

# Trudeau's Federalism in the C.Y.C.

Radicalism smashed in English Canada — Used in Quebec  
by Skip Hamlin, as told to  
Ron Thompson of Canadian University Press

(Skip Hamlin has been a volunteer working with the Company of Young Canadians in community organizing in the CYC's only project in the Maritimes. He is now an elected member of the governing council of the company. The story comes out of a discussion between him and Thompson, after the meeting of the council in Ottawa at the height of the crisis begun by the administration of the city of Montreal, calling for an investigation of the company's activities in Quebec.

The story he tells sheds much light on the relationship between the internal problems of the company and the relationship of the activities of the federal government towards the company in Quebec and the rest of the country.)

The Company of Young Canadians is in the prime minister's pocket and that's where it's likely to stay.

The public, and that includes the left in this country, have been completely misinformed about what happened, and is happening, in Montreal. The permanent council of the CYC and the federal government have completely white-washed the situation there.

This may seem strange given the fact that there are separatists in the company and the PM is a federalist — it might seem it would be better for him to use this opportunity to get rid of it.

What is necessary is to understand how the company fits into Trudeau's particular philosophy of federalism.

A federal presence in Quebec is more important than anything else, especially in areas not constitutionally federal, such as health, welfare and housing — areas in which CYC volunteers, doing community organizing can 'legitimately' work.

Secondly, the PM seems dedicated to as near a 50-50 split as he can achieve between French and English Canada. The company is the first to come close to that.

Nearly fifty per cent of the company's work is in Quebec. What we've seen in the last year is an increase in funds, an increase in personnel, an increase in freedom to do what they want in the province.

That includes radicals in Quebec — separatists. Radicals in English Canada are uptight because it drains resources from what was going on in the rest of the country.

An important corollary to what's happening with the CYC in Quebec — radicals in white English Canada are leaving the company. They're leaving for two reasons: one, resources are being taken from them; two, they are being harrassed by officials in the company.

In the process, what this accomplishes is a split between radicals in Quebec and in English Canada.

The only volunteers staying on in English Canada are "social-worker" types — on projects that are not radical, but as liberal as anyone could imagine.

An example of the kind of harrassment that's bringing this about would be the case of Jim Littleton, who has been continuously on the staff of the CYC longer than anyone else, and who has probably been more closely identified with the left in English Canada than anyone else in the company, and (this is important) who has personally been actively involved in opposition to Claude Vidal.

Vidal is the executive director of CYC, and has been for the last year.

Allen Clark, who had been director, threatened to resign a number of times during his term over government intervention in the company, like the investigation into David Dapoe because of his involvement in anti-Vietnam work.

Rival left and right wing groups had grown in the company in Quebec. The right threatened at that time to publicly reveal during the election campaign there were separatists in the CYC in Quebec unless the government got rid of Martin Beliveau, a separatist, and then, Quebec head of the CYC.

When Gerard Pelletier told Clark to fire Beliveau, Clark finally did resign and Beliveau along with him.

Stewart Goodings was acting director for six months while they looked for a new director. When it became clear that Vidal was the government choice, people looked into his back-ground.

They discovered Vidal was the last person we wanted in the company — a professional bureaucrat-administrator — formerly principal of l'Ecole des beaux-arts in Montreal, where a two-year strike by students won nothing from him. The teachers union was down on him too; he just wasn't the man for the company.

So Littleton organized a protest against his appointment from within the CYC. Volunteers sent letters and telegrams asking that Goodings be appointed permanent director. And even after Vidal was appointed Jim made an attempt to talk Pelletier out of it.

It was over Vidal's appointment that volunteers in the company came to Ottawa from all over to protest the appointment and demand, two years after the company had been formed, that the permanent council be elected by the volunteers and the appointed provisional council be removed.

That was last December. It wasn't until July that the

10 elected members of council were chosen by the volunteers; even then, the government delayed appointing their 5 members to the council until October.

In the meantime, Vidal had gone about his cleanup. He did it bureaucratically, always claiming that he wasn't making the decisions, but was acting on directions from the 'interim' provisional council.

To a degree that was true. Since the company was admittedly pretty loose when Vidal came in and he had to set his own ground rules, the council had been willing to let him do what he wanted. They were tired of the job, and many of them had already retired.

He got rid of the oldest and most radical project in the company, the white project in North West Ontario; effectively strangled the project in Cape Breton and virtually eliminated Littleton.

For Littleton, he invented a 'secret meeting' of the personnel committee of the 'interim' provisional council, which he said had decided to abolish Jim's program department — responsible for planning projects all over the company.

When Jim went to the press with the story in July, he was suspended without even severance pay.

That decision was later reversed by the permanent council at the beginning of October, but Vidal decided the council was 'unconstitutional' and refused to allow Jim into the office or use the company phone.

Challenged by the council, he refused to obey — and they backed down, saying Jim was reinstated but on "an enforced leave of absence": forbidden to work or speak to the press.

The act which formed the company says the council shall govern the company through the executive director, but through their actions the council effectively admitted the relevance of Vidal's position.

Vidal defied the council and won — the council effectively denied their own power to govern.

What happened with the project in Northwest Ontario is a whole story in itself. Similarly with Cape Breton project. But maybe they can be quickly described.

In Northwestern Ontario, the company had first worked among the Indians. The plan from the start had been that eventually there would be Indians who could take over the work in that area and the whites would move into different work, splitting the project into two.

This was accomplished by the time Vidal came into office. The Indians were working in community organizing, putting out an Indian language newspaper, and working with a mobile radio station that broadcast from different communities.

The whites moved into other work they had already begun; organizing around the American plans to divert the arctic watershed into the Great Lakes to supply American cities, and the planned Mid-Canada Corridor.

One of the volunteers on the project had submitted a plan and budget which Vidal told him were only a formality to go to the provisional council. But three days before the council was to meet, Vidal wrote a letter to him, saying he had no confidence in his administrative ability and could't endorse the plan.

Although the plans had been made and given tacit approval, and arrangements made to hire people, the decision of the council was that the Northwest Ontario project would be only the Indian project. Anything the whites got would be leftovers from the Indian project.

That caused real splits and tensions between the two projects. The whites were uptight about being a drain on the Indian project, and, to the extent Vidal had engineered it that way, it was true.

By the time the elected councillors and the interim executive council met and declared a moratorium on the project, most of them had already decided to leave on the basis of a letter from Vidal accepting their threatened resignations.

In all the delay, with nothing being done, he was able to take things into his own hands. Vidal's final touch was to send only half-pay to everyone, even the Indian project, after the moratorium had been decided on.

Similar kinds of bureaucratic hassling by Vidal, or his aides in Ottawa, have virtually incapacitated the Cape Breton project. Again, too long a story, it can only be sketched.

Delays were frequent in everything from regular paychecks to action on approving transportation requests.

There were constant attempts to drive a wedge between staff and volunteers on the project, by refusing to honor purchases approved by the staff person who had signing power, or taking money off the pay of the volunteer involved.

People were paid as little as \$20 or \$30 a month, and the blame was laid on the staff person. Threatened court action against the company stopped that practise, but pay was still frequently two or three weeks late.

Vidal and his aids constantly used every bureaucratic obstacle they could find.

One volunteer hired by the project had his pay cut off when, after he had worked some time on the project, it was discovered letters or recommendation were not in.

Phone calls made from Ottawa to people in the com-

munity where the volunteer had lived all his life, checking up on him, created mistrust in the community over the work he was now doing.

All this was necessary from Vidal's point of view — here again was a project of the kind it was 'dangerous' to have the company involved in — radical work among the white working class.

The Cape Breton project was on the surface no different from other projects in community organizing. Their first victory was a sewer for the town of Sydney Mines, after 20 years of raw sewage.

The difference was that the struggle for that sewer had been used as a way of showing people in the community that they could organize and get what they wanted. The extension of it was a project that was beginning to make links between the community and the radical local of the United Mine Workers.

This was over so benign a project as clearing a piece of wasteland owned by the mine-owners, now the federal government. But there are clear dangers to the status quo in the maritimes when work is done making links between a community and a union local, nick-named the 'red local' because it had elected communists to the executive.

There are also dangers when a tenants' association attempts to organize, not just on a local level, but for the whole of Cape Breton. That's an explosive potential in an area where the amount of slum-landlordism, the age of the houses are so high.

The economic deprivation, the total severity of the economic reality mean community organizing in that area, which has a long history of militant working class struggle, verges on basic economic revolution.

The same kind of harassment that hit the Northwest Ontario and Cape Breton projects has not been the case in the more liberal projects in white English Canada.

Paychecks coming once three days late to the Calgary project was a surprise that caused real irateness among the volunteers there. But the tenants' association there is not as radical; the lateness was just a mistake.

There has been no harassment of the freeschool project in Vancouver, nor in the B.C. post-release center, which does rehabilitation for Indians coming out of prison. This doesn't mean such work shouldn't be done only it isn't really working for social change, and the CYC shouldn't be doing it.

In Ontario there is a project working on growing food without soil... presumably it's for social change: 'if you can grow food in the bathtub, you become independent of the society.'

Or there is the project in the Okanogan where an artist was demonstrating how to work 'for social change through painting.'

In short, the projects in English Canada among whites an artist was demonstrating how to work 'for social change through painting.'

In short, the projects in English Canada among whites that do nothing, or are into something 'wingy', get support — those that are into anything radical are quashed.

Yet radicals, and that means separatists, in Quebec projects are not hassled — that's partly because we flagellate ourselves with liberal self-guilt over "Canada's special problem" — nor are those with Indian workers, for the same reason.

Everything in Quebec has done no harm to the federal government.

The whole uproar is not unfunctional to the company because it's functional to the PM. He's got a lot of free advertising in Quebec for his tolerance of separatism: short of individual criminal activity.

But it goes beyond just publicity for Trudeau's tolerance. Another very plausible, and much more insidious, theory comes into play in understanding the position of the federal government on Quebec.

That is, the company is being used there for the same reasons the Peace corps is used by the American government: as an instrument of counter-insurgency.

The tolerance of separatism has acted as a carrot to radical activists. Once in the company, they are not just government employees doing radical work (they'd be doing that anyway) but they are that crucial federal presence.

And not just a presence, for the federal government has in them, people who are in on what's happening on the left in Quebec, a good idea of the whole situation in the province.

They are a vital pipeline for the federal government into the heart of possible 'subversion' in the province — not that they would act as spies, but it only takes one person who can get around to all the projects in the province who can gain their confidence, to syphon off valuable intelligence.

The uproar has added to the credibility of the company to the activists, who find themselves under too much heat to mistrust the value or radical-ness of their work.

Yet they feel tied to supporting the federal control of the company that is protecting at least some of them. That's why even the Quebec councillors on the permanent council showed the company is directly controlled by the cabinet, the PM and Pelletier particularly — by abdicating their right to govern to Pelletier's man, Claude Vidal.

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