

Visions of an independent Quebec

Books weak on tactics, but strong gadflies

By GEORGE HEWSON

How to bring about the existence of an independent Quebec is a major theme of two important books, *Days of Rage*, by Herman Buller, and *Why there must be a Revolution in Quebec*, by Leandre Bergeron.

In neither is this central question answered, and therefore they might both be considered failures. However, though weak on tactics, their analysis of Quebecois society and its place in Canada is in itself a

necessary step towards eventual action.

Herman Buller has succeeded in creating a novel where a suspenseful plot is combined with a convincing personality portrait. The story tells of Pierre Gascon, a young asbestos miner whose political consciousness is aroused during strike activity, and who joins the FLQ and plans to assassinate the Queen on a royal visit to Quebec.

Gut feeling and intuitive un-

derstanding, notable characteristics of Pierre early in the book, grow into a more thorough comprehension of the situation as he participates in labour activity in the mining town and political discussions in Montreal. This maturation process is well presented by Buller, and worthy of comparison to Pierre Valliere's autobiographical account of a similar development in *White Niggers of America*.

Gascon is not without faults, including one that leads to his final

demise as he agonizes over the morality of revolutionary execution. On route, however, he exposes the realities of Quebec past and present, and wins our support for the FLQ's ultimate goals, if not for their methods.

Leandre Bergeron states that while many Quebecois shared the sentiments of the FLQ activists, few would condone their violence.

More practically, he points out that any armed attacks against the capitalist order are bound to be suppressed by the police and the army. His alternative is to build a worker's party to the left of the Parti Quebecois. He is wary of the bourgeois nationalism of the PQ because it does not recognize the element of class division in the separatist struggle.

In the end Bergeron equivocates on just how to bring down the government, as he is caught in the old socialist dilemma of what cooperation to give to reformist elements. Moreover, he has an ill-

defined view of the future; this is fatal to any plan for change that might appeal to those now discontent but fearful of totalitarian domination.

Despite this criticism, Bergeron's discussion of Quebec today in *Why There Must Be a Revolution*... is a good follow-up to his *The History of Quebec: A Patriote's Handbook*. Both books are simplified, more or less vulgar Marxist polemics.

Yet, granting some inaccuracies and distortions, they are, nevertheless, examples of good historical and political writing in a popular style. By using a dialogue format, Bergeron keeps the reader's attention and prompts him, in a gadfly manner, to consider the structure of power in Quebec.

Days of Rage, Herman Buller, October Publications, Montreal Toronto 1974.

Why there must be a Revolution in Quebec, Leandre Bergeron, NC Press, Toronto, 1974.

Film documents Quebec's turmoil

By NORMAND HASTY

Action, made by the National Film Board's Robin Spry, is a film of the events that led up to the October Crisis of Quebec in 1970.

Having offered the film to the CBC, and having received no response, the NFB recently decided to release the film through community channels. It was premiered through the St. Lawrence Centre Public Service Programme two weeks ago.

The film is composed of a sequence of events which relate the story of a people who fought for their freedom at a time of great political, economic and cultural turmoil.

The oppressors constantly change faces from English to American capitalists, to British colonizers and finally to a government which will not hesitate "to protect democracy (dixit Trudeau) by suspending 'habeas corpus', and proclaiming the War Measures Act, which permits the government to arrest and imprison anyone up to 90 days without any reason.

Spry lets the facts speak for themselves. The sound of Claude Wagner, the minister of "justice", declaring that he 'had not seen any vestige of violence', while on screen policemen beat down everything moving, inevitably broadens the spectator's awareness of the shameless cynicism of our leaders.

Spry doesn't stress the individual personalities of the different political demonstrators and potential FLQ members — that is not his purpose. Rather, he shows scenes of the strike in Asbestos in 1949, the explosion of the first bomb in 1963, the demonstrations of Valliers-Gagnon at the UN in 1966, the formation of the Parti

Quebecois in 1968, the demonstrations during the St.-Jean-Baptiste parade, the bombing of Eaton's and the Montreal Stock exchange: scenes of a people rebelling against the inadequacy of the ruling regime.

Spry then focuses on the 1970 elections. The Parti Québécois received 24 per cent of the popular vote, which allowed them a representation of seven) the Union Nationale and the Social Credit parties received 20 and 11 per cent of the total vote, giving them a representation of 17 and 12 MLAs respectively.

The bombing attempts were revived once again in Westmount, which resulted in what is known today as the October Crisis, and the army moved in to arrest numerous people in Montreal, without valid reasons.

Spry does not attempt to give the real reason for the deployment of military power in the face of a small demonstration; but he has shown that the government wants peace and order, and that it is opposed to the people who no longer wish to recognize the rulers who are not aligned with their expectations.

In the context of the film, the actions of the FLQ seem to be the logical outcome of accumulated

frustration. They no longer believe in the democracy that Pierre Trudeau had such difficulty defining.

The film illustrates that the use of violence is not advantageous for Quebec. The democratic process will be long, perhaps, but it is the only way to achieve a truly representative government.

The film is available through the public libraries.

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