

Quebec sait faire l'indépendance

Par
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Excalibur - Dave Cooper

The problem in Quebec is that there is a new generation and more than a new generation I think it's a new humanity. This new generation is no more complex than the old one — the people of my age, who didn't go to school and who were afraid of politics.

Those who were born during the war or after the war didn't starve like their fathers and forefathers. They went to school and now they are at the university — most of them. And they want to run their own show.

They think that Quebec is upside down and they believe that we are living under an economic dictatorship with a forefront of political democracy, and that the people in Ottawa, like those in Queen's Park or in Quebec City are a bunch of puppets, run by the United States of America.

We want a radical change in society. Either we'll do it with arms or as I am — working in the labor movement. The way the Confederation of National Trade Unions is built up there are 13 professional federations who bargain. And then in each of 20 districts of the province of Quebec there is the Central Council — what we call the second front or the political front.

In Montreal, for instance, we decided we would cooperate with every movement, whether they are a revolutionary movement or a *protestateur* or *contestateur* — this is our policy. We work them and try to help them with money when we can — even if we don't go along with all their opinions or their philosophy or their ideology. There are 67,000 workers affiliated with the Montreal Central Council.

Kicked off board

I was kicked out of the board of directors of the CNTU and then I was reelected three times in two months and now they have made up their mind that I am going to stay there.

In the meantime I went to jail a few times. I wanted to see the new jail in Montreal — it's a very nice place. People there are very nice and they are far better than the people in the courthouse.

I was accused of sedition by my friend Remi Paul. Remi Paul, when he was a candidate for Mr. Diefenbaker in '56 was helped as campaign manager by Adrien Racand, a former leader of the Nazi Party in Quebec before the war.

The sedition charge was because I said that if Bill 63 went through, the new generation wouldn't be as patient and as cowardly as the former generation, and that the English schools and the English universities would be dynamited or plasticized or something of the kind.

I don't think that the new generation will stand what the other generations have stood in Quebec. They want to live as French people and they want to run their own show.

I think that the basic instinct of liberty is just as strong as the sexual instinct — which is a very good thing. You are born with it or you are not born with it. Whenever you are born with the instinct of liberty and with the sexual instinct then you are a complete human being and you can get very far.

What we are trying to do at the Montreal Central Labor Council is to try and get more solidarity among the organized workers and with the working class. We don't take the labor movement as the working class — we think that it's only a part of the labor movement. Labor organization is only a part of it. And we still think that this is a people's organization and this is why we work in it.

We will this year change our declaration of principles and I think that it will be against capitalism — we want to get rid of capitalism as fast as possible. Whether we'll be Marxists or we won't be Marxists I don't know. Some of my friends say I'm a Catholic and others say I'm a Marxist. Maybe I'm neither a good Catholic, nor a good Marxist.

But we are fed up with capitalism. We want to run our own show and we want an economic democracy, a social democracy and an industrial democracy. This is why we are organizing political action committees in the various locals and in the various districts. Our main occupation at the Montreal Central Labor Council is to get the workers together and to organize political education and to make them more politically conscious.

The same people

Some people say it's not the work of a labor union to be politicized or to make politics but we think that any time we want to do anything we hit the government, we hit the labor minister. Whenever we want to bargain for the hospital employees or the school teachers or the public servant or the municipality workers, we are always faced with the same people, the same government, and all the same judiciary apparatus. I think the workers are becoming more and more conscious of that.

We did not organize the labor party, because we want the workers to decide for themselves what kind of party they want. Some of them are joining the Parti Québécois and I think it will go more left. M. Levesque (Parti Québécois leader Rene Levesque) is a very respectable fellow. He is more honest than other politicians but I don't think he is a socialist and I don't think he will ever be a socialist, and his party will not become a socialist party.

We, call us *separatistes* or *independentistes*, are more and more convinced that there must be a new deal between Quebec and Canada. We have to start all over again or else nothing will go on in a few years from now. There is not much interest for Ottawa in the province of Quebec and there is not much interest from the workers' part — not only from the students' part. When the CNTU says that it is a Canadian movement from coast to coast it's just more folly — because it's not true. It's a French Canadian movement.

The story of the labor leaders from the CLC or the CNTU that French Canadian workers have no different aspirations than the boys of Vancouver or Toronto or anywhere else in Canada is a damn stupidity. It's not true. There are lots of workers who are *independentistes* because they don't see their way out otherwise.

We want, for instance, to see the Quebec government, the Liberals, and the minister of labor, who was elected by members of the CNTU in Shawinigan.

Well, the workers are very well organized in the pulp and paper and chemical industries. They had elected people three or four times against the regime of Maurice Duplessis and had been fighting against the Duplessis regime. Then this guy was in power as minister of labor.

Passed the buck

We went to see him with a brief of 64 pages about unemployment all over the province in every industry and every district of the province. He took the brief and said: "This is a matter for Ottawa."

Then we got the brief translated, because we were going to Ottawa, where it is bilingual. So we got it translated into English and Mr. Diefenbaker (then-prime minister John Diefenbaker) looked at the brief and he said:

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There was a meeting of the ILO, International Labor Organization, in Ottawa. I was supposed to go there but I said, what the hell, why should I go there. Canada is not signing an international agreement because labor legislation is under the jurisdiction of Quebec. And Quebec is not signing any international labor agreement because it is not in its jurisdiction to sign international agreements. So they look like a bunch of monkeys.

The labor movement tries to deal with the capitalist government. Sometimes they don't, such as when they were asked to limit the increase of wages to fight against inflation.

Well, everybody knows that during inflation periods the prices are going up by elevator and the wages are going up by the stairs, and you get kicked in the pants or in the face when you try to get up the stairs. Everything is controlled, everywhere. Food and everything. Just look into the books in Ottawa and you will find that every product or every commodity in Canada is controlled.

It's the same thing in the United States. Sixty-five per cent of the prices are controlled. So what the hell is there for the workers to say. So why the hell should the workers say that they won't take a share of the cake.

But we don't want only to take a share of the cake. We want to make our own cake. Maybe you like mince pie, but we like apple pie. Then maybe if we are stupid and maybe if our standard of living will go lower, then will be the time to have toilet paper with flowers and perfume. So what will you use the Gazette and the Star for?

The newspapers and the television, and even the CBC — their job is to inform the people. They try to have the people think what is good for capitalism, for private enterprise, for a very small minority which is running Canada from outside Canada. Maybe the people of Ontario or the rest of Canada aren't bothered by that, but we are concerned about it.

Maybe it's just because we are just out from the woods, but we want to run our show. And if somebody is not satisfied or

not pleased with that, we don't give a damn.

We are too near the United States to be like the Europeans, or even like some of the socialist people in Europe, to be hypnotized by the United States.

Whenever a kid has an electric train he is not eager to get another one. He's seen one. He can go without it. But when you have never had an electric train, then you want an electric train, even if you are a grown-up.

The population of Canada knows about the gadget of United States. They can do without it. So we are not afraid of the threat that our standard of living will be lowered. It cannot be worse than it is now. 250,000 unemployed people, 100,000 in Montreal. The municipal authorities have destroyed something like 24,000. They built up an international Expo, but they were not able to build 1,000 houses in Montreal.

There is no money for housing and there will be less money for housing on account of the rate of interest. It's the same thing for education and it's the same thing for health care. But they still steal you and they steal us with automobile insurance and all kinds of gadgets.

So we're building a political action committee and we said that we would not cooperate with the municipal, the provincial or the federal authorities. This is our policy and the members of the CNTU in Montreal agree with that. Some of the officers of the CNTU don't like it very much, but I don't think they can do anything about it. Furthermore I'm quite sure that the labor organizations, the unions, are able to make a contribution to our revolution that will get rid of capitalism as fast as possible with the cooperation of the new generation.

The Central Labor Council discussed what was going on in St. Leonard, where the fight started over a French school instead of an English school. The discussion went on for two years before we took a stand as a labor organization, and then there was another demonstration where the municipal police of St. Leonard, the municipal police of Montreal on the border of St. Leonard, the provincial police and the federal police let some people throw stones.

Enough is enough

So we decided that we were fed up with that kind of stuff and that the people would have the right to hold a meeting whenever they see fit for whatever they see fit.

When I was out of jail on bail I said we would keep on with the same tradition of the labor movement. Maybe for a while the labor movement was not militant enough but I think that it is the workers who are willing to fight and I don't think that we can make the revolution with the unemployed people.

I think that the people to be the vanguard of the revolution against capitalism in Quebec are the people in the labor movement who have been fighting against Alcan or General Motors or any other big corporation and who have won the fight there.

It's the same thing with the farmers. The farmers are progressive people. They know the price of their product. They have to bargain with capitalist firms. They have to buy their chemical products and

their seed from international trusts, so they know the score alright.

And sometimes they know the score better than the workers. Because it's their own product, their own work, and they know how difficult it is to get a fair price for their product. So they are not against the new generation. So what more do we want?

I think the situation is very good. You may not like it the way it went on in Quebec with Bill 63 but we said that if we are in the middle of 200-million English-speaking people in North America there is no chance to take. We've got to take every security measure for our language.

Or else we should be honest enough to tell the new generation to make their own way in English. Because if you are *unilingual* English you go in front of a bilingual person with the same university degree. The Bi-Bi commission and all other investigations have proved that.

We want a country

But this is not our main problem. It's not only a matter of making more money but we want to have the feeling that we have a country and we don't want to disturb anybody. We've been tolerant. We've been patient and we've been cowardly long enough that nobody should be afraid that they will be pushed around in Quebec. And whether they are afraid or not is their own problem.

We have decided that we will have a country. A country of our own that we will run the way we want, dealing with everybody, not only North America, but Asia, Eastern Europe and Western Europe, which we're not able to do now.

The people who are exploiting the forests of Quebec and the forests of Ontario don't want to take any market in Asia. We could sell as much paper to China as we are selling wheat. They don't like it. They don't want to. They'll do anything. They'll sell napalm to the United States to sell in Asia.

We don't like the system and we don't like the way Canada is run, whether it is M. Trudeau — I went to school with him — whether it is Jean Marchand, a former leader of the CNTU, we think they are in a capitalist outfit and they are puppets of the American dictatorship, who is killing more people every day, more scientifically than ever anybody in the world including Stalin or Mussolini or Hitler. In Latin America — stealing them. And this is a part of our standard of living, and we don't like that either.

We don't think that our standard of living should be made by starving people and killing them, stealing their natural resources and refusing to help them when we could and reimburse them of what we have stolen them. So this is the way we think, and whether you like it or not, I'm sorry, but I can't do anything about it.

Whether you are willing to go along with us — this is your problem too. I don't think that we have to wait for the rest of Canada or the United States to have a socialist government run by French Canadian or Indians with white faces in the Quebec reserve.

This is an abridged transcript of a speech delivered by Michel Chartrand to the annual conference of Canadian University Press in December, 1969. Chartrand is chairman of the Montreal branch of the Confederation of National Trade Unions and an active Quebec independentist.