefore need to invent its own systems of thought, its own methods of action, as well as the very character of Quebec socialism.

-Le Mouvement de Libération Populaire et la revue Parti Pris, "manifeste 1965-1966," *Parti Pris* 3, no. 1-2 (1965) "le Québec est un pays à la fois colonisé et industrialisé, il est en cela un cas unique... dans ses pensées, ses méthodes d'action, dans les caractères du socialisme québécois, la classe révolutionnaire aura à inventer."

The extent and depth of dissent in Montreal reached a new scale in the 1960s, but the intellectual and psychological challenges to structures of power had begun much earlier. From the labour radicals, socialists, and anarchists of the late 19th and early 20th centuries to Communists and social democrats during the Depression of the 1930s, organized dissent in Montreal has played an important role in the political life of the city.¹ For those living through the long years of the 1950s, however, this did not always seem to be the case. A few moments of working class militancy aside, many experienced the 1950s as a period of conformity and repression. Even in this atmosphere of alienation and stagnation, a torrent of political energy was brewing underground. By the end of the decade, many cracks in the ideological structure had begun to widen, and new avant-garde cafés had sprung up, filled with young people eager to escape the stifling atmosphere of the 1950s. Beat culture, jazz, poetry and theatre created an atmosphere of excitement which spilled out from the cafés into the city streets. And in the Librairie Tranquille, situated on rue Saint-Catherine in the heart of downtown, francophone poets, writers, and painters would regularly gather to talk about the state of Quebec society and the possibilities of a liberated future.²

Despite this bubbling underground energy, it is still of immense significance that an entire generation of intellectuals and activists *experienced* the 1950s as a time of repression and isolation. In the 1950s, many books were still banned, reading Marx in public drew hostile glares,³ and, according to one young intellectual, “fear of

¹ For examples of pre-1960 radicalism in Québec, see Robert Comeau and Bernard Dionne, *Le droit de se taire : histoire des communistes au Québec, de la Première Guerre mondiale à la Révolution tranquille* (Outremont Québec: VLB, 1989), 53-81; Claude Larivière, *Albert Saint-Martin: militant d'avant-garde (1865-1947)* (Laval: Éditions coopératives Albert Saint-Martin, 1979); Andrée Lévesque, *Virage à gauche interdit : les communistes, les socialistes et leurs ennemis au Québec, 1929-1939* (Montréal, Québec: Boréal express, 1984).

² See Yves Gauthier, *Monsieur Livre: Henri Tranquille* (Sillery: Septentrion, 2005).

³ See Jean-Marc Pottle, *La communauté perdue: petite histoire des militantismes* (Montréal, Québec: VLB, 1987), 14.

living” was daily fact of life.⁴ In the late 1950s legendary poet Gaston Miron would sit for hours at the restaurant on the corner of Montreal’s Carré Saint-Louis with the young Pierre Vallières, a future towering figure of the Montreal left. The two, sad and depressed about the state of Quebec society, would talk for hours about poetry and decolonization, dreaming of going to France and leaving Montreal behind them. While the two writers – both of whom would go on to play key roles in defining the new terms of political resistance in the coming decade – dreamed of leaving Montreal, a third, Raoul Roy, was busy laying the foundations for a new socialist movement in the province. Roy was a complicated figure who had followed a strange and contradictory political trajectory, one which took him from sympathizing with fascism in the 1930s to joining the Communist Party in the 1940s. Although Roy’s reasons for leaving the Communist Party are unclear, he did so at a moment when the party lost the vast majority of its French-Canadian members who had been accused, because of their desire for greater provincial autonomy, of ‘nationalist deviations.’⁵

Although Roy was the first to promote the idea of socialist decolonization for Quebec, by the time that he created a journal in 1959 the idea of decolonization had already been circulating throughout the province for a number of years. In 1957 a small group of right-wing nationalists formed the Alliance Laurentienne, one of Quebec’s first separatist organizations. Through the pages of its journal, *Laurentie*, the group promoted a form of decolonization which, far from democratizing social structures, hoped to by-pass democracy and promote a nationalist Christian social order based on corporatism. Before long, however, metaphors of Quebec’s colonization began being articulated by the far more influential voice of André

⁴ Pierre Vallières, “La peur de vivre” *Le Devoir* (18 mai 1957). Reproduced in Pierre Vallières, *Paroles d'un nègre blanc* (Montréal: VLB, 2002), 28. “La peur de vivre.”

⁵ Henri Gagnon, *Les militants socialistes du Québec: d'une époque à l'autre* (Saint-Lambert: Héritage, 1985); Mathieu Lapointe, “Nationalisme et socialisme dans la pensée de Raoul Roy, 1935-1965” (M.A., Université de Montréal, 2002), 87-90.

Laurendeau, editor of *Le Devoir*, the province's most prestigious French-language newspaper. In the late 1950s, Laurendeau consistently made use of metaphors comparing Quebec to colonized societies, famously declaring in 1958 that premier Maurice Duplessis was a '*roi nègre*,' ruling Quebec on behalf of foreign colonial interests in a fashion similar to that of local leaders ostensibly ruling Africa.⁶ But Roy's project differed from that of *Laurentie* and Laurendeau. He worked to lay the base of a vast movement which would advocate decolonization from the left, seeing socialist decolonization as a way in which French Canadians could succeed in building a new society free from cultural and material alienation.

Roy almost single-handedly founded the *Revue socialiste* in 1959; working tirelessly day and night, he wrote nearly all of the articles and produced the journal himself. And in the journal's pages he argued that, since French Canada was a colonized nation, it needed to look to Algeria and Cuba for inspiration in overcoming imperial domination. The journal's lengthy 100-point manifesto accompanied the first issue and, while it dealt with everything from secularization to unilingualism, its very first point oriented and coloured all others: "Humanity is divided by two constant and entangled struggles: vertically between subjugated or oppressed peoples and imperialist or expansionist nations, and horizontally between exploited workers and bourgeois or directing classes." Although these two struggles often varied with intensity, the journal argued, they sometimes – as was currently the case with French Canadians – converged into a single battle opposing a proletarian nation and a foreign bourgeoisie.⁷

⁶ André Laurendeau, "Maurice Duplessis à l'Assemblée nationale: la théorie du roi nègre" *Le Devoir* (18 novembre 1958).

⁷ "Manifeste politique: Propositions programmatiques de la REVUE SOCIALISTE," *La Revue Socialiste*, no. 1 (printemps 1959): 13. "L'humanité est divisée par deux luttes constantes et enchevêtrées: verticalement entre peuples subjugués ou opprimés et nations impérialistes ou

This was the major innovation of the *Revue Socialiste*: it provided a socialist analysis of Quebec society that forcefully argued that French Canadians formed a colonized and oppressed population. French-Canadian workers had no choice but to struggle “for their liberation from capitalism and colonialism, as workers and as (French) Canadians,” for they could only achieve complete liberation if “their nation achieved both economic and political independence.”⁸ Roy, by maintaining that French Canadians were oppressed both culturally and economically, and by conflating ‘anglophone’ with ‘bourgeoisie,’ was among the first to argue that francophones formed an ‘ethnic class’ of workers.⁹ The idea of the French-Canadian ‘ethnic class,’ despite its obviously limited ability to provide any kind of nuanced conceptualization of power relations in the province, would achieve widespread prominence among radicals in the years to come.

Eager to establish a political movement which could bridge theory and practice, Roy worked to found “la Société des amis de *La Revue socialiste*” in 1959, a group which began to organize public events and protests. On 24 May 1960, members of the group – marking their separation from more mainstream nationalists – picketed and heckled a traditional nationalist celebration attended by both Montreal’s mayor and religious icon cardinal Léger. In the summer of 1960 collaborators and friends of the journal met in Roy’s house on Amherst St. in east Montreal to found the Action socialiste pour l’indépendance du Québec (ASIQ), the first formal

expansionnistes, horizontalement entre travailleurs exploités et couches sociales bourgeoises ou dirigeantes.”

⁸ Ibid.: 13-14. “pour leur affranchissement du capitalisme et du colonialisme à la fois comme ouvriers et comme Canadiens (français)”; “leur nation conquiert son indépendance économique et politique.”

⁹ Magali Deleuze, *L'une et l'autre indépendance 1954-1964: Les médias au Québec et la guerre d'Algérie* (Outremont: Les Éditions Point de Fuite, 2001), 105; Lapointe, “Nationalisme et socialisme dans la pensée de Raoul Roy, 1935-1965”, 182. In 1962, Roy’s concept of the ‘ethnic class’ received academic sanction in an influential article by Jacques Dofny et Marcel Rioux. Jacques Dofny and Marcel Rioux, “Les classes sociales au Canada français,” *Revue française de Sociologie* III (1962): 290-300.

organization which advocated socialist decolonization. The minutes of the first meeting reveal that the discussions revolved around the administration and financing of the *Revue Socialiste*, and the association, which never counted more than ten or twenty members, essentially acted as a means to increase the circulation and reach of the *Revue*. The organization – which was composed mostly of professionals and intellectuals – did, however, hold nearly monthly public assemblies on topics ranging from French unilingualism to economic liberation.¹⁰

In the early 1960s, Roy played a crucial role in introducing ideas of socialist decolonization into Quebec's public sphere, and, largely through his efforts, a nascent left formation began to emerge. In the smoke-filled backroom of a café that he ran on avenue Christophe Colomb – *Le Mouton pendu* – Roy would lecture to groups of young followers, some of whom went on to be among the first members of the Front de libération du Québec and *Parti Pris*.¹¹ In the café, poets and beatniks would mix with locals from the neighbourhood, and many young Montrealers were introduced to ideas and theories of decolonization for the first time, changing their perspectives of both themselves and the world that they inhabited. Roy offered a book service through which young thinkers could obtain copies of the new radical literature of decolonization. Among the very first books sold, and surely the most successful, was Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*. In 1963, Roy even reprinted a brochure of Albert Memmi's *The Colonizer and the Colonized* for greater distribution in Quebec.¹² Out of the discussions held in these social spaces and cafés – and through this distribution of books and ideas – new understandings of the world were fomenting, germinating in young and fertile minds.

¹⁰ Lapointe, "Nationalisme et socialisme dans la pensée de Raoul Roy, 1935-1965", 111-25.

¹¹ Louis Fournier, *FLQ: Histoire d'un mouvement clandestin* (Outremont: Lanctôt Éditeur, 1998), 18. Also, see Jean-Marc Pôtier, *Un parti pris politique* (Montréal: VLB éditeur, 1979), 13.

¹² Lapointe, "Nationalisme et socialisme dans la pensée de Raoul Roy, 1935-1965", 125-27.

Roy's politics remained both complicated and contradictory. He argued that socialism would allow Quebec to take full control of science and culture, would make the full development of the individual possible, and would usher in a new and better humanism. And he wrote that French-Canadian workers needed to express solidarity with all oppressed groups in North America, including American Blacks and Canadian Natives. Yet, in the same breath, he vehemently denounced immigration and maintained an exclusionary nationalism which was closed to the multi-faceted nature of Montreal. As the bourgeoisie promoted immigration to enlarge the labour pool, drive down wages, and assimilate French Canadians, he argued, French Canadians had the right to defend themselves, both as workers and as members of a specific ethnic group. Immigrants were tools of the imperial power, and a future independent Quebec would strictly control immigration and issue work permits and identity cards. Rather than declaring solidarity for all exploited members of Quebec society, socialists, Roy argued, needed to demand the repatriation of all French Canadians who, as a result of high unemployment, were "scattered throughout all of North America."¹³

It therefore did not take long for Roy to feel out of step with the new and increasingly self-confident generation of radicals. While younger thinkers were vehemently anti-clerical and demanded the independence of the territory of Quebec, Roy refused to attack Catholicism and he maintained his desire for the liberation of the ethnically based 'French-Canadian people.' As he moved gradually further and further away from the analyses of a younger and more educated generation, Roy's influence would drastically wane.¹⁴ By 1963, Roy's ASIQ had run out of steam,

¹³ "Manifeste politique: Propositions programmatiques de la REVUE SOCIALISTE," 22-33. "éparpillés dans toute l'Amérique du Nord."

¹⁴ It should be noted, however, that Roy did not completely fall into obscurity. As late as 1970, Pierre Vallières drew on Roy when discussing the strained relationship between radicals in Quebec and the

crumbling out of its own lack of organization and under the pressure of new groups which seemed to better incarnate the radical mood of the era.¹⁵ Even if Roy himself was surpassed by a movement which seemed to be headed in a different direction, the analyses that he articulated had an enormous impact on the development of radical politics in the coming years. The *Revue Socialiste* was the first journal to explicitly declare that Quebec was a colony in need of socialist decolonization. While the journal's circulation remained limited, hovering at around four or five hundred,¹⁶ the ideas that it advanced catalyzed the formation of two groups which drastically and irreversibly transformed Quebec's political and cultural landscape in the 1960s, the Front de libération du Québec (FLQ) and *Parti Pris*, and had an important impact upon a third, the Rassemblement pour l'indépendance nationale (RIN).

Throughout the 1960s, the RIN acted as the main political party advocating political independence for Quebec. Although it never received more than 10% of the popular vote (in the 1966 provincial election, it received 7% of the vote across the province and 10% in Montreal), the RIN galvanized those on the left, even if the lines which separated the party's ideology from that of many leftist organizations was often blurred. The RIN could be respected or it could be hated, but, evolving rapidly from a political movement in 1960 to a political party a few years later, it could not be ignored. Formed initially by a group of roughly twenty professionals and intellectuals from Ottawa/Hull and Montreal, the organization quickly acquired the label of 'bourgeois nationalist.' Unlike the FLQ and *Parti Pris*, the RIN, composed of an older crowd of people in their late twenties and early thirties, steered clear from

French left. UQAM, Charles Gagnon fonds, 124p-202a/19, Pierre Vallières, "Nous voulons une révolution globale au Québec" in *Combat* no. 8180, 4 novembre 1970.

¹⁵ Lapointe, "Nationalisme et socialisme dans la pensée de Raoul Roy, 1935-1965", 111-25.

¹⁶ Ibid., 103.

making statements on social questions at all, let alone demanding social revolution.¹⁷

At first, the RIN advocated national independence to the exclusion of any other political ideology, be it the corporatism of the Alliance Laurentienne or the Socialism of the ASIQ. In a 1961 speech, founding president André d'Allemagne declared that

the goal of national independence needs to be placed far above other social or political doctrines, and well above individual opinions or beliefs. Such an ideal needs to be the greatest common denominator among all citizens, and must not be monopolized or exploited by any one party, group, or minority. It is therefore necessary that there be, alongside existing parties and political groups, a movement founded upon different grounds... a movement which is the incarnation of a truly national consciousness.¹⁸

Nationalism, and not socialist decolonization, motivated the party throughout its early stages. Even if the RIN always remained a complicated common front of diverse ideologies, its discourse moved steadily to the left as the 1960s progressed. It did not take long for a flood of students to join the RIN, and the students, along with the Montreal section in general, continuously worked to push the party further to the left, to adopt Marxist analyses, and to discard leaders, like Marcel Chaput, who prioritized national over social liberation.¹⁹ Despite its move to the left, however, the RIN remained tarnished with the image of bourgeois nationalism, and it became a main foil against which many leftists defined themselves, highlighting the different and oppositional nature of their visions of liberation.

¹⁷ André d'Allemagne, *Le R.I.N. de 1960 à 1963: étude d'un groupe de pression au Québec* (Montréal: Éditions l'Étincelle, 1974), 47.

¹⁸ Seen in Ibid., 34. "un idéal comme celui de l'indépendance nationale devait être placé bien au-dessus des doctrines politiques et sociales, bien au-dessus des opinions et des croyances individuelles. Un tel idéal doit être le plus grand dénominateur commun entre tous les citoyens et il ne doit pouvoir être monopolisé ni exploité par aucun parti, par aucun groupe, par aucune minorité. Il est donc essentiel qu'il existe, parallèlement aux partis et aux groupements politiques, un mouvement fondé sur d'autres bases... un mouvement qui incarne une conscience vraiment nationale."

¹⁹ Ibid., 47-56. Chaput, along with many of his followers, would go on to quit the RIN in December 1962 to form the Parti Républicain du Québec (121).

And yet André d'Allemagne – widely recognized as the party's most important intellectual²⁰ – published *Le colonialisme au Québec* (1966), a text which presents a program of political and economic decolonization extremely similar to that advocated by many of those who considered themselves to be on the left.

D'Allemagne, for example, argued that “cultural and linguistic survival is indissociable with economic and political power.” And in an independent Quebec, economic and political power would need to be equitably distributed throughout society, not remaining in the hands of a new French-Canadian elite. Wealth in Quebec was currently concentrated in the hands of a small English-speaking minority, he argued, but creating a French-Canadian bourgeois class would do nothing to solve province's problems. The task of achieving real economic independence lay with the exploited classes, as a French-Canadian bourgeoisie, following Fanon's analysis of the ‘false’ nature of the colonial bourgeois class, would likely only “strengthen the forces of colonialism and social conservatism, as is the case everywhere else.”

D'Allemagne was arguing, in short, that Quebec needed “an authentic revolution,” not one which would merely reform society's existing institutions and structures, but one which would undo and deconstruct them. The Quebec government alone had the power to introduce state planning and put an end to economic colonialism, but to do so it would need to abolish the British North America Act.²¹

For d'Allemagne, colonization led to the psychological conditioning of colonized people, destroying their history and sense of self-worth, acting as ongoing cultural genocide. In Quebec, colonialism was “essentially a psychological

²⁰ See Jean-Claude Labrecque, *Le R.I.N.* (Canada: Les Productions Virage, 2002).

²¹ André d'Allemagne, *Le colonialisme au Québec* (Montréal: Édition R-B, 1966), 116, 71, 75, 57-59. D'Allemagne relied heavily on Charles Bettelheim, *Planification et croissance accélérée* (Paris: Éditions F. Maspero, 1964). “la survivance linguistique et culturelle est indissociable du pouvoir économique et politique”; “ne pourrait vraisemblablement qu'apporter un appui supplémentaire aux forces du colonialisme et du conservatisme social, comme ce fut le cas partout ailleurs”; “une authentique révolution.”

phenomenon, an illness of the colonized, whom history has made forget that his fate lies in his own hands.” He argued that Canadian Confederation merely perpetuated the Conquest of 1759, keeping Quebecers in a subordinate position as an ‘ethnic class’: colonialism, he argued, “had made the entire French-Canadian nation a vast semi-rural, semi-urban, proletariat.”²² Colonization in Quebec was total: the province had a colonial economy dominated by foreign capital, the colonial power had imposed its products and tastes, and the French language had been relegated to secondary importance by the language of the colonizer, a language which led to “power, prestige, and success.” Because of the urgency of the situation, decolonization had become a permanent struggle, a struggle which would end only with the collapse of the regime or the disappearance of the forces of decolonization. Those who opposed Quebec independence were portrayed as backward-looking, especially when compared with separatists who represented “the forces of liberation and the future.”²³

Throughout the 1960s d’Allemagne was publicly identified as a ‘indépendantiste’ rather than a ‘socialiste,’ but *Le colonialisme au Québec* demonstrates how, in certain respects at least, these two traditions had come to overlap by the mid 1960s. Marcel Rioux, when reviewing the book for the journal *Socialisme 66*, wrote that the publication of *Le colonialisme au Québec* appeared as a completely normal phenomenon, offering an interpretation of Quebec society which was now widely accepted, and speaking to a consciousness that Quebecers had of

²² d’Allemagne, *Le colonialisme au Québec*, 14, 127, 63. “essentiellement un phénomène psychologique, une maladie du colonisé à qui l’histoire a fait oublier que son sort dépend de lui-même”; “a fait de l’ensemble de la nation canadienne-française un vaste prolétariat mi-rural, mi-urbain”

²³ Ibid., 54, 80, 157. “puissance, au prestige et au succès”; “[les] forces de la libération et de l’avenir.”

their daily lives.²⁴ The lines between the left of the RIN and the extra-parliamentary left were so slim that, in the late 1960s, many individuals from *Parti Pris* – the most influential socialist journal of the period – joined the RIN in an attempt to push the party even further to the left, hoping to instil in it the idea that sovereignty needed to be achieved through the impulse and in the interests of the working class.²⁵ The deep internal tensions which resided at the heart of the party had reached such a state that, when the popular liberal nationalist René Lévesque quit the provincial Liberal Party and created his own political movement in 1967, the RIN came apart at the seams. The left of the RIN, which had opposed a possible merger with Lévesque's Mouvement Souveraineté-Association (MSA), would be expelled, and what was left of the party simply disbanded. While those who were on the right of the party generally joined with Lévesque's movement in founding the Parti Québécois, the left went on to create a new extra-parliamentary organization, the Front de Libération Populaire (FLP).

If the RIN – with ideas that at times overlapped and at times contradicted those being developed by the overtly socialist writers of the Quebec liberation movement – represented the legalistic and reformist wing of Quebec nationalism, the Front de libération du Québec (FLQ) stood at the opposite end of the spectrum. The founding of the FLQ goes back to the clandestine discussions among renegade RIN members in the early 1960s, before being formally established by Raymond Villeneuve, Gabriel Hudon, and Georges Schoeters in February 1963. The three founders represent the diversity of FLQ activists. While Villeneuve and Hudon were both young (19 and 21 respectively) members of the RIN, motivated by a combination of socialism and an

²⁴ Marcel Rioux, "Compte rendu de André d'Allemagne Le colonialisme au Québec," *Socialisme* 66, no. 9 (octobre-décembre 1966): 166.

²⁵ Francis Provost, "Étude sur les dissensions entre la 'droite' et la 'gauche' au sein du Rassemblement pour l'indépendance nationale entre 1966 et 1968," *Bulletin d'histoire politique* 12, no. 2 (hiver 2004): 204-13.

especially a deep-felt nationalism, Schoeters, age 33, was a Belgian-born immigrant to Quebec. Schoeters, who had met Fidel Castro when Castro came to Montreal in 1959, and who had travelled extensively to Cuba, drew his motivation from Third World Marxist humanism. Cuban and Algerian flags and pictures of Castro and Che Guevara hung on the walls of his apartment on Côte-des-Neiges Boulevard,²⁶ and, when appearing in court after being arrested for his FLQ activities, he insisted on swearing on *The Wretched of the Earth* rather than the Bible.²⁷

The FLQ first captured the imagination of Quebec when, in the dead of night on the 7 March 1963, sounds of explosion tore into the icy cold calm of the Montreal winter. On the walls of the targeted army barracks were three letters, F.L.Q., painted in red, announcing the birth of the armed wing of the Quebec liberation movement. In the coming months, more barracks would be attacked, and mailboxes in the upper-class and English-speaking neighbourhood of Westmount would be bombed. The initial explosions of 1963 marked the beginning of a seven-year period during which the FLQ would be responsible for a series of bombings, a period which came to a dramatic end with the kidnapping of British diplomat James Cross and the murder of Quebec cabinet minister Pierre Laporte in October 1970. In response to the initial kidnappings, the federal government sent the army into Montreal, enacted the War Measures Act, made hundreds of arrests and undertook thousands of searches. While the FLQ had a brief history following the ‘October Crisis,’ the police and military actions crushed the group so thoroughly that it ceased to exist in any meaningful sense. The FLQ was never formally a ‘party’ or even an ‘organization,’ but a loose and informal network of comrades. Throughout the years of its existence, there were

²⁶ For details about the founding of the FLQ, see Fournier, *FLQ: Histoire d'un mouvement clandestin*, 27-39. Also see Michael McLoughlin, *Last Stop, Paris: The Assassination of Mario Bachand and the Death of the FLQ* (Toronto: Viking, 1998), 13.

²⁷ Marc Laurendeau, *Les Québécois violents: la violence politique, 1962-1972* (Montréal: Boréal, 1990), 121-22.

many different ‘generations’ or ‘waves’ of activists who declared themselves to be fighting in the name of the FLQ, but all shared the objective of using urban guerrilla tactics to overcome colonialism, and insisted on the necessity of waging a struggle for national liberation.

Modeling itself – in name and practice – on Algeria’s Front de Libération Nationale (FLN), the opening lines of the first FLQ manifesto, dated 16 April 1963, were intended to broadcast the group’s message to the world: “Since the Second World War, dominated peoples throughout the world have been breaking their chains and acquiring their rightful liberty. The vast majority of these peoples have defeated the oppressor and today live in freedom. Like so many others, the Quebec people have had enough of being subjected to the arrogant domination of Anglo-Saxon capitalism.” The first manifesto of the FLQ already revealed an underlying tension. It is commonly believed that the first wave of FLQ militants were motivated by a blind nationalism, insensitive to social concerns. The manifesto did, after all, declare that former colonized countries were now living in complete freedom (with no mention of either neo-colonialism or problems posed by the creation of new national bourgeoisies). But the manifesto also went further, arguing that “independence alone will solve nothing. It needs at all costs to be completed by social revolution. Quebec Patriots are fighting not for the label of independence, but for independence in fact.”²⁸ In its early years, the FLQ had neither party line nor doctrine, and its members, often extremely young, advocated a varying mix of nationalism, decolonization, and social

²⁸ F.L.Q., “Message du FLQ à la nation,” in *FLQ: un projet révolutionnaire*, ed. R. Comeau, D. Cooper, and P. Vallières (Outremont, VLB, 1990), 13-17. “Depuis la Seconde Guerre mondiale, les divers peuples dominés du monde brisent leurs chaînes afin d’acquérir la liberté à laquelle ils ont droit. L’immense majorité de ces peuples a vaincu l’opresseur et aujourd’hui vit librement. Après tant d’autres, le peuple québécois en a assez de subir la domination arrogante du capitalisme anglo-saxon.”; “l’indépendance seule ne résoudrait rien. Elle doit à tout prix être complétée par la révolution sociale. Les Patriotes québécois ne se battent pas pour un titre mais pour des faits.”

revolution.²⁹ It was not until 1966 that the FLQ developed a sophisticated outline of its ideology, one which would eventually advocate a utopian communism based upon worker self-management and the creation of a non-capitalist egalitarian society.³⁰

Because of the FLQ's dramatic and violent tactics, it attracted a vastly disproportionate amount of media and popular attention during the Sixties, and the tendency to reduce the political activism of the extra parliamentary left to the actions of the FLQ has been repeated in many popular representations of the period.

And yet throughout the Sixties, and outside of the FLQ, groups, organizations, and publications proliferated.³¹ In addition to *La Revue Socialiste* and to the FLQ's *La Cognée*, a multitude of other publications worked tirelessly to apply international socialist theory to Quebec's unique local conditions. A new literary avant-garde formed around the journal *Liberté* in 1959, and an older generation of academics and trade unionists came together in 1964 to form *Socialisme 64*. The radical and semi-clandestine Front républicain pour l'indépendance (FRI), through its major publication, *Québec Libre*, demanded decolonization, openly displayed its sympathies for the actions of the FLQ, and advocated a populist form of socialism.³² Different Quebec student bodies came together in 1964 to form the Union générale des étudiants du Québec (UGEQ), a body which became increasingly radical as the years advanced. The explosion of socialist groups also crossed linguistic and ethnic lines. In the mid-1960s a group of dedicated young intellectuals from the West Indies came

²⁹ The FLQ's theorization of Quebec's colonial condition – one which was neither nuanced nor sophisticated – can be found in its organ, *La Cognée*. Following Albert Memmi, Paul Lemoyne and Louis Nadeau, to take just one typical example, argued that the revolution was “toujours l'aboutissement d'un conflit entre le colonisateur et le colonisé.” Paul Lemoyne and Louis Nadeau, “La révolution, phénomène historique et phénomène global,” *La Cognée*, no. 43 (15 septembre 1965): 2.

³⁰ Pierre Vallières, *Les Héritiers de Papineau. Itinéraire politique d'un 'nègre blanc' (1960-1985)* (Montréal: Québec/Amérique, 1986), 27.

³¹ For a more detailed explanation of the diverse ideologies and socialist groups which existed in Montreal (although limited to francophone groups), see Luc Racine and Roch Denis, “La conjoncture politique québécoise,” *Socialisme québécois*, no. 21-22 (avril 1971): 17-79.

³² The ‘colours’ of its publication were those of the revolution: red and black. Fournier, *FLQ: Histoire d'un mouvement clandestin*, 74.

together to form the Caribbean Conference Committee on West Indian Affairs, an organization that would organize public conferences and publish piercing analyses of global imperialism and socialist strategy. The New Democratic Party (NDP), a country-wide political party advocating social democracy, had an important community of support in Montreal. In the early 1960s, however, factional debates over provincial self-determination led the 'nationalist' and 'federalist' wings of the provincial section of the party to split in two.³³ Out of the split came the Parti Socialiste du Quebec (PSQ), a party which unsuccessfully fielded candidates for election to the provincial legislature.

To a greater degree than the NDP, the bubbling world of activists in the movement opposing nuclear arms sparked the imaginations of young English-speaking radicals. The Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, formed in Britain in the late 1950s, quickly spread to Canada through the influence of Dimitri Roussopoulos, an individual who returned from England in 1959, and who would become one of the leading figures of English-speaking activism in the city.³⁴ In the fall of 1961 Roussopoulos and a few colleagues founded *Our Generation Against Nuclear War* (later shortened to *Our Generation*), a major theoretical journal which attempted to challenge a militarist culture which was leading the world down the path of nuclear annihilation. Internationalist from the beginning, the journal attempted to voice the concerns of a transnational 'generation' which had come of age in an era when the threat of nuclear holocaust hung constantly over the horizon.³⁵

In the pulsating world of Sixties Montreal, as people travelled across many circles, and as individuals engaged in wide-ranging and passionate discussions in the

³³ See André Lamoureux, *Le NDP et le Québec, 1958-1985* (Montréal: Éditions du Parc, 1985); David H. Sherwood, "The N.D.P. and French Canada, 1961-1965" (McGill University, 1966).

³⁴ Simone Monet-Chartrand, *Les Québécoises et le mouvement pacifiste (1939-1967)* (Montréal: Les Éditions Écosociété, 1993), 41-43.

³⁵ "Statement of Purpose," *Our Generation Against Nuclear War* 1, no. 1 (Fall 1961): front cover.

city's avant-garde cafés, the boundaries between different organizations and ideologies often blurred. Pouring into the cafés, universities, and meeting places were individuals from the city's many 'lefts,' each informed by distinct reading lists, theoretical orientations, and publications. English-speaking activists mixed with francophone advocates of national liberation. Refugees from the Spanish Civil War brushed shoulders with Latin American and Caribbean immigrants. As I will explore in Chapter Four, the cultural mixing of these meeting places profoundly affected the nature of activism in the city. For the moment, it suffices to say that the topic of Quebec decolonization hovered over all of these diverse discussions and debates. Throughout the early and mid-1960s, as the terms of a new language of opposition began to take shape, one political grouping played a role like no other.

Parti Pris, describing itself as the 'Front Intellectuel de Libération du Québec,' began publication in October 1963, just months after the first FLQ bombs had exploded.³⁶ Although many groups and individuals worked to define ideas of Quebec decolonization, *Parti Pris* would have the greatest impact on the formation of a larger language of dissent, becoming the epicentre of the burgeoning attempts to outline the meaning of Quebec liberation. The idea of founding a journal emerged out of the discussions and desires of a small group of young Montrealers. Jean-Marc Pottle and André Major met while growing up on the rough streets of east Montreal, and the two spent countless hours talking about philosophy and literature, poetry and politics. At the beginning of May 1963, Pottle moved out of his family home into an apartment in the downtown east end with Major and another friend, André Brochu. Paul Chamberland, who studied philosophy with Pottle, lived across the street.

³⁶ Pierre Maheu, "De la révolte à la révolution," *Parti Pris*, no. 1 (octobre 1963): 15.

Frustrated with the state of Quebec society, and eager to dramatically alter its own understanding of itself, the iconoclastic authors – after seeking out the help of another young writer, Pierre Maheu – set out on the project of publishing a journal which would combine culture, literature, and politics. They saw themselves as intellectuals and poets, and felt that they were experiencing a profound rupture with a static French-Canadian past.³⁷ As young students who had just arrived in university when the provincial Liberals came to power in 1960, and when major changes in Quebec's institutional structure began to take place, they lived with the confidence that they could change everything, influence all aspects of life, and incite the revolution – which had become their new purpose in life – by themselves. The writers came from different backgrounds, but they all felt the same burning necessity; there was “a people to liberate, a country to invent, and a reality to create.”³⁸

Despite their optimism, the young founders of *Parti Pris* were not prepared for the journal's immediate success, a development that catapulted them nearly overnight from being unknown figures into minor celebrities.³⁹ As Pierre Maheu would write many years later, the success of the journal was due in large part to the intellectual climate which was “ripe for the expression of these ideas.”⁴⁰ After only three months, the journal counted 500 subscribers with a circulation that stood at 3,500.⁴¹ Nine months later, the journal's subscribers had grown to 800 and its print-run to 4,000, sizeable enough to have a major influence on intellectual circles.⁴² The writers and artists of *Parti Pris*, by working both to analyse the cultural deprivation wrought by colonialism and, simultaneously, to actively create a new culture, tapped into a

³⁷ Piotte, *Un parti pris politique*, 33-37.

³⁸ Pierre Maheu, *Un parti pris révolutionnaire* (Montréal: Parti Pris, 1983), 291-92. “un peuple à libérer, un pays à inventer, une réalité à créer.”

³⁹ Piotte, *Un parti pris politique*, 37.

⁴⁰ Maheu, *Un parti pris révolutionnaire*, 293. “mûr pour l'expression de ces idées.”

⁴¹ Paul Chamberland, “Éditorial,” *Parti Pris*, no. 4 (janvier 1964): 2.

⁴² “Lettre au lecteur,” *Parti Pris* 2, no. 1 (septembre 1964): 18.

sentiment of unrest and hope which had up until that point not been fused with the revolutionary aspirations of youth. The baby boom generation felt itself living this rupture with the past, and felt itself poised to shape the foundations for the construction of a new world.⁴³ The writers of *Parti Pris* therefore challenged not only conservative French-Canadian nationalism, but also *Cité libre* and the dissident liberal intelligentsia that came before them.⁴⁴ They saw themselves (wrongly) as the first generation of socialist intellectuals in Quebec – “If a few socialist political parties have existed in Quebec’s past, there have never been any socialist thinkers”⁴⁵ – believing naively that radical thought began with them.

The journal saw its task as one of helping the budding ‘revolutionary class’ to achieve self-consciousness, and it forged a new vocabulary in which the experience of French-speaking Quebecers could be understood. Readers encountered new words, terms, and ideas: Quebecers were *alienated* and *dehumanized*, and the role of the intellectual was to *demystify* and create an *authentic* culture of resistance, one in which the colonised would become the active subjects in the creation of the future. A desire for liberation, in the widest possible sense, acted as the central motivating drive of *Parti Pris*, and to achieve liberation it was first necessary to overcome alienation. Arguably *Parti Pris*’s greatest cultural importance came through its work to locate French-Canadian alienation as the material and psychological consequence of colonialism. Because of colonization, the journal argued that francophone Quebecers were alienated on a political, economic, and cultural level. Francophone Quebecers were alienated politically because of the limited powers of the provincial

⁴³ For an essay on the experience of the baby boom generation in Quebec, see François Ricard, *La génération lyrique: essai sur la vie et l'oeuvre des premiers-nés du baby-boom* (Montréal: Boréal, 1992).

⁴⁴ Malcolm Reid, *The Shouting Signpainters: A Literary and Political Account of Quebec Revolutionary Nationalism* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Limited, 1972), 258.

⁴⁵ Jean-Marc Pôtte, "Éditorial: le socialisme," *Parti Pris*, no. 6 (mars 1964): 4. “S’il a existé quelques partis socialistes au Québec, il n’y a jamais eu de penseurs socialistes.”

government, and they were marginalized economically by foreign companies that controlled their natural resources and industry. And on the question of culture, the journal argued that their profound alienation could be witnessed in the degeneration of Quebec French.⁴⁶ For the rebellious writers, the power of the Catholic Church came to be interpreted as one of the primary mechanisms through which the colonial power maintained its control over the local population. As Paul Chamberland explained, the “theory of socialist decolonization necessarily implies an end to clericalism, because as a system of exploitation clericalism is an integral part of Quebec’s colonial structures, and this is true from no matter what angle we examine it, be it economic, political, social or ideological.”⁴⁷ Clericalism was seen as a force of inertia which prevented the French-Canadian population from creating its own future.⁴⁸

By analyzing their condition as that of a colonized people, many writers followed Fanon’s attempt to locate a psychopathology of oppression in social rather

⁴⁶ "Présentation," *Parti Pris*, no. 1 (octobre 1963): 3.

⁴⁷ Paul Chamberland, "Exigences théoriques d'un combat politique," *Parti Pris* 4, no. 1 (septembre-octobre 1966): 9. "La théorie du socialisme décolonisateur implique nécessairement la suppression du cléricalisme puisque celui-ci, en tant que système d'exploitation, fait partie intégrante des structures coloniales qui affectent le Québec, et cela, sous quelque aspect qu'on l'aborde: économique, politique, social ou idéologique."

⁴⁸ Pierre Maheu, "Laïcité 1966," *Parti Pris* 4, no. 1 (septembre-octobre 1966): 59. It would be wrong, however, to mistake the left’s deep anti-clericalism as a rejection of religion in general. Left Catholicism played a crucially important role in the development of dissident culture in Quebec, and this tradition influenced the Montreal left throughout the 1960s. Many of those who became activists in the 1960s themselves had religious backgrounds, and, in some cases at least, it was religion which brought them to politics in the first place. Pierre Vallières and Michel Chartrand had both, at one point, joined religious orders. And much of the early community organizing which took place in poor communities in Montreal was initiated by religious brothers. When, after announcing the beginning of a hunger strike at the United Nations, Pierre Vallières learned that a group of Christians from the Université de Montréal declared their solidarity for him, he wrote that “This declaration has been one of the greatest consolations to us during our detention in New York.” Religion and religious values were attacked far less often than the structures and institutions of the Roman Catholic Church. Pierre Vallières, *White Niggers of America*, trans. Joan Pinkham (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1971), 70. Also see Fernand Foisy, *Les voies d'un homme de parole (1916-1967)* (Outremont: Lanctôt-Éditeur, 1999); Vallières, *Paroles d'un nègre blanc*. The important role of left Catholicism in organizing radical politics in local neighbourhoods during the 1960s is often forgotten in political histories of Quebec during the 1960s. For a fascinating look at the developments in one neighbourhood, see The CourtePointe Collective, *The Point Is... Grassroots Organizing Works: Women from Point St. Charles Sharing Stories of Solidarity* (Montreal: les éditions du remue-ménage, 2006). Also, for a portrait of Catholicism’s role in the modernization of Quebec, see Michael Gauvreau, *The Catholic Origins of Quebec's Quiet Revolution* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2005). For an important look at the religious convictions of Pierre Vallières, see Constatin Baillargeon, *Pierre Vallières vu par son 'professeur de philosophie'* (Montréal: Médiaspaul, 2002).

than individual causes. Colonization, they argued, caused a whole array of mental disorders for the colonized. According to Michel van Schendel, one of the many “aberrations of the system is to have developed, in the eyes of Quebeckers, an unattainable image of their identity and history,” and this was one of the “primary psychological characteristics of colonialism.” This lack of identity, moreover, was a “source of permanent neurosis.” “The troubling proportion of nervous disorders among French Canadians,” Van Schendel continued, “and the often schizophrenic manifestation of their thought, or their difficulty in expressing themselves, are probably not mere coincidences.”⁴⁹ André Benoist argued that French Canadians, and especially those living in Montreal, had a higher rate of depression than people living elsewhere. The reasons, he argued, were threefold: the importance of religion in education, the attitude of parents towards their children, and a profound sentiment of inferiority caused by colonialism.⁵⁰

All of Quebec’s ideological, religious, and economic structures needed to be swept aside, and room needed to be made for a new generation which would no longer accept compromise and cooptation. *Parti Pris*’s political project revolved around three interrelated demands: secularization, independence, and socialism. Although two tendencies would eventually form within the journal, one advocating a tactical alliance with the bourgeoisie to achieve independence before moving on to form the bases of socialism, and the other maintaining that socialism and independence needed to come about at the same time, all agreed on one central point:

⁴⁹ Michel Van Schendel, "La maladie infantile du québec," *Parti Pris*, no. 6 (mars 1964): 34. “aberrations du système que d’avoir développé aux yeux des Québécois une image insaisissable de leur identité et de leur histoire”; “caractéristiques psychologiques fondamentales du colonialisme”; “source permanente de névrose.”; “La proportion inquiétante de maladies nerveuses chez les Canadiens français, l’expression souvent schizophrénique de leur pensée ou leur difficulté à s’exprimer sont probablement plus que de simples coïncidences.”

⁵⁰ André Benoist, "Valeurs culturelles et dépression mentale," *Parti Pris*, no. 9-10-11 (été 1964): 30-31.

independence for its own sake, unaccompanied by social revolution, and inattentive to an individual's need for liberation, would lead nowhere. Quebec's political independence had to form part of a larger move towards a comprehensive liberation, a transformation which would affect all spheres of life, from poetry and literature to cinema and sexuality.

Issues of *Parti Pris* therefore did not only contain discussions of politics and philosophy. As the coming revolution needed to be cultural as well as political, politics could not be separated from poetry, and the journal printed creative works alongside discussions of political strategy and analysis. Poetry, literature, and culture generally were deeply constitutive of this leftism, and were central to the new world of freedom and creativity which needed to be built.⁵¹ If the cultural structures of a religiously-dominated Quebec society were to be undone, not only culture, but also sexuality, would need to be liberated. Writing in 1964, Denys Arcand argued that Quebec society itself, and Quebec cinema in particular, had "begun its journey on this path to liberty." And as "this sought-after liberty needs to be wholly social, religious and political," he argued, "it also needs to include, in particular, a liberation of sexuality; a free and complete life requires an equally free and complete understanding of sexual realities."⁵² A desire to liberate sexuality was at the very core of *Parti Pris*'s attempt to overcome the ideological control of the Roman Catholic Church, and it would be the cornerstone of the new liberated humanity which was already forming in embryo. Paul Chamberland captured the attitude of the new

⁵¹ For interesting reflections on the relationship between culture and rebellion, see Eric Hobsbawm, *Uncommon People: Resistance, Rebellion, and Jazz* (New York: The New Press, 1988); Bryan Palmer, *Cultures of Darkness: Night Travels in the Histories of Transgression* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2000).

⁵² Denys Arcand, "Cinéma et sexualité," *Parti Pris*, no. 9-10-11 (été 1964): 90. "entrepris sa marche sur ce chemin de la liberté"; "cette liberté recherchée doit être globalement sociale, religieuse et politique, elle doit être aussi, particulièrement, sexuelle; puisque toute existence libre et totale exige une appréhension également libre et totale des réalités sexuelles."

intellectuals well when he declared that he did not “understand the revolutionary who does not take the trouble to make love well.”⁵³

Within its first year of existence, *Parti Pris* had expanded to become a publishing house, and, shortly afterwards, a political movement. As a publishing house, Les éditions Parti Pris worked to publish literary works and essays as well as working documents for the revolution: tracts for political education, personal accounts, studies of various aspects of political life, and sociological and economic analyses of Quebec society.⁵⁴ In its attempt to portray the harsh reality of poverty and cultural degradation in Quebec, it published works written in *joual*, the urban slang French of east Montreal, and sought to build a literature of struggle.⁵⁵ Through the journal, the group hoped to ‘demystify’ Quebec’s ideological structure: “our critical work will tear apart established myths, we will attempt to destroy, by discovering their inner contradictions, official rules and morals, in order to make possible the establishment of authentic relations between men.”⁵⁶ And through its numerous public meetings, reading groups, discussions, and street protests, the editors hoped to foster an ongoing dialogue between readers and writers. The journal encouraged readers to see the publication as their own, and the relationship between theory and praxis as one running in both directions.

In *Parti Pris*’s first manifesto, published in September 1964, it summarized the history of the emergent left of which it formed a part, and it came to the

⁵³ Reid, *The Shouting Signpainters*, 89. It should be noted that *Parti Pris*’s advocacy of sexual liberation corresponded with significant changing societal outlooks on sexuality in general. For an interesting discussion on the ways in which the sexual experimentation of youth became commonplace in the period, see François Ricard, *The Lyric Generation: The Life and Times of the Baby Boomers*, trans. Donald Winkler (Toronto: Stoddart, 1994), 147-48. Sexual liberation, of course, was an important theme for both the New Left and youth revolts throughout the 1960s.

⁵⁴ “Manifeste, 1964-1965,” *Parti Pris* 2, no. 1 (septembre 1964): 17.

⁵⁵ For a document outlining the goals and functions of the publishing house, see UQAM, G  rald Godin fonds, 81p-660:02/12, ‘  ditions parti pris’ (1966).

⁵⁶ Maheu, “De la r  volte    la r  volution,” 15. “notre travail critique fera violence aux mythes   tablis, nous tenterons de d  truire, en d  couvrant les contradictions, la moralit   et la l  galit   officielles, afin de permettre l’  tablissement de relations authentiques entre les hommes.”

conclusion that all of its various organizations were plagued with the same crippling problem: “we are fascinated by and enthusiastic about the idea of revolution because we feel a real necessity for it, but we don’t have the concrete means to achieve it, and, up to this point, we have not worked seriously to acquire them.” The journal therefore concluded that it would need to work towards the creation of a revolutionary party,⁵⁷ and, with this in mind, it acquired an office space on rue Bellechasse in the francophone working-class neighbourhood of Rosemont. The journal’s editors hoped that the space would become the physical and social location of a flourishing revolutionary network, a place where they could organize public forums and assemblies, and hold meetings of *Parti Pris*’s new political club.⁵⁸ At the journal’s public events, leftists from across the city would come to debate, argue, and learn about different initiatives taking place in the city. While the journal’s editors organized public meetings in the hope of reaching the widest possible audience, they also engaged in secret basement discussions with those who had gone underground, organized protests and authored manifestos, and were followed by the police and had their telephones tapped. In the bubbling atmosphere of the 1960s, when many friends and comrades were arrested, when jobs were lost and reputations ruined as a direct result of political activity, the young revolutionaries lived as if radical change of the social system was immanent, and that, with just a little bit more work, the revolution would come.⁵⁹ By the mid-1960s, they had begun laying the groundwork for what would become the first serious attempt to begin building a revolutionary party, the Mouvement de Libération Populaire (MLP).

⁵⁷ "Manifeste, 1964-1965," 9, 15. “nous sommes fascinés et enthousiasmés par l’idée de révolution, parce que nous en sentons la nécessité objective, mais nous n’avons pas les moyens concrets de la faire, et jusqu’ici nous n’avons pas travaillé sérieusement à nous les donner.”

⁵⁸ Ibid.: 17.

⁵⁹ Maheu, *Un parti pris révolutionnaire*, 293-94.

The MLP

While the MLP was the result of the coming together of a variety of different leftist organizations, the two most important groups that merged were the Club Parti Pris and the activists that circulated around *Révolution Québécoise*. *Révolution Québécoise* was founded in 1964 by Pierre Vallières and Charles Gagnon, two individuals who would become iconic figures of the Quebec liberation movement. Vallières, a twenty-eight-year-old journalist who had been born into a working-class family in east Montreal, had spent most of his youth growing up in the muddy streets of the shanty-town suburb of Longueuil. Gagnon, for his part, was a twenty-seven year-old teacher who had moved to Montreal in 1960 from Sainte-Cécile-du-Bic, a small town east of Quebec City. The two writers, who met while working with the liberal political journal *Cité libre* in the early 1960s, shared a burning desire to ameliorate the cultural and material degradation which surrounded them. In 1965, after Vallières had been fired from his editorial position at *Cité libre*, he, along with Gagnon and a few other comrades, founded *Révolution québécoise*, a political journal which placed the struggle for Quebec independence more firmly within a Marxist framework, and which challenged *Parti Pris* from the left. Through their analyses in *Révolution québécoise*, Vallières and Gagnon resituated ideas of Quebec decolonization through their overwhelming emphasis on American economic imperialism, a move which would have important consequences for the development of the movement.

In 1965, when *Révolution québécoise* joined with the club *Parti Pris* and a few other organizations to form the MLP, an important transformation of the movement had begun to occur. The MLP – for which Vallières became the first employee – worked to train and educate activists with the goal of creating a revolutionary party.

And its manifesto, published in the September 1965 edition of *Parti Pris*, laid the foundations for radical politics in the province for years to come. The document provides nuance and depth to earlier and more simplistic formulations of Quebec decolonization. It rejects, for example, the idea that francophone Quebecers formed an 'ethnic class': "Between the resident of Outremont and that of Saint-Henri, even if both are ethnically francophone Quebecers, there are still differences of which each is well-aware."⁶⁰ And the manifesto not only outlines the changes of Quebec's class structure as a result of the Quiet Revolution, but it also grapples with the deeply North American nature of Quebec's unique situation of being an industrialized colony. Because the Quebec economy was controlled by English-Canadian and American capital, the province was an underdeveloped region of North America. American interests were imposed on Quebec through the intermediary of the colonial government in Ottawa and, although participating to a certain degree in North American prosperity, Quebec workers were exploited as consumers, excluded from political and economic power, and culturally degraded. If the Quiet Revolution witnessed the rise of a new bourgeoisie in Quebec, the manifesto argued, independence would now need to be won not through a tactical alliance with this bourgeoisie, but through the efforts of the working class.⁶¹

The MLP offices were situated on Carré Saint-Louis in the centre of Montreal. The organization planned to support workers' struggles and hoped to implant itself in working class neighbourhoods.⁶² Yet just as the MLP seemed to be getting off the ground, attracting a couple hundred members, it broke apart into differing factions,

⁶⁰ Le Mouvement de Libération Populaire et la revue *Parti Pris*, "Manifeste 1965-1966," *Parti Pris* 3, no. 1-2 (août-septembre 1965): 7. "Entre l'habitant d'Outremont et celui de Saint-Henri, même s'ils sont tous deux membres de l'ethnie québécoise-française, il y a tout de même des différences, dont eux-mêmes sont bien conscients."

⁶¹ *Ibid.*: 2-41.

⁶² The MLP's activities are chronicled in the organization's publication *Le Militant*.

effectively thwarting the plans of creating a unified and coherent movement. Vallières, the movement's full-time employee, was partly responsible for its demise; while working for the organization, he had begun working clandestinely to form the basis of a new formation of the FLQ.⁶³ Some members followed Vallières into the FLQ, while others either joined the RIN in the hope of pulling the party further to the left. The rest turned half-heartedly to the marginal Parti Socialiste du Québec, a party which would itself soon no longer exist.⁶⁴ Although the attempt to form one unified party advocating Quebec decolonization had failed, the analysis of Quebec society put forth and popularized by the MLP manifesto would shape radical politics in Quebec until at least the end of the decade.

The Possibilities and Limitations of Decolonization

Throughout the 1960s, debates raged about whether Quebec needed to achieve independence before proceeding to build socialism, or whether independence and socialism needed be achieved through the same process. Some felt that a short-term tactical alliance with the French-Canadian bourgeoisie could spur the independence movement, while others felt that any such alliance would compromise the entire project. Activists were divided on whether it was necessary to build a party – and once again split as to whether the party should be Leninist or social democratic – or whether the masses needed to spontaneously take control of all social institutions. Yet, despite all of these divisions and long-standing arguments, radical francophone intellectuals in Montreal had much in common. Despite differing on strategy, all

⁶³ For more details, see Jean-Marc Pottle, "Note de lecture: Charles Gagnon, *Feu sur l'Amérique*," *Bulletin d'histoire politique* 15, no. 3 (printemps 2007): 311-18.

⁶⁴ Interview with Jean-Marc Pottle, 30 October 2006, Montreal.

agreed that Quebec was a colonized society and that francophone Quebecers needed to take it upon themselves to develop an autonomous voice of resistance.

One overriding concern informs the entire drive to decolonization: the demand to become the active subjects rather than the passive objects of history. In the late 1950s, Albert Memmi had persuasively argued that one of the most devastating effects of colonization was to remove the colonized from history, to strip them of their ability to play “any free role in either war or peace,” and to deny them “all cultural and social responsibility.”⁶⁵ For the colonized, “[p]lanning and building his future are forbidden.”⁶⁶ In the 1960s, people the world over were developing autonomous voices of resistance and asserting their rights to be the active creators of the world in which they lived. Jean-Paul Sartre famously observed that in the past Europeans made history, but now history “is being made of us.”⁶⁷ The struggle was therefore not conceived of as an attempt to go back to a previous ‘age of glory’ before colonization, to turn back the forces of modernity. Rather, activists and intellectuals worked to construct a counter-modernity, an alternative society in which citizens would be able to grasp and control the forces which shaped their lives.

Authors began arguing that citizens needed to rise up and take control of the city in which they were living. When discussing the alienating nature of Montreal, Luc Perrier argued that it was “up to us to impose our tastes, our preferences, and our personality.” And it was up to the city’s citizens to transform it, to reorient it, and to humanize it.⁶⁸ Yves Préfontaine wrote that “I think that we can, that we have to

⁶⁵ Albert Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, trans. Howard Greenfeld (Boston: Beacon Press, 1967), 91.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 102.

⁶⁷ Jean-Paul Sartre, preface to Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (New York: Grove Press, 1963), 27.

⁶⁸ Luc Perrier, “Connaissance d’une ville,” *Liberté* 5, no. 4 (Juillet-Août 1963): 341. “nous de lui imposer nos goûts, nos préférences, notre personnalité.”

reinvent the city.”⁶⁹ And this drive for responsibility and control spread outwards to society as a whole. Since the Conquest of 1759, André d’Allemagne maintained, French Canadians had stopped being subjects in their own history. But now things had changed, the population was rising up and demanding its rights; “the colonized were no longer demanding favours but, rather, responsibility and therefore power.” Once Quebec had been liberated from the oppression of colonialism, it would become “a blank page upon which everything is yet to be – and on which everything can be – written.”⁷⁰ Charles Gagnon wrote in 1966 that the time when French-speaking Quebecers would ask others to take care of them was over; from now on, he argued, it would be up to them to take care of themselves.⁷¹ And in the pages of *Parti Pris* Paul Chamberland wrote one of the most articulate statements of the existential responsibility and drive of the colonized:

decolonization has never been a movement based upon reason: it is the result of a decision, which is at first unsubstantiated and then becomes justified through analysis. [The person who makes history] makes it in opposition to the supposedly objective evidence, which actually is only the falsely universal truths and values of the oppressor. The person who makes history – the proletarian, the Black, the Algerian, the South American – only believes the evidence inherent to his own project: he actively perceives, as if contained within his very being, the new possibilities heralding the dislocation and rearrangement of current realities. It is he who becomes the active force, the centre and heart of history. This force overcomes all intellectual understandings of power relationships.⁷²

⁶⁹ Yves Préfontaine "L'équipe de LIBERTÉ devant Montréal: (essai de situation)," *Liberté* 5, no. 4 (Juillet-Août 1963): 296. "je pense qu'on peut, qu'il faut réinventer la ville."

⁷⁰ d'Allemagne, *Le colonialisme au Québec*, 129, 37, 75. "le colonisé ne revendique plus des 'bienfaits' mais des responsabilités, donc des pouvoirs"; "une page blanc sur laquelle tout est à écrire et tout peut être écrit."

⁷¹ André Jacques (Charles Gagnon), "La révolution, c'est une entreprise de construction" *La Cognée* 56 (1 avril 1966), reproduced in *FLQ: un projet révolutionnaire*, 100.

⁷² Paul Chamberland, "De la damnation à la liberté," *Parti Pris*, no. 9-10-11 (été 1964): 55. "la décolonisation n'a jamais été un mouvement fondé sur des raisons analytiques: elle fut le résultat d'une décision globale, d'abord obscure puis affermie par le recours à l'analyse... il fait plus ou moins l'histoire contre les évidences prétendues objectives, qui ne sont que les vérités et les valeurs faussement universalisées du dominateur. Celui qui fait l'histoire - le prolétaire, ou le noir, l'algérien, le sud-américain - obéit à une évidence qui ne fait qu'un avec son projet: il discerne activement, comme impliqués par son être même, les possibles nouveaux qui appellent le bouleversement et le réarrangement des réalités présentes. C'est lui qui devient le principe dynamique, le centre vivant et le foyer totalisant de l'histoire. Cette dynamique surborde toute évaluation savante des rapports de force."

Chamberland was far from being alone in articulating existentialist ideals. A few years later, Vallières discussed how he came to understand that truth and freedom did not stand “outside our history, outside our past, present, and future.” “I was coming to understand,” he continued, “that they are born, live, and die with us; that we affirm their reality and power through action, through practice, through continual transformation of the world.” To agree to live, therefore, was to agree to “take responsibility for a collective history that is being made and at the same time always remains to be made, that is ceaselessly made, unmade, and remade, according to our knowledge and abilities, to our struggles, passions, hopes, interests, needs, and choices.” Society therefore needed to be organized in such a way that it would enhance freedom, so that workers could have “control over economic and social policy.”⁷³ The future would be open, everything could be created, and history could be written anew.

And yet, despite the humanistic and existential desire to deconstruct systems of domination, to empower the marginalized and forge a new ethic of human solidarity, the left’s language of democratic participation remained profoundly circumscribed. Because the new subject of history was almost universally, and by definition, male, the new language of dissent had the paradoxical effect of constructing new boundaries of inclusion and exclusion. By portraying revolution as a hyper-masculine activity, much of the new leftist literature served to undermine the very ideals of universal emancipation that they had played such an important role in creating. Until the birth of the women’s liberation movement at the end of the 1960s, liberation was gendered male. In the very first issue of *Parti Pris*, Pierre

⁷³ Vallières, *White Niggers of America*, 200, 19.

Maheu argued that Quebec liberation was necessary so that Quebecers could become true men and positively assume their liberty.⁷⁴ And through the journal's intellectual work, Maheu argued, it would be possible to create the conditions which would permit the establishment of "authentic relations between men."⁷⁵ Maheu's use of highly gendered metaphors not only excluded women from any active role in the movement, but also portrayed them as inactive figures upon which male liberation would depend.⁷⁶

Maheu was far from alone. Members of the early FLQ argued that Quebecers needed to continue "the struggle of our fathers,"⁷⁷ and wrote that only a revolutionary could become "a whole man, a model citizen."⁷⁸ Rather than giving women an autonomous voice, the avant-garde writers of *Liberté*, in a roundtable about Montreal, joked that the good looks of Montreal women were what distinguished the city from others.⁷⁹ Pierre Vallières spoke of the necessity of learning "the pride of being men,"⁸⁰ and saw his mother as nearly entirely responsible for the repression of his childhood which stifled his hopes and dreams.⁸¹ True, a few references to the liberation of women found their way into *Parti Pris*,⁸² but the general tendency was to

⁷⁴ Maheu, "De la révolte à la révolution," 12.

⁷⁵ Ibid.: 15. "relations authentiques entre les hommes."

⁷⁶ See, for example, Pierre Maheu, "L'œdipe colonial," *Parti Pris*, no. 9-10-11 (été 1964): 29. Liberation, he wrote, "sera du même coup faire de la femme l'amante et l'épouse et nous libérer de la Mère en surgissant à nouveau de son sein, tout armés pour un nouveau combat, un nouvel affrontement: celui de l'homme libre qui s'attaque de plein front à des ennemis concrets, et non à un fantôme de Père. Ce sera du même coup instaurer la praxis révolutionnaire."

⁷⁷ "La lutte pour la libération nationale est commencée" *La Cognée* (October 1963). Reproduced in *FLQ: un projet révolutionnaire*, 21. "la lutte de nos pères"

⁷⁸ Paul Lemoyne, "Renforçons l'unité de la lutte de libération nationale," *La Cognée*, no. 3 (décembre 1963): 4. "un homme complet, le citoyen-modèle."

⁷⁹ "L'équipe de LIBERTÉ devant Montréal: (essai de situation)," 288.

⁸⁰ Vallières, *White Niggers of America*, 20.

⁸¹ "How I wish my mother had been a woman with some courage and at least as much hope as my father," Vallières wrote. And, later on, he reflected that "my mother wanted to force me back into the passivity, docility, resignation, and humiliation which were precisely what I wanted to escape from once and for all." Ibid., 83, 129.

⁸² Interestingly, the most notable discussion about women's liberation was written by Maheu himself. "La civilisation de demain," he argued, "si elle est laïque, suppose par exemple la libération de la femme." Maheu, "Laïcité 1966," 71.

exclude them symbolically and metaphorically from the movement. In an important study, Stéphanie Lanthier argues that, in the radical literature of the 1960s, women are not only excluded from any active roles, but that male writers constructed their models of national liberation against the submission and exclusion of women. Lanthier found that when women are not symbolically representing either Quebec or anglophone culture, they are absent from all historical analysis.⁸³ Malcolm Reid makes a similar point in his study of the *Parti Pris* group. "In the *parti pris* world," he argues, "woman remains the beloved, the symbol of the land, the one the revolutionary does not neglect to love well."⁸⁴

If the Quebec decolonization movement built upon hyper-masculine conceptions of the ideal revolutionary agent, thereby excluding women from playing any active political role, it also contained within it other equally profound shortcomings.⁸⁵ Until the late 1960s, the movement, in all of its various manifestations, remained remarkably silent on one crucially important issue (and one which would plague Quebec nationalism from the 1970s through to today). Francophone Quebecers, of course, were themselves White settler colonists who had pushed Aboriginals to the margins of Quebec society and relegated them to subordinate status. A natural starting point for anti-colonial analysis in Quebec, one

⁸³ Stéphanie Lanthier, "L'impossible réciprocité des rapports politique entre le nationalisme radical et le féminisme radical au Québec 1961-1972" (M.A., Université de Sherbrooke, 1998), 117, résumé. Of the many examples that could be cited in support of Lanthier's thesis, see the announcement of the publication of 'Papa Boss' by Jacques Ferron: "Le véritable état du Québec depuis 200 ans apparaît à mon avis dans ce thème de la femme fourrée sous de fausses représentations. Ainsi, le Québec croit-il constituer un couple normalement constitué avec Ottawa, alors qu'il n'est au fond que l'enculé de la farce, le bardache de l'histoire, l'être dont le sexe lui échappe au moment où il croit enfin pouvoir aimer ou être aimé." Gérald Godin, "'Papa boss', de Jacques Ferron," *Parti Pris* 3, no. 9 (avril 1966).

⁸⁴ Reid, *The Shouting Signpainters*, 94.

⁸⁵ It should be remembered, of course, that all decolonization movements lived with their own inner ambiguities. According to Arif Dirlik, "the historical relationship between colonialism and anti-colonial nationalism presents a major problem for the concept of colonialism: if there was no nation to begin with, how is it possible to speak of colonialism, except in a sense imagined retroactively, *after* a national consciousness had come into existence in response to colonialism?" Arif Dirlik, "Rethinking Colonialism: Globalization, Postcolonialism, and the Nation," *Interventions* 4, no. 3 (2002): 436-37.

would have thought, would have been a critical reflection upon Quebec's own process of colonization.

Yet Aboriginals are, with a few rare exceptions, almost completely absent from the early writing about Quebec decolonization. In order to imagine themselves as the indigenous population, Quebec liberationists needed to ignore the existence, both past and present, of the Aboriginal communities in Quebec.⁸⁶ True, some radical activists looked to Quebec's Aboriginal past with romantic visions of the noble savage.⁸⁷ André Major claimed Indian ancestry,⁸⁸ and Raoul Roy felt that francophone Quebecers were the legitimate natives because of the *métissage* in the colony's past.⁸⁹ But in nearly all of the historical portraits drawn of Quebec's past, the perspectives, and often even the existence, of Native communities were systematically ignored. Pierre Vallières, for example, barely mentions Natives in his analysis of Quebec history, and when they do appear, they do so as entities out of a distant past, divorced from any relation to the present.⁹⁰ The absence of Natives in the imagination of the theorists of Quebec decolonization was so total that Jacques

⁸⁶ *Parti Pris* did publish one substantial article on the discrimination against the Weymontaching in the Mauricie in 1967. Camil Guy, "Les indiens du québec: désagrégation culturelle et prolétarianisation," *Parti Pris* 4, no. 9-10-11-12 (mai-août 1967): 165-80.

⁸⁷ See, for example, Jacques Perron, "Ce bordel de pays: d'un amour inquiétant," *Parti Pris* 2, no. 7 (mars 1965): 60.

⁸⁸ Reid, *The Shouting Signpainters*, 106.

⁸⁹ Although Roy's interpretation was certainly idiosyncratic, it is interesting that, unlike many other decolonization thinkers, he realized that the paradox of the colonized status of francophone Quebecers could not be ignored. According to Roy, "jamais les Français, et encore moins les Canadiens français, n'ont 'volé' ce pays aux Indiens. Encore moins les Canadiens français parce que, de par leur ascendance partiellement indienne, ils sont ici depuis toujours et sont ainsi les héritiers des premiers occupants de ce sol canadien, en plus d'en être les défricheurs. Et les Indiens d'aujourd'hui, à part ceux qui ont été enfermés dans les réserves par les Anglo-Saxons, on peut dire que ce sont les Canadiens français." Le Marabout (Raoul Roy), "Indépendantistes victimes de falsifications historiques," *La Revue Socialiste*, no. 7 (hiver 1963-1964): 58.

⁹⁰ When describing the experience of French settlers, the only Natives that Vallières mentions are Iroquois guerrillas. Vallières, *White Niggers of America*, 24. Vallières also wrote that "le FLQ n'est pas le premier à choisir la guerre de guérillas comme stratégie. À l'époque de l'impérialisme français, au XVII^e siècle, les Iroquois et d'autres 'nations' indiennes (Les Cinq Nations) ont, pendant des années, pratiqué la guerre de guérillas." And he stated that it was necessary "que la métropole envoie à la colonies les moyens militaires d'exterminer les Cinq Nations pour que cessent ces guérillas.. en même temps que les guérilleros et les nations indiennes elles-mêmes." Mathieu Hébert (Pierre Vallières), "Gagner l'appui des masses" *L'Avant-garde* (no. 4, juin 1966). Reproduced in *FLQ: un projet révolutionnaire*, 135.

Godbout could joke at the thought that Quebecers could possibly be thought of as exploiters: “of who?” he asked, “the Eskimos?”⁹¹ Throughout the early to mid 1960s, virtually all of Montreal’s radical francophone writers, confined in Manichean conceptions of Quebec society, promoted decolonization while ironically ignoring the possibility that the various Aboriginal populations in Quebec could have their own claims of colonization, their own grievances, and would eventually develop their own terms of resistance.⁹²

The Quebec decolonization movement contained many contradictions and committed many errors. Although its vision of freedom was limited, however, its democratic language remained open and flexible. When many different groups began emerging in the late 1960s – women’s liberationists and racial minorities locally, and Red Power groups across the continent – radical francophone activists would be forced to re-examine their previously held conceptions of themselves and their movement. Unlike earlier radical portrayals of Quebec history, Léandre Bergeron’s 1970 *Petit manuel d’histoire du Québec* explores the complexities and multi-layered nature of colonization in Quebec, and he discusses the marginalization of Native populations in the province’s past. And unlike his own *Nègres blancs d’Amérique*, Vallières’s 1971 *L’urgence de choisir* makes considerable room for women and women’s liberation. In the early to mid 1960s, these openings had not yet appeared, but many radical intellectuals and activists were experimenting with new ways of living and thinking.

By the late 1960s and early 1970s, social forces demanding greater democratization of social structures – that now included many new segments of the

⁹¹ Jacques Godbout, “La haine,” *Parti Pris* 2, no. 3 (novembre 1964): 21. “de qui? des esquimos?”

⁹² For a brief but illuminating discussion about Aboriginal activism leading up to Montreal’s Expo ’67, see Richard Gordon Kicksee, “‘Scaled down to size’: contested Liberal commonsense and the negotiation of ‘Indian participation’ in the Canadian Centennial celebrations and Expo ’67, 1963-1967” (M.A., Queen’s University, 1995).

population – were propelled by an unparalleled momentum. Thousands of artists, intellectuals, union members and political activists worked to define sophisticated critiques of the liberal capitalist order, to place their struggles within the larger trajectories of worldwide movements, and to develop a new humanism that, they hoped, would open the future to a full range of democratic possibilities. Some saw this ‘agitation’ as the result of the anxieties of youth, or as the predictable consequence of increased social permissiveness. Others, pointing to the growing wave of international dissent, blamed ‘foreign agitators.’ In reality, the growing unrest in Montreal was the result of a movement which had begun years earlier in the cafés and radical journals of the early to mid 1960s. This movement was forged through an interaction between international and local developments, between a transnational language of dissent and the specific conditions which prevailed in the city itself. And it is to this dual nature of the movement – the interrelated nature of its local and its international dimensions – that we now turn.

CHAPTER FOUR:

Streets, Cafés, and the Urban Texture of Revolt

Quebec can only exist, as a political, economic, social, and cultural entity, if it is composed of and for those who decide to become Québécois, who consent to this we... Race and religion, for example, are matters of secondary importance. I would say the same thing about linguistic origin: francophones, anglophones, italophones, germanophones, aphones, all have an inalienable right to both desire and to decide to be Québécois. I don't believe my thinking is entirely utopian: Quebec, this envisaged Quebec, is a real possibility, as long as we don't once again become confined to the ghetto of nationalism.

. -Jacques Brault, "Un pays à mettre au monde," *Parti Pris* 2, no. 10-11 (juin-juillet 1965): 16.

Revolution is, above all, a humanism

-Pierre Vallières, "Indépendance et révolution" (not published), août-novembre, 1967 (Prison de Montréal), 142. "la révolution est avant tout un humanisme."

Neither accident nor coincidence dictated that Montreal become the scene of one of the most profound, far-reaching, and lasting political revolts in North America during the 1960s. For the rebellion emerged from the very fabric of the city. One of the reasons why both the ambiguity and the unique nature of Quebec's situation have been left unexamined is because, with the possible exception of Éric Bédard,¹ the importance of Montreal as the site of the vast majority of political confrontations during the period has not been adequately theorized. The city was not only the location of an overwhelming amount of political activity, but it also acted as a physical and symbolic incarnation of the cultural and economic exploitation that was to be resisted and overturned. In the lived and imagined geographies of everyday life, the city, divided into two distinct, opposed, and contrasting sections, became a physical manifestation of the colonial relationship which Montreal's radical thinkers attempted to overturn. For Michel van Schendel, "Montreal makes us think of the luxurious cities of South America, North and Sub-Saharan Africa – Rio de Janeiro, Tangiers, Casablanca, Dakar."² With the largely French-speaking working class living in the neighbourhoods to the east, and the English-speaking middle and upper classes living in the high-scale neighbourhoods to the west, radical francophone theorists began to map linguistic and ethnic identity onto social class, seeing Montreal as a classic colonial city.

Don Mitchell argues that conflicts over social justice are often also conflicts over space and geography.³ As Montreal's francophone majority was, to a large extent, spatially confined to particular neighbourhoods, any counterhegemonic

¹ Éric Bédard, *Chronique d'une insurrection appréhendée* (Sillery: Septentrion, 1998).

² Michel Van Schendel, "La maladie infantile du québec," *Parti Pris*, no. 6 (mars 1964): 39. "Montréal fait penser aux luxueuses grandes villes d'Amérique du Sud, d'Afrique du Nord, ou d'Afrique noir – Rio-de-Janeiro, Tanger, Casablanca, Dakar."

³ Don Mitchell, *The Right to the City: Social Justice and the Fight for Public Space* (New York: The Guilford Press, 2003), 81. The term, of course, is taken from Henri Lefebvre.

movement would therefore need to challenge dominant control over space. Yet just as the theorists of national liberation were drawing portraits of Montreal as city of ethnic and linguistic absolutes, these strict divisions were continually being disrupted by the complexities of the cultural interactions of daily life. Montreal is a complicated and multi-faceted city, and the histories of its many different groups and individuals intersect and overlap. If many radicals felt alienated by the segregated nature of the city, they also constructed alternative spaces where passionate debate and artistic creativity could thrive. And in these avant-garde cafés and meeting places leftists of all different political tendencies, and of all different linguistic and ethnic backgrounds, interacted and learned from one another, profoundly shaping the development of political thought in the city. Rather than being separate and homogeneous, the meeting places and cafés were porous and mixed, necessarily hybrid and full of arguments, debates, and disagreements. Out of these complex and sometimes acrimonious interactions emerged a common language of dissent, a language premised on shared sensibilities, terms of reference, and common understandings of key problems which needed to be addressed.

In this chapter I will attempt to explore the importance of Montreal as the key site in which the main ideas of Quebec decolonization were forged. After looking at the ways in which the spatial divisions of power shaped mental geographies of the city, helping to reinforce the thesis that Quebec formed a colonized society, I will then proceed to explore the fault lines of those very boundaries, the spaces of interaction and cultural mixing, and the unique ways in which theoretical and cultural influences merged. The ideas of the Quebec liberation movement, ideas which would have a dramatic impact on the political climate in the entire country, were deeply marked by the fact that their primary authors were shaped by their experiences in the cafés and

on the streets of Montreal. I will argue that, out of the culturally mixed world of Montreal's avant-garde cafés and city streets, by the mid-1960s a new conception of humanity and solidarity began to take hold.

Alienation, Resistance, and the City

If, by the late 1960s, anti-imperialism was so powerfully influencing such a vast array of individuals, and colouring so many different strands of ideology, it is at least partly because anti-imperialist ideas helped to give meaning to the daily lives of those living in Montreal. In *The Wretched of the Earth* Fanon described in vivid detail the spatial confinement of the colonized, and the way in which the colonial city was divided into compartments. The zones of the colonizer and of the colonized, he argued, “are opposed, but not in the service of a higher unity.” If the colonizers live in brightly lit and spacious luxury, the colonized are confined to the dark and dingy quarters, living under the conditions of overcrowding and filth.⁴ Sekyi-Otu writes that, for Fanon, the “peculiarity of the colonial condition of being-in-space is that whatever the relative material size of the space assigned to the subjugated, the colonized must remain absolutely fixed in this space, separated by an unbridgeable chasm from the ‘others,’ compelled to renounce the ‘self,’ the individuality which is normally validated in the body’s spatial strategies.”⁵ In the United States, it did not take long for Black Americans to realize the similarities between their inner city ghettos and the colonial city. African Americans, many argued, were spatially entrapped, and their *place* had become fixed.⁶ Young francophone radicals also

⁴ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (New York: Grove Press, 1963), 38-40.

⁵ Ato Sekyi-Otu, *Fanon's Dialectic of Experience* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), 83.

⁶ James Tyner, *The Geography of Malcolm X: Black Radicalism and the Remaking of American Space* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 65, 81.

began to see their situation as one of spatial entrapment, and the alienation of city life in Montreal stoked the fires which pushed them towards the creation of a holistic program of social change.

In the politically charged environment of the 1960s, Montreal became a metaphor for the Quebec nation, as the place where relations of domination stood out in sharp relief. English-speaking Westmount – one of the wealthiest and most ostentatious neighbourhoods in all of Canada, towered above the poverty-stricken and French-speaking Saint-Henri. Every day, young francophones walked in the streets of downtown Montreal, a city in which francophones comprised two thirds of the population, knowing that the public language, the language of prestige for most downtown establishments, was English. Poet Gaston Miron wrote movingly about cultural humiliation faced by francophones in Montreal, and about the redemption he found in identifying himself with the marginalized. In the finale of his *Monologues de l'aliénation délirante*, Miron wrote of the feeling of pain and humiliation when walking through Montreal's streets:

Around me is the opulent city,
mighty St. Catherine, the street that charges
through an Arabian Night of neon light
while I, I live in a prison brain
stripped of my poetry, my language, and my homeland
askew and adrift from my place of belonging
I rummage my memory and search my flesh
for the cries that will render a nationless reality.

I go down to the cringing part of town
where the air they breathe is pestilential
and find here my truth, my life constructed
off the scrap and junk of History – and this I claim, this I assume
and drift among its swirl of dead-end streets
refusing a personal salvation; a deserter,
identifying myself as one of the humiliated
and wanting men to know what I have known.⁷

⁷ This translation appears in Malcolm Reid, *The Shouting Signpainters: A Literary and Political Account of Quebec Revolutionary Nationalism* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Limited, 1972), 183-84.

If one of the central driving ideas of the 1960s was the necessity to gain democratic control over one's own society, nothing exhibited the lack of French-Canadian power and control like the physical geography of Montreal. Walking through the downtown streets, statues of British royalty and conquering British generals stared down upon you. As Jacques Trudel wrote in 1964, one needs to be either a hypocrite or deeply colonized to state that "rage does not overcome us as we walk through the streets of Montreal."⁸ Montreal was the city in Quebec in which the colonial contradictions were greatest, and where colonial relationships were inscribed on the very landscape of the city. For many intellectuals and activists coming to Montreal from other parts of Quebec, it was in Montreal where systems of exploitation were put into sharp focus. In 1960, Charles Gagnon, a young student who would go on to become one of the most well-known advocates of Quebec liberation, moved from the Bic – a small town east of Quebec City – to Côte-des-Neiges, a region close to the campus of the Université de Montréal. At first, the wealth of the city's residents shocked Gagnon, but, once he left the mountain and travelled down into the French-speaking working class districts, he found the familiar poverty and cultural deprivation that he had known growing up. Through this contact with the city, its poverty, and the suffering of its citizens, Gagnon decided to actively join the political struggle.⁹ Pierre Vallières, for his part, maintained that his *Nègres blancs d'Amérique* was not "the product of an individual but of a milieu." And that milieu, he continued, "is contemporary Quebec, but more especially Montreal and the

⁸ Gaëtan Tremblay, "Éditorial le f.l.q. et nous," *Parti Pris* 4, no. 3-4 (novembre-décembre 1966): 3. "que la rage ne nous prend pas lorsque nous parcourons les rues de Montréal."

⁹ Charles Gagnon, "Je suis né au Bic..." part of which was published in *Magazine Maclean* in July of 1970. Reproduced in *FLQ: un projet révolutionnaire*, 228-232.

metropolitan area.” Someone from the Gaspé, he continued, “would probably have written a quite different book.”¹⁰

For many, growing up in the slums of east-end Montreal provided a lived experience which fostered the development of revolutionary thinking. During the 1960s, writer after writer discussed the great contrast between east and west Montreal. When, during a roundtable discussion on the importance of Montreal hosted by *Liberté*, the journal of Quebec’s literary avant-garde, one of the participants declared his dislike for the west end of Saint-Catherine St., the other participants broke out in applause.¹¹ When Malcolm Reid, an anglophone journalist sympathetic to national liberation, began his book about the literary world of *Parti Pris*, he did so by recounting a walk through the poor east end, reflecting on the ways in which language and class largely coincided in the city’s living patterns. The situation, he argued, was “colonial.”¹² Pierre Maheu argued that it was in Montreal where francophone Quebecers were “most deeply scarred by the effects of domination.” For a young writer like Maheu, it was hard to avoid concluding, like many throughout the 1960s, that ethnic and class divisions coincided, that to speak English and live in the west was almost by definition to be bourgeois. Montreal, he wrote, consisted of two separate cities: the “ville indigène” which sat in the east, and the rich anglophone city to the west.¹³ While anglophones controlled the economy, francophones provided the “cheap labour.” As a direct result of colonial alienation, neither French nor English felt at home in the city – “Montreal always appears as *a city for others*.” The

¹⁰ Pierre Vallières, *White Niggers of America*, trans. Joan Pinkham (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1971), 17-18.

¹¹ “L’équipe de LIBERTÉ devant Montréal: (essai de situation),” *Liberté* 5, no. 4 (Juillet-Août 1963): 277.

¹² Reid, *The Shouting Signpainters*, 20.

¹³ Pierre Maheu, “En guise d’introduction,” *Parti Pris* 2, no. 4 (décembre 1964): 17, 10. “surtout marqué par les effets de la domination.”

solution, of course, was that French should once again become the primary language of the city, as it was already the mother tongue of the majority of its inhabitants.¹⁴

Because of the deep-seated contradictions that the city streets, monuments, and institutions both revealed and reproduced, the city itself became a crucial site where colonial relations were lived on a daily basis, woven into the very fabric of daily life. The city's urban landscape, many believed, was scarred with the political and cultural exploitation of French-speaking Quebeckers, and the city became a symbolic incarnation of the cultural and economic exploitation that was to be resisted and overturned.¹⁵ It should perhaps not be a surprise that many FLQ bombing campaigns were waged against colonial symbols in Montreal, often statues or army barracks, or that many of the major protests that erupted in the late 1960s marched from the east to the west, attempting to reclaim the city for the majority of its citizens. Writer Hubert Acquin even once claimed that he regularly went to the foot of the statue in honour of Horatio Nelson – standing tall in the centre of old Montreal – to weep.¹⁶

In a special edition of *Parti Pris* dealing with colonial alienation in Montreal, Jacques Trudel published an article discussing the depersonalization present in the city's urban landscape. For Trudel, the built environment within which an individual lives profoundly marks that individual's imagination, influences his or her actions, and establishes relations that he or she makes with other individuals, and with society in general. The built environment is an "exact mirror of a social milieu, a people, a civilization," and, as such, it reflects "all of the social, economic, technical, geographical, and cultural traits of a society." The built environment therefore acts as "the most tangible expression of the life and personality of that society." In Montreal,

¹⁴ Ibid.: 15, 17-18. "Montréal apparaît toujours comme *la ville des autres*."

¹⁵ For an interesting look at battles over Quebec's symbolic past (although in an earlier period), see Alan Gordon, *Making Public Pasts: The Contested Terrain of Montréal's Public Memories* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's Press, 2001).

¹⁶ "L'équipe de LIBERTÉ devant Montréal: (essai de situation)," 282.

colonization, both in its British and American manifestations, structured the development of urban life. For Trudel, colonization bore the responsibility for the proletarianization of French Canadians, resulting in the spatial confinement of francophones in working-class neighbourhoods. Colonization had played so powerful a role in defining the urban landscape that French Canadians, like other colonized peoples, had lost their ability to define beauty and value on their own terms, and had sought to imitate the values and styles of the colonizer. It was more urgent than even, Trudel maintained, “to reclaim our autonomy and personality.” To do that, of course, it was necessary to attack the roots of the problem, Quebec’s existing social, political, and economic structures.¹⁷

East Montreal symbolized alienation, but it also represented hope and possibility. As Sherry Simon writes, in the late 1960s, to travel east through Montreal was not only a voyage into the working class slums, but it was also “to move in the direction of the future.”¹⁸ Radicals began valorizing the east end, with its colloquial French and working-class housing, while at the same time denouncing the grandeur and arrogance of the west end. For André Major, a young writer who had grown up in the rough east end, no matter where he went in life, he would “always remain the guy from Ontario street.” His soul, he argued, was of the east.¹⁹ The residents of east Montreal spoke in *joual*, or colloquial street French filled with English expressions, faulty syntax, and grammatical mistakes. A whole new generation of literary figures in Quebec began writing in *joual*, a language which expressed their anger and

¹⁷ Jacques Trudel, “Notre environnement urbain: montréal, ville capitaliste et colonisée,” *Parti Pris* 2, no. 4 (décembre 1964): 21-22, 29-31. “le miroir exact d’un milieu social, d’un peuple, d’une civilisation”; “tous les aspects sociaux, économiques, techniques, géographiques et culturels d’une société”; “est l’expression la plus tangible de la vie, de la personnalité de cette société”; “de retrouver vraiment notre autonomie, notre personnalité.”

¹⁸ Sherry Simon, *Translating Montreal: Episodes in the Life of a Divided City* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2006), 28.

¹⁹ André Major, “Un déménagement,” *Parti Pris* 2, no. 4 (décembre 1964): 48-50. “je resterais le gars de la rue Ontario.”

frustration, but which also allowed them, in Simon's words, to "turn its negative condition into one full of hope." Novels such as Jacques Renaud's *Le Cassé* and plays like Michel Tremblay's *Les Belles-soeurs* caused a sensation, turning urban slang into a weapon of liberation.²⁰ Gérard Godin, one of the most ardent defenders of the use of *joual* in literature, wrote that Quebec writers needed to refuse to use proper French, which would merely gloss over the decayed language of the people. It was not proper French which needed to be defended, he argued, but the pride and liberty of French Canadians.²¹ The hope of the future was born out of the alienation of the east.

For leftist writers and thinkers, Montreal became the epicentre of political revolt in Quebec and the crucial site of political confrontation. While sitting in jail in 1967, Pierre Vallières wrote *Indépendance et révolution* – a manuscript which was seized by the police before it could be published – in which he explicitly theorized the importance of concentrating political efforts in Montreal. For Vallières, Montreal was the heart of an exploitative system. But, more importantly, "the class consciousness of workers in the region of Montreal is more developed than that of workers in other areas." In short, it was "in the cities, and in particular in Montreal, where Quebeckers are developing a revolutionary class consciousness." Montreal would be both the spark and the main battlefield of the revolution, and it was in Montreal where the struggle would be either won or lost.²² By the late 1960s, east Montreal and the other

²⁰ Simon, *Translating Montreal: Episodes in the Life of a Divided City*, 29.

²¹ Gérard Godin, "Le joual politique," *Parti Pris* 2, no. 7 (mars 1965): 57, 59. For some, writing in *joual* was a way of escaping their bourgeois origins, which had given them the training to be able to write in proper French. For others, a glorification of *joual* – which was not a language but the absence of language, of the ability to communicate and to think – was an insult to those who lived in misery and cultural deprivation. Charles Gagnon, "Quand le 'joual' se donne des airs," *Révolution Québécoise* 1, no. 6 (février 1965); Gérard Godin, "La folie bilinguale," *Parti Pris* 3, no. 10 (mai 1966): 57.

²² UQAM, Charles Gagnon fonds, 124p-202a/45, Pierre Vallières, "Indépendance et révolution" (not published), août-novembre, 1967 (Prison de Montréal), 183-185, 189. "la conscience de classe des travailleurs de la région de Montréal est plus développée que celle des travailleurs des autres régions";

francophone and working-class sections of the city were perceived to be the sites of a radical consciousness, and consequently as the locations with the greatest insurrectionary potential. As one political pamphlet urged:

Citizens of Pointe Saint-Charles, Saint-Henri, Côte Saint-Paul, east Montreal, Ville Jacques-Cartier, Ville Laflèche, Brossard, Brosseau Station, N.-D.-du-Sacré-Coeur, Sainte-Thérèse, and all other 'French quarters' or working-class suburbs of Montreal, the solution to our many problems does not depend on Lesage, Laporte, or Drapeau.²³

Montreal simultaneously acted, in short, as the site of both oppression and possibility.

Cultural Difference and Montreal's Avant-Garde Cafés

In the first half of the 1960s, it did not seem like much of a stretch to read Montreal into Fanon's vivid portrait of the divided colonial city, and to look to marginalized francophone neighbourhoods as the epicentre of political revolt, as the hope for a liberated future. Yet the divisions that seemed so powerful, so natural, to young francophone writers were continually being undone and disrupted by the lived realities of their daily lives. While Montreal certainly had distinct geographies of power, and while it is undeniable that this power was closely tied to language, to engage in political and cultural activity in the downtown core meant to engage alongside people of different linguistic and ethnic origins. In *A Dying Colonialism*, Fanon argued that, in a struggle for liberation, individuals needed to use political judgement to side with the marginalized, and that this judgement could not be

"dans les villes et plus particulièrement à Montréal que les Québécois développent une conscience de classe révolutionnaire."

²³ UQAM, Charles Gagnon fonds, 124p-202a/49, "Passons à l'action," pamphlet of the FLQ, n.d. "Citoyens de Pointe St-Charles, de St-Henri, de Côte St-Paul, de l'est de Montréal, de Ville Jacques-Cartier, de Ville Laflèche, de Brossard, de Brosseau Station, de N.-D.-du-Sacré-Coeur, de Ste-Thérèse et de tous les autres 'quartiers français' ou banlieues ouvrières de Montréal, la solution à nos nombreux problèmes ne dépend pas de Lesage, de Laporte ou de Drapeau."

deduced from one's ethnic origin.²⁴ Montreal has always been a complicated multicultural city, a city in which political ideas crossed linguistic boundaries. Identity, of course, is neither fixed nor stable, and political attempts to draw *a priori* boundaries between people could not hold in the face of the complicated ways in which citizens were reconstructing their subjective identities and political ideologies in the 1960s. The club Parti Pris had, among many other members, English Canadians as well as people of Portuguese, Belgian, and Vietnamese backgrounds.²⁵ The various formations of the FLQ, moreover, included people from a variety of backgrounds, including at least one English Canadian and an Aboriginal person.²⁶ Even if most political groups in the city remained either predominantly English-speaking or French-speaking in character, all were profoundly influenced by the cultural mixing of Montreal society.

Although Montreal was spatially divided, it was also home to an array of 'alternative spaces,' spaces in which people from a variety of different backgrounds came together to escape stifling conformity and think about alternative ways of living and imagining the future. In the late 1950s, one of the most important cafés for cultural and political dissidents was the Pam Pam, a café started by Hungarian Jews who had fled Hungary in the tragic aftermath of the 1956 uprisings. Their café, the first of its kind in Montreal, became an important 'free space' for political and cultural discussion. Other cafés, clustered around Stanley, Victoria, and Clark Streets, along with jazz nightclubs on Saint-Antoine, and the Librairie Tranquille – a crucially important meeting place for the francophone cultural avant-garde – provided spaces where culturally marginalized anti-conformist thinkers and artists could congregate.

²⁴ Of his many important essays in this collection, see especially "Algeria's European Minority" in Frantz Fanon, *A Dying Colonialism* (New York: Grove Press, 1965), 35-67.

²⁵ Reid, *The Shouting Signpainters*, 226-27.

²⁶ Michael McLoughlin, *Last Stop, Paris: The Assassination of Mario Bachand and the Death of the FLQ* (Toronto: Viking, 1998), 100.

And in the very early 1960s, many of the city's young francophone bohemian poets, artists, and *chansonniers* began meeting at Le Mas, a third-floor loft on Saint-Dominique St., just above Sherbrooke. In the late-night atmosphere, amidst poetry and music and art, discussion topics increasingly drifted towards the new climate of political rebellion. Situated at the crossroads of different worlds – just one street east of Saint-Laurent, the traditional dividing line between the French-speaking east and the English-speaking west, and in a neighbourhood composed largely of European immigrants and working-class francophones – Le Mas maintained a vibrant dynamism. Politicized francophone artists interacted with the jazz musicians who played throughout the night, and two different expressions of rebellion collided. Although Le Mas closed its doors in the spring of 1962, the political and cultural mixing which occurred in the venue would be repeated in the countless cafes, coffee-houses, meetings, and protests which characterized the Sixties in Montreal.²⁷

One of the most of important cafés was La Paloma on Clark Street, just below Sherbrooke St., where young bohemians talked and argued late into the night, sipping espresso and brio. Walking down the steps from the street, the café's patrons entered a different world. Having no windows, the café was cloaked in semi-darkness, and the music of the legendary French iconoclastic singers, Jacques Brel and Léo Ferré, filled the air. Owned and run by a Spaniard named Diego, who was rumoured to have fought in the Spanish Civil War, the café had a mural of a bullfight covering one wall, and a painting of the Costa del Sol on another. The young rebels spoke about Spain and the Spanish Civil War, about Cuba and Algeria, and about Sartre, Camus, and de Beauvoir. The clientele of poets, singers, and artists sat around the café's large refectory tables which, because they sat twenty, forced people to mix, to exchange

²⁷ For a description of Le Mas and its role in the history of Jazz in Montreal, see John Gilmore, *Swinging in Paradise: The Story of Jazz in Montréal* (Montréal: Véhicule Press, 1988), 209-13.

ideas and thoughts about the world. In the café, young Montrealers experimented with alternative lifestyles, attempting to find new ways of living. Young women – in direct defiance of the religiously dominated culture which still prevailed in Quebec – would spontaneously stand up to announce that they were going to lose their virginity.²⁸ It was a space which represented free thought in the face of a repressive world, and which, although having a clientele which included anglophones, remained a French-speaking venue.²⁹ In La Paloma, and other places like it, new ideas, theories, and knowledge were being generated.

By the mid-1960s, two venues – the Swiss Hut and the Asociación Española, both situated on Sherbrooke St. close to Bleury – had become the dominant radical cafés. And they were frequented by all of the various oppositional currents in Montreal, both anglophone and francophone, anarchist and communist, pacifist and violently revolutionary. For francophone radicals who had been confined to the eastern part of the city, going to the Swiss Hut and the Asociación Española was a symbolic burst westward, bringing them into contact with a whole array of radicals of all stripes. Once there, they would talk for hours, argue, debate, and exchange ideas and strategies as well as contacts and practical information. Dark and dingy and smelling of beer, the Swiss Hut had walls made of varnished boards, and masonite tables. Its clientele consisted of a strange mix of both middle-aged regulars and young bohemian radicals. The Asociación Española sat on the other side of the street and, with its red-and-white tablecloths and lively flamenco performances, was a favourite club of Spanish immigrants.³⁰ In the second half of the 1960s, the Asociación Española became an important site for innovations in Montreal jazz. A

²⁸ Carole de Vault with William Johnson, *The Informer: Confessions of an Ex-Terrorist* (Toronto: Fleet Books, 1982), 35-40.

²⁹ Interview with Jean-Marc Pottle, 30th October 2006, Montréal.

³⁰ Reid, *The Shouting Signpainters*, 40-41.

new style of jazz – one which did not have a set program, and which gave individual musicians the freedom to use music to express their innermost emotions – gained ground in the United States in the late 1950s and the early 1960s. And this ‘free jazz,’ as it came to be known, acted as a musical expression of the mixed feelings of anger, frustration, and the possibilities of liberation which were taking hold in Black communities across America. It was not until the second half of the 1960s that local musicians began experimenting with ‘free jazz.’ When they did so, it was politicized French Canadians who took the lead.³¹

The young francophone musicians who went on to form *Jazz libre* were first exposed to free jazz at The Barrel café, a café in which visiting American jazz musicians played regularly. Immersed in the world of the Montreal left and attracted by the politics of the new music, the young musicians decided to form a band and live communally in east Montreal, seeing their group as both a political and musical experiment. Like the political theorists of the period, they drew similarities between the plight of francophone Quebecers and that of American Blacks, and they attempted to forge a politics based on collective psychological liberation. *Jazz libre* began playing between sets of flamenco music at the Asociación, improvising on stage and debating among themselves and the audience afterwards about what had been produced.³² The group’s appropriation and adaptation of a musical form of resistance was just one example of the cultural mixing in Montreal’s cafés and meeting places. The Asociación was also frequented by an important clientele of

³¹ Gilmore, *Swinging in Paradise*, 235-36.

³² *Jazz Libre* became well-known throughout radical circles in Montreal. The group played, for example, at a major concert organized in support of Pierre Vallières, “Songs and Poets of the Resistance.” In the early 1970s, the group formed ‘Le Petit Québec,’ a political and artistic commune equipped with its own printing press. After their barn was burnt to the ground by RCMP agents, *Jazz libre* opened a coffee house in old Montreal. In the coffee shop hung a picture of FLQ member Paul Rose, and at the end of their performances they would play ‘the internationale.’ Ibid., 245-56; Reid, *The Shouting Signpainters*, 287-88.

Spanish anarchists who had come to Montreal after the Spanish Civil War, by members of the francophone left, and by a variety of anglophone radicals (including increasingly radicalized students at nearby McGill). The venues were interactive, the patrons full of admiration and hostility for each other, with each one trying to convince others of the greater validity of his or her particular political project. It was an atmosphere in which culture and politics mixed, language changed freely, and the world seemed to be opening up to the dreams of the young. Out of these late-night conversations – and the revolutionary journals which proliferated – a common vocabulary of dissent was slowly emerging.

‘*Action* is the final unifier’: Place and Montreal’s Anglo Left

Many of the young radicals gravitating to avant-garde cafés were not only English-speaking, they were also people who emerged from an English-speaking milieu which was, in a cultural and material sense, far-removed from the daily realities of francophone Quebec. Impatient with the electoral system and living under the crushing weight of the Cold War, many began looking with increasing optimism and urgency to the anti-nuclear movement and its Montreal-based publication *Our Generation Against Nuclear War* (later just *Our Generation*). But, as the decade progressed, they could not escape the reality of their position as anglophones living at the heart of Quebec, surrounded by a population which was becoming increasingly militant in demanding the decolonization of Quebec. By frequenting cafés and reading radical francophone literature, English-speaking activists were profoundly influenced by the intellectual and political events taking place all around them, and this influence began to be recorded in the pages of *Our Generation*. All throughout the 1960s, the journal had acted as an important pole of radical thought in Montreal,

but it increasingly became an important site of translation, a place where English-speaking radicals at home and abroad could learn of developments taking place in Quebec. Briefly exploring its development and its ideological trajectory will demonstrate the complicated mixing of political traditions in city, and will help to highlight the impossibility of drawing a Manichean division between anglophone and francophone political organizations.

Although *Our Generation*'s content in the early 1960s rarely reflected upon Quebec society, the journal's editors were profoundly marked by living in Montreal. The legendary union organizer Michel Chartrand, for example, operated a printing press and acted as the printer for the journal's first issues. And both he and his wife, Simone Monet-Chartrand, had been involved in various aspects of the peace movement and joined the *Mouvement pour le désarmement nucléaire* (MND) when it was founded at McGill in November 1962.³³ Unlike most peace activists in other parts of the country, the journal's editors were well-versed in both French existentialism – especially Sartre, Camus, and de Beauvoir – and in the anti-colonial literature emerging from the Third World. Throughout the early 1960s the writers and activists in the anti-nuclear movement read the work of francophone radicals and began opening up to new interpretations of Quebec society. In their search for an anti-militarist tradition in Canada, for example, they began to realize the long French-Canadian tradition of resistance to military conscription.³⁴

³³ As Simone Monet-Chartrand wrote, "Depuis la déclaration de la Deuxième Guerre mondiale, en 1939, jusqu'à la deuxième Conférence des femmes pour la paix, en 1967, mon journal intime et ma correspondance me permettent de retracer le contexte qui a donné naissance aux mouvements internationaux pour la paix et de me rappeler tous les efforts de coopération et de solidarité venus s'opposer aux forces politiques et militaires qui s'enlisaient dans une guerre froide menaçant la survie de l'humanité." Simone Monet-Chartrand, *Les Québécoises et le mouvement pacifiste (1939-1967)* (Montréal: Les Éditions Écosociété, 1993), 13, 46.

³⁴ Interview with Dimitri Roussopoulos, 16 May 2006, Montreal. Also, see Dan Daniels, "Non-violent Actions in Canada," *Our Generation Against Nuclear War* 3, no. 1 (June 1964): 68-70.

Anti-nuclear activists joined with francophone groups to protest at La Macaza Air Force base in 1964,³⁵ and in 1965 the anti-nuclear radicals joined with UGEQ to organize a massive rally to simultaneously support the American Civil Rights movement and denounce the Vietnam War. Crowds of protesting students filled the streets surrounding the American consulate, and American Civil Rights leader James Forman, who had been flown in from Atlanta, addressed the protesters. With lyrics in hand, the crowd of mostly francophone students then broke out into a translated version of 'We Shall Overcome.'³⁶ The contact between anglophone and francophone activists led to more than just temporary alliances. Through their interactions, conversations, and meetings with other groups and other constituencies in the city, *Our Generation* slowly began to change, becoming more deeply imbedded in the fabric of Montreal society. In 1966, the journal announced a major change in orientation. An editorial boldly announced that the social developments in Quebec were, from that time forward, going to become "a permanent feature of the journal." Revealing a debt to French-language radical publications, *Our Generation* argued that, from "the vantage point of an English-language journal in the heart of Québec," it was clear that "a realistic policy on Québec is integral to the programme of the *new radicals* in Canada." This policy, moreover, was as important as a "correct policy towards the demand of the Negro people for their human rights in the U.S. is for the new left there."³⁷ The journal stopped short of advocating Quebec separation, but events in Montreal were clearly having a profound effect on its ideology. From 1966 onwards, the journal began translating the work of French-speaking academics,³⁸

³⁵ For a full description of the protests, see Ibid. Daniels is careful to outline the turbulent political climate in Quebec in which the protests are taking place.

³⁶ Interview with Dimitri Roussopoulos, Montreal, 16 May 2006.

³⁷ "Editorial Statement on Quebec," *Our Generation* 4, no. 2 (September 1966): 1-2.

³⁸ Marcel Rioux, "Youth in the Contemporary World and in Québec," *Our Generation* 3, 4, no. 4, 1 (May 1966): 5-19.

publishing in-depth analyses of Quebec society,³⁹ and covering the developments of other social movements in the province.⁴⁰

It would be wrong to suggest that *Our Generation* ever shared an ideological position with the largely francophone advocates of national liberation. Bertrand Russell acted as the journal's main theoretical influence, and its editors denounced Fanon, and especially his writings about violence in the anti-colonial struggle.⁴¹ In 1968, associate editor Fred Caloren published a damning review of *Les Québécois*, a collection of *Parti Pris* articles published by François Maspero in Paris. While acknowledging the book's merits, he denounced both *Parti Pris*'s nationalism and its insistence on seeing the working class as the driving force of social change. The nascent revolution, he argued, was "the struggle against depersonalization in a hyper-rational and over-organized society." Nationalism and class struggle were the "political tools of the nineteenth century."⁴²

And yet, throughout the late 1960s the two movements were clearly moving in the same direction. As events in Quebec increasingly came to assume a central importance for the editors and writers of *Our Generation*, the very foundations of their thought began to change. The upsurge of political activity in Quebec therefore did not only affect the content of the journal, but also the very nature of its political ideology. True, *Our Generation* never did share with the francophone left a political viewpoint, but it did share a similar sensibility, a desire for meaningful democracy,

³⁹ Jean Laliberté, "Les travailleurs étudiants du Québec; Student Social Action," *Our Generation* 4, no. 3 (November 1966): 6-15; Roy Lemoine, "De Gaulle and the future of Québec," *Our Generation* 5, no. 2 (September 1967): 44-58; Roy Lemoine, "The Quebec Elections: A Reaction, A Pause or Another Step in the Revolution," *Our Generation* 4, no. 2 (September 1966): 32-39.

⁴⁰ See, for example, Evelyn Dumas, "The new Labour left in Québec," *Our Generation* 4, no. 4 (March 1967): 85-89; Robert Favreau, "The Quandary of L'Union Général des Étudiants du Québec," *Our Generation* 5, no. 1 (May 1967): 93-101.

⁴¹ See, for example, Michael Freeman, "Our Generation: The Damned and the Saved [review of Frantz Fanon *The Damned*]," *Our Generation Against Nuclear War* 3, no. 1 (June 1964): 86-90.

⁴² Fred Caloren, "Book Review: 'Parti pris', *Les Québécois*," *Our Generation* 6, no. 1-2 (May-June-July 1968): 198-99.

and a reaction against individual and collective alienation. At the same time that it began publishing substantial articles on the situation in Quebec, the journal began undergoing other major changes. By dropping its subtitle '*against nuclear war*' and becoming just *Our Generation*, the editors wrote that they intended "to concentrate more substantially on the total implications of pursuing peace *and* freedom."⁴³ It began advocating fundamental social change, and began outlining the possibilities of participatory democracy. The editorial offices of the journal moved from Saint-James St., the old bastion of the anglophone-dominated business elite, to Saint-Laurent, the street which acted as the traditional dividing line between east and west Montreal. Greatly influenced by various other social movements which were flourishing in the late 1960s, the journal began opening up to new conceptions of democracy and democratic participation, and came to a new understanding of the specific oppression of minorities.

The journal began printing articles detailing the powerlessness and alienation of citizens, articles which advocated a decentralization of power in order to allow citizens to regain control over their lives.⁴⁴ Writing in 1968, Dimitri Roussopoulos argued that alienation, both social and personal, stood as the central concept shaping the new radicalism. For Roussopoulos, social alienation "is an *estrangement* from mainstream society, the surrounding purposelessness, hypocrisy, selfishness, moral sterility and inaction." Personal alienation, on the other hand, was the feeling of being separated "from meaningful or creative work, education or leisure, to the point where one doubts the whole purpose of one's existence." Most young people were alienated either in a social or in a personal sense, he argued, with many alienated on both fronts. The new generation of young activists was attempting to find new ways

⁴³ "Editorial Statement," *Our Generation* 3, 4, no. 4, 1 (May 1966): 3.

⁴⁴ See, for example, Lucia Kowaluk, "The Dimensions of Powerlessness," *Our Generation* 4, no. 4 (March 1967): 5-7.

of living and understanding the world around them, and the “components of the embryonic ideology are the search for *a new theory* of history, human society, human nature, social change and the historical agencies of social change.” Ultimately, echoing the insights of French existentialism, insights which had had such a profound influence on francophone writers, he argued that “*action* is the final unifier of theory and practice.”⁴⁵

Roussopoulos recognized that certain groups within North American society, because of the specific forms of oppression facing them, felt alienation to a greater degree. Although *Our Generation* had consistently argued that “national societies in pursuing the self-interest of their elites could not dislodge themselves from the basic patterns which drift and push towards international conflict,” a new perspective and outlook began to take shape. Realizing the shallowness of democracy in the west, the journal looked to new forms of democracy, new ideas of political participation, and new ways of including previously marginalized groups. According to Roussopoulos, the journal “discovered that ethnic minorities, the large ‘other world’ of poverty, the student, the young industrial worker, and more particularly the Negro people in the USA, the French-Canadian in Canada were faced with the same sense of powerlessness and hence frustration.”⁴⁶ And he outlined the interconnected nature of Sixties protest movements: “The long, hot summers in the USA do not only affect the life and work styles of the people in the black ghettos. They affect ... Spanish-Americans, Puerto-Ricans, people of Indian ancestry, French-Canadians, the anti-poverty movement, the industrial workers and students. Finally, it affects the North

⁴⁵ Dimitrios Roussopoulos, "What is the New Radicalism?," *Our Generation* 6, no. 1-2 (May-June-July 1968): 17, 20.

⁴⁶ Dimitrios Roussopoulos, "The Purpose of Our Generation," *Our Generation* 4, no. 4 (March 1967): 2-3.

American power elite which is beginning to suffer from a kind of Parkinson's disease."⁴⁷

As a result of the rising tide of protest, the pages of *Our Generation* began articulating a new conception of freedom and new ideas of how society needed to be organized. Roussopoulos argued that the "dispossessed" needed to learn to exercise power, and he saw in the cries of "'black power', 'student power', [and] 'national self-determination'" demands to radically decentralize social structures. Believing that participatory democracy could not be constructed in one state alone, he maintained that the "upsurge in social consciousness" needed to affect the entire international system of war. The task at hand was therefore to demonstrate the profound links between the peace movement and struggles for freedom and decolonization.⁴⁸ Like Pierre Vallières and Charles Gagnon, the editors of *Our Generation* began looking to North American minorities – rather than a vaguely defined 'generation' – as the vanguard of social change. The journal argued that the radical upsurges of 1968 resulted from the actions of "students, blacks, Québécois, other ethnic and radical groups," as well as "certain sections of the new and industrial working classes."⁴⁹ The state of discontent, originally confined to "Blacks and French Canadians," was "now spreading rapidly to Mexican Americans, Puerto Ricans, American Indians, Western farmers and even to sections of the Canadian and American labour movements."⁵⁰

Through their interactions with the individuals and organizations of the Quebec liberation movement, the writers and activists of *Our Generation* began to

⁴⁷ Dimitrios Roussopoulos, "The State of the Movement," *Our Generation* 5, no. 2 (September 1967): 3.

⁴⁸ Roussopoulos, "The Purpose of Our Generation," 3-4.

⁴⁹ "Historical Perspectives 1968 [Editorial]," *Our Generation* 6, no. 3 (January 1969): 3.

⁵⁰ "The Quebec Elections: Has the Countdown Begun? [Editorial]," *Our Generation* 7, no. 1 (January-February 1970): 11.

sharpen their anti-imperialist and anti-colonial analyses. Although consistently denouncing the nationalism of national liberation, the editors of *Our Generation* recognized the common ground between themselves and decolonization movements. Because “similar political structures and authoritarian economies” existed the world over, there were numerous points of contact between resistance in the First and Third Worlds. While the system had “condemned all of us in the western world to subordination, exploitation and alienation,” it subjected “the people of the southern hemisphere to misery, oppression and hunger.” And, as the two movements were fighting the same structures of domination, “objective premises” existed “for an alliance.” In a drastic reversal of the position which it had defended in the first few years of the 1960s, the editors of the journal argued that their most important task was “the fight against continentalism in Canada as well as colonialism in Québec.”⁵¹

English-speaking writers and activists were deeply shaped by the multi-faceted influences, interactions, and encounters between various cultural and linguistic groups in the cafés and on the streets of Montreal. As anglophones living at the centre of Quebec, while having direct access to the networks and writings of North American activist circles, they had also come to realize the profound difference between their situation and that of other anglophones in the rest of North America. They lived in a city which was, to a large extent, linguistically divided, yet they had come to live and operate in the cracks, in the spaces of interacting and intermixing, of cultural cross-fertilization and of artistic creativity which flourished in the downtown core.

⁵¹ “Towards a Peace and Freedom Movement,” *Our Generation* 5, no. 1 (May 1967): 5.

Cultural Mixing and the Birth of Radical Humanism

Radical francophone writers were fully aware that they too lived in a complex and multi-ethnic society, and immigrants frequently appear in their depictions of the city.⁵² True, in the early 1960s Raoul Roy and the *Revue socialiste* regularly published articles which advocated an end to immigration, but in this the journal was alone on the left,⁵³ and its anti-immigrant stance was a holdover from previous forms of French-Canadian nationalism. When the writers of *Parti Pris* took up and expanded Roy's ideas of socialist decolonization, they parted ways with him in many important respects, not least of which was their inclusion of immigrants within the ranks of those who were exploited, and therefore among those who were poised to create a new world. The relative openness to immigrants – an openness which was far from universal in the wider ranks of the nationalist movement – was at least partly the result of the daily interactions between different groups in Montreal. Yet interactions between groups of different linguistic and ethnic origin cannot alone explain the radicals' attitude towards immigrants. How radical writers maintained a rhetorical openness towards people of various different linguistic and ethnic groups, yet all too often excluded them from any conceptualization of the political struggle, will be discussed in the next chapter. For now it will suffice to look at the ideology which allowed for the creation of such a contradiction in the first place.

⁵² For just one example, see Jacques Godbout, "La Côte-des-Neiges," *Liberté* 5, no. 4 (Juillet-Août 1963): 300-03.

⁵³ The first FLQ did, however, sometimes lean towards nativist sentiments. As a 1965 *La Cognée* editorial read, "Tant qu'il y aura du chômage au Québec, nous ne pouvons accepter une immigration massive de travailleurs destinés à accroître le chômage. Le plein-emploi, d'abord, et l'immigration ensuite. Sans oublier que selon les bonnes habitudes fédérales, ces travailleurs seront anglais, scandinaves, allemands, c'est à dire des gens qui naturellement s'assimilent au groupe anglo-saxons; pour Ottawa, voici une façon détournée de noyer davantage la société québécoise dans le melting-pot canadien. Réduire la puissance du Québec en l'affaiblissant numériquement, c'est toujours la même politique depuis la conquête, depuis l'infâme rapport Durham." "Au Québec, pas d'immigration tant qu'il y aura du chômage [éditorial]," *La Cognée*, no. 42 (1 septembre 1965): 1.

Out of the democratic spaces of the city, the cultural intermixing of cafés, and the meetings spaces and arguments of the 1960s, a new understanding of human freedom slowly began to take shape. In the tragic aftermath of the Second World War, and in the face of colonies which were powerfully asserting both their humanity and their desire for independence, it had become evident that European humanism, responsible for so much destruction, needed to be cast aside. As Aimé Césaire had famously wrote in his *Discourse on Colonialism* in 1955, “the West has never been further from being able to live a true humanism – a humanism made to the measure of the world.”⁵⁴ Fanon had also turned the very terms of European humanism against Europe, demonstrating the vast hypocrisy of “this Europe where they are never done talking of Man, yet murder men everywhere they find them, at the corner of every one of their own streets, in all the corners of the globe.” Yet it remained that those basic humanist principles could not merely be cast aside, but needed to be re-imagined, and that the “new humanity cannot do otherwise than define a new humanism both for itself and for others.”⁵⁵

Humanism, the idea that the world is created by the actions of individuals, rather than God, and can be understood rationally, therefore needed to be renewed and redefined from the margins.⁵⁶ In other words, a *new* universalism needed to be established.⁵⁷ Rather than looking to the unchanging and essentialized nature of the

⁵⁴ Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, trans. Joan Pinkham (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2000 [1972]), 43, 52.

⁵⁵ Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 311, 246, 316. One sees echos of this in Vallières: “J’attendais de la lutte révolutionnaire non seulement le surgissement d’une nouvelle nation et la création d’un État indépendant (‘le Québec libre’) mais aussi et surtout, comme Frantz Fanon, le remplacement d’une ‘espèce’ d’homme et de femmes par une autre ‘espèce’ d’hommes et de femmes. J’espérais la substitution totale, complète, absolue, sans transition, d’un type de vécu social par un autre type de vécu social, totalement différent.” Pierre Vallières, *Les Héritiers de Papineau. Itinéraire politique d’un ‘nègre blanc’ (1960-1985)* (Montréal: Québec/Amérique, 1986), 127-28.

⁵⁶ For an elegant recent statement on humanism and its open potential, see Edward W. Said, *Humanism and Democratic Criticism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004).

⁵⁷ Charles Gagnon, *Le Référendum: un syndrome québécois : essai* (Lachine, Que.: Pleine Lune, 1995), 43, 47.

‘human,’ the new humanism of radical writers in the post-World War Two era understood humans as product of their own history.⁵⁸ Writer after writer denounced the false universalism of western humanism, a humanism in which, as Paul Chamberland wrote, “Whites impose their universalism by force and exploitation.” Under these conditions, to accept the values of western humanism “is unconsciously to identify with the forces of western domination which impose, through the combined power of money and guns, western ideas and culture (for French Canadians, the master is Anglo-Saxon).”⁵⁹ In the context of the looming prospect of nuclear holocaust, the ‘democracy’ of the West seemed hollow at best. Young Montrealers attempting to come to terms with the absurdity of existence turned to existentialist humanism for direction.

From many of the most popular writers of the era – Rimbaud, Faulkner, Kafka, Sartre – radical intellectuals learned of the uncertainties and existential doubts that haunted human existence, and they began to see the possibilities of creating a future which did not rely on the stale structures of the past. From the very beginning of the decade, it was clear that a new culture and a new politics needed to be created, invented, and dreamed. According to Sartre, the writer who, by far, had the greatest influence on young francophone intellectuals, humans were condemned to liberty, and hope resided only in action. To live a fully human life, humans needed to recognize that it was through action, and action alone, that they could define themselves and their existence. Sartre reaffirmed the possibility of transcendence, the capacity of individuals to escape from alienation, to refuse inauthenticity, and to change the

⁵⁸ See Robert Young, *White Mythologies: Writing History and the West* (London: Routledge, 1990), 121.

⁵⁹ Paul Chamberland, "M. Jean-Charles Harvey, un 'mystique de la race'," *Parti Pris* 1, no. 6 (mars 1964): 57. “Le Blanc impose l’universalité de sa force et de son exploitation”; “c’est inconsciemment s’identifier au dominateur occidental, qui impose, avec ses armes et son argent, ses idées et sa culture. (Pour le canadien-français, le maître est anglo-saxon).”

structures in which they lived.⁶⁰ This search to build a ‘new man,’ to sketch the outlines of a new culture in which humans would live with each other in solidarity and respect, and would assume responsibility for the world around them, embodies the underlying ethical basis of the project which shaped an entire generation. For Paul Chamberland, the ultimate objective of the struggle for political and economic emancipation was the creation of a new Quebec man.⁶¹ For Pierre Maheu, “the revolution, as much as being a transformation of political and economic structures, will represent the birth of a new humanity.” “Being a revolutionary,” he continued, “is to put one’s faith in man,” in the idea that it is possible to invent a world in which people could be free. To accusations that this was merely utopian thinking, Maheu responded, “I believe that a socialist ideology without this dream of inventing a new man would be sterile, just as the dream, without its socialist content, would be in vain.”⁶²

Out of the existential angst, radicals felt the necessity of accepting the responsibility of forging a new culture, and of building new lines of resistance which would not only allow Quebecers to exercise power, but which would lay the foundations of a new humanity. Already in the early 1960s, Vallières had outlined the necessity of creating a new humanism. In a 1963 edition of *Cité Libre*, he wrote that the challenge was “to found this humanism which is indispensable to any collective movement, and which itself is central to any meaningful revolution.”⁶³ In the mid-

⁶⁰ Important reflections can be found in Pierre Vallières, “Préface (1979). Écrire debout”, *Nègres blancs d’Amérique* (Montréal: Typo, 1994), 37. For Sartre’s influence on one thinker, see Vallières, *Les Héritiers de Papineau*, 45.

⁶¹ Paul Chamberland, “De la damnation à la liberté,” *Parti Pris*, no. 9-10-11 (été 1964): 79.

⁶² Pierre Maheu, “La laïcité: inventer l’homme (notes),” *Parti Pris* 4, no. 9-10-11-12 (mai-août 1967): 198. “la révolution, autant qu’un changement de structures économique-politiques, ce sera la naissance de l’humanité”; “Être révolutionnaire, c’est parier sur l’homme”; “je crois que l’idéologie socialiste sans ce rêve d’inventer l’homme nouveau est aussi stérile que le rêve sans son contenu socialiste serait vain.”

⁶³ Vallières, Pierre. “*Cité libre* et ma génération” *Cité libre* (59, 1963). Reproduced in Pierre Vallières, *Paroles d’un nègre blanc* (Montréal: VLB, 2002), 72. “de fonder cet humanisme indispensable à tout mouvement d’ensemble, lui-même indispensable à toute révolution profonde.”

1960s, during a crucial period in his intellectual development, Vallières was deeply marked by his interactions with the streets, spaces, and cafés of Montreal. After taking part in a drawn-out strike at *La Presse*, Vallières, crushed under the weight of debt, was forced to leave his residence and sell his furniture. He went to rent a small room on Carré Saint-Louis, the one part of Montreal which attracted not only the marginalized and the poor, but also revolutionary singers and poets.

“At that time Carré Saint-Louis represented,” Vallières recalled years later, “a haven of liberty for everything in Quebec society which was seen as marginal, deviant, provocative or anarchistic.” The office of the Mouvement de libération populaire (MLP), where Vallières began working full-time in 1965, was situated only a hundred metres from the square. Vallières and his comrades gravitated not only to Carré Saint-Louis: in the evenings, they would head west to La Hutte Suisse, La Casa Espagnole, l’El Cortico, La Paloma or L’Enfer. When they could, they headed to the legendary nightclub on Saint-Catherine St, the Jazz Hot, right on top of the Casa Loma.⁶⁴ In these cafés, they would meet with like-minded individuals of all backgrounds, argue, and debate about the possibilities of a new world.

These discussions led to a profound questioning of freedom, liberation, and decolonization. Vallières was also profoundly marked by his reading of Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth*, a book which, in Vallières’s eyes, spoke for all other colonized people.⁶⁵ According to Vallières, the liberation of Quebeckers was inextricably linked to the liberation of other peoples around the world. International theory drawn

⁶⁴ Vallières, *Les Héritiers de Papineau*, 84-86. “Le Carré Saint-Louis représentait, en ce temps-là”; “un havre de liberté qui accueillait tout ce qui, dans la société québécoise, était reconnu comme marginal, déviant, provocateur ou anarchiste”

⁶⁵ As Vallières would write years later, “*Les Damnés de la terre*, traduit en dix-sept langues et tiré à plus d’un million d’exemplaires, était devenu en quelques mois la bible des contestataires de partout.” And, “Mort de leucémie, le 6 décembre 1961, Fanon apparaissait comme *le colonisé absolu* fait de tous les colonisés du monde, comme *le nègre idéal* fait de tous les nègres de la terre, comme le Christ armé et laïc fait de tous les révolutionnaires du Tiers-Monde.” Ibid., 66.

from the Third World could not be mechanically applied – it needed to be adapted, shaped, and redefined by groups around the world struggling to make sense of their own realities.⁶⁶ And this invention and shaping of the future, this living a life of liberty, could only be done collectively, when everyone worked together to create “this marvellous spontaneity, this creativity full of hope, fervour, intelligence, and commitment.” Individual and collective liberation therefore operated simultaneously, the one being the pre-condition of the other, each being born in struggle:

our individual liberty begins with the struggle for collective liberation and is reached through struggle. We will not become free as individuals because the population will one day decide of its own accord to rise up as one and destroy the system through a general revolt. We will become free as individuals to the extent that we each take part in the collective struggle, when we each make the effort that we expect of ‘the people.’ On the other hand, our liberation will never be achieved if the population as a whole does not become free. The ‘salvation’ of all depends on the commitment of each, just as the ‘salvation’ of each depends on the success of the overall revolution.⁶⁷

For Vallières, the FLQ was, above all else, a manifestation of revolt, a refusal, an act of resistance which would act as a spark igniting the fire of rebellion.⁶⁸

Out of revolt came the possibility of creation. In 1966, Charles Gagnon wrote that if the FLQ at times attempted to destroy, it was so that the population as a whole

⁶⁶ Vallières further explained his thinking in 1979, when he declared that Quebeckers occupied an extremely precarious position. Like Jews, Roma, and Palestinians, they did not possess a homeland and they had no guaranteed survival. If they did not take hold of the present and invent and shape the future, they would disappear. Pierre Vallières, “Préface (1979). Écrire debout”, *Nègres blancs d’Amérique* (Montréal: Typo, 1994), 41-42.

⁶⁷ Pierre Vallières à Gaston Gouin, 25 octobre 1968. Reproduced in Vallières, *Paroles d’un nègre blanc*, 114-15. “cette spontanéité merveilleuse, cette créativité pleine d’espoir, de ferveur, d’intelligence et de sérieux”; “notre libération individuelle commence dans le combat pour la libération collective et se réalise dans la lutte. Nous ne deviendrons pas libres individuellement parce que le peuple, un bon jour, se soulèvera d’un seul bloc et détruira le système à travers une insurrection générale. Nous deviendrons libres individuellement dans la mesure où personnellement nous nous s’engagerons dans la lutte commune, où personnellement nous ferons l’effort que nous attendons du ‘peuple.’ Par contre, notre libération n’aboutira vraiment que si tout le peuple se libère aussi. Le ‘salut’ de la collectivité dépend de l’engagement de chacun, comme le ‘salut’ de chacun de nous dépend du succès de la révolution globale.”

⁶⁸ Charles Gagnon, “Hommage à Pierre Vallières,” *Bulletin d’histoire politique* 7, no. 3 (printemps-été 1999): 10-11.

could begin to build.⁶⁹ And in order to begin constructing a different future, individuals needed to be free to think, to dream, and to imagine alternatives ways of living. Utopia, for Vallières, “sums up aspirations which cry out not only to be perceived and understood, but above all to be *realized*.” Far from being the end point of human history, Utopia acted as a “point of departure,” a “beginning,” a “first stage of the new history.”⁷⁰ In an unpublished manuscript written in jail in the summer and fall of 1967, *Indépendance et révolution*, Vallières wrote an entire section entitled “La Révolution est un humanisme.” Worker collective self-management, the abolition of the dictatorship of the market, the suppression of the state, were all just a beginning in the real project: human beings needed to be freed from alienation, liberated, and humanized. If humans themselves had created forms of slavery and alienation, it would be humans who would find the pathways to liberation. It was, after all, only human to seek “the maximum of liberty, justice, fraternity and happiness.” Revolution, for Vallières, was “above all a humanism.”⁷¹

The building of a new society required a constant outward expansion of popular participation. All aspects of the human being would need to be developed, and academic and scientific insights would need to be radically decentralized and put in the hands of the people. When writing to Université de Montréal professor Marcel Rioux, Charles Gagnon argued that knowledge could not remain confined to schools, colleges, and universities. Montreal, like cities all across Quebec, needed have houses of popular learning which would be run by and for the people, and organized with the objective of “making knowledge accessible for all, and giving everyone the

⁶⁹ André Jacques (Charles Gagnon), “La révolution, c’est une entreprise de construction” *La Cognée* 56 (1 avril 1966) Reproduced in *FLQ: un projet révolutionnaire*, 99.

⁷⁰ Vallières, *White Niggers of America*, 60.

⁷¹ UQAM, Charles Gagnon fonds, 124p-202a/45, Pierre Vallières, “Indépendance et révolution” (not published), août-novembre, 1967 (Prison de Montréal), 142. “le maximum de liberté, de justice, de fraternité et de bonheur”; “avant tout un humanisme”

opportunity to participate in the revolution.” It was the logic of a repressive capitalist order which set knowledge outside of the hands of the people, and it was therefore necessary for those who opposed that order to fight so that the university would come to exist, “like poetry, ‘in the streets.’”⁷²

The radical humanism articulated in various ways and at various times throughout the 1960s led to a new understanding of the nature of Quebec society and of its various components. Earlier forms of French-Canadian nationalism had often looked suspiciously upon immigrants, seeing immigration as a tactic to either assimilate or outnumber French Canadians. In radical circles in the 1960s, however, many began arguing that immigrants faced much of the same exploitation as francophone Quebecers, and that they needed support and solidarity. In 1963, Jean Cimon linked the common oppression of both immigrant groups and francophone Quebecers: “What is disconcerting for the provincial who enters a Montreal hotel is to realize the subjugation of both *Montréalais* and Neo-Canadians by the arrogant omnipotence of *Montrealers*, who impose the use of the English language upon them both.”⁷³ Even leading RIN member André d’Allemagne, one of the primary architects of the system of ideas which divided Quebec into two categories, the colonizer and the colonized, argued that, although the vast majority of immigrants had chosen to integrate into the language and worldview of the colonizer, it remained true that they were not wholly integrated into that society, sharing “neither its history, emotional reactions, or perspectives.”⁷⁴ Pierre Vallières, although stating that Anglo-

⁷² Charles Gagnon à Marcel Rioux, automne 1966. Reproduced in *FLQ: un projet révolutionnaire*, 157-158. “rendre le savoir accessible à tous pour permettre que tous participent à la révolution”; “comme la poésie, ‘dans la rue.’”

⁷³ Jean Cimon, “Montréal innombrable,” *Liberté* 5, no. 4 (Juillet-Août 1963): 377. “Ce qui déconcerte le provincial pénétrant dans le hall d’un hôtel montréalais c’est de constater la domestication des Montréalais et des Néo-Canadiens par l’omnipotence arrogante des *Montrealers* qui leur imposent l’usage de la langue anglaise.”

⁷⁴ André d’Allemagne, *Le colonialisme au Québec* (Montréal: Édition R-B, 1966), 24. “ni l’histoire, ni les réactions émotives, ni les optiques.”

Quebeckers were “our ‘Rhodesians,’” took the time to point out that he was talking about the English-speaking bourgeoisie, “and not about the tens of thousands of anglicized immigrants who are exploited in the same manner as French-Canadian workers.”⁷⁵ In his *Nègres blancs d’Amérique*, moreover, Vallières had argued that ninety percent of Quebec’s population belonged to the working class, which was composed not only of French Canadians, but also of “the majority of non-British immigrants, Italians, Greeks, Spaniards, Poles, *et al.*, who represent an important percentage of the proletariat of Montreal.”⁷⁶ By the time the FLQ published its second manifesto, in June 1970, the group declared that it stood “beside all immigrant workers in Quebec and it is with them that we want to oppose our collective enemy: Anglo-American capitalism. We want to struggle with all workers to achieve national liberation.”⁷⁷

Since the project of Quebec liberation in the 1960s was one of open creation, some even argued that anyone, regardless of his or her background, could choose to take part in it. In a 1965 edition of *Parti Pris*, for example, Jacques Brault wrote,

Quebec can only exist, as a political, economic, social, and cultural entity, if it is composed of and for those who *decide* to become *Québécois*, who consent to this *we...* Race and religion, for example, are matters of secondary importance. I would say the same thing about linguistic origin: francophones, anglophones, italophones, germanophones, aphones, all have an inalienable right to both desire and to decide to be *Québécois*. I don’t believe my thinking is entirely utopian: Quebec, this envisaged Quebec, is a real possibility, as long as we don’t once again become confined to the ghetto of nationalism.⁷⁸

⁷⁵ UQAM, Charles Gagnon fonds, 124p-202a/45, Pierre Vallières, “Indépendance et révolution” (not published), août-novembre, 1967 (Prison de Montréal), 39. “nos ‘Rhodésiens’ à nous”; “et non des dizaines de milliers d’immigrants anglicisés qui sont exploités au même titre que les prolétaires canadiens-français.”

⁷⁶ Vallières, *White Niggers of America*, 47.

⁷⁷ Second Manifesto of FLQ – published in *Québec-Presse*, 23 juin 1970. Reproduced in *FLQ: un projet révolutionnaire*, 211. “Nous sommes avec tous les travailleurs immigrés au Québec et c’est avec eux que nous voulons combattre notre ennemi commun: le capitalisme anglo-américain. C’est avec tous les travailleurs que nous voulons mener à bien la lutte de libération nationale.”

⁷⁸ Jacques Brault, “Un pays à mettre au monde,” *Parti Pris* 2, no. 10-11 (juin-juillet 1965): 16. “Le Québec ne peut exister, comme fait politique, économique, social, culturel, que par et pour ceux qui choisiront d’être québécois, qui consentiront à ce nous... La race et la religion, par exemple, ne sont ici que des facteurs différentiels de seconde importance. J’ajouterai la même remarque à propos de la

Radical humanism went beyond openness and inclusion. In article after article, speech after speech, writers in Montreal affirmed that the various struggles throughout the world were interrelated, inseparable, and they all depended upon each other. To be truly internationalist, however, one needed to be culturally autonomous, and able, according to Vallières, “to maintain through the present a positive, dynamic, and creative link between the past and the future.” International solidarity, in other words, was inconceivable if Quebecers did not have a sense of their own history and present-day political reality.⁷⁹ There was another aspect to the internationalism of Quebec radicals during the 1960s, one with its origins in the thought and work of Aimé Césaire. Césaire, a poet and a politician from Martinique, was a co-founder of the *negritude* movement, a movement which had the express purpose of reclaiming the dignity and the humanity of marginalized and racialized peoples. For those living in Montreal, Césaire was most well-known as the author of the stunningly powerful *Notebook of a Return to the Native Land* and *Discourse on Colonialism*. Poet Gaston Miron worked tirelessly to make Césaire known in Quebec, introducing Césaire to Pierre Vallières as well as many others,⁸⁰ and Césaire’s influence breathed energy into the works of a wide variety of writers. Andrée Ferretti, for example, recalls reading Césaire as an act of transgression, realizing for the first time that rebelling would be the first step to fundamentally changing society’s structures.⁸¹

langue d'origine: francophones, anglophones, italophones, germanophones, aphones, tous ont un droit inaliénable à se vouloir, à se choisir québécois. Je ne crois pas nager en pleine utopie; le Québec, ce Québec *projeté*, est une hypothèse soutenable, pourvu qu'on ne l'enferme pas à nouveau dans le ghetto du nationalisme.”

⁷⁹ Vallières, *Les Héritiers de Papineau*, 18. “d’assurer à travers le présent une liaison positive, dynamique et créatrice entre le passé et l’avenir”

⁸⁰ Pierre Vallières, quoted in Jean-Daniel Lafond, *La manière nègre. Aimé Césaire, chemin faisant* (Montreal: l'Hexagone, 1993), 157.

⁸¹ Andrée Ferretti, quoted in *Ibid.*

In *Discourse on Colonialism*, Césaire developed what Robin Kelley has termed a “poetics of revolt.” The coming revolution necessarily involved “the complete and total overthrow of a racist, colonialist system that would open the way to imagine a whole new world.”⁸² Césaire anticipates Fanon in his rejection of European humanism and in his simultaneous drive to build a new ethic of universality not based on European conceptions of the world. As Césaire explained on another occasion, “I have a different idea of a universal. It is a universal rich with all that is particular, rich with all the particulars there are, the deepening of each particular, the coexistence of them all.”⁸³ Césaire speaks of the ways in which colonialism had ravaged native cultures, of “cultures trampled underfoot,” and of “extraordinary possibilities wiped out.” But the project of liberation could not merely look back to the past; it is “not a dead society that we want to revive,” but “a new society rich with all the productive power of modern times” that needed to be built.⁸⁴

Césaire, more than anyone else, advocated a common struggle of all of humanity, and spoke eloquently of the interrelated nature of any depictions of a just future. For Césaire, each nation had an important role to play in the struggle for justice and human dignity.⁸⁵ The lesson was not lost on Paul Chamberland who, years later, would argue that the fact that a small colony like Martinique could produce both Aimé Césaire and Frantz Fanon acted as “an indisputable lesson of

⁸² Robin D.G. Kelley, “A Poetics of Anticolonialism,” in *Discourse on Colonialism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2000), 10, 24.

⁸³ Quoted in *Ibid.*, 25-26.

⁸⁴ Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, 43, 52.

⁸⁵ In 1990, at the opening of the Festival de Fort-de-France, dedicated to Nelson Mandela, Césaire rearticulated what he had said, in different words, many times before: “Nous avons toujours voulu rappeler au peuple martiniquais, tenté qu’il peut être de s’isoler dans le catégoriel, que le combat de l’homme est UN, que la culture n’est ni évasion hors du monde, ni repli égoïste sur soi, mais qu’au contraire la culture est un combat et que le combat pour la culture introduit et doit introduire au plus épais du combat de l’homme, je veux dire le combat contre tout ce qui opprime l’homme, le combat contre tout ce qui écrase l’homme, le combat contre tout ce qui humilie l’homme où qu’il se trouve, et que, dans ce combat-là chaque peuple, quelque petit qu’il soit, tient une partie du front, donc, en définitive, est comptable d’une part même infime de l’espérance humaine.” Aimé Césaire, quoted in Lafond, *La manière nègre. Aimé Césaire, chemin faisant*, 182.

history!”⁸⁶ Pierre Vallières also shared the insight that working in one location could have an important impact throughout the world. In the mid-1980s, in a political climate which was far from hospitable to his thoughts, Vallières reaffirmed what he had first expressed years earlier in the pages of *Nègres blancs*⁸⁷: “If one nation, no matter how small, advances one step in history, all of humanity gains in depth and creativity. Yet the opposite is also true: the regression (voluntary or not), repression, or failure of one group is a step backwards for the entire world.”⁸⁸ The struggle for Quebec liberation, conceived in this light, was far from being parochial or outside of the main centres of world revolutionary action. Quebec, seen from this angle, was as important a site of resistance and struggle as any other.

In the years following the Second World War, after all, radical writers from around the world urged, again and again, that theory needed to be generated from the margins, that the Third World needed to begin to outline a new history of humanity. By decentring imperial capitals, and recognizing the importance of struggles on the margins, a new way of seeing the world opened up. Quebec liberation was conceived, according to Charles Gagnon, as “the launching pad for the construction of socialism, not only in Quebec and Canada, but also in the United States, where ethnic conflicts, like the demands of Blacks and Aborigines in particular, offered fertile ground for revolution.”⁸⁹ At the end of the decade, Gagnon and Vallières together wrote “Pour

⁸⁶ Paul Chamberland, quoted in *Ibid.*, 157. “une leçon d’histoire ineffaçable!”

⁸⁷ In *Nègres blancs*, Vallières wrote that his work may “have something to say to the men and revolutionaries of other countries, colonized or even imperialist.” Vallières, *White Niggers of America*, 15.

⁸⁸ Vallières, *Les Héritiers de Papineau*, 19. “Si donc un seul peuple, si petit soit-il, peut avancer d’un pas dans l’histoire, l’humanité tout entière y gagne en richesse et créativité. En sens contraire, la régression (volontaire ou non), la répression ou la faillite d’un seul fait faire un pas en arrière au monde entier”

⁸⁹ Gagnon, *Le Référendum: un syndrome québécois : essai*, 28. “la rampe de lancement de la lutte pour le socialisme, non seulement au Québec et au Canada, mais même aux États-Unis où, là aussi, les conflits ethniques, dont les revendications des Noirs et des Amérindiens notamment, offraient des terrains jugés propices à la lutte révolutionnaire”

un front commun multinational de libération,” a document attesting to the profoundly interrelated nature of the struggle:

It is by achieving our own collective liberation that we can support the struggles of other oppressed peoples, and it is by raising our struggle to the same level as theirs that we will demonstrate our solidarity, in the largest sense of the word, with our brothers in Palestine, Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, Philippines, Indonesia, and India; with Angola, Mozambique and Guinea; with Chad and the Canary Islands; with our Black brothers from South Africa, Rhodesia and the USA; with our brothers in Uruguay, Brazil, Guatemala, Bolivia and Colombia; with the Basque Country and with Ireland; etc.⁹⁰

And in the mid-1980s Vallières remained as convinced as ever that “the ‘Quebec revolution’ exemplified, from its very beginnings, the fundamental question of the autonomous development of the peoples of North America.” “Blacks, Latinos, Acadians,” Vallières argued, “expected a lot from our actions. Our dream of liberation was also their own.”⁹¹

The Quebec decolonization movement emerged out of the daily realities of Montreal, from the creative mix of the local conditions that prevailed in the city. Montreal’s avant-garde cafés and meeting places provided the setting for countless discussions and debates, the city’s concentration of dissident intellectuals and artists provided a critical mass for the formation of a counter-hegemonic language of opposition, and the urban landscape and the linguistic division of labour highlighted the uneven power relations between anglophones and francophones. The theories and

⁹⁰ Charles Gagnon et Pierre Vallières, “Pour un front commun multinational de libération” (écrit en prison en février 1970). Reproduced in *FLQ: un projet révolutionnaire*, 209. “C’est en somme en réalisant dans les faits notre propre libération collective que nous apporterons en appui à la cause des peuples opprimés et c’est en élevant notre lutte au même niveau que la leur que nous pourrions vraiment nous montrer solidaires, au sens fort du mot, de nos frères de Palestine, du Viêt-nam, du Cambodge, du Laos, de Taïlande, des Philippines, d’Indonésie et de l’Inde; de l’Angola, du Mozambique et de la Guinée; du Tchad et des Canaries; de nos frères noirs d’Afrique du Sud, de Rhodésie et des USA; de nos frères d’Uruguay, du Brésil, du Guatemala, de Bolivie et de Colombie; du pays basque et de l’Irlande; etc.”

⁹¹ Vallières, *Les Héritiers de Papineau*, 270-71. “la ‘révolution québécoise’ posait, à l’origine, de façon exemplaire, la question fondamentale du développement *autonome* des peuples en Amérique du Nord”; “Les Noirs, les Latinos, les Acadiens”; attendaient beaucoup de notre action. Notre rêve de libération était aussi le leur.”

conceptions of Third World decolonization did much more than just give authors the tools to re-conceptualize their local reality; they also provided Montreal writers with the framework within which they could imagine themselves as forming a part of a vast international movement of liberation.

Chapter Five:

‘Nègres blancs d’Amérique’: Internationalizing Resistance

Imperialism has not only linked us all in our servitude, but it has also made us interdependent in our efforts to conquer our liberty and our selves. We will either all become free together, or we will together remain slaves of the American Yankee

Pierre Vallières, “Cuba révolutionnaire” (1967).

If the ebullient cafés of Montreal provided the local setting in which ideas of decolonization were forged, it was on the scale of the world that they were dreamed. Throughout the 1960s, international literature filled the shelves of Montreal bookstores and the private homes of individuals, and scores of international activists and intellectuals – including many of the most important theorists of the era – passed through the city, exchanging ideas and information, insights and inspiration.¹ Groups like *Parti Pris* and the FLQ sent copies of their material to like-minded organizations around the world, from Havana to Buenos Aires to Berkeley.² The power, appeal, and very foundation of socialist decolonization rested on a reading of the local situation through the lens of international movements and processes, through an optic of revolutionary humanism which gave individuals the belief that they were part of a movement of world-wide dimensions.

Because francophone Quebecers were oppressed on national and cultural bases, it was on these grounds, radicals believed, that they needed to organize. Far from a turning inwards upon themselves, however, many argued that the ultimate goals and objectives could not remain limited to the realm of national or cultural affirmation, but that they needed to proceed through the nation to human liberation writ large. Always aware that people in other oppressed countries were engaged in similar struggles,³ writers and activists of the 1960s built on Fanon's key insight that it was "at the heart of national consciousness that international consciousness lives

¹ Various groups in Montreal, especially by the end of the 1960s, were instrumental in forging international solidarity by bringing various individuals from other areas to the city. The Quebec Student body, UGEQ, to take just one example, organized speaking engagements for representatives of the Vietnamese NLF, inviting workers and students to come and hear the embattled delegates. Gilles Bourque, "UGEQ," *Parti Pris* 5, no. 2-3 (octobre-novembre 1967): 52.

² *Parti Pris* even boasted that the *New Left Review* and the *Revue Internationale de Socialisme* had asked them for articles about Quebec. "Lettre au lecteur," *Parti Pris* 2, no. 1 (septembre 1964): 18. Nicholas M. Regush, *Pierre Vallières: The Revolutionary Process in Quebec* (New York: The Dial Press, 1973), 112.

³ "Manifeste, 1964-1965," *Parti Pris* 2, no. 1 (septembre 1964): 17. As the manifesto put it, they were aware that others "osent cette folie avec nous."

and grows.”⁴ Writers regularly argued that the development of a “national self” would lay the groundwork upon which Quebecers could move on to “universalization,”⁵ and that the “struggle for national liberation signifies precisely the end of an isolation imposed by the Canadian situation.” It was *through* national liberation, the argument went, that Quebecers could move on to the next step of participating in the creation of a truly global consciousness.⁶

Internationalism therefore never acted merely as one aspect of a larger ideology, but stood at the very core of the entire political project. Activists and writers worked to stretch the bounds of knowledge, to expand the geographical frame of reference in which Quebec’s politics were generally understood; rather than seeing the plight of francophone Quebecers as an internal problem which could be solved by appealing to local leaders for redress, they endeavoured, following Malcolm X, to move beyond the local context and take their grievances to the world stage.⁷ In her study of the impact of the Algerian war of independence on Quebec, Magali Deleuze, by looking closely at the reception of the war in Montreal newspapers and journals of the 1950s, maintains that an international awareness among Montreal intellectuals existed long before the 1960s.⁸ And one could, of course, argue that Montreal’s intellectuals have always been shaped by events taking place in the rest of the world. What was new about the young radicals espousing decolonization during the 1960s

⁴ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (New York: Grove Press, 1963), 247-48.

⁵ Camille Limoges, "Éditorial: de l'homopoliticus à nous," *Parti Pris*, no. 9-10-11 (été 1964): 5. “être national”; “d’universalisation.”

⁶ Paul Chamberland, "De la damnation à la liberté," *Parti Pris*, no. 9-10-11 (été 1964): 83. “lutte de libération nationale signifie précisément la suppression de l’isolement dans lequel nous plonge la situation canadienne.”

⁷ *Malcolm X Speaks: Selected Speeches and Statements Edited with Prefatory Notes by George Breitman*, (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1966 [1965]), 143. For important reflections, see James Tyner, *The Geography of Malcolm X: Black Radicalism and the Remaking of American Space* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

⁸ See Magali Deleuze, *L’une et l’autre indépendance 1954-1964: Les médias au Québec et la guerre d’Algérie* (Outremont: Les Éditions Point de Fuite, 2001).

was not this sentiment of being *influenced by* international events, but believing oneself to be *forming an important* part of a larger global struggle of resistance and rebellion, one which had its origins and found its most dramatic expression in the Third World and the political struggles of American Blacks.

All nascent radical groups of the 1960s worked to situate themselves within a larger international framework, to connect their struggles with those taking place in the far reaches of the world. Raul Roy claimed in 1959 that his group would be composed of the first Quebec socialists who were “genuinely internationalist,”⁹ and writers in *La Cognée*, the organ of the first FLQ, argued that “the colonized is now searching to integrate into the larger world of humanity.”¹⁰ It was in the electrifying pages of *Parti Pris*, and in the politically charged public forums of the journal – forums in which young and curious activists would gather to argue, debate, and discuss – where the internationalism of Quebec decolonization came to take shape concretely. *Parti Pris* co-founder Paul Chamberland quickly became one of the brilliant young voices of a new generation of Quebec writers. When replying to Jean-Charles Harvey’s assertions that the political violence of recent years was not a ‘French-Canadian’ phenomenon, but the result of ‘external’ influences, Chamberland wrote a stinging reply. Because he so elegantly outlines the local particularity and the international dimension of the revolt, and as he articulates much of the ethic of the Montreal left of the early to mid-1960s, he is worth quoting at length:

... it is equally justifiable to highlight ‘foreign influences,’ since in opposing the American imperialism which enslaves us, we are making common cause with countries oppressed in the way Cuba used to be. We are engaged in a similar process of liberation, and the quest for our identity by seizing our own destiny makes us spontaneously identify with these nations. We live as *nègres blancs*,

⁹ Raoul Roy, “Présentation,” *La Revue Socialiste*, no. 1 (printemps 1959): 2. “véritablement internationaliste.”

¹⁰ Paul Lemoyne and Louis Nadeau, “La révolution, phénomène historique et phénomène global,” *La Cognée*, no. 44 (1 octobre 1965): 4. “le colonisé cherche maintenant à s'intégrer à l'ensemble de l'humanité.”

and our permeability to ‘foreign influences’ is founded on a situation which, to a certain point, we have in common with other dominated countries, particularly with those of Latin America. That our struggle takes on its own particularities, that is another story: it is a requirement imposed by the specific realities of life in Quebec.¹¹

As Chamberland points out, those involved in the Quebec liberation movement, like all Third World Marxists, interpreted international theory and adapted it to their unique local circumstances. In so doing, they formed part of a far larger movement of resistance against imperialism. *Parti Pris* opened up its pages to regular reports on developments of struggles taking place around the world, publishing, alongside detailed accounts and explorations of the particularities of the Quebec situation, articles on revolution and decolonization, on the Congo and the Vietnam War.

Above all, however, it was the radical intellectual developments taking place in three countries – France, Cuba, and the United States – which would have the most profound impact on Montreal radicals. Through their engagements with writers and activists of these three countries, I will argue, the intellectuals of Quebec decolonization not only reconceived of Quebec and its place in the world, but they also came to reconceptualize the very meanings attached to human liberation and transnational solidarity. They gave the terms a new conceptual sophistication and theoretical depth, and stretched the reach of their radical possibilities.

¹¹ Paul Chamberland, "M. Jean-Charles Harvey, un 'mystique de la race'," *Parti Pris* 1, no. 6 (mars 1964): 57-58. "...il est également juste de faire appel aux 'influences étrangères', puisque, dans la mesure où nous nous opposons à l'impérialisme américain qui nous asservit, nous faisons cause commune avec les pays dominés comme l'était Cuba. Nous sommes engagés dans un processus analogue de libération, et la conquête de notre identité à travers la prise en charge de notre destin nous fait spontanément nous identifier à ces pays. Nous nous vivons comme nègres-blancs, et notre perméabilité aux 'influences étrangères' que sur le fond d'une situation qui nous est jusqu'à un certain point commune avec les pays dominés, de l'Amérique latine notamment. Que notre lutte prenne des formes particulières, c'est une autre histoire: elles sont exigées par la réalité québécoise."

The Promises and Pitfalls of the French

In the turbulent aftermath of the Second World War, France, living with volatile and unstable governments, became an important centre of intellectual and cultural creativity. This cultural creativity existed alongside the dislocation caused by the breaking up of the country's colonial empire, a disintegration which had its most painful expression in the drawn-out violence of the Algerian war of independence. The bitter experience of the Algerian war tore French society apart at the seams,¹² and leftists around the world watched with dismay as the French socialist and Communist parties refused to support Algerian independence. Intellectuals in Montreal kept a close eye on developments in Algeria, and Algerian decolonization became an important early influence for young radicals searching for models and examples from which to draw.¹³ Although all of France, including the French left, appeared to have its hands bloodied by the bitter fighting in Algeria, a small but influential group of French intellectuals began openly speaking out in defence of Algeria's right to self-determination. Of these intellectuals, none influenced Montreal radicals more than Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir. By reading *Les Temps Modernes*, the publication with which the two philosophers were intimately associated, writers in Montreal learned of the vibrant world of cultural and intellectual resistance to imperialism, a resistance which would come to thrive in Parisian cafés and university campuses throughout the 1960s. Because Paris acted simultaneously as a capital of intellectual creativity and colonial tyranny, of resistance and repression, it was irresistible for young Montrealers. And so they travelled in significant numbers to Paris to study and take part in French intellectual life, highlighting much of the

¹² For an important account of post-war French intellectual life, written from the perspective of one of the period's most important protagonists, see Simone de Beauvoir, *Force of Circumstance* (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1968 [1963]).

¹³ See Deleuze, *L'une et l'autre indépendance*.

ambiguity of Quebec's imperial positioning; although conceptualized as a colony of either English Canada or the United States, in many ways it was Paris that acted, in a cultural sense at least, as an imperial metropole.

One of the most important cultural figures in 1960s Paris was radical writer, translator, and publisher François Maspero. Maspero opened a bookstore in Paris's Latin Quarter in the mid-1950s, and only a few years later he founded Les Éditions Maspero, a radical publishing house with a publication list which would come to include Frantz Fanon and French-language translations of Amílcar Cabral, Che Guevara, and Malcolm X. Les Éditions Maspero, publishing books which were distributed and read around the globe, remained an indispensable resource for the French-speaking world, significantly expanding the range of anti-imperialist writers available in French. As Kristin Ross explains, in "these years dominated by the decomposition of the European empires, Maspero's bookstore and press took up the task of representing the image of an exploded world where Europe is no longer the centre."¹⁴ In the bookstore itself, one would find, side-by-side, books of theory and personal testimonials, poetry and politics.¹⁵ For radicals in Montreal, Maspero's publishing house was a crucial conduit between their movement and other decolonization struggles, and writers such as Pierre Vallières and Jean-Marc Pothé remained in contact with him.¹⁶ Maspero therefore became a natural choice when Montreal writers began searching for an international publisher for their work. The publishing house published *Les Québécois* – a book of *Parti Pris* articles – and the French edition of *Nègres blancs d'Amérique*, thereby making the works of the Quebec liberation movement widely available to the French-speaking world. From 1956 to

¹⁴ Kristin Ross, *May '68 and its Afterlives* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 82.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 84.

¹⁶ See Pierre Vallières à Jean-Marc Pothé, 20 juillet 1967. Reproduced in Pierre Vallières, *Paroles d'un nègre blanc* (Montréal: VLB, 2002), 110-11.

1975, Maspero also maintained his bookstore, La Joie de Lire, situated on rue Saint Severin in downtown Paris. At the lively and crowded store, the various factions of the French left would meet and discuss with individuals coming from all parts of the world, sometimes even using the space as a refuge from police clubs during protests. Young Quebec intellectuals studying or travelling in France came to the store to meet, discuss, and exchange ideas, sharpening their analyses and deepening their understandings of global politics.

Anti-imperialist French intellectuals also travelled to Montreal, both to teach and to learn from the local situation in the city. In 1962 Jacques Berque, Islamic scholar, professor at the Collège de France, and well-known decolonization theorist, accepted an invitation from the Department of Anthropology of the Université de Montréal. While in Montreal, Berque took a keen interest in intellectual and political currents in the city, and met and entered into discussions with young activists and thinkers.¹⁷ He became good friends with poet Gaston Miron.¹⁸ And to the great pleasure of radicals in Montreal, Berque published a major article in the anti-imperialist *France Observateur* on “Les révoltés du Québec.” In the article, later reprinted in *Parti Pris* and *La Revue Socialiste*, Berque not only outlined the cultural and material degradation of French-speaking Quebecers, but categorically stated that their struggle was one of decolonization.¹⁹ When he published in 1964 what came to be one of his most important works, *Dépossession du monde*, Quebec acted as one of his examples of colonial alienation.²⁰ Because of the great ambiguity which

¹⁷ Deleuze, *L'une et l'autre indépendance*, 175.

¹⁸ Berque and Miron went on to continue their relationship through correspondence. See ANQ, Gaston Miron fonds, 410/004/033. For an interesting discussion of the relationship between Berque and Miron, see Jean-Christian Pleau, *La révolution québécoise : Hubert Aquin et Gaston Miron au tournant des années soixante* (Saint-Laurent, Québec: Fides, 2002), 165-70.

¹⁹ Jacques Berque, “Les révoltés du Québec” *France Observateur* (10 octobre 1963). ANQ, Gaston Miron fonds, 410/004/033.

²⁰ See Jacques Berque, *Dépossession du monde* (Paris: Éditions du seuil, 1964).

surrounded Quebec's status as a colony, international legitimacy was both incredibly valued and hard to attain, and Berque's endorsement of the Quebec liberation movement lent much-needed academic prestige to the framework outlined by Montreal radicals.

Yet, despite Berque's approving articles and the important relationship between François Maspero and Montreal writers, the relationship that Montreal radicals had with France remained fraught with tension. While certain prominent French radicals were sympathetic to Quebec liberation, much of the establishment of the French left remained intransigent, denouncing the movement in Quebec for its nationalism, and refusing to see the legitimacy of Quebec decolonization.²¹ This only compounded the many negative experiences that francophone Quebecers had when travelling to France, where their high expectations were almost always met with bitter disappointment. Pierre Vallières described his three months in Paris as "a veritable hell."²² Vallières admitted that he did learn a great deal in France – he met North Africans who significantly radicalized his thinking²³ and, by working with Italian and Spanish labourers, he learned about the unique challenges of immigration²⁴ – but not through his interactions with the French left. Jean-Marc Pôté, for his part, found that Quebecers were far from being well liked by Parisians who, mistaking them for Belgians, treated them as if they were worthless.²⁵ After having lived for a year in

²¹ For Albert Memmi's reflections on this phenomenon, see "Les Canadiens français sont-ils des colonisés?" Albert Memmi, *Portrait du colonisé. Précédé du Portrait du colonisateur, et d'une préf. de Jean-Paul Sartre. Suivi de Les Canadiens français sont-ils des colonisés?*, Éd. rev. et corr. par l'auteur ed. (Montréal: L'Étincelle, 1972).

²² Pierre Vallières, *White Niggers of America*, trans. Joan Pinkham (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1971), 187.

²³ Jacques Jourdain, "Pierre Vallières et les palinodies de la gauche québécoise" (M.A., UQAM, 1995), 21.

²⁴ Pierre Vallières, "Le mythe de l'opulence" *La Presse*, (14 août 1963). Reproduced in Vallières, *Paroles d'un nègre blanc*, 47.

²⁵ Jean-Marc Pôté, *La communauté perdue: petite histoire des militantismes* (Montréal, Québec: VLB, 1987), 43.

Paris, he moved to London, ironically finding himself far more at home among the English than he ever had among the French.²⁶

The troubled relationship between radicals in Montreal and those in France would be made plainly visible on the occasion of French president Charles de Gaulle's visit to Canada in the hot summer of 1967. On 24 July, de Gaulle stood before a cheering crowd on the balcony of Montreal's City Hall. After delivering a stirring speech about the energy, enthusiasm, and atmosphere of excitement which reigned throughout the province of Quebec, he, responding to the pulsating cheering of the crowd, dramatically pronounced his famous "Vivre le Québec libre." The exact meaning of de Gaulle's words remain obscure, but they were clear enough to infuriate Canadian officials in Ottawa. Montreal radicals, on the other hand, were ecstatic. Not pausing to critically question the limited form of independence which de Gaulle surely had in mind,²⁷ they heard in de Gaulle's ambiguous statements what they wanted to hear, a ringing endorsement of the Quebec liberation movement. For Gilles Bourque, the speech represented a crucially important act in the process of decolonization; de Gaulle "illuminated Quebec," placing it in the international arena and revealing it to itself, forcing people everywhere to take a position on its future.²⁸

²⁶ Interview with Jean-Marc Pottle, 30 October 2006, Montreal

²⁷ There were, of course, a few exceptions. See, for example, Luc Racine, "L'inévitable indépendance du Québec: pour qui et au profit de qui?," *Parti Pris* 5, no. 4 (janvier 1968): 9-14. According to Racine, "Pour de Gaulle, et pour les intérêts qu'il sert en France, concurrencer l'emprise américaine au Québec représente un atout politique majeur que l'indépendance politique du Québec pourrait grandement faciliter. Toutefois, pour que cela soit possible, il faudrait évidemment que les besoins des travailleurs québécois soient oubliés au profit d'un Etat planificateur et technocratique du même genre que l'actuel Etat français. Le prix d'une indépendance politique appuyée par la France gaulliste serait ainsi payé, une fois de plus, par les travailleurs" (10). By 1970, at least according to the French newspaper *Le Figaro*, many leftists seemed to have changed their minds. "Quant aux intellectuels," the paper reported, "ils dissèquent les propos du général dans un contexte franco-russe-américain. Chez les étudiants, les hommes de gauche et les extrémistes du F.L.Q., on dit: 'De Gaulle nous a coupés volontairement du progressisme du monde entier. En s'associant à nous, il nous a donné une coloration politique à droite. Il a créé ainsi une confusion regrettable nous associant à des nationalistes alors que nous voulions remettre avant tout en cause l'establishment.'" "De Gaulle vue par les Québécois," *Le Figaro*, 27 octobre 1970, 5.

²⁸ Gilles Bourque, "De Gaulle, Politique et stratégie," *Parti Pris* 5, no. 1 (septembre 1967): 7. "plaçait le Québec sous un éclairage total."

According to Philippe Bernard, the “visit of the President of France to our country acted as a catalyst,” one which could be compared in importance to the birth of the FLQ, the death of Duplessis, or the Asbestos strike of 1948.²⁹ Pierre Renaud and Robert Tremblay argued that, with de Gaulle’s speech, “the struggle for Quebec liberation is known around the world.”³⁰ *Parti Pris* even printed a portrait of de Gaulle on its front cover, and, declaring ambiguously that “France and Quebec share a common destiny,” dedicated the issue to the journal’s French comrades.³¹

De Gaulle’s enthusiastic reception by Montreal radicals only served to underscore the lines of demarcation between the French and the Quebec lefts. Although associated with right-wing and anti-democratic politics in France, de Gaulle’s speech made him a hero for Montreal radicals, and they became increasingly frustrated with the French left’s refusal to recognize the importance of Quebec independence. Gilles Bourque wrote that the “French left is for the Quebec left what the USSR is for Latin American guerrillas: a force of inertia.”³² Vallières felt that the problem resided in the fact that the “French left imagined that de Gaulle had himself initiated the national liberation struggle in Quebec, without even taking the time to consider the fact that if de Gaulle had cried ‘Vive le Québec libre,’ and if his words had such an incredible resonance, it is because a national liberation movement had already existed – even if people outside of Quebec had not yet begun to talk about it.” Montreal radicals, he argued, did not wait for de Gaulle to begin their struggle for

²⁹ Philippe Bernard, “Éditorial: Vive le Québec libre,” *Parti Pris* 5, no. 1 (septembre 1967): 5. “séjour du Président de la France dans notre pays fut un catalyseur.”

³⁰ Pierre Renaud and Robert Tremblay, “Les nègres blancs d’amérique,” *Parti Pris* 5, no. 7 (1968): 19. “la lutte pour la liberté québécoise est connue du monde entier.”

³¹ Inside cover, *Parti Pris* 5, no. 1 (septembre 1967). “la France et le Québec partagent un destin commun.”

³² Bourque, “De Gaulle, Politique et stratégie,” 11. “gauche française est pour la gauche québécoise ce que l’URSS est pour les guérilleros d’Amérique du Sud: un pouvoir d’inertie.”

liberation.³³ Vallières attributed the silence of French leftists on the ‘Quebec question’ to an excessive anti-imperialism which had the ironic effect of blinding them to the colonial reality of the province. So worried about being labelled racist – especially in the bitter aftermath of the Algerian war of independence – the French left trembled before the prospect of admitting that French descendants could possibly be colonized.³⁴ Montreal radicals had hoped that the French left would help to propel their movement to the international arena, but they were left frustrated and disillusioned. Just as the perceptions and analyses of the French left weighed heavily on their minds, however, they could not help but look with excitement on the developments which took place in France the very year following de Gaulle’s visit, in May and June of 1968.

When the administration of the Université de Paris X in Nanterre, situated on the outskirts of Paris, decided to shut down the university in response to an increasingly politically charged atmosphere, students at the Sorbonne met to protest the following day, on 3 May. Political frustration had been brewing in France for years. Students and workers had been challenging the authoritarian nature of French society and the injustices of capitalism, and unresolved tensions left over from the

³³ UQAM, Charles Gagnon fonds, 124p-202a/19, Pierre Vallières, “Nous voulons une révolution globale au Québec” in *Combat* no. 8180 (4 novembre 1970). “gauche française a imaginé, que de Gaulle avait déclenché la lutte de libération nationale au Québec, sans même prendre le temps d’en arriver à la conclusion que si de Gaulle avait crié ‘Vive le Québec libre’ et que si cela avait eu une telle résonance, c’est que véritablement il existait une lutte de libération nationale mais dont on n’avait pas encore parlé ailleurs qu’au Québec.”

³⁴ When asked about the reasons behind the silence for the French left, Vallières responded: “Cette indifférence vous est d’ailleurs, à vous Français, reprochée par un de nos écrivains, Raoul Roy, qui la met au compte d’un ‘paternalisme bouffi d’orgueil.’ Il paraît aussi que vous souffrez, toujours d’après Roy, d’un ‘complexe anti-colonialiste’ tellement accusé que vous tremblez de passer pour raciste en prenant la défense de vos frères colonisés...” Vallières did, however, reach out to the French left, asking it to consider “la lutte de libération nationale au Québec de la même façon qu’ils le font vis à vis des Palestiniens, des Tupamaros d’Uruguay, vis à vis des Black Panthers aux U.S.A.” He went on to argue that Quebecers were now in the same situation as Algerians a few years before. But then, realizing what he had just said, he admitted that he was not surprised that “la Gauche ait aujourd’hui tellement de difficulté à comprendre le problème québécois alors qu’elle n’était même pas capable, hier, de comprendre le problème algérien et qu’elle a eu beaucoup de mal et en a encore à comprendre la cause palestinienne et à lui donner son appui.” UQAM, Charles Gagnon fonds, 124p-202a/19, Pierre Vallières, “Nous voulons une révolution globale au Québec” in *Combat* no. 8180 (4 novembre 1970).

Algerian war hung suspended in Paris' cool spring air. When the police moved into the Sorbonne to arrest protesters who had barricaded themselves inside, groups of students, feeling that the police had breached a long-standing tradition of non-interference with university affairs, began bombarding police vehicles with projectiles. Police reinforcements were called in, and rioting continued throughout the night. The clash at the Sorbonne set off a wave of student strikes and protests which grew in intensity and violence. Before long, workers walked off the job and the entire country was paralyzed in a vast general strike.

The powerful symbolism of May '68 – of students and workers joining together, and of countless citizens taking to the streets with slogans demanding the liberation of the imagination and the decentralization of power at all levels – quickly spread across the Atlantic.³⁵ From their jail cells, Vallières and Gagnon followed the events with great hope. For Gagnon, the events of May demonstrated that “*only action*, and the boldest action at that, can allow this sentiment, this class consciousness to express itself.” Before the May revolts, no poll would have indicated that an uprising was to occur, but once initiated, the movement took on a dimension of its own, allowing him to conclude that a revolutionary consciousness needed to be created through action.³⁶ For Vallières, the spontaneity of May '68 demonstrated that “a far-reaching revolution is possible in an industrialized country,” and was therefore especially so in “an under-industrialized and colonized place like Quebec.”³⁷ While he spoke of the way in which the movement in France challenged

³⁵ Montrealers watched the events closely through their newspapers and televisions, and countless books were soon published on the massive revolt. For one written from a Canadian perspective, see Paquerette Villeneuve, *Une Canadienne dans les rues de Paris pendant la révolte étudiante* (Montréal: Éditions du jour, 1968).

³⁶ Charles Gagnon, “La maladie de la société” écrit en prison en décembre 1968. Reproduced in *FLQ: un projet révolutionnaire*, 190. “*L’action seule*, et l’action la plus audacieuse, permet à cet esprit, à cette conscience de classe de se manifester.”

³⁷ UQAM, Charles Gagnon fonds, 124p-202a/45, Pierre Vallières, “Avant-Propos” 7 janvier 1969, *Indépendance et révolution* (not published), (août-novembre 1967), 1. Also see Pierre Vallières, *Les*

all forms of power and demanded self-management on all levels,³⁸ he ironically looked back to the great wave of euphoria that swept the city when de Gaulle had visited the previous year. That de Gaulle in France stood for centralized authority and public order, precisely the opposite of Vallières's ideals, did not seem to matter. In a letter to Gérard Godin, Vallières wrote: "Let us hope that the 'cultural revolution' taking place in Paris and the provinces will inspire our own Quebec Red Guards, who have been rather lazy for the past little while. Unless, of course, we can bring back big Charles."³⁹

De Gaulle's pronouncements were so important because they were interpreted as a recognition of the legitimacy of the Quebec liberation movement, a recognition that Quebec, like other areas of the Third World, had both the right and the responsibility to decolonize. Despite the deep vagueness of what de Gaulle had really meant, despite his insistence on calling francophone Quebecers "des français du Canada," his seeming endorsement of their cause went a long way in helping them to achieve a momentary stability in a movement which, riddled with paradoxes, was generally met with scepticism. Radicals in Montreal looked to France with excitement and frustration. In the end, however, it would not be to France that they would look when attempting to situate themselves within a larger global movement of liberation. For this, their eyes were firmly fixed on the one nation which seemed to embody the hopes of the Third World: Cuba.

Héritiers de Papineau. Itinéraire politique d'un 'nègre blanc' (1960-1985) (Montréal: Québec/Amérique, 1986), 152. "qu'une révolution globale est possible et réalisable dans un pays industrialisé"; "dans un pays sous-industrialisé et colonisé comme le Québec."

³⁸ For Vallières, "l'autogestion" was "la base de toute démocratie authentique, de toute liberté, de toute justice." UQAM, Charles Gagnon fonds, 124p-202a/45, Pierre Vallières, "Avant-Propos" 7 janvier 1969, *Indépendance et révolution* (not published) (août-novembre 1967), 16.

³⁹ ANQ, Éditions Parti Pris fonds, MSS-140, 32, Pierre Vallières to Gérard Godin, 17 mai 1968. "Espérons que la 'révolution culturelle' en cours à Paris et en province va inspirer nos gardes rouges québécois qui sont pas mal assoupis depuis quelques temps. A moins qu'on fasse venir encore une fois le grand Charles."

Cuba, Anti-imperialism, and the Dream of the Third World

For those in search of an alternative model of development, Cuba became the single most important point of reference, standing out as a beacon of hope by demonstrating that small nations could triumph over the seemingly invincible power of imperialism. No event since the Russian revolution of 1917 had so transformed the political climate, inspiring the hopes of leftists around the world, as the Cuban revolution. Images and ideas emanating from Cuba reverberated from Mexico City to Paris, and from Harlem to Montreal. The Cuban revolution can be said to have begun when, on 26 July 1953, less than a year after Cuban president Fulgencio Batista had returned to power by way of a coup d'État, a group of rebels led by Fidel Castro launched an attack on the Moncada fortress just outside of Santiago de Cuba. In 1953 Castro was a 26-year-old lawyer, well-known in his student days as a great orator and athlete, a man born into a wealthy family and who, upon first glance, seemed to have the background and training to engage in a conventional career as a member of Cuba's political ruling class. When Batista's coup upset his hope of running for election under the banner of the Ortodoxo party, he began organizing a group of rebels which could overthrow the newly installed government. The attack failed, many of rebels were executed, and Castro was sentenced to 15 years in prison on the Island of Pines. After being released in a good-will gesture by Batista in May of 1955, Castro fled to Mexico where he, along with his new comrades (including the Argentinean Che Guevara) began making plans to return to the island to lead an armed insurrection. And when they finally did return, in December of 1956, they waged an epic struggle of guerilla warfare in the Sierra Maestra mountains in the eastern part of Cuba. Despite countless setbacks, the movement only gathered momentum in the coming two years. By New Year's day of 1959, Batista had fled,

the army had been defeated, and swarming crowds filled the streets of Havana to celebrate the end of Batista's rule and arrival of the new revolutionary regime.

Images of Cuba's bearded rebels, portrayed as fighting a heroic battle against tyranny and injustice, circulated around the world.⁴⁰ Yet when the rebels came to power in 1959, their social and economic program was, at best, unclear. Castro had declared humanism the guiding principle of the revolution, and he immediately set out to initiate a vast program of land reform. The program expropriated large estates and turned roughly 40% of the island's farmland into individual plots for Cuba's landless peasants.⁴¹ Although the revolution enjoyed wide popular support at home, it was raising eyebrows abroad. The United States government became increasingly disenchanted with Castro, and Castro, in response, became more defiant, deciding to exchange sugar for oil with the Soviet Union. Despite the menace of the United States, the revolution continued in earnest. In 1961, declared the 'Year of Education,' the country set out on a vast literacy campaign which had the radical objective of eliminating illiteracy in the country in a one-year period. A hundred thousand student teachers, many of whom were young teenagers, headed out to the countryside armed only with a special uniform and an oil lamp, powerfully demonstrating to the world the commitment of the Cuban people towards human dignity and the alleviation of misery. The early years of the revolution were filled with experimentation and setback, but its symbolic power – demonstrating that a small but determined nation could stand up to the world's greatest economic and military power – resonated with progressive intellectuals and activists throughout the world. Cuba moved steadily into

⁴⁰ For an important study of the way in which Cuba helped to shape the emergence of the American New Left, see Van Gosse, *Where the Boys Are: Cuba, Cold War America and the Making of a New Left* (London: Verso, 1993).

⁴¹ Richard Gott, *Cuba: A New History* (New Haven: Yale Nota Bene, 2005), 170. I have drawn on Gott for the details of the Revolution.

the Soviet camp, yet it also stood for something new, acting as the voice of the post-colonial Third World.

Many of the most well-known leftist intellectuals of the period, from Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir to C. Wright Mills, Claude Julien, and Paul Sweezy, visited the island, recording their thoughts and communicating Cuba's atmosphere of freedom and experimentation to the world. In his quickly-written and fast-selling *Listen, Yankee: The Revolution in Cuba*, C. Wright Mills assumes the voice of a Cuban revolutionary explaining the revolution's imperatives to an American audience, making clear the "distinct possibility" that what "the Cubans are saying and doing today, other hungry peoples in Latin America are going to be saying and doing tomorrow." If Latin Americans had remained "outside of world history," he wrote in his 'note to the reader,' they were now "entering that history" as subjects, with both vengeance and pride.⁴² Sartre's book on Cuba – entitled simply *Sartre on Cuba* – detailed the country's pre-revolutionary dependency on the United States and the tyranny of a sugar quota which, by imposing a single-crop economy, worked to preserve feudal relations on the island. He described in vivid detail the youthful energy of the revolution, the young rebels who barely slept, meeting Guevara at midnight and touring the countryside with Castro. But Sartre went further, explaining that through the process of actively creating and taking control of their society, the Cuban people had become citizens, awakened to responsibility, and created individual and national sovereignty; they had, in short, changed "even the very notion of man." "The Cubans must win," Sartre dramatically declared, "or we will lose all, even hope."⁴³

⁴² C. Wright Mills, *Listen, Yankee: The Revolution in Cuba* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1960), 7, 173.

⁴³ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Sartre on Cuba* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1974 [1961]), 159, 46. For an important account by Simone de Beauvoir on her and Sartre's impressions of Cuba, see de Beauvoir, *Force of Circumstance*. For a selection of Sartre's writings published in Cuba, including an important

All throughout the 1960s, Cuba symbolized the possibilities inherent in Third World revolution. It stood for the prospect of creating an alternative to American-led capitalism and the racism and inequalities inherent to it. On 26 April 1959, just months after assuming power, Castro came to Montreal, where he spoke to leading business figures at a banquet sponsored by the Jeune chambre de commerce. In the years after the revolution, Cuba, while inspiring Montreal's revolutionaries, ironically worked extremely hard to court the support of both the Canadian government and the country's business community.⁴⁴ Official diplomatic and business relations aside, the shining example of the Cuban revolution filled Quebec revolutionaries with hope. As early as 1960, Raoul Roy argued that the significance of the Cuban revolution resided in its destruction of a myth, the myth according to which the struggle against economic dictatorship was doomed to failure.⁴⁵ Vallières quoted Che Guevara to highlight that, because of the triumph of the Cuban revolution just off the shores of the United States, "the exploited masses of the entire world knew with greater certainty that, from that point on, 'whatever the tribulations of History during short periods, the future belongs to the people,' and this is true *in all countries*."⁴⁶ From Guevara, activists also learned that they could not sit back and wait for the right conditions for social transformation, but that these conditions needed to be actively created and fostered.⁴⁷

interview which he held while in the country, see Jean-Paul Sartre, *Sartre visita a Cuba: ideología y revolución, una entrevista con los escritores cubanos, huracán sobre el azúcar* (Habana: Ediciones R, 1961).

⁴⁴ And, according to Robert Wright, when relations between Cuba and the United States cooled, "Some Canadian politicians and business leaders were unabashed in their enthusiasm for the sudden vacuum in the Cuban market." Robert Wright, *Three Nights in Havana: Pierre Trudeau, Fidel Castro and the Cold War* (Toronto: HarperCollins, 2007), 69.

⁴⁵ Raoul Roy, "La Révolution de Cuba," *La Revue Socialiste*, no. 4 (été 1960): 41-52.

⁴⁶ Vallières, *Les Héritiers de Papineau*, 90-91. "les masses exploitées du monde entier savaient désormais avec une certitude accrue que 'quelles que soient les tribulations de l'Histoire pendant de courtes périodes, l'avenir appartient au peuple', et cela *dans tous les pays*."

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 91.

The Cuban revolution differed from the decolonization of Africa in that it pitted rebels against their own ostensibly sovereign government. The battle was not against ‘foreign’ forces, but against a government and army which were beholden to foreign economic interests. The writings of Fidel Castro,⁴⁸ and especially the socialist humanism of Che Guevara,⁴⁹ convinced many that new Third World socialism wore an entirely different face than its Soviet counterpart. And the 1966 Tricontinental conference in Havana powerfully marked what seemed to be the dawning of a new era, the first time, as Robert Young explains, that “the three continents of the South – the Americas, Asia and Africa – were brought together in a broad alliance to form the Tricontinental,” an event marking “the formal globalization of the anti-imperial struggle.”⁵⁰ Because of the global reach of American imperialism, the success of the Cuban revolution depended upon the various anti-imperialist struggles taking place everywhere, including Quebec. Vallières wrote in 1967 that “Imperialism has not only linked us all in our servitude, but it has also made us interdependent in our efforts to conquer our liberty and our selves. We will either all become free together, or we will together remain slaves of the American Yankee.” And, from this perspective, he argued that the best way to support Cuba is “to foster the struggle against imperialism and capitalism in our own respective countries.”⁵¹

In the first half of the 1960s, Vallières had been instrumental in building this large systemic analysis of imperialism, an analysis which modified the way in which

⁴⁸ See, for example, Fidel Castro, *History Will Absolve Me* (New York: L. Stuart, 1961).

⁴⁹ Among the most famous of Guevara’s writings was “Notes on Man and Socialism in Cuba.” See Ernesto Guevara, *Che Guevara Speaks: Selected Speeches and Writings* (New York: Merit Publishers, 1967).

⁵⁰ Robert Young, *Postcolonialism: an Historical Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2001), 192.

⁵¹ Pierre Vallières, “Cuba révolutionnaire,” *Parti Pris* 5, no. 1 (septembre 1967): 22, 24. “L’impérialisme non seulement nous a rendu interdépendants dans l’esclavage mais aussi solidaire dans la lutte pour la conquête de notre liberté et de nos individualités. Nous deviendrons tous libres ensemble ou bien nous demeurerons les peuples esclaves de l’Amérique yankee”; “de développer dans nos pays respectifs la lutte contre l’impérialisme et le capitalisme.”

radicals situated themselves internationally. When *Révolution québécoise*, founded by Vallières and Charles Gagnon, appeared on the political horizon in 1964, its writers placed themselves in opposition to *Parti Pris*, but their criticism was based on an analytical framework which laid greater claim to highlighting the transnational nature of the struggle. It is instructive to listen to a typical critique of *Parti Pris* published in the journal, a critique in which the author attempts to resituate the ‘imperial capital’ of Quebec:

We should never forget that secession will only be meaningful if it eliminates or greatly weakens foreign control over the Quebec economy, if it eliminates what you, comrades of ‘Parti Pris,’ call the economic alienation of French Canadians. As Latin America demonstrates, Washington controls virtually all the national bourgeoisies of the Western Hemisphere. The weaker they are, as much internationally as nationally, the more they need to rely on Washington and the more they become dependent upon American capitalists, who even resort to ‘military aid’ to prop up the political power of these national bourgeoisies when their own power is challenged by progressive forces. ... In the Quebec of 1964, the number one enemy is no longer Ottawa, but Washington.⁵²

The critique articulated by *Révolution québécoise*, one which drew heavily on Marxism and insisted that power lay in the hands of American imperialists rather than politicians in Ottawa, profoundly transformed the geographic boundaries which had earlier confined Quebec liberation. Cuba was not the only inspiration for this subtle yet profound transformation in the language of Quebec decolonization, but the Cuban example was crucial in reinforcing this new interpretation, surfacing again and again as the primary example of the imperatives of world anti-imperialist struggle.

⁵² Jean Rochefort, "Aux camarades de 'Parti Pris'," *Révolution Québécoise* 1, no. 3 (novembre 1964): 13, 15. "Car il ne faut jamais perdre de vue que la sécession n'aura de sens que si elle élimine ou affaiblit grandement le contrôle étranger sur l'économie du Québec, si elle élimine ce que vous appelez, camarades de 'Parti Pris', l'aliénation économique des Canadiens français. Or, toute l'Amérique latine en témoigne, les bourgeoisies nationales de l'hémisphère occidental sont toutes plus ou moins sous la coupe de Washington. Et plus elles sont faibles, tant sur le plan international que national, plus elles doivent compter sur Washington et plus elles deviennent tributaires des capitalistes des U.S.A., qui vont jusqu'à 'l'aide militaire' pour étayer le pouvoir politique de ces bourgeoisies nationales quand ce pouvoir est menacé par des forces progressistes. ... Car pour le Québec de 1964, l'ennemi no 1, ce n'est plus Ottawa, c'est Washington."

Under the new rubric of anti-imperialism, intellectual work and activism underwent an important shift. Internationalism was no longer associated with an understanding of solidarity in a parallel struggle; rather, political activity in Quebec formed one part of a much larger global movement against imperialism. In each year following the publication of *Parti Pris*'s 1965-1966 manifesto, the tendency to focus on American imperialism became more pronounced. In the second half of the 1960s, writers like Philippe Bernard maintained that Quebec liberation not only paralleled, but was deeply integrated with the struggles of Black and Latino Americans. Bernard, articulating much of the sentiment of *Parti Pris* in general, argued that it was the responsibility of all advocates of Quebec liberation to support the Black Power movement, assist American army deserters, be in solidarity with Vietnam, and encourage all other manifestations of liberty in opposition to imperialism.⁵³ For Gabriel Gagnon, because the United States was the most important enemy in North America, all challenges to American hegemony furthered the cause of building an alternative American society. Far from being limited to Quebec, therefore, the struggle for Quebec decolonization was actively being forged "in the outskirts of Chicago, the rice paddies of Vietnam, and the *Maquis* of the Andes."⁵⁴

Throughout its five-year existence, *Parti Pris* played a central role in building a sophisticated analysis of Quebec's condition as a colonized nation, of its subjection to the powers of American imperialism, and of the necessity of forging a totalizing program of decolonization. By its last year of existence, certain issues of the journal – now published in a new layout which highlighted its internationalism – dealt almost

⁵³ Philippe Bernard, "Éditorial. Politique internationale: bilan et perspective," *Parti Pris* 5, no. 4 (janvier 1968): 7.

⁵⁴ Gabriel Gagnon, "Pour un socialisme décolonisateur," *Parti Pris* 4, no. 1-2 (septembre-octobre 1966): 52. "dans les faubourgs de Chicago, dans les rizières du Vietnam et dans les maquis des Andes."

entirely with the international sphere.⁵⁵ In demonstrating the grip of American imperialism, and the necessity of common struggle in opposing it, *Parti Pris*, reflecting the larger world of Montreal radicalism, could not help but keep its eyes fixed on Cuba, the one nation which seemed to be beating all odds by actively constructing a post-imperialist future.

Cuba had more than just symbolic value; many individuals travelled to the country, interacted with Cubans,⁵⁶ and learned from their concrete engagement with Third World socialism. When in Montreal in 1959, Castro met with George Schoeters, a thirty-two year old Belgian immigrant who had sat eagerly during the Cuban leader's press conference listening to his every word. Already in the late 1950s, Schoeters had been intensely interested in Third World affairs. When Castro came to Montreal the two met for over an hour, and Castro extended him an invitation to visit the island. A few months later, he and his wife travelled to Cuba and toured cooperative farms and sugar plantations, and Schoeters returned once again to participate in an agrarian reform program.⁵⁷ Only a couple of years after his visits to Cuba, Schoeters became one of the first members of the FLQ, attempting to bring what he had learned in Cuba north to the shores of the St. Lawrence River.

Schoeters was among the first Montreal dissidents to travel to Cuba, but he was not the last. As Richard Gott writes, "Havana in the 1960s, like Paris in the 1790s and Moscow in the 1920s, became for a brief moment a revolutionary Mecca,

⁵⁵ After *Parti Pris* folded, the Front de Libération Populaire carried on, drawing on very similar analyses of the political situation in Quebec and the nature of international solidarity. See, for example, WRDA, FLP fonds, "Press statements". "Message de SOLIDARITÉ du FRONT de LIBÉRATION POPULAIRE au CONGRÈS de la SDS (Chicago)", n.d.

⁵⁶ It was not only in Cuba where Montrealers entered into contact with Cuban officials. In the fall of 1965 a group of Quebec revolutionaries entered into contact with Julia Gonzalez, Cuban consul in Montreal. After the Canadian government applied pressure on Cuba, Gonzalez was replaced with a more 'neutral' representative. Louis Fournier, *FLQ: Histoire d'un mouvement clandestin* (Outremont: Lanctôt Éditeur, 1998), 119.

⁵⁷ Michael McLoughlin, *Last Stop, Paris: The Assassination of Mario Bachand and the Death of the FLQ* (Toronto: Viking, 1998), 10-11.

the epicentre of a changing and optimistic world.”⁵⁸ Many Montreal radicals travelled to the country, some for political conferences or to discover the revolution for themselves, others fleeing Quebec in forced exile as a result of illegal political activity (including those involved in the kidnapping of James Cross in October 1970). In the early 1960s, Michel Chartrand, legendary labour organizer, printer, and future leader of the Montreal Central Council of the CSN, travelled to Cuba in an attempt to gain a better understanding of the country and its development. Chartrand spoke admiringly of trailers which traveled to the countryside to show movies to the rural population, and of the Cuban government’s program to bring rural people to the city to take courses in ceramics and attend the ballet.⁵⁹ And he drew clear parallels between Cuba and the situation in Quebec. The introduction of socialism in Quebec would begin, he argued, with the nationalization of natural resources, and “will extend to education and hospitals, and so on.” The only difference with Quebec was that “we are white people, so it will be a little more difficult for the USA to push us around.”⁶⁰ Countless other radicals travelled to Cuba – Eric Hobsbawm, for example, recalls encountering young Quebec revolutionaries when at the Havana Cultural Congress of January 1968⁶¹ – but they often left few traces of their travels, aside from reports by the Canadian intelligence service.⁶² While in Cuba, Quebec revolutionaries met with like-minded individuals from around the world, exchanging ideas, experiences, and

⁵⁸ Gott, *Cuba: A New History*, 178.

⁵⁹ Michel Chartrand, Vernel Olson and John Riddell, *The Real Cuba as Three Canadians Saw it* (Toronto: Fair Play for Cuba Committee, 1964), 4.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 8.

⁶¹ Eric Hobsbawm, *Interesting Times: A Twentieth-Century Life* (London: Allen Lane, 2002), 256-58. One Montreal radical, Roger Soublière, wrote of his experiences at the 1968 Havana conference. According to his article, their delegation of fourteen Quebecers (they were also accompanied by two ‘Canadians’) signed a declaration of solidarity with the struggles of the Third World. Roger Soublière, “Hasta la victoria siempre!,” *Parti Pris* 5, no. 7 (avril 1968): 31-32. For interesting reflections on the 1968 conference, and on the experience of foreign radicals in Cuba in general, see Andrew Salkey, *Havana Journal* (Baltimore: Penguin, 1971).

⁶² Canadian intelligence sources have been used most effectively to reconstruct the experience and activities of many Quebec radical in Cuba in McLoughlin, *Last Stop, Paris: The Assassination of Mario Bachand and the Death of the FLQ*.

political strategies. Reflecting on their time in exile in Cuba, two members of the FLQ, Alain Allard and Pierre Charette, wrote that they slowly came to understand themselves in relation to the rest of the world.

We became conscious of important things and came to reject what turned out to be not really that important. We have learned the art of being objective and patient. In terms of practical discoveries, we encountered Marxism. This allowed us to better understand the problems of Quebec. ... we encountered groups of revolutionaries who came from all around the world. As a consequence, we became internationalized.

As Quebeckers, we have also become less sedentary. We found in different places problems which were identical to ours. Our actions became indissociable from those who, like us, were also fighting for their dignity.⁶³

Allard and Charette, like so many other Montreal activists of the 1960s, were profoundly transformed through their interactions with others struggling in the same global anti-imperialist movement.

In the first decade of the revolution, Cuba advanced in an almost experimental way, giving support to different revolutionary movements around the world. The Cuban revolution meant many things to many people, but among its most important gestures were its broad declarations announcing an end to racism in Cuba, and its open courting of Black militants in the United States. Discrimination against Blacks was rife in pre-revolutionary Cuba. Blacks were excluded from White-only beaches and White-only clubs. The new revolutionary government quickly set out to put an end to racial discrimination. Operating on an integrationist logic, however, it failed to take into account the power of racism as a cultural system that could not merely be

⁶³ Michèle Tremblay, *De Cuba le FLQ parle* (Montreal: Les Éditions Intel, 1975), 150-51. "On a pris conscience des choses importantes et à rejeter ce qui ne l'était pas vraiment. Nous avons appris l'art d'être objectif et patient. Sur le plan pratique, on a découvert le marxisme. Ça nous a permis de mieux voir les problèmes québécois.... et nous avons rencontré divers groupes de révolutionnaires qui venaient de tous les pays. Par voie de conséquence, nous nous sommes internationalisés.

En tant que Québécois, nous sommes aussi devenus moins sédentaires. On retrouvait, ailleurs, des problèmes identiques aux nôtres. Notre action devenait indissociable de ceux qui, comme nous, luttaien pour leur dignité."

undone by eliminating discriminatory laws. The government therefore did not allow the development of Black organizations which would work towards the active undoing of the cultural structures of racism. Despite its mixed record on race, Cuba's triumph over the colossal powers of imperialism and its pronouncements on behalf of the marginalized and oppressed ensured that in the 1960s the revolution would have a profound impact on Black thinkers in the United States. Castro worked hard to reach out to American Blacks, even famously staying at Harlem's Theresa Hotel when in New York City for the opening session of the United Nations in 1960. And he welcomed a continuing stream of Black revolutionaries and exiles – including Robert Williams, Eldridge Cleaver and finally Huey Newton – who were eager to receive Cuba's support and encouragement.⁶⁴

As Black Americans drew on the Cuban revolution to compare their situation with that of colonized subjects,⁶⁵ Cuba raised interesting and puzzling questions for radicals who were thinking through the relationship between race and revolution. In the minds of the vast majority of those engaged in the wave of decolonization in the post-war period, 'empire' had become inextricably intertwined with 'race.' Frantz Fanon had argued that colonialism created a Manichean world which separated the White colonisers from the indigenous population.⁶⁶ Malcolm X, for his part, spoke of "dark mankind[']s" movement of liberation, composed of the world's "non-white" peoples, be they "brown, red or yellow."⁶⁷ Yet Cuba was composed of both Blacks and Whites, of the descendents of slaves as well as of Spanish settler colonists (and, of course, of millions who fit into neither category). Because of its position as a

⁶⁴ Cynthia Young, "Havana Up in Harlem: LeRoi Jones, Harold Cruse and the Making of a Cultural Revolution," *Science & Society* 65, no. 1 (Spring 2001): 15. For a brilliant look at the relationship between one important Black activist and Cuba, see Timothy B. Tyson, *Radio Free Dixie: Robert F. Williams & the Roots of Black Power* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999).

⁶⁵ Young, "Havana Up in Harlem," 13-14.

⁶⁶ Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 40.

⁶⁷ *Malcolm X Speaks*, 49-52.

victim of American imperialism and its active efforts to forge a movement on behalf of the world's dispossessed, however, many African Americans, demonstrating the flexibility and malleability of racial metaphors, recognized Castro as on the right side of the world's racial divide. Robert Williams's *The Crusader* initially described Castro as 'colored,'⁶⁸ and Stokely Carmichael, after giving a stirring speech in Cuba on the combined struggles of Black Americans and the Third World, told *Time* magazine that "Castro is the blackest man I know."⁶⁹ Legendary Black American literary and political figure, LeRoi Jones (later Amiri Baraka), evinced much of the same sentiment when writing that, during his visit to Cuba, he had grown "even blacker" under the hot Cuban sun.⁷⁰

Much of Cuban identity, of course, is premised on the impossibility of racial essentialisms. For many, the very defining feature of the country – or even of Latin America as a whole – is its *mestizaje*, its fusing of the culture and identity of slaves, aboriginals, and settlers. But racialized power relations remained all-too-present in Cuban society. For many, the spirit of the revolution demanded that the privileged adopt the identity of the marginalized, that they see, in the words of the great Cuban essayist Roberto Fernández Retamar, history from "the *other* side, from the viewpoint of the *other* protagonist."⁷¹ Following José Martí, Retamar argued that, as the country's racial and ethnic minorities were the most oppressed, it was with them that revolutionaries needed to join in solidarity. In support of his view, Retamar quoted Che Guevara, iconic figure of the period, in a speech that he gave at the University of Las Villas on 28 December 1959. Guevara stood before the distinguished professors

⁶⁸ Young, "Havana Up in Harlem," 221.

⁶⁹ Gott, *Cuba: A New History*, 228. A copy of the speech can be found in Stokely Carmichael, *Stokely Speaks: Black Power to Pan-Africanism* (New York: Random House, 1971).

⁷⁰ Young, "Havana Up in Harlem," 22.

⁷¹ Roberto Fernández Retamar, *Caliban and Other Essays*, trans. Edward Baker (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 16.

of the university and beseeched them to leave their privileges aside, imploring them to “become black, mulatto, a worker, a peasant.”⁷²

Radicals in Montreal watched events in Cuba with unprecedented interest and intensity. Cuba and the Cuban revolution had opened a whole new world of possibility for them, transformed their understanding of imperialism and of the interrelated nature of anti-imperialist struggle, and provided them with a concrete example of the possibility of forging a new post-imperialist and post-colonial present. They too wanted to “become Black,” to join in common cause with oppressed peoples everywhere. Yet radical Montrealers realized that they were not Latin Americans, that their situation differed greatly from that of Cuba, and that they would need to look elsewhere to build a radical new identity of resistance. Many in Montreal were coming to realize that, unlike Cuba, they were situated at the very centre of the empire, and that for solidarity they would need to look to other North American minorities, and especially to American Blacks. The project of forging a broad alliance of racial and ethnic outcasts, of transforming imperialism from within, and of creating and building a new and better America, would require a dramatic voyage to the largest and most powerful city on the continent.

Black Power, Race, and the North American Revolution

More than anyone else, it was Charles Gagnon and Pierre Vallières who were responsible for bringing the Quebec liberation struggle to the world stage. On 25 September 1966, wanted by the police in Canada, Vallières and Gagnon emerged from hiding and appeared before the television studios of the United Nations headquarters in New York City. The United Nations, as flawed as the organization

⁷² Quoted in *Ibid.*, 44.

may have been, had come to be seen by the Third World as a body in which it was possible to wield some influence.⁷³ Malcolm X had even famously urged Black Americans to stop appealing to the American government for the protection of their civil rights, but rather to elevate their struggle by bringing the American government before the United Nations for its fundamental violation of African Americans' human rights.⁷⁴ And so, deeply influenced by both Malcolm X and the countries of the Third World, it is no surprise that the two Quebec revolutionaries ended up at the United Nations. Speaking before the international media, Vallières and Gagnon announced their plans to begin an indefinite hunger strike with the goal of bringing the world's attention to the plight of francophone Quebecers, their struggle for liberation, and the existence of political prisoners in Quebec.⁷⁵ When they returned the following day, they attempted to make their way onto the international territory of the United Nations, were prevented by scores of police and journalists, and were finally arrested on charges of illegal entry into the United States.⁷⁶ In the long years of imprisonment which followed, Gagnon and Vallières were collectively identified as the living symbols of the Quebec liberation movement.⁷⁷

The desire to attract international attention to Quebec's situation, along with a deep fascination with the Black Power movement, led the two writers to New York in the first place, but it was while imprisoned in the Manhattan House of Detention for

⁷³ Vijay Prashad, *The Darker Nations: A People's History of the Third World* (New York: The New Press, 2007), 28-41.

⁷⁴ See *Malcolm X Speaks*. When Vallières arrived in New York, he later wrote, everyone was reading Malcolm X and James Boggs, and he was profoundly influenced by these two writers. Vallières, *Les Héritiers de Papineau*, 107-10.

⁷⁵ See Lettre de Charles Gagnon et Pierre Vallières, rédigée à la suite de leur arrestation à New York, en septembre 1966. "Grève de la Faim pour la reconnaissance 'du crime politique' au Québec (Canada) et du statut de 'prisonnier politiques' pour tous les partisans du FLQ" Reproduced in *FLQ: un projet révolutionnaire*. The letter was also published in *Parti Pris* in December 1966

⁷⁶ Vallières, *Les Héritiers de Papineau*, 114-17.

⁷⁷ In the late 1960s, Vallières and Gagnon were so closely identified with each other that, at one point *Parti Pris* published an interview in which all of the answers of the interview questions are assigned to both of them, making no distinction between who answered what question. See Renaud and Tremblay, "Les nègres blancs d'amérique," 21.

Men that Vallières wrote *Nègres blancs d'Amérique: autobiographie précoce d'un 'terroriste quebecois'*, a work which would do more than any other to bring both Quebec's struggle to the world and to bring an internationalist perspective to Montreal radicalism. Vallières wrote the book non-stop, working day and night standing up in his cell, writing with worn-down pencils on lined paper which rested on a folded piece of wool. He divulged the story of his life in all of its fragility, complete with contradiction, desire, and uncertainty. The manuscript, disguised as notes for his trial, were given to his lawyer who handed them over to Gerald Godin, director of *Parti Pris* publishing house.⁷⁸ When it was released in the spring of 1968, the book caused an immediate sensation. Fearing its power to ignite revolutionary fervour, the Minister of Justice had the police seize all of the copies held in bookstores and libraries, including the legal deposit at the National Library. Repression only added fuel to the fire, and the book was reprinted many times underground, becoming an immediate best-seller.⁷⁹ Before long it was being translated and published around the world.

Part political manifesto, part autobiography of growing up in working-class Montreal, *Nègres blancs* was profoundly international in both content and form. As a personal tell-all autobiography, exploring various forms of oppression through the narrative of one's own life, Vallières took his lead more from the autobiography of Malcolm X than from Quebec's intellectual tradition. In the years leading up to their appearance before the United Nations, Vallières and Gagnon – like many other Montreal leftists – had become fascinated with the Black Power movement in the United States. Drawing on the revolutionary literature of the time – from Marx to Mao, Fanon, and Guevara – Vallières knew that those who were the most exploited

⁷⁸ Vallières, *White Niggers of America*, 126-27.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 166.

represented, at the same time, the greatest hope for the future of humanity.⁸⁰ And by employing a highly racialized metaphor as a title, Vallières attempted to tap into a universal identity of suffering and resistance, and sought to position Quebecers as being among the wretched of the earth. Vallières, however, was not the first Montreal writer to draw on racial metaphors when referring to Quebecers.

During the Sixties, Montreal was awash in a sea of racial metaphors: francophone Quebecers were the ‘Nègres blancs d’Amérique’, the ‘indigènes,’ their leaders the ‘roi nègres.’ Well-versed in Sartre and Fanon, ideas of decolonization were built on a language of victimization that borrowed heavily from the Third World. As Jean-Paul Sartre said famously in the opening lines of his preface to the *Wretched of the Earth*, “Not so very long ago, the earth numbered two thousand million inhabitants: five hundred million men, and one thousand five hundred million natives.”⁸¹ According to the intellectuals who worked in the early 1960s to construct ideas of Quebec decolonization, francophone Quebecers were the ‘natives,’ and francophone workers the ‘indigenous labourers’ who were colonized by an external power. Already in 1959, the autodidact socialist Raoul Roy was warning that the anglophone bourgeoisie wanted to maintain French Canadians in inferior jobs, as a sub-proletariat, or as Canada’s “*nègres blancs*.”⁸² Members of the FLQ argued that the federal government had created Quebec as a giant native reserve in which the colonized had neither power nor authority.⁸³ In the mid-1960s Gérard Godin maintained that Quebec writers needed to refuse formal French and write in *joual* – colloquial street French – just as “African graduates of the Sorbonne have broken

⁸⁰ Vallières, *Les Héritiers de Papineau*, 68.

⁸¹ Jean-Paul Sartre, Preface to Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 7.

⁸² "Manifeste politique: Propositions programmatiques de la REVUE SOCIALISTE," *La Revue Socialiste*, no. 1 (printemps 1959): 15.

⁸³ Paul Lemoyne, "Travailleurs, aux armes!," *La Cognée*, no. 8 (31 mars 1964): 3.

with French and now speak the language of their tribe or their country.”⁸⁴ Gilles Bourque argued that Blacks and Quebecers had a common struggle. As internally colonized groups, they both worked to destroy the system “at its very heart.”⁸⁵

Racial metaphors first came to widespread prominence when, in 1958, André Laurendeau compared premier Maurice Duplessis to a ‘roi nègre,’ ruling Quebec as local African leaders ruled on behalf of their British colonial masters.⁸⁶ The concept of the ‘roi-nègres’ – “subjugated intellectuals, profiteering notables, a whole network of people with the one and only goal of keeping the population in ignorance for as long as possible, trading natural resources with the colonizer as secretly as possible, and signing centralizing agreements”⁸⁷ – would become a standard trope of the era. Racial categories are, of course, never stable or self-evident, and are always open to a wide variety of possible meanings. Norman Mailer wrote about how many young Americans in the 1950s turned to the cultural codes of Black America in their search for the ‘hip,’ becoming, in his words, ‘White negroes.’⁸⁸ And many scholars have shown that various immigrant communities attempted to secure cultural and material advantages by becoming ‘White.’⁸⁹ When Quebec radicals appropriated racial metaphors in the late 1950s and early 1960s, it is reasonable to assume, following David Roediger, that they did so not as an act of solidarity with the marginalized, “but rather a call to arms to end the inappropriate oppression of whites.”⁹⁰

⁸⁴ Gérald Godin, “Le joul politique,” *Parti Pris* 2, no. 7 (mars 1965): 59. “les Africains diplômés de la Sorbonne ont rompu un jour avec le français pour parler la langue de leur tribu ou de leur pays.”

⁸⁵ Bourque, “De Gaulle, Politique et stratégie,” 10. “en son coeur même.”

⁸⁶ André Laurendeau, “Maurice Duplessis à l’Assemblée nationale: la théorie du roi nègre” *Le Devoir* (18 novembre 1958).

⁸⁷ “Sur Pierre E. Trudeau,” *Parti Pris* 5, no. 7 (avril 1968): 8. “intellectuels asservis, notables profiteurs, tout un réseau dont le seul et unique rôle est de maintenir le peuple dans l’ignorance le plus longtemps possible, de trafiquer les richesses naturelles avec le colonisateur dans le plus grand secret possible, de signer des ententes centralisatrices.”

⁸⁸ See Norman Mailer, *The White Negro* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1957).

⁸⁹ See, for example, Noel Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White* (London: Routledge, 1996).

⁹⁰ David R. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (London: Verso, 1991), 68.

As radicals in Montreal worked to place Quebec in the larger worldwide decolonization movement, it became evident that Quebec differed from most decolonizing nations in one crucial respect. Rather than being a colonized indigenous population, or a population whose ancestors had been sold into slavery and forcefully displaced from their home of origin, French Canadians were, although rarely theorized as such, the descendents of White settler colonists themselves.⁹¹ And herein lies the paradox – how does a ‘White’ population draw on a literature, and imagine itself as part of an entire global movement, which has explicitly stated that its objective was to overcome and displace White power? In *Nègres blancs*, Vallières is the first Quebec intellectual to substantially grapple with this question, and he does so through an extensive engagement with the ideas of the major personalities of the Black Power movement in the United States.⁹² Already in 1964, in the pages of *Révolution québécoise*, Vallières and Gagnon were attempting to introduce Malcolm X and the Black liberation struggle to Quebec radical circles. In its very first issue, *Révolution québécoise* printed an article dealing with the struggle of American Blacks,⁹³ and in November 1964 the journal published an interview with Malcolm X.⁹⁴ Late in 1964, Vallières had even been involved in a plan to bring Malcolm X to Montreal, a plan thwarted, presumably, only by Malcolm X’s assassination.⁹⁵

⁹¹ For an early comparison of some of the similarities and differences between the particularities of French Canada and South Africa, see R.R.H. Davenport, "Nationalism and Conciliation: The Bourassa-Hertzog Posture," *Canadian Historical Review* XLIV, no. 3, 1963): 193-212.

⁹² While racial metaphors were used in *Parti Pris* and *Révolution Québécoise* – Gérard Godin argued that Quebecers were “les Noirs du Canada,” and Jean Rochefort wrote that if American Blacks could produce such a powerful liberation movement, surely “Les nègres blancs du Québec” could do so as well – it was Pierre Vallières who did the most to insert the metaphor into the popular imagination. See Gérard Godin, "La folie bilinguale," *Parti Pris* 3, no. 10 (mai 1966): 56; Jean Rochefort, "Qui sont les traîtres?," *Révolution Québécoise* 1, no. 5 (janvier 1965): 33.

⁹³ Wilfrid Martin, "Où est la gauche américaine?," *Révolution Québécoise* 1, no. 1 (septembre 1964): 40-50.

⁹⁴ The publication of the interview is a testament to the interconnection of international radical circles during the period. The interview was first published in *Monthly Review*, and appeared in translation in *Révolution*. "Malcolm X parle..." *Révolution Québécoise* 1, no. 3 (novembre 1964): 52-57.

⁹⁵ See *Revolution québécoise* 1, 3 (novembre 1964): 52-57.

Vallières also learned from Black Power on a theoretical level. From James Boggs, the famed Detroit-based African-American theorist, Vallières learned of the ways in which Black oppression and marginalization was rooted in the injustices of the capitalist system. And from both Frantz Fanon and Malcolm X, Vallières learned of the ways in which fixed racial categories were maintained and guarded by a racist society in which Whites maintained their power through the dehumanization and cultural degradation of Blacks. Race, in short, was a relational concept, with racial essentialism hiding a structure intent on maintaining White privilege.⁹⁶ During the 1960s, many writers, including those who directly influenced Vallières, used the word ‘Black’ as a flexible metaphor, some using the word to describe peoples of colour throughout the world, from Asia to Latin America, and some to designate the vanguard of the world revolution.⁹⁷ In a recently published important work, *Afro-Orientalism*, Bill Mullen outlines the ways in which many radical writers, mostly coming from the radical African-American tradition, have opted for a “strategic anti-essentialism” on questions of race, giving the term ‘Black’ “relational *political* (as opposed to racial) meaning.”⁹⁸ During the 1960s, writer after writer argued that to be ‘Black’ was not only to be colonised, but to be on the side of humanity which was poised to create a new and humane world.

If whiteness was synonymous with power and privilege, and blackness with marginalisation and oppression, Vallières clearly saw the ‘White’ population of

⁹⁶ Key figures in the theoretical world of Black Power, such as Malcolm X, began a fascinating reflection on the meaning of racial categories, and especially on the meaning of ‘whiteness.’ After returning from his epic voyage to Mecca in 1964, Malcolm X stated that in “Asia or the Arab world or in Africa, where the Muslims are, if you find one who says he’s white, all he’s doing is using an adjective to describe something that’s incidental about him, one of his incidental characteristics; there is nothing else to it, he’s just white.” This *meaning* of whiteness, of course, was completely different than the meaning associated to being White in the United States. In America, he argued, when a man “says he’s white, he means something else.” You can hear in “the sound of his voice – when he says he’s white, he means he’s boss.” And what could possibly denaturalize race more powerfully than Malcolm X’s continued reference to the “so-called white man”? *Malcolm X Speaks*, 163.

⁹⁷ Bill V. Mullen, *Afro-Orientalism* (Minneapolis, 2004). xxv, xxxv.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.* 78.

Quebec as an anomaly, sharing a similar place in North American society as American Blacks. Vallières was profoundly marked by his reading of Fanon: “By awakening the idea of *négritude*, by plumbing the depths of its humanity, (‘of higher quality’ than the Westerner, Sartre insisted), Fanon was also inviting us to become *nègres*, inheritors of the anger of the humiliated, of the poor and maimed: to become ‘*nègres blancs*.’”⁹⁹ Vallières had clearly learned from Fanon, but also from Aimé Césaire, the great poet and co-founder of the *négritude* movement, a movement which sought to valorize Black history and culture, rejecting the demands of assimilation and persistent cultural denigration by the White world. Years later, in a documentary which appeared in the early 1990s, Césaire admitted to have first laughed at the prospect of a White population employing the concept of *négritude*, but he eventually came to see that, in fact, Vallières and other Quebeckers had understood the *négritude* movement at a profound level.¹⁰⁰ As Césaire would later reflect, “Our movement was based in fact apparently on race but it went beyond that, beyond race. There was a cry, a universal human cry. It is not a triumphant glorious negritude. It isn’t that. It is negritude trodden on. The trodden-on Negro. The oppressed Negro. And it is the Negro rebel. That’s what negritude is. Our negritude. It is a humanization. And that is why there can be a White negritude, a negritude of the people of Québec, a negritude of any color. That is the basic notion.”¹⁰¹

And so when Vallières was choosing the title, he did so informed theoretically by the ideas of Malcolm X and Stokely Carmichael and the emerging Black Power

⁹⁹ Vallières, *Les Héritiers de Papineau*, 67. “En réveillant la *négritude*, en puisant en elle son humanité, (‘de meilleure qualité’ que l’occidentale, insistait Sartre), Fanon nous invitait à devenir nous aussi des *nègres*, des fils de la colère des humiliés, des pauvres et des estropiés: des ‘*nègres blancs*.’”

¹⁰⁰ See the fascinating footage of Paul Chamberland interviewing Césaire in Jean-Daniel Lafond, *La Manière Nègre, ou Aimé Césaire, chemin faisant* (Canada-France coproduction: ACPAV (Quebec) and RFO (Martinique), 1991).

¹⁰¹ Euzhan Palcy, *Aimé Césaire: a voice for history, prt II* (United States: California Newsreel, 1994).

movement in the United States.¹⁰² He looked to Black Power ideas for their open potential, arguing that it was “in the interest of all the other niggers, all the other exploited people, including the Québécois, to unite with the American blacks in their struggle for liberation.” Like American Blacks, Quebecers were brought to the Americas as “servants of the imperialists,” imported as cheap labour, and, with the exception of the colour of their skin, “their condition remains the same.” And, with such a definition, it was clear that Quebecers were not the only ‘nègres blancs’ in North America; they were joined by the vast array of immigrant communities which lived in substandard condition as members of the working class. Vallières argued that Black nationalism, with its emphasis on Black self-determination, a reaffirmation of Black culture, and a defence of universal human rights, was analogous to Quebec separatism. Neither, he argued, could possibly be oppressive, as both were made up of those who were already located on the margins of society.¹⁰³ To be truly ‘White,’ for Vallières, one practically needed to be of British descent. Vallières even denaturalizes the category ‘White’ by placing the word in quotation marks when speaking of people with pale skin, like Paul Sweezy, who had taken the side of the marginalized.¹⁰⁴ To be a ‘nègre,’ rather than being a racial or a biological category, was the condition of being “someone’s slave,” of being a “sub-man.”¹⁰⁵ Being a ‘nègre,’ building on Césaire’s concept of *négritude*, and fully aware of the British colonial practice of using the term ‘nigger’ for non-European colonial subjects,¹⁰⁶ was also a way to transform a category of oppression into a force of revolution.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰² It is interesting to note that when Vallières saw his book advertised under a different title, he immediately wrote to the head of the *Parti Pris* publishing house, Gérard Godin, insisting that his original title be maintained. ANQ, Éditions Parti Pris fonds, MSS-140, 32, Pierre Vallières to Gérard Godin, 24 août 1967.

¹⁰³ Vallières, *White Niggers of America*, 73, 21, 52.

¹⁰⁴ These quotation marks have been removed from later editions of the book.

¹⁰⁵ Vallières, *White Niggers of America*. 21.

¹⁰⁶ Young, *Postcolonialism: an Historical Introduction*, 33.

¹⁰⁷ Jean-Daniel Lafond, *La Manière Nègre*.

Vallières was far from alone in his fascination with Black Power. Charles Gagnon collected literature produced by the various strands of the Black Power movement,¹⁰⁸ and, partly through his engagement with Black Power, sharpened his analysis of Quebec's role in the larger North America revolution. In *Feu sur l'Amérique, Propositions pour la révolution nord-américaine*, a manifesto written in prison in August and September 1968, and seized by police before it could be published,¹⁰⁹ Gagnon disregarded the Canadian border and looked to francophone Quebecers as one colonized group among many in North America. When the North American bourgeoisie talks about the high standard of living in North America, Gagnon argued, it was forgetting "the shanty towns of Mexico, the ghettos of Watts and Harlem, and the slums of Saint-Henri and Mile-End (Montreal)." It was ignoring the chronic poverty which afflicted so much of the continent, having particularly devastating effects "in the regions inhabited by French Canadians, Mexicans, Aborigines, Acadians, Puerto Ricans, and Blacks." Perhaps most importantly, it was being wilfully blind to the reality that North America had become "the land of White Anglo-Saxon racism."¹¹⁰ In 1968, Gagnon believed that 'class' alone could not explain either the full dimension of oppression nor the real-life axis upon which individuals organized for liberation. We now know, he argued, that "being a Black

¹⁰⁸ In Gagnon's papers, one can find, for example, issues of *The Black Panther* newspaper, a copy of the speech that Stokely Carmichael gave to the OLAS in Havana in 1967 which attempted to link the Black liberation struggles with struggles in the Third World, and, importantly, information on the Sir George Williams Affair. UQAM, Charles Gagnon fonds.

¹⁰⁹ See Fournier, *FLQ: Histoire d'un mouvement clandestin*, 163. For an interesting look at *Feu sur l'Amérique* and the influence of the American New Left on Gagnon, see Ivan Carel, "Feu sur l'Amérique. Proposition pour la révolution nord-américaine de Charles Gagnon: analyse et mise en perspective," *Bulletin d'histoire politique* 15, no. 1 (automne 2006): 149-61. Also, see Charles Gagnon, *Le Référendum: un syndrome québécois : essai* (Lachine, Que.: Pleine Lune, 1995), 29.

¹¹⁰ UQAM, Charles Gagnon fonds, 124p-203/10, Charles Gagnon, "Feu sur l'Amérique, Propositions pour la révolution nord-américaine. Une Amérique à détruire, une Amérique à bâtir" (August-September 1968), 7. "les bidonvilles de Mexico, les ghettos de Watts et de Harlem, les taudis de Saint-Henri et Mile-End (Montréal)"; "dans les régions habitées par les Canadiens français, les Mexicains, les Amérindiens, les Acadiens, les Porto-Ricains et les Noirs"; "la terre du racisme blanc anglo-saxon."

proletarian in North America is not the same thing as being a White proletarian,” and “being a *Québécois* proletarian is not the same thing as being an (English) Canadian proletarian.” Because colonialism and imperialism exploited people on the basis of ‘race’ and nation, and set different groups against one another, it was precisely around national liberation struggles that the oppressed needed to organize.¹¹¹

Throughout the text, the ‘racial’ category of “blanc anglo-saxon” is continually highlighted, constructed as the Other against which various political movements could mobilize. Gagnon argued that daily life in North America pressured everyone, regardless of his or her race or culture, to adopt the cultural mores of the dominant group. Drawing on the language of one of the most explosive poems of the era, one which had debuted only a few months earlier,¹¹² Gagnon argued that everyone had “to speak white” and “be white.” Because of this added dimension of oppression, revolutionary fervour did not originate among the White English-speaking working class,¹¹³ but at the margins, among “impoverished people who belonged to oppressed national groups, victims of White Anglo-Saxon racism.” Even though Amerindians, Acadians, and Puerto-Ricans would play an important role, true possibilities of revolution lay with three groups: Quebeckers, Blacks, and Mexicans. In contrast to the high standard of living among Anglo-Saxons, minority groups lived in conditions that more closely resembled the Third World, a second Third World living in the very centre of the empire, one which needed to recognize its historical

¹¹¹ One hears here an echo of Stokely Carmichael’s famous address, “Black Power and the Third World,” delivered in Havana in the summer of 1967. According to Carmichael, because “our color has been used as a weapon to oppress us, we must use our color as a weapon of liberation. This is the same as other people using their nationality as a weapon for their liberation.” UQAM, Charles Gagnon fonds, 124p-201a. A copy of the speech can also be found in Stokely Carmichael, *Stokely Speaks: Black Power Back to Pan-Africanism* (New York: Random House, 1971). “qu’être un prolétaire noir en Amérique du Nord, ce n’est pas la même chose qu’être un prolétaire blanc”; “être un prolétaire québécois, ce n’est pas la même chose qu’être un prolétaire canadien (anglais).”

¹¹² See the discussion below on Michèle Lalonde’s explosive poem, “Speak White.”

¹¹³ UQAM, Charles Gagnon fonds, 124p-203/10, Charles Gagnon, “Feu sur l’Amérique, Propositions pour la révolution nord-américaine. Une Amérique à détruire, une Amérique à bâtir” (August-September 1968), 11-17.

destiny and fight American imperialism from the inside. The creation of a North American common front, therefore, became the crucial task of the moment.¹¹⁴

When Vallières and Gagnon headed to the New York in the summer of 1966, it was with this idea of making contacts, forging links, and establishing connections with oppressed minorities, and especially with those involved in the burgeoning Black Power movement. In New York, Vallières recalls wandering the streets and holding discussions with a variety of activists, thinking hard about how a unified theory could be forged from the various struggles of Blacks and Whites, workers and students, women and men, and flower children and those who advocated armed revolution. But his experience in New York deeply shocked him. Having read about and been fascinated with the emergence of Black Power, Vallières, along with Gagnon, hoped to make alliances and join with American Blacks; in New York, however, he found that Black militants knew nothing about Quebeckers, of their history, beliefs, or aspirations. Black militants did not realize that Montreal was the metropole of a French-speaking population distinct from the rest of North America. Rather than looking north, Black militants “looked to Cuba, Latin America, Africa, or Asia.” They felt closer to “Peking, Cairo, and Algiers than they did to Montreal and Quebec City.” Vallières felt that Black militants saw all Whites in North America in the same light, making little distinction between the various different groups, even if some were Francophone, Quebeckers, and socialists. At first sight, according to Vallières, a White Quebecker was merely one more White North American, and was

¹¹⁴ UQAM, Charles Gagnon fonds, 124p-203/10, Charles Gagnon, “Feu sur l’Amérique, Propositions pour la révolution nord-américaine. Une Amérique à détruire, une Amérique à bâtir” (August-September 1968), 79. “des pauvres qui appartiennent à des collectivités nationales opprimées, victimes du racisme blanc anglo-saxon.”

not yet a “nègre blanc.”¹¹⁵ Although writing in French, Vallières claims that his title came to him spontaneously in English: *White Niggers of America*. He wanted, more than anything, to pierce the “wall of indifference and disdain” which separated Americans from the Quebec liberation struggle.¹¹⁶

And, to some degree at least, he succeeded. His book was published around the world and reviewed in many of the world’s biggest newspapers.¹¹⁷ In the *New York Times Book Review*, Christopher Lehmann-Haupt argued that *Nègres blancs* will likely “take its place alongside the writings of Malcolm X, Eldridge Cleaver, Frantz Fanon, Che Guevara and Régis Debray; for it is an eloquent revolutionary document that clutches one’s throat like a drowning hand.”¹¹⁸ Nicolas Regush, a journalist who had been born in Montreal but was living in the United States, came across *White Niggers of America* while living in New York City, and he was so moved by the book that he decided to become Vallières’s first biographer.¹¹⁹ Vallières himself boasted of receiving the support of, among many others, the *Monthly Review*, Youth Against War and Fascism, the Black Panthers, and various other Black Power representatives.¹²⁰

The greatest show of support came by way of a telegram at the beginning of 1968. Only a day after Vallières’s trial began, Stokely Carmichael, one of the most important Black leaders in the United States, wrote to him and Gagnon:

¹¹⁵ Vallières, *Les Héritiers de Papineau*, 104-05. “regardaient plutôt du côté de Cuba, de l’Amérique latine, de l’Afrique ou de l’Asie”; “de Pékin, du Caire et d’Alger que de Montréal et de Québec.”

¹¹⁶ Pierre Vallières, “Préface (1979). Écrire debout”, *Nègres blancs d’Amérique* (Montréal: Typo, 1994), 31. “mur d’indifférence et de mépris”

¹¹⁷ For a selection of these reviews, see ANQ, Éditions Parti Pris fonds, MSS-140, 32

¹¹⁸ Christopher Lehmann-Haupt, “The Making of a Terrorist” *New York Times, Daily Book Review*, (April 6 1971).

¹¹⁹ Regush also stated that *Nègres blancs* “received international attention and Vallières’s name became linked with those of Frantz Fanon, Che Guevara, and Eldridge Cleaver. The book has since become a manifesto for the liberty of all oppressed peoples.” When he returned to Quebec after his time in New York, he saw the province in a new light: “What I saw was an estranged landscape and a brutalized Quebecois soul.” Particularly revealing were Montreal street signs, indicating to him that “Quebec had always been a colony and was one still.” Regush, *Pierre Vallières*, 5, 170-74.

¹²⁰ “En guise de présentation ou d’épilogue à l’édition américaine de ‘Nègres blancs d’Amérique’” 9 février 1969, Prison de Montréal. ANQ, Éditions Parti Pris fonds, MSS-140, 32.

Courages nos frères,

SNCC [Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee] experiences government chicanery and deception daily. We refuse to be divided from our brothers in the FLQ by malicious lies. We support you in your trial. Your experiences are no different from those of true patriots everywhere and at any time who resist against tyranny. We are confident of your complete vindication.

Nous Vaincrons.¹²¹

When Martin Luther King was assassinated just a few months later, Vallières and Gagnon sent their own letter to Carmichael:

The time has come for Black Americans and white niggers of Quebec and America to unite their forces to destroy the capitalist and imperialist Order which assassinates those who choose to break the chains of slavery and liberate humanity from oppression, exploitation and all forms of enslavement. We are uniting with you to avenge the heroic death of Reverend King, Malcolm X, and all those who paid with their lives, their passion for justice, freedom, equality, brotherhood and peace. ...

Vallières and Gagnon, on behalf of the white niggers of Quebec.¹²²

Nègres blancs profoundly shook activists and writers living in Montreal and had an important impact on the political language of the city. In the years following the book's publication, references to the concept of 'nègres blancs' multiplied, reshaping the way that many conceived of oppression and liberation. As Gilles Dostaler wrote in the pages of *Parti Pris*: "The title of the book, one must concede, is a revelation. We are *nègres*, like all other victims of imperialism, in the same way as those who have started to weaken the giant: the twenty-two million Afro-Americans. Regardless of the opinions of our friends from the publication 'Indépendantiste,' all of the *nègres* of the world, of all colours, have one common enemy."¹²³ Pierre Renau

¹²¹ Seen in Regush, *Pierre Vallières*, 5.

¹²² Ibid., 6.

¹²³ Gilles Dostaler, "Nègres blancs d'amérique," *Parti Pris* 5, no. 8 (été 1968): 8. "Le titre de l'ouvrage, il faut le concéder, est une découverte. Nous sommes des nègres, au même titre que toutes

and Robert Tremblay were so convinced by the metaphor that they published a chronology of the Quebec liberation struggle in which, each year beginning in 1963, developments in Quebec were juxtaposed with the development of the American Civil Rights/Black Power movement.¹²⁴ In a special issue dealing with a student strike in the Philosophy department, *Le Quartier Latin* – the student newspaper at the Université de Montréal – made creative use of racial metaphors. Co-editor Roméo Bouchard, influenced by both the student-rights movement and the Quebec liberation movement,¹²⁵ argued that students were “more or less subjugated *nègres*,” and their professors were, at best, ‘White liberals’ unable to disassociate themselves from the White racist power structure. As *Quebec* students, moreover, they were “doubly *nègres*,” in urgent need of making the difficult choice of developing their own terms of reference, of becoming ‘Black.’¹²⁶

By borrowing and building upon ideas developed by Black Power theorists, loosening the ties of essentialism, and proclaiming the common cause of the marginalized, Vallières had opened up new avenues of thought, new possibilities of

les victimes de l'impérialisme, au même titre que ceux-là qui commencent à ébranler le géant: les vingt-deux millions d'afro-américains. Quoiqu'en pensent nos amis de l'Indépendantiste, tous les nègres du monde, toutes les couleurs, ont un ennemi commun.”

¹²⁴ Renaud and Tremblay, “Les nègres blancs d'amérique,” 17-25.

¹²⁵ In the late 1960s, the use of the word *Nigger* to highlight dispossession and powerlessness became widespread with Jerry Farber's widely-read *The Student as Nigger* and Yoko Ono's famous formulation of “Woman is the nigger of the world” in an interview which appeared in the March 1969 edition of the magazine *Nova*. See Jerry Farber, *The Student as Nigger: Essays and Stories* (North Hollywood: Contact Books, 1969).

¹²⁶ Roméo Bouchard, “Vous êtes des nègres,” *Le Quartier Latin*, 11 février 1969, 2. The great irony of the special edition of *Quartier Latin* that compared the plight of students to the plight of ‘nègres’ was that it was released on 11 February 1969, the same day that a major confrontation was taking place over racism at Sir George Williams University across town. And, in the light of the recent turbulence over charges of racism, the students were not able to ignore the plight of Blacks in Montreal as Vallières had done. According to co-editor Bouchard, it was precisely because of their exploitation that they were “doublement frères des noirs sequestres de Sir George.” And, at the end of the special edition of the paper, there is a chronology of events at Sir George Williams. Bouchard, “Vous êtes des nègres,” 2. “doublement nègres”; “plus ou moins nègres asservis”

imagining and creating links with other marginalized peoples.¹²⁷ The adoption of the identity of the marginalized is, after all, an attempt to declare a common bond of humanity, an anti-essentialism which challenges the very classifications wrought by colonialism. In this sense, ‘nègre blanc’ was similar to the famous rallying cry heard on the revolutionary streets of Paris in May 1968 in response to attacks on Daniel Cohn-Bendit, ‘we are all German Jews’ (Cohn-Bendit being of German-Jewish origin). As Kristin Ross explains, in “that peculiar construction of an impossible ‘we,’ a subjectivation that passes by way of the Other, lies an essential dislocation or fracturing of social identity.” By “loosening the ties that bind the word to its sociological connotations,” she continues, such expressions become “available as a new political identity or subjectivity.”¹²⁸ In the summer of 1968, Charles Gagnon demonstrated how this process could work. Learning both from Parisian crowds and from Vallières, he denounced René Lévesque for utilizing reformist arguments drawn from the ‘White’ civilized world, and argued that, because “we are the victims of American imperialism, we are also Congolese, Guinean, Bolivian, Vietnamese, Guatemalan, Sudanese (Black from the south), and South African.”¹²⁹ By adopting the identity of the most marginalized, Gagnon articulated a radical humanism which loudly proclaimed the interconnected nature and fundamental worth of all human individuals.

¹²⁷ The metaphor, of course, contained many flaws and contradictions. When working on his explosive film dealing with labour conditions in the textile mills of the eastern townships, *On est au coton*, Denys Arcand hoped to contrast Quebec labourers with American Blacks working in similar textile mills in the American south. He went, along with his team, for a prolonged voyage to the Southern U.S. to film American Black textile workers, only to find that it was not Black but White workers who worked in the textile factories. As an homage to Vallières, he left an image of one Black man which he juxtaposed to a line of workers leaving their textile factory in Quebec. Denys Arcand speaking on 23 November, 2005, on the occasion of a public showing at the NFB in Montreal of the uncensored version of *On est au coton*.

¹²⁸ Ross, *May '68 and its Afterlives*, 57, 108.

¹²⁹ Charles Gagnon, "René Lévesque n'est pas Lumumba!," *Parti Pris* 5, no. 8 (été 1968): 10. “nous sommes victimes de l’impérialisme américain, nous sommes aussi Congolais, Guinéens, Boliviens, Viet-Namiens, Guatémaltèques, Soudanais (noirs du sud), Sud-Africains”

And this radical humanism, this reading the cultural degradation of francophone Quebecers through the lens of anti-colonial resistance and Black Power, also had a powerful resonance among poets and song-writers. On 27 May 1968 Quebec's most well-known poets and *chansonniers* gathered together at the Théâtre Gesù to raise money for the defence of Vallières and Gagnon in an evening of performances entitled "Chants et poèmes de la Résistance." The evening opened – in front of a capacity crowd of 700, with over 100 people turned away due to lack of space – to a report on Vallières's trial, followed by a reading out of the names of all of Quebec's political prisoners. Poets Gaston Miron and Paul Chamberland read out their work, and the music of *Jazz Libre* filled the air. According to *Le Devoir* reporter Jacques Thériault, "Songs, poems, and free jazz followed one another at a dizzying and solid rhythm: each number, each silence, each act formed a crucial element of a moving evening."¹³⁰

It was in this atmosphere of free creativity, political anger and hope, that debuted the most well-known poem of the period. An energetic audience listened as Michelle Rossignol read Michèle Lalonde's poem 'Speak White,'

...
 speak white and loud
 qu'on vous entende
 de Saint-Henri à Saint-Domingue
 oui quel admirable langue pour embaucher
 donner des ordres
 fixer l'heure de la mord à l'ouvrage
 et de la pause qui rafraîchit
 et ravigote le dollar

Writing just after the release of Vallières book, and composing the entire poem in one long night in the month of May 1968, Lalonde was writing with the belief that, for

¹³⁰ Jacques Thériault, "Les Chansonniers 'noirs' du Québec," *Le Devoir*, 29 mai 1968. "Chansons, poèmes et jazz-free se succédaient à un rythme vertigineux et solide: chaque numéro, chaque silence, chaque acte constituait une articulation capitale d'une bouleversante soirée."

Quebeckers, the French language was their *Blackness*. 'Speak White' was the command of the coloniser to the colonised, the command of the British in west Montreal, of White Americans in the United States, of the British colonizers in Africa and of the French in Algeria.¹³¹ And, and this is the central point, if all colonized people shared a similar cultural degradation and humiliation at the hands of the colonizer, then they also shared a common basis upon which they could unite in opposition.

speak white
c'est une langue universelle
nous sommes nés pour la comprendre
avec ses mots lacrymogènes
avec ses mots matraques

speak white
tell us again about Freedom and Democracy
nous savons que liberté est un mot noir
comme la misère est nègre
et comme le sang se mêle à la poussière des rues d'Alger
ou de Little Rock

speak white
de Westminster à Washington relayez-vous
speak white comme à Wall Street
white comme à Watts
be civilized
et comprenez notre parler de circonstance
quand vous nous demandez poliment
how do you do
et nous entendez vous répondre
we're doing all right
we're doing fine
we
are not alone

nous savons
que nous ne sommes pas seuls.¹³²

¹³¹ Michèle Lalonde, "'Le français', c'est notre couleur noire..." *Le Jour*, 1 juin 1974.

¹³² The poem was published in *Socialisme* 68, see Michèle Lalonde, "Speak White," *Socialisme* 68, no. 15 (octobre-novembre-décembre 1968): 19-21.

The ultimate effect of Vallières's book was to rally support and highlight the plight of francophone Quebeckers, to place their struggle in the larger context of the world decolonization movement, and to tap into a universal identity of suffering and resistance.¹³³ There is a central contradiction, however, which lies at the very heart of Vallières's work. The ability to control language and narrative is, of course, a form of power which articulates its own politics of inclusion and exclusion, and Vallières, intent on affirming an abstract solidarity with oppressed groups elsewhere, marginalizes and ignores other oppressed groups within Quebec. In *Nègres blancs*, for example, Vallières states that "French Canadians are not subject to this irrational racism that has done so much wrong to the workers, white and black, of the United States." They can take no credit for this, he argues, as "in Quebec there is no 'black problem.'"¹³⁴

Throughout his book, Vallières makes no mention of the Black population in Montreal, a population of over 15,000 individuals who were waging constant struggles against discrimination.¹³⁵ Vallières, of course, was hardly alone in his silence on Black and Native populations within Quebec; he merely reflected a general lack of concern widespread across the Montreal left. With the one exception of Monique Chénier, who noted in 1965 the contradiction of many on the left who were in solidarity with Blacks who were "far away," while at the same time being blind to discrimination in their own province,¹³⁶ most of the francophone decolonization

¹³³ The comparison of the plights of the francophone Quebeckers and American Blacks spread around the world, even finding its way into Eric Williams's history of the Caribbean. See Eric Williams, *From Columbus to Castro: The History of the Caribbean* (New York: Vintage Books, 1984 [1970]), 506.

¹³⁴ Vallières, *White Niggers of America*. 21. When Vallières was again making the case for the concept of *nègre blanc* in a documentary film which appeared in the early 1990s, Michaël Jean quickly reminded him that, in Quebec, the 'nègres blancs' also had their 'nègres noirs'. Jean-Daniel Lafonds, *La Manière Nègre*.

¹³⁵ Dorothy W. Williams, *The Road to Now: A History of Blacks in Montreal* (Montreal: Véhicule Press, 1997), 109.

¹³⁶ Monique Chénier, "La ségrégation raciale ça existe à Montréal," *Révolution Québécoise* 1, no. 8 (avril 1965): 39. "des Noirs 'éloignés'",

journals almost completely ignored the existence and oppression of other groups in Montreal. It was not until 1968 that *Parti Pris* published an article on Montreal Blacks. The article, written by Robert Tremblay, served only to demonstrate the extent of the separation between *Parti Pris* and the Montreal Black community, describing Black immigrants who came to Montreal during the 19th century while ignoring both the Black population of New France and those of West Indian and African origin who were currently living in the city.¹³⁷ Tremblay concludes by stating that “Montreal is a city of subtle discrimination, a situation which is tolerated at the moment but which will quickly become unsustainable if the Black population grows to significant levels.”¹³⁸ It was just this sort of attitude – an attitude which downplayed discrimination and spoke of the Black population of Montreal as negligible – that would soon be challenged in no uncertain terms by Blacks in Montreal.

From its beginning, one assumption structured the myriad strands of the decolonization movement: that it was French-speaking Quebeckers who were colonized, that it was they who needed to gain collective control over their future, who needed to free themselves from the psychological and economic bondage of the colonial order. And it was assumed that their struggle was on par with the great revolutionary movements throughout the world, which would lead to ultimate freedom and human liberation, to a new internationalism. In 1968 and 1969 – with the dramatic explosion of Black Power in Montreal – all of these assumptions would be challenged, and francophone intellectuals would be forced to search for new ways

¹³⁷ Renaud and Tremblay, "Les nègres blancs d'amérique," 19.

¹³⁸ Ibid.: 23. “Montréal est une ville de subtile discrimination, situation qui se tolère actuellement mais qui deviendrait facilement insupportable dans l'éventualité où la population noire deviendrait importante.”

of defining the meaning of politics, and of understanding the multiplicity of oppression and the variegated forms of resistance.

The framework which was developed largely by francophone radicals throughout the early and mid-1960s opened new perspectives, provided new ways of thinking, and vastly expanded the ways in which a democratic future would be imagined. They had developed a nationalism that was really an internationalism, and had articulated a genuine desire to build a multi-racial coalition. Now the work of stretching the framework outwards, of finding new spaces of democratic politics and a wider conception of human liberation, would be left in the hands of others. By 1968, Vallières, Gagnon, and the majority of their political comrades, were behind bars, *Parti Pris* had folded, and many activists and intellectuals of an earlier generation were studying in France or had taken up full-time employment. Even if the impulse of democratic politics would largely come from elsewhere, the intellectual foundations of anti-colonial resistance provided the framework upon which a wide variety of distinct, yet largely overlapping, challenges to the established order would build in the coming years.

Part Two: 1968-1972 Rebellion

CHAPTER SIX:

Montreal's Black Renaissance

What though before us lies the open grave?
Like men we'll face the murderous, cowardly
 pack.
Pressed to the wall, but fighting back

Claude McKay, "If we Must Die" Reprinted in *Caribbean International Opinion* 1, 1 (Montreal, October 1968).

‘Black Power’ had been inspiring the Quebec liberation movement since the mid-1960s. But now, in the fall and winter of 1968-1969, in the movement’s overflowing cafés and avant-garde papers, in the teach-ins and cramped apartments, a new topic began creeping into conversations. Those who had considered themselves the ‘left,’ and who had compared their plight to that of American Blacks, were caught by surprise by the sudden explosion of Black activism in the city. Pierre Vallières had argued in *Nègres blancs* that Quebec, unlike the United States, did not have a ‘Black problem,’ yet for Black Montrealers the problem of racism was very real. In the years leading up to the 1960s, the vast extent of discrimination in the city ensured that Black Montrealers remained segregated together into substandard living conditions and concentrated in unskilled and low-paying jobs. Montreal’s Black population – with its history stretching back to the seventeenth century – had always found ways to resist persistent racism and discrimination, but in the 1960s something new was taking place. From the perspective of Montreal’s Black population, the 1960s, with political organizations continually being formed, public protests abounding, and a whole series of international conferences bringing activists and intellectuals of international renown to the city, was a watershed in political organizing.

Historical accounts of the 1960s in Quebec have almost completely ignored the experiences of Black Montrealers. Yet, in the spring of 1969, few issues were more discussed, caused more controversy, and altered Montreal’s radical imagination more profoundly, than the actions and thoughts of the city’s Black activists and intellectuals. In the space of a few years, Black intellectuals and activists transformed Montreal into a major centre of Black thought and militancy. The immediate spark that set off a cultural and political renaissance in Montreal’s Black community came in February 1969 with the trauma of ‘the Sir George Williams Affair.’ Beginning

with an occupation of the computer room of Sir George Williams University to protest racism, the episode ended with the blows of riot police, the destruction of \$2,000,000 of property, and scores of arrests and criminal charges. In response to the devastating racist backlash after the event, many members of the Black community began meeting regularly and discussing the need to develop autonomous institutions. By 1969, Black militants in Montreal had founded their own independent means of communication – *UHURU* – through which they articulated their own narratives of liberation, their own logic of victim and oppressor, their own readings of Fanon and Malcolm X, and their own vocabulary of imperialism and decolonization. Through the pages of *UHURU*, Black Montrealers not only challenged the established order, but they also started to question the previous efforts that had been devised to oppose that order, unsettling and unravelling the conceptions of decolonization that had been developed by the theorists of Quebec liberation.

The powerful surge of Black activism in Montreal cannot be understood outside of the larger international context of Black militancy in the late 1960s. Many activists were, after all, recent immigrants from the Caribbean who had come to Montreal to study for a limited number of years, and all were profoundly influenced by the Black freedom movement taking place in the United States. Although they framed their struggle in global terms, they also operated in a local milieu, one which was highly politically charged and filled with intensity and drama. Even if they had wanted to, it would not have been possible for Montreal's Black radicals to remain indifferent to the larger Quebec liberation movement that was unfolding all around them. Drawing on the same body of theory and reaching similar conclusions about both the state of the world and the possibilities of a just and liberated future, the insights of Quebec decolonization and those of Black liberation freely crossed each

others' porous boundaries, colliding with each other, and transforming each in the process. The emergence of Black militancy, I will therefore argue, simultaneously operated on many levels, generated many diverse meanings, and constituted a movement that was not only profoundly international in scope, but one which was also deeply imbedded in the lived realities of Montreal.

The Antecedents

While the Sir George Williams Affair of 1969 acted as the immediate spark which set off a vibrant Black renaissance in the city, the currents of Black opposition to racism stretch deep into the city's past. From the everyday forms of resistance employed by the Black Slaves of New France, to the organization of a Montreal division of the Universal Negro Improvement Association in 1919, to the unionization of the largely Montreal-based sleeping car porters of the Canadian Pacific Railway during the Second World War, Montreal's Black residents had never idly accepted the racism and segregation that they faced on a daily basis. Yet, despite their best efforts, racism persisted, limiting both their employment prospects and the areas of the city in which they could live, ensuring their psychological and cultural segregation from mainstream Montreal society. Walking into downtown restaurants and cafés would often be a humiliating experience for Blacks, as they were met with cold looks and sometimes refused service altogether.¹ White passengers on Montreal's public transit system would refuse to sit beside Black people, bars and clubs sometimes

¹ Dorothy W. Williams, *The Road to Now: A History of Blacks in Montreal* (Montreal: Véhicule Press, 1997), 39. Also see James W. St.G. Walker, *Racial Discrimination in Canada: the Black Experience* (Ottawa: Canadian Historical Association, 1985). For an important look at systemic racism in Canada's past, see James W. St.G. Walker, *'Race,' Rights and the Law in the Supreme Court of Canada: Historical Case Studies* (Toronto: The Osgoode Society for Canadian Legal History and Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1997). Walker even recounts a case in which the Supreme Court of Canada upheld the right of a tavern situated in the Montreal Forum, the arena in which the Montreal Canadiens hockey team played its home games, to refuse service to Blacks.

turned them away, and they were almost always forced to work in jobs far below their skill level.² Throughout the 1950s and early 1960s, Montreal's main civil rights organization, the Negro Citizenship Association, began denouncing the continued discrimination against Blacks and, in the midst of the increasingly politicized climate of the mid-1960s, founded the journal *Expression*.³

From its beginning in 1965, the journal denounced discrimination, and advocated a persistent lobbying campaign to the provincial and federal governments that aimed at both more comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation and also for a stronger enforcement of the laws already in place. While the Negro Citizenship Association patiently pursued its work to secure the long-denied civil rights for Blacks, a new radical energy began to sweep into the city, capturing the imaginations of many young Blacks, and especially those of Caribbean origin who had recently arrived in the city. Montreal's Black population has always been a multi-faceted agglomeration of people of different origins and diverse experiences and, as many individuals and ideas circulated throughout the community as a whole, it would be wrong to draw too clear a division between the community's various components.⁴ But in the 1960s Caribbean immigrants were the ones who introduced radical Marxist and anti-colonial ideas into Black Montreal, at first upsetting many established members of the community, but ultimately deeply affecting the way in which the

² David Austin, "Contemporary Montréal and the 1968 Congress of Black Writers," *Lost Histories* 1998, 59.

³ For an outline of the history and outlook of the NCA, see Richard E. Leslie, "Editorial," *Expression* 1, no. 1 (February 1965): 5.

⁴ While divisions existed within the larger community, all groups shared many of the common experiences of racism in Canadian society. According to James Walker, "When white Canadians express discriminatory tendencies they do so on the basis of colour, making colour a unifying characteristic for West Indians of African descent and giving them a community of experience with other black Canadians. Even the Haitians, who are distinguishable by language, report strikingly similar experiences to those of their anglophone counterparts." James W. St.G. Walker, *The West Indians in Canada* (Ottawa: Canadian Historical Association, 1984), 20.

community conceived of itself and its relation to both the rest of Quebec society and the larger world.⁵

In the mid-1960s a new group of Black West Indians came together, calling themselves the Caribbean Conference Committee on West Indian Affairs, to form the basis for a new radical Black intelligentsia in the city. The tight-knit committee, which studied tirelessly, and read, argued, and debated late into the evenings, worked to develop new analyses and understandings of colonialism and neo-colonialism in the Caribbean, laying much of the groundwork for the flourishing of Black politics in Montreal in the late 1960s and early 1970s.⁶ Working with a passionate intensity, the committee saw itself continuing in the tradition of the International African Service Bureau, a grouping of intellectuals which included C.L.R. James, Jomo Kenyatta, and George Padmore, and which had worked to lay the theoretical groundwork for African emancipation.⁷

As recent immigrants to Canada, the group members felt isolated and alienated from larger society. While their focus remained fixed on the future of the Caribbean, the committee also strove to oppose the daily realities of discrimination in Montreal, fully aware, as one member put it, that they were continuing in a tradition of what others in the city “had done before.”⁸ They knew, however, that they lived under different historical circumstances than Black activists of the past. Deeply troubled by

⁵ Williams, *The Road to Now*, 111.

⁶ According to David Austin, in “the 1960s and 1970s, the Roberts’ apartment on Bedford Street in the Côte-des-Neiges district of Montreal was a political stomping ground where books could be borrowed by friends, Caribbean students, political activists, and aspiring politicians. It was a place where dusk till dawn discussions were held on a wide array of subjects, and where political strategies were mapped out. Alfie and his wife Patricia hosted many sessions in their Montreal home, earning it the name ‘The University of Bedford,’ and many people, including several future Caribbean prime ministers, came of age politically in their living room.” David Austin, “Introduction,” in *A View for Freedom: Alfie Roberts Speaks on the Caribbean, Cricket, Montreal, and C.L.R. James* (Montreal: Alfie Roberts Institute, 2005), 20.

⁷ For more detail, see the work of David Austin, the foremost historian of the Conference Committee: Ibid., also see Austin, “Contemporary Montréal and the 1968 Congress of Black Writers.”

⁸ Alfie Roberts, *A View for Freedom: Alfie Roberts Speaks on the Caribbean, Cricket, Montreal, and C.L.R. James* (Montreal: Alfie Roberts Institute, 2005), 77.

the continued subjugation of their countries of origin by dominant western powers, even after formal political independence had been achieved, the group set out to organize a series of international conferences that would analyse the history and present day realities of the Caribbean. Robert Hill, one of the group's central members, recalls that the conference committee was formed at a time when recuperating Black history was seen as a revolutionary gesture. For its very first conference in 1965, the committee hoped to bring Aimé Césaire to Montreal but, when Césaire could not attend, Barbadian novelist and poet George Lamming took his place.⁹ Lamming's ringing speech, his tone and cadence revealing his profound belief in the possibilities opened up by the process of decolonization, congratulated the young activists, assuring them that the effects of their work were being felt around the world.¹⁰ In the exciting aftermath of the first conference, individuals began discussing the possibilities of bringing C.L.R. James to Montreal for the conference the following year. And James would not only come to Montreal for the 1966 conference, but also became deeply involved with the members of the committee, staying in Montreal for prolonged periods throughout the winter of 1966-1967, and greatly influencing the intellectual work of the group.¹¹

Although a militant Black nationalism, rather than the more theoretical Marxism of the Conference Committee, would come to play an increasingly important

⁹ Robert Hill, "The Caribbean Island of Montreal: The Caribbean Conference Committee and the Black Radical tradition" at REBELLION, PROTEST, AND CHANGE: *Reflections on the 1960s and the Development of Montreal's Black Community*, February 18, 2006, UNIA Hall, Montreal. Videorecording (available through the Alfie Roberts' Institute, Montreal).

¹⁰ Audio recording of George Lamming's address at the 1965 Conference on West Indian Affairs at the Université de Montréal. My thanks to Anne Cools for providing me with this recording. This quotation is also reproduced in Austin, "Contemporary Montréal and the 1968 Congress of Black Writers," 59.

¹¹ For a vivid description of the conference committee, and a discussion of the political atmosphere in Black Montreal during the 1960s, see Roberts, *A View for Freedom*, 65-73. According to Austin, "It was as a result of the CCWIA activities in Montreal that James was eventually permitted to re-enter the United States for the first time since his expulsion in 1953. James returned to Montreal for the Congress of Black Writers in October 1968 and on several other occasions between 1968 and the early seventies." Roberts, *A View for Freedom*, editorial note, 72.

role in Montreal at the end of 1960s and early 1970s, the effects of the theoretical work that the group produced would continue to be felt for years to come. Perhaps even more important than its intellectual achievements was the sea change the Conference Committee represented. By starting a tradition of radical Black intellectual thought, a tradition made up of individuals who were both theoretically informed and highly committed to social justice and democracy, the committee began an ongoing discussion and debate about the deep structural roots of racism and economic exploitation. At the end of the 1960s, although the committee itself had disbanded, the ideas that they had worked so hard to develop began finding increasingly fertile ground, and young activists in Montreal began decisively turning their energies in a radical direction. True, a multi-faceted convergence of both local and international forces led to the dramatic explosion of Black Power activism in Montreal at the end of the decade, but such an event would have been unthinkable had an earlier generation of activists not laid much of the groundwork in the preceding years.

The end of the 1960s was a turbulent time for Blacks in North America. Because of the persistence of racism in the United States, despite the legal victory of the American Civil Rights Bill, many young African-Americans – like Martin Luther King himself – began rethinking the analyses and strategies of the Civil Rights movement.¹² In popular representations of the period, the Civil Rights and Black Power movements are often portrayed as being mutually exclusive, the former

¹² Jeffrey O.G. Ogbar, *Black Power: Radical Politics and African American Identity* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), 197. This new outlook is more powerfully articulated in King's speech against the Vietnam War, "Beyond Vietnam: A Time to Break Silence," delivered at the Riverside Church in New York City on 4 April 1967. Also, in "Black Power Defined," appearing in the *New York Times Magazine*, King argued that "We must frankly acknowledge that in past years our creativity and imagination were not employed in learning how to develop power." And, he went on, it was now necessary to "take the next major step of examining the levers of power which Negroes must grasp to influence the course of events." Both of these texts are reproduced in Martin Luther King, *I Have a Dream: Writing & Speeches that Changed the World* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1992).

advocating racial integration and the end to legal segregation, and the latter advocating racial pride and separation. What this perspective ignores are the ways in which the two movements emerged in response to similar problems, reflected the same pursuit of freedom, and, perhaps most importantly, both changed as the 1960s progressed.¹³ Popularized by Stokely Carmichael in 1966, ‘Black Power’ generally refers to attempts to overcome the psychological and material consequences of being Black in a society marked by persistent institutionalized racism. Rather than appealing to the moral conscience of White America, the Black Power movement “affirmed black people, their history, their beauty, and set them at the center of their own worldview.”¹⁴ In the face of a brutal racist order, the argument followed, Black people needed to organize independently and affirm their own priorities and needs. The earlier hope of integration into White society gave way to the idea of Black community-building, one that meant moving beyond the narrow individualism that characterized mainstream White society. It also meant transforming Blackness from a source of shame into a source of pride.¹⁵

The changing atmosphere of the Black freedom movement in the United States had a profound effect on Black politics in Montreal. No one single event, of course, marked the end of the Civil Rights era. But, in the minds of many, the assassination of Martin Luther King on 4 April 1968 put an end to hopes of peaceful racial integration through legalistic demands. King’s assassination sparked a wave of violence that swept across most major urban centers of the United States. Many took

¹³ For just one example of an author who argues for a re-examination of the divisions between the Civil Rights and Black Power movements, see Timothy B. Tyson, *Radio Free Dixie: Robert F. Williams & the Roots of Black Power* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999).

¹⁴ Ogbar, *Black Power*, 2, 156.

¹⁵ For a moving account of one person’s journey through the civil rights movement and its aftermath, see the epilogue to John Howard Griffin, *Black Like Me* (New York: Signet, 1976 [1960]). For some of the main arguments of the emerging Black Power movement, see Stokely Carmichael and Charles V. Hamilton, *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America* (New York: Vintage Books, 1967).

to the streets in anger, and, in the days of rioting which ensued, the National Guard was mobilized, curfews were established, and forty African Americans were killed and another twenty thousand arrested.¹⁶ In Montreal, while the actions were less dramatic, the anger was just as intense. Citizens organized a major street protest to denounce the continued racist nature of both the United States and Canada. A crowd of six hundred gathered at the Hall building of Sir George Williams University, but, as the march proceeded to Dominion Square, the protesters swelled to over 2,000. The rally, made up of both Blacks and Whites, itself demonstrated the growing militancy of Montreal's Black population. Many protesters sang the Civil Rights anthem 'We Shall Overcome,' but a large picture of Malcolm X was carried at the very front of the march. Protesters carried signs reading "Shake off your chains," and "Vive le pouvoir noir." One speaker spoke with approval of Stokely Carmichael, the figure most closely associated with Black Power, and another yelled out: "For 400 years, we've been exploited. We've been beaten. We've been shot." This exploitation did not only occur in "Raceland, U.S.A.," he argued. Blacks had also been discriminated against and exploited in Canada. Now, he continued, "is the time to put an end to the discrimination, the exploitation, the degradation."¹⁷

The pages of the Negro Citizenship Association's *Expression* also began to reveal a new and more pronounced mood of anger, and the journal's tone reflected the feelings of frustration felt by Black communities throughout North America. In a fuming editorial published right after King's assassination in 1968, the editors argued that, if Montreal continued along its present road, it was "almost inevitable" that the city would witness fierce racial rioting in the years to come. If nothing was done, the

¹⁶ Clayborne Carson, *In Struggle: SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), 288.

¹⁷ Quoted in Bill Bantey, "Montreal Mourned and Cried With Black And White Together," *The Montreal Gazette*, 8 April 1968, 13.

journal warned, "Our ghettos will grow; we will fester under your noses; and, the dirty dunghills that you have created will, one day, explode with the thunder of many suns into your clean, unconcerned, lily-white faces." To both federal and provincial government officials, the editors warned that they were "tired of writing useless letters," and that were going to be "forced to use novel methods of making ourselves heard." Presaging the uncompromising attitude to come, the editorial thundered that Blacks "are no longer duped" by "clever lies." "Behind the false facade of pleasantness, we can glimpse the murderous teeth of discrimination, we can spy the diseased head of prejudice, we can smell the putrid odour of their rotting and bankrupt souls."¹⁸ The rage of the Black community was palpable, and it cut through the thick air of a hot Montreal summer.

The Congress of Black Writers: 'Towards the Second Emancipation'

By the fall of 1968, many Black Montrealers were searching for new interpretations of the world and new ways to understand how they could overcome racism. Two conferences took place in the fall of 1968 – both indirect successors to the conferences on Caribbean affairs – and both clearly demonstrating that a new era of militancy had begun. The first, held from 4 to 6 October 1968, dealt with problems pertaining specifically to Blacks in Canada. Held at Sir George Williams University, the conference featured speakers who discussed everyday problems of discrimination in housing and employment, the paucity of opportunities for marginalized peoples, and the social and cultural alienation of Blacks in Canada.¹⁹ Although the conference

¹⁸ "Editorial," *Expression* 3, no. 1 (May 1968): 3-5.

¹⁹ "Sir George hosts Black conference," *The Georgian*, 1 October 1968, 3. Dennis Forsythe, "The Black Writers Conference: Days to Remember," in *Let the Niggers Burn! The Sir George Williams*

was reformist in nature, many of the speakers reflected the larger overall mood of militancy. John Shingler, a professor of Political Science at McGill University, argued that merely integrating Blacks into the larger capitalist system is to “entirely to miss the point of human liberation.”²⁰ And in his keynote address, Howard McCurdy spoke of the necessity for Black self-respect, arguing that it was necessary to get to “the roots of our blackness.” Black Power meant, he maintained, “black solidarity” in Canada and throughout the world.²¹

It was the Congress of Black Writers, held at McGill from 11 to 14 October, that captured the imaginations of the city.²² Dedicated to the memory of Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, and organized by a younger crowd of mostly student radicals, the congress had the goal of fostering a ‘second liberation’ for Blacks.²³ In the week leading up to the event, *Quartier Latin*, the student newspaper of the Université de Montréal, wrote that it formed part of a logical continuity with the Congrès des Écrivains et Artistes Noirs held in Paris in 1956, in Rome in 1959, and in

University Affair and its Caribbean Aftermath, ed. Dennis Forsythe (Montréal: Black Rose Books/Our Generation Press, 1971), 58-59; Williams, *The Road to Now*, 118-19.

²⁰ John Shingler, "Panel Discussion," *Expression* 3, no. 3 (Winter 1969): 21.

²¹ McCurdy also spoke of the necessity of forming an alliance with “the Indians,” their natural allies. Daniel Hill, "Panel Discussion," *Expression* 3, no. 3 (Winter 1969): 18; Howard McCurdy, "Problems of Involvement in the Canadian Society with Reference to Black People," *Expression* 3, no. 3 (Winter 1969): 13-14. McCurdy was not alone in his defence of Native Canadians. Montreal economist Barry Mayers spoke of the necessity to confront discrimination on all fronts, for, “if we can justify discrimination, either by silence or otherwise, of the Indians, of the Eskimos, of the French Canadians, of the English Canadians, then there is no reason why the society can’t justify discrimination against Negroes.” The problem was largely one of poverty, and the Canadian population “will never get any kind of meaningful involvement unless we change the whole social structure of the Canadian Society and so make it possible to remove from isolation not only the Negro but the Indian, the Eskimo and, in a general sense, the entire population.” Barry Myers, "Panel Discussion," *Expression* 3, no. 3 (Winter 1969): 25-26.

²² For a summary of the many of the ideological divisions and debates of the congress, see chapter II of Fanon Che Wilkins, "'In the Belly of the Beast': Black Power, Anti-Imperialism, and the African Liberation Solidarity Movement 1968-1975" (New York University, 2001). Even those Black groups in Montreal who favoured a more reformist and legalistic approach wrote, while deploring the glorification of violence, that the event played “un rôle très significatif pour tous les noirs dans leur quête de leur identité réelle.” And they thanked the organizers of the congress “d’avoir fourni cette occasion de prise de conscience du rôle que le noir est appelé à jouer dans le monde, ainsi que d’avoir mise en lumière le désir du noir de jouir de sa liberté partout dans le monde.” UQAM, Gérard Godin fonds, 81p-660:02a/16, Letter signed by the Negro Community Centre Inc., Negro Theatre Arts Club, Montreal Negro Alumni Group, The Jamaica Association of Montreal, Canadian Conference Committee (Black Organisations), and the Trinidad and Tobago Association (Montreal).

²³ Forsythe, "The Black Writers Conference: Days to Remember," 60.

Dakar in 1966²⁴; the *McGill Daily* called the event the “largest Black Power conference ever held outside the United States.”²⁵ In the program of the congress, co-chairs Elder Thébaud, a Haitian postgraduate student at McGill, and Rosie Douglas, a graduate student from Dominica who had previously been involved in the Caribbean Conference Committee, and who acted as a link between the two different ‘generations’ of Black activists in the city,²⁶ explained the radical and far-reaching goals of the event:

In the face of this total colonial stranglehold, it is clear that the task of self-liberation involves much more than freedom from economic and social oppression. Genuine freedom can only come from the total liberation of the minds and spirits of our people from the false and distorted image of themselves which centuries of cultural enslavement by the white man have imposed upon us all. The struggle for liberation of black people is accordingly not only an economic or political question, but also a cultural rallying cry, a call to re-examine the foundations of the white man’s one-sided vision of the world, and to restore to ourselves an image of the achievements of our people, hitherto suppressed and abandoned among the rubble of history’s abuses.

It is in this context that this Congress of Black Writers hopes to make its contribution. Here, for the first time in Canada, an attempt will be made to recall, in a series of popular lectures by black scholars, artists and politicians, a history which we have been taught to forget: the history of the black man’s own response (in thought and in action) to the conditions of his existence in the New World; in short, the history of the black liberation struggle, from its origins in slavery to the present day. For the sake of to-morrow’s victories, it is imperative that we take another look at the events of yesterday, in the Congress, black people will begin to rediscover themselves as the active creators, rather than the passive sufferers, of history’s events; the subjects, rather than the objects, of history. It is only when we have rediscovered this lost perspective on ourselves that we can truly begin to speak of emancipation; it is only when we have returned to our authentic past that we can truly begin to dream about the future.²⁷

²⁴ Stanley Aleong, “'Dynamique de la libération noire': Congrès des écrivains noirs - McGill, 11-14 octobre,” *Quartier Latin*, 8 Octobre 1968, 12.

²⁵ “Black Power is coming,” *McGill Daily*, 27 September 1968, 1. The McGill West Indian Society was not pleased, however, by the fact that the *Daily* described the conference as a ‘Black Power conference’ and demanded a retraction, to which the *Daily* consented. “Letter to the Editor” *McGill Daily*, 9 October 1968.

²⁶ Leroy Butcher, “The Sir George Williams Affair and its Aftermath” “REBELLION, PROTEST, AND CHANGE: *Reflections on the 1960s and the Development of Montreal's Black Community*, February 18, 2006, UNIA Hall, Montreal. Videorecording.

²⁷ UQAM, Gérard Godin fonds, 81p-660:02a/16, Elder Thebaud and Rosie Douglas, “Editorial” Souvenir Program of Conference on Black Writers, held at McGill University 11-14 October 1968.

The congress brought many of the world's most important Black intellectuals to Montreal: Michael X, leader of the Black Muslims in England, Walter Rodney, prominent West Indian intellectual, and American activist and intellectual James Forman. The congress also featured both C.L.R. James and Halifax-based activist Rocky Jones.²⁸ Jones, the only African Canadian to speak, endorsed an alliance between Blacks in Canada and other marginalized people in the country, including Natives and francophone Quebecers.²⁹ Eldridge Cleaver, the Black Panther 'Information Minister' and author of *Soul on Ice*, hoped to attend, but was stopped because of his troubles with Californian law. His message of apology was read out to the enthusiastic conference participants.³⁰ It was the presence of fiery Black Power advocate Stokely Carmichael, however, which caused the most excitement, generated the most controversy, and inspired the most hope for the possibility of creating a future different from the tragedy of the past.

The conference's various speakers lectured on African history and African civilization, and on the necessity of fostering a pride in the beauty of Blackness. James Forman, drawing on Fanon, vitriolically denounced the African bourgeois leaders as opportunistic unrepresentative individuals who had only their own interests in sight.³¹ The biggest event of the conference was undoubtedly the appearance of Carmichael, the Trinidadian-born, American-raised Civil Rights and later Black Power activist. After waiting anxiously in the Union Ballroom at McGill University, the overflow audience of 2,000 – mostly made up of White students – stood in disbelief as Carmichael stepped up to the stage. He began by describing the

²⁸ UQAM, Gérard Godin fonds, 81p-660:02a/16, Souvenir Program of Conference on Black Writers, held at McGill University 11-14 October 1968.

²⁹ Austin, "Contemporary Montréal and the 1968 Congress of Black Writers," 58.

³⁰ Forsythe, "The Black Writers Conference: Days to Remember," 63.

³¹ An edited version of Forman's speech can be found in James Forman, "Black Writers Hail Frantz Fanon," *Guardian*, 23 November 1968, 20-21.

colonization of Black people throughout the world, and vividly described the devastating effects of dehumanization and colonization on the world's Black people.³² And he insisted on the need to internationalize and globalize the Black struggle, calling on Blacks the world over to "create their own legitimations."³³ The electrified crowd repeatedly interrupted Carmichael, who spoke for over an hour, with wild cheers and applause.³⁴ The power of his speech brought seasoned activists "close to tears," and had a profound effect on C.L.R. James.³⁵

It is hard to overestimate the impact of the Congress of Black Writers on Montreal citizens. As Montreal's English-language newspapers denounced the gathering, many White radicals attended the conference and were fascinated by this local manifestation of Black Power. McGill lecturer Stanley Gray, an individual at the very centre of radical student politics at McGill, listened to the various presentations and analyses, working to piece together various movements of resistance which were sweeping the world.³⁶ Gérard Godin, the well-known radical poet and publisher of *Parti Pris* publishing house, sat on the sidelines, carefully taking notes and listening attentively to the proceedings. Godin, a regular contributor to *Parti Pris*, had long drawn on racial metaphors to describe the alienation and oppression of French Canadians, and had even argued just two years earlier that francophone Quebecers were "the Blacks of Canada."³⁷ And now, in the scribbles in the margins of his souvenir program, Godin began to make connections between the oppression and alienation of French Canadians and that of Blacks in *Canada*. When

³² Mike Boone, "Stokely preaches violent revolution," *McGill Daily*, 15 October 1968, 2.

³³ Forsythe, "The Black Writers Conference: Days to Remember," 62.

³⁴ Boone, "Stokely preaches violent revolution," 1.

³⁵ See the account of Ekwueme Michael Thelwell in Stokely Carmichael and Ekwueme Michael Thelwell, *Ready for Revolution: The Life and Struggles of Stokely Carmichael [Kwame Ture]* (New York: Scribner, 2003), 544.

³⁶ Interview with Stan Gray, June 10, 2005, Hamilton.

³⁷ Gérard Godin, "La folie bilinguale," *Parti Pris* 3, no. 10 (mai 1966): 56. "les Noirs du Canada."

listening to Halifax-based activist Rocky Jones – a talk which included a plea for Canadian Blacks to join forces with Francophone Quebecers and Aboriginal peoples³⁸ – Godin dutifully wrote in his notes “that’s the way I feel,” transcribing Jones’s attempt to convey the psychological impact of racial oppression. And, directly underneath, Godin drew similarities between Blacks and francophone Quebecers, adding a message of his own: “that’s the way French Canadians feel.”³⁹ Godin was so moved by the congress that he even began putting together plans to make a movie about Canadian Blacks.⁴⁰

The congress undoubtedly had its greatest impact on a new generation of Black activists in Montreal. According to Barbara Jones, for Black people in Canada, the congress was an “edifying experience,” and they came to realize that their only hope lay “in a new era of black militancy and a new humanism.”⁴¹ The atmosphere of the conference itself is best described by Dennis Forsythe. Looking back from the perspective of 1971, he wrote that the “best analogy in terms of which we can understand the atmosphere of the Conference was that of a religious revival ... Present were the high priests of the movement – present-day symbols and heroes of the new ‘honourable’ Black men, second only to our dead heroes like Patrice Lumumba and Frantz Fanon whose portraits hung in omnipotent awe on the distant walls.” Many claimed that the conference was the biggest event of their lives, that it demonstrated “the emotional intensity of Blacks crying out in the wilderness.” As Forsythe continues: “The overall effect on the black psyche was to inculcate a feeling

³⁸ Austin, "Contemporary Montréal and the 1968 Congress of Black Writers."

³⁹ UQAM, Gérard Godin fonds, 81p-660:02a/16, Souvenir Program of Conference on Black Writers, held at McGill University 11-14 October 1968.

⁴⁰ Godin drafted a memo stating that “Lors du Congrès des écrivains Noirs, en fin de semaine, nous avons pris des contacts avec le Stokely Carmichael du Canada, M. Rocky Jones, de Halifax, ainsi que M. Buddy Dave, un des dirigeants du Neighbourhood Council de Halifax où existe un ghetto.” It went on to state that “Ils ont disposés a nous recevoir, mais restent méfiants.” UQAM, Gérard Godin fonds, 81p-660:02a/16, Untitled memo, Gérard Godin, 16 octobre 1968.

⁴¹ Barbara Jones, "A Black Woman Speaks Out," *McGill Reporter*, 4 November 1968.

of exhilaration and uplift; we had christened in the holy cause. We now saw ourselves as makers rather than takers of our history. We saw ourselves as part of a great struggle, a historic struggle, from which we derived a peculiar feeling of exhilaration, uplift and pride, and a sense of power. We were sanctified as the makers of our own destiny.”⁴²

And this sentiment that Blacks were going to take control of their own history, shape their own future, and define their own systems of thought and legitimacy, captured the imaginations and inspired the hopes of many Black people in Montreal. In the fall of 1968, Black activists were responding to a world which had drawn clear racial lines around them, dehumanizing and debasing them. And the solution, for many, was to organize around the basis upon which they had been oppressed: their ‘Blackness.’ At the congress, according to Forsythe, as Blackness became “a symbol of rightness,” then “the Whites present had to be, by definition, symbols of evil.” Much controversy broke out at the conference when some wanted to exclude White people from sessions, and others wanted to ensure that they did not wear Malcolm X buttons. Many speakers shocked the largely White audience by referring to Whites as “pigs” and “oppressors.”⁴³ For the first time, many Whites felt “distrusted, excluded, [and] ignored.”⁴⁴ In an interview, conference co-organizer Rosie Douglas stated that, because Whites were among the audience, “the speakers found themselves having to justify the need for liberation,” and it was therefore necessary to make a compromise: Whites were allowed in, but after every session there was a specific Black caucus.⁴⁵ It is not difficult to understand why, after such a long period of discrimination and marginalization at the hands of Western societies, anger, distrust, and militancy would

⁴² Forsythe, "The Black Writers Conference: Days to Remember," 62-66.

⁴³ Ibid., 64.

⁴⁴ Editors, "Black militants and Red Guards," *McGill Reporter*, 4 November 1968, 1.

⁴⁵ Rosie Douglas, Rita Sherman and Robert Chodos, "No time for coalitions," *McGill Daily*, 21 October 1968, 5.

carry the day. In the months to come, the pent-up frustrations of Montreal's Black population would head towards a dramatic collision with one of the city's most important institutions.

The Sir George Williams Affair

The powerful influx of Black Power ideas into Montreal had a great impact on the political dynamic of the city.⁴⁶ New ideas, new thoughts, and new interpretations of world were talking hold in Montreal, but it was not until January and February of 1969 that this new militancy would be translated into action at Sir George Williams University, with all of its tragic consequences. The origins of the conflict dated back to the end of the 1967-68 school year, when a group of West Indian students accused biology professor Perry Anderson of racial discrimination and academic incompetence. On 29 January 1969, after months of heated controversy, the students felt that their charges were not being adequately addressed. Roughly 200 protesters overtook a hearing into the matter, and then proceeded to the ninth floor of the Hall building to occupy the university's computer centre.⁴⁷ Tensions grew to a climax on the fourteenth day of the occupation when, feeling betrayed by the

⁴⁶ The Congress of Black Writers also had important international ramifications. The international nature of the struggle was made abundantly clear when Walter Rodney, lecturer at Jamaica's University of the West Indies, was banned from returning to Jamaica after his appearance at the conference in Montreal. News of the ban quickly spread to Jamaica, where angry crowds took to the streets. Police unleashed clouds of tear gas, and made generous use of guns and clubs. The riots left downtown Kingston in shambles; fifty buses were burned, and three Jamaicans were killed in the confrontations. At a mass rally held at Sir George Williams University in support of Rodney, Rodney himself took to the podium. He insisted that the violence was not a mere student uprising, but was a "revolutionary manifestation of social malaise" on the part of the entire population of Kingston. The audience listened intensely as Rodney spoke of his dedication to working with lower class Blacks. These people, he stated, humbled him with their knowledge about heritage and culture, and about the beauty of Black people. The audience, clearly moved, repeatedly broke into enthusiastic applause, and when Rodney concluded his speech by saying that they will "celebrate victory with black drums," the crowd burst into a standing ovation. Robert Wallace, "Local rally supports Jamaican students," *McGill Daily*, 21 October 1968, 1. It should be noted as well that after the Congress of Black Writers, Bobby Seale of the Black Panthers came to the city for the Hemispheric Conference to End the War in Vietnam at the end of November 1968. "Bobby Seale makes it..." *McGill Daily*, 2 December 1968, 3.

⁴⁷ "SGWU hearing folds: 200 students occupy computing center," *McGill Daily*, 30 January 1969, 1.

administration and cornered by the police, the students barricaded themselves into the computer centre. Realizing that the riot squad had been called in, the students threw paper and computer punch cards out of the ninth-floor window. Riot police broke down the doors and, in the confusion that ensued, a fire broke out and computers were destroyed. In the end, ninety-seven protesters were arrested, criminal charges were laid, and the damage totalled over two million dollars. The international media broadcast news of the event around the world,⁴⁸ and protests against symbols of Canadian power erupted throughout the Caribbean. In the aftermath of the event, students at the Cave Hill campus of the University of the West Indies in Barbados mounted a “symbolic burial of Anderson and the racist institution of Sir George Williams University,”⁴⁹ and the visit of Canadian Governor General Daniel Roland Michener to the West Indies on a ‘good-will’ tour set off a series of mass protests, contributing to a revolutionary moment that nearly toppled the government of Trinidad.⁵⁰

The Sir George Williams Affair has generally stood outside of the mainstream narratives which chronicle political developments in Montreal during the 1960s. It has been seen as either an aberration or, at best, a matter of secondary importance to the struggle between two warring linguistic groups.⁵¹ When it is remembered, it is generally portrayed as a ‘Black event,’ having relevance only for Black Canadians, and as a conflict which had little impact outside of the circles of Black Montreal. Such representations, however, severely distort both the profound impact of this event

⁴⁸ Williams, *The Road to Now*, 120-21.

⁴⁹ Carl Lumumba, "The West Indies and the Sir George Williams Affair: An Assessment," in *Let the Niggers Burn! The Sir George Williams University Affair and its Caribbean Aftermath*, ed. Dennis Forsythe (Montreal: Black Rose Books - Our Generation Press, 1971), 179.

⁵⁰ See Ibid., Austin, "Introduction," n12.

⁵¹ For an example of a prominent book which puts forth an exclusively ‘linguistic analysis’ to the changes of the 1960s, see Marc V. Levine, *The Reconquest of Montreal: Language Policy and Social Change in a Bilingual City* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990).

on various sectors of Montreal society, and the ways in which the protest itself formed part of a larger generalized atmosphere of revolt that prevailed in the city. It should not be forgotten, of course, that the occupation had the support of many White students at Sir George, and that Whites formed the majority of those present during the occupation.⁵² For many Whites, participating in the sit-in was, as one student put it, a “coming of age,” a first concrete realization of the reality of structural racism.⁵³

For radicals across the city, be they anglophone or francophone, Black or White, the Sir George Williams Affair and its aftermath significantly affected the way they understood race. And it challenged the adherents of both Black Power and of Quebec liberation – the two most important radical movements in Montreal at the time – to rethink the nature of their political projects. Drawing on the same language of decolonization and democracy, and the same theories of solidarity and self-determination, the two groups would begin to open up to each other’s analyses in the years following the event. Prominent Black intellectuals and francophone writers involved in Quebec liberation, both deeply shaped by the converging struggles talking place in Montreal, finished by publicly recognizing the importance and legitimacy of each other’s movement.

⁵² It is revealing that virtually nobody at the time, or since, has pointed out that the majority of those arrested were not Black, but White. According to the editors of *UHURU*, “most” of the students arrested were Black. In fact, Blacks comprised only 42 of the 97 people arrested. See “Editorial: Deep Ramifications,” *UHURU*, 16 February 1970, 2. It is revealing that the only sustained historical account of the Sir George Williams Affair is in a book dealing exclusively with ‘Black Montreal.’ The event has received virtually no attention in works dealing with the Quiet Revolution writ large. See Williams, *The Road to Now*.

⁵³ A major defining moment came during an a rally in the mezzanine of the Hall building on 4 February 1969. The rally, which was composed mostly of White people, was addressed by both Black and White speakers, nearly all of whom spoke of the inherent racism in Canadian society. After the rally, in a gesture of support to the Black protesters, White students began their own occupation of the Faculty Club on the seventh floor of the Hall building, two floors down from the computer centre. Quoted in Dorothy Eber, *The Computer Centre Party : Canada Meets Black Power* (Montreal: Tundra Books, 1969), 98-99. Jill Ross, “Students occupy faculty club,” *The Georgian*, 6 February 1969, 1.

The Black students, most of whom had come to Canada to study, were keenly aware not only of the international context in which they operated, but also of the local environment in which they lived.⁵⁴ They framed their analysis in the international language of decolonization and Black Power, but their rebellion emerged out of the turbulent atmosphere in Montreal. Alfie Roberts, one of the city's most important Black activists, a member of the Caribbean Conference Committee, and a participant in the Sir George Williams Affair, was deeply aware of being part of a larger movement which affected nearly all aspects of life in Quebec. In 1962, the same year that he immigrated to Montreal from his native St. Vincent, Roberts read Marcel Chaput's *Pourquoi je suis un séparatiste* and realized that many people in Quebec were making claims to independence similar to those being championed by the nations of the Third World. Roberts described the meshing of international and local developments when he arrived in Montreal:

So all of this was happening and there was a certain conjuncture of events. We are talking about the agitation, the effervescence, the emerging to the fore of the problems that black people were having and were publicly agitating to have redressed in the United States; we are talking especially about the Cuban Revolution in 1959 with its bearded, olive green-clad combatants filling the newspaper pages and the works of guerrilla warfare by Che Guevara making the rounds; we're going back to Nkrumah in 1957 – the independence of Ghana; we're talking about Guinea in 1959; the works of Fanon. All of this had a tremendous impact on what was happening here in Quebec and I walked into all of it.⁵⁵

Throughout the 1960s, Roberts understood both himself and the larger Black radical movement as part of the major changes that were taking place in Montreal, and he even argued that the many Black conferences of the 1960s could be considered as “a Black complement to the ongoing Quebecois Quiet Revolution.” When the Sir

⁵⁴ The Sir George Williams Affair had ramifications that spread far beyond the Canadian border, initiating a whole series of political revolts throughout the Caribbean. For important insights, see Dennis Forsythe, ed., *Let the Niggers Burn! The Sir George Williams University Affair and its Caribbean Aftermath* (Montréal: Black Rose Books/Our Generation Press, 1971).

⁵⁵ Roberts, *A View for Freedom*, 57-58.

George Williams Affair erupted in February of 1969, Roberts continued, it “announced loud and clear that Black people were here, and not only below the tracks, but inside the whole society.” The event, Roberts explained, must be understood as coinciding with the “tremendous worker unrest” that prevailed in the province of Quebec at the time.⁵⁶ True, Roberts was somewhat of an exception among those involved in the Sir George Williams Affair. He had arrived in Canada relatively early, and he was not a student at the time of the event. But the young students who were radicalized by the affair also came to recognize the importance of the local situation. The Sir George Affair – with crowds of White people yelling ‘burn, nigger, burn’ during the fire, and with the Black students being locked up separately from the White students once they had been arrested⁵⁷ – provided many with a dramatic example of the racism that they faced more subtly on a daily basis. The events of February therefore caused many to embrace Black Power as an intellectual framework and to place the confrontation in the larger world-wide context of imperialism and race relations. In the years which followed, Black radicals also started developing more sophisticated analyses of both Quebec society and their place within it.

The confrontation at Sir George also changed the way in which many people involved in the Quebec liberation struggle thought of race. Gestures of support came from many in Quebec nationalist circles. During the occupation, a scheduled ‘Quebec

⁵⁶ Ibid., 73, 81-82.

⁵⁷ Austin, “Contemporary Montréal and the 1968 Congress of Black Writers,” 59. In both the short and medium term aftermath to the incidents of 11 February, many different groups began speaking up against the racist backlash which was occurring. The West Indian Students Association, for example, wrote that “We cannot accept the hysterical cries of ‘hoodlums’, ‘rioters’, ‘dangerous agitators’, ‘foreigners’, ‘Red Chinese agents’, and ‘let the niggers burn’. We reject the overt racism and anti-student sentiment comparable in many ways to the witch-hunt atmosphere of McCarthyism in the early 1950’s.” WRDA, Anderson Affair Fonds. West Indian Students Association memo, n.d.

Week,' which was to feature Parti Québécois members, as well as Andrée Ferretti, Raymond Lemieux, and others, was cancelled in support of the occupation.⁵⁸ Student groups across the country came out in support of the occupation and against institutionalized racism. After the forced expulsion from the computer room and the vast property damage that ensued, however, the supporters of the students quickly disappeared. The students' society at Sir George Williams attempted to draw the biggest distance possible between itself and the events of 11 February, even firing the editor of *The Georgian*, the university's main student newspaper. There was also a widespread backlash against the students involved in the demonstration among the university's student body,⁵⁹ even among many of the university's Black students.⁶⁰ Nearly all of the main anglophone student organizations abandoned those involved in the protest, and a group of self-defined 'radical faculty' at the university even publicly denounced the protesters for their tendency towards 'nationalism.'⁶¹ While English-Canadian students and Sir George's own 'radical faculty' turned against the protesters, support came from those involved in the Quebec liberation movement. UGEQ, the Quebec student union, spoke out in defence of the students.⁶² And perhaps even more importantly, the fiery Montreal Central Council of the CSN

⁵⁸ See *The Georgian* 4 February 1969.

⁵⁹ For examples of this backlash, see the many articles in the 19 February 1969 edition of *The Georgian*.

⁶⁰ For an example of a West Indian student speaking about how many West Indian students were opposed to the occupation, see A.R. Ali, "The Price of Courage to Disagree," *The Georgian*, 19 February 1969, 8.

⁶¹ "SGWU pulls out of UGEQ," *McGill Daily*, 17 February 1969, 1. Also, see "Fired Georgian editor to receive CUP verdict," *McGill Daily*, 26 February 1969, 3. For the letter from the 'radical faculty,' see CUA, Dr. Marsden Papers, Statements, "An open letter to leftwing faculty and students at Sir George Williams University from a group of radical professors," 1969. Eugene Genovese, a radical historian working at Sir George Williams University, was a leading member of the group of left-wing faculty who opposed the students. Genovese dedicated a subsequent book, published two years after the event, to his allies at Sir George Williams who denounced the "reactionary nihilism masquerading as revolutionary action" during the Sir George Williams Affair, and the "nihilist perversions" of the New Left in general. See Eugene Genovese, *In Red and Black; Marxian Explorations in Southern Afro-American History* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1971), v-vi.

⁶² Doug Owram, *Born at the Right Time: A History of the Baby-Boom Generation* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 287-88.

demanded the liberation of those being held in prison, declaring that the mainstream media “tends to forget that the material mess caused by the occupation of SGWU is nothing in comparison with the problem of racism.”⁶³

In the student newspapers of the city’s universities, individual students wrote angrily about the events at Sir George. Speaking on behalf of students at the Université de Montréal, Romeo Bouchard wrote that, as both francophone Quebecers and as students, they were “brothers twice over” of the Black students at Sir George.⁶⁴ One author in *Quartier Latin* wondered whether, by “blaming the ferocity of a cornered animal, we come to forget the ferocity of the animal which corners,” and went on to question the operating priorities of the modern capitalist system: “These charred IBM computers acted as the very symbol of a consumer society which turns its universities into depersonalizing factories, manipulating and shaping humanity to its own needs.” Those “who idolize the dollar as the Supreme Dispenser of peace and happiness are enraged to see \$ 2 million go up in flames,” yet these same people do not shed a tear when “the human spirit is suffocated in the cold bowels of the machine.”⁶⁵ McGill student Jacques Maassen articulated the same sentiment in the pages of the *McGill Daily*, arguing that the very fact that such “havoc” was caused over “the destruction of a few computers” demonstrated “the corrupt sense of values infused into us by our ‘great society.’” The destruction of a

⁶³ Presse release, “Sir George Williams et le cas de Charles Gagnon: les Deux Masques de la Répression”, 21 février 1969. ACSN, CCSNM, publications. On the occasion of a conference held on the twentieth anniversary of the Sir George Affair, on 11 February 1989, Michel Chartrand gave a paper entitled “The Affair and Quebec’s National Question.” See “The Computer Centre Incident 20 Years Later: Feb. 11, 1969 – Feb. 11, 1989” Alfie Roberts Institute, Montreal. “tend à faire oublier que le dégât matériel causé lors de l’occupation de l’USGW n’est rien en regard du problème de racisme.”

⁶⁴ Roméo Bouchard, “Vous êtes des nègres,” *Le Quartier Latin*, 11 février 1969, 2. “doublement frères”

⁶⁵ Kenneth-Charles De Puis, Jacques Michon and Pierre Larivière, “On soutient toujours son frère et sa soeur,” *Quartier Latin*, 25 février 1969, 12. “blâmant la férocité d’une bête coincée, nous oublions la férocité de la bête qui coince” “Ces ordinateurs IBM calcinés étaient le symbole même d’une société de consommation qui fait de ses universités une usine dépersonnalisante, maniant la pâte humaine pour en faire un produit adapté à ses besoins”; “qui idolâtrèrent la piastre comme Dispensatrice Suprême de la paix et du bonheur regrettent de voir brûler les \$2 millions”; “l’esprit humain étouffé dans les froides entrailles de la machine.”

computer, he argued, was a symbolic act against “the image of the progression and evolution of this society.”⁶⁶

When many of those arrested during the Sir George Affair appeared in court, they were represented by Robert Lemieux, a lawyer closely associated with the Quebec left.⁶⁷ And in the hall outside of the large courtroom, amongst the bright and colourful dashikis, many people wore ‘McGill français’ buttons. A petition was being passed around stating that “black students and French students are more or less fighting for the same things.”⁶⁸ And a Reverend who had travelled all the way up from Harlem for the trial was distributing leaflets that had been given to him outside. The leaflet reads:

WE THE SUPPORTERS FOR ALL PEOPLES DEMAND THAT THE STUDENTS WHO ARE BEING ILLEGALLY HELD WITHOUT BAIL BE RELEASED IMMEDIATELY.

THE ALLEGED DAMAGE DONE TO THE COMPUTERS READ TO THE AMOUNT OF TWO MILLION DOLLARS WHEREAS THE AMOUNT OF DAMAGE MANIFESTED BY INSTITUTIONALIZED RACISM IS INCALCULABLE.

NOT EVEN IN RACELAND, U.S.A. WOULD THIS GRAVE INJUSTICE BE COMMITTED.

WE WANT JUSTICE.

And, on the reverse side of many of the leaflets:

NOUS LES NÈGRES BLANCS D’AMÉRIQUE SOUTENONS NOS FRÈRES.⁶⁹

Montreal’s Black Renaissance

The Sir George Williams Affair was not only a ‘Black’ event. By bringing questions of racism and immigration to the forefront of public discussion, it

⁶⁶ Jacques Maassen, “Values and the computer,” *McGill Daily*, 14 February 1969, 4.

⁶⁷ Forsythe, ed., *Let the Niggers Burn!*, 149.

⁶⁸ Eber, *The Computer Centre Party : Canada Meets Black Power*, 271, 20.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 152.

challenged and unsettled many of the established truths of the Montreal left. Only a year earlier, Vallières had argued that Black nationalism, with its emphasis on Black self-determination, a reaffirmation of Black culture, and a defence of universal human rights, was analogous to Quebec separatism. Neither, he argued, could possibly be oppressive, as both were made up of those who were already located on the margins of society.⁷⁰ For many of the intellectuals of the Quebec liberation movement, francophone Quebecers held the position of being the “Blacks of Canada.” As I will explore later on, at least partly because of the explosion of Black activism in the city, writers throughout Montreal would be forced to rethink many of their previously unquestioned assumptions and understandings of race, oppression, and resistance.

While having a profound effect on debate across the spectrum of the Montreal left, the Sir George Williams Affair’s most important and lasting impact was on Black Montreal. When Black militants and their supporters decided to take over the computer centre, they did so with the belief that the computer symbolized not only capitalist modernity, but also the ravages that western imperialism had wrought on the poor nations of the world. Through the control of technology, western capitalism was transforming the world’s population into unthinking, uncritical consumers. And they conceived of their fight, their struggle, as an attempt to bring democracy to the community, to the country, and to the world.⁷¹ After the riot squad’s forceful removal of the students, the various segments of Montreal’s Black community felt a common sense of outrage and anger.⁷² According to Dennis Forsythe, the affair was “a major event in the metamorphosis of Black people.”⁷³ In the pages of *Expression*, the

⁷⁰ Ibid. 52.

⁷¹ Leroy Butcher, “The Sir George Williams Affair and its Aftermath.”

⁷² Williams, *The Road to Now*, 121.

⁷³ Dennis Forsythe, “By way of introduction: ‘The Sir George Williams Affair,’” in *Let the Niggers Burn! The Sir George Williams University Affair and its Caribbean Aftermath*, ed. Dennis Forsythe (Montréal: Black Rose Books/Our Generation Press, 1971), 8.

journal of the Negro Citizenship Association, an editorial argued that the events “had a profound influence on that institution and the entire Montreal community.” It had become clear that Canada, “riddled with paradoxes and contradictions,” was a country that championed “equality for all races” yet “condone[d] in silence the unequal treatment of its non-white peoples: the Indians, the Eskimos, the Japanese, the blacks.” In the heated context of the aftermath of the Sir George Williams Affair, the battle for equality “can be considered nothing less than a revolutionary struggle to reformulate the basic and fundamental concepts, value judgments, and ways in which each racial group perceives the existence of all others.”⁷⁴

Ultimately, neither *Expression* nor the NCA would become the voice of this “revolutionary struggle” to reformulate the perception of racial categories. Black activists decided that they needed to move out of the university milieu, to begin organizing the Black community in its entirety, and especially those, like domestic servants, who were in the most vulnerable positions. Alfie Roberts started a group called the Caribbean International Service Bureau which organized a conference, started a day care, and published a special issue of the *McGill Free Press* entitled ‘The Black Spark.’⁷⁵ According to Leroy Butcher, Black activists and intellectuals were attempting to give people the feeling that they had the right to do things for themselves, and to teach people to believe in themselves and in their history.⁷⁶ In what became known as the ‘Thursday Night Rally,’ members of the Black community began meeting on a weekly basis. The rallies had their origins in the immediate aftermath of the Sir George Affair, when semi-weekly gatherings were held to relay information to the community about the arrested students. As the meetings slowly

⁷⁴ "Editorial. Canadian Liberalism: Fact or Fiction," *Expression* 3, no. 3 (Winter 1969): 3, 4, 6.

⁷⁵ See Caribbean International Service Bureau, "Black Spark Edition," *McGill Free Press: Black Spark Edition* (18 February 1971): 1.

⁷⁶ Leroy Butcher, "The Sir George Williams Affair and its Aftermath."

evolved, they became a forum for broad community discussions about race and racism. Before long, guest speakers were regularly being invited, and a crowd of up to 175 people would commonly turn out for the event. Historian Roy States gave lectures on international Black history, and on the history of Blacks in Montreal. Films featuring the Black struggle were screened, speakers lectured on Africa and South America, and lengthy reading discussions – on books like *Malcolm X Speaks* and *Soul on Ice* – captured the imaginations of many young people struggling to find their place in the world.⁷⁷

The most important legacy of the Sir George Williams Affair was *UHURU* (Swahili for ‘freedom’), a newspaper which became the dominant voice articulating militant Black activism in the city.⁷⁸ The paper – founded by people who were closely involved with the Affair – began as a bulletin of the Feb. 11th Defence Committee and, through its very existence, acted as a concrete demonstration of Black Power ideals.⁷⁹ Through it, Black activists and intellectuals were able to provide a medium free from White control. By challenging the truth structure of western society, they were able to develop their own narrative understandings of themselves and of their community.

⁷⁷ Brenda Dash, "Thursday Night Rally Re-Opens," *UHURU*, 12 January 1970, 7.

⁷⁸ Because of its radical tone, *UHURU* did not, of course, speak as the lone voice of Montreal's Black community. At the first meeting of the Canadian Conference Committee in Toronto in October 1969, a major confrontation erupted between Montreal radicals – demanding that the fallout of the Sir George Williams Affair be discussed as a priority – and other Black organizations. The confrontation, which ended in blows, led to a schism in the community and the creation of the National Black Coalition, with its headquarters in Montreal, representing a coalition of organizations throughout Canada. Immediately following the conference, the group opposing the Montreal radicals founded *Umoja*, a newspaper which eventually became the organ of the National Black Coalition. The purpose of *Umoja* was to provide a counter voice to *UHURU*. Through the pages of the paper, a frustration with those involved in the Sir George Williams Affair was palpable. According to co-editor Clarence S. Bayne, "a black community cannot be built on the basis of people who are continually living in a state of returning to the West Indies, who are not committed to making this country theirs." "Editorial Note: Black Unity," *Umoja* 1, no. 1 (30 October 1969): 1; "A Programme of Action for the National Black Coalition," *Umoja* 1, no. 2 (12 December 1969): 1, 4. C.S. Bayne, "A report on the Canadian Conference Committee," *Umoja* 1, no. 1 (30 October 1969): 3.

⁷⁹ "Focus on Uhuru," *UHURU*, 8 December 1969, 4.

The paper, while always controversial, was an immediate success. Its circulation of roughly 3,000 nearly matched that of *Parti Pris* of the mid-1960s,⁸⁰ and the editors felt that the “demand is even more pressing.”⁸¹ *UHURU* even received a letter of congratulations from Stokely and Miriam Carmichael, thanking the paper for the service that it was rendering “to the Black world.”⁸² On 30 November 1969, the paper and over 300 of its supporters celebrated the opening of its new office on 2554 Saint-Antoine. Located on the ground floor of an apartment building in the city’s traditional Black neighbourhood, the office was identified only by a big sign that hung in its window. The interior of the building matched its austere exterior. The walls, plastered with posters, were adorned with only one painting, a map of Africa, and a donated electric clock; a picture of Eldridge Cleaver hung on the door to the toilet. In the combined work room and library, young Black intellectuals sought to develop their own understandings of the origins and alternatives to the racism and injustice which surrounded them.⁸³

In the pages of *UHURU* a distinctively Montreal expression of Black Power began to take shape. Freely borrowing inspiration and ideas from both the local milieu and from the complicated mixture of Black nationalist and anti-colonialist ideas which circulated internationally, Montreal activists developed a unique expression of radical Black politics. Although the various authors who wrote in *UHURU* articulated a variety of highly developed and sometimes contradictory ideological positions, all agreed on a few central points of analysis. For the writers of *UHURU*, to be ‘Black’ was to be ‘colonized,’ and therefore to be on the side of those who were involved in a worldwide struggle of resistance and rebellion. In their

⁸⁰ The circulation of *Parti Pris* in the mid-1960s stood at roughly 4,000. “Lettre au lecteur,” *Parti Pris* 2, no. 1 (septembre 1964): 18.

⁸¹ “Focus on Uhuru,” 4.

⁸² Stokely Carmichael and Miriam Carmichael, “Letter to the Editor,” *UHURU*, 2 February 1970, 2.

⁸³ “Focus on Uhuru,” 4-5.

many articles, the language of empire and imperialism, of resistance and decolonization, abounded. And Montreal's radical Black writers – building on the work and insights of the Caribbean Conference Committee⁸⁴ – were at the forefront of developing analyses of Canada's imperialist role in the Caribbean. While the intellectuals of the Quebec liberation movement saw Montreal as a colonized city, Black writers began looking to the city as an imperial metropole, as a city which undoubtedly formed part of the 'West,' and which held its share of responsibility for the misery inflicted upon the poor nations of the world.⁸⁵

Black writers in Montreal would continue seeing their condition through an anti-imperialist lens, analysing universities like Sir George Williams as institutions which fulfilled a "colonial role of conditioning young people (bible in hand) under the guise of progress, civilization, democracy and christianity."⁸⁶ Viewed from this angle, the Sir George Affair was an "unavoidable confrontation between colonizer and colonized."⁸⁷ Because capitalism had historically required slave labour, it was argued, racism and capitalism were connected. But it was not capitalism per se, but colonization – theorized explicitly as the experience and legacy of African slavery – that gave the Black liberation struggle "an autonomous vitality of its own."

Colonization, which was both an outgrowth of slavery and embedded in capitalist society, "goes beyond economic exploitation to the actual psychological subjection of

⁸⁴ In a publication which members of the Conference Committee published in October 1968, meant to coincide with the Congress of Black Writers, several authors spoke of the imperial and neocolonial role that Canadian capital and Canadian companies played in the Caribbean. See, for example, A. Eustace, "On the Economism of the Movement... As the West Indian Society for the Study of Social Issues," *Caribbean International Opinion: Dynamics of Liberation* 1, no. 1 (October 1968): 26-31; Feleon, "On Haiti," *Caribbean International Opinion: Dynamics of Liberation* 1, no. 1 (October 1968): 61-64.

⁸⁵ Powerful analyses of race and of the connections between Canada and the Caribbean sometimes even made their way into mainstream leftist writing. "SGWU Blacks get a Taste of Just Society," *The Last Post* 1, no. 3 (April 1970): 5-6.

⁸⁶ "Sir George and O'Brien," *UHURU*, 18 August 1969, 1.

⁸⁷ LeRoi Butcher, "The Anderson Affair," in *Let the Niggers Burn! The Sir George Williams University Affair and its Caribbean Aftermath*, ed. Dennis Forsythe (Montréal: Black Rose Books/Our Generation Press, 1971), 106.

the minds of black people.” Colonization therefore “strips the victim (black man) of his heritage, language, culture, country, birth right, in effect, of everything he requires to develop his manhood,” and, in their place, the colonialist instils White values.⁸⁸ Frantz Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masks* acted as a key work for Montreal’s Black intellectuals who struggled to understand the meaning of racial oppression. Fanon had outlined the devastating effects of the cultural devaluation of the Black culture, of the ways in which notions of Black inferiority and White superiority had infused and shaped cultural systems and perceptions. For Fanon, ‘White’ had come to represent morality, beauty, intelligence, rationality, and respect; ‘Black,’ on the other hand, symbolized “the lower emotions, the baser inclinations, the dark side of the soul.”⁸⁹ For Montreal’s radical Black writers, Fanon helped to elucidate the “black sickness of mind,” the “acquired belief” in “inferiority based on the enforced values of a white society.”⁹⁰

Canadian-born Maurice Tremblay, for example, wrote movingly in *UHURU* about growing up Black in Montreal, about how he devalued himself as a Black person, and about the psychological trauma of constantly living under the gaze of White society. For Tremblay, the Sir George Affair was a turning point. When the administration remained deaf to the students’ concerns, and when the crowd of White students yelled “let the niggers burn” as the fire broke out in the computer centre, he came to realize his ‘Blackness.’ He began to understand, like Fanon, that the task at hand was *not* to emulate White society, but to celebrate and “rejoice in Black Identity.”⁹¹ And in this he was not alone. Radical Black writers in Montreal set out,

⁸⁸ Rosie Douglas, "On Black-White Relationship," *UHURU*, 2 September 1969, 4.

⁸⁹ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Charles Lam Markmann (New York: Grove Press, 1967 [1952]), 190.

⁹⁰ "The Sixties: Revolution or Evolution?," *UHURU*, 12 January 1970, 4.

⁹¹ His title drew explicitly on a chapter from *Black Skin, White Masks* Maurice Tremblay, "The Facts of Blackness," *UHURU*, 1 June 1970, 6-8.

along with Black people throughout the world, to counter the cultural degradation of Black people through a redefinition of Blackness. They had learned from Fanon that Blacks needed to avoid accepting “white beauty standards,” and they began working to uncover “a shining cultural past” which would highlight “new black heroes.”⁹²

In the pages of *UHURU*, ‘Black’ took on many different and at some points contradictory meanings, but all authors were united on one overarching issue: Blacks in Montreal could no longer be passive. They could no longer sit back in the face of a hostile culture and allow themselves to have their self-perceptions forged by others. In other words, it was necessary to *build* a Black culture, to *construct* their lines of unity, and to *create* a new conception of Blackness. Despite coming from different origins and having varying backgrounds, it was necessary to organize as Blacks, because it was as Blacks that they were oppressed.⁹³ Stokely Carmichael had argued that Blacks needed to transform colour from a source of oppression into “a weapon of liberation.”⁹⁴ Writers in *UHURU* varied in the intrinsic meaning that they assigned to ‘Black.’ Some defended an essentialist position arguing that Blacks formed a proud race which had been destroyed,⁹⁵ while others gave a political and ethical definition to the word.

In a feature article in 1969, C.J. Munford argued that “‘Black’ is properly a *political* term and implies the emancipation of Black peoples everywhere.” Being Black, he continued, “is to be the agent of revolutionary change in 20th century

⁹² “The Sixties: Revolution or Evolution?,” 4.

⁹³ See, for example, Omowale, “The Need For A Black United Front in Montreal,” *UHURU*, 18 July 1969, 4.

⁹⁴ Stokely Carmichael, speaking in Cuba at an organizing conference of the Organization of Latin American Solidarity, 1967. Seen in Carmichael and Thelwell, *Ready for Revolution*, 590. This lecture is reproduced in Stokely Carmichael, *Stokely Speaks: Black Power to Pan-Africanism* (New York: Random House, 1971).

⁹⁵ See, for example, Omowale, “The Need For A Black United Front in Montreal,” 4.

America,” the new “gravedigger of history.” Having “dark-hued skin” in itself signified little. Only Black militants, he argued, had “earned the right to be proud.”⁹⁶ Munford was far from alone in ascribing a political meaning to the term ‘Black.’ When discussing a proposition for the promotion of Black capitalism, the editors of *UHURU* argued that they could not “subscribe to any form of capitalism – black or white,” and that they could not “use our skin colour to replace white exploitation with black exploitation.” The editors then went further, arguing that Black capitalism was in itself inconsistent with the meaning that they had been ascribing to Blackness. “We have defined blackness several times subtly and consistently,” they maintained, “and the definition is always inconsistent with exploitation.”⁹⁷ ‘Blackness’ was not self-evident, but something which needed to be demonstrated and built through action. The team which worked to put together *UHURU* were “truly BLACK brothers and sisters,” as they “not only TALK BLACK, but they practise what they preach.”⁹⁸

Uniting the various attempts to define Blackness was the belief that Blacks themselves needed to do the defining, needed to come together and establish their own terms of reference. In the incendiary *Malcolm X Speaks*, a book of speeches that he pronounced during the last year of his life, Malcolm X had argued for a militant Black nationalism in which Blacks should work to gain control over their own communities. “The political philosophy of black nationalism,” he argued, “means that the black man should control the politics and the politicians in his own

⁹⁶ Dr. C.J. Munford, “On the Importance of Being Black,” *UHURU*, 31 July 1969, 4.

⁹⁷ “Editor’s Note,” *UHURU*, 22 June 1970, 8.

⁹⁸ “Opportunity to Demonstrate Blackness,” *UHURU*, 24 November 1969, 1.

community.”⁹⁹ Building on Malcolm X, *UHURU* strongly advocated Black self-determination in Montreal. It argued for the necessity of founding a Black board of education, Black studies programs, Black libraries, and Black institutions like the paper itself. The influence of Black Power on the Montreal Black community spread far beyond the pages of *UHURU*. Like *UHURU*, the group which founded *Umoja* decided on an African name for its paper (Umoja meaning ‘unity’ in Swahili). Both groups focused on the necessity of fostering ‘racial pride,’ promoted Black history, and advocated international solidarity. But many throughout the community pointed out one fact again and again: whereas in the United States many talked of forming a Black nation, a longstanding idea for many on the U.S. left, or of separating from mainstream society and reclaiming the ghettos, these analyses did not fit with the local conditions in Montreal. In relation to the size of the Black population of many American cities, Montreal’s Black community was extremely small, numbering no more than about 15,000 at the end of the 1960s.¹⁰⁰ Blacks in Montreal were deeply aware that there was little hope of advocating complete separation from larger society.¹⁰¹

In addition to fighting to gain control over their own lives on a local level, Malcolm X had argued that it was necessary for Blacks to see their struggles in global terms. While Blacks were a minority in the United States, he argued, they need not forget that the world’s coloured people comprised the vast majority of the world

⁹⁹ *Malcolm X Speaks: Selected Speeches and Statements Edited with Prefatory Notes by George Breitman*, (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1966 [1965]), 38.

¹⁰⁰ Williams, *The Road to Now*, 109.

¹⁰¹ For Howard McCurdy, “[w]e cannot look at black power as based on numbers in this country.” In the pages of *UHURU*, Omowale made a similar observation, stating that the small size of Montreal’s Black community created an “urgent need for one large Black United Front.” McCurdy, “Problems of Involvement in the Canadian Society with Reference to Black People,” 14; Omowale, “The Need For A Black United Front in Montreal,” 4. Omowale, “The Need For A Black United Front in Montreal,” 4.

population.¹⁰² Perhaps because of the small size of Montreal's Black population, or because of the particular makeup of the Black community, radical Black politics in Montreal took a decisively internationalist and Pan-Africanist direction. "If we believe in Black nationalism," an *UHURU* editorial argued, "our first duty is to recognise the fact that whether we are indigenous Africans, Canadians, American, West Indian or South American; we as Black people have a common African heritage." Racial unity was necessary, according to *UHURU*, because it "will certainly bring us the power we never had and which we are now seeking to obtain."¹⁰³ The paper therefore set the goal of developing "a political level of consciousness based on a unified acceptance of the politics of Pan-Africanism," defined as "the belief in the ONENESS of an African people on the continent and scattered abroad, and the commitment of these people to the struggle for a common advancement, self-determination and total freedom."¹⁰⁴ According to this framework, American Blacks, West Indian Blacks, and Canadian Blacks did not exist as separate categories.¹⁰⁵

Following Stokely Carmichael, many activists in Montreal saw Pan-Africanism as the extension of the ultimate logic of Black Power. Carmichael, himself having moved to the West African country of Guinea, acted as the physical personification of the possibilities and hopes of Pan-Africanism.¹⁰⁶ For Rosie Douglas, Carmichael saw Pan-Africanism as the "highest political expression" of Black Power, and believed that "African people on the continent or scattered all over

¹⁰² *Malcolm X Speaks*, 47. Rosie Douglas clearly demonstrated the impact that Malcolm X had on his thinking: "Brother Malcolm X whose outstanding contribution was altered by an assassin's bullet in 1965, was without a doubt our most significant leader because he took our struggle out of the narrow confines of the geographical boundaries of the United States, elevated it to a struggle for human rights, and linked it with the struggles of our brothers and sisters throughout the world." Rosie Douglas, "Malcolm X Celebration - May 15th-19th (Montreal)," *UHURU*, 27 April 1970, 4.

¹⁰³ "Editorial: 'Divide and Rule'," *UHURU*, 31 July 1969, 1.

¹⁰⁴ "Focus on Uhuru," 4.

¹⁰⁵ "Editorial: 'Divide and Rule'," 1.

¹⁰⁶ See Carmichael and Thelwell, *Ready for Revolution*.

the world must define their working political framework in a manner which will enable us in our day to day struggle to relate our common heritage to the racist oppression which we all face irrespective of our socio-economic status.” While “Africans of the Diaspora intensify their efforts to break the back of racist imperialism,” he continued, “it is equally important that we work to stop the raping of and take complete control of the Motherland.”¹⁰⁷ Others went even further than Douglas. According to one writer identifying himself only as ‘An African Freedom Fighter,’ “Black People (it doesn’t matter where ever they are) must know that they are Africans, and the Black Revolution must identify itself with the African Revolution.”¹⁰⁸ Following this line of thinking, the paper argued that “Black people in Montreal will not begin to taste FREEDOM until Black people in Africa (primarily) and throughout the world have also tasted FREEDOM.”¹⁰⁹ Pan-Africanism, while not unanimously supported by those writing in *UHURU*,¹¹⁰ remained the dominant tendency. As more and more Blacks in Montreal began to see the world through the lens of Pan-Africanism, there was a great surge of interest in all things African. Groups began organizing “Journeys back to Africa” and articles outlined “authentic African fashion.” The news of the “first real Afro-American wedding in Canada” even adorned the front page of one of the paper’s issues.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁷ Rosie Douglas, "Stokely Carmichael Returns to U.S.," *UHURU*, 13 April 1970, 1.

¹⁰⁸ 'An African Freedom Fighter', "General Outlook of the Black Revolution," *UHURU*, 15 September 1969, 7.

¹⁰⁹ Amega Ambrose, "Thanks to You," *UHURU*, 13 July 1970, 6.

¹¹⁰ According to one writer, “notre frère Stokely se soit un peu éloigné du chemin de l’histoire, de l’histoire révolutionnaire du temps présent. Ne serait-ce que par sa décision prétentieuse d’abandonner le premier front pour aller se rabattre en Afrique Stokely a déserté les voies difficiles de la révolution.” “Le Congrès des écrivains noirs un an après,” *UHURU*, 24 November 1969, 8.

¹¹¹ See *UHURU*, 2 September 1969.

Black Intellectuals and Montreal's Radical Imagination

While the Pan-Africanists of *UHURU* may have looked to Africa as the spiritual homeland of Black Montrealers, at the present moment they were working in a highly politically charged and unique local milieu that could not be ignored. And, in general, the longer that individuals stayed and struggled in Montreal, the more deeply embedded they became in the city. *UHURU* framed its struggle as one which set Black against White, but any system which drew too clear a dichotomy between 'us' and 'them' ultimately could not hold in the face of the requirements of radical humanism and radical democracy to be in solidarity with the suffering of others. Being 'colonized,' in short, also meant standing in solidarity with other colonized peoples, other peoples who shared some claim to being 'the wretched of the earth.' From its very beginning, *UHURU* revealed a tension between the desire to conflate the 'colonized' with 'Black,' and the recognition that not all of those who were colonized were of African origin. In an issue which argued that the dominant legacy of the Sixties was a challenge to White supremacy, Asian and Latin American anti-imperial resistance was cited alongside struggles in Africa, the Caribbean, and Black North America.¹¹² And, perhaps not surprisingly, Black Power advocates in Montreal reached out to Native Canadians in their first attempt to build solidarities across different movements.

The first non-Black person who lectured at a Thursday night rally was Henry Jacks, an Aboriginal man from Vancouver. In *UHURU*, Edmund Michael drew a direct connection between the plight of Aboriginals and the plight of Blacks in Canada. Henry Jacks, Michael wrote, "has had to endure very much the same type of humiliations and dehumanization that the black man has had to endure in this

¹¹² See *UHURU*, 12 January 1970.

country.”¹¹³ “We as black people here in Canada,” Michael continued, “must turn a sympathetic eye to the plight of the red man and vice versa for, just as he is kept in place on his controlled reservations and in the ghetto and are always regarded as ‘those damned Indians,’ so too are we regarded as ‘those damned niggers,’ by whites.” It was therefore necessary for radical Black activists to make contact with Native groups, for “after all it is they who were the original owners of N. America and we as black people were forced to work and build it all for the white people, who are our oppressors.” The task at hand, therefore, was for “us work to develop the consciousness of our fellow blacks, while the reds strive to re-educate their people, and in this way, we can co-operate with each other in areas which can rebound to the mutual benefit of both peoples who constitute the ‘wretched of the earth’.”¹¹⁴

Black intellectuals therefore began demonstrating the flexibility of their analyses, making room for new groups and new conceptions of victimization and oppression. Mocking Cardinal Leger’s plea for Catholics to conduct missionary work in Africa, an *UHURU* article argued that, in “view of the treatment meted out not only to Blacks in Canada but also to the indigenous Indians, one wonders whether Cardinal Leger and the Church should not transfer their missionary activities to the Canadian scene.”¹¹⁵ Following and extending the logic of Black Power, *UHURU* advocated Native control over Native communities. *UHURU* also covered the rising tide of militant Native activism in the United States,¹¹⁶ and clearly saw Red Power as a natural ally of Black Power. The paper printed a press release for a *Think Indian* project which argued that “the only way that we as Indians can survive, is to stop

¹¹³ Edmund Michael, “Red Power in Canada,” *UHURU*, 29 September 1969, 3.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ “Check Point: Montreal,” *UHURU*, 12 January 1970, 6.

¹¹⁶ Asher, “Red Nationalism on the Rise,” *UHURU*, 2 March 1970. The 12 January 1970 edition of the paper also covered the occupation of Alcatraz Island in San Francisco Bay.

seeking help from the very society which oppresses us.”¹¹⁷ To widen their political conceptions, some began making a semantic shift from speaking about ‘Blacks’ to speaking of ‘non-Whites.’ In a letter to the editor, Mark Ainsley argued that, for “many years Canada has been able to shroud its inhumane treatment of its non-white peoples, the Indians and the Blacks, by projecting a liberal and benevolent image on the international scene.” A serious investigation of the Sir George Affair would, he argued, highlight the contradictions of a system “in which there is so much suffering and poverty amongst the non-white peoples of this affluent society.”¹¹⁸

As Black intellectuals came to recognize the complexities and multi-faceted nature of colonization, it did not take them long to recognize the plight of Aboriginal Canadians. By 1970 many had also come to give their implicit support to the Quebec liberation movement. To understand radical Black activism in Sixties Montreal, it is centrally important to recognize that it emerged in a highly charged local environment. When Black activists began presenting new narratives of colonization, therefore, their ideas collided with a radical language of decolonization already circulating throughout the city. Montreal differed from other North American cities in that radicals of the majority population claimed to be colonized by a foreign power. Unlike Black militants in the United States, Montreal’s Black Power advocates were therefore faced with a situation in which many in the White population which surrounded them had theorized themselves – drawing on the very same literature of Third World liberation and Black Power – as being culturally, economically, and psychologically dominated by an imperial system of power. This basic fact of Montreal life in the 1960s could neither be ignored nor dismissed; at press conference

¹¹⁷ "Press Release - Project: Think Indian," *UHURU*, 8 December 1969, 7.

¹¹⁸ Ainsley Mark, "Letter to the Editor," *UHURU*, 2 February 1970, 2.

and in interviews, Black activists were repeatedly asked about their position on the 'Quebec situation.'¹¹⁹

As late as 1968, many Black leaders maintained stringent resistance to acknowledging the legitimacy of the Quebec liberation movement. When the co-organizers of the Congress of Black Writers, Rosie Douglas and Elder Thébaud, were interviewed by the *McGill Daily* just before the opening of the congress, Douglas stated that one of the important landmarks of the event was that it brought both French- and English-speaking Blacks together in the same forum.¹²⁰ When the interviewer of the *Daily* pushed further, asking about the 'significance' of the bilingual nature of the conference, clearly implying that it was not unrelated to its location in Montreal, Thébaud merely reiterated that it was significant in that French- and English-speaking Blacks were getting together. That Quebec itself was bilingual, Thébaud stated, was of little importance. The interviewer then pushed further: "some Québécois drawn an analogy between the situation of the Blacks in the world and that of French-speaking Québécois. Do you [think that] the analogy is valid, and if so, do you see the possibility of co-operation between Québécois and blacks?" Thébaud remained intransigent: "Quebeckers like to call themselves the *nègres* of Canada, but we would like to highlight the fact that of all races, the black race has been the most humiliated. We therefore need first to organize among Blacks who have been divided by the colonizer. Collaboration between Blacks and oppressed Whites is desirable, but this is not the task of the moment." Thébaud and Douglas were adamant that it

¹¹⁹ At a meeting held at Sir George Williams University in November 1968, for example, prominent American Civil Rights activist Floyd McKissick and history professor Arvarh Strickland spoke to a crowd of 200 students, and were immediately asked whether the plight of Blacks could be related to the struggles of francophone Quebeckers in Canada. McKissick, clearly caught off guard, could only muster a confused and ambiguous reply. According to the *Georgian*, "Mr. McKissick replied that his concern was with the immediate, local racial problems and that he considered racism to differ from region to region, not necessarily along Marxist class lines." "'White racist system ain't healthy for whites or blacks' - McKissick," *The Georgian*, 26 November 1968, 6.

¹²⁰ Rosie Douglas, "Black Writers Congress: The Organizers talk..." *The Review (McGill Daily supplement)*, 11 October 1968, 2.

mattered little that the congress was being held in Montreal. When asked if it was important for people in Canada and Quebec to hear speakers on the subject of racial discrimination, Thébaud responded again: "No," it was important for "people generally." It was "incidental" that the congress was being held in Montreal, and it "could have been held anywhere."¹²¹ Rosie Douglas quickly added that, for all that it mattered, the congress could have been held "on Mars."¹²²

It is not difficult to understand why Black activists would have been hesitant to recognize the political claim of French-speaking Quebecers. Black people had been enslaved by French colonists from the earliest days of French settlement, and they had been marginalized and debased ever since. They had been subject to the discrimination and racism of French- and English-speaking Montrealers alike, and it is easy to see how the struggle for Quebec liberation, which up until the late 1960s had been predicated on the language of francophone victimization, could be seen to be of little concern for them. With the rarest of exceptions, the intellectuals of the Quebec liberation movement had almost completely ignored the presence of Montreal's Black population, and, from a distance, francophone Quebecers did not look, either materially or culturally, too different from other White North Americans. Yet both Black Power activists and the radicals of the Quebec liberation movement advocated an open form of radical humanism, a radical humanism which would lead both groups to recognize the legitimacy and radical potential of the other.

¹²¹ Elder Thébaud, "Black Writers Congress: The Organizers Talk..." *The Review (McGill Daily Supplement)*, 11 October 1968, 4-5. "Les Québécois aiment s'appeler les Nègres du Canada, mais [je] vous ferai remarquer que de toutes les races humaines, la race noire a été la plus humiliée. Nous devons d'abord organiser les noirs qui ont été divisé par [le] colonisateur. Cette collaboration entre noirs et blancs opprim[ées] est tout à fait souhaitable, mais je crois que ce n'est pas [la] tâche du moment."

¹²² Douglas, "Black Writers Congress: The Organizers talk..." 5.

The first opening towards mutual recognition came in 1969, during the lonely days of the aftermath of the computer centre incident and amidst the vicious language debates that were tearing the city apart. As mentioned earlier, when virtually all other student groups had abandoned them, the largely francophone UGEQ came out loudly in defence of those who had occupied the computer centre.¹²³ The Montreal Central Council of the CSN – the nerve centre of radical political activity in Montreal and an organization which was quickly becoming the very symbol of radical anti-imperialist union activity – also publicly declared its support for the students, and denounced the attitude of the courts in which they were being prosecuted.¹²⁴ And in the years of intense activism and intellectual work which followed the Sir George Affair, Black intellectuals arrived at a deeper understanding of the complex power relations of Montreal society. The language struggles which began in 1969 polarized discussions of language, and Black writers began to see that, as anglophones (for the most part) in the province of Quebec, there was a danger that they might be associated with English Montreal.

Black activists in Montreal had always been aware of the local context in which they operated. In the late 1960s, with the political landscape shifting all around them as a result of mass popular upheavals over language rights, they developed an even greater sensitivity to political questions in the city. By 1970, Black activists had begun arranging lectures dealing with Blacks in Canadian history for their Thursday night rallies, and they had decided to set up a Political Committee to develop an analysis “of the political situation in Quebec.”¹²⁵ They also began taking notice of their ambiguous situation in the heated language wars that were raging throughout

¹²³ Owsam, *Born at the Right Time: A History of the Baby-Boom Generation*, 287-88.

¹²⁴ ACSN, CCSNM fonds, Congrès 1969, Fernand Foisy, “Rapport du secrétaire – décisions du comité exécutif,” 19.

¹²⁵ Sister Obiageli, “Thursday Night Rally Revival!,” *UHURU* 1970, 6.

Montreal, and of the danger that they might be unwittingly drawn into the debate as tacit supporters of 'English rights.' When an English-language school attempted to use Black children to bolster their arguments for English education, *UHURU* reacted angrily. If "the white English at the Royal Arthur School, want to fight the white French," the paper asked, "why use blacks to fight their war?" In educational debates, like in all other aspects of life, Black people needed to "act on decisions made by themselves and by their own initiation."¹²⁶ When linguistic conflicts reached new heights in the fall of 1969, an *UHURU* article argued that Blacks have "no place in such an alien debate." Racism "existed in both the major linguistic communities," and it was necessary that Blacks demand that "both English and French be taught to our children." The article then went beyond neutrality by recognizing that it was important for the 'French' to fight to preserve "their majority rights."¹²⁷

While *UHURU* always maintained that Blacks were the object "of discrimination from both English and French," the paper did recognize that both Blacks and francophone Quebecers were oppressed by the same forces in the province, and the paper never printed articles which rallied to the defence of Montreal's English-speaking community. In English-controlled companies, an editorial argued, "racist hiring policies ... have existed for years," and "French speaking Quebecois find it very difficult to make any headway in the economics of their country." It was therefore "difficult if not impossible to understand how blacks (the object of discrimination from both English and French) can find themselves doing any better than the French if at all as well."¹²⁸ For Philippe Boye Filsaime,

¹²⁶ "C.B.C. Use Innocent Black Children," *UHURU*, 27 April 1970, 1, 8.

¹²⁷ Charles, "Black Children & Bilingualism," *UHURU*, 13 April 1970, 7.

¹²⁸ "Editorial," *UHURU*, 27 April 1970, 2.

moreover, the “real enemies of Black people” were “the big bosses in St. James Street” who set up the system of exploitation in the first place.¹²⁹

The 1970 provincial election campaign was the first in which the Parti Québécois (PQ), the new provincial sovereignist party that had been founded in 1968, fielded candidates. Although reformist in nature, the PQ attracted a great deal of support among francophone radicals, and its social democratic platform captured the hopes of a wide variety of activists, from labour unionists to members of neighbourhood citizens’ committees. Opinion in the Black community was divided over the election and the significance of the PQ. In an official editorial, *UHURU* attempted to explain the world of Quebec politics to its Black readers. During the election, which brought the Quebec Liberal Party to power, the paper argued, “the white anglo-saxon (English speaking) voters panicked at the thought of independence in Quebec, not understanding what it is all about, fearing reprisals, loss of influence, and against the French majority assuming their rightful positions of responsibility (economic and otherwise) in their own province.” When it came to the PQ, the editorial explained that their “platform is clear cut and should be viewed without fear since it simply calls for [francophone] Quebecers [to take] control of Quebec, which is the ambition and right of all nations and peoples.” And then, demonstrating the influence of the linguistic debates and demonstrations of 1969, the editorial argued that “Blacks must if they intend to stay in Quebec make up their minds to adopt at least a working knowledge of French.”¹³⁰ If the official editorial line of *UHURU* accepted the legitimacy and the progressive nature of the PQ program, however, the assessment was far from unanimous. Perhaps not surprisingly, Rosie Douglas

¹²⁹ Philippe Boye Filsaime, "Letter to the Editor," *UHURU*, 8 December 1969, 2.

¹³⁰ "Editorial," 2.

emerged as the most powerful spokesperson articulating an alternative reading of the present political conjuncture in the province.

Writing during the final days before the election, Douglas denounced all of the political parties that fielded candidates, arguing that all remained “completely insensitive to the needs of our people.” Over the past couple of years, he argued, Blacks had become fully aware that Canada itself had come into existence “at the cost of wiping out an entire civilisation of indigenous inhabitants (whom following Columbus, we today call Indians).” And they had also become aware “of the interconnection between the industrial development of Western society on the backs of the human and physical resources of Africans and Africa.” But, while their struggle had to be placed in the larger international movement of African people in a “quest for liberation,” it was equally necessary to “work out a specific type of short term strategy to meet our immediate needs in Quebec.” Douglas maintained that White people, “irrespective to what language they speak,” have “developed and institutionalised, from slavery, a particular type of relationship with our people based on white supremacy.” In this respect, Quebec was no different than elsewhere. Demonstrating an understanding of Quebec history and an evaluation of the present political situation which had remarkable similarities to the analyses of many francophone radicals, Douglas went on to argue that “the historical development of Quebec involved a certain level of Anglo-Saxon exploitation which has maintained French speaking Canadians in a relatively weak position. The English-speaking bourgeoisie has denied entry to their French counterpart to participate in the full enjoyment of the fruits of exploitation and colonization.” Viewed from a Third World Marxist perspective, therefore, the PQ, far from being “concerned with the overthrow of capitalist, racist oppression once and for all,” was “merely concerned with

providing French-speaking Canadians with the opportunity to benefit more fully from the profits derived from economic exploitation and racist oppression.”¹³¹

At this point Douglas makes an unexpected twist, breaking fundamentally with a position that he had consistently defended throughout the past couple of years. He had maintained earlier that “all white people are part and parcel of [the] oppressing group,”¹³² but now he was in the process of adding nuance and depth to his analysis, admitting the possibilities for liberatory movements to originate in White populations. In the turbulent years at the end of the 1960s, it is reasonable to speculate that Douglas and other Black activists would have come into contact with advocates of the Quebec liberation movement in Montreal’s vibrant avant-garde cafés and numerous street protests. Or perhaps, like so many other groups and individuals, he frequented the offices and meeting rooms of the Montreal Central Council of the CSN, an organization which had opened its doors and offered its services to all groups fighting for social change, and which had become a place where radicals of all backgrounds met and exchanged ideas and strategies. While at McGill, Douglas had studied with two of its best-known radical professors, Stanley Gray and Kari Levitt, both of whom were deeply involved in the wider world of the Montreal left.¹³³ Whether through direct contact with radical intellectuals in the city or through his access to the literature of the Quebec liberation movement, readily available in bookstores and newsstands around the city, Douglas had come to wrestle with the arguments of Quebec decolonization.

Douglas argued that Blacks in Montreal did not need to choose between the limited options available in the Quebec elections, and he maintained that there was

¹³¹ Rosie Douglas, "The Irrelevance of the Quebec Elections," *UHURU*, 27 April 1970, 6.

¹³² Douglas, "On Black-White Relationship," 4.

¹³³ Interview with Stan Gray, 10 June 2005, Hamilton; Interview with Kari Levitt, 9 December 2006, Montreal.

another political tradition in Montreal, one which was full of liberatory potential for both Blacks and Whites. The Quebec liberation movement, identified most closely with Charles Gagnon and Pierre Vallières, he argued, was seriously grappling with ways to escape and move beyond the colonial situation in which they were living. For Douglas, Vallières and Gagnon “aimed not only at a narrow bourgeois independence for Quebec – but for an independence that will bring about a revolutionary change in the ownership of the means of production from racist capitalist to the working class.” “Such a change,” he continued, had the possibility of bringing about an end to “institutionalised racism.” “Clearly,” he argued, “black people must in the long run (coming from a Pan Africanist perspective) aim at bringing down capitalist society. After all the wealth of western capitalism and its continued existence stems directly from slavery. Racism will remain as capitalism remains. It therefore follows that we should examine the relevance of the third alternative [that of Vallières and Gagnon] even with the view of understanding the political dynamics of the community in which we live.” Having come to recognize the importance of Quebec liberation, Douglas began arguing that it was crucial for Blacks to adapt to their local environment by learning the language of the majority. In “the short run,” it was necessary “to equip ourselves in the French language.” “Those of us that are not interested in learning the French language but want to remain in Canada,” he continued, “should make immediate plans to seek employment in another province.”¹³⁴

By 1971, when Dennis Forsythe published the important book *Let the Niggers Burn!* about the Sir George Williams Affair and its aftermath, the language of radical

¹³⁴ Douglas, "The Irrelevance of the Quebec Elections," 6.

Black politics in Montreal had undergone a decisive shift, and a recognition of the ways in which Black activism fit within the larger currents of Montreal radicalism were readily acknowledged. The very first sentence of the book: "Something happened here in Montréal on February 11th, 1969, which for different reasons neither Blacks nor Whites will ever forget" reveals an important change. Rare among anglophones, Forsythe puts an accent on 'Montréal,' thereby recognizing the primacy of the French language in the city.¹³⁵ For Forsythe, "The first point to grasp is that Sir George Williams University is a microcosm of Montreal and that Montreal is a microcosm of Canadian society, which in turn is a smaller version of the world society. Therefore the problems that fatigue the world today can legitimately be expected to be replicated at the lower levels."¹³⁶ Although Montreal was a microcosm of Canada, it was unique in its own way, and Forsythe acknowledged that this played into the events at Sir George. For Forsythe, it was crucially important to understand that

Quebec is a tension-ridden environment, and that this state of affairs has increased over the last few years. Quebec, and Montreal specifically, is like a machine creaking at its seams, as witnessed by the increasing frustrations and resentment expressed by almost all segments of the society. In the last three years policemen, teachers, taxi-drivers, post-men, anti-poverty groups, students and women have all entered the 'long march' here in Quebec. Their tactics have overwhelmingly been the strike. But the French Canadians, who have become increasingly resentful of their low status in the province, have moved from the level of conventional protest to that of urban guerrilla warfare which found full expression in the F.L.Q. offensive assaults. One could place the Sir George Williams Affair within this long line of protests, as expressive of the pent-up grievances and frustrations experienced by Blacks.¹³⁷

Montreal radicalism, of course, did not exist in isolation from what was happening elsewhere. One had to realize that, as "conservatism, capitalism and

¹³⁵ Dennis Forsythe, "Preface," in *Let the Niggers Burn! The Sir George Williams University Affair and its Caribbean Aftermath*, ed. Dennis Forsythe (Montréal: Black Rose Books/Our Generation Press, 1971), 3.

¹³⁶ Forsythe, "By way of introduction: 'The Sir George Williams Affair'," 10.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

imperialism, to an even greater extent, do not respect national borders, ... neither can radicalism respect frontiers.” What was important was the way in which an international radical movement was interpreted, shaped, and built by those working in a specific local environment. From this perspective, one could “see that an incident of this kind could have occurred in many other places; that it erupted in Montreal, and at Sir George Williams University, is due to specific situational factors that emerged in Montreal.”¹³⁸ Other authors in the collection also revealed the importance of the local context of Montreal, and recognized the legitimacy of French-speaking Quebecers who formed their own liberation struggles. Leroi Butcher spoke of the War Measures Act as a way for Canada “to stifle the yearnings of a people of the right to be masters in their own Quebec home.”¹³⁹ Roosevelt Williams discussed the ‘myth of the white backlash,’ and spoke of how, while the media attempted to paint the riot leaders as ‘foreign radicals,’ the UGEQ had come out in support of the students. Drawing similarities between the media coverage of different events in Montreal, Williams wrote that “the recent F.L.Q. crisis was another case in which public figures sought vigorously to attribute the situation to Cuban and other foreign influences, while looking away from the objective conditions which produced that situation.” And during the Sir George Williams crisis, the police were just doing what they usually do: protecting “the interests of the Anglo-Canadian ruling class here in Quebec.”¹⁴⁰

By 1971, the language of radical Black politics had changed substantially. While struggling with the key questions of empire, imperialism, and colonization, radical Black Montrealers came to understand the cultural and material oppression of French-speaking Quebecers, and began looking at the interrelated nature of the two

¹³⁸ Ibid., 14, 12.

¹³⁹ Butcher, “The Anderson Affair,” 77.

¹⁴⁰ Roosevelt Williams, “Réactions: The Myth of the White ‘Backlash,’” in *Let the Niggers Burn! The Sir George Williams University Affair and its Caribbean Aftermath*, ed. Dennis Forsythe (Montréal: Black Rose Books/Our Generation Press, 1971), 115-22.

liberation movements. Some, like the writers of the Caribbean International Service Bureau, even began seeing the French-Canadian working class, who they hoped would intervene “on the side of black and oppressed people in their struggle for a new society,” as potential allies in the political struggles in the years to come.¹⁴¹

Through their interactions with the streets, rhythms, and structures of urban life in Montreal, radical Black militants worked to outline a distinct Montreal expression of Black Power. Profoundly linked with movements taking place elsewhere, Black politics in Montreal evolved in response to the unique realities, challenges, and possibilities presented to those living in the city. Black writers introduced new analyses of race, community development and democracy into the public sphere of Montreal radicalism, adding and contributing to the complex and hybrid mixture of ideas and movements. In ways which were at times complex and at times contradictory, a new generation of radical Black intellectuals challenged dominant understandings of empire and colonization, and worked to reclaim the meaning of Blackness through a process of psychological, economic, and political decolonization. Like Black Power activists throughout North America, they “revealed the vulnerability of whiteness,” demonstrating that, far from being a symbol of virtue, it was “corrupt and inextricably bound to the frailties of humanity.”¹⁴² Through the years of political activity, and especially in the aftermath of the Sir George Williams Affair, Black Power activists came to recognize the legitimacy of the Quebec liberation movement and the anti-imperialist nature of the linguistic struggle in the city. It would be wrong, of course, to argue that supporting Quebec liberation ever became central to the political efforts of Black Montrealers. Rather, they were

¹⁴¹ Bureau, “Black Spark Edition,” 1.

¹⁴² Ogbar, *Black Power*, 188.

concerned with human liberation writ large, with the undoing of all unjust structures of power and the reorganization of society on the principles of radical humanism. And it was on this basis that their movement collided and significantly overlapped with other movements of decolonization and liberation that were gaining momentum in the city.

And yet Black Power in Montreal, like the larger world of Montreal radicalism of which it formed a part, rarely even recognized one of its most central contradictions. While advocating total liberation for all human beings, Black Power was theorized explicitly as a “struggle for manhood,”¹⁴³ both explicitly and implicitly excluding women from any active role. Winston Franco argued that “there are some black people who cannot see the institutionalized racism of our society.” This was not such “a strange phenomenon,” he continued, “since people who lose their balls in their infancy find it impossible to remember what it felt like to have had them.”¹⁴⁴ In the lead up to the Sir George Affair, Omowale wrote that “the dignity and manhood of black students at Sir George Williams University ... was belittled in every way possible.”¹⁴⁵ During one of the demonstrations of the occupation, Rocky Jones spoke of White men as “pansies, because they won’t even fight for white folks.”¹⁴⁶ And in the surge of Black Power activism after the event, one author wrote in *UHURU* that the “Black Man is the personification of strength, power, peace and love; the ‘Father of Civilization,’” and even the very “essence of Manhood.”¹⁴⁷ Rosie Douglas spoke

¹⁴³ Butcher, "The Anderson Affair," 77.

¹⁴⁴ Winston Franco, "Two Views of the Conference of Black Writers - II," *Expression* 3, no. 3 (Winter 1969): 43-44.

¹⁴⁵ Omowale [[Kennedy Frederick], "Respectable Faces Students Twelve Charges," *UHURU*, 18 August 1969, 7.

¹⁴⁶ Seen in Eber, *The Computer Centre Party : Canada Meets Black Power*, 126.

¹⁴⁷ "Dear Sister," *UHURU*, 14 October 1969, 6.

of the “emasculat[i]on” of Black men,¹⁴⁸ and C.J. Munford argued that Black militancy acted as “the sign of the historic failure of a repressed and constipated white civilization to negate Black virility, the hallmark of the inability of the progeny of Europe to reduce the children of Africa to the level of their own neuter frustrations.” The Black militant, therefore, “claims to epitomize the virility of the generality of Black manhood.”¹⁴⁹

And as Black men were called forth to reclaim their manhood, the corollary was that Black women should assume a traditional, passive, heterosexual role. True, women had been involved in radical Black politics from the beginning. The 1967-1968 *Caribbean Conference Bulletin* highlighted the work of Anne Cools, Bridget Joseph, Gloria Simons, and Jean Depradine as “the living indication that the Caribbean woman will be in the forefront of the movement for a new Caribbean.”¹⁵⁰ More often than not, however, women were seen to be the reproductive force of the nation. One man wrote to *UHURU* complaining that he and his wife had had a conflict over her desire to take the birth control pill. She hoped to achieve a certain degree of material security through limiting her number of children; he, on the other hand, saw reproduction as a woman’s duty to the nation. The female advice columnist, demonstrating how deeply traditional gender roles had been interiorized, pleaded to the future husband to “straighten the sister out.” “Presently (in the white world),” she argued, “it is very hip to take birth control pills, and black women call themselves progressive when they ape white women. In their quest for equality with their men, white women seek to dispense with child bearing. Sister, birth control pills are a threat to our motherhood, and our nation not to mention our femininity.”

¹⁴⁸ Rosie Douglas, “Race Relations in Canada,” *Caribbean International Opinion: Dynamics of Liberation* 1, no. 1 (October 1968): 35.

¹⁴⁹ Munford, “On the Importance of Being Black,” 4.

¹⁵⁰ Quoted in Austin, “Introduction,” 21.

Encouraging Black women to use the birth control pill was interpreted as a devious tactic on the part of the White power structure, and it amounted to nothing less than a Black genocide.¹⁵¹

In this sense, Black women shared much with women in revolutionary nationalist movements elsewhere. While theorizing national liberation, male activists generally assumed that women would willingly take on traditional roles to raise the future generation of the nation.¹⁵² But at the end of the 1960s, women began rising up to speak out against the sexism of a movement which was ostensibly going to bring about their liberation. So much effort, it seemed, was spent on reclaiming Black manhood, that it seemed inevitable that a reaction would come. And it came, slowly at first, but then in greater and greater frequency, mostly through letters to the editor and letters to the advice column of *UHURU*, and surely in many heated arguments in the meeting places and private homes of Black activists. A new voice started to emerge, the voice of Black women who felt that they were being marginalized *within* the new liberation movement. Letter after letter complained that Black men continued to believe the myth of White beauty. White womanhood, many Black women argued, was ‘socially identified’ by Black men as being the epitome of beauty. And the men also thought that being seen with a White woman was a symbol of success. Black women felt that they were perceived as slowing the progress of their husbands. Black men’s search for White women, their “reaching out after whiteness,” affected Black women “to the point of trauma.”¹⁵³ Many were left “sad and confused” with the hypocrisies of the movement.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵¹ "Dear Sister," 6.

¹⁵² At the Congress of Black Writers reiterated “the honored place of the woman in the black society.” Jones, "A Black Woman Speaks Out," 1, 5.

¹⁵³ "Letter to the Editor," *UHURU*, 8 December 1969, 2.

¹⁵⁴ "Letter to the editor," *UHURU*, 24 November 1969, 2.

Black women were beginning rise up and argue that racism, with all of its devastating implications, did not operate in isolation. For one women it was clear that “our so-called black brothers” did not seem to be practising what they preached. “These brothers,” she argued, “have no morals, no manners, no etiquette, they treat the sisters like dirt,” leading her to believe “that all this black power bit is a farce.”¹⁵⁵ Black women, another author wrote, experienced the same devaluation by Black men as Black men did from White society. “So that what he [the Black man] termed as ‘violence’ on the part of the white man,” she argued, “he viciously practices in turn on the Black woman.”¹⁵⁶ Anne Cools, who was both a member of the Caribbean Conference Committee and a participant in the Sir George Williams Affair, was one of the loudest voices to speak out against the sexism of the movement. Through her work and action, she helped to build the beginnings of a new militancy among women, a militancy which was capturing the imaginations of women across North America.¹⁵⁷ Black women were not alone in their frustration with a movement that, while advocating liberation and preaching freedom, relegated women to secondary roles, taking neither their complaints nor their perspectives seriously. All throughout Montreal, many individuals began discovering that they shared similar experiences, and they began recognizing the need to extend the logic of autonomous organizing and cultural self-affirmation to women. Once women began forming autonomous organizations and formulating their own visions of freedom, Montreal radicalism would never again be the same.

¹⁵⁵ "Dear Sister," 6.

¹⁵⁶ "Letter to the Editor," 2.

¹⁵⁷ According to Akua Benjamin, who arrived to Toronto from Trinidad in the middle of Toronto's radical upsurge: “Anne Cools came to one of these meetings, and she blasted the men. She challenged us women in the room as to why we were not talking. In those days, I just sat quietly in the back of the room. I would sit there and sweat. I was afraid to speak, afraid that I would get shut down. Anne cursed the men out, saying, ‘fucking’ this and ‘fucking’ that. We had never heard a woman talk like that. She really empowered me. After that I thought, ‘I’m going to raise my voice.’” Quoted in Judy Rebick, *Ten Thousand Roses: The Making of a Feminist Revolution* (Toronto: Penguin, 2005), 9-10. Also see Anne Cools, "Womanhood," *McGill Free Press: Black Spark Edition* (18 February 1971): 9.

Chapter Seven:

Québécoises deboutte!: The Origins of Women's Liberation

*Hey, c'est nous autres
qui s'font écoeurer
s'a rue
c'est nous autres
qui s'font encore fourrer
qui s'font encore avoir!
Mais là, ça un boutte
On est tannées
d'crever
d's'faire écoeurer
d'être reluquées
comme à l'étalage
d'dire quelque chose
sans être écoutées
d'servir d'jouets
pour forcer à consommer
pis pas même avoir le droit d'choisir
décider c'qu'on veut
Hey, on t'veut
mais pas pour que tu sois malheureux
Et pis c'est drôle hein?
mais je sens ben
qu'ça va changer!
On va toute changer ça
ben oui! toute ça!*

-Québécoise deboutte! (novembre 1971)

*...
Thought I better tell you
all:*

*no gas, no bullet
can kill
what these faces
reflect*

what this soft

flesh

projects /today jan. 28 here

-Anne McLean, Women Unite! (1972).

On the evening of 29 November 1969, two hundred women – many wearing chains to symbolize their oppression – charged out of their meeting-place on Saint-Laurent boulevard into the middle of the street, where they sat down in a circle and waited to be arrested. The hundreds of riot police who were waiting outside proceeded to arrest 165 of the protesters, and, in less than an hour, Saint-Laurent, to the relief of police and the frustration of citizens, was again open to its regular flow of traffic. The protest on Saint-Laurent, although small in size and relatively short in duration, was loaded with symbolic meaning. In the fall of 1969, a spirit of revolt had been spreading throughout various different sectors of Montreal society. The city's streets had become the primary space where dissident groups had gathered to express their voices. In November, the Montreal administration, claiming to be acting in the interests of the 'silent majority,' passed Regulation 3926, effectively banning public protests in the streets of Montreal. Although many groups and individuals were quick to denounce the new regulation, the two hundred women protesters were the first to take to the streets and defy the law, loudly claiming their right to the city. And, through their actions, the women protesters set the initial contours of a movement which would significantly challenge and deepen Montreal's language of dissent.

The demonstration acted as a watershed in feminist organization and mobilization. True, the women's liberation movement did not begin with the protest; throughout the entire fall of 1969, women on Montreal's English-speaking university campuses had been reading feminist literature, meeting together, and had formed the Montreal Women's Liberation Movement (MWLM). But in the lead-up to the protest, and during the protest itself, many anglophone women close to the MWLM joined with francophone women from leftist groups, unions, and citizens' committees, to create the Front commun des Québécoises, a loose organization which had no

leader, spokesperson, or official ties to any feminist organization.¹ And in the aftermath of the protest, English- and French-speaking women, in roughly equal numbers, came together to form the Front de libération des Femmes du Québec (FLF), a group which would become the public voice of women's liberation in Montreal. Many of the ideas and arguments that the FLF would later popularize were first articulated in the lead-up and aftermath of the protest on 29 November. In response to the municipal administration's claim that it was acting on behalf of the 'silent majority,' the women argued that they were representing "the point of view of the largest silent majority which exists in the world, that of women."² They were taking to the streets, in other words, with a conscious effort to confront and contest the symbol of female passivity. By "relying on an old prejudice which dictates that men, embodied by the police, are the protectors of women," they hoped to disarm the established system of power.³ And by claiming the right to protest, the women were asserting their right to think and act as citizens, and therefore challenging the traditional hold that men claimed over political participation.

But the women saw their action as having a significance that stretched far beyond the interests of one social group. By defending their right to protest, to think, and to disagree, they saw themselves as fighting on behalf of "all of Quebec

¹ Solange Chalvin, "Le Front commun des Québécoises descendra dans la rue, ce soir," *Le Devoir*, 28 novembre 1969, 11. The Montreal Central Council of the CSN claimed to have both approved of and collaborated with the protestors. See, ACSN, CCSNM fonds, Foisy, "Rapport du secrétaire," Congrès 1970, 39. At its general assembly held at the beginning of December 1969, the meeting unanimously passed a proposal "D'appuyer et de féliciter le Front Commun des Québécoises pour leur manifestation du 28 novembre 1969." ACSN, CCSNM fonds, Procès-Verbaux, Assemblée Générale, 2 décembre 1969, 113.

² Conférence de presse du Front commun des Québécoises, 28 novembre 1969. See in Véronique O'Leary and Louise Toupin, *Québécoises deboutte! Une anthologie de textes du Front de libération des femmes (1969-1971) et du Centre des femmes (1972-1975)*, vol. 1 (Montréal: remue-ménage, 1982), 55. "le point de vue de la plus grande majorité silencieuse qui puisse exister au monde, celle des femmes."

³ Conférence de presse du Front commun des Québécoises, 28 novembre 1969. See in Ibid. "protègent les femmes."

society.”⁴ Radical women in Montreal, like Black women in the United States, differed from many other North American feminists by rejecting the idea that ‘woman’ was a universal category. They argued that Quebec women were marginalized both as women and as Quebeckers, and that, as a result, their fight needed to be framed in the much larger terms of radical humanism and universal emancipation.⁵ Their fight was therefore never just about women, or just about Quebeckers for that matter; what was at stake, as one group put it, was “not only our liberation, but also the liberation of all our people, and of all the peoples of the world.”⁶ As bell hooks has long argued, a feminist struggles can significantly enrich larger liberatory ideologies. “A struggle to end sexist oppression that focuses on destroying the cultural basis for such domination,” she maintains, “strengthens other liberation struggles.”⁷ By challenging the radical humanism of the left on its own terms, women therefore worked to stretch its bounds outwards, to conceptualize freedom and liberation in new, deeper, and more all-inclusive terms.

It is of no small significance that the FLF was born in the streets of Montreal, amidst the atmosphere of generalized revolt which had engulfed the city in 1969. In this chapter I will argue that, when the first women’s liberation organizations arrived on Montreal’s political landscape in 1969, they were deeply embedded in the city, profoundly shaped by the local milieu, and formed part of a larger radical awakening inspiring thousands of the city’s inhabitants. From its beginnings, women’s liberation in Montreal was a hybrid movement, one which combined the insights of the nascent women’s liberation movement in the United States (and, somewhat later, France) with

⁴ FLF, “FLFQ: Historique,” été 1970. *Québécoises deboutte!:* Tome I [hereafter *QDI*] (Ville Saint-Laurent: les éditions du remue-ménage, 1982), 65-66. “toute la société québécoise.”

⁵ For an interesting look at the ideas of radical Black feminists, see Robin D.G. Kelley, *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002), 135-56.

⁶ CWMA, Box 31, “Revolution in the Revolution: second manifesto by a collective of women in the Front de Liberation des Femmes Québécoises,” Montréal, September 1971, 1.

⁷ bell hooks, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (Cambridge: South End Press, 2000 [1984]), 42.

conceptions of decolonization that were being developed in Montreal. It has often been forgotten that women's liberation in Montreal emerged in a prolonged moment of cooperation and cross-fertilization between various groups and individuals in the city. And this converging of ideas and individuals, this mixing of traditions and merging of different bodies of radical literature, ensured that the movement in Montreal – while forming part of a wider feminist revival which was sweeping across North America – remained, in many ways, distinct. Through their activism and their writing, women in Montreal worked not only to reconceptualize the place of women in society, but also to deepen and broaden Montreal's radical imagination, an effort which had the ultimate effect of profoundly and irreversibly altering the city's structures and vocabularies of dissent.

Voices of Anger and Voices of Hope

Many were surprised at the sudden explosion of radical women's activism at the end of the 1960s, but they should not have been. Long before the birth of women's liberation, women in Montreal had been reacting to sexism and patriarchy, and were engaged in an ongoing process of self-authorization, self-definition and strategizing. All throughout the 1960s, women from a variety of different backgrounds had been making new claims of citizenship, introducing new perspectives into the public sphere and, in an important sense, laying the groundwork upon which the women's liberation movement would build in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Historian Gerda Lerner defines a feminist consciousness as the awareness among women that they form a subordinate group which has suffered wrongs, that their subordination is not natural, and a belief that women must join together “to remedy these wrongs” and to “provide an alternate vision of societal organization in

which women as well as men will enjoy autonomy and self-determination.” Women, in short, had to learn both to think for themselves and to see themselves as being central to processes of historical change.⁸ Beginning in the early 1960s, there was a resurgence of a feminist consciousness in Montreal, as women began arguing that the right to vote – which had been the object of a long and arduous political battle – did not, in itself, guarantee full political citizenship or equal rights.

Women’s lives were changing dramatically in the 1960s. Beginning in 1961, Quebec’s birth rate dropped, births out of wedlock increased dramatically, and married women came to occupy a greater role in the workforce.⁹ In 1966, one-third of women aged 24 to 34 were in the paid work force, and this number jumped to 39.9% by 1971 and continued to climb.¹⁰ Despite newfound economic independence, however, many opportunities for individual self-development were blocked by the persistence of ingrained sexism. Although entering the workforce in record numbers, women, for the most part, were marginalized in ‘women’s professions,’ and were often expected to work a double day, working in the paid labour force during the day while remaining responsible for housework in the evening.¹¹ Women did not sit idly by as society was changing all around them. In 1960, some Montreal women, like long-time labour activist Simone Monet-Chartrand, joined the Voice of Women, a women-based peace organization which denounced nuclear proliferation, advocated greater female participation in politics, and argued that it was up to women, in their role as mothers and educators, to defend the universal values of justice, love, and

⁸ Gerda Lerner, *The Creation of Feminist Consciousness: From the Middle Ages to Eighteen-Seventy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 14, 19.

⁹ Micheline de Sève, "Féminisme et nationalisme au Québec, une alliance inattendue," *Revue internationale d'études canadiennes*, no. 17 (Spring 1998): 159.

¹⁰ Micheline Dumont, "The Origins of the Women's Movement in Québec," in *Challenging Times: The Women's Movement in Canada and the United States*, ed. Constance Backhouse and David H. Flaherty (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1992), 86.

¹¹ Violette Brodeur et al., *Le Mouvement des femmes au Québec: étude des groupes montréalais et nationaux* (Montréal: Centre de formation populaire, 1982), 27.

liberty.¹² Other women began organizing informally, making their voices heard at public hearings, and struggling to develop an understanding of women's place in the world. Monique Bégin, for example, recalls reading Simone de Beauvoir's groundbreaking *The Second Sex* with friends, and feeling "part of history in the making."¹³ But it was not until 1966 that long-time activist, suffragist and social democrat Thérèse Casgrain founded the Fédération des femmes du Québec (FFQ), the first mass-based second-wave feminist organization in the province. Open to all women regardless of ethnicity or religion, the FFQ fought legal and social discrimination, and maintained that true equality would not be attained until women were equally represented in all political spheres, from parliament to the civil service.¹⁴

In the face of persistent discrimination, women from both English Canada and Quebec began demanding a Royal Commission on women's inequality, and it was not long before the Pearson government yielded to their demands by establishing, in February 1967, the Royal Commission on the Status of Women.¹⁵ In the briefs to the commission, we can hear the voices of women standing up and denouncing a system in which they were denied equal opportunities to develop themselves as citizens and as individuals. The various individuals and groups who came before the commission demanded pay equity, equal opportunities in the workplace, maternity

¹² Judy Rebick, *Ten Thousand Roses: The Making of a Feminist Revolution* (Toronto: Penguin, 2005), 3-4. Quebec Voice of Women members, Brief to the Royal Commission on the Status of Women, May 1968, 1. Also, see Simone Monet-Chartrand, *Les Québécoises et le mouvement pacifiste (1939-1967)* (Montréal: Les Éditions Écosociété, 1993). For Monet-Chartrand's more general reflections on women's activism, see Simone Monet-Chartrand, *Pionnières québécoises et regroupements de femmes d'hier à aujourd'hui* (Montréal: Éditions du Remue-Ménage, 1990).

¹³ Monique Bégin, "The Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada: Twenty Years Later," in *Challenging Times: the Women's Movement in Canada and the United States*, ed. Constance Backhouse and David H. Flaherty (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1992), 25.

¹⁴ La Fédération des Femmes du Québec, Mme. Yvonne R. Raymond, Présidente du comité, Brief to the Royal Commission on the Status of Women, March 1968, 3-4.

¹⁵ For an interesting look at the conditions which led to the establishment of the Royal Commission, see Bégin, "The Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada: Twenty Years Later," 22-24.

leaves and day care, reintegration and retraining for ‘mature’ women, the valorization of women’s unpaid work in the home, and an end to a system which gave drastically different opportunities according to one’s sex. Many of the countless briefs to the Royal Commission were collectively articulating the central concerns of second-wave feminism: the need to overcome individual and social alienation, the necessity for self-actualization, and the central importance of women’s meaningful participation in society. Both Betty Freidan, author of the groundbreaking *The Feminine Mystique*, and Simone de Beauvoir had argued that, because women had been taught that happiness and fulfilment could only be achieved through their role as mothers, they were systematically excluded from responsibilities of political citizenship. Because women were structurally discouraged from developing their full creative potential, they did not see the future as an open realm of possibility which could be created and forged through their actions. Women, in other words, were taught to be objects rather than subjects of history.¹⁶

In the testimonies before the Royal Commission, many Montreal women were massively demonstrating, by their words and actions, that they were no longer willing to accept a passive role.¹⁷ And one essential first step in becoming fully autonomous and responsible human beings was having control over one’s own body. In the hearings of the Royal Commission, women consistently and repeatedly argued for the necessity that women gain greater control over their sexuality, seeing the ability to control fertility as a central factor in emancipation. The Marriage Counselling Centre of Montreal demanded, for example, daycare and legalized abortion, and argued that

¹⁶ See Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. H.M. Parshley (New York: Vintage Books, 1989); Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2001).

¹⁷ See Quebec Voice of Women members, Brief to the Royal Commission on the Status of Women, May 1968, 2. Confederation of National Trade Unions (C.N.T.U.), confederation des Syndicats Nationaux (C.S.N.), Brief to the Royal Commission on the Status of Women, June 1968; the Young Men’s and Young Women’s Hebrew Association and Neighbourhood House Services, Montreal to the Royal Commission on the Status of Women, 11 April 1968.

medical schools needed to provide better teaching to ensure that doctors were more sensitive to sexual health issues.¹⁸ The Medical Students' Society of McGill University, speaking to issues directly affecting "the freedom of women in society," argued that laws needed to be adapted to the new social mores of a rapidly changing society; contraception and sexual education needed to be made widespread, and abortion legalized.¹⁹ For Montreal's *Centre de Planification familiale*, birth control was the cornerstone of all of the changes in the status of women throughout the past few years. While it was clear that "our society was constructed by men and for men," the arrival of new forms of contraception profoundly altered the political and social landscape; for the first time in history, women could separate sexuality from reproduction, could rely on reason rather than tradition, and weigh the different possible options and choose for themselves which one to follow.²⁰

‘All the Power to the People’

By giving a hearing to voices of complaint and anger, and to feelings of hope and possibility, the Royal Commission brought together a myriad of disjointed sentiments and experiences not united in any holistic program of social change. Such a programme would emerge from the theories and analyses of women's liberation, theories which first arrived in Montreal on the fertile ground of the city's politically charged English-speaking university campuses. In 1968, the pages of the *McGill Daily* – a paper which was both widely read and which acted as one of the most important voices of anglophone student activism – began publishing new voices of

¹⁸ Brief of the Marriage Counselling Centre of Montreal, Royal Commission on the Status of Women, April 1968.

¹⁹ Medical Students' Society, McGill University, Montreal, Brief to the Royal Commission on the Status of Women, May 1968, 1, 13.

²⁰ *Le Centre de Planification familiale*, Montreal, Brief to the Royal Commission on the Status of Women, 14 June 1968, 1-2, 14-15, 21. "notre société a été construite par des hommes et pour des hommes."

radical women. The front page of the 1 November 1968 edition of *The Review*, the *McGill Daily* supplement, features a graphic picture of a young naked woman being held down by barbed wire, and the lead article sarcastically muses about the socially prescribed roles that women were expected to fill.²¹ Other articles urged that women's liberation must form part of the larger radical upheaval.²² The first major politicization of women's rights came with the publication of the *Birth Control Handbook* by the McGill Students' Society in 1968. The publication of the handbook deliberately defied a Canadian law which prohibited the distribution of information on birth control, and was conceived, from the outset, as "a political act."²³ First distributed to students at Quebec's English-language universities, the publication became increasingly popular and successful, and other schools and organizations began ordering copies. The phenomenal success of the publication is a testament to the widespread pent-up demand for reliable access to information about contraception. By the summer of 1969, nearly 50,000 copies had already been sold, and this number increased to a quarter of a million by 1969-1970, and to nearly two million by 1970-71.²⁴

A decisive moment for feminist organizing came when renowned American feminist Marlene Dixon obtained a teaching post in the Sociology Department at McGill University in 1969. She began giving courses in the sociology of women that directly addressed, among other issues, questions relating to the women's movement,

²¹ "How to play the game... of being a woman," *The Review* (*McGill Daily supplement*), 1 November 1968.

²² For examples of radical women writing in the *McGill Daily* in 1968, see Martine Eloy, "Woman: why is she?," *the Review* (*McGill Daily supplement*), 6 December 1968, 5; Myrna Wood and Marsha Taubenhaus, "The Doll House, revisited: Further notes on the condition of women in our society," *the Review* (*McGill Daily supplement*), 22 November 1968, 7.

²³ Donna Cherniak and Allan Feingold, "Introduction" *Birth Control Handbook* 6th edition, Montreal, March 1971, 3.

²⁴ Donna Cherniak and Allan Feingold, "Birth Control Handbook (1971)," in *Women Unite! An Anthology of the Canadian Women's Movement* (Toronto: Canadian Women's Educational Press, 1972), 109-10. Susan Brownmiller talks of the handbook being distributed as far away as Austin, Texas. Susan Brownmiller, *In Our Time: Memoir of a Revolution* (New York: Dial Press, 1999), 119.

imperialism, labour, and women's work.²⁵ Partly as a result of her influence, English-speaking university students founded, in October 1969, the MWLM.²⁶ The group's members – many of whom were Americans who had fled the United States with male draft dodgers – were deeply shaped by American feminist theory.²⁷

The explosion of the women's liberation movement in anglophone Montreal was therefore intrinsically linked to the collective awakening of women all across North America, an awakening in which thousands of women were discovering new understandings of themselves and new forms of collective consciousness.²⁸ Susan Brownmiller, speaking of the beginnings of radical feminism in New York City, recalls meetings which at times “took on the flavor of a tent camp revival, a hallelujah chorus.”²⁹ In Montreal, the MWLM was attracting members by the dozen, holding meetings in the fall of 1969 and the winter of 1970 on Thursday nights at the University Settlement on Saint-Urbain Street. The meetings had no hierarchy, no leadership, and the topics and format of discussions were determined by all participants. From the larger meetings, small ‘consciousness-raising’ groups were formed.³⁰ Discovering their common experiences of discrimination and alienation, women were beginning to see the political nature of personal problems. Housework and birth control, sexual satisfaction and ideas of feminine beauty, were all, in a fundamental sense, political issues.³¹ Through their discussions, women began

²⁵ Marie Henretta, “The Oppression of Women in Canada,” *Montreal Women's Liberation Newsletter*, March 1970, no. 1, 3.

²⁶ Martine Lanctôt, “La genèse et l'évolution du mouvement de libération des femmes à Montréal, 1969-1979” (M.A., UQAM, 1980), 52.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 53.

²⁸ For an excellent look at the movement in the United States, see Alice Echols, *Daring to be Bad: Radical Feminism in America 1967-1975* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989).

²⁹ Brownmiller, *In Our Time: Memoir of a Revolution*, 41.

³⁰ Henretta, “The Oppression of Women in Canada,” 2.

³¹ According to Geoff Eley, the “‘personal’ meant less an individualistic private domain than the contexts of everydayness – the quotidian and the local.” This was a form of politics in which old ideas of the ‘Party’ played no role, and in which “[p]lurality and flexibility were the rule.” Geoff Eley,

realizing the systemic and structural nature of their personal problems, and they began to think collectively about the possibilities of building a different future.³² Because oppression was inscribed in the cultural codes of daily life, it was necessary to begin creating “an entirely new culture,” and to do this women needed to realize their “full potential for being strong, effective, complete human beings.”³³

But women’s liberationists in Montreal knew from the very beginning that their movement was intimately related to other liberation struggles. Marie Henretta opened the first issue of the *Montreal Women’s Liberation Newsletter* with a damning statement, immediately placing the fight for women’s rights alongside other struggles that had engulfed the city. “Women,” she argued, “are victims of a system of male supremacy as virulent as racism.” Women were systematically devalued, demeaned, and relegated to the private sphere of the home. But Henretta also revealed a debt to a larger language of dissent, one which spoke to psychological and cultural power and which bore a close resemblance to analyses made by Black radicals. In “Imperialism in the Home,” she argued that,

For the wife without an independent source of income, marriage is a minute system of imperialism. Not only does the husband own and control the family property; not only has he legal power over his wife and children; not only does he direct the labour of his domestic slave, his wife, for his own benefit; but he also engages in a psychological stance as ‘lord and master’. He must not only be admired, his commands must be obeyed – his own low status in the world and his cowardice in accepting the humiliations there, are purged when he heaps more of the same shit on his wife. Vicariously, he becomes the ‘boss’, the ‘dictator’ – he feels the thrill of domination.

To end sexist oppression, to undo this form of domination, women were beginning to realize that they needed to struggle “for a revolution that is both feminist and

Forging Democracy: The History of the Left in Europe, 1850-2000 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 372.

³² Henretta, “The Oppression of Women in Canada,” 3.

³³ “Art through Revolution through Art,” *Montreal Women’s Liberation Newsletter*, June 1970, 5.

socialist,” a revolution which would create a society “in which there will be equal human beings,” and “in which all share freely.”³⁴

The authors of the *Birth Control Handbook*, Donna Cherniak and Allan Feingold, similarly attempted to place the struggle for women’s rights in the framework of a larger democratic awakening taking place throughout the globe. Perhaps partly because of their experiences in Montreal, and partly because of the generalized atmosphere of revolt at the end of the 1960s, the authors saw the importance of their handbook as stretching far beyond the dissemination of medical information. Theirs was a project that sought to decentralize structures of power by placing expert knowledge in the hands of the oppressed, providing “men and women with the information they need to control their own bodies.”³⁵ Birth control therefore had a “radical potential,” was crucial “in the redefinition of women,” and could help empower women to “write our own history and to create a future adequate to our needs.” Because all forms of oppression were linked, and because the liberation struggles of various marginalized peoples were connected to one another, building women’s liberation could lead to a more widespread undermining of dominant structures of power. From “the understanding of one’s own oppression as a woman,” the authors argued, “comes a better understanding of the oppression of others also enchained in master-slave relationships.” The authors therefore explicitly theorized their project as forming one part of a larger movement of resistance to imperialist systems of power,³⁶ and of an ongoing search for “new methods of governing ourselves.”³⁷

³⁴ Henretta, “The Oppression of Women in Canada,” 1-2.

³⁵ Donna Cherniak and Allan Feingold, “Introduction” *Birth Control Handbook* 7th edition, Montreal, July 1971, 2.

³⁶ Cherniak and Feingold, “Introduction” *Birth Control Handbook* 6th edition, 2-3.

³⁷ Cherniak and Feingold, “Introduction” *Birth Control Handbook* 7th edition, 4. According to Christabelle Sethna, the politicized editorial content of the handbook sparked such a controversy that

In consciousness-raising groups and public discussions women were learning to see themselves as victims of a power structure which systematically maintained male privilege, yet they were also learning to connect their oppression with that of other marginalized groups. The authors of the handbook were deeply sensitive to the fact that they were anglophones living and writing in Montreal. The front cover of the handbook proudly bore a stamp declaring that the production had been carried out by workers affiliated with the CSN, the union most closely associated with radical labour activism at the end of the 1960s. Although writing in English, the authors wrote both 'Montréal' and 'Québec' in French, symbolically declaring that they believed French to be the official language of the city. But, more importantly, the handbook was translated into French as *Pour un contrôle des naissances*, and the task of writing a new introduction and distributing the document was given to the FLF. By 1971, 200,000 copies of the French-language edition had already been distributed.³⁸

As anglophones situated in the heart of Montreal, the members of MWLM knew that they did not hold a monopoly on victimhood, and they were keenly aware of the local political climate in which the English language was being associated with imperial domination. This awareness ensured that the MWLM was, from its very beginnings, deeply embedded in Montreal society. At its Thursday night meetings, in addition to discussing the economic exploitation of women and the problems with the nuclear family, the group specifically explored the history of women in Quebec. The organization agonized about its relationship to other movements in Montreal,³⁹ and

the "Royal Victoria Hospital, the Montreal General Hospital, the Family Planning Association of Montreal and Dialogue, an interdenominational organization that distributed contraception information returned a total of 3,000 *Handbooks*. The town of Pembroke, Ontario banned the publication. In the United States, the city of Miami, Florida did the same. Copies were burned in Missoula, Montana." A controversy even broke out at Princeton over allegations that the handbook was Maoist propaganda. Christabelle Sethna, "The Evolution of the *Birth Control Handbook*: From Student Peer-Education Manual to Feminist Self-empowerment," *Canadian Bulletin of Medical History* 23, no. 1 (2006): 102.

³⁸ Cherniak and Feingold, "Birth Control Handbook (1971)," 111.

³⁹ Henretta, "The Oppression of Women in Canada," 2.

worried greatly about poor rural women in Quebec and their access to reliable contraception.⁴⁰ At a celebration for international women's day, on 8 March 1970, a representative of the group addressed a teach-in organized by La Ligue des Femmes in "fluent French," and spoke about how their new organization hoped to play an important role in the larger world of the Montreal left.⁴¹ And, when discussing its participation in the abortion caravan in Ottawa in 1970 – a demonstration in which 100 Montreal women participated – the group deliberated long and hard over the reasons behind its participation. Knowing that the FLF had refused to participate on the basis that it did not recognize the legitimacy of the federal government, the MWLM began to question its own motivations. The basic problem with the action, the group argued, was that its "lack of an analysis" ensured that it did not break out of a reformist mode to "make our demands revolutionary." The central contradiction of the action was that the group "never really resolved the question of why we were going to Ottawa from Québec."⁴²

Given that the MWLM was founded in the fall of 1969, the exact moment that the city's political foundations were being rocked by explosive linguistic debates (which will be examined in the following chapter), it is no surprise that its role within Quebec society pre-occupied the group from the very beginning. Deeply aware that it was an English-speaking group in the midst of a French-speaking society, and knowing that the English language was associated with social and cultural privilege, members of the group began working to establish contacts with women in the increasingly radical Quebec labour movement. In the meetings and contacts which ensued, anglophone women began talking with francophone women about the possibility of holding an all-women's protest to denounce the city's increasingly

⁴⁰ L. Wynn, "The Pill Scare" *Montreal Women's Liberation Newsletter*, March 1970, no. 1, 5.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁴² "Abortion Caravan" *Montreal Women's Liberation Newsletter*, June 1970, no. 2, 9-10.

repressive political climate.⁴³ On 29 November, women from different backgrounds joined together to take to the streets to defend the right to protest in the city.

After the protest, a group of women decided to establish the FLF. Although a roughly equal number of anglophone and francophone women were involved in the decision to form the FLF, it was the anglophones, influenced by American feminism, who pushed the francophone women to join in independent political action.

According to Martine Lanctôt, there was a significant gap between the motivations of francophone and anglophone feminists. For francophones, she states, the

women who were the most likely to join the women's liberation movement were precisely those who were involved in the political struggles of the era, and those involved in the nationalist movement. They were not very concerned about the struggle for the liberation of women. It was the anglophone feminists of Montreal who would encourage the francophone women to join the struggle for women's liberation.⁴⁴

After much discussion, the FLF set its goal as the liberation of women through the creation of an independent and socialist Quebec.

After the FLF was formed, it worked alongside and collaborated with the MWLM. The profits earned by the sales of the *Birth Control Handbook* provided enough money to open a Women's Centre located, ironically enough, on Sainte-Famille Street in downtown Montreal. The Centre housed the MWLM, the FLF, and an abortion counselling service which had previously been run out of the apartment of the *Handbook's* authors.⁴⁵ Walking through the door of the Sainte-Famille centre,

⁴³ Lanctôt, "La genèse et l'évolution du mouvement de libération des femmes à Montréal, 1969-1979", 58. See, also, "F.L.F.Q. Historique" été 1970 *QDI*, 65.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 56. "femmes qui sont le plus susceptibles d'adhérer au mouvement de libération des femmes sont justement celles-là même qui sont impliquées dans les luttes politiques de l'époque et qui sont engagées dans le mouvement nationaliste. Elles sont alors peu concernées par la lutte de libération des femmes. Ce sont les féministes anglophones de Montréal qui vont inciter les francophones à participer à la lutte de libération des femmes."

⁴⁵ Cherniak and Feingold, "Birth Control Handbook (1971)," 110; Lanctôt, "La genèse et l'évolution du mouvement de libération des femmes à Montréal, 1969-1979", 63. Lanctôt maintains that the centre was opened due to the financial help of Dr. Morgentaler.

one was immediately struck by the slogan 'Québécoise deboutte' hanging at the entrance, and by the poems and feminist slogans adorning the walls.⁴⁶ In the common space, women from the two groups worked in close proximity, exchanging ideas and experiences and greatly influencing each other's understandings of women's liberation. The FLF and the MWLM jointly ran the abortion referral service in 1970, until it was finally taken over completely by the FLF in 1971.⁴⁷ The collaboration between the two organizations, and between anglophone and francophone activists more generally, profoundly shaped the early years of women's liberation in Montreal, contributing to the creation of a unique and profound understanding of women's oppression and the possible paths to liberation.

The MWLM was a crucial catalyst in feminist organizing in Montreal, but the group did not make a large effort to develop a public voice; it never published a newspaper and did not attract a great deal of media attention to its cause. In this respect, the MWLM differed greatly from the FLF, a group which continually tried to reach out and attract headlines, and to change the public language of dissent that prevailed in the city. The FLF fought to lay claim to the city and widen the sphere of female political participation. Members of the group plastered 'Québécoises deboutte!' stickers all around Montreal,⁴⁸ and occupied taverns which did not permit the entry of women.⁴⁹ In one of its most daring activities, an FLF cell occupied the jury boxes of a Montreal courthouse during a hearing for Lise Balcer, one of the witnesses in the trial of FLQ member Paul Rose. Because women were not allowed to sit as jurors, Balcer refused to testify as a witness and was found in contempt of court. When she was in the witness box explaining the reasons for her refusal, seven

⁴⁶ Claude-Lyse Gagnon, "Le Front de libération des femmes prépare l'escalade," *La Patrie*, 7 mars 1971.

⁴⁷ O'Leary and Toupin, *Québécoises deboutte! Une anthologie de textes*, 81.

⁴⁸ "Bulletin de liaison FLFQ," no 1, juillet 1971, *QDI*, 102.

⁴⁹ O'Leary and Toupin, *Québécoises deboutte! Une anthologie de textes*, 98.

FLF women from the audience charged to the front of the courtroom, took over the jury benches, and began yelling ‘discrimination!’ and ‘la justice c’est de la merde!’; they were sentenced from one to two months in prison.⁵⁰ In addition to trying to publicize these and other forms of discrimination, the FLF worked to develop a new interpretation of the world which would voice the concerns and desires of Quebec’s oppressed and colonized women. In the summer of 1970, the FLF announced that some of its members were planning to found a newspaper “exclusively devoted to women, and centred on the various aspects of their oppression.” Finished were the days of having ‘feminine’ pages in mainstream papers. From now on “Quebec women will have an entire newspaper to themselves, where they can fully express the violence of their condition.” It was up to women themselves to determine their own conditions of existence, to determine how to use their bodies and what to make of their lives. Women, the FLF argued, had never had a say in major decisions that affected their daily lives, and they were given “an education which prevented them from becoming full and equal human beings.”⁵¹ Through the FLF, the women’s liberation movement became highly visible in Montreal, ensuring that its analyses and critiques would have a significant effect on wider structures of dissent.

‘We Must Create’ – Gendering Radical Montreal

The women who formed the FLF came from diverse origins and backgrounds; while some had been politicized in the largely English-language women’s liberation movement, others had been active in the various mixed groups of the Montreal left.

⁵⁰ Guy Deshaies, “Un commando féminin prend d’assaut la tribune des jurés,” *Le Devoir*, 2 mars 1971, 1-2.

⁵¹ “F.L.F.Q. Fonctionnement” été 1970 *QDI*, 67. “uniquement consacré aux femmes, centré sur les divers aspects de leur oppression”; “[l]es Québécoises auront un journal à elles, où elles pourront exprimer toute la violence de leur condition”; “une éducation qui les empêchait de devenir des êtres humains à part entière.”

Women, of course, had been involved in various facets of Quebec liberation from the very beginning, frequenting cafés, participating in street demonstrations, and writing theoretical articles, poetry, and songs of resistance.⁵² By the late 1960s, however, the way that many women conceived of their participation in the larger movement began to change dramatically. Women in progressive political organizations all across Montreal were beginning to stand up and denounce the expectation that they perform secondary ‘feminine’ roles, typing, making coffee, and preparing food for male activists. The MWLM wrote of the “schizophrenia” of radical groups that called “for the liberation of all oppressed peoples,” yet oppressed “the women right among them.”⁵³ Women began accusing male theorists of not taking the specifics of gender oppression seriously, and of continually brushing aside women’s experiences and concerns. Radical women began, in short, to turn the language of liberation and emancipation back on the movement itself, and they began to realize that, if women were to become free political subjects, they too would need to develop their own terms of reference and their own autonomous voice of resistance. Following the example of other marginalized groups, many women began arguing that they needed to break away, organize independently, and create political groupings and free social spaces of their own. By separating and organizing autonomously, women began making their own independent analyses of their place in the larger struggle, of their own needs as women in the movement, and of a deeper and more all-inclusive understanding of freedom that was, in many ways, unique to Montreal. This ideology

⁵² Women have also been involved in the long history of the left in Quebec before the 1960s. For interesting and important accounts, see Thérèse F. Casgrain, *A Woman in a Man's World* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Limited, 1972); Andrée Lévesque, *Red Travellers: Jeanne Cobin & Her Comrades*, trans. Yvonne M. Klein (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2006); Simone Monet-Chartrand, *Ma vie comme rivière* (Montréal: Éditions Remue-ménage, 1981-); Susan Mann Trofimenkoff, "Thérèse Casgrain and the CCF in Québec," *Canadian Historical Review* 66, no. 2 (June 1985): 125-53.

⁵³ “Art through Revolution through Art,” 5.

was most often articulated by the women who formed the FLF, although it was by no means confined to this organization.

Radical women began arguing that it would no longer be enough to demand a more equitable representation within the existing social structures. For true democracy to flourish, and for women to be both empowered and liberated, the power structure itself needed to be radically transformed. In *Personal Politics: The Roots of Women's Liberation in the Civil Rights Movement & the New Left*, Sara Evans demonstrates how women's liberation in the United States was born out of the discrepancy that female activists felt between the New Left's "egalitarian ideology and the oppression they continued to experience within it." But the New Left did much more "than simply perpetuate the oppression of women"; it also created arenas in which women could develop new senses of themselves and, by "heightening women's self-respect, it allowed them to claim the movement's ideology for themselves." The radical democracy of the New Left, therefore, "carried over into an unequivocal assertion of sexual equality," and women began taking their demands beyond a formal equality of 'rights' towards a more comprehensive conception of empowerment.⁵⁴ The women's liberation movement in Montreal similarly emerged out of the wider structures of the left, and learned much from the radical humanism and liberatory rhetoric of the Quebec liberation movement. By working in the various political groups of the period, women gained confidence and experience in political organizing, and, perhaps more importantly, they began learning new ways of seeing both themselves and the world around them. When radical women began defending their specific rights as women, therefore, it was from within – and not in opposition to – the language of Quebec decolonization. It was in this atmosphere of mixed and

⁵⁴ Sara Evans, *Personal Politics: The Roots of Women's Liberation in the Civil Rights Movement & the New Left* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 220, 14-15.

hybrid influences, this coming together of American women's liberation theory with the terms and vocabularies of the Montreal left, that women's liberation in Montreal began to take on its own shapes and outlines.

The FLF was the most vocal and prominent group attempting to situate women's liberation within a larger conception of freedom, but it was not alone. A group of women from Montreal also published, in 1971, the *Manifeste des femmes québécoises*, a remarkable document that circulated throughout various leftist circles. The book's editor described the work as one of self-definition, a process which always preceded self-determination.⁵⁵ The authors had clearly thought deeply about the left's project, and about its liberatory possibilities and serious limitations. It was not a coincidence, the authors argued, that, although women had been involved in the Quebec liberation movement from the very beginning, nobody ever remembered the names of women revolutionaries. And it was not an aberration or an oversight that led the FLQ to neglect to mention any of the concerns of Quebec women in its manifesto published during the October Crisis. "It seems that in the minds of everyone," the authors argued, "national liberation implies the liberation of women." And they went on:

We have all, for the most part, been active in a variety of groups with rather ambiguous positions on the question of women. The 'Marxist' theory of these groups can be summed up quickly: the capitalist system oppresses men and women. Men oppress women because they are colonized. If we change that system, men will be decolonized and they will stop oppressing women. Splendid. Here is an easy evasion of the question of women, of their specific oppression, and of the struggle that they need to wage. Such a theory encourages passivity and a wait-and-see policy. We, the women of these movements, engaged in the big struggle against the common enemy, have been unable to articulate how this enemy oppresses us.

⁵⁵ Note de l'éditeur, un groupe de femmes de Montréal, *Manifeste des femmes québécoises* (Montreal: l'étincelle, 1971), 7.

The experience of previous socialist revolutions had demonstrated that, as the liberation of women was far from being an automatic outcome, it was necessary for women to work to develop their own terms of analysis.⁵⁶ But this severe criticism of the Quebec movement did not change the fact that the liberation of women was impossible without the national liberation of Quebec. Women therefore had a responsibility towards the larger liberation movement, a responsibility to deepen and strengthen the view of freedom which it articulated.

While male revolutionaries had *Nègres blancs d'Amérique* and *le Petit Manuel d'Histoire du Québec*, women, with the exceptions of report of the Royal Commission and Simone de Beauvoir, did not have any tools of analysis which would help outline their own specific terms of oppression. Women's oppression, the authors argued, needed to be understood as affecting all aspects of daily life. Although each woman lived in her own way, all were subject to a specific form of oppression which they lived on a daily basis. Women now needed to move *beyond* discussions of their daily lives, as a "growing awareness of the necessity for liberation needs to lead to collective action." The women spoke of their coming to consciousness, of the way in which they learned that women's oppression, while being distinct from other forms of exploitation, was rooted in the material world and could therefore be analyzed using the tools of historical materialism. They had come to learn that the liberation of women implied the transformation of the capitalist system. And they realized that, although French and American feminism had provided much of the original

⁵⁶ Ibid., 11-23. "Il semble que pour tout le monde"; "la libération des femmes soit sous-entendue dans la libération nationale"; "Nous avons toutes pour la plupart milité dans les mouvements mixtes dont la position en ce qui a trait aux femmes est assez équivoque. La théorie 'marxiste' des mouvements mixtes se résumait à peu de choses: le système capitaliste opprime les hommes et les femmes. Les hommes oppriment les femmes parce qu'ils sont colonisés. Changeons le système. Les hommes seront décolonisés et ils cesseront d'opprimer les femmes. Splendide. Voilà qui élude à peu de frais la question des femmes, de leur oppression spécifique et de la lutte qu'elles doivent mener. Une telle théorie est une invitation à l'attentisme et à la passivité. Nous, les femmes de ces mouvements, occupées à la grande lutte contre l'ennemi commun, nous n'avons pu définir comment cet ennemi nous opprimait."

theoretical basis upon which Quebec feminism was founded, it was now time to situate their struggle “within a framework of social and national liberation,” and to define for themselves, as Quebec women, their specific terms of oppression and struggle.⁵⁷

The authors of the *Manifeste* were attempting to define their own terms of oppression, but in so doing they were making use of the terms and concepts that had been developed in the wider movement, adapting them to their own purposes and shaping and stretching them to their own ends. Responding to accusations that it was women who were among the first to denounce the flourishing feminist movement, the authors of the *Manifeste* drew on the wider literature of decolonization: “this opposition can only be explained within the framework put forth by Memmi (Albert) regarding the relationship between the oppressors and the oppressed. Since the oppressed are and want to be precisely how the oppressor wants them, because they depend upon the oppressor for their sense of self worth.” For the authors of the *Manifeste*, women’s liberation fit into a larger discourse of radical humanism and total liberation; women, by outlining their own terms of oppression and their own understanding of liberation, could significantly deepen and radicalize the movement and help in their own way to liberate “all the peoples of the world.” And, following the line of argumentation of both Black activists and the intellectuals of *Parti Pris*, the authors argued that they needed to begin “by denouncing the ideologies ... that reinforce our inferior status, and by creating a new culture of women, a culture in which women will be in solidarity in the struggle for liberation.” It was, after all, only through struggle that the new woman could be forged.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ Ibid., 9-57. “prise de conscience doit déboucher sur notre action collective pour notre libération”; “dans le cadre d’une libération nationale et sociale.”

⁵⁸ Ibid., 38-51. “cette opposition ne peut s’expliquer que par le schéma typique défini par Memmi (Albert) des relations entre opprimés et oppresseurs. Car l’opprimé est et veut être tel que l’opresseur

The *Manifeste des femmes québécoises* articulated many of the intellectual arguments that were being developed by the FLF. In its first widely distributed text, the FLF outlined its goal of creating “*solidarity among all Québécoises*” which would, the group hoped, allow women “to articulate together the meaning of our liberation.”⁵⁹ A first step in this liberation was working to understand the world in their own terms. The women of the FLF were tired of being continually told that their liberation was implied by Quebec’s national liberation. From its outset, the FLF saw its struggle as forming an essential element of Quebec’s national liberation which, it believed, also acted as the condition for women’s emancipation. The FLF’s slogan clearly revealed the primary tenets of its ideology: “*NO LIBERATION OF QUEBEC WITHOUT THE LIBERATION OF WOMEN, NO LIBERATION OF WOMEN WITHOUT THE LIBERATION OF QUEBEC.*” The group therefore situated its struggle in the rhetoric of total liberation. “The liberation of women,” an FLF bulletin declared, “will not be achieved by oppressing other groups or individuals, but forms part of a process of liberating all human beings. Roles must not be reversed, they must be transformed.”⁶⁰ With its goal of total liberation, the FLF modeled its struggle on male-dominated revolutionary groups, and both its name and its internal organization, by design, drew conscious links to the FLQ.

The FLF’s debt to the larger Quebec decolonization movement is clearly revealed in its introduction to the French edition of the *Birth Control Handbook*. In

veut qu’il soit car il attend sa valorisation de l’opresseur”; “tous les peuples de la terre”; “en dénonçant les idéologies ... qui tendent à renforcer notre statut d’infériorité et aussi en créant une nouvelle culture des femmes, une culture où les femmes seront solidaires dans la lutte de libération.”

⁵⁹ “F.L.F.Q. Historique,” été 1970, *QDI*, 65-66. “*une solidarité entre toutes les Québécoises*”; “d’élaborer ensemble ce que devra être notre libération.”

⁶⁰ FLF, “Bulletin de Liaison FLFQ – cellule journal,” no. 2, août 1971, *QDI*, 117. “*PAS DE LIBÉRATION DU QUÉBEC SANS LIBÉRATION DES FEMMES, PAS DE LIBÉRATION DES FEMMES SANS LIBÉRATION DU QUÉBEC*”; “La libération de la femme”; “n’a pas pour but d’en faire l’oppression d’autres groupes d’individus, mais elle s’insère dans un processus de libération de tous les êtres humains. Il ne faut pas inverser les rôles mais les changer.”

the introduction, the FLF vehemently denounced the Catholic Church's teachings that sexuality was 'impure,' and that it was the duty of Quebec women to reproduce and perpetuate the 'race.' The church, according to the FLF, worked to keep women in ignorance about contraception and the workings of their bodies, ensuring that they continued to produce a steady stream of cheap labour for the province's industries. Revealing some of the theoretical inspirations behind the group's ideology, the FLF began its introduction with lengthy quotations by two very different authors, Emma Goldman and Pierre Vallières. The group approvingly quoted Goldman declaring that women should have the free choice to bear children when they wanted them, and that only this would ensure that children be conceived and raised in love.⁶¹ More surprising, however, is the group's reliance on Vallières's discussion of his mother in *Nègres blancs d'Amérique*. From a contemporary perspective, Vallières's denunciation of his mother, and his blaming of nearly all of his problems of adolescence on her and her domineering tendencies, and on the way in which she was responsible for imposing clerical repression on the family, strike the reader as approaching misogyny in their virulence.⁶² Yet, in the early 1970s, Vallières's analysis that "capitalism and religion have mass-produced mothers like mine"⁶³ was understood by radical women as a damning indictment of the ways in which the combined forces of capitalism and colonialism stripped individuals of their humanity. The introduction went on to argue that access to contraception provided the first step towards women's liberation, as the "control of one's own body" provides the condition for "the control of one's individual and collective existence." Birth control would allow women to control their own bodies, no longer forcing them to have large

⁶¹ "Introduction" *Pour un contrôle des naissances* (2e édition, Montréal, février 1971), 3.

⁶² For such an interpretation, see Lancôt, "La genèse et l'évolution du mouvement de libération des femmes à Montréal, 1969-1979", 235.

⁶³ Quoted in "Introduction," *Pour un contrôle des naissances*, 3. "capitalisme et la religion ont fabriqué en série des mères comme la mienne."

numbers of children. Rather than providing cheap labour for industry, therefore, the children that Quebec women conceived of their own free will would grow to swell the ranks “of those who are currently fighting for a more just way of life in a liberated Quebec.”⁶⁴

Despite its heavy reliance on the rhetoric of national liberation, the FLF cannot be seen as a mere appendage to the male-dominated revolutionary movement, nor should it be seen as being handicapped by its reliance on decolonization theory.⁶⁵ Radical women powerfully challenged the idea that Quebec liberation necessarily implied the liberation of women, arguing instead that women’s liberation was *one of the conditions* for a truly revolutionary movement. “We believe that women will not be able to truly liberate themselves,” the FLF declared, “unless their liberation forms part of a larger process of social liberation writ large, which will itself only be possible if it includes the participation of women at all levels.”⁶⁶ By challenging gender relations from within the larger revolutionary movement, the members of the FLF hoped to ensure the conditions for total human emancipation. While it was imperative that feminists fight for women’s emancipation, Quebec women could not

⁶⁴ “Introduction,” *Pour un contrôle des naissances*, 3. “contrôle de son propre”; “le contrôle de sa propre existence et de son existence collective”; “de ceux qui combattent actuellement pour un mode d’existence plus juste, dans un Québec libre.”

⁶⁵ This argument of the early women’s liberation movement being ‘dependent’ on the left is most famously articulated in Diane Lamoureux, *Fragments et collages : essai sur le féminisme québécois des années 70* (Montréal: Éditions du Remue-ménage, 1986). This opinion is also articulated in Lanctôt, “La genèse et l’évolution du mouvement de libération des femmes à Montréal, 1969-1979”, 272. In contrast, Stéphanie Lanthier explains that “les paradigmes du mouvement de libération des femmes s’établissent dans l’idée d’une révolution globale des structures de rapports entre les hommes et les femmes.” Stéphanie Lanthier, “L’impossible réciprocité des rapports politique entre le nationalisme radical et le féminisme radical au Québec 1961-1972” (M.A., Université de Sherbrooke, 1998), 58.

⁶⁶ FLF, “FLFQ: Historique,” été 1970, *QDI*, 66. “Nous considérons que les femmes ne pourront se libérer”; “qu’à l’intérieur d’un processus de libération globale de toute la société. Cette libération ne sera possible qu’avec la participation entière et à tous les niveaux.”

forget that they also needed to join “the struggle for the national liberation of the Quebec people, without which their liberation would be illusory.”⁶⁷

By borrowing the language of national liberation, the members of the FLF placed their movement in an international context. From the beginning, Véronique O’Leary and Louise Toupin maintain, Quebec feminists “felt very close to women involved in Third World liberation movements.”⁶⁸ Situating themselves internationally, the women of the FLF attempted to place their struggle on the same plane as other liberation movements. The situation, an FLF bulletin declared, “is the same for all exploited groups: Blacks, Quebecers, and the colonized around the world.”⁶⁹ Seeing Quebec as a colonized nation was the beginning point of the FLF’s social analysis, and, like earlier decolonization theorists, the women of the FLF believed that it was through their work in Quebec that they could best participate in a larger international movement. When writing to American feminists, they explained the reasons why they were not able to participate in activities of international solidarity: “We believe that the best way to join in your struggle and that of the women of the world is, for the moment, to devote all of our energies to the struggle for Quebec liberation.”⁷⁰

Because Quebec women were exploited on a national level by colonization, on an economic level by capitalism, and on a social level by patriarchy, it was imperative that a total revolution take place to transform all social structures. For the FLF, the

⁶⁷ FLF, “Bulletin de Liaison FLFQ – cellule journal,” no. 2 août 1971, *QDI*, 115. “la lutte de libération nationale du peuple québécois, sans quoi, cette libération ne serait qu’illusoire.”

⁶⁸ Véronique O’Leary et Louise Toupin, “Nous sommes le produit d’un contexte,” *QDI* 27. “se sentait très près des femmes des mouvements de libération du tiers-monde.”

⁶⁹ FLF, “Bulletin de Liaison FLFQ – cellule journal,” no. 2 août 1971, *QDI*, 116. For another example of the association of women’s liberation with the liberation of other minorities, see Marcelle Dolment and Marcel Barthe, *La femme au Québec* (Ottawa: Les Presses Libres, 1973), 149. “est la même pour tous les groupes humains exploités: les Noirs, les Québécois, les colonisés à travers le monde.”

⁷⁰ Front de libération des femmes du Québec, “Lettre à des féministes américaines,” 4 décembre 1970, *QDI*, 80. “Nous pensons que la meilleure façon de lutter avec vous et avec toutes les femmes du monde, c’est actuellement de consacrer toutes nos énergies à faire progresser la lutte de libération des Québécoises.”

economic exploitation of Quebec women was deeply shaped by the interrelated forces of American imperialism, colonialism, and capitalism.⁷¹ In its 1971 *Bulletin de Liaison*, the FLF clearly outlined the interrelated nature of its programme. According to its authors, the group was struggling “For independence, because we are not only women, but *Québécoises* women and as *Québécoises* we are colonized. For socialism because, even if the exploitation of women predates capitalism we live today in a capitalist system which depends upon the exploitation of women.”⁷² To free themselves from national, sex, and capitalist exploitation, the women of the FLF believed that it was necessary for feminists to struggle in independent women’s organizations that advocated national liberation through socialist revolution. Building upon the analyses of Black Power militants, many argued that the FLF needed to work towards “reconquering our dignity as human beings.”⁷³

The FLF maintained that its focus and energy needed to be placed on the most marginalized, to reach “women from poor communities, as they have no material comforts to lessen their hardship, and because they have nothing to lose and everything to gain.”⁷⁴ And some FLF women involved in the Théâtre radical québécois went down to Saint-Henri to be of service to the local citizens’ committee.⁷⁵ By 1971, the FLF was divided into many ‘cells,’ each with its own unique take on effective political action, its own rationale for the necessity for women’s liberation, and its own understanding of the conditions of women’s

⁷¹ FLF, “Bulletin de Liaison FLFQ – cellule journal,” no. 2 août 1971, *QDI*, 117.

⁷² FLF, “Bulletin de Liaison FLFQ – Ex-cellule ‘X’ et cellule ‘O comme dans vulve,’” no. 2 août 1971, *QDI*, 119. “Pour l’indépendance, parce que nous sommes femmes mais femmes Québécoises et en tant que Québécoises nous sommes colonisées. Pour le socialisme, parce que même si l’exploitation de la femme est antérieure au capitalisme ... nous vivons quand même dans un système capitaliste et c’est ce système-là qui utilise l’exploitation de la femme aujourd’hui.”

⁷³ “Bulletin de liaison FLFQ,” no 2, août 1971, *QDI*, 118. Cellule garderie. “reconquérir notre dignité d’être humain.”

⁷⁴ “Bulletin de liaison FLFQ,” no 2, août 1971, *QDI*, 120. Ex-cellule X and the Cellule O come dans vulve. “les femmes des milieux populaires parce que celles-ci n’ont aucune compensation matérielle pour adoucir leur condition, elles n’ont rien à perdre, tout à gagner.”

⁷⁵ O’Leary and Toupin, *Québécoises deboutte! Une anthologie de textes*, 74.

oppression. The two poles of the group, represented by ‘cellule II’ and ‘cellule X,’ reflected many of the debates that were shaping the women’s liberation movement across North America. ‘Cellule II’ highlighted the ways in which the oppression of women was intimately related to capitalism and the family structure, and it argued for the close collaboration with mixed (male and female) revolutionary groups. ‘Cellule X,’ for its part, while recognizing the material nature of exploitation, pointed more directly to patriarchy as a system of oppression, insisted on complete autonomy from male groups, and oriented its activities around shock actions of cultural demystification.⁷⁶

Despite the different ideological positions which prevailed within the group, all still maintained that the emancipation of women could only be achieved through a comprehensive program of national liberation. ‘Cellule II’ argued that the “complete integration of women into the struggle for national liberation” was not only “an essential element of that liberation,” but was also crucial for “the abolition of our own particular exploitation.” Liberation would, after all, remain incomplete if it did not liberate “all Quebec men and women.”⁷⁷ Another group argued that the FLF needed to be focused on one common objective: “the struggle for the sexual, social, political and economic liberation of the Quebec woman in order to achieve her individual and collective self-determination.”⁷⁸ And ‘cellule X,’ the defender of an autonomous women’s movement, and the group which went the furthest in identifying the

⁷⁶ For a summary of the ideological differences within the different groups of the FLF, see “Bulletin de liaison FLFQ,” no 2, août 1971, *QDI*. Lancôt, “La genèse et l’évolution du mouvement de libération des femmes à Montréal, 1969-1979”, 77-81.

⁷⁷ “Bulletin de liaison FLFQ,” no 2, août 1971, *QDI*, 111-112. Cellule II. “intégration complète des femmes à la lutte pour notre libération nationale”; “une condition essentielle pour cette libération”; “pour l’abolition de notre exploitation spécifique”; “toutes les Québécoises et tous les Québécois.”

⁷⁸ “Bulletin de liaison FLFQ,” no 2, août 1971, *QDI*, 114. Cellule cinéma-animation-formation. “la lutte de la libération sexuelle et sociale, politique, économique de la Québécoise en vue d’une auto-détermination individuelle et collective.”

common plight of all women under patriarchy, still argued that the FLF “needs to form part of the struggle for Quebec independence and social revolution.”⁷⁹

Seeing themselves as forming a part of a larger struggle for Quebec liberation, the women of the FLF did not primarily identify as ‘women,’ but rather as ‘Quebec women,’ women who were taking part in a larger struggle against imperialism. In this sense, feminists working in this framework challenged the universal idea of ‘sisterhood’ which was being developed by many English-speaking feminists. Instead they looked to the ways in which a confluence of systems of oppression served to marginalize colonized women. Because of their ardent belief in the need for national liberation, the women of the FLF had a turbulent relationship with English-speaking activist groups. The group, for example, refused to participate in the anglophone-organized abortion caravan to Ottawa. In a May 1970 press release, the FLF explained its refusal to participate:

Comrades, we refuse to go and protest in front of the Canadian Parliament when we do not recognize the authority which it claims over Quebec. We are, however, in solidarity with the women of Canada, because, as women, we suffer the same oppression. We have the same dreams: we want to bring the world from fatalism to freedom.⁸⁰

By refusing to participate in the first pan-Canadian act of the women’s liberation movement,⁸¹ the members of the FLF were attempting forcefully to demonstrate the centrality of Quebec national liberation to their cause.

In addition to distancing itself from English-Canadian feminist organizations, the FLF’s belief in the centrality of national liberation led it, in the fall of 1970, to

⁷⁹ “Bulletin de liaison FLFQ,” no 2, août 1971, *QDI*, 119. Cellule ‘X’ et Cellule ‘O comme dans vulve’. “doit s’insérer dans la lutte pour l’indépendance du Québec et pour la révolution sociale.”

⁸⁰ FLF, Press Release 8 mai 1970, Montréal, *QDI*, 71. “Camarades, nous refusons d’aller manifester devant un parlement dont nous ne reconnaissons pas les pouvoirs qu’il s’arroge sur le Québec. Cependant, nous sommes solidaires des femmes du Canada, puisque étant femmes, nous subissons la même oppression.... Nous avons les mêmes aspirations: nous voulons faire passer la terre de la fatalité à la liberté.”

⁸¹ Lanctôt, “La genèse et l’évolution du mouvement de libération des femmes à Montréal, 1969-1979”, 61.

exclude anglophones from its ranks. O’Leary and Toupin recount how the francophone women of the FLF were worried about the imbalance that existed between francophone and anglophone members of the group. It was during a two-day meeting in the Laurentians, they recall, that the francophone members decided to exclude anglophones. “Among the reasons put forward,” O’Leary and Toupin state, “was the argument that the anglophones, because they had access to a wide array of American and British documentation on ‘Women’s Lib.,’ exerted an ideological control over the FLF, giving the group an American orientation which had little regard for the specific realities of Quebec.” The existence of an increasing body of English-language feminist literature emanating from the United States and Britain therefore threatened the francophone members of the FLF. The foundational publication of France’s women’s liberation movement, a special issue of *Partisans* entitled *Libération des femmes, année zéro*, a collection of essays which would have a deep influence on the women of the FLF, was not available to Quebec women until the spring of 1971.⁸²

To the FLF’s francophone members, therefore, whose main theoretical influences remained Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex*, Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique*, and *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* by Friedrich Engels, the anglophones’ imparting of their knowledge and opinions seemed to “reveal a thoroughly colonial attitude.” Hoping to create a movement based both on an international awareness of women’s oppression and a firm understanding of specific issues relating to Quebec women, the FLF felt that the movement must be composed only of francophones. The anglophone members of the group, comprising

⁸² Véronique O’Leary et Louise Toupin, “Un bilan de parcours,” *QDI*, 76-77. “Parmi les raisons invoquées”; “mentionnons celles voulant que les anglophones, du fait qu’elles ont accès à toute la documentation américaine et anglaise sur the ‘Women’s Lib.,’ exercent un contrôle idéologique sur le FLF, imprimant ainsi au groupe une tendance américaine, sans égard à la réalité québécoise.”

about half of the total membership, were shocked by their exclusion from the organization that they had helped to form. Many anglophones, O’Leary and Toupin recount, “deeply integrated into the francophone and separatist community,” were hurt and upset by their exclusion, and decided to stop feminist activity altogether.⁸³ In February 1971, the FLF decided that it would only conduct abortion counselling in French, and the francophone women moved out of the shared house on Sainte-Famille.⁸⁴

Shortly after the expulsion of the FLF’s anglophone members, in December 1970, the FLF decided to refuse to participate in an American-organized conference on women’s liberation and anti-imperialism – a conference which would feature a delegation of women from Vietnam – that was to be held in Montreal. The group had initially expressed interest in the idea, and a few members of the FLF even travelled to New York with Marlene Dixon to discuss the possibility of organizing the conference. While in New York, the members of the FLF took the occasion to protest in front of a prison demanding the release of Black female prisoners.⁸⁵ Although initially showing interest in the project, the FLF ultimately opposed the idea because of the climate of fear created by the enactment of the War Measures Act just a few months earlier (under the auspices of which two FLF members were arrested). In its letter to the American feminists, the FLF clearly outlined its position towards anglophone feminists in Montreal and elsewhere. If the conference was organized in Montreal by Anglo-Canadian or American feminists, the FLF stated, it would

⁸³ Véronique O’Leary et Louise Toupin, “Un bilan de parcours” *QDI*, 76-77. It is interesting to note that, in the round table that was set up to discuss the FLF in 1982, none of the original anglophone members were present, and the decision to exclude the anglophone is not discussed (with the exception of Francine Aubin who merely states that she joined the FLF during the debate over exclusion in September 1970). “relever d’une attitude toute colonisatrice”; “très intégrées à la communauté francophone et indépendantistes.”

⁸⁴ Heather Jon Maroney, "Contemporary Quebec Feminism: The Interrelation of Political and Ideological Development in Women's Organizations, Trade Unions, Political Parties and State Policy, 1960-1980" (PhD, McMaster University, 1988), 251.

⁸⁵ O’Leary and Toupin, *Québécoises deboutte! Une anthologie de textes*, 79.

interpret this action “as another manifestation of the colonialism to which we are daily subjected.” The letter went on to clarify the FLF’s position towards Marlene Dixon, the Montreal contact for American feminists: “Marlene is a professor at (anglophone) McGill University; she belongs neither to Montreal Women’s Lib. nor to the Front de libération des femmes du Québec. She has lived here for a year and a half and she has never been able to communicate directly with us as she still does not speak French. She can therefore in no way speak for us nor for any *Québécoise*.” In its letter, the FLF reminded American feminists that, as Quebec women, its members were “oppressed not only as women but also as francophone Quebecers, colonized by Anglo-American capitalists.”⁸⁶ By excluding its anglophone members and clearly distancing itself from English-speaking feminist organizations, the FLF was, it thought, demonstrating the importance of the national liberation struggle to its ideology.

From the FLF to the Centre des Femmes

After two turbulent years struggling to free Quebec from colonial capitalist domination, the FLF had staged many demonstrations, opened a daycare, and published the first edition of a newspaper. Although it had never attracted a large membership, probably never surpassing 60 members organized in independent cells, it had a large impact of Quebec’s feminist movement.⁸⁷ By 1971, however, internal

⁸⁶ Front de libération des femmes du Québec, “Lettre à des féministes américaines,” *QDI*, 79, 80. “nous interprétons inévitablement ce geste comme une autre manifestation du colonialisme que nous subissons quotidiennement”; “Marlene est professeur à l’Université McGill (anglophone); elle n’appartient ni au Women’s Lib de Montréal, ni au Front de libération des femmes du Québec. Elle vit ici depuis un an et demi et elle n’a jamais pu communiquer directement avec nous car elle ne parle toujours pas français. Elle ne peut donc en aucune façon parler en notre nom ni en celui d’aucune Québécoise”; “opprimées non seulement en tant que femmes mais aussi en tant que Québécoises francophones, colonisés par les capitalistes anglo-américains.”

⁸⁷ Collectif Clio, *L’histoire des femmes au Québec depuis quatre siècles* (Montréal: Quinze, 1992), 382. Heather Jon Maroney estimates that a total of roughly 200 women attended the FLF’s meetings. Maroney, “Contemporary Quebec Feminism”, 249.

divisions and a drastically reduced membership discouraged the few remaining activists, and they decided to dissolve the group. When the FLF folded, the anti-colonial framework for understanding the triple exploitation of Quebec women was transported, more or less directly, into the Centre des femmes. When the Centre was established in January 1972, it intended to provide a forum for consciousness-raising and studying the status of women. Unlike the FLF, which placed a great deal of emphasis on spontaneous action, the women of the Centre focused on analysis, attempting, in Heather Jon Maroney's words, "to become a politically homogeneous nucleus of revolutionary feminists." One of its most important accomplishments was the publication of nine editions of *Québécoise Deboutte!* (with a circulation of roughly 1,500 to 2,000), Quebec's first women's liberation newspaper (with the exception of the one issue produced by the FLF).⁸⁸

Many historians have argued that, from the beginning, the Centre's position on the national question was far more nuanced than that of the FLF.⁸⁹ The Centre's early documents nonetheless clearly outline its continued faith in national liberation. In the Centre des femmes' first issue of *Québécoises Deboutte!*, the group forcefully outlined its continued faith in the FLF's original principles. According to the paper, "the liberation of women is neither an individual nor a cultural liberation: the struggle for women's liberation needs to be waged within the framework of national, social, economic, political, and cultural liberation." It was therefore necessary to situate their "role as housewives, workers, and mothers in the context of Quebec society."⁹⁰ The

⁸⁸ Maroney, "Contemporary Quebec Feminism", 257-59.

⁸⁹ See, for example, Lanctôt, "La genèse et l'évolution du mouvement de libération des femmes à Montréal, 1969-1979", 87.

⁹⁰ "Lettre à nos camarades," *Québécoises deboutte!* novembre 1972, *Québécoises deboutte!*: Tome II [hereafter *QDI*] (Ville Saint-Laurent: les éditions du remue-ménage, 1982), 18. "la libération des femmes n'est pas une libération individuelle ou culturelle: la lutte de libération des femmes doit se faire dans le cadre de la libération nationale, sociale, économique, politique et culturelle"; "rôle de ménagères, de travailleuses et de reproductrices dans le contexte de la société québécoise."

Centre des femmes, maintained a focus on Quebec workers and ensured that its social analysis was conducted within a Quebec framework.

Because the struggle “necessarily implied the primary objective of radically changing society,” the Centre des femmes sought not only to outline the terms of their oppression, but also to “clarify our objectives in the present conjuncture of the struggle of the Quebec people, choose our approaches, and work to draw Quebec women together into a revolutionary organization which will empower them.”⁹¹ One of its first initiatives was to use its newspaper as a forum to create a revisionist version of Quebec history. Offering a counter-narrative not only to dominant representations of the past, but also to radical histories which, like Léandre Bergeron’s best-selling *Petit manuel d’histoire du Québec*, ignored the contributions of Quebec women, the Centre hoped to create a more inclusive history that could be used in contemporary political struggles. Because historians “are especially interested in the history of the White male dominant class,”⁹² it was necessary to recover the voice of women in the past. In the first edition of *Québécoises Deboutte!*, the women of the Centre firmly outlined the necessity of offering a revisionist version of Quebec history:

For us Quebec women, history has not yet been written. Recent efforts to rewrite the history of the oppression of the Quebec people have again ‘neglected’ to deal with our oppression. Even if the history of *Québécoises* follows the main lines defined by a specific context shaped by our economy, politics, and identity, it still remains that we have lived a specific form of oppression due to the roles that we have been allotted by a patriarchal society.

⁹¹ “Pour un féminisme révolutionnaire,” *Québécoises deboutte!* décembre 1972, *QDII*, 50-51. “implique nécessairement comme objectif premier un changement radical de la société québécoise”; “préciser nos objectifs dans la conjoncture actuelle de la lutte du peuple québécois, décider de nos moyens de lutte, travailler à rassembler les Québécoises dans une organisation révolutionnaire qui sera leur force.”

⁹² “Histoire d’une oppression,” *Québécoises deboutte!* décembre 1972, *QDII*, 41. “sont particulièrement intéressés au passé de la classe dominante blanche et masculine.”

The Centre therefore ventured, through a series of articles, to construct an alternative narrative of Quebec's past. With the goals of incorporating "the specific oppression of Quebec women" into the history of the province, the group reinterpreted prehistoric societies and re-examined events such as the Conquest and the Lower Canadian Rebellions from a women's perspective.⁹³

In addition to rewriting Quebec history, the Centre des femmes, at its outset, consciously disassociated itself from other less radical groups. The Centre, for example, dismissed the founding of the Montreal Feminist Association, a group with the goal of uniting as many women as possible in a common struggle for increased women's rights. The Centre objected to the alliance of women from all theoretical backgrounds, and felt that any attempt to bring women from diverse social classes into the movement would vitiate the prospect of creating an authentic class consciousness. The attempt to organize women before they had become conscious of their oppression, the Centre believed, could only result in the creation of an elite organization, with interests and concerns far removed from those of the majority of Quebec women. Another significant problem with the Montreal Feminist Association was that its meetings, while ostensibly bilingual, operated almost entirely in English.⁹⁴ The Centre therefore considered the Montreal Feminist Association a reformist organization that did not fully understand the necessity of national liberation. For the FLF and, in the beginning, the Centre des femmes, the struggle for

⁹³ "Histoire d'une oppression," *Québécoises deboutte!* Vol. 1, No. 1, novembre 1972, *QDII*, 28. "implique nécessairement comme objectif premier un changement radical de la société québécoise"; "Pour nous, femmes Québécoises, l'histoire n'est pas encore écrite. Les tentatives récentes de retracer le passé d'oppression du peuple québécois ont encore 'négligé' de souligner le nôtre. Pourtant, même si l'histoire des Québécoises suit les grandes lignes définies par un contexte économique, politique et social identique, il reste que nous avons vécu une oppression spécifique due aux rôles qui nous sont dévolus dans une société patriarcale"; "l'oppression spécifique des femmes québécoises."

⁹⁴ "Pour un mouvement de femmes: mais lequel?" *Québécoises deboutte!* mars 1973, *QDII*, 94-95.

national liberation needed to be a central component of any plan to truly liberate Quebec women.

Only a year after its birth in the political turmoil, radical upheaval, and cultural mixing of the fall of 1969, the women's liberation movement in Montreal divided along linguistic lines. Francophone women, following the same logic of Black activists and early women's liberationists, argued that, as the oppressed of the oppressed, they themselves needed to organize in separate organizations. This decision to separate does not, of course, mean that women would or could cordon themselves off from the larger influences and ideas that circulated in the society in which they formed a part. No one group can insulate a fully "autonomous" viewpoint from the rest of society. All groups form part of a larger social world and, whether they realize it or not, are fundamentally influenced and shaped by that world. The perspectives and possibilities opened up by the dream of national liberation, however, seemed to dim after the first few years of the 1970s. National liberation no longer offered the promise of freedom and total liberation that it once did.

Although the Centre des femmes emerged out of the dissolution of the FLF and, at first, remained loyal to the FLF's principles, the emphasis that the group placed on the 'nation' slowly waned. By the early 1970s the women's movement had gained important experience in independent political action and began to rely less on the nationalist rhetoric that had nourished its early theoretical orientation. At the same time, the Centre decided to fully engage in the fight for legalized and state-funded abortion, and the group began to conflate nationalism with PQ policies. Because the group vehemently opposed what it saw to be the PQ's glorification of

motherhood and the nuclear family, the Centre came to reject the nationalist project in its entirety.

It was the arrest of Dr. Henry Morgentaler that first mobilized the Centre to actively engage in the fight for legalized abortion. Abortion was, while not an end in itself, a crucial step towards female emancipation. In an unsigned article in *Québécoises deboutte!*, the author outlined the Centre's position:

the legalization of abortion (free and on demand) is not an end in itself; it is, however, an essential service owed to us by a society which does not even ensure the minimum material conditions which would allow us to raise children (free daycare, paid maternity leave, collectivisation of housework, etc.). For women, birth control through contraception and abortion (if the contraception didn't work) is crucial. It's the first step towards the possibility of controlling our own lives.⁹⁵

In addition to advocating legalized and state-funded abortion, the Centre saw the criminalization of abortion as a corollary of capitalism. The question of abortion, the Centre argued, is intimately related to the social, economic, and political conditions of a country. In Quebec, there were two main interest groups debating the question: the state and the church on one side, and working-class women on the other.⁹⁶ Because capitalism relied upon women's reproductive capacity, the struggle for abortion "put into question the very foundations" of the economic system.⁹⁷

In 1973, the Centre announced that it would decisively enter into the struggle to legalize abortion. Clearly establishing a link between capitalism and the nuclear family, the Centre rejected its earlier decision to abstain from the abortion debate.

"The Centre des femmes is clearly taking a position," the group proudly declared, for

⁹⁵ "L'affaire Morgentaler," *Québécoises deboutte!* avril 1973, *QDII*, 163. "Pour nous, la légalisation de l'avortement (avortement gratuit et sur demande) n'est pas une fin en soi; cependant c'est un service essentiel que doit nous rendre une société qui n'assure même pas les conditions matérielles minimum nous permettant d'élever des enfants (garderies gratuites, congés de maternité payés, collectivisation des travaux ménagers, etc...). Pour nous les femmes, le contrôle des naissances par la contraception et l'avortement (si la contraception a fait défaut) est primordial. C'est le premier pas vers une possibilité de prise en main de nos vies."

⁹⁶ "Les intérêts en cause," *Québécoises Deboutte!* juillet-août 1973, *QDII*, 220.

⁹⁷ "Problème politique: lutte politique" *Québécoises Deboutte!* juillet-août 1973, *QDII*, 225. "remet en cause un des fondements."

the setting up of “free abortion on demand.” Although the group had considered abortion as “an important political problem,” it had thus far refused “to enter the struggle.” But now the Centre decided that it could no longer stay on the defensive and wait for a gift from the government.⁹⁸ A year later, in 1974, it would join with other like-minded groups and form the Comité pour l’avortement libre et gratuit.⁹⁹

At the same time that the Centre des femmes was becoming heavily involved in the struggle to legalize abortion, the Parti Québécois (PQ), a party founded in 1968 which advocated political sovereignty and social reformism, was beginning to occupy an increasing amount of ideological space in the nationalist movement. At the beginning of the 1970s, the Quebec left held an ambiguous relationship with the rising tide of reformist Quebec nationalism. When Pierre Vallières announced in 1971 that he would be joining the PQ, it became increasingly apparent that the Quebec liberation movement was undergoing an important change.¹⁰⁰ Although many denounced the PQ as a ‘bourgeois nationalist’ party, its rising fortunes and its position as a credible opposition to the governing Liberals attracted many on the left who hoped that, by working inside the PQ, they could radicalize the party. While many on the left decided to work within the PQ, others were attracted to the emergent flourishing world of Marxist-Leninism (represented most clearly by the publication of Charles Gagnon’s *Pour le parti prolétarien* in 1971) or to the class politics of Quebec’s major labour organizations. As the 1970s progressed, class politics began to assume an importance on the radical left which it had not enjoyed, or at least not as

⁹⁸ Ibid., 225-226. It should be noted, however, that this decision was a subject of considerable debate and division among the women at the Centre des femmes. See: “Bilan du Centre des Femmes à Montréal, Janvier 1972 à septembre 1974,” novembre 1974, *QDI*. “Le Centre des femmes prenant position clairement”; “l’avortement gratuit et sur demande”; “un problème politique d’importance”; “d’engager la lutte.”

⁹⁹ Diane Lamoureux, “La lutte pour le droit à l’avortement (1969-1981),” *Revue d’histoire de l’Amérique française* 37, no. 1 (juin 1983): 84.

¹⁰⁰ Roberta Hamilton, “Pro-natalism, Feminism, and Nationalism,” in *Gender and Politics in Contemporary Canada*, ed. François Pierre Gingras (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1995), 229.

explicitly, throughout the 1960s. If national liberation, premised on ideas of socialist decolonization, had been the central driving idea of the left throughout the 1960s, the movement seemed to be coming apart in the early 1970s.

It is in the context of the unraveling of the Quebec liberation movement that the Centre's attack on the PQ needs to be situated. The PQ's nationalism, according to Dianne Lamoureux, emerged from two sources: traditional French-Canadian nationalism and the Quiet Revolution's political modernization. These two components came together, she argues, in the project of constructing a national state.¹⁰¹ Because of the influence of traditional French-Canadian nationalism with its focus on cultural and 'racial' survival, Lamoureux argues, feminists have always had a somewhat strained relationship with the PQ.¹⁰² While many feminists have sought to expose the exploitative nature of the nuclear family, for Quebec nationalists of the 1970s the family was "not only the base unit of society," but also "the microcosm of the nation." And the role of the mother, of course, was central.¹⁰³

The relationship between feminism and nationalism in Quebec was both more complicated and more multi-faceted than Lamoureux suggests. As this chapter demonstrates, the language of national liberation, a language which promoted participatory democracy and self-determination, provided a set of resources that a nascent feminist movement was able to exploit, stretch, and extend to its own use. And, as I will explore later, by challenging the left's language on its own terms, the women's liberation movement significantly challenged and altered that very language. Yet it is true that the association of French-Canadian nationalism with pro-natalism

¹⁰¹Diane Lamoureux, "Nationalisme et féminisme: impasse ou coïncidences," *Possibles* 8, no. 1 (1983): 50-52.

¹⁰² A good example of this ambiguity is the way in which the PQ responded to the 'Yvettes' movement during the 1980 referendum. The incident, in Lamoureux's view, "permet de mettre en lumière l'ambiguïté du discours péquiste en ce qui concerne les femmes." Ibid.: 56.

¹⁰³ Ibid.: 51-52. "n'est pas seulement l'unité de base de la société"; "le microcosme de la nation"; "le rôle de la mère est central."

has a long history in Quebec,¹⁰⁴ and the Centre des femmes quickly realized that the policies of PQ were not those of the national liberation movement. The PQ was reformist in that it did not envision a radical overturning of society's economic and social structures and, for the Centre, it made use of traditional nationalist tropes to restrict women to the roles of mothers and wives.

Because the Centre began to conflate the PQ with Quebec nationalism, when it fiercely attacked the PQ in 1973, it ultimately abandoned 'the nation' as its site of struggle altogether. The immediate spark which set off the Centre's vehement reaction was, perhaps ironically, the PQ's adoption of 'pro-women' resolutions at its February 1973 convention. The PQ's six major resolutions which related to women included wages for a spouse (male or female) whose primary responsibility was housework, a substantial sum of money for women both before and after giving birth, paid maternity leave of six months, free daycare, services for parents with sick children, and a reform of marriage law to ensure that it be egalitarian and that a woman would not be obliged to take her husband's name.

Although the PQ's resolutions seemed progressive, the Centre, drawing on Gagnon's *Pour le parti prolétarien*, argued that they were merely illusory remedies. The election of a few women to the executive and the passing of a few 'pro-feminine' resolutions at its congress were deceiving. The party sought merely to institutionalize women's roles and to preserve the family, an institution which was both the bedrock of capitalism and responsible for the exploitation of women. The PQ, the Centre pointed out, did not resolve to provide free and legal access to abortions, nor did it advocate a socialization of housework. The party, which desired to see in power a

¹⁰⁴ See Hamilton, "Pro-natalism, Feminism, and Nationalism." Interesting insights can also be found in Heather Jon Maroney, "'Who has the baby?' Nationalism, Pronatalism and the Construction of a 'Demographic Crisis' in Quebec, 1960-1988," *Studies in Political Economy* 39 (Autumn 1992): 7-36.

nascent Quebec bourgeoisie – allied to American imperialism – provided both workers and women with false hope. It merely gave them a few “crumbs to rally them around the idea of ‘national unity.’”¹⁰⁵

Even more worrisome than the PQ’s insincere policies towards workers and women, the Centre believed, was the party’s celebration of the nuclear family and (it inferred) female domestication. The idea of baby bonuses, while having the ostensible purpose of recognizing the role of mothers in society, the centre argued, in reality were meant to institutionalize “this private work carried out within the family.” Rather than “valuing the woman as an individual,” moreover, “it is the woman-mother that is being glorified.” The Centre des femmes also linked the PQ’s desired preservation of the family with capitalism. For the group, right-wing nationalist parties had always valued the family as the ideological basis for both capitalism and the authoritarian power of the state, and the PQ was no exception.¹⁰⁶ Because the Centre des femmes saw the nuclear family as an oppressive institution, the PQ’s valorisation of the family structure was seen as an impediment to the struggle for women’s liberation. It was clear to them that “behind the PQ’s terminology of ‘a partner at home’ lurks the usual nationalist ideology of ‘a return to the home,’ with the ever-present glorification of the role of the wife and mother.”¹⁰⁷

After vehemently opposing the PQ, the Centre began to distance itself from the national project in its entirety. Quebec nationalism, it seemed, was no longer compatible with the Centre’s struggle for legalized and state-funded abortion, or with

¹⁰⁵ “Le P.Q. espoir ou illusion” *Québécoises deboutte!* avril 1973, *QDII*, 127-130. “des miettes pour les rallier autour de ‘l’unité nationale.’”

¹⁰⁶ “Le P.Q. espoir ou illusion” *Québécoises deboutte!* avril 1973, *QDII*, 127-130.

¹⁰⁷ “Sur notre condition: un salaire à la ménagère?” *Québécoises deboutte!* avril 1973, *QD*, 134. “ce travail privé effectué dans le cadre de la famille”; “valoriser la femme en tant qu’individu”; “c’est la femme-mère que l’on glorifie”; “derrière la phraséologie péquiste du ‘conjoint au foyer’ se retrouve toute l’idéologie nationaliste du ‘retour au foyer’ avec l’éternelle revalorisation du rôle de mère-épouse.”

its larger project of emancipation in general. In this, the women of the Centre followed a path similar to that followed by many other activists of the era who turned to the language of class oppression and away from that of national alienation. Many of the women who left the FLF re-entered leftist revolutionary groups, and many turned to the increasingly class-oriented Saint-Jacques political action committee and its publication *Mobilisation*.¹⁰⁸ The Quebec union movement and Marxist-Leninist groups, both of which were undergoing periods of mass expansion and militancy, were significantly affecting the intellectual climate of the city, and both began to integrate women's issues into their political programs.¹⁰⁹

As the rhetoric of national oppression slowly disappeared within Montreal's radical circles, the Centre increasingly focused on class exploitation. Replacing its earlier slogan linking the liberation of Quebec with the liberation of women, for example, the Centre des femmes adopted, in 1973, the more class-oriented and less nationalist "*NO LIBERATION OF HOUSEWIVES WITHOUT THE LIBERATION OF WORKERS, NO LIBERATION OF WORKERS WITHOUT THE LIBERATION OF HOUSEWIVES!*"¹¹⁰ By shifting its focus towards class, the Centre began to see itself as forming a part of the international struggle of all women and workers. The Centre argued that it was by making women's liberation a "key demand of the working class that we will put an end to the present system of exploitation."¹¹¹ Women formed an essential, albeit unpaid and undervalued, element of the capitalist mode of production.

¹⁰⁸ As Lancôt points out, these former FLF women played an important role in bringing women's issues to the revolutionary left. *Mobilisation* even published, soon after their arrival, an entire issue devoted to women's oppression. See especially "Faire du problème des femmes une revendication de la classe ouvrière," *Mobilisation*, no. 6 (1972). Lancôt, "La genèse et l'évolution du mouvement de libération des femmes à Montréal, 1969-1979", 81-82.

¹⁰⁹ For an early Marxist-Leninist publication oriented towards Quebec women, see *Femmes du Québec: organe officiel de la ligue des femmes progressistes du Québec* 1, no. 1., (12 août 1970).

¹¹⁰ "Pour une vrai fête des mères & ménagères" *Québécoises deboutte!* Vol 1, No. 6 – juin 1973, *QDII*, 171. "*PAS DE LIBÉRATION DES MÉNAGÈRES SANS LIBÉRATION DES TRAVAILLEURS, PAS DE LIBÉRATION DES TRAVAILLEURS SANS LIBÉRATION DES MÉNAGÈRES!*"

¹¹¹ "À la Regent Knitting..." *Québécoises deboutte!* février 1973, *QDII*, 71. "revendication de la classe ouvrière que nous réussirons à mettre fin au système d'exploitation actuel."

By doing housework they reinforced the labour power of the husband, and their unpaid work in the home therefore acted as “the economic cement of the capitalist system.” Yet in a society in which human worth was determined by money, women were excluded from decision-making power.¹¹² When, in 1974, the Centre reflected on its first two years of activity, it outlined its definition of feminism: “the revolutionary struggle against the exploitation of women, and particularly working-class women.”¹¹³ By the mid-1970s class struggle rather than national liberation had become the necessary condition for women’s liberation.

In addition to privileging class over national oppression, the women of the Centre des femmes began seeing themselves as a part of an international struggle for women’s liberation. Rather than looking to other countries for inspiration in decolonization, the Centre saw itself as part of a movement that extended far beyond Quebec’s borders. In both the writings in *Québécoises deboutte!* and the internal documents of the Centre, the fight against the specific exploitation of Quebec gave way to an international struggle against the exploitation of women. All over the world, the group declared, “there are millions of women of all races and nationalities who are subjected to the same discrimination and exploitation.”¹¹⁴ *Québécoises deboutte!* therefore began publishing accounts of women’s struggles from around the world. Chinese women’s ability to free themselves from both capitalism and patriarchy was especially lauded. The journal published long accounts of the liberation of women which had taken place alongside the Chinese Revolution, and

¹¹² “Sur notre condition: le ménagères,” *Québécoises deboutte!* mars 1973, *QDII*, 109, 113. For an interesting comparison with analyses being made in Toronto, see Susan Wheeler, “Women and the Political Economy: Wages for Housework,” *Our Generation* 11, no. 1 (1975). “le ciment économique du système capitaliste.”

¹¹³ “Bilan du Centre des Femmes à Montréal, janvier 1972 à septembre 1974,” novembre 1974, *QDI*, 156-157. “la lutte révolutionnaire contre l’exploitation des femmes, plus spécifiquement celles de la classe ouvrière.”

¹¹⁴ “La journée internationale des femmes,” *Québécoises deboutte!* octobre 1973, *QDII*, 307. “il y a des millions de femmes de toutes races, de toutes nationalités qui subissent la même discrimination et exploitation.”

wrote approvingly that the “Chinese people have accomplished a revolution to build socialism, and they are conscious that socialism cannot exist without the liberation of women.” It then went on to argue that “what seems particularly remarkable about the struggle for women’s liberation in China is that this liberation is not imposed from above: women have taken their liberation into their own hands.”¹¹⁵

When Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Selma James, two influential Marxist-feminists, came to Montreal in April 1973, the Centre worked to ensure that their message would have as wide an influence as possible. While Dalla Costa worked in Italy, James, the wife of C.L.R. James, was born in Brooklyn but had lived in both England and the West Indies. Because of the wide-ranging appeal of the two visitors, the Centre organized an important meeting which brought together women activists from many different sectors of Montreal society, and it organized a public conference in their honour. *Québécoises deboutte!* translated and published a fourteen-page interview with the women.¹¹⁶ The ideology of the Centre des femmes had significantly changed from its beginnings. Rather than seeing its project as one of radicalizing and deepening the Quebec liberation struggle, the group now saw itself as forming a part of a global struggle of working-class women.

By 1975, women’s liberation theory in Montreal had traveled a long way since it first made its appearance in 1969. But it was not just women’s liberation theory which had changed; as I have tried to indicate, the transformations within the women’s movement were part of a much larger transformation within the language and structures of the Montreal left. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, national

¹¹⁵ “Les femmes en Chine,” *Québécoise Deboutte!* juillet-août 1973. “peuple chinois a accompli une révolution pour construire le socialisme, conscient que le socialisme ne pourrait exister sans la libération des femmes”; “[c]e qui semble particulièrement remarquable dans la lutte pour la libération des femmes en Chine, c’est que cette libération n’est pas imposée par en haut: ce sont vraiment les femmes qui prennent en main leur libération.”

¹¹⁶ “Rencontre avec deux féministes marxistes” *Québécoises deboutte!* juin 1973, *QDII*, 190-203.

liberation had opened up possibilities and fed the imaginations of radical activists. But by the early 1970s the PQ's monopolization of the national question had made it difficult for radical women to remain in the national liberation framework. The struggle for abortion waged by women's liberationists contrasted sharply with the PQ's desire to encourage the development of Quebec families. The PQ's program, the Centre claimed, stood in direct opposition to its goal of eliminating gender discrimination. In addition to denouncing foreign exploiters, therefore, the Centre began fighting against Quebec nationalism itself.

In late 1974, when the Centre conducted an internal evaluation of its activities, it conceded that it considered itself to be "a core of avant-garde feminists with a 'leading' role to play in the feminist movement." The problem was, however, that "the bases for the creation of this movement did not yet exist."¹¹⁷ Plagued by internal division and conflict, the Centre des femmes dissolved just as the feminist movement was beginning a new chapter of thought and action.¹¹⁸ The formation of the MWLM and the FLF in 1969 marked the beginning of a new phase in the history of Quebec feminism. But by 1975 it was clear that the phase was over. The United Nations declared 1975 International Women's Year, and the women's movement gained a new momentum and an unprecedented number of women were drawn to the cause. Although the years after 1975 witnessed a proliferation of groups and a diversification of themes within the feminist movement in Quebec, the legacy of the MWLM, the FLF, and the Centre des femmes provided an essential groundwork upon which later feminists would build.

¹¹⁷ "Bilan du Centre des Femmes à Montréal, Janvier 1972 à septembre 1974" novembre 1974, *QDI*, 157. "un noyau féministe d'avant-garde ayant un rôle de 'direction' à jouer au sein du mouvement féministe"; "les bases mêmes pour la création de ce mouvement n'existaient pas encore."

¹¹⁸ The internal conflict of the group is evident in the 1982 round table discussion on the Centre, *QDII* 347-370.

From its beginning, the development of women's liberation in Montreal was inextricably intertwined with the Quebec liberation movement, and it worked to radicalize, deepen, and extend the reach of the left's dominant language of dissent. Women's liberation in Montreal was born of a coming together of anglophone and francophone activists, giving the movement an orientation which, while sharing much with women's liberationists across North America, was unique. The movement was always mixed, fluid, and in constant mutation, but its intense creativity did not come without important mistakes. It maintained, for example, a striking silence on the subject of homosexuality in general, and on lesbianism in particular.¹¹⁹ And the major split between francophone and anglophone feminists in 1970 damaged relations between the two groups, shaping the way in which feminist politics would develop in the city throughout the 1970s. How 'language' had become such a polarizing force across the broad spectrum of the Montreal left – even in some cases becoming an essentialized category of identity – will be the subject of the following chapter. But regardless of their shortcomings, Montreal's women's liberationists, through their writings and their actions, significantly altered the very nature of Montreal radicalism.

¹¹⁹ Even the editorial content of the *Birth Control Handbook* maintained a silence on homosexuality until 1973. Sethna, "The Evolution of the *Birth Control Handbook*: From Student Peer-Education Manual to Feminist Self-empowerment," 104. For a study of lesbianism in Montreal from 1950-1972, see Line Chamberland, *Mémoires lesbiennes: le lesbianisme à Montréal entre 1950 et 1970* (Montréal: Les Éditions de remue-ménage, 1996). Important insights can also be found in Irène Demczuk and Frank W. Remiggi, eds., *Sortir de l'ombre : histoires des communautés lesbienne et gaie de Montréal* (Montréal: VLB, 1998).

CHAPTER EIGHT:

The Language of Liberation: McGill français, Bill 63, and the Politics of Unilingualism

As it turned out, the true division of forces was not on lines of language or race; there were English and French on both sides. It was a division between oppressors and oppressed. One side has people, the other has money and guns.

-Mark Wilson, "Twilight of the gods," *McGill Daily (extra)*, 2 April 1969, 2.

Beginning in the early 1960s, ‘language’ dominated political debate in Montreal. From its earliest days, questions of language rights and of linguistic devaluation, of the cultural and imperial power of the English language, and of the necessity of building a new francophone culture of resistance, stood at the very centre of the Quebec liberation movement. In 1969 these questions exploded.¹ The first mass street demonstration held specifically over ‘language rights’² took place on 28 March 1969, marking the beginning of a new era in which linguistic struggles would be played out on the streets of Montreal. The protest began when a crowd of 15,000 protestors carrying placards reading ‘McGill aux Québécois!’, ‘McGill aux travailleurs’, ‘Vallières-Gagnon innocents!’ began marching west towards Montreal’s most prestigious English-language university. In the heated political atmosphere of 1969, McGill, standing high on Mont Royal and dominating the city’s urban landscape, became an egregious symbol of capitalism and imperial domination. In the months leading up to the demonstration, radicals had demanded that the university shed its colonial identity by becoming a French-language institution serving the province’s working class. Their arguments were not met with success, and so they forged ahead with plans for the demonstration.

Leading the march were two figures who had become prominent personalities in the provincial media: recently-fired McGill professor Stanley Gray and renowned nationalist leader Raymond Lemieux. The city’s municipal authorities feared for the worst; 2,707 security officers were deployed, hundreds of police were camped inside McGill, and many more were waiting in full riot gear at the Montreal headquarters of the provincial police, the city police, and the RCMP. The covers of utility holes on

¹ Pierre Godin refers to the language question of the period as a “poudrière linguistique”. See Pierre Godin, *La poudrière linguistique* (Montréal: Boréal, 1990).

² As I hope to demonstrate in this chapter, questions and debates over language in the late 1960s were about far more than just language. ‘Language’ became a lightning rod which focused and gave coherence to debates about cultural and economic power.

the streets around McGill were welded in place, and, during the demonstration, the crowd was circled by police helicopters and watched from rooftops. As the protestors reached the front entrance of the university, a group of counter-demonstrators yelled insults and sang 'God Save the Queen.' By 10:30 p.m., the riot squad had already divided the crowd into three and, although many scuffles and arguments broke out, the protesters never did succeed in 'taking' McGill. A few fires burnt throughout the evening but, by midnight, 'Opération McGill français' had come to its anti-climactic end.³

The McGill français movement occupies a strange place in the history of the Quiet Revolution, and in popular memory more generally. Few historians have studied the movement, and it is often assumed to be just one more '60s' riot, similar to the 1968 Saint Jean Baptiste riot that preceded it or the 1971 *La Presse* riot that came after. Marc Levine argues that the march acted as merely one more example of a linguistically motivated disturbance,⁴ and Eric Bédard writes that the movement was of little importance and had little impact.⁵ While it is true that there were larger events and more violent confrontations in the 1960s, McGill français represented a decisive turning point in the development of the Quebec liberation movement. It was the first of a series of mass demonstrations which – triggered by debates over the relationship between language and education in the province – had messages and programs which went much further than merely demanding language 'rights.' They made the radical claim that linguistic and cultural deprivation could only be reversed

³ "Montreal's Diagram for Defence," *Canadian Magazine* 1969, 2. "Hitting a sore spot," *McGill Daily (extra)*, 2 April 1969, 4. "L'opération McGill coûtera aux contribuables de \$50,000 à \$100,000," *Le Devoir*, 31 mars 1969, 1. Peter Allnutt and Robert Chodos, "Quebec: Into the Streets," *Radical America* 6, no. 5 (September-October 1972): 43. François Barbeau, Jean-Claude Leclerc and Normand Lépine, "L'opération McGill," *Le Devoir*, 29 mars 1969, 1-2.

⁴ Marc V. Levine, *The Reconquest of Montreal: Language Policy and Social Change in a Bilingual City* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990), 76-77.

⁵ Éric Bédard, "McGill français: un contexte de fébrilité étudiante et nationaliste," *Bulletin d'histoire politique* 9, no. 1 (automne 2000): 148-52.

if the root problems of capitalism and imperialism were opposed in their totality. Or, to put it another way, if an alternative North American society based on social justice and human dignity was to be built, the cultural power of the English language would need to be opposed.

The question of language rights does not, of course, belong solely to the left. The defence of the French language, and the fear of assimilation and cultural devaluation, have been constant themes throughout Quebec history. But the defence of linguistic rights becomes a left question when the devaluation of language is linked to larger analyses of capitalism and colonialism, and when the remedies to such problems are seen to be a radical reshaping of social relations in general. *Opération McGill français*, planned and organized by the left, played a decisive role in articulating and popularizing a leftist interpretation of language rights, an interpretation which could appeal to all those concerned with social justice, regardless of an individual's particular linguistic background. As the fight for the French language became a rallying cry for a wide variety of radicals at the end of the 1960s, previously separate movements and organizations began coming together in a common cause. On the crowded Montreal streets on 28 March, the previously separate categories of 'students' and 'workers,' and of 'francophone' and 'anglophone' radicals, began to come undone. In this chapter I will argue, first by looking at the *McGill français* movement and then by exploring the massive street protests in the fall of 1969 over the province's proposed language legislation (Bill 63), that the linguistic explosions were characterized by a radical mixing of people and ideas, of issues and analyses, and by the forging of new coalitions which defy the simplistic classifications in which they have so often been understood. Out of the street protests and political debates, moreover, emerged a comprehensive leftist

analysis of linguistic devaluation, one which placed conceptions of language firmly within a political economy of empire.

Origins and Explanations of the ‘Language Question’

The struggle for the defence of the French language has a long history in Quebec. Various organizations such as the *Société du bon parler français*, the *Comité permanent de la survivance française* (which later became the *Conseil de la vie française*) and nationalist organizations such as the *Ligue d’Action nationale* and, most importantly, the *Société Saint-Jean Baptiste*, promoted the use of the French language in business names, labels, and signs, and steadily worked to defend French-Canadian cultural rights more generally. In the late 1950s a major conflict broke out over the new name for a Canadian National Railways (CNR) hotel in Montreal. Nationalists hoped for ‘Château Maisonneuve,’ but the CNR, reflecting the insensitivity which characterized English-Canadian elites, held firm to its idea: ‘The Queen Elizabeth.’ In 1962 Donald Gordon, president of the CNR, did not help matters by declaring that, while it was true that not one single senior post in the organization was occupied by a French Canadian, the absence was due to the simple fact that none was sufficiently qualified. Riots broke out, Gordon was burned in effigy, and linguistic tensions grew to new heights. Throughout the 1960s, political parties in Quebec began attaching a new priority to language. The RIN had long demanded that French be declared the sole official language in Quebec and, in its official 1966 election platform, the Quebec Liberal Party made the proposal that French should be the language ‘with priority’ in the province.⁶

⁶ William D. Coleman, "The Class Bases of Language Policy in Quebec, 1949-1975," *Studies in Political Economy*, no. 3 (Spring 1980): 97.

All throughout the 1960s, of course, the politicization of language motivated much political activity and critical reflection. The radical authors and writers of the Quebec liberation movement had denounced in no uncertain terms the cultural and economic power of the English language. They had spoken eloquently about the need for francophones to build and create a culture of resistance, and had attempted to valorize the spoken French of the Quebec working class. Radicals all agreed that French in Quebec was, as the famed 1965 *Parti Pris* / MLP manifesto put it, a “decomposing language.”⁷ The manifesto continued by arguing that, at the cultural level, “there is much to do to protect national culture: the creation of a Quebec press agency and a Quebec film board, measures to protect national art and literature, aid to French-language libraries.” But the most important measure, the precondition for all of these different endeavours, was the establishment of “French unilingualism: that is to say that French be recognized, at all levels, as the only official language of Quebec.”⁸

Many authors have sought to uncover the reasons for the explosion of linguistic nationalism at the end of the 1960s, and for the provincial government’s decision to begin legislating in the sphere of language rights. Historians have written about the rise of a new middle class, and have argued that, as Quebec became both more modern and secular, language became the main mark of distinction between Quebec and the rest of North America.⁹ Others have attempted to demonstrate that, as the language question had the possibility of focusing and orienting critiques of

⁷ Le Mouvement de Libération Populaire et la revue *Parti Pris*, “Manifeste 1965-1966,” *Parti Pris* 3, no. 1-2 (août-septembre 1965): 17. “langue en décomposition.”

⁸ Ibid.: 26-27. “il y a beaucoup à faire pour protéger la culture nationale: création d’une agence de presse québécoise, d’un office du film québécois, mesures d’aide et de protection aux arts et à la littérature nationale, d’aide aux librairies français”; “l’unilinguisme français: c’est-à-dire que le français soit reconnu comme la seule langue officielle du Québec, à tous les niveaux.”

⁹ Variations on this argument can be found in Ramsay Cook, *Watching Quebec: Selected Essays* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s Press, 2005), 30; Richard Jones, “Politics and the Reinforcement of the French Language in Canada and Quebec, 1960-1986,” in *Quebec Since 1945*, ed. Michael D. Behiels (Toronto: Copp Clark Pitman Ltd, 1987), 223-40.

capitalism, the language policies enacted by the Quebec government served specific legitimating purposes within the capitalist system.¹⁰ These various explanations certainly contain many elements of truth. Yet, until recently, few authors have dealt explicitly with the intellectual arguments which were made in defence of the French language generally, and of 'unilingualism' specifically.

In this respect, the works of Karim Larose have significantly added to our understanding of this often misunderstood concept. For Larose, the idea of unilingualism – the idea that French should be the one official language of Quebec – first emerged at the end of the 1950s as a response to federal initiatives of bilingualism. When bilingualism was promoted between two unequal partners, the argument went, the stronger language would emerge triumphant, pushing the weaker one to the sidelines of history.¹¹ Unilingualism therefore became an important concern for francophone intellectuals throughout the decade as they sought to promote and reinvent a distinctly francophone North American culture.¹² While Larose's work is extremely important in adding depth to our understanding of the idea of unilingualism, because he operates solely on an intellectual level and deals exclusively with francophone writers, he cannot do justice to the relationship between intellectual ideas, street politics, the city, and resistance. In his 450 page book devoted to the idea of French unilingualism, for example, he spares only one sentence for the McGill français movement. It was on the streets below McGill, however, where the radical fusing of language debates and the left, of students and workers, and

¹⁰ See Coleman, "The Class Bases of Language Policy in Quebec, 1949-1975," 93-117.

¹¹ Karim Larose, "L'émergence du projet d'unilinguisme. Archéologie de la question linguistique québécoise," *Globe. Revue internationale d'études québécoises* 7, no. 2, 2004): 181-84.

¹² For studies on the question of unilingualism, see Guy Bouthillier, "Aux origines de la planification linguistique québécoise," in *L'État et la planification linguistique II. Études de cas particuliers*, ed. André Martin (Québec: Éditeur officiel du Québec, 1981), 7-22; Alain Combres, "La question linguistique et les partis politiques québécois (1960-1990)" (thèse de doctorat, Université de Paris I, Panthéon-Sorbonne, 1996).

of francophone and anglophone radicals, first began. By ignoring Opération McGill, Larose, despite his important and nuanced treatment of francophone intellectuals, offers no analysis of the many anglophone writers who not only advocated unilingualism, but who developed some of the most influential interpretations of the interrelated nature of language, capitalism, and imperialism.¹³

The McGill français movement did not emerge out of nowhere. Rather, it must be understood within the context of the growing tensions over language and education which had been brewing for some time in the Montreal suburb of Saint-Léonard.

Language and Schooling in 1960s Quebec

The immediate origins of the linguistic crises of 1969 go back to November 1967, when the Catholic School Board in the Montreal neighbourhood of Saint-Léonard – situated between downtown and the industrial east end – decided that, for the children of immigrants living under its jurisdiction, French would be the exclusive language of instruction. Low housing costs had drawn many lower middle-class families to the new suburb and, by the end of the decade, the neighbourhood was made up of a majority (60%) of individuals of French-Canadian origin, with a significant minority (30%) of people of Italian descent. Immigrants to Quebec in the post-war period, after taking one look around them and seeing that power and wealth resided in anglophone Montreal, generally decided to have their children educated in English. By 1957, according to Michael Behiels, “nearly 75 per cent of all immigrant children were enrolled in English-language schools.”¹⁴ In Saint-Léonard specifically, before 1967 the Catholic school board had been offering bilingual schools for Italian

¹³ Karim Larose, *La langue de papier. Spéculations linguistiques au Québec* (Montréal: Les Presses de l'Université de Montréal, 2004).

¹⁴ Michael D. Behiels, *Quebec and the Question of Immigration: From Ethnocentrism to Ethnic Pluralism, 1900-1985, Canada's ethnic groups* (Ottawa: Canadian Historical Association, 1991), 15.

children, and parents reacted angrily to the new restrictions against English schooling. In April 1968, the school board, unprepared for the backlash that its decision elicited, decided to delay the implementation of the new policy by one year. But it was too late; Saint-Léonard had already become a symbol in a growing linguistic battle, and a new militant organization, the Mouvement pour l'Intégration Scolaire (MIS), had been formed to defend French-language schooling rights in the district and throughout the province.¹⁵

Before long, the MIS, led by Saint-Léonard architect Raymond Lemieux, an American of French-Canadian origin who had returned to Quebec and learned French,¹⁶ had a membership of over 3,000 and an increasingly large public profile. Throughout the late 1960s, the MIS became closely allied with other left-nationalist groups, deployed shock-troops to demonstrations, and, echoing Che Guevara, outlined its goal of creating “10, 20, 50 St. Léonard crises.”¹⁷ In the Saint-Léonard Catholic school board election of June 1968, the MIS presented a slate of candidates and, after winning a resounding victory, declared that French would be the only language of instruction in all schools which fell under the board's jurisdiction. With linguistic tensions reaching a fevered pitch, Premier Jean-Jacques Bertrand announced, in November 1968, his plans to introduce legislation that would protect English-language schooling rights from the power of local school boards. ‘Bill 85’ stated that, while French would be the ‘priority’ language of the province, all parents would have the right to choose whether their children would be instructed in either French or English.¹⁸ While Quebec's elected politicians were scrambling to contain the

¹⁵ Levine, *The Reconquest of Montreal*, 65-68.

¹⁶ See Dean Louder, book review of *The Reconquest of Montreal* in *Canadian Journal of Political Science / Revue canadienne de science politique* 24, no. 3 (September 1991).

¹⁷ See in Levine, *The Reconquest of Montreal*, 69.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 68-69, 73-74.

growing crisis in the official halls of the National Assembly, however, linguistic unrest had already begun spilling out into the streets.

If the language of elementary schools had sparked the crisis of 1967, in the fall of 1968 it was the state of post-secondary education which ignited a new but closely related dispute. In 1967 the Union Nationale government opened the first seven CEGEPs – new junior colleges which would replace the province's antiquated classical college system – and in September 1968 16 more CEGEPs were created. But by October 1968, as word spread that a majority of CEGEP graduates would not be able to find university placements the following year, the new system became paralyzed by a devastating series of student strikes and occupations. Before long, 10,000 students, having watched students and workers in France bring their country to a standstill just months earlier, took to the streets demanding less repressive education, money to be able to attend university, more opportunities to use their skills once they graduated and, most importantly, a new French language university in the city (while both McGill and Sir George Williams served the city's smaller English-speaking community, Montreal's only French-language university was the Université de Montréal).¹⁹

It did not take long for resentment over the inadequacy of the French-language education system to be directed against the privileges and grandeur of McGill. On 21 October 1968, ten thousand students marched through the McGill campus chanting slogans of 'étudiants-ouvriers,' and proceeded to make their way to the Université de Montréal to hear speeches by student leaders.²⁰ And then, on 3 December 1968, activists close to the MIS stormed McGill campus and proceeded to occupy the school's computer data centre. The occupation – which took everyone by surprise –

¹⁹ Allnutt and Chodos, "Quebec: Into the Streets," 39; Nick Auf der Maur, "'Operation McGill' viewed from inside," *McGill Reporter*, 31 March 1969, 2.

²⁰ Robert Chodos, "Désormais," *McGill Daily*, 23 October 1968, 5.

was meant as a form of protest against Jean-Jacques Bertrand's planned law to guarantee English-language schooling rights in the province. Principal Locke Robertson called in the police, and the riot squad stormed the building at 1:00 am. The 11 students had enough provisions to stay for a week, but their internal barricade of a door which opened to the exterior did little to protect them, and the police had no trouble in clearing them out.²¹ Although the occupation was a failure, it, along with the earlier CEGEP strike, brought Quebec politics directly onto the campus of McGill and to the attention of McGill's student radicals.

Before the 1968-1969 school year, student politics at McGill comprised the same mixture of local issues and universal causes which were captivating the imaginations of students across North America and Europe.²² McGill radicals advocated the transformation of the school into a 'critical university' organically connected to the needs and aspirations of the majority of citizens. Rather than fostering a critical consciousness, the university, it was argued, moulded students to the demands of capitalist society, creating the functionaries and technicians of exploitation. The task for radicals was therefore to grab hold of the university machine, bring the vast forces of modernity under democratic control, unite theory and practice, and put the university to the service of 'the people.'²³ More than simply rethinking the educational system, the idea of the 'critical university' was an attempt by student radicals to ally themselves with broader movements of social change.²⁴ Many student activists were acutely aware of their relatively privileged position at the very heart of Quebec society. But it was not until the 1968-1969 school year – when

²¹ "McGill ne déposerait pas de plainte contre ses onze 'occupants' francophones," *Le Devoir*, 5 décembre 1968, 3.

²² For an overview of student activism at McGill throughout the 1960s, see Peggy Sheppard, "The Relationship Between Student Activism and Change in the University: With Particular Reference to McGill University in the 1960s" (M.A., McGill University, 1989).

²³ Stan Gray, "For a critical university," *McGill Daily*, 24 October 1968, 4.

²⁴ Interview with Stan Gray, June 10, 2005, Hamilton.

McGill itself became the object of unrelenting attacks and denunciations – that many of them fully entered into the ranks of a city-wide movement of social upheaval.²⁵

In September 1968, the atmosphere at McGill – like that at universities around the world – was explosive. Only a few months earlier, campuses across France had erupted as students, who were quickly joined by workers, nearly succeeded in toppling the French government. Students at New York's Columbia University had staged an important occupation before being brutally expelled by police, and other campuses throughout North America were undergoing varying mixtures of revolt and repression. McGill's Radical Student Alliance (RSA) was doing its best to ensure that this insurrectionary energy would fuel student politics on campus. After fierce debate, the RSA even came to support Quebec independence, arguing that Quebec sovereignty could be likened to the efforts of Third World nations to free themselves from the grip of colonialism.²⁶ But of all the different groups, movements, publications, and personalities that emerged on McGill campus at the end of the 1960s, it was Stanley Gray – a young lecturer in the Department of Political Science – who captured the most attention, caused the most controversy, and became the undeniable intellectual leader of a new group of students who would put Quebec at the very centre of their political ideology. Gray had grown up in Montreal's Jewish ghetto of Mile End, and his father had been a member of the Communist Party of Canada. No stranger to the prejudices of English-speaking Montreal, Gray nonetheless enrolled at McGill in the early 1960s, where he became active in the Combined Universities Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament. After earning his D.

²⁵ Robert Lantos, "The Rise of the Left at McGill," *Together*, 25 February 1970, 5.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

Phil. at Oxford, Gray returned to McGill in the fall of 1967, and would soon be at the very centre of the greatest controversy that the university had ever witnessed.²⁷

September 1968 also marked an important moment of radicalization for the *McGill Daily*, a publication which not only acted as the most important critical voice at the university, but which also had an important influence over Montreal's English-speaking activists more generally. In the fall of 1968, with Mark Starowicz taking over as editor, the *Daily* began critically to assess McGill's role in Quebec society. When John Ross Bradfield, Chairman of the Board and Chief Executive of Noranda Mines, received an honorary doctorate from McGill, for example, Starowicz lambasted both the company and McGill. Contrary to what the university claimed, Starowicz argued, the event made it clear that the university does "take political stands."²⁸ And it was therefore the task of student radicals to take political stands of their own, demanding a democratization of both the university and of the larger society of which they were a part. Student activists at McGill – a school which seemed, in the eyes of many, to be an isolated bastion of anglophone privilege – had come, by the fall of 1968, to believe that a democratization of society in general implied a radical questioning of both themselves and their institution. Throughout the coming school year, the *Daily* would become the chief organ of anglophone radicals who had not only decisively joined the ranks of the Quebec liberation movement, but who had also become some of the most important advocates of socialist decolonization. As students set aside their privileges, both as students and as anglophones, a new coalition began to emerge, one which was not based on rational and calculated self-interest.

²⁷ Stan Gray, "Stan Gray: The Greatest Canadian ... Shit-Disturber," *Canadian Dimension* 38, no. 6 (December 2004): 12-13. Interview with Stan Gray, June 10, 2005, Hamilton, Ontario.

²⁸ Mark Starowicz, "Why was this Man Honoured?," *McGill Daily*, 10 October 1968, 5.

McGill français and the Crisis of Functionalism

What shocked the English Canadians was the painful realization that it is no longer possible to isolate labour problems, the educational system, or language questions – that these are all being attacked together.²⁹

Before, workers distrusted students, because they knew that students would eventually be those who exploited them. But all that is rapidly becoming outdated.³⁰

Opération McGill was not just one more large street demonstration of the late 1960s. It acted as a challenge to the functionalist logic of high modernism. It defied the logic fuelling the reformist liberalism of the Quiet Revolution which, as Léandre Bergeron pointed out, dictated that each person had an assigned position within the social system, “workers at work, welfare people at home, bourgeois in their beautiful clean districts, students at their studies.”³¹ The months leading up to the march on McGill represented a crucially important moment for the Montreal left, as previously separate movements and organizations began joining together. In this sense, the lead-up to the McGill français movement shared many characteristics with other revolts taking place around the world, and with France’s May ’68 in particular. According to Kristin Ross, May ’68 can be seen as a “crisis in functionalism,” as a time when the movement “took the form of political experiments in *declassification*, in disrupting the natural ‘givenness’ of places.”³² In the union of intellectual and worker rebellions, Ross argues, lay “the verification of equality not as any objective of action, but as something that is part and parcel of action, something that emerges in the

²⁹ Allnutt and Chodos, “Quebec: Into the Streets,” 30.

³⁰ “Can Quebec Win True Independence? An Interview with François Bachand,” *McGill Daily (Review)*, 31 January 1969, 3.

³¹ Léandre Bergeron, *The History of Quebec: A Patriot's Handbook*, Updated ed. (Toronto: NC Press, 1971), 219.

³² Kristin Ross, *May '68 and its Afterlives* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 25.

struggle and is lived and declared as such.”³³ In a similar way, in the first months of 1969, students in Montreal were no longer defending only student rights.

Anglophones had joined the opposition to the cultural and economic power of the English language, and workers took their demands outside of the workplace, to the front gates of the bourgeois university. Issues and movements mixed together, causing a breakdown in many of the divisions which had previously separated movements, causes, organizations, and people.

While it is true that, in the years immediately preceding McGill français, workers and students had sometimes joined together in demonstrations and on picket lines, it was only in the months leading up to the march on McGill that the logic which kept various movements separate began to fully unravel, and that a wide coalition began emerging in opposition to the cultural and economic power of empire. It is not difficult to see why McGill became a lightning rod channelling so much anger and frustration. It had long symbolized two different imperial systems superimposed upon each other. Having its roots in nineteenth century British colonialism, by the 1960s McGill had become an institution which, dominated by American capital, trained the future managers and engineers who would go on to work for the American companies operating in Quebec. The school had therefore come to symbolize much more than ‘anglophone’ rights; it became perceived as a symbol of both the privileges of settler colonialism and of the technocratic and inhuman nature of American imperialism. As one newspaper argued, McGill’s role in the hierarchy of exploitation should be no surprise given that James McGill himself

³³ Ibid., 74.

“exploited French Canadians and Indians, owned Black slaves, and accumulated a massive fortune at the end of the 18th century.”³⁴

The battle over McGill was not only about schooling rights, but it was also a fight concerning foreign control of the economy and public space in the city. Rather than merely writing political tracts from a distance, the protesters took their grievances over the state of Quebec society to the heart of its most venerable and well-respected institution. On the Monday following McGill français, an article in *Le Devoir* openly mused about the necessity of limiting protests to certain areas of the city.³⁵ And in the period leading up to the march on McGill, Montreal police finalized their plans to prevent marchers from coming onto the McGill campus and to make it extremely difficult for protesters to gather anywhere near the university. According to Don Mitchell, social justice and rights to urban space “are not determined in the abstract, but rather in practice.”³⁶ In this sense, the conflict over McGill was, at least to some extent, a conflict over who owned and controlled Montreal. Protesters denounced the fact that McGill remained isolated from the interests of the vast majority of Quebec citizens. To protest anywhere else would have merely reinforced McGill’s lack of accountability to the Quebec people. The marchers wanted to build a different type of society, one in which human interests would take precedence over profit, and in which the cultural and linguistic domination of the exploiter would be replaced by popular self-government.

³⁴ UQAM, Charles Gagnon fonds, 124p-202a/49, *Opération Libération*, newspaper n.d. “exploitait les Canadiens français et les Indiens, possédait des esclaves noirs, et accumulait une immense fortune à la fin du 18^{ième} siècle.”

³⁵ Vincent Prince, “Quelques réflexions sur la manifestation de vendredi soir à l’université McGill,” *Le Devoir*, 31 mars 1969, 4.

³⁶ Don Mitchell, *The Right to the City: Social Justice and the Fight for Public Space* (New York: The Guilford Press, 2003), 6.

The first organizational meetings for the McGill français movement, bringing together anglophone radicals and the largely francophone organizations of the Quebec liberation movement – including CEGEP action committees, the Comité Indépendance-Socialisme, and the Front de Libération Populaire – began in the aftermath of the MIS demonstration on McGill campus in the fall of 1968.³⁷ Francophone radicals knew that challenging the hegemony and dominance of McGill allowed them to attack many symbols at once: the legacy of colonialism, the injustices of capitalism, the present-day dominance of the English language, anglophone control over the Quebec economy, and the inadequacy of the francophone education system. At the same time, McGill's anglophone radicals had come to see that, if they wanted to be relevant to the larger society in which they lived, they would need to join forces with the main francophone groups advocating Quebec liberation.³⁸ Before long the coalition had received the support of the Mouvement de Libération du Taxi, citizens' and workers' committees, the Comité Vallières-Gagnon, the Chevaliers de l'indépendance, and, perhaps most importantly of all, the Montreal Central Council of the CSN (representing the CSN's 65,000 Montreal workers).³⁹

From its origins as a confessional Catholic union, the CSN had always paid special attention to the French language. Although the initial motivations in establishing the union centred around questions of religion rather than language, from 1921 until 1969 the union consistently passed resolutions advocating the defence of

³⁷ "Hitting a sore spot," 4.

³⁸ Interview with Stan Gray, June 10, 2005, Hamilton.

³⁹ Allnutt and Chodos, "Quebec: Into the Streets," 42. Also, see Louis Fournier, *FLQ: Histoire d'un mouvement clandestin* (Outremont: Lanctôt Éditeur, 1998), 203. The Central Council voted to support the protest on the 28th, denounced McGill and invited all workers to take part in the march on the university. It also pledged \$100 to the organization that published *Bienvenue à McGill*. In the explosive protest that took place in the evening of 28 March, many workers of various affiliations took the advice of the Montreal Central Council and attended. ACSN, CCSNM fonds, Congrès 1969, Fernand Foisy, "Rapport du secrétaire – décisions du comité exécutif," 7, 26.

French language rights in a bilingual Canada.⁴⁰ But upholding Canadian bilingualism is a far cry from supporting French unilingualism. By the late 1960s, the question of French unilingualism had been explicitly placed in the larger framework of struggles over power and democracy in Quebec, and it quickly became a central element in the decolonization struggle. As I will recount in more detail in the following chapter, the election of Michel Chartrand to the presidency of the Montreal Central Council of the CSN at the end of 1968 marked the beginning of a new era of radicalism in the ranks of Quebec labour. It did not take long for Chartrand and the Montreal Central Council to engage in the wider world of the Montreal left. Opération McGill was the Central Council's first major street demonstration of the late 1960s; the protest, acting as a major turning point for the left, brought the organization to very centre of the buzzing world of Montreal radicalism.

In the weeks leading up to the march on McGill, Chartrand invited Gray to speak before a General Assembly of the Central Council. In an explosive hall packed with workers, Gray outlined the case against McGill, the destructive power of imperialism, and the need for decolonization. And he watched as huge piles of the newspaper *Bienvenue à McGill* were devoured by the anxious audience, eager to get their hands on the intellectual arguments and the concrete figures upon which the movement was based. In the period leading up to the protest, Gray, along with Michel Chartrand and Raymond Lemieux, even toured the province, being greeted by enthusiastic crowds everywhere that they went.⁴¹ On 26 March 1969, just two days before the protest, a 'teach-in' held in the ballroom of the University Centre featured

⁴⁰ Jacques Rouillard, *Histoire du syndicalisme au Québec. Deux siècles d'histoire* (Montréal: Boréal express, 2004), 12-15.

⁴¹ Interview with Stan Gray, June 10, 2005, Hamilton. Also, see Gray, "Stan Gray: The Greatest Canadian ... Shit-Disturber," 14.

talks by, among others, Léandre Bergeron, Michel Chartrand, Raymond Lemieux, and, of course, Stanley Gray.⁴²

As the growing coalition began making its preparations for its march on McGill, the university administration began to panic, and Gray became the primary target of repression. On 11 February 1969, the same day as the Sir George Williams Affair, Gray was given notice that he was being fired from his job at the university. Although the ostensible reason for his dismissal was his role in the disruption of a Board of Governors' meeting, it was common knowledge that the real reason lay in Gray's effort to bring student activism off the McGill campus and into the very centre of a larger revolutionary upsurge which was sweeping the city.⁴³ Gray's termination hearings demonstrated both the new coalitions and the new lines of opposition which were being drawn. While some members of Montreal's English-speaking establishment wondered what McGill had been doing in hiring "such a dirty, unkempt creature" in the first place,⁴⁴ the CSN assigned two of its staff lawyers, Jacques Desmarais and Robert Burns, to Gray's defence, both of whom refused to speak English at the hearings.⁴⁵ Michel Chartrand issued a statement supporting Gray, declaring that, from "its behavior, it is becoming simpler to visualize McGill as some university in South Africa."⁴⁶

⁴² MUA, Opération McGill, RG2 c401. Flyer for 'teach in' at McGill held 26 March 1969, n.d.

⁴³ Marlene Dixon, *Things Which are Done in Secret* (Montréal: Black Rose Books, 1976), 50. The *McGill Daily*, of course, immediately rallied to his defense. See, for example, Robert Chodos and Mark Starowicz, "Don't Put Out the Fire - Stop the Alarm," *McGill Daily*, 13 February 1969, 4.

⁴⁴ MUA, Opération McGill fonds, RG2 c401, Message left by Mrs. Roschon for Rocke Robertson, 10 March 1969.

⁴⁵ "Gray Outlines Defence," *McGill Daily (extra)*, 2 April 1969, 3.

⁴⁶ Michel Chartrand, "Chartrand Statement," *McGill Daily*, 3 March 1969, 3. The termination of Gray's contract was a point of much controversy in the university community. Roughly 100 McGill faculty members signed an open letter denouncing the university and its proceedings. Revealingly, F.R. Scott, former dean of law at the university and one of the most well-known leftists in the country, openly rejected the arguments of the 100 faculty members who had come to Gray's defence. Scott maintained that the administration did not object "to Mr. Gray's views," but fired him because he had disturbed an official university meeting. Scott's unquestioned acceptance of the university's reasoning, however, is contradicted by the principal's private correspondence. Speaking about Gray's termination, James Campbell, a member of the Board of Governors, wrote to Principal Robertson

The merging of previously separate movements, groups, and individuals caused an unprecedented degree of fear among Montreal's English-speaking establishment. In the climate of hysteria of the early months of 1969, the McGill administration had informers relaying information directly to the principal about the activities of the MIS, and about Gray's involvement with the organization.⁴⁷ The McGill administration spoke boldly about the coming "attack" on McGill by outside forces.⁴⁸ Famed neurosurgeon Wilder Penfield compared Gray to Hitler, and spoke of the allegedly fascist nature of radical student publications. For Penfield, while the 'extremists' wanted to destroy both the university and society in general, he remained confident that the "University, the State, and the Family of Man shall be preserved."⁴⁹ Another well-known McGill professor, Stanley Frost, spoke – weeks after the demonstration had taken place – of the "ignorant mob of adolescents" that marched on McGill. Seemingly unaware of the condescending nature of his remarks, Frost argued that if "McGill were to become a French institution, or even markedly bilingual, this would be a disaster for the Universités de Montréal et de Sherbrooke and for l'Université Laval, to say nothing of the Universités d'Ottawa et de Moncton."⁵⁰

concerning "the survival of our way of life." "I don't think that getting rid of this particular personality is going to cure our situation by any means," Robertson replied, "but it will be helpful. It is likely that he will still be around to haunt us, but at least he won't be a member of the University." See "McGill Teachers Question Administration's Handling of the Stanley Gray Issue," *The Montreal Star*, 27 February 1969; F. R. Scott, "Advocacy of the Right to Disrupt any Meeting Seen as the Basis of the McGill Teacher Dispute," *The Montreal Star*, 4 March 1969, 8. MUA, Opération McGill fonds, RG2 c401, James Campbell to Rocke Robertson, 19 August 1969. And for the reply, see MUA, Opération McGill fonds, RG2 c401, Rocke Robertson to James Campbell, 27 August 1969.

⁴⁷ See, for example: MUA, Opération McGill fonds, RG2 c401, Memo to Rocke Robertson, 13 March 1969.

⁴⁸ WRDA, Opération McGill fonds, "Shaw Calls for Support, Protection of McGill University." Information office, McGill University Press Release, 24 March 1969, 1.

⁴⁹ WRDA, Opération McGill fonds, Wilder Penfield, "Address to the Canadian Club, Montreal" 24 March 1969, 3-8, 16.

⁵⁰ MUA, Opération McGill fonds, RG2 c401, Stanley Frost, "A Truly Quebec University," 11 April 1969. Typed document.

Attacks on the protestors and the leaders of the movement did not, however, come from the English-speaking establishment alone. The organizers and sympathizers of the movement were routinely harassed by police, residences were put under surveillance, cars were followed, and arbitrary arrests were made. On 18 March, when returning from an assembly of the Montreal Central Council, the police arrested, among others, Mark Starowicz and Robert Chodos from the *McGill Daily*, Louis-Bernard Robitaille from *La Presse*, Stanley Gray, and an assorted group of activists that included CSN militants, members of the Mouvement de libération du taxi, a professor, an unemployed man, and a bureaucrat.⁵¹ In the week leading up to the protest, many of the main organizers even had to go underground to avoid police harassment.⁵² The movement received scorn from many of the city's mainstream nationalists, including the editorialists of the province's major newspapers. Claude Ryan, editor of *Le Devoir*, for example, argued that the English-speaking community in Quebec merited its own schools, not only because its numbers warranted them, but also because of its very long, distinguished, and honourable tradition.⁵³ For the movement's organizers, that the vast majority of French-speaking editorialists denounced the demonstration merely demonstrated "collusion between the 'vendus' Québécois and the colonialists and imperialists."⁵⁴ But it was not only the city's newspapers which kept their distance from the new radical movement. All of the

⁵¹ WRDA, Opération McGill fonds, "Organizers of Opération McGill français in Regards to Police Actions," 30 March 1969, 1. Fournier, *FLQ: Histoire d'un mouvement clandestin*, 203.

⁵² Gray, "Stan Gray: The Greatest Canadian ... Shit-Disturber," 14. One of the main organizers of the event, Mario Bachand, was arrested for an incident which occurred during an organizational meeting on 22 March. At the meeting Bachand intercepted the cameras of police officers who had infiltrated the meeting, and it was on this basis that he was later arrested and detained. He missed the demonstration and fled the country, flying to Paris, through Madrid, and finally to Havana. Michael McLoughlin, *Last Stop, Paris: The Assassination of Mario Bachand and the Death of the FLQ* (Toronto: Viking, 1998), 103-07.

⁵³ Claude Ryan, "Éditorial: McGill et son avenir," *Le Devoir*, 26 mars 1969.

⁵⁴ WRDA, Opération McGill fonds, "Organizers of Opération McGill français in Regards to Police Actions," 30 March 1969, 4. "la collusion entre les 'vendus' québécois et les colonialistes et impérialistes."

main political parties, including the newly formed Parti Québécois and its leader René Lévesque, distanced themselves from the protesters.⁵⁵ Even the Société Saint Jean Baptiste de Montréal, the traditional mouthpiece of French-Canadian nationalism, and an organization which was one of the most ardent defenders of linguistic rights, decided that it would have nothing to do with the protest.⁵⁶

The Language of Liberation: The Argument Against McGill

Why would a long-standing nationalist organization like the Société Saint Jean Baptiste de Montréal disassociate itself from the first mass demonstration in defence of the French language? And why would the newly-born PQ, a party which claimed to embody the popular energy of the province, not want to take part in this unprecedented opportunity to highlight the injustices which reigned in Quebec? The reason, of course, is that the coalition of forces which made up the McGill français movement had an entirely different project in mind than that of either of the two organizations.

In the middle of February 1969, the *McGill Daily* published Stanley Gray's "McGill and the Rape of Quebec," an article which, reprinted in publications throughout the province, played a central role in shaping the ideology of the movement as a whole. The article was crucially indebted to the language of Quebec decolonization, inheriting both the insights and the weakness of the larger movement. Gray's very title reveals his reliance on the heavily gendered language of decolonization which had been characteristic of the movement since its very beginning. Gray not only spoke of the 'Rape of Quebec,' but also of how "the

⁵⁵ Allnutt and Chodos, "Quebec: Into the Streets," 42.

⁵⁶ "La SSJB de Montréal se dissocie de la manifestation de vendredi prochain," *Le Devoir*, 26 mars 1969, Cahier 2.

university's academics act as the intellectual whores of the Establishment."⁵⁷ Gray was not alone in using gendered metaphors in his attempt to highlight power relations in the province. Mark Starowicz, for example, caricatured the administration's pronouncements in defence of the university as an attempt to pose "the spectre of McGill the innocent virgin standing naked before thousands of sexually depraved separatists."⁵⁸ By using gendered metaphors which represented women as either innocent and passive victims or as 'whores,' many of the movement's most important theoreticians worked not only to democratize and deconstruct systems of power and oppression, but also to construct new lines of exclusion.⁵⁹

But "McGill and the Rape of Quebec" does open up new ground; it attempts not only to think through the role of the university in the larger social system, but it also strives to expose the latent democratic possibilities which lie dormant in the university structure. The article begins with the premise that for the past 200 years Quebec has been thoroughly colonized, its natural resources owned by British and then American capital, and its people exploited by foreign elites (with the collusion of local leaders).⁶⁰ And there was perhaps no better symbol of this foreign domination, Gray argued, than McGill University. The McGill Board of Governors personified Quebec's ruling corporate elite, representing corporations which had "a relationship to Quebec similar to that of the United Fruit Company to Latin America banana republics – absentee owners of the economy, plundering the nation's natural resources and taking the profits out of the country."⁶¹ That Quebec's richest and most

⁵⁷ Gray, "For a critical university," 4. Stan Gray, "McGill and the Rape of Quebec - Part I," *McGill Daily*, 10 February 1969, 4-5.

⁵⁸ Mark Starowicz, "Terrorism in the press," *McGill Daily*, 2 April 1969, 6.

⁵⁹ It should be noted, however, that Gray would later admit that the critiques made by those involved in the women's liberation movement had a deep effect on him, and that he had come to learn of the inherent sexism of his earlier actions. See Gray, "Stan Gray: The Greatest Canadian ... Shit-Disturber."

⁶⁰ Gray, "McGill and the Rape of Quebec - Part I," 4.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

important institution functioned in English was not an accident of history: the English language had been imposed on Quebecers by “military conquest, political colonization and economic domination.” The fact of colonialism had ensured that the “two major contradictions operating within Quebec society – the class conflict pitting workers against the interests of private profit, and the national conflict pitting the nation on the bottom against the nation on top – are thus integrally related.” Echoing the simplistic Manichaeism reminiscent of the early FLQ, Gray argued that when workers went on strike against major corporations “the French are almost wholly on one side and the English almost wholly on the other.” In Quebec, there were two forms of exploitation – class and national – but these two different forms of domination were fused together, and McGill, Gray pointed out, was “on the wrong side of both.”⁶² As Quebec workers were oppressed on both national and economic bases, the struggle for democracy and freedom therefore could not be framed in the language of nationalism alone, but needed to be formulated in a Fanon-inspired language of national liberation.

Gray’s analysis of both Quebec society and of McGill’s role within it were taken up by student publications throughout the city, from the *McGill Daily* to the papers of many francophone CEGEPs. When, in March 1969, Maurice Roy of the Université de Montréal’s *Le Quartier Latin* telephoned Mark Starowicz to inquire into the *Daily*’s position on the upcoming demonstration, for example, he was both surprised and pleased that, while the *Daily* supported a French-language McGill, Starowicz made a point of indicating that “it was not merely a linguistic question: the editors of the *Daily* are demanding a socialization of McGill.” If it was a question “of creating a second ‘Université de Montréal,’” Starowicz was reported to have said,

⁶² Stan Gray, “McGill and Quebec, Part II,” *McGill Daily*, 12 February 1969.

they would no longer take part. The editors of the *Daily*, Roy wrote, “define themselves as indépendantistes and socialists, and are unable to disassociate the two concepts.”⁶³

The terms of opposition forged during the lead-up to the McGill français march were therefore not those of a strict or narrow nationalism; rather, they were those of a movement of national liberation based on socialist decolonization. Because of its function as a training centre for the managers of American capital, the CEGEP students at College Sainte-Marie in Montreal argued, “McGill has become the bastion of Canadian and American imperialism.” As the university was guilty of “the exploitation of thousands of Quebec workers and entire populations,” and formed an important part of the American military industrial complex, it became clear that the liberation of Quebec workers “passes through McGill.”⁶⁴ For J.-P. Dallaire of *Le Quartier Latin*, McGill had become the symbol of a “colonial minority,” and it was becoming more and more clear that the university was an obstacle to any progress of the Quebec people.⁶⁵ In a future independent and socialist Quebec, McGill would not only have to become a French-language institution, but it would have to totally revise its relationship with the population, overcoming its current relations of domination.⁶⁶

In a widely-circulated document signed by many of the groups involved in organizing Opération McGill⁶⁷ – a document which became somewhat of a manifesto

⁶³ Maurice Roy, “La gauche mcgilloise: 'pas une deuxième université,” *Le Quartier Latin*, 18 mars 1969, 5. “il ne s’agit pas là d’une question simplement linguistique: la rédaction du Daily demande la socialisation de McGill”; “de créer une deuxième ‘Université de Montréal’”; “se définissant comme indépendantiste et socialiste, ne saurait dissocier ces deux termes.”

⁶⁴ WRDA, Opération McGill fonds, “Who’s Who in that Two-Faced McGill?,” *Le sainte-marie: journal des étudiants du collège Sainte-Marie de Montreal* 14, no. 8 (24 mars 1969): 7. “McGill est devenue le bastion de l’impérialisme américain et canadien”; “l’exploitation des milliers de travailleurs québécois et de peuples entiers”; “passe par McGill.”

⁶⁵ J.-P. Dallaire, “McGill un autre St. Léonard?,” *Le Quartier Latin*, 18 mars 1969, 2. “une minorité colonisatrice.”

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ The signatories included the following organizations: Comité Indépendance-Socialisme; Comités d’action des CEGEPs: Ahuntsic (St-Ignace) Bois-de-Boulogne, De Mortagne, Edoouard-Montpetit,

for the movement⁶⁸ – the current troubles and inequities of the education system in Quebec were traced back to the Conquest of 1759. Because of the fortune of the English-speaking bourgeoisie, the wealth and quality of English-language universities sharply contrasted with that of their French-language counterparts, schools which reflected “the painful history of a defeated, conquered and dominated nation.” The statistics seemed to speak for themselves: although francophones made up 83% of Quebec society, of Quebec’s six universities, three were English. Anglophones comprised 17% of the population, but they occupied 42% of all university places and received 30% of Quebec government scholarships. McGill had a research budget equivalent to the budgets of the Université de Montréal and Laval combined, and its library, closed to the general public, had the best collection of Quebec literature available in the province. McGill’s tuition was \$200 higher than that of other universities and, to top it all off, the school regularly awarded honorary doctorates to Anglo-American financiers who were responsible for the exploitation of the Quebec people.⁶⁹

Of all the documents, papers, and flyers which were produced by the diverse elements of Opération McGill, the most important was the French-language newspaper *Bienvenue à McGill*. Originally conceived as a French edition of the

Maisonnette, Rosemont, Vieux Montréal (Arts Appliqués, Marie-Victorin, Ste-Marie); Comités Ouvriers: Rosemont, Ste-Marie; Comité d’action de l’U. de M. (Hec. Philosophie, Sciences sociales, Histoire, Lettres); Comité d’action école normale Ville-Marie; Front de Libération Populaire; Intellectuels ouvriers patriotes du Québec; McGill radical students alliance; Mouvement d’intégration scolaire; Mouvement pour l’unilinguisme français au Québec; Société nationale populaire; Université libre d’art quotidien; Union générale des étudiants du secondaire. The document was republished in various newspapers, but it was not reproduced in exact detail everywhere. In *Le sainte-marie*, the student newspaper for Montreal’s Sainte-Marie’s College, for example, the following uncompromising concluding paragraph was added: “Selon Albert Memmi, il y a deux réponses possibles pour le colonisé face à la violence de la situation coloniale: l’identification aux colonialistes ou la recherche d’une identité; donc... soumission ou révolte.” WRDA, Opération McGill fonds, “Whose Afraid of a French McGill?,” *Le sainte-marie: journal des étudiants du collège Sainte-Marie de Montreal*, 24 mars 1969, 2-3.

⁶⁸ See “Une douzaine d’organismes signent un manifeste sur l’opération McGill,” *Le Devoir*, 13 mars 1969, 3.

⁶⁹ WRDA, Opération McGill fonds, “Operation McGill” typed document. Montreal, March 1969, 2-6. “la pénible histoire d’une nation vaincue, conquise et dominée.”

McGill Daily,⁷⁰ the paper was funded by the ‘comités d’actions’ of a number of CEGEPs, and by the Montreal Central Council of the CSN. In the end, over 90,000 copies of the paper were printed and distributed in schools, factories, metro stations, and political meetings.⁷¹ The paper, more than any other document, spoke as the voice of the movement, outlining the reasons why students, workers, and activists needed to take to the streets in protest. McGill needed to be opposed, the paper argued, because it was the living symbol of the 200 years during which Quebec had been exploited by imperial powers.⁷² *Bienvenue à McGill* then went on to place Opération McGill at the forefront of the Quebec liberation movement. It reprinted Michèle Lalonde’s stinging poem ‘Speak White’ detailing the cultural and imperial power of the English language, a poem which drew direct links between Quebec liberation and the liberation of non-White peoples throughout the world. To demonstrate the international reach of the movement, the paper reprinted a letter of solidarity – framed in the radical humanist language of Fanon and Césaire – received from the German S.D.S.:

Today, in the context of international interdependence, international solidarity is not only a question of moral sympathy towards people who are struggling for their liberation. The victory of the Vietnamese is also our victory, the repression against movements in Quebec is also repression against us.

The S.D.S. movement has followed the development of an anti-imperialist consciousness in Quebec with much interest, sympathy, and solidarity. The National Bureau of the S.D.S. therefore expresses its total support of the struggle of the *Québécois* against Anglo-Saxon cultural imperialism.⁷³

⁷⁰ The McGill student council, which had originally agreed to provide the funding for the special edition of the paper, revised its decision, believing that the paper raised the possibility of inciting violence. "Des étudiants de McGill publient un journal en français," *Le Devoir*, 19 mars 1969, 16.

⁷¹ "Hitting a sore spot," 5. "Des étudiants de McGill publient un journal en français," 16. Fernand Foisy, "Rapport du secrétaire – décisions du comité exécutif", ACSN, CCSNM fonds, Congrès 1969, 7.

⁷² WRDA, Opération McGill fonds. "Message de solidarité avec la manifestation McGill," *Bienvenue à McGill: Journal publié par des étudiants de l'Université McGill appuyant la manifestation du 28 mars*. n.d.

⁷³ Ibid. "Aujourd’hui, dans un contexte d’interdépendance internationale, la solidarité internationale n’est pas seulement une question de sympathie morale envers les peuples qui luttent pour leur libération. La victoire des Vietnamiens est aussi notre victoire, la répression contre les mouvements du

In its attempt to reach a wide constituency of support, *Bienvenue à McGill* reached out to Quebec workers, printing a message by Michel Chartrand. Chartrand spoke about the need for a radical restructuring of Quebec's economy, and argued that if McGill were simply to become another French-language university, little would have changed. The university system itself needed to be radically transformed, democratized, and put to the service of the people. Chartrand's argument about the necessity of transforming the very nature of the university was also taken up by Gray who, more than just denouncing McGill, highlighted the enormous potential which the university possessed. If the university was democratized and put in the hands of the people, he argued, it could become "a centre of research and teaching which would help give the population the means of taking control of its own destiny." But if McGill did not change, did not democratize, "an increasing number of *Québécois* will perceive it as a threat to their self-realization, as an obstacle to their liberation."⁷⁴

The main spokespeople of Opération McGill placed the struggle firmly within global movements of national liberation, and they deeply opposed a narrow nationalism which would merely see a change in the functional language of the university. In the lead-up to the march on McGill, however, a tension began developing between those who hoped to situate the language question in the context of national liberation, and those who conceived the fight as a nationalist attempt for francophones to exercise their 'majority rights.' While the lines were often unclear,

Québec est une répression contre nous. Le mouvement S.D.S. a suivi avec intérêt, sympathie et solidarité le développement de la conscience anti-impérialiste au Québec. Le Bureau national du S.D.S. exprime donc son appui total à la lutte des Québécois contre l'impérialisme culturel anglo-saxon."

⁷⁴ WRDA, Opération McGill fonds. Stan Gray, "McGill: Option Anti-Quebec" *Bienvenue à McGill: Journal publié par des étudiants de l'Université McGill appuyant la manifestation du 28 mars*. n.d., 4-5. "un centre d'étude et de recherche qui contribuerait à amener le peuple à prendre le contrôle de son destin"; "un nombre croissant de Québécois la percevront comme une menace à leur épanouissement, comme un obstacle à leur libération."

and while the streets below McGill on the evening of 28 March witnessed a crowd advocating a complicated mélange of national and class politics, the vast majority of those who took part had preoccupations which focused at least as much on class as they did on language. The entire argument of the movement rested, after all, on the belief that language and class could not be untangled.

As the McGill français movement came and went, it focused an enormous amount of attention on the unequal status of Montreal's two language groups and on the power relations between them. An important consequence of the McGill français movement was the radicalization of a new generation of anglophone leftists who, after the event, would continue to defend the cause of Quebec decolonization. Stanley Gray became an important intellectual leader in the FLP, engaging in many of the various debates which took place within the organization.⁷⁵ And many of the radical writers from the *McGill Daily* went on to found *The Last Post*, an English-language political journal which sought to connect anglophone readers with the radical political movements taking place in Quebec. Hoping to be a Canadian version of *Ramparts*, *The Last Post*, from its original publication in October 1969 through the 1970s, provided the most reliable and informed news available in English on political developments in Quebec, from the October Crisis to the Common Front strike of 1972. The journal stands alone as the one major English-Canadian publication to be born directly out of the struggle for Quebec decolonization.⁷⁶

⁷⁵ Arrested during the October Crisis and detained without charge, Gray reflected upon his future in Quebec and, when released, moved to Hamilton to devote the rest of his life to city's labour movement. Gray, "Stan Gray: The Greatest Canadian ... Shit-Disturber," 15.

⁷⁶ Réналd Bourque, "L'esprit de Stan Gray n'est pas mort," *Le Quartier Latin*, 1 octobre 1969, 10. *Last Post* covered events in Quebec so well that the publication even received a note of congratulations from Charles Gagnon. "I had the chance to read most of the articles of your magazine (Dec 69)," Gagnon wrote, "and I want to tell you it interested me very much. I was particularly pleased by the one on 'Ford' and that on 'Quebec into the streets'. I consider the latter is a very penetrating resume of the most important events of Quebec 'revolution' for the last months. I hope your magazine will reach many Canadians and many Americans. The Quebec struggle must be known by every North American militant and become his own struggle, the same way as we in Quebec must assume the struggle of all

But Opération McGill was far from the year's last protest over the 'language question.' In the explosion of protests which were to erupt across the province in the fall of 1969, however, the political playing field would be much different. Although the left would be central to the larger upheaval, it would no longer play a hegemonic role. In other words, if the language of liberation remained French, the struggle for French did not necessarily imply liberation.

Bill 63, Decolonization, and the Ambiguity of Nationalism

Opération McGill français was a prelude for the major linguistic crisis which seized the province in the fall of 1969. All throughout 1969, the MIS/Ligue pour l'intégration scolaire (LIS)⁷⁷ organized boisterous public meetings and demonstrations to discuss and debate the language of schooling in Saint-Léonard, but the conflict reached new heights at the beginning of the school year of 1969. On 10 September, as the LIS decided to march through the neighbourhood demanding that the language of education be French, Italian demonstrators lined the roads yelling insults. Before long, a riot broke out, fifty people were arrested, 100 were injured and, for the first time since 1957, the Riot Act was read in Montreal.⁷⁸

progressive movements of our continent. I would say like M.L. King, 'I have a dream' ... Mine is that all progressive movements of North America cooperate narrowly. Otherwise our efforts would be senseless, unuseful. America will be a continent where everybody can live happily when every people (peuple) living on it, Indians, Black, Mexican, French, Anglo-Saxon..., can live as they please, cooperating among themselves. Imperialism is behind racism, no doubt. Racism is going to stay as long as imperialism will. In other words, Westmount and Saint-Henri cannot stay in good terms for long now. We cannot rewrite the history of this continent, but I hope we can try to shape a better future. I would be happy to read your magazine every month. Anyway, be sure I am going to make it known among my friends here in Montreal and abroad. Long live the Last Post!" Charles Gagnon, "Dear Last Post [Letter to the Editor]," *The Last Post* 1, no. 2 (February 1970): 50.

⁷⁷ On the 16 March 1969, the MIS held a meeting at which it changed its name to the Ligue pour l'intégration scolaire (LIS). The chair of the assembly, Pierre Jobin of Laval University, had difficulty maintaining quorum in the tumultuous assembly, where countless amendments, propositions, and counter-propositions were debated simultaneously in the chaotic room. François Barbeau, "Le MIS devient la Ligue pour l'intégration scolaire et adopte sa première constitution," *Le Devoir*, 17 mars 1969, 3.

⁷⁸ Levine, *The Reconquest of Montreal*, 78.

With linguistic tensions growing more pronounced by the day, Quebec's Union Nationale government realized that it would need to enter into the explosive debate. On 23 October 1969, Bertrand presented his new solution to the linguistic crisis, Bill 63. Many features of the Bill were intended to promote the French language; immigrants would be encouraged to learn French, an Office de la langue française would be established, and all graduates from Quebec schools would be expected to have a 'working knowledge' of the language. But these features of the Bill did not, and could not, ease the worries of Quebec nationalists and leftists. For the Bill contained one key provision: all parents in the province – francophones included – would be able to choose whether their children would be educated in either English or French.⁷⁹ By guaranteeing English-language schooling rights, the government was seen to be giving a privileged place to the language of the dominant class. Because it was economically unrealistic to expect immigrants to choose of their own accord a language which would ensure their economic marginalization, Bill 63 was seen by many as "one more step in the direction of the cultural genocide of the Quebec nation."⁸⁰

As soon as the Bill was presented, virtually all segments of the Montreal left were outraged. Labour unions, student groups, and extra-parliamentary organizations began moving into action. But unlike the lead-up to Opération McGill, this time protest would not come from the left alone. Both the PQ and the Société Saint-Jean Baptiste joined the ranks of opposition, and, on the first Saturday after Bertrand unveiled Bill 63, over 600 individuals representing a wide variety of groups gathered to form a common front in their struggle against Bill 63. Over 100 groups came

⁷⁹ Ibid., 79.

⁸⁰ WRDA, Stanley Gray fonds, Box 1, Stanley Gray, "The Struggle in Quebec – 1969." Speech delivered at the Year of the Barricade conference at Glendon College in Toronto on 25 October 1969, 11.

together to form the Front du Québec Français (FQF), and they decided that they would organize a week of protest to mobilize public opinion against the passing of the Bill.⁸¹ Within days the streets of Quebec were filled with angry protesters; large crowds quickly mobilised both in Montreal and across the province, forming the largest popular mobilisation since the conscription riots of the Second World War.

That the FQF took the lead in the mobilisation against Bill 63 is highly significant. The FQF's main spokesperson was François-Albert Angers, president of the Société Saint Jean Baptiste de Montréal. Angers declared that the struggle against Bill 63 was a new Battle of the Plains of Abraham, and he affirmed that Quebec premier Jean-Jacques Bertrand was a new General Wolfe. By giving English an equal legal status to French, he argued, the National Assembly was *de facto* legislating anglophone superiority. From its very beginnings, the FQF outlined its demands in purely linguistic rather than social and economic terms. As a solution to the language problem, the FQF demanded that the government present the population with a comprehensive policy on the French language and that it proclaim French unilingualism at all levels.⁸² True, many groups involved in the protests situated the struggle in far larger terms than merely the defence of language rights, and saw the protests as mass desire for social change. But it was the FQF which succeeded, especially after the first week of protests, in becoming the main voice of opposition to Bill 63.

The FQF – bringing together groups from both the right and the left – spoke in a language of nationalism which blurred class distinctions and relations of economic power. There is perhaps no better expression of this nationalism than François-

⁸¹ Gilles Provost, "Un Front commun du 'Québec français' organise la résistance contre le bill 63," *Le Devoir*, 27 octobre 1969, 1. For details on the functioning of the FQF, see Denis Turcotte, *La culture politique du Mouvement Québec Français* (Québec: Centre international de recherche sur le bilinguisme, 1976), 10-12.

⁸² Provost, "Un Front commun du 'Québec français' organise la résistance contre le bill 63," 1-2.

Albert Angers himself, speaking, ironically, before the Montreal Central Council of the CSN. Appealing to the CSN workers as the “elite of the working class,” and then, fumbling, as “simply the elite of Quebec,” Angers argued that:

French is the mother tongue of the entire population, and when it is in danger, there are no more workers, no more lawyers, there must no longer be business men, or professors, but there are only francophone Quebecers, defending their life, their very existence, their right to work in French, to speak French, in the language of their mothers and fathers.⁸³

For Angers, the linguistic problems in Quebec society were the result of historical circumstances of conquest, in which one group imposed its language by force onto another. For English-speaking parents who were attempting to employ the language of parents’ right to choose, he stated that true linguistic rights were the rights “of a group to conserve its culture in spite of conquests.”⁸⁴ The only solution was for the nation to close ranks among itself, ignore the distinctions between workers and professionals, put aside questions class and power differences, and fight for the self-preservation of the ethnic/national community.

But there was also another vision, one which looked to the complicated intersectionality of class and language, and which envisioned social transformation in far more all-encompassing ways. Although the FQF came to be seen as the dominant voice of opposition to Bill 63, the crowds which surged into Montreal streets in the first week of protests had an agenda of their own, one which could not be controlled or subsumed by a single voice at the top. The protests were, in many respects,

⁸³ ACSN, CCSNM fonds, Assemblée Générale, François-Albert Angers, invité, 18 novembre 1969, 85-86. “élite ouvrière”; “l’élite tout court du Québec”; “Le français est la langue maternelle de toute la population, et lorsqu’elle est en danger, il n’y a plus d’ouvriers, il n’y a plus d’avocats, il ne doit plus y avoir d’homme d’affaires, il n’y a plus de professeurs, mais il n’y a que des québécois francophones, défendant leur vie, leur existence fondamentale, leur droit de travailler en français, de parler en français, dans la langue de leur mères et leur pères.”

⁸⁴ WRDA, Campaign Against Bill 63 fonds, F.-Albert Angers, “Le Droit des parents” *L’Information nationale*. newspaper of the SSJBM. n.d., 7. “d’une collectivité à conserver sa culture en dépit des conquêtes.”

spontaneous acts of rebellion. Workers, students, and independent leftists organized themselves to mobilize in the streets. Student and citizen groups worked to mobilize their constituencies, and a coalition of leftist groups – including workers’ and students’ committees, the Mouvement syndical et politique (MSP), FLP, and LIS – even formed a common front of their own, “Front Commun Contre le Bill 63.” The alternative common front ran parallel to the FQF, and acted as the main organizational force behind many of the demonstrations during the first week after Bill 63 was unveiled.⁸⁵ The first major protest, held Tuesday 28 October, was organized by the combined forces of student and other leftist groups. Students throughout the province disrupted the regular functioning of their schools, organizing study sessions and walk-outs. In Montreal 10,000 students marched through the city before converging on the sporting centre of the Université de Montréal, where they were met by thousands of others. At certain moments, there were more than 11,000 students packed into an arena which held 4,500; the ice surface and aisles were covered in people, and, in the end, over 20,000 students rotated in and out of the arena for a massive ‘teach-in.’⁸⁶ Michel Chartrand, Pierre Bourgault, and Raymond Lemieux spoke to the crowd, telling the agitated and receptive audience that their purpose in opposing Bill 63 was to stop English from serving as the “main tool in the oppression of the Quebec people.”⁸⁷

On Wednesday 29 October, a coalition of workers’ and citizens’ committees⁸⁸ organized a massive protest which brought at least 25,000 citizens to the streets of Montreal. Protesters met in the early evening at four rallying points, in Saint-Henri,

⁸⁵ Léandre Bergeron, *Petit manuel d'histoire du Québec* (Montréal: Éditions québécoises, 1971), 226. Stan Gray, "Le mouvement contre le bill 63," *Mobilisation 5* (février 1970): 17-18.

⁸⁶ Gilles Provost, "Des milliers d'étudiants descendent dans la rue," *Le Devoir*, 29 octobre 1969, 1-2.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 2. “principal outil d’oppression du peuple québécois.”

⁸⁸ According to Gray, the protest was organized by the FLP and its worker committees, with the collaboration of the Saint Jacques citizens’ committee. Gray, "Le mouvement contre le bill 63," 17-18.

downtown, and in the east and the north ends; they were soon joined by groups of students who had been roaming the city throughout the day, and who had gathered at Parc Lafontaine in preparation for the march. The itinerary of the march reveals much about its underlying ideology. The mass of protesters walked past the main sites of power in Montreal, first to City Hall and then west to Square Victoria, the heart of the city's business district. Once at Square Victoria, standing before business offices, including the offices of the Conseil du patronat and the Montreal Chamber of Commerce, the crowd lit a large bonfire and burned Bertrand, mayor Drapeau, and others in effigy. The protesters then marched back along Dorchester and up to Parc Lafontaine, where they lit fires, burnt effigies, and then dispersed.⁸⁹ By marching through the city's main sites of economic and political power, the crowd demonstrated, through its actions, that the struggle for the French language needed to form a part of a more all-encompassing program of social change.

While the FQF did not oppose the protests organized by students and workers, it did not do anything to aid them. But it was the FQF which planned a massive rally in Quebec City on Friday 31 October. The protest, which started out calmly, erupted into violence when protesters began throwing bottles at police. It did not take long for the police to respond with tear gas, and for chaos to ensue.⁹⁰ By the end of the unprecedented week of protests, it was clear that opposition to Bill 63 was profoundly influenced by the actions in the streets. The groups of workers, students, and leftist organizations did not have a clear political line or a coherent ideology, but, for them, Bill 63 fit within their larger conception of the colonized nature of Quebec society. Seemingly conscious of Fanon's conception of the 'pitfalls of national consciousness,' their actions suggested analysis that maintained that liberation did not

⁸⁹ "Une mer de manifestants déferle rue Craig," *Le Devoir*, 29 octobre 1969, 1-2.

⁹⁰ Jean-Luc Duguay, "La violence éclate devant le parlement," *Le Devoir*, 1 novembre 1969, 1.

come through nationalist revolution alone. For if the deep structural roots of exploitation were not attacked, a francophone Quebec, under the ostensible control of francophone leadership, but in reality beholden to the forces of American imperialism, would have solved neither the problem of cultural degradation nor the harsh reality of economic exploitation. According to a pamphlet issued by a variety of neighbourhood workers' committees, Bill 63, the "Bill of electoral donations," facilitated the exploitation of Quebec workers by the province's anglophone minority.⁹¹ Even Raymond Lemieux, the most ardent defender and the most visible spokesperson for French unilingualism, argued that the problem was far more complex than one of mere linguistic rights. When he was speaking at McGill in November 1969, he was challenged by another participant of the colloquium who accused him of neglecting the social revolution at the expense of the national revolution. Lemieux coolly responded that in Quebec the national revolution and the social revolution were inextricably intertwined, and the fact that a few bourgeois francophones had aligned themselves with the economically dominant anglophone minority was clear proof that the class struggle and the national struggle were one.⁹²

The newly-minted *Quebec-Presse* – a weekly newspaper founded by the left in the effort to provide a counter-weight to the mainstream media – outlined its alternative rationale for opposing Bill 63. The French language was in danger in Quebec, the paper argued, because francophones increasingly needed to be able to speak English – the language of power and authority – to survive. Bill 63, by reinforcing this unequal power relationship in Quebec, was a piece of legislation designed by either "the conqueror" or "the *roi-nègre*," and was not that "of a free

⁹¹ WRDA, Campaign Against Bill 63 fonds, "Travailleurs unissons nous contre le bill 63," pamphlet put out by the Comité ouvrier de St-Henri, Comité ouvrier de St-Marie, Comité ouvrier Centre-Ville, Comité ouvrier Hochelaga Maisonneuve, Comité de citoyens de Mercier, Comité de citoyens de St-Jacques, n.d. "Bill de la caisse électorale."

⁹² "'L'Université McGill doit être bilingue' Laurier Lapierre," *Québec-Presse*, 9 novembre 1969, 7.

government.”⁹³ The editors of the paper knew that parents could not be blamed for choosing to send their children to English-language schools, as everyone knew that speaking English was economically advantageous.⁹⁴ An in-depth and comprehensive understanding of the language problem therefore revealed that focusing only on the language of education was putting the “cart before the horse.” Was the problem of language at work, the paper asked, not an effect of social and economic factors?⁹⁵

When the Parti Québécois – with the collaboration of the CSN, the CEQ, the Alliance des Professeurs de Montréal, the FTQ, the Fédération des Sociétés Saint-Jean Baptiste and the SSJB de Montréal – published a special edition of *Pouvoir*, the differing ways of understanding the language problem in Quebec were made apparent. On the one hand, the paper reprinted a speech by Jérôme Proulx, an ex-Union Nationale deputy who left the party when it unveiled Bill 63. Proulx, far from seeing the world through the humanist lens of national liberation, made ample use of traditional nationalist tropes, speaking of a “betrayal to the direction of history,” and about how “how there exists only one true loyalty, one solidarity, that which we owe to our nation, our people, ourselves.”⁹⁶ But while the paper printed Proulx’s speech, it also published speeches by Raymond Parent of the CSN and Fernand Daoust of the FTQ, both of whom insisted that the struggle for language rights needed to be placed within a larger vision of liberation. Parent argued that, while the causes of the present linguistic crisis were multi-faceted, they included both the power and influence of English Canada and the United States, and the separation under capitalism between “the economic rulers” who were “mostly anglophone,” and the “mass of the

⁹³ “Notre position,” *Québec-Presse*, 2 novembre 1969, 1A. “de conquérant”; “de roi-nègre”; “d’un gouvernement libre.”

⁹⁴ “Le Bill 63,” *Québec-Presse*, 2 novembre 1969, 7A.

⁹⁵ Ibid. “la charru avant les boeufs.”

⁹⁶ WRDA, FRAP fonds, ‘Jérôme Proulx’ *Le Pouvoir* 2, no. 4. n.d., 2. “trahison au sens de l’histoire”; il n’existe qu’une seule fidélité, qu’une seule solidarité, celle que l’on doit à sa nation, à son peuple, le nôtre.”

population.” “Taken as a whole,” Parent argued, “we believe that the future of a threatened and compromised culture like ours depends on a deeply popular movement, one which is political, economic, and social.”⁹⁷ Fernand Daoust, for his part, argued that English was the language of prestige and economic power and French the language of unemployment and uncertainty. The FTQ rejoiced in the knowledge that the population “has begun to wake up and that more and more, it has decided to take its destiny into its own hands.” Daoust argued that the struggle to make French the official language in Quebec was, far from being an end in itself, “ONLY A BEGINNING.”⁹⁸

While both the street politics and the political language of opposition to Bill 63 were profoundly influenced by ideas and interpretations of decolonization, it would be wrong to argue that ideas of decolonization were the only ideas shaping the vast protests. Many, especially those who protested at the National Assembly on 31 October, spoke of the danger for the nation, ignoring the structural reasons for linguistic degradation. The opposition to Bill 63 came from many directions, and some progressives began to fear that the opposition was fuelled by a defensive chauvinist nationalism that threatened Montreal’s diversity. But most were caught up in the vast expression of outrage and anger; protesters on the streets articulated an ambiguous mélange of nationalism, Marxism, and national liberation, positions which often merged together to denounce the government’s plan to guarantee English-language schooling rights in the province. And yet, despite the mixing of perspectives and movements, many voices were left unheard, suppressed, or, at the

⁹⁷ WRDA, FRAP fonds, Raymond Parent, “La CSN” *Le Pouvoir* 2, no. 4. n.d., 2. “les dirigeants économiques”; “surtout anglophones”; “la masse de la population.” “De façon globale”; “nous estimons que l’avenir d’une culture menacée et compromise comme la nôtre dépend d’un mouvement populaire de fond, de nature politique, économique et sociale.”

⁹⁸ WRDA, FRAP fonds, Fernand Daoust, “La FTQ,” *Le Pouvoir* 2, no. 4. n.d., 3. “ait commencé à se réveiller et que de plus en plus, elle décide de prendre en mains ses destinées”; “QU’UN DEBUT.”

very least, pushed to the sidelines. If the language of schooling for immigrants sparked the crisis in the first place, why were the voices of those immigrants – and especially of the many immigrants on the left who formed such an important part of Montreal’s radical community – not being heard?

A Question of Immigrants?

Although the struggle against Bill 63 revolved specifically around the language in which new immigrants would be educated, it was never conceived as a battle against immigrants themselves, or even against the immigration system. As Benedict Anderson has pointed out, language “is not an instrument of exclusion: in principle, anyone can learn any language. On the contrary, it is fundamentally inclusive, limited only by the fatality of Babel: no one lives long enough to learn *all* languages.”⁹⁹ So the struggle over the language of schooling rights in Quebec was not a struggle over whether immigrants should preserve their culture of origin. Rather, it was a fight over which cultural system and which language group would receive new immigrants, over which linguistic community in Montreal, the French or the English, would, in the face of a dramatically declining birthrate, continue to grow.¹⁰⁰ Leftists in Montreal consistently included immigrants in their descriptions of the oppressed in Quebec. When giving an interview to the *McGill Daily* about the political situation in Quebec, radical activist François Bachand pointed out that the

⁹⁹ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991; reprint, Revised Edition), 134.

¹⁰⁰ It is, of course, rather ironic that the debate was framed around the question of the integration of immigrants. According to Michael Behiels, throughout most of the twentieth century, neither francophone nor anglophone communities were particularly eager to accommodate immigrant communities, and neither “wanted the provincial government to alter the dual ethnic and religious constitutional structure.” “Their respective unwillingness to come to terms with religious and ethnic pluralism,” Behiels argues, “set the pattern for nearly seven decades and contributed in no small measure to the linguistic and cultural crises of the 1970s and 80s.” Behiels, *Quebec and the Question of Immigration: From Ethnocentrism to Ethnic Pluralism, 1900-1985*, 5.

new library at McGill was built by both “Italian and Quebecois laborers,” explicitly recognizing the multiplicity and multi-faceted nature of Montreal’s working class.¹⁰¹ Raymond Lemieux, the most vilified Quebec nationalist in the English-language media, always maintained that he was in favour of large-scale immigration to Quebec, and he consistently argued that “our real adversaries are certainly not Italians but, in general, Montreal anglophones.”¹⁰² The problem was not that immigrants were refusing to integrate into a new society, but rather that they were integrating, for reason of economic necessity, into the language and culture of the colonizer.

At the same time that debates about the place of immigrants in Quebec society brought the city to a standstill, however, many immigrants themselves were demanding that their voices be heard. On 12 November 1969, Kimon Valaskakis, a self-declared ‘néo-Québécois,’ published a moving article in *Le Devoir* in which he outlined what he saw as some of the promises and pitfalls of the debates around Bill 63. For Valaskakis, one could not but be encouraged when seeing a “long oppressed population deciding to take to the streets to demonstrate its desire to avoid fading away,” and he was convinced that the “neo-Quebecker certainly needs to assimilate into the *québécois* milieu.” In all of the excitement and passion of the moment, and in the face of the new alliance which seemed to be emerging between mainstream nationalists and the left, Valaskakis worried about the lack of debate which characterized the near unanimous response of civil society to Bill 63. He objected to both narrow nationalist arguments and to the arguments which prevailed on the left – arguments which too easily conflated language and class – on two grounds: “1) not all of the exploited are francophones; 2) not all francophones are exploited.” To the

¹⁰¹ "Can Quebec Win True Independence? An Interview with François Bachand," 3.

¹⁰² ACSN, CCSNM fonds, Assemblée Générale 16 septembre 1969, “Déclaration de Raymond Lemieux – La Ligue d’Intégration Scolaire,” 57. “nos vrais adversaires ne sont certainement pas les italiens mais, en général, le groupe anglophone de Montréal.”

contention that language was an arm of domination, Valaskakis responded that this argument did not take adequate account of the political, economic, and military dimensions of domination, against which speaking French offered little protection. And it was not just francophones who were poor: the two ethnic groups who ranked below them, Italians and Natives, were predominantly English-speaking.¹⁰³

What made Quebec unique, for Valaskakis, was that it escaped the prison of monolithism which entrapped so many other societies. Montreal symbolized “a veritable mosaic of nationalities, ideas, and points of view. Here we have an open society, and therefore a rich and fertile one. Here we have, in opposition to the old European capitals, a human dimension which is a language without nationality, an aggregate of values, a free spirit.” But Montreal was not only different from Europe – it also acted as an alternative to the monolithic nature of the rest of North America. “This character,” he argued, “exists only because of francophone Quebec culture which, through its vitality, has foiled North America. And it is this same society which can either remain multi-dimensional or itself become monolithic.” He worried that Quebec nationalism had the potential of denying and restricting Quebec’s diversity, and that, if this were to happen, the “transatlantic and multicultural symbiosis of Quebec will be eliminated. The American melting-pot will be neutralized, but only to be replaced by a new French-language one. Individualities will be broken, dissidents will be treated as foolish and a monolithism as ruthless... and as ugly as its American version will transform us.” “We can therefore ask ourselves,” he argued, “what would be the interest of being ‘melted’ in French rather than in English?” During its struggle for liberation, he concluded, Quebecers would

¹⁰³ Kimon Valaskakis, “La crise du bill 63 vue par un Néo-Québécois: L’alliance des nationalistes et des mouvements de gauche débouchera-t-elle sur une monolithisme intolérant?,” *Le Devoir*, 12 novembre 1969, 5. “peuple longtemps opprimé qui décide de descendre dans la rue pour manifester sa volonté de ne pas mourir”; “Néo-Québécois doit certainement s’assimiler au milieu québécois”; “1) tous les exploités ne sont pas francophones; 2) tous les francophones ne sont pas exploités.”

need to adopt a form of nationalism which was polyvalent and flexible, one which would undergo perpetual questioning and renewal, and work to create “the first technologically advanced society which would not be one-dimensional.”¹⁰⁴

Valaskakis’s intervention, coming just weeks after the beginning of the major protests against Bill 63, was prescient and insightful. The struggle to found a firm identity, one which positioned francophones as the absolute victims in Quebec’s historical drama, which drew a clear line between ‘English’ capital and ‘French’ labour, was bound to failure from the very beginning. Life in Montreal was too complicated, too multifaceted, to ever contain only one movement of political opposition with one axis of oppression. In the radical rhetoric of opposition to McGill or to Bill 63, those on the left often juxtaposed francophones – seen to be a colonized ethnic class which carried the humanistic hopes of building a future based on justice and liberty – against the province’s English-speaking minority – portrayed as a parasitical class of settler colonialists and capitalist imperialists. But in between, as the object of struggle, as the silent partner which both sides hoped to ‘integrate’ or ‘assimilate,’ were Montreal’s immigrant communities, almost by definition excluded from the debates. When a group of anglophones who had been radicalized through the McGill français movement headed out to Saint-Léonard with the intent of informing the Italian community about the Quebec liberation struggle, for example,

¹⁰⁴ Ibid. “une véritable mosaïque de nationalités, d’idées, de points de vues. Nous avons ici une société ouverte, donc riche et fertile. Nous avons, ici, à l’encontre des vieilles capitales européennes une dimension humaine qui est un langage sans nationalités, un agrégat de valeurs, une liberté d’esprit”; “Ce caractère”; “n’existe qu’à cause de la culture québécois francophone qui, par sa vitalité, a fait échec à l’Amérique du Nord. Et c’est cette même société qui peut ou bien rester multidimensionnelle ou bien devenir elle-même monolithique”; “symbiose transatlantique et multiculturelle qu’est le Québec sera éliminée. Le melting-pot américain sera neutralisé mais seulement pour être remplacé par un rouleau-compresseur français. Les individualités seront brisées, les dissidents traités de niais et un monolithisme aussi impitoyable.. et aussi moche, que l’Américain viendra nous transformer”; “A ce compte-là on pourrait se demander, quel serait l’intérêt d’être ‘fondu’ en français plutôt qu’en anglais”; “la première société technologiquement avancée qui ne sera pas unidimensionnelle.”

few thought of seeking out the unique perspectives of immigrants themselves.¹⁰⁵ The independent voice of these communities, although they were beginning to be more loudly articulated, rarely factored into the debates.

Soon these voices would be too loud to be ignored. Haitian emigré groups began publishing newsletters, participating in debates at the Université de Montréal, and appearing on Radio-Canada to discuss their efforts to bring social justice to Haiti.¹⁰⁶ African groups advocating anti-imperialism and decolonization began publishing newspapers and bulletins.¹⁰⁷ Montreal's Vietnamese community organized marches and demonstrations to oppose the war being waged on their country of origin, and exiles from South Africa organized resistance to the Apartheid regime which ruled with brutal terror.¹⁰⁸ As the vast coalition of francophone radicals attempted to claim public space in the city, therefore, new groups of radical immigrants protesting against the exclusion of minorities from society's larger structures began to emerge. They were intimately attached to the struggles which were taking place in their countries of origin, yet were also gradually starting to become interested in the social struggle in Quebec. Many groups even began developing their own spaces of resistance where radical thought could develop. Like the offices of *UHURU* and the Negro Community Centre for Black Montrealers, a group of self-defined 'Afro-Asians' founded the Ho Chi Minh bookstore, and members of Montreal's Arab community established the Palestine House, a centre

¹⁰⁵ Bourque, "L'esprit de Stan Gray n'est pas mort," 10.

¹⁰⁶ UQAM Archives, Collection de publications de groupes de gauche et de groupes populaires, 21p 900:04/67, "Faisons le point" Le Bulletin du C.H.A.P. (Comité haïtien d'action patriotique – Montréal) 20 mars 1971, 3.

¹⁰⁷ In addition to the publications cited in chapter five, see, for example, UQAM Archives, Collection de publications de groupes de gauche et de groupes populaires, 21p 900:04/3, *African Voice, Organ of the African Progressive Study Group* 1, no. 2 (Montreal, 10 June 1972).

¹⁰⁸ Interview with Daya Varma, 24 June 2007, Montréal.

from which they hoped to mobilize support for the national liberation struggle of Palestinians.¹⁰⁹

The Afro-Asian Latin American People's Solidarity Committee and the parallel Comité de Solidarité des Peuples d'Afrique, d'Asie et d'Amérique Latine eventually went on to establish a 'Third World Centre' on University St., asserting by its very presence that wars over language alone could not capture the full dynamics of the complexity of life in a cosmopolitan city like Montreal. But the 'Third World Centre' also maintained a goal which differentiated it from other similar centres and organizations throughout North America. The Centre, it was hoped, not only had the mandate of broadening "the base for anti-imperialist work among the Third World people," but also to "play its due role in promoting solidarity between the people of Quebec and the people of the Third World."¹¹⁰ Already in 1969 and 1970, various coalitions of 'national minority people' began staking their specific claims to playing a part in *both* the worldwide anti-imperialist struggle and the political battles which were taking place in Quebec. By the early 1970s, individuals in the Mouvement Progressiste Italo-Quebécois, like many Black Montrealers, were advocating the cause of Quebec liberation and promoting the fusing of Quebec's multi-faceted and multi-ethnic working class.¹¹¹ But this convergence of movements, this two-way opening between francophone leftists and Montreal's radical ethnic minorities,

¹⁰⁹ See "Fascist Attacks Against Ho Chi Minh Book-Store and its Workers," *National Minority News* 1, no. 1 (1971): 9; "Fascist Attacks Against Palestinian House," *National Minority News* 1, no. 1 (10 January 1971): 10.

¹¹⁰ In the early 1970s, the Afro-Asian Latin American People's Solidarity Committee met for discussion groups in English at McGill University on Thursday, and the parallel Comité de Solidarité des Peuples d'Afrique, d'Asie et d'Amérique Latine met for their French-language discussion groups on Tuesdays at the newly established Université du Québec at Montreal. "A Brief Review of Some Activities," *Third World Solidarity: Journal of the Afro-Asian Latin American People's Solidarity Committee* 3, no. 1 (March 1972): 16. "Third World Centre," *Third World Solidarity: Journal of the Afro-Asian Latin American People's Solidarity Committee* 3, no. 1 (March 1972): 13.

¹¹¹ "Solidarity Statement by Movement Progressiste Italo-Quebécois," *National Minority News* 1, no. 1 (10 January 1971): 14.

required a catalyst to break down years of prejudice and suspicion. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, this catalyst was the Montreal Central Council of the CSN.

CHAPTER NINE:

Labour's Avant-Garde: The Montreal Central Council of the CSN

What we've seen in the last year is the convergence in Quebec of two movements or two struggles that had not previously been linked, that is to say: the national liberation struggle in Quebec against Anglo-American colonialism, which originally was very much a phenomenon of the middle-class type intellectual, small businessmen, some state functionaries, as well as all kinds of media freaks; and also at the same time developing, but not yet linked to it was a fantastically militant rise of the working class as a whole in Quebec.

-Stanley Gray, "The Struggle in Quebec – 1969". Speech delivered at the Year of the Barricade conference at Glendon College in Toronto on October 25th, 1969.

In North American radical circles of the 1960s, the organized labour movement did not have a good reputation. In both contemporary and historical accounts, the New Left was generally seen to have occupied a space left vacant by a receding class politics. Where once stood class, the argument goes, came a new and deeper understanding of individual and national alienation, racial oppression, and a new awareness of the political nature of private life.¹ Frantz Fanon had argued that, in a colonized society, the true hopes for revolution lay with the rural masses of the countryside. The urban working class, “pampered by the colonial regime,” had “everything to lose” in the event of decolonization.² Malcolm X, for his part, did not make use of class as a category at all, preferring to see the world through the lens of race, just as Betty Friedan and Simone de Beauvoir did with sex. In perhaps the most damning analysis, Herbert Marcuse spoke of how the system of advanced capitalism had come to accommodate industrial workers, buying them off with material abundance.³ Even when ‘class’ was not written off as a category, few looked to the North American labour movement for inspiration. French intellectual Claude Julien argued that, in the United States at least, the major labour unions constituted “one of the pillars of the empire.”⁴ And Pierre Vallières wrote in 1964 that Quebec unions merely reinforced in workers feelings of “powerlessness, uselessness, and humiliation.”⁵

¹ While this is certainly reflected in much of the international literature, the few studies that exist of the Canadian New Left also pay little attention to developments among the working class. See, for example, Myrna Kostash, *Long Way From Home: The Story of the Sixties Generation in Canada* (Toronto: Lorimer, 1980).

² Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (New York: Grove Press, 1963), 108-09.

³ See, most notably, Herbert Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1991 [1964]). Herbert Marcuse, *An Essay on Liberation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971).

⁴ Claude Julien, *America's Empire*, trans. Renaud Bruce (New York: Pantheon Books, 1971 [1968]), 400.

⁵ Pierre Vallières, "Le nationalisme québécois et la classe ouvrière," *Révolution Québécoise* 1, no. 1 (septembre 1964): 16. By 1966, he had become a little bit more generous, arguing that the union movement “mène un peu malgré lui une suite de combats partiels sans jamais remettre en question le

By the end of the 1960s and the early 1970s, such comments could no longer be made, or not in Quebec at least. Organized labour in Montreal had the wind in its sails, becoming the dominant voice of the Quebec Liberation movement and capturing the attention of radicals across North America.⁶ Beginning in 1969, labour activists were present at every major demonstration and participated in nearly every major assembly in defense of social justice and national liberation. The radicalization of labour came in many forms and in many places, from the new militancy of the *Metallos* (steelworkers) to the Mouvement de Libération du Taxi, a union of the city's beleaguered taxis drivers who roamed the city in packs and, engaging in urban guerilla tactics, waved red flags and openly displayed their allegiance to Che Guevara.⁷ More than any other organization, however, it was the Confédération des syndicats nationaux (CSN) – and especially the Conseil central des syndicats nationaux de Montréal, the organ representing CSN locals in Montreal – which brought the labour movement to the very centre of Montreal radicalism, creating a new explosive environment in which an increasingly politicized and self-conscious working class began to take shape.

Unlike other North American minorities – such as Chicano(a)s or American Blacks – which did not have large institutional structures at their service, the CSN gave French-speaking Quebecers a powerful organization through which they could make demands for both cultural and economic democracy.⁸ The CSN originated in the Catholic clergy's attempt to counter the influence of American-based unions in the

système lui-même." UQAM, Charles Gagnon fonds, 124p-20a/48, Mathieu Hébert (Pierre Vallières), "Qu'est-ce que le f.l.q.?" juin 1966, 47. "d'impuissance, d'inutilité, d'humiliation."

⁶ By the early 1970s, the Quebec labour movement was receiving a significant amount of attention in the American press. In the fall of 1972, an entire edition of *Radical America* was devoted to it (6, no. 5, September-October 1972).

⁷ See Nick Auf der Maur, "Lessons on Fighting City Hall: A Study of Montreal's 'Mouvement de Libération du Taxi'," *The Last Post* 1, no. 3 (April 1970): 19-25.

⁸ Black Rose Books Editorial Collective, "The Radicalization of Quebec Trade Unions," *Radical America* 6, no. 2 (March-April 1972): 59-60.

early twentieth century. Although it was born out of attempts to ensure the servility of Catholic workers, the Catholic union movement grew increasingly militant in the post-World War Two era, engaging in a series of violent and bitter strikes. By 1960, the union had shed its religious character and changed its name to reflect its new identity as a 'national' labour organization. While the CSN was always home to many different individuals and ideas, by the late 1960s, the radical wing of the movement began to congregate around the Montreal Central Council, especially after Michel Chartrand was elected as president at the end of 1968. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, the Central Council did much more than radicalize the world of organized labour, it also changed the very terms and operating logic of the Quebec liberation movement, giving it new meaning, opening its sphere of intervention, and broadening its base of support.

By the end of the 1960s, it had become deeply ingrained in the grammar of Montreal leftism that the Quebec liberation movement formed part of a larger revolt which was sweeping the world. Various groups and individuals organized international conferences in Montreal, inviting speakers from embattled countries to come to the city to meet local activists and exchange ideas, strategies, and common experiences. From the Black ghettos of the United States⁹ to Chile and Vietnam, a whole array of international activists passed through Montreal, and virtually every left publication began stressing the need for international solidarity. But a major paradox remained. If the organizations of the Quebec liberation movement were internationalist in scope, Montreal's various immigrant communities remained largely outside of their conceptions of the movement. If it is true, as Chapter Four

⁹ On the run from the law, a few members and supporters of the Black Panthers headed to Quebec and, before long, a committee of Quebec-Black Panther solidarity was established with the participation of Charles Gagnon. Pierre Vallières, *Les Héritiers de Papineau. Itinéraire politique d'un 'nègre blanc' (1960-1985)* (Montréal: Québec/Amérique, 1986), 174.

demonstrates, that many of the intellectuals of Quebec liberation had made conceptual room for understanding the exploitation of immigrants in Quebec society, few had actively invited them to unite in solidarity. Radicals in Montreal were therefore in the paradoxical position of advocating international solidarity while remaining blind to much of the diversity existing in their very own city.

The Central Council, however, broke with this tradition. Through its meetings and assemblies, protests and conferences, it actively courted the participation of radicals of all origins and backgrounds. It provided office and meeting space for a wide variety of left organizations, including the Afro-Asian People's Solidarity Committee, the Québec-Palestine Solidarity Committee, and the Mouvement de Libération du Taxi.¹⁰ It defended the Black and White activists who were arrested during the Sir George Williams Affair, and it printed tracts for the Regroupement des Noirs de Montréal.¹¹ And the Central Council also provided the milieu in which the Quebec liberation movement's most important attempt to rethink Quebec history was written. Emerging out of worker education classes at the Central Council, Léandre Bergeron's *Petit manuel d'histoire du Québec* is the first radical history of the period which deals seriously with race, the colonization of Native peoples, and the multi-faceted nature of Quebec's colonial past.

Throughout the late 1960s and early 1970, the Central Council became involved in a wide variety of projects, from consumer co-operatives to the creation of a radical municipal party and a mass-circulation newspaper.¹² In this chapter,

¹⁰ Interview with Daya Varma, 24 June 2007, Montreal. Interview with Fernand Foisy, 8 December 2006, Montreal.

¹¹ ACSN, CCSNM fonds, Fernand Foisy, "Rapport du secrétaire – décisions du comité exécutif," Congrès 1969, 19. ACSN, CCSNM fonds, Presse release, "Sir George Williams et le cas de Charles Gagnon: les Deux Masques de la Répression", 21 février 1969. ACSN, CCSNM fonds, Fernand Foisy, "Rapport du secrétaire," Congrès 1970, 33.

¹² One of its most important initiatives was founding a mass circulation weekly newspaper, *Quebec-Presse* (published between 1969 and 1974), which provided an alternative media source and acted as an independent and critical voice.

however, I will argue that the Central Council's most important innovation was its forging of a radical space – in a physical and metaphorical sense – in which a broad alliance of oppositional movements could form, and where an alternative reading of Quebec history could be written. It was in this radical space of collaboration, I will maintain, that a new language of labour radicalism emerged, one which, building on the key insights of Quebec liberation, integrated understandings of cultural and racial alienation with the politics of class, and placed labour at the centre of anti-colonial opposition.

The CSN and the Sixties

While the Montreal Central Council acted as the radical wing of the CSN, the organization as a whole had been moving to the left since the mid-1960s. A decisive turning point came at the union's 1966 convention when Marcel Pepin, newly-elected as president, delivered his famed report, *Une société bâti pour l'homme*. The CSN had grown at a remarkable rate during the 1960s, mostly due to the rapid unionization of Quebec's public sector workers. By 1966, the union represented 190,454 individuals, more than double the 90,733 of 1960,¹³ and many began seeing the enormous potential that such a rapid growth entailed. The report of the CSN president, known as a 'moral report,' is a highly significant document which, written collectively and approved by the executive, laid the ideological parameters for the organization as a whole.¹⁴ When Pepin stood before the convention hall in 1966 and

¹³ Jacques Rouillard, *Histoire du syndicalisme au Québec. Deux siècles d'histoire* (Montréal: Boréal express, 2004), 155.

¹⁴ In Pepin's case, authors and intellectuals such as Jacques Dofny and Pierre Vadeboncoeur were directly involved in putting together the reports. Pepin felt that his 1966 report was his most important, serving as an example and laying the foundations for all of his reports and writing to come. He even goes as far to say that his reports that came afterwards were, in a sense, merely re-enforcing and deepening ideas that he had already developed in *Une société bâti pour l'homme*. Jacques Keable and Marcel Pépin, *Le monde selon Marcel Pepin* (Outremont, Québec: Lanctôt, 1998), 285.

delivered his speech, therefore, many knew immediately that the CSN had taken a decisive turn to the left. In the years to come, his reports were reprinted and circulated many times, becoming the objects of numerous discussions and debates.¹⁵

Une société bâtie pour l'homme denounced the inhumanity and irrationality of the capitalist system, a system in which workers were forced to sell their labour power as a commodity. Monopoly capital, having no consideration for the public interest, subverted democracy, dehumanized workers, and stifled social progress. To combat these powerful forces, Pepin argued, workers needed to develop new and more advanced forms of struggle.¹⁶ An elaboration of just what that this new struggle would entail would need to wait for two more years when, in an increasingly polarized social climate, Pepin used his speech at the October 1968 convention to launch his famous call to arms, calling on the CSN to open up a 'second front.' Labour activists, he argued, could not restrict their activity to the arena of collective bargaining alone (the 'first front'), as too many aspects of workers' lives could not be dealt with within the confines of collective agreements. Price increases, poor housing conditions, exploitation through credit, unemployment and inflation were all problems that called for the opening up of a new 'second front,' a front in which workers would organize outside of the workplace as consumers, renters, and parents.¹⁷

Pepin's report landed like a bomb on the Quebec labour movement. For the growing number of activists who were hoping that labour would play an increasingly important role in the larger movement, the report spoke to their hopes and desires.

¹⁵ For just one example, see *Socialisme* 67, no. 11 (1967).

¹⁶ Marcel Pepin, "Une société bâtie pour l'homme," in *Procès-verbal Quarante-deuxième session du Congrès de la C.S.N.* (Montreal: 1966), 37.

¹⁷ Marcel Pepin, "The Second Front: The Report of Marcel Pepin, National President, to the Convention of the CNTU, October 13, 1968," in *Quebec Labour: The Confederation of National Trade Unions Yesterday and Today*, ed. Black Rose Books editorial collective (Montreal: Black Rose, 1972), 20, 35-27, 53.

While Pepin was delivering his report to the 1968 convention, another well-known labour activist, Michel Chartrand, recently returned to the labour movement after a long absence, was in the process of organizing all of the Montreal delegates at the convention into a bloc. When the convention came to a close, Chartrand had emerged as the clear voice of the Montreal unions and, before long, was elected as president of the Montreal Central Council. When Chartrand returned to the labour movement, he did so as an elder statesman, as a veteran of many of the struggles that had shaped Quebec throughout the previous thirty years. Politicized during the Depression and the conscription crisis of the Second World War, Chartrand joined in the labour movement in 1948 during a divisive and legendary strike in Asbestos Quebec, and he then went on to work throughout the 1950s for both Catholic and American-based international unions. By the early 1960s, Chartrand – while remaining politically active in social democratic politics, most notably as the founding president of the Parti socialiste du Québec – left the labour movement entirely, returning to his trade as a printer and founding *Les Presses Sociales*.¹⁸ Although he remained formally outside of the ranks of organized labour, Chartrand continued to meet with many of his former colleagues associated with the left-wing of the CSN at the *Press Club* on Saint-Denis.¹⁹

Chartrand's ascendancy to the presidency of the Montreal Central Council marked a watershed in labour activism. Disorganized and lacking political energy before 1968,²⁰ the Central Council, representing the roughly 65,000 workers in unions

¹⁸ Throughout the Sixties, *Les Presses Sociales* was indispensable to the left, publishing, in addition to collective bargaining agreements, a wide variety of radical writers, poets, political journals like *Our Generation Against Nuclear War*, *Socialisme*, *Le Peuple* (organ of the PSQ), and *Socialisme 64*. Fernand Foisy, *Michel Chartrand, Les voies d'un homme de parole* (Outremont: Lanctôt Éditeur, 1999), 149, 230.

¹⁹ Fernand Foisy, *Michel Chartrand, la colère du juste (1968-2003)* (Outremont: Lanctôt Éditeur, 2003), 26-42.

²⁰ As Pamphile Piché wrote in the 1967 report of the political action committee: "Quant nous sommes saisis de problèmes il ne faut jamais oublier que nous sommes un groupe de travailleurs qui se sont

affiliated to the CSN on the territory of Montreal (roughly one third of the CSN's total membership),²¹ would quickly become both the avant-garde of organized labour and the main bridge between the labour movement and the left. At its legendary general assemblies, crowds of people – ranging from unemployed workers to McGill professors – packed into a primary school on De Lanaudière St. in east Montreal.²² Although Chartrand and Pepin developed a fierce rivalry, the Central Council became the most ardent advocate of Pepin's idea of the 'Second Front.'²³

The Council's general assemblies were open forums for discussion and debate, criticism and denunciation. And out of the debates, discussions, and political actions, a new language of contestation began to emerge, one which brought new modes of understanding and new frames of reference into the world of organized labour. Pepin had spoken in his 1966 and 1968 reports of the humiliation and dehumanization of workers under the capitalist system, yet, for Pepin, capital existed only in the abstract; it was not yet identified with a home of origin.²⁴ For the Central Council, it was

associés pour un but précis: la lutte revendicative au niveau économique d'abord et au niveau social come complément. Lutte qui dans le passé a permis aux travailleurs d'arracher aux patrons des conditions de travail contractuelles qui ont sorti les salarié·es de leur état d'esclaves mal payés." After 1968, such language in which socialism, class struggle, and decolonization faded before the corporatist demands of unionized workers would be unthinkable. ACSN, CCSNM fonds, Pamphile Piché, "Rapport du comité d'action politique, conseil central des syndicats nationaux de Montréal" 9e congrès, 21, 22, 23 avril 1967.

²¹ Unions affiliated to the CSN are represented both geographically, in regional central councils, and by trade or profession, in federations. While the federations are responsible for providing unions with services related to negotiations and the application of collective agreements, central councils are responsible for supporting workers during their struggles, forging solidarity among workers, organizing and defending workers outside of the workplace, and representing workers politically on a regional level. See Stéphanie Poirier, "Le Conseil central des syndicats nationaux de Montréal (CSN) à l'heure de la radicalisation syndicale, 1968-1980" (M.A., Université de Montréal, 2005), 20, 28-29.; ACSN, CCSNM fonds, "Qu'est-ce qu'il peut faire pour nous autres le Conseil Central?" pamphlet, congrès 1970.

²² Well-known McGill professor Immanuel Wallerstein attended the meetings of the Central Council as the representative of the McGill faculty union. Interview with Kari Levitt, 9 December 2006, Montreal. Interview with Fernand Foisy, 8 December 2006, Montreal.

²³ In Jean-François Cardin's words, the Montreal Central council would become the "porte-flambeau" of the 'Second Front.' Jean-François Cardin, "La CSN et le syndicalisme de combat (1960-1975)," in *La CSN, 75 ans d'action syndicale et sociale*, ed. Yves Bélanger and Robert Comeau (Sainte-Foy: Presses de l'Université du Québec, 1998), 36.

²⁴ It is true, however, that the CSN periodically denounced imperialism throughout the 1960s. It stood against the nuclear arms race, came out in opposition to the Vietnam War in 1966, and denounced the

capitalism in its *imperial* form which needed to be denounced and opposed in all of its myriad manifestations. In this sense, the activists and thinkers that circulated around the Central Council learned from the analyses being developed by the larger world of radical politics in Montreal. Before going on to discuss the tenets of this new language of labour, therefore, it is first necessary to explore the creation of a radical space of collaboration.

The Central Council and the Left

From 1969 to 1972, the offices of the Montreal Central Council became a hub of activity for a dizzying array of individuals, groups, and ideas. The office, with two small rooms on either side, was situated on the corner of Saint-Denis and Viger, and people on the street below were able to observe the chaos and excitement taking place above. Crowded from the early morning until late into the night, people tripped over one another, shouted, exchanged ideas and contacts.²⁵ The Central Council also opened the doors of its general assemblies and conventions to leftists of all origins and backgrounds, and provided moral and material support for radicals throughout the city. In 1969 alone, the Central Council supported – both financially and otherwise – the legal battles of Pierre Vallières and Charles Gagnon, participated in countless street protests, helped to organize McGill français and the battles against Bill 63, and succeeded in forcing the CSN's larger confederal body to pronounce itself in favour of unilingualism.²⁶ During the October Crisis of 1970, the Central Council provided

CIA and American imperialism in Latin America in 1968. See, Collective, "The Radicalization of Quebec Trade Unions," 62.

²⁵ Interview with Fernand Foisy, 8 December 2006, Montreal.

²⁶ The Conseil Central posted bail for Vallières and Gagnon. ACSN, CCSNM fonds, Fernand Foisy, "Rapport du secrétaire," Congrès 1970, 19, 36. Also see Vallières, *Les Héritiers de Papineau*, 175. On the question of unilingualism and the CSN, see Poirier, "Le Conseil central des syndicats nationaux de Montréal (CSN) à l'heure de la radicalisation syndicale, 1968-1980"; Jacques Rouillard, "La CSN et

office space for FLQ lawyer Robert Lemieux and endorsed the ‘objectives’ of the FLQ manifesto.²⁷ The authorities deemed that the lines of collaboration between the left and the Central Council were so close that, on 16 October, Chartrand himself was arrested and, on 28 January 1971, the offices of the Central Council were raided and its documents confiscated.²⁸

The Central Council also supported the activities of non-francophone radicals. At its 1969 convention, for example, the front table, covered in a red table cloth, was lined with a dozen guests. In addition to labour leaders from other organizations, the guests included Dimitri Roussopoulos from *Our Generation*, representatives from the Saint-Jacques Citizens’ committee, the Jeunesse ouvrière catholique, the Association of Canadian Greeks, the National Labour Confederation of Spain in exile, members from the Mouvement de libération du taxi, and many others.²⁹ In his speech to the assembly, Chartrand warmly endorsed collaboration with “the various groups which were working for the well-being of the population or which are working for the liberation of the population of Montreal.”³⁰ At the end of his hour-long speech, Chartrand pronounced one line which brought the audience to its feet: “we will fight,”

la protection de la langue française (1921-1996)," in *La CSN, 75 ans d'action syndicale et sociale*, ed. Yves Bélanger and Robert Comeau (Sainte-Foy: Presses de l'Université du Québec, 1998), 12-25.

²⁷ Foisy, *Michel Chartrand, la colère du juste (1968-2003)*, 137-8. Chartrand maintained a close relationship with many members of the FLQ. When he was released after four months of incarceration following the October Crisis, Chartrand declared to a cheering crowd: “Moi, pour ma part, je ne changerai pas d’idée là-dessus. La déclaration du FLQ, c’est une petite déclaration qui n’a rien de virulent. C’est des affaires qu’on sait, c’est des affaires qui sont vraies et pour ma part, moi, je suis encore d’accord avec ça et puis vous autres, vous étiez d’accord avec ça et j’imagine que vous serez encore être d’accord avec ça. (Applaudissements).” When Pierre Vallières was released in June 1971, he went to the home of Michel and Simone Chartrand and stayed with them for the entire summer. ACSN, CCSNM fonds, Michel Chartrand, “Allocution de Michel Chartrand sur ses quatre mois en prison,” Procès-verbaux, Assemblée Générale, 2 mars 1971, 142. Vallières, *Les Héritiers de Papineau*, 223.

²⁸ “Le Deuxième Front,” *Unité Ouvrière* 2, no. Édition Spéciale (avril 1978): 11. Also see ACSN, CCSNM fonds, Fernand Foisy, “Rapport du secrétaire,” Congrès 1971, 31.

²⁹ Foisy, *Michel Chartrand, la colère du juste (1968-2003)*, 57-9. ACSN, CCSNM fonds, Procès-verbaux, congrès 1969, 1-4 mai 1969, 2.

³⁰ ACSN, CCSNM fonds, Michel Chartrand, “Rapport du président,” congrès 1969, 3. “les différents groupes qui travaillent au bien-être de la population ou qui travaillent à la libération de la population de Montréal.”

he declared, “alongside all dissidents, protestors, and revolutionaries.” He wanted to make it clear that the Central Council would not only act as the voice of the working class, but that it also needed to be an organization which would work with community organizations of all types, fight on behalf of renters and taxi drivers, and challenge the economic dictatorship which dominated political power.³¹ The Central Council therefore continually sought out alliances with community groups, and made its resources available to all organizations and individuals working for social change. When it published an information brochure explaining the services and resources at its disposal, for example, it explicitly pointed out that “The *Montreal Central Council* collaborates with all Quebec community associations, including those with members who do not speak French. It will soon make a meeting space available to workers from other areas of the world who have chosen Quebec as their adopted homeland.”³² And the brochure itself was translated into eight languages: English, French, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, German, Greek, and Chinese.³³

It is of enormous significance that the Central Council opened its doors to members of Montreal’s various immigrant communities, doing so at a time when many racialized minorities themselves began coming together to denounce the racism of Canadian society in general, and of the immigration system in particular. In the 1960s, as racially-based immigration laws were being replaced by ones that were ostensibly more open, an increasing number of immigrants originating in Third World countries began to arrive in North American cities (many international students, of

³¹ Seen in, Foisy, *Michel Chartrand, la colère du juste (1968-2003)*, 60-61. “On va se battre avec tous les contestataires, tous les protestataires et tous les révolutionnaires.”

³² ACSN, CCSNM fonds, “Qu’est-ce qu’il peut faire pour nous autres le Conseil Central?” pamphlet, n.d. “Le *Conseil central de Montréal* collabore avec toutes les associations populaires québécoises, y compris celles dont les membres ne sont pas de langue française. Il mettra bientôt un local à la disposition des travailleurs des autres parties du monde qui ont choisi le Québec comme patrie d’adoption.”

³³ Foisy, *Michel Chartrand, la colère du juste (1968-2003)*, 102.

course, were already studying at North American universities). And within the new diasporic communities, ideas of decolonization and national liberation often burned with intensity, being sustained by what Arjun Appadurai has termed “new diasporic public spheres.”³⁴ In December 1969, the Afro-Asian People’s Solidarity Movement was founded with the goal of supporting “the national liberation struggle of the oppressed peoples and nations of Asia, Africa, Latin America and elsewhere.” The organization even declared its backing of the “liberation struggle of the Quebec people and the anti-imperialist struggle of the Canadian working class and oppressed people against U.S. domination.”³⁵ In December of 1970, in the aftermath of the repression of the October Crisis, many self-defined ‘national minority people’ joined with francophone Quebec activists in discussing, exposing, and denouncing the racism of the Canadian immigration system. As a result of such discussions and debates, individuals from a wide variety of different background – including Trinidadians, Haitians, Latin Americans, Afro-Canadians, Iranians, and others – came together in Montreal to form the Committee for the Defense of National Minority People’s Rights.³⁶

The Central Council made its resources available to the various groups of racial minorities in Montreal. By doing so, it also began changing the very nature of its ideology. The Conseil Central created a special committee on the question of immigration, and the committee’s report recognized the specific oppression of immigrant workers. Immigrants were forced into ethnic ghettos and plagued by long

³⁴ Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 4.

³⁵ UQAM, Collection de publications de groupes de gauche et de groupes populaires, 21p 900 :04/124, Afro-Asian People’s Solidarity Movement, 30 December 1969.

³⁶ "Committee Formed to Defend the Rights of the People of Afro-Asian Origin and Other National Minority Peoples Against Racial Discrimination and Political Repression," *National Minority News* 1, no. 1 (January 10 1971): 1. For the group’s attempt to reach out to other organizations around the world, see Indian Worker’s Association Archive, Birmingham, Box 4/10, L. Barker to J. Joshi, 27 December 1970. My thanks to Jodi Burkett for this reference.

periods of unemployment, all so that the dominant class could have a ready supply of cheap labour and maintain the ethnographic superiority of “Anglo-Saxons.” Rather than arguing that colonial power was built on the back of a French-Canadian ‘ethnic class,’ as earlier thinkers had argued, the committee maintained that it was sustained by the exploitation of “of minority groups: French Canadians, Aboriginals, and those that we euphemistically call neo-Canadians (the three groups with the lowest income levels: B&B report).” While the precise question of immigration policy required thorough study, at the moment it was necessary for immigrants and non-immigrants alike to fight to abolish an exploitative system of class privilege and imperial exploitation.³⁷

In the radical years of the late 1960s and early 1970s, as the offices of the Montreal Central Council became a central meeting place for different groups and individuals, the organization began to provide copy services and meeting rooms to radical groups, and it opened its doors to visiting activists from outside of Montreal. It housed American students heading to Cuba and hosted guests from North Vietnam. Because the Central Council’s offices were far too small to accommodate the large demand for space, the organization rented out additional rooms. Among the other groups to which it provided office space, the Central Council became the home of the Quebec-Palestine Solidarity committee.³⁸

³⁷ ACSN, CCSNM fonds, “Rapport du Comité d’Action Politique, Annexe ‘B’ Rapport du comité de l’immigration,” 17 mars 1970, 4-10. Throughout the 1970s, the Montreal Central Council also actively worked to fight the deportation of immigrants. “Solidarité internationale,” *Unité Ourvière* 2, no. Édition Spéciale (avril 1978): 30. “anglo-saxons”; “des groupes minoritaires: Canadiens-Français, autochtones et ceux que l’on appelle euphémiquement Néo-Canadiens (les 3 classes ayant le plus bas revenu du pays: rapport B & B).”

³⁸ Interview with Fernand Foisy, 8 December 2006, Montreal. Foisy, *Michel Chartrand, la colère du juste (1968-2003)*, 237.

In the aftermath of the Arab-Israeli Six Day War of 1967, during which countless Palestinian refugees were permanently displaced, the cause of Palestinian solidarity began capturing the attention of anti-imperialist activists around the world. Montreal, like other metropolitan cities, became the home of Palestinian refugees who were eager to take part in movements of resistance. As Palestinians in Montreal worked to organize movements of solidarity,³⁹ in February 1969 Pierre Vallières and Charles Gagnon circulated a document entitled “Pour un front commun Québec-Palestine.” The two francophone radicals argued that, as all liberation struggles “were inseparable from one another,” it was increasingly necessary to forge a multinational common front against imperialism. The struggle for Palestinian liberation, they maintained, did not seek to promote a narrow nationalism, but a classless society based on freedom, justice, and equality. And, in this sense, “the ideal of Palestinian resistance is identical to that of Quebec resistance.” Rather than actively working to directly support the Palestinian cause, the two writers argued that it was “by raising our struggle to the same level as theirs that we can demonstrate our solidarity ... with our Palestinian brothers.”⁴⁰ Vallières and Gagnon’s declaration of support for Palestinian liberation would soon be echoed by the Central Council. In 1969, in the aftermath of a meeting at Laval University in Quebec City, Michel Chartrand met Rézeq Faraj, a young immigrant who would become one of Quebec’s most influential Palestinian activists.⁴¹ Throughout the years to come, Chartrand and Faraj became

³⁹ As mentioned earlier, in September 1970, many Palestinians in Montreal, along with other members of Montreal’s Arab community, established a ‘Palestinian House’ on Rue de Bullion, a centre conceived to “mobilize support from the Arab and Quebecois people for the national liberation struggle of the Palestinian people against Zionism supported by U.S. imperialism.” “Fascist Attacks Against Palestinian House,” *National Minority News* 1, no. 1 (10 January 1971): 10.

⁴⁰ WRDA, Comité québécois provisoire de solidarité avec le peuple palestinien fonds, Charles Gagnon et Pierre Vallières, “Pour un front commun Québec-Palestine” Montréal, février 1969. “sont inséparables les unes des autres”; “L’idéal de la résistance palestinienne est identique de la résistance québécoise”; “en élevant notre lutte au même niveau que la leur que nous pourrions vraiment nous montrer solidaires ... de nos frères Palestiniens.”

⁴¹ Foisy, *Michel Chartrand, la colère du juste (1968-2003)*, 231-37.

close friends, and they supported each other in their various struggles and worked to create a broad movement of solidarity.⁴²

In March of 1970, efforts to conceptualize the basis for a movement of Quebec-Palestine solidarity began to take concrete form. Activists of a wide variety of linguistic and ethnic origins organized a week of events and presentations devoted to the cause, inviting speakers from around the world to participate. In addition to the Central Council, the organizing committee consisted of the *Métallos* of the FTQ, various citizens' and workers' committees, student groups, members of Montreal's Black community, associations of Latin Americans, Greeks, Portuguese, Vietnamese, Palestinians, Iranians, as well as the Front de libération populaire, the Mouvement syndical et politique, the Afro-Asian youth movement, and the Jeunesse révolutionnaire du Québec.⁴³

During the week of activities, which included speeches, movies, and lectures, participants heard about struggles against imperialism throughout the world. In close succession, for example, audiences heard from Charles Gagnon and Léandre Bergeron, the Black Panthers and the Students for a Democratic Society, the Movement de Libération du Taxi, and reports on resistance in Puerto Rico, Zimbabwe, and Portugal. Other presentations – given by the Comité ouvrier de Saint-Henri, the Agence Rouge du Japon, the Algerian FLN, the Portuguese patriotic movement, the Association of Vietnamese patriots in Canada, etc. – captivated audiences and sparked debate.⁴⁴ As the cause of Palestinian and anti-imperialist solidarity dominated radical energy in Montreal, it created links between a wide

⁴² When Chartrand was arrested in the fall of 1969, he received a telegram of support from Réseque Faraj. ACSN, CCSNM fonds, Procès-verbaux, Assemblée Générale, 18 novembre 1969, 82.

⁴³ UQAM, Collection de publications de groupes de gauche et de groupes populaires, 21p 900:04/156, Fiches d'organiseurs, "Semaine de solidarité avec le peuple palestinien, du 2 au 12 mars, Montreal 1970," 7.

⁴⁴ WRDA, Comité québécois provisoire de solidarité avec le peuple palestinien fonds, Untitled Document, Schedule of Teach-In. n.d.

variety of liberation movements, and many began looking to possible parallels between the situations in Palestine and Quebec. It was clear, the organizers argued, that the “Palestinian people’s national liberation struggle against the imperialism of the United States and its allies is a struggle pitted against the same enemies as those of the Quebec people.”⁴⁵ Two entire days of the program, 5 and 6 March, were devoted to presentations and discussions about the comparison.⁴⁶

As part of the week of solidarity, Michel Chartrand invited Rézeq Faraj to speak before a General Assembly of the Central Council.⁴⁷ After he finished his address, the Council voted its first resolution supporting the Palestinian cause. Palestinian workers, the resolution read, “are daily being oppressed economically, politically, and militarily by American imperialism and its ally, Israel.” And against this imperialist assault, “the Palestinian population is actively waging a heroic liberation struggle to regain its homeland and its territory usurped by military aggression in 1967.” The Montreal Central Council therefore asked the larger CSN to support the cause of Palestinian liberation.⁴⁸ In an attempt to maintain links between Quebec and Palestinian liberation, Rézeq Faraj organized a solidarity trip to Lebanon, Egypt, Syria, Iraq and Jordan. Among other prominent Quebeckers, Michel and Simonne Chartrand joined the tour and met with refugees, poets and teachers. Chartrand also met with the Palestinian revolutionary council and had a long and passionate discussion with Yasser Arafat about the nature of their respective

⁴⁵ WRDA, Comité québécois provisoire de solidarité avec le peuple palestinien fonds, “Pourquoi un Comité québécois de solidarité avec le peuple palestinien,” n.d. “[La] lutte de libération nationale du peuple palestinien contre l’impérialisme américain et ses alliés est une lutte contre les mêmes ennemis que ceux du peuple québécois.”

⁴⁶ UQAM, Collection de publications de groupes de gauche et de groupes populaires, 21p 900:04/156, Fiches d’organiseurs, “Semaine de solidarité avec le peuple palestinien, du 2 au 12 mars, Montreal 1970,” 3.

⁴⁷ Foisy, *Michel Chartrand, la colère du juste (1968-2003)*, 232.

⁴⁸ ACSN, CCSNM fonds, Procès-verbaux, Assemblée Générale, 17 mars 1970. “sont quotidiennement opprimés économiquement, politiquement et militairement par l’impérialisme américain et son allié Israël”; “le peuple palestinien mène actuellement une lutte de libération héroïque pour retrouver sa patrie et ses territoires usurpés par l’agression militaire de 1967.”

struggles.⁴⁹ Upon their return to Montreal, Rézeq Faraj became the first employee of the Quebec-Palestine solidarity Committee.⁵⁰

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, the Montreal Central Council actively worked to create a new space of resistance which broke down the boundaries between labour and the left. By opening its doors to radicals of all backgrounds, the organization helped to forge a common language of dissent which transcended linguistic and ethnic origin, and which was firmly rooted and shaped by the particularities of Montreal. Confronted with the deep diversity of life in the city and the complexity of its overlapping systems of power, many of the intellectuals of Quebec liberation were forced to reconsider many of the very ways in which they had understood themselves and their movement. Such a rethinking of the present and future, however, also implied a rethinking of the past.

The Rewriting of History

In the project of re-interpreting Quebec as a colonized nation, few efforts were more important than re-narrating its history. Although the journals and books of the Quebec liberation movement drew on alternative historical readings throughout the 1960s, the first large-scale attempt to re-narrate Quebec's past emerged out of the new radical space which the Central Council fostered. The effort to rethink Quebec history involved the participation of countless individuals, but one Montreal intellectual, Léandre Bergeron, played a central role in synthesizing many different

⁴⁹ Foisy, *Michel Chartrand, la colère du juste (1968-2003)*, 233, 39. When he returned from the Middle East, Chartrand reflected upon Israel, "C'est un petit État capitaliste, malgré tous ses kibboutz. Mais c'est d'abord et avant tout une tête de pont d'un grand pays capitaliste, les États-Unis, de l'impérialisme américain au Moyen-Orient. C'est donc un ennemi du Québec et de tous les peuples du monde, comme les USA sont notre ennemi." "Chartrand de retour du Moyen-Orient : 'Tout un peuple entassé dans des camps de réfugiés, ça fait dur en maudit!'," *Québec-Presse*, 3 septembre 1972, 8. ACSN, CCSNM, Discours de Michel Chartrand, "Retour du Moyen-Orient," procès-verbaux, Assemblée Générale, 5 septembre 1972, 42.

⁵⁰ Foisy, *Michel Chartrand, la colère du juste (1968-2003)*, 237.

views, producing a narrative of Quebec's past which grappled with the complex issues facing the Quebec liberation movement in the present. Born in Saint-Lupicin Manitoba and educated in Winnipeg and France, Bergeron taught at the Royal Military College in Kingston until 1964, and then in the department of modern languages at Sir George Williams University. During his time at Sir George Williams, Bergeron, while maintaining close contact with the intellectuals and writers of Quebec liberation, came into contact with students of a wide variety of backgrounds and perspectives. As a faculty member at the university during the Sir George Williams Affair of 1969, Bergeron, who supported the student occupation,⁵¹ was forced to think through questions of race in Quebec society, a reflection which deeply influenced the way in which he would rethink Quebec history in the coming years.

Bergeron's first efforts at popular historical education came in the summer of 1969, when he organized a series of weekly courses for the Saint-Jacques citizens' committee.⁵² The idea of holding popular education courses for workers quickly sparked enthusiasm at the Central Council's 1969 convention, and the organization decided that the education committee and the political action committee would work together to prepare their implementation. According to the education committee, to understand the contradictory forces in our present society, it was necessary not only to study history, but to study history according to a precise method which highlighted the central contradictions governing Quebec's past. It was crucial that a "colonized

⁵¹ During the occupation, Bergeron was one of the seven signatories of a letter printed in the *Georgian* which denounced the actions of the administration and which concluded with a declaration of support for the students. David Orton et al., "Dissenting Faculty State Position," *The Georgian*, 4 February 1969, 2.

⁵² The popular history courses formed part of a larger efflorescence of popular education courses under the auspices of the Montreal Central Council which began in 1968. See "L'Éducation: Une priorité continue du Conseil Central," *Unité Ouvrière* 2, no. Édition Spéciale (avril 1978): 3-4. For Bergeron's reflections on his early attempts at popular education, see UQAM, Charles Gagnon fonds, 124p-202a/3, Léandre Bergeron, "Expériences de formation politique de ces dernières années."

population like that of Quebec” be taught a history different than that which it had been traditionally taught. It needed to be offered a history shaped by the politics of decolonization, a history which could help it “reinterpret its past, understand its present condition, and change its future.” Political education for workers therefore needed to include a study of the ideology of the British colonizers and the collaborationist elite, as well as Quebec workers’ various attempts to organize resistance. Limiting political education to the history of the labour movement “would only orient workers towards a corporatist view of society,” and limiting the courses to abstract economic theories, not grounded in reality, would be dreadfully boring. To truly politicize workers, the committee argued, the only possible approach was to present their struggle within the larger history of anti-imperialist resistance.⁵³

And so in November 1969 Léandre Bergeron, along with Bertrand Lapalme, began to give popular education courses to the workers of the Montreal Central Council. The courses, given at the Central Council’s headquarters on Saint-Denis, were attended by 45-60 people, and covered Quebec history, nationalism and the class struggle, the history of the Quebec labour movement, capitalism, socialism and communism.⁵⁴ While the sessions themselves reached many, the greatest legacy of the courses was the publication of Léandre Bergeron’s spectacularly successful *Petit Manuel d’Histoire du Québec*. The book, which built upon Bergeron’s course notes, was sold by the Council for one dollar, and for 50 cents at its 1970 convention.⁵⁵ The

⁵³ ACSN, CCSNM fonds, Victor Leroux, Jean-Paul Guillemette, Bernard Leclerc, Clermont Bergeron, Léandre Bergeron, Jean-Yves Vézina, “Rapport du Comité d’Éducation,” Congrès 1970, 2-3. “un peuple colonisé comme l’est le peuple Québécois”; “réinterpréter son passé, s’expliquer sa condition présente et changer son avenir”; “ne ferait qu’orienter les travailleurs vers une vue corporatiste de la société.”

⁵⁴ ACSN, CCSNM fonds, Fernand Foisy, “Rapport du secrétaire” Congrès 1970, 48. ACSN, CCSNM fonds, Victor Leroux, Jean-Paul Guillemette, Bernard Leclerc, Clermont Bergeron, Léandre Bergeron, Jean-Yves Vézina, “Rapport du Comité d’Éducation,” Congrès 1970, 2-3.

⁵⁵ ACSN, CCSNM fonds, Fernand Foisy, “Rapport du secrétaire” Congrès 1970, 48.

Council held a press conference to launch the book,⁵⁶ and took it upon itself to sell two thousand copies.⁵⁷ In the first seven months after its publication, sales had already reached an unprecedented 60,000 and, by 1972, over 140,000 copies had been sold.⁵⁸

The *Petit manuel d'histoire du Québec* was the Quebec liberation movement's single most influential attempt to rewrite Quebec history, and it attempts nothing short of re-narrating the Quebec nation. While not an official document of the Central Council, the book emerged out of its activities, was fully endorsed by the organization, and deeply reflected its new and more open adaptation of the ideas of Quebec liberation. Bergeron argues that a new history – one which is both situated within and responds to the needs of anti-colonial resistance – is needed. A religiously-dominated elite had attempted to construct a vision of a 'heroic' past, Bergeron argues, "to make us believe that at a certain epoch we too were great colonizers and nation builders," finding compensation for their present colonial status "in the fact that we had colonized the Red man." Other historians, employing scientific methodologies, had tried to look 'dispassionately' and 'objectively' upon Quebec's past, but have acted only as "angel[s] of knowledge rummaging through humanity's garbage dumps to extract material for neat obituary notices," merely confirming the viewpoint that "American capitalism sets the supreme order," and that

⁵⁶ ACSN, CCSNM fonds, Fernand Foisy, "Rapport du Secrétaire", Congrès 1972, 34.

⁵⁷ UQAM, Charles Gagnon fonds, 124p-202a/3, Léandre Bergeron, "Experiences de formation politique de ces dernières années."

⁵⁸ See "An Open Letter to W.O. Twaits, Chairman of the Board, Imperial Oil" Appendix III to Léandre Bergeron, *The History of Quebec: A Patriot's Handbook*, Updated ed. (Toronto: NC Press, 1971). The figure of 140,000 copies is found on the front cover of this edition of the book. After the book's publication, the popular education courses became more popular than ever, being given three times a week to audiences of as many as 200. After a while, however, many students began to lose interest. Many said that they no longer needed courses now that all of the information was available in the *petit manuel*. Léandre Bergeron, UQAM, Charles Gagnon fonds, 124p-202a/3, Léandre Bergeron, "Experiences de formation politique de ces dernières années."

small nations, “relics of another era, are marginal.”⁵⁹ While Bergeron does not mention the neo-nationalist historians of the ‘Montreal school,’ historians who point to the central importance of the Conquest of 1759 and its continuing legacy,⁶⁰ he clearly distances himself from them as well.

Bergeron argued that a new interpretation of Quebec’s past, one which was explicitly oriented towards giving citizens the tools to understand their present, was now needed. In order to be able to “engage in struggle more effectively,” it was more necessary than ever to understand the “forces that reduced us to colonial status,” and those forces “that keep us there today.” His work was therefore one which hoped to re-examine

the outstanding events in our history and place them in the struggle between oppressor and oppressed, colonizer and colonized, exploiter and exploited. It defines the general framework of this struggle in Quebec but does not hope to include every detail. This handbook will have achieved its goal if individual readers or study groups use it as a springboard to advance the study of our history and to better understand the mechanisms of colonialism, in order to channel our collective frustration into precise and effective acts of decolonization.

This handbook is on the course, the course of the School of the Street, for the man in the street, for the people of Quebec thrown into the street and dispossessed of their house, of the fruits of their work, of their daily life.

This handbook sets its sights on a repossession, the repossession of our history, the first step in the repossession of ourselves, in order to move on to the next step, the possession of our own future.⁶¹

While Bergeron attempts to resituate Quebec history in the larger framework of international colonization, the present climate of international revolt informs every

⁵⁹ Ibid., forward.

⁶⁰ The historians most closely associated with the ‘Montreal school’ of Quebec historical writing are Guy Frégault, Maurice Séguin, and Michel Brunet. The general arguments of these historians was that, because of legacies of the Conquest of 1759, French Canadians had been largely excluded from positions of power and had been relegated to inferior economic positions. The works of these three historians played an important role in fuelling the neo-nationalism of the 1960s, and their interpretations of the past often found their way into the writings of the intellectuals of Quebec liberation. For differing views on these historians and their legacy, see Jean Lamarre, *Le devenir de la nation québécoise: selon Maurice Séguin, Guy Frégault et Michel Brunet, 1944-1969* (Sillery: Septentrion, 1993); Ronald Rudin, *Making History in Twentieth-Century Quebec* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997).

⁶¹ Bergeron, *The History of Quebec: A Patriot's Handbook*, forward.

page. When discussing French soldiers burning Iroquois villages in the seventeenth century, the act is compared to “the current American aggression against Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia.” Some of Louis Riel’s ideas came “close to Che Guevara’s concept of the ‘new man.’” And it is hard to not read echos of the Cuban Revolution in Bergeron’s judgement that the major strategic flaw of the anti-Tory rebellions of the 1830s was the Patriots’ adoption of classic warfare strategy. Instead, they should have made use of guerilla tactics, formed a base of habitant support in the rural countryside and waged a “people’s war” against “English domination.” The British Rifle Corps formed during the 1830s is even read as a precursor of the Algerian O.A.S.⁶²

The *Petit manuel* marks a milestone in the writing of a politically oriented history of Quebec, one which remains open to the multi-faceted nature of Quebec’s past, and which portrays Quebec as a society deeply scarred by the legacy of overlapping imperial systems of power. Rather than merely looking to the Conquest, or to the negative effects of ‘Anglo-Saxon colonialism,’ Bergeron argues that Quebec’s past can be divided into the three different colonial ‘regimes’ to which it has been subjected, the French, the English, and the American. European explorers did not ‘discover’ America, he argues, as the land “was already populated by *men*, men of a different colour, yes, but men all the same.” White explorers conquered territories by force, practising “genocide as barbarously as Hitler did against the Jews or as the Americans are doing against the Vietnamese.” Bergeron also highlights the powerful effects of racism which, present during the early years of European colonization, “still permeates much of White society, and will only disappear with the complete liberation of all non-White peoples.” Far from ignoring Natives, Bergeron argued that

⁶² Ibid., forward, 25, 146, 03, 77.

the “principal characteristic of human society in New France was the domination of the White population over the Red population.”⁶³

As colonialism is intimately related to capitalism, Quebec’s various colonial societies have always been highly stratified, containing multiple levels of exploitation. Aboriginal peoples were therefore not alone in being exploited by the French elite; they were joined by lower-class French settlers who, often brought by force to the new world, had interests diametrically opposed to those of French merchants and religious orders. In dramatic contrast to a romantic vision of Quebec history which, according to Bergeron, glorified “those famous exploiters of the Red man – Dollard des Ormeaux, Jeanne Mance, Maisonneuve, Marguerite Bourgeoys and the rest,” his version of the past traces the ancestors of present-day Quebec back to the “exploited settlers,” a group “composed of convicts, vagabonds and the ‘king’s daughters.’” By identifying the ancestors of modern-day Quebecers as the ‘outcasts’ and ‘rejects’ of France, Bergeron attempts to demonstrate a continuity of exploitation beginning in the days of French colonialism through to the present. Bergeron’s very terminology speaks to his attempt to read Quebec history through a lens of international revolution. He insists on using the term *Canayen* when referring “to those 70,000 French people of Canada and their descendants.” A *French Canadian*, he argues, “is the Canayen who licks the boots of the English or American colonizer,” who “is like the American Negro who tries to escape from his identity and hopes to be integrated into White society.” Like the African American who refuses integration to become *Black*, the

⁶³ Bergeron even discusses the ways in which French-Canadians missionaries had been involved in perpetuating “White colonialism in China, Basutoland and the land of the Eskimo.” Strangely, however, Bergeron almost completely ignores the history of the Black population of Quebec, with the exception of a single footnote outlining the presence of Black slaves. Bergeron further elaborates on the question of race, and his belief that it is “a natural outcome of capitalist exploitation,” when discussing Lord Durham. Durham “merely expresses the racist attitudes of international colonialism in every period of history,” Bergeron argues, which one can see practiced “by the French in Algeria, Indochina and Black Africa; by the English in India, the Middle East, and Africa; and by the Americans in the Philippines, Latin America, Vietnam, Thailand, and in their own country with respect to the Black population.” Ibid., 6-7, 37, 100-5.

“*Québécois* is the Canayen who rejects colonialism” and who struggles “against the Anglo-American-Canadian domination of Quebec.”⁶⁴

By looking at history from the perspective of the marginalized, Bergeron is able to challenge the entire school of neo-nationalist historiography, arguing provocatively that the Conquest of 1759 meant “little more than *changing masters*.” Rather than being exploited by French merchants and administrators, the Canayens were now exploited by English ones. The Catholic Church, currying favour with the new administration, assumed the role of assuring the subservience of the people, becoming the ‘negro king’ of the province. The complex mixing of class and colonialism then takes another twist with the rise of the American regime, and especially in the post World War Two period when American capital stratifies Quebec into two main groups, workers and the bourgeoisie. The upper bourgeoisie is composed almost entirely of anglophones, although francophones are well-represented among the middle- and petit-bourgeoisie. The working class, for its part, is composed not only of francophones, but also of Italian and Portuguese immigrants and some English Canadians. Because the vast majority of francophone Quebecers were workers, however, Bergeron conflates the struggle of Quebec workers with the struggle of the Quebec people, a people which was now on the march towards liberation: “The *Québécois* people, those who were the undesirables, who were driven back into the wilderness and then drawn to the cities to be made slaves of the capitalist production system, those who were brutally crushed every time they tried to revolt, are making their entrance into history.”⁶⁵

And herein lies the major tension of Bergeron’s work. How is it possible to write one ‘national’ history of the Quebec people while, at the same time, including

⁶⁴ Ibid., 174, 26, 19, f40.

⁶⁵ Léandre Bergeron, *Petit manuel d'histoire du Québec* (Montréal: Éditions québécoises, 1971), 44-45, 199, 214-15, 26.

the voices and perspectives of other marginalized groups in Quebec? While Bergeron attempts to demonstrate the multi-faceted nature of colonialism, and while he believes that the “slow genocide of the Red race is another crime on the conscience of the White ruling class, be it French, English, Spanish, Portuguese or Dutch,” his narrative remains singular and, in a sense, monolithic. Just like mainstream historical narratives of North America, Natives are present at the beginning of his study, but disappear as the ‘Québécois’ people begin forming a community of resistance. Even more problematic is the way in which the Quebec community is defined. At the very beginning of the book, he declares that he is writing about ‘our’ history, about how “We, the Québécois, have always been under the domination of these ‘others.’” And later on he maintains that “the resources of the Quebec soil are the inalienable property of the Québécois people.”⁶⁶ Although Natives and immigrants are present, they are never permitted to enter the work as privileged subjects, but only as secondary figures.

Ultimately, the *Petit manuel d'histoire du Québec*, like the popular education courses from which it emerged, represented an attempt to build a narrative of Quebec’s past which could better inform present political struggles, and it represents many of the tensions, ambiguities, and paradoxes of the larger Quebec liberation movement. It was published at a time when decolonization theories and interpretations reigned supreme, yet it represents an attempt to reconcile them with a more class-based Marxist outlook. And, although it did not succeed in resolving the tensions between the desire to include Aboriginal perspectives and the goal of writing a history of the Quebec people, its preoccupation with the multiple levels of colonialism, its attention to race, and its sympathetic treatment of the plight of Native

⁶⁶ Ibid., 6, 38, 1-2, 193.

people reflect many of the creative ways in which individuals were attempting to think through some of the inherent paradoxes of the larger movement.

A New Language of Labour

Bergeron's attempts at rewriting Quebec history, of constructing a narrative of Quebec's past which looked forward to a decolonized future, emerged out of the crowded meeting rooms and bustling cafés of the city's downtown core. The Montreal Central Council dove head-first into the larger structures of the Montreal left, learning from its intellectual production and offering new analyses of the place of organized labour in the larger structures of the movement. Through its innovations, it changed the very vocabulary in which labour politics could be articulated, situating organized labour at the very forefront of political resistance.

The Central Council outlined a new and comprehensive conception of democracy, one including not only political and cultural, but also economic rights. Formal democratic political structures, the Council argued, hid an insidious system of economic dictatorship, one which operated solely on the logic of profit and which had no consideration for borders or cultures, and which was both immoral and inhuman.⁶⁷ At the Council's 1969 convention, a workgroup was established to draft new founding principles for the movement, principles which were officially adopted in 1970.⁶⁸ The document argued that the social liberation of the working class could only come with a rapid and radical transformation of society's social, cultural, and economic structures. And it was the responsibility of unionized workers to be the avant-garde

⁶⁷ See, for example, ACSN, CCSNM fonds, Michel Chartrand, "Rapport du Président" Congrès 1970, 13, 18. ACSN, CCSNM fonds, Discours de Michel Chartrand, procès-verbaux Assemblée Générale, 20 janvier 1970.

⁶⁸ "Le Conseil central de Montréal (CSN) propose une déclaration de principe," *Québec-Presse*, 1 février 1970, 1A; "Projet de déclaration de principes de la CSN présenté par le comité exécutif du conseil central de Montréal," *Le Travail. édition de Montréal*, février 1970. ACSN, CCSNM fonds, procès-verbal, assemblée générale, 17 mars 1970.

of this radical democratic movement. Citizens needed to be given the opportunity to actively participate in economic institutions and on the shop floor, in culture and politics, and women needed to have the same opportunities as men. To achieve these goals, organized labour needed to join with other popular movements in their attempts to replace an economic dictatorship by a “government of the people, by the people, and for the people.”⁶⁹

The Central Council, drawing on the analyses of the wider world of the Montreal left, knew that building a deep and comprehensive democracy meant more than opposing the capitalist system. In Quebec, capitalism existed in its imperial form. Liberation therefore presupposed decolonization. Part of its declaration of principles recognized the right of populations to control their own economies, and it denounced “all forms of imperialism and colonialism.”⁷⁰ In the radical years of 1969-1972, the Central Council repeatedly framed problems in the light of decolonization, advocating a radical fusing of ‘economic’ and ‘national’ questions, and linking problems of language and culture with those of unemployment and wages.⁷¹ Fighting for a just judicial system, to take only one example, meant opposing “social and economic injustice” and working to build “a free, decolonized, egalitarian, just, and fraternal Quebec.”⁷² The struggle for socialism not only implied the abolition of class exploitation, but also “the domination of one nation over another.”⁷³ The organization believed ardently in the necessity of building a culture of resistance,

⁶⁹ ACSN, CCSNM fonds, Annexe ‘A’ C.A.P., “Déclaration de principes et charte des droits de l’homme,” Congrès 1970. “gouvernement du peuple, par le peuple et pour le peuple.”

⁷⁰ ACSN, CCSNM fonds, Annexe ‘A’ C.A.P., “Déclaration de principes et charte des droits de l’homme,” Congrès 1970. “toute forme d’impérialisme et de colonialisme.”

⁷¹ For just one example, see ACSN, CCSNM, Jacques Bourdouxhe, “Rapport Comité d’Action Politique” Congrès 1971.

⁷² ACSN, CCSNM fonds, Extrait du Procès-Verbal du 13e congrès du Conseil Central des syndicats nationaux de Montréal tenu les 28, 29, 30 avril et 1, 2 mai 1971, 10. “l’injustice sociale et économique”; “un Québec libre, décolonisé, égalitaire, juste et fraternel.”

⁷³ ACSN, CCSNM fonds, “Le socialisme c’est la démocratie,” document de travail du 14ème congrès du Conseil central des syndicats nationaux de Montréal,” Congrès, 1972, 4. “la domination d’une nation sur une autre.”

maintaining that workers not only had “a sense of solidarity and collaboration,” but also “a potential of creativity which, stifled by the capitalism system, would be liberated by socialism.” The creative capacity of each person needed to be fostered, and a new culture, based on “the experience and values of the working class,” and which would seamlessly integrate education and life, needed to be forged. The proliferation of workers’ newspapers and theatres demonstrated that workers not only needed this new culture, but that they were actively involved in the process of building it.⁷⁴

In the late 1960s and early 1970s the Central Council advocated a broad project of anti-imperialism and national liberation, one which was focused on a holistic project of liberation. As its support for the cause of Palestine demonstrates, international solidarity was central to both its activities and outlook. It also denounced the U.S. intervention in Vietnam and, in support of struggling farm workers, boycotted grapes from California. It supported the liberation struggles of Angola, Mozambique and Guinea-Bissau against Portugal, and the Greek and Spanish people against their own dictatorial governments.⁷⁵ In the very early 1970s, it began making important contacts with people of Latin American origin in Montreal,⁷⁶ and Chartrand travelled to Chile at the end of 1972 to observe firsthand the country’s experiments with democratic socialism.⁷⁷

⁷⁴ ACSN, CCSNM fonds, “La démocratie culturelle,” document de travail du 14ème congrès du Conseil central des syndicats nationaux de Montréal,” Congrès 1972, 4-6. “un sens de la solidarité et de la collaboration”; “un potentiel de créativité que le capitalisme étouffe et qui sera pleinement libéré dans le socialisme”; “l’expérience et des valeurs de la class ouvrière.”

⁷⁵ “Solidarité internationale,” 30-31.

⁷⁶ UQAM, Collection de publications de groupes de gauche et de groupes populaires, 21p-900:04/155, “Le secretariat Québec-Amérique Latine et sa place à l’intérieur du mouvement ouvrier québécois,” Secrétariat Québec-Amérique Latine, novembre 1975, 5.

⁷⁷ Foisy, *Michel Chartrand, la colère du juste (1968-2003)*, 240. When the American-backed coup disposed of the democratically elected government of Salvador Allende in 1973, the Central Council became a major centre of Chilean solidarity and resistance. On 1 December 1973, the newly-formed Quebec-Chile solidarity committee, an organization very close to the Central Council and fully supported by it, organized a major rally at the Montreal Forum in support of Chilean workers.

The critical terrain of struggle nevertheless remained Quebec. When the Parti Québécois (PQ) was founded in the late 1960s as a left-leaning pro-independence party, it captured many of the hopes of leftists in the city desperately looking for a political alternative to the established political parties. In its early years, the PQ was laden with deep ambiguity. Even if its policies were profoundly reformist in nature, as a movement it seemed to capture the imaginations of many young activists. In the 1970 provincial election, the Central Council – breaking with the CSN’s long-standing tradition of political neutrality – indicated its preference for the PQ, before officially giving its support to the new party in 1971.⁷⁸

In the period leading up to the 1970 election, the executive outlined a position, adopted by the general assembly, which argued that the PQ had the most democratic platform of the parties, and that it was the only party that wanted to put an end to that present constitutional ambiguity. But the PQ also had “certain gaps and certain weakness in its economic program and its legislation for workers,” and the Council reaffirmed that “the real battle for the national liberation of Quebec workers will not stop with constitutional liberation; this constitutional liberation must be achieved in light of the social and economic liberation of the Quebec people.” Robert Burns, legal councillor for the CSN, and one of the PQ’s most left-wing candidates, spoke before the assembly about the forces within the PQ which could eventually transform

Salvador Allende’s wife, Hortensia Allende, and Cesar Chavez, the legendary defender of California’s Mexican-American grape-workers, spoke at the event. The Central Council refused to see the coup in Chile as an isolated event. The speakers at the mass rally also included, among others, representatives of Quebec’s three main labour unions and “un représentant des Indiens du Québec.” The event declared itself in solidarity with striking workers in Quebec, Aboriginal peoples, coffee workers in Angola, Spanish workers and unionists, Mexican-American workers in California, and the persecuted peoples of Chile and Greece. “Manifestation de solidarité au Forum 1er décembre,” *Le Travail, édition de Montréal* 1, no. 8 (Décembre 1973): 1-2.

⁷⁸ “Le Conseil Central et les partis politiques,” *Unité Ourvière* 2, no. Édition Spéciale (avril 1978): 23. The Central Council would officially declare its support for Quebec independence in 1972.

the party into one which would advocate the interests of the working class.⁷⁹ Despite the Central Council's support for the party, however, Chartrand would declare at its 1970s convention that the labour organization's objective remained "a veritable revolution, a rapid and deep change of the capitalist system," one which would build a society which would place human concerns above economic ones.⁸⁰

Through its actions and pronouncements, the Central Council played a crucially important role in changing the nature of organized labour in Quebec. Although it encountered resistance within the labour movement as a whole,⁸¹ the Central Council stretched labour's language of dissent, pushing it in new directions and building bridges between labour and other progressive movements. Not having a strict party line or an official dogma, many voices, organizations, and individuals moved in and out of its meetings and overflowing offices, discussing ideas and engaging in heated arguments. The organization worked to open up a radical space of collaboration between labour and other popular movements and, rather than pushing away the radical diversity of life in Montreal, it embraced it. By opening itself up to immigrants, the organization not only worked to broaden the lines of solidarity in Montreal, sensitizing new groups to the national liberation struggle of francophone Quebecers, but it also learned from the individuals and groups in its midst.

⁷⁹ ACSN, CCSNM fonds, Procès-verbaux, Assemblée Générale, 7 avril 1970. "certaines lacunes et certaines faiblesses de son programme économique et de législation ouvrière"; "la vraie bataille de libération nationale des travailleurs québécois ne s'arrête pas à la libération constitutionnelle; cette libération constitutionnelle doit être faite en vue de la libération économique et sociale du peuple québécois."

⁸⁰ ACSN, CCSNM fonds, Michel Chartrand, "Rapport du Président," Congrès 1970, 10-11. "une révolution véritable, un changement radical profond et rapide du système capitaliste."

⁸¹ A major conflict broke out between the Montreal Central Council and the larger confederal body of the CSN when, in 1970, Michel Chartrand, Florent Audette, and the Syndicat de la construction de Montréal supported an FTQ-led strike in the construction industry. "D'un syndicalisme de collaboration vers un syndicalisme de classe: L'évolution du Conseil Central de Montréal," *Unité Ourvière* 2, no. Édition Spéciale (avril 1978): 6. For the response of the Montreal Central Council, which loudly declared its support for its executive, see ACSN, CCSNM fonds, Procès-verbaux, Assemblée Générale 6 juin 1970. Also see "La fondation du Conseil Central de Montréal," *Unité Ourvière* 2, no. Édition Spéciale (avril 1978): 2.

What were the effects of the Central Council's actions and words on the mainstream of the labour movement? Could its radical critiques possibly have a resonance among its rivals, both within and outside of the CSN? Or, for that matter, outside of Montreal? Chartrand had often articulated his hope that anti-imperialism would be adopted by labour in general.⁸² During the heated battles surrounding the *La Presse* strike in 1971, it looked as though his hope was beginning to materialize.

‘Things Will Never be the Same Again’ – The *La Presse* Strike

Up until the early 1970s, the radical ideas promoted by the Montreal Central Council had not found their way into the mainstream of the Quebec labour movement. Then, for a variety of reasons, this pattern changed in the aftermath of the October Crisis. One event, more than any other, catalyzed the labour movement's rapid radicalization: the long and bitter strike at *La Presse*, North America's largest French-language newspaper. What began in the summer of 1971 as a lock-out of 321 typographers, pressmen, stereotypers, and photo-engravers soon ballooned into a fierce political battle. *La Presse* holds a deeply significant cultural importance in Quebec society, acting as one of the primary means of news and communication. In 1967, *La Presse* had come under control of Paul Desmarais's financial empire, Power Corporation, an organization which had close personal and financial ties to the provincial Liberal government of Robert Bourassa. Political turmoil had been brewing for years at *La Presse*, and many young journalists were frustrated with the political censorship of the paper's editorial board. When the lockout was announced, rumours circulated that the paper hoped that the locked-out employees would erect

⁸² See, for example, his speech on 20 January 1970. “Si le reste de la CSN était d'accord avec le CCSNM pour l'unilinguisme français, on espère qu'il va être d'accord avec le CCSNM pour que la tâche primordiale des syndicats, tant sur le premier front que sur le deuxième front, c'est de combattre à fond le capitalisme monolithique, la dictature économique impérialiste des Etats-Unis.” ACSN, CCSNM fonds, Discours de Michel Chartrand, procès-verbaux Assemblée Générale, 20 janvier 1970.

picket lines, that journalists would refuse to cross these lines, and that the paper would have a pretext for firing its undesirable reporters.⁸³ Realizing the trap which had been set, the locked-out employees refused to picket, and journalists continued working as usual.

The original issue leading to the lock-out was a conflict over the paper's introduction of new automated technology. As this technology made many skilled newspaper jobs obsolete, and as the paper was unwilling to guarantee workers' rights and job security, the lines of opposition were quickly drawn. Because of the political climate of the era, many radicals began interpreting the conflict as one in which the imperatives of capital were in conflict with the rights of labour. Throughout the hot summer of 1971, labour leaders continually emphasized the political nature of the lock-out and the collaboration between finance capital and the state.⁸⁴ Louis Laberge, leader of the Fédération des travailleurs du Québec (FTQ), argued that "All those who have been fighting for years so that human dignity would be respected in the workplace need to know that the conflict at *La Presse* is putting into jeopardy all of these hard-fought struggles."⁸⁵ By September, Fernand Daoust, the general secretary of the FTQ, was proclaiming that the struggle at *La Presse* was of historic dimensions, and that it was in the process of transforming the very nature of the union movement in Quebec.⁸⁶

⁸³ The journalists of *La Presse* issued a statement in October stating that censorship had become institutionalized at the newspaper. See Nick Auf der Maur, "The Trigger was the 'La Presse' Affair," *The Last Post* 2, no. 3 (December-January 1971-1972): 17.

⁸⁴ UQAM, FTQ fonds, 100p-630 :01/7, Communiqué de Presse, "Power Corporation facilite la politisation syndicale," 23 août 1971.

⁸⁵ UQAM, FTQ fonds, 100p-630 :01/7, Communiqué de Presse, "Le Conflit à *La Presse* devient une lutte de tout le mouvement" 23 août 1971. "Tout ceux qui se battent depuis des années pour que la dignité de l'homme soit respectée dans les entreprises doivent savoir que le conflit à *La Presse* remet en cause ces luttes durement menées."

⁸⁶ UQAM, FTQ fonds, 100p-630 :01/7, Communiqué de Presse, "La grève de la Presse un conflit historique," 28 septembre 1971.

The three main labour organizations in Quebec, the CSN, the FTQ, and the province's teachers' union, the CEQ, began preparations for a massive protest to bring the struggle at *La Presse* to the city streets. Two days before the scheduled protest, Desmarais shut down the paper, locked out all of its employees, and blocked access to the *La Presse* building with barricades, armed guards, and police dogs.⁸⁷ The ensuing battle therefore became one over public space, the nature of capitalism, and control of the city. Mayor Jean Drapeau, after consulting with premier Robert Bourassa, re-introduced a by-law banning demonstrations.⁸⁸ And on the evening of 28 October, Paul Desmarais met with Drapeau. Barricades were erected blocking off an entire section of downtown Montreal. Activists and union militants waited in anxious anticipation for the protest the following day.

On 29 October, the crowd began gathering at Carré Saint-Louis. As the procession began slowly marching down Saint-Denis St., at the front were the leaders of the three main labour organizations: Louis Laberge (FTQ), Yvan Charbonneau (CEQ), and Marcel Pepin (CSN). At their side was Robert Burns, an executive member of the Parti québécois who marched alongside the workers in open defiance of the PQ's decision not to take part in the protest.⁸⁹ The crowd marched along its planned route, but, blocked from turning west onto Dorchester, the crowd continued down Saint-Denis to Craig St., where it came across another police barricade. According to the plan, the three presidents were to calmly breach the police barricade, planning to offer themselves for arrest without resistance. After shoving and jostling, the police stormed the crowd, hitting and beating anyone in their way, including

⁸⁷ Louis Fournier, *Louis Laberge : le syndicalisme c'est ma vie* (Montréal: Québec/Amérique, 1992), 200-1.

⁸⁸ The by-law, which was first introduced in the fall of 1969, had been declared unconstitutional by the Quebec Superior Court. Because it was pending appeal, however, Drapeau felt that it was constitutional to re-enact the legislation. Auf der Maur, "The Trigger was the 'La Presse' Affair," 18.

⁸⁹ Fournier, *Louis Laberge : le syndicalisme c'est ma vie*, 200-2.

bystanders who happened to be in the area.⁹⁰ According to official count, 190 people were injured and 200 arrested, and Montreal's local hospitals and jails were full.

Michèle Gauthier, a young student at CEGEP Vieux-Montreal who marched among the protestors, died in the chaos which followed the police attack.⁹¹

Michèle Gauthier's death sparked outrage in the city. Her funeral, held on 2 November in a small village 25 miles southeast of Montreal, attracted thousands of mourners. Gauthier had been involved not only in left-wing and labour politics, but also in the women's liberation movement as a member of the Front de Libération des Femmes. A wreath on her gravestone was draped with a banner reading "Morte pour la liberté," and the flag of the *Patriotes* covered her casket. The pall bearers at her funeral symbolically represented Montreal's generalized atmosphere of revolt. The coffin was carried to its grave by Pepin, Charbonneau, and Laberge, a locked-out *La Presse* worker and a student of CEGEP Vieux-Montréal, as well as a representative of the Front de Libération des Femmes. In the tense atmosphere pervading the city, Gauthier became a martyr for the movement, representing the senseless human costs of capitalism.⁹²

The day after the march, Quebec's labour unions held a press conference at which, after vehemently denouncing the behaviour of the police, they proceeded to read the Montreal Policemen's Brotherhood out of the labour movement.⁹³ Police barricades had prevented the march from moving west into the wealthy anglophone sections of the city, a detail which was not lost on either protestors or political observers. A *Le Devoir* editorial entitled "L'ouest interdit" argued that the "nègres

⁹⁰ For a detailed account of the reactions to the demonstration, see Yves Ménard, "Le lock-out de *La Presse* et l'émeute du 29 octobre 1971: un conflit d'envergure nationale," *Bulletin du RCHTQ* 28, no. 2 (automne 2002): 5-35.

⁹¹ Fournier, *Louis Laberge : le syndicalisme c'est ma vie*, 204-6.

⁹² Pierre Vennat, "2,000 Québécois portent Michèle Gauthier en terre," *Le Quotidien Populaire*, 3 novembre 1971, 16.

⁹³ Auf der Maur, "The Trigger was the 'La Presse' Affair," 18.

blancs of Montreal can destroy their ghetto, as long as they do not decide to protest in the west.” They were allowed only to “fight amongst themselves in their territory of slums and unemployment... in the east.”⁹⁴

On 2 November, the same day as Gauthier’s funeral, the locked-out workers from *La Presse* – with the financial help of the Central Council – published the first volume of their own worker-run newspaper, *Le Quotidien Populaire*, a paper which quickly exhausted its print-run of 100,000 copies.⁹⁵ That evening, 15,000 workers – acting on less than 24 hours notice – accepted an invitation from the Central Council to attend a mass rally at the Montreal Forum, a venue chosen both because of its size and because it was situated firmly in the western part of the city. At the rally, Michel Chartrand, dressed in a fiery red shirt, took the stage and asked the crowd to stand in a minute of silence for all who had died for the cause of the working class; the energy and anger of the crowd was palpable in the cool autumn air.⁹⁶ Chartrand argued that Quebecers constituted the population on the planet which was evolving the fastest, and he maintained that labour and a new rising generation were finally converging, and were now working together to build a new and better world.⁹⁷

Robert Lemieux, the lawyer for the FLQ who had also represented many Black activists after the Sir George Williams Affair, stood before the crowd and gave

⁹⁴ Seen in Ménard, “Le lock-out de *La Presse*,” 20. A deeply shaken Louis Laberge also spoke of Drapeau’s attempt to keep workers “dans les quartiers populaires de l’est, loin des ghétos des gavés de l’ouest.” UQAM, FTQ fonds, 100p-630 :01/7, Communiqué de Presse, “Vendredi soir c’était l’émeute de la police,” 23 août 1971. “nègres blancs de Montréal peuvent saccager leur ghetto, mais qu’ils ne s’avisent pas de manifester dans l’ouest”; “battent entre eux dans le territoire de leurs taudis et du chômage; “...dans l’est.”

⁹⁵ “À nos lecteurs et à nos agents de vente,” *Le Quotidien Populaire*, 3 novembre 1971, 14. Also see Pierre Vennat, “Les 12,000 travailleurs au Forum: Une volonté commune: se libérer,” *Le Quotidien Populaire*, 3 novembre 1971, 3.

⁹⁶ Foisy, *Michel Chartrand, la colère du juste (1968-2003)*, 209. For vivid images of the event, see Gilles Groulx, *24 heures ou plus* (Montréal: ONF-NFB, 1971).

⁹⁷ ACSN, CCSNM fonds, Discours de Michel Chartrand, procès-verbaux, Assemblé Général, 2 novembre 1971, 59.

a detailed outline of the curtailment of democratic liberties in Quebec.⁹⁸ Yvon Charbonneau, president of the CEQ, rose to speak, receiving a thunderous standing ovation, and proceeded to highlight the meaning of the working class' transgression into west Montreal. Francophone workers had come to the west to prove that the city was theirs, claim their right to the city, and demonstrate that they were not going to submit to either the police or the city administration. He spoke of the political education that workers had received from their "papas colonialistes," Bourassa and Drapeau, and spoke of other 'colonialist' measures enacted by the Quebec government. And he argued that it was necessary to form a mass movement of solidarity which transcended the traditional divisions between white- and blue-collar workers, highlighting that "in this hall this evening there are thousands of teachers among us, and teachers will be with the people for the victory of a liberated Quebec."⁹⁹

Few, however, were more thoroughly transformed by the events on 29 October than Louis Laberge, the president of the FTQ. Before 1971, the FTQ had had a reputation of reformism and servility to power. Because it represented large American-based international unions, moreover, it was often attacked by radicals as being merely one more American-dominated institution operating in Quebec. Laberge himself had even declared, less than a year earlier, that "I'm a practical guy, not a dreamer... I believe in evolution, not revolution... and while I don't agree with the present system, I don't want to destroy it."¹⁰⁰ But on 2 November, Laberge took centre stage at the Forum and argued that the trauma of the *La Presse* affair created an

⁹⁸ ACSN, CCSNM fonds, Discours de Robert Lemieux, procès-verbaux, Assemblée Générale, 2 novembre 1971, 50.

⁹⁹ ACSN, CCSNM fonds, Discours de Yvon Charbonneau, procès-verbaux, Assemblée Générale, 2 novembre 1971, 53-55. Foisy, *Michel Chartrand, la colère du juste (1968-2003)*, 210. "dans cette salle par des milliers d'enseignants qui sont parmi nous ce soir et les enseignants seront avec le peuple pour la victoire du Québec libéré."

¹⁰⁰ Quoted in Nick Auf der Maur, "A Bleu Collar October," *Radical America* 6, no. 5 (September-October 1972): 74.

unbreakable solidarity between the three main unions, and between workers and students. Through the course of one simple demonstration, Laberge argued, workers received ten years worth of political education. Quebec would never be the same again, he continued, and then went on to finish his speech with the famous ringing words, “it is not windows that we want to smash, but the regime.”¹⁰¹

The massive turnout at the Forum demonstrated the profound politicization not only of the leaders of the major unions, but also of the rank and file. The following day, Pierre Vennat observed in *Le Quotidien Populaire* that “yesterday evening was an evening of the ‘voiceless,’ or, if we’d rather, of the rank-and-file.” While well-known personalities took the floor, so too did representatives of the locked-out *La Presse* workers, individuals fired by Canadair, and employees of Montreal’s French-speaking universities, among others. Nicole Therrien stood on the stage representing the women’s liberation movement, and the longest, loudest, and most passionate standing ovation went to Frank Diterlizzi, a worker of Italian origin who represented the ‘gars de Lapalme,’ postal workers engaged in a long and bitter battle with the federal government. In the crowd there was not only a growing class consciousness which overcame differences of profession and union affiliation, but also a growing recognition of “the necessity of politicizing problems” and of creating “a comprehensive political strategy of action for the labour movement.”¹⁰²

The rally at the Montreal Forum, planned and organized by the Central Council, was a decisive moment in the radicalization of the labour movement as a

¹⁰¹ ACSN, CCSNM fonds, Discours de Louis Laberge, procès-verbaux, Assemblée Générale, 2 novembre 1971, 57. “ce ne sont pas des vitres qu’on veut casser, c’est le régime.”

¹⁰² Auf der Maur, “The Trigger was the ‘La Presse’ Affair,” 10; Henry Milner and Sheilagh Hodgins Milner, *The Decolonization of Quebec: an Analysis of Left-Wing Nationalism* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1973), 208; Vennat, “Les 12,000 travailleurs au Forum: Une volonté commune: se libérer,” 3. “la soirée d’hier était celle des ‘sans voix’, ou, si l’on aime mieux, des militants de la base”; “l’obligation de politiser les problèmes”; “une action politique globale pour le mouvement syndical.”

whole. A new radical language of labour, premised on critiques of capitalism and imperialism, born amidst the ebullient world of the Central Council, had now reached the very heart of the mainstream union movement. And it was through this movement that its ideas would spread far the beyond Montreal's narrow downtown streets where it had, thus far, been largely confined.

Part Three

CHAPTER TEN:

Towards Revolution: Labour, Imperialism, and the New Working Class

The unveiling in broad daylight of the oppressive character of our colonized society brought us back to the very roots of our fight.

-Louis Laberge, "A One and Only Front," 1971

We must be experimental.

-Phase One, Manifesto of the CEQ, 1971

In the late 1960s and the early 1970s, as individuals moved back and forth between demonstrations, union meetings, and political conferences, their ideas and experiences travelled with them. The Montreal Central Council of the CSN succeeded in channelling much of the city's radical energy into the ranks of organized labour, breaking down the barriers which had existed between the labour movement and the left. Yet the Central Council, for all of its work, remained stigmatized as the labour movement's radical wing. By the early 1970s, however, the radical analyses first popularized by the Central Council – analyses which denounced American imperialism and imagined new forms and conception of democracy – had found their way into the mainstream of the province's labour movement. Through its radical literature, mass demonstrations, and tumultuous rallies, labour became the most radical expression of the Quebec liberation movement while, simultaneously, deeply transforming its very nature. In the ranks of organized labour, empire came to be conceptualized in new ways, the Conquest of 1759 disappeared from memory, and economic aspects of imperial domination began to take precedence over the psychological and cultural ones. André Gunder Frank and Claude Julien became more important than Frantz Fanon and Albert Memmi. And, although the transition had been taking place for some time, conceptions of the liberation of the Quebec people were increasingly replaced by the project of liberating the Quebec working class.

By the early 1970s, Quebec's labour organizations had been undergoing profound transformations for over ten years. With a new social and legal climate favourable to organized labour – created in part due to a new labour code which allowed for the unionization of the public service – the ranks of organized labour swelled to unprecedented levels, with the CSN and the CEQ as the prime

beneficiaries.¹ Throughout the 1960s there was a continual growth in Quebec's rate of unionization, growing from 29.3% of the workforce in 1961 to 37.6% in 1971.² From 1960 to 1970, the CSN grew from 94,000 members to 245,000, the FTQ from 100,000 to 230,000, and the CEQ from 28,000 to 70,000. Many individuals who had taken part in the political battles of the 1960s, moreover, themselves became active players in the labour movement by the early 1970s.³ The dramatic growth of the labour movement gave it a new sense of social responsibility, one first demonstrated in a powerful way during the October Crisis of 1970.

When the federal government, in response to the FLQ kidnapping of British trade commission James Cross and Quebec cabinet minister Pierre Laporte, enacted the War Measures Act, sent the army into Montreal, and made hundreds of arrests and thousands of searches without warrant, few on the left dared to resist openly. With many of the most prominent leftists behind bars, others were paralyzed by fear. But in this atmosphere of anxiety and paranoia, Quebec's three major labour organizations, the Confédération des syndicats nationaux (CSN), the Fédération des travailleurs du Québec (FTQ),⁴ and the Corporation des enseignants du Québec (CEQ),⁵ produced common declarations opposing the suspension of civil liberties and

¹ Jean-François Cardin, "La CSN et le syndicalisme de combat (1960-1975)," in *La CSN, 75 ans d'action syndicale et sociale*, ed. Yves Bélanger and Robert Comeau (Sainte-Foy: Presses de l'Université du Québec, 1998), 35; Jacques Rouillard, "La CSN et la protection de la langue française (1921-1996)," in *La CSN, 75 ans d'action syndicale et sociale*, ed. Yves Bélanger and Robert Comeau (Sainte-Foy: Presses de l'Université du Québec, 1998), 145.

² Rouillard, "La CSN et la protection de la langue française (1921-1996)," 141.

³ Louis Favreau, Pierre L'Heureux and avec la collaboration de Michel Paul, *Le projet de société de la CSN de 1966 à aujourd'hui: crise et avenir du syndicalisme au Québec* (Montréal: Centre de formation populaire, 1984), 86-87.

⁴ The FTQ was founded in 1957 as the provincial wing of the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC), and unions affiliated to the CLC joined the FTQ on a voluntary basis. In 1957, the FTQ only represented one third of unions affiliated to the CLC, but this number kept increasing over the years. Starting in 1967, the organization reinforced its structure and power. As it became the most important labour organization in Quebec, it also became more present on the Quebec political scene. Jacques Rouillard, *Histoire du syndicalisme au Québec. Deux siècles d'histoire* (Montréal: Boréal express, 2004), 145-7.

⁵ It was at its 1966 convention that the province's main teachers' union changed its name from the Corporation générale des instituteurs et institutrices catholiques de la province de Québec (CIC), and it decided, at the same time, to begin engaging in political action. Beginning in 1971, the union also

deploring the creation of a military regime “similar to those of banana republics, where military juntas rule as kings and masters.”⁶ In conventional accounts of the 1960s, the October Crisis is seen to be the Quebec liberation movement’s last gasp, the last moment in which the project of socialist decolonization appealed to those on the left. Narrating the Sixties in this way, however, is to place groups like the FLQ and the FLP at the very centre of historical developments, and to marginalize the ways in which anti-imperialist ideas contributed to the radicalization of other groups, like Black Montrealers, women’s liberationists, and the new working class. For the labour movement, far from being an end, the October Crisis marked a beginning in its process of radicalization, and the army’s occupation of Montreal and the War Measures Act became important points of reference for labour activists intent on highlighting Quebec’s colonized nature in the years to come.

Less than a week after the proclamation of the War Measures Act, on 21 October, the CSN, FTQ, and CEQ held an unprecedented joint meeting of their authoritative bodies, and the unions decided to produce a joint edition of their respective newspapers, *Le Travail*, *Le Monde ouvrier*, and *L’Enseignement*.⁷ This show of strength had a great effect on Montreal radicals. Jean-Marc Pottle, who had been one of the founders of *Parti Pris* and who had recently returned to Montreal after studying in Europe, was profoundly affected by the total collapse of the left during the Canadian army’s occupation. When the three unions joined together to oppose the War Measures Act, he realized that organized labour had become the

began representing non-teaching employees of school boards, CEGEPs, and universities. At its 1972 convention, it decided again to change its name, this time to the Centrale de l’enseignement du Québec, a decision which took effect in 1974. Ibid., 165-67.

⁶ For a copy of the joint declaration of the three unions of on 17 October 1970, see Jean-François Cardin, *La crise d’octobre 1970 et le mouvement syndical québécois* (Montréal: Collection RCHTQ, Études et documents, 1988), 288-89. For a copy of the declaration adopted at the meeting of 21 October, see “Position des trois centrales syndicales devant la loi des mesures de guerre,” *Le Travail*, octobre 1970. “comme on pourrait en retrouver dans une république de bananes, où règnent en rois et maîtres les juntas militaires.”

⁷ Cardin, *La crise d’octobre 1970 et le mouvement syndical québécois*, 148-58.

primary force of opposition in the province and the only real counterweight to the power of the state, and he proceeded to spend the next decade of his life deeply involved in labour politics.⁸ From the October Crisis to the *La Presse* strike to the Common Front strike of 1972, labour's spectacular radicalization focused the attention of radicals throughout English Canada and the United States.⁹ In the early 1970s, workers in Quebec were radicalized to a degree not witnessed in North America since 1919.

In this tumultuous period, the speeches of labour leaders and the official documents of the organizations gave voice to the anger of workers, but they did not create that anger. Radical energy came as often from below as it did from above.¹⁰ Quebec labour historians have explained the radicalization in a variety of ways. While Jacques Rouillard sees it as the result of the 'raised expectations' engendered by the Quiet Revolution,¹¹ Carla Lipsig-Mummé argues that it was the combined result of the slowing of Quebec's economic growth and the "explosion of expectations concerning union participation in social-policy."¹² The reasons for the radicalization are undoubtedly complicated and multi-faceted, but, I believe, the radicalization of

⁸ See Jean-Marc Pôtier, *Un parti pris politique* (Montréal: VLB éditeur, 1979), 22-25. Interview with Jean-Marc Pôtier, 30 October 2006, Montréal.

⁹ It should be noted that the radicalization of workers in Quebec coincided with the grassroots activism and 'worker control' movements in other industrialized countries. For important insights, see Dan Georgakas and Marvin Surkin, *Detroit: I Do Mind Dying* (Cambridge: South End Press, 1998); George Katsiaficas, *The Subversion of Politics: European Autonomous Social Movements and the Decolonization of Everyday Life* (New Jersey: Humanities Press International, 1997).

¹⁰ In the tumultuous fall of 1969, for example, when protesters were taking to the streets over the Bill 63, the FTQ leadership decided to abstain from taking a position on the language question, and Laberge stated that "Pour les travailleurs, la question linguistique n'est pas une préoccupation prioritaire. On ne peut pas dire que ça intéresse la masse des travailleurs." At a special session of the FTQ leadership, however, the nationalist wing prepared a resolution opposing Bill 63 and declaring its support for French unilingualism. At the convention, the resolution was not only adopted by the delegates, but it was also made more radical. Laberge was openly attacked for his timid approach to the language question, and Fernand Daoust, a well-known left nationalist, was elected as the secretary general of the FTQ. Louis Fournier, *Histoire de la FTQ, 1965-1992: la plus grande centrale syndicale au Québec* (Montréal: Éditions Québec/Amérique, 1994), 49-52.

¹¹ Rouillard does, however, offer some comments on the importance of larger social and political movements when speaking of the increasing influence of left nationalism in the CSN. See Rouillard, *Histoire du syndicalisme au Québec*, 140-58.

¹² Carla Lipsig-Mummé, "The Web of Dependence: Quebec Unions in Politics before 1976," in *Quebec: State and Society*, ed. Alain G. Gagnon (Toronto: Methuen, 1984), 304.

labour cannot be separated from the diversity and energy of radical politics in Montreal. As the labour movement adopted and appropriated the language of Quebec liberation, it also stretched and transformed it, adapting it to its own needs and desires. Through the communication structures of the unions, moreover, the new radical language of labour spread to all corners of the province and, interacting with local grievances and histories of resistance, gave shape to the largest spontaneous general strike that North America had ever experienced.

In its period of radicalization, the labour movement drew on many intellectual resources and bodies of knowledge. More than any other, however, it looked to the immense store of theoretical and practical insights which had been developed by the theoreticians of the Montreal left. But as it was doing so, the left itself was undergoing important transformations of its own.

Towards a Political Economy of Empire

The new analyses emerging from the organized labour movement coincided with, learned from, and profoundly influenced a transformation in the language of anti-imperialism in Montreal. In 1967, Monthly Review Press published *Capitalism and Underdevelopment in Latin America* by André Gunder Frank, an economist who worked at Sir George Williams University from 1966 to 1968. The basic premise of Gunder Frank's work was that wealthy nations and regions at the centre increased their wealth by exploiting those at the periphery, securing primary resources and using them as markets for manufactured goods. Gunder Frank's theories of underdevelopment made quick inroads in Quebec, finding their way into an article by Charles Gagnon published in 1968 in *Parti Pris*. Gagnon argued that "speaking of economic growth in the U.S.A. or the U.S.S.R., without taking into account the

stagnation or decline of India or Quebec, is putting aside an essential part of the question.” Simplistic theories which posited the natural evolution of capitalism into socialism – or the return of socialism to capitalism – ignored the basic fact that the growth of societies at the centre of an empire relied on the underdevelopment of those, like Quebec, which stood on the periphery. For the world’s two major empires, the United States and the USSR, the rest of the world was important only as a vast reservoir of natural resources.¹³

By the early 1970s, socialists throughout the city were striving to provide economic backing for their various arguments about the meaning and impact of empire. A new generation of young academics congregated around the journal *Socialisme québécois*, attempting to provide a ‘scientific’ political economy of imperialism. Montreal’s Caribbean intellectuals began to argue that Canada, through its role as a major exporter of capital to the Caribbean, acted as an imperial power.¹⁴ And Pierre Vallières, whose *Nègres blancs* had been driven by his inner *subjective experience* of colonization, wrote in 1971 that his decision to join the Parti Québécois was not based on an “abstract” or “theoretical” choice, but on an analysis “of the conditions of exploitation and the interplay of forces that the imperialist mode of

¹³ Charles Gagnon, "Pourquoi la révolution?," *Parti Pris* 5, no. 5 (février 1968): 28-29. “parler de la croissance économique des U.S.A. ou de l’U.R.S.S. sans tenir compte de la stagnation ou du recul de l’Inde ou du Québec, c’est laisser de côté une partie essentielle de la question.”

¹⁴ For the Marxist-inspired pan-Africanists of Montreal’s Black community, the events at Sir George Williams University – a university which had a board of directors composed of people directly involved in corporations which did business in the Caribbean – served to highlight the workings of Canadian imperialism. According to *UHURU*, the Sir George Williams Affair, far more than being of mere local importance, “blew the myth of friendly Canada and this resulted in an exposure of the military-imperialistic ambitions of Canada in the West-Indies.” “Editorial: Deep Ramifications,” *UHURU*, 16 February 1970, 2. For *The Last Post*, moreover, an “examination of Canadian capital at work shows that its investments serve to maintain the Caribbean economy in a state of dependence, disintegration and perpetual underdevelopment.” And, for the journal, the true meaning of the Sir George Williams Affair found “forceful expression back home in the Caribbean.” The “popular upheaval in the streets of Port-of-Spain” demonstrated “the desperately important connection between domestic racism in North America and our economic imperialism in the world’s non-White nations.” “The Caribbean: The People Rebel Against Canadian Control,” *The Last Post* 1, no. 3 (April 1970): 46. “SGWU Blacks get a Taste of Just Society,” *The Last Post* 1, no. 3 (April 1970): 7.

production imposes on the Quebec people as a whole.”¹⁵ In the early 1970s many Montreal leftists also began looking with growing interest towards the struggles and analyses of Latin America, and many Quebec activists travelled to the region. The influence of the Latin American left was also felt through the many immigrants who, having arrived in Montreal, made important contacts with the Quebec labour movement and established a variety of solidarity organizations.¹⁶ For a variety of reasons, therefore, Latin American theories of imperialism, including a popularization of dependency theory, began to circulate widely throughout the diverse circles of the left. In addition to Montreal being the home of francophone radicals and immigrant leftists, many English-Canadian New Left radicals – increasingly concerned about American domination and the lack of Canadian sovereignty – also resided in the city. In 1967, *Canadian Dimension*, the English-Canadian New Left’s most important periodical, hosted a major conference in Montreal – which featured renowned American political scientist Robert Engler and Andre Gunder Frank – entitled “Canada and the American Empire.”¹⁷

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, therefore, Montreal was an important laboratory in which different conceptions of empire and various forms of anti-imperial resistance were being developed, debated, and reformulated. Out of this particular Montreal mix of English-Canadian left nationalism, francophone radicalism, and Caribbean and Latin American economic analyses, came one of the most influential anti-imperialist economic analyses in Canadian history, and one which had an important influence on Quebec labour, Kari Levitt’s *Silent Surrender: the Multinational Corporation in Canada*. Levitt had arrived in Montreal in 1960 to

¹⁵ Pierre Vallières, *Choose!*, trans. Penelope Williams (Toronto: new press, 1972 [1971]), viii.

¹⁶ UQAM, Collection de publications de groupes de gauche et de groupes populaires, 21p-900 :04/155, “Le secretariat Québec-Amérique Latine et sa place a l’intérieur du mouvement ouvrier québécois” Montreal, novembre 1975, 16,

¹⁷ See *Canadian Dimension* 4, 2 (January-February, 1967), 3.

accept a teaching post in the Department of Economics and Political Science at McGill. After quickly becoming close with NDP-leaning professors in the department, Levitt, urged on by her colleague Charles Taylor, soon accepted the task of studying the effects of foreign investment in Canada.¹⁸ At the same time that she was working with the NDP, however, Levitt, who was also involved in a major project studying plantation economies of the Caribbean, quickly found herself at the centre of city's Caribbean activist community.¹⁹ Levitt's economic analyses of Canada and the Caribbean converged. The first version her study on foreign investment in Canada, "Economic Dependence and Political Disintegration: the case of Canada," was published in the *New World Quarterly*, a West Indian journal of independent criticism.²⁰

Before long Levitt's paper achieved a cult status, being distributed underground, and generating debate among radicals across the country.²¹ And when a revised and lengthened version was published, complete with a forward by University of Toronto Professor Mel Watkins, it became an immediate success, being reprinted many times in a variety of different editions.²² In the book Levitt charts Canada's slide into "economic, political and cultural dependence on the United States,"²³ arguing that American multinational corporations had replaced earlier forms of European mercantilism, and that their political and economic influence had stripped

¹⁸ Interview with Kari Levitt, 9 December 2006, Montreal. Also see Kari Levitt, *Silent Surrender: the Multinational Corporation in Canada* (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1970), xix.

¹⁹ Interview with Kari Levitt, 9 December 2006, Montreal.

²⁰ Levitt, *Silent Surrender*, xix-xx.

²¹ See Mel Watkins, Preface to Levitt, *Silent Surrender*, xvii.

²² The success of *Silent Surrender* spread far beyond Canada's borders. The Prime Minister of Guyana distributed copies of the book to all of the members of his cabinet, and called Levitt hoping that she would travel to the country to advise on economic development. The Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, Eric Williams, read the book closely, and even incorporated many of Levitt's findings into his work on the history of the Caribbean. Interview with Kari Levitt, December 9, 2006. Eric Williams, *From Columbus to Castro: The History of the Caribbean* (New York: Vintage Books, 1984 [1970]), 503-6; Eric Williams, *From Columbus to Castro: The History of the Caribbean* (New York: Vintage Books, 1984 (1970)), 503, 06.

²³ Levitt, *Silent Surrender*, xix.

Canada of its democratic decision-making capacity.²⁴ Her passionate plea to curb the power of American imperialism, and to bring vast economic forces under rational democratic control, would have a profound resonance in the newly radicalizing Quebec labour movement.²⁵ When the French-language edition of *Silent Surrender* appeared in early 1972, the author's new preface captured the climate of radicalism so well that the Montreal Central Council reprinted and distributed it at assemblies and meetings.²⁶ Writing on the fault lines of oppositional movements in Montreal, Levitt exemplified many of the ambiguities and possibilities of the beginning of the 1970s. She maintained that Canada needed to decolonize and acquire its political and economic independence from the United States. Her hope for a liberated future, however, clearly resided in a socialist Quebec.²⁷ Departing from her earlier work, Quebec now represented a surfacing of the "Third World inside the New World." Quebec stood as a "sub-colony" run by its own "rois-nègres."²⁸ Power in Quebec had

²⁴ Ibid., 23-24.

²⁵ *Silent Surrender* would be quoted directly in two of the three major labour manifestos of 1971. CSN, "It's Up to Us," in *Quebec - Only the Beginning: The Manifestoes of the Common Front*, ed. Daniel Drache (Toronto: New Press, 1972 (1971)), 35; FTQ, "The State is our Exploiter: F.T.Q. Manifesto (1971)," in *Quebec - Only the Beginning: The Manifestoes of the Common Front* (Toronto: New Press, 1972), 201.

²⁶ Interview with Kari Levitt, 9 December 2006, Montreal. Levitt's dedication to the French edition of the book highlights her orientation far more explicitly than the book's first English-language edition: "Cette édition québécoise de *La capitalisation tranquille* est dédiée à la mémoire de mon père, Karl Polanyi, qui m'a ouvert la perspective d'un socialisme humain. Nous partageons les racines du vieux monde, une existence dans le nouveau monde d'Amérique, et les espoirs de libération humaine qui caractérisent le meilleur du Tiers-Monde." Levitt and her mother even decided, in 1970, to donate the last of the funds from a journal which had been run by Karl Polanyi to Chartrand's defence fund. Interview with Kari Levitt, 30 January 2007, Montreal.

²⁷ The combined impact of the October Crisis and the *La Presse* affair deeply transformed Levitt, leading her to abandon the English-Canadian nationalist project. Levitt had also been in Trinidad during that country's massive Black Power demonstrations in 1970, when prime minister Eric Williams declared a state of emergency as rumours swirled of a general strike, and as oil and sugar workers seemed to be forming new bonds of solidarity. When she found herself in the tumult of the *La Presse* demonstration in the fall of 1971, it immediately brought back the recent memory of same mass labour demonstrations, the same police brutality, and the same social ferment that she had just lived through in Trinidad. For Levitt's response to the October Crisis, see Kari Levitt, "La crise d'octobre et l'érosion du pouvoir," *Le Devoir*, 25 novembre 1970, 4. Interview with Kari Levitt, 9 December 2006, Montreal. The new postscript, entitled "Post-scriptum à l'édition québécoise, Vers la décolonisation: Canada et Québec", is dated 15 December 1971.

²⁸ Kari Levitt, *La capitulation tranquille. La mainmise américaine sur le Canada*, trans. André d'Allemagne (Montreal: Réédition-Québec, 1972), xxiv. "Tiers-Monde à l'intérieur du Nouveau Monde"; "sous-colonie"; "rois-nègres."

many faces, but Levitt saw a fundamental resemblance between the “*nègres noirs* and the *nègres blancs* of America,” arguing that the redefinition “of the American Negro into a Black, and the French Canadian into a *Québécois*, remains the most powerful internal force of change in these two adjoining countries.”²⁹

She also recognized Quebec’s ambiguity as a Third World country in which its inhabitants lived much like other North Americans, and which possessed the most modern production technologies,³⁰ arguing that this combination of a North American industrial society and Third World liberation theory was explosive. In contrast to many other Third World theorists, and even to her own earlier work, Levitt now placed her hopes in Quebec’s revitalized labour movement. Quebec unions, demanding French-language rights and the creation of a humanistic socialism, contrasted markedly “with the veritable integration of Ontarian unions into North American society.”³¹ In the fall of 1971, Levitt was remarking on something obvious to everyone in Montreal, from labour activists to government officials to mainstream newspaper editorialists: the movement of opposition which had been developed by the extra-parliamentary left and by student movements had now been adopted by the unions, and labour had suddenly become the avant-garde of the larger movement. Although Levitt, Vallières, Gagnon, Montreal’s Black activists, and the writers of *Socialisme Québécois* had all begun prioritizing economic analyses of imperialism, it was within the labour movement itself that the new key texts of Quebec socialism would emerge. In the heated atmosphere of the fall of 1971, the distance between the

²⁹ Ibid., xxix. “*nègres noirs et blancs d’Amérique*”; “du Nègre américain en Noir, et du Canadien français en Québécois, demeure la force interne de changement la plus importante au sein des deux pays attenants.”

³⁰ Ibid., xl.

³¹ Ibid., xxxii. “avec la véritable intégration des syndicats ontariens dans la société nord-américaine.”

labour movement's 'moderates' and 'radicals' was quickly narrowing.³² Each of Quebec's three main unions developed sophisticated analyses of imperialism which were distributed to tens of thousands of workers throughout the province.

The Manifestos

Just as new economic analyses of imperialism were playing an increasingly prominent role within the left, a wind of energy swept into the labour movement. At an FTQ convention held in Montreal from 30 November to 4 December 1971, nearly one month exactly after the brutal repression of the *La Presse* protest, the newly radicalized language of labour hung in the air. Louis Laberge's opening speech set the tone, providing, as one observer put it, "one of the most militant speeches ever made by a modern top-ranking North American trade-union leader."³³ Events in the past two years, Laberge declared, had forced all trade unionists "to constantly interrogate themselves without respite," as they had brutally unmasked "a hypocritical society which had heretofore more or less succeeded in hiding its oppression." But Laberge went further, arguing that power operated differently in Quebec than elsewhere. As "a colonized people," Quebecers had come to realize the "colonial character" of power, a power which operated through the combined effects of economic imperialism and local collusion. They lived in a "colonized country where the government does everything in its power to make life easy for the owners of this country of which we are the lessees." Laberge quoted Fanon directly, arguing that, since the *La Presse* demonstration of 29 October, *The Wretched of the Earth* had had "a very acute relevance for the workers in Quebec." Quebec's politicians and

³² For detail, see Nick Auf der Maur, "The Trigger was the 'La Presse' Affair," *The Last Post* 2, no. 3 (December-January 1971-1972): 8-18.

³³ Nick Auf der Maur, "A Bleu Collar October," *Radical America* 6, no. 5 (September-October 1972): 74.

capitalists, and maybe even its labour unions, had played the role of Fanon's "teachers of ethics," blunting the sharp edge of oppression. But now that power had shown its ugly and violent face, there could no longer be any doubt that Quebec's "weak and dependent political structures exactly correspond to the colonial model."³⁴

Laberge spoke of the vast federal and provincial subsidies to multinational corporations, the subordination of the Quebec government to Ottawa, and the disastrous human consequences of capitalist modernity. Workers could no longer afford to be complacent, he argued, but nor could they afford to act alone; it became more necessary than ever for organized labour to form a broad coalition with non-organized workers, students, teachers and people on social assistance, and to outline an alternative vision of North America. The labour movement, allied with all other progressive movements, needed to develop a holistic program of social change, one which recognized that it was the "whole" of the individual – as worker and tenant, consumer and citizen – which needed to be liberated.³⁵

At the same convention during which Laberge delivered his stirring speech, the FTQ, in addition to declaring Quebec's right to independence, adopted its radical and mass-circulated manifesto, *L'État, rouage de notre exploitation*.³⁶ The manifesto set out, with the use of comprehensive economic analyses, to argue that the economic intervention of the Quebec state – far from gradually instituting socialism – actually

³⁴ Louis Laberge, *A One and Only Front: Opening address by Louis Laberge to the 12th Convention of the Quebec Federation of Labour* (Montréal: Quebec Federation of Labour, 1971), 5-6, 27, 44, 30. The radicalization of the FTQ did not merely emerge out of nowhere in 1971, but was part of a longer process of radicalization that stretched back many years. Already in 1967, Louis Laberge spoke about the need to forge a common front between unionists and *groupes populaires* in order to form a "un programme de réforme de toute la société." Laberge, like Pepin, worried greatly that "Notre syndicalisme est rapidement en train de devenir, si ce n'est déjà fait, l'expression d'un égoïsme individuel d'un trop grand nombre de syndiqués." And, he continued, "Nous sommes en train de créer un syndicalisme de classe moyenne, plus près de la classe possédante que de la masse des 'maudits de la terre.'" Laberge feared that there would be "une révolte des pauvres, non seulement contre nos adversaire traditionnels à nous employeurs et gouvernants bourgeois, mais aussi contre nos propres syndicats et contre les syndiqués eux-mêmes." Seen in Fournier, *Histoire de la FTQ*, 34-35.

³⁵ Laberge, *A One and Only Front: Opening address by Louis Laberge to the 12th Convention of the Quebec Federation of Labour*, 44, 92-94.

³⁶ Fournier, *Histoire de la FTQ*, 72-74.

reinforced capitalist domination. But capitalism in Quebec did not operate in the same way that it did in other areas of North America; being controlled by American and Anglo-Canadian monopolies, it bore “the additional stamp of colonialism.” By protecting the interests of foreign capital at the expense of Quebec workers, the state itself therefore acted as the “exploiter of the working class,” disempowering workers and excluding them from the crucial political decisions which affected their lives. Terms like ‘free world’ hid the fundamental truth that they did not “refer to the freedom of a people,” but rather to “the freedom of a privileged class.” If Quebec was to become free, it would therefore need to look much further than merely the creation of a French-speaking capitalist class. For a veritable project of economic liberation to take hold, imperialism would need to be crushed, and its protector, the bourgeois state, overcome.³⁷

The FTQ’s highly politicized manifesto created shockwaves in the labour movement, symbolizing the unquestionable radicalization of an organization which had for so long been synonymous with reformism and moderation. At a major rally at the Montreal Forum in February 1972, the FTQ issued a shortened and popularized manifesto which summarized much of *L’État, rouage de notre exploitation*, ensuring a greater mass distribution of its ideas.³⁸

At the same time that the FTQ manifestos were circulating throughout Quebec, two other labour manifestos, one put out by the CSN, and the other by the CEQ, were also challenging traditional frameworks of labour politics in Quebec. In the ranks of Quebec’s teachers’ union, radical ferment had been simmering beneath the surface for

³⁷ FTQ, “The State is our Exploiter: F.T.Q. Manifesto (1971),” 151-60, 263.

³⁸ See Yves Vaillancourt and Michel Pelletier, *Du chômage à la libération. Suivi du manifeste de la FTQ* (Montréal: Édition québécoise, 1972), 5. The manifesto is reprinted at the end of this work. The manifesto goes on to argue that “Nos efforts ne doivent donc pas porter uniquement sur l’obtention d’adoucissements à notre condition d’exploités. Nous devons frapper au coeur de cette bête à profit” (99-110).

years. The October Crisis acted as “a helpful shock, inciting us to discuss real problems,” prompting many to question the very meaning of democracy. In January 1971, just months after the proclamation of the War Measures Act, the CEQ began a systematic programme of political education, attempting to widen the sphere of union activity by highlighting the political nature of teachers’ daily problems. Teachers were becoming increasingly aware that they needed to go beyond the narrow sphere of collective bargaining, and that they needed to develop a new and more comprehensive understanding of freedom and liberation. In February 1971 a special committee began touring the province, meeting with local union members and listening to their problems and concerns. The culmination of the committee’s efforts was the writing of *Premier plan: livre blanc sur l'action socio-politique de la C.E.Q.*, a manifesto outlining the possible reach of the CEQ’s social and political engagement.³⁹ At the organization’s 1971 convention, the manifesto dominated proceedings.⁴⁰

Premier plan denounced the widespread dehumanization of capitalist modernity, and spoke out against the environmental pollution and poor housing which were the by-products of a system which worked individuals to death, destroying everything from self-esteem to sexuality. The manifesto recognized that the economy – “the pivotal point of all political and social struggle” – was dominated by the forces of U.S. imperialism. Workers needed to bring it under democratic control. One of the document’s central concerns was to draw common bonds between teachers – ‘producers’ of ideology – and other workers. Both earned wages, the document argued, and neither controlled their working conditions. Lacking any freedom or

³⁹ Rapport du Conseil d’Administration (CEQ), 21^e congrès de la C.E.Q., Juin 1971, 89-91. “un choc salutaire, une incitation à discuter des vrais problèmes.”

⁴⁰ CEQ, “Phase One: CEQ Manifesto (1971),” in *Quebec - Only the Beginning: The Manifestoes of the Common Front*, ed. Daniel Drache (Toronto: New Press, 1972), 99.

control in the workplace and living under the tyranny of the market, both had a common interest of building “a democratic, free and equitable society.” But teachers did have a specific role to play in the larger struggle. Since the education system was designed to reproduce the ideology of the ruling class, and although teachers were expected to be mere cogs in the capitalist machine, they were uniquely positioned to transform the system from the inside. Rather than reproducing an ideology dictated from above, they could transform the educational system by placing “its resources and personnel at the disposal of the people so that they could manage their own lives and assume collective responsibility for their political and economic well-being.” Teachers could therefore be at the forefront of creating “a free, non-authoritarian, and democratic society in which men and women will unfold into self-actualizing persons.” They had the potential of heightening consciousness, developing individual autonomy, and creating new cultural values. The manifesto even suggests that during strikes teachers could keep schools open, making them “meeting places where we can discuss with other workers problems that we have in common.”⁴¹ Teachers needed to wrestle with capitalist modernity, bring it under democratic control, and subordinate the economy to society. And to do so, they needed to join with the working class as a whole.

At its June 1971 convention, during which *Premier plan* dominated all discussion, the CEQ decided to engage in full-time political work, hiring three part-time and two full-time employees for this purpose. It also decided to print and distribute copies of *Premier plan*. In the end 52,535 copies were circulated, and, as networks of activists attempted to implement its recommendations, it became a

⁴¹ Ibid., 99-119, 34-37.

crucially important and very widely circulated document for the radicalization of teachers across Quebec.⁴²

In contrast to the CEQ and the FTQ, the process of radicalization had begun much earlier in the CSN. For years it had been thinking about its own unique nature in North America, and about how best to construct an alternative to the dominant forces of North American modernity. And through its various political and workplace struggles, it had begun realizing the coordinated nature of political and economic power.⁴³ In September 1971, the Confederal Bureau of the CSN adopted the evocatively titled manifesto, *Il n'y a plus d'avenir pour le Québec dans le système économique actuel*, a document which had been prompted by a new wave of lay-offs and plant shut-downs.⁴⁴ Before long the document, which highlighted the injustices of imperialism in Quebec, had been printed and over thirty-two thousand copies distributed.⁴⁵ The organization's more elaborate study, *Ne comptons que sur nos propres moyens*, accepted as a working document in October 1971,⁴⁶ became the most widely read and discussed labour manifesto in Quebec history. When Marcel Pepin read the document aloud at a CSN meeting, a wave of euphoria swept over the audience, and people rose to their feet in excitement.⁴⁷ The CSN resolved that the manifesto's insights should be made available to the widest possible audience, and it

⁴² Rétrospective 71-72 : Rapport du Conseil d'Administration. XXII^e Congrès de la C.E.Q. Juin 1972, 23-24.

⁴³ See, for example, Lettre du Président Général Marcel Pepin aux militants de la CSN, Janvier 1970, 39. "Rapport moral du président général de la confédération des syndicats nationaux Marcel Pepin au congrès général le 6 décembre 1970," 17-19, 25.

⁴⁴ Jacques Keable and Marcel Pépin, *Le monde selon Marcel Pepin* (Outremont, Québec: Lanctôt, 1998), 209.

⁴⁵ Favreau, L'Heureux and Paul, *Le projet de société de la CSN de 1966 à aujourd'hui: crise et avenir du syndicalisme au Québec*, 79.

⁴⁶ It should be remembered that *Ne comptons* was not an official CSN policy document, but rather an official CSN 'working document.' Marcel Pepin, "Preface," in *Quebec Labour: The Confederation of National Trade Unions Yesterday and Today*, ed. Black Rose Books Editorial Collective (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1972), 10.

⁴⁷ Keable and Pépin, *Le monde selon Marcel Pepin*, 210.

set out to print tens of thousands of copies and to create pedagogical tools for popular distribution.⁴⁸

Ne comptons que sur nos propre moyens, while highlighting the destructive power of American imperialism, argues that, to better grasp its functioning, workers needed to understand the mechanisms of capitalism. The manifesto therefore outlines the stratification of social classes under the capitalist system, and the ways in which it leads to anarchy, overproduction, and monopoly. According to the twisted logic of the system, the manifesto argues, when American multinational companies invest in Quebec to take advantage of its natural resources and cheap labour, they impeded local development, therefore further consolidating their vast economic empires. Excluded from economic life, Quebeckers were expected to sit back and watch silently as plants were closed, workers laid off, and profits flowed south rather than being reinvested in the province. While *L'État, rouage de notre exploitation* and *Premier plan* both argue that the creation of francophone capitalism would not lead to a veritable liberation, *Ne comptons que sur nos propre moyens* takes these insights one step further. The CSN manifesto maintains that the Quebec bourgeois class – even with the help of the state – was far too weak to control the province's development. If Quebeckers were truly intent on economic liberation, they would need to look elsewhere. The task of building a radically democratic alternative to capitalism lay in the hands of workers and workers alone, and once they understood the complex mechanisms of capitalist domination, they would be free to exercise “their extraordinary capacity to invent.”⁴⁹

⁴⁸ "L'origine et le statut des documents," *Le Travail*, janvier 1972.

⁴⁹ *Ne comptons que sur nos propre moyens* (Service de l'information de la CSN 1971), 44, 68. For an English translation of the document, see CSN, "It's Up to Us." "leur extraordinaire capacité d'invention."

Ne comptons que sur nos propre moyens created a sensation across the province, initiating a vast conversation about the nature of Quebec society and its role in a larger global system. Over 75,000 copies were printed and distributed, 44,000 of which were delivered as a special insert in the weekly newspaper *Québec-Press*.⁵⁰ Fifty-thousand introductory brochures and vast amounts of pedagogical tools were circulated in local unions throughout the province⁵¹ and, by the beginning of 1972, the entire CSN was engaged in a far-reaching debate over the document's arguments and findings.⁵² The Montreal Central Council, for example, made the study of the document a priority, and members of political, student, and community organizations, eager to collaborate, came to its offices in large numbers to get copies for themselves.⁵³ The debate, not without important moments of conflict, generated unprecedented excitement and energy,⁵⁴ a mood that pervaded the drastic labour activism in the coming months.

'It's only the beginning' – From the Manifestos to the May Revolt

The mass distribution of the manifestos was a unique and unprecedented step in Quebec history, creating a debate which spread throughout the labour movement, from the very centre of Montreal to the very furthest reaches of the province. This vast consultation was taking place at the same time as an unprecedented attempt of workers in the public and para-public sectors – represented by the three unions which

⁵⁰ "Le comité des douze et les instruments de vulgarisation," *Le Travail*, janvier 1972. Some sources state that as many as 100,000 copies were distributed. CSN, "It's Up to Us".

⁵¹ "Le comité des douze et les instruments de vulgarisation."

⁵² The dissent which followed the publication of the document built upon tensions which had existed inside the union since Marcel Pepin had first become president. For a discussion of some of these divisions, see Ralph Peter Guentzel, "The Confédération des Syndicats Nationaux, the Idea of Independence, and the Sovereigntist Movement, 1960-1980" (M.A., McGill University, 1991).

⁵³ Fernand Foisy, "Montréal," *Le Travail*, janvier 1972.

⁵⁴ "Des documents de travail qui ne moisiront pas sur les tablettes," *Le Travail*, janvier 1972. In the same edition one can read about the vast efforts and consultation over the documents which were then taking place.

had come together in a massive common front – to negotiate a collective wage scale for the entire province.⁵⁵ The demands of the common front included a minimum wage of \$100 dollars a week for all public-sector workers, job security, and equal pay for equal work, irrespective of region or sex. Specifically designed to influence the wage structure of the private sector – a fact widely recognized by government officials, who were fearful of the economic consequences of the demand – the \$100 a week became the central rallying cry for the unions. But the first task was to convince the government to agree to negotiate at a single bargaining table, something which, up until the spring of 1972, it had consistently refused to do. Frustrated by the government's intransigence, the unions held a strike vote on 9 March and, after receiving a clear mandate, waged a first 24-hour general strike on 28 March and began preparations for an unlimited general strike.

In the spring of 1972, the atmosphere in the unions was electric. Many realized that the public-sector negotiations carried implications that reached far beyond the public sector. The CEQ, which had been attempting to place the negotiations with the government in a socio-political framework from the very beginning, noted a growing life at the grassroots and an emerging consciousness of socio-economic problems.⁵⁶ Marcel Pepin argued that the union movement as a whole was living an experience “of labour solidarity unprecedented in the history of the Quebec labour movement.”⁵⁷ The March 1972 edition of *Le Travail*, the organ of the CSN, stated that, with the intense activity taking place within the organization, it appeared “more alive than ever.” The labour movement in general was now situated

⁵⁵ For a detailed look at the various stages of negotiation during the period leading up to the strike, and for an analysis of the political meaning of the strike itself, see Diane Ethier, Jean-Marc Pôté and Jean Reynolds, *Les travailleurs contre l'État bourgeois, avril et mai 1972* (Montréal: L'Aurore, 1975).

⁵⁶ *Rétrospective 71-72 : Rapport du Conseil d'Administration*. XXII^e Congrès de la C.E.Q. juin 1972, 39-41.

⁵⁷ Marcel Pepin, "Marcel Pepin, à l'ouverture du conseil confédéral le 14 mars," *Le Travail*, mars 1972. “de solidarité syndicale sans précédent dans l'histoire du mouvement syndical québécois.”

at the heart of current affairs in Quebec, and workers were developing a growing consciousness “of the common causes which are at the root of Quebec workers’ problems.”⁵⁸ The demand for a minimum wage of \$100 a week could not be met, the CSN argued, as the government worked to defend the interests of private companies, a fact which only proved the common struggle of private and public sector workers.⁵⁹

During the month of March, people all across the province were reading and discussing the labour manifestos, and were debating the best ways to build a liberated future. The Syndicat des professeurs de l’université du Québec (SPUQ) demanded that the unions come together to create a synthesis of their three manifestos, and that they deepen the discussion of the concrete steps which needed to be taken to truly change society. The results of such an investigation, it argued, would then need to be distributed to all workers, unionized and non-unionized alike.⁶⁰ And in Granby – to take one example that is indicative of what was happening in the small communities and major cities of Quebec – union activists gathered to discuss the CSN manifestos, and worked to situate their personal experiences within a larger collective understanding of the problems which plagued the province. The workers saw *Ne comptons que sur nos propres moyens* as an “evaluation of our national failure,” and, while many different ideas were expressed as to possible solutions, most agreed that the ideal would be a society with “true popular power, a living democracy.”⁶¹ The workers demanded more information, more political analysis, and more cultural

⁵⁸ "De nouvelles solidarités," *Le Travail*, mars 1972. "plus vivante que jamais"; "des causes communes qui sont à la source des problèmes de tous les salariés du Québec."

⁵⁹ "La bataille est la même," *Le Travail*, mars 1972.

⁶⁰ See *Le Travail*, mars 1972.

⁶¹ "Les documents d'étude font leur chemin," *Le Travail*, mars 1972. "bilan de notre faillite nationale"; "véritable pouvoir populaire, une démocratie vivante."

information, “as workers are not less intelligent than others, and are as able to express themselves.”⁶²

The atmosphere of excitement and contestation also infused private-sector unions. From 25 to 27 of March, the CSN’s federation of retail workers held its biannual conference. Coming out fully in support of the public sector common front, the federation argued that, as the present economic system ran counter to the interests of workers, it was necessary to take their demands beyond collective bargaining and towards a more general social change. Private companies, the federation argued, needed to become the collective property of their patrons and be managed by their workers. If it was true that a few key sectors needed to come under the control of the state, the state itself needed to be fundamentally decentralized and re-organized to allow for the direct participation of citizens. The federation even proposed its own document to complement *Ne comptons que sur nos propres moyens*, one which looked to worker self-management as the solution to the current problems which plagued Quebec. In “Pour Une Société Plus Juste: Le Socialisme Coopératif,” the federation outlined a visionary program of building a society for the interests of the whole of the individual, rather than for the “consumer-object.” To do so, it would be necessary to move beyond the well-worn paths of the left, to reverse the commodification of social life, and to stop the current machine and inverse its methods of making decisions. Private companies needed either to become public or be transformed into worker co-operatives. Unions, for their part, needed to become schools providing “training in administrative responsibilities,” and working to progressively initiate workers to self-management. Human beings, organized in a democratic community, needed to decide what to produce, and both the state and

⁶² Quoted in Ibid. “car les travailleurs ne sont pas plus fous que les autres et pourraient s’exprimer autant.”

cooperatives needed to yield to these demands. To those who would surely dismiss it as an organization of dreamers, the federation responded that it was “preferable to be treated as utopians” than to sit back and passively accept the status quo.⁶³

The radical energy was felt all throughout the labour movement, in all regions of Quebec. If Montreal had been the centre of radical politics throughout the 1960s, the centre was rapidly shifting, and local communities were building and shaping new understandings of their own conditions, making use of their own creativity and working to construct the outlines of a different future. When an indefinite general strike was finally called on 11 April, public sector workers all across the province walked off the job, pushing the province into a major crisis. Before the strike had even taken place, a series of injunctions were passed which effectively withdrew the right to strike for nearly 15,000 workers, mostly in the hospital sector. But the unions, seeing the injunctions as a serious threat to the public service’s newly-established right to strike, decided, despite the inevitability of fines and the possibility of jail time, that they would not obey the regulations.

As the strike progressed from its first to its second week, the government, realizing the danger of the situation, decided to pass back-to-work legislation. ‘Bill 19’ threatened heavy fines, the suspension of the right to strike for two years, and the possibility of government-imposed decrees fixing working conditions. Caught off guard, the unions initially announced that they would defy the law but, facing the law’s drastic consequences and unable to consult their members adequately, the unions finally recommended an end to the strike. As the state’s 210,000 employees

⁶³ "Les travailleurs du commerce," *Le Travail*, avril 1972; "Pour une société plus juste: le socialisme coopératif (Le document d'orientation de la Fédération du Commerce)," *Le Travail*, avril 1972. ““consommateur-objet””, “des écoles d’entraînement aux responsabilités administratives”; “préférable d’être traités d’utopistes.”

began filing back to work, the state's repressive tactics fuelled anger and confusion. A delegation of twenty workers from Sept-Iles – a city which had voted 87% to disobey the back-to-work order – travelled all the way to Quebec City to denounce the decision to go back to work, arguing that the “people doing the striking need to be the ones setting its tone.”⁶⁴

On 4 May the three union presidents were brought before the court in Quebec City, charged with having recommended the defiance of the injunctions. The courtroom was filled with riot police and, when the judge did not appear at the prescribed time, the three presidents left the courtroom to be tried in absentia. Before the verdict was announced, a calm fell over the labour movement. On 7 May, Yvan Charbonneau, president of the CEQ, told a crowd of 1,500 in east Montreal that there would be no resumption of the general strike, or at least not until the following school year.⁶⁵ But then, on 8 May, the judge finally pronounced his sentence: one year in prison for each of the three leaders. The severity of the decision reverberated in labour circles around the world.

As the three presidents began their journey on 9 May to Quebec City to surrender themselves for incarceration, the work stoppages and lock-outs began, spontaneously, with no order from above. At the FTQ headquarters in Montreal, telegrams started to pour in announcing that workers in a dizzying number of factories and institutions had walked off the job. General Secretary of the FTQ, Fernand Daoust, announced – revealing his surprise at the spontaneous outpouring of anger – that the organization could not “do otherwise than pronounce itself in solidarity with

⁶⁴ Jacques Côté, "Désobéissance à la loi," *Le Piochon*, 9 mai 1972, 13; "Délégation de Sept-Iles," *Le Piochon*, 21 avril 1972, 5. "Ceux qui font la grève doivent être les mêmes personnes qui en donnent le ton."

⁶⁵ Gérald LeBlanc, "La grève générale paraît reléguée aux oubliettes," *Le Devoir*, 8 mai 1972, 1.

these actions.”⁶⁶ While the FTQ, the CSN, and the CEQ all came to support the spontaneous insurrection, the initiative and the momentum came from below. The Comité d’information du front commun, based in Montreal, sent out communiqués detailing the extent of the work stoppages, and these communiqués were read on radio stations across the province.⁶⁷ By 14 mai, *Québec-Presse* was already reporting that it was “becoming almost impossible to give the complete list of work stoppages.” The strike included workers in English- and French-speaking institutions, and in the public and private sectors. Federal government employees walked off the job, as did the employees of Montreal’s newspapers. Radio stations were occupied, and schools and hospitals either closed or were taken over.⁶⁸ The employees of *Québec-Presse* itself went out on a 24-hour strike, demanding the resignation of the Bourassa government which, they argued, was “incapable of responding to the veritable needs of workers.”⁶⁹

All throughout the province, new and creative expressions of anger and frustration, and of hope and possibility, were being manifested. The seven vice presidents of the FTQ demanded that the government take its “inquisition” to its logical conclusion by placing them, as well, behind bars.⁷⁰ The ten members of the CEQ executive asked to be put in jail with their president.⁷¹ Thirty-six individuals who had earlier been sentenced for having defied injunctions, but who were released

⁶⁶ UQAM, FTQ fonds, 100p-630 :01/7, Communiqué. No. 2, “La FTQ appuie tous les débrayages et les actions de protestations” 10 mai 1972. “ne peut faire autrement que de se dire solidaire de ces actions.”

⁶⁷ UQAM, FTQ fonds, 100p-630:01/92. These communiqués give a detailed list of who was on strike when.

⁶⁸ “Les débrayages de vendredi,” *Quebec-Presse*, 14 mai 1972, 2. “Il devient presque impossible de donner la liste complète des débrayages.”

⁶⁹ “Grève à Québec-Presse,” *Québec-Presse*, 14 mai 1972, 2. “incapable de répondre aux véritables besoins des travailleurs.”

⁷⁰ UQAM, FTQ fonds, 100p-630 :01/7, Communiqué. No. 3, “Les viols d’injonction salués par la FTQ,” 10 mai 1972.

⁷¹ Gérald LeBlanc, “Les dirigeants de la CEQ demandent à être incarcérés avec Yvon Charbonneau,” *Le Devoir*, 10 mai 1972, 6.

after having appealed their sentence, travelled to Quebec City with over 1,000 supporters to demand to be incarcerated, stating that they would rather serve their sentences now than wait for the appeals process to be exhausted.⁷² At the prison where the three presidents were being held, thousands of teachers from all over Quebec took part in a giant rally dubbed “Opération Woodstock” for its festival-like atmosphere.⁷³ The main slogan of the strike, ‘Ce n’est qu’un début, continuons le combat,’ drew, in both its words and inspiration, from the radical moments of creativity of May ’68 in France.⁷⁴ Messages of solidarity came from community organizations in Montreal, and from labour organizations across Canada and around the world.⁷⁵

While labourers in the ports of Montreal, Quebec City, and Trois-Rivières began walking off the job, workers in many regions were shutting down entire cities. On the evening of 8 May hundreds of workers, the majority of whom were women, gathered at the courthouse in Sept-Îles, a city on Quebec’s North Shore. When the police brutally broke up the demonstration, the city of 22,000 became completely paralyzed by a general strike during which civil authority passed to the hands of city’s workers. Air traffic was stopped, workers attempted to prevent fraud by enforcing a price freeze, and the city’s commercial establishments were closed, except by order of

⁷² UQAM, FTQ fonds, 100p-630 :01/92, Communiqué, “Le Front Commun du secteur public CSN-FTQ-CEQ,” 16 mai 1972.

⁷³ “Woodstock syndical autour d’Orsainville,” *Le Devoir*, 15 mai 1972, 1.

⁷⁴ The Montreal Editorial Group, “Nous: May 1972 Quebec’s General Strike,” *Our Generation* 8, no. 3 (June 1972): 32.

⁷⁵ Emilio Maspero of the Centrale Latine Américaine des travailleurs sent a message of support, saying that he would work to organize workers from “tous les pays Latino Américaine pour faire triompher ensemble cause irrefutable libération totale travailleur Canada Amérique Latine du monde.” KJose Lasso of the federation of rural Latin America workers sent a similar message of support, as did many others. The Confédération française démocratique du travail sent its support, as did the Vancouver Seamen. Other messages of solidarity came from labour organizations from as far away as Venezuela and Luxembourg. UQAM, FTQ fonds, 100p-630 :01/92, message to CSN from Emilio Maspero secrétaire générale CLAT, 16 mai 1972. Message of Support from KJose Lasso Sec. Gen. adjoint ‘La fédération Latino-Américaine des paysans,’ 16 mai 1972. Message of Support from La fédération Latino Américaine des travailleurs du bois et du Batiment,” 16 mai 1972. Communiqué – May 8 72 Teamsters Local Union 879 Hamilton Ontario. Laurent Lucas, “Paris, 12 mai,” *Le Travail*, mai 1972.

the Common Front. The strike coordinating committee met daily, students at the city's CEGEP joined in the common front, and the radio station was occupied.⁷⁶ "This station is now in the hands of the workers," came the new message on the air, "From now on we'll be broadcasting union bulletins from across Quebec and be playing the music of the resistance."⁷⁷ The movement which began in Sept-Iles soon spread to other cities, to Port-Cartier, Gagnon, Hauterive, Baie-Comeau, and even all the way to Murdochville in the Gaspé peninsula.⁷⁸ Towns were taken over, and local papers and radio stations around the province came under worker control. In the town of Saint-Jérôme, situated just north of Montreal, those listening to the radio were able to hear live as workers who were occupying the station, chanting 'solidarité,' were expelled by the police.⁷⁹

In response to René Lévesque's claim that the demonstrations of labour radicalism were the result of the irresponsibility of labour leaders – because they refused to appeal their sentences or condemn the uprising – the editorial committee of *Québec-Presse* argued that workers themselves had demonstrated an "impressive sense of responsibility" in deciding to take over entire towns.⁸⁰ Rather than being conducted in a spirit of anarchy, citizens were acting in a spirit of democracy that the government itself had long abandoned. After the first five days of the uprising, *Québec-Presse* maintained that "Quebec has probably just lived the most dramatic and intense week of its brief history." Never had so many Quebecers been aroused

⁷⁶ Jacques Côté, "Réunion de dimanche," *Le Piochon*, 18 avril 1972, 3. For a look at the social and economic conditions of Sept Iles, and a detailed outline of the way in which the strike evolved, see Jean-Marc Potté's analysis in Ethier, Potté and Reynolds, *Les travailleurs contre l'État bourgeois*.

⁷⁷ Richard Théorêt, "The Struggle of the Common Front," *Radical America* 6, no. 5 (September-October 1972): 100. The quotation from the radio station was seen in "Liberating the Media," *Radical America* 6, no. 5 (September-October 1972): 24.

⁷⁸ Michèle Juneau et al., "Mai 72: une lutte à finir entre le pouvoir et les travailleurs," *Québec-Presse*, 14 mai 1972, 15.

⁷⁹ In total, 23 radio stations were occupied during the May strike "Liberating the Media," 112-15.

⁸⁰ Le Comité de rédaction, "Il s'agit de vaincre," *Québec-Presse*, 14 mai 1972, 2. "un sens de responsabilité impressionnant."

“to collectively demonstrate their attachment to liberty and to their rights.”

“Something has begun,” the paper argued, “which no person and no thing will be able to stop: the taste of true democracy.”⁸¹

After the strike had gone on for just over a week, the three unions, acting on a renewed hope for a negotiated settlement, issued a joint declaration: “To encourage a return to negotiations, we are appealing to our members who have walked off the job to return to work.”⁸² The workers’ actions did not come to an abrupt stop. In Thetford Mines and Black Lake, workers remained out on strike for a little while longer. In Mauricie teachers returned to work, but only to declare that they would take the three pedagogical days allowed by the school board to engage in an in-depth study, not only of the impact of the new regulations and legislation on their working conditions, but also of the possibilities of worker self-management.⁸³ Elsewhere around the province, teachers returned to work, but only to begin ‘internal’ actions, including occupations, assemblies, and study days.⁸⁴ Despite these last acts of resistance, the strike did, however, eventually come to an end.

But why? Why did such a massive outpouring of anger and creativity – an outpouring which went far beyond the expectations of labour leaders and government officials alike – spread so quickly and with such intensity throughout the province?

Labour papers wrote of the concrete demonstrations of imagination and

⁸¹ Le comité de rédaction, “Le goût de la véritable démocratie (éditorial),” *Québec-Presse*, 14 mai 1972, 4. “Le Québec vient probablement de vivre la semaine la plus dramatique en même temps que la plus intense de sa brève histoire”; “à manifester ensemble leur attachement à la liberté et à leurs droits”; “Quelque chose s’est mis en marche que rien ni personne ne pourra arrêter”; “le goût de la véritable démocratie.”

⁸² UQAM, FTQ fonds, 100p-630 :01/92, Joint message by FTQ, CSN, and CEQ, 17 mai 1972. “Pour favoriser la reprise des négociations, nous lançons un appel à nos membres qui ont debrayé pour qu’ils reprennent le travail.”

⁸³ UQAM, FTQ fonds, 100p-630 :01/92, “État de la situation chez les enseignants de la CEQ,” 16 mai 1972.

⁸⁴ UQAM, FTQ fonds, 100p-630 :01/92, “La situation est loin d’être rose et rassurante dans le secteur de l’éducation au Québec.” n.d.

courage, about how years “of bullying exploded,” and about how workers were collectively learning to overcome fear and risk a bit of security, to rely on their own means and to reinvent democracy. They were learning, in short, “to be respected” and “to believe in ourselves.”⁸⁵ The labour manifestos had circulated to all corners of the province, been read and studied by countless individuals, and ensured that a new language of labour and imperialism, and of alternative ways to conceptualize democracy, became widespread.⁸⁶ The anger and frustration sprang from citizens who had come to a new understanding of their collective problems. “The anger of Quebec workers is not gratuitous,” *Le Travail* reported, as workers had come to understand that the government would not, could not, create a wage policy which would favour the least fortunate, diminishing the wage differential between the rich and poor. For the CSN, the repeated desire of the Quebec government to fully integrate Quebec into the rest of North America – and its complete disregard for the interests and identity of its people – convinced many of the urgent necessity of creating a new and more fully human society.⁸⁷ New understandings of imperialism had collided with local grievances, creating the explosive compound of revolt. Workers throughout Quebec were united in the project of building an alternative America, one in which human interests would not capitulate to the demands of profit.⁸⁸

The struggle over wages in the civil service had therefore become a political battle, with the government, intent on preserving the integrity of the capitalist system, on one side, and the unions, demanding that human concerns take precedence over

⁸⁵ “La colère des travailleurs,” *Le Travail*, mai 1972. “brimades éclatent”; “à se faire respecter”; “à croire en soi.”

⁸⁶ See, for example, “Ils n’arrêteront pas la démocratie des travailleurs,” *Le Travail*, juin 1972.

⁸⁷ Ibid. “La colère des travailleurs du Québec n’a rien de gratuit.”

⁸⁸ “Le Québec ne doit pas se distinguer du reste de l’Amérique,” *Le Travail* wrote sarcastically of the government’s refusal to yield to the demands of labour. “La pire vague de terrorisme contre les travailleurs,” *Le Travail*, mai 1972.

profit, on the other. But the question remains. If the dominant language of opposition emanating from labour leaders was deeply anti-imperialist, identifying the Bourassa government as the primary defender of imperial prerogatives,⁸⁹ how was this language understood and interpreted at the base? The reasons for the strike were multi-faceted and the causes complex. But, by looking at both the actions and words of members of the grassroots, we can see that it was the mixing of local grievances with a larger interpretation of their structural causes that provided the explosive mixture leading to rebellion. When workers occupied the offices of *Québec-Presse*, they took over the page upon which a regular column appeared by Jacques Parizeau, a member of the PQ executive and, according to the occupiers, a representative of the dominant class. Drawing on Che Guevara, they urged workers throughout the province to create “two, three, many Sept-Iles.”⁹⁰ In Sorel, workers demanded the resignation of Bourassa, arguing that the “enslaved population which has been terrorized for so long is no longer afraid,” and they encourage the population to participate “in this movement of pure democracy.”⁹¹

The striking workers of Sept-Iles, workers who set much of the tone for the spectacular uprisings across north-eastern Quebec, published *Le Piochon* from March through May 1972. The paper, which claimed to represent the city’s workers, opened its pages to the analyses and thoughts of the rank-and-file.⁹² Among other insights, the paper reveals the profound importance of women to working-class militancy. The majority of strikers during the entire common front period were women.⁹³ As women were generally underpaid and confined to the lowest positions, provisions of pay

⁸⁹ Suzanne Cormier, “La nouvelle mentalité créée par le front commun,” *Le Piochon*, 9 mai 1972, 10.

⁹⁰ See *Québec-Presse*, 14 mai 1972, 5. “deux, trois, plusieurs Sept-Îles.”

⁹¹ “Sorel, 11 mai,” *Le Travail*, mai 1972. “Le peuple esclave qu’on a terrorisé si longtemps n’a plus peur”; “à ce mouvement de pure démocratie.”

⁹² Valmore Tremblay, *Le Piochon*, 28 mars 1972, 11.

⁹³ Favreau, L’Heureux and Paul, *Le projet de société de la CSN de 1966 à aujourd’hui: crise et avenir du syndicalisme au Québec*, 94.

equity and a minimum wage of \$100 a week stood to benefit women disproportionately (36,000 of the 40,000 workers who did not earn \$100 a week were women). During the middle of the April strike, at the convention of the Montreal Central Council, women workers at UQAM tabled a resolution which demanded, in addition to an end to the devaluation of women's work, an uncompromising stand on the \$100 a week minimum wage and the continuation of an unlimited general strike.⁹⁴ In Sept-Iles, women challenged the traditional masculine rhetoric of labour and developed their own analyses of how they were specifically oppressed by the workings of the capitalist system. Michèle Desfonds, writing in *Le Piochon*, demanded that women be paid an equal wage for equal work, and argued that "the government needs to consider women as human beings, and as full and equal workers."⁹⁵ Martine Vaillancourt, for her part, vehemently denounced the unequal conditions that women faced in the workforce, reminding readers "to be outraged for women as well."⁹⁶

But women and men joined together to denounce the current state of Quebec society. On 28 March, the day of the first 24-hour strike, Carol Leblond evoked the anger felt by workers in the region: "We're on strike today because we're fed up! We're sick of bosses who exploit us non-stop, we're sick of working conditions imposed on us by force... we're sick of salaries that barely allow us to pay the interests on our loans at HFC."⁹⁷ Réjean Langlois wrote about the dissolution of the traditional animosity between white- and blue-collar workers, and between the public

⁹⁴ UQAM, FTQ fonds 100p-630:01/101, CCSNM 14e congrès 1972.

⁹⁵ Michèle Desfonds, "Le front commun et les femmes," *Le Piochon*, 28 mars 1972, 8. "le gouvernement doit les considérer comme des personnes humaines, des travailleuses à part entière."

⁹⁶ Martine Vaillancourt, "A travail égal, salaire suppose... égal," *Le Piochon*, 12 avril 1972, 4. "qu'on s'indigne aussi pour les femmes."

⁹⁷ Carol Leblond, "Yvon-t-y en manger une maudite!," *Le Piochon*, 28 mars 1972, 1. Nous autres, on fait la grève aujourd'hui parce qu'on est écoeurés 'auboutte'! On est écoeurés des boss qui nous exploitent sans cesse, on est écoeurés des conditions de travail imposées par la force... on est écoeurés des salaires qui nous permettent à peine de payer les intérêts de nos emprunts chez HFC."

and private spheres. Teachers and school janitors, workers from Hydro Quebec and hospitals, from the industrial sector and the state-run liquor stores, were all meeting and discussing their common concerns at the same assemblies, and were coming to understand their common interests in opposing the same system.⁹⁸ Fernand Tardif argued that workers needed to take their struggle beyond the negotiation of collective agreements, that they were required to work to transform a system which was concerned only with profits. As the president of the Front commun of Sept-Iles, he argued that workers needed to make use of the work stoppage to study and think about the capitalist system, and to reflect collectively on how they could build something different. He recommended that all members of the common front read and study the famed manifestos, always keeping the goal of popular power in mind.⁹⁹ And he argued that it was time that workers took control of their own destiny, and that they stopped counting on far-away union leaders who were too often corrupted by their proximity to power.

The articles appearing in *Le Piochon* demonstrated more than a passing acquaintance with the labour manifestos of 1971. Workers worked to understand their own conditions and their own experience within the larger frameworks of left politics which were circulating throughout the province. Martin Poirier not only denounced government subsidies, but also the way in which these subsidies helped multi-national corporations exploit Quebec's natural resources, only to go on processing them in either the United States or Europe.¹⁰⁰ Fabien Mignault wrote about Robert Bourassa as the "docile servant of the dominant class," but also integrated insights from *Ne comptons que sur nos propres moyens* about government subsidies to American corporations. And he spoke of the "international American

⁹⁸ Réjean Langlois, "Solidarité," *Le Piochon*, 28 mars 1972, 10.

⁹⁹ Fernand Tardif, "On est jamais mieux servi que par soi-même," *Le Piochon*, 28 mars 1972, 3.

¹⁰⁰ Martin Poirier, "Les pouvoirs réels," *Le Piochon*, 18 avril 1972, 16.

fascist Gestapo” before concluding by addressing his fellow workers directly, reminding them of their inherent capacity “to think and to act.”¹⁰¹ Jacques Côté spoke of government subsidies to American corporations,¹⁰² Serge Tremblay denounced the use of these subsidies to create ten jobs while eliminating twenty others,¹⁰³ and Viateur Beaupré wrote about teachers’ lack of freedom and their subjection to the conditioning of “our modern factory-schools.”¹⁰⁴ J.P. Dallaire not only reminded readers that the role of the ruling order was to manage the profits of foreign capitalists, but also that Quebec unions had joined the global guerilla struggle “between people and capital,” which, in addition to Quebec, was being played out in “Vietnam, Ireland, and Uruguay.”¹⁰⁵

It is in the last edition of *Le Piochon*, published on 9 May, the day on which spontaneous walkouts paralyzed the province, that we can see the fusing of national and social demands. Some, such as Viateur Beaupré and Jacques Côté, situated the current struggle in the larger battle of the past 200 years against British colonialism,¹⁰⁶ and Valmore Tremblay highlighted how “Bill 19 was made by a small group of individuals who were elected and manipulated by our large financiers and capitalists who are sold-out to Anglo-Saxon and American interests.”¹⁰⁷ Suzanne Cormier, for her part, argued that the common front strike went far beyond drawing new lines of opposition, and that it provided an opportunity to bring “people out of

¹⁰¹ Fabien Mignault, "Camarades grévistes," *Le Piochon*, 14 avril 1972, 3-5. “serviteur docile de la classe dominante”; “Gestapo fasciste internationale américaine”; “de penser et d’agir.”

¹⁰² Côté, "Réunion de dimanche," 5; Jacques Côté, "Une hausse des taxes," *Le Piochon*, 18 avril 1972, 3.

¹⁰³ Serge Tremblay, "Soyons réalistes!," *Le Piochon*, 18 avril 1972, 12.

¹⁰⁴ Côté, "Réunion de dimanche," 8. “nos modernes école-usines.”

¹⁰⁵ J.Pierre Dallaire, "La peur ou le réalisme," *Le Piochon*, 9 mai 1972, 1-3. “entre le capital et les peuples”; “Vietnam, en Irlande, en Uruguay.”

¹⁰⁶ Viateur Beaupré, "Adieu! Adieu!," *Le Piochon*, 9 mai 1972, 6-7; Viateur Beaupré, "Les Anthropophages et leur loi," *Le Piochon*, 9 mai 1972, 12-13; Jacques Côté, "Les jeunesses," *Le Piochon*, 9 mai 1972, 14-15.

¹⁰⁷ Valmore Tremblay, "Il faut accentuer la lutte," *Le Piochon*, mai 9 1972, 19. “La loi 19 est faite par un petit groupe d’individus élus et manipulés par nos grands financier et capitalistes québécois vendus à l’élément anglo-saxon et américain.”

their isolated worlds to create a new mentality, one based on the idea of working for everyone rather than only for oneself.”¹⁰⁸

During the entire period of the common front, workers rallied around the slogan, ‘Nous, le monde ordinaire.’ Labour activists therefore drew important lines of separation between themselves and the province’s elite, they struck against local bosses, and they protested against their everyday existence. But the defender of the established order, the advocate of increased external control of Quebec’s economy, was the Quebec state itself. “The state,” the title of the FTQ manifesto famously read, “is our exploiter.” After the October Crisis, the *La Presse* affair, Bill 19, and the sentencing of the three union presidents, citizens throughout Quebec had lost confidence in the very state which had represented the triumph of the Quiet Revolution. The modernizing liberal state, built throughout the 1960s by employing a democratic language of equality, stood revealed as the guardian of imperialism. The system was corrupt; the state hollowed out. When forced to choose, the Liberal government of Robert Bourassa, and the entire bourgeois class, did not side with the Quebec people. By 1972, Quebec liberation had come to mean something quite different than it had in the early 1960s; not only liberation from the economic and cultural tyranny of imperialism, but also liberation from the state itself.

¹⁰⁸ Cormier, “La nouvelle mentalité créée par le front commun,” 10. “les gens de leur monde clos et de créer une autre mentalité, celle de travailler pour tout le monde et non uniquement pour soi.”

Conclusion: 1 May 1973

“This May first has all the appearances of a new beginning.”

-Le comité de rédaction, "1er mai: il était temps." *Québec-Presse*, 6 mai 1973, 4.

May first, 1973. The presidents of Quebec's three major unions – Marcel Pepin, Louis Laberge, and Yvon Charbonneau – were still behind bars for their actions during the common front strike held over a year earlier. A harsh and cold winter was at last showing signs of abating, and a new era seemed to be beginning. Despite May first being the traditional moving day in Quebec, and despite a Montreal Canadiens playoff final at the Montreal Forum, all throughout Quebec tens of thousands of citizens took to the streets to celebrate International Workers' Day: 3,000-4,000 in Quebec City, 1,500 in Jonquière, 1,000 in Rouyn. In Montreal, an unprecedented 25,000 people – many bussed in from as far away as Sherbrooke, Hull and Trois-Rivières – marched in the early evening from Viger Square to Parc Lafontaine. University and CEGEP students met at Carré Saint-Louis before heading down Saint-Denis to join the demonstration, and many small Marxist-Leninist groups paraded among the groups of workers. As the joyous and carnival-like crowd marched, flags and banners in hand, it was becoming increasingly clear that the lines of opposition which had been drawn in the early 1960s, and which had fuelled protest movements in various ways throughout the preceding ten years, had begun to change.¹

The May Day demonstration of 1973 was far from being Montreal's first. Radicals had been taking to the streets on and off since 1906, public assemblies had been held on 1 May throughout the 1960s, and an important demonstration of several thousand had occurred only a few years earlier in 1970.² Yet, for almost everyone involved, the demonstration of 1973 had a novel feeling. Despite celebrations in previous years, many predicted that, from this moment on, May Day would become a

¹ Jules LeBlanc, "La marche du premier mai dépasse tous les espoirs des organisateurs," *La Presse*, 2 mai 1973, 1, 6. Louis Fournier, "Un 1er mai pétant de santé," *Québec-Presse*, 6 mai 1973, 10-11.

² Confédération des syndicats nationaux and Centrale de l'enseignement du Québec., *The History of the Labour Movement in Québec* (Montréal: Black Rose Books, 1987), 218-19.

“New Quebec tradition.”³ The Montreal Central Council of the CSN loudly proclaimed that the “tradition of celebrating May first has begun.”⁴ The official demand of the protest was the release of the three union leaders, but union locals and rank-and-file militants had a message of their own: they wanted nothing less than the “liberation of the working class.”⁵ In the days leading up to 1 May, *Québec-Press* published a special supplement which traced the history of the labour movement both in Quebec and around the world. And on the day itself, it was clear for all to see that a newly radicalized working class, walking confidently through the streets of Montreal, would play a crucially important role in the political life of the province for years to come.

Nearly a year had passed since the strike of May 1972, but its memory hung suspended in the cool spring air. First politicized through the larger struggle of Quebec liberation, workers throughout the province had engaged in a wholesale project of questioning the reforms of the Quiet Revolution, the meaning of democracy, and the possibilities of liberation. Anti-imperialist ideas were central to the ways in which economic democracy and working-class solidarity were imagined, just as they had fuelled Quebec feminism and linguistic debates, and provided a common framework for a rapprochement between Black Montrealers and francophone radicals. But something profound had changed with the rise of this strong and increasingly confident working-class presence. Born amidst radical anti-colonial and anti-imperial politics, the constantly expanding and tumultuous world of Quebec labour, through its actions and analyses, had forced a transformation in the very terms and conceptions of the movement. If the May 1972 general strike can be

³ Special supplement to *Québec-Press* 29 avril 1973, 12. “Nouvelle tradition québécoise.”

⁴ “Nous l'avons vécue dans la rue le 1er mai,” *Le Travail* (édition de Montréal), mai 1973, 1-2. “La tradition de la fête du 1er mai est instaurée.”

⁵ See the messages of the many union locals printed in the supplement to May Day in *Québec-Press*, 29 avril 1973.

interpreted – as I have argued– as the high point of the Quebec decolonization movement, it can therefore also be seen, somewhat paradoxically, as the moment of its undoing. For many throughout the 1970s, the working class would be considered as the primary vector of change. Rather than the ‘colonized Quebecker,’ it was now the ‘Quebec worker’ which acted as the primary revolutionary agent, capturing the imagination of countless individuals and creating the terms of debate across the city’s dissident public sphere. Or, to put it another way, in the new atmosphere of the 1970s Quebec workers were seen to be oppressed because they were workers, not because they were Quebeckers.

While it is true that the working class had been crucial to the way in which Quebec liberation had been conceptualized since the mid-1960s – *Parti Pris*’s 1965 manifesto had, after all, said that Quebec decolonization would need to be achieved through the impulse of the working class – a major difference separated the anti-colonial politics of the 1960s and the new class politics of the 1970s. The primary objective of *Parti Pris* remained the liberation of Quebec from colonialism, and francophone Quebeckers, like American Blacks, were imagined as forming a part of a world-wide struggle against empire, one which focused as much on material oppression as on psychological and cultural alienation. If the objective of decolonization remained at the centre of radical politics throughout the 1960s, for many radicals of the 1970s the new objective became the triumph of the working class. The proletariat, they argued, occupied a crucial position within the economic system, and if only it could be united, and its direction focused, the possibilities for social transformation would be endless.

Quebec was far from alone in experiencing a resurgence of class politics in the 1970s, but in no other region in North America did a revival of class occur with such

speed and intensity.⁶ The seemingly sudden explosion of working-class radicalism, and the state repression which it engendered, attracted the attention of activists around the world. The important American journal *Radical America* began publishing substantial articles on Quebec labour in the early 1970s, even devoting an entire issue to the subject following the general strike. In the name of working-class solidarity, labour leaders in English Canada, the United States, Europe, and Latin America rallied to the defence of Quebec's imprisoned labour presidents. In the eyes of many, Quebec quickly became the North American centre of revolutionary syndicalism, and its strong and dynamic labour organizations became the envy of labour radicals everywhere.

Yet even within labour organizations themselves, the radicalization of rank-and-file workers – represented most clearly by May 1972 – had both destabilizing and mobilizing effects. If many were won over to a radicalized position of permanent class struggle, others remained more cautious, committed to traditional union practices of collective bargaining and reformist politics. In the FTQ, there was much internal dissent pitting radical against more moderate factions.⁷ Louis Laberge himself attempted to curb the radical memory of the events of May. He published a book denying the radical nature of the conflict, arguing that its main importance lay in its creation of a favourable climate for collective bargaining.⁸ Although a certain degree of internal dissent certainly existed within the CEQ, Yvan Charbonneau maintained that, on the whole, the union came out of the strike even stronger and more united, more resolved in its conviction that teachers formed an important part of

⁶ For important insights, see Max Elbaum, *Revolution in the Air: Sixties Radicals turn to Lenin, Mao and Che* (London: Verso, 2002; reprint, 2006).

⁷ Louis Fournier, *Histoire de la FTQ, 1965-1992: la plus grande centrale syndicale au Québec* (Montréal: Éditions Québec/Amérique, 1994), 83-92.

⁸ Louis Laberge, *En prison pour nous. Historique du front commun* (Montréal: Fédération des travailleurs du Québec, 1973).

the working class.⁹ Marcel Pepin, for his part, emerged from May 1972 angry and even more convinced of his anti-imperialist position. Labour needed to forge ahead in building an alternative North American society, he maintained, as the ruling regime in Quebec was on the verge of collapse, close to an implosion caused by its own contradictions.¹⁰ The irony is that it was not the Liberal government, but the CSN itself, which was in the process of implosion. In the aftermath of the strike, tensions which had long been festering inside the union, and which had been especially present among the five-person executive, reached a critical stage. In the split which ensued, the ranks of the CSN shrank from 240,000 to 170,000. The CSN emerged from the crisis wounded, yet more united in its confrontational position opposing both the capitalist system and the state upon which that system relied.¹¹

Quebec's labour unions became crucially important venues in which the politics of class were articulated, but they were far from being the only ones. Outside of the structures of organized labour, a wide variety of individuals and groups began gravitating to orthodox Marxism, inspired by the concrete demonstrations of class politics in the streets. In the early 1970s, Marxist study groups abounded, and activists sought to gain a clearer grasp of the central contradictions of their society. History students at the newly established Université du Québec à Montréal were obliged to take a course in Marxist theory,¹² and Marxism became the topic of heated conversations in the city's avant-garde cafés. By reading many of the leading Marxist theorists of the time, especially Louis Althusser and Nicos Poulantzas, many of the

⁹ Yvan Charbonneau, "Cadre générale," *Prospective*, xxii congrès, CEQ juin 1972, 11. Also see Yvon Charbonneau, "Introduction 1972-73 : un intermède agité" *Rétrospective: Rapport des activités de la CEQ pour 1972-73*, XXIII Congrès, juillet 1973, 3.

¹⁰ Marcel Pepin, *Pour Vaincre*, Rapport moral du Président général de la CSN au 45e Congrès, Québec, le 11 juin 1972, 42.

¹¹ Louis Favreau, Pierre L'Heureux and avec la collaboration de Michel Paul, *Le projet de société de la CSN de 1966 à aujourd'hui: crise et avenir du syndicalisme au Québec* (Montréal: Centre de formation populaire, 1984), 81-97. Also see Jacques Rouillard, *Histoire du syndicalisme au Québec. Deux siècles d'histoire* (Montréal: Boréal express, 2004), 155-57.

¹² Interview with Robert Comeau, 27 September 2006, Montreal.

city's radicals began turning to structural Marxism, a move which paralleled a slow but steady decline in the idea that Quebec was a colony in need of decolonization. One could follow the transformation in Quebec Marxism in the pages of *Socialisme québécois*, a journal which had once prided itself on providing a space of debate for a diversity of left positions, but which announced a major transformation in 1970. Denouncing its earlier eclecticism – described as an intellectual no-man's-land – it now argued for rigour and scientific analysis. Socialism had become a historical necessity, and Marxist-Leninism the proper way to inform revolutionary thought and action.¹³ Earlier notions of decolonization were deficient, it argued, as Marxism was incompatible “with all nationalist mixtures that we can imagine.”¹⁴ The journal's new (all male) editorial board hoped to become a rallying point for the diverse elements of the left,¹⁵ giving unity and structure to decentralization and diversity. The sought-after unity, however, could not possibly capture or structure the full range and diversity of radical politics in the city.

This drive for certainty entailed in the new Marxist language of class struggle was taken to its ultimate limits by Montreal's new Marxist-Leninist organizations. Trotskyist groups proliferated in 1970s Montreal, but it was Maoist organizations which flourished, often attracting thousands of members, publishing weekly newspapers, and playing an influential (if highly controversial) role in union and community organizations. Montreal's Maoist organizations worked with tireless intensity, commanding the total devotion of their members, and making Montreal a

¹³ "Éditorial Socialisme québécois," *Socialisme québécois*, no. 20 (avril-mai-juin 1970): 2-12.

¹⁴ "Avant-Propos," *Socialisme québécois*, no. 23 (avril 1972): 8; "Editorial: La crise d'octobre 1970 au Québec," *Socialisme québécois*, no. 21-22 (avril 1971): 16. Jean-Marc Pottle, co-founder of *Parti Pris* and a member of *Socialisme québécois*'s editorial board in the early 1970s, recalls becoming strictly Leninist on the national question. He attacked nationalism and subordinated all considerations to the interests of the class struggle, arguing that the Canadian proletariat needed to unite within the same organization. Jean-Marc Pottle, *Un parti pris politique* (Montréal: VLB éditeur, 1979), 23-24. “avec toutes les mixtures nationalistes que l'on puisse imaginer.”

¹⁵ "Éditorial Socialisme québécois," 4; Michel van Schendel, "Note de la rédaction," *Socialisme* 69, no. 19 (octobre-novembre 1969): 3.

centre for Maoist influence unmatched elsewhere in North America.¹⁶ In the early 1970s students and seasoned activists alike sought to overcome the organizational impasse which seemed to hang over the left. After so many years of politicization and struggle, they asked, why did nothing seem to be changing? Many began believing that in their earlier politics they had erred, that they had ignored the lessons of history and spit upon the well-worn path of revolution. Everything needed to be done anew: the economic and social systems needed to be broken down and analyzed, new media founded and, perhaps most importantly of all, a new avant-garde revolutionary workers' party needed to be built.¹⁷ Although many early Marxist-Leninist publications originally integrated ideas of Quebec's national liberation into their new frameworks, by the middle of the decade virtually all were arguing that the 'interests of the working class' dictated that French- and English-Canadian workers needed to unite in opposition to the Canadian bourgeoisie. Society's primary contradiction, and therefore the central point of struggle, opposed the working class and the bourgeoisie. Quebec, while maintaining the democratic right to self-determination, did not need to go through a process of decolonization, they argued, because it was not a colony.¹⁸

By the early 1970s the working class had achieved a new prominence as both political force *and* as a new theoretical category, one which upset the earlier category of the 'colonized.' The flourishing world of Marxist-Leninism spoke in the language of certainties, assured of its capacity to provide correct analyses and proper political lines. Rather than searching to found a new humanism and attempting to build a

¹⁶ Max Elbaum writes in his foundational book on the American New Communist Movement that, at its height, the movement counted roughly 10,000 core activists. In Montreal alone, however, at least 3,000 activists gravitated to the city's three major Maoist organizations. Jacques Benoît, *L'extrême gauche* (Montréal: La Presse, 1977), 90; Elbaum, *Revolution in the Air*, 4.

¹⁷ Charles Gagnon, "Il était une fois... Conte à l'adresse de la jeunesse de mon pays," *Bulletin d'histoire politique* 13, no. 1 (automne 2004): 43-56.

¹⁸ For important statements on this question, see "Créons l'organisation marxiste-léniniste de lutte pour le parti," *EN LUTTE!*, 12 décembre 1974, 9. Mouvement révolutionnaire des étudiants du Québec, *En avant pour la création de l'organisation marxiste-léniniste* (Montréal: 1974), 25-32.

deeper and more meaningful form of participatory democracy, two goals which had formed the central thrust of the Quebec decolonization movement, Marxist-Leninists worked to establish the dictatorship of the proletariat, and to raise class to a new ontological status which stood above all other social categories of oppression. Rather than insisting that marginalized groups needed to define their own truths and understandings of the world, Marxist-Leninists attempted to impose their rigid conceptions of truth upon the movement as a whole.

Yet this sought-after unity and scientific certainty could only be but an illusion. It is no accident that the resolve for a fixed doctrine, discipline, and organization came at a moment of profound flux, when earlier frameworks of thought were crumbling. In the early 1970s, acquired truths of decolonization were being replaced by uncertainty, searching, and debate. Many of the Caribbean activists of the 1960s had left Montreal, and Montreal's remaining Black activists were thinking about new ways of continuing the struggle. The first major women's liberation organization had come to an end, and the city's feminist activists were considering how they could continue their efforts of challenging both dominant social structures and the categories of the left. And young francophone activists, realizing that the language of decolonization was losing ground, were left searching for new ways of understanding themselves and the world around them. One young activist who first entered the RIN and then the FLQ, and who went on to join the Maoist *En lutte!*, recalls the confusion of the moment: he subscribed to and drew upon the insights of mainstream communist and Trotskyist publications alike, and read everything put out by François Maspero. He was influenced by Che, Mao, Lenin and Gramsci, Althusser and *Il Manifesto*. And he was unsure of which direction to turn.¹⁹

¹⁹ Interview with Robert Comeau, 27 September 2006, Montreal.

All throughout the 1970s, debates raged in classrooms and meeting places, restaurants and cafés. Within the labour movement, many wondered whether they should support the PQ and work to bring the party further to the left. Or, they asked, should they create a labour party of their own? Or, maybe they should abstain from electoral politics altogether, and advocate worker self-management, or revolutionary syndicalism? Debates within the labour movement paralleled equally divisive debates outside of it. As the politics of class struggle inspired the activities of countless radicals who had previously been engaged in the project of Quebec liberation, many others began moving towards the electoral politics of the PQ. Founded amidst a split in the provincial Liberals and constituted as an official party advocating ‘sovereignty association’ in 1968, the PQ challenged, frustrated, and inspired leftists from its very beginning. On 1 May 1973, four members of the party’s national executive marched along with the crowd to demand the release of the labour presidents, and many were visibly excited about the possibility of the coming together of the two movements.²⁰ Would the party, after years of frustrating divergences – René Lévesque had even once declared that he would “rather live in a South American banana republic” than in a province dominated by the “ranting and raving of labor leaders”²¹ – finally begin to support the cause of labour? Could it be, many asked, that the electoral route of the PQ was the movement’s best chance of taking power? Perhaps independence was a necessary first step before moving on to socialism?

Perhaps. But could one really place any radical hopes in this party which worked so hard to court respectability? René Lévesque’s 1968 *Option Québec*, after all, was full of painfully essentialist passages about the ‘Québécois personality’ and

²⁰ Some people were reported to have been chanting “PQ, travailleurs, solidarité” when leaving an assembly later that evening. “Le PQ esquisse un mouvement vers les travailleurs,” *La Presse*, 2 mai 1973, C1.

²¹ Quoted in Nick Auf der Maur, “The Trigger was the ‘La Presse’ Affair,” *The Last Post* 2, no. 3 (December-January 1971-1972): 13.

the long struggle for French-Canadian ‘survival’ waged by traditional elites.²² True, the party promised many social democratic and left nationalist reforms,²³ yet it did not propose a radical restructuring of the social system, nor did it speak in the language of a world-wide opposition to imperialism. It promised political independence from Canada, but it advocated economic association. It spoke often of social justice, but it gave frustratingly little support to major demonstrations and strikes. And yet, in its early years the PQ’s sizeable and energized left wing, demonstrating a dynamic force of remarkable proportions, exercised an important influence over the party’s programme and conduct. It convinced many that this party – alone among parties to be financed only through individual donations – could be transformed into an important agent of change.²⁴

Despite its ambiguous character, the draw of the PQ therefore remained strong. Charles Gagnon captured the phenomenon well when he stated that, while nearly everyone criticized René Lévesque, few “could resist his appeal.”²⁵ Organizations and movement leaders who officially opposed the PQ – denouncing its half-measures and refusal to challenge American imperialism – were forced to recognize that their organizations were weakened because many of their members were working for the party.²⁶ One event highlighted the appeal of the PQ to those on

²² René Lévesque, *An Option for Quebec* (Toronto/Montreal: McClelland and Stewart Limited, 1968). The opening pages are especially filled with traditional nationalist tropes of ‘survival.’

²³ See Léon Dion, *Québec, The Unfinished Revolution* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1976); Richard Jones, "L'Idéologie du Parti Québécois," in *Idéologies au Canada Français, 1940-1976*, ed. Fernand Dumont (Québec: Les Presses de l'Université Laval, 1981).

²⁴ For an important document which reflected many of the positions of the party’s left wing, see André Larocque, *Défis au Parti québécois* (Montréal: Éditions du Jour, 1971). After the internal controversy which ensued after the PQ’s decision not to march during the *La Presse* strike in the fall of 1971, the party was forced to issue a new manifesto which outlined its goal of becoming a truly democratic party advocating national liberation. "Conduire à la victoire un parti populaire," *Le Devoir*, 29 novembre 1971, 5.

²⁵ Charles Gagnon, "Le parti Québécois et la révolution," *Socialisme 69*, no. 17 (avril-mai-juin 1969): 131. "ne peut résister à son attrait."

²⁶ See Peter Allnutt and Robert Chodos, "Quebec: Into the Streets," *Radical America* 6, no. 5 (September-October 1972): 66. According to CSN militant Jacques Bourdoux, "Quand le PQ a commencé à prendre figure, nos résolutions se sont retrouvées intégralement soumises au congrès du

the left more than any other. In December 1971, Pierre Vallières – the most well-known theorist of decolonization – shocked the province by announcing that he would be joining the party, leaving the FLQ and armed struggle behind him. Vallières, like many other leftists both before and after him, decided to place his hopes in the PQ, but he was soon bitterly disappointed by the party's drive towards the centre and its corresponding attempts to shed its radical image. It soon became clear that the PQ's plans were not those dreamed of by the earlier advocates of Quebec decolonization.²⁷

Vallières never really did put all of his energy into building the PQ. Instead, he headed for the countryside, leaving Montreal and its political battles behind him. If Quebec were to be liberated one day, he maintained, it would be the result “of a multitude of small liberations, of ‘miniature revolutions’ at the grassroots.” It was time to stop dreaming of a different future, but to live that alternative in the present, to create new modes of living and thinking. Vallières had earlier argued that the revolution would *necessarily* begin in Montreal, but he now maintained that urban revolutionaries had everything to learn from the impoverished residents outside of the city.²⁸ Although his actual path would take him into the counterculture rather than into the world of party politics, Vallières's long arguments about the strategic necessity of joining the PQ, first published in Montreal newspapers and then as *L'urgence de choisir*, had a profound effect on radical circles.²⁹ Vallières argued that to truly oppose imperialism, Quebecers first needed to “unite” to achieve political

PQ. Sur le plancher, les militants syndicaux disaient qu'ils avaient déjà voté ça au congrès de la CSN.” In Favreau, L'Heureux and Paul, *Le projet de société de la CSN de 1966 à aujourd'hui: crise et avenir du syndicalisme au Québec*, 102.

²⁷ Pierre Vallières, *Les Héritiers de Papineau. Itinéraire politique d'un 'nègre blanc' (1960-1985)* (Montréal: Québec/Amérique, 1986), 244-45.

²⁸ Ibid., 236-37. Pierre Richard, “Pierre Vallières à Mont-Laurier: L'espoir de la population ne saurait être déçu sans risque de violence,” *Le Devoir*, 15 mai 1972, 16.

²⁹ Vallières, *Les Héritiers de Papineau*, 227-29. Pierre Vallières, *Choose!*, trans. Penelope Williams (Toronto: new press, 1972 [1971]).

independence.³⁰ And in direct opposition to the position that he had been defending since the mid-1960s, he now maintained that, “in a country like Quebec – colonized, dominated and exploited,” socialism would need to come after “national liberation,” a process which he now conflated with “the establishment of a national, independent state.”³¹

L'urgence de choisir is most often read as a strategic text, cited for its clarity or hypocrisy (depending on the position of the reader). But it can also be read in another way. Written in the fall of 1971, it highlights many of the tensions, ambiguities, and creative spaces which had developed in the language of Quebec liberation. If Vallières's earlier work had been loaded with a gendered language of revolutionary masculinity, he now recognized that true “popular power is inconceivable without the liberation of women from their specific exploitation.”³² And as he had come to rethink his earlier positions on gender, so too did he reformulate his understandings of race. The idea that Quebeckers could be thought of as ‘nègres blancs’ – a concept which had formed the core of his earlier writings – is almost entirely abandoned, appearing only once (and safely cordoned off in quotation marks).³³ Even more significantly, Vallières not only acknowledges the exploitation of immigrants, but also the multi-layered nature of colonialism in Quebec. Reflecting a context of increased Aboriginal activism throughout North America, Vallières now

³⁰ Vallières, *Choose!*, 10.

³¹ Ibid., 19.

³² Ibid., 130. Publications like *Our Generation*, *Québec-Presse*, and *UHURU* began featuring articles on women's liberation. The FLP even argued that, as women were exploited not only by capitalism and colonialism, but also by men, “elles constituent au sein du Québec notre ‘Tier Monde.’” See, WRDA, FLP fonds, “Press statements,” n.d., 9. Also see “Editorial,” *Our Generation* 8, no. 3 part one (April 1972): 1; Lucia Kowaluk, “Review: Report of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada,” *Our Generation* 8, no. 2 (Winter-April 1972): 108-15; Helen Levine, “Report: The Women are Coming,” *Our Generation* 7, no. 2 (June-July 1970): 75-76; Valerie, “Capitalism and the Family,” *UHURU*, 2 March 1970, 4, 7.

³³ Vallières, *Choose!*, 96.

spoke of how the “American Indians and the Eskimos of Quebec and Canada” were even more exploited than the most downtrodden of francophone Quebecers.³⁴

Vallières’s new recognition of the plight of Native Canadians reflected a broader change taking place among many on the left. Throughout the 1960s, the contradictions and ambiguities of Quebec’s colonial situation were rarely broached, but in the early 1970s the multi-layered nature of colonialism in the province could no longer be ignored. Some francophone radicals, like Gérard Godin and Gilles Groulx, worked to integrate Natives into their radical cinema.³⁵ Articles in left labour papers began highlighting the plight of Natives,³⁶ and radical histories of Quebec – like Bergeron’s *Petit manuel d’histoire du Québec* – began to make room for the history of the colonization of Aboriginal populations. *Le Travail*, the organ of the Montreal Central Council of the CSN, even began speaking of France’s colonization of North America, and its increasing control “of the territories and Native peoples with whom it entered into contact.”³⁷

It was during a major conflict in Quebec’s far north, however, that advocates of Quebec decolonization were forced to deal with the accusation that francophone Quebecers themselves had become (or had always been) a colonial power. In the early 1960s, the provincial government had increased its presence in the north (which had previously been administered by the federal government). Many believed that it would create the conditions in which native groups could take control of their own educational system, but, more than ten years later, the government had done nothing

³⁴ Ibid., 53.

³⁵ Gérard Godin’s papers include draft manuscripts of a NFB film in which he would attempt to capture the voice of Aboriginal peoples. UQAM, Gérard Godin fonds, 81p-660:02/15, draft manuscript. Also see the important footage of Aboriginals in Gilles Groulx, *24 heures ou plus* (Montréal: ONF-NFB, 1971).

³⁶ See, for example, Marthe Therrien, “Avec ‘leur’ loi, les blancs briment les Indiens et les Esquimaux!,” *Québec-Press*, 14 décembre 1969, 10A.

³⁷ “Les Indiens veulent leurs terres,” *Le Travail, édition de Montréal* 1, no. 10 (avril 1974): 17. “des territoires et des peuples indiens avec qui ils entraient en contact.”

to facilitate indigenous self-determination. Instruction was not being given in native languages as promised, aboriginal teachers were not being trained, local customs were not being observed, and the goal of creating local control over education was not being met. Many believed that Quebec had the responsibility to act differently than other White populations in North America, treat Aboriginal peoples with respect and dignity, and facilitate the process of self-determination.³⁸ But it was not living up to that responsibility, and the original progressive goals set by the Quebec government stood revealed as merely a new incarnation of the same old colonialist policy, except that French rather than English became the language of colonialist assimilation.³⁹

And so, in the midst of frustration and disappointment, the francophone teachers of the region's education system went on a two-month strike, fighting alongside the Inuit for the preservation of their cultural rights.⁴⁰ By working in Quebec's far north, teaching in French and within a system designed for the francophone majority of the south, the teachers – who would have been conceptualized as *nègres blancs* in the mid-1960s – came to be conscious of their 'whiteness.'⁴¹ The title of the CEQ's major report on the question is revealing: *Le Nouveau-Québec, ou comment des colonisés traitent leur colonie...* The report argued that native populations lived distinct histories from Quebecers of the south, and had different ways of conceptualizing their past and future. Francophone Quebecers – “themselves profoundly oppressed in the economic and political spheres” – needed to become conscious “of the colonialist treatment which they are inflicting upon groups

³⁸ *Le Nouveau-Québec, ou comment des colonisés traitent leur colonie...* Mémoire adressé au ministre de l'Éducation et à l'assemblée nationale du Québec (Québec: Corporation des enseignants du Québec, 1973), 1-2.

³⁹ *Le Nouveau-Québec, ou comment des colonisés traitent leur colonie...* Annexe B – “Lettre de la C.E.Q. aux membres de l'assemblée nationale du Québec” Sainte-Foy, le 20 décembre 1972, Michel Agnaieff to members of the National Assembly, 42.

⁴⁰ CEQ, *Rétrospective 71-72 : Rapport du Conseil d'Administration*. (XXII^e Congrès de la C.E.Q. Juin 1972), 25.

⁴¹ See “L'Inuit et 'notre' système d'éducation,” *Action Pédagogique*, no. 24 (juin 1972): 43.

of Indians and Esquimaux.” The province’s teachers’ union, having been deeply influenced by the language of decolonization in the preceding years, articulated in unequivocal terms the distance separating it from the modernizing goals of the Quiet Revolutionary state: “To the right of states to organize peoples,” the union maintained, “we oppose the right of peoples to organize themselves.”⁴²

In the early 1970s, the language of Quebec decolonization was being stretched in many different directions, forced to face internal contradictions and ambiguities which had lain dormant for years. As a set of ideas – first developed in the Third World and creatively adapted to the realities of Quebec society in the early 1960s – the framework had remained remarkably resilient for roughly a decade. Throughout the 1960s and early 1970s, the ideas were adapted, deepened, and ultimately transformed by the many different groups which made them their own. In the confusion of the early 1970s, the notion of Quebec decolonization was in disarray. Some, like Pierre Vallières, Léandre Bergeron, and the CEQ, attempted to integrate the colonization (and potential decolonization) of Aboriginal peoples into their frameworks, but others began to give up on the idea altogether. The forces which led to the decline of decolonization as an interpretive framework were many: the PQ, working-class radicals, and Marxist-Leninist groups all offered substantially different ways of understanding the meaning of liberation and the pathway to achieving it. Radical Black activists and immigrant groups also challenged the dualistic view of Quebec society upon which much of decolonization rested, and Quebec feminists denounced the gendered terms in which, with a few important exceptions, it was still

⁴² *Le Nouveau-Québec, ou comment des colonisés traitent leur colonie...*, 36. “eux-mêmes profondément dominés sur le plan économique et politique”; “du traitement colonialiste qu’ils infligent à des groupes esquimaux et indiens”; “Au droit des Etats à disposer des peuples”; “nous opposons le droit des peuples à disposer d’eux-mêmes.”

framed. Substantial efforts were made to integrate the contradictions, to open up the language to all of its radical possibilities, but, ultimately, its time had passed.

As the global movement against imperialism progressed to a new stage in the early 1970s,⁴³ anti-colonialism in Quebec began to wane. Like the ideas of the various movements outlined in this work which continually shifted and melted away, giving way to new interpretations and perspectives, so too did the larger vision of Quebec decolonization lose its power and hold over Montreal's radical circles. True, ideas of anti-imperialism lived on in Quebec throughout the 1970s, especially in the Montreal Central Council of the CSN and other radicalized elements of the Quebec labour movement, but these ideas never again commanded the influence that they did in the late 1960s and very early 1970s. Throughout the decade to come, political activism in Montreal thrived. Thousands of groups and individuals worked to deconstruct and oppose oppression based on gender, race, class, and – an issue which was largely absent from debates on decolonization – sexual orientation.⁴⁴ But very few still argued that Quebec was a colony. In 1975, Pierre Vallières himself was forced to concede to the new line of interpretation prevailing in the province: Quebec did not belong to the Third World, he argued, “but to the privileged West.”⁴⁵

⁴³ Delegates from over seventy-five nations, with African Americans foremost among them, participated in the fourth Summit of the Non-Aligned Movement held in Algiers in September 1973. Elbaum, *Revolution in the Air*, 203.

⁴⁴ Few, if any, of the various groups and individuals in this study had anything substantial to say (during the period) about discrimination against homosexuals. In the early 1970s, the first group defending homosexual rights, the Front de libération homosexuel (FLH), emerged. By the time that the homosexual liberation movement achieved more concrete form, both theoretically and organizationally, however, it was situated in the Marxist language of class oppression. See Roger Noël, “Libération homosexuelle ou révolution socialiste?,” in *Sortir de l'ombre: Histoires des communautés lesbienne et gaie de Montréal*, ed. Irène Demczuk and Frank W. Remiggi (Montréal: VLB éditeur, 1998), 189.

⁴⁵ Pierre Vallières, “Memmi, le Québec, le Tiers-Monde et la sexualité” Reproduced in Pierre Vallières, *Paroles d'un nègre blanc* (Montréal: VLB, 2002), 173. “mais à l'Occident privilégié.”

The adaptation of anti-colonial ideas to Quebec society was neither clear, linear, nor without significant contradiction. The wide variety of social groups of newly politicized identities which built upon anti-colonial ideas, however, is testament to their power and scope. By 1972, it had been over ten years since Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* had first inflamed political debate in Montreal. During the 1960s, Third World liberation theory, developed in far-away nations, travelled back to the very centre of North America. Drawing upon its insights, and on the related works of Black Power theorists, radicals in Montreal worked to rethink the very nature of their society, and to redraw the boundaries within which they had previously understood themselves and their movement. They used its insights to challenge the truth-claims of western knowledge, to construct alternatives to the neo-nationalist project of modernization, and to think about the psychological, cultural, and material consequences of imperialism. New social groups made use of the ideas and language of anti-imperialism to develop new claims of democracy, new ideas of how power structures needed to be deconstructed and decentralized. These ideas and narratives of liberation, born on the streets and forged through collective struggles, were deeply shaped by the daily interactions which occurred in Montreal's hybrid streets and meeting places. Living and working in the same city, and drawing upon and adapting the same ideas, these various groups could not help but respond to each other's analyses, and build on each other's insights. Collectively, these various movements and ideas – separate yet linked by the flexible language of Quebec decolonization – constituted Montreal's radical imagination.

For all but the most marginal of writers, Quebec is no longer considered a colony, and the concept of 'Quebec liberation' no longer carries with it a radical political message. Quebec now largely sees itself – and is seen by others – as part of

the developed world, undoubtedly advantaged by an unjust international distribution of wealth. The intellectual climate has changed so dramatically that even the memory of a time in which thousands of intellectuals and activists attempted to draw parallels between their conditions and those the Third World is largely fading away. Yet, although the idea of decolonization has disappeared from the political landscape, the practice of empire is still alive and well. In recent years anti-imperial resistance has come once again to dominate radical politics in Montreal, although this time the perspective has been reversed; rather than conceptualizing the city's inhabitants as colonized subjects, political activists have denounced the imperialist aggressions being carried out in their name. Deportations, security certificates, foreign invasions and torture centres have all resurfaced with a vengeance, reminding us that the imperialist drive to draw boundaries around different people functions still. Its logic continues to shape politics at both its centre and periphery. It is therefore more pressing than ever to understand to the interconnected nature of resistance in the past.

Bibliography

Archival and Library Collections

Canadian Women's Movement Archives (Ottawa)

31. Front de libération des femmes québécoises (Montréal, QC): manifeste et bilan, 1971.

Concordia University Archives (Montreal)

Ready Reference File, "The Comupter Riot, Sir George Williams: 1969"

Archives, Confédération des syndicats nationaux (Montreal)

- Fonds d'archives, Conseil central des syndicats nationaux de Montréal
 - rapports de congrès, 1968-1974
 - procès-verbaux, assemblées générales, 1968-1974
 - publications

McGill University Archives (Montreal)

RG2 c401. Opération McGill fonds

National Archives of Québec – Montreal, Quebec

MSS 140. Fonds Éditions Parti Pris
MSS410. Fonds Gaston Miron fonds

Archives, Université du Québec à Montréal (Montreal)

21p. Collection de publications de groupes de gauche et de groupes populaires
81p. Fonds d'archives Gérald-Godin
100p. Fonds d'archives de la Fédération des travailleurs et travailleuses du Québec
124p. Fonds d'archives Charles-Gagnon

The William Ready Division of Archives and Research Collections, McMaster University (Hamilton)

Quebec social and political organizations
Quebec – Anderson Affair
Quebec – Campaign against Bill 63 collection
Quebec – Comité québécois provisoire de solidarité avec le peuple palestinien
Quebec – Confédération des syndicats nationaux
Quebec – Corporation des enseignants

Quebec – Fédération des travailleurs du Québec
Quebec – Front de libération populaire
Quebec – Front de libération du Québec
Quebec – Front d'action politique
Quebec – Mouvement syndical populaire
Quebec – Opération McGill
Quebec – Parti québécois
Quebec – Union générale des étudiants du Québec fonds
Stanley Gray fonds

Political Journals (Various dates)

Caribbean International Opinion: Dynamics of Liberation (Montreal)
La Cognée (Montreal)
Expression (Montreal)
Femmes du Québec: organe officiel de la ligue des femmes progressistes du Québec
(Montreal)
The Last Post (Montreal)
Liberté (Montreal)
Mobilisation (Montreal)
Montreal Women's Liberation Newsletter (Montreal)
National Minority News (Montreal)
Noir et Rouge (Montreal)
Our Generation (Montreal)
Our Generation Against Nuclear War (Montreal)
Parti Pris (Montreal)
Québécoises deboutte! (Montreal)
Québec Libre (Montreal)
Radical America (Madison)
Révolution Québécoise (Montreal)
La Revue Socialiste (Montreal)
Socialisme 64... (Montreal)
Socialisme québécois (Montreal)
Third World Solidarity: Journal of the Afro-Asian Latin American People's Solidarity
Committee (Montreal)

Newspapers and Magazines (Various dates)

Canadian Magazine
Le Devoir
EN LUTTE!
Le Figaro
France Observateur
The Georgian
The Guardian
Le Jour
The McGill Daily
The McGill Free Press: Black Spark Edition

The McGill Reporter
The Montreal Gazette
La Patrie
Le Piochon
Le Pouvoir
La Presse
Quartier Latin
Québec-Presse
Le Quotidien Populaire
The Review (McGill Daily supplement)
Le sainte-marie: journal des étudiants du collège Sainte-Marie de Montreal
Le Travail
Le Travail, édition de Montréal
UHURU
Umoja
Unité Ourvière

Royal Commissions

Briefs to the Royal Commission on the Status of Women

Interviews

Robert Comeau
 Fernand Foisy
 Stanley Gray
 Kari Levitt
 Jean-Marc Piotte
 Dimitri Roussopoulos
 Daya Varma

Films

Arcand, Denys. *On est au coton*. Montréal: ONF-NFB, 1970.

Groulx, Gilles. *24 heures ou plus*. Montréal: ONF-NFB, 1971.

Labrecque, Jean-Claude. *Le R.I.N.* Canada: Les Productions Virage, 2002.

Lafond, Jean-Daniel. *La Manière Nègre ou Aimé Césaire, chemin faisant*. Canada-France coproduction: ACPAV (Quebec) and RFO (Martinique), 1991.

Labrecque, Jean-Claude and Jean-Pierre Masse. *La Nuit de la poésie 27 mars 1970*. Montréal: ONF-NFB, 1970.

Paley, Euzhan. "Aimé Césaire: a voice for history, part II." United States: California Newsreel, 1994.

Rebellion, Protest, and Change: *Reflections on the 1960s and the Development of Montreal's Black Community*, February 18, 2006, UNIA Hall, Montreal. videorecording (available through the Alfie Roberts' Institute, Montreal).

Academic Theses

Combres, Alain. "La question linguistique et les partis politiques québécois (1960-1990)." thèse de doctorat, Université de Paris I, Panthéon-Sorbonne, 1996.

Guentzel, Ralph Peter. "The Confédération des Syndicats Nationaux, the Idea of Independence, and the Sovereignist Movement, 1960-1980." M.A., McGill University, 1991.

Jourdain, Jacques. "Pierre Vallières et les palinodies de la gauche québécoise." M.A., UQAM, 1995.

Kicksee, Richard Gordon. "'Scaled down to size': contested Liberal commonsense and the negotiation of 'Indian participation' in the Canadian Centennial celebrations and Expo '67, 1963-1967." M.A., Queen's University, 1995.

Lancôt, Martine. "La genèse et l'évolution du mouvement de libération des femmes à Montréal, 1969-1979." M.A., UQAM, 1980.

Lanthier, Stéphanie. "L'impossible réciprocité des rapports politique entre le nationalisme radical et le féminisme radical au Québec 1961-1972." M.A., Université de Sherbrooke, 1998.

Lapointe, Mathieu. "Nationalisme et socialisme dans la pensée de Raoul Roy, 1935-1965." M.A., Université de Montréal, 2002.

Maroney, Heather Jon. "Contemporary Quebec Feminism: The Interrelation of Political and Ideological Development in Women's Organizations, Trade Unions, Political Parties and State Policy, 1960-1980." PhD, McMaster University, 1988.

Poirier, Stéphanie. "Le Conseil central des syndicats nationaux de Montréal (CSN) à l'heure de la radicalisation syndicale, 1968-1980." M.A., Université de Montréal, 2005.

Sheppard, Peggy. "The Relationship Between Student Activism and Change in the University: With Particular Reference to McGill University in the 1960s." M.A., McGill University, 1989.

Wilkins, Fanon Che. "'In the Belly of the Beast': Black Power, Anti-Imperialism, and the African Liberation Solidarity Movement 1968-1975." PhD, New York University, 2001.

Books and Articles

- Ali, Tariq. *Street Fighting Years: An Autobiography of the Sixties*. London: Verso, 2005 [1987].
- Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso, 1991 [1983].
- Appadurai, Arjun. *Modernity at Large*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996.
- Austin, David. "Contemporary Montréal and the 1968 Congress of Black Writers." *Lost Histories* 24, no. 1 (1998): 56-60.
- . "Introduction." In *A View for Freedom: Alfie Roberts Speaks on the Caribbean, Cricket, Montreal, and C.L.R. James*, 11-25. Montreal: Alfie Roberts Institute, 2005.
- Baillargeon, Constatin. *Pierre Vallières vu par son 'professeur de philosophie'*. Montréal: Médiaspaul, 2002.
- Bédard, Éric. *Chronique d'une insurrection appréhendée*. Sillery: Septentrion, 1998.
- . "McGill français: un contexte de fébrilité étudiante et nationaliste." *Bulletin d'histoire politique* 9, no. 1 (2000): 148-52.
- Bégin, Monique. "The Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada: Twenty Years Later." In *Challenging Times: the Women's Movement in Canada and the United States*, edited by Constance Backhouse and David H. Flaherty, 21-38. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1992.
- Behiels, Michael D. *Prelude to Quebec's Quiet Revolution: Liberalism versus Neo-nationalism, 1945-1960*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1985.
- . *Quebec and the Question of Immigration: From Ethnocentrism to Ethnic Pluralism, 1900-1985*. Ottawa: Canadian Historical Association, 1991.
- Benoît, Jacques. *L'extrême gauche*. Montréal: La Presse, 1977.
- Bergeron, Léandre. *The history of Quebec: a patriot's handbook*. Updated ed. Toronto: NC Press, 1971.
- . *Petit manuel d'histoire du Québec*. Montréal: Éditions québécoises, 1971.
- Berque, Jacques. *Dépossession du monde*. Paris: Éditions du seuil, 1964.
- . Preface to *Les québécois*. Paris: François Maspero, 1967.
- Bettelheim, Charles. *Planification et croissance accélérée*. Paris: Éditions F. Maspero, 1964.

- Boehmer, Elleke, and Bart Moore-Gilbert. "Postcolonial Studies and Transnational Resistance." *Interventions* 4, no. 1 (2002): 7-21.
- Bourque, Gilles, Jules Duchastel, and Jacques Beauchemin. *La société libérale duplessiste, 1944-1960*. Montréal: Presses de l'Université de Montréal, 1994.
- Bouthillier, Guy. "Aux origines de la planification linguistique québécoise." In *L'État et la planification linguistique II. Études de cas particuliers*, edited by André Martin, 7-22. Québec: Éditeur officiel du Québec, 1981.
- Brodeur, Violette, Suzanne G. Chartrand, Louise Corriveau, and Béatrice Valay. *Le Mouvement des femmes au Québec: étude des groupes montréalais et nationaux*. Montréal: Centre de formation populaire, 1982.
- Brownmiller, Susan. *In Our Time: Memoir of a Revolution*. New York: Dial Press, 1999.
- Butcher, LeRoi. "The Anderson Affair." In *Let the Niggers Burn! The Sir George Williams University Affair and its Caribbean Aftermath*, edited by Dennis Forsythe, 76-109. Montréal: Black Rose Books/Our Generation Press, 1971.
- Cardin, Jean-François. *La crise d'octobre 1970 et le mouvement syndical québécois*. Montréal: Collection RCHTQ, Études et documents, 1988.
- . "La CSN et le syndicalisme de combat (1960-1975)." In *La CSN, 75 ans d'action syndicale et sociale*, edited by Yves Bélanger and Robert Comeau. Sainte-Foy: Presses de l'Université du Québec, 1998.
- Carel, Ivan. "Feu sur l'Amérique. Proposition pour la révolution nord-américaine de Charles Gagnon: analyse et mise en perspective." *Bulletin d'histoire politique* 15, no. 1 (2006): 149-61.
- Carmichael, Stokely. *Stokely Speaks: Black Power Back to Pan-Africanism*. New York: Random House, 1971.
- Carmichael, Stokely, and Charles V. Hamilton. *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America*. New York: Vintage Books, 1967.
- Carmichael, Stokely, and Ekwueme Michael Thelwell. *Ready for Revolution: The Life and Struggles of Stokely Carmichael [Kwame Ture]*. New York: Scribner, 2003.
- Carson, Clayborne. *In Struggle: SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981.
- Casgrain, Thérèse F. *A Woman in a Man's World*. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Limited, 1972.
- Castro, Fidel. *History Will Absolve Me*. New York: L. Stuart, 1961.

- CEQ. "Phase One: CEQ Manifesto (1971)." In *Quebec - Only the Beginning: The Manifestoes of the Common Front*, edited by Daniel Drache, 99-147. Toronto: New Press, 1972.
- . *Prospective*, xxii congrès, CEQ juin 1972.
- . *Le Nouveau-Québec, ou comment des colonisés traitent leur colonie...* Mémoire adressé au ministre de l'Éducation et à l'assemblée nationale du Québec. Québec: Corporation des enseignants du Québec, 1973.
- . *Rapport du Conseil d'Administration* (CEQ). 21^e congrès de la C.E.Q., Juin 1971.
- . *Rétrospective 71-72: Rapport du Conseil d'Administration*. XXII^e Congrès de la CEQ, Juin 1972.
- . *Rétrospective: Rapport des activités de la CEQ pour 1972-73*, XXIII Congrès, juillet 1973.
- Césaire, Aimé. *Discourse on Colonialism*. Translated by Joan Pinkham. New York: Monthly Review Press, 2000 [1955].
- . "Notebook of a Return to the Native Land." In *Aimé Césaire, the collected poetry*, 32-85. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983.
- Chamberland, Line. *Mémoires lesbiennes: le lesbianisme à Montréal entre 1950 et 1970*. Montréal: Les Éditions de remue-ménage, 1996.
- Chaput, Marcel. *Pourquoi je suis séparatiste*. Montréal: Les Éditions du Jour, 1961.
- Chartrand, Michel, Vernel Olson, and John Riddell. *The Real Cuba as Three Canadians Saw it*. Toronto: Fair Play for Cuba Committee, 1964.
- Cherniak, Donna, and Allan Feingold. "Birth Control Handbook (1971)." In *Women Unite! An Anthology of the Canadian Women's Movement*, 109-13. Toronto: Canadian Women's Educational Press, 1972.
- , and Allan Feingold, "Introduction" *Birth Control Handbook* 6th and 7th editions, Montreal, 1971.
- Chodos, Robert, and Nick Auf der Maur, eds. *Quebec: A Chronicle 1968-1972*. Toronto: James Lewis & Samuel, 1972.
- Coleman, William D. "The Class Bases of Language Policy in Quebec, 1949-1975." *Studies in Political Economy*, no. 3 (1980): 93-117.
- Collectif Clio. *L'histoire des femmes au Québec depuis quatre siècles*. Montréal: Quinze, 1992.

- Comeau, Robert, D. Cooper, and Pierre Vallières. *FLQ : un projet révolutionnaire : lettres et écrits felquistes (1963-1982)*. Outremont, Québec: VLB, 1990.
- Comeau, Robert, and Bernard Dionne. *Le droit de se taire: histoire des communistes au Québec, de la Première Guerre mondiale à la Révolution tranquille*. Outremont Québec: VLB, 1989.
- Confédération des syndicats nationaux, and Centrale de l'enseignement du Québec. *The History of the Labour Movement in Québec*. Montréal: Black Rose Books, 1987.
- Cook, Ramsay. *Watching Quebec: Selected Essays*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's Press, 2005.
- CSN. "It's Up to Us." In *Quebec - Only the Beginning: The Manifestoes of the Common Front*, edited by Daniel Drache. Toronto: New Press, 1972 [1971].
- The CourtePointe Collective. *The Point Is... Grassroots Organizing Works: Women from Point St. Charles sharing stories of solidarity*. Montreal: les éditions du remue-ménage, 2006.
- d'Allemagne, André. *Le Colonialisme au Québec*. Montréal: Édition R-B, 1966.
- . *Le R.I.N. de 1960 à 1963: étude d'un groupe de pression au Québec*. Montréal: Éditions l'Étincelle, 1974.
- Davenport, R.R.H. "Nationalism and Conciliation: The Bourassa-Hertzog Posture." *Canadian Historical Review* XLIV, no. 3 (1963): 193-212.
- de Beauvoir, Simone. *Force of Circumstance*. Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1968 [1963].
- . *The Second Sex*. Translated by H.M. Parshley. New York: Vintage Books, 1989 [1953].
- de Sève, Micheline. "Féminisme et nationalisme au Québec, une alliance inattendue." *Revue internationale d'études canadiennes*, no. 17 (1998) : 183-212.
- de Vault, Carole, with William Johnson. *The Informer: Confessions of an Ex-Terrorist*. Toronto: Fleet Books, 1982.
- Deleuze, Magali. *L'une et l'autre indépendance 1954-1964: Les médias au Québec et la guerre d'Algérie*. Outremont: Les Éditions Point de Fuite, 2001.
- Demczuk, Irène, and Frank W. Remiggi, eds. *Sortir de l'ombre: histoires des communautés lesbienne et gaie de Montréal*. Montréal: VLB, 1998.
- Desbiens, Jean-Paul. *Les insolences du Frère Untel*. Montréal: Éditions de l'homme, 1960.

- Dion, Léon. *Québec, The Unfinished Revolution*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1976.
- Dirlik, Arif. "Rethinking Colonialism: Globalization, Postcolonialism, and the Nation." *Interventions* 4, no. 3 (2002): 428-48.
- Dixon, Marlene. *Things Which are Done in Secret*. Montréal: Black Rose Books, 1976.
- Dofny, Jacques, and Marcel Rioux. "Les classes sociales au Canada français." *Revue française de Sociologie* III (1962): 290-300.
- Dolment, Marcelle, and Marcel Barthe. *La femme au Québec*. Ottawa: Les Presses Libres, 1973.
- Dumont, Micheline. "The Origins of the Women's Movement in Québec." In *Challenging Times: The Women's Movement in Canada and the United States*, edited by Constance Backhouse and David H. Flaherty, 72-89. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1992.
- Eber, Dorothy. *The Computer Centre party: Canada meets black power*. Montreal: Tundra Books, 1969.
- Echols, Alice. *Daring to be Bad: Radical Feminism in America 1967-1975*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989.
- Elbaum, Max. *Revolution in the Air: Sixties Radicals turn to Lenin, Mao and Che*. London: Verso, 2006 [2002].
- Eley, Geoff. *Forging Democracy: The History of the Left in Europe, 1850-2000*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002.
- Ethier, Diane, Jean-Marc Piotte, and Jean Reynolds. *Les travailleurs contre l'État bourgeois, avril et mai 1972*. Montréal: L'Aurore, 1975.
- Evans, Sara. *Personal Politics: The Roots of Women's Liberation in the Civil Rights Movement & the New Left*. New York: Vintage Books, 1979.
- Fanon, Frantz. *Black Skin, White Masks*. Translated by Charles Lam Markmann. New York: Grove Press, 1967 [1952].
- . *A Dying Colonialism*. New York: Grove Press, 1965.
- . *The Wretched of the Earth*. Translated by Constance Farrington. New York: Grove Press, 1963 [1961].
- Farber, Jerry. *The Student as Nigger: Essays and Stories*. North Hollywood: Contact Books, 1969.

- Favreau, Louis, Pierre L'Heureux, avec la collaboration de Michel Paul. *Le projet de société de la CSN de 1966 à aujourd'hui: crise et avenir du syndicalisme au Québec*. Montréal: Centre de formation populaire, 1984.
- Foisy, Fernand. *Les voies d'un homme de parole (1916-1967)*. Outremont: Lanctôt-Éditeur, 1999.
- . *Michel Chartrand, la colère du juste (1968-2003)*. Outremont: Lanctôt Éditeur, 2003.
- . *Michel Chartrand, Les voies d'un homme de parole*. Outremont: Lanctôt Éditeur, 1999.
- Forsythe, Dennis, ed. *Let the Niggers Burn! The Sir George Williams University Affair and its Caribbean Aftermath*. Montréal: Black Rose Books/Our Generation Press, 1971.
- Fournier, Louis. *FLQ: Histoire d'un mouvement clandestin*. Outremont: Lanctôt Éditeur, 1998.
- . *Histoire de la FTQ, 1965-1992: la plus grande centrale syndicale au Québec*. Montréal: Éditions Québec/Amérique, 1994.
- . *Louis Laberge: le syndicalisme c'est ma vie*. Montréal: Québec/Amérique, 1992.
- Friedan, Betty. *The Feminine Mystique*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2001.
- FTQ. "The State is our Exploiter: F.T.Q. Manifesto (1971)." In *Quebec - Only the Beginning: The Manifestoes of the Common Front*, 179-272. Toronto: New Press, 1972.
- Gagnon, Charles. "Hommage à Pierre Vallières." *Bulletin d'histoire politique* 7, no. 3 (1999): 9-18.
- . "Il était une fois... Conte à l'adresse de la jeunesse de mon pays." *Bulletin d'histoire politique* 13, no. 1 (2004): 43-56.
- . "Le parti Québécois et la révolution." *Socialisme* 69, no. 17 (1969): 130-33.
- . *Le Référendum: un syndrome québécois: essai*. Lachine, Que.: Pleine Lune, 1995.
- . *Pour le parti prolétarien*. Montréal: Equipe du Journal, 1972.
- Gagnon, Henri. *Les militants socialistes du Québec: d'une époque à l'autre*. Saint-Lambert: Héritage, 1985.
- Gauthier, Yves. *Monsieur Livre: Henri Tranquille*. Sillery: Septentrion, 2005.

- Gauvreau, Michael. *The Catholic Origins of Quebec's Quiet Revolution*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2005.
- Genovese, Eugene. *In Red and Black; Marxian Explorations in Southern Afro-American History*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1971.
- Georgakas, Dan, and Marvin Surkin. *Detroit: I Do Mind Dying*. Cambridge: South End Press, 1998.
- Gilmore, John. *Swinging in Paradise: The Story of Jazz in Montréal*. Montréal: Véhicule Press, 1988.
- Godin, Pierre. *La poudrière linguistique*. Montréal: Boréal, 1990.
- Gordon, Alan. *Making Public Pasts: The Contested Terrain of Montréal's Public Memories*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's Press, 2001.
- Gosse, Van. *Rethinking the New Left: An Interpretive History*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005.
- . *Where the Boys Are: Cuba, Cold War America and the Making of a New Left*. London: Verso, 1993.
- Gott, Richard. *Cuba: A New History*. New Haven: Yale Nota Bene, 2005 [2004].
- Gray, Stanley. "Stan Gray: The Greatest Canadian ... Shit-Disturber." *Canadian Dimension* 38, no. 6 (2004): 12-21.
- Griffin, John Howard. *Black Like Me*. New York: Signet, 1976 [1960].
- Guevara, Ernesto. *Che Guevara Speaks: Selected Speeches and Writings*. New York: Merit Publishers, 1967.
- Hamilton, Roberta. "Pro-natalism, Feminism, and Nationalism." In *Gender and Politic in Contemporary Canada*, edited by François Pierre Gingras, 135-52. Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1995.
- Hobsbawm, Eric. *Interesting Times: A Twentieth-Century Life*. London: Allen Lane, 2002.
- . *Uncommon People: Resistance, Rebellion, and Jazz*. New York: The New Press, 1988.
- hooks, bell. *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*. Cambridge: South End Press, 2000 [1984].
- Ignatiev, Noel. *How the Irish Became White*. London: Routledge, 1996.
- Jameson, Fredric. "Periodizing the 1960s." In *The Ideologies of Theory: Essays 1971-1986, Syntax of History*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988.

- Jones, Richard. "L'Idéologie du Parti Québécois." In *Idéologies au Canada Français, 1940-1976*, edited by Fernand Dumont. Québec: Les Presses de l'Université Laval, 1981.
- . "Politics and the Reinforcement of the French Language in Canada and Quebec, 1960-1986." In *Quebec Since 1945*, edited by Michael D. Behiels, 223-40. Toronto: Copp Clark Pitman Ltd, 1987.
- Julien, Claude. *America's Empire*. Translated by Renaud Bruce. New York: Pantheon Books, 1971 [1968].
- Katsiaficas, George. *The Subversion of Politics: European Autonomous Social Movements and the Decolonization of Everyday Life*. New Jersey: Humanities Press International, 1997.
- Keable, Jacques, and Marcel Pépin. *Le monde selon Marcel Pepin*. Outremont, Québec: Lanctôt, 1998.
- Kelley, Robin D.G. *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination*. Boston: Beacon Press, 2002.
- . "A Poetics of Anticolonialism." In *Discourse on Colonialism*, 7-28. New York: Monthly Review Press, 2000.
- King, Martin Luther. *I Have a Dream: Writing & Speeches that Changed the World*. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1992.
- Kostash, Myrna. *Long Way From Home: The Story of the Sixties Generation in Canada*. Toronto: Lorimer, 1980.
- Laberge, Louis. *En prison pour nous. Historique du front commun*. Montréal: Fédération des travailleurs du Québec, 1973.
- . *A One and Only Front: Opening Address by Louis Laberge to the 12th Convention of the Quebec Federation of Labour*. Montréal: Quebec Federation of Labour, 1971.
- Lafond, Jean-Daniel. *La manière nègre. Aimé Césaire, chemin faisant*. Montreal: l'Hexagone, 1993.
- Lamarre, Jean. *Le devenir de la nation québécoise: selon Maurice Séguin, Guy Frégault et Michel Brunet, 1944-1969*. Sillery: Septentrion, 1993.
- Lamonde, Yvan. *Histoire sociale des idées au Québec*. Montréal: Fides, 2000.
- Lamoureux, André. *Le NDP et le Québec, 1958-1985*. Montréal: Éditions du Parc, 1985.

- Lamoureux, Diane. *Fragments et collages: essai sur le féminisme québécois des années 70*. Montréal: Éditions du Remue-ménage, 1986.
- . "La lutte pour le droit à l'avortement (1969-1981)." *Revue d'histoire de l'Amérique française* 37, no. 1 (1983): 81-90.
- . "Nationalisme et féminisme: impasse ou coïncidences." *Possibles* 8, no. 1 (1983): 43-59.
- Lantos, Robert. "The Rise of the Left at McGill." *Together*, 25 February 1970, 4-5.
- Larivière, Claude. *Albert Saint-Martin: militant d'avant-garde (1865-1947)*. Laval: Éditions coopératives Albert Saint-Martin, 1979.
- Larocque, André. *Défis au Parti québécois*. Montréal: Éditions du Jour, 1971.
- Larose, Karim. *La langue de papier. Spéculation linguistiques au Québec*. Montréal: Les Presses de l'Université de Montréal, 2004.
- . "L'émergence du projet d'unilinguisme. Archéologie de la question linguistique québécoise." *Globe. Revue internationale d'études québécoises* 7, no. 2 (2004): 177-94.
- Laurendeau, Marc. *Les Québécois violents: la violence politique, 1962-1972*. Montréal: Boréal, 1990.
- Lerner, Gerda. *The Creation of Feminist Consciousness: From the Middle Ages to Eighteen-Seventy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993.
- Létourneau, Jocelyn. "La grève de l'amiante entre ses mémoires et l'histoire." *Journal of the Canadian Oral History Association* 11 (1991): 8-16.
- . "La mise en intrigue. Configuration historico-linguistique d'une grève célébrée: Asbestos, P.Q., 1949." *Recherches sémiotiques, Semiotic Inquiry* 12, no. 1-2 (1992): 53-71.
- . "Le 'Québec moderne': un chapitre du grand récit collectif des Québécois." *Discours social / Social Discourse* IV, no. 1-2 (1992): 63-88.
- . "Québec d'après guerre et mémoire collective de la technocratie." *Cahiers internationaux de Sociologie* XC (1991): 67-87.
- Létourneau, Jocelyn, and Sabrina Moisan. "Mémoire et récit de l'aventure historique du Québec chez les jeunes québécois d'héritage canadien-français: coup de sonde, amorce d'analyse des résultats, questionnements." *Canadian Historical Review* 85, no. 2 (2004): 325-56.
- Lévesque, Andrée. *Red Travellers: Jeanne Cobin & Her Comrades*. Translated by Yvonne M. Klein. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2006.

- . *Virage à gauche interdit: les communistes, les socialistes et leurs ennemis au Québec, 1929-1939*. Montréal, Québec: Boréal express, 1984.
- Lévesque, René. *Memoirs*. Translated by Philip Stratford. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1986.
- . *An Option for Quebec*. Toronto/Montreal: McClelland and Stewart Limited, 1968.
- Levine, Marc V. *The Reconquest of Montreal: Language Policy and Social Change in a Bilingual City*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990.
- Levitt, Kari. *La capitulation tranquille. la mainmise américaine sur le Canada*. Translated by André d'Allemagne. Montreal: Réédition-Québec, 1972.
- . *Silent Surrender: the Multinational Corporation in Canada*. Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1970.
- Linteau, Paul André. *Histoire de Montréal depuis la Confédération*. 2e ed. Montréal: Boréal, 2000.
- Linteau, Paul-André. "Un débat historiographique: l'entrée du Québec dans la modernité et la signification de la Révolution tranquille." *Francofonie. Studi e ricerche sulle letterature di lingua francese* XIX, no. 37 (1999): 73-87.
- "L'Inuit et 'notre' système d'éducation." *Action Pédagogique*, no. 24 (1972): 35-47.
- Lipsig-Mummé, Carla. "The Web of Dependence: Quebec Unions in Politics before 1976." In *Quebec: State and Society*, edited by Alain G. Gagnon, 286-313. Toronto: Methuen, 1984.
- Lortie, André, ed. *The 60s: Montreal Thinks Big*. Montréal: Canadian Centre for Architecture, 2004.
- Maclure, Jocelyn. "Narratives and Counter-Narratives of Identity in Québec." In *Quebec: State and Society*, edited by Alain-G. Gagnon, 33-50. Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2004.
- Maheu, Pierre. *Un parti pris révolutionnaire*. Montréal: Parti Pris, 1983.
- Mailer, Norman. *The White Negro*. San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1957.
- Manifeste des femmes québécoises*. Montreal: l'étincelle, 1971.
- Marcuse, Herbert. *An Essay on Liberation*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1971.
- . *One Dimensional Man*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1991 [1964].

- Maroney, Heather Jon. "'Who has the baby?' Nationalism, Pronatalism and the Construction of a 'Demographic Crisis' in Quebec, 1960-1988." *Studies in Political Economy* 39 (1992): 7-36.
- Mathieu, Sara-Jane (Saje). "North of the Colour Line: Sleeping Car Porters and the Battle Against Jim Crow on Canadian Rails, 1880-1920." *Labour / Le Travail*, no. 47 (2001) : 9-41.
- McLoughlin, Michael. *Last Stop, Paris: The Assassination of Mario Bachand and the Death of the FLQ*. Toronto: Viking, 1998.
- Memmi, Albert. *The Colonizer and the Colonized*. Translated by Howard Greenfeld. Boston: Beacon Press, 1967.
- . *Portrait du colonisé. Précédé du Portrait du colonisateur, et d'une préf. de Jean-Paul Sartre. Suivi de Les Canadiens français sont-ils des colonisés?* Éd. rev. et corr. par l'auteur ed. Montréal: L'Étincelle, 1972.
- Ménard, Yves. "Le lock-out de *La Presse* et l'émeute du 29 octobre 1971: un conflit d'envergure nationale." *Bulletin du RCHTQ* 28, no. 2 (2002): 5-35.
- Mills, C. Wright. *Listen, Yankee: The Revolution in Cuba*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1960.
- Mills, Sean. "When Democratic Socialists Discovered Democracy: The League for Social Reconstruction Confronts the 'Quebec Problem'." *Canadian Historical Review* 86, no. 1 (2005): 53-81.
- Milner, Henry, and Sheilagh Hodgins Milner. *The Decolonization of Quebec: an Analysis of Left-Wing Nationalism*. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1973.
- Mitchell, Don. *The Right to the City: Social Justice and the Fight for Public Space*. New York: The Guilford Press, 2003.
- Monet-Chartrand, Simone. *Ma vie comme rivière*. Montréal: Éditions Remue-ménage, 1981-.
- . *Les Québécoises et le mouvement pacifiste (1939-1967)*. Montréal: Les Éditions Écosociété, 1993.
- . *Pionnières québécoises et regroupements de femmes d'hier à aujourd'hui*. Montréal: Éditions du Remue-Ménage, 1990.
- Mouvement révolutionnaire des étudiants du Québec. *En avant pour la création de l'organisation marxiste-léniniste*. Montréal, 1974.
- Noël, Roger. "Libération homosexuelle ou révolution socialiste?" In *Sortir de l'ombre: Histoires des communautés lesbienne et gaie de Montréal*, edited by Irène Demczuk and Frank W. Remiggi, 187-206. Montréal: VLB éditeur, 1998.

- Ogbar, Jeffrey O.G. *Black Power: Radical Politics and African American Identity*. Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004.
- O'Leary, Véronique, and Louise Toupin. *Québécoises deboutte! Une anthologie de textes du Front de libération des femmes (1969-1971) et du Centre des femmes (1972-1975)*. Vol. 1 and 2. Montréal: remue-ménage, 1982.
- Owram, Doug. *Born at the Right Time: A History of the Baby-Boom Generation*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996.
- Palmer, Bryan. *Cultures of Darkness: Night Travels in the Histories of Transgression*. New York: Monthly Review Press, 2000.
- Parry, Benita. "Liberation theory: variations on themes of Marxism and modernity." In *Marxism, Modernity, and Postcolonial Studies*, edited by Crystal Bartolovich and Neil Lazarus, 125-49. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.
- Pepin, Marcel. *Pour Vaincre*, Rapport moral du Président général de la CSN au 45e Congrès, Québec, le 11 juin 1972.
- . "Preface." In *Quebec Labour: The Confederation of National Trade Unions Yesterday and Today*, edited by Black Rose Books Editorial Collective, 9-11. Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1972.
- . "The Second Front: The Report of Marcel Pepin, National President, to the Convention of the CNTU, October 13, 1968." In *Quebec Labour: The Confederation of National Trade Unions Yesterday and Today*, edited by Black Rose Books editorial collective, 47-99. Montreal: Black Rose, 1972.
- . "Une société bâtie pour l'homme." In *Procès-verbal Quarante-deuxième session du Congrès de la C.S.N.*, 7-37. Montreal, 1966.
- Piotte, Jean-Marc. *La communauté perdue: petite histoire des militantismes*. Montréal, Québec: VLB, 1987.
- . "Note de lecture: Charles Gagnon, *Feu sur l'Amérique*." *Bulletin d'histoire politique* 15, no. 3 (2007): 311-18.
- . *Un parti pris politique*. Montréal: VLB éditeur, 1979.
- Pleau, Jean-Christian. *La révolution québécoise: Hubert Aquin et Gaston Miron au tournant des années soixante*. Saint-Laurent, Québec: Fides, 2002.
- Pour un contrôle des naissances*, 2e édition. Montréal, février 1971.
- Prashad, Vijay. *The Darker Nations: A People's History of the Third World*. New York: The New Press, 2007.

- Pulido, Laura. *Black, Brown, Yellow and Left: Radical Activism in Los Angeles*. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2006.
- Raboy, Marc. *Movements and Messages: Media and Radical Politics in Quebec*. Translated by David Homel. Toronto: Between the Lines Press, 1984.
- Rebick, Judy. *Ten Thousand Roses: The Making of a Feminist Revolution*. Toronto: Penguin, 2005.
- Regush, Nicholas M. *Pierre Vallières: The Revolutionary Process in Quebec*. New York: The Dial Press, 1973.
- Reid, Malcolm. *The Shouting Signpainters: A Literary and Political Account of Quebec Revolutionary Nationalism*. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Limited, 1972.
- Retamar, Roberto Fernández. *Caliban and Other Essays*. Translated by Edward Baker. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999.
- Ricard, François. *La génération lyrique: essai sur la vie et l'oeuvre des premiers-nés du baby-boom*. Montréal: Boréal, 1992.
- . *The Lyric Generation: The Life and Times of the Baby Boomers*. Translated by Donald Winkler. Toronto: Stoddart, 1994.
- Roberts, Alfie. *A View for Freedom: Alfie Roberts Speaks on the Caribbean, Cricket, Montreal, and C.L.R. James*. Montreal: Alfie Roberts Institute, 2005.
- Roediger, David R. *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class*. London: Verso, 1991.
- Ross, Kristin. *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies: Decolonization and the Reordering of French Culture*. Cambridge: M.I.T. Press, 1995.
- . *May '68 and its Afterlives*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002.
- Rouillard, Jacques. *Histoire du syndicalisme au Québec. Deux siècles d'histoire*. Montréal: Boréal express, 2004.
- . "La CSN et la protection de la langue française (1921-1996)." In *La CSN, 75 ans d'action syndicale et sociale*, edited by Yves Bélanger and Robert Comeau. Sainte-Foy: Presses de l'Université du Québec, 1998.
- Rudin, Ronald. *Making History in Twentieth-Century Quebec*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997.
- Said, Edward W. *Culture and Imperialism*. New York: Vintage Books, 1994.
- . *Humanism and Democratic Criticism*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2004.

- . "Travelling Theory Reconsidered." In *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays*, edited by Edward W. Said, 436-52. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000.
- Salkey, Andrew. *Havana Journal*. Baltimore: Penguin, 1971.
- Sartre, Jean-Paul. *Being and Nothingness*. New York: Washington Square Press, 1953.
- . *Colonialism and Neocolonialism*. London: Routledge, 2001.
- . *Critique of Dialectical Reason*. Translated by Alan Sheridan-Smith. London: Verso, 2004 [1976].
- . *Nausea*. Translated by Lloyd Alexander. New York: New Directions, 1964.
- . *Sartre on Cuba*. Westport: Greenwood Press, 1974 [1961].
- . *Sartre visita a Cuba: ideología y revolución, una entrevista con los escritores cubanos, huracán sobre el azúcar*. Habana: Ediciones R, 1961.
- Sekyi-Otu, Ato. *Fanon's Dialectic of Experience*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996.
- Sethna, Christabelle. "The Evolution of the *Birth Control Handbook*: From Student Peer-Education Manual to Feminist Self-empowerment." *Canadian Bulletin of Medical History* 23, no. 1 (2006): 89-118.
- Sewell, William H. *Logics of History: Social Theory and Social Transformation*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005.
- Simon, Sherry. *Translating Montreal: Episodes in the Life of a Divided City*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2006.
- Tremblay, Michèle. *De Cuba le FLQ parle*. Montreal: Les Éditions Intel, 1975.
- Trofimenkoff, Susan Mann. *The Dream of Nation: A Social and Intellectual History of Quebec*. Toronto: Gage, 1983.
- . "Thérèse Casgrain and the CCF in Québec." *Canadian Historical Review* 66, no. 2 (1985): 125-53.
- Trudeau, Pierre. *La grève de l'amiante*. Montréal: Les éditions Cité libre, 1956.
- Turcotte, Denis. *La culture politique du Mouvement Québec Français*. Québec: Centre international de recherche sur le bilinguisme, 1976.
- Tyner, James. *The Geography of Malcolm X: Black Radicalism and the Remaking of American Space*. New York: Routledge, 2006.

- Tyson, Timothy B. *Radio Free Dixie: Robert F. Williams & the Roots of Black Power*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999.
- Vaillancour, Yves, and Michel Pelletier. *Du chômage à la libération. Suivi du manifeste de la FTQ*. Montréal: Édition québécoise, 1972.
- Vallières, Pierre. *Paroles d'un nègre blanc, Anthologie préparée par Jacques Jourdain et Mélanie Mailhot*. Montréal: VLB, 2002.
- . *Les Héritiers de Papineau. Itinéraire politique d'un 'nègre blanc' (1960-1985)*. Montréal: Québec/Amérique, 1986.
- . *White Niggers of America*. Translated by Joan Pinkham. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1971.
- Varon, Jeremy. *Bringing the War Home: The Weather Underground, the Red Army Faction, and Revolutionary Violence in the Sixties and Seventies*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004.
- Villeneuve, Paquerette. *Une Canadienne dans les rues de Paris pendant la révolte étudiante*. Montréal: Éditions du jour, 1968.
- Walker, James W. St.G. *'Race,' Rights and the Law in the Supreme Court of Canada: Historical Case Studies*. Toronto: The Osgoode Society for Canadian Legal History and Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1997.
- . *Racial Discrimination in Canada: the Black Experience*. Ottawa: Canadian Historical Association, 1985.
- . *The West Indians in Canada*. Ottawa: Canadian Historical Association, 1984.
- Williams, Dorothy W. *The Road to Now: A History of Blacks in Montreal*. Montreal: Véhicule Press, 1997.
- Williams, Eric. *From Columbus to Castro: The History of the Caribbean*. New York: Vintage Books, 1984 (1970).
- Wright, Robert. *Three Nights in Havana: Pierre Trudeau, Fidel Castro and the Cold War*. Toronto: HarperCollins, 2007.
- X, Malcolm. *Malcolm X Speaks: Selected speeches and statements edited with prefatory notes by George Breitman*. New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1966 [1965].
- Young, Cynthia. "Havana Up in Harlem: LeRoi Jones, Harold Cruse and the Making of a Cultural Revolution." *Science & Society* 65, no. 1 (2001): 12-38.
- Young, Cynthia Ann. *Soul Power: Culture, Radicalism, and the Making of a U.S. Third World left*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2006.

Young, Robert. *Postcolonialism: an Historical Introduction*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2001.

———. *White Mythologies: Writing History and the West*. London: Routledge, 1990.