

QUEBEC ON THE EVE OF THE 15 NOVEMBER 1976 ELECTION

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In 1959, Maurice LeNoblet Duplessis died. The death of this politician who had dominated Quebec's political life for three decades signaled the end of an era. Duplessis was the sour incarnation of a long standing tradition, that of the alliance between the Church and the State which led him to brag that he had bishops eating out of his hand. Duplessis was a politician who clung to quasi-mystical beliefs in the virtues of the past while he conceded the present of industrialization and technology to the American trusts and corporations that owned the economy of his province. So that when Duplessis died in Quebec's northern wilderness, while visiting the installations of one of those combines whose rights for exploitation of iron ore were obtained for a pittance, his death was the ironical death of a king: [in the words of the late journalist André Laurendeau] a "negro king."

Knowing his record, intellectuals and artists of Quebec who had formulated their dissent throughout Duplessis' rule in the pages of *Le Devoir* and *Cité Libre* did not cry "Hail to the King" but they thought joyfully nonetheless that their fight against obscurantism had been rewarded. Now it was felt, Quebec would open its windows to the world.¹

DURING THE SEVENTEEN YEARS that followed the end of the Duplessis era, it was a commonplace in the thinking in and about Quebec that the evolution of Quebec society was best characterized as a quest inspired by the need to open a society that had been traditionally closed and kept isolated. A nation which for better or for worse had been forced to live closed in, conditioned by conservative ideologies, had no alternative but that of destroying the frontiers which had been historically established for its protection and survival. The evolution of Quebec over the last seventeen years is thus characterized in a notion that is agreed upon by schools of thought as opposed as that of the Federalists (which believes in Quebec's future within Confederation) and the Independentists (which believes that Quebec's future is best understood within the framework of self-determination). It is precisely on the political dimension of this opening to the world that these two schools of thought disagree.

The problematical frame of this opening to the world is etched by an historical phenomenon during the last decade, in the context of the literature of that period. By means of a singular image in the poetry and fiction of the Sixties, the Quebec writer demonstrated a keen interest in if not a fascination for a diversified and complex cultural experience symbolized in the concept of Negritude. Negritude is an ideology, a literary movement, some would say a mythology that grew in the Thirties and Forties first in Europe and later in Africa and the West Indies: a concept argued by intellectuals of the Third World to assert their identity and, by extrapolation, the identity of their native culture. Negritude identified the forms, the characteristics of the cultural experience of black people subjected to colonialism in Africa, in the West Indies as well as in the Americas. It is with this search for identity, this quest for self-understanding by Third World intellectuals, that certain writers and intellectuals of Quebec associated their vision of a new Quebec. But before analyzing the terms of this new vision we have to consider the ideological conflict which gives it sustenance.

Duplessis' death was accompanied by a crisis within the intelligentsia in Quebec. The intellectual elite revolving around the review *Cité Libre* (1950-1965) had led a fight based on a liberal concept of the state and on humanism as an individual code of ethics. Claiming the right to personal fulfillment freed of conservative, religious and other dogmatic impositions, Pierre Elliott Trudeau, Gérard Pelletier and other thinkers perceived the disappearance of the Duplessis era as the symbolic sign of the birth of a society which by discarding a state-of-siege mentality would henceforth relate to the mainstream of modernity:

around 1960 it seemed that freedom was going to triumph in the end. From 1945 on, a series of events and movements had combined to relegate the traditional concepts of authority in Quebec to the scrap-heap; So much so that the generation entering its twenties in 1960 was the first in our history to receive fairly complete freedom as its lot. The dogmatism of Church and State, of tradition, of the nation had been defeated.²

But this elite, nourished by the ideas of the English liberal tradition, the thinking of the French Christian humanists and the social doctrine of the Catholic Church, found itself overtaken by a series of events. On the outside, these events were the accession of former colonies in Africa and the West Indies to self-determination. On the inside, this elite was outflanked by upheavals in the political, labour, religious and educational fields. The past was opposed to the present, conservatism to radicalism, resignation to defiance, tradition to innovation. Two world outlooks, two conceptions of the new Québécois, were brought to light. So much so that Pierre Elliott Trudeau bemusedly notes that "In 1960, everything was becoming possible in Quebec, even revolution."³

The precepts of liberalism and of humanism advocated by the *Cité Libre* elite

gave rise to a new social conscience determined to effect a total overhaul of Quebec society. The generation following *Cité Libre*, organized around *Liberté* (1958-), *Parti Pris* (1963-1968), *Socialisme 64* (1964-1966) and a publishing house like Hexagone, left free to draw parallels and establish ideological links between the decolonization movement in Africa and in Asia and the "Quiet Revolution" that was occurring in Quebec. For the European liberal and humanist model, the intellectuals of *Parti Pris* substituted a Third World model inscribed in the perspective of colonialism, declaring the right of people to control their political destiny. The theorists of *Parti Pris*, far from perceiving Duplessis' rule as an aberration, or as the cause of Quebec's problems, characterized it as the reflection of an historical imbalance consequent to the 1760 Conquest. Accordingly, it was felt that a feeling of dispossession deeply embedded in consciences explained the century-long influence of the Church and the traditional reliance on one form of dogmatism or another in social and individual relations. Taking a long look at the history of Quebec since 1760, these theorists assigned to dispossession the significance of a dramatic shock which traditionally had never been confronted. The young intellectuals of *Parti Pris* committed themselves to the task of bringing about this resolution.

Basically, the ideological model provided by *Parti Pris* can be thus described. Like the former colonies of the Third World, Quebec had to liberate, repossess and recreate itself by means of political sovereignty. The equation was as follows. Like the Third World colonies, Quebec had been subjected to a foreign power. A local administration had been put in place, controlled by means of indirect rule by the foreign power. Any attempt at questioning the status quo was cancelled out from the beginning insofar as a conservative ideology obsessed with the past and a denial of the present dominated in all spheres of activity, and directly or indirectly sustained a colonial type of subjugation. Individual success was achieved by means of assimilation, acculturation to the dominant power group. On the one hand was a mass of people resigned and kept ignorant of the real causes of its sense of defeat; on the other, an elite that was convinced of the need to maintain the status quo as a guarantee of social mobility. Many other parallels were drawn with the aim of re-enforcing this new equation of Quebec sharing the Third World experience of colonialism, disenfranchisement and alienation. Not surprisingly, we find underlying the thinking of Paul Chamberland, Pierre Vallières, Pierre Maheu and others, some of the key ideas of the revolutionary Martiniquan Doctor Frantz Fanon. It is these same ideas, especially Fanon's theories on colonial violence, which in practice inspired the action of the first cells of the FLQ in the early Sixties. Read and analyzed further by Pierre Elliott Trudeau, Gérard Pelletier and other intellectuals of both *Cité Libre* and *Parti Pris*, the work of Fanon and later that of Albert Memmi and Jacques Berque, Gramsci and Ernesto Guevara, were perceived as the cornerstone of a debate on the future form of Quebec society. Thus, it is with this crisis between two generations in the

intelligentsia in the background that we can approach the image centrally used in the literature of Quebec in the Sixties, the image of Negritude as co-opted by Quebec writers.

ADMITTEDLY, this identification with a Third World experience did not take place on the popular level; it was the concern of an educated middle-class. This movement in its extreme form was characterized by the violence or the rhetoric of violence of the FLQ members or sympathizers during the period 1963-1970. Inasmuch as this violence was not supported by the general population that the terrorists claimed to represent, their action was that of marginal elements in Quebec society. One could even add that insofar as identification with the Third World was essentially a theoretical problem debated by intellectuals in little magazines that reach a restricted readership, the Fanonian model is perhaps doubtful as an empirical base for the analysis of the cultural effervescence of Quebec during the decade of the Sixties. But on the literary level, in the mythical perspective of the imagination in Quebec, the image provided by the Quebec writer articulates at length a new vision of the Québécois.

The esthetic of the *Parti Pris* movement celebrated a native land; it called for an exploration, an inventory of landscape which had to be given proper expression. This esthetic established the particularities of a concept of art which rested on the power of the word, on the spoken effectiveness of language in its more vital concrete and direct form. It was a concept of art that aimed at describing in realistic fashion the Québécois' everyday life of alienation and general uneasiness. To be sure this vision produced an art that was violent in language, in imagery, since this art was coupled with a design that was vital and existential according to its practitioners. This design was that of a struggle for liberation. It was in this context that the mythology of Negritude and the image of the black man as the symbol of the Québécois were put to use: "I am the evil that you have created. I am what you have created Dorchester, Colburn, Durham. I am the heap of blackness in the gallows of America."⁴ The influence of the poet, politician and playwright from Martinique, Aimé Césaire, was dominant in this literature of "decolonization."

This perception of the black man did not differ from certain stereotyped images since it indicated what the onlooker aims at finding in what is looked at. To that extent, the perception revealed a psychological truth far more germane to the onlooker than to the one that was looked at. And perhaps that is what needs to be underlined: how the Québécois "engagé" writer painted a reverse image which he claimed as his own. This process of identification is fairly simple: the Québécois was perceived as alienated, uprooted, assimilated, oppressed, and divorced from himself; somebody who existed for others rather than for himself was therefore

associated with the image of the black, the stereotyped image of the alienated being. The writers expressing with the greatest anguish their sense of unease went to the extent of co-opting even the blackness of pigmentation to express their alienation, if not the precise historical experiences meted out to the black man: "When I'll go to New York it is to Harlem that I will head for and not because of exoticism. I am much too concerned with precise familial links. I know the feeling of night-sticks in Alabama. There are fraternities in sorrows that your civil rights cannot hide."⁵ If the black man represented in his concrete physical self the embodiment of dispossession, the Quebec writer of the Sixties affirmed that the Québécois was a "white nigger" because he displayed all the psychological characteristics of Negritude.⁶

The metaphor of Negritude was omnipresent. In 1962, the novelist Jacques Godbout, fresh from a two-year stay in Ethiopia, used in his novel, *L'Aquarium*, a tropical colonial setting in the periphery of which a motley crew of expatriates survived. Clearly this novel was symbolic of Godbout's perception of Quebec as a hot-house environment for which fresh air was needed. Another writer, Réal Benoît, in a long short story entitled *Rhum Soda*, had used Haïti as a setting to evoke a sense of personal freedom sorely lacking in the Quebec experience. But it was particularly in the writings of Hubert Aquin (in his novels *Prochai Episode*, *Trou de Mémoire*), Paul Chamberland (in his poetry, *Terre Québec*, *L'Afficheur Hurlé*), Jacques Renaud (in his novel *Le Cassé*), Jacques Brault, Gaston Miron, Gérald Godin and Michèle Lalonde, to name just the major writers of the Sixties, that we can see the diverse uses made of this new-found mythology. In her poem *Speak White*, published in 1968, Michèle Lalonde addressed herself in the following manner to this new preoccupation:

Speak white/ Tell us again about freedom and democracy/ We know that liberty
is a black word/ as misery is black/ as blood is muddied with the dust of Algiers
or of Little Rock/ Speak white from Westminster to Washington, take turns/
Speak white as on Wall Street/ white as in Watts/ Be civilized/ and understand
our conventional answer/ when you ask us politely/ how do you do/ and we mean
to reply/ we're doing all right/ we're doing fine/ we/ are not alone/ We know
that we are not alone.⁷

What we see in this passage is a summary of the equation drawn by most of the writers of the Sixties, an equation between what is said to have been the historical experience of the Québécois and that of other minority groups throughout the world, particularly the black experience.

In more general terms, this new mythology appeared in the following fashion. In one instance, it was the lyrical and aggressive call for revolution, for armed uprising. It was the picture of the revolutionary whose archetype was the Fanonian colonized who finds liberation by means of cathartic violence. In the words of Paul Chamberland: "The foundries are erupting in the veins of a people/ the

majestic soil grows and carves in its flesh/ the hammer and the/ sickle and the cannon powder/ its face expands in the primordial lights of bombs.”⁸ Elsewhere, it was the clinical description of a quotidian life style bared of any artifice, where an individual dispossessed of self — of identity, language, culture — sought a precise object to vent his rage against. That was the substance of Jacques Renaud’s short novel *Le Cassé*. Further, it was a psychological climate where the Québécois was described as a member of the international fraternity of the “wretched of the earth.” That was the design at work in Hubert Aquin’s novel *Prochain Episode*.

BASICALLY THERE ARE TWO ASPECTS to the Negritude archetype. First, is the inventory of a sense of uneasiness and of pain, the quest through myriad events for the causes of a state of despair. Second, following the identification of unease and anguish, there was a desire to act upon and perhaps correct this state of despair. In Quebec literature of the Sixties, we find therefore by means of characterization, symbolism and themes, the commitment of the writer to a refusal of traditional acceptance and resignation; his commitment was to revolt and to the depiction of acts as augurs of the birth of a new revolutionary being. A novel that captured those two attitudes is Jacques Godbout’s *Le Couteau sur la table* (1965). In the poetry of Paul Chamberland, revolt was dramatized in a symbolism of blood and fire suggestive of a ritual of destruction accompanied by creation. In Chamberland as well as Miron, the theme was the cry of pain preceding the ultimate release of anger.

But around 1968 the movement of revolt and identification with the Third World had spent itself. The magazine *Parti Pris* folded. The principal theoreticians of the movement had other concerns. Chamberland left for Paris to pursue his studies. Upon his return, and with the collaboration of Pierre Maheu, he got involved in mysticism and in research on language and communication. Chamberland and the former revolutionaries found themselves in sympathy with the counterculture and other popular movements coming from the U.S. which were proclaiming by the end of the Sixties that social change could best be achieved by means of psychic change. Hubert Aquin, who in his first novel was already engaged in extending the boundaries of experimental fiction, went on to further mystify his readers with a display of arcane erudition and a probing of the mysteries of identity. The rhetoric of disguise, metamorphosis, bewildering temporal and spatial schemes, demonstrated Aquin’s affiliation with the baroque tradition. Other writers cultivated an interest in the visual arts, in the cinema for instance. Or they simply stopped writing. By the Fall of 1970, as in a final resurgence of life, the FLQ was again in the news, but it was more or less of a death

throe: two years before, the visionaries and the celebrants of a revolutionary Quebec had revealed that they were tired or defeated.

Why? Perhaps, in one way, it was the revenge of history; a revenge not altogether different from the one that the *Parti Pris* generation had taken against their elders of *Cité Libre*. Towards the end of the Sixties a new generation had come to be no longer conditioned by the negative impositions which had been at the root of the revolt of *Parti Pris*. In an urban Quebec, where the birth rate had reached the degree zero, the traditional family no longer existed. The Church had lost its former power; the secondary and college school systems had been secularized; a breath of fresh air blowing all over Quebec since 1960 had brought in its wake the sequels of the decolonization movement in Africa. The process of self-determination in most of the former colonies had suffered from false starts or it had been aborted by fratricidal struggles and coups d'état. Also those newly-independent nations had discovered that they were still very much dependent on the resources of the former colonizing powers. But mainly, the rebellion against the established order in Quebec had found a substitute to Fanon in the youth movement, rock music and "flower power": a youth movement or counterculture which proclaimed the need for change by means of inner quest and experimentation with drugs. The stress was on personal vision as opposed to collective vision.

In Quebec, as well as in the United States, England and France, this new generation that appeared in the late Sixties replaced the hardline political models for social change with so-called alternative models (albeit provided by the culture of affluence and consumerism). Pop culture characterized the era. The new heroes were the Beatles, the Rolling Stones and other creatures of the media. The Third World model for revolt had been discarded and a revolt more germane to the North American experience was in place, the product of the contradictions of the consumer society. Violence or the rhetoric of violence was no longer fashionable, but "dropping out" of the system was. The talk was no longer about removal of the system but removal *from* the system. Hence a whole generation turned to utopias: it was back to nature, getting close to the earth, indulgence in Eastern philosophies, recourse to communal life style; in short, "getting high," "tripping." An anarchic wind blew over the European and American youth of that period and Quebec youth — the very same generation which presumably should have continued the fight begun by *Parti Pris* — participated in the process. There was a general lack of interest in Society. Instead of Fanon, the taste was for Jimi Hendrix; Janice Joplin was deemed more significant than Angela Davis. Quebec perhaps had finally made its entry into the modern world when the post-*Parti Pris* counterculturists, grouped around the avant-garde little magazine *Mainmise* (founded in 1970), identified Quebec's problems with the general malaise prevailing in most industrialized Western societies. The malaise was the same and the remedy provided in Quebec, as in the U.S. and elsewhere, was the recourse to

hallucinatory solutions. The sentiment of dispossession which for the *Parti Pris* generation had been a root motivation for the need for social change was now identified with an overwhelming sense of despair and cultural decadence prevalent throughout the Western world. The polarization came to be thus: on the one hand, the youth and avant-garde intellectuals of Quebec were claiming the counterculture and denouncing the Establishment; on the other, the Quebec Establishment rejoiced in finding itself sketched in a general frame alongside most Western Establishments: i.e. acquisitive, profit-oriented, committed to the benefits of technology. The era of the great clerics and of the rural notables in Quebec was gone. The new era of the Seventies was to be ruled by technocrats. This technocratic vision of Quebec society was provided by the Liberal party led by Premier Robert Bourassa, starting with his election to office in 1970 with the promise of 100,000 jobs within the first months of his term.

A "brains trust" along the Ford Company "whizzkids" pattern envisaged for Quebec an essentially American model for growth and affluence. An uncritical welcome was then extended to the multinationals and to theories of unlimited growth. If Jean Lesage led Quebec in 1960 on a "Quiet Revolution," in the direction of a goal which logically forced the *Parti Pris* intellectuals to call for an unconditional and unquiet revolution, Robert Bourassa lay claim in 1970 to the model of the affluent society as defined by J. K. Galbraith: a society based no longer on national values or on historical demands, but one that recognized only the imperatives of the mass world-wide market economy. Room was to be made for the multinationals and other international conglomerates. In the span of ten years, from 1960 to 1970, the evolution of Quebec had come full circle. Maurice Duplessis died in 1959 while visiting the installations of an American mining company in Northern Quebec; in 1970, Bourassa celebrated the opening of Quebec to the world by dining with David Rockefeller.

INDEED, QUEBEC WAS DISCOVERING ITS AMERICANNESSE. The popular arts were replacing the cultural constructs and concepts of previous generations, whether of the *Cité Libre* of the *Parti Pris* stamp, who were found to be elitists and in any case "irrelevant." The post-*Parti Pris* creative writers sought to explore further the premises of art rooted in the spoken form of language, by making full use of the vernacular, particularly the street vernacular of the Montreal East end, "joual." The new populist art triumphed not in the traditional literary genres such as fiction and poetry but in the songs and the plays that were produced in the early 1970's. The premise of the need to describe the Québécois in as realistic a mode as possible led to the celebration (in the plays of Michel Tremblay for instance) of individuals from the working class. The

accent was on the environment, the language, the values, the outlook of urban street culture judged now to be symptomatic of the true Quebec reality beyond ideology and political aspiration. The native land was no longer claimed in the lyrical and transcendent fashion of the Sixties, but was presented, in drama and in the new film industry, in its quotidian form void of any theory. It was as if at the end of *Parti Pris* ideology was the discovery of an everyday life style which beyond language did not differentiate Quebec reality from the general North American reality. Which was precisely the theme of a well-known song of Robert Charlebois (who emerged as the epitome of the new “hip,” urban, young Québécois image). The thinking of the Seventies reflected a consciousness of the decisive influence of the media on society. So that, in Quebec as elsewhere in North America and Europe, the perception involved the “generation gap”, the rebellion against middle class ethics, the refusal of the culture of the academies, the desire for an alternative life style that no political doctrine could circumscribe; briefly, the ambivalence of a well-fed younger generation vis à vis the values of the affluent society. Unsurprisingly, the bible of American youth, Charles Reich’s *The Greening of America*, was widely read in Quebec; something like “California Dreamin’ ” became the common dream of many an urban young Québécois.

From 1960 to 1970, a new middle class reigned in Quebec, the product of urbanization and technology. The values of this middle class became endemic: there was little inclination for traditional nationalist debates but there was a strong desire to correspond to the image of the middle class in all industrial societies. The taste was for prosperity, comfort, tourism, “the sweet life.” At a time when the Québécois could afford to travel extensively; when Quebec industry, whether in the book trade, in cinema, or in hostelry, was expanding, necessitating wider, outside, markets; at a time when Quebec society was discovering a vocation for leadership of the francophone world; when Quebec had disenfranchised itself both of the state of seige of the Duplessis era and of a Third World-inspired ideology, the opening of Quebec to the world meant a new image of self, or the need for a new image of self. But which one? The image of the Québécois as a “white nigger” had lost its shock value.

Quebec literature of the Seventies indicated, if anything, the end of movements and ideologies. Writers were involved in projects where the imagination was deemed to be self-sufficient. Godbout’s novel, *D’Amour, P.Q.* (1972), for example, was a reflection on the impact of the media on modern life; Aquin’s *Neige Noire* (1974) was a mixture of media, time and space; Langevin’s *L’Elan d’Amérique* (1972) dramatized the Americanness of the modern Quebec ethos; Carrier’s *Il est par là la soleil* (1970), *Le 2000e étage* (1973) presented a mythology based on the Rabelaisian grotesque. Poets found themselves taking a back seat. Since 1968, in a state of uncertainty and ambiguity, a society which used to be closed found itself

now opened to all currents and to all winds. A society characterized by intense homogeneity had moved to pluralist openness informed by the spirit of individual pursuit of happiness of most consumer societies.

Ironically, Quebec and the Third World mirrored each other once more. The images reflected were those of a new middle class satisfied with itself and bent on maintaining newly-acquired privileges. The landscape was one of sharp contrasts. In Quebec the traditional elite was replaced by an elite which was indifferent to the national question. If that elite demonstrated a national preoccupation, it was to the extent that the national interest did not detract from the new economic order the elite benefited from. Therein lay the paradox of the Parti Québécois whose clientèle up to the November elections was essentially to be found within the ranks of this new urban elite. And there still lies the crucial question faced by the P.Q. now that it is in power: how to reconcile the benefits of affluence with political sovereignty? How to bring to fruition aspirations to self-determination without rocking the economic boat? But these are questions no one has answers for at the moment. To get back to the pre-November 1976 cultural climate and the vision of the new elite, we find the vocation of this new elite illustrated in various forms. It was the vision of the mayor of Montreal to inscribe his city in the lineage of the major urban centres of North America. It was the vision of Premier Robert Bourassa, continuing in the footsteps of Premier Duplessis, when he handed over large chunks of Quebec territory to I.T.T. Or it was Premier Bourassa hastening the coming of a "brave new world" when in disregard of ecology and the rights of the native populations he launched the billion-dollar hydroelectric James Bay project on Quebec's north shore. No doubt, the guiding principle was growth at all cost, at a time when limits were being placed on such a notion in the United States, where this concept had showed its worst excesses. It is ironic that at a time when American cultural influences were rampant in Quebec no one in government seemed to be paying much attention to the findings of a Barry Commoner or a Paul Erlich.

Social inequities meanwhile worsened. Citizens' groups made a dent in the municipal political structure of Montreal, but not to the extent of preventing the wastage that went into making Montreal the host for the 1976 Olympics. Agitation on the labour scene came to a head when labour leaders in 1972 threatened to bring down the state: they were consequently locked up. Junior colleges and universities jumped on the bandwagon of prolonged strikes. When the November 1976 elections took place, two large universities, one in Montreal and the other in Quebec city, were on strike. But all in all, the consensus was that these turmoils were at best mere reflections of the fact that Quebec had become an open society no different from American and other mass societies. Quebec was in the mainstream of a world order where technology and industrialization were allowed

to chart their own course, while, on the other hand, social needs were left attended by rhetorical agitation.

The Third World reflected a similar ambivalence. The state of things in general in Black Africa in the post-independence era was that of societies for which the need for a new order had been proclaimed, but which, shortly after independence had been achieved, repeated the mistakes, the errors and the built-in inequities bequeathed by the former colonizing nations. These nominally "independent" societies found themselves still subjected to the markets of Western nations, dependent on their technical assistance, accepting the principle of foreign investment as a *sine qua non* condition for progress. In brief, the acceptance of the maintenance of foreign social and cultural structures explained the existence of an elite whose values, outlook and interests were in most cases merely the mirror image of the former colonizer's. Frantz Fanon had, in *The Wretched of the Earth* (written in 1961), foreseen the ravages of neo-colonialism when political independence was not paralleled by a revamping of the economic structures of the former colonies:

The national middle class which takes over power at the end of the colonial regime is an underdeveloped middle class. It has practically no economic power, and in any case it is in no way commensurate with the bourgeoisie of the mother country which it hopes to replace. In its narcissism, the national middle class is easily convinced that it can advantageously replace the middle class of the mother country. But the same independence which literally drives it into a corner will give rise within its ranks to catastrophic reactions, and will oblige it to send out frenzied appeals for help to the former mother country . . . Neither financiers nor industrial magnates are to be found within this national middle class. The national bourgeoisie of underdeveloped countries is not engaged in production, nor in invention, nor building, nor labor; it is completely canalized into activities of the intermediary type. Its innermost vocation seems to be to keep in the running and to be part of the racket.⁹

In the Third World, as in Quebec, the population was left waiting for promised rewards like the characters in Samuel Beckett's play *Waiting for Godot*. The gap was wide and growing increasingly wider between the standard of living shared by a westernized elite and the traditional life style of the population. In the Third World, as in Quebec, one finds that the cornerstone of the social order was not so much national as a-national, and that "culture" simply meant the vagaries of everyday living subjected to the rise and fall of the Dow-Jones average.

Such was the general picture in Quebec on the eve of the 15th of November 1976 elections. A society had during the relatively short time span of two decades been tested by its ruling intellectual and cultural elite against three models. In the Fifties, the *Cité Libre* group called for a European liberal and humanist view of man whose primary concern was the preservation of individual rights. In the Sixties, the *Parti Pris* people looked to the Third World for inspiration and proposed an ideology for political liberation with the accent put on nationalism and

group consciousness. In the Seventies, the Quebec counterculture as well as the Establishment completed the journey where it had begun it, by effecting a re-discovery of America.

Hence the central question faced by Quebec on the eve of the 15th of November elections was precisely whether the future lay in the continued acceptance of and indulgence in the "brave new world" of consumerism or whether the quest for affluence was worth the price of relinquishing Quebec's indigenous historical and cultural character. Differently put, the challenge was whether consumerism could be compatible with nationalism. A positive answer to this last question had been badly thought out by Duplessis. Reformulated by the P.Q., the answer agreed upon by a plurality of the Quebec electorate suggested that Quebec might be in the unique position of integrating the apparently incompatible values of nationalism and consumerism in the making of a new society. And *that* has yet to be seen.

NOTES

¹ Max Dorsinville, *Caliban Without Prospero: Essay on Quebec and Black Literature* (Erin, Ont.: Press Porcépic, 1974), p. 27.

² Pierre Elliott Trudeau, *Federalism and the French Canadians* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1968), p. 206.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Paul Chamberland, *L'Afficheur Hurle* (Montréal: Parti Pris, 1964), p. 18. My translation.

⁶ See Pierre Vallières, *Nègres Blancs d'Amérique* (Montréal, Parti Pris, 1968).

⁷ Michèle Lalonde, "Speak White," *Ellipse*, 3 (Spring 1970), p. 29, p. 31.

⁸ Paul Chamberland, "Deuil 4 juin 1963" in *Terre Québec* (Montréal: Déom, 1964), p. 33.

⁹ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1968), pp. 149-50.