

Québec 70



Stanley Ryerson is a Marxist historian and resides in Montreal. His latest book, 'Unequal Union' is about to be translated into French. He is presently writing a book on Canadian nationalism.

The following, is a transcript of part of a talk he gave at the conference on Quebec nationalism, 'The Other Solitude', held last June at Glendon College.

I'd like to talk about the unchanging elite structures in Quebec. Although there are changes going on in Quebec, and they are terrifically important, it would be a massive illusion to think that the 'révolution tranquille' which was not so 'tranquille' was a revolution.

Or that the ancient elites whose background goes back to a gentlemen's agreement called the Quebec Act, have been overthrown by an insurgent people.

The de-mystification of 'la révolution tranquille' is in a sense relating to the problem of de-mystifying a certain aura of publicity that we experience - for example, a candidate for the prime ministership mingled with shoppers in plazas. That suggestion of participation was perhaps intended to imply that things were really changing - even though Dominion stores continued to be owned by Argus Corporation which in turn is

controlled by Edward Plunkett Bayview Avenue.

While there is fermentation, I think my argument would be that the block of 'la classe mercantile' elites which joined forces in the period, is still in power and operating within the framework of the system.

The kind of changes that have taken place in the direction of urbanization from the rural to the urban Quebec now has been to form a more concentrated urban per cent urban. This is a social modernization with the streamlining of education and business institutions within the framework of a business system.

What is new and what is changing in the structure of Quebec has basically been a social modernization has come a question of the social order, and the ancient social order established in 1760, modified in 1837 after the 1837 rebellion, and 1867. This has taken place under the banner of 'examen de conscience' in Canada, which was precipitated by the 'révolution tranquille' in Quebec.

Whether the problems in Quebec are in the sense of 'la nation Québécoise' or 'la nation qui a sa vie et son être en français' is a question of departure.

Two anglophones and their elites and dissenting

Evelyn Dumas has been a frequent contributor to 'Canadian Dimension', 'Le Devoir', and the 'Montreal Star'. She has been on the Quebec labour scene for eight years, and knows her field well.

The following is an edited version of a talk she gave the same Quebec conference, from which the above Ryerson transcript was taken.

The word nationalism in relation to Quebec is a very confusing term. It runs all the way from the FLQ terrorist to the person who puts Quebec first and foremost. This confusion over what nationalism means is a major political problem today.

Someone who defines the problems of Quebec in terms of the majority there being French Canadian has one step into the 'house of nationalism'.

The nationalism in the trade unions is confused by the fact that there are two legitimate unions - the Quebec Federation of Labour and the Confederation of National Trade Unions (CSN). The latter defines itself as a coast to coast organization. In fact they are operating almost exclusively in Quebec.

These organizations have several levels within these groups. There is the top leadership who act as official spokesmen; there's the staff level; the federation level and finally, there are the workers.

If it's one thing that I have learned from eight years of reporting on the labour scene, it's that no one has the right to say what the workers think. They make up close to 80 per cent of the population and it is fair to

assume that there are as many problems among them as among other groups. We must not lump them all into one group.

Looking at different levels of nationalism, I think we should look at the powerful unionising drive which included a great number of workers which is something new. In Canada, 10 per cent of the white collar workers in Quebec, teachers, hospital workers were organized for the first time. These organizations were revitalized.

The civil service leaders have put more emphasis on nationalist blue collar workers. So, when we talk of nationalism Quebec as a whole, they are covering over the active groups as Hydro Quebec and the teachers.

On the part of the blue collar workers, they tended to be quite wary of nationalist nationalism had been more of a slogan - and his political capital of reputation in Ottawa.

So, there was a natural reluctance to use any form of nationalist nationalism. The Quebec Federation of Labour, those people such as Emile Bouchard, to achieve what is now taken for granted, were branded as separatists. This was taken for granted, and is an irony of that has occurred.

Evelyn Dumas