

White Niggers
of America
Pierre Vallières

The
Precocious
Autobiography
of a
Quebec
"Terrorist"



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of a Quebec "Terrorist"

by Pierre Vallières

Translated by Joan Pinkham



New York and London

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Originally published as *Nègres blancs d'Amérique: Autobiographie précoce d'un "terroriste" québécois*
by Editions Parti pris, Montreal, Canada, copyright
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Library of Congress Catalog Card No: 76-142986

First Printing

Monthly Review Press
116 West 14th Street, New York, N.Y. 10014
33/37 Moreland Street, London, E.C. 1

Manufactured in the United States of America

Foreword

In reading this book it is important to remember the following facts.

1. The book was written in prison, immediately after a twenty-nine-day hunger strike, under particularly difficult conditions. It was written in the midst of the constant noise of cells being opened and closed by an iron hand and of guards and prisoners shouting back and forth, and within the framework of an absurd discipline (called prison rules), invented and applied for the purpose of brutalizing the inmates as much as possible.

The section in which Charles Gagnon and I are still held as these lines are written is reserved chiefly for the mentally ill, drug addicts, men accused of homicide and facing possible life imprisonment, prisoners in depressive states and, lastly, "political" madmen, like Charles and me, whom the officers regard more or less as "de-ranged."

Very often one or another of our jail mates slits his veins out of despair, or simply to attract attention. For one of the chief characteristics of prison life is the boundless solitude each of us feels, especially during those hours of depression when it becomes impossible to communicate with others.

In addition to this profound and unnamable suffering that constitutes our daily human environment, I must particularly mention the howling stupidity of the radio and television during "lock-out" and "rest period," the fact that we are forbidden to go outdoors to get a breath of fresh air and an occasional look at the sun, and the thousand petty annoyances that are deliberately imposed on our most elementary activities: eating, pissing, sleeping (in the cells in our section

the lights are *never* turned out), receiving mail, doing laundry, shaving, etc.

In short, this book was written in a universe of cunningly organized dehumanization . . . which drives more than one prisoner to suicide—or murder, if he is set free again.

2. This book is first of all a *political act*. It is necessarily biased. It contains not so much answers as questions, and facts, that I want to set before men—in particular the men of Quebec—who are capable of consciousness, social responsibility, and revolutionary action.

It is the political act of one member of the Front de libération du Québec (FLQ), of a militant who is still young, who has not had a long experience of revolutionary struggle, and who has no monopoly on truth.

This book, moreover, was not written with the intent of “shaking revolutionary thought and action to their foundations,” but of performing an act whose meaning is given by the book itself, which comes from my guts as much as from my head.

3. In this essay, which is no doubt badly put together, and which I shall probably not have the leisure to revise before it is sent to the printer (unless my extradition to Canada or deportation to another country is postponed to the spring or summer of 1967), the reader will find many faults, repetitions, and awkward constructions, side by side with limpid passages where the words “flow.” For driven by the constant threat of deportation or extradition that has hung over Charles Gagnon and me ever since we were arrested in New York on September 28, 1966, I have had to scribble down in haste my memories, impressions, ideas, my short but brutal experience of life and my boundless conviction that it is possible to build a better world *now*, if we all agree to roll up our sleeves and set to work. The world is waiting to be transformed.

All this necessarily makes for a book that is unfinished, imperfect, and full of words which, in this age of “relativity,” may have different meanings for the author and the reader according to the camera that each focuses on them (his vision of the world). I have tried to write simply, with everyday words, but I have not always been successful; and in certain parts (Chapter 6 in particular) you may find “indigestible” passages. Furthermore, certain categories, such as the words “objective” and “subjective,” may now be out of date. I have

sometimes used them as convenient tools for making what I have to say more understandable to men who are not primarily concerned with language.

It is also possible that I have given certain words a meaning that is rather personal or a content that is difficult to grasp for anyone ignorant of certain historical facts or systems of thought, thus contradicting my first intent, which was to write a book that would be easy to "digest." (But sometimes the precise expression of what one means, thinks, or wants to make understood does not lend itself to simplification . . . although—another contradiction!—in places I have doubtless succumbed to the temptation to simplify.)

For that matter, you will surely find more than one contradiction in this book. At least, that is my impression. The "literary" and autobiographical pages will probably seem clearer to you—perhaps because of the acid in them—than the pages devoted to a partial definition of "our ideal" of an egalitarian social structure. Certain of my analyses may be disconcerting to some readers, just as certain positions that I take will no doubt be shocking to more than one discriminating mind.

But I think that the unity of the book and its "meaning" (in the phenomenological sense of the word, in the sense of "truth" or relative "essence"—relative both to the experiences, feelings, and ideas of the author and to those of the reader) lie precisely in this complexity of the writing, which is only a very awkward expression of the complexity of human behavior, individual and social, personal and collective. An expression, furthermore, peculiar to one man, restricted to a given number of experiences and acts, formulated by a mind which is, when all is said and done, limited, and conditioned by a milieu—Quebec—which has just leaped from the Middle Ages into the twentieth century.

I believe that the unity and meaning of any activity lie in its complexity and that they cannot exist, develop, and become complete outside the contradictions inherent in reality as we perceive it, reality as we live it, reality as we transform it according to the present, changing state of our knowledge and means of action, reality as to a great extent we also undergo it, under the influence of the forces of nature whose "secrets" we do not yet possess and which we are not yet able to control for purposes really our own.

Contemporary scientists are convinced that the physical and human universe (can one really separate *physical* from *human*?) of which we are a part and which, in each generation, is at a given but not fixed state of development, of evolution, is "essentially infinite." I do not know what meaning they give to the word "essentially." But in any event, if they are right, as I believe, in affirming that the universe is at once infinite and relative—which is fundamentally the same thing—and if, as they likewise affirm, our knowledge of reality can only be partial and must constantly be re-examined; if, finally, our action can only be *biased*, that means that our activities—whether in the domain of thought, of scientific research, or of political engagement—will always contain contradictions.

In other words, every new affirmation calls forth a new set of questions. Every scientific discovery gives rise to hypotheses that were hitherto unknown. Every political action calls forth a reaction ("reaction" being understood here as an effort to prevent man from becoming so identified with his creation or his revolution that he remains *fixed* at that point and becomes fossilized).

But none of this, as I say somewhere in this "rough draft," prevents men—us—from using practical, constantly modified affirmations and negations of the contradictions around us to *make* history, to evolve, ever more conscious and free, by means of "revolutions."

4. This book contains a considerable number of footnotes, some of which are of respectable length. These footnotes should be read *in their place*, that is, at the end of the sentence, expression, or paragraph where they are indicated by the usual numbers.

With a few changes, some of these footnotes could have been integrated into the text, if I had had the time and means to do three or four drafts. But under present conditions I am obliged to turn over to the reader a rough draft expanded here and there by explanatory notes.

5. I am neither a scholar nor an accredited philosopher. I am only a proletarian who has had the good fortune to read a great deal (but without method, since there was no money to buy method at a university) and who has also had the opportunity to act, who is acting and wants to go on acting. For whom it is enough to be honest with himself and to try, as best he can, to put his convictions into practice.

6. This autobiographical essay is a conscious witness and a con-

scious appeal that I have made freely and for the same reason that I have made my political choice, my choice of the revolution: the conviction that the relations between men must be radically transformed and that imperialism must be definitively overthrown if—in this age when biologists, biochemists, physicists, astronomers, and so on are on the verge of discovering the “mysteries” of matter both living and inert, conscious and unconscious, and therefore the “secrets” of life and death—if, I say, we do not want humanity, on the threshold of tremendous progress, to become, in spite of itself, the victim of a universal nuclear catastrophe which would turn it back to the stone age.

We must wrest the vast resources and gigantic possibilities of this century (which are due in large part to contemporary technological discoveries) from the grasp of the businessmen—the businessmen of state capitalism as well as the businessmen of private-corporation capitalism—by practical, revolutionary, and collective action.

Today, as in the time of Lenin, this action, which began as far back as the eighteenth century with the first rebellions of the English workers and the organization of the Chartist movement, must advance to new stages. It must do so not only in Quebec but in the entire world. For it must be recognized that with the present expansion of communications and of population movements, etc., which is based on the international organization of the market, of competition and class struggle, our true country is increasingly becoming the world. This, far from destroying nationalities and the individual, actually provides an opportunity, if we succeed in overcoming certain individual and collective fixations on outmoded “categories,” of coming into our own, perhaps for the first time in history.

7. The author of this book is a Québécois, a French Canadian, a proletarian, a colonized man and a baptized son of the Church. Hence, an extremely frustrated individual for whom “freedom” is not a metaphysical question but a very concrete problem.

My consciousness and activity (what I sometimes call my responsibility) are bound up with my frustrations and my need to free myself from them completely, once and for all.

I believe that my experience of life has much in common with that of many individuals, both in Quebec and in other countries, in my own class and even in the upper classes, which are better off, richer economically and intellectually.

That is why I spontaneously chose to write an essay that would be at one and the same time an autobiography and an attempt to reflect upon and sum up acts which have already been performed and others yet to be performed, acts which concern you just as much as me.

8. I have no diplomas or medals. The one thing I take pride in is something I owe to the American police, who arrested me at the request of the Canadian police. By so doing, they in a way forced me—and my friend and comrade Charles Gagnon—to bear witness publicly to the determination, not only of a little nucleus of individuals but of the immense class of the oppressed (peasants, workers, students, young people, intellectuals, white-collar workers, and even scientists and researchers harnessed to the interests of big capital), to free their human activities definitively from the dictatorship of the “sharks of high finance.”

The increasing number of letters that Charles and I receive offer us daily proof that we will not have borne witness in vain.

9. I take advantage of this foreword to give infinite thanks to all those (students, workers, journalists, militants in unions and popular movements, housewives, friends known and unknown) without whom this work would have rotted in the many garbage cans of the Manhattan House of Detention for Men into which, often enough, we throw the whole plate of dogfood they serve us at mealtime.

To me, as to Charles Gagnon, the disinterested devotion and uncalculating support of all these friends is material proof of the existence of human *solidarity*. Solidarity which will be the cement of the new classless society, as money is the cement of the present society based on the exploitation of man by man.

There is already a growing number of people for whom solidarity has replaced money as the “reason for living,” as the principal “value” in life.

That is why I have chosen—that is why *we* have chosen—to work for the revolution.

As in the physical universe, so perhaps in the revolution there are neither straight lines nor curves. One can act in many ways, just as there are many ways of seeking and discovering the “secrets” of the universe. But there are constant *relations* among these many different ways of acting on the world and on society. And I have an increasingly clear impression that through these relations, which at first

glance are difficult to grasp and comprehend because they are complex and integrated with a universe that is perpetually changing, we are approaching a unity unprecedented in known human history, a unity which will not be monolithic or subject to the hegemony of any one group. A unity which we will make concrete only through a long revolutionary struggle, collective and multinational, conducted by the majority of the men who people this planet: the peasants, workers, white-collar workers, students, young people, progressive intellectuals, and researchers.

It is this unity of *conscious, responsible* men, bound together in solidarity, that will create the new society humanity needs in order to progress. Yes, to progress, for this unity is not an end but a beginning, the first act of a new world, of a human history that will at last be determined by the majority of men.

10. Finally, this book, as is clearly indicated in the introduction which follows this long foreword (!), was conceived first of all in terms of the practical tasks which today confront the workers, students, and young revolutionaries of Quebec.

Nevertheless, perhaps it may also have something to say to the men and revolutionaries of other countries, colonized or even imperialist.

—*Pierre Vallières*

Manhattan House of Detention for Men
New York, fall-winter 1966–1967

1

The White Niggers of America

To be a “nigger” in America is to be not a man but someone’s slave. For the rich white man of Yankee America, the nigger is a sub-man. Even the poor whites consider the nigger their inferior. They say: “to work as hard as a nigger,” “to smell like a nigger,” “as dangerous as a nigger,” “as ignorant as a nigger.” Very often they do not even suspect that they too are niggers, slaves, “white niggers.” White racism hides the reality from them by giving them the opportunity to despise an inferior, to crush him mentally or to pity him. But the poor whites who despise the black man are doubly niggers, for they are victims of one more form of alienation—racism—which far from liberating them, imprisons them in a net of hate or paralyzes them in fear of one day having to confront the black man in a civil war.

In Quebec the 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 that, since in Quebec there is no “black problem.” The liberation struggle launched by the American blacks nevertheless arouses growing interest among the French-Canadian population, for the workers of Quebec are aware of their condition as niggers, exploited men, second-class citizens. Have they not been, ever since the establishment of New France in the seventeenth century, the servants of the imperialists, the white niggers of America? Were they not *imported*, like the American blacks, to serve as cheap labor in the New World? The only difference between them is the color of their skin and the continent they came from. After three centuries their condition remains the same. They still constitute a reservoir of cheap labor whom the capi-

talists are completely free to put to work or reduce to unemployment, as it suits their financial interests, whom they are completely free to underpay, mistreat and trample underfoot, whom they are completely free, according to law, to have clubbed down by the police and locked up by the judges "in the public interest," when their profits seem to be in danger.

1

Our ancestors came here with the hope of beginning a new life. They were for the most part soldiers or day laborers. The soldiers came, a long time after Champlain, to fight the English, and they remained in New France because they did not have the money to return to the metropolitan country. They became traders, artisans, or *coureurs de bois* in order to subsist. The others came as "volunteers," especially under the Talon administration, about a century before the English conquest. They were unskilled laborers who could find no work in Colbert's France and no reason for living. They belonged to the growing number of idle men and vagabonds who filled the towns of mercantile France. In Talon's mind, these "volunteers" were to be added to the unemployed to serve as a permanent local source of labor. Married by force, as soon as they arrived in New France, to orphan girls imported from Paris, the "volunteers" were given the task of laying the foundations of an independent society. They were to work at building an indigenous industry and developing agriculture, and they were to have as many children as possible in order to rapidly expand the labor force and the market. Those who refused to obey the directives of the intendant were put in prison or sent back to France. Many colonists preferred to become *coureurs de bois* rather than be forced to marry a woman whom they did not know and often did not want because she was ill-tempered, homely, or stupid.

The colonists, or Habitants as they later came to be called, were thus placed at the service of the ambitious projects of Colbert's protégé. But these men, who were sent from France by the hundreds, had learned no trade in the metropolitan country. They possessed no technical knowledge and had nothing to offer Talon but their muscle, good will, and taste for adventure. In the mother country they belonged to that mass of unemployed workers whom the development

of manufacturing, the concentration of capital in the towns, and overpopulation had driven out of the rural areas and reduced to idleness and vagrancy. In the towns of France they constituted that increasingly large and threatening class of pariahs who could find no other way to survive than to turn to highway robbery. The king had outlawed brigands and vagabonds, but the only result of the law was to send a considerable number of innocent men to prison or to death, because the state, whose revenues were devoted to financing incessant wars and the splendor of the court, was unable to provide work for the growing number of the starving. The ruling classes had three ways of getting rid of this cumbersome burden: the army, prison, or the colonies. Tens of thousands of these "paupers"—as the aristocrats called them—were therefore sent to the battlefields of Europe, America, Asia, and the Middle East. Tens of thousands more died in prison, had their throats cut, were hanged or decapitated. The rest were abandoned to their fate or exported like cattle to the colonies, where they were to serve as labor or cannon fodder. When the prisons of the metropolitan country were filled to overflowing and the people were growing a little too restless, the "hotheads" were often exiled to the colonies instead of being hanged: it was more humane. Periodically the strongest prisoners were "freed" to be turned into mercenaries or "colonists." The same policy was applied by the English ruling classes, especially with regard to the Irish and Scotch *bastards* (English *dixit*). Furthermore, France and England were then engaged in an unrestricted and lucrative trade in black slaves. The pirates (the gangsters of those days) made fortunes by assisting the ruling classes of Europe in their work of "civilizing" and "evangelizing"!

Talon had little success in endowing the colony with an independent economy. He lacked not only qualified labor but capital. The French merchants were not in the least interested in sacrificing their monopoly in order to develop an independent economy which would sooner or later be prejudicial to the interests of the metropolitan country—that is, which would increasingly restrict their freedom of trade and their profits. For these merchants, colonization in the sense in which Talon understood it did not deserve to be encouraged. New France was to remain a trading post, a source of raw materials and profits for France. The theocracy Bishop Laval was trying to estab-

lish, Talon's industries, and the rapid increase in the number of immigrants irritated them. The money "swallowed up" in colonization and evangelization brought no returns to France. And all the "volunteers" who were taking root in New France appeared to them as so many potential rivals and enemies. Decidedly, this Talon had become their chief enemy. They demanded that the king recall him to France. Which was done in 1672.

No intendant dared pursue Talon's work. The "volunteers," destitute, disappointed, prisoners of their poverty, resigned themselves to clearing an ungrateful soil on the seigneuries granted by the king of France; they had to become hunters, fishermen, and woodsmen in order to feed their numerous children. In 1689 there were 10,000 French Canadians in New France.¹

The fur trade was monopolized by a few French merchants—"the French of France," as they were already beginning to be called by the Habitants, who hated them. All the profits went back to the metropolitan country. The little money (many times devalued) that remained in the colony was concentrated in the hands of a minority of speculators. The people lived in the most extreme poverty, under the amused eyes of the François Bigots of the administration. Sometimes the Habitants were called to the colors to defend the American possessions of the king of France, while their women cleared the land and tended to the sowing and harvesting, raising their broods at the same time. At times, alone or in groups, these women even had to arm themselves with rifles to confront the Iroquois guerrillas, while far away their husbands were fighting the English in the name of the king.

With each war reinforcements arrived from France. And after each treaty, the penniless demobilized soldiers stayed to swell the ranks of the Habitants, marrying their daughters and perpetuating their rough existence. Only a few officers had the signal honor of being admitted to the society of the nobles.

Soon the seigneuries were overpopulated. Abandoned by the seigneurs, who were more interested in speculation and trade than in agriculture, the land deteriorated and the misery of the Habitants became unendurable. A great many of them abandoned their fields, cursing God for having led them to this country of forests, rocks, and

water where man wore himself out in vain trying to build a life consistent with his dreams of freedom, happiness, and peace.²

The towns of the colony, like those of the metropolitan country, overflowed with idle, hungry men. A few years before the English conquest, the "hunger riots" broke out nearly everywhere; Bigot replied with an edict ordering all the unemployed to return to their land. "Take your hunger off our hands," Bigot said to them. "We don't know what to do with it. Instead of idling away your time in the towns and stinking up the place with your poverty, go cultivate the land, work harder. There is no work for you here. But all the land belongs to you. Go where you please!" But the Habitants could not work miracles and change rocks into arable land. Besides, all the land did not belong to them, as Bigot claimed. The best land had long been reserved for the handful of merchants and nobles who had obtained control of the wheat trade.³ The riots broke out again worse than ever, and even under the intendency of the saintly Hocquart, the Habitants became more and more of a threat.

The last war between England and France, which was to give New France to the English, made it possible for the ruling class to enroll the rioters in the French king's army. Many Habitants died in combat, and once the war was over, the people, exhausted, again withdrew to the seigneuries.

The English merchants took over from the French merchants who, before surrendering the colony to the English, had had time to effect some profitable sales of arms. The conquerors had no difficulty in gaining the collaboration of the clergy and those impoverished seigneurs who had remained in the colony despite the defeat. Together they divided up the power: the English monopolized economic affairs and the executive power, the clergy continued to control education and collect the tithe, the seigneurs retained ownership of their land and obtained the right to hold certain administrative posts. Nothing changed in the frugal and monotonous life of the Habitants. They were still beasts of burden, despised in a hostile country. But, God be praised, the clergy received the order from Heaven to make this resigned and silent collectivity into a nation dedicated to the Church. At last the life of slavery would take on meaning by becoming redemption. This people, planted in America by an accident of

history, suddenly found itself invested with a supernatural vocation. Its task, in the pagan world of the savages and the English, would be to save souls by patiently bearing poverty, hard labor, and isolation. The clergy organized the embryonic nation into parishes, created elementary schools and *collèges*, arrogated to itself the right to regulate the lives of individuals and groups, and defined the ideology which was to fashion a vision of the world consistent with the interests of the Church. The higher clergy became the true ruling class, while every day the self-complacent nobility sank a little further into decay.

The population continued to increase at a very rapid rate. The land, which was already inadequate and impoverished, became less productive and more overpopulated. The young people left the countryside to try their luck in town, where the number of unemployed was constantly growing. In the meantime, in its classical *collèges* the clergy was educating an indigenous petty bourgeoisie, composed mainly of lawyers, notaries, doctors, and journalists. Toward the end of the eighteenth century, this petty bourgeoisie began to develop its own class consciousness and, in the name of the nation, set itself up in opposition to the clergy, the decadent aristocracy, and the English. By establishing a Legislative Assembly for Lower Canada (Quebec), England gave the petty bourgeoisie a forum which it used to the fullest to identify its class interests with those of "the people" as a whole. After a few years of apprenticeship, the French-Canadian politicians entered into open rebellion against the masters of the economy, the English, and their allies, the higher clergy and the seigneurs. The Habitants, who had been completely dispossessed, were hypnotized by the fiery Patriots and, despite the opposition of the higher clergy, demonstrated with increasing violence their will to overthrow the ruling classes. Papineau, more than any other man, inflamed the imagination of the Habitants and became almost a god to them. Nevertheless, some of the Habitants who were skeptical or discouraged were already beginning to set out for exile, seeking a more hospitable land. In 1820 there began an exodus of French-Canadian families to the United States. This exodus was to last a century.

French-Canadian Christendom was suddenly transformed into a vast insurrection, which was just as frightening to the Church as to the conquerors of 1760. The French-Canadian population of Lower

Canada had reached 500,000 and was growing rapidly. For many months unrest had been spreading across the country.⁴ In 1837 and 1838 the people rose up without asking permission from their Leader. The Leader, Papineau, fled with his chief associates to the United States. The Habitants had to confront the English soldiers alone and practically unarmed. After having met the savage counter-offensive of the English with heroic and desperate resistance, they were crushed and massacred.

The Patriots, the petty bourgeois led by Papineau, had not wanted a popular revolution. In mobilizing the people they had only sought to bring pressure on the English in order to obtain for themselves, for their class—and not for the Habitants—a new division of power which would bring them certain additional revenues and a greater share in the economic advantages of the system. Thus, they demanded control of the trade in wheat and domestic consumer goods in Lower Canada. They wanted to participate in the financial activities which had up to that time been reserved for the English and to take back from them the rights which they declared had long been their due. But they did not want to overturn the system or to drive the English out. They demanded nothing more than a redistribution of privileges between themselves and the English. They wanted the victors of 1760 to recognize them as the ruling class and to admit them as equal partners within the same political institutions, the same economic system, and the same social organization. The discontent of the Habitants had only been exploited as a means of applying pressure. The people, taken in by Papineau's eloquence and driven to desperation by their economic difficulties, had let themselves be "had."

The popular revolution took the Patriots by surprise. It upset their plans. For now the English were justified, from a capitalist point of view, in granting no concessions to the French Canadians. Worse yet, the English still had the support of the clergy, who everywhere began to preach obedience to the established authority and submission to the "just punishment" which had been brought upon the people by the Patriots' rationalism, atheism, and spirit of revolt!

The defeats of 1837–1838, the defection of Papineau, and the many sentences of excommunication handed down by the upper clergy struck a hard blow to the hopes of the Habitants, who, like

their ancestors, took refuge in bitterness and resignation to "God's will." The exodus of French Canadians to the United States increased.

For the petty bourgeoisie, once the English hysteria in response to the rebellion had passed, the defeat was quickly turned into a new compromise. The popular rising had alarmed those of the English who understood what was happening. They decided the time had come to integrate the petty bourgeoisie into their system of class collaboration and to meet some of the Patriots' demands. Lafontaine and Baldwin were the instruments of this compromise. The French-Canadian petty bourgeoisie renounced Voltaire the way Christians renounce Satan "and all his works and pomps," and became reconciled with the higher clergy. Even Papineau made honorable amends before being officially rehabilitated and becoming the seigneur of Montebello (a fine career as a revolutionary!). England granted Quebec and Ontario "responsible government," and a few years after the rebellion the French-Canadian petty bourgeois, with few exceptions, were only too happy to be paternally invited by London to play at being statesmen and to become "English." But affairs remained under the exclusive control of the British.

Since 1760 the British and their English-Canadian agents had monopolized the trade in furs and wheat and had been the sole beneficiaries of the sale of English products on the Canadian market (Ontario and Quebec), as well as of the export of Canadian raw materials (furs, lumber, wheat) to England, via the ports of Quebec. These capitalists, anxious to preserve the social peace that had been regained, began to buy the services of a few Québécois lawyers and by giving them prestigious posts, to co-opt them into their companies and into the political parties whose "machines" they had controlled from the beginning. So it was that after the departure of Lafontaine, Georges-Etienne Cartier became a dominant figure, both as solicitor for the Grand Trunk Railway, the most powerful financial institution in the country (controlled by British interests), and as "national" leader of the Tory party. The Grand Trunk used him as chief propagandist for the projected confederation, which was to be approved by London in 1867.⁵

The petty bourgeois had managed to come out all right, but the working class of Quebec was none the better for that. The clergy

began to worry about the exodus of French Canadians to the United States. The petty bourgeoisie, which often controlled trade in the countryside, was also growing nervous. If the rural areas continued to be depopulated, to be drained of their youngest and most dynamic elements, would not the clergy and the petty bourgeoisie lose the base of their power and profits? Montreal was then a city more English than French, and in the eyes of the French-Canadian élite, the rural milieu represented the *true* nation, the *true* people. But if the people refused to live in this rural milieu, would not "the nation" (that is, the petty bourgeoisie and the clergy) sooner or later disappear? What would become of the Church and small, family industry?

It was then that the instinct of self-preservation inspired the clergy and the petty bourgeoisie with the ideology of a "return to the land" and the "colonization" of the vast undeveloped regions of Quebec. This unexpected find was welcomed by the English Canadians and by the French-Canadian bourgeoisie of the towns, who saw it as the most practical and economical means of solving the problem of urban unemployment created by the rural exodus. Business circles and the government hastened to finance the colonization projects, and a whole literature began to circulate inviting the French Canadians to remember their "glorious" past, deliberately falsifying history so as to idealize the life of the Habitants under the French regime, making the words "rural," "Catholic," and "French" synonymous and preaching the crusade of a "return to the land" as the sole solution to the grave social problems of the French-Canadian nation.

Thousands of unemployed were despatched with their families to Saguenay-Lake St. John, to the Laurentians, to Upper St. Maurice Valley, to certain remote corners of the Eastern Townships, to the Portneuf region, and to the interior of the Gaspé peninsula. Later, colonization was to extend to Abitibi and northern Ontario. The colonists were given plots of land to clear without anyone's bothering to find out if the land could really be cultivated. Some colonists were lucky enough to be granted land of excellent quality. But the majority of these "pioneers" were innocent victims of the stupidest, most antisocial, most inhuman enterprise conceivable. Only a clergy and a petty bourgeoisie as backward as ours could have dreamed up and carried out such a "reform." For decade after decade, hundreds of thousands of Québécois, left to themselves, were to wear themselves

out like convicts trying to convert acres of rocks into productive, profitable farms. The miracle never took place. And the result of colonization was even greater misery than any the French-Canadian workers had known until then. But listening to the curés' preaching, we could console ourselves with the divine thought that so much suffering could not fail to win us entrance into Heaven. Were we not on earth to expiate our sins and to "earn" a place in paradise? This absurd philosophy was again presented to the people as the essence of the most perfect happiness. Does the history of mankind offer other examples of collective masochism as tenacious as the Catholic religion of Quebec?

While the French Canadians toiled in pain and anxiety and expiated sins whose exact nature they did not know, the businessmen of Montreal and Toronto, with the advice and support of the businessmen of London, were organizing the infrastructure that would enable them to grow rich. The compromises which Lafontaine and Cartier had reached with the English millionaires had left the Habitants totally indifferent. Since the insurrections of 1837-1838, they had only contempt for professional politicians. The politicians did not dare to stir up the indifference of the masses by submitting the plan for confederation to the popular verdict. The Confederation was established the way a law is passed in the House, in complete disregard of public opinion.

The Confederation of 1867 institutionalized the domination of business over Canadian economic, political, and social life as a whole, "coast to coast." Today we know the real motives that guided the Fathers of the Confederation and the economic considerations hidden behind the sentimental speeches about the unity of the two "founding races" of Canada. The Canadian Confederation was nothing more than a vast financial transaction carried out by the bourgeoisie at the expense of the workers of the country, and more especially the workers of Quebec. At the time the Confederation was established, the railroad companies, which had invested large amounts of capital and were finding it very difficult to meet the competition of the American lines, were on the brink of bankruptcy. The Montreal businessmen were afraid of losing their monopoly on the trade between England and Canada, a large part of which was beginning to pass by way of New York rather than Montreal. Since rail-

roads were considered at the time as the principal economic agents of progress, the Montreal businessmen concluded that as much capital as possible must be invested in the construction of a railroad which would link the Atlantic to the Pacific, Toronto to New York and Quebec via Montreal, and the west to the commercial capital of Canada—Montreal. In order to reduce the risks of private enterprise, they decided that this money should be taken from the state coffers; that is, from the pockets of the taxpayers, from the greatest possible number of citizens. As the heads of the Canadian government, Cartier and Galt in particular, were also administrators of the Grand Trunk, the most important of the railroad companies, the operation was relatively easy to carry out on the legal level. The Maritime Provinces (with the exception of Newfoundland), Quebec, and Ontario were inundated with romantic speeches about “Canadian” unity and the prosperity that this unity could not fail to bring to the “privileged” inhabitants of the vast country.

Once Confederation had been voted by the House and approved by London, in complete disregard of popular opinion, Quebec, which thirty years earlier under the influence of the Patriots had dreamed of becoming a republic, was *de facto* turned—by the disciples of those same Patriots—into a minority within the fictitious bicultural and bilingual “Canadian nation.” Quebec patched together a government from the few jurisdictions left to the provinces, in the fields of education, social security, and natural resources (hardly developed at the time). The federal government retained control of currency, banking, commerce, customs, immigration, foreign policy, etc., and applied from the beginning a policy of centralization that worked to the advantage of the financial circles concentrated in Montreal and Toronto. The capital that was gathered together by uniting the provinces was invested in the private railroad companies, which thereupon experienced unprecedented expansion. The Confederation was no sooner born than it set off down the road toward its first bankruptcy, its first economic crisis, for which the workers would, as always, pay the bill.

Already in 1840, the Anglo-Saxons, who possess a keen sense of their own interests, had taken advantage of the climate of hysteria generated by the French-Canadian rebellion to proclaim a provisional union of the two Canadas (Ontario and Quebec) and to merge

the debts of the two provinces. Quebec (which had a larger population and no debts, since the ruling classes had invested nothing in the development of an infrastructure) was thus made to pay for the considerable deficit created by the construction of many costly canals in the Ontario of the Loyalists.⁶ In 1867 the Confederation effected a similar merger, in more attractive guise. Quebec and the Maritime Provinces were made to serve the economic interests of the Anglo-Saxon bourgeoisie of Montreal and especially of Ontario. Once this conquest was complete, the Fathers of the Confederation undertook to annex the west. The railroad, accompanied by the army, conquered each of the western provinces and bloodily crushed the least signs of resistance on the part of the local populations, in particular the Metis (a people formed by the intermarriage of Indians and French Canadians from Quebec). The result of crushing the Metis was to unify all classes in Quebec against the Confederation, the central power, and English Canada only a few years after the provinces had been united. The Québécois turned to their own state, the State of Quebec, and tried to make the best of their forced annexation to the rest of Canada. The federal government, for its part, granted them subsidies in order to avoid a resurgence of nationalism. The premiers of Quebec, in particular Honoré Mercier, cultivated this nationalism and turned it into an instrument of blackmail, to the profound irritation of the federal government. Daniel Johnson, like Le Sage and Duplessis, is only doing what Mercier did.

But French-Canadian nationalism did not necessarily provide a living. The petty bourgeoisie, of course, turned it to good account (while at the same time making deals with the English Canadians and the Americans behind the people's back). But the condition of the workers hardly improved, even if Honoré Mercier did his best to make them believe in the greatness of their "mission" as Frenchmen and Catholics in North America. An estimated 700,000 French-Canadian workers were forced into exile between 1820 and the end of the First World War. For the people do not readily resign themselves to dying of hunger . . . even out of patriotism! Today the descendants of these Habitants are to be found in Louisiana, New England, New Brunswick, Ontario, Manitoba, and even British Columbia. (Even now, in the period of the "quiet revolution" and Expo 67,

Québécois workers are abandoning their homeland to go chop pines in British Columbia or bury themselves alive in the mines of northern Ontario and Manitoba: a sure sign that, since the time of Honoré Mercier, the petty-bourgeois nationalists of the State of Quebec have still not found solutions to the agonizing problems of the French-Canadian working class. The workers of Quebec are fed up with speeches, flags, hymns, and parades. They want to have their own industries, control over the sale and consumption of their products, political power and economic security, the privilege of studying and sharing in the discoveries of science, etc. They no longer want to sit like beggars on either side of Sherbrooke Street every June 24 to behold, with joy befitting the occasion, the allegorical floats of an artificial "national pride" bought on credit at Household or Niagara Finance. The people are going to rise to their feet, parade in the streets themselves, and make of this country something other than a medieval masquerade organized by grocers who can scarcely see beyond the borders of their own parish.)

If Confederation made no immediate change in the traditional life of the people of Quebec, "rural, Catholic, and French," it did create the economic and political conditions for the invasion of Quebec and the rest of Canada by the American entrepreneurs and financiers. Preparations for the "real" conquest were being made in the polished offices of the executive boards in New York, which were in continual contact with London and in whose service a whole army of lackeys, in Toronto, Montreal, Quebec City, and Halifax, were working feverishly and spending millions to buy local politicians and businessmen and, with the complicity of the bishops and journalists, to lull the masses to sleep. Already the British imperialists controlled a large sector of the Canadian economy. But every year the United States was taking a bigger slice of their powers and privileges. The progressive transfer of financial, industrial, commercial, and political hegemony to the Americans could not be effected without provoking crises and liberating (for the time being at least) new, independent energies which were under the illusion that they could compete with imperialism. That is why, in order to avoid clashes that would be pointless (between capitalists) and politically dangerous (they might set the stage for popular revolts) the English and American business-

men engaged in a gigantic underground bargaining operation of which the people, and sometimes even the majority of politicians, unaware of the economic reality, were totally ignorant.

Leaving the imperialists to silently invade the country, Honoré Mercier, for example, converted "colonization" into a policy of national salvation and, with the help of the clergy, made the "return to the land" into a veritable mystical epic. This absurd nationalism was dubbed a "Christian miracle," and the misery of the people was sprinkled with holy water. Shanties were decorated with dried palm leaves, effeminate Sacred Hearts, and bloodless Virgins. "Blessed are the poor, for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven." The religion of degradation, of the vicious circle, of unremitting sacrifice and resignation to misfortune became "The Imitation of Jesus Christ." But the forces of life were not to be so easily gainsaid by the requirements of atoning for sin and saving souls from Purgatory.

Even in this society dedicated, in spite of itself, to the interests of the Holy Church of God and of His poor servants—cardinals, bishops, and canons—men were still men, basic needs were still basic needs, and money was still a vital necessity. For the bakeries, hardware stores, groceries, and clothing stores, the doctors, lawyers, notaries, and merchants of grain, hens, and livestock did not fatten their bank accounts on indulgences. Even the curés liked to collect the tithe—in hard cash! Because it took a lot of money to build cathedrals and presbyteries—those lowly houses of God—out of Italian marble! So you always had to get more money, by working if possible. Or by stealing from others. Or finally, in desperation, by giving yourself up to the money-lenders of every village and county, who asked nothing better than to "get you out of the hole," the better to take the shirt off your back.

Thus, while God looked on amused, a new social category became more important every day: the money-lenders. These "realistic" Christians (who would have made excellent Calvinists) placed in circulation the money that was to enable the petty bourgeoisie (professionals, tradesmen, and clergymen) to prosper during the end of the nineteenth century, which marked the high point of our collective misery, our virtues (the virtues of baptized slaves), and our impotence, sublimated by Catholicism. The French-Canadian petty bourgeoisie (doubtless less Christian than we, the blessed poor) took full

advantage of our docility, first by developing trade in everyday consumer goods, especially in the countryside, and later by creating those thousands of small, family manufacturing enterprises which are so justly celebrated for the low wages they have always paid and still pay—in the name of patriotism.

Toward the end of the nineteenth century, the English, American, and Canadian capitalists became aware of all the advantages and profits to be drawn from Christian Quebec.

Already, in order to build their railroads, they had begun buying up a number of seigneuries and driving the farmers out. Shortly thereafter they demanded the abolition of the seigneurial regime, which restricted their freedom to build roads, speculate in real estate, and exploit the rich forests of Quebec for export. It will be remembered that at that time the English forests had been devastated and the British demand for lumber was constantly growing. They immediately obtained satisfaction, despite the opposition of certain French-Canadian seigneurs, including the "revolutionary" Louis-Joseph Papineau, then seigneur of Montebello!

Seeing the abundance of cheap labor standing idle in the towns, suburbs, and even remotest "colonies," businessmen said to themselves that they must take advantage of all these hands begging for work and use them to exploit cheaply Quebec's vast resources in timber, minerals, and hydraulic power; and at the same time to develop in Quebec certain industries based on the exploitation of cheap labor, such as the textile industry, which was flourishing at the time. In this way they could create and develop, with a minimum of expense and a maximum of profitability, a "Québécois" economy that would complement the dominant economies of the end of the nineteenth century, those of Great Britain and the United States.

After buying up the best land, these capitalists obtained broad lumbering and mining concessions from the provincial government. And almost for nothing. The sawmills multiplied. The forests were devastated in record time. Thousands of "colonists" became lumberjacks. Little by little the lumber industry reached out to every region of Quebec, and the great majority of farmers began to sell their labor to the lumber companies, at least for several months of the year. The French Canadians, peasants in spite of themselves, became "a people of hewers of wood and drawers of water." The textile industry began

to develop in turn, particularly in the Montreal region and in the Eastern Townships. A whole army of workers—men, women, young people—were turned into slaves of the spinning jennies and looms in factories where there was neither light nor air nor safety. Wages were low, accidents frequent, diseases numerous and sometimes fatal. (These conditions have not changed.) Finally, at the beginning of the twentieth century, asbestos began to be mined in the Eastern Townships, and gold, copper, and zinc in Abitibi; hydraulic resources were exploited for the manufacture of newsprint on the St. Maurice and of aluminum ingots in Saguenay–Lake St. John.

The proletarianization of the “rural, Catholic, and French” French Canadians and the urbanization of medieval Quebec became irreversible. The “return to the city” needed no propagandists; it happened of its own accord, like any natural phenomenon.

While continuing to preach “return to the land,” “buy at home,” and the “call of the race,” the clergy and the petty bourgeoisie were taking advantage of the industrialization of Quebec, particularly in the region around Montreal where a considerable number of industries were being installed, close to the financial and commercial institutions, communications, and the headquarters of the masters of the economy (most of them foreigners). The petty bourgeois paid court to the Anglo-Saxon businessmen and, on the periphery of the fiefs reserved for the bigshots of imperialism, began to establish hundreds of small, family industries for the manufacture of products for domestic consumption: furniture, clothing, shoes, candles, food and drink. (Later, around 1920, they would secure additional revenue by taking control of the food, dairy, and loan cooperatives, and especially of the cooperative credit unions.) Around the turn of the century a few French Canadians launched out into big industry: railroads (Sénécal), lumber (Dubuc), textiles (Hudon), wholesale trade (Paquet). But their rise was as short-lived as it was rapid. They were unable to resist the formidable American financial offensive launched at the beginning of the twentieth century and not yet ended.

In fact, a number of Americans had already undertaken the economic conquest of Quebec in the middle of the nineteenth century, without being too sure whether they should rely on British imperialism, which was still very powerful, or on the new American imperialism, which was much more dynamic. These “knights of industry,”

these adventurers of the dollar, had neither patriotism nor "national interests." They had only class interests and all they cared about was their own fortunes. Capital was at one and the same time their religion, their politics, and their reason for living. Their language was the language of business. Their empire was the world market of capital and goods produced by an anonymous mass of cheap labor for which they had only contempt. They manufactured Law, Justice, Democracy, and the Rights of Man from day to day, as these served the unlimited growth of their investments and profits. Their great ambition was to take possession of the world in the name of the Dollar, which God gave to businessmen so that (along with the Pope and the Archbishop of Canterbury) they might worship Him, love Him, and serve Him in the gilded basilicas, abbeys, and cathedrals of the Church of poor little Jesus.

These American Christians, who constantly invoked the name of God in their apologies of capitalism, made friends with the higher clergy of Quebec and the heads of the Quebec government just as quickly as with the financial circles of Montreal. Religious communities were invited to join them and invest in banks, commerce, and industry. (It was at this time that the Montreal clergy began to demand that Rome give them a cardinal, who, with the prestige and financial powers attached to his rank, would be in a position to promote the interests of the Church by negotiating the most advantageous transactions possible. All that, of course, for the propagation of the Faith: in China, the Congo, and Peru. Still, it cannot be said that the Vatican bureaucracy hastened to give satisfaction to the tonsured bourgeois of the Canadian See!)

From the time they arrived in Canada, the Americans, who came from New York, Pennsylvania, or the New England states, practiced a "double allegiance" to English capitalism and American capitalism, waiting to see which country would in the end eliminate the other in the frantic competition they were carrying on as they multiplied agreements, understandings, and treaties on matters of "common interest." These great entrepreneurs—who were often men of genius in their specialty—gave a vigorous stimulus to the exploitation of Quebec's natural resources, took control of the most profitable sectors of the infant French-Canadian industry, and soon bought the allegiance of almost all the premiers of Quebec who came after the na-

tionalist Honoré Mercier and of most of the prime ministers of Canada, starting with the French-Canadian "Sir" Wilfred Laurier.

At the end of the nineteenth century, they were convinced that England would continue to lose ground and that in a few years the United States would be master of the world—which the evolution of imperialism in the twentieth century was to confirm.

The Americans encountered no opposition within the Quebec government, no matter which party was in power. Nearly all the successive premiers of Quebec were invited to sit on the executive boards of one or another of their enterprises. The electoral machines of the two traditional parties were also well provided for, and the business circles got on as well with the "reds" as with the "blues."

At the federal level, the Americans rapidly took control of the Liberal Party, while "*les British*," who had a sentimental attachment to the English Crown and managed British interests in Canada, had the Conservative Party well in hand. The struggles between the two parties only reflected the extension to Canada of the competition between English and American imperialism for control of the world market. But while Great Britain increasingly alienated public opinion by its openly imperialist and racist policy, its colonial wars (such as the Boer War), its ridiculous attachment to the gilded remains of a sanctimonious and conservative monarchy, its contempt for the French Canadians and for "colored" peoples, its hypocritical and inflexible legalism and so on, the United States, equally racist, imperialistic, and hypocritical—but more intelligent and wily—quietly effected the economic and, I might say, the "spiritual" conquest of Canada, especially Quebec and Ontario.

The French-Canadian petty bourgeoisie, in particular the "thinking" élite, ignorant of economic and social reality, of its origin, its historical development, and the direction of its evolution, and perceiving the world through the *idées fixes* of an immutable system, as in the Middle Ages, spoke to the people in a language that did not correspond in the least with the reality of the daily life of the worker. Henri Bourassa and his disciples were still talking about "return to the land" and "Canadian independence" vis-à-vis Great Britain at a time when the urbanization of Quebec was an irreversible phenomenon and the Americans were taking control of the economic activity and even the politics of Quebec. The tutelage legally exercised over

Canada by London was now only symbolic. The Dominion of Canada, already shaky, was changing into an economic colony of Yankee America. And within this vast colony, Quebec was no longer anything but the poor appendage of a foreign economy.

Bourassa's speeches were of no use to anyone except the small-minded petty bourgeois for whom attachment to the values of the past meant the subjugation of the people to their own narrow economic interests.

It is thanks to this parochial mentality that the French-Canadian petty bourgeoisie was not completely swept away by the economic offensive of the Americans in the twentieth century. Supported by one of the most powerful clergies in the world, this class of professionals, small industrialists, small tradesmen, and small financiers has succeeded in preserving and even strengthening its role as an intermediary between the people, on the one hand, and, on the other, the foreigners who hold the economic power and the English-Canadian bourgeois who control federal politics. The provincial state was (and still is) its licensed instrument of domination and betrayal, a means of perpetually bargaining over the collective wealth and auctioning it off, an enterprise for hoodwinking the masses and debasing the whole political life of Quebec. For the last hundred years the State of Quebec has been nothing more than the legal form of the dictatorship of the most reactionary strata of the French-Canadian petty bourgeoisie—and their silent partners of the Rue Saint-Jacques—over the vast majority of the population of Quebec, for whom the sole political activity permitted by the system is the famous “right to vote,” the absurd freedom to choose which of two, three, five, or eight thieves will be granted the privilege of exploiting the masses!

The industrial revolution of the beginning of the century radically changed the way of life of the Québécois, or rather it urbanized and modernized their three-centuries-old slavery. The population became concentrated in the cities which, with the exception of Montreal, were—and still are—only huge underindustrialized villages, poor and without a future. Montreal rapidly became the center of attraction for the “hewers of wood and drawers of water.” Many found work there and a little security, but Montreal alone could not absorb all the unemployed and poor of Quebec. Already in 1920 the proportion of unemployed in Montreal was steadily rising. And when the

crisis of 1929 broke, the unemployed and the poor of the big city experienced a misery even more terrible than that of the countryside.

Social agitation expanded with the depression of the thirties. The union movement made enormous progress, and socialism began to recruit sympathizers and propagandists in Montreal. Strikes and demonstrations of discontent multiplied. In 1937 riots broke out in Sorel, leaving dead and wounded. The port of Montreal was more than once transformed into a battlefield, and the textile workers rose up against their exploiters. Finally, when the second "conscription crisis" broke out during the war, insurrections occurred all over, and Quebec experienced the beginning of a popular revolution.⁷ Already, during the First World War, the draft had provoked violent outbreaks, and every night for three months the streets of Montreal had been invaded by thousands of angry workers demanding the overthrow of the system and trying to procure arms.⁸ But these spontaneous uprisings had not given birth to any popular, political, revolutionary organization. On the one hand, the workers' leaders were for the most part dominated, if not terrorized, by the clergy, who systematically blocked every attempt at revolutionary organization of the working class. On the other hand, the "anti-draft" leaders of the forties were petty bourgeois who had no real influence over the workers. They were disciples of Bourassa and Canon Groulx, intellectuals who were often sympathetic to Mussolini and Hitler, anti-Semitic and racist. They were incapable of mobilizing popular discontent around a concrete program of social reforms, and all they did, in sum, was to prepare the ground for Duplessis by their exacerbated nationalism.⁹

After the war, apathy, withdrawal, and indifference followed once more upon the disappointed hopes that had been raised by the unionists, the Communists, and the anti-draft groups. Duplessis entered upon his reign without opposition. He took advantage of the fact to cede the rich iron deposits of northern Quebec to the Americans and, with their financial assistance, to endow his party with the most formidable political machine Quebec and Canada had ever known.

The cooperative movement and the union movement, both of which (with few exceptions) were controlled by the Church and the traditional petty bourgeoisie, were put into the service of the slogans "buy at home," "French-Canadian thrift" (monopolized by the

Desjardins Credit Unions), and the "preservation of faith, language, and religion." Certain union leaders even preached "return to the land" and the abolition of any policy favoring immigration, because in their eyes the immigrants were only "stealing jobs and land." The chaplains exercised a despotic reign over the unions and cooperatives, as did the curés over the parishes and the bishops over the dioceses. For the Church, while it had been struggling against the rural exodus ever since the beginning of the century, had had the wisdom to provide priests for the thousands of workers in the cities who were "exposed to vice, pernicious ideas, and Communism." The laymen who dared tell the priests to concern themselves more with God and a little less with politics and union affairs were automatically called "rebels" and "Communists," calumniated and persecuted. The Middle Ages would not be the Middle Ages without a well-organized Inquisition.¹⁰ And despite the efforts of the American capitalists, God did not want Quebec to lose its medieval character. It's a wonder the Holy Virgin did not appear to some child, the way she did in Portugal, to entreat us to obey those who were carrying on the work of the schizophrenic Bishop Laval who, in the seventeenth century, had laid the foundations of the madhouse we were living in.

The American unions with branches in Quebec were less dominated by the obscurantism of the chaplains but they were more subservient to the economic interests of the United States, which in the end was just as bad for the workers of Quebec.

In 1949 striking asbestos miners took control of the city of Asbestos for a few days and refused to obey their leaders, including Jean Marchand, and even their curé. Duplessis' police crushed their revolt, and this action aroused the people against the monarch of "the great darkness."¹¹ The Asbestos strikers received sympathy, support, and material aid from all sides. A few years later, in 1957, the miners of Murdochville, on the Gaspé peninsula, rose up in turn, and the opposition to Duplessis grew deeper and more widespread. Spontaneous strikes broke out in various corners of Quebec, and Duplessis' political police became increasingly hard on the workers. The union movement got rid of the chaplains and the advocates of blind obedience to the Very Catholic Leader—who went to Mass and took communion every morning. Some of the Quebec intellectuals began to concern themselves with "social sciences" and founded "left" re-

views. Weeklies like Jacques Hébert's newspaper *Vrai* revealed the true face of Duplessism to the people. The "Coffin affair,"* among others, forced tens of thousands of Québécois, accustomed to the cunning demagoguery of Duplessis, to open their eyes and reawaken to their responsibilities. It was no longer possible for anyone to accept injustice without protest.

Quebec awoke only very slowly from its long winter. In 1960, after years of obscure and difficult struggles, of lost strikes, rigged trials, legal assassinations, censorship and inquisition, eleven years after Asbestos, the unexpected victory of the Liberals and the coming to power of the "socialist" René Lévesque marked the end of "the great darkness" and the beginning of "the quiet revolution." All the institutions of Quebec were publicly called into question. Secularism, separatism, and Marxism shattered the apparent unanimity. The traditional monolithic ideology was broken. Pressure groups, patriotic organizations, and political parties separated into opposing factions. New groups and parties were founded. Political reviews and newspapers multiplied. Young people were seized with a desire to read and to know, and the book trade enjoyed an unprecedented expansion. A hearty appetite for truth and a fierce need for freedom took hold of the nation. God made a terrible grimace and the bishops called an urgent meeting to invoke the Holy Ghost.

The gospel of resignation and the apologia of slavery were ripped up with an enthusiasm mixed with an obscure instinct for vengeance. And more than one man who had helped to manufacture the traditional ideology and had profited from it began to suffer from insomnia and break into sweat dreaming of civil war. "Like in Spain . . . Is it possible? . . . Rich men and priests executed . . . Factories in the hands of workers . . . Churches burned to the ground . . . The socialists in power . . ." The simple announcement by the Liberals that they intended to modernize—that is, "bring up to date"—the teaching dispensed to the youth of Quebec sowed panic among most of the venerable and undisputed "bosses" of traditional education; especially among the bishops, who finally succeeded in quietly sabo-

* Wilbert Coffin, a prospector from the Gaspé, was accused of the murder of three American hunters from Pennsylvania. Coffin, whom many believed to be innocent, was convicted on circumstantial evidence and hanged on February 10, 1956. (Trans.)

taging educational reform, with the complicity of Ti-Jean-la-Taxe-Lesage,* who had only defended reform (which his Minister of Education wanted very much) in order to win re-election in 1962. But the bishops' sabotage was a partial defeat for the Church, which has never been so discredited in the eyes of the people as it is today. To be sure, the churches are still filled with the faithful on Sundays, and most people believe in God. But the Québécois are disgusted with the comfortable priests who lead the lives of millionaires in their richly furnished presbyteries and drink Scotch on the money of the poor. As for the young people, not only are they anti-clerical, but the majority of them refuse to go to church on Sunday to watch the empty and incomprehensible rituals of another age and to pay for the show besides, if only so much as 25 cents. Do they believe in God, in Jesus Christ, in Mohammed or Buddha? I don't know. But I have the impression that they believe first of all in themselves and in humanity, and that, unlike their parents, they are not prepared to sacrifice their earthly life for a hypothetical celestial happiness.

Notwithstanding the opposition of those who had formerly profited from obscurantism, the "quiet revolution" completely upset the habits of thought of the Québécois, who for the first time in their history—thanks partly to the prodigious development of television, radio, and the press—witnessed a "national" debate that enabled them all to ask questions, discuss their problems openly, and take sides. The "quiet revolution" liberated hitherto unsuspected energies, and the reformist Liberals were the unconscious instruments of unprecedented social ferment. Every level of society, every class, took a position in accordance with its present condition and its fundamental interests. The petty bourgeoisie expressed its traditional nationalism with new vigor. However, a broad faction of the petty bourgeoisie secularized this nationalism and transformed it into a resolutely separatist and lay movement. For the first time since 1837, the petty bourgeoisie set itself political, economic, and social objectives that were precise enough to constitute a complete political program (a program for the petty-bourgeois class and not the working class). Today there remains no doubt that the entire petty bourgeois-

* Jean Lesage earned his nickname by imposing heavy taxes to finance his reforms, notably new schools. This policy helped defeat him. (Trans.)

sie, from the traditional nationalists to the separatists, are demanding a new division of power. The Canadian Confederation is at the point of death at the very moment when it is beginning to celebrate its centennial in an effort to believe it will survive, like a half-unconscious victim of cancer who refuses to make his will and persists in denying the death that is devouring him.

In Ottawa, only a small minority of Québécois who are either behind the times, blind, or ambitious for their own careers (I'm not sure which) still believe that Lafontaine, Cartier, and Laurier were not traitors and are desperately calling for a constitutional miracle that will save the Confederation. How, without denying history, can these intelligent men believe and declare that it is in the interests of French Canadians to perpetuate a "pact" which in reality they never concluded and which was imposed on them in the same way as the recent Canadian-American treaty on free trade in automobile parts? Can Messrs. Marchand, Favreau, Sauv , Pelletier, and Trudeau tell us *when* the French-Canadian people were democratically consulted on this famous "pact of confederation," for love of which these gentlemen were willing to compromise themselves with the stinking, scandal-ridden Liberal stable? And with the Liberals' impotent leader, that darling of President Lyndon B. Johnson, that insipid prime minister for whom it would be worth instituting a Nobel Prize for Incompetence? Decidedly, the great men who lived through (*sic*) Asbestos must have gone through some pretty traumatic experiences under the reign of Duplessis. They are still haunted by "the great darkness." And their "*politique fonctionnelle*" is thrashing around like a man who is suffocating from having swallowed too much smoke.*

* The phrase "*politique fonctionnelle*" refers to an article entitled "Pour une politique fonctionnelle: un manifeste" ("A Manifesto for Realism in Politics"), by Pierre Elliott Trudeau, Marc Lalonde (now one of Trudeau's chief advisers), and others. This article appeared in 1964, at a time when Trudeau, together with G rard Pelletier and Jean Marchand (both now ministers in the federal government), was preparing to go into Liberal politics. The manifesto expounded the authors' views on "functional politics" (or "pragmatism in politics," as the phrase is sometimes translated), that is, the necessity of dealing with practical social problems rather than with grand schemes and ideologies (i.e., separatism and Marxism). The Trudeau government still considers itself to be carrying out this manifesto. (Trans.)

While the founders of the "*cit  libre*,"* imprisoned in the Parliament in Ottawa as members or ministers, pace back and forth in their offices like madmen unaware of their madness, ceaselessly turning over in their tired brains ideas that men of healthy minds do not even want to discuss, the French-Canadian workers fix their eyes on Quebec. All the promises of reforms and "revolutions" that the petty bourgeoisie in power (the Liberal Party) waved in front of the people (educational revolution, social revolution, revolution here, revolution there) have aroused new needs and deeply stirred old hopes that have given birth to a feeling of urgency among the most disadvantaged layers of the population. The "ignorant," whom Lesage despises, want their share of the feast, their *ample* share. Do they not constitute 90 percent of this nation that has just been promised a new life free from fear, ignorance, and servitude?

The promises of 1960 are still the promises of 1966 except, in part, in the field of education. Promises are even postponed indefinitely. And with Danny Boy in power, some people are wondering if the promises that are kept by the "new regime" will not be consigned to oblivion tomorrow. Since his surprising election, Mr. Daniel Johnson has been talking a lot about independence, but he also talks about breaking strikes, cutting social expenditures, and granting new privileges to foreign investors. How can Mr. Johnson reconcile his policy of independence with his unequivocal invitation to American investors, whose economic activity, in the words of the economist Andr  Gunder Frank, can only "develop underdevelopment" and impoverish us collectively and individually until Quebec is nothing but a country in ruins? Naturally, Mr. Johnson will not answer you, because it is not in his party's interest to do so. But as my father used to say, "we're not crazy."

In recent years, taxes have been steadily going up in order to finance these so-called reforms which the people have not yet been allowed to see, as though they were state secrets. Where has all this

* The phrase "the founders of the '*cit  libre*'" is an ironic allusion to Trudeau, Pelletier, and others. In 1950, these men founded the magazine *Cit  libre* (in which the manifesto on *politique fonctionnelle* was to appear fourteen years later). The magazine's point of view was Catholic, secularist, nuclear pacifist, anti-Duplessist, social democratic, and, later, anti-separatist. Since *la cit * is sometimes used in French in the broad, political sense of "the marketplace" or "public life," Valli res is making a play on words to mock the pretensions of "the founders of the 'Free Society.'" (Trans.)

money gone? Into the pockets of the ministers, the party hacks, the Filions?° Swallowed up in Sidbec, the stillborn steel works? Wasted on pieces of road or on gifts to certain school board members? Transferred to friendly capitalists in the form of "industrial loans"? Given to the Americans in payment of interest on the ever increasing "national debt"? Invested in projects for the centennial of the Confederation and the Expo of the capitalists?

In 1962 Social Credit gave the first concrete formulation to popular discontent, and Caouette's party, finding support in the old resentment of the French-Canadian farmers and workers against the capitalists, swept Quebec in the federal elections.† The *créditistes* disappointed the workers by their internal quarrels and incongruous statements, but popular discontent continued to grow. Two years later strikes broke out pretty much all over. Lesage wanted to muzzle the press, and conflicts multiplied in journalistic circles. *La Presse*, *Le Soleil*, *L'Action*, *La Tribune* went through difficult times. The very long strike of the employees of *La Presse*, a strike that had a strong political coloration, made the population aware of the problem of freedom of opinion and the right to information. The people understood that in trying to censor newspapers, the Liberals were trying to hide the truth from them, and that this was being done at the instigation of the very men who had launched the reform movement.

Strikes increased in number and intensity. The Liberals became professional strike-breakers and club-swingers. Their speeches boiled down to irresponsible denunciations that were pointless and sometimes even hysterical. The people saw them as their worst enemies. In the elections of June 1966, Lesage's crowd received a vote of no-confidence. The National Union Party was carried back to power in spite of itself—and in spite of the workers, who could not choose their methods. But never fear. The workers of Quebec may have voted against Lesage so as not to go through another period of "great

* Gérard Filion, long a Catholic Farmers' Union official and suburban mayor, later director of *Le Devoir*, is now president of Marine Industries, a mixed state-private corporation. He is an anti-nationalist and an advocate of the view that his fellow French Canadians should forget about separatism and acquire the business sense of the English in order to get ahead. (Trans.)

† Social Credit is a right-wing, religious fundamentalist, anti-separatist party with a working-class orientation. It rose from obscurity in the elections mentioned. (Trans.)

darkness," but do you think they are going to let themselves be burdened for long with Daniel Johnson and his clique of upstarts who are in the pay of the Americans and the most reactionary elements of the nationalistic petty bourgeoisie? And do you really think the workers of Quebec are going to go on playing at elections indefinitely, for the fun of it, every four years, just because the system asks them to? Hunting rifles can sometimes be used for other things besides shooting deer.

At the time these lines are written, there is nothing to indicate that there will be a slowdown in popular demands: violence is breaking out everywhere. Farmers, workers, and students make no secret of their profound dissatisfaction and constantly manifest it in one form or another. The government of Quebec is finding it harder and harder to master the situation. Especially since the state coffers are empty and it is impossible for the party in power, whichever it may be, to think up lasting remedies to quiet the muttering storm.

While the working and agricultural class (farmers, however, represent only 6 percent of the total labor force) is slowly and painfully developing class consciousness—without which no revolution is possible—the Americans are seizing more and more of our national patrimony. It is estimated that today they control, directly or indirectly, 80 percent of the economy of Quebec. By means of an increasing number of long-term loans, they capture an ever growing share of the revenues of the State of Quebec in the form of interest and thus hold back any possibility of autonomous development. Even if Quebec gets all the taxes back from Ottawa, this additional revenue will soon pass into the hands of the Americans, who constitute the main obstacle to the economic independence of Quebec. As for paper independence, Washington couldn't care less. What difference does that fiction make so long as American interests are safeguarded? Imperialism is not interested in flags: one flag more or less in no way disturbs its universal system of exploitation of natural resources and cheap labor. An obedient "nationalist" government is the surest ally for Washington, as Latin America shows by many an example. What the Americans fear is socialism, popular revolution. With Daniel Johnson, as with Jean Lesage, they can rest easy.

Seventy thousand in 1760, the French Canadians of Quebec today number more than five million, out of a total population of about six

million. Ninety percent of them belong to the working class, and to that figure should be added the majority of non-British immigrants: Italians, Greeks, Spaniards, Poles, *et al.*, who represent an important percentage of the proletariat of Montreal. Forty percent of the population of Montreal, according to a study made in 1965 by the Montreal Labor Council, is considered "economically weak," and in the countryside—where two-thirds of the French-Canadian population lives—the proportion of poor people, unemployed, seasonal workers, and welfare recipients is considerably higher. With the exception of the area around Montreal, where all the wealth of Quebec is concentrated and where the headquarters of both indigenous and foreign exploiters are located, most regions of Quebec are economically chained to a single type of local production controlled from abroad: aluminum in Saguenay-Lake St. John, pulp and paper in the St. Maurice Valley, copper in Abitibi, iron on the St. Lawrence North Shore, etc. A drop in the world (or American) demand for one or another of these products suffices to bring the whole region concerned face to face with famine. Moreover, only a minority of workers can find jobs in these industries, which are sometimes highly automated; and the great majority of the population "vegetate," as the saying goes, and spend their time *surviving*.

The Quebec market is flooded with foreign products, and local production of consumer goods, even food, is reduced every month by the overwhelming competition of products imported from the United States, Japan, and elsewhere, a competition that is completely unrestricted. Prices rise steadily and so does the indebtedness of the workers. "Credit" poisons the life of individuals and insecurity is the general condition.

Notwithstanding the unprecedented number and long duration of their struggles, the workers of Quebec have not yet succeeded in creating an independent political organization with a view to taking power and radically transforming the society into one of justice, equality, and fraternity. But the idea of such a revolutionary, popular organization and the need for it are becoming increasingly clear to the workers, farmers, and youth of Quebec. The violent demonstrations of May 24 and July 1, 1965, the recent conflicts of workers in the textile industry, in the ports of Montreal, Trois-Rivières, and Quebec, in the La Grenade Shoe Company, in the construction trades, hospitals, railroads, and the post office, and the struggles of

the trade-school students, the teachers, and lastly the employees of Ayers at Lachute^o—to cite only a few—show beyond all doubt that the “white niggers of America” are determined to break the yoke of slavery once and for all and to take the control of their destiny into their own hands.¹²

After three centuries of an entire people’s mute and useless submission to the interests of you exploiters, the truth is at last throwing a glaring light on everything, and you must not expect the popular revolt that is brewing to concern itself, Messrs. bourgeois and bishops, with what is going to happen to your privileges and your respectable persons when it breaks out—pitiless and inevitable outcome of the system of exploitation and enslavement which you *yourselves* established and developed.

2

While it is no exaggeration to call the people of Quebec white niggers, they are not the only whites in America who “deserve” this degrading title. The industrial revolution of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries drove from Europe millions of peasants and workers who came to America in search of freedom as well as work and bread. Only a small number of them succeeded in growing rich and enjoying the freedom of enterprise which, on this continent, is bought at great price. The majority of immigrants have remained the hired servants of the “first white men,” the entrepreneurs of the superior English race, who ever since the time of the Washingtons, Jeffersons, and Franklins have considered themselves the sole proprietors of North America. These immigrants, despised by the European capitalists, were welcomed with open arms by the founders of American democracy, who badly needed cheap labor in order to make maximum profits out of the labor and capital they had invested in the American colonies since the seventeenth century. The “first white men” became accumulators of profits, speculators and businessmen, while the newcomers were invited to cooperate, by selling their labor by the hour, in the rapid development of this gigantic country which was supposed to belong to them.

The famous “melting pot” was—and still is—a snare and a delusion. There was a “melting pot” at the level of the wage earners, the

^o “Ayers” refers to three companies: Dominion Ayers Wood, Ayers Blankets, and Beautyrest Mattresses, all owned by Gilbert Ayers. (Trans.)

unemployed, the poor, those who struggled to survive. But there was never a "melting pot" at the level of the American aristocracy, the class of the big bourgeoisie, the financiers and professional imperialists.

Furthermore, American democracy developed a spirit of division in the working class that has enabled the bourgeoisie to dominate the enormous and extremely mobile mass of cheap labor without much difficulty. First, American democracy kept immigrants from the Christian countries of Europe as far as possible from the blacks. It organized black slavery in the South, white slavery in the North. Later, it conquered the West, and the new rich of Texas and California organized Mexican and Indian slavery. In the North, the Yankee élite divided the white slaves into "colonies": Italian, Irish, Polish, German, Puerto Rican, etc. The second industrial revolution, stimulated by the war of 1939, gave rise to an exodus of southern blacks to the big industrial cities of the North. The white slaves, already grappling with unemployment, greeted their black brothers, who were even poorer than they, like enemies. The unions, which were organizations of the white slaves of big industry, were closed to the newcomers. Racism, which had already turned the South into a veritable hell, poisoned working-class life in most of the cities of the North. The blacks were penned up in ghettos where the misery exceeded anything that the various "colonies" of white slaves had known. The workers' struggle against capitalist exploitation was compromised by fierce hatred of the blacks, engendered by the racist ideology. Financed by the exploiters of white and black workers alike, racism enabled capitalism to delay popular revolution in the United States for many decades. By keeping the workers at each others' throats for irrational reasons, racism made it easier for the big bourgeoisie to sabotage the American union movement and protected the millionaires from the disagreeable experience of having to curtail their profits a little in order to finance social reforms. The union movement, controlled by speculators who were tied to the financial and political interests of the "Warfare State," supported the official policy of Washington and became the surest ally of the big corporations. Disgusted and in revolt, thousands of white slaves, who had been ardent union members before the war, set off hundreds of wildcat strikes in protest against the joint dictatorship of the unions and the companies. As for

the blacks shut up in their ghettos, they rose up *en masse* and set fire to their miserable poverty. Automation brought with it a considerable increase in the number of persons unemployed or on welfare, and a few years ago the State Department had to admit publicly that there were fifty million poor in the United States, or nearly a third of the total population. Today the unemployed number three million, while the young people, particularly those who belong to the working class, have no idea what the future may hold for them. The blacks, the Puerto Ricans, and the Mexican-Americans engage in more and more demonstrations and riots. Thousands of them fill the prisons, North and South. Black Power is organizing, inspiring the most conscious elements of the working class with the idea and the necessity of "Workers' Power." The war in Vietnam has aroused the youth against the state. Groups opposing the war, fascism, and capitalism are multiplying across the country. Class consciousness is developing despite the long history of senseless hatreds that has so weakened the movement for workers' demands in America in the last thirty years. It is a slow process, but little by little racism is giving way to solidarity. The big-business nature of the unions, although discredited, still remains a major obstacle to the emancipation of the workers, but the workers are beginning to find more direct and violent ways of asserting their rights than collective bargaining and legal strikes. The blacks are at the head of the movement, followed by the Puerto Ricans of New York and the agricultural workers of California and Texas. These slaves learned long ago to mix their blood with their anger. The white slaves, who are just beginning to awake from the long nightmare of racism, will not take long to discover that it is in their interest to follow the "colored" workers who long ago set out ahead of them on the road to liberation.¹³ It is the same in Canada, where the workers of Ontario and British Columbia and the "Frenchies" of northern Ontario and New Brunswick are beginning to turn to violence.

The development of class consciousness among all levels of workers in America is still not clearly discernible because it has not yet reached the stage of independent, revolutionary political organization, and because there are many unhealed wounds left by long years of racism. So far as black nationalism is concerned, far from seeing it as an obstacle to the class struggle, as do certain so-called orthodox

Marxists (who are more obsessed with scholastic orthodoxy than with the urgent necessity of working *practically*, under *given* conditions, for the liberation of the working class), I see it as one of the most positive and progressive manifestations of the development of the American revolution. For that revolution will have to take into account not only the "proletarian" aspect of the worker, but also his culture, his ethnic origin, his traditions and customs, his particular needs and tastes; otherwise it will not be a human revolution, total and liberating.

Black nationalism—like French-Canadian separatism—is of inestimable service to revolutionaries in that it forces them to envisage the liberation of the whole man and enables them to avoid the trap of half-revolutions which, as soon as they are victorious, change into the oppression of racial, linguistic, religious, or other minorities. Black nationalism and Quebec separatism are again teaching people how much is demanded by a true respect for men in the equality of *natural* and *historical* differences (and not of differences in power and privilege created by the unequal division of wealth, by private ownership of the means of production, by free competition, the concentration of capital in the hands of the fiercest exploiters and the division of society into antagonistic classes). This respect of man for man presupposes the abolition of social classes, of capitalism, of the exploitation of man by man. And the nationalism of the poor, the exploited—in contrast to the nationalism of the steel and oil kings, the proprietors of nuclear energy and atomic bombs, the warmongers and the manufacturers of Agena rockets—aims to crush no one. Since they are already the ones who are most oppressed, the poor can only dominate themselves, that is to say, become their own masters. Their enemies cannot be the "dirty niggers," because *they are* those dirty niggers; they cannot be the "French Pea Soups," because *they are* those French Pea Soups; they cannot be the "damned ignorant factory hands," because *they are* those ignorant factory hands. These niggers—who do not all have the same color skin, who do not all speak the same language, who believe in different prophets, live in ghettos that are foreign to each other and experience in different ways the dictatorship of the same economic, political, and social system—all these niggers whom the partisans of slavery, the businessmen, and the politicians have for centuries contrived to set against

each other (the better to exploit them and keep them powerless), know today that in this world of money, violence, and oppression, freedom and peace can be won only by the strength of numbers and of arms. They already have the numbers. The arms will come in due time . . . on the day when they are sufficiently united to constitute the invincible army of their own liberation and the liberation of the millions of men on the five continents who are now enslaved to the interests of the "free world." For the niggers of America are one with the niggers of the entire world. One with them in servitude. One with them in the struggle for liberation. One with them, when the time comes, in the final assault on imperialism and in the definitive victory of the human over the inhuman. One with them in the revolution of man and by man, in the grand event that will sweep away all the decay of the old system and prepare all humanity, that is, all men, to begin a new history, without masters or slaves, without war or racism, without banks or thieves.

3

"But how can we, the niggers, who are the ones most deprived (materially, intellectually, technically) of the means of conquering power and keeping it, how can we hope to overcome the greatest economic, political, and military power in the world, overthrow imperialism, and found a new society on a completely different basis from that of the present society, we who possess nothing and who find it hard to understand the workings of the oppression that makes us slaves?"

Every nigger, every worker who becomes aware of the intolerable injustice of the present system, every slave, in short, who educates himself and opens his eyes to the truth—which it is the function of propaganda, religion, and education to hide from him as much as possible—asks himself with anguish and skepticism the famous question: HOW?

A man accustomed to humiliation and forced labor (labor in order to subsist) becomes fatalistic, passive, skeptical. He is tempted to say to himself: "All those dreams only make us even more unhappy and don't change anything. And then, isn't it in the 'order' of things that there should be some people more intelligent than others, more hard

working, more thrifty, less given to drink, less lazy, who succeed more easily because they are more 'capable,' soberer, better educated . . . richer too, you have to admit?

"But doesn't someone become 'capable' because he is educated? And that education that he got at the university, didn't he pay a lot for it? Where did he get the money? Where did his father get the money? How does it happen that his father has a higher income than the average person? How did he get to be a doctor or an industrialist? Where did his father's father get the money to have his son educated? And where did his father's father's father . . .

"And then, why couldn't *my* father have *me* educated, send *me* to the university? Why have *my* father and my father's father always been so hard up? And why are the schools in the working-class quarters dirty, ill equipped, damp, as if they had been built on purpose to make you hate studying? (You do better taking lessons from the gangsters, you know. And it pays off fast, too! But I'd be afraid of that . . .) And why are workers' wages so low, and the cost of living so high, that at fourteen or sixteen you have to look for work like your father, sell your labor by the hour or the week and accept the hardest job like a gift from Heaven because it brings in a few bucks—which you will immediately spend at the clothing store, the corner grocery, the movies, the doctor's . . . and at the tavern when, at the end of six months of this dog's life, you go there to drown the dreams of your youth in beer and noise? Can you explain to me, dear doctor, how it is that there are so many taverns in Montreal and so many drunkards inside? Can you explain to me why you meet mostly workers there, "ignorant" men and the unemployed? And why there are more of these taverns in the French East than in the English West?

"There must be an explanation for all that," Joe says to himself over and over. "It's not possible that all of us from the East End of the city, and from Saint-Henri and the Pointe Saint-Charles, are mentally retarded. And that all of those damn rich men from Westmount, Outremont, and Mount Royal are more intelligent than the rest of us. Here, take my boss for example: he doesn't even know that Cartier made political deals for the railroad companies. He doesn't know the first thing about the history of his country, and he believes in fairy tales. The other day he said to me in all seriousness that his

father knew Ringuet well, 'the author of *Maria Chapdelaine*,' says he! ° How can those damn fools get rich so fast while I, who am still taking courses at night and am interested in everything that's going on and everything that's being written, I'm still paying back my debts? In the middle of the twentieth century, my wife has to go to work as a cleaning woman to pay for the schooling of my oldest, who's at the *collège*, and I'm not even sure I can send him back next year. And while the rest of us are busting our guts, those bastards tell us to get an education! (Of course there's Arthur, my brother-in-law, who's a contractor—he has money and no education. But he makes it off patronage, damn him, he steals from his own people.) I'm sick of hearing them preach to us. If this goes on, I'm going to send one of those bourgeois to the next world. If I haven't done it already, you see, it's because I'm not sure it would help much. A lot of us would have to get together and settle their account once for all, all that gang of damn heartless exploiters, of . . . There's enough dynamite in Quebec to blow them all up at the same time. But the men are afraid. When I get worked up at a union meeting, the president cuts me short, because he doesn't want the men to do something foolish, he says. And the men fall for it, because *monsieur le président* is a great friend of the business agent! The business agent, he's a lawyer. He knows a lot about the law, but he doesn't know much about life. He's not one of us. He doesn't understand what you say to him. And then he complicates everything with his Labor Code that you can't understand a word of . . . But things are going to change, I'm telling you. Take a worker's word for it! At the next elections we're going to kick all the old ladies off our Executive. We're going to take our affairs in hand. And then to hell with the regulations on this and the regulations on that. The sparks are going to fly! We're fed up with having the bosses and the union treat us like children. From now on either they listen to us or we smash their faces for them. I hope the men will stick together. It's damn well time we took our responsibilities and stopped making our revolutions in taverns and started making them in *our* factories. I can't wait for the day when one of our

° *Maria Chapdelaine* is a well-known novel written in 1913 by Louis Hémon. It deals with the life of the Habitants around the turn of the century. Ringuet is the pen name of Philippe Panneton, the author of another novel on the same theme but set during the Depression. (Trans.)

boys, a longshoreman, say . . . or a lumberjack, yes, a lumberjack, a big strapping fellow, stands up in front of us, thousands of workers assembled in Lafontaine Park, and strikes up the *Marseillaise* or the *Chant des partisans*—because we don't have any songs like that yet in these parts—and then this lumberjack shouts to us: '*Aux armes, Québécois!*' And all together, like one man, we repeat: '*Aux armes, Québécois!*' And then we get out our rifles and grenades and decide to make an end of . . . But that great day, it won't be tomorrow. We'll have to rouse the men. If we can get rid of the moss-backs and the ass-lickers, that will help. Those idiots are worse than the bosses. By the way, you know the little newspaper *La Cognée*? I don't know who writes it, but they're right on target! Read it. If I could write, that's the way I'd do it. They're just right when they say the bigshots in the union are rotten. But we're going to change that, and no later than this year, whether *they* like it or not. We're sick of being spat on. I for one, anyway, I've made up my mind. Nothing is going to stop me. If the men can act like men . . ."

It is through such reflections, based on a daily experience of exploitation, that every conscious worker reaches the conclusion that the heart of the problem is not the alleged "capacity" of some (the few) and the incapacity of others; that it is not a question of "competence," much less intelligence, but basically a question of privileges unequally divided, of powers unjustly acquired through centuries of violence during which the weaker have always been pitilessly crushed by the stronger (stronger because richer).

4

The heart of the problem is neither metaphysical nor moral. It is material; it is at the same time economic, historical, and military. Consequently its solution must be of the same nature. Since the evolution of humanity is not a philosophical system, there is no theoretical solution to the problems that it raises. There are only practical solutions.

Theory is an instrument of research whose usefulness is measured by the practical actions it enables us to perform. A theory is progressive and revolutionary insofar as it enables men to perform acts which *transform* their world by *radically changing their social relationships*.

That is why every worker who comes to realize the injustice of his condition, the condition of his fellows, and consequently of the vast majority of men, is immediately confronted with the most gigantic practical problem that has ever presented itself, first to men, then to collectivities: *How* to transform thousands of years of exploitation of man by man and of incessant murderous wars, how to transform centuries of accumulation of capital and concentration of wealth at the expense of men's progress and freedom, how to transform this long history of massacre, pillage, and slavery into a new history of peace, justice, and freedom? *How* to transform a world dominated and perverted by money, hatred, and violence into a world without money, hatred, or violence? *How* to make a world without niggers?

How . . . ? It is not a theoretical problem but a practical one, because it is solely a problem of the relationship of forces. It is a question of overturning the present relationship of forces; of seeing to it that the weak—the vast majority of the two billion inhabitants of the planet, whose numbers give them a natural, inalienable right to control their own affairs—become the stronger, the sole masters of their fate, the sole artisans of their social universe; of seeing to it that the powerful—the small minority who make up the international business bourgeoisie and who monopolize economic, political, and social affairs, the means of communication, the engines of war and the reigning ideologies—are reduced to impotence, held in check, prevented forever from exploiting human labor for their profit.

It is a question of making men equal, not only in law but in fact.

It is necessary to create the material conditions for this equality, that is, to abolish everything that makes the present social relations the relations between masters and slaves, sellers and buyers, rich and poor, exploiters and exploited. It is necessary to replace all that with new social relations which are no longer based on force, money, and systematic injustice, but on all men's right to equality, on justice, fraternity, and the collective enjoyment of the wealth, both material and cultural, that belongs to every man from birth.

Humanity, like everything that is natural, can find within itself the "self-regulators" necessary to its survival and progress, without needing a class of businessmen to act as policemen. Perhaps, up until now, humanity needed to be run by a minority class of "entrepreneurs" (in the broad sense). But today every man is in a position to

become his own entrepreneur, because science and technology have already reached a sufficient level of development to enable all the collectivities on earth—and through them, all men—to acquire the material and intellectual means of achieving freedom, social equality, and the happiness of working through personal and collective creation for the progress of humanity.

Only the usurpation by the international business bourgeoisie (businessmen, manufacturers of automobiles and rockets, war-mongers) of the instruments of research, the industries, the discoveries, the universities, the means of disseminating knowledge, etc.—only this usurpation by a handful of financiers and their army of technicians, scientists, and intellectuals prevents humanity today from taking the most gigantic step in all its history, from making the most profound and human revolution the earth has ever known. Only this class of businessmen, to whom must be added the bureaucrats of Soviet and East European state capitalism, prevents humanity from coming out of its long prehistory.

The point of departure of all revolutions has been that a broad faction of a given population has recognized the conservative and parasitic nature of the dominant class, which enjoys everything without doing anything, without producing, while the majority is reduced to servile obedience to the dictates of the guardians of Order. The great revolution for which humanity is ripe will really get under way on the day when the workers, scientists, technicians, and intellectuals meet in joint opposition to the gold-plated obscurantism of the bankers and monarchs of the universe. In this century more than one revolution, civil war, insurrection, riot, general strike, and war of national liberation has demonstrated the will of the peasants, workers, and youth of the entire world to transform this world, pillaged by the international race for profits, into a world of peace, social justice, and fraternity. But too few scientists, technicians, and intellectuals have as yet come to understand that their discoveries and labor will always be subjugated to the class interests of the great financiers (to their wars, to their exploitation of the labor of hundreds of millions of men, and to the systematic development of underdevelopment in the majority of the countries of the “third world”) until the day when, instead of assisting the capitalists in their enterprise of dehumanization “made in U.S.A.,” they turn toward those whose toil, over the centu-

ries, is precisely what has enabled them to make discoveries that are the pride of the twentieth century, and who, for their part, are ready to join together to build a world commensurate with the imagination of the scientists.

Unless they renounce all dignity, unless they cynically flee from their tremendous social responsibility, the scientists, technicians, and intellectuals of the twentieth century must consent to become politicized, to get their hands dirty along with the millions of "ignorant" men, the starving, the illiterate, the beggars, the peasants, the unemployed, the little office clerks, the sales clerks, and the wage-earners, to whom science has so far brought only new and more refined forms of oppression and alienation.

The same remark holds true for that faction of the petty bourgeoisie, of the middle class, which does not aspire to live in the orbit, or on the periphery, of the great multinational corporations, but which wishes to give its existence a meaning more worthy of man. This progressive part of the petty bourgeoisie must lose its illusions about the alleged ability of the system to put an end to injustice without itself disappearing. You cannot abolish slavery without abolishing the power of the master and the relation of master to slave.

For the progressive petty bourgeois, as for those scientists, intellectuals, and "technocrats" who have not sold out to the present holders of economic and political power in the world, the *only choice* that makes sense objectively is *to ally themselves with the workers, farmers, students, and all young people*—with the great majority of mankind.

By allying themselves, I mean that they must take over the profound aspirations, the demands, and the economic, political, and social objectives of the mass of men, not as "enlightened" and paternalistic guides of the "ignorant" but as responsible and conscious auxiliaries of men and women equal by rights, to whom history at last offers the opportunity and the means to organize, in every country, for their definitive liberation from oppression, from their thousand-year-old status as niggers, as cheap labor, as exploited and humiliated beings.

5

At first glance, the problems raised by the evolution of humanity at each historical stage always appear insurmountable. The picture one

paints for himself, and describes to others, of this society without exploitation, for the achievement of which one is ready to take up arms, is like something out of science fiction.

And in the beginning, your utopia makes some people pity you, others ridicule you, and the majority look upon you as a kind of mystic without God! It is not long before you have acquired a reputation for being a dreamer—a fellow who is “sincere” but “idealistic.” If, on top of that, you intend to go on to action, then you become *ipso facto* a “communist,” an “anarchist,” an irresponsible and dangerous man who, in the interest of society, should be locked up as soon as possible in a prison or insane asylum. As long as you only preach your utopia, the established order is content to take note of your “dissent” with contempt or indifference. But as soon as you begin to act, the old system hastens to turn you into a public menace and a criminal, so as to be able to bury you alive before your “idealism” puts Molotov cocktails, dynamite, and rifles into the hands of the workers and the young people, who are very receptive to the idea of Utopia, which is all they are waiting for to rise up *en masse* against those who organize, profit from, and defend oppression. For no matter what the ideologists of capitalism, neocapitalism, and imperialism may say about Utopia, it is not a philosopher’s utopia: it sums up aspirations which cry out not only to be perceived and understood, but above all to be *realized*. Nor is Utopia the final point, the terminus of human evolution. On the contrary. It is only the point of departure, the beginning, the first stage of the new history which men will embark upon together once they are liberated from their present condition as niggers, as sub-men.

The worker or petty bourgeois who has one day confronted himself and become personally implicated in the unprecedented challenge which the liberation of hundreds of millions of men on the five continents represents, cannot help feeling that he is a visionary and a madman. And this is so even after the Russian, Chinese, Vietnamese, and Cuban revolutions, for we all know that these revolutions are still only first, stumbling steps. Much greater changes will have to occur if human freedom is to become not just an essence of the philosophers but an act, if it is to pass from being an ideal of the moralists to concrete existence, from desire to practice, if it is to become the individual and collective reality of life.

6

The author of this book is an idealist who, from childhood on, learned from his father to long for a better world in which the men who work anonymously from day to day—the farmers, workers, day laborers like my father—could enjoy life after having toiled so hard to subsist, to endure . . . and to perpetuate the species. Enjoy life not by getting drunk on the weekend, by “drinking up their pay,” beating their wives and children and destroying themselves in useless fits of anger, but by possessing the material and intellectual means of creating something in this world, of giving of themselves to others and of exchanging with them something other than curses, sarcasms, and humiliations.

“I wonder when we’ll be able to take it easy for a bit and enjoy life without worrying about tomorrow,” my father often said. And with a bitterness mingled with resignation, my mother would answer: “When you’re born for half a loaf, you can’t expect . . .” My mother was learning to forget all the dreams of happiness that, like all women, she had had in her youth. And she did not want to discuss fantasies with my father. What was the use? You hurt yourself by hoping. You increase your disappointments and life becomes unbearable. Better to expect nothing and take what comes, as it comes.

My father would say nothing, suppressing his hopes the way one holds back sobs. I would look into his deep, gentle eyes and read a mixture of immense kindness, silent suffering, and perhaps also grief. Sometimes he would smile, just long enough to tell me, without opening his lips, that his dreams could be realized, that one had to believe that.

My mother would complain about her headaches, the dullness of the radio broadcasts, the slovenliness of such and such a neighbor . . . while I, trying not to hear anything that was going on around me, would listen to the revolt that mounted inside me and heated my blood.

They say that silent suffering is the most terrible. (I read that in a prose poem of Baudelaire’s, I think.) I learned very early to question fate in silence. Especially on those long rainy days when it seemed to me that the whole universe had withdrawn into the depths of a swamp of misery. There, men seemed to have given up, abdicated, as

if it was their destiny to go around in circles in the slimy mud of their impotence. Rainy days soon became unbearable for me. With eyes darkened by loneliness and hunger, I would appeal to the sun. For the sun gave me back playmates and made me forget my hunger.

Life very early posed for me the questions that are hard for men to answer. It took me many years to begin to find the elements of an answer, and even more time to discover what had to be done to provide a concrete solution, a real solution, to servitude, passivity, alienation, and poverty.

My itinerary from working-class slums to the FLQ was long and tortuous. For a workingman's son, nothing in life is laid out in advance. He has to forge ahead, to fight against others and against himself, against his own ignorance and all the frustrations accumulated from father to son, he has to surmount both the oppression laid upon his class by others and his own congenital pessimism, to give his spontaneous revolt a consciousness, a reason and precise objectives.

Otherwise, he remains a nigger, he turns into a delinquent or a criminal, he consents to becoming at the age of thirty the ruin of a man . . . a bitter and disenchanting slave.

The entire experience of workers shows them that the explanation for their poverty and impotence lies in the brutal fact that there are, on the one hand, those who possess everything and, on the other, those who possess nothing. That is something they all know, they live it every day. But, they say to themselves, what can you do when you are one of those who possess nothing?

If revolt is natural to workers, hope is not. Except in times of crisis and revolution, when workers can take advantage of the weakness of the system to deal it a mortal blow, their long-enforced degradation often engenders fatalism, resignation, and even indifference to everything, including themselves.

When a "great darkness," such as characterized the Duplessis regime from 1944 to 1959, extends over a whole people, those who ask themselves questions about man's destiny are sometimes tempted to despair of others and of themselves. The triumphant reign of Stupidity seems to justify the metaphysics of the Absurd, of individual Anarchy and of Nausea. Before going through its "quiet revolution," Quebec went through the dictatorship of Stupidity; and for a long

time the Québécois struggled vainly, in anxiety and despair, like peniless prisoners who are totally ignorant of the procedures that cause them to be in prison one day and in court the next, then in prison again, without ever understanding the working of the machine that shifts them back and forth in a universe from which all light, reason, and meaning are shut out, the universe called Justice, Law and Order, the Public Interest.¹⁴

Under the reign of Duplessism, it was not easy for the Québécois to resist intoxicating themselves by reading the classics of despair. How could one give a meaning to this society of crushed and silent men? Not even the best of the oppressed knew how to turn their oppression into revolt. Everywhere there was unanimous silence, a conspiracy among all men to remain shut up in their ghettos, to die there as soon as possible and no longer have to breathe the atmosphere of submission mixed with selfishness in which practically no one dared accept the responsibility, beyond his own immediate interest, of working for the *downfall* of Stupidity!

It was as if after the years of struggle during the Depression and the war, the Québécois had become indifferent to their fate. They had no resiliency left.

At that time, a man who chose to give his life for an idea would have stirred no emotion among the mass of sluggish men. Winter had frozen the best minds. Nothing was left but day-to-day living, without a future, without passion, without reason. Once in a while—rarely—a revolt, a burst of anger here or there. But no enduring passion, no firm determination, no precise goal. God the Father governed in Quebec, and while the Québécois did not really justify that government, they did not seek to contest it either. They laughed at it; and took advantage of it “under the counter.” Political patronage provided social welfare for the disinherited and profits for the new rich who were manufactured by the regime to compete with the liberal bourgeoisie.

It seemed as if, having come through many years of black misery, the Québécois no longer attached any importance to their future, to what they called their fantasies of the old days. The only thing they looked forward to—and they didn't even really believe in that—was the American money that Duplessis dangled glittering in front of the

bishops, deputies, and petty bourgeois; and, when there was any left over, in front of the farmers or workers who promised him their votes and complicity in advance.

And yet, a few years before, these same men had often assembled to denounce the dictatorship of capital and to demand the heads of their exploiters. They had invaded the business quarter and done significant damage to the big buildings of the financiers. They had refused to go and fight to defend the interests of Rockefeller. They had hidden in the woods, armed with their rifles. They had even mobilized their wives and children to organize resistance to the military police. They had been men.

And now here they were, applauding the demagoguery of Duplessis and the vulgarities of the drunkard Camillien Houde.* The country was becoming a vast circus where if one still wanted to give a meaning to life, one had to have blind faith and commit one's inner self to a solitary hope, hard as the rocks of the Gaspé, black as the mines of Abitibi, dreary as the faces of the workers of Montreal and cold as the winter of Quebec.

Few were those who dared to believe. Nevertheless, during the war men of this country had spoken to other men of this country in a language of combat and fraternity. A language which men like my father kept in their hearts, in the hope that one day combat and fraternity would give them the homeland they did not have. Yet in those days there was war and hunger.

At the very time when war seemed to be telling men that they were wrong to be bent on living, there were workers in Quebec, as in most of the countries of the world, who were longing more than ever for a change of system.

Notes

1. While the Anglo-Americans numbered 200,000. In 1760, at the time of the English conquest, 1,500,000 Anglo-Americans mobilized their forces against 70,000 French Canadians dispersed over a vast territory.

* Camillien Houde was the mayor of Montreal during the 1940's and early 1950's. (Trans.)

2. “. . . New France sought to evolve a sounder economy than it had yet known, with its sole reliance on the fur trade. Agriculture was encouraged . . . but it did not prosper and misery was often widespread. Commerce and industry fared as badly; the fur trade passed through its customary cycles of poverty and plenty; while inflation, shipwreck, and the profiteering of French merchants kept the prices of imports high, far beyond the means of most of the colonists. Local industry was alternately encouraged and then stamped out when it interfered with French manufacturing interests, under the mercantilist policy which prevailed at court; in 1702 it was still the king’s view that ‘*The Colony of Canada is good only inasmuch as it can be useful to the Kingdom.*’ Where noncompetitive industries could be established, they were encouraged with too lavish a hand, so that they never became self-sufficient. Corruption, the shortage of manpower and capital, the difficulties of communication and transportation, and absentee direction all combined to prevent New France from developing a strong and well-rounded economy.” F. Mason Wade, *The French Canadians 1760–1945* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1955), p. 31; emphasis added.

See also the excellent study by Jean Hamelin, *Economie et société en Nouvelle-France*, published by the Presses de l’Université Laval.

As can be seen, the idyllic New France of Canon Groulx never existed outside the imagination of the apostles of theocracy and obscurantism. Moreover, it is false to picture our ancestors as Louis Héberts, professional farmers. Agriculture was developed very belatedly in Quebec, especially in the Eastern Townships . . . under the English regime! The French-Canadian seigneurs took no interest in the development of agriculture, unlike the Anglo-American colonists, who quickly grasped the fact that at this time the development of agriculture was the very foundation of the accumulation of capital, and who instituted slavery precisely in order to accelerate and increase this accumulation by the maximum exploitation of human labor. That is why a bourgeoisie rapidly developed in the United States, while in Quebec the ruling class remained poor and powerless. (The rich did not belong to the country and had come only for as long as it would take them to amass money.)

At the time of the conquest of 1760, more than one French-Canadian seigneur viewed the defeat as a kind of deliverance. These do-nothing nobles would no longer have to *answer for* the country; they would no longer have to feel responsible for its development. They could die quietly in idleness, content with the privileges that protected them from work and insecurity.

The dreams of Champlain and Talon were never realized. Under the

French regime, there existed no economic base for autonomous development. Under the English regime, the economic base (agriculture and commerce) was created and placed at the service of the Anglo-Saxon interests. With the development of banks, canals, railroads, and industry, this economic base expanded, but it continued to serve English and American interests. Today, in the era of the great multinational corporations, the economic base of development is controlled and limited by American imperialism, according to the needs of the world market—that is, according to the interests of the powerful American business bourgeoisie. Today imperialism is working hard to underdevelop the development that already exists, in order to prevent the people from building a solid economic base for the independence and social revolution they want.

That is why, in nearly all the countries dominated by imperialism, even the once powerful “national” bourgeoisies, and most of the petty bourgeoisies, are reduced to the role of policemen and lackeys of Yankee interests. And that is why, when the necessary revolutions have taken place in those countries, everything will still have to be built.

(One of my future projects will be to gather the necessary material for an economic history of Quebec.)

3. The nobles belonged for the most part to the group of privileged, idle men who formed the local ruling class (as opposed to the French merchants who were only “passing through” the colony). In reality, this ruling class had only the power to profit from the general corruption, while the people, who were reduced to the most abject poverty, did not participate in the government in any way. The ruling class was poor because misery was too widespread for the accumulation of wealth to be the basis of the social structure of the time. Apart from the merchants, the only nobles who succeeded were the Jesuits, the Sulpicians, and the priests of the Seminary of Quebec, who did not have to finance the numerous wars (against the Iroquois and the English). Besides, ever since 1659 Bishop Laval, who was a Vaticanist and believed in centralization, had been taking advantage of the absence of civil administration in the colony to make the Church the armature of the emerging nation. The missionaries were imported not so much to convert the savages as to conquer the country in the name of the Church. Four years after the arrival of this holy dictator and aristocrat, the town of Quebec alone had 150 ecclesiastics out of a total population of barely 500, or one for every three inhabitants! Even today, after three centuries, the power of the Church is still one of the greatest obstacles to the development of Quebec. This was proved yet again when the bishops undertook to torpedo Bill 60 on educational re-

form. On this subject see, among others, the recent study by Léon Dion on Quebec pressure groups and Bill 60, published in the *Cahiers de l'Institut canadien de l'éducation des adultes*, No. 1, 1966, and titled "Le Bill 60 et le public."

4. This whole period was dominated by a serious commercial and agricultural depression that affected both Europe and the colonial empires. This depression (which reached its depth in the years 1833–1838) sharpened and precipitated class conflicts in most of the countries of Europe and their overseas colonies. The French-Canadian rebellion of 1837–1838 was thus part of an international movement of revolutions which sowed panic among the ruling classes of Europe.

The economic depression of the first half of the nineteenth century had many consequences for the life of Lower and Upper Canada. Perhaps the most important of these was the massive immigration from the Irish countryside, which was being laid waste by the pitiless industrial revolution presided over by the capitalists of His Very British Majesty. It is estimated that between 1838 and 1849 England sent to Canada 428,000 Irish poor who had been dispossessed of their goods and independence. During this period thousands of French Canadians, likewise dispossessed of everything, emigrated to the United States. According to contemporary historians, twenty years after the failure of the rebellion of 1837–1838, 100,000 French Canadians had left their country. And, according to the first census of the Province of United Canada (created from the union of Quebec and Ontario), in 1851 there were 60,000 more English-speaking people in Canada than French Canadians, out of a population of about two million. Shortly after Confederation, the French Canadians would represent 31.07 percent of the Canadian population, and henceforth everything would be done to convince them that they did not form a nation but a "minority," a "cultural enclave," an "ethnic group." Exceeding five million today, they are still considered by the descendants of the conquerors of 1760, and by the Americans and most foreign observers who deign to take an interest in this curious people, as a "remnant" of medieval society, with no power and no future. Fortunately, the Québécois have a quite different view of themselves, and they firmly intend to carry out the revolution that is ripening in the cities and in the countryside, to the great despair of those who profit from the present regime and their most faithful allies, the politicians and the clergy.

5. Cartier was the only French Canadian, but the cleverest politician, in the group of Hincks, Galt, Merrit, Watkin, Keefer, and Andrews, who created the coast-to-coast railroad network for which the British North America Act was drawn up. Already in 1854–1856 and in 1861–1862 he

had protected the interests of the Grand Trunk by a piece of legislation that provided guarantees and substantial loans for the reorganization of the railroads belonging to the most important financial group in the country. That is what the taxes wrung from the workers were used for.

6. "One powerful force [in London] behind the Union Act was that of the banking firm of Baring Brothers, which had underwritten almost all the Upper Canadian securities. . . . One of the principals of this firm, Francis T. Baring, was chancellor of the exchequer in the Melbourne cabinet, and the Baring interests may have had something to do with the determination of the cabinet to shift the burden of Upper Canadian bankruptcy onto the shoulders of the prosperous lower province." F. Mason Wade, *op. cit.*, p. 225.

It can be assumed that the same phenomenon occurred again in 1867, if one considers that the Grand Trunk and Intercolonial Railway companies were controlled by British interests.

7. During the summer of 1944 a number of street fights took place in Montreal between French Canadians and the military police. The Saint-Jean-Baptiste Society of Montreal, of which Roger Duhamel was president, publicly condemned violence. "Civilized people should have other methods for finding a common ground for their different viewpoints," he wrote in *La Patrie* of June 10, 1944.

In the fall, acts of violence multiplied all across Quebec, even in Chicoutimi and Rimouski. There was more talk than ever about independence and revolution. The Rue Saint-Jacques and the "clique of colonels" were denounced on every hand.

On November 29, after a speech by André Laurendeau, several thousand French Canadians paraded through the financial district of Montreal breaking windows at the offices of the National Selective Service, the "sold-out" newspaper *Le Canada*, the Bank of Montreal, the Montreal Trust Company, and other Anglo-American businesses.

The riots spread and the English-language newspapers demanded that the demonstrations be repressed. *Le Devoir*, as was its habit, "deplored" the incidents in Montreal, Quebec, Chicoutimi, and Rimouski.

An angry crowd broke windows at the Quebec residence of Louis St. Laurent, then Canadian Minister of Justice. And eminent English Canadians recommended that machine guns be used to force the "French Pea Soups" to defend the interests of the "free world"!

8. The disturbances came to a head on August 29 and 30, 1917. Orators exhorted the crowds to clean their rifles and take up a collection to buy other arms. The police tried to break up the meetings: at least one man was killed. The wealthy home of Hugh Graham (Lord Atholstan), owner

of the *Montreal Star*, was dynamited. One Lalumière and eleven other French-Canadian workmen were held responsible for this attack and were accused of having plotted to kill Borden, Senator Beaubien, and other public men who supported conscription. The leaders of the rioters, Villeneuve, Lafortune, Côté, and Mongeau, gave their entire support to Lalumière and his companions. They were all arrested on September 12, 1917. Crowds continued to roam the streets shouting "Borden to the gallows!" and "Long live the Revolution!" and shooting their rifles into the air. Some Paris newspapers began to raise the possibility of Quebec's seceding from Canada, while Bourassa preached more sermons on "sterile violence" and sang the praises of electoralism and dialogue (from Bourassa to Pelletier, the tradition is maintained!). Which did not prevent violence from reigning from one end of Quebec to the other, even in Sherbrooke, one of the most conservative cities in the country.

In March 1918 riots broke out in Quebec. Several thousand persons poured through the city and set fire to the federal police station. The crowd went wild and sang the *Marseillaise*. They sacked the offices of the *Chronicle* and *L'Événement*, then attacked the office of the registrar of the Military Service Act and burnt it to the ground with all its records. On March 30 the army fired on the crowd, and the next day the entire city rose up. It was Easter. On the 1st of April the crowd in its turn fired on the army from rooftops, windows, snowbanks—any place that afforded cover. Five soldiers were wounded and four civilians killed. Hundreds of workers and young people were wounded and some sixty others were thrown in jail. On April 4 the federal government decreed, by ministerial order, that the rioters should be immediately drafted, the effect of which was to heighten the rioting instead of lessening it. The disturbances ended with the close of the war, but the people's bitterness never ended.

9. Trained in the classical *collèges* of the clergy, where education was based exclusively on the study of the "humanities," these petty bourgeois, stimulated by "the Irish troubles," began to promote a quasi-religious separatism without an economic program. Duplessis was able to take advantage of this to reinforce his power immediately after the war, but once firmly established he wasted little time supporting the nationalists, whom at heart he despised. He became God's gift to the Americans. In the same way, Duplessis took advantage of the clergy's admiration for Franco, Hitler, Mussolini, and especially Salazar (who had set up in Portugal the corporate regime recommended by the encyclicals) to place the bishops and curés at his mercy. Having broken the back of the nationalists, the liberals, and the "Communists," Duplessis built his power on an alliance between Religion and Finance, with a "pro-autonomy" flavor—in order

to save face for the Banana Republic that Quebec had become. His greatest delight was to provide the bishops with opportunities to come and eat out of his hand . . . when he had concluded good bargains with his American friends.

10. The Grand Inquisitor of the time, Cardinal Villeneuve, was the chief architect, along with Duplessis, of Quebec anti-Communism, the French-Canadian and Catholic version of Senator McCarthy's witch hunt.
11. On the occasion of this conflict the Archbishop of Montreal, Msgr. Charbonneau, declared: "We want social peace, but we do not want the working class to be crushed. We are more interested in man than in capital." (*Le Devoir*, May 2, 1949.) Alerted by the Rue Saint-Jacques, Duplessis persuaded Pope Pius XII to force the resignation of Msgr. Charbonneau and exile him to British Columbia.
12. When Charles Gagnon and I went on a hunger strike at the United Nations, a group of Christians from the University of Montreal demonstrated their solidarity with us. One can judge from the contents of their "declaration of solidarity" what a long way social consciousness has come in Quebec, for believers as well as nonbelievers. This declaration has been one of the greatest consolations to us during our detention in New York. Here are a few extracts from it:

"We declare our solidarity with the hunger strike undertaken by Pierre Vallières and Charles Gagnon in New York on September 26, 1966. By this we mean that we are fighting for the liberation of the workers of Quebec, and indeed against all forms of exploitation of man by man; and that we are trying to promote a more just and fraternal society through socialism. If Pierre Vallières and Charles Gagnon thought it necessary to use *violence* by organizing the new terrorist network of the FLQ, they did so advisedly. One may dispute the realism and effectiveness of this method of action. One may also approve it. . . . As one may dispute the realism of a world which 'right-thinking' people believe to be peaceful when it is steeped in the *violence* that is done to the weakest every day . . . !

"We are united in solidarity with those who are fighting against the chief enemy of Man, which at the present time is *neocapitalism* . . . and imperialism. . . .

"We are aware of the fact that our struggle in Quebec is taking place in the framework of another, much vaster struggle, that of all the clear-thinking, responsible, and fraternal men the world over, atheists or not, Christians or not, Marxists or not, who are fighting for the liberation of Man. . . ." *Le Quartier Latin*, October 24, 1966; and *Le Devoir*, October 25, 1966.

This statement was signed by believers and nonbelievers, students, workers, professors, journalists, writers, priests, and so on.

13. A. *The American blacks*: Increasingly conscious, they are becoming increasingly responsible and active. Black Power, however, is not yet a structured and ideologically defined *organization*. It is a sort of Afro-American equivalent of Quebec separatism and contains all the same shades of thinking. On the other hand, its immediate objectives are more clearly defined. They can be summed up as follows:

(1) The first aim of Black Power is to give the black majorities of certain counties, districts, or great urban centers (in 1970, blacks will be in the majority in fifty big American cities) control over economic, political, and social affairs—first of all, the affairs of the blacks themselves—by putting in force the rights which the American Constitution already guarantees to all citizens of the United States, including blacks. In the beginning, therefore, the struggle is legal, but the blacks are determined to have *all* their constitutional rights *fully* respected. And in the North of the United States no less than in the South, that is enough to sow panic among the white ruling classes, particularly among their richest members, who are almost exclusively of British stock. Nazism and all the other forms of fascism (Minutemen, John Birch Society, Ku Klux Klan, etc.) are organizing the counterattack against Black Power.

(2) That is why the second point of the Black Power program is the organization of *armed self-defense* of American black communities and of such governments as they may in time establish over counties, districts, quarters, cities, and perhaps even states. The blacks also want to take control of their schools, hospitals, playgrounds, etc., and to defend this control, weapons in hand. (There is a striking similarity between this objective and that of the Popular Liberation Committees that the FLQ wants to help organize in the cities and countryside of Quebec. See especially “Les Comités populaires de libération” in *L’Avant-Garde*, No. 2, February 1966, and my pamphlet “Qu’est-ce que le FLQ?,” 1st ed., June 1966.) Armed self-defense was organized for the first time by the black revolutionary Robert Williams, who has related his experience in the book *Negroes with Guns* (New York: Marzani and Munsell, 1962). Williams’ book, together with *The American Revolution* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1963) by the black worker and unionist James Boggs, has appeared in translation in the collection “Les Cahiers libres” of François Maspero under the title *La Révolution américaine*. A good part of the philosophy of Black Power has been drawn from the famous lectures of Malcolm X (who was assassinated in 1965). The major speeches of Malcolm X have been published by Merit Publishers (New York) under the title *Malcolm X Speaks*.

(3) In addition, Black Power demands that black leaders democratically elected by blacks to defend the interests of blacks be given the right to represent the twenty million Afro-Americans at the international level. That means that if the whites refuse to apply the majority rule, which they themselves invented, the blacks will simply get along without them. And that is the profound meaning of what is called "black nationalism." The blacks are increasingly refusing integration, because *integration means the subjugation* of the black majorities of many counties, districts, and cities in the United States to rich, white minorities. (Thus, in Lowndes County, Alabama, the blacks constitute nearly 85 percent of the population, and yet in the elections of November 8, 1966, there were in that county as many whites as blacks who had the right to vote! That's integration.) Constitutionally the blacks have the same rights as the whites, but in concrete reality they do *not* have the same freedoms. And when the rich whites cannot crush the blacks with laws, they assassinate them. Personally, I believe that in no civilized country does one find so much violence and hate as in the United States. And this hate-filled violence comes exclusively from the powerful American capitalists.

Since the violent death of Malcolm X in 1965, the most influential and popular leader of the Black Power movement has been the president of SNCC (Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee), Stokely Carmichael, who is only twenty-five years old. He has already been in prison several times, but he has not yet been assassinated! Working with poor blacks of the rural South, Harlem, Atlanta, or Los Angeles, Carmichael has just launched a campaign against the drafting of blacks, whom the Pentagon sends to Vietnam by the thousands to murder innocent people and be murdered in turn in the diabolical war engendered by imperialism. A great number of American officials are now demanding Carmichael's head.

Black Power is being organized in a climate of riots, bombings, and assassinations and is a strong expression of the class struggle that is developing in Uncle Sam's country and threatening its system. But while Black Power and the Black Panthers—the political party to which it has given birth in the South—are organizing the blacks against the white capitalists, their "nationalism" has a strong socialist coloration and is in increasingly radical opposition to the black bourgeoisie which, moreover, has just publicly condemned Black Power. Of course, there are conflicts of interest within the Black Power movement, but dominated and led as it is by the most progressive (and youngest) elements of the black "nation," "class," or "community," it has every chance of creating, in the near future, the conditions for a revolution of unprecedented

scope in the United States. For Black Power, which is a very popular mass movement, one which mobilizes the majority of the most exploited citizens of North America, is developing a strategy which cannot fail to radicalize class struggle in the United States and lead the millions of poor people in this, the richest country in the universe, to rise in revolt. That is why it is 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.

More than one petty bourgeois in the black organizations dreads the approaching upheaval, but feeling it to be inevitable, is forced either to follow the movement or to ally himself with all the Martin Luther Kings of the black bourgeoisie and of Lyndon B. Johnson's Democratic Party; in short to prostitute himself to the organizers and defenders of colonization at home and colonization of the third world, in the name of "non-violence"! Today it is no longer Birmingham—that is, the integration of buses, snack bars, and bowling alleys (what a revolution!!)—that symbolizes the fundamental aspirations of the twenty million black workers and young people, but Watts—that is, armed violence, the disappearance of the slums and ghettos, the occupation of factories by the workers, and so forth.

The black organizations that feel most responsible for their class are CORE (Congress of Racial Equality) and SNCC. These organizations, which were originally "nonviolent," are becoming increasingly conscious of what is required to liberate the blacks and are learning in daily struggle *with* the workers that it will be necessary to employ energetic and, consequently, illegal means to transform not only the unbearable condition of the blacks but the whole of American society, which is completely perverted by capitalism and its terrible social consequences: racism, poverty, unemployment, crime, delinquency, etc. With fire and sword, the blacks are regenerating North America and giving back to man what belongs to man by wrenching it from the grasp of the businessmen, the Johnsons, the McNamaras, and the Kennedys (Bobby, Ted, John F., and Co.).

As for the "white" organizations, those that are most aware and most concretely *committed* understood from the beginning that Black Power and "black nationalism," being fundamentally and spontaneously anti-capitalist, were therefore not "racist." They saw at once that the blacks were not hostile to cooperation on a basis of *absolute equality* but to the white paternalism that constantly humiliated them—the paternalism of the Marxists as well as the liberals. The blacks loathe that sort of paternalism, and rightly so, but they willingly agree to cooperate with the revolutionary whites, in particular Youth Against War and Fascism, the DuBois

Clubs (a mixed organization that includes both whites and blacks but is predominantly white), Students for a Democratic Society, the Progressive Labor Party, and the Young Socialist Alliance. All of these organizations are young, dynamic, open, and in ideological agreement with Marxism. They differ among themselves only as to means of action. Apart from Youth Against War and Fascism and Students for a Democratic Society, their members still take refuge too often in the clear conscience that comes from giving the blacks "moral" support. But they are all in the process of becoming radicalized and their agitation, like their propaganda, has increasing influence in the cities of the North and the poor rural areas of the South.

The "white" publications which support and even contribute to the development of Black Power are as follows:

(a) *Monthly Review* (of international reputation) which, together with the French review *Partisans* (François Maspero), contributes the most to the renewal of revolutionary thought and to the historical, dialectical analysis of the development of the class struggle throughout the world. By their profound economic analyses, Baran, Sweezy, Huberman, Gunder Frank, and the others are successfully carrying on the work undertaken more than a century ago by Marx and Engels. Together with the *Partisans* group, they are certainly the intellectuals of the capitalist world who are closest to the revolutionaries of the entire world, the most useful to them on the level of revolutionary ideology and strategy and the most listened to and respected by the movements struggling against oppression. (b) *The Partisan*, published by Youth Against War and Fascism, a review more accessible to the masses and, like *Monthly Review*, open to the problems of revolutionary movements the world over. (c) *The Young Socialist*, published monthly by the group of the same name. (d) *Challenge*, the newspaper of the Progressive Labor Party, published in English and Spanish (for the Puerto Ricans and Dominicans "in exile" in New York).

B. *The Puerto Ricans and the Mexicans*: The Puerto Ricans of New York, of whom there are at least a million and whose numbers are growing very rapidly, constitute an increasingly dangerous mass for the capital of "free enterprise" where everything is the "greatest in the world." Unemployment, slums, disease, and ignorance bring them together with the blacks in the same struggle for liberation. Besides, the majority of them live near Harlem, and as nearly all the Puerto Ricans are brown or black, they are coming more and more to form a single community with the Afro-Americans—especially since they share the same living conditions as their Harlem brothers. (A fact to be underlined: in the Manhattan House of Detention, one of the biggest prisons in the state of New York, where Charles

Gagnon and I have been held since September 28, a minimum of 80 per cent of the prisoners are black or Puerto Rican. The remaining 20 percent are chiefly Greeks, Italians, Jews, Poles, *et al.*, in short "white niggers." The subordinate prison personnel are in great majority black, while the superior officers—captains and so on—are almost exclusively white. Personally, since I have been here I have seen only one black captain . . . and God knows we see enough captains! They are the only "visitors" we have inside the cell blocks.)

The Puerto Ricans, to whom should be added a few thousand Dominicans, Haitians, Japanese, *et al.*, who live in the same district, have a few newspapers and magazines of their own. But unfortunately, these newspapers and magazines are quite conservative, although not so much so as the Yankee publications. There are a few small groups of revolutionaries (made up chiefly of refugees from Santo Domingo), but as yet nothing comparable to the black organizations. At first glance, it seems that the Puerto Ricans lack the "rediscovered pride" and determination which animate the struggle of the blacks. They seem more completely crushed, more disoriented. Many thousands of them do not speak a word of English, unlike the blacks, who all speak English. Consequently, they are more withdrawn into themselves and more vulnerable to the despotic nature of the system. The prisons of New York are filled with *innocent* Puerto Ricans who have no means of defense. The blacks, in general, do better; not because they are more intelligent, but because despite the centuries of slavery their community is better equipped, because they are more numerous, and because they have rediscovered their collective pride. They have a class consciousness which the Puerto Ricans have not yet sufficiently developed. But the struggle for independence and revolution going on in Puerto Rico makes them more aware every day, and their anti-imperialism is becoming more violent. A number of black and white organizations are presently contributing to the awakening of a Puerto Rican class consciousness that later will spontaneously integrate itself with a broader class consciousness, a class consciousness that is international and multiracial.

As for the Mexican-Americans of Texas and California, they are organized in agricultural workers' unions. In 1966 their demands took on unprecedented scope. Forming a population of a few million disinherited workers, stripped of everything, underpaid and enslaved to seasonal labor, they have begun to invade the luxurious cities of the "new rich" by the thousands. A number of strikes and demonstrations, directed jointly by union leaders and priests, have been repressed by the "Western-style" reigning Order, which did not hesitate to have Kennedy assassinated and

which is the brains and heart of the white, millionaire, extreme Right. The "Kennedy" men, who are not very firmly established in this region, are trying to take advantage of the discontent of the Mexican-American "poor" who are beginning to imitate the black "poor." It is possible that the Mexican-Americans will continue to be deceived by the Democratic Party, because their struggle is only beginning and an ideology corresponding to their true interests does not seem to have been formulated yet. It is possible that they will be fooled by a Martin Luther King or a Bobby Kennedy (who is only a fascist disguised as a liberal and who is taking advantage of his brother's "canonization" by capitalist opinion to attempt to succeed him). But the recent and current history of the "decolonization of the American black" (that is the title of a book by Daniel Guérin, published by Editions de Minuit, Paris), demonstrates that all the Martin Luther Kings that capitalism can manufacture, now and in the future, are—like the system itself—not strong enough to resist the will of the majority of men, to resist their vital need for concrete freedom. The Mexicans of Texas and California will also finally come to understand that this freedom is not to be found by marking an X on a ballot.

C. *The "white niggers"*: Although their unions are rotten to the core, although most of their parties—including the Communist Party—are conservative and accept the rules of the democratic (i.e., legal) game, the workers, students, intellectuals, and youth of the United States are beginning to recognize the true nature of the system, its *arbitrary* character, which is called freedom of the individual. (Which individuals? The rich, of course, those who can "buy" anything they want, even the right to kill the weak, to jail them, exploit them, etc.; those who regularly spend millions to get themselves elected so as to be able to "democratically" impose on the people laws which will enable them to make even more millions, and to manufacture wars—in Vietnam, the Congo, Santo Domingo etc.—in order to make billions out of the oppression they give themselves the right to exercise over three-quarters of humanity . . . in the name of the Rights of Man, the United Nations, world peace, the great Kennedy, Saint Paul VI, God the Father, and General Motors!) The war in Vietnam, the bloody repression of the Dominican revolution, the intervention of the CIA in Indonesia, in Algeria, and in Brazil in 1965, the struggle of the blacks, the growing number of spontaneous strikes, the widespread and growing unemployment, poverty, delinquency, etc., the increasingly frequent intervention of the State Department in the private lives of members of the opposition, the rising cost of living, etc., are turning the white "American Way of Life" into a veritable hell. Revolt is rumbling among the whites. Housewives boycott the supermarkets; union members go out

on wildcat strikes; young people ally themselves with the blacks against the Southern and Northern racists, publicly tear up their draft cards and other symbols of American imperialism, burn Johnson in effigy and choose to go to jail rather than murder innocent Vietnamese. The unemployed and the poor whites, say thirty million Americans, are still unorganized. But out of the present social agitation there should arise a revolutionary organization capable of reaching this mass which now has no voice or power but which, if it rose up united with the blacks, Puerto Ricans, and Mexican-Americans, would soon rid humanity of its worst enemies. Let us hope that the "New Left" in America will soon recognize the urgency of building a revolutionary organization and will devote less energy to publishing seventy-five newspapers that have undeniable value . . . but not the value of a people in arms. (It is interesting to note that most of the leaders of the progressive "white" movements are of non-British origin; they are the descendants of the generations of immigrants from whom the big bourgeoisie, which is of British stock, has drawn its wealth by exploiting their labor to the maximum and by rigorously applying the social philosophy of Adam Smith: give the worker a subsistence, that is, just enough to enable him to go on producing surplus value as long as possible for the profit of the Wall Street birds of prey.)

To that Left which is accustomed to orderly offices and "anti-revisionist" conventions, the day when the whites will take up arms, join with blacks and other minorities, and march on Washington seems far off. But personally, I believe that the American working class is ripe for revolution. Although, like every working class in the world, it is poor in resources and weak in hope, it lacks neither courage nor ingenuity. But since the Left neglects its responsibilities and is still content to wait, it may be up to the black revolutionaries to give the "white niggers" the opportunity and the means of making the revolution, notwithstanding all the difficulties presented by such an undertaking in a society contaminated by racism. But the economic interests of the workers, whatever the color of their skin, always win out in the end, overcoming both racism and religious prejudice. The poor economic health of the American people in this last third of the twentieth century leads me to believe that the American revolution is already on the march.

14. To be convinced of this, one need only read or reread the Québécois literature of the 1950's.