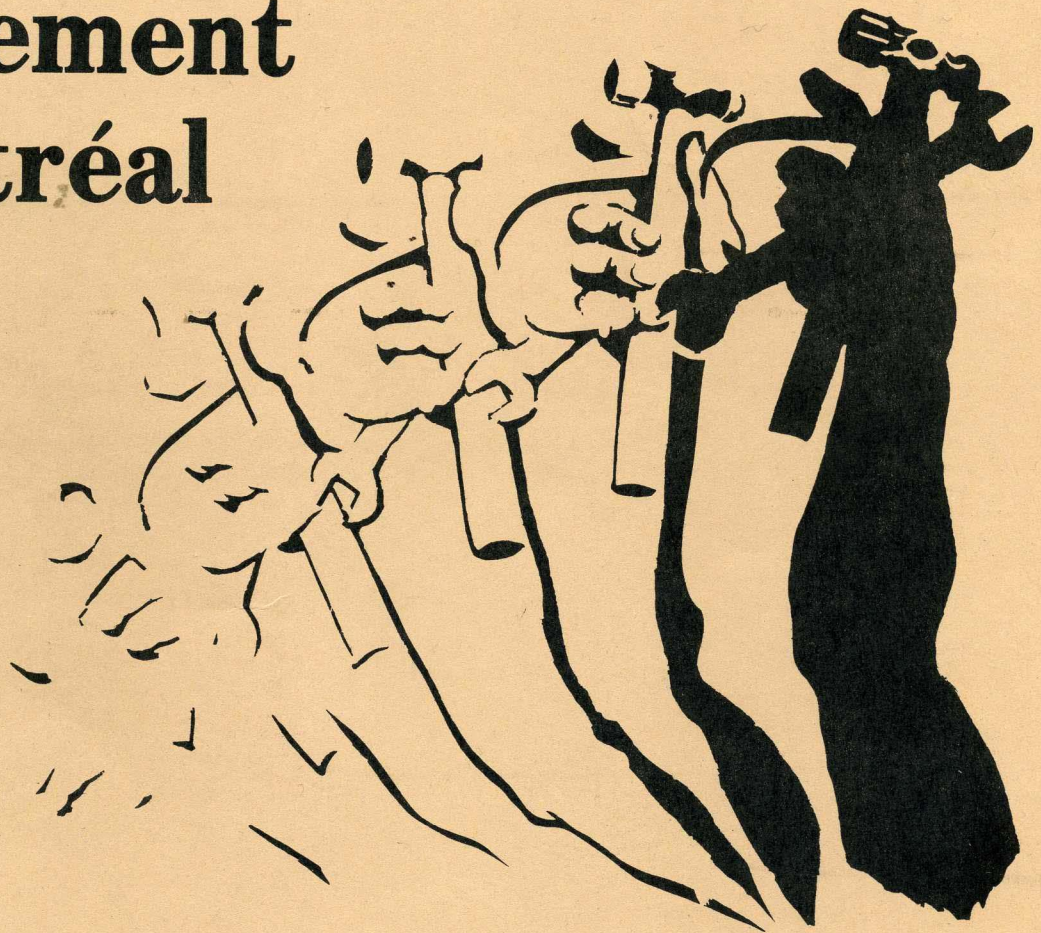


# SOLIDAIRE

montréal, québec

no.7 avril 1975

## Beginnings of a Socialist Movement Montréal



translation and adaptation of "Quelques aspects du  
Début d'un Mouvement Socialiste à Montréal"

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**SOLIDAIRE** is a magazine put out by a group of English-speaking Québécois to inform progressive people in Canada and the U.S. of the growing struggle for socialism in Québec.

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# Introduction

The document of which we are now presenting a shortened translation, was originally published in Montréal two years ago by **Mobilisation**, a militant political magazine. It was an attempt to analyse the history of a certain political tendency, evaluating the errors which had been committed and the lessons which could be drawn from political work done up to that time. It included discussion on the political and economic situation in Québec, the level of consciousness of the working class and the state of its organisations, and the tasks of progressive militants within the framework of the building of a political organisation of the working class.

This document was recently re-issued in a modified form by Mobilisation, including a new introduction outlining criticisms of the original text, and an afterword analysing the major tendencies in the socialist movement in Montréal today and the tasks presently facing revolutionaries. The translation we have done consists of a shortened version of the original, followed by excerpts from the new introduction and an adaptation of the new afterword.

The original text is largely a history of the realization by a certain sector of petty bourgeois progressive intellectuals of the importance of basing their political work on close organic links with the masses of workers. Progressive intellectuals had at various times adopted a wide range of tactics: the creation of broad-based, social-democratic organisations; mass agitation and propaganda (e.g. organization of mass demonstrations); terrorism (FLQ), etc. Gradually it became apparent in practice that these kinds of activity could not bring about a revolutionary change in society: certain types of action, such as government-funded community groups, were unable to go beyond the limited framework of immediate demands and often became purely reformist; while others, such as "ultra-leftist" terrorist activities, were completely cut off from the masses. Many who saw the futility of these types of political work began to work directly within factories, communities and schools to help create organisations which were genuinely rooted in the masses.

However, as the afterword states, this new orientation was an important step but not sufficient. While the present worsening economic situation provides fertile ground for the growth of mass struggle, a substantial part of the socialist movement considers that the mass organizations cannot themselves bring about the overthrow of capitalism and imperialism. Because of a lack of long-term strategy, an economist, or reformist, deviation developed within organizational practice over the past few years. Almost total emphasis was placed on the struggle for immediate economic demands, while the question of political struggle was incorrectly understood and in practice overlooked. The role of struggles on the economic level was not placed in its proper perspective: that of raising the level of consciousness, militancy and organization of the working class. It was believed that these struggles would somehow, later, spontaneously transform themselves into the political struggle to overthrow capitalism and imperialism. But in the light of the examination of errors committed in practice, and of the history of the workers' struggles internationally, many militants have come to the conclusion that only a revolutionary Marxist-Leninist party, made up of the most conscious, organized sector of the working class, the sector most able to assume leadership and to develop correct tactics and strategy, can guide and direct workers' struggles to revolutionary change. Economic struggles in themselves can be co-opted by the bourgeoisie through reform and compromise; only a clear political strategy guiding all forms of struggles can lead to revolution.

In order to achieve this goal, three main tasks are seen as priorities for revolutionaries. The first is to continue the work of forming and consolidating links to the working class. Already lessons have been drawn from organizational work in factories, communities and schools (lessons which we intend to discuss in future issues of *Solidaire*.\*) Another task recognized as essential is the linking up of Marxist-Leninist theory to practice, so that the deviations of the past, economist and others, may be understood and overcome, and a correct orientation established on a tactical as well as a strategic level. We must also work toward the unity of all Marxist-Leninists, so that, through debate and common practice, we may overcome the divergences which presently exist among revolutionaries and which, if allowed to continue, will prevent the building of the revolutionary party.

These political positions are largely shared by *Solidaire* and constitute the framework within which we situate our work. For, over the past few years, *Solidaire* has broken out of its isolation as a group of English-speaking students. The group was formed in the months following the October crisis of 1970 around a desire to provide information on Quebec for progressive people outside. We had very few contacts with other groups; we defined our aims and functions in isolation and determined the content of the magazine according to our own criteria of what was useful or interesting.

Closer contacts gradually developed with a range of groups. At first irregular and informal, these contacts slowly developed into formal collaboration and the integration of the tasks of debate and exchange with progressive groups outside of Quebec with the tasks of revolutionaries here in Quebec. This is partly due to the fact that individuals have assumed political tasks within the movement; but it is mainly due to the fact that the sector of the movement with which we are in agreement is now able to recognize the importance of creating links and debating with militants outside Quebec and to direct this task as it directs any other facet of political work.

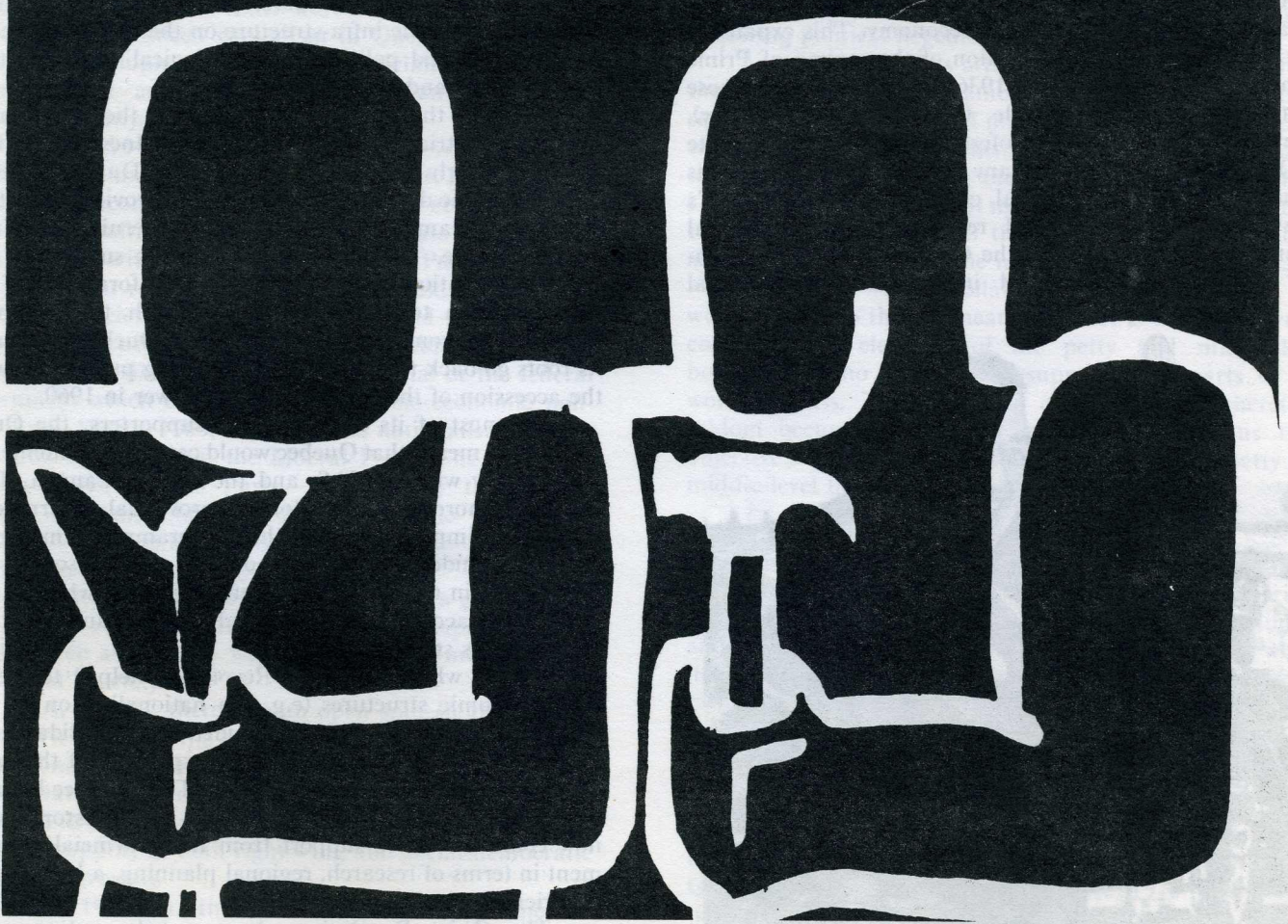
The development of strong links among revolutionaries throughout North America is of primary importance if we are to defeat our common enemy, US imperialism, and as well, in Canada and Quebec, the Canadian bourgeoisie and its state structure. We see the role of *Solidaire* at the present time as being one of encouraging investigation, exchange, debate and support, primarily among socialist militants politically active in the working class. We must make investigations in order to keep informed of what is happening elsewhere, with whom it is possible to make contacts and to collaborate. We will attempt to encourage exchange on lessons learned and errors made in various types of practice, and debate on these lessons and errors in order to further the development of a just political line. We recognize that political situations are at uneven levels of development in different areas, and that sometimes clear political lessons are difficult to draw. But we believe it is necessary to try to advance as much as possible on the lessons we do have through the application of Marxist-Leninist theory to our practices. Lastly, we should develop our links in such a way as to be able to provide political support when needed.

Thus we see the importance of the document "Beginnings of a Socialist Movement in Montréal," not only in the historical perspective it provides on the work of progressive militants in Montreal, and its discussion of the present state of debates among revolutionary groups, but also in the possibility that it will shed light on the practices of militants everywhere. We will welcome all reactions, debate and questions...

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\* We expect that much of the content of future issues will consist of summings-up of concrete organizational experiences, aimed at drawing the lessons and errors from each specific situation, in order to clarify organizational tactics and overall political strategy. These summings-up will be taken from work done in a wide range of sectors: factories, schools, communities, the public, or service sector. Tentatively planned are articles on hospitals, and on an organizational experience in a large Montreal factory.

# Beginnings of a Socialist Movement in Montréal



# I. The Context of the Workers' Struggles

The period between 1920 and 1960 saw the penetration of American Imperialism into Quebec to the point where it became dominant in the Quebec economy. This expansion was facilitated by the cooperation of the regime of Prime Minister Maurice Duplessis (1936-1939; 1944-1959) whose party, the Union Nationale (National Union Party), represented the traditional professional petty bourgeois elite of Quebec. In the absence of any programme of indigenous industrialization, U.S. capital came to control Quebec's most profitable sectors and resources. The ideological stranglehold maintained by the Catholic Church throughout this period also helped in demobilizing potential

opposition. (See annex on class structure in Québec).

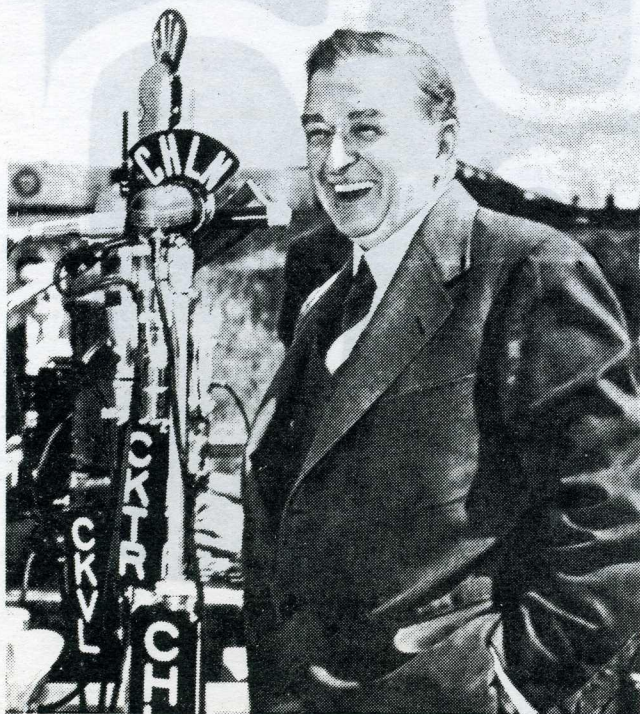
The result of this development was a relatively advanced economic infra-structure on the one hand and a rather traditional political and ideological superstructure on the other hand.

By 1960 the contradiction between the needs of a modern industrial society and the backwardness of the state structure clearly required a solution. With Duplessis' death in 1959 and the defeat of his party in the provincial election of 1960, it became possible to begin a modernization of the state structure. This period, called by its supporters the "Quiet Revolution," was essentially a transformation of the superstructure to bring it into line with the relatively advanced economic development of the Quebec economy: its roots go back to the 1920's, but the big push came with the accession of the Liberal Party to power in 1960.

For most of its initiators and supporters, the Quiet Revolution meant that Quebec would catch up economically and socially with the U.S. and the rest of Canada. This implied a more active role for the provincial government. The main impetus behind this programme came from Quebec's middle-level bourgeoisie(1) which sought to remain within the Canadian federal structure while at the same time acquiring a greater degree of autonomy in managing its state affairs.

On the whole the Quiet Revolution helped to create state economic structures (e.g. the nationalization of the hydro-electricity industry) which aided the consolidation of the middle-level bourgeoisie and the expansion of the large Canadian and American monopolies. The province became even more attractive for investment as the investors could now count on active support from the provincial government in terms of research, regional planning, a lowering of electricity costs, highways, etc...

The Quiet Revolution also created modern state structures through legislative reforms such as the reinstatement of a Ministry of Education (which had been abolished in the last century as education was returned to the control of the churches), Hospitalization Insurance, reform of the



Maurice Duplessis, Prime Minister of Quebec from 1944 to 1959. Reactionary in his politics, he quietly sold Quebec down the river to the U.S. in the years of his control.

(1) See annex on class forces in Quebec.



The Congress of the Parti Québécois

Labour Code, etc.; all of which were attempts to respond to the needs of advanced capitalism in Quebec. The school system, for example, now trained technicians, technocrats, engineers and administrators rather than the priests, doctors and lawyers it had before.

Around 1964-65, however, the Quiet Revolution began to die out and there was a clear slowdown in governmental social and economic measures. While economic and political difficulties demanded increased state intervention, divisions grew within the governing Liberal Party, primarily over two inter-related questions: i) should bold socio-economic policies be slowed down or should this course of action be pursued, primarily through public and mixed enterprise; and ii) should it be the provincial or the federal government which controls Quebec's socio-economic policies? From 1965 to 1969, federalist and nationalist elements had been united within the Liberal Party. The dominant faction of the Liberal Party—most closely tied to big capital—chose now to slow down economic and social legislation and took a federalist stance; the minority faction (with support among the upper civil servants and the newer strata of petty bourgeoisie) began to push for a greater state role in socio-economic development, with independence for Quebec seen as the only way of creating a "modern" and "balanced" society.

Thus, in 1967 there was an open split in the Liberal Party. With some of the Liberals, René Lévesque, leader of the nationalist faction, founded the Mouvement Souveraineté-Association (Sovereignty-Association Movement) which became the Parti Québécois in October of the same year (with the support of both right-wing and social-democratic nationalist groups).

From 1967 on, the national question became the principal contradiction on the Quebec political scene<sup>(2)</sup>; witness the rise of the Parti Québécois; the relatively direct confrontations between the Union Nationale prime minister Daniel Johnson and his federal counterpart, Pierre Elliot Trudeau; the tumultuous provincial elections in 1970, when

(2) We have strong reservations on the manner in which the principal contradiction is defined. See critical commentary after the main text.

the Liberals came back into power and the Parti Québécois won 25% of the popular vote; the October Crisis, the adoption of a hard line towards Quebec nationalism by both the provincial and federal Liberal governments, etc. In short, we can say that the national question was a secondary contradiction in the years 1960 to 1967 but that it became principal five or six years ago.

## QUEBEC'S POLITICAL PARTIES AND THE NATIONAL QUESTION

The independence debate in Quebec has slowly led to a realignment of forces within the different factions of Quebec's petty and middle-level bourgeoisies.

### a] the Parti Québécois

The Parti Québécois is the only political party in Quebec whose programme is based on Quebec's political independence from Canada. On the one hand, the PQ recruits its supporters from among intellectuals, civil servants, and some former supporters of the Union Nationale (small town elites, professionals); it has also made certain gains within the middle-level bourgeoisie and the "state bourgeoisie" (top level bureaucrats in the state apparatus), who see in independence the possibility of acquiring political hegemony.

As well, the PQ has attracted important support from the working class, mainly among the unionized francophone sector working in large and medium-sized plants. There are two principal reasons for this: 1) the image of social change that it projects (militancy; the nature of its party funding, i.e. by the base; a somewhat more progressive platform than the other parties); and 2) the lack of any revolutionary alternative representing the interests of the working class.

What this "class collaboration" by sectors of the working class in the PQ means in effect is that the party is controlled by elements of the petty and middle-level bourgeoisie who in turn are supported by parts of the working class. These working class elements, therefore, seldom occupy positions of leadership, and thus their objective interests are subordinated to those of the petty and middle-level bourgeoisie.

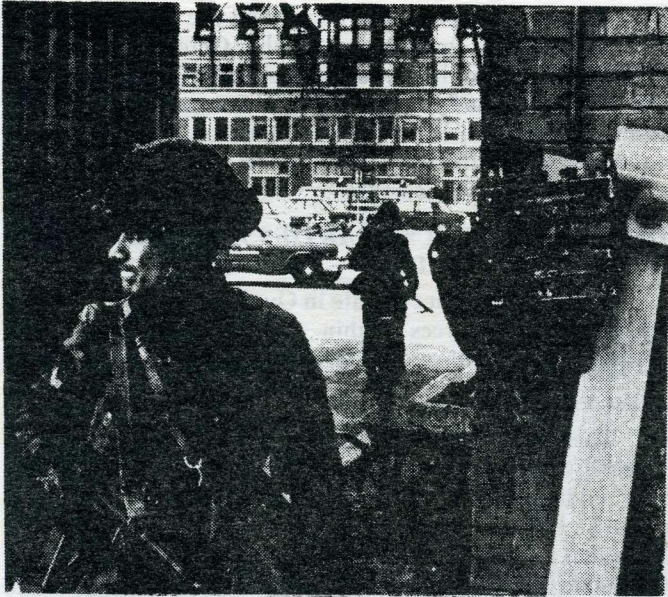
### b] the Liberal Party

On the other hand, the Liberal Party has established itself more and more clearly as the party of the American and Canadian monopolies, of their Québécois subordinates and of a good part of the middle-level bourgeoisie, whose interests favour the maintenance of the Canadian confederation.

### c) the Ralliement Creditiste (Social Credit)

The Ralliement Creditiste is a right-wing, populist party concentrated in rural areas, and whose economic programme is largely based on far-fetched schemes for credit and banking reforms. They have only been present in Quebec on the provincial level since 1970 and are an off-shoot of a federal party of the same name.

The Creditistes seek to channel the discontent of the population toward an ideology that is clearly reactionary and into propositions which are directly opposed to the objective interests of the working class (for example, unconditional apologies and support for free enterprise, the battle against the "socialists," the restoration of religious instruction in the schools). On the national question the Creditistes lean toward the status quo.



Federal troops in Quebec, Oct. 1970.

#### d) the Union Nationale (National Union)

Not having succeeded in electing a single member in the last election in October 1973, the Union Nationale is now clearly on the decline.

The industrialization of Quebec by American imperialism which created the need for a modern state structure undermined the strength of the Union Nationale, a party which had been rooted among the traditional professional petty-bourgeois elites.

#### EFFECTS OF THE RECESSION ON QUEBEC

While the 1968-1972 recession hit North America and a good number of other capitalist countries, it affected Quebec with particular force. In 1972, for example, 80 out of the 200 factories closed in Canada were in Quebec. In 1972, 18,000 workers were victims of layoffs due to plant closures. This figure obviously does not take into account partial layoffs, which would raise the total considerably.

The recession reached its worst point in 1970-1971. The situation became so serious that there was talk of a "crisis." The official unemployment level reached 10% in Quebec in February 1971. Every industrial sector was affected: The machinery and transport materials industry laid off one worker in ten, while the pulp and paper and electrical equipment industries laid off one worker in 20. Aeronautics workers and workers in electronics and communications equipment were also seriously affected.

A special characteristic of this period of recession was the fact that both unemployment and inflation were on the rise: between 1968 and 1971, the rate of inflation rose by 12.4%, while from 1961 to 1965, a period of economic prosperity in Quebec, the inflation rate had risen by only 6.9%.

For the workers who had jobs, this meant that they had to fight harder to obtain salary hikes which were lower than those obtained during the preceding period of "prosperity". Thus, from 1965 to 1970, the average weekly salary of Quebec workers rose from \$85.35 to \$92.74. This represents an increase of 8%, adjusting for inflation. In fact, the recession seemed to have the effect of increasing the bosses'

power over the workers by permitting them to play off the unemployed against the workers who had jobs with threats of factory closures, etc. However, the bosses' tactics didn't always work, as can be seen by the marked rise of worker combativity in this period.

#### 1968—1971: PERIOD OF POLITICAL AGITATION

In the realm of politics, the period from 1968 to 1971 was one of considerable activity. The two major events of this period occurred in 1970—the provincial elections of April 1970 and the October Crisis.

In general, these events did not alter the relation of forces between the federalist and independentist factions but both events contributed to a certain polarization and clarified the respective alignments. On the federalist side, despite the victory of the provincial Liberals in April, the military intervention of the federal government was deemed necessary to deal with what was a relatively minor crisis in October.<sup>(3)</sup> The Quebec bourgeoisie and its political representatives, the provincial Liberals, were unable to handle the situation alone and had to call on Ottawa, who demonstrated a firmness and determination to use any means to deal with the situation.

On the nationalist side the fence-straddling Union Nationale had lost out in the April elections. In general, the nationalist forces also closed ranks in October with opposition to the repressive measures of the federal government coming from the petty and middle bourgeoisie as well as union officials, the cooperative movement and various intellectuals previously associated with the Liberal Party. The Federalist forces (Canadian financial bourgeoisie and sectors of the Quebec middle-level bourgeoisie—the former playing the dominant, heavy-handed role) succeeded not only in dealing a blow to the nationalist forces but also severely set back the nascent community and progressive movement by conjuring up links between them and the terrorist FLQ. Their objective was to isolate progressive forces they felt could lead to an eventual workers' organization.

The working class during this period, as previously, did not play an autonomous political role. On the political level, it continued to support the different established political parties who became more and more interested in recuperating the working class vote. And its struggles were virtually all restricted to a purely economic level. It identified itself, in part at least, only with the unions and it was here that the transformations began in the 1960's continued to develop.

The pronounced recession of 1970-71 stimulated both the various sectors of the working class it affected and the union movement which was forced to respond, at the same time, to the militancy of the rank and file and to the impossibility of dealing with the problems it confronted (work conditions can be negotiated, but not the closing of a plant).

(3) In October 1970, the Front de Liberation du Québec — The Quebec Liberation Front, a terrorist organization kidnapped the British Trade Commissioner and the Quebec Labour Minister. The most important of their demands were the release of political prisoners and the broadcasting of the FLQ manifesto on national television. The situation was used by the federal and provincial governments to bring down repression on all left groups in Quebec. The federal government, not trusting the provincial government to do the job well, moved in the Canadian army for the occasion.



# II. The Trade Union Movement and Community Organizations & Progressive Groups

On the whole, over the years 1966-70, many new community organizations emerged and working class struggles proliferated (in comparison with the years of the "Quiet Revolution" during which there were relatively few major conflicts). However, while it does seem that there was a growing combativity during this period, the level of workers' class consciousness remained quite low, as it was almost exclusively limited to economic aspects.

## The Trade Union Movement

The three major Quebec unions are: i) CSN: Confederation of National Trade Unions; ii) FTQ: Quebec Federation of Labour; and iii) CEQ: Quebec Teachers' Corporation.

Both the CSN and the CEQ are purely Quebec unions whereas the FTQ is the Quebec branch of the Canadian Labour Congress, which in turn is affiliated to the AFL-CIO. The FTQ regroups primarily the industrial sector (steelworkers, rubberworkers, etc.) while the CSN has a strong base in the civil and public service (e.g. hospital) though it competes with the FTQ in construction and has certain teacher unions (college & university level).

In the context of the end of the "Quiet Revolution," of the beginning of the recession, and of a certain radicalisation of existing citizens' committees, the union federations began to modify ideologically their perceptions of social problems and their conceptions of their own role. They did not criticize "business unionism" but essentially opted for widening the scope of union activity beyond internal contract negotiations. This had become necessary as a result of increased government intervention at all levels on the one hand, and on the other because there continued to exist a large gap between the hopes and demands generated by the "Quiet Revolution" and the incapacity of the government to

provide solutions to the real problems of the working class. The trade union movement tried to move away from being a marginal, defensive force, or mere pressure group. It sought to become an intermediary force and at the same time an integral part of the bosses-state-unions network, and the representative of the "underprivileged" and the working class. This led them in the first instance to a position more critical of capitalist society and towards a verbalization of social inequalities. This comes out clearly in two documents produced by the two union centrals. In 1966, the CSN issued a report entitled "A Society Built for Man" and a regional branch of the FTQ, the Montreal Labour Council, published a paper called "The Third Solitude." It should be noted that in general, the FTQ follows the lead of the CSN in political and social matters.



At its 1968 convention, the CSN clarified the main lines of its orientation. Its report entitled "The Second Front" appeared at the beginning of a recession and at a time when an increasingly sharp consciousness of economic and social problems on the part of community organizations had led them to try to orient themselves around political action. At this point, out-flanked by the combativity of these organizations, the union movement sought to catch up by using them as models and by seeking to integrate them into a framework divided into a first front and a second front. Thus, their position was: "We will take care of the first front—the workplace—and you, community organizations, the second front—community organizing, consumer and political struggles."

This "trade-unionist" or "social-democratic" concept of a separation between workers' economic and political struggles influenced the ideological and organizational development of the community organizations in the period 1968-70. On the whole, the militants in the community organizations limited themselves to consumer problems and when there was a workers' struggle they gave it their support while trying to integrate it into the social struggles at the community level.

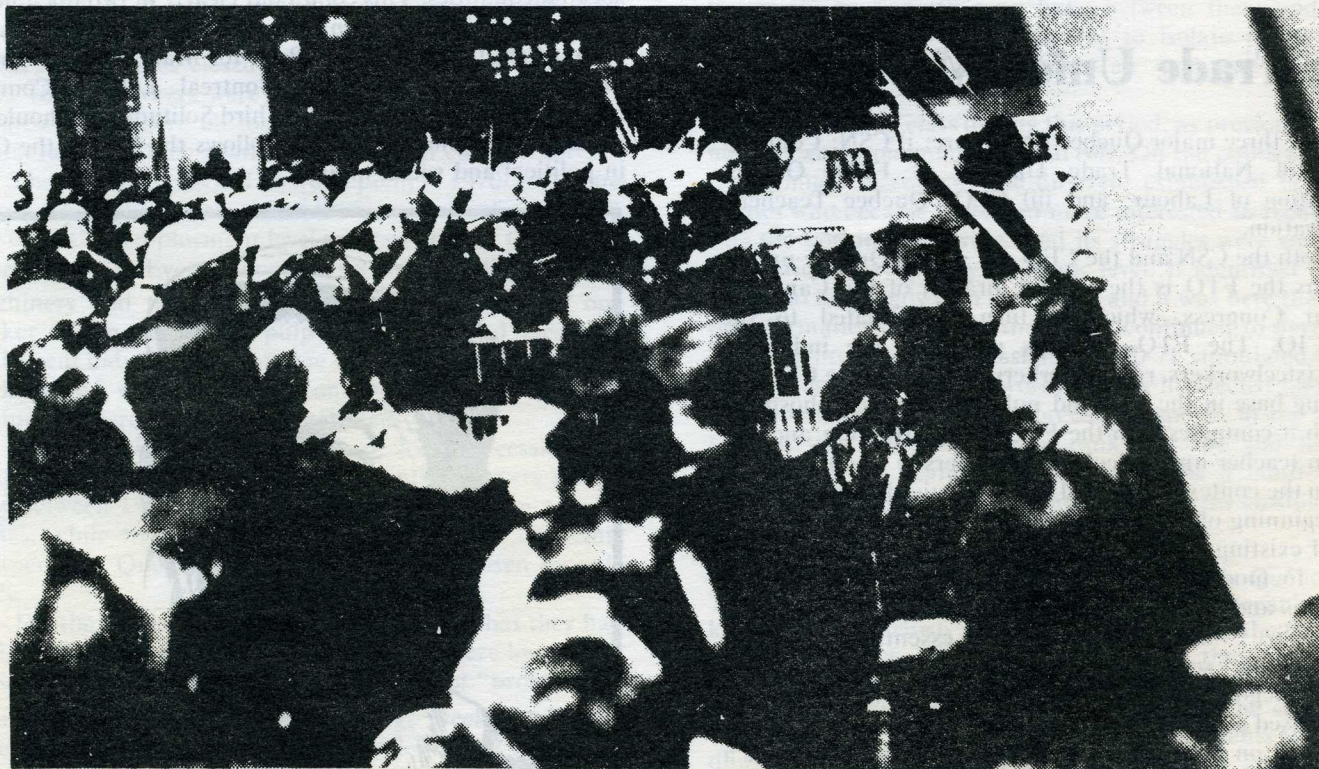
Workers' struggles were given two comparable types of leadership during this period: trade union "organizers" for economic struggles at the workplace and the community organizers for economic struggles in the community. It was at this time that these two groups of petty-bourgeois intellectuals began developing common positions via regional conferences, during 1970 and through a projected "Labour"-type political movement in Montreal (which was later to become the Front d'Action Politique—FRAP, Political Action Front).

## SINCE 1970: NEW KINDS OF STRUGGLE

The years 1970-71 marked the culminating point of the recession which began in 1966 and ended only in 1972.<sup>(5)</sup> This recession affected not only the less dynamic sectors of the economy (leather, clothing, textiles) but also the more stable and more advanced sectors (metallurgy, aeronautics, pulp and paper, petrochemicals). These industries are the most solid within Quebec's economic structure, employing the best-paid workers, who generally enjoy the greatest job security. The workers in these sectors constitute, along with the workers in the public service (and para-public, e.g. hospitals) the principal foundations of Quebec unionism. Thus, for the first time in a long while, their relatively privileged position was attacked by a recession.

The beginning of the 1970's was thus marked by long and determined workers' struggles. While these were principally centred around collective bargaining they were intensified by the strengthened position of the bourgeoisie during a recession. As well, new types of struggles appeared: against technological innovations resulting in the elimination of jobs (as was the case in the heated struggle at Montreal's largest daily newspaper, La Presse), or against plant shutdowns or layoffs (Gulf, mines in northwestern Quebec).

For the most part, the struggles have been fought with determination and in many cases have been quite militant; the Common Front General Strike in the public service and the spontaneous sympathy strikes in support of it in May 1972; the workers' occupation of the Price pulp and Paper plant; the detention of one of the owners of Consolidated Bathurst (pulp and paper); the militant rally and demonstrations around the strike at La Presse etc., are examples of the heightened worker combativity in this period.



In October, 1971, 15,000 people came out to demonstrate their solidarity with the striking workers of the French-language daily, La Presse.

In many cases, however, the struggles met with setbacks, or at best with partial successes. Union defeats considerably outnumbered victories in the early 1970's. It was the recession that confronted "traditional" trade-unionism with problems it was incapable of resolving: unemployment, layoffs, plant shut-downs, but also inflation and speed-ups which constantly eat away at increased salaries. The need for readjustment asserted itself for the union officials.

This, in conjunction with a growing number of organizers who were trying to inject a political content into the economic struggles, led to the union centrals (CSN, FTQ, CEQ) each issuing a "manifesto." These documents were the first attempt by the workers' movement to bring out the economic and political context of the specific battles they were waging and to situate them in the framework of the class struggle. They thus represented a step forward in ideological terms for the workers' movement. In the spirit of the manifestos, various other documents and public pronouncements were made which attempted to clarify workers' opposition to American imperialism (Gulf), the Canadian big bourgeoisie (Dominion Glass, La Presse) and to the Quebec state and middle-level bourgeoisie.

However, the syndical attempts to constitute an opposition force remained fragile. On the one hand they modified their role as defenders of the workers' interests by diminishing their collaboration with the state apparatuses and withdrawing from several joint consultation committees. But on the other hand, they have remained faithful to their reformist conceptions of political action and have generally continued to uphold this conception outside the workplace, within the "second front."

These forms of political action (hospital and school board elections among others) have been unsuccessful. The leftist rhetoric of the union leaders, coupled with a lack of leftist strategy (a practice conforming to traditional trade unionism), the division between the union federations, the lack of credibility they have with the workers, the bureaucratic nature of the federations and the absence of solid relations with rank and file, all converged to make the

unions easy targets for those in power. And when the reaction came, it was well-organized—combining demagogic attacks, repressive legislation, and fines and imprisonment of the three union leaders (after the general strike in 1972, on charges of contempt of court, for suggesting that the strikers ignore injunctions).

However, these struggles did help many of the workers involved gain a certain level of consciousness of the fact that their interests are opposed to those of the ruling class, not only on the economic level but on the political level as well. The Common Front struggle, for instance, showed clearly the collusion between the Quebec state structure and the bosses. It exposed as well some of the repressive instruments (special back-to-work laws) that the state was ready to use against the workers.

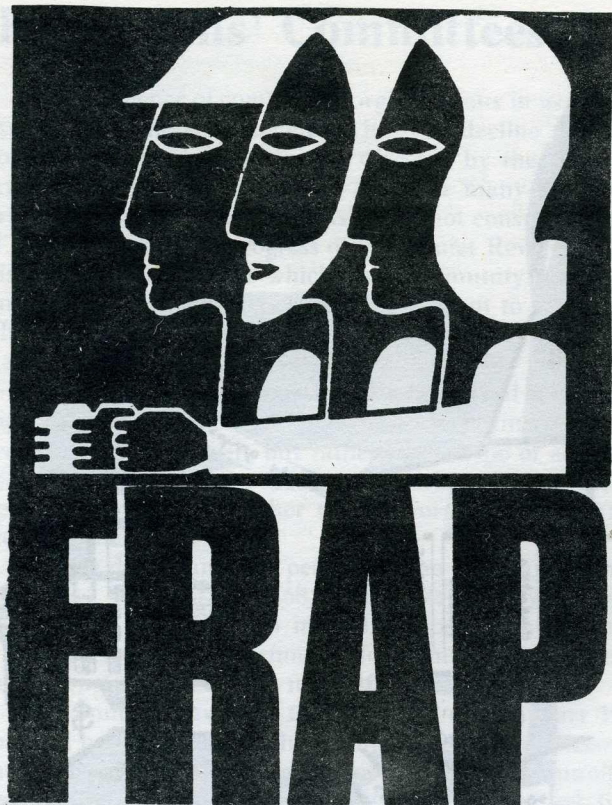
In brief, these struggles helped certain workers to express their interests, both political and economic, to understand that they were opposed to those of the ruling class and their state, and to begin to understand the necessity for workers to organize into an autonomous force which could struggle effectively against the ruling class.

In the short term, the positive effects could be seen in the more militant struggles and also in acts of defiance towards the political powers (e.g. non-respect of injunctions). In some instances the workers went beyond the limits set by the union leaders. However, on the whole, these struggles did not go beyond the immediate interests of the workers involved. Because of the lack of an autonomous political organization belonging to the workers to help give direction to these struggles, they remained militant economic struggles rather than political struggles.

This brings us to those groups which, during the sixties, operated outside the framework of the union movement while trying to defend either the interests of the "majority of the population," or, the interests of the working class. It is principally from these groups, the community organizations and progressive groups, that the current socialist movement developed, both organizationally and in terms of its militants.



FROM COMMON FRONT — TO INTER-UNION RAIDING



located in the Montreal districts of St-Jacques and Hochelaga-Maisonneuve) while others were created solely for the municipal elections, and were thus more open to near-complete domination by community organizers and union officials.

For the leaders and theoreticians of FRAP, its practice was inserted into the strategic perspective of the creation of a national workers' party, for which municipal activity was seen as the springboard. Ideologically social-democratic, FRAP rejected the framework of continuing the Quiet Revolution of the early sixties (i.e. reform of a backward state by the rising technocratic petty bourgeoisie in conformity with the interests of American imperialism). It opposed to this the beginnings of a class analysis situating "salaried workers" as the constituency capable of remoulding society in its interests and not that of the bourgeoisie. FRAP had the merits of undertaking a widescale action which regrouped the majority of progressive militants on the basis of a programme which corresponded to the low level of class consciousness of the majority of the working population.

Tactically, FRAP decided to contest the municipal elections against Montreal's reactionary mayor Jean Drapeau, who was seen as the municipal expression of capitalist political domination in Quebec. It was hoped that the participation of large numbers of previously isolated militants and the launching of the organization on the basis of concrete participation in the municipal elections would guarantee its success. However, not a single seat was won.

The reason for this electoral failure were multiple. The most obvious was the sensationalist tactic used by the incumbent mayor Drapeau. Using the uncertain atmosphere surrounding the "October Crisis" of the FLQ,

Drapeau adroitly issued a statement claiming that FRAP was a front of the FLQ, and thus helped reduce any chances that FRAP might have had in winning any seats.

However, there were more serious weaknesses in FRAP, which if not directly responsible for its electoral losses, were important in its inability to grow in strength after the elections. For the leadership, the production of a programme that was minimal but that discussed various social problems encountered by the citizens of Montreal, coupled with the participation in the October 1970 mayoral elections were the most important ways of developing unity in the organization. However, this didn't respond to the needs of the militants at the base. As a result, the level of debate around the leadership's tactical programme, and its assimilation by the rank-and-file, was not particularly high. It did not touch the major political questions, such as the national question, the trade-union movement, American imperialism; which were already under discussion amongst isolated groups of the militants involved. FRAP's political analysis could be summed up in the phrase the "majority versus the minority", i.e., salaried workers are the majority of the population (all salaried workers without distinction) and a minority within government, which is controlled by a small group of businessmen, luminaries, industrialists; the majority of the population are tenants, the minority are landlords, etc. FRAP's programme dealt with such problems as housing, health-care, leisure and recreation without applying any more of a systematic analysis to them than they did to their global evaluation of society.

The other major weakness of FRAP was the heterogeneous nature of the rank-and-file: students, nationalists, marxists, syndicalists, community organizers, members of citizens' committees, technocrats in opposition to Drapeau (who was often their employer), etc. The result was a bureaucratic superstructure tacked on to a heterogeneous base which was going through a process of questioning, often bringing up questions that the leadership would refuse to answer.

It was all of these factors that added up to FRAP's electoral defeat.

## The Collapse of FRAP

Following the elections, FRAP turned in on itself, already showing signs that the unity of the organization was fragile. This came out clearly at the congress held in March 1971, which resulted in the first of two splits in FRAP.

At this congress three factions were present, representing different fractions of the progressive petty bourgeoisie, expressing positions which came out of differing practices. On the one hand there was the dominant faction constituted mainly of militants of the CAP in the St-Jacques district of Montreal (a working class area with a high proportion of students, welfare and unemployed). They identified two major faults in FRAP; a low level of theoretical understanding (class analysis) and weak links with the working class, principally in the workplace. They proposed consequently to decentralize the structures of FRAP in order to permit a greater concentration of energies amongst the rank-and-file. From this practice they saw the possibility of developing the level of theoretical knowledge.

In direct opposition was a more clearly reformist

tendency, represented by the community organizers who felt that the orientation FRAP had given itself (urban activity based on the community) was correct, and refused the beginnings of a class analysis put forward by CAP St-Jacques. In between the two was a more or less trade-unionist tendency which wished to maintain the unity of the movement but rallied behind CAP St-Jacques' propositions.

The congress led to the departure of 4 CAPs (those which depended most strongly on the leadership of the community organizers). For the groups which remained, it represented a step forward in their strategic orientation (beginnings of a class analysis, criticism of the Parti Québécois and of the trade-unions). However these advances were made in the context of debates largely cut off from consistent practices within the working class and as such had a tendency to be marked by a certain ultra-leftism; lack of debate between the more advanced militants and the less advanced, and a neglect of the necessity of some centralization in order to permit the development of ideological unity, and by a trend towards a turning in on oneself.

The year following this congress saw a further split in FRAP with the departure of the majority of its militants, from the two strongest CAPs (St-Jacques and Maisonneuve). At the time, the respective positions were not stated explicitly, but were characterized by three major points of divergence:

1. The trade-unionist tendency was prepared to support a project for a workers' party emanating from the ranks of the more left-wing trade-union bureaucrats, whereas the socialist tendency saw the necessity of maintaining a critical distance vis-à-vis the trade unions.

2. The trade-unionist tendency was in general more

favorable to actions in support of workers in struggle which were larger in scale than those advocated by the socialist tendency who were trying to develop strong links with small groups of workers.

3. Finally the trade-unionist tendency saw its organizational links to the working class as being based on the residential nature of the community which would make possible links with various strata of the working class. In contrast, the socialist tendency was pushing for placing the priority on developing core groups of militants principally at the workplace and secondarily within community groups and in the school system.

This split was the end of the second version of FRAP. The organization continues to exist with the support from the unions but has ceased to be a major participant in the evolution of the socialist movement in Montreal.

The period from the middle of 1971 til the middle of 1973 is one of transition characterized by the emergence of a myriad of groups which have attempted to respond to certain demands of the popular strata of Quebec society, including food co-ops, tenants' associations, unemployed workers' groups, groups of progressive students. These groups evolved alongside FRAP, some developing similar perspectives, others (the majority) not being able to survive beyond the length of a grant from the government or charity. Thus the groups present during the period can be divided into 3 major categories: 1. The political action committees (CAPs); 2. Social pressure and service groups; 3. study and research groups. Analysing them in this schematic fashion has the danger of oversimplifying and even eliminating that which is dynamic in their evolution, but unfortunately could not be avoided for the purposes of this text.



# Conclusion

Up to now our translation and presentation have followed closely the original. At this point in the original text there remained two short sections ("Groups after the Collapse of FRAP", and "The Workers' Committees") and a conclusion. We have chosen to present a brief synopsis of these remaining sections rather than as originally published. Our reasons for doing so are as follows:

1. Beginning with the section, "Groups after the Collapse of FRAP", the original document becomes more and more a defense of one particular orientation within the socialist movement (this point is developed in the Critical Commentary which follows), an orientation with which we have profound disagreements and whose positions on the evolution of the socialist movement we consider to be, at best, partial.

2. The historical data presented in this part of the original on those groups operating outside the workplace, in communities or schools, is of very little use, since it contains no information on the specific dynamics and activities of these groups, nor on their importance in an overall strategic perspective.

Nonetheless we felt it necessary to present some of the information from these sections. In the first place, the critiques made in this part of the original towards specific groups remain partially valid. Secondly, in order to understand the Critical Commentary and Afterword which follow, this information is necessary.

Thus we have concentrated exclusively on the "Political Action Committees" (CAPs) which emerged from FRAP, and from whom emerged the "Workers' Committees" orientation (see Afterword). We have omitted the discussion of community, education, and research groups that existed during this period, such discussion being, in any event, very inadequate in the original. (Although we recognized this as a limitation, we were unable to modify the text in such a way as to present correctly these groups. Nor were we willing at this time to write our own presentation of them.)

For all intents and purposes, the only CAPs which continued to develop after FRAP's collapse were those which had existed before FRAP itself; that is, CAPs St-Jacques and Maisonneuve. Within these groups the progressive petty bourgeois intellectuals became dominant, taking the leadership from the community organizers. Two major political currents were present throughout this period: the dominant one at the beginning can be categorized as "theoreticism", that is, the idealization of the role of theory and the revolutionary intellectual, and the minimization of the role of the working class.

This orientation had both positive and negative aspects. On the one hand, its insistence on the necessity of acquiring a solid understanding of Marxist theory was a step forward in comparison to the amorphous, reformist ideology of FRAP. As well, the need to build links with the working class was seen as the central priority, and in order to accomplish this the general directive of "implantation" among the masses was put forward. That is; the task of socialist militants was to go and work directly with the working class, either by working in factories or other workplaces, or in working class communities.

On the other hand, both the tasks of theoretical development and "implantation" were conceived of one-sidedly. The CAP's activities were subordinated to an academic, dogmatist conception of Marxist theory. The role of revolutionary intellectuals was over-estimated. Any progressive workers contacted in the workplaces of communities were immersed in theoretical debates on a level beyond their existing capacities and became isolated from their fellow workers in the process. On top of all this, the CAPs became very bureaucratized, with a central apparatus out of proportion to the actual work being done.

The second political current in the CAPs in this period tended to develop in reaction to the first. It is this second orientation which characterized in general the document, "Beginnings of a Socialist Movement in Montreal". It also had positive and negative sides to it.

This orientation emerged from the section of the CAPs which dealt with workplace organizing (the other sections being concerned with organizing in the working class communities and in the educational institutions). The basis of its criticism was the "intellectualism" and "theoreticism" of the CAPs, and their resulting isolation from the mass of working people. A large gap was seen between the theoretical objectives of the CAPs and their practice. This was attributed to the following factors:

- an inadequate understanding of working class reality.
  - a basic tendency to take as a starting point the needs of the CAPs and not the needs of the working people.
  - a false conception of the CAPs as developed political organizations with a political line, and with the task of recruiting workers to this organization.
- All these factors had led to an impasse which was preventing any real link with the working class from developing.

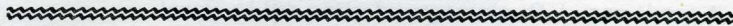
According to this second orientation, the response to this impasse was the creation of workers' committees in the workplaces. These were to bring together the most militant workers and become an organizational and ideological reference point for all the workers in a given shop. Socialist militants in the workplaces were to participate fully in these committees and thus would be solved the problem of how to link progressive intellectuals directly to workers' struggles. This was the terrain on which could develop, in an organized form, a political intervention in the workplaces.

It was also claimed that the workers' committees corresponded to the level of development of the workers' movement itself, and was not merely the brainchild of isolated intellectuals. The workers' committees would lead economic and trade-union struggles and attempt to situate them in a wider political context.

Lastly, the workers' committees were to represent the **foundations** of the future political organization of the working class. On the basis of their preliminary organizational and ideological work, and through the gradual unification of the workers' committees, the party of the working class would emerge.

The essentially positive aspects of this orientation were in its criticism of the CAPs' "theoreticist" errors and their resulting isolation from the working class. Despite the one-sidedness of the criticism and its lack of concern with its own limitations, it did state clearly the necessity of breaking down this isolation. Secondly, it insisted on the necessity of working within the working class, and finding organizational forms that could concretize this work that would correspond to the level of development of working class consciousness.

However, this orientation, which came to dominate an important section of the socialist movement and continues to exist in organized form, has demonstrated important errors and clearly reormist tendencies. In the Critical Commentary and Afterword that follow, an attempt is made to examine the fundamental errors of this orientation and how these have affected the socialist movement, and the document "Beginnings of a Socialist Movement..." itself.



## INTRODUCTION to the following texts

As was mentioned earlier, the new French edition of "Beginnings of a Socialist Movement in Montreal" was published with a new critical introduction and an afterword that attempted to bring it up to date and present an analysis of the present tasks of socialists. The "Critical Commentary" which follows is a translation of the bulk of the new introduction, and the section on "The Present Situation" is an adaptation of the new afterword.

We decided that it was better to publish the new introduction **after** the presentation of the main text, since it was, after all, a commentary on that text. "The Present Situation" is an adaptation rather than a simple translation of the new afterword because we felt that the original had left out certain facts and information that were necessary, especially for those readers outside of Montreal and Quebec, and because we felt some of its criticisms were inadequate as they stood. As a result, some of the section as we present it is written by **Solidaire**, some (the majority) is a direct translation, and some is translated from a document called "Serve the People: a summing up of political work in a large Montréal factory". (This last document will almost certainly be published in full in a future issue of **Solidaire**.)



# A Critical Commentary on the Text

## Comments on the First Part of the Text

### The positive aspects of the text in general:

Firstly, it should be noted that "Beginnings of a Socialist Movement in Montréal" represents a serious attempt to analyse scientifically the recent history of groups of progressive militants in Montréal, while trying to place this analysis in the context of developing economic forces and class relationships in Québec. In the text, the authors tried to go beyond a simple description or facile generalizations, to analyse concretely progressive political activity (in Montréal). This in itself is a major step forward, even if the analysis in the second part of the text is based on a political line we now consider incorrect.

Secondly, the mass of information in the text on the activities of socialist militants in the citizens' committees, in FRAP, and in various groups that have followed, is also of considerable importance and useful. To our knowledge, this is the first time that a public document has presented such basic information on the various Montréal groups, and thus enabled those who were not directly implicated to understand their development.

### SPECIFIC COMMENTS ON THE ANALYSIS OF THE ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL CONTEXT:

The quality of the economic and political analysis and the analysis of the union movement represent a third positive aspect of the text. Though not without faults and over-generalizations, the analysis is an attempt, with the aid of Marxist theory, to understand the relationship between changing economic conditions and the development of class relations, both within the bourgeoisie and between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. In this sense the text represents a step forward in comparison to previous texts, both on the level of method and of content.

Nonetheless, certain remarks are necessary concerning various aspects of this analysis.

#### • On the Nature of the Principle Contradiction in Québec.

Baseing ourselves on the first version of "Travailleurs Québécois et Lutte Nationale,"\* we had defined and used the concept of principle contradiction by reducing it to the major political conflict visible on the "political

scene" in a given period. This led us to talk of the national struggle between the Parti Québécois and the federalist parties as the basic manifestation of the principle contradiction in Québec.

Such a conception is incorrect. We believe that the principal contradiction must be considered above all as a contradiction between classes, whether these are already organized and active on the political level or constituted by social forces, still little organised and absent from "politics" at a given time.

Following on from these remarks, we believe that at present, the principal contradiction is the foreign domination of the Québec nation and people shown in two interlinked forms: 1) the growing control of American imperialism in Québec, and 2) the national oppression we suffer inside Canada on the part of the Canadian bourgeoisie. In class terms, this contradiction opposes on the one hand big American and Canadian capital (the dominant aspect) and on the other the Québec people, composed of the working class, the lower levels of the petty bourgeoisie, and certain elements of the middle levels of the petty bourgeoisie. Between these two poles oscillate the present nationalist forces, (e.g. the PQ) composed principally of the middle and upper levels of the petty bourgeoisie and certain nationalist elements of Québec's middle-level bourgeoisie.

#### • On the Pick-Up in the Economy (of 72 73)

In discussing the economic improvement that began in '72, we said in "Beginnings" specifically that it should have the effect of increasing the economic power of the workers vis-à-vis their respective bosses. That is, given their enormous profits, the bosses would be more prepared to make monetary concessions to their workers

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\* "Travailleurs Québécois et Lutte Nationale" (Québec workers and the National Struggle) was a document published in 1972 by militants in an attempt to develop a Marxist analysis of the national question. A revised and developed version has recently been published.

rather than waste a prosperous period because of a strike. Although generally correct, these remarks only told part of the story and were incorrect in their narrow economist viewpoint. If things were always like that, how does one explain such long and hard strikes as Firestone, Price, Canadian Gypsum, and United Aircraft, to mention only

the most well-known? In presenting the terms of the balance of economic forces between the companies and their workers, we forgot that it was necessary to bring in other factors than the general economic situation: specifically the economic force of the particular enterprise, and the militancy of its workers.

## Comments on the Analysis of Community and Progressive Groups

This analysis is clearly the most important part of "Beginnings". It is equally the part requiring the most criticism.

Firstly, there is a definite gap between the stated intentions of the text and the reality it in fact describes.

The explicit **objectives** of the text are as follows. Firstly, it tries to see the stages and principle characteristics of the developing link between the progressive petty bourgeoisie and the workers movement and the working class in general. Secondly, it claims to present, via this linking process, the first stages of an organized socialist movement, that is, "the link between socialism and the working class."

In **reality** the development of only a part of this progressive petty bourgeoisie is presented by the text: that which was found in the citizens' committees, in FRAP, in CAPs St. Jacques and Maisonneuve, and finally, in the groups of militants that directly followed them. Certainly this is an important fraction of the progressive petty bourgeoisie. Nonetheless it must be admitted that there exist other fractions, other progressive groups whose importance doesn't have to be argued....

For example, the text does not present the activities developed at present by militants on levels other than the workplace: in working class communities, for example, via various "services" (e.g. food coops, health clinics, etc.) or with housewives. In the same way it denies the existence of other political tendencies developing through these various practices, particularly that which would become the editorial committee of the paper En Lutte. This is hardly the way to develop unity between socialist militants....

### THE DEFICIENCIES AND ERRORS OF THE ANALYSIS

#### a) Essentially, the Analysis of the Period up to the Collapse of FRAP is Correct.

A basic quality of the text should be recognized from the beginning: it correctly seized the political meaning of militant activity. Above all, this is based on its explicit recognition of the central task of linking with the working class. In effect, the dominant factor in the history of community and progressive groups has been the various levels of their link with the working class, the means they have used to develop these links, and the errors they have

\*EN LUTTE! is a bi-weekly newspaper aimed at the progressive and militant elements of the working class, with the object of presenting a Marxist-Leninist analysis of workers' struggle in Québec, and developing the conditions for the foundation of a revolutionary workers' party. It has been published for 1½ years by militants of various origins, among them people from the community and education sectors of CAPs St. Jacques and Maisonneuve (which dissolved in early '74).

committed. Correctly, the text presents this.

On top of this, the text makes a very correct analysis of the periods of the citizens' committees and of FRAP. It recalls that at the time this task of linking with the working class was conceived of in a very elitist way, and also that we confused the working class, the proletariat, and working people in general. It recalls also that the political content of this time was essentially social-democratic, marked by a very populist attitude. This camouflaged a desire to keep peoples' struggles under the control of militants from the progressive petty-bourgeoisie.

Nonetheless the FRAP period allowed militants of CAP St. Jacques, and later, Maisonneuve, to develop considerably. The text recalls this clearly enough:

- We were led in this period to clarify the position that the basic task of political militants is the struggle to build a political organisation of the workers.

- We identified two general tasks that would lead towards this goal. Implantation among the masses, principally in the workplaces, is the first of these tasks. This was not presented in a restricted sense (i.e. to go and work in a shop), but on a wider level (the spread, via different means, of proletarian ideology among the masses). The second task was the acquisition of Marxist-Leninist theory by militants.

#### b) The Analysis of CAPs St. Jacques and Maisonneuve after FRAP is Partial: the Intellectualist Tendency is Described.

The text "Beginnings" gives therefore a correct idea of the period up to the collapse of FRAP. Where the analysis begins to fall down is in the presentation of the period from 1971, after FRAP, until the summer of 1973, the writing of the text. Let us return to the text.

In general it shows us that the movement of linking with the masses was dominated, in the period 71-72, by an intellectualist deviation....

With some confusion, the authors define this deviation in the CAPs in the following terms:

- If Marxism became, after FRAP, a reference point and a useful guide for clarifying militants' activity, it was a Marxism taken from books and little understood. As a result, many militants were led to subordinate practice to theory, and, via an intense program of individual political education, search for a complete and total political line, while at the same time forgetting that the link with the working class was only just beginning.

- There also existed in the CAPs (above all in St. Jacques in '72) a false conception of the relationship between intellectuals and workers, between the so-called revolutionary militants in the CAPs and the workers movement. Based on a fixed conception of Lenin's positions on the relationship between the conscious

element and the spontaneous element, many militants idealized the role of revolutionary intellectuals (their own role) and denied the role of the working class. Such an attitude led militants to see as their first task the recruitment of militant workers into the CAPs, which they saw as essentially the vanguard of the workers' movement, despite these organisations' isolation from that movement.

The workers thus recruited were obliged to suffer through a level of political debate much above their own level of development. On top of this, the internal functioning of the CAPs did not allow them to be integrated. Finally, not many workers were interested. For those that were, they risked finding themselves isolated in their own workplaces. Effectively, the type of political education proposed to them by the CAP militants gave them few tools that were useful in raising the class consciousness of their fellow-workers, on the basis of the workers' own needs and preoccupations.

• Finally, the organisation of the CAPs was very bureaucratic; the best militants found themselves mobilized full-time on technical and coordinating tasks that were totally out of proportion to the real importance of the CAPs.

The result of these errors is clear: the process of linking with the working class was slowed down, if not stopped, while the organisations of militants stagnated.

Still according to the text, certain militants, aware of this setback, decided to transform their point of view and work towards the construction of autonomous committees of workers in the workplaces. In other words, everything is presented as if the "workers' committees" stage followed directly the "intellectualist" stage, and was somehow the correct solution to this deviation.

Unfortunately, these affirmations are not quite correct. By presenting things in this way, the text commits three errors.

### c) 'The Empiricist Tendency is Not Analysed.

The **first** error is in the analysis of the intellectualist deviation, particularly concerning the links between theory and practice, and the relationship between intellectuals and workers.

In terms of theory and practice, the authors were correct in stating that the basic error was to arrive at the point of subordinating practice to Marxist theory. What they forgot to mention was the confusion existing at the time, between Marxism as a tool for analysing social and economic reality, and Marxism-Leninism as a political guide to the orientation of our practices. Militants with some understanding of the capitalist mode of production were considered "advanced," even if this understanding was of little use in clarifying their perspectives on how to build up the link with the working class. Such an error laid the ground for the extreme empiricism that would follow. Marxism as it was used having proved its lack of usefulness as a guide to practice, numerous militants concluded in effect that it wasn't worth bothering with, and launched themselves headfirst into practice.

As for the question of relations between intellectuals and workers, the problem was not in the fact that militants of CAPs St. Jacques and Maisonneuve attempted to recruit militant workers into the CAPs. After all, has there ever been an organisation with the stated objective of overthrowing capitalism and building socialism that has not concerned itself with its progressive proletarianization? The problem lay in the fact that the question of recruitment was never clarified (**who** are we recruiting, and **on what basis**?) On top of this, the CAP militants had no political strategy to propose to the

workers contacted. Finally, they never made systematic efforts to understand that the proletarianization of organisations of militants (i.e. "recruitment") was only one condition for the emergence of the party, and not unconnected from others, such as the development of proletarian ideology in the masses.

The **second error** was an error of method in the analysis of the historical development of the two CAPs.

In effect, parts 3 and 4 of "Beginnings" (after FRAP's collapse) refer to the historical development of the two CAPs, even if they don't state this explicitly. Now, it is an

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incorrect analysis to state that the CAPs were dominated exclusively by the intellectualist tendency right up to the point where people, in opposing the errors of this tendency, were led to put the priority on the development of workers' committees.

In fact, if the authors of "Beginnings" had been explicitly analysing the history of the CAPs, on the basis of the internal contradictions of these two groups, they would have been led to a fairly evident conclusion. Throughout the history of the CAPs, above all, St. Jacques, runs a struggle between two political tendencies. On the one hand there is the intellectualist tendency described above; on the other, there was a tendency with often diametrically opposed characteristics, which we will call "empiricist."

These two tendencies coexisted inside the CAPs for a large part of the history of these groups. Up to the summer of 1972 it was the intellectualist tendency that dominated, while the second tendency was only latent. However, from this time on, the empiricist tendency gradually replaced the former, in reaction to its excesses and the stagnation that had resulted. By the beginning of '73 this new tendency was dominant, to the point where some militants who had been the most deeply involved in the intellectualist deviation had completely changed their position and become the most articulate representatives of the empiricist tendency.

Let's examine the characteristics of this empiricist tendency:

• in opposition to the intellectualist error which had idealized theory, the empiricist reaction which followed led militants to idealize practice. Militants went so far as to consider that practice determined the orientation of political work, that it created, in some way, its own theory. Certainly none formally denied the importance of Marxist theory, but there was no attempt to use it as a political guide capable of clarifying the practices. Consequently, the link with the working class—was made correctly, the primary form it would take from that time on; implantation directly in the workplaces—was made blindly. It had little or no long-term perspective, and implantation became practically an end in itself. One went so far as to quote Mao (On Practice, and Against Book Worship) to denigrate theory.

An example of such an empiricist approach was given by those groups of militants who concentrated their activities exclusively on the exchange of information and technical suggestions on methods for linking with the workers in their respective enterprises. They could have worked towards gradually becoming a basis for the political coordination and direction of their members' practices, clarifying the general political orientation of their work and how to link the daily practices to this political orientation. Instead they were content to simply become places where one exchanged information and anecdotes from "our respective shops."

• to such an attitude idealising practice to the detriment of theory, there corresponds a similar attitude concerning the relationship between workers and revolutionary militants. This question was presented as if militants had reached the point of considering themselves simply as combatative workers—more combatative than the others—rather than political militants with a specific role to play in the transmission of revolutionary theory.

• finally, in reaction to the very bureaucratic leadership and organisation of the CAPs, people went so far as to practically dissolve them, and as a replacement, put together very loose groups of militants that were more or less isolated one from the other and were themselves considered as transitional structures.

The consequences of this empiricist period were two fold.

Firstly, a positive result was the recognition from this time on of the necessity to root ourselves concretely among the masses, on the basis of their immediate preoccupations, participating in their struggles, and from this, beginning a slow process of organisation and political development. For militants of CAPs St. Jacques and Maisonneuve this conception permitted a definite acceleration in the process of linking with the working class.

However, after certain initial successes, difficulties began. The link with the workers often operated, in fact, without the aid of Marxist theory as a political guide, and several militants were led to wear themselves out in purely unionist practices, without any real political perspectives. On top of this, the isolation of the groups of militants made exchange difficult, and even less easy was any common evaluation of their practices on the basis of a more general conception of the political tasks at hand. Finally, in the absence of any general political guide, some militants were led to follow uncritically those with more advanced practices; basing themselves on these practices almost unconditionally.

The text "Beginnings of a Socialist Movement in Montréal" does not mention whatsoever this second, empiricist, tendency in the CAPs, nor its characteristics or consequences. As we have said, this was a second error. It led to a third error: the way the text presented the workers' committees.



#### d) A False Conception of the Role of the Workers' Committees.

Basically, the text states that the perspective of primarily developing workers' committees in the workplaces represents an alternative for militants, a response to their intellectualist deviation. The text also says that these committees are wide organisations, open to militant workers of each workplace, and that they will become the supporting structures of the future political organisation of the workers. Stating this, several things are forgotten.

**Firstly**, one forgets that all the work of conceptualizing the workers' committees, basically within the "Committee of Ten," and by extension inside the text "Beginnings," must be situated **within** the context of this empiricist period that affected the activities of militants following the summer of 1972. In a certain sense, this entire effort of clarification had been seen as an attempt to get out of this empiricism.

However, this attempt was itself marked by a very empirical approach and to some extent made attempts to justify it. It is because of this that the text "Beginnings" makes no attempt to situate the task of developing workers' committees in relation to the strategic objective of socialist militants; the construction of a revolutionary political organisation of the workers. What's more, it presents this task as an absolute priority, in the short term, which must be followed by all militants. This denies that there are other bases for linking with the workers than the workplace, and other ways of linking than the construction of mass organisations in the workplaces.

**Secondly**, this way of looking at the workers' committees leads to an incorrect political position. This consists of making mass organisations, by definition centred on economic struggle in the workplace, the base of the future workers' party, "a first link in the construction of the political organisation of the workers."

To take this position makes no sense: mass organisations, even grouped together, are one thing, and the future revolutionary workers' party is another. The first bring together both militant workers and socialists, while the second is made up only of socialist workers or not. Consequently, to say that the future socialist organisation will come from the workers' committees, is to wish to replace that organisation by some federation of mass organisations. Historically, such a conception has led to an impasse.

The least one can say is that it is an incorrect political conception; however, the authors echo it in "Beginnings...."

The consequences of such a political conception are great: they led to the dismantling of certain groupings of socialist militants in the winter of 1974. In effect, if one takes the position that the future political organisation of the workers will develop from the workers' committees, what is the point of organisations of socialist militants, and why attempt to develop them? Within this logic, organisations of socialists have no reason to exist. At least that is what is stated by the authors of the text, and it is a serious error.

Such a position is the logical result of the other one, whereby the workers' committees—presented as wide organisations of militants and combative workers—represent the bases of the future party. To say this is to make the construction of such organisations the first condition of the creation of the future workers' party.

In our opinion, this is an erroneous position. Certainly, it is not a question of denying the lessons presented by the workers' committees in the workplaces: to work towards the construction of such organisations is one way for militants to develop their links with the masses. But to make it the only condition for the building of the party is to go too far.

At the risk of being schematic, we identify three basic conditions to the emergence of the revolutionary workers' party:

- The development of the class consciousness of the workers, notably via the workers' committees.
- The political development of socialist worker-militants, capable of leading mass struggles.
- The unity of socialist militants.

If "Beginnings" had presented in this way the necessary conditions for the development of the revolutionary workers' party, they could have avoided the idealization of the workers' committees. Rather than present them as some "royal road" mechanically leading to the future party, they could have presented them more realistically, as one form of the link between socialism and the workers' movement, one of the places where militants can, if they work correctly, develop the first of these three conditions: the development of the class consciousness of the workers.



\* The "Committee of Ten" was set up during 1973 by the "workplace" section of CAPs St. Jacques and Maison-neuve, including representatives from the various groups of militants (or "noyau") within the section and later from some information, research, and other "support" groups which had close connections with the CAPs. Its purpose was to clarify the existing situation and develop a general orientation for the section. It didn't complete these tasks before the CAPs effectively split and dissolved and its main production was a document called "The Workers' Committees," putting these forth as a priority.

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# The Present Situation

## More than ever before, the linking of socialism to the workers' movement is imperative

At the time that the document was written the workers' movement was at a pause—few struggles, somewhat of a retreat after the Common Front strikes, etc. Such is no longer the situation. Workers' struggles are numerous and expected to intensify.

An important factor is spurring the increase of struggles of workers and popular groups. This factor is the galloping inflation which continues to gouge purchasing power and to attack the standard of living of large strata of the population.

Another subjective factor influences the character of these struggles, notably, the revival of combativity in the unions, a revival provoked by the present economic situation.

### THE PRINCIPAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE STRUGGLES OF THE WORKERS' MOVEMENT

These struggles demonstrate a resurgence of worker combativity. The workers refuse to accept the deterioration of their standard of living, and begin to struggle to maintain or increase their wages, their purchasing power, their working conditions, etc. This combativity sometimes has the result that the unions are outflanked by their base (last winter's struggle in the clothing industry is an example).

This combativity is also shown by a certain demystification of the framework of bourgeois legality, as is testified by the increasing number of illegal strikes. New forms of struggle, as well as new ways of applying pressure have appeared in some areas (such is the case, for example, at Canadian Steel Foundries on the questions of health and safety). These new forms of struggle are, moreover, sustained by new forms of organisation (workers' committees, "struggle committees," enlarged executives, etc.). One can also say that, in general, the struggles are more intense, even when they proceed within the traditional framework of business unionism (note the example of United Aircraft).

It should also be pointed out that the past year has marked the development of struggles and the appearance of a strong workers' resistance outside of Montréal. Look at Joliette, Berthier, Drummondville, the South Shore, etc.

Certain elements of class solidarity have appeared, as is demonstrated by the existence of the "Committee of Solidarity with Workers' Struggles" and the regional common fronts. Many of these regional common fronts were born under the impetus of regional union executives (which is a step forward in any case), but some of them have their roots in the rank-and-file (we cite again the case of Joliette).

All of these things are a manifestation of the progressive development of the workers' movement.

Nevertheless, it is important not to submit to feelings of false optimism. The resurgence of combativity has so far reached only certain strata of the proletariat—heavy industry in particular, but also the public services. Several sectors of the economy have not yet been touched, namely, private services. Moreover, it usually remains sporadic, e.g. around a contract negotiation. After that, it declines again.

**Note: In this section, those parts of the text in bold type were written by *Solidaire*, and those parts in regular type are translations.**

Such a situation nonetheless constitutes a fertile terrain for the development of class consciousness, all the more so because in fighting against inflation the workers are not attacking any one boss in particular but rather the whole capitalist class. However, the absence of a revolutionary workers' party leaves a vacuum and has the result of slowing down the development of this class consciousness. Thus, the workers' movement remains a prisoner of the bourgeoisie, and its combativity always ends up by being salvaged by the boss, the union, or by the Parti Québécois.

In other words, in the workers' movement, there exists the following contradiction: on the one hand the deterioration of the economic situation favours the combativity of the workers and represents a favourable terrain for the birth of a political class consciousness. But on the other hand, the absence of a solid and implanted socialist movement creates a vacuum and facilitates the recuperation of militant workers in the cul-de-sac of revisionist solutions supplied by the bourgeoisie. In this way their combativity finds an outlet, but at the same time it is turned away from the real interests of the workers. It will remain so as long as the revolutionary socialist movement has not made a solid link with the working class, so as to build a revolutionary organisation of the workers. Now more than ever, the link between the workers' movement and socialist militants for the building of such a political force has become an urgent necessity.

## The Socialist Movement in Quebec

Developing links with the working class is clearly a priority for socialist militants, and a central task towards the creation of a revolutionary workers' party. In Québec, this process, though in its early stages, is nonetheless advancing rapidly; in workplaces, working class communities, and schools, socialists are undertaking the work of organisation, agitation and propaganda.

At the same time, this work is in large part confused and unorganized. While political activity among the working class increases, the attempt to apply and develop revolutionary theory to guide these practices and clarify their political direction lags behind. On top of this, socialist militants are divided among numerous groups, often isolated one from the other, not to mention individuals working alone, without connection to any group. All of this slows down the development of an organized "socialist movement"; what exists being more a loose collection of groups and individuals with no common political position and direction.

Within the socialist movement in Québec at present, various political tendencies exist, all in various ways attempting to build links with the working class. Their differing political conceptions and orientations have specific effects on how they are attempting to build these links.



On the one hand is the Regroupement des Comités des Travailleurs [the "Organization, or regrouping, of Workers' Committees"], or RCT, an organization put together during the first half of 1974 by a number of militants from Cap St. Jacques after it [and Cap Maisonneuve] dissolved in the beginning of that year. It developed directly from that tendency in the Caps that had put the essential priority on the construction of workers' committees in factories, as wide organisations of socialists and militant workers. It differs most obviously from other groups by its immediate attempt to build a more wide-scale group and

On the other hand are those groups [some deriving from Cap St. Jacques and Maisonneuve and some not] who have in common the explicit reference to the principles of Marxism-Leninism, and are attempting to base their development and activity on the application of those principles to Québec. This does not mean that important divergences do not exist, however, notably between groups arising from the old "Workplace" section of the two Caps [and who did not join the RCT] and the groups and individual militants organized around the newspaper En Lutte! ["In Struggle!"], among them militants from the "Education" and "Community" sections of the Caps.

These three "parts" of the socialist movement—the RCT, other groups from the "Workplace" section of the Caps, and En Lutte!—will be described in what follows, in an attempt to present a general idea of the political positions at present existing within the socialist movement. It is not an attempt to present all the various groups and organizations in any detail.

(Please note: In the presentation which follows, *Solidaire* does not pretend to be "objective" in any idealist sense (i.e. standing outside of the divergences that presently exist in the socialist movement in Québec or unaffected by the youth and inexperience of the movement in general). The individuals in *Solidaire* and the group as a whole are closely linked with some of the groups in the second category mentioned above. We attempt to present a discussion of the state of the socialist movement as we and other people see it. This includes important but unequal criticisms of both the RCT and En Lutte!).

#### THE RCT

As stated above, the Regroupement des Comités des Travailleurs was developed by those militants in the two Caps who placed the No. 1 priority on building the workers' committees. Their political approach is a direct development of the "empiricist" position developed inside the Caps (and discussed in the previous "Critical Commentary"). Their activity has been to develop workers' committees in a number of factories and on this basis lead struggles on local, economic questions (working conditions, health conditions, etc.) as well as attempt to democratize the union structure. From this they have linked these committees together in the "Regroupement". In both nature and size the RCT is thus distinguished from other groups.

#### THE PRINCIPLE LESSON OF THE RCT: MASS WORK

Many militants of the RCT have acquired in the course of their struggles a rich and valuable experience in mass work, especially considering the youth of Québec's revolutionary movement. We have much to learn from them about the formulation of demands, on the basis of the concrete preoccupations of the workers, that open the way towards working to develop the class consciousness of the workers. The same can be said for struggles to democratize union locals. On top of this, they show us the necessity to form broad groups of workers in the workplaces that can serve as a jumping-off point for a more effective intervention in workers' struggles, and also as a place for political education.

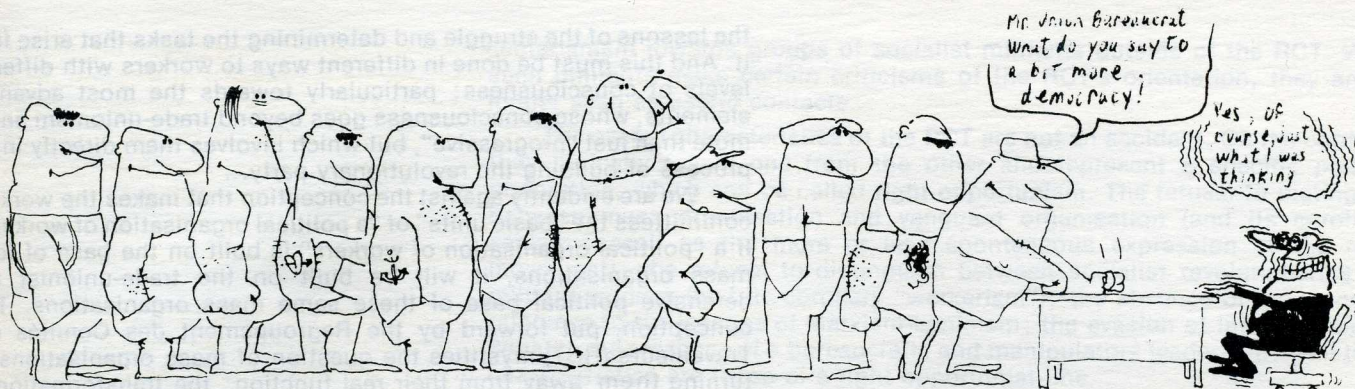
#### ABSENCE OF DISTINCTIONS BETWEEN VANGUARD ORGANIZATION AND MASS ORGANIZATION

But it is incorrect to reduce the RCT to a certain number of mass actions led by some of its militants. Above all, the RCT is characterized by a specific conception presented as the way towards the development of the future workers' party. Let us examine the principal characteristics of this conception.

For the militants of the RCT, the struggle for the construction of the workers' party is made up of two principle tasks:

- mass work, centred on agitation and propaganda around economic struggles in the workplaces, directed towards the short-term goal of building a





workers' committee. This committee is seen as a broad grouping of militant workers and socialists, autonomous of the union leadership, which seeks to lead the economic struggles of the workers.

The building of a workers' committee is the only organisational objective in the workplace foreseen by the militants of the RCT. There is no question of the creation of groups of revolutionary workers, more limited and brought together on a clearer political basis: "...it is out of the question for us, given the present stage of things, to promote organisations in the workplaces founded on the acceptance of the historical principles of socialism." (from "Les Comités des Travailleurs"—The Workers' Committees, page 7)

- Such is the first of the two conditions that must be realized in order to reach the future workers' party according to the RCT. The second is the unification of these workers' committees in a common organisation. In other words, the workers' committees are the bases of the future party. It is necessary simply to bring them together, propose a common political program and a common leadership, and the second condition for the founding of the future party will be realized. To a certain extent, the RCT is itself seen as this second stage, in the sense that it is attempting to bring together the workers' committees around a common political program.

In our opinion, it is politically incorrect to present the pre-conditions for the party in this way. It reduces the struggle for the construction of the revolutionary workers' party solely to the work of building a mass organisation around a minimal political agreement...

These two levels of organisation are equally essential. It is necessary to build mass organisations capable of defending the immediate interests of the workers. At the same time, starting from these struggles and organisations, we must construct a revolutionary workers' party that can give political leadership. Nonetheless one must not confuse these two levels of organisation, and even less affirm that a mass organisation will give rise to the party...

**The necessity to distinguish between these two levels of work is well presented in the document "Serve the People":**

Our critical appraisal of the struggle now shows us the following lessons. It is important to build mass organisation and struggle in the workplace. This task is based on the impossibility of transforming the union from the "inside", through the official structures (through the general assemblies, the delegates, grievances, elections, etc.). A union local that has become a structure oppressing the workers can only be changed through the organisation of militant elements, that is, their organisation in autonomous structures that can direct the struggle, whether they are called workers committees or whatever. These organisational forms\* have a mass character and are linked to the transformation of local conditions. The dominant aspect within them is clearly the economic and syndical. As a result these organisations will change themselves in the course of the struggle, depending on their situation with regard to the union, and on the actions they themselves lead. Because of their mass character they fluctuate and are subordinated to immediate, short and medium-term struggles. On the other hand... it is essential that these mass organisations serve also as "schools of war", schools of political class struggle. The political aspect of these mass organisations (and the struggles they lead) is often evident during the course of the confrontation. But it is necessary that revolutionary militants (giving leadership) be present, explaining

the lessons of the struggle and determining the tasks that arise from it. And this must be done in different ways to workers with different levels of consciousness; particularly towards the most advanced elements, whose consciousness goes beyond trade-unionism and is more than just "progressive", but which involves them directly in the process of building the revolutionary party...

We are evidently against the conception that makes the workers' committees the "basic units" of "a political organisation of workers". If a "political organisation of workers" is built on the base of local mass organisations, it will be built on the trade-unionist and defensive political base of these same mass organisations. This conception, put forward by the Regroupement des Comités des Travailleurs (RCT) mystifies the question of mass organisations by turning them away from their real function: the transformation of local unions and the development of economic struggles, and also the development of political class consciousness. The mass organisations that must be built are not and can never be the "basic units" of some such "political organisation." They are instruments to transform, objectively and subjectively, a specific working class milieu...

\* These organisations can have a permanent character, which can create favourable conditions for the political development of more advanced workers, or they can be more short-term and linked closely to a particular state of struggle.

### THE RESULTS OF THE CONFUSION OF MASS AND VANGUARD WORK

The RCT is an undifferentiated grouping of socialist militants and combative workers: it is therefore characterized by a very uneven level of political development among its members. This characteristic of its composition means that the level of internal debate cannot go beyond the level of understanding of the least advanced workers in the RCT, otherwise these people might be lost. This leads the socialist elements to censure themselves, to evade political debate on basic political or strategic questions, and to avoid all reference to Marxist-Leninist theory for fear of "losing" people. Consequently, these questions cannot be debated openly because of the lack of a structure in which to discuss them. Nonetheless, these questions cannot fail to arise for all that...

**As a result of this method of operation, and the absence of any structure of socialists as such in the RCT, there is no reference to Marxist-Leninist theory, a lack of any critical summation of their political work, and a lack of any clear political strategy.**

**From the beginnings of the RCT inside Cap St. Jacques, its leadership has refused any discussion of strategy and any criticism from other groups, on the grounds of avoiding "sterile political debate." This has often led to a bureaucratic style of work, an example being the founding of the RCT itself; it was the unilateral decision of some militants to form the RCT, inviting some people to participate and leaving out others, that caused the final dissolving of the Caps (even though they had been going through a process of collapse for several months previously.)**

**The actual choice of militants invited to participate in the Regroupement indicated another characteristic of the RCT: its overwhelming stress on organizing the industrial proletariat, in factories, while leaving out the service sector, and thus most women working outside the home, and ignoring other bases for organising working people in communities, schools and so on.**

Finally, the political positions of the RCT lead to an incorrect approach to the question of the unity of socialist militants. For us, working towards the unity of the socialist movement is a very important task, on the same level as linking with the masses and assimilating Marxist-Leninist theory. Such is not the case for the RCT. It is difficult for the RCT to develop this task since they make no distinction between the socialist movement and the workers' movement (the RCT seeing itself as the expression of this workers' movement). If one sees the grouping together of socialist militants as useless, since it supposedly slows down the process of joining with the workers in the workplace, what is the point of wasting time meeting and discussing with socialists outside of the RCT? What is more, such a position has led to a lot of

sectarianism towards groups of socialist militants outside of the RCT. When such militants make certain criticisms of the RCT's orientation, they are no longer seen as useful contacts...

The overall characteristics of the RCT are not an accident. On the contrary, they logically follow one from the other and represent a specific political orientation, which can be called **right opportunism**. The refusal to distinguish between mass organisation and vanguard organisation (and its corollary; seeing oneself as the more or less spontaneous expression of the mass movement); the refusal to distinguish between socialist revolutionaries and militant workers (and its corollary "workerism"); the absence of any concrete reference to the lessons of Marxism-Leninism; the evasion of internal political debate; the presence of a bureaucratic and manipulatory leadership;—all these characteristics are those of a right opportunist line.

At the same time, an important distinction must be made between the leadership and general political line of the RCT, and many of the revolutionaries and militant workers that form its base. Among these people are those who are attempting to change various aspects of the RCT's policy and action, some on the basis of Marxist-Leninist theory. These contradictions can only grow in importance. Above all, it is up to these militants to develop the critique of the RCT's errors and incorrect approach, and change it.

Also there can be no question of denying the positive aspects of the RCT's work—the realization that it is vital to build mass organisations in the workplace, and their important experience in doing so. Nonetheless, this remains only one aspect of developing the socialist movement.

Certainly, the political aim of these militants is the construction of a revolutionary workers' party, but the political line of their organisation leads directly towards the building of a party that is not Marxist-Leninist, but is rather a wide organisation with a minimal political base, a reformist organisation.

#### **OTHER GROUPS DEVELOPED FROM THE CAPS [LINKED TO NEITHER THE RCT OR EN LUTTE]**

After the formation of the RCT and the dissolution of the Caps, there remained a number of groups and individuals who had either been "left out" by the RCT or had refused to participate. In varying degrees, these groups have begun explicitly to use Marxist-Leninist theory and are attempting to base their practices on it.

In effect, with the definitive disintegration of Caps St. Jacques and Maisonneuve as socialist groups, some militants, specifically some from the "workplace" section of the Caps, refused to accept the disappearance of all structures of socialist militants. These militants, even though they wished to criticize and change radically the old structure of the Caps, decided it was essential to function as socialist militants, to guide both politically and theoretically the work of organisation and agitation among the masses. As a result these militants reorganized in groups of Marxist-Leninists.



The sentiment of revolt is not limited to workers; in the neighbourhoods, housewives, welfare recipients and the unemployed have united to try to eliminate the discrimination directed towards them.

This was not an easy process. On the one hand, those individuals not participating in the RCT were left isolated and disoriented in the wake of these Caps' collapse, and a long process of discussion and reorganisation was necessary as several groups ("noyau") of militants were reconstituted. At the same time, among those groups left intact but not participating in the RCT, the empiricist errors of the Caps had not disappeared overnight, even if they were seen as errors to be overcome. It has taken time for these mistakes to be understood concretely and efforts made to rectify them, both in theory and practice.

Whereas previously the structure of the Caps was such that the various groups of militants were in effect no more than structures for exchanging experiences, the militants attempting to reconstitute these groups did so in places where the work of organisation could itself be organised and directed and where Marxist-Leninist political education could be developed. In these groups, the essential point was seen by everyone as the real and concrete fusion of Marxist-Leninist theory with the practice of organisation and propaganda in the struggle and organisation of the masses...

**It has become clear in these groups that the task of socialists is to build a revolutionary workers' party. From this point of view it is not just a question of organising mass struggles in a particular workplace or industry against the bosses' exploitation or the domination of business unions, but also the building of a working class vanguard, capable of developing the struggle for socialism. The practical application of this principle is only in its beginning stages, but it clearly differentiates the approach of these groups from the general line of the RCT.**

At the same time, a good number of revolutionary militants have been engaged for several years in political work in working class communities and in schools and colleges. During the existence of the Caps, above all towards the end, a sort of rightist line (connected with the position that would found the RCT) prevented the development of this work. All work was seen in relation to the workplaces, while other types of political activity in fact were relegated to being technical supports for the "real struggle in the factories." (Thus excluding not just community and educational work but also any work with service and other non-industrial workers, and consequently most women working outside the home.) This "workerist" conception of political work was opposed vigorously by numerous revolutionary militants who are now among the young Marxist-Leninist forces in Québec's socialist movement. These militants, whether they work with welfare recipients, in peoples' day-care centres, in community groups, or in the student movement, will also participate fully in the building of a revolutionary party, participating in and leading mass struggles, and linking in a creative and revolutionary way Marxist-Leninist theory and the class struggle in Québec...

Finally, among these numerous Marxist-Leninist groups, must also be included several groups involved in research, propaganda, analysis, or technical support (printing, distribution, etc.) who are also attempting to situate their work in the context of building a revolutionary workers' party....

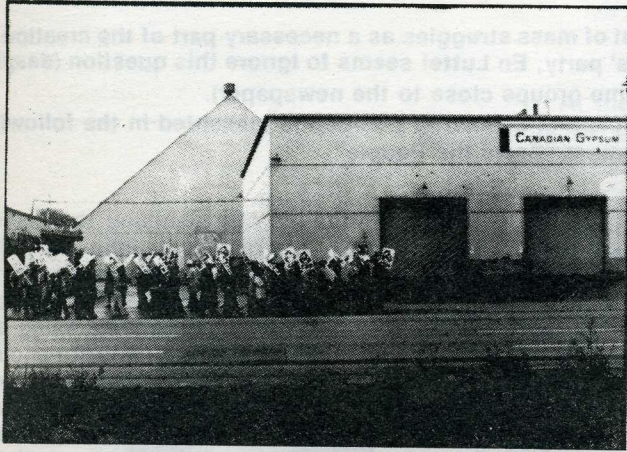
## **EN LUTTE!**

**Within the growing number of groups in Québec's socialist movement attempting to build on the basis of Marxism-Leninism must be included the group producing the bi-weekly newspaper, En Lutte!, and the numerous groups that have developed around it (including several from the "Community" and "Education" sections of the old Caps).**

The newspaper En Lutte! has existed for a year and a half, and the group of militants around it for two years. The paper attempts to present, through mass propaganda work, the struggles led by the workers, and it tries to diffuse a working class perspective on the problems faced by the working class. As well, the paper tries to develop the debate over political direction among the various groups of Marxist-Leninist militants. Through widespread distribution it tries to make links with politically advanced workers in a good number of workplaces.

**The general political line of En Lutte!, and its practices, can be summarized as follows:**

According to En Lutte!, the primary contradiction within the working class is that which exists between the high level of combativity of Québec workers and their low level of class consciousness. Consequently, the priority to put



Strikes at Canadian Gypsum and Firestone were two of the struggles supported by the Committee of Solidarity with Workers' Struggles. In both cases, after a long struggle against the companies, the workers won.

forward is the **ideological struggle**, that is, all forms of political activity which encourage the development of the level of consciousness of the working class. Such is a basic condition for the construction of a political direction within the workers movement.

In other words, the priority at the present time is the linking with the working class on the basis of Marxist-Leninist principles and through a constant struggle to develop the level of political conscienceness of the workers. This priority takes various forms: concrete participation in workers' struggles in order to bring out the political implications (agitation); the diffusion of revolutionary theory or of analyses intended for concrete application (propaganda); the grouping of combative workers on minimal bases or the slow transformation of advanced workers into revolutionary militants.

As far as En Lutte! is itself concerned, it adheres to all these forms of political activities, but claims to continuously devote the greatest part of its energies to agitation and propaganda work. Propaganda work is carried out through the newspaper En Lutte!, of which the editing, production and distribution takes up most of the time of En Lutte's militants. Agitation is carried out by the active participation of many of its militants in the Committee of Solidarity with Workers' Struggles (Comité de solidarité aux luttes ouvrières).

The other task of priority, according to En Lutte! is the struggle for the unification of Marxist-Leninist militants. It realises on the one hand the need for ideological unity, that is, the need to arrive at a consensus on the basis not only of certain basic principles, but also on the beginnings of a strategic line. On the other hand organisational unity is also needed. That is, the grouping of different groups of Marxist-Leninist militants within an authentic organisation, capable of uniting under the same leadership the different tasks that must be assumed by Marxist-Leninist militants and of thus accelerating the process of linking to the working class.

At the present time there does not exist a revolutionary organisation capable of gathering together all of these tasks. There are only groups, each one of them more or less specialised in a few of these tasks (and En Lutte! considers itself one of these groups just as do the others). Such a situation perpetuates the confusion and the artisanal work-style, blocks the clarification of the strategic line, and slows down the linking process. That's why the struggle for unity, for the creation of an organisation of Marxist-Leninist militants, is important. It's important because, isolated and unorganised these militants remain completely incapable of facing reformist currents which tend to develop by taking advantage of new situations.

According to En Lutte!, this unity cannot be realised through any chance fashion. It must be carried out through a long process of debate, confrontation, and common practices of Marxist-Leninist militants. In addition, it implies a certain degree of precision of the strategic and tactical line. Finally, it must be carried out by an intensification of the process of linking to the working class.

**What differentiates En Lutte! from the various Marxist-Leninist groups described previously, is its overwhelming stress on wide-scale propaganda and agitation, to the virtual exclusion of organising in workplaces. While most of the developing Marxist-Leninist groups outside of En Lutte! see the direct participa-**

tion in the development of mass struggles as a necessary part of the creation of a revolutionary workers' party, En Lutte! seems to ignore this question (despite disagreement from some groups close to the newspaper).

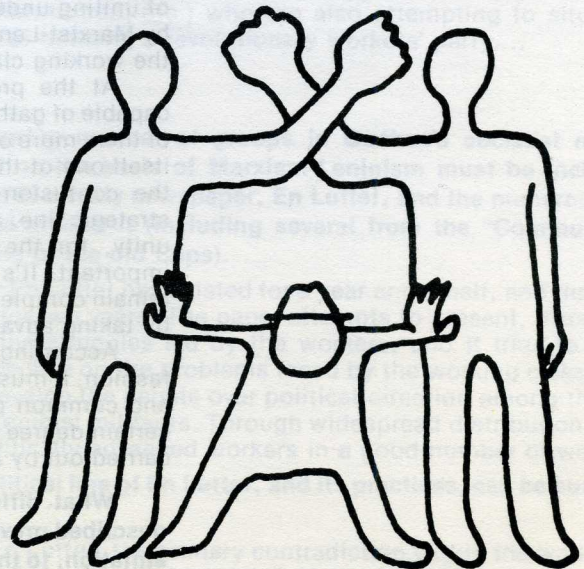
The essential criticism of En Lutte's position is presented in the following excerpt from the document "Serve the People":

We are conscious of the importance of organising the masses into an organisation which is not an abstraction or long-term idea, but which must have an immediate form. It is necessary for the masses to "learn about war by making war." The elementary notions of organisation, of solidarity, and of unity must become living and concrete experiences for the masses. In other words, it is not enough either now or later just to broadcast general ideas and calls to action. It is necessary to take these ideas and apply them with the masses, to systematize the work and the struggle, to sum up experiences and political lessons from them. In the workplace it is thus essential to establish organisations of the masses in order that they will participate in struggle. Victory will not be so much the concrete result of any particular struggle (for example, a change in the union executive or an economic gain), rather it will be in the process through which the masses will have passed in order to organise themselves and participate in the struggle... The important thing is the necessity of organising the masses and their struggles and to ensure that the masses themselves, the advanced elements in particular, take control of their own destinies...

If it is essential to determine political objectives and an orientation, it is no less essential to develop correct tactics. As Mao says, it doesn't do any good to talk about the other side of the river if we don't see how to build the bridge in order to get there. But on the other hand, if we have only tactical perspectives we are like blind people groping in the dark....

#### THE MASS LINE

The mass line is a revolutionary principle consisting of two elements: (1) the linking with the masses, and (2) the leading of the masses. If the linking with the masses is underemphasized one falls into authoritarianism and bureaucratism. If the leading of the masses aspect is underemphasized, one falls into spontaneism, tailism, and opportunism. As Mao has stated: "However active the leading group be, its activity will be reduced to the unproductive effort of a handful of people if it is not linked with the activity of the broad masses. But on the other hand, the activity of the broad masses which is not appropriately directed by a strong leading group cannot be maintained for very long, nor can it develop in a proper direction and raise itself to a higher level." (On Methods of Leadership).



## Conclusion

At the present stage, the building of a revolutionary workers' party is the principal task for all militants. In other words, the priority is to put in place the conditions necessary for the birth of the party.

### LINKING WITH THE MASSES

Linking with the working class, the proletariat, the masses in general, constitutes the first of these conditions. This joining has to be carried out on different terrains: the production or service companies, the neighbourhoods, households, schools, etc. Among these areas there are certainly priorities which remain to be identified more clearly, but nevertheless one basic necessity is clear; that this linking to the masses must be carried out wherever there are masses.

The linking must be made according to the general perspective described below, which is to develop the level of class consciousness of the workers.

The masses are engaged in struggle at the present time. Their struggles are principally economic struggles, struggles of resistance. To link oneself to the masses it is thus necessary to participate in economic and union struggles. But it is also and above all necessary to instill the consciousness that the struggle in the workplace is only a part of the class struggle, a struggle which has to be political. Militants must participate in economic struggles and at the same time conduct a political and ideological explanation.

What the above describes is a job of agitation and propaganda for militants. This work must go hand in hand with organisation work: on the one hand to bring combative workers together within wider groupings; on the other to develop, through the struggles, groups of revolutionary worker militants, and to gradually transform militant workers into Marxist-Leninist revolutionaries.

### THE LINK BETWEEN THEORY AND PRACTICE

The linking with the masses must be carried out on the basis of Marxism-Leninism. If not it risks sinking to workerism, or if not that into dogmatism. What this signifies for militants is the constant necessity of the following:

- working to assimilate the principles of Marxism-Leninism;
- framing practices in the light of this theory (by means of political reexamination of work done, criticism and self-criticism);
- gradually developing, in the light of the developing practices, a strategic line.

Our belief is that it is necessary to begin carrying out this work of clarification immediately. But this work cannot be realised on an isolated basis. Its realisation, the slow learning-process of linking together theory and practice can only be accomplished in groups of socialist militants brought together around a common political understanding. At the present time these constitute the only forum where such questions can be debated. Does this necessity contradict the other necessity; linking oneself to the militant workers in one's workplace? In our opinion, no. The work of political clarification which is carried out between revolutionaries is one thing, the participation in activities with others (including the explanation and diffusion of the results of such clarification) is another, and these two activities must be conducted side by side since they are complementary. To conduct the first without the second is to risk falling into theoreticism. To conduct the second without the first means falling into empiricism, i.e. bringing about the linking with the masses outside of the perspective of Marxism-Leninism.

### THE UNIFICATION OF MILITANTS

The unification of revolutionary militants constitutes the third basic task. At the present time, those groups which relate are attempting to base their work

The unification of revolutionary militants constitutes the third basic task. At the present time, those groups which are attempting to base their work on the principles of Marxism-Leninism are divided, scattered. It is impossible that their political work can continue for very long under such conditions. Also it is necessary to plan for the development of an **organisation of militants** which could undertake all of the current political tasks, and at the same time continue the work which aims at clarifying the strategical perspectives of the struggle. The construction of such an organisation would require the unification of the Marxist-Leninist groups which exist at the present time.



But the unification of these groups is not a simple matter of mechanically adding them up, nor is it a matter of rallying these groups around one of their number which claims to hold the correct line. It's a slow process of coming together which would develop through confrontation, debate, and practices carried out in common between these groups. In this way the groups will be able to become acquainted with each other, to clarify their points of divergence and convergence, and to exchange mutual criticisms. In other words, the organisational unity of Marxist-Leninist militants comes only after their ideological unity.

One should not expect that the unification of militants will be a rapid process. There are obstacles preventing its rapid development:

- The links to the masses are weak, although they are developing.
- The proletarianisation of the Marxist-Leninist movement is not yet very far advanced.
- The whole political line, as well as the analysis of the concrete conditions of the class struggle in Québec are, at present, not far advanced; thus work is needed to perfect them.
- There still exists a certain persistence of sectarianism between different groups of militants.

All of these obstacles indicate to us that the unity of Marxist-Leninist militants cannot be built in one day. Nevertheless, it is necessary that we start to work immediately on the realisation of this task. Moreover, if unity is a condition for the development of the linking to the masses, the reverse is also true: for the groups of militants, the acceleration of their process of linking to the masses is a condition for realizing their unity.

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## Class Forces in Quebec

**Ed. note:** The following outline of class forces in Quebec is by no means intended as a definitive analysis. It was originally published as an annex to *Solidaire* 4, on the Parti Québécois, and is included again to help clarify the usage of certain terms in the main article.

### BIG BOURGEOISIE

- In Quebec, the economy is controlled by foreign capitalists. Anglo-Canadian, American, and a number of European corporations own the key sectors of the economy and thus control the direction of the economy as a whole.
- Quebec, therefore, has no **national bourgeoisie**; that is, an indigenous capitalist class that owns and controls the key economic sectors and the course of Quebec's economic development.
- The very small number of French-Canadian capitalists wealthy and powerful enough to be considered "big bourgeoisie" are totally integrated economically and politically into the Anglo-Canadian bourgeoisie and are therefore firm supporters of Canadian federalism.
- **Note:** While Anglo-Canadian capitalists are logically averse to Quebec nationalism, Americans tend to be more flexible, though no less concerned with stability. They, after all, already have experience with neo-colonial regimes throughout the world.



## MOYENNE (MEDIUM) BOURGEOISIE

- Despite the overwhelming and ever-growing foreign domination of Quebec's economy, there has always been a class of smaller, independent Québécois capitalists, traditionally characterized by their relatively small scale of operation and purely local importance. Eg. small manufacturing, local food processing, local financial companies, etc. Foreign competition continues to reduce the number of these capitalists.
- The intense post-war industrialization in Quebec and the growth of the public sector and various state agencies has added elements to the moyenne bourgeoisie:
  - a) owners of small but modern industries
  - b) directors and managers of the Quebec operations of multi-national corporations
  - c) top provincial government bureaucrats.
- Members of Quebec's moyenne bourgeoisie are split between federalist and nationalist orientations depending upon their specific economic bases and interests, although it is safe to assume that the majority of this class still tends to be federalist.
- More specifically—
  - Small Québécois capitalists tend to vary on this question depending upon the specific relationships between their companies and the large corporations or with the Quebec or Canadian governments.
  - Top Québécois executives in Anglo-Canadian corporations tend to be strongly federalist seeing little to gain and much to lose in independence. At the same time, Québécois executives in American corporations are more varied in their positions, some seeing the possibility of advancement in more direct dealings with US head offices after independence.
  - Among top Quebec government civil servants one finds the strongest support for nationalism in the moyenne bourgeoisie, since they experience most strongly the limitations of Canadian federalism on Quebec.

## PETTY BOURGEOISIE

- The course of industrialization and urbanization over the last forty years has greatly weakened Quebec's traditional rural petty bourgeoisie. Farmers, small commercial businessmen, craftsmen, and to a lesser extent professionals such as lawyers and doctors, have been largely destroyed by growing monopoly competition; proletarianized and forced into the cities in search of work.
- Since the war, a new and urban "petty bourgeoisie" of technicians, professionals, and lower managers, and bureaucrats has developed to serve the needs of the large corporations and the growing public service. At the same time, economic expansion has not continued at a high enough rate to absorb all these people, turned out in ever greater numbers by the new educational system.
- What remains of the declining rural petty bourgeoisie tends to support conservative quasi-nationalist political parties, while the new urban petty bourgeoisie provides the largest active support for the Parti Québécois.

## WORKING CLASS

- The industrialization of Quebec, as it destroyed the rural petty bourgeoisie, also created an urban working class. Over the past fifteen years, Quebec's working people, along with other sections of the population, have become increasingly conscious of Quebec's domination by both Canada and the United States.
- Quebec's workers form much of the Parti Québécois' electoral support and all of the P.Q.'s 6 seats in the National Assembly are from working class areas. There are two interconnected reasons for this:
  - a) The P.Q.'s nationalism provides a direction for the traditional and growing working class consciousness of Quebec's domination.
  - b) Secondly, but perhaps more important, the P.Q. offers clearly the best programme of social reform and welfare legislation of all Québec's electoral parties, thus promising to meet certain of the workers' everyday needs.
- At the same time, the P.Q. does not promise any fundamental change in the economic system of Quebec and their programme offers no threat to US or even Canadian Capital. More and more local working class political organizations are accusing the P.Q. of being just another capitalist party that does not and will not serve the workers' interests.

# Mobilisation

Mobilisation is a Quebec french-language militant political magazine, published monthly. The magazine has three main objectives: to describe working class struggles, linking them to the principal lessons of Marxism-Leninism, and to make available analyses of struggles led by revolutionaries; to analyse the major problems confronting the revolutionary movement in Quebec [such as the national question, the women's struggle, the student movement, trade-unionism, etc.]; and to work towards the unity of the Quebec revolutionary movement by encouraging the exchange of lessons learned in revolutionary practice.

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