
by

Nathan Elliot Marvin
Class of 2010

A thesis submitted to the faculty of Wesleyan University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Bachelor of Arts with Departmental Honors in History and French Studies

Middletown, Connecticut April, 2010
# Table of Contents

**Acknowledgements** ............................................................................................................. 3

**Introduction** ......................................................................................................................... 4

**PART ONE: The Front and Quebec** ..................................................................................... 18

Chapter I. Anything but “Quiet” Revolution:  
The Political Context of the Early FLQ ..................................................................................... 18

Chapter II. FLQ and Quebec Nationalism: Starting in Tradition ................................................. 40

Chapter III. Nationalism and Social Revolution:  
The Felquiste conception of the Québécois nation ..................................................................... 88

**PART TWO: The Front and the World** .................................................................................. 110

Chapter IV. Foreign Identities within the FLQ ............................................................................. 110

Chapter V. The International FLQ ............................................................................................... 138

Chapter VI. Through the Lenses of Black Power  
and North American Revolution ................................................................................................ 175

**Conclusion** ........................................................................................................................... 198

**Bibliography** .......................................................................................................................... 202
Acknowledgments

I would like to extend my gratitude to everyone who has helped me with this project. To my thesis advisor, Professor Richard Elphick, for his patience and faith.

To Lorriane Poitras-Gallant who provided a living source of information on la belle province.

I offer my thanks to my family and friends. To my wonderful parents, who inspire me every day and without whom I would be utterly lost.

I am eternally grateful to everybody.

Merci à tous!
Introduction

At 8:15 on the morning of October 5, 1970, a group of armed men belonging to a clandestine cell of the terrorist organization the Front de Libération du Québec, kidnapped the British trade commissioner, James Richard Cross, from his home in an upscale neighborhood of Montreal. Two hundred years after the conquest of French Canada by the British, the FLQ was determined to take back the province of Quebec by force and establish a sovereign, socialist French-speaking state. Cross’ abductors attempted to negotiate with the Canadian government for the release of their hostage. They published a series of demands, which included the liberation of 23 “political prisoners” affiliated with the FLQ; 500,000 Canadian dollars in gold; the broadcast and publication of the “FLQ Manifesto”; the cessation of police search activities against the Front, ongoing since the organization’s founding in 1963; and an airplane to take the kidnappers to Cuba or Algeria, whose revolutionary governments, they hoped, would accommodate them.

The government of Prime Minister Pierre Elliot Trudeau dismissed the demands as “ridiculous” and refused to be intimidated into further action. On October 6, a leaked version of the “FLQ Manifesto” was printed in a Montreal newspaper, days before the government would officially authorize its distribution to the public. On October 9, the document was read in its entirety on the Radio-Canada television channel, bringing the message of the Felquistes* into the homes of French-speaking

---

*A term designating FLQ members, coined from the French pronunciation of the acronym F.L.Q. The word Felquiste is also used in French as an adjective to describe anything pertaining to the FLQ.*
Quebeckers.† When an English version of the document was broadcast shortly afterwards, all of Canada had become aware of the FLQ’s goals.

In an article that appeared in the Journal de Montréal on October 10, René Lévesque, head of the parliamentary opposition party, the Parti Québécois, and the most prominent supporter of Quebec sovereignty‡ in the province, urged the kidnappers to abandon violence.¹ At 6:00 p.m., militants belonging to another FLQ cell kidnapped the Quebec labor and immigration minister, Pierre Laporte, an important figure in the Liberal provincial government and the most powerful politician in Quebec behind his close friend, provincial premier, Robert Bourassa. This second abduction frightened Bourassa into entering official negotiations with the FLQ, if only to gain time. FLQ attorney Robert Lemieux was recruited to act as the principal link between Canadian officials and the FLQ throughout the growing “October Crisis.” On October 12, Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau dispatched Canadian troops to Ottawa to protect federal officials from suffering the fate that had befallen Laporte. The following day, when asked by a reporter how far he would go in the “suspension of civil liberties” to maintain order Trudeau famously replied, “just watch me.”²

On October 15, Bourassa announced that he had requested the aid of the Canadian army to protect politicians and public buildings in the province of Quebec. On the same day, three thousand people packed a Montreal arena to capacity,

---

¹ The term “Quebecer” is technically the English equivalent of Québécois(e). It is used here to designate any citizen, English- or French-speaking, of the province of Quebec. Québécois is used throughout this thesis to designate members of the francophone majority of the province.

² Sovereignists (souverainistes) are a moderate group of Quebec nationalists not to be confused with separatists (indépendantistes) who want full political and economic independence for Quebec. While calling for an independent Quebec, sovereignists insist on forging an economic and political partnership with the rest of Canada for the equal benefit of both nations.
cheering on pro-FLQ speakers and chanting “FLQ, FLQ!” The atmosphere in Montreal was tense. In the middle of the night, the federal government in Ottawa began to send soldiers to occupy Quebec—a total of 8,000 mostly English-Canadian troops. At 4:00 a.m., Trudeau’s government, which had taken on the management of the entire situation, proclaimed that it was invoking the “War Measures Act,” a Canadian statute that allowed the government to assume extraordinary emergency powers in the event of “war, invasion or insurrection, real or apprehended.”³ It remains the only occurrence of the use of these powers during peacetime. The government declared that an “apprehended insurrection” was imminent. The writ of habeas corpus was suspended in order to aid the government in locating those responsible for the kidnappings.⁴

Unaware that the law had changed while they were asleep, hundreds of people were dragged out of their homes and arrested, without the possibility of bail or trial for 90 days. The police targeted known supporters of Quebec separatism and former FLQ members and sympathizers. Being a member of the FLQ had retroactively become a crime punishable by up to five years in prison. In a televised address to the Canadian people the prime minister justified these measures: “At the moment,” he explained, “the FLQ is holding hostage two men in the Montreal area…They are threatened with murder…Should the government give in to this crude blackmail, we would be facing the breakdown of the democratic system and its replacement by the law of the jungle.”⁵

On October 17, the body of Pierre Laporte was found in the trunk of a car near the St-Hubert Airport outside of Montreal. The death of Minister Laporte shocked
Canadians and was treated as a national tragedy. On December 3, James Richard Cross was finally located and liberated by the police. His kidnappers were granted safe passage to Cuba. Later that month, police also located and arrested Pierre Laporte’s kidnappers.

It must be noted that the majority of Canadians—both English- and French-speaking—were nothing but appalled by the FLQ’s violent tactics. The FLQ claimed to have a sizeable support base among French Canadians. At the height of pro-FLQ sentiment in Quebec, directly following the broadcast of the “Manifesto” on October 9, 1970, while many French-Canadians identified with the group’s message, very few approved of its violent tactics.

The murder of Pierre Laporte, a popular politician and “one of their own,” stripped the Felquistes of almost all the support they had enjoyed in the province. In a television interview René Lévesque, visibly distressed, told one journalist that those who had murdered Laporte had “no sense of humanity [and did not] reflect Quebec.”

Prime Minister Trudeau declared that the FLQ had revealed that it had “no mandate but terror, no policy but violence and no solution but murder.” Newspaper polls conducted on October 15, 1970, showed that 84% of Quebec’s citizens approved of Prime Minister Trudeau’s handling of the Crisis.

The legacy of the October Crisis left an imprint on Canada’s collective memory that lasted decades. In 1990, a Canadian television special marking twenty years since the events of autumn 1970, recalled that with the October Crisis, a “certain image of Canada” had “evaporated.” “No longer was terrorism the domain of places like Northern Ireland or the Middle East. No longer did the words ‘police
state’ seem foreign.” In the “peaceable kingdom” of Canada, “a certain innocence had been lost.”

The period treated in this paper, 1963-1970, covers the years in which the Front de Libération du Québec was at its most powerful in Canada. The events of the October Crisis, while they brought the FLQ an unprecedented level of international recognition, represented only the climax of the organization’s terrorist activities. Between 1963 and 1970 the FLQ was responsible for over 200 violent crimes, including bombings, armed robbery, and kidnappings. In addition to the murder of Pierre Laporte, these incidents resulted in three deaths by FLQ bombs and two by gunfire.

This thesis presents an intellectual history of the FLQ. It does not pretend to offer a comprehensive narrative of the organization’s terrorist actions or the efforts of Canadian authorities to combat them, a task more qualified authors have already accomplished in exhaustive detail. However, a brief overview of the FLQ’s actions in Quebec is needed to establish the historical framework for the rest of the paper.

The FLQ was never a single continuous political movement, but a loose association of clandestine “cells” (cellules, in French). As each cell or group of cells was infiltrated and dismantled by the police, a new group would emerge with new members and sometimes, a new strategy. The scholarship dealing with the FLQ typically refers to the chronology of the movement in terms of “waves” (vagues) or “networks” (réseaux). Four major “waves” and no fewer than eleven “networks” of
FLQ activity have been identified. This periodization is largely erroneous and misleading, so I have discarded it in favor of simpler terminology. This paper is principally concerned with the following periods: the “FLQ-63” which I refer to as the “first” or “founding” network; the Armée révolutionnaire du Québec, whose leader, François Schirm, played an important ideological role in the FLQ; the 1965 interlude of outreach to Black activists in the U.S.; the “Vallières-Gagnon Group,” which began activity in 1966 but continued to exert an ideological influence on the movement until 1970; the 1969 “Geoffroy Network,” which would set off the FLQ’s largest bombs before fleeing Canada and scattering around the world; the brief “tenth network” behind two failed plots to kidnap diplomats in the spring of 1970; and lastly, the Libération and Chénier Cells of the so-called “eleventh network,” the group responsible for the kidnappings that launched the October Crisis in the autumn of 1970.

The FLQ was founded in February 1963. Its original three members began recruiting immediately and by April, had created a network of loosely associated cells. They sought to shake up the established order, which in Quebec, was represented by the English-speaking market-dominant minority and those French Canadians whom the FLQ believed had “collaborated” with anglophone commercial and cultural interests. The early FLQ immediately began to target symbols of “Anglo-Saxon colonialism” with Molotov cocktails and small bombs. On April 22, one of these bombs exploded at a recruiting center for the Canadian army causing the unintended death of a night watchman and veteran of both world wars, Wilfred O’Neill. The episode made the FLQ infamous in Montreal, but the Front continued
their attacks, launching a mailbox bombing campaign in the affluent anglophone town of Westmount just west of downtown Montreal. In June the police infiltrated several FLQ cells and arrested the majority of its members, effectively crushing the first network of the FLQ.

Following the arrests of June 1963, the FLQ was briefly rehabilitated by a new set of militants during the “Military Period,” (late 1963-1964) but would not continue the kind of urban terrorism that had characterized its earliest actions until 1966. One of the FLQ leaders in of this interlude, François Schirm, wrote an autobiography while in prison that revealed much about Felquiste thought. The first issue of the FLQ’s clandestine publication La Cognée appeared in October 1963 and would provide the movement with its primary source for news and propaganda until the final issue in four years later.

1965 saw a heavily-publicized, but ultimately unfruitful attempt by several female RIN members to renew the FLQ in conjunction with a Black activist group in New York. The international connections they forged inspired Canadian intelligence services to take the threat posed by the Front more seriously. But the Royal Canadian Mounted Police was unable to thwart the rash of Montreal bombings that started up again with the rise of the Vallières-Gagnon Group in January 1966. The new group was led by a pair of like-minded Marxists, Pierre Vallières and Charles Gagnon, who gave FLQ ideology a left-leaning slant from then on. The Vallières-Gagnon Group became famous for its attacks on factories whose workers were on strike. The sixteen-year-old Felquiste Pierre Corbo became the second person to die by FLQ bombs when he was killed by a faulty explosive he was setting up at a Montreal factory on
July 14. A secretary at another Montreal factory, 64-year old Thérèse Morin, was killed by an FLQ letter bomb on 5 May.\textsuperscript{14}

The violent riots that had broken out in France and West Germany in 1968 were echoed that fall in Quebec. The Saint Jean-Baptiste Day parade of June 24 became the scene of bloody fighting between police and \textit{indépendantiste}\textsuperscript{15} protesters. Most of the FLQ bombs of the 1969 Pierre-Paul Geoffroy network were carried out in the wake of those riots, including the February 13 attack on the Montreal Stock Exchange, which injured 27 people. On May 4, police arrested Geoffroy himself, effectively dismantling the network. In the same year there was more nationalist rioting involving FLQ members. Some of them would join forces to restore the FLQ in 1970 and redirect its tactics from bombings to political kidnappings. During the October Crisis events of 1970 the FLQ succeeded in taking hostages but eventually collapsed in the face of the government’s tough response. In terms of its structure and terrorist capacities, it turned out that the Front was far less dangerous than had been imagined by authorities in Quebec City and Ottawa and had at no point been capable of inciting an “insurrection.”

The legacy of the FLQ in Canada’s collective historical memory is almost exclusively a violent one, but the October Crisis and earlier bombings are not the only vestiges of the Felquistes. On the twentieth anniversary of the October Crisis, the ex-FLQ militant Pierre Vallières compiled a collection of Felquiste writings. In his preface he despaired that, “to this day, history has, above all, retained the dramatic
actions [*coups d’éclat*] of the FLQ: bombs, kidnappings, armed robberies, etc.”

Violent action, he claimed, “was only one aspect of the FLQ, which was first and foremost an ideological struggle.”¹⁶ Felquiste ideology remains the least-analyzed aspect of the FLQ.

The source material that I have used to glean information about Felquiste ideology comes from three principle sources: official FLQ publications, including the movement’s own newspapers, communiqués and memos; books and essays written by incarcerated FLQ militants before the October Crisis; and memoirs published after the early 1970s that give post hoc insight into the political thought of Felquiste individuals. The reader must be forewarned that Felquiste theorists represented only a tiny sliver of the most radical separatist thinkers of their day. Some of the ideas presented in this thesis may (rightly) be perceived as extraordinarily far-fetched. Indeed, the very idea that FLQ members based their actions on a serious ideology was dismissed entirely by one analyst, who called the Felquiste “adolescents seeking adventure and an ego boost.”¹⁷ Nevertheless, in order to understand the novelty of Felquiste ideology, all of these ideas, however fanciful, must be carefully examined and analyzed as they form a body of literature that serves, if not to dignify the FLQ, at least to accurately classify it as a developed intellectual movement.

Marc Laurendeau’s *Les Québécois violents* (last updated in 1990) remains the only attempt at a systematic analysis of the ideological aspects of the FLQ. Like Laurendeau, I agree that Felquiste ideology remained fundamentally nationalist and socialist throughout the life of the movement, a point that was extremely important for FLQ militants. Laurendeau determined the principle product of Felquiste thought
to have been a “Quebec theory of violence,” which a “sense of urgency” had caused to deviate from its orthodox Marxist-Leninist roots.\textsuperscript{18} But the FLQ’s theory of violence was in fact the least “Québécois” of all of its ideological creations, almost entirely imported. Laurendeau failed to see that the most important aspect of Felquiste thought was its particular conception of the Québécois identity, which combined foreign and Québécois ideas to produce a novel brand of Quebec nationalism.

The FLQ strain balanced the moderate with the radical, the old with the new, and the domestic with the foreign. Re-cast from materials carefully chosen from previous strains of French-Canadian nationalism and contemporary ideologies conceived abroad, this unique Felquiste creation was in essence a \textit{bricolage} nationalism. In his work \textit{The Savage Mind}, French ethnologist Claude Lévi-Strauss coined the term \textit{bricoleur} as one who uses “the means at hand,” those instruments he finds at his disposition, which may not have been conceived with an eye to the operation for which he then uses them, to create something new.\textsuperscript{19} In this \textit{bricoleur} fashion, Felquiste crafted an amateur Quebec nationalism from a diverse range of ideas that happened to be available; it was do-it-yourself and bottom-up. In a province in which the architects of nationalism had always been members of the most privileged social strata, the FLQ reconceived the “Québécois identity” as actively inclusive of lower-class Québécois (to the extent even, of excluding the French-Canadian “bourgeoisie”). Furthermore, in departing from the xenophobic tendencies of Quebec nationalism, it became receptive to difference and diversity (incorporating foreign ideas as well as foreign ethnicities into the portrait of the Québécois).
The eminent historian of French Canada, Mason Wade, referred to nationalism as the “spirit” that unified French-Canadian history. Indeed, Felquiste nationalism had a rich historical precedent. Earlier generations of Quebec nationalists, both secular and ordained, had constructed their identity around the central ideal of a peaceable tight-knit community, rooted in its Roman Catholic faith and firmly attached to the soil they worked on the banks of the Saint Lawrence River. The industrial revolution that gripped New England in the late nineteenth century and arrived soon after in Quebec itself would mark the beginning of an unstoppable trend of urbanization in French-Canadian society. Impoverished French-speaking farmers from Quebec and Canada’s Maritime Provinces, their fields barren, descended in droves to mill towns clustered around the waterfalls of New England, and later, into Quebec’s own ports, factory towns, and mining centers. The population of Montreal, Canada’s commercial capital and largest city until 1976, grew exponentially in the postwar period, surpassing one million people in 1951. By the 1960s, Quebec had become a thoroughly urbanized region. During this period of rapid change a group of Québécois thinkers breathed new life into an age-old dream of independence. While right-leaning separatists clung to the time-tested French-Canadian values of family and Church, many of those on the left extreme of the separatist spectrum began to question the old nationalism. The Front de Libération du Québec was part of this growing tradition.

The trajectory of this thesis is thematic. It traces the evolution of Felquiste nationalism from its birth in the context of dramatic political and social changes in

---

1 It was succeeded by Toronto.
1960s Quebec, into various phases in which old themes are reinterpreted and new ones borrowed. The first half of the thesis relates the crystallization of Felquiste nationalist thought within Quebec. FLQ thinkers began to deconstruct the values of their nationalist predecessors almost as soon as they arrived on the scene in Montreal in 1963. The pillars of nationalism in French Quebec had always been its unique language, religion, and history. Those institutions will be reconsidered by the FLQ in the second chapter. The resulting rehashed ideas were used to generate a new nationalism in the province to support the FLQ’s political goals of independence and social revolution. The geographic focus of the paper remains in Quebec through the following chapter, which investigates the origins of a novel idea in the province: the Felquiste’ “national” language revolved around three francophone social groups: students, workers, and peasants, whom FLQ leadership believed would lead Quebec to independence. The Felquiste leadership redefined the Québécois nation and explicitly reassigned the guardianship of its nationalism—which had long been controlled by French-Canadian politicians—to Quebec’s least privileged citizens.

The second half of this thesis attempts to convey the level of openness within the FLQ toward foreign ideas and foreign identities, both within the organization and within the Felquiste understanding of the Québécois nation. In the fourth and fifth chapters the motives and actions of FLQ militants are discussed at length, especially as they relate to this new international openness. The FLQ’s adoption of imported language and ideologies corresponded with an increase in Felquiste activity overseas and in the United States, especially after 1965. The language of struggle, from North African anti-colonialism to Latin-American guerilla revolution, was tacked onto the
ever-growing *bricolage* of Felquisté ideological influences and given a Québécois flavor. In the last chapter I will discuss one international influence on Felquisté thought that resonated strongly with FLQ leadership, the incorporation of Black Power language from the U.S. into Felquisté nationalism and the Québécois national struggle in general.

---

2 *Ibid.*, 485
3 *Ibid.*, 486
4 *Ibid.*, 487
6 On March 15, 1964, an FLQ editorial half-jokingly quoted the English-language Montreal Star: “most alarming of all, … a great many people in Quebec would be sympathetic to a rising of some kind or, alternatively, would adopt a neutral attitude if one should develop.” “For once the English are right!” the article exclaimed (see “Quebec Should Denounce Terror” *La Cognée*. No 7, March 15, 1964, Mitch Abidor, Marxists.org) The FLQ did have some die-hard supporters in Quebec. The “Comité d’aide au groupe Vallières-Gagnon” (Support Committee for the Vallières-Gagnon Group) was formed in November 1966 to advocate the release of imprisoned Felquistes Pierre Vallières and Charles Gagnon. The group organized a popular event called “Chansons et poèmes de la résistance” on May 27, 1968 that brought some of Quebec’s foremost poets and musicians together in support of incarcerated FLQ members. (see Fournier, *FLQ*, 167)
10 “Appendice III” Laurendeau, *Trois Textes*, 225
13 The most important of the groups of this phase was the Revolutionary Army of Quebec (Armée révolutionnaire du Québec) led by an immigrant to Quebec and former general of the French Foreign Legion, François Schirm. The ARQ attempted to organize a military training camp in the forest north of the town of Trois-Rivières, Quebec. Shortly after its founding, the group was involved in a botched arms robbery in downtown Montreal resulting in the shooting of two English-speaking employees. The five ARQ members involved were arrested and given life sentences. (Fournier, *FLQ, l’Histoire*, 478)
14 An FLQ communiqué released shortly after blamed Morin’s death on the “criminal block-headedness” of her employers failed to react to the FLQ’s “telephone warning.” Most of the members of the Vallières-Gagnon group were arrested by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police in August 1966. (Fournier, *FLQ, l’Histoire*, 124)
15 The French equivalent of the English “separatist,” *indépendantiste* refers to an adherent of the Quebec movements for total independence from the rest of the Canadian Confederation. *Indépendantisme* became a political party phenomenon in the early 1960s.
« Jusqu’à ce jour, l’histoire a surtout retenu les coups d’éclat du FLQ : bombes, enlèvements, vols à main armée, etc. Pourtant, l’action violente, directe, immédiate, n’était qu’un aspect de la lutte avant tout idéologique menée par le FLQ. » (Flq : Un Projet Révolutionnaire : Lettres Et Écrits Felquistes (1963-1982), Études Québécoises, ed. Robert Comeau; D Cooper; Pierre Vallières (Outremont, Québec: VLB Editeur, 1990).:“Préface”,9)

17 Gustav Morf, Terror in Quebec: Case Studies of the Flq (Toronto,: Clarke, 1970) 23.
18 Laurendeau, Marc, Les Québécois violents 220.
PART ONE: The Front and Quebec


The death of “le Chef,” Maurice Le Noblet Duplessis, on 7 September 1959 marked the end of an era many had associated with darkness and isolation. Originally elected in 1936, Duplessis had enjoyed a lengthy stint, interrupted for only four years during the war, as Premier ministre of the province of Quebec until his death. His right-wing Union Nationale government had consisted of a conservative élite of lawyers, politicians, and clergymen, united in their opposition both to the federal government in Ottawa and to the “anglophone enemy” whom they accused of “communism” and “atheism.” ¹ To give legitimacy to his policies Duplessis had appropriated the old rallying cries of French-Canadian nationalism. In 1948, he adopted the fleurdelisé as Quebec’s “national” flag, ² the first official provincial flag in Canada, replacing the Union Jack as the only banner to fly above the Hôtel du Parlement in Quebec City. ³

The expression la Grande noirceur (the Great Darkness) refers to the postwar years of the Duplessis administration, an era perceived negatively in the collective

¹ The design was based on the banner honoring the Virgin Mary reputedly carried by French-Canadian militiamen at the Battle of Carillon, a victory for French forces during the Seven Years War. It is called the fleurdelisé because it features four white fleurs-de-lis framed by a white cross and set on a blue field. See: Susan Mann Tofimenkoff, The Dream of Nation: A Social and Intellectual History of Quebec (Toronto, Canada: Gage Publishing, 1982) 267.

³ Canada would not adopt the Maple Leaf national flag, called the unifolié in French, until 1965, continuing to use the Union Jack and Red Ensign (featuring British symbols).
historical memory of Quebec as one of political corruption, economic backwardness, social and cultural stagnation, and extreme isolation. Contrary to the static Grande noirceur image, between 1944 and 1959 Québécois society underwent dramatic social changes not unlike those experienced by other regions of the Western world after the Second World War. This period was marked by increased economic prosperity and the emergence of a sizeable middle class; industrialization and a massive exodus of the rural population to the cities; violent labor conflicts; the expansion of the university system and the birth of a new and increasingly radical intelligentsia.² In conjunction with the Catholic clergy and the province’s traditional élite, Duplessis fought this torrent of social change with a vehement and reactionary conservatism.

The Liberal party would later propagate the notion that during the Duplessis years, living standards plummeted in Quebec while foreign (especially American) companies were given free rein to exploit the natural and human resources of the province.³ Duplessis strongly sided with those companies in labor conflicts, largely due to his hostility towards any kind of socialism. Not only were workers unions kept in check through repressive legislation and sometimes ruthless anti-strike tactics, as during the 1949 Asbestos Strike, but civil liberties were also curtailed under Duplessis. Jehovah’s Witnesses and suspected Communists suffered persecution by the Church-State alliance, which sought to root out subversive ideas that threatened the sensibilities of traditional Catholic, French-Canadian society.⁴

A close alliance between Church and state also ensured the continued control of the clergy over Quebec’s social institutions. All French-language universities in the
province (of which there were three by 1954) were operated by the Catholic Church and open only to privileged youths who had completed the mandatory eight-year program at a *collège classique*, the system of exclusive French-language secondary education institutions in Quebec, all of which were linked to the Church and offered a humanities-based education generally geared toward careers in law, medicine, or the priesthood.\(^5\)

When Duplessis died in 1959, forces that had been repressed for decades were set loose, even under his chosen replacement, Paul Sauvé, who succeeded him as head of the Union Nationale and premier of Quebec. Sauvé held these positions for only 112 days before he too died in office, having implemented the first steps towards educational reform by negotiating with Ottawa for funds it had set aside for higher education.\(^6\) The tension between tradition and the forces of change that had characterized the *Grande noirceur* period would play out in the elections for Sauvé’s successor. This time the forces of change, represented by the new intelligentsia, would emerge victorious. In the provincial election of July 22, 1960, Jean Lesage and the Liberal Party, who had campaigned on the slogan “Il est temps que ça change!” (It’s time for a change) was swept to victory.\(^7\) This point marked the beginning of an era of political and social change in Quebec, which has been called the *Révolution tranquille*, a “francization” of the expression “quiet revolution.”\(^\dagger\)

The expression “Quiet Revolution” has come to encompass all the transformations in Quebec society jumpstarted by the policies of Jean Lesage’s

\(^5\) The expression “Quiet Revolution” was purportedly coined by an anonymous journalist writing for the Toronto-based *Globe and Mail*. He declared that the social changes going on in Quebec were “nothing short of a revolution, albeit a quiet one.” See: Claude Bélanger, *The Quiet Revolution*, 2000. Available: http://faculty.marianopolis.edu/c.belanger/quebechistory/events/quiet.htm, April 13 2010.)
government. Even social phenomena that were not directly related to Liberal policies (such as the sharp drop in church attendance among Catholics in the mid-sixties) have been attributed to Quebec’s “Quiet Revolution.” The expression is sometimes erroneously used to refer to the entire decade in Quebec. In order to back away from the mythical qualities the expression “Quiet Revolution” has acquired, the phrase as it is applied hereafter refers specifically to the changes brought about by the set of policies enacted by the Liberal government, and the “Quiet Revolution period” corresponds only to the tenure of Lesage’s government (from 1960 to 1966). In the writings of the Front de Libération du Québec, the phrase “quiet revolution” applied exclusively to Lesage’s government.

Upon winning the election in 1960, the Liberals quickly took action. Among the earliest and most enduring changes enacted were the reforms of the education system in Quebec. Spearheaded by Liberal minister Paul Gérin-Lajoie, the reorganization and modernization of Quebec’s schools were intended to benefit the whole of Quebec society, instead of just a small élite. The catch phrase was “democratization of education.” Children in Quebec were to be offered greater social mobility and diversity of professions than previous generations had known under the old system. Educational reform would lay the foundation for a French-Canadian assault on sectors that had been traditionally monopolized by the Anglophone minority. The first move was the gradual wrestling of the school system away from the Catholic Church. The old social order, in which French Canadians were concentrated in agricultural occupations and English Canadians managed the national economy, was to be overturned. The reformed education system would enable the
Francophone majority in Quebec to take possession of the province’s urban centers and economic infrastructure in a way never before imagined.

From 1956 to 1966, the rate of urbanization of the population of Quebec rose by 8.3% (the sharpest augmentation since 1861). Drovers of farmers continued to pour into the cities. Between 1958 and 1970 the percentage of the population enrolled in secondary education institutions doubled and almost tripled at the university level.9 Due to the flocks of immigrants to the cities and the “Quiet Revolution” education reforms that accommodated their children, the French-Canadian outlook was becoming increasingly urban, heralding a new kind of nationalist sentiment among Quebec’s francophones.10

Even before this period of increased population growth in the cities, it had become evident that the needs of the population had surpassed the limited capacity of the various social services that Catholic religious orders had traditionally offered.11 For the first time in Quebec’s history, the Liberals proposed that the government, not the Church, be responsible for the welfare of all citizens in the province. This was the beginning of the Quiet Revolution’s État-providence (welfare state) program, which public opinion agreed was the only solution to the problem of Quebec’s overburdened social institutions. As the welfare state continued to expand, it gradually unified Quebec and accelerated the province’s estrangement from Ottawa. Even the Union Nationale opposition agreed with the Liberals that the welfare-state paradigm was proving successful.12 In addition to the educational reform inaugurated by Quebec City bureaucrats, Ottawa’s hospital-insurance plan (which included federal cost sharing) was accepted by the Quebec Liberals on 1 January 1961, launching an
irreversible trend toward the secularization of healthcare in the province. The traditional Church function of keeping official birth, death, and marriage registers, was also assumed by the provincial government. It is worth noting that the Church offered little resistance to the nationalization of its social functions. As it no longer had the capacity to minister to the social needs of the population, the transfer of power was seen by many—including some Church figures—as both inevitable and long overdue.  

On the economic front, while big business had enjoyed a cozy relationship with the Duplessis government, the Liberals deepened the isolation of the predominantly Anglophone business community. As they viewed much of the provincial government’s politics as contrary to their interests, entrepreneurs and traders in Montreal increasingly identified with federal power in Ottawa. Despite the alienation of the market-dominant English-Canadian minority in Quebec, limiting the power of big business in the province did not take on nationalist tones until two years into the Liberal regime, when voters would be reminded that the overwhelming majority of large and medium-sized firms were anglophone. The unsuccessful strategy of the Duplessis years of selling off the province’s natural resources at bargain prices to create jobs in Quebec was completely reversed under the Liberals. The Liberal Party, who had called for an election in 1962, were returned to power with an increased majority and proceeded to nationalize the hydroelectric companies in the province under Hydro-Québec. After the success of Hydro-Québec, Lesage’s government began to nationalize large areas of the iron and steel, mining, forestry, and petroleum sectors into public companies.
When they took power in 1960 Jean Lesage and the provincial Liberals had been resolutely antinationalist. For them, nationalism was associated with the strict cultural isolation, stagnancy and repression of Duplessisme. It was seen as a backward force—a roadblock to economic growth, greater individual rights, and honest and efficient government. Yet in only a few years Jean Lesage’s government had reversed their own beliefs and had began to use nationalism to mobilize the masses in support of Liberal agendas of nationalization of industries and the displacement of the social functions of the Catholic Church. As early as 1960 the new state bureaucracy had taken on the role that the Catholic clergy had occupied in Quebec for nearly a century between Confederation and the Quiet Revolution. It had begun to nourish the nationalist sentiment that it found lingering within the French-speaking population, resentful of its low economic situation and position as a linguistic minority within Canada. At least on an official level, the policies of the Liberals replaced the ethno-religious aspects of Quebec nationalism, which had been cultivated under Duplessis, with a civic nationalism based on citizenship and the French language.

The growing political tension between Quebec and Ottawa, even within the countrywide Liberal party, helped whipped up this new strain of nationalist sentiment. The nationalist aspects of the Quiet Revolution marked the beginning of an ideological split in the Liberal Party whose echoes would resound for decades in Canadian politics. The federal Liberals in Ottawa—especially those of French-Canadian descent—strongly believed that the best solution for Quebec’s cultural survival was through close integration with the rest of Canada, including an
aggressive French presence in federal institutions. On the other hand, almost immediately after taking power in 1960, the provincial Liberals who had already facilitated a rapid expansion of state power in the province began to promote the idea that Quebec represented the political and territorial heart of French Canada which, if it was going to thrive socially and economically, would require an increase in Quebec’s provincial autonomy, including the creation of its own bureaucracy. It was Quebec Liberal minister René Lévesque who publicly pointed out the glaring contradictions between rivaling ideologies within the same party: How could “the [Liberal] party retain the confidence of the public when from one side of its mouth it [was] preaching autonomy and from the other it [was] committed to the centralization of Canadian institutions?” In 1965, the federal and Quebec wings of the Liberal party officially split. The provincial Liberals in Quebec City declared that no federal initiative in education, welfare, health, and municipal areas, could take precedence over its jurisdiction. It also asserted the right to sign agreements with foreign countries and international organizations on any issue within its constitutional authority. Quebec continued to build up a bureaucracy large enough to rival that of the federal government’s in Ottawa.

At a certain point in the early 1960s, the Quiet Revolution succeeded in bringing about a degree of unity within French-Canadian society in Quebec. Divisions that had persisted between the old rural society and the new, dominant urban one were gradually being overcome. The government was aided by the same outlet that Maurice Duplessis had used to his advantage in the 1950s: television. Sympathetic Francophone television announcers constantly denounced the vestiges of
the former regime, readied the population for the government’s increasingly active role in their lives, and promoted a sense of collective awareness.\textsuperscript{26} Television, the welfare state and the nationalization of the power companies seemed to be unifying French-speaking Québécois behind the provincial Liberals. But the modernization and neo-nationalism of the Quiet Revolution also provided the backdrop of parallel political force that was fast developing as an alternative to both the old order and the Lesage regime: Quebec separatism.

\textit{Quebec Separatism and the FLQ}

A small crop of separatist associations began to appear at the same time that the Liberals were arriving on the scene in 1960. Although their views periodically corresponded with those of the Liberals, many of the slogans they were beginning to yell from the streets did not match up with the ideology of Quiet Revolution bureaucracy. From both ends of the political spectrum, from blue-collar youths to bourgeois intellectuals, one common goal was shared: an independent Quebec state.\textsuperscript{27} The more conservative factions held fast to the dream of a unilingual Quebec whose very existence would ensure the survival of French Canada’s distinctiveness as a Francophone, Catholic nation. Others sought full secession for economic reasons: only by obtaining total control over the industry and commercial apparatus of the state, especially through the expulsion of the entrenched “foreign” (including English-Canadian) presence in the economy, could Quebec hope to profit fully from its own resources. Lesage’s steps towards greater autonomy were commended, but his concessions to Ottawa, though few, were perceived by ardent nationalists as
unforgivable betrayals. Full independence, they believed, was the only way to gain true autonomy for Quebec.  

Some *indépendantistes* saw secession as a necessary first step in the establishment of a socialist political order. Left-wing separatist ideology had evolved parallel to the Quiet Revolution, and had been born partially out of frustration over the enduring economic disparities between Quebec and the other provinces, and more specifically, between French and English Quebeckers. Since 1959, the unemployment rate had been steadily rising in Quebec. For years it remained higher in Quebec than in Ontario, British Columbia, or the Prairie provinces. Quebec was home to 37.2 percent of all unemployed Canadians. Statistics from 1961 reveal that between anglophone and francophone citizens of Quebec, the gap in average income was 35 percent. In 1960 and 1961, the unemployment rate in Quebec exceeded 9 percent of the total workforce. Francophones controlled less than 20 percent of the province’s economy despite the fact that they made up 80 percent of its total population.  

During the Liberal years the numbers generally remained at a steady plateau, but the income gap between anglophones and francophones slowly shrunk. The employment rate, especially among youth, would go through a period of heavy deterioration in Quebec, but only in 1966, the year the Liberals lost the majority. During Lesage’s six-year stint, the number of jobs remained roughly the same as in 1960, still lower than in most other provinces.  

Among the most prominent of the *indépendantiste* groups, was the pressure group or Rassemblement pour l’indépendance nationale (Rally for National Independence), which eventually became a voice of dissent against the Liberals. It
had been established less than three months after the June elections of 1960 by a group of professors, federal civil servants, lawyers, and artists. It was among the first organizations to identify the nationalist struggle in Quebec within the global context of decolonization, drawing from the postcolonial works of Frantz Fanon and Albert Memmi. Although the RIN often veered towards the left and gain a reputation for rallying loud demonstrations in its later years, its origins were far less radical. The founding precepts for its dream of a “free Quebec” included a high level of state intervention, nationalization of resources, and secularization—all of which were integral aspects of the Quiet Revolution undertaken by the Liberals. Even in its separatist expression, the early RIN was far from the extreme platform it embraced when it became a political party in 1964 under the leadership of Pierre Bourgault, whose fiery speeches attracted many to the organization.

The political objectives expounded in the RIN’s founding manifeste included the attainment of independence and new government through democratic means:

The first of civil liberties being the independence of the homeland, the Rassemblement pour l’indépendance nationale claims total independence for Québec in order to make it possible for the French Canadian people to freely determine their future. Once independence is acquired, the French Canadian Nation will have to give itself, through democratic means, the institutions which it will judge to be appropriate.

Future separatist thinkers would oppose that ideology, preferring to seek independence through revolution, after which they would implement socialist systems. The Front de Libération du Québec (FLQ), composed of the most radical of these left-leaning separatist groups, would eliminate the idea of independence through “democratic means” entirely.
The prelude to the creation of the FLQ in February 1963 was a whole year of nationalist sentiment and frustration manifested in the streets of Montreal. The summer of 1962, the tag *Québec libre* appeared overnight all over buildings and monuments in Montreal. On the eve of June 24, the national holiday of the Québécois, a large papier-mâché sheep was stolen from the parade float carrying the traditional effigy of Saint-Jean-Baptiste, patron saint of French-Canadians. A clandestine organization, the Mouvement de libération nationale, claimed responsibility for the theft. In reality the “MLN” was only a poorly-organized group of student RIN-members, some of whom would later join the first network of the FLQ. They denounced the image of the sheep as a “symbol of [the] submission and alienation” of the Québécois people. 33 Mundane as these acts may have seemed, they marked the beginning of a decade of radical nationalist demonstrations and terrorism in the province.

A few months later, the RIN gained national attention for its involvement in violent nationalist protests in downtown Montreal. The events had been sparked by a statement made on November 19, 1962 by Donald Gordon, president of the Canadian National railroad, one of the largest companies in the country. When asked about the total absence of francophones in the company’s seventeen vice-president positions, Gordon responded dryly that “promotions are made based on merit.” The statement highlighted what many French Canadians believed to be an anti-French attitude among English-speaking Montrealers, and brought to the forefront the glaring economic inequalities between French and English Canadians in Canada’s commercial capital. Just days after the success of the government’s “maîtres chez
nous” (masters of our own house) campaign to nationalize hydroelectric power companies in provincial territory, the “affaire Gordon” became fodder for dozens of agitated Quebec nationalists. It was high time, they declared, that the “era of economic colonization” in Quebec came to an end. Peaceful nationalist parades turned violent. Effigies of Donald Gordon, along with the Red Ensign and Union Jack (Canada had still not adopted a national flag without British symbols) were burned in front of the Queen Elizabeth Hotel, headquarters of the Canadian National corporation in downtown Montreal.34

In the midst of the nationalist fervor that gripped the cities of Quebec in the early 1960s, the most radical indépendantistes broke away from their respective parties, which they thought lacked a sense of urgency and militancy about the national question in Quebec. Among them were the original founders of the Front de Libération du Québec, all three of whom had been RIN-members as well as members of a radical splinter group, the Réseau de Résistance (Network of Resistance), which were behind the 1962 graffiti. The FLQ despaired completely of resolving the national, social and economic problems of the province through peaceful means. From its inception in February 1963 to its decline in the early 1970s, the FLQ would always be a group on the margins, composed of small bands of young people who firmly believed that violent revolution was necessary to transform Quebec into an independent state that could adequately minister to the needs of its most disadvantaged citizens. The FLQ drew their political inspiration from the movements that had secured independence for colonial territories in Cuba, Asia and Africa. Most Quebecois reacted negatively to the FLQ’s violent tactics even if they agreed with the
group’s platform on the injustice of unequal power and wealth distribution in the province. Some radical separatist groups, ideologically linked to the FLQ but preferring to work within the legal system in order to gain independence, wavered between embracing and rejecting the Front. Liberal critics of separatism, found it advantageous to lump the terrorist FLQ right in with the separatist parties, RIN\(^\text{35}\) (on the left) and Ralliement national (center-right), particularly on the campaign trail.\(^\text{36}\)

On the nights of March 7 and 8, 1963, the FLQ commenced its “sabotage” operations by bombing three barracks of the Canadian Army in greater Montreal. The FLQ distributed a “Notice to the Population” shortly afterwards claiming responsibility for the attacks and detailing its mission. Only one newspaper carried the communiqué:

> The FLQ is a revolutionary movement made up of volunteers ready to die for the political and economic independence of Quebec. The suicide commandos of the FLQ have as [their] principal mission the complete destruction, by systematic sabotage, of:

> a) All the symbols and colonial institutions (federal), in particular the RCMP and the Armed Forces
> b) All the media in the colonial language (English) that lie to us
> c) All commercial enterprises and establishments that practice discrimination against the Québécois, that do not use French as their first language, that advertise in the colonial language (English)
> d) All factories that discriminate against French-speaking workers.

The FLQ will attack all commercial and cultural interests of English colonialism... INDEPENDENCE OR DEATH \(^\text{37}\)

Although there would never be “suicide commandoes,” the FLQ did uphold its declared mission of attacking institutions representative of the English presence in Quebec. On April 21, 1963, a bomb exploded behind the Canadian Armed Forces Recruitment Centre on Sherbrooke Street West in downtown Montreal, killing night watchman Wilfred O’Neill, a bilingual (Irish and French-Canadian) veteran of both
world wars. The FLQ had not intended for their nighttime attacks to result in any casualties, and the death of O’Neill spread doubt through the early FLQ as to whether or not they should continue.  

However they did continue, declaring, “Unfortunately, no revolution takes place without blood.” Authorities in the province responded with renewed force and some rule-bending that even Premier Lesage was obliged to defend. In June 1963 the Montreal police detained its first batch of FLQ suspects under the Coroner’s Act. By labeling them “witnesses” to the death of O’Neill, the police bypassed the problem of lacking sufficient evidence to lay criminal charges on any of the suspects. Under the Coroner’s Act the Felquistes could be held indefinitely and the police were not obliged to release their names or locations. Detainees’ family members were left without information about their missing sons. These tactics incited public protest against the Montreal police and the politicians backing them. Pierre Trudeau, then a professor of constitutional law at the University of Montreal, declared (somewhat ironically, in retrospect), “I cannot imagine lawyers and politicians giving a law an interpretation contrary to the most elementary liberties. When there is no case against someone, one does not arrest him.” But Jean Lesage defended the controversial police tactics going on in his province as a forgivable measure in extraordinary circumstances: “Isn’t it obvious when they must fight to crush a revolutionary and anarchist movement, it is time for police to use even all exceptional powers allowed in all democratic countries when they are endangered?” In Premier Lesage, the early FLQ had found one its earliest enemies. A tradition of slighting the Liberal party and
its “quiet revolution”, even directly targeting party leaders and supporters, was born in this first year of the Front’s existence.

Although they often criticized the bourgeois and clerical elements of French-Canadian society, Felquistes of the first wave rarely used the expression “grande noirceur.”\textsuperscript{42} The FLQ was by no means prepared to honor Duplessis himself: although his name seldom appeared in Felquiste propaganda, he figured implicitly among those “traitors” who blocked “the path of progress” in Quebec because of his legacy as the fiercest opponent of the Asbestos strikers, in whose memory the FLQ declared themselves to be fighting.\textsuperscript{43} But the Duplessis era did not represent a “backwardness” in Quebec society that needed to be eliminated, as Liberal policies often suggested. In their clandestine publication \textit{La Cognée}, which first appeared in October 1963, early FLQ militants insisted on carrying forward the “struggle of our fathers,” believing they were contributing a new perspective on their past, \textit{all} aspects of which they perceived in terms of a constant struggle toward liberation. The Felquistes were sure of their own role as revolutionary catalysts of that history; it was an honor which they did not bestow on the Quebec Liberals and their “Quiet” revolution.

In general, FLQ militants were adamant in their total rejection of the architects of the Quiet Revolution, whom they perceived as defenders of a status quo and champions of the \textit{bourgeoisie} to which they belonged. FLQ militants were particularly pessimistic about the perceived superficiality of the Quiet Revolution era in which their organization had been born. It seemed to them that in the face of so much poverty amongst the farmers of the province, the working classes in the mining
centers and factories, the droves of jobless people in Montreal, and students who could not afford their education, the Liberals were failing to deliver on their promises.

At first glance, it seemed that since the FLQ had declared itself in favor of a secular and socialist Quebec, they would have been content with the Liberals form building Quebec into a laic welfare state. But for many FLQ thinkers, the fall of Duplessisme and the subsequent social transformation of Quebec were simple inevitabilities, and no excuse to congratulate the Liberal Party. Reflecting on the history of his beloved Quebec after years of prison, one-time Felquiste leader François Schirm concluded that, “The great darkness of Maurice Duplessis couldn’t last forever; there needed to be a change, the same way a person must replace old shoes with new ones.” 44 The long-awaited fall of Duplessisme had prepared Quebec for its natural destiny of independence from Canada. Any achievements of the Quiet Revolution were merely superfluous.

For FLQ ideologue Charles Gagnon, who partnered with Pierre Vallières in 1966 in the formation of their own FLQ network, Quebec had changed during the Quiet Revolution period, no thanks to the Liberals. These changes had occurred because North America—and the whole world—were changing; Quebec was acting accordingly:

Quebec was changing, not because of one man or a handful of men, but because Quebec, as a particular national collectivity, was reacting in its own way to the transformations, the tensions, the contradictions brought about by the evolution of the North-American economic system 45

FLQ thinkers also dismissed Jean Lesage as a liar and a fraud as François Schirm believed it had been the youth of 1960s Quebec society that had instigated social reform, not the Lesage:
Jean Lesage was in no way an idealist, much less progressive. On the contrary, he was a careerist like so many other politicians in Quebec, who learned how to take advantage of the political revival that was already making its mark on the evolution of society. The youth of the era were the catalysts of change and not the Liberal Party.\textsuperscript{46} The FLQ would add the provincial Liberals to its list of targets in the mid-1960s. This change was partly due to the party’s renewed dedication to federalism in the face of the rising tide of separatist movements prior to the elections of 1966. The moderate Liberal figures Pierre Trudeau, Gérard Pelletier, and Jean Marchand, all of whom had once spearheaded the opposition to Duplessis, had ironically become, in the eyes of the FLQ, some of the fiercest defenders of the established order. When, at the behest of Prime Minister Lester Pearson, they entered Liberal politics on the federal level and were called the “Three Wise Men” of Ottawa.

The Quiet Revolution period of the 1960s saw the most dramatic episodes of political violence in Quebec since 1917. Pierre Vallières, in his influential work \textit{Nègres blancs de d’Amérique}, described what he remembered as the rising sense of social upheaval in the early 1960s. In fact, he claimed, the era of the Quiet Revolution was anything but “quiet.” In light of rising tension in the province, it was only “out of concern for [the preservation] of social peace” that “the Lesage crowd and their Anglo-Canadian friends” had dubbed the first half of the decade a “quiet revolution.”\textsuperscript{47} The FLQ, along with the rest of the separatists, of course, were the chief instigators of the revolutionary atmosphere in 1960s Quebec. For Vallières and many of his contemporaries, the decade needed to be loud—not a “quiet,” bureaucratic extension of the established order, but a full blown social revolution.
Eventually, complaints against the Liberal government began coming from all sides, not just from the FLQ. Among the most raucous voices of opposition to the Liberals came from the labor unions, a few of which would endorse separatist parties in the coming elections. In its early years, the Liberal government had proven itself to be much more sympathetic to unionization than Duplessis’ had. A new province-wide *Code du Travail* was adopted in 1964, making unionizing much easier and giving public employees the right to strike. But the poorest members of society and the great majority of non-unionized workers sometimes found themselves outside the reach of the Liberal government’s *État-providence*. They began to question what they perceived as a middle-class bias in Quebec City. The big unions, claiming to represent the forgotten outsiders, became vocal in their criticism of Lesage’s government.48

By the middle of the decade, the clamor had risen considerably. Traditionalists and conservatives distrusted the *État-providence* that claimed to do “everything for everyone,” and frowned upon the government’s undermining of the Church’s control of social institutions only to achieve its own monopoly over them. Radicals accused the bureaucrats behind the Quiet Revolution of using reforms to benefit their own “bourgeois” class. Rural dwellers were wary of the rapid pace of change in the cities. Regional advocates were upset about the increasing economic dominance of Montreal and the bureaucratic dominance of Quebec City. Although many workers saw their wages rise in this period, they also saw increased inflation eat away at their gains. As many of the nurses, teachers, social workers, and so forth had been unpaid priests, brothers and nuns under the Duplessis era, the sharp increase
in the amount of civil servant positions meant a rise in provincial spending, and an unpopular rise in taxes. Nationalists thought the Liberal government wasn’t doing enough to assert provincial power against Ottawa while federalists were concerned with the nationalist tendencies within the government. English-speaking Quebeckers, for their part, were alarmed at what they perceived as a newfound enthusiasm among French-Canadian nationalists.⁴⁹

In provincial elections of 5 June 1966, all of those forces combined to take ten percent of the popular vote away from the Liberals, the Union Nationale⁵⁰ gained two percent while the various separatist parties received eight. Although the Liberals managed to get the most votes, Union Nationale won enough seats to form the government.⁵¹ Liberals marked that moment as the end of the Quiet Revolution era, but the groups that noisy period had spawned continued to dream their dreams of nation.⁵² One of those groups, which had placed a bomb at a Jean Lesage campaign rally only two days before the election, was the Front de Libération du Québec. In the wake of the loss of the indépandantistes, under new leadership and operating on more clearly defined goals, the FLQ was determined to continue the fight for an independent Quebec.

---

³ Dominique Clift, Quebec Nationalism in Crisis (Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1982) 55.
⁴ Tofimenkoff, The Dream of Nation : A Social and Intellectual History of Quebec 269.
Historically collèges classiques designated the secondary education institutions that prepared a privileged few for university in Quebec. The curriculum, a vestige from France, was based in the humanities, theology and the classics. All of the collèges were under the direct management either of the Catholic diocese or of a religious order, most notably the Society of Jesus. Following the Parent Report on the state of the Quebec education system, the collèges were replaced with secular cégeps in the province (from the acronym collège d'enseignement general et professional) which offer technical or university preparation programs.

Clift, *Quebec Nationalism*, 20

Ibid., 22

Clift, *Quebec Nationalism*. 21


Clift, *Quebec Nationalism*, 22

Ibid., 27

Ibid., 28

Ibid., 31

Ibid., 32-33

Ibid., 23


Ibid., Quebec Nationalism, 22

Ibid., 28

Ibid., 29

Ibid., 22

Ibid., 29

Ibid., 26

Ibid., 30

Ibid., 28


Clift, *Quebec Nationalism in Crisis* 33.


Ibid., 313

Fournier, *Flq : Histoire D'un Mouvement Clandestin* 17.


Ibid., *Flq : Histoire D'un Mouvement Clandestin* 16.


Ibid., 21

The RIN condemned the FLQ publicly when it first arrived on the scene, in an op-ed piece published in the Montreal journal *Le Devoir* on 22 April 1963. D'Allemagne, co-founder of the RIN, reiterated, as he was apparently in the face of media associations of the group with the FLQ, that the RIN had always been, and would remain "opposed to violence," stating that "it is absolutely anti-democratic to want to impose your will on the people by force." D'Allemagne, did however, express a certain degree of sympathy for the Fèlquistes, "because in a large measure it is the society of Quebec that is responsible for the birth of the FLQ by not proposing real solutions to our problems," (SEE "The FLQ: Our Position" by André D'Allemagne, first published in "Independence," Vol 1, No 9, June 1963 translated by Mitch Abidor for marxists.org.)


McLoughlin, *Last Stop, Paris* 33

Ibid., 33


La Cognée [Montreal] October 31, no. 1 : 1
“La grande noirceur de Maurice Duplessis ne pouvait durer éternellement et il fallait du changement, de la même manière qu’une personne a besoin de remplacer ses vieilles chaussures par de nouvelles.” François Schirm, Personne Ne Voudra Savoir Ton Nom, Prose Entière (Montréal: Quinze, 1982).

« Le Québec changeait, non pas à cause d’un homme ni d’une poignée d’hommes, mais parce que le Québec, collectivité nationale particulière, réagissait à sa façon aux transformations, aux tensions, aux contradictions que l’évolution du système économique nord-américain entraînait. » Charles Gagnon, Robert Comeau, Manon Leroux and Ivan Carel, Feu Sur L’amérique, Collection "Histoire Politique" (Montréal: Lux, 2006) 45.

Jean Lesage n’avait rien d’un idéaliste, voire d’un progressiste. Au contraire, c’était un carriériste comme tant d’autres hommes politiques au Québec, et qui avait su profiter du renouveau politique qui marquait déjà l’évolution de la société. C’est la jeunesse québécoise de l’époque qui était le catalyseur du changement et non le Parti libéral. » Schirm, Personne Ne Voudra Savoir Ton Nom 42.


Tofimenkoff, The Dream of Nation : A Social and Intellectual History of Quebec.

Clift, Quebec Nationalism in Crisis. 28

Determined to capitalize on the enthusiasm whipped up by the separatist organizations, the Union nationale, led by Daniel Johnson, had conducted a very nationalist campaign on the theme “Equality or Independence.” Daniel Johnson accused the Liberals of “collaborating with the occupiers,” meaning, with Ottawa. (Fournier, F.L.Q. : The Anatomy of an Underground Movement, 78)


Coined from the title: Tofimenkoff, The Dream of Nation : A Social and Intellectual History of Quebec.
II. FLQ and Quebec Nationalism: Starting in tradition

The FLQ: an “Ideological Struggle”

In 1990, Pierre Vallièrèes accurately described the FLQ as having been “above all, an ideological struggle.”\(^1\) However, at no point did all Felquistes share a single, stable ideology on matters such as the appropriateness of violence, alliance with legal political parties, and the acceptability of members of non-French-Canadian ethnic groups within the ranks of the Front. Only a few months after its birth in February 1963, the founding network of the FLQ was already divided by ideological and personal differences. The extreme nationalists Raymond Villeneuve and Gabriel Hudon were seen by others in the “first wave” as too politically conservative.\(^2\) One of the Front’s earliest militants, François Mario Bachand, along with other left-leaning members, disapproved of the “nationalism” of the Front’s founders, which they interpreted as bourgeois and only symbolic.\(^3\) Well into its second year of action, the FLQ’s ideology was still unclear. At the same time that the official mouthpiece of the FLQ leadership, *La Cognée* (The Axe), advised “strategic direction” as “the great principle at the base of every insurrection,” the FLQ consisted of little more than a loose, anarchistic association of friends and acquaintances operating on unshared and undeveloped ideologies.\(^4\)

On the other hand, between late 1963 and the mid-1960s a new level of ideological concord flourished within the FLQ thanks to *La Cognée*. The newspaper was dominated by a “comité central” that served a double role as the intellectual
leadership of the FLQ and the editorial board of the Front’s first and longest-lasting publication. At the order of this Comité central, *La Cognée* had been founded on 15 October 1963, as a clandestine “organe de liaison” between the executive and the lower levels of the FLQ. It would continue to be published on a bimonthly basis for four years, undergoing a peaceful change of leadership mid-way, in 1965. In April 1967 the paper’s secret presses were located and the comité central was disbanded by the police.

Consisting of five to ten pages of typewritten sheets per issue, *La Cognée*’s political commentaries, news section, occasional op-eds, and ever-present propaganda formed a body of thought that—although by no means representative of all viewpoints within the FLQ—provide the bulk of Felquiste ideological musings from late 1963 through 1966. Through the mouthpiece of their organe official, the comité central informed low-level Felquistes and FLQ of developments within the movement, and occasionally published instructions on carrying out acts of sabotage. One section of the paper, “*La Révolution en marche*” (Revolution on the March), reported the revolutionary actions carried out by the FLQ throughout the province.

*La Cognée* is purported to have spread its message to thousands of people and resulted in the recruitment of hundreds into the ranks of the FLQ. Its central team of writers contributed nearly all of Felquiste literature (barring the preliminary manifesto and communiqués distributed by the founding network) until 1965. Indeed, in a rare op-ed piece that appeared in the late February 1966 issue, one reader complained about the quasi-monopoly that the paper’s own editors exercised over the
Although they seem to have never been active in the FLQ’s terrorist actions, the *La Cognée* editorial staff formed the FLQ’s longest-operating “network.” Pierre Vallières and Charles Gagnon, first writing under aliases in *La Cognée* and later in the signed works that appeared in the internal FLQ publication *L’Avant-Garde* (5 issues, 1966) as well as their essays from prison (1966-1970), provided the FLQ with its second largest body of ideological writings. The arrival to the FLQ (and *La Cognée*) of Gagnon and Vallières in 1965 indicated a definitive swing in the ideological orientation of the FLQ. The chronology most scholars have applied to the history of the FLQ typically corresponds to stages in the evolution of its terrorist methods and strategies. But Marc Laurendeau has identified “periods” of not only tactical but ideological evolutions. In general terms, the first phase of FLQ activity, referred to by Laurendeau as the “Period of attacks against Anglo-Saxon symbols” or simply, “la Révolte anglophobe,” has been identified as representative of a “radically nationalist” period in the evolution of Felquiste thought. During and after 1965, the last phases of FLQ activity in Quebec were marked by a “Période de défense des travailleurs” (Period of support for workers) and then by a “Période de guérilla urbaine,” throughout which the ideas of the FLQ became more Marxist and internationalist, even, some claimed, *anti-*nationalist.7 Throughout its entire existence, the Front de Libération du Québec remained a fundamentally nationalist movement. There were strong ideological forces at play in Felquiste thought: patriotism, anti-colonialism, and an offshoot of Quebec separatism inextricably linked with proletarian revolution. In his brief historical analysis of the FLQ movement, *La crise d’octobre*, Gérard Pelletier, who had served as federal
secretary of state for external affairs during the crisis, attempted to expose the FLQ as it appeared in October 1970, as anarchistic and anti-nationalist. Pelletier argued that between the Front’s inception in 1963 and the culmination of its terrorist actions in 1970, Felquiste ideology underwent a gradual radicalization, abandoning its nationalist roots for a type of “anarchic socialism.” This point however, has been refuted, notably by Laurendeau, who asserted, in his study of the phenomenon of terrorism in Quebec, that the ideological orientation of the Front had been fixed since its foundation as both nationalist and socialist. Using the broadest definition of “nationalism”, Laurendeau is correct in maintaining that the FLQ remained a nationalist movement from start to finish. All of its militants and rhetoricians strongly identified their social identity with that of the Québécois nation, and fought for the establishment of an independent state as a homeland for that nation. Despite varying interpretations of the Québécois nation and of the type of nationalism appropriate to its condition, a yearning for national liberation and a strong personal sense of patriotism guided FLQ thinkers and actors for a decade.

This mid-60s turning point in the history of the movement coincided with the enlistment in 1965 of two prolific far-left thinkers, Pierre Vallières and Charles Gagnon. The two had met in 1964 while working for the journal Cité libre, a publication co-founded in 1950 by the future Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau to oppose the perceived conservatism and authoritarianism of the Duplessis government. Vallières and Gagnon thought that by 1964, Cité libre had become decreasingly radical in its political orientation, to the point of denouncing separatism. The pair consequently left to publish eight issues of their own review, Révolution québécoise,
before joining the team of left-wing journal *Parti pris* and then, secretly, the FLQ in 1965. From within the Front they launched their own influential network and came into ideological conflict with the intellectual leadership of the movement, the editors of *La Cognée*. Vallières and Gagnon’s demand for a revolutionary theory that considered social forces was disapprovingly labeled “communist” by *La Cognée*. Although perhaps little more than an intramural power struggle, this disagreement revealed a tension between two rival ideological currents within the FLQ of the mid-1960s. The branch of the FLQ that became the “Vallières-Gagnon network,” which until then had been exclusively nationalist, began to promote revolutionary Marxism and internationalism.

The sites and symbols targeted in the first few years of the FLQ movement (1963-1965), compared to those targeted after 1965 were suggestive of this ideological shift. In the first period, attacks against statues depicting English-speaking historical figures, anglophone radio stations, institutions related to the Royal Canadian Mounted Police or the Canadian Army, and the attempted sabotage of a train carrying Prime Minister Lester Pearson, were generally seen as nationally-motivated actions because they targeted “Anglo-Saxon symbols of colonialism.” After 1965, bombs placed at Montreal factories whose employees were striking and a “superbomb” at the Montreal Stock Exchange, as well as later planned kidnappings of Israeli and American diplomats, revealed a changed FLQ that was pro-worker, anti-financial establishment and international in its scope.

The targeting of different types of sites should not be perceived as an abandonment of nationalism or a deviation from the goals established by the first
FLQ network. In fact, the first communiqué issued by the FLQ had listed “factories that discriminate against French-speaking workers” among its targets. The mid-1960s shift did represent a changed strategy and a broadening of ideological enemies. Instead of attacks on symbols, FLQ militants sought to enact change directly by damaging and destabilizing those institutions that it grouped among the exploiters of the Québécois people. The view that the actions of the FLQ after 1965 marked a abandonment from nationalism in favor of “socialism” (or “anarchy”) is also inaccurate. Although internationalist and Marxist philosophies (which, in their purest forms, are anti-nationalist forces) were emphasized in post-1965 FLQ propaganda, the nationalist element and Quebec-centric nature of the project were by no means downplayed, even under the intellectual leadership of Vallières and Gagnon. The FLQ went beyond appropriating whole ideologies; its members formulated their own ideology—their own Felquiste nationalism, even—that would serve as a unifying force for the Front and the justification for its violent political agenda.

The Quebec Origins of Felquiste Nationalism

A “nation” can be defined as “a group that identifies itself as such, based on a shared understanding of a common culture, history, land and descent.” By the early nineteenth century, those who called themselves Canadiens, (the 70,000 people of French origin living in the St Lawrence River Valley), considered themselves a nation. “Nationalism is the mobilization of a nation in pursuit of political goals. These typically include national survival and self-rule.” For decades after the 1760 Conquest, while Canadien numbers continued to surpass the handful of English
settlers in the whole of Lower Canada, “self-rule” was on the agenda; by the mid-nineteenth century, their numbers had begun to dwindle against waves of anglophone settlers. The new goal of the Canadiens became “national survival.” Cultural preservation would dominate the nationalist narrative through the middle of the twentieth century. As a minority within a continent dominated by “Anglo-Saxons,”* the Canadiens, now demoted to the label French Canadians, were faced with the continuous (for some, the divinely appointed) task of preserving an identity frozen in time: Catholic, francophone and the guardian of ancient socio-cultural values.

At the height of French presence in North America, francophone territory had spread out in a thin swath from Labrador to the Great Lakes and prairies, and down the Mississippi to New Orleans. As a survival tactic, nationalists in Quebec were forced to reduce the geographic wingspan of the homeland to its “cradle” along the banks of the St. Lawrence, effectively turning French-Canadian nationalism into Quebec nationalism. The French-speakers of Manitoba and the remaining Acadians of New Brunswick (and the United States) were sacrificed and the boundaries of the Patrie were shrunk to fit the provincial borders of Quebec. The brooding nationalism of a scattered minority became the forward-looking nationalism of a majority-Francophone political entity.

Maurice Duplessis appropriated the Quebec-bound version of French-Canadian nationalism during his first stint as provincial premier (1936-1939). Under his management Quebec nationalism took on the traits of a political program. It gave

---

*The term “Anglo-Saxon” was often used in French-Canadian parlance of the time to denote the whole of English-speaking North American civilization. In reality, a large portion of the anglophone population of Canada (and of the United States) was composed of Scots and Irish, to say nothing of the more recent immigrants who had integrated into English-speaking society.
legitimacy to Duplessis’ politics, including a government-approved renewal of the historic link between Church and state, and a protective mentality in opposition to the nation-threatening evils of English Canada, Americanization, and Communism. One of Duplessis’ aides, Paul Bouchard, had even resurrected the centuries-old dream of independence in 1936, proposing the formation of a French national state. For such a state Bouchard had envisioned an economic system of corporatism and a political model based on the admired totalitarianism of Mussolini’s Italy, which he had greatly admired. After the death of Duplessis, “nationalism” was still a word with negative connotations. It seemed, especially in the eyes of the new Liberal government, to represent a stale ideology that had been exploited to gain votes and popular support.

After their rise to power in 1960, the Liberals’ adopted their own version of Quebec nationalism that dropped the religious aspect, but retained an emphasis on preserving the French language. The Liberals also introduced a new kind of civic nationalism (as opposed to an ethnic one) reflected in the nationalization of energy resources and the creation of multiple Quebec-exclusive bureaucratic institutions to wrestle (at least symbolically) the political control of the province away from Ottawa.

Contemporaneous to the first tenure of the Liberals in Quebec City (1960-1966) the rise of the radical indépendantiste movement also spawned new versions of nationalism, oriented towards the left. For the most part, the views they fostered on the Québécois identity sustained the ethnic aspects of the original movement. An important ancestor of these groups, the Alliance laurentienne, founded by Raymond Bearbeau in 1957, advocated the creation of a free Quebec to be called the République de Laurentie. While it supported corporatist policies and regarded the
Catholic faith as essential in its vision of an independent Quebec, the Alliance also called for a government that would promote “the common good of all the citizens.”

The ideology of the Alliance represented a stepping stone between Duplessis-era conservative nationalism and the radical nationalism of the separatist groups of the early 1960s. One member of the Alliance, André D’Allemagne, frustrated with the “conservatism” of the group, left to co-found the Rassemblement pour l’indépendance national in 1960.

A fundamentally socialist element was also introduced into the burgeoning indépendantiste movement by Raoul Roy, co-founder of the organization Action socialiste pour l’indépendence du Québec (ASIQ). Roy envisioned a prolétarienne-nationale liberation of French Canadians and an independent Quebec state whose natural resources and laborers would be freed from the grip of Anglo-Canadian and American firms. From 1963 onward, the RIN would also become a radical voice of the indépendantiste movement. Head of propaganda and future president, Pierre Bourgault, espoused a project for political independence linked to social revolution, a nationalized economy, secularization and French unilingualism (as opposed to the official bilingualism of Quebec at the time.)

During the postwar period, one notion that really fueled the separatist movement in the 1960s and beyond was that of the Québécois being a “colonized” people. The creators of the concept drew heavily from the postcolonial literature of the time, notably Frantz Fanon’s Damnés de la terre and Albert Memmi’s Portrait du colonisé. In particular, Raoul Roy was one of the first in Quebec to theorize the rising indépendantiste struggle in terms of decolonization. In his magazine La Revue
socialiste (first published in 1959), Roy wrote that “French Canadians form a colonized, and almost completely proletarianized people, occupied by a colonialist upper-middle class [grande bourgeoisie] that speaks a foreign language and has a foreign culture.” Roy’s identification of Québec as a both a “nation colonisée” and a “nation prolétaire” was particularly important for the early FLQ militants, some of whom frequently attended Roy’s evening lectures in the back room of his small café in Montreal. The twin doctrines of anti-colonial revolution and “social revolution”—in conjunction with “radical nationalism” made up the basis of the Front’s ideology. Separatism and the emancipation of Quebec’s lower classes were seen as inextricably linked and would remain the professed goals of the FLQ from its inception in 1963 until its decline in the early 1970s.

It is also important to note that in the 1960s, the idea of the Québécois as a “colonized” people was by no means limited to revolutionary circles. The Liberal provincial government invoked similar rhetoric in its campaign to nationalize all hydroelectric power companies in Quebec in 1962. As spokesperson for that program, Liberal minister René Levesque commented in 1960 on “the extent to which we [French Canadian] are still … colonized people,” and, what was even more infuriating, “considered as such.”

It was into this political atmosphere, dominated by left-wing nationalist pressure groups like the RIN and ASIQ, that the Front de Libération du Québec was born. The new nationalism that drove these organizations was generated from a sense of frustration with the feeling of emptiness and worthlessness that “Anglo-Saxon colonialism” (and inadvertently, previous forms of nationalism) had inspired among
French Canadians. Traditional nationalism seemed hopelessly stagnant in the changing social climate of the postwar years, a period in which Quebec was being increasingly industrialized and urbanized (sometimes, at the expense of lower-class French Canadians) and colonized peoples throughout the world were throwing off their chains. Set against a backdrop of social change in the province, the strain of Quebec nationalism being wrought by radical *indépendantistes* in the 1960s were the fruit of a detailed reevaluation of the old myths of previous nationalisms.

Groups like the RIN and the ASIQ supplied much of the ideological framework for the FLQ in its early years. Raoul Roy’s ideas, for example, of a proletarian Quebec nationalism and separatism as decolonization, were directly incorporated into Felquistie thought. But the tenacious new group refused to fall into any category prescribed by these or subsequent separatist parties. Indeed, the FLQ would later describe itself as proudly non-aligned to any particular party or ideology. Although legal counterparts to the underground FLQ were considered in its later years, the Front never became a party (nor was it officially affiliated with one) and remained constantly distrustful of the electoral system in Quebec. Unlike the “official movements” with their election campaigns and “bourgeois” political games, the FLQ saw itself as truly in tune with the “anger of the Québécois people.”

Instead of adopting a previously-established Quebec nationalism, Felquistie leaders and thinkers participated in and actively encouraged the formation of a kind of do-it-yourself nationalism, compiled from a *bricolage* of available ideas. Like its ideological predecessors the (radical) RIN and the ASIQ, FLQ thinkers first looked to the past for French-Canadian nationalist precedents. In particular, FLQ “intellectuals”
engaged in a deconstruction of those things most sacred to the Québécois national identity: language, history, and religion. Through the processes of borrowing, rejecting, and reconfiguring past ideas, successive waves of FLQ thinkers effectively reinvented Quebec nationalism.

“Good French” to “Joual”: The FLQ and Language

The first FLQ “manifesto,” distributed to newspapers on April 16, 1963 and reprinted in *La Cognée* two years later, described the extent to which its authors viewed Quebec as a colonized country. One of the grievances mentioned was the social oppression imposed by the “colonizers” on the Québécois in their insistence on the use of English over French in the public sphere:

We are 80% of the population, yet the English language dominates in the most diverse domains. Little by little French is relegated to the rank of folklore, while English becomes the language of the workplace. The contempt of the Anglo-Saxons towards our people remains constant. The ‘Speak white, Stupid French Canadian’ [in English in the original], and other epithets of this kind, are very frequent. In Quebec itself, thousands of cases of English unilingualism are arrogantly displayed. The colonialists consider us inferior beings, and let us know this without shame.²⁰

Seven years later, fighting language-based discrimination was still one of the most important objectives of the FLQ. A second manifesto, from April 1970, reiterated the FLQ’s determination to continue the fight against “all forms of exploitation, the most glaring of which is linguistic segregation: the need to speak two languages because we are Québécois.”²¹ Beyond the manifesto, the terrorist attacks perpetrated by the first FLQ network drew attention to the pro-French unilingual element of their
nationalist agenda. Members of The Réseau de Résistance, the direct predecessor of the FLQ, had set off this trend when they threw a Molotov cocktail through the window of an English-language radio station in Montreal on February 23, 1963. Two months later the nascent FLQ lay twenty-four sticks of dynamite at the base of a transmission tower on Mount Royal that broadcasted Anglophone radio and television programs, but a technical error prevented the explosion.22

It was not only the public dominance of English in Montreal that upset Quebec nationalists in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Teachers in the French-language schools of the city increasingly remarked that their classrooms were filled with students who communicated in a dialect littered with slang words and anglicisms. Some of their students could barely form a proper sentence in French. Journalist André Laurendeau had coined the term “Joual” in 1959, (which mimicked a local pronunciation of the French word “cheval”),23 that was used to describe the dialect spoken by many French Canadians. It was the linguistic vestige of two centuries of separation from the cradle of the French language and as many years of English-language influence. In later years the term “Joual” would take on a class connotation as the sociolect used predominantly by working-class Montréalais.24

Many French-Canadian nationalists rejected Joual because of its use of English expressions and disregard for the rules of French. In his controversial book Les insolences du Frère Untel (The Impertinences of Brother Anonymous), published in 1960, Jean-Paul Desbiens, an incognito brother of the Marist order, attacked the deplorable state of the public education system in Quebec and what he perceived to be the steadily declining quality of spoken and written French among the younger
generations. Along with the omnipresence of English, he blamed Joual for the rapid disappearance of French in everyday life and for the languishing French culture:

“This absence of language that is Joual is one example of our inexistence as French Canadians… Our particular inability to assert ourselves, our refusal of the future, our obsession with the past; all that is reflected in Joual, our real language.” 25 Desbiens has been credited as a major inspiration for the educational reforms of the Quiet Revolution and the campaign of “refrançisation” of the province. He suggested extreme measures such as eliminating signs in English or Joual and boycotting television programs that were not in “bon français.” 26

For Quebec nationalists of the late 1950s and early 1960s, Joual was a bête noir that needed to be stamped out of use. Augustin Turenne codified and compiled the dialect into a Joual-French dictionary in order to facilitate the process of “de-joualization” and “refrançisation” in Quebec. 27 In taking care to highlight expressions that needed to “be corrected,” as well as French words that were used inaccurately, he exhibited a slightly patronizing attitude toward Joual and its speakers, the majority of whom belonged to the working class. 28 Turenne attempted to appeal to a sense of nationalism to convert his compatriots: “We French Canadians who so often pride ourselves on having remained French despite the pressures we have had to bear throughout our history, are not only increasingly losing our pride in who we are, we are losing respect for our language.” 29 Turenne hoped that his Dictionnaire would provide a valuable contribution to the “crusade” against Joual. 30

The early FLQ were very much on the same wavelength in terms of language preservation with… Beneath a header of hand-drawn fleurs-de-lis, the first edition of
La Cognée listed “bilingualism fanatics”\textsuperscript{31} in Quebec—as the first of their enemies.\textsuperscript{32} At the same time however the FLQ also identified the forces of “bilingualism” originating within the French-Canadian community as the most dangerous. In October 1963 the editors of La Cognée denounced a recent decision of the Commission des écoles catholiques de Montréal (The Montreal Catholic School Commission) to attempt “the experiment” of teaching English for fifteen minutes every school-day. According to the article, the direct consequence of that and similar decisions would mean an “accelerated Anglicization of our population” (even “cultural genocide”), which “only French culture will be strong enough to resist.”\textsuperscript{33} The article also reflected an anti-Joual nationalist position by denouncing an attitude it believed to be prevalent among federal politicians in Ottawa: “the sooner a Québécois begins to speak English, the better. No matter if he writes or speaks French poorly”\textsuperscript{34}—in other words, even if he can only communicate in Joual. Those who stood idly by, (or worse, actively promoted bilingualism) while the children of the province were becoming assimilated into English-language civilization, inhibited the people’s struggle towards independence and were traitors to both their nation and its past.\textsuperscript{35}

English would remain the enemy, but Joual underwent a renaissance in the late 1960s as a source of pride, especially for the student and working-class communities of Montreal. By 1970 Joual was increasingly being reaffirmed. It had also gained a more prominent public face as the favorite language of the contemporary counter-culture, popularized by the rock songs of Robert Charlebois and the plays of Michel Tremblay.\textsuperscript{36} Some scholars, like the historian and professor at
Concordia University in Montreal, Léandre Bergeron, began to spell terms as they were pronounced in Joual in order to portray them as particular to Quebec. Canayen, coined from a local pronunciation of Canadien is used in his books to refer to those French-speaking Canadians who did not “collaborate” with the English colonizer.

The FLQ began consciously to write its propaganda in a style of French closer to Joual, hoping that the message would be better received by its target audience of factory workers, poor farmers and students. While both the first “manifesto” of April 1963 and the last, of October 1970 appeared to transmit the same general message—a call for independence and social revolution in Quebec—they differed greatly in their tone and in the type of language used. The first manifesto presented its arguments in eloquent, even scholarly French. The October 1970 manifesto rejected the academic language of its precursor and adopted a vernacular closer to Joual that incorporated anglicisms and slang. For the authors of the October 1970 Manifesto, the choice was both strategic and cultural. As Marc Laurendeau pointed out, “to speak Joual was to speak the very language of the people. . . Choosing that way of speaking also amounted to a rejection of the bourgeoisie’s language.” Part of the message of the Manifesto was hidden in the language itself: for the FLQ the very fact that in Quebec there was a way of speaking that was “correct” and another that was frowned upon and associated with the lower class, confirmed the glaring inequalities in Quebec society.

A lesser-known manifesto had been distributed to the union-financed weekly Québec-Presse and published on June 23, 1970. The text of this “second manifesto” came out of an FLQ cell formed at the Université du Québec à Montréal (established
one year earlier) and had been authored by Robert Comeau, a young history professor and former member of the RIN. The language, not unlike that of the 1963 manifesto, was polished and contained no “corruptions” of standard French. Some of its content was directly transmitted into the October manifesto four months later, but translated into colloquial speech that incorporated a number of offensive monikers. For example, the Mayor of Montreal Jean Drapeau, Quebec Premier Robert Bourassa, and Prime Minister Trudeau, who were denounced in the June 1970 manifesto, are styled as “French-speaking puppet politicians”, while in the October manifesto, the same individuals are referred to as “Drapeau the Dog [English in the original], Bourassa the Simards’ Simple Simon and Trudeau the Faggot.” The anglicisms and vulgar language were surely intended to make the message as direct and straightforward as possible and to shock the listener. Both authors of the document, Jacques Lanctôt and André Roy had, like Comeau, served as teachers; Lanctôt, specifically, had been a French teacher. Because the manifesto was meant to be read publicly over radio and television, its authors made the very deliberate choice to use Joual in their manifesto, in order to make their message as accessible to working class French Canadians as possible.

To a certain extent, the “joualization” approach was successful. According to journalist Louis Fournier (and author of the only comprehensive history of the FLQ), who was the first to read the October 1970 “FLQ Manifesto” over the radio, the document aroused a certain level of sympathy in public opinion, partly “because of its simple, deliberately populist style.” Following its reading over radio waves (on October 7) and on television (October 8), the vast majorities of the student bodies (as
well as faculty members) of Montreal’s two French-language universities went on strike in support of the aims laid out in the “Manifesto.” An opinion poll was conducted on hot-line programs of popular French stations in Montreal, and a reporter for a Canadian Broadcasting Corporation interviewed parishioners coming out of an 11 o’clock Sunday mass at a French Catholic church. The results of both surveys showed that while condemnation of the FLQ’s acts was almost universal, about 50 percent of French-speakers interviewed expressed support for the message of the “Manifesto.”

Marc Laurendeau, author of Les Québécois violents, has wisely noted that the switch to Joual did not represent a slump in nationalist sentiment among the final waves of the FLQ, as some had suggested. Laurendeau points out that in 1970, what characterized the Québécois was not “the fact that they use or don’t use the ‘language of Molière’ when speaking,” But rather that they had Joual “to communicate in a privileged and profound manner.” Despite the opinion held by pro-françisation nationalists of the early 1960s, by the end of the decade, Joual had made a place for itself in the new Québécois identity that emerged from the decades-long changes wrought by industrialization and urbanization.

**Constructing a Revolutionary Narrative: The FLQ and History**

Throughout the dynamic evolution of Quebec nationalist thought, perhaps no tool has been employed as often and as effectively as their unique historical narrative. It has been used to inspire patriotic sentiment, justify political agendas, and legitimize
cultural movements. Jean-Pierre Gaboury, writing in 1969 at the height of the FLQ’s terrorist actions, noted that in nationalist rhetoric among minority peoples,

history acquires considerable importance, and the links between nationalism and history are particularly narrow as demonstrated by the French-Canadian experience . . . Even a revolutionary nationalism, detached from the conservative inclination towards the cult of ancestors and the past, never neglects the past, at least not a certain past.\textsuperscript{48}

Indeed, the Front de Libération du Québec, which fit squarely into the “revolutionary nationalism” category provided by Gaboury, would do more than merely acknowledge Quebec history; its leaders exploited the power of historiography to justify their actions, and to provide an ideological education for their fellow militants. Thus, FLQ “historians” would continue the tradition of storytelling (or as perceived by the FLQ’s, truth-telling) about Quebec’s past that had been used for a century to promulgate patriotic or nationalist messages.

In 1840, the British government sent Lord Durham, a liberal English aristocrat, to Canada to investigate the political and social situation there in the wake of a recently-squashed Lower Canada Rebellion that had rocked the colony. In his report back to London, Durham famously dismissed the French Canadians as “a people with no literature and no history.”\textsuperscript{49} Deeply offended by these claims, French-Canadian academics launched themselves into the impassioned venture of writing their own French-language histories of Canada, most of them with a certain patriotic flair. French Canada’s first “national historian,” notary and civil servant François-Xavier Garneau, undertook his \textit{Histoire du Canada} (1845-5) in response to the attitude perpetuated in the Durham Report, to which, he noticed, his English Canadian colleagues had subscribed as well. Garneau was explicit about his designs:
“I began this work in order to repel the attacks … and the insults to which my
countrymen are daily subjected by men who wish to oppress and exploit them at the
same time.”

It wasn’t just the English who alleged that French-Canadian culture was
lacking or stagnant. French Abbé Jean-Baptiste-Antoine Ferland, having been
assigned to a teaching position at the Séminaire de Québec in the provincial capital,
wrote in 1852 that conquest had altered the character of the “Français du Canada.”
The abbé contended that French Canadians displayed “shyness, wariness, and
indecision, the distinctive marks of a conquered people.” As the Durham report had
done a decade earlier, claims like Ferland’s would lead to the birth of an apologetic
French-Canadian historiographical tradition driven by patriotism and sometimes,
conscious bending of the truth.

The most famous of these historian-apologists was the canon Lionel Groulx,
the founding father of Canadian history as a university discipline and an important
spokesman for French-Canadian nationalism, who was active in the press, universities
and churches of the province from the 1920s through the 1950s. In reaction to
perceived social changes, Abbé Groulx and his followers espoused a triune
nationalism based on religion (Roman Catholicism), language (French), and the
family (centered on the mother of the household who concerns herself principally
with the physical and spiritual well-being of her husband and children). Groulx
dreaded the foreign influences that threatened the sanctity and balance of his system,
notably assimilation, urbanization, non-Catholic trade unionism, feminism and
Americanism (TV and baseball figured among the worst vices). His main
counteraction to these threats was to instill a sense of pride in French Canadians’ cultural distinctiveness, their language, heritage and enduring strength.

Another kind of “nationalism” that existed in the political thought of French Canadians was federalism. One of Groulx’s contemporaries of the 1940s and 1950s, Abbé Arthur Maheux of Laval University in Quebec City, advanced a history of French-Canadians in line with his vision of Canada as a unified, bi-cultural national entity, united in its economic goals and opposition to the pressures of Americanization.53 Up the Saint Lawrence in Montreal, where tensions between French-speakers and their “Anglo-Saxon” surroundings were traditionally much higher, Abbé Groulx crafted a history to combat the federalist view and support his own national dream of a French-speaking Catholic state that supported an agrarian society and rejected all things modern.54 Groulx offered an optimistic perspective on the French-Canadian condition in the face of its chief threats. The nationalism he espoused combined a desire for greater political autonomy for Quebec, an acute awareness of the province’s responsibility towards the French diaspora in North America, and a firm belief in the importance of tradition—religious and cultural—as the key to a brighter future.55

For Abbé Groulx, nationalism and history were “inseparable.”56 He famously referred to the past as the master that the French-Canadian “race” must obey, as it was so deeply entrenched in their national identity and would, he believed, define their future as a people. He once said that he had undertaken his work Histoire du Canada français (1950-2), to provide French-Canadian nationalism with its “historical evidence.”57 Like Garneau before him, Groulx’s objective as a historian was to
restore a sense of patriotic pride in the history of New France. Groulx invented a French-Canadian history that pitted daring Canadien adventurers and pioneers against savage bands of Iroquois, all the while downplaying the negative social effects of the dominant institutions of Church and the semi-feudal seigneurie system. In the realm of historiography, Groulx is credited with “resurrecting” the memory of such heroes as Dollard des Ormeaux, the semi-mythologized defender of Montreal against invading Iroquois in 1660. He is also considered among the first French-Canadian scholars to have interpreted the 1760 Conquest as a disaster rather than a blessing for the French-Canadian people.\(^{58}\) (Earlier historians—especially among the clergy—had interpreted the Conquest as a divine blessing in disguise. The Church in Quebec had been separated from the mother country and therefore saved from the atheist ravages of the French Revolution and later, the dramatic 1905 separation of Church and state.)\(^{59}\)

In the 1960s, a new historical consciousness and corresponding historiography took hold in Quebec. It was the work of both professional historians and radical nationalists eager to interpret their past to fit a separatist mold. The old nationalism that had championed an agrarian Quebec society with the French language as the “guardian of the faith” was no longer meaningful in this period of broad social and economic mutation. It was replaced by ideas of the right to self-determination (especially control of Quebec’s natural resources). In a fast-paced world increasingly dominated by capitalism, the old notion that one could (and should) preserve French-Canadian culture by remaining a country of small farmers, was absurd to these thinkers.\(^{60}\)
While they would retain some the more patriotic and progressive elements in Groulx’s work, a new wave of leftist historiography largely rejected his nationalist writings, especially the half-invented, romanticized tales of New France’s missionary-filled glory days. Old themes were discarded. The heroes of history were swapped: instead of seventeenth-century martyr Dollard des Ormeaux, Louis-Joseph Papineau and Jean-Olivier Chénier, Patriote leaders of the Lower Canada Rebellion against British rule, were championed as heroes of the Québécois nation. Often the traditional Catholic element was dismissed in favor of a more secular approach. Some interpreted the collective weakness of Quebec to have been the result of the Catholic Church’s conservatism throughout the province’s history.  

In the late 1960s and 1970s, a Marxist trend emerged in French-Canadian historiography. Léandre Bergeron epitomized the most incendiary of the historians of that camp. In the preface to his Petit manuel de l’histoire du Québec, Bergeron addresses his fellow Québécois: “We Québécois suffer colonialism. We are a prisoner people. To change our situation, we must first come to know it.” Bergeron would proceed to present the French-Canadian people of Québec not only as “colonized,” but triply colonized, in a relationship close to that of a “slave in relation to the master.” This history presented the French Canadians as having been exploited first by the French Regime (mid-sixteenth century to 1760)—who submitted them to feudalism and taxes, then by the English Regime (1760-1920), then by the American Regime (1920 to the present) under which the Québécois labor force and natural resources were freely exploited by United States capitalists.
But this conception of history was not new. By the mid-1960s, this conception of history had already become so widespread that Pierre Vallières remarked, “It has become a cliché to say that Quebec is a colony, a sub-colony, a sub-sub-colony, a triple colony, etc. . . For ever since [Samuel de] Champlain established a trading post in Quebec in 1608, Quebec has always been subject to the interests of the dominant classes of the imperialist countries: first France, then England, and today the United States.”\(^65\) In one of his own essays, Vallières would state that the Canadiens had lived, since the French Regime, under absolutism—first monarchic, then ecclesiastical.\(^66\) This interpretation fit well with the desire among FLQ militants to generate a proletarian reading of Quebec history. They hoped that a revelation of this real heritage of the Québécois would popularize the Front’s own version of revolutionary nationalism.

The list of historical instances of ill-treatment of French-speaking Canadians by the British and English Canadians had long been an important element of the Quebecois nationalist rhetoric of suffering. Nationalists in Quebec tended to fall back on a standard narrative of grievances. In 1755, British troops forcibly expelled thousands of French-speaking Acadians from their lands in Nova Scotia. They then defeated General Louis de Montcalm and his French forces on the Plains of Abraham, outside of Quebec City; with the 1763 Treaty of Paris that ended the Seven Years War, Canada passed into the hands of the English. The Lower Canada Rebellion of the 1830s was harshly suppressed and assimilation policies would follow in its wake. The Canadian government executed French-speaking Métis rebel Louis Riel in 1885 and put an end to Catholic School funding in Manitoba in 1890. Even though his fight
had been for the recognition of his own ethnic group, the half-Amerindian, half-white Métis people, many French Canadians had supported Riel because as a French-speaker and a Catholic opposed to the English encroachment, his battle had paralleled their own. Both World Wars were periods of high ethnic tension. Many French-Canadians refused to be conscripted into the war effort as “cannon fodder” for the British crown. English-Canadian soldiers had opened fire on a crowd of rioters in Quebec City during the First World War Conscription Crisis, killing four people.67

In the collective memory of nationalistic-minded Québécois there was one particularly heroic moment, the Lower Canada Rebellion of 1837-1838. In those years, a group of frustrated members of a newly-created middle class calling themselves Patriotes, launched an insurrection against the English “occupant” in which they declared Lower Canada (the southern portion of the modern-day province of Quebec) to be a sovereign state. The particular Canadien nationalism of the Patriotes under the leadership of Louis-Joseph Papineau, had been influenced by Enlightenment principles and the American Revolution. It would arise as a response to unfair representation in the colonies and corruption in London. A culminating point of violence in the history of Quebec and of Canada, the rebellion, after a few considerable victories on the side of the Patriotes, was eventually crushed by British troops and twelve of its soldiers publicly hanged to serve as a lesson to future rebels.68 The Lower Canada Rebellion, although it had been fought by an alliance of French Canadians, Irish immigrants and even English Canadians, was reconceived in some circles as an ethnic struggle of French against English. Others attributed the rebellion’s failure to the Catholic Church’s support of the British. The memory of the
“Troubles de 1837-38” (the world “rebellion” signified failure) was utilized by left-wing nationalists as a case in point for anti-clerical, socialist, and/or anti-colonial agendas.69

Like the nationalists who preceded them, FLQ leaders engaged in their own myth-making by borrowing symbols from French Canada’s past. The FLQ’s balancing of old and new, traditional and radical, is evident in the organization’s use of symbols, an area in which the movement seems at first to have embraced conflicting ideological forces, but which attests to the *bricolage* nature of Felquiste nationalism. The more radical and internationalist tendencies within Felquiste thought identified with the “FLQ flag,” which appeared in FLQ communiqués from 1963 and was periodically resurrected during demonstrations in the late 1960s. Georges Schoeters testified in court that he had designed the banner to include the colors blue, for France, white, for liberty, and to feature a red star, representing Marxist revolution.70 But apart from the little-used FLQ flag, almost all Felquiste symbols were borrowed from Quebec’s history. *La Cognée’s* namesake, taken from the word for axe, was symbolic of French Canada’s pioneer past; it had once been used as both a tool—to clear forest for farming, and as a weapon by rural militiamen.71 “The *Cognée,*” explained the first issue of the paper, “is a work tool. Like our ancestors, we must build our country with determination . . . It is [also] a weapon. We must defend ourselves.”72 Every issue of *La Cognée* until that of October 31, 1964, was also graced with fleur-de-lis, the symbol of French Canada, featured on Quebec’s national flag. But they also had an ancient religious meaning, symbolizing purity and the Virgin Mary. According to Felquiste François Mario Bachand, the lily emblem
represented the excessively patriotic (*chauvin*) and reactionary past of the Québécois. Unlike the majority of FLQ members, Bachand was intolerant of almost every sign of traditional nationalism; he preferred the kind of nationalism represented by the Patriots’ Flag. The historical flag of the Patriots’ Rebellion, which featured green, white and red stripes, was originally conceived to honor the Irish, French and English residents of Lower Canada who had fought in solidarity against Imperial Great Britain, but it was primarily waved by French-Canadians who associated it with the separatist movement. The symbol of the “Patriote” himself, as imagined by painter Henri Julien—marching in ragged clothes with rifle, pipe and traditional Canadian *tuque*—graced the background of the “FLQ Manifesto” in October 1970.

Like their contemporaries in the separatist movement, FLQ thinkers recognized the importance of history for spreading nationalist sentiment. They did their part to revisit the history of the Québécois, taking care to highlight moments of brutality on the part of “Anglo-Saxons” and moments of revolutionary heroism among French Canadians. Historical (re)-education served a double role: to open the eyes of the people to the “truth” about their history in order to promote “class consciousness,” the first step towards liberation; it also served as an FLQ militant’s “*formation idéologique*” (ideological training).

The first publicly distributed piece of FLQ “historiography” was contained within the “Message of the FLQ to the nation” (the group’s first “Manifesto”), distributed to local newspapers on April 16, 1963. The message decried the post-Conquest mission of the English to assimilate the 60,000 French colonists so that “Anglo-Saxon” economic and political “supremacy over Quebec [would] become
uncontested.” They did this first by military force, than by law, reported the FLQ message, through the union of Lower and Upper Canada and then Confederation of the four British colonies in North America in 1867. “Since the advent of this latter, all the efforts of the people of Quebec to obtain its fundamental rights have been blocked by colonialism.”

One of the purposes of La Cognée was to facilitate the “dissemination of our ideas to a wider audience.” In its first issue it clearly listed the events of the past that the FLQ understood to be its historical antecedents. Advancing the first manifesto’s historical narrative into the twentieth century, the front page declared that the FLQ would fight…

In the memory of Asbestos, of Murdochville, of Louiseville [three famous postwar mining workers riots], as of the conscriptions of 1917 and 1914 and Saint-Eustache [the battle in which the last camp of the Patriotes were defeated] and the Plains of Abraham … We are following the trail blazed in 1837. That was more than a century ago. All the more reason to end it now.

The events that La Cognée cites highlight episodes of Quebec’s labor history alongside political events better known to the French-Canadian nationalist. The “trail blazed in 1837” refers to the Lower Canada Rebellion of 1837-1838. For both the legal separatist movement and the FLQ, it was perceived as a founding historical event in the struggle for independence in Quebec. One of the FLQ’s founders, George Schoeters, had stated during his trial that the FLQ had been created to “pick up where the Patriotes had left off.” The FLQ often invoked the Patriotes’ struggle as a nineteenth-century model for their own organization. They too had created a clandestine society, the Sons of Liberty (based on the American model of the same
name) whose leadership had come from the ranks of the Canadien nationalist group, the Société de Saint-Jean-Baptiste, founded in 1834.80

In October of 1964, La Cognée began the publication of a series entitled, “La veritable histoire des Québécois” (The True History of the Québécois), written by one of the editors, “Paul-André Gauthier” (a pseudonym). It would appear every 15 days for a year in the format of detachable sheets that could be easily preserved and studied. In its entirety, this document offered a particular version of Quebec history with which the FLQ sought to indoctrinate the followers of the movement.

Knowledge of history was part of the educational “formation idéologique” (as Pierre Vallières would call it in 1968) that Felquistes-in-training were recommended to undergo in order to become better militants: “To free ourselves from slavery we must free ourselves from ignorance.”81 “To objectively orientate our combat,” Gauthier explained in the prelude to his first installment, “it is necessary to study the progression of colonialism” in Quebec. The goal was to “take another look at where [colonialism] came from, to see where it [was] going.” To this end, said Gauthier, he had compiled a work concerning “all the events that have most deeply marked our history since the Conquest.”82

As François Xavier Garneau had done in the nineteenth century, Gauthier wrote his “Véritable histoire” in response to a claim made about Quebec history, this time from a 1949 quote from the work of British historian Arnold J. Toynbee, which was printed just above the article. While Toynbee predicted that the Québécois would become the “people of the future” on the American continent (as would the Chinese in Asia, he claimed), Toynbee referred to Quebec as a country whose
“inhabitants…didn’t have a very glorious history.” Gauthier would make sure that the readers of his narrative were left with exactly the opposite feeling.

The “Véritable histoire des québécois” was by far the most biased and inaccurate of Felquiste dabblings in amateur historiography, but it got its point across quite well, especially if one took all of Gauthier’s claims to be true: the poor of Quebec had always been devoted to independence and had fought at every chance to obtain it.

Gauthier used strategically incendiary language as if speaking to a crowd at a nationalist rally. His essay presented the history of the early British regime in Canada as repeating pattern that oscillated between rebellion and brutal repression. Along the length of the narrative, Gauthier employed terms specific to the FLQ and its era (“waves”; “anti-imperialism”) and alluded to figures from the provincial government of 1960-1966 (such as Crown Attorney, Claude Wagner, who also served as the Quebec minister of Justice) Gauthier made every effort to describe the English regime as barbarous and unlawful, especially in its their punishments of Québécois rebels. He called certain aspects of British rule “terrorism”.

From the 1760s through the Lower Canada Rebellion and then on to the Conscription crises of the twentieth century that pitted brave French-Canadian mobs against armed red-coated Canadian officers, Gauthier’s essay painted the picture of a people who refused to refused to give in to assimilation, forced labor and curtailed civil liberties. He claimed that, in spite of the disapproval of the French-Canadian élite and clergy, the majority of common Canadiens sided with the Continental Congress (during the American Revolutionary War) and later, with Napoleon’s
France, both of which had hoped to trigger a Canadien uprising against the British. In both situations, claimed Gauthier, independence “passed under our noses.”\footnote{84} One historical figure whom Gauthier mentioned was David McLane (whom Gauthier misnames “Maclean”), the alias of a rather confused American operative in what appears to have been a foiled attempt sponsored by Napoleonic France to topple British rule in Canada. He was caught and convicted of high treason in Quebec City where he was hanged and gorged. Gauthier suggested that he be honored as the “martyr” of the French-Canadian nation.\footnote{85} (Gauthier insisted that he was really French-Canadian: “He had adopted [an] English pseudonym.”)\footnote{86}

Beyond his novel concept of le martyr Maclean, Gauthier’s history seems to have been unprecedented for a number of reasons. When it came out in March 1965, Austrian-born Joseph Costisella’s book Peuple de la nuit was an explosive success among French Canadians. It was lauded as a first “history of armed resistance by the people of Quebec against the occupying power,” and had even mentioned the FLQ as “the people taking up arms again [for the first time] after the 1837 Rebellion.”\footnote{87} But Gauthier’s “Véritable histoire” predated Costisella’s book by a year. It may have provided much of the inspiration behind Peuple de la nuit, whose author was involved in revolutionary circles in Quebec and probably read La Cognée.

Gauthier’s history provided clear historical precedents for the FLQ’s perspective on its own era, its goals, methods and enemies. Gauthier explicitly drew a number of parallels between the eighteenth and nineteenth-century events he recounted in his narrative, and those of the twentieth century and the FLQ’s own time. “Then [in 1795] as today,” wrote Gauthier, “‘judges’ perverted the law in favor
of colonialism.”

Conscription acts, he claimed, had been forced onto Canadiens since 1778. Gauthier drew a parallel between the English authorities in previous centuries and the police forces of the 1960s in Quebec, which the FLQ had often denounced as tyrannical and “colonial.” He pointed out that at one point in the 1770s the English were packing so many “political prisoners” (an FLQ term for jailed Felquistes) into the warships in Quebec City’s harbor that they had to use the converted cells of the Recollects’ monastery.

Gauthier’s agenda was clear. He had undertaken the compilation of a “true history of the Québécois” to refute the idea that the Québécois were an unobtrusive farming people who obeyed authority at all times, not only to refute the idea that his people had almost always been docile, unobtrusive and respectful of authority, and to refute the claim that theirs was not a “glorious past.” Instead, he conveyed the century following the Conquest of New France by Great Britain as constant chain of popular rebellions against their new rulers and those traitorous former top-dog institutions of the régime français: the Church and the petite noblesse, who took their side. More often than not, Gauthier claimed, those early rebels had employed guerilla warfare tactics. He thus defended the legitimacy of the FLQ’s own desire to spark a popular revolution, and its methods of urban violence.

The amateur “historiography” of the FLQ was constantly being passed around and retouched by various Felquiste writers. The most important example of this process was in the Felquistes’ treatment of the historical episode of the Patriotes and their Lower Canada Rebellion of 1837-38. In the second issue of La Cognée the pages were full of praise for the Patriotes, “morts pour la libération du Québec.”
1963, as in 1837, “We have the same collaborating forces fighting against us, and history had taught us how to get rid of them. The blood of the Patriotes cries VENGANCE and we will satisfy it.” A year later, the twenty-first issue of La Cognée provided a more accurate view of the Rebellions as, admittedly, having been a bourgeois class phenomenon.

Pierre Vallières gave the Patriotes a much rougher treatment in an editorial he wrote for the first issue of the publication L’Avant-garde (a paper meant only to be used to communicate between the FLQ leadership) in 1966. Vallières called the Patriotes leader, “the bourgeois Papineau,” a traitor, who hid in the United States while those who had fought for him were hanged by the English.

Charles Gagnon provided a more nuanced analysis of the Lower Canada Rebellion in terms of a class struggle within a colonial context. His text, also published in L’Avant-garde, was circulated as an educational piece for all FLQ militants. In the introduction to his essay on the Patriots’ War, Gagnon explained that he had avoided making the same mistakes as much of the “fantastical” historiography surrounding the events. He refused the thesis that the events had hinged on an ethnic conflict (English versus French Canadians) as well as the thesis that it had been the Catholic hierarchy’s strong disapproval of the rebellion that had clinched the British victory. Instead, he proposed an analysis of the Rebellion in terms of a struggle between the emerging local bourgeois class (represented by the Patriote leaders) and the dominant class of aristocrats and big merchants. It was not a people’s rebellion at all, said Gagnon, but a struggle in which the “peuple” was manipulated and tossed between the clergy (worried about keeping its privileged status under British rule),
and the new bourgeoisie, (eager to set up a regime favorable to their own class). By invoking the discontent between French and English farmers and general grievances against the colonial authorities, the *Patriotes* were able to whip up popular support for their project. No longer said to represent an *indépendantiste* revolution of the lower classes, the FLQ thus removed the Patriots’ War from its pedestal in search of more proletarian historical narratives. The demystification of the *Patriotes* marked a break with other radical nationalist movements which continued to revere the rebels of 1837-38.

FLQ “historians” were typically ashamed of the century or so between the Patriot Rebellions of 1837-38 and the Conscription Riots of the World Wars during which the French Canadians had withdrawn into themselves as insular group defined (in quiet opposition to the millions of “Anglo-Saxons” surrounding them) by their Catholicism and French cultural identity. At this point the conservative elements of society and the clergy had taken the reins and dug the ideological foundations for a new national groundwork entrenched in the soil of Quebec. In negotiating a constitution for the new Confederation of Canada, adopted in 1867, the Quebec representatives had only weakly defended the rights of the French minorities throughout Canada. The idea of nationalism as an institution to ensure cultural survival within the federal framework of the 1867 Constitution would determine the dominant bourgeoisie's actions until the 1960s. During that century-long interlude a “minority mindset” had taken root within the collective French-Canadian consciousness.
The FLQ and other separatist thinkers of the 1960s were eager to revive a more active nationalist narrative. For the Felquistes, it was imperative to wake up the Québécois people—violently, if need be—from their slumber of resigned colonization, and restore and reinvigorate the proactive nationalist dream of independence. The Québécois needed to take an active role in their history and in the improvement of their social condition. Louis Fournier, in his history of the FLQ movement, claimed that the FLQ wanted to play the “role of detonator, of accelerator of history.”

The ideas of accelerating, or even of creating history, were prevalent in the writings of FLQ militants, who rejected the historiographical precedent set by Lionel Groulx. Charles Gagnon wrote that while he considered it an important work as one of the only comprehensive histories of Canada’s early history, Groulx’s *Histoire du Canada français depuis la découverte* was too “‘petit-bourgeois’ in that it assumes all the interests of French-Canadian professionals and businessmen, while insisting on Quebec’s rural vocation.” FLQ theoretician Pierre Vallières remarked that the Québécois seemed to him to be a people “turned toward a past they had built into a myth.” He repeatedly urged the French Canadians of Quebec to contribute in the making of their history instead of dwelling in a romanticized version of the past. Vallières rejected the idea of a Quebec “blessed with poverty, ignorance, and religion.” He proposed a new motto: “Our master is the future” to replace Lionel Groulx’s famous slogan, “the past is our master.” He offered the FLQ-prescribed method of separatist and socialist revolution as a way for the Québécois to affirm their presence in the world and in history. Vallières’ had joined the FLQ to be able
to “give the masses of Quebec both the means (ideological and technical) and the opportunity for economic, political and cultural liberation”—not through éléctoralisme, as the concerns of wage-earners would always lose out to the bourgeois class of the politicians, and specifically not with the help of the Parti socialiste and Parti communiste, in step with Moscow. Only through violent revolution, as prescribed by the FLQ, could the Québécois finally become masters of their own history.  

In its 66th and last issue, on April 15, 1967, the centennial year of the inauguration of the Canadian Confederation, La Cognée invoked the past one final time as part of a call to action. The Union of Upper and Lower Canada in 1840, and Confederation in 1867, declared the article, had been

The culmination of a British policy of colonization and assimilation. The French Canadians are permanently trapped in an iron collar; their future is decided. Two solutions are offered to them: either to accept full assimilation or to break the shackle through independence. In 1967, the situation in Quebec is static; the iron collar is still there. But the excitement of recent years, coinciding with the awareness of our situation as colonized people, leave us hopeful that the moment of our escape is coming soon. The F.L.Q will make sure of that!  

“\textit{The Roman Capitalist Church}”: the FLQ and Religion

\begin{quote}
\textit{Un jour quelqu’un lui avait dit}
\textit{Qu’on l’exploitait dans son pays}
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
\textit{Il a pas cherché à connaître}
\textit{Le vrai fond de toute cette affaire}
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
\textit{Si son élite, si son clergé}
\textit{Depuis toujours l’avaient trompé} (from \textit{Bozo-les-Culottes}, by Raymond Lévesque)
\end{quote}
Quebec songwriter Raymond Lévesque’s famous tune “Bozo-les-Culottes,” first performed in 1967, describes the path of a naive young French Canadian who joins the FLQ after hearing that “his élite and his clergy had wronged him from the beginning,” but he never tries to understand the reality of the problem. The song evokes the stereotype that radical nationalists in the 1960s were opposed to the Catholic Church.

In 1774, the Quebec Act ensured the free practice of Roman Catholicism in British Canada and the preservation of the Church’s social and cultural role in French-speaking society. By virtue of the fact that virtually all French Canadians were Catholic and most of their English-speaking neighbors were not, the Roman Catholic faith quickly became a crucial aspect of the Canadien identity and later, of French-Canadian nationalism. The Church itself claimed to provide the force that protected and differentiated French Canada. At the height of its power in the Duplessis years, no other organization in North America could claim the level of “divine” assurance” and “institutional presence” that the Catholic Church brought to French Canadians.103

Those who engaged in efforts to deconstruct Quebec nationalism in the 1960s, including FLQ thinkers, typically vilified the Catholic Church as having betrayed (historically and for some, in their own period) its French-speaking flocks. Among the most notorious of the crimes of the clergy, as emphasized in the reinterpreted histories of Quebec, were the excommunication of the Patriotes and of those Québécois who had sided with the American Continental Congress against the
British. It became popular to blame the Catholic hierarchy—which exercised considerable influence in the lives of many Québécois—for the success of British imperialism in Canada and for Quebec’s reticence during the negotiations that would incorporate the province into a Canadian Confederation of anglophone provinces. It has recently been revealed that the role of the clergy in the 1960s, a decade in which its social power was significantly reduced, was much more dynamic than previous imagined. Many priests in Quebec actively sought to facilitate reform (in the vein of that enacted during the “Quiet Revolution”) to satisfy the new spiritual demands of a vastly changed society. Those grassroots endeavors did not go unacknowledged, even by the Felquistes, but the fact remained that Quebec’s higher clergy were much less willing to budge on matters they had always firmly supported or opposed. For the FLQ, the main problem was not with religion itself (although a number of Felquistes would struggle with their faith during the period and many underwent a “conversion” from Catholicism directly to atheism\textsuperscript{104}) but with the perceived historical and contemporary role of the Catholic Church in Quebec as ardent defender of the status quo, the established order that the FLQ swore it would overthrow.

In an early list of “Ottawa ‘colonials’ and their whores in Quebec” to hold accountable, the FLQ did not include clergymen among the many groups it mentioned.\textsuperscript{105} But for the majority of the Front’s militants throughout the next seven years, there was a general tendency to demand laicization of the public sphere and some anti-clericalism in their political thought. The so-called “\textit{père spirituel}” (spiritual father) of the FLQ, Raoul Roy, had called for an end to the suffocating “hold of clericalism” in his vision of an independent Quebec.\textsuperscript{106} The FLQ’s own
vision was equally secularist, though a little less harsh toward priests themselves. La Cognée proclaimed in January 1964, “After the liberation, the Church of Quebec will be separated from the state, which will do some good for both clergy and politicians.”

Indeed, during the period of the FLQ’s activity in Quebec, Jean Lesage’s provincial government was already gradually doing away with the public functions traditionally occupied by Catholic dioceses and religious orders. Of all of the FLQ’s many criticisms of the Liberal government, no complaints were voiced over the program of laicization. The text of the 1970 Manifeste made public a significant turning point in FLQ thought: the document was violently anticlerical, adding the Church to the list of enemies and exploiters of the Québécois people, along with the “English”, politicians, businessmen, technocrats, academics and judges. For the authors of the October 1970 “FLQ Manifesto,” the greatest evil of the Church was what they perceived as its hypocritical connection to money. The “Manifesto” made sure that everyone in Quebec was aware that the “the Roman Capitalist Church,” owned the Montreal Stock Exchange skyscraper, and had excommunicated the Patriotes in 1837 “to better sell out to British interests.”

In a section on the nature of “English Colonialism” La Cognée’s editors discussed the “alienation” of the clergy in Quebec’s history, but made it very clear that the Church—at least the lower clergy—had since corrected the errors of their past. After the Conquest, stated La Cognée, while the aristocracy fled to France, the clergy remained in Canada and almost immediately began to collaborate with the conquerors:

We [Québécois] became the victims of a shameful barter that the Church today would denounce immediately. This barter: the Church would be given
free rein for its ministry, but it was to preach submission to the new English rulers; the clergy of that time, which was remarkably more opportunistic than holy, accepted. . . . That is why five French Canadians who did not honor the oath of allegiance to England were excommunicated; they were even denied Christian burial. Bishop Pontbriand declared: “Blessed are those who…recognize (in the Conquest) the victorious arm of the Lord and submit to it.” . . . The clergy thus occupied the role of [collaborator] for a long time here . . . A few months ago, a separatist leader said, “Let us replace our curés [“pastors”—priests at the head of a parish] with prêtres [“priests” in general—not necessarily associated with a diocese].” By this he meant that in the past, the clergy here played a role that dishonored itself. 110

Along with many radical nationalists of the 1960s, some FLQ militants blamed the clergy for holding back progress in Quebec by advocating big families and a rural lifestyle. La Cognée posted an article expressing the editorial staff’s solidarity with a farmers’ uprising against Jean Lesage’s taxes. It mentioned that the night before deciding to stop paying their taxes, an abbé had urged the group of farmers to be patient and wait, “reminding [them] of the hierarchical channels that must be respected, the authority relations between boss and employee, blah blah blah. (sic)" But the farmers decided otherwise. According to the article’s author, this was a symbol of revolution in the face of frustration over continuing poverty and a government that had failed to deliver on its promises. The Church, represented in the lone abbé, had acted as a counter-revolutionary force. 111

Pierre Vallières was adamant in his view that the Church in Quebec was inextricably linked with the capitalist system. For a French Canadian to rise up at all on the rickety ladder of social mobility in the province, he had to go to a French collège and suffer the indoctrination of Catholic clergymen. Drawing on his own experience, he noted what he perceived as the hypocrisy of that system:

Duplessis and Salazar, standing on either side of a Pius XII as cold as a block of ice, infused their orthodoxy into the teaching of the imbeciles who had the
presumption to bring us Truth as a gift, the way missionaries bring Baptism to the natives (who, fortunately, are not taken in, and let themselves be baptized in the hope of obtaining a bit of the capitalist wealth that the Church takes with it everywhere). We put up with the Truth in the hope of some day enjoying the material privileges attached to it! We all lived in a state of forced hypocrisy . . . We were all Catholics, perforce. But very few of us really believed in God.”

By virtue of the monopolistic religious education system, to be French Canadian and successful meant being (at least nominally) Catholic. Put in the colorful language of Vallières, “the Church and High Finance imprison [French Canadians] in an empire (their empire) in which men have to alienate themselves, prostitute themselves….if they don’t want to die like rats.”

Vallières’ view represented the most extreme end of the anti-clerical spectrum among FLQ militantes. He had screamed at one of his seminary professors: “To me all priests will be profiteers and cowards so long as I don’t see them helping the workers, the farmers, and the students of Quebec to burn their churches, their seminaries, their presbyteries, their Cadillacs and the rest!” He would revise this view later in his life when, in 1962, he come across extraordinary Carmelite nuns who were helping workers. These were members of religious orders who, following the contemporary example of “practical charity” championed by the French father Henri Grouès (Abbé Pierre), were offering free meals and laboring alongside workers down in the dangerous construction sites of Montreal.

Members of the founding network of the FLQ expressed their sadness in a communiqué on June 6, 1963 at the loss of Pope John XXIII who had died three days earlier and whom they cited as an inspiration:

His Holiness Pope John XXIII was a pope of peace, of a just and fair peace in which all exploitation would be banned. His death is a great loss for humanity.
Whatever anyone says, the FLQ is not an organization devoted to death and destruction. On the contrary, we are fighting so that the Quebec nation will one day know the freedom that John XXIII has always stood for.\textsuperscript{117}

The FLQ’s ambiguity with regards to the Catholic Church in Quebec derives from its re-interpretations of Quebec history and of nationalist themes from a proletarian perspective. By way of \textit{La Cognée}, FLQ thinkers of the early 1960s made sure to point out that the Church in their own time had become much more sensitive to the needs of the Québécois people. The official organ of the FLQ took care to underline those points in Quebec’s history during which the clergy supported French Canadian rebels, or, later, the struggles of its working class. In his “Véritable histoire des Québécois” Paul-André Gauthier noted that although Quebec’s bishops had \textit{denounced} the Patriotes, a few lower clergy had heroically supported their cause. The Quebec City and Montreal archbishops’ support of the 1949 Asbestos strikers and public opposition to the anti-strike tactics of the Duplessis government were also praised. Gauthier ended his section on the effects of the American Revolution in Quebec, during which the church hierarchy took the side of the British, with the concluding note, “fortunately, in 1965, our bishops no longer have this attitude; our clergy is now dynamic and nationalist.”\textsuperscript{118}

But even for the sympathetic \textit{La Cognée} network, several declarations in favor of federalism made by Quebec’s cardinals in early 1967, would finally tip the scale, eventually resulting in the resolutely anti-clerical stance held by the FLQ until its decline in the early 1970s. In the February 1967 issue of \textit{La Cognée}, an author writing under the name T. Du Tremble sent out a message to readers that seemed to
mark a changing point in the neutral attitudes expressed in La Cognée towards the contemporary Church:

We have preferred to leave the Catholic Church outside of our firing range. We understand that, wanting to remain universal, it has avoided taking a position . . . [However], two of the highest [Church] leaders [Cardinals Maurice Roy and Paul-Émile Léger] have sided with the colonial power and have guaranteed their support of the degrading regime that oppressed the people of Quebec, reviving a long history of collaboration.  

The article ended with a suggestion to Catholics in Quebec that they hold their cardinals accountable:

Within the Church, the faithful must obey their cardinals, but not outside matters of faith, Catholics can forcefully express their feelings of contempt toward the improper conduct of their cardinals. We would not be surprised if these feelings are widespread and spoken with strength and conviction!

Erroneous claims have been made that the FLQ targeted the Catholic Church in its attacks. Except for the robbery of a bingo safe from a Montreal church basement during the Front’s decline in the early 1970s, that statement is inaccurate. Until 1967, Felquistes’ attitudes toward the Church were much more nuanced than one might assume for a violent, left-wing group. In general, cardinals and bishops were criticized as “collaborators,” but FLQ members praised worker-priests and nuns who, in the Felquistes’ eyes, remained true to their vows of poverty and helped the French-Canadian proletariat, not just in prayer but in political action and on the worksite. In comparison to the anti-clerical tendencies within the left wing of the burgeoning separatist movement, it is perhaps surprising that the bulk of FLQ writings present such a nuanced attitude toward the contemporary Church in Quebec.
What the FLQ created from its rehashing of the traditional nationalist narrative was its own brand of Quebec nationalism, distinct from any other. It is evident from their style and strategy, that the FLQ were following the example of the times. Both the Lesage government (until 1966) and the radical separatists (notably within the RIN and ASIQ) were drastically redefining the Quebec nation. But instead of directly adopting any of these new nationalisms, or previous strains, FLQ thinkers creatively pieced together their own standard from homegrown ingredients. Part of the new Felquiste nationalism included variations on the paradigms of the past, especially the three pillars of traditional French-Canadian nationalism: language, history, and religion. It extracted the nationalist institution of language from its shelter within the walls of the universities, colleges and presbyteries of Quebec, and added a hint of Joual, the sociodialect of the urban poor. Their history, they redefined as one of constant exploitation—first by the élite of France, then by the British, and finally by American big-business interests—but one in which the people had always revolted against the colonial authority. Finally, it exposed the Catholic clergy—earthly representatives of that institution closest to French-Canadian sensibilities—as approvingly pro-worker at the lowest levels and despicably colonialist on its highest rungs. FLQ thinkers did not reject any of the major institutions of nationalism in Quebec. They simply tailored them to fit the needs of a Québécois national identity that, for them, was blue-collar and eager for social revolution.

2 McLoughlin, Last Stop, Paris : The Assassination of Mario Bachand and the Death of the Flq, 32.
3 Ibid., 33
4 Ibid., 59
5 Fournier, Flq : Histoire D’un Mouvement Clandestin 145.
6 La Cognée 31 February 1966, No 53


"Expressions à corriger" (expressions to be corrected) and “adjectifs erronés” (inaccurate adjectives).

Turenne, Petit Dictionnaire Du "Joual" Au Français.

"Nous, Canadiens français, qui nous voulons tellement d'être restés français malgré les pressions auxquelles nous avons été soumis au cours de notre histoire, perdons de plus en plus la fierté d'être ce que nous sommes et par là même, le respect de notre langue. " Turenne, Petit Dictionnaire Du "Joual" Au Français 10.

"Anglicisation accélérée de notre population [que] seule la culture française sera assez forte pour résister" avant le "génocide culturel." La Cognée, 31 October 1963, no. 1

Peter Rutland, “Nationalism” [Forthcoming in the International Encyclopedia of Political Science]

"Çette absence de langue qu'est le joual est un cas de notre inexistence, à nous, les Canadiens français... Notre inaptitude à nous affirmer, notre refus de l'avenir, notre obsession du passé, tout cela se reflète dans le joual, qui est vraiment notre langue. " Jean-Paul Desbiens, Les Insolences Du Frère Untel (Montréal: Éditions de l'homme, 1988) 20.


"Plus vite un Québécois parlera l'anglais, mieux ce sera. Qu'importe s'il parle mal ou s'il écrit mal le français." La Cognée, 31 October 1963, no. 1 : 3


8 Gérard Pelletier, The October Crisis (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1971). 77

9 Claude Savoie, La véritable histoire du FLQ (Montréal : Les Éditions du jour, 1963), pp. 27-28


11 Ibid.

12 Paul Bouchard, The Nation, 1936


14 Ibid., 17 “‘les Canadiens français forment un peuple colonisé et Presque entièrement prolétarisé, occupé par une grande bourgeoisie colonialiste de langue et de culture étrangères.” / “nation prolétaire. ”

15 Fournier, Flq : Histoire D'un Mouvement Clandestin 19.

16 “À quel point nous [les Canadiens français] sommes toujours un peu beaucoup des colonisés et, ce qui est encore plus enrageant, considérés comme tels.” Fournier, Flq : Histoire D'un Mouvement Clandestin 19.

17 Marie-Françoise Lapointe, Petit Dictionnaire Du "Joual" Au Français 476.

18 Ibid.

19 "‘les Canadiens français forment un peuple colonisé et Presque entièrement prolétarisé, occupé par une grande bourgeoisie colonialiste de langue et de culture étrangères.” / “nation prolétaire. ”

20 Fournier, Flq : Histoire D'un Mouvement Clandestin 18.

21 Ibid., 16

22 Ibid., 17 “‘les Canadiens français forment un peuple colonisé et Presque entièrement prolétarisé, occupé par une grande bourgeoisie colonialiste de langue et de culture étrangères.” / “nation prolétaire. ”

23 Ibid., 16

24 Ibid.


28 Ibid.

29 Ibid., 17 “‘les Canadiens français forment un peuple colonisé et Presque entièrement prolétarisé, occupé par une grande bourgeoisie colonialiste de langue et de culture étrangères.” / “nation prolétaire. ”

30 Fournier, Flq : Histoire D’un Mouvement Clandestin 476.

31 Ibid.


33 Ibid.

34 "Anglicisation accélérée de notre population [que] seule la culture française sera assez forte pour résister" avant le "génocide culturel." La Cognée, 31 October 1963, no. 1

35 Ibid.

36 Ibid.

37 "Plus vite un Québécois parlera l'anglais, mieux ce sera. Qu'importe s'il parle mal ou s'il écrit mal le français." La Cognée, 31 October 1963, no. 1 : 3

38 Ibid.


40 "‘les Canadiens français forment un peuple colonisé et Presque entièrement prolétarisé, occupé par une grande bourgeoisie colonialiste de langue et de culture étrangères.” / “nation prolétaire. ”

41 Ibid.

42 Ibid., 17 “‘les Canadiens français forment un peuple colonisé et Presque entièrement prolétarisé, occupé par une grande bourgeoisie colonialiste de langue et de culture étrangères.” / “nation prolétaire. ”

43 Ibid.

situation, il faut d'abord la connaître. 

Le fait qu'ils utilisent ou non la ‘langue de Molière’ pour s'exprimer; c'est plutôt qu'ils possèdent un fonds culturel commun qui leur permet de communiquer de façon privilégié et profonde », (Laurendeau, 69)

L'histoire acquiert une importance considérable et les liens entre nationalisme et histoire sont particulièrement étroits comme le démontre l'expérience canadienne-française ... même un nationalisme révolutionnaire, détaché de la propension conservatrice au culte du passé et des ancêtres, ne néglige jamais le passé, du moins un certain passé. » Jean Pierre Gaboury, Le Nationalisme De Lionel Groulx; Aspects Idéologiques, Cahiers Des Sciences Sociales, (Ottawa; Éditions de l'Université d'Ottawa, 1970). 93

J'ai entrepris ce travail dans le but de... repousser les attaques et les insultes dont mes compatriotes ont été et sont encore journallement l'objet de la part d'hommes qui voudraient les opprimer et les exploiter tout à la fois.” Gaboury, Le Nationalisme De Lionel Groulx; Aspects Idéologiques 92.

"La timidité, la défiance et l'indécision, marques distinctives d’un peuple vaincu.” (Gaboury, Le Nationalisme De Lionel Groulx; Aspects Idéologiques, 92.)


Ibid., 6

Pierre Trépanier, Lionel Groulx Biography - L’Action française, Histoire du Canada français http://www.jrank.org/history/pages/7332/Lionel-Groulx.html#ixzz0gY0UZmAu

Gaboury, Le Nationalisme De Lionel Groulx; Aspects Idéologiques 92.

argumet historique “ Ibid., 93

Tofimenkoff, The Dream of Nation: A Social and Intellectual History of Quebec 269.

Ibid.

Gagnon, Quebec and Its Historians : The Twentieth Century. 25.

Ibid., 29

Nous, Québécois, subissons le colonialisme. Nous sommes un peuple prisonnier. Pour changer notre situation, il faut d'abord la connaître. » (Bergeron, Petit manuel, 3)

"Esclave vis-à-vis le maître " (Bergeron, Petit manuel, 8, Note # 7)

Bergeron, Petit Manuel D’histoire Du Québec 251.

Vallières, White Niggers of America: The Precocious Autobiography of a Quebec "Terrorist" 21-22.)


"National Unity – Quebec’s Anger.” Canada and the World, October 2002. (From Course Documents)


"National Unity – Quebec’s Anger.” Canada and the World, October 2002. (From Course Documents)


La cognée se veut un outil de travail. Comme nos ancêtres, nous devons construire notre patrie avec acharnement. Elle est une arme de combat. Il faut nous préparer. (La Cognée, 1 October 1965, no. 1)

François Mario Bachand, Trois Textes De François Mario Bachand (Montreal: Dém, 1971) 186.

Gagnon, Comeau, Leroux and Carel, Feu Sur L'amérique 59.


"Message of the F.L.Q to the Nation” F.L.Q, Un Projet Révolutionnaire, Texts assembled by R. Comeau, D. Cooper, and P. Vallières. VLB Éditeur, Montréal, 1990. (Translated: for marxists.org by Mitch Abidor)


"En mémoire d’Asbestos, de Murdochville, de Louiseville, autant des conscriptions de 1917 et 1943 que de Saint-Eustache et des plaines d’Abraham ... Nous suivons la voie tracée en 1837. C'était il y a plus d’un siècle. Raison de plus d’en finir » La Cognée, 1 October 1963, no. 1


« Comme nous l’affirmions… il fallait faire le point, afin d’orienter objectivement notre combat. Pour cela, il fallait étudier la progression du colonialisme chez-nous. Il fallait revoir d’où il vient, pour voir où il ira… A cette fin, nous avons donc compilé un travail sur les événements qui nous ont le plus durement marqués, depuis la Conquête. » (La Cognée No. 21 (p. 17))

Les habitants… n’ont pas eu un passé très glorieux.‖ (Ibid.)

« Le calvaire de notre martyr.‖ La Cognée, April 1965, No. 28 : 6

« Nous avons contre nous les mêmes forces collaboratrices, et l’Histoire nous enseigne à nous en débarrasser. C’est le sang des Patriotes qui crie VENGEANCE et nous saurons le satisfaire » (La Cognée, 31 October 1963, no. 2 : 5)


Nous fûmes alors victimes d’un troc honteux que l’Église aujourd’hui dénoncerait immédiatement. Ce troc : l’Église avait le champ libre pour son ministère, mais en revanche, elle devait prêcher la soumission aux nouveaux maîtres anglais; le clergé d’alors, qui brillait plus par son opportunisme que par sa sainteté accepta… C’est ainsi que cinq Canadiens-français qui ne respectèrent pas le serment d’allégeance à l’Angleterre furent excommuniés, on leur refusa même la sépulture ecclésiastique. Mgr Pontbriand déclara : « Heureux ceux qui…y reconnaissent (dans la Conquête) le bras vainqueur du Seigneur et s’y soumettent » . . . Le clergé a donc rempli, ici, pendant assez longtemps, le rôle du [collaborateur] . . . Un leader indépendantiste déclarait, il y a quelque mois : « Remplaçons nos curés par des prêtres. » Il voulait dire que le clergé d’ici a joué, dans le passé, un rôle qui n’est pas à son honneur.


Sa sainteté le pape Jean XXIII fut le pape de la paix, d’une paix équitable et juste où toute exploitation serait bannie. Sa mort est une grande perte pour l’humanité. Quoi qu’on en dise, le FLQ n’est pas un organisme voué à la mort et à la destruction. Nous combattons au contraire afin que la nation québécoise connaisse un jour cette liberté que Jean XXIII a toujours défendue. (p. 84 Claude Savoie) 

A ud sein de l’Église, le fidèles doivent obéissance à ces deux cardinaux, mais en dehors des questions de foi, les catholiques peuvent exprimer avec vigueur les sentiments de mépris qu’ils ressentent devant le comportement inqualifiable de leurs cardinaux. Nous ne serions pas très surpris que ces sentiments soient très répandus, et qu’ils s’expriment effectivement avec force et conviction !

One of the perpetrators of that crime, Andre Lavallée, vice-president of the Montreal executive committee and the third-ranked politician at City Hall, has since confessed.


http://montreal.ctv.ca/servlet/an/local/CTVNews/20090917/mtl_lavallee_flag090917/20090917/Hiccups
III. Nationalism and Social Revolution: The Felquisté conception of the Québécois nation

The first communiqué of the FLQ was a “Notice to the Population,” issued on March 8, 1963. The message concluded with a call to arms addressed to a specific wedge of French-speaking society in Quebec:

The dignity of the people of Quebec demands independence. The independence of Quebec is possible only through social revolution. Social revolution means a “free Quebec.” Students, workers, peasants: form your clandestine groups against Anglo-American colonialism.¹

Students, workers and peasants. Those were the groups the FLQ had called upon to form the revolutionary army against “Anglo-American colonialism.”² In a single statement the first FLQ had also introduced an element of their nationalist agenda, borrowed from their “spiritual father,” socialist and separatist Raoul Roy, which would continue to animate the movement until 1970: the combination of Quebec independence with social revolution. In the view of the Felquistes, the liberation of Quebec’s disenfranchised classes was the necessary, and indeed the only, possibility for a “Québec libre.”³ Although the FLQ would remain a fringe movement throughout its decade of existence and would never amass the wide support it hoped for, most of the FLQ’s members would be recruited from the lowest classes of Quebec society, attracted to the Front’s unique socialist-separatist nationalism.

François Mario Bachand, a voice of the extreme left within the FLQ since its earliest actions, declared that the Felquisté mission was to imbue the masses with a proletarian class consciousness, a crucial first step in the path to social revolution
prescribed by Marx. Facilitating revolution in Quebec, he wrote, was a particularly daunting task: “proletarian class consciousness has never existed [here],” the French Canadians having historically “formed a feudal and very hierarchical agricultural society.” Even in 1969, six years after the FLQ’s founding, the task of “organizing the proletariat” remained unachieved. For the FLQ, the success of this aspect of its mission was a necessary first step toward achieving national liberation for the exploited of Quebec. With its hybrid ideology of Quebec nationalism and Marxist revolution, the bricoleur thinkers within the FLQ had combined two ideological traditions, nationalism and socialism, that had often been at odds in the history of Quebec, notably during the labor conflicts of the Duplessis years.

In a “colonial and police regime” such as Quebec, declared one issue of La Cognée, “only a clandestine and minority organization of ‘professional’ partisans (meaning those who dedicate themselves entirely to the liberation of their country) can enable the revolutionary struggle to reach the masses.” As that organization, it was the job of the FLQ to “provide the people with the opportunity, the motives, and the means to rise up against the established authority” and seize independence. Although the FLQ (especially after 1965 with the adherence of self-proclaimed Marxists Pierre Vallières and Charles Gagnon) took inspiration from Leninism, none of the FLQ leaders ever suggested that the organization follow Lenin’s example and become a vanguard political party at the forefront of a popular revolution. Their mission, they believed, was to give to the members of the Québécois proletariat the ideological (and later, material) tools they would need to liberate themselves. That message was later echoed in the “FLQ Manifesto,”
broadcast publicly during the October Crisis of 1970: “Make your own revolution in your neighborhoods, in your workplace.”

To accommodate the nationalist-socialist double platform of their movement, Felquiste thinkers generated an entirely new idea of the Québécois nation itself, which they equated with the “proletarianized” people who made up the majority of the citizens of the province of Quebec. In its re-conception of the Québécois nation, the FLQ left no room for English Canadians or their “collaborators” within the francophone sphere, all of whom represented only a “minority of privileged foreigners and autochthones (sic)…favored by an unjust political regime.”

Pierre Vallières would explain that the “nation” the FLQ fought to liberate admittedly incorporated only the majority of Québécois. But members of that majority, Vallières argued, formed a solid nation of their own in that 1) they shared the “same origins,…the same language, the same culture, otherwise said, have the same customs, the same way of thinking,” and 2) because they were “currently victims of the same system of exploitation.”

What FLQ thinkers perceived as the shared ethnic identity (which effectively excluded the anglophones) and social status (excluding the “bourgeois” francophones) of the majority of Québécois made fighting for social revolution and Quebec independence one and the same as the real Quebec “nation” shared the common need to be liberated from the exploitive forces of imperialism and capitalism.

The ethno-social conception of the Quebec nation was generally agreed upon by Felquiste thinkers, but slight differences in the model arose between individual
philosophies. In August 1964, Pierre Schneider (of the first FLQ network) sent a letter to the editors of La Cognée from his jail cell at the Saint-Vincent-de-Paul prison outside of Montreal. The editors printed the letter but took pains to remind their readers that “of course, [it] expresses only the thinking of its author; the FLQ is by definition a ‘front’ that comprises militants of all ideological inclinations.” Nevertheless, Pierre Schneider claimed to speak on behalf of the entire movement when he declared that “we [the FLQ] consider ourselves soldiers of liberation and as such, are prepared to die for our country (Patrie)...To love one’s country is to love those of whom it consists. For a Québécois, that means viewing as brothers the fisherman of the Gaspé, the exploited of Lac-Saint-Jean and the workers who just get by [vivotent]...in the factories of Montreal.” To love one’s country, he concluded, is to fight for “La liberté, l’égalité, la fraternité.” The battle cry borrowed from the French Revolution seemed intended to replace the threefold nationalist motto of “religion, language and family” that had been popularized by Lionel Groulx. For Pierre Schneider, it was clear that fighting for social equality for Quebec’s least advantaged citizens was more important than preserving the anachronistic values of traditional nationalism.

Pierre Vallières, writing under the pseudonym Mathieu Hébert, was more explicit in his equation of nationalism with social revolution when he wrote in La Cognée that for the Quebec “masses, the opposite of exploitation was independence.” In a colonized country such as Quebec, he explained, the core of the “national question” was not just the “the cultural and linguistic issues,” but the “agricultural issue, the issue of natural resources and the forest,...of extreme poverty (over 25% of
urban families), [and] of chronic unemployment.” 14 Real social liberation, he concluded, could only be realized in the wake of independence.

This idea was echoed by Jacques Lanctôt, (the main author of the October 1970 Manifesto), during a speech he delivered at a benefit for separatist prisoners in 1978. Recalling the ideology of the FLQ, which he had not abandoned, Lanctôt declared that “national oppression and social oppression are two aspects of the same reality.” 15 The FLQ had had no intention of becoming a substitute for “popular actions,” he said. Its objective had been to present itself as an “embryo of political and military organization,” for the people and to demonstrate the viability of the strategy of armed conflict. 16 More specifically, the FLQ had never been affiliation with a party and had therefore served as an impetus of change for groups disenfranchised by previous nationalist organizations, political parties, and even, as Charles Gagnon revealed, by workers’ unions, whose benefits only ever reached a privileged few. 17

The FLQ’s goal was to prepare the way for a revolution that would benefit the “nation,” of exploités 18: industrial workers (in the cities and in mines, factories and other work sites in the country), poor independent farmers, and students. Perhaps it was a natural consequence that a large number of adherents to the FLQ hailed from these milieus, including some of its most important leaders. Some of them felt entitled to act as spokespeople of the “masses” in Quebec precisely because they had not been born into the “petits or grands bourgeois” classes, but represented the “dynamic elements of the people.” 19
“Melting Pens to Make Plastic Bombs”: Student Felquistes

Of the three population groups from which FLQ leaders sought to recruit new militants and among whom they hoped to gain solidarity, young people—students, in particular—proved the most receptive to the FLQ’s mission. The La Cognée network, including its successors, Pierre Vallières and Charles Gagnon, focused their recruiting efforts on that demographic. In 1965 they even established a university edition of their publication, La Cognée universitaire, which was put under the management of a sympathetic group of students and professors based at the University of Montreal, which at that time was still the only francophone institution of higher learning in the city. A co-editor of La Cognée, “Paul Le Moyne” (a pseudonym) wrote an editorial urging youths to join the Front and praising them as the true heroes of the new proactive wave of nationalist sentiment in Quebec:

The youth have a much sharper awareness of the contradictions of our regime than past generations. Their enthusiasm and dynamism are not stifled by compromise or bogged down by conformism. They are our wise ones. . . Between the two generations there is a war; a revolutionary and forward-looking nationalism has replaced the narrow and reactionary nationalism of the ‘30s.20

Le Moyne attributed the emergence of a generation of politically conscious Québécois to the social and political conditions of the period in which they grew up—a time, he claimed, that was characterized by an increasing level of awareness of economic and political instabilities in Quebec and abroad: “Via television, [the young generation] saw colonies liberate themselves through violence; they saw France emerge from its economic slump and take back its place on the international scene; they saw a shaky confederation [Canada] seek an impossible harmony in fruitless struggles.”21 Le Moyne reminded Quebec’s youth that within the ranks of
In the 1960s, the number of French-speaking students in Quebec was beginning to exceed the capacity of the education system. Even with the reforms put in place during the “Quiet Revolution,” the price of higher education continued to separate the haves from the have-nots. Raymond Villeneuve, co-founder of the FLQ, had himself been unable to attend university because of his family’s inability to pay tuition.  

The founding issue of *La Cognée universitaire* in October 1965 declared that education should be public and completely government-subsidized as a “sacred right.” The money was available, it was argued, if the Quebec government would only tax the “companies that exploit our national patrimony.”

Jacques Lemelin beseeched his fellow students to follow in the revolutionary path of the FLQ instead of using their privileged education to become *exploiteurs* themselves. “We of the ‘mountain’ (a reference to the Mount Royal campus of the Université de Montréal), will we continue to remain passive in the face of the general movement? . . . Will we miss the train of revolution?”

Determined to do their part, the editors of *La Cognée universitaire* closed their second article with an academic-themed call to arms: “It is time to melt down our pens to make plastic bombs!”

Throughout the 1960s, francophone graduates from CEGEP programs (public post-secondary collegiate institutions found only in the province of Quebec) faced a limited number of slots in Montreal’s only francophone university.*

---

* The Université du Québec à Montréal (UQÀM) was established in 1969.

94
François Mario Bachand, along with Marxist professor Stanley Gray of McGill University, launched a massive demonstration that targeted McGill, a symbol of the anglophone minority and funded by the provincial government, in the heart of predominantly francophone Quebec. On March 28, 1969, 10,000 trade unionists, jobless persons, leftist activists, CEGEP students, and a handful of McGill students marched on the university’s main gates in downtown Montreal, demanding that it become francophone and more sympathetic to the nationalists’ and workers’ movements. Although a success in terms of its large numbers and considerable media coverage, *Opération McGill français* was broken up by the police fairly early and failed to secure official acquiescence in any of its demands. Bachand, wanted for assaulting a police officer during the riot, was forced to flee Canada.27

*In Pursuit of a Radical Ruralism: the FLQ and Quebec’s Peasants*

In the years in which the FLQ was the most active the bulk of Montreal’s food arrived daily on trains from Canada’s bread basket in the western Prairies. Almost the entirety of Quebec’s rapidly-diminishing rural society consisted of small subsistence farmers who faced extreme poverty and limited harvests. When the FLQ included the category *paysans* in its reconceived portrait of the Québécois nation, they renewed an old nationalist view championed by Lionel Groulx that the future of the French-Canadian nation lay in the hands of farmers. Unlike the FLQ, Groulx had taken this view to a nationalist extreme in conceiving of the ideal Quebec nation as primarily agricultural and rural. Groulx’s ruralist dream had persisted in nationalist circles in Quebec until the end of the 1950s when the proportion of the work force engaged in
farming dropped below 10% and more than 75% of the provincial population had become urban. Following that demographic trend, the FLQ remained above all, an urban movement from 1963 to 1970. But the fact that Felquistes held on to the peasant minority in their conception of the Québécois identity is significant, especially given the fact that the “Quiet Revolution” and later, the Parti Québécois provincial governments both dropped the paysans from their nationalisms, which defined Quebec as an urban, industrial society.

Indeed, by the 1960s there was little incentive for peasants to remain on their farms. According to statistics related by the FLQ itself, among the 90,000 or so farmers of Quebec, the average yearly salary was $1550 per year (C$10,445 if one accounts for inflation), and therefore had only $30 (roughly $200) per month with which to support their families. Given their feeble incomes, Quebec’s peasants were often incapable of paying for health services; infant mortality and starvation was not uncommon in the far-reaching rural regions of Quebec.

From their mere $30 per month, the government took out $4 in property tax. Independent farmers in Quebec, many of whom had grown impatient with Lesage’s failure to inquire duly into their tax situation, were particularly admired by the early FLQ because they had been among the first to “revolt against the old parties.” The Union catholique des cultivateurs (UCC), the largest organization of farmers in the province, had endorsed the Créditistes, a conservative but independence-oriented social credit party, two decades earlier. Based on this fact, the early FLQ made the naïve assumption that the peasants of Quebec would be sympathetic to a radical separatist movement coming
from the city. An article in *La Cognée* announced that any revolution that did not involve the *paysans* “would be incomplete.”

Charles Gagnon, who rose to the status of FLQ leader in 1966 and became one of the most prolific contributors to Felquisté thought, had a far better understanding of the challenge that encouraging Quebec’s farmers to join the FLQ’s revolution would pose. Gagnon had come from a poor farming family himself; this heritage would have profound effects on his political thinking as a Felquisté. “I have the impression,” Charles Gagnon would say in 1990 recalling his childhood in the tiny village of Bic near the Gulf of the St Lawrence, “that in your twenties, the political choices you make are due to personal experiences.”

He had been born the last of fourteen children to a father who was a farmer during planting and harvesting seasons and a lumberjack in the winter. Gagnon’s father belonged to a whole class of rural Québécois men who were obliged to leave their land and families for six months every year to migrate towards temporary employment. More often than not, work could only be found in the foresting industry, which was extremely dangerous, yielded low wages and an even lower level of job security.

Despite their poverty, said Gagnon, his was a proud family. “One can be poor and proud,” he wrote in his memoirs. “It makes you have to hide things. If you have to patch a pair of worn pants, the patch must be exactly the same fabric, with the same dye, and well sown. …Because there are rich people, there is no glory in being poor!” Gagnon insisted that because of this mentality, the peasants of Quebec, as the province’s poorest and proudest people, were “doubtless the slowest to experience revolt.” The example of his own family prompted in part his steadfast advocacy of
spreading “class consciousness” without inducing a feeling of shame, especially in agricultural communities like the one in which he had grown up.  

While the FLQ claimed to be fighting on their behalf, very few of the peasants of rural Quebec ended up supporting or joining the FLQ. The only area where there appeared to be any success for recruitment was in the extremely impoverished farming and fishing region of the Gaspé Peninsula. While the Front made some efforts to establish regional branches outside of the city (as the RIN had done, with some success), generally, it had the most success recruiting in Montreal among the city’s working class.

_Taking Advantage of a “Sad Reality”: the FLQ, Workers, and the Urban Poor_

Adapting the chant heard at nationalist rallies in the 1960s, “le Québec aux Québécois!” (Quebec for the Québécois!), in 1965 the slogans of the FLQ became “Le Québec aux travailleurs québécois.” (Quebec for Québécois workers!) Figuring at the top of the list of the FLQ’s “exploités” were blue-collar workers in the manufacturing and mining industries, who sought more security for their jobs and their families in the shadow of what the FLQ regarded as the Liberals’ and subsequent Union Nationale governments’ empty promises of change. A trade union edition of _La Cognée_ began to be published in 1965, which hoped to encourage recruitment to the FLQ from the working class. More generally, the “liberation” of the urban poor, including the unemployed and underemployed, was particularly important to the FLQ, especially in light of the fact that many of its members came from working-class Montreal backgrounds.
In the 1960s, Montreal continued to rank as the largest and most important urban center in Canada, and had experienced a sharp rise in growth over the previous decade that brought its population up to 1.3 million. Under the auspices of ambitious Mayor Jean Drapeau, the city underwent a massive transformation. Highways were built, the first lines of the Metro system were constructed, skyscrapers shot up in the Centre-Ville, and in 1967, the Expo 67 international exposition (considered the most successful in the twentieth century) opened with a dizzying number of pavilions and attractions. None of this excited the FLQ, apart from the treasure troves of dynamite that the construction sites provided. The Front hated Jean Drapeau and denounced what it perceived as the growing economic gap between those who benefitted from the mayor’s spread of “progress” and those who suffered from it.\(^{42}\)

In 1965, the editorial staff of *La Cognée* printed an article entitled “Poverty and Misery in Montreal,” that related new information that the economic situation for lower-class French Canadians in Montreal had worsened in the past few years. A study undertaken by the *Conseil du travail de Montréal* (Work Commission of Montreal) of the *Fédération des travailleurs du Québec* (Quebec Workers Federation) had recently found that over a third of the city’s families were “incapable of satisfying basic needs: food, lodging, clothing.”\(^{43}\) Like other North American urban centers of the time, geographic segregation continued to reign in the metropolis of Montreal. The poorest classes were crowded into the predominantly francophone or immigrant neighborhoods of St-Henri, Faubourg Québec, Faubourg à M’lasse (present-day Sainte-Marie), St-Louis and Ville Jacques-Cartier (now part of Longueil
and childhood home of Felquiste Pierre Vallières). The FLQ made it perfectly clear that it intended to use the recent statistics to their advantage:

[The revelations of the FTQ report represent] a clear and precise answer to the detractors of independence. . . . [and] conditions for a revolutionary situation, conditions that, according to the “leftists” [the provincial Liberals], did not exist in Quebec. That is the main reason for popular discontent against the authorities [and] established structures. . . . 38% of the metropolitan population is more than enough for the FLQ to channel these forces of rebellion towards a revolutionary consciousness. It is our duty to learn to take advantage of this sad reality.\(^{44}\)

In his biography, Vallières described the slum-like conditions of the francophone “settlement” of Ville Jacques Cartier, just across the Jacques Cartier Bridge from downtown Montreal. In the late 1940s and early 1950s, when Vallières was growing up, Ville Jacques Cartier had lacked a sewer system, paved roads or building regulations and had become known as the “Wild West of Quebec.”\(^{45}\) The wealthy of the city, he remembered, had been shocked to learn in the papers of their proximity to so much poverty. Headlines had read: “Babies dying of cold in Coteau-Rouge”; “A City of Sheet Metal.”\(^{46}\) According to the FTQ report, by 1965 conditions in the neighborhood had not significantly improved. The Chénier Cell, responsible for the kidnapping of Pierre Laporte in 1970, would be based in Ville Jacques-Cartier. All of its members had been raised in the neighborhood.

The statistics about poverty in Montreal actually ran counter to the economic statistics of the rest of the province, which under the Lesage government, was experiencing a period of rising (although slowly) employment rates.\(^{47}\) The relative prosperity of the majority of the Québécois compared to other “dominated” or “colonized” world regions was a fact the FLQ leadership had to grapple with
throughout the 1960s as it defended its position in favor of violent revolution. Louis Nadeau wrote the following in the November 1963 issue of *La Cognée*:

> It is often said that Quebecers have much more than the subsistence level [minimum vital] and that consequently, they will not want to risk a revolution because of the uncertainty that it entails [especially given the enduring poverty of many recently-independent countries]. But there is also a “social” subsistence level, a certain amount of goods and services that an individual must obtain before being able to integrate into the society in which he lives... We live in North America. If we fix the standard of living in Canada at 100%, the Quebecker is 28% behind the Canadian from Ontario and 50% behind the American; our purchasing power is 37% lower than that of the Canadian from Ontario. What is worse is that wealthy English are counted in these calculations...as if they were Québécois. This means that the standard of living in Quebec is really even lower that I reported. . . . In this context, like the other peoples of the world who have freed themselves from colonial rule, we have nothing to lose with revolution and independence.\(^4^8\)

FLQ propaganda attested to an ever worsening economic situation in 1960s Quebec. François Mario Bachand claimed in 1969 that one in two unemployed Canadians was a citizen of Quebec because large employers like the shipyards and textiles companies had been forced to shut down operations because of foreign competition, (mostly Japanese), and because Americans were investing less in Quebec’s industries.\(^4^9\)

The FLQ claimed that it was reorienting Quebec nationalism from a “bourgeois” to a “revolutionary” nationalism. The “true” nationalism, created by and for “the people,” had begun to triumph over the “false” nationalism that had benefited only the upper crust of French-Canadian society. This was evident in a short-lived but exciting rise in the number of adherents to the FLQ’s provincial branches throughout the blue-collar and even rural regions of the province outside of Montreal. *La Cognée* reported in March 1966: “In the Gaspé, people talk of taking up arms, and it’s coming
to Lac Saint-Jean† and Abitibi‡ also... The people are beginning to understand, to become politicized, to turn to us [the FLQ]; more and more, in terms of progressivism and revolution, we are becoming the true representatives of the people.”

Unlike many other nationalist groups in Quebec the majority of FLQ militants hailed from the milieus for which they claimed to be fighting. The sweeping social changes of the postwar years had not eliminated the long-existing monopoly of the bourgeoisie over positions of power. Nearly all of Quebec’s French-speaking politicians surfaced from the province’s small educated élite. This trend had long kept nationalist expression firmly within the control of the upper echelons of society, who formed exclusive patriotic clubs that doubled as lobbies and networking societies. The most famous of these was the Order of Jacques-Cartier, a secret nationalist society composed of mostly French-Canadian lawyers and businessman, which was known to play an influential back-seat role in provincial politics. Even though they tended to depart from traditionalist rhetoric and promoted social equality, the new radical nationalist organizations of the 1960s, apart from the FLQ, did not reverse the trend.

With the notable exception of ASIQ founder, Raoul Roy, who was born into a farming family in the Eastern Townships, many of the leaders of those separatist progenitors of the FLQ had been members of the French-Canadian privileged strata. Raymond Barbeau (who had co-founded the early indépendantiste organization,

† Saguenay-Lac-Saint-Jean is an extensive region north of Quebec City, and a center in the 20th century for pulp and paper milling and aluminum smelting.
‡ Abitibi is a northwestern region of the province of Quebec and a center of paper manufacturing
Alliance laurentienne, in the late 1950s) had been a teacher, essayist, and literary critic, with a doctorate from the Sorbonne, while André D’Allemagne (co-founder of the RIN) was a prominent translator and political commentator with training from McGill University.\textsuperscript{51}

The FLQ’s founders came from much humbler roots and were significantly younger than their middle-aged counterparts in the legal movements: Georges Schoeters, an unemployed immigrant in his early thirties; Raymond Villeneuve, 19, the son of a baker, who could not afford to continue his studies to the university level; and Gabriel Hudon, 24, an industrial draftsman at an aircraft hydraulics plant.\textsuperscript{52} The goal of the nascent FLQ was pure and simple: to make a state for people like them, French-speaking and working-class, a demographic that had, in the last twenty years, encompassed the vast majority of the province’s population. Future generations of Felquistes, following the trend established by the FLQ founders, were mostly young workers and students who typically hailed from lower class families.\textsuperscript{53} A few separatist groups that cropped up in the 1960s also enjoyed the support and active membership of a lower-class constituency, but they were short-lived and much less active than the FLQ.\textsuperscript{54} However, many FLQ militants, especially at the lower levels of the organization, often hopped between the Felquiste networks and these smaller groups, to the point that the membership of the FLQ and of other small left-wing separatist factions bore significant overlap.\textsuperscript{55} However, the FLQ remained the largest and most prominent of these fringe groups and the humble backgrounds of its leaders made it unique among the major voices arguing for the independence of Quebec from the left.
One notable exception to this Felquiste trend was the short-lived ALQ (Armée de Libération du Québec) or the “Lasalle group” of the 1964, which, unlike its predecessor the original FLQ, was not inclined toward socialism. According to Bachand, the ALQ was much more interested in being perceived as more intelligent than its forerunners. Most of the ALQ had been born into the French-Canadian bourgeoisie: its leaders were Jean Lasalle, 21, son of the president of the regulating body of Quebec doctors, the Collège des Médecins; Jean Gagnon, 22, son of a prominent judge; Jules Duchastel, 20, the son of the Canadian Baron Duchastel de Montrouge, and so forth.

Even though most Felquistes came from modest backgrounds, the fact must not be overlooked that many of those who contributed regularly to the ideological dialogue within the movement were educated at classical colleges. A secondary education at such a francophone private institution—or better yet, at an anglophone one—was extremely rare for those members of French-Canadian society who were not sons of lawyers, doctors, or politicians. The training offered at classical colleges was consciously geared toward producing the future members of a small, privileged French-Canadian élite. This was a fact that the few collège-trained FLQ leaders acknowledged and were deeply ashamed of. Charles Gagnon remembered that, for a French-Canadian farmers’ son in the 1950s, attending the nearest collège was “the royal path…to escape being broke.” But being surrounded by the sons of the rich in school had increasingly estranged him from the rest of his family. He could not help feeling that he had betrayed his milieu. “My young, emancipated student attitude, my new behavior…all that put me into the category of the ‘educated,’ the ‘big-shots.’”
Later in his life Gagnon would revolt against that system that had prepared him for integration into the French-Canadian ruling class.\textsuperscript{60}

The FLQ’s dedication to its radical socialist nationalism in opposition to the bourgeois one that, in its view, had always occupied the domain of government in Quebec, was good enough incentive to steer clear of party affiliations or becoming a party itself. Between 1963 and 1970, the Felquistes repeatedly affirmed their belief that when nationalist agendas crept into politics they only benefited the wealthiest members of French-Canadian society. In the grip of electoral politics, nationalism, as attached to a political party, could only ensure the continuing domination of the French-Canadian \textit{bourgeoisie} while the lowest strata continued to languish in poverty. By its very nature, explained Gagnon, party politics was a game of the rich, nothing but “clashes between ‘clans’ within the ruling class.”\textsuperscript{61} He mocked the PSQ (Parti socialiste du Québec) for trying to form a “party of workers” within the “electoral machine” because it required lots of money—something workers didn’t have—to survive in that system.\textsuperscript{62} To FLQ observers, the pitfalls of electoral politics had already befallen Quebec with the election in 1960 (and re-election in 1970) of the Liberal Party to the provincial government at Quebec City. The architects of the “Quiet Revolution” had merely been new members of the French-Canadian élite replacing other, more conservative ones. René Lévesque of the Parti québécois and Pierre Bourgault of the RIN, although more promisingly pro-independence, would only perpetuate the cycle of bourgeois politics if elected. Even the left-wing separatists, who thought of themselves as far removed from what the FLQ called the
“bourgeois nationalists” in politics, were, according to the Felquistes, hopelessly isolated from the people. The last thing the FLQ wanted was to be estranged from the groups they considered their base.

In creating their “people’s” version of Quebec nationalism, FLQ thinkers had borrowed the traditional building blocks left by past generations of nationalist tradition and significantly retooled them to fit a populist foundation in Quebec’s past and, they hoped, a socialist vision for its future. The concept of “social revolution” had the most profound effects on the FLQ’s conception of the Québécois national identity in the tumultuous 1960s, which focused on three major groups: workers, students and peasants. Just as FLQ thinkers favored a do-it-yourself approach to nationalism, the revolution they promoted within Quebec’s subordinate classes encouraged spontaneity and amateurism.

The terms borrowed by the FLQ, “classe ouvrière” (working class) and “peuple prolétarisé” (proletarianized people), denoted a class that Marx had called the “collective worker” and which the orthodox version of his thought had discouraged from associating with the “bourgeois pastime” of nationalism. But the FLQ deviated from this orthodoxy when it not only connected but combined nationalism and social revolution into one ideology. The FLQ conceptions which fit more squarely in the vein of Marxist orthodoxy were mostly those derived from imported revolutionary thought, which in the hands of the FLQ, was used to assert that the Québécois were a third-world people in the midst of decolonization. The transnational influences on Felquistes thought, and subsequent outsourcing of the Front de Libération du Québec, will be discussed further in the following chapter.


3 In April 1968, radical members of the separatist party, the Rassemblement de l’Indépendance nationale, unhappy with the decision of RIN leadership to merge the party with the sovereignist, social-democratic Parti Québécois, would leave to found the organizations, Front de libération populaire (FLP) and the Comité Indépendance-Socialisme (CISM), which followed the FLQ precedent of a socialist/separatist platform. 

4 « La conscience de classe prolétarienne n’a jamais existé, parce que nous formions une société féodale agricole et très hiérarchisée. Il faut maintenant organiser le prolétariat. » Bachand, Trois Textes De François Mario Bachand 186.On May 9, 1968, an event that the FLQ regarded as a small victory for « class consciousness » occurred in Montreal. The first “common front” of twenty-five citizens committees active in underprivileged areas of the city, convened in the working-class neighborhood of St-Henri at which Canon Jacques Grand’Maison, of the Comité ouvrier de Saint-Jérôme declared that “the existing social order must be changed from top to bottom. The system has to be scrapped, because we can no longer accept it.” (Fournier, F.L.Q. : The Anatomy of an Underground Movement 13.) But the neither the FLQ nor the FLP ever considered themselves a serious “vanguard party” in the Leninist sense. 

5 “Certes, en régime colonial et policier, seule une organisation minoritaire et clandestine de partisans “professionnels” (c’est-à-dire qui se consacrent tout entière à la libération de leurs pays) peut faire aboutir la lutte révolutionnaire des masses. » Cognée 

6 « Fournir au peuple l’occasion, les motifs, et les moyens de se soulever contre l’autorité établie, » 

7 The one exception to this was the Front de Libération Populaire party, which had been inspired by the leftist thought of Felquistes François Mario Bachand. Pierre Vallières and Charles Gagnon declared that they saw the FLP as a legal “political vanguard,” working alongside the FLQ, an underground “military vanguard.” (Fournier, F.L.Q. : The Anatomy of an Underground Movement 13.) But the neither the FLQ nor the FLP ever considered themselves a serious “vanguard party” in the Leninist sense. 

8 « Faites vous-mêmes votre révolution dans vos quartiers, dans vos milieux de travail. » Manifeste 


10 “Même origine, partagent la même langue, la même culture, autrement dit, ont les mêmes habitudes, la même façon de penser,”/ “Actuallement victimes d’un système d’exploitation.” 

11 « Il est bien entendu que cette lettre n’exprime que la pensée de son auteur. Le FLQ est par définition un “front” et regroupe des militants de toutes tendances idéologiques. (N.D.L.R.) » La Cognée, 31 August 1964, no. 18 

12 « Pour notre part, nous nous considérons comme des soldats de la libération et en tant que tels sommes prêts à mourir pour notre Patrie. Aimer sa Patrie, c’est aimer ceux qui la composent. Pour un Québécois, c’est fraterniser avec les pêcheurs de la Gaspésie, les exploités du Lac-Saint-Jean et les ouvriers qui vivent dans l’insécurité dans les usines de Montréal. Aimer sa Patrie, c’est combattre pour la LIBERTÉ, L’ÉGALITÉ, LA FRATERNITÉ. » La Cognée, 31 August 1964, no. 18 


14 « L’essence de la question nationale, c’est d’abord au Québec la question agricole, la question des richesses naturelles et de la forêt, la question culturelle et linguistique, la question du crédit, de l’indigence (plus de 25% des familles urbaines), du chômage chronique, du sous-emploi et de la pauvreté. » (« Le MLP et la lutte de libération nationale » La Cognée 1December1965, no. 48 (also appeared in Flq : Un Projet Révolutionnaire : Lettres Et Écrits Felquistes (1963-1982) 64.) 

15 L’oppression nationale et l’oppression sociale sont deux aspects de la même réalité. » 

16 « embryon d’organisation politique et militaire » (Fournier, F.L.Q. : The Anatomy of an Underground Movement 13.)
The unemployment rate in Quebec rose briefly after 1961, reaching 7.1%. It would rise significantly to over 8% in 1966, a discrepancy that had effectively created a hierarchy of “classes” within the working class itself. (Gagnon, Comeau, Leroux and Carel, Feu Sur L’amérique 59.)

According to Gagnon, while union workers in Quebec could earn up to $5 per hour, most earned only $7.50, a discrepancy that had effectively created a hierarchy of “classes” within the working class itself. (Gagnon, Comeau, Leroux and Carel, Feu Sur L’amérique 59.)

It would not be until after 1966 (once the Liberals had been voted out of power) that the working class would begin to realize the full extent of their power. (Ibid.)

La jeunesse a une conscience beaucoup plus aigue des contradictions de notre régime, que les générations passées. Son ardeur et son dynamisme ne sont pas étouffés dans le compromis, ne sont pas enlisés dans le conformisme… Ce sont nos sages… entre les deux générations, il y a une guerre, et qu’au nationalisme étroit et réactionnaire des années ’30, s’est substitué un nationalism révolutionnaire et tourné vers l’avenir. La Cognée No 4, p. 5

“Par la télévision, elle a vu des colonies se libérer par la violence, elle a vu la France sortir de son marasme, et reprendre place sur la scène internationale, elle a vu une confédération impossible harmonie dans les luttes stériles.” La Cognée No 4, p. 5

The young have a much sharper consciousness of the contradictions of our regime, that of the previous generation. Their ardor and dynamism are not stifled by compromise, not ensnared in conformism… Between the two generations, there is a war, and where an nationalism narrow and reactionary of the 1930’s, there has been substituted a revolutionist nationalism and turned towards the future. La Cognée No 4, p. 5

“On peut donc être pauvre et être fier. Cela oblige à considérer les droits de la personne et les droits sociaux sous un autre angle, et à se révolter contre les vieux partis, en votant pour le Crédit social; … une révolution sans eux ne serait que partielle.” Jean-Claude Hebert, La Cognée universitaire, octobre 1965, no. 1

“Les compagnies qui exploitent notre patrimoine national.” La Cognée universitaire, octobre 1965, no. 1

“Nous de la ‘montagne’, allons-nous demeurer passifs face au mouvement général…allons-nous manquer le train de la révolution?” “Une lutte que nous n’avons pas choisie” La Cognée universitaire, octobre 1965, no. 1

“Incapables de satisfaire les besoins élémentaires: nourriture, logement, vêtement.” Jean-Claude Hebert, La Cognée No 4, p. 5


“On peut donc être pauvre et être fier. Cela oblige to cover the cuts. If a pantalon needs to be repaired, the piece must be exactly the same fabric, of the same color and well-coupled….Since there are rich people, there’s no glory in being poor! The poor who are also proud are probably the slowest to know the revolution.” Gagnon, Comeau, Leroux and Carel, Feu Sur L’amérique 59.

“Les compagnies qui exploitent notre patrimoine national.” La Cognée universitaire, octobre 1965, no. 1

“Nous de la ‘montagne’, allons-nous demeurer passifs face au mouvement général…allons-nous manquer le train de la révolution?” “Une lutte que nous n’avons pas choisie” La Cognée universitaire, octobre 1965, no. 1

“Incapables de satisfaire les besoins élémentaires: nourriture, logement, vêtement.” Jean-Claude Hebert, La Cognée universitaire, octobre 1965, no. 1

“On peut donc être pauvre et être fier. Cela oblige to cover the cuts. If a pantalon needs to be repaired, the piece must be exactly the same fabric, of the same color and well-coupled….Since there are rich people, there’s no glory in being poor! The poor who are also proud are probably the slowest to know the revolution.” Gagnon, Comeau, Leroux and Carel, Feu Sur L’amérique 59.

“I have the impression that in the twenties the choice of politics are due to …the personal experience that one has had.” Claude Hebert, La Cognée universitaire, octobre 1965, no. 1

“On peut donc être pauvre et être fier. Cela oblige to cover the cuts. If a pantalon needs to be repaired, the piece must be exactly the same fabric, of the same color and well-coupled….Since there are rich people, there’s no glory in being poor! The poor who are also proud are probably the slowest to know the revolution.” Gagnon, Comeau, Leroux and Carel, Feu Sur L’amérique 59.

“On peut donc être pauvre et être fier. Cela oblige to cover the cuts. If a pantalon needs to be repaired, the piece must be exactly the same fabric, of the same color and well-coupled….Since there are rich people, there’s no glory in being poor! The poor who are also proud are probably the slowest to know the revolution.” Gagnon, Comeau, Leroux and Carel, Feu Sur L’amérique 59.

“On peut donc être pauvre et être fier. Cela oblige to cover the cuts. If a pantalon needs to be repaired, the piece must be exactly the same fabric, of the same color and well-coupled….Since there are rich people, there’s no glory in being poor! The poor who are also proud are probably the slowest to know the revolution.” Gagnon, Comeau, Leroux and Carel, Feu Sur L’amérique 59.

“On peut donc être pauvre et être fier. Cela oblige to cover the cuts. If a pantalon needs to be repaired, the piece must be exactly the same fabric, of the same color and well-coupled….Since there are rich people, there’s no glory in being poor! The poor who are also proud are probably the slowest to know the revolution.” Gagnon, Comeau, Leroux and Carel, Feu Sur L’amérique 59.
of provincial power until 1970), that the employment rate in Quebec would go into a period of sharp decline until the 1980s. (see: Simone Langlois, Recent social trends in Quebec, 1960-1990 (p. 140))

40 On dit souvent que les québécois ont beaucoup plus que le minimum vital et que, conséquemment, ils ne voudront pas se risquer dans une révolution à cause de toutes les incertitudes que cela comporte... C'est plutôt un minimum « social » il s'agit d'une certaine somme de biens et services qu'un individu doit obtenir pour être intégré à la société dans laquelle il vit... Or, nous vivons dans le contexte nord-américain. Si nous fixons à 100% le niveau de vie du Canada, le québécois est 28% derrière le canadien de l'Ontario et 50% derrière l'américain; notre pouvoir d'achat est 37% de plus bas que celui du canadien de l'Ontario. Ce qu'il y a de pire, c'est que, dans ces calculs, on a compté les anglais riches de Westmount, Hampstead and Town of Mount Royal, comme s'ils étaient des québécois. Cela veut dire que le niveau de vie des véritables québécois est encore plus bas que celui que j'ai indiqué... (D)ans notre contexte, nous n'avons rien à perdre par la révolution et l'indépendance, au même titre que les autres peuples du monde qui se sont libérés du joug colonialiste. Nadeau, Louis “Le Minimum Vital” La Cognée, November 1963, No. 2 : 5

40 Bachand, Trois Textes De François Mario Bachand 186.

50 "En Gaspésie, les gens parlent de prendre les armes, et ça s’en vient aussi au Lac Saint-Jean et en Abitibi. . . . Le peuple commence à comprendre, à se politiser, à se tourner vers nous [le FLQ]; de plus en plus, nous devenons les véritables représentants du peuple dans ce qu’il a de plus progressistes et de révolutionnaire.” La Cognée, 1 March 1964, No. 7

52 D'Allemagne, Manifeste Du Rin.


54 On July 15, 1965, a network of Felquistes attempting to operate in the Laurentide Mountains was arrested and its members’ identities revealed. Almost all of them were students or in vocational training. (SEE: Louis Fournier, F.L.Q. : The Anatomy of an Underground Movement (Toronto: NC Press, 1984) 84.) When a large portion of the low-level membership of the Vallières-Gagnon Group was arrested on June 15, 1966 and then on August 27, their professions were listed in the police reports: Robert Lévesque, 25, a plumber; and Réjean Briggs, 23, a barber; Gérard Laguerre, 24, a social science student at the Univ. of Montreal; Rhéal Mathieu, 19, a laboratory technician; and Claude Simard, 19, a hospital worker. (SEE F, en, 101)

54 In January of 1964, a semi-secret indépendantistes group, the Front républicain pour l’indépendance (FRI), was founded with the declared goal of attaining national independence through any means available. The FRI and FLQ had a significant amount of overlap in its ideology and membership. The Royal Canadian Mounted Police suspected the FRI of being a front for the FLQ, and in May of 1964, only four months after its founding it was effectively snuffed out as an active group after a police raid of its headquarters. However, one enduring vestige of the FRI was its monthly, Québec Libre, an influential source of news and propaganda whose readership included many FLQ members. Its editors were in contact with the team that printed La Cognée. (see f, 74)

55 In June of 1964, days after being arrested for protesting the participation of Governor General Georges Vanier (viceregal representative of Queen Elizabeth II in Canada) at the annual Saint Jean-Baptiste Day parade. Reginald (“Reggie”) Chartrand, a former boxer with no secondary education, founded the group Chevaliers de l’indépendence (Knights of Independence) There were some links between the felquistes and the Chevaliers. Chartrand’s lieutenant and body-guard was an FLQ militant, Jean-Joseph Dagenais. Although he never joined the FLQ himself, Chartrand claimed that the “FLQ was the wake-up call of a sleeping people.” Although there were other nationalist political organizations (besides unions, of course) with a proletarian base, they were often closely linked to the FLQ. (see Fournier, Flq : Histoire D’un Mouvement Clandestin 48


57 Bachand, Trois Textes De François Mario Bachand 186.


60 «C’est l’élite qui allait perdre un joueur! » Gagnon, Comeau, Leroux and Carel, Feu Sur L’amérique 59.

61 Luttes de ‘clans’ à l’intérieur de la classe dirigeante. » Gagnon, Comeau, Leroux and Carel, Feu Sur L’amérique 59.

62 Ibid., 17
PART TWO: The Front in the World

IV. Foreign identities within the FLQ

In 1967, violent protests erupted in Montreal when the local Saint-Léonard school board insisted that the children of the (mostly Italian) immigrant families within its jurisdiction receive a unilingual French education. The opposition came from anglophone and allophone families seeking an English-language education for their children. The school board’s attempts at compromise were refused. In light of the controversy surrounding the Saint-Léonard decision, the provincial government hurriedly enacted Bill 63 without having it reviewed by the commission that had been established to inspect language problems in the province.

Officially, the *Loi pour promouvoir la langue française au Québec* did precisely what its name suggested. The law required children receiving public schooling in English to learn French and demanded that new immigrants acquire knowledge of the French language upon arrival to the province. However, the law’s most controversial measure was its concession to immigrants of the right to choose the language of their children’s education, a measure that for many francophone Quebeckers was far too lax. Bill 63 unleashed an unprecedented uproar among French-speaking Québécois, especially within nationalist groups. Needless to say, immigration policy was a contentious issue in Québécois society in the 1960s and 1970s. Fears of competition in the labor market plagued working class Québécois,
and the perceived inevitability of dwindling French language use inspired panic among those concerned with the preservation of Quebec’s distinct linguistic status.

Anxiety about immigration, and the xenophobia that often accompanied it, were not new phenomena in French Canada. Some of the roots of these attitudes in Quebec can be traced back to nineteenth-century colonial policies. After the suppression of rebellions against British control in both Upper and Lower Canada in the 1830s, the British government dispatched a liberal aristocrat, Lord Durham, to analyze the uneasy situation in Canada. Durham’s personal view was that French-Canadians were an uneducated people who stubbornly clung to ancient customs in ignorance of modernity and the benefits of English liberalism. He believed that by fault of their uncooperative nature, French Canadians were destined to inferiority as “labourers in the employ of English capitalists.”¹ In his reports back to London, Durham suggested the assimilation of French Canadians into English civilization as the best, and most generous, solution to the political problems that they had posed during the 1837-38 Rebellion. Inspired by Lord Durham’s report, the political entities of Upper and Lower Canada were officially merged in 1841, in part to facilitate the integration of French populations in the east into the rapidly growing anglophone areas of Canada. Settlement of the former Lower Canada by people from the British Isles was actively encouraged in order to make the Canadien as insignificant a minority as possible.²

There was a sharp increase in the number of migrants arriving in the port cities of Montreal and Quebec in the late nineteenth century. The 1920s saw the

¹ Upper Canada was located in what is now the southern portion of Ontario. Lower Canada included the southeastern quarter of the modern province of Quebec and the Labrador region of Newfoundland.
advent of new waves of immigrants from Eastern Europe, and during the Second World War and postwar period there was a general upsurge in immigration throughout North America. French Canadians from rural areas continued to pour in to the industrial centers of the province in search of work. As their Lower Canada ancestors had once faced the competition of English and Irish settlers for the best farmlands, francophone Quebeckers in the age of industrialization and urbanization were struggling against new immigrant groups for jobs. According to 1961 statistics, in terms of average salaries earned, French Canadians, who made up four fifths of the provincial population, ranked twelfth on a list of 14 “classes ethniques” in Quebec. They figured just above Italian immigrants and Amerindians.

The view of influential nationalist historian Lionel Groulx, writing in the early decades of the twentieth century, was that the French-Canadian “nation,” “absolutely depends on homogeneity.” The idea of French Canada as a nation was based on the “harmony that emerged from common culture, history, religion, ‘land’ and ‘race.’” Much of French-Canadian nationalism, from its early orientation against English and Protestant influences, was built on a notion of cultural survival. Abbé Groulx praised the French-Canadian nation’s survival instincts and constant resiliency in the face of years of conscious or unconscious attempts to stamp it out. Consequentially, concerns about the preservation of “la nation canadienne-française” inspired xenophobic attitudes. A rhetoric of “racial purity” grew out of these elements, epitomized in the expression *pure laine* (literally, “pure wool”), a label reserved for members of what one sociologist recently termed “French New World” ancestries, which in Quebec

---

† The term “race” was used in both French and English writings of the time to denote the French-Canadian “ethnicity”
has overlapped with the identifiers “French,” *Canadien*, or simply *Québécois*. The “racial” element was an important basis for much of traditional Quebec nationalism through the early decades of the twentieth century and beyond. Until the 1960s the majority of self-declared Quebec nationalists identified as Canadians of “pure” French ancestry.⁷

*Immigrants and Quebec Separatism*

In light of the traditional associations of Quebec nationalism with *pure laine* ethnic pride, it is important to note that a few of the most enthusiastic militants in the struggle for Quebec’s independence were recent immigrants or descendants of recent immigrants. The incidence of this phenomenon, in the midst of the 1960s “Quiet Revolution,” corresponded with a change in the way French Canadians were articulating their identity and subsequently, their nationalism. Quebec nationalism in this period, having become gradually homogenized by television and appropriated and remolded by elected officials, was making the transformation from an ethnic nationalism to a civic nationalism.⁸ The new strain retained only the linguistic element.

Since the rise of the Liberal Party through the provincial elections of 1960, new political rhetoric had been developed that preferred to focus on the consolidation of provincial powers, the construction of a welfare state bureaucracy, and the

---

⁷ Civic nationalism (also known as civil or liberal nationalism) stems from the traditions of rationalism and liberalism. Civic nationalism is inclusive, based on the assimilation of people of diverse ethnic backgrounds into a common culture, and including strong guarantees for individual rights; it has been called non-xenophobic. In contrast, ethnic nationalism stresses the group over the individual and ties the nation to a specific ethnic identity, while civic nationalism has been defined as non-xenophobic.
preservation of the French language. The new institutions took precedence over the old goals, espoused by traditional Quebec nationalists and former Premier Maurice Duplessis, of guaranteeing the cultural survival of the French-Canadian race. Nevertheless, despite ideological shifts at the government level, xenophobic tendencies persisted, especially in the French-Canadian community and its press.

How did those few indépendantistes who were immigrants, or not Québécois de souche\(^8\)—particularly, those affiliated with the radical FLQ movement—reconcile their separatist thinking with a nationalism that had historically been defined in ethnic terms and sometimes manifested xenophobic tendencies? In a period in which the immigrant experience was rapidly integrating into the social fabric of Quebec’s urban centers, these enthusiastic indépendantistes contributed to the ongoing formation of a new Québécois identity and a new Quebec nationalism. The presence of persons with foreign backgrounds within the FLQ exhibited the kind of transnational influences the movement was bringing to indépendantisme in Quebec and to Quebec society as a whole. In light of the fact that all of these individuals, to varying degrees, felt a personal affinity with Quebec and its French-speaking population, it would be inaccurate to attribute their participation in the FLQ solely to shared ideological convictions.\(^8\)

The two most prominent foreign-born FLQ revolutionaries, Georges Schoeters and François Schirm, had come to Canada with pre-conceived notions of “maquis”, “resistance”, and “decolonization” Having experienced first-hand the manifestation of these concepts, they were able to import and reapply them in the

---

\(^8\) Literally, “from the stump” de souche is synonymous with pure laine in Quebec. Most “pure laine” Québécois can trace their ancestry back to the original settlers of New France in the seventeenth century.
context of their new Montreal home. Like Quebec-born FLQ militants, they would also embrace transnational ideologies such as Marxism and anti-colonialism—ideologies that did not require (and indeed often frowned upon) loyalty to a particular nation. However, all of those few FLQ militants of foreign birth or foreign blood shared the sentiment that they had been adopted into the Québécois nation and each was willing to die for its independence.

The presence of a few non-Canadian voices was notable within the radical Quebec nationalist organizations of the 1960s, some of which were ancestors of the FLQ. In 1962, a group of intellectuals founded the Comité de libération nationale with the goal of combining clandestine separatist activity with overt legal action. Members of the sluggish Comité would later join the FLQ, eager to take more drastic action. One of the four founders of the Comité, Professor Jacques (Santiago) Lucques, was of mixed Chilean and French descent. Lucques immigrated to Canada and became a citizen in 1957. Having obtained a doctorate in geopolitics in Paris, he maintained links with the FLN in Algiers and with certain “milieux gaullistes” in France, as well as with the United Nations Special Committee on Decolonization, created in 1960. Strongly influenced by the revolutionary nationalism of Latin America, Lucques travelled to Cuba and Puerto Rico. He was 26 years old when he joined the Comité de libération nationale. Lucques was arrested on April 12, 1963, not long after the birth of the FLQ, during a search operation known as the Good Friday “razzia.” Lucques had been apprehended a year earlier painting “Quebec libre” in red across Ville Mont-Royal.⁹
Although he was often suspected by the authorities of membership in the FLQ, Lucques was never an active Felquiste. He founded his own separatist organization, the Front républicain pour l’indépendance (FRI), and published a monthly paper, Quebec libre, which served as a main source of information for the early FLQ even after the founding of the Felquiste paper la Cognée in October 1963. One of Lucque’s fellow FRI members was an Austrian immigrant, Joseph Costisella, a professeur de lettres who authored the popular book on Quebec history, Peuple de la nuit in 1965. He wrote of the FLQ’s terrorist activity, “the people of the night have taken up arms once again” 125 years after the insurrection of the Patriots. Dedicated to socialist ideology and the theories of Quebec decolonization, Lucques and Costisella were notable immigrant separatists and supporters of the burgeoning FLQ movement.

At the age of 18, Pierre Schneider became a member of the “noyau de direction” (executive cadre) in the tiny first network of the FLQ. He was among those apprehended on June 1, 1963 during the police raid that effectively dismantled the founding FLQ network. Of the twenty FLQ members arrested below the level of the highest-ranking founders, all were males between the ages of 18 and 22, RIN militants for the most part, and many belonged to French-Canadian families. Schneider’s was the only name on the list that did not ring of pure laine ancestry.

Schneider’s autobiography offers a glimpse into his struggle with identity growing up in the deeply language-segregated world of 1950s Quebec. Schneider was not himself an immigrant, but descended from them. He was the son of an anglophone father born of German immigrants, and a French-Canadian mother.
During his childhood years, Schneider spent most of his time with his maternal
grandfather. A fervent Catholic and ardent supporter of the nationalism espoused by
Lionel Groulx, he imbued Schneider with a sense of French-Canadian pride from an
eyear age.\textsuperscript{14} But his German name represented a powerful stigma in postwar Quebec,
one which would plague him throughout the years he spent growing up in the middle-
class French-speaking enclave of Outremont, a borough in Montreal:

During all those school years in Outremont I was always aware of my ethnic origins and my German family name, which made me feel different. I admit that I felt shame for my family name which reminded me too much of my German descent, even more because World War II, where Hitler committed paroxysms of horror, had just finished. How I wished to be called Tremblay or Gagnon like everybody or almost everybody in this close knit province.\textsuperscript{15}

The rejection of his father’s identity—that of a first-generation, English-
speaking Canadian—in favor of his mother’s and grandfather’s, would endure beyond
his childhood. In 1963 he became one of the youngest and most passionate members
of the newborn FLQ, the most extreme manifestation of the nationalist struggle
against the Anglophone “exploiter.” He was largely responsible for the mailbox-
bombing campaign of the nights of May 16 and 17 in Westmount, which he called the
“colonial castle.”\textsuperscript{16} While no civilian was injured, the threat to the well-to-do English-
speaking neighborhood stirred up enough panic to warrant the involvement of special
bomb-diffusing units of the Canadian Army. While neutralizing an undetonated FLQ
bomb, Sergeant-major Walter Leja, himself of Polish origin, was severely maimed.\textsuperscript{17}

Schneider was still passionate in his recollection of Operation Westmount decades
later:

After the attack of military symbols of their domination we would now show them our determination in exploding dynamite two steps from their little castles, in the middle of this area that the residents enriched themselves at the
expense of the Quebecois, who they exploited odiously as cheap labour and natural resources.\textsuperscript{18}

It is important to note that the mailbox bombs were not uncontroversial even among the members of the FLQ. Founding member, Georges Schoeters disapproved of Operation Westmount. He worried that instead of fighting symbols of English-Canadian colonialism, the FLQ was now attacking people.\textsuperscript{19}

\textit{The Adopted “Patrie”: The Case of Two Immigrant Felquistes}

Two of the FLQ’s most influential leaders in the 1960s were recent immigrants to Montreal: Georges Schoeters, the ideological father and co-founder of the organization, and François Schirm, the leader of the FLQ’s short-lived Armée de Libération du Québec (inspired by the military branch of the Algerian FLN that had fought against the French Army). In 1967, a Swiss psychiatrist, Dr. Gustav Morf, embarked on a psychoanalytical study of “Quebec terrorists.” He conducted hundreds of interviews over the span of three years both within and outside of the federal penitentiary of St. Vincent de Paul, in order to better understand “the motives, aims, ideals and disillusion of the terrorists.” Both Schoeters and Schirm featured prominently in his study, partly due to the fact that they both had “extraordinary backgrounds.”\textsuperscript{20} Indeed, the cases of Schoeters and Schirm bore striking similarities.

Georges Schoeters was born on April 22, 1930 in Antwerp, the illegitimate son of a Flemish mother and a Balkan father he would never know.\textsuperscript{21} He was raised in an orphanage until the Nazi occupation of Belgium in 1940. His mother, having become the mistress of a very wealthy man, spent her days travelling throughout
Europe. By the time he was twelve years old, Georges had become involved with the partisans of the Belgian *résistance* in the forests of the Ardennes running messages past German soldiers. Morf, perhaps because of his training in Jungian psychoanalysis, focused primarily on Schoeters’ early life experience in the Belgian *maquis*, in which violence was a daily fact, to explain his future terrorist tendencies in Canada.

Following the liberation of Belgium, Schoeters spent three years in Brussels where he worked as an office clerk and became a member of a Catholic youth organization, the Cercle des jeunes travailleurs. He expressed a desire to immigrate to Canada to a priest-leader of the movement who contacted another priest in Outremont and was able to arrange for Georges to stay with a family there. Schoeters arrived in Montreal in September 1951 at the age of 17 and immediately became a member of a large French-Canadian family. He decided that he should learn English in order to compete in his new country so he left for Vancouver (the mountains and forests of British Columbia reminded him of the Ardennes). He returned a year later to his adoptive family in Outremont, nearly fluent in English, 22-years-old and in search of an occupation. He eventually entered into a career as an electrician, enrolling in the appropriate trade school. He finished with success and was awarded the proper degree, but instead of going into an apprenticeship at a firm as everyone expected, he prepared himself for study at the university level. Aided financially through grants and the generosity of one of his professors, he spent five years at the (francophone) University of Montreal studying economics and sociology.
At school, most of his friends were foreign students with whom he organized discussions about Third World issues and the Cuban and Algerian Revolutions. Soon after Schoeters’ graduation, Fidel Castro, who had just won the revolution in Cuba, traveled to Montreal, having been denied a visa to the United States. He was received at the Cercle social of the University of Montreal and Schoeters was among those who greeted him. Castro invited students to come to Cuba and help with agrarian reform. Schoeters dropped everything and, together with his new wife (the daughter of a French-Canadian X-ray technician), set off for Havana. Schoeters had arrived in Cuba “motivated…by idealism and a sincere desire to help the people,” but found the situation there disappointing. The majority of the population was still living in stark misery, progress was painfully slow, and Castro no longer seemed as glamorous as he had in Montreal. Most of Castro’s entourage (except Che Guevara) “were already strongly under Russian influence …and did not have the lofty ideals Georges had taken for granted.” After his return to Quebec, he went abroad again, this time alone. He visited Rome, Tunisia, Turkey, Switzerland, and Algeria, where he made connections with the ruling Front de Libération National party. Upon his return to Montreal, he purportedly told his wife, “I am a revolutionary.”

Immediately upon return to Montreal, Schoeters became a member of the Rally for National Independence (RIN). The RIN was not radical enough for Georges, who eventually formed the Réseau de résistance, inspired by the Belgian resistance network. Finally, with the help of two enthusiastic youths, he evolved the RR into the “Front de libération québécois” (later called the Front de Libération du Québec), based on a combination of Belgian, Algerian, and Cuban revolutionary models.
Despite the negative impressions documented by Gustav Morf, Schoeters’ passion for the latter two was enduring. He is purported to have decorated his apartment on Côte-des-Neiges Boulevard with Cuban and Algerian flags, posters of Fidel Castro and Che Guevara, and a photograph of himself next to Castro in Cuba.\(^\text{27}\) He envisioned for Quebec the kind of revolution by which the new states of Algeria and Cuba had been established. Accordingly, the FLQ was devoted to evicting the English “occupant” by violence and was organized underground. On June 1, 1963, twenty-three militants of the founding FLQ network were arrested, including Georges Schoeters.\(^\text{28}\)

In the wake of the break-up of a second network of FLQ operations in 1964 (those of the Armée de Libération du Québec), François Schirm, a Hungarian-born immigrant to Montreal, led one of the FLQs most notorious and shortest series of operations. François Schirm was born on May 21, 1932 in Budapest, the only child of “an honorouable middle-class family.” Morf emphasized that Schirm’s parents were hard-working, honest people who “respected God and the law,” and “did not believe in class war.” While his father fought in the Hungarian Army against the Russians, François (then Ferenc) fled with his mother to Austria. Before he was 13, François Schirm witnessed inhuman atrocities. Flickers of the memories of Allied bombings, rape and pillaging by drunken Russian soldiers, and wide-spread famine after the war would haunt him years later in his Canadian jail cells.\(^\text{29}\)

Morf familiarized himself with Schirm’s early life through letters he wrote, unknown to Schirm, to François’ mother in Europe. Rummaging through the details of his childhood, Morf discovered that young Schirm had enjoyed reading the books
of Karl May, who had never set foot outside his native Germany, but wrote “boys’ stories about Red Indians,” in which the heroes, the honest, courageous, and proud Indians, were pitted against cruel and treacherous Englishmen. Morf traced the roots of Schirm’s anti-colonialist sentiments all the way back to “these pathetic stories, [which could only win the reader] over to the lost cause of the Indians and [make him] detest the white imperialists guilty of the genocide of such a noble race.”

But Schirm would have direct real-world experience with “white imperialism,” in his career as a member of the prestigious French Foreign Legion. Like many Légion recruits, François came to regret his decision. After an initial training period in Algeria he was sent to Indochina where he fought bravely and was promoted to the rank of sergeant. He was put at the head of a company of Vietnamese soldiers in the service of the French, but soon came to the conclusion that the “French cause [in Indochina] was lost in advance.” When the French did eventually lose the war in Vietnam, Schirm was sent to North Africa as a parachute trainer. In Algeria, as in Vietnam, he was “not able to refrain from admiring the commitment and courage of the [enemy] guerillas.” The savagery and mercilessness of both sides disgusted Schirm, especially when the French army resorted to “Nazi torture tactics” to extort information from FLN prisoners. Schirm secretly sided with his enemies, and knew that there too, “the French cause was lost.” He left the Foreign Legion after six years of service, a few years before the French gave up the fight in Algeria.

Morf pointed out that Schirm could have remained in France, where he would have been able to obtain citizenship. Still a “stateless person” at the age of twenty-four, Schirm’s decision to leave France “was possibly the biggest mistake of his
life.” But Schirm had no desire to remain in Europe, which he said he had learned to detest while fighting its colonial wars “in the jungles and rice paddies of Indochina where [Europe] sent us to die.” With the help of a young Hungarian emigrant in Montreal, Elizabeth, Schirm was able to obtain a visa and, against the will of his parents, immigrate to Canada. Elizabeth (and the new land she had settled in) represented “the promised land, the haven of peace, the lighthouse my ship was sailing towards.”

In Montreal, Schirm’s experience was similar to that of many immigrants: “no one seemed to need him.” He had immediately married Elizabeth when he arrived, but found it difficult to stand life in the little Hungarian bubble in which he and his wife had settled. He was desperate for a job that could support himself and his new wife, and he “accepted all the little jobs nobody wanted except those who had recently arrived to the country.” He found work as a bricklayer, and later as a glazier, cutting glass panes. He suffered from an injury when a glass shard pierced his arm. The glass splinter was eventually found and removed, but he had to spend six days in the hospital, during which time he received three-quarters of his salary. He also needed physiotherapy but the Workmen’s Compensation Board refused to make further payments. After his accident, Schirm was incapable of most forms of manual labor so he secured a job as a private agent with the Security Investigation Company. The company received $2 per hour for his services but paid Schirm only $1.05. They even deducted the price of his uniform from his salary. Schirm felt humiliated and exploited. In addition to work troubles, the federal government did its part to “alienate Schirm from the English.” His application for Canadian citizenship in
1963 was denied when it was discovered that Schirm had failed to mention that he had spent four months in Florida the previous summer. Feeling like a second-class citizen in the eyes of the ruling English class, he identified more and more with the underprivileged and with all those who considered themselves victims of “Anglo-Saxon exploitation.” Like Schoeters, he became a member of the RIN, but decided it was not “revolutionary” enough. As soon as he had learned about the FLQ, he joined and quickly became one of its leaders because of his military experience. “By nature deeply romantic… he came to believe in armed revolution as the sole way of liberating man.”  

Morf’s psychoanalysis of Schirm concluded with the observation that Schirm was weighed down by a sense of pride, (apparently a characteristic of “the Hungarians”) that was so powerful that it kept him from admitting “his faults and [making] peace with society.”

Putting Gustav Morf’s lofty assumptions aside, it is important to note the similarities between the lives of these two individuals, the most influential immigrants within the FLQ. Both Georges Schoeters and François Schirm bore witness to atrocities during the Second World War, and both had some kind of military or paramilitary experience. The two of them had been influenced to a certain extent by socialist thinking and anti-colonial movements. However, perhaps the most crucial aspect of their stories was that both of these individuals, while capable of speaking English, were assimilated into the French-speaking sphere of the changing world of postwar Montreal. Both experienced the inequalities of a social system in which English-speakers were on top and French-speakers made up the majority of the blue-collar workforce.
Both Schoeters and Schirm were ardent Quebec nationalists and card-carrying members of one of the most extensive and most radical indépendantiste organizations of the time, the Rassemblement pour l’indépendance nationale (RIN). It was perhaps out of disdain for his interviewees’ having “chosen” to assimilate into the society of francophone Quebec instead of that of Anglophone Canada, that Gustav Morf failed to provide an adequate explanation for the conversion of these two men to the cause of Quebec separatism. The psychiatrist Morf, it is important to note, was also a recent immigrant to Montreal (he arrived in 1953 from Switzerland) where he flourished in the English-speaking (and publishing) bubble of Montreal society. In his memoirs, François Schirm remembered that Morf had “seemed hurt by the mistake I had committed, [Morf] said, of siding with the French Canadians.”41 Indeed, Schirm had come to the conclusion over the course of his sessions with Morf, (who he had not realized was an immigrant at all), that the psychiatrist’s goal was to brainwash Schirm into changing his political ideas.42

If Schirm is to be believed, Morf’s methods were not entirely commendable. He bribed his interviewees with the prospect of being transferred to another prison facility in exchange for information. He copied much of the information for the biographical sections of his book from confidential dossiers compiled by prison officials. But in the end, Morf’s book “was very well received by English Canada because Morf had said what the English wanted to hear: that we were emotively disturbed. The English felt reassured.”43

Gustav Morf’s analyses provided clues to explain why a recent immigrant would become dedicated to a nationalist project that traditionally contained an ethnic
or even xenophobic element. When Schoeters and Schirm arrived in Quebec in the depth of the reign of Maurice Duplessis, neither of them had any notion of Quebec nationalism. Morf explained Georges Schoeters’ thinking at the time of his arrival to Montreal: “For him, Quebec was part of Canada and Canada was to be his country. The picture of the Queen [Elizabeth II] hung in his room.” According to Morf, Schoeters “remained a convinced monarchist in Canada for a good ten years.” Similarly, at the time of his arrival in 1956, François Schirm “had been ignorant of Quebec’s history and its political and social problems. He had absolutely nothing against “les Anglophones”—the English-speaking Canadians.”

Morf blamed Schoeters’ future separatist tendencies on the “somewhat nationalistic” atmosphere of the Department of Sociology at the University of Montreal in the 1950s. Morf only briefly mentioned the job Schoeters held to help pay for his studies. Schoeters worked in the freight department of Windsor Train Station for Canadian Pacific where he may have had experiences similar to Schirm. No writings or diaries of Schoeters survive him, but through Morf’s biographical sketch, and various contemporaneous sources, it is evident that he felt a certain affinity with the French-Canadian people. In an interview with a Montreal magazine he said, “I have two children, my wife is French-Canadian, I love Quebec and I’m here to stay.” He also repeatedly decried the “arrogance that the English maintained against French Canadians that foreigners [like him] recognized immediately.” During his four-month stint as an FLQ leader, he was known for his enthusiasm about the worldwide socialist movement, but he said that he saw his efforts as part of a
movement that was picking up where the French-Canadian heroes, the *Patriotes* of 1837-1838 had left off.  

In the case of François Schirm, mistreatment by English-Canadian employers and by the Federal Government made him impatient with the anglophones who controlled Ottawa and the economy. “He was treated as a man with no experience—by employers who were English.” These feelings manifested themselves in a sense of comradeship with his francophone neighbors. He pointed out that in Montreal, to be French-Canadian was also to be *apatride* (“stateless,” as he was), like an immigrant in one’s own home: “[Montreal is] a city in which Québécois workers must speak English to earn a living just like the immigrants who have to anglicize themselves to feel accepted.”

While involved with the FLQ, François Schirm was a leader of the Armée révolutionnaire du Québec. Besides setting up a “training camp” in the countryside, its most famous exploit was the botched raid on an ammunition and army supply store on rue Bleury in downtown Montreal on August 29, 1964. In a confusing series of events, two store employees were shot dead. After a shoot-out with the police that followed, the leader of the raid, Schirm, and a few others involved were tracked down and arrested. At his first court appearance, Schirm chose to represent himself. In his statement, he described the experiences that brought him to identify with the French-Canadian people of the country he had made his new home:

I related my personal experience as an exploited immigrant and the path that had led me towards the francophones of Quebec. I could not identify with the English Canadians and their Canada that offers no sense of belonging, and as I wanted to break with the Hungarian ghetto within which I felt suffocated, it was easy for me to identify with the Québécois because they are a stateless people in search of a Homeland and because they are exploited as *cheap*...
labour like myself. Therefore, taking up arms to liberate Quebec, my adopted homeland, seemed quite logical, normal, and legitimate.51

Despite the fact that both Schoeters and Schirm had developed a certain affinity with their “adopted homeland” they were often targeted because of their immigrant status. They had to face the xenophobic tendencies that pervaded Québécois society. Certain journalists, in the French-language press especially, were relentless in their emphasis of both Schoeters’ and Schirm’s foreign origins, suggesting that they were outsiders disrupting the otherwise peaceful social climate of Quebec with imported foreign ideas. Louis Fournier, journalist and historian of the FLQ, wrote that Schoeters “was portrayed as a ‘foreign agitator’ by the media because he was an immigrant.52 While the coverage of the rue Bleury affair in the English-language press focused on a perceived increase in violence among the “separatists,” and lumped together all of those involved as neuropaths, psychopaths, and paranoiac killers, François Schirm remembered that the French-language media had singled him out in particular as an outsider:

Because I was “the foreigner,” the adventurer who imported ideas and methods from abroad that young French Canadians would never have thought about. . . . The downright racist tone of the newspapers accurately reflected the rampant xenophobia of the existing system.53

In addition to their dangerous foreignness, the media’s portrayal of both Schoeters and Schirm were quick to point out that Schoeters had “passed some time in Cuba” and therefore fit the much-feared stereotype of “revolutionary trained in Havana.”54 Likewise, Schirm was depicted as a dangerous communist sympathizer in the press—a bad influence who had corrupted young French-Canadians and “trained
them in a revolutionary enterprise with the intention of implanting communism in Quebec.”

Xenophobia and Foreign Felquiste Identities

Latent xenophobic elements in French-Canadian society only added to the general disdain that many Quebeckers felt for the FLQ. To some extent, this xenophobia existed within the FLQ itself, but mostly because of fears of immigration. Even the editors of La Cognée were incensed at the government-approved rise in immigration in 1965. In their view, the problem was two-fold. Not only would new arrivals only worsen the unemployment situation among French Canadians, it would dilute the francophone population:

The Canadian government has decided to launch a major campaign to recruit workers abroad. This is not the first time Ottawa has promoted immigration to the detriment of Quebec. We remember that in 1956 and 1957, tens of thousands of Britons came to settle here thanks to federal aid and our money. . . . Foreign workers coming to this country means less work for us . . . Not to mention that according to the federal custom, these workers will be English, Scandinavian, German, that is to say, people who naturally assimilate into the Anglo-Saxon group. For Ottawa, it is just another way to drown Quebec society in the Canadian melting pot. Reducing the power of Quebec by weakening its numbers has been the policy since the conquest and since the infamous Durham Report.

La Cognée’s editors repeated the fear that non-francophone immigrants coming to Montreal would integrate into the anglophone sphere, following the example of previous groups, like the Italians. Tensions between Italian immigrants and French Canadians escalated in the 1960s, especially in the wake of Bill 63. Felquiste thinker François Bachand pointed out that when racial conflicts occurred in Montreal it was usually between Italian and French Canadians. “The Italians beat us
with rods, become our enemies and form the shock troops of the Anglo-Canadian bourgeoisie.” Following the introduction of Bill 63 in November 1969, an FLQ bomb exploded in the middle of the night near the home of prominent Italian-Canadian Mario Barone, a leader of the St-Léonard community at the forefront of the French school issue. Bachand deplored this ethnic violence because, he told his fellow Felquistes, “These immigrants are just as poor as us.” The poor were “killing each other,” and shrinking away from that element of the FLQ’s struggle that was most important to Bachand: the rise of the poor against exploitation.

There were always tinges of xenophobia within the Front, especially in its earliest, most traditionally “nationalist” period, dominated by the socially conservative members Raymond Villeneuve and Denis Lamoureux. The first-network member François Bachand claimed that Schoeters could not technically have been in charge of the movement because of a supposed rule proscribing that FLQ leaders be Quebec-born. In the Front’s famous “Manifesto,” read on television during the October Crisis of 1970, the FLQ capitalized on mounting apprehension in the province by mentioning the “swelling” numbers “of New Quebeckers, the immigrants who are the darlings of Bill 63.” But even then, the emphasis was not so much xenophobic but anti-bilinguisme, and an attempt by the FLQ to rally around an issue that had become a sticking point for many French-Canadians.

There is textual evidence that attests to a very open-minded view within the Front towards foreign immigrants. The June 1970 manifesto, published in the small unionist paper Québec-Presse, clearly stated that the FLQ was “with all the immigrant workers in Quebec, and it is alongside them that we want to fight the
common enemy: Anglo-American capitalism.”63 The statements of the June 1970 Manifesto seemed much more in line with the generally non-exclusive attitude of the FLQ.

Some of the “new identities” in the Front came from within the First Nations of Canada, long ignored by the FLQ even though several people of Amerindian ancestry participated actively in the movement. When the FLQ’s second manifesto was published on June 23, 1970, it was the first time an official Front document had pledged support for “the struggle of the first exploited people of this continent: the American Indians.”64 One of the members of an FLQ cell linked to the la Cognée network in 1965, Lionel Chenette, was a Québécois military technician “of Indian ancestry.”65 Another Felquiste, a member of the main cell of the “Geoffroy Network” of 1969, Pierre-Léo Lacourse, was a 22-year-old worker in Montreal who hailed from the Gesgapegiac Mi’kmaq reserve in the Gaspé Peninsula.66 The Felquisite siblings Louise and Jacques Lanctôt, of the 1970 Libération Cell, also had distant Amerindian roots. Their mother was a proud descendent of Louis Riel.67

Perhaps the evolution towards openness to ethnic diversity within French-Canadian nationalism started with the legacy of Louis Riel himself. Riel was the founder of the province of Manitoba and a leader of the Métis, a First People of Canada with mixed European and Indian heritage. He led two resistance movements against the Canadian government to preserve lands he thought rightfully belonged to the Métis. Riel was Catholic and a defender of francophone rights, including the right to French-language school. He was viewed sympathetically in francophone regions of Canada, and his execution for treason in 1886 widened the rift between Quebec and
English Canada. Riel was seen as a martyr by many French Canadians in Quebec even though he had been neither French-Canadian nor from the province of Quebec. An FLQ cell was even named in his honor. With the adoption of Riel into the pantheon of French-Canadian folk heroes, perhaps an early precedent was set for the eventual outward expansion of Quebec nationalism from its ethnic base.

Beyond ethnic diversity, the FLQ also encompassed identities that were “foreign” in the sense that they had not been represented in previous Quebec nationalist movements. The Felquiste leader Pierre Vallières would point out that “in the era of the FLQ, feminism did not yet occupy the central position that it would in the 1970s. Same thing, indeed, for the homosexual movement.” François Schirm admitted that he was often baffled by “radical feminism,” which he generally viewed negatively, as an import from the United States and the instigator of a veritable “war of the sexes” in Quebec. There was also a “hypermascularity coded into the politics of the FLQ,” that emerged in its language. It was not uncommon for Felquiste propaganda to apply the French equivalents of the words “bitch” and “pansy” to the Front’s federalist enemies. Vallières addressed the Québécois when he wrote, “Let us learn the pride of being men.” Although Pierre Vallières was gay, he would not make it known publically until decades after his involvement with the FLQ.

The level of machismo prevalent in the movement was a constant challenge for Louise Lanctôt. In her memoirs, Une Sorcière comme les autres (A Witch Like the Others), Lanctôt recalled that she had often been reminded of her inferior status as a woman during her activism in the Front in 1970. Indeed, few women occupied even low-level positions within the organization. During the period of the founding
network, Georges Schoeters’ wife, Jeanne, was utilized precisely because she was a woman. Her job was to keep watch at locations of bomb attempts “as nobody suspected a woman of terrorist activity at that time.” But the activism of women Felquistes is not entirely negligible. Two Québécoises would launch the movement’s first successful international contact network in 1965.

Although they were few and far between, the presence of foreigners and “foreign identities” within the FLQ attested to a change in the expression of the Quebec identity in the province. While it remained steadfastly francophone, the revised idea of the Quebec “nation” incorporated fresh social and cultural flavors as new groups (or previously voiceless ones) were integrated into the provincial population.

Unlike New York or Buenos Aires, immigrating to Montreal in the postwar years typically required the conscious or unconscious assimilation into one of two dominant social spheres, English-speaking or French-speaking. For those immigrants who found themselves on the francophone side, poor job opportunities and working conditions, combined with the feeling of being alienated by the dominant English-speaking power, were daily experiences that they shared with many ethnic French Canadians. It is evident from the cases of immigrant involvement in the FLQ and in other radical separatist factions that the nationalist dream in Quebec was resonating with new people. In a period in which the influx of foreigners was rapidly transforming the social fabric of Quebec, the francophone immigrant experience accelerated the evolution of nationalism in Quebec towards an ethnically-neutral, or a
multiethnic brand. In 1963, a film by the Québécois director Claude Jutras, À Tout Prendre, was the first in the province to depict an interracial Québécois couple. In his own definition of the Québécois identity, Jutras had included a Haitian-Canadian woman.74

In reality, ethnic diversity would remain a rare phenomenon within nationalist or separatist groups. On a list of the 355 people whose identities could be confirmed from the hundreds of arrests made under the War Measures Act of 1970, only 42 had non-French or even ambiguous names.75 Their numbers were small within the FLQ as well, but the fact that most of those with foreign or mixed backgrounds occupied top positions is in itself indicative of a level of openness among Felquistes to non-Québécois influences within the FLQ.

Before the 1960s, the most prominent Quebec nationalists had been men belonging to the francophone bourgeoisie, intelligentsia, and clergy, most of whom claimed pure laine ancestry. In contrast, the FLQ counted among its most enthusiastic members, recent immigrants, women and Amerindians. By incorporating these individuals into the fight for the freedom of a nation, the FLQ added a new ingredient to their bricolage conception of Québécois nationhood. They encouraged an exclusive and inward-looking nationalism to become more outward-looking and accepting of foreign identities and ideologies. With these foreign imports, Felquistes would further reshape nationalism and embed the language of other struggles into their own.

1 Tofimenkoff, The Dream of Nation : A Social and Intellectual History of Quebec 79.
2 Ibid.


Of course, over the course of the twentieth century, ideological allegiances have at times been more effective than ethnic or national allegiances in uniting different people to a cause. Participation of non-Spanish nationals was common on the Republican side of the Spanish Civil War, for example. Involvement of immigrants or non-native individuals, especially in leadership roles or as instigators, was not uncommon within the revolutionary movements of the FLQ’s era. Many figure among the Front’s top influences: Cuban Revolution hero Che Guevara had been an Argentinean national. “Honorary prime minister” of the Black Panther Party, Stokely Carmichael, was Trinidadian-American. Frantz Fanon, member of and great inspiration to Algeria’s Front de Libération National party, was Martiniquais. Usually these foreign revolutionaries shared a common language with native nationalists; they almost always shared ideologies that could be described as “transnational” (or not pertaining to any specific people) in their purest form.

Fournier, Flq : Histoire D’un Mouvement Clandestin 131.

Morf, Terror in Quebec: Case Studies of the Flq 49.

Schneider, Boum Baby Boom, 21

Schirm, Personne Ne Voudra Savoir Ton Nom, 68

Schirm, Personne Ne Voudra Savoir Ton Nom, 85.

Morf, Terror in Quebec: Case Studies of the Flq 49.

Ibid., 50

Ibid., 50

Ibid., 50

“ dans les jungles et les rizières d’Indochine où elle nous envoyait mourir, » Schirm, Personne Ne Voudra Savoir Ton Nom, 68

“ la terre promise, le havre de paix, le phare dans la nuit sur lequel mon navire mit le cap. » Schirm, Personne Ne Voudra Savoir Ton Nom, 68

Morf, Terror in Quebec: Case Studies of the Flq 49.

“ j’ai accepté toutes les « jobines » dont personne ne voulait, sauf les nouveaux arrivés aux pays. » Schirm, Personne Ne Voudra Savoir Ton Nom, 86

Morf, Terror in Quebec: Case Studies of the Flq 49.

Ibid., 53

Ibid., 57

“ semblait être peiné par l’erreur que j’avais commise, selon lui, d’avoir été du côté des Canadiens français. » Schirm, Personne Ne Voudra Savoir Ton Nom, 112
Ibid., 112
42 « Fut très bien accueilli par le Canada anglais parce que Morf disait que les Anglais voulaient bien entendre : que nous étions des gens émotivement dérangés. Les Anglais se sentaient alors rassurés. » Schirm, Personne Ne Voudra Savoir Ton Nom, 113
43 Morf, Terror in Quebec: Case Studies of the FLQ 49.
44 Ibid., 23
46 Ibid., 23
47 Morf, Terror in Quebec: Case Studies of the FLQ 49.
49 Morf, Terror in Quebec: Case Studies of the FLQ 49.
50 [Montréal est] une ville dans laquelle les travailleurs québécois doivent parler anglais pour gagner leur vie tout comme les immigrés qui doivent s’angliciser pour se sentir acceptés. Schirm, Personne Ne Voudra Savoir Ton Nom, 25-26
51 Schirm, Personne Ne Voudra Savoir Ton Nom, 40
52 Fournier, Flq : Histoire D’un Mouvement Clandestin 131.
53 Car moi, j’étais ‘l’étranger’, l’aventurier qui importait d’ailleurs des idées et des méthodes auxquelles n’auraient jamais pensé les jeunes Canadiens français. . . Le ton carrément raciste des journaux de l’époque reflétait fidèlement la xénophobie rampante du système en place. Schirm, Personne Ne Voudra Savoir Ton Nom, 40
54 Fournier, Flq : Histoire D’un Mouvement Clandestin 131.
55 « Les avait entraînés dans une entreprise révolutionnaire dans l’intention d’implanter le communisme au Québec. ” Schirm, Personne Ne Voudra Savoir Ton Nom, 40
56 Le gouvernement canadien a décidé de lancer une vaste campagne pour recruter des travailleurs à l’étranger. Ce n’est pas la première fois que Ottawa favorise l’immigration au détriment du Québec; on se souvient qu’en 1956 et 1957, c’est par dizaines de milliers que les Britanniques vinrent s’établir ici grâce à l’aide fédéral et avec notre argent . . . Des travailleurs étrangers venant s’établir au pays, c’est du travail en moins pour les nôtres . . . Sans oublier que selon les bonnes habitudes fédérales, ces travailleurs seront anglais, scandinaves, allemands, c’est-à-dire des gens qui naturellement s’assimilent au groupe anglo-saxon; pour Ottawa, voici une façon détournée de noyer davantage la société québécoise dans le melting-pot canadien. Réduire la puissance du Québec en l’affaiblissant numériquement, c’est toujours la même politique depuis la conquête, depuis l’infâme rapport Durham. » La Cognée 1 September 1965, No. 42
57 « Ce sont les Italiens qui nous tapent dessus à coup de barres qui deviennent nos ennemis et forment les troupes choc de la bourgeoisie anglo-canadienne. » (Bachand, Trois Textes De François Mario Bachand 186.)
59 On s’entretue entre pauvres, car ces immigrés sont aussi pauvres que nous, Bachand, Trois Textes De François Mario Bachand 186.
60 Ibid.
63 June 1970 Manifesto
64 Fournier, Flq : Histoire D’un Mouvement Clandestin 131.
65 Ibid.
67 Lancôt, 16
68 « Il faut remarquer cependant qu’à l’époque du FLQ, le feminism n’occupe pas encore la place centrale qu’il aura au cours des années 70. Même chose, d’ailleurs, pour le mouvement homosexuel » (Flq : Un Projet Révolutionnaire : Lettres Et Écrits Felquistes (1963-1982) 64.)
69 Schirm, Personne Ne Voudra Savoir Ton Nom, 105-106
70 Bryan D. Palmer: Canada’s 1960s: Notes to pages 346-7 (5)
71 Vallières, Whit Niggers of America, 20
72 Lancôt, Une sorcière comme les autres 40.
73 Morf, Terror in Quebec: Case Studies of the FLQ, 49.

75 Fournier, FLQ: Histoire d’un mouvement clandestine, 507-512
Towards a postcolonial intellectual discourse in Quebec

The Front de Libération du Québec gave Quebec nationalism a new, international value by injecting it with the language of Third World anti-colonial movements. Much of the literature produced by those movements was written in French and available to the Québécois, albeit sometimes through clandestine channels, as many of the books were banned. Anti-imperial discourse in 1960s Quebec developed in constant reflection on the works of French-educated authors writing within the French imperial sphere. These included Frantz Fanon, Albert Memmi, and Jacques Berque, as well as the poets, playwrights, and philosophers of the Négritude tradition, a francophone black nationalist and anti-colonial literary movement. In Quebec, anti-colonial discourse granted new meaning to the idea that “the British victory on the Plains of Abraham [had] turned French Canadians into a "colonized" people, oppressed by foreign rule, their territory invaded by foreign settlers.”¹ This "colonizing" presence was deemed to have expanded to encompass the entire anglophone population of North America, including the United States (which was characterized as "neo-imperialist").

Memmi may have been the only one of these anti-colonial authors to have commented at length on the Quebec case. Albert Memmi, in his reflections on the contemporary circumstances in North Africa (in particular, the Algerian War of 1954-1962) and on his own situation as a Tunisian Jew growing up under French control, had become one of the most prominent voices of the worldwide anti-colonial
movement. He considered the Quebec experience to fall within the terms outlined in his famous book, *Portrait du colonisé, Portrait du colonisateur* (translated into English as the Colonizer and the Colonized). His thoughts on the matter were published in the 1971 Montreal edition of the book, within a preface entitled, "Les Canadiens français sont-ils des colonisés?" (“Are the French Canadians a colonized people?”) But Memmi had publicly announced his views on the Quebec experience in a 1967 discussion with business school students in Paris. He recognized that his own *Portrait du colonisé*, which had been printed and distributed clandestinely in Quebec, had already played a crucial role in the development of the radical Quebec nationalism of the 1960s. In Memmi’s view the domination of Quebec by "Anglo-Americans” created a cultural subordination, which in turn, allowed for economic and political domination. He maintained that, while the term colonisé was perhaps too extreme, the Québécois, despite their relative prosperity, were at least a peuple dominé, as they met two of the parameters, cultural and political, that he had ascribed to dominated peoples in his *Portrait du colonisé*.²

Memmi claimed that the Québécois experienced “colonial bilingualism”: the enforced subordination of one language to another. In Quebec, as in regions of the Maghreb, there was

An efficient official language of the dominant class, and a maternal language, that has almost no hold in business transactions in the city. The fact that people speak two languages would not be so serious if the more important language for them was not so crushed and inferiorized. This is what differentiates colonial bilingualism from bilingualism in general.³

A second aspect of Memmi’s formulation that seemed to fit the Quebec experience was his concept of “refuge-values.” In Memmi’s view, a colonized culture
undertook a quiet revolt against the invading culture by taking refuge in “traditional values,” particularly in the institutions of religion and the family. Under the domination of the colonizer and in the absence of a normal trajectory of social change, the “indigenous institutions” associated with traditional values were left to stagnate in a state of backwardness and become forces of opposition to social development. In *Portrait du colonisé*, Memmi described the two-fold effect as “a cyst growing from inside” and a “corset imposed from the outside.”

In the French-Canadian case, Memmi argued, the Catholic religion served as a means of cultural survival against the encroachment of the Protestant English, “but refuge-values eventually become a restraint and [needed to] be shaken off.” As with Memmi’s point about “colonial bilingualism,” the FLQ and other left-wing separatists agreed that the “refuge-values” concept applied to their own context.

Like other ideological influences from francophone anti-colonial thought, Memmi’s interpretation was used by Felquistes to ally the movement with a novel and militant theory, while reinforcing the chief element in the traditional identity of Quebec that they wished to retain, the French language. The FLQ extended Memmi’s *dominé* labeling of French-Canadian society to *colonisé* outright, and, in line with its supposition that the Québécois were indeed a colonized people, it began to look to the more militant ideologies emerging from francophone anti-colonial literature, especially those that legitimized violence.

The back cover of Bernard Smith’s 1963 pro-FLQ book, *Les Résistants du F.L.Q.*, carried the simple message, “For love of their country, Quebec, they chose violence. Why?” In its rejection of the so-called bourgeois cycle of electoral politics,
the FLQ offered violent revolution “by the people” and “with the people” as the only solution to the national/social problem of Quebec.\(^8\) Since its foundation in 1963, the connection to violence was one of the most important and most distinctive aspects of FLQ thought. Mario Bachand, who had himself been a member of the first network, believed the FLQ to have been “the movement that put an end to the traditional fear of the Québécois, fear to dare, fear to fear, fear to violently attack the colonizer.”\(^9\) But some FLQ militants believed this idea, which hinted at a rejection of the past, to be unhealthy for the success of their movement and had rummaged through Quebec’s “sacred” history for examples from past (beyond those episodes that already existed in the nationalist cannon) that could legitimize the FLQ’s present violence. As noted earlier, some Felquiste nationalists (particularly Paul-André Gauthier in his “Véritable histoire des Québécois”) had desperately tried to piece together a “people’s history” that depicted the Québécois as having always been inclined toward revolution. FLQ “historians” found themselves forced to bend the truth or create their own myths. The real origins of the FLQ’s theory of violence came from outside Canada.

Felquistes found their earliest inspiration for an ideology that embraced violence in Frantz Fanon’s *Les Damnés de la Terre* (Wretched of the Earth). Described as the “most radical voice of the Algerian Revolution,” Fanon, a black Martiniquais psychiatrist, had moved to the Maghreb in the midst of the war between France and Algeria and had sided strongly with the Algerian Front de libération nationale. Written in Algeria during the war, *Les Damnés de la Terre* became the “bible of the anticolonialist movement,” and “bedtime reading for several activists of
the FLQ.” Fanon commented on the roles of class, race, national identity, and—important for the FLQ—violence, in the struggle for national liberation. Fanon argued that decolonization was inherently a violent process as it entailed the replacing of one “species” of man (colonial) with another in the struggle for freedom. Later, the Felquiste thinker Charles Gagnon would defend the FLQ’s pro-violence platform with the declaration “exploited people are naturally violent,” echoing Fanon. There was a certain naiveté in some FLQ militants’ constant application of the generalizations made in _Damnés de la Terre_ to the specific “colonial” situation in Quebec. One writer in the June 1, 1965 issue of _La Cognée_, remarked that “in fact, Quebec has gone through all the steps outlined in Frantz Fanon’s book [and yet] the working-class people [were still not] taking up arms.” The writer concluded that it must be “pressures from the oppressive regime” that were keeping “the people” from rising up.

_Dépossession du Monde_ (translated into English as _Dispossession of the World_), published in 1964 by French-Algerian orientalist and ethnologist Jacques Berque, became another important francophone influence on Felquiste anti-colonial thought. Writing from a privileged _pied-noir_ (European-Algerian) perspective, Berque interpreted the essence of North African imperialism not merely as economic or political but as “anthropological.” In this sense, his work, along with Memmi’s, provided the FLQ with the framework for viewing Quebec as a cultural colony, impoverished and alienated. Berque also spent time in Quebec as a visiting professor at the University of Montreal in 1962.
In 1960s Montreal, revolutionary publications, affiliated directly or indirectly with the FLQ, kept their readership informed on the latest news from the Third World anti-colonial front. The FLQs own “anti-colonial” mission was bolstered throughout the 1960s by reports of the ongoing decolonization struggles in Africa. An editorial entitled “Mozambique and Us,” which appeared on May 1, 1965 in *La Cognée*, cited similarities between FLQ rhetoric and that used by the FRELIMO (the Marxist-Leninist Mozambique Liberation Front), which had begun its insurrection against the Portuguese on September 25, 1964. At a recent “world conference for peace and international cooperation” in New Delhi, a FRELIMO representative had reiterated the importance of “complete national independence” for his own and similar organizations. Addressing the Mozambican nationalists, *La Cognée* said: “If ‘your armed struggle against the Portuguese is a contribution to the cause of world peace and international cooperation’, we [in the FLQ] also know that it is a contribution to our own struggle; it is a contribution to the independence of Quebec. Long live the FRELIMO! Long live the F.L.Q.!”

In July 1966, the Vallières-Gagnon group effectively redirected the ideological direction of the FLQ from a fusion of local nationalism and francophone anti-colonial thought towards one that embraced Marxism and internationalism. Among foreign influences on FLQ thought, Fanon and Memmi now increasingly took a back seat to a range of thinkers beyond the French-colonial experience, and FLQ thought became slightly distanced from the nationalistic overtones of previous liberation literature. In the 1994 retrospective documentary *La liberté en colère*, Pierre Vallières remembered that during the period of his involvement in the FLQ
(1965-1971) the most important ideological influences from abroad had been Che Guevara, Mao Zedong and Fidel Castro.\textsuperscript{16}

In June 1966, Vallières authored a confidential memorandum, later confiscated by the police, in which he stated that he and his hundred-or-so fellow Felquistes were continuing to fight to make Quebec the first socialist country in North America.\textsuperscript{17} The FLQ, he continued, was "in total agreement with the world revolutionary strategy defined by Che Guevara and by the Chinese Communists." At the time Vallières was writing these lines, the Cultural Revolution had just begun. "People's China," maintained Vallières, "is the Communist country in the best position to help coordinate revolutionary movements in the world." But perhaps the most important of Vallières’ assertions, and the most worrying to the police, was that "like all revolutionary movements, the FLQ desires outside help, from a country or a fraternal party more advanced than we are."\textsuperscript{18}

\textit{The FLQ and the “Transnational Guerilla Network”}

It has been suggested by ex-FLQ militants themselves that “internationalism” only became an important aspect of Felquiste ideology in the mid-1960s with the arrival of the Vallières-Gagnon Group. It is true that in 1965 and 1966 the FLQ would actively reach out to movements beyond Canada, but to a certain extent, “internationalism” was as much a founding Felquiste principle as “independence” and “social revolution.” Purportedly attached to the April 1963 \textit{Manifeste} but perhaps never printed, was a communiqué that read, “[the FLQ] supports all movements
working for ‘national independence,’ in particular those of Puerto Rico, the National Liberation Army of Venezuela, and Guatemala.”

And in 1965, one year before the Vallières-Gagnon group arrived on the scene and definitively transformed Felquiste ideology to include coordinating with foreign movements as a key strategy, the FLQ launched an attack on what was perhaps its first categorically “international” political target. The night of May 1, 1965, a bomb constructed from 12 sticks of dynamite with the signature “FLQ” spray-painted nearby, exploded in front of the United States consulate in Montreal. The attack coincided with the first mass protest organized in Montreal against the American war in Vietnam and in support of the Vietnamese National Liberation Front. From then on, the FLQ would become increasingly vocal in its support for revolutionary movements abroad but never forgot its original enemy of “Anglo-Saxon colonialism.”

On July 1, Dominion Day, the FLQ exploded a bomb outside of Westmount Town Hall, and later, beneath the transmission tower of an English-language radio station in Sherbrooke.

Despite the message sent by the May 1 U.S. consulate bombing, the FLQ was by no means at the forefront of the Anti-Vietnam War movement in Quebec. At the end of November 1968, a group unaffiliated with the FLQ targeted the companies in Montreal that produced war materials for the U.S. Army, and four bombs were planted near the homes of senior executives at United Aircraft and Canadair, providers of military aircraft. Montreal’s “Peace movement” was the host to the “Hemispheric Conference to End the War in Vietnam,” held shortly after the election
of U.S. President Nixon, which convened with delegations from the Vietnamese FLN, the Cubans, and the Black Panthers.  

On February 13, 1969, the biggest bomb in FLQ history—the work of the “Geoffroy Network”—exploded inside the Montreal Stock Exchange, injuring 20 people and temporarily halting trading. René Lévesque denounced the perpetrators as “those who want to make Quebec a laboratory for world revolution,” and who, in response to Guevara's call, "want to create a new Vietnam or a new Bolivia here in Quebec." Indeed, the FLQ had once said “Let us create another Vietnam” in Quebec. The RCMP was increasingly concerned that revolutionary influences from abroad were having a destructive effect in Quebec.

Published in June 1969, Brazilian revolutionary leader Carlos Marighela’s *Little Handbook of Guerilla Warfare*, made urban guerilla and terrorist strategies—including how to go about kidnapping political officials—available to the FLQ. In addition, the FLQ learned much from the example of the Tupamaros (also known as the Movimiento de Liberación Nacional), a socialist guerilla organization operating in Uruguay in the 1960s and 1970s. The Tupamaros had benefited from the support of unions, and had taken several important figures hostage in attempts to get compatriots freed from prison. These methods proved successful in Uruguay and were copied by the FLQ.

On February 26, 1970, Canadian police arrested Felquistes Jacques Lanctôt and Pierre Marcil, foiling an FLQ plan to kidnap the chief Israeli commercial attaché in Montreal, Moshe Golan. In June, police raided a house in a village in the Laurentian Mountains north of Montreal and found arms and dynamite as well as the
draft of a ransom note that was to be used in the kidnapping of Harrison Burgess, the American consul in Montreal. The two thwarted kidnapping plots reflected the FLQ’s increasingly vocal stance in support of the Palestinian liberation movement, and its hatred for American “neo-imperialists.”

The FLQ’s internationalist ideology culminated in a document written by Pierre Vallières and Charles Gagnon, “Pour un front commun multinational de libération,” (For a Multinational Common Liberation Front) which was distributed in February 1970. On September 26, 1966, Vallières and Gagnon, wanted in Canada on charges of murder related to the death of a factory employee Thérèse Morin, had surfaced in New York City; newspapers carried images of the two Felquistes marching at the headquarters of the United Nations to attract the attention of the world to the FLQ’s mission in Quebec. Shortly afterward, Vallières called for the FLQ’s participation in a new world order that would sacrifice nationalism for a united uprising of all people against the tyrannies of imperialism and capitalism (a more inclusive version of Marx’s “proletarian internationalism”): a movement not “directed from Moscow, Peking or Havana, but a movement run collectively by peasants, workers, intellectuals, and young people of all countries, without distinction as to language culture, color, or privileges (privilege of the sort: I’m a Russian, I’m Chinese, I’m a Cuban, my country did this, did that, etc.)” The idea would crystallize in the dream of a “multinational common liberation front.” The 1970 text of that name, written by Gagnon and Vallières while they were in prison in Montreal, reflected a desire on the part of their organization to solidify the worldwide revolutionary struggle and pledged FLQ support for oppressed
peoples throughout the globe against American capitalism and its allies and against the imperialism of the USSR, which was, in their view, becoming almost as bad as the United States’. The document declared that the “liberation struggles around the world are inseparable from each other,” therefore it was not enough to promote revolution in one’s own country; the liberation struggles of the FLQ’s “brothers” in Palestine, Vietnam, Cambodia, Thailand, the Philippines, Indonesia and India; Angola, Mozambique and Guinea; Chad and the Canary Islands; our black brothers in South Africa, Rhodesia and the USA; our brothers in Uruguay, Brazil, Guatemala, Bolivia and Colombia; the Basque Country and Ireland . . . must result in the organization of a vast revolutionary movement...an authentic multinational common liberation front.\(^{31}\)

Vallières and Gagnon did not call for an end to any of the FLQ’s previous goals. Addressing the FLQ, the document continued that only by “realizing [Quebec’s] own liberation that we will support the cause of oppressed peoples.” The main objective was to “elevate [the FLQ’s] struggle to the same level as” those of other revolutionary movements around the world to “truly demonstrate solidarity, in the strongest sense of the word, with our brothers” throughout the world.\(^ {32}\) The dream of a multinational common liberation front would never come to fruition for the FLQ, but from 1965 onward, the Front made efforts to reach out to organizations beyond Canada, some of which were reciprocated.

Although they were historical contemporaries and shared much of the same ideology, the FLQ would never establish links with such European groups as the Irish Republican Army (IRA), Euskadi Ta Askatasuna (ETA, “Basque Homeland and Freedom), or West Germany’s Baader-Meinhoff Group (or Red Army Faction). Within France, although the FLQ example may have influenced minority liberation movements there, the FLQ would maintain no links with the Front de libération de la
Bretagne (which was responsible for 30 bombings of public buildings between 1967 and 1969 in its fight against the French ‘colonizers.’), nor with other movements that cropped up in France in the early 1970s such as Corsican liberation movement, and the FLJ (Front de libération jurassienne, which targeted mostly farms owned by German-speakers). However, in March 1970, the Parti nationaliste occitan (arguing since 1959 that the Occitan-speakers of Southern France were an ethnic group and should have their own socialist state) announced the formation of the Solidarity Committee for the Basque Revolution comprising nine organizations, including the FLQ. Outside of North America, the FLQ had the most success finding asylum and solidarity in Revolutionary Algeria and Cuba, as well as in France.

Fellaghas and Felquistes: the FLQ in Algeria

Historically, French-Canadian and Algerian nationalism were similar in their adherence to what Albert Memmi called “refuge-values.” A Catholic religious identity in Quebec, and an Islamic one in the Maghreb, set the French-Canadian and Muslim Algerian cultural identities apart from those of their respective “colonizers.” Both regions’ nationalist movements found strength in their superior numbers. Indeed, the FLN had borrowed the term coined in Quebec, “revanche du berceau” (revenge of the cradle) to refer to their traditionally high birthrates vis-à-vis European Algerians. Both the French Canadians and Algerians had protested their being used as “chair à canon” (cannon fodder), respectively by the Canadian and French armies during the First and Second World Wars. Police imposition of conscription in both countries had provided fuel for the rise of nationalist sentiment.
On 5 July 1962, after eight years of war with France, the victorious Front de libération national (FLN) officially declared Algeria completely independent from French rule. Six months later, the Front de libération du Québec was born, naming itself in honor of the FLN. From its inception, the FLQ aligned itself with the new FLN-led state of Algeria. One of the FLQ’s co-founders, Georges Schoeters, had visited North Africa in 1961 on a trip funded by a professor and friend at the University of Montreal. Schoeters made contacts with members of the FLN in that year, which was one of the most desperate and bloodiest of the Algerian war of Independence, he made contacts with members of the FLN. In April of 1961 a few prominent generals of the French military, in a desperate attempt to keep Algeria French, initiated a putsch to overthrow President de Gaulle, who had begun to favor a solution involving Algerian autonomy. In the midst of this fighting, Schoeters managed to receive training in revolutionary strategy from fellaghas in Algeria and across the border in Tunisia. After two formative years abroad, he was “well equipped to import the revolution to Quebec.” Schoeters returned to Montreal in 1963 steeped in FLN ideology and armed with instructions for making Molotov cocktails and time bombs.

Since its commencement in 1954 until its end in 1962, the war in Algeria had increasingly become a subject of confusion and controversy for French-speaking people on both sides of the Atlantic. From an international point of view, the French army’s tactics and allegations of torture appeared to tarnish the honor of “la vieille France.” Thanks to the arrival of television in Canada in the 1950s, no military conflict was covered and analyzed for French-Canadian audiences as thoroughly as
the Algerian War. In particular, the popular Radio-Canada news program, *Point de Mire* (which aired between 1956 and 1959) delivered consistent updates on the Algerian War to French-Canadian households. Cigarette in one hand, a stick of chalk in the other, the show’s charismatic young host, René Lévesque (future sovereigntist leader), explained the “nearly incomprehensible labyrinth” of the Algerian conflict in layman’s terms to thousands of francophone viewers. The clarity, candor, and slightly pro-FLN slant of the reports offered Canadians a certain level of elucidation about the Algerian situation of which the general public in France had been deprived due to government censorship of the media. Lévesque concluded his first episode entirely dedicated to the Algerian “question” with a statement that would have sounded familiar to Canadian listeners. Days after Charles de Gaulle’s 1958 call for continued French control of Algeria within the framework of a policy of social and political “integration” between European and Muslim society, Lévesque made an implicit reference to Canada’s own policy of biculturalism and bilingualism:

> It remains to be seen whether [De Gaulle] will be able to achieve this miracle, which in our time has not yet been successful anywhere. This miracle that aims to marry very powerful and contradicting trends, to reconcile men fighting furiously amongst themselves for clashing interests, ideas, or mirages. And [if De Gaulle will] also able to unite everyone and bring them together under the same platform to make them sing in one chorus in both Arabic and French.  

All eyes were on the conflict playing out in Algeria. The attempt at integration turned out to be a failure; the concept was extremely unpopular to the majorities on both sides of the divide. In 1962, Algeria emerged from the war an independent nation.

The terrific success of the FLN’s unprecedented anti-colonial strategy of urban guerilla warfare made the Algerian Revolution the primary overseas role-model
for the nascent FLQ. Aspects of the organization and structure of the FLN as well as its strategy of urban terrorism were directly copied from the Algerians. In Felquist literature, the English-speaking bastion of Westmount was compared to the European Quarter of pre-Independence Algiers; “Operation Westmount” was the FLQ’s answer to the FLN’s 1956 terrorist attacks on locations frequented by civilian French colonials in the “ville européenne.”

Terminology from the Algerian Revolution was integrated into FLQ propaganda. A January 1964 issue of La Cognée republished a list from the French-language daily, La Presse, of 26 francophones who held positions at the headquarters of the RCMP. The FLQ branded them “harkis of America.” Harkis was the name given to Muslim Algerians who had served as army auxiliaries alongside the French in the Algerian War; to this day, the word has the negative connotation of “traitor to one’s people” in Algeria. “We will not hesitate,” declared La Cognée, “to shoot down in cold blood any man who has reached such a point of degradation that he consciously betrays the will for liberation of an entire people.” In this respect the FLQ’s message was disturbingly similar to that of the FLN, which, along with Algerian lynch mobs, was responsible for the murder of between 50,000 and 150,000 Harkis and their family members in the aftermath of the 1954-1962 war.

The FLN was set up as a standard by which Felquistes could legitimize their actions or past behavior. In his memoirs, François Schirm pointed out that the founders of the Algerian Armée de libération nationale (the military extension of the FLN) had fought in Indochina as soldiers in the French expeditionary forces, to justify the fact that he and the other co-founders of the Armée de Libération du
Québec (the short-lived “military branch” of the FLQ, named in honor of the Algerian ALN) in 1964 had been veterans of “colonial armies” (Canadian, and in Schirm’s case, French). 45

Like the one-and-a-half million chouhada (martyrs) of the Algerian War claimed by the FLN, the FLQ designated its own “martyr,” the Felquiste militant Gilles Legault who committed suicide in his jail cell on May 17, 1965. A La Cognée headline screamed “The murderers of Gilles Legault will pay!” 46 The separatist paper Québec Libre (loosely affiliated with the FLQ) echoed the message: just like the Algerian patriot Larbi Men M’hidi who had been tortured to death by the French Special Service in 1957, Legault had been “assassinated” in the “climate of violence and inequality, the physical and mental torture…that the henchmen of the political police, camouflaged under the term ‘anti-terrorist squad,’ [had] installed in Quebec [as if it were] the Algeria of 1954-1962.” 47

The Algerian Revolution had been the first successful national liberation movement to have used urban guerilla warfare and terrorism as its principal strategies. 48 Independent Algeria’s first legal documents echoed a strong attachment to that revolutionary heritage, and established a policy of solidarity with other anti-colonial struggles. Independent Algeria’s first constitution, proposed by the FLN (under the aegis of President Ahmed Ben Bella) and adopted by the Assemblée nationale constituante in 1963, declared in its preamble, “Revolution is realized through…an international policy based on national independence, international cooperation, the anti-imperialist struggle and effective support to movements fighting for the independence or the liberation of their country.” 49 The Algiers Charter,
adopted by the FLN Congress in 1964 recommended “recourse to armed struggle [as] decisive in winning national sovereignty.” The FLN, which owed its victory largely to attention from the international press and sympathetic voices in the United Nations, stayed true to the internationalist principles enshrined in its earliest law codes. Throughout the following decade, Algeria became an international safe haven for revolutionaries, offering subsidies, training, and a wide array of contacts with other national liberation organizations worldwide. As one scholar remarked, Algiers in the 1960s and early 1970s became a “locus at which transnational actors crossed paths”—a central node in an emerging transnational revolutionary network.

The FLQ established its first contacts in Algeria through Gilles Pruneau. Following his arrest for participation in the FLQ’s first wave of bombings that had killed a night watchman, Pruneau jumped bail and fled Canada for France. He eventually ended up in Algiers sometime in early 1964. In a message published in La Cognée on July 15, 1964, Pruneau communicated to his fellow FLQ militants and sympathizers that he was in the process of rallying support in Algeria (and earlier, in Europe) for the FLQ. Pruneau, who had been closely following the news in Algiers, described the recent quarrels within the FLN leadership since the party’s convention in April as “unfortunate,” but expressed his pleasant surprise at finding an “immense” sense of approval of Quebec’s liberation struggle in the French-language press in Algiers. Hardly an ambassador for the FLQ, Pruneau ran a souvenir stand while in the Algerian capital, but his exile paved the way for a more solid FLQ presence in North Africa.
If the “sources” of the historian of the FLQ, Louis Fournier, are to be believed, Ahmed Ben Bella (president of the Republic of Algeria between 1963 and 1965) privately confirmed that the FLQ maintained successful contacts in the Maghreb until the early 1970s. Ben Bella, who had led his fledgling country in increasingly socialist directions until he was deposed by Houari Boumédiène on June 19, 1965, also testified that during a private meeting with Charles de Gaulle in Paris, the French president had urged him to offer support “to the Québécois in their separatist cause.”

After leaving Canada in April 1969, another member of the FLQ’s first network, François Bachand travelled by way of Paris to the revolutionary safe-zone of Algiers. His intention was to establish stronger ties between the FLQ and the FLN. He was largely unsuccessful: when he arrived in Algiers some thirteen foreign revolutionary movements enjoyed the support of the FLN government and had offices in the Algiers, including the Black Panthers and the Provisional Government of South Vietnam. Bachand expressed his disappointment to the Parisian paper *L’Express* that the FLQ was not recognized at that level in Algeria. He eventually settled in France.

At the end of 1969, a group of FLQ exiles would finally realize their predecessors’ goal of establishing a real link with the FLN government. In that year Algiers became a haven for self-exiled FLQ militants. When the 1969 “Geoffroy network” of the FLQ was infiltrated by police on March 4, those members who had not been arrested went into hiding. There were several FLQ militants already in Algeria when Normand Roy of the “Geoffroy network” arrived in the capital after a
journey through underground revolutionary channels in several countries. Roy, along with fellow FLQ militants Michel Lambert and Raymond Villeneuve (in exile since 1963) set up the Délégation extérieure du FLQ (DEFLQ) in Algiers in December 1969, finally establishing an “official” FLQ presence in Algeria.\(^58\) The FLN government supported the DEFLQ with a monthly subsidy of about 2,000 francs per month. The organization’s objectives were the “maintenance of contacts with the FLQ abroad, to distribute information about the movement and to strengthen links with other revolutionary movements represented in Algiers.”\(^59\) The DEFLQ would benefit from the “hospitality of the Algerian people and its revolutionary government” through 1972.\(^60\)

In mid-November 1969, Rémi Paul, the Canadian federal Justice Minister, released the sensational “revelation” that his intelligence services had furnished him with proof that the FLQ was funded in part by the Algerian government through its representative, Gilles Pruneau, “one of the contacts with Al-Fateh who acts as a go-between linking the FLQ with the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine.” In reality, Pruneau had left Algeria in 1968, but there was some truth in the Justice Minister’s assertions about the FLQ’s involvement with Palestinian nationalists.\(^61\) For various FLQ members, Algiers was a launching pad for contacting and travelling to the camps in Jordan where Palestinian liberation groups offered training in guerilla warfare.

In 1970, Jordan was home to thousands of Palestinian refugees and had become a central location for Palestinian guerilla movements.\(^62\) The most important of these was the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP). In June 1970, 6
members of the Baader-Meinhoff group arrived from Germany for instruction in
guerilla warfare at a PFLP camp in Jordan near the Syrian border. On Aug 9, they
took their training back to West Germany to begin a series of terrorist attacks on
targets it associated with capitalism or the American military presence. In August
1970, only a month before the outbreak of civil war between the Jordanian army and
the de facto state controlled by Palestinian militants, two well-travelled Felquistes
journeyed from Algiers to Jordan.

By complete coincidence, the Quebec reporter Pierre Nadeau and the
photographer Ronald Labelle who were filming a documentary about Palestinian
resistance movements ran into two Felquistes calling themselves “Salem” and
“Sélim” at a Palestinian training camp in Javesh, Jordan. Their photograph appeared
in the magazine Perspectives on August 15, their heads concealed under red-
checkered keffiehs. In their interview, televised via Radio-Canada, “Salem” and
“Sélim” promised to return to Quebec with the skills they had acquired in the Jordan
camp and continue with their goal of “total political and economic independence from
“the American monster.” Sélim exclaimed that the FLQ intended to commit
“selective assassination.” “For too long the FLQ has been synonymous with bombs and
useless violence. We intend to pick our targets so that the people who are responsible
will pay.” The identities of the two men were later revealed: they were Michel
Lambert and Normand Roy, members of the 1969 “Geoffroy network,” who had fled
Canada in May 1969.
“From Cuba, the FLQ speaks”

Just as the FLN’s Algeria sought to coordinate socialist and anti-colonial revolution on a global scale, Cuba developed into a hub for revolutionary networks in the Western hemisphere. Following the success of the Revolution in 1959 that overthrew the government of the U.S.-backed general Fulgencio Batista, Fidel Castro enacted a series of sweeping social, economic and political reforms in the new Cuban state. Che Guevara became the international mouthpiece of the Cuban revolution, touting it as a promising role-model for social equality and justice in Latin America and the rest of the world. One of the founding members of the FLQ, Georges Schoeters, saw Cuba, along with Algeria, as a shining example for the FLQ dream of an independent, socialist Quebec. A new political ideology of revolution was derived from Guevara’s writings. Guevarism, contrary to the phase strategy of forming a “revolutionary party” to coordinate revolutionary activity at the outset of a movement, Guevarism followed the recent Cuban example in calling for armed struggle first. Inspired by this ideology, the first network of the FLQ sought to stimulate revolution in Canada’s metropolis through “armed partisan struggle” with an urban guerilla flavor. Three years later, following the complete take-over of the FLQ by the Vallières-Gagnon network in 1966, the Front in Quebec renewed its Guevarist roots in its propaganda. Although neither the first FLQ network or its 1966 brainchild desired the FLQ to become a “revolutionary party” in the wake of a people’s rebellion, they saw their organization as playing the role of instigator. They hoped to create the conditions necessary for armed revolt against the established order to take hold.
In Havana in January 1966, the Tricontinental Conference, the first international solidarity conference of Third-World revolutionary groups, ended with the proclamation that the strategy of armed struggle should be not only the preferred tactic, but the defining principle for liberation movements around the globe. The conference, consisting of 513 delegates from 83 movements in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, established a global headquarters in Havana as well as an international journal, *Tricontinental*, which was soon after made available to the Québécois in its French-language edition. Although the conference focused most of its attention on the “Third World,” Castro proclaimed in his closing speech that “all revolutionary movements in the world can count on the support of Cuba.” The FLQ immediately began to look to Cuba for solidarity and material support.  

Unfortunately for the FLQ, which was in constant need of resources beyond bank-heist money and dynamite stolen from construction sites, there was a discrepancy in Cuban foreign policy that the FLQ would never quite grasp: while Castro proclaimed himself to be a generous supporter of the worldwide revolutionary movement, he realized that it was imperative to maintain good relations with Canada, Havana’s only gateway into North America. For this reason, the Cuban government, while it would offer asylum for wanted Felquistes, would never give substantial material support to the FLQ. Pierre Vallières was not thinking about the intricacies of Havana’s foreign policy when he attempted to contact the Cuban consul in Montreal, Julia Gonzales, shortly after Castro’s declaration of solidarity at the Tricontinental Conference in 1966. Vallières was pleased to discover that not only was Gonzales a staunch supporter of Guevarism, but she sympathized with the
Quebec separatist movement. Canadian police soon became aware of the FLQ’s correspondence with the Cuban Consulate. Following the recommendation of the RCMP, the Cuban government recalled Gonzales to Havana almost immediately and replaced her with a more neutral consul.71

The history of the FLQ in Cuba can be traced back to the trip that the Front’s enigmatic co-founder, Georges Schoeters, made to the island nation in 1960. The FLQ that Schoeters co-founded in 1963 idolized Castro and Guevara. The Front held weekly discussions in which Schoeters gave “glowing accounts” of the Cuban and Algerian Revolutions. In the trial of members of the first FLQ network on October 7, 1963 Schoeters was convicted of homicide for the death of night watchman O’Neill in the FLQ attack on an army recruiting center; he was allowed to go into self-exile in Belgium on the condition that he never return to Canada. A few members with less severe sentences fled the country. Raymond Villeneuve broke the terms of his parole and went to Cuba. François Mario Bachand was freed on parole in 1967 but would later flee to Cuba after being arrested for assaulting a police officer in 1969.

Many self-exiled Felquistes from subsequent networks eventually settled in Cuba for some time. Following the police break-up of the 1969 “Geoffroy Network,” members Alain Allard and Pierre Charette escaped into the United States, taking refuge at the addresses of a few sympathizers in New York. On May 5, 1969, using French pseudonyms, they bought first-class tickets for a New York-Miami National Airlines flight leaving the same day. En route to Florida, Charette and Allard, using a firearm and a knife, forced the flight crew to fly to Havana.72 The Felquistes had been inspired by recent events in the news. Theirs was one of 35 aircraft hijacking
incidents that took place between the United States and Cuba in 1969 alone, almost all of which were attributed to flight for political asylum. Allard and Charette, along with Felquistes Bachand, Villeneuve and André Garand would later leave Cuba for France in April, 1970.\textsuperscript{73}

In their 1975 interviews with Québécoise journalist Michèle Tremblay, featured in the book \textit{De Cuba, le FLQ parle} (From Cuba, the FLQ speaks) Allard and Charette said they felt extremely “grateful” toward the people of Cuba: “The country welcomed us and gave us everything, without expecting anything in return.”\textsuperscript{74} In fact, after only a few months travelling through France, Algeria and the Middle East in 1970, the two had returned to Cuba in 1971, where they felt more “at ease,” and because they had already learned some Spanish and “adapted to the Cuban Revolution.”\textsuperscript{75}

In the last dramatic episode of the events of the “October Crisis” of 1970, police located the hostage James Richard Cross and his kidnappers in early December 1970. Cross’ release was negotiated in exchange for the safe passage of five of the Felquistes to Cuba, granted by the Canadian government and approved by Fidel Castro. The talks were held at the site of Expo 67 on St. Helen’s Island, declared Cuban territory for the period of the negotiations. Safe conduct for Cross’ kidnappers to either Algeria or Cuba had been one of the FLQ’s demands during the Crisis.

In a letter dated March 12, 1971 from the Délégation extérieure du FLQ in Algiers to the Algerian president Houari Boumédiène, the Felquistes in Algeria asked for visas to be granted to those remaining FLQ members in Cuba so that they
might join “their comrades in Algeria.” After 1972 only Allard and Charette remained in Cuba.

The RCMP believed the FLQ to have been part of an international network supported by Castro’s Cuba. A November 1969 secret police report indicated that, according to RCMP intelligence, “the separatist-terrorist movement [was] trained, financed, and assisted in various ways by contacts in Cuba.” The same file suggested that there was evidence that “some of the terrorists [were] Cuban-trained professionals financed by an international organization” (which was left unidentified). Most of the report was inaccurate in its assumptions about Cuban links with the FLQ. A handful of Felquistes were “supported” in Cuba, but only insofar as they were allowed to remain in the country without being deported. Indeed, by the spring of 1970, FLQ militants were “effectively out of circulation” in the Caribbean. Castro had become increasingly wary of putting his government’s relations with Ottawa at risk. When the Cuban government agreed to take in the FLQ members responsible for the kidnappings of October 1970, it was doing Ottawa a favor. Trudeau’s government was more than happy to be rid of the Felquistes. Despite the holes in their intelligence reports, the RCMP were convinced that some kind of international plot was underway involving Cuba, Algeria, and Moscow, a claim that may have inclined Canadian politicians from the municipal to the federal level to perceive the FLQ as a greater threat than it really was during the events of October 1970.
“Vive le Québec libre!”: the FLQ and France

In the international community of Felquiste exiles, most of those who had found refuge in Cuba and Algeria ended up at some point in France, a country whose language they shared and within which a growing tradition of revolution and social agitation was flourishing. Since 1963, the FLQ’s bombing campaigns had periodically focused France’s attention on her former colony and its loud new separatist voice. A headline in the Paris daily La Croix wondered at the parallels between the decolonization of Africa and the violent strain—represented by the FLQ—of the indépendantiste movement in Canada: “Québec: Décolonisation à l’africaine?” According to the article’s author, Pierre Rondot, “French Canada finds itself at an important turning point in its national history. In offering [French Canada] its eloquent and passionate vocabulary, ‘decolonization’ will doubtless contribute much to the perception of the extent of the urgency, too long forgotten.” While not endorsing the FLQ’s actions, La Croix declared that the Front’s attacks had announced Quebec separatism to France and the rest of the globe. “It is doubtful,” wrote Rondot, “that in the absence of these attacks, world opinion would enquire much about Quebec.”

In its July 15 issue of 1965, La Cognée reported in its news section that a group of fifty French intellectuals had recently “declared their support for the F.L.Q.” and demanded political prisoner status for imprisoned Felquistes, particularly François Schirm and Edmond Guénette, both of whom were serving life sentences. Among the signatories in Paris were magazine and newspaper editors, professors at the Sorbonne and “writers of great renown” including Left-wing and Catholic
intellectual, Jean-Marie Domenach, Communist poet Louis Aragon, and author and member of the Académie française, François Mauriac. The attention from France, “la mère-patrie” [the motherland], satisfied one of the primary goals of the early FLQ bombs: to stir things up enough in Montreal to attract international attention to the problems of French Canadians. But the most powerful bomb by far arrived in the form of a speech made by French President Charles de Gaulle on his visit to Montreal in 1967.

De Gaulle had been invited to Expo 67, Canada’s world’s fair, by Quebec Premier Daniel Johnson of the Union Nationale party. In his very first speech after disembarking from the steamer Colbert at Quebec City, the French president aroused the excitement of nationalists in the old capital: “We are witnessing here, as in many other parts of the world, the awakening of a people who want to be free to determine their own destiny in every respect. France salutes this awakening wholeheartedly.” Travelling along the centuries-old chemin du Roy to Montreal, de Gaulle remarked that the atmosphere in Quebec reminded him of France after the Liberation. When he arrived in Montreal on July 24, de Gaulle toured the city and the Expo and in the afternoon, delivered a speech to a massive crowd from the balcony of the Hôtel de Ville: “All of France knows, sees, hears what is happening here and I can tell you that she wants better for you.” “Vive le Québec!” he boomed, “Vive le Québec libre!” (Long live Quebec! Long live free Quebec) cleverly intonating the last word so that it stuck in the collective memory of a nation for decades. The crowd went wild waving French and Quebec flags.
Federalist Canadians, however, were not pleased. The government in Ottawa was so furious that de Gaulle chose to cancel a diplomatic visit to the capital that had been scheduled for the following day. Despite the indignation of Ottawa, De Gaulle refused to retract his statement. At a press conference at the presidential palace in Paris on November 27 he reaffirmed that he looked forward to the day when “Quebec would take her place as a sovereign state and master of her national existence, and she would negotiate with the rest of Canada, freely and as an equal, the terms of their cooperation.”\(^8\) De Gaulle’s 1967 declaration had a direct and immediate impact on the political rise of separatists in the weeks and months that followed. Only five days after the French president’s visit, François Aquin became the first self-declared separatist deputy in Quebec history to hold a seat in the Assemblée nationale at the provincial capital. Along with Aquin, René Lévesque and other radical members of the Liberal party immediately set about drafting a new proposal for Quebec independence; when it was rejected during the Liberal party convention, it became the platform of the new Sovereignty-Association Movement, the progenitor of the Parti québécois.\(^9\) After de Gaulle’s speech, the FLQ—or at least its propagandists—returned on the scene with newfound zeal. *La Cognée* declared that Quebec was a “pre-revolutionary state,” and that militants should form underground networks to prepare for the imminent revolutionary moment.\(^\)\(^7\)

The reaction of the crowd of hundreds of spectators that afternoon in June 1967, mostly members of *indépendantiste* organizations like the Rassemblement pour l’indépendance nationale (RIN), was described as emotional and “frenzied.”\(^8\) Quebec separatists were elated. De Gaulle, the liberator of France, had given a new level of
legitimacy to the slogans painted by the first *indépendantistes* in the early years of the decade. The daily *Le Soleil* reminded Canada that the slogan was not only the rallying cry of the legal Quebec separatist movement; it was “at the root of the terrorism that has occurred in our province.” Indeed, the FLQ were overjoyed to hear one of their old mottos elevated to such lofty heights. François Schirm, the longest-incarcerated member of the FLQ, recalled in his memoirs that he was “profoundly moved,” and cried “for the first time” listening to the radio broadcast in his prison cell. “Treated like cattle and humiliated as we were for wanting to do in Quebec what so many other peoples had realized in their countries, that is to say create an independent, modern state, open to the world and not folded in on itself in the cocoon of confederation—Charles de Gaulle avenged us.”

Veteran Felquiste François Mario Bachand declared in an interview three years after de Gaulle’s visit that the French president’s speech had given “tactical aid” to the independence movement: “Two hundred thousand people [an exaggeration] were in the street, which was excellent for us because de Gaulle embodied authority for the Québécois, old France, almost the king. The Québécois people, only recently proletarianized, retain their peasant mentality. It was no longer just some crazy youths screaming ‘Vive le Québec libre!’ but de Gaulle. In this way, the general pushed the Québécois to vote for independence.” Within most FLQ circles and in Quebec in general, de Gaulle had not become the symbol of stuffiness and conservatism that the following year’s radical workers’ and student movement would attribute to him. He was the 1945 hero of France, and, even though he had stubbornly continued to fight the Algerian War for four years it was de Gaulle who
had negotiated the Evian Accords, an act that granted Algerians their independence and almost cost him his life by the hands of infuriated European-Algerian nationalists.92

For federalist government officials in Ottawa, de Gaulle was a nuisance. His “Vive le Québec libre!” had become a scandal, putting Quebec separatism on the front page of newspapers worldwide while launching a period of staleness in Canada-France relations that would endure for decades.93 Shortly after his 1967 visit, the RCMP received orders to watch out for any suspicious links between the indépendantiste movement and foreign powers. 1967 marked the first year in which the RCMP would launch a surveillance operation against France, which had been labeled an ‘enemy power’ in a nominal sense because of its ‘special’ relationship with Quebec.94 As it turned out, the suspicions of officials in Ottawa were not totally unfounded.

Philippe Rossillon was a French government official active between the years 1964 and 1968 within the Haute Comité pour la defense de l’expansion de la langue française (High Commission for the Defense of the Expansion of the French Language), a committee attached to the French prime minister’s office. In his capacity as chairman of the Commission (1966-1968), Rossillon developed a strong interest in sustaining French-language use within the various francophone enclaves of Canada. He made several trips to Quebec, New Brunswick (home to a number of Acadians), and Manitoba, distributing funds to various francophone cultural institutions. While in Montreal, Rossillon contacted several members of the indépendantiste RIN, including Michèle Duclos and François Dorlot, both of whom
accompanied him on his voyage to New Brunswick. Back in France, Rossillon allegedly united forces with several gaulliste members of *Parlement* and a few French diplomats, to put into force a French foreign policy that was sympathetic to Quebec independence—the platform adopted by de Gaulle just before his 1967 trip to Canada.

Rossillon became the subject of a snag in France-Canada relations in autumn 1968 when it was revealed to the government at Ottawa that President de Gaulle had personally sent Rossillon to Quebec in order to stir up support for Quebec separatism. The information, provided by RCMP intelligence, led Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau to denounce Rossillon as “more or less [a] secret agent” working for France and declared him *persona non grata* during a speech given before the Chamber of Commons in Ottawa. Rossillon and his friends in Quebec denied the allegations, maintaining that his sole mission in Canada was to support francophone cultural institutions.

The “Rossillon Affair,” as the incident became known, was the final straw in a chain of events that one writer argued “amounted to a program to destabilize the Canadian federation.” In February, the small West African state of Gabon had annoyed Ottawa when it invited Quebec to send its own representative to a meeting of ministers of education of French-speaking states. In April a communiqué arriving from Paris had referred to Quebec as a “country,” a label France had used in diplomatic dealings with Canada since de Gaulle’s speech the previous year.

Whether or not de Gaulle’s France really had “subversive” goals in its relations with Ottawa, any plan Paris was hatching would never come to fruition. In May 1968, France was brought to a complete standstill as left-wing student
occupation protests and a general workers strike that involved over ten million employees for two consecutive weeks crippled the economic and, nearly, the political workings of the country. For the strikers, the primary enemy was President de Gaulle, seen as a symbol of outdated “old society” values and too closely allied to capitalism. The majority of Quebec’s student population was sympathetic to the strikers in France. The Quebec Students Association, the Union générale des étudiants du Québec (UGEC) publicly declared its support in a letter published in the popular Montreal daily Le Devoir. The following autumn, Quebec experienced the most destructive rash of student violence in its history. Although his government had survived the events of May 1968, President de Gaulle stepped down in 1969 after losing a country-wide referendum.

The increasingly far-left ambiance that pervaded Paris in the late 1960s and 1970s made France a top destination for exiled Felquistes escaping North America or tired of Havana and Algiers. A few first-network FLQ members had found sanctuary among sympathizers in France early on, but it was not until the two years of FLQ decline following the October Crisis of 1970, that Paris became the principle meeting point for Felquistes on the run. For the most part, as long as they maintained a certain distance from Western Europe’s own nascent radical and minority liberation movements, the government in Paris turned a blind eye to the presence of Quebec terrorists on French soil. It was the Canadian authorities who arrived in 1971 when the “French Cell,” headed by François Mario Bachand, became a real threat to Canadian envoys and business interests. The cell, which called itself the Délégation européenne du FLQ, having remained in constant contact with other Felquistes in the
Délégation extérieure at Algiers, attempted to coordinate a few attacks against Canadian companies and diplomats abroad. When the Canadian ambassador to France, Leo Cadieux, was threatened, the RCMP established an intelligence branch at the Canadian embassy in Paris. Recent evidence indicates that after this increase in Canadian police presence in France, the RCMP may have been behind the assassination of François Mario Bachand. He was found dead in his apartment in the Paris suburb of St. Ouen on March 29, 1971—assassinated, some claim, by the RCMP. FLQ presence in France faded away almost immediately.

In 1967, a top-level security panel called by Prime Minister Lester Pearson had decided that “separatist/terrorist” activity (the ambiguous label used by the RCMP) posed a greater threat than “Communism” to the Canadian government. (A similar panel in 1964 had concluded that Communism and “separatism” were equally dangerous). In addition to “terrorism” and “constitutional separatism,” another concern was also identified at the 1967 security panel meeting: “foreign involvement.” The intelligence services in Canada, the United States (and even France and Israel’s Mossad), feeding off stray tips about the FLQ members scattered throughout Europe, Cuba, and Algeria, arrived at the conclusion that the FLQ were involved in an international conspiracy (allied with Moscow) to take down capitalist governments. It has been argued by Evan Cross, in a recent undergraduate thesis, that the FLQ “was part of transnational urban guerrilla movement, a network that utilized “common tactics, a shared discourse and ideological foundation and a strong material relationship with similar movements throughout the world.” The statement
is true but somewhat misleading. Various Felquistes enjoyed a certain degree of welcome, and to a very limited extent, material support in the centers of the transnational revolutionary network of the 1960s and 1970s, Algiers and Havana, but beyond that expression of solidarity, the FLQ’s contacts were typically only nominal in nature, especially in the period in question, between 1963 and 1970.

The mid-1960s marked a period in the FLQ’s political and ideological trajectory that embraced internationalism and a saw an increased number of attempts to coordinate with revolutionary movements abroad. In the evolution of FLQ thought, the increasingly outward-looking perspective of Felquiste leadership also marked a chrysalis of the Felquistes’ strain of Quebec nationalism. The foreign influences and connections suggested that the Québécois nation was no longer isolated and limited to provincial borders, but an integral part of a global community. Indeed, Vallières and Gagnon took pride in their firm belief that the Québécois people were open enough to the world to become a continental or even a global leader in struggles for independence and social revolution throughout the world.

2 Ibid.
3 "Une langue officielle, efficace, qui est celle du dominant, et une langue maternelle, qui n'a aucune prise ou presque sur la conduite des affaires de la cité. Que les gens parlent deux langues ne serait pas grave, si la langue la plus importante pour eux n'était pas ainsi écrasée et infériorisée. Ce qui différencie le bilinguisme colonial du bilinguisme tout court." Green, “Toward Defining a Postcolonial Quebec Cinema: The Films of Claude Jutra.”
4 "Un enkystement né de l'intérieur”; “un corset imposé de l'extérieur.” Ibid.
5 “Mais les valeurs-refuges deviennent à la longue un frein et il faut en effet les secouer.” Ibid.
6 The FLQ officially advocated strategic, carefully coordinated terrorism to bring about its goals, as the Algerian FLN had done in the late 1950s with much success. The editors of *La Cognée* vigorously denounced any actions of “terrorisme gratuit,” or terrorism for terrorism’s sake, such as the mysterious bombing of the Victoria Bridge over the Saint Lawrence, which, it assured, was not connected to the FLQ. (See *La Cognée* 31 May 1964, No. 2 : 8 ) In 1964, Queen Elizabeth was scheduled to visit Quebec and *La Cognée* issued an advance condemnation of any attack against her, as she was not a political target but only a “symbol of colonialism.” By the end of 1964, *La Cognée* had launched a new series of attacks and declared that it was going to publish a series of informative articles describing “sabotage techniques,” but only four such articles followed. (Fournier, *Flq : Histoire D'un Mouvement Clandestin* 131.)
8 La Cognée 1 June 1965, No. 36
9 « le mouvement qui a mis fin à la traditionnelle peur des Québécois, peur d’oser, peur d’avoir peur, peur d’attaquer violemment le colonisateur. » Bachand, Trois Textes De François Mario Bachand 186.
11 « Le peuple exploité est naturellement violent. » Gagnon, Comeau, Leroux and Carel, Feu Sur L’amérique 59.
12 Au fait, le Québec est passé par toutes les étapes définies dans le livre de Frantz Fanon. A certains moments, les fervents partisans de la révolution se demandent pourquoi la masse, le ‘gr os’ du peuple, l’ouvrier, a-t-il attendu si longtemps avant de prendre les armes [et] prendre ‘la ville.’ » / « les pressions du régime oppresseur. » “Marcel Martel” “Notre révolution est la révolution du peuple, avec le peuple.” (La Cognée 1 June 1955.
15 “Si ‘votre lutte armée contre les Portugais est une contribution à la cause de la paix mondiale et de la coopération internationale”, nous savons aussi qu’elle est une contribution à notre propre lutte; elle est une contribution à l’indépendance du Québec. Vive le FRELIMO ! Vive le F.L.Q. ! » May 1, 1965, p. 2 no 34
16 “Il était encore possible, on pensait, de changer le monde radicalement . . . Che Guevara est admiré par la jeunesse de notre époque. Mao Tsé-toung est admiré. Fidel Castro. Pour notre génération nous étions aussi des héros.” Liberté en colère
18 Ibid., 99
21 Ibid., 82
22 Ibid., 141
23 Ibid., 150
24 Ibid., 151
25 Ibid., 162
28 Ibid., 185
29 Ibid., 103
32 Ibid., 207
33 Ibid., 208
34 McLoughlin, Last Stop, Paris : The Assassination of Mario Bachand and the Death of the Flq 40.
35 Ibid.
36 An Arabic word, meaning “bandit,” the term fellagha came to mean the armed militants affiliated with anti-colonial movements in French North Africa.
37 Morf, Terror in Quebec: Case Studies of the Flq 49.
38 Ibid., 23
40 Ibid.
41 « Il reste à voir si [de Gaulle] est capable à réussir ce miracle, qui à notre époque n’a pas encore été réussi nulle part. Ce miracle qui essaye de marier les courants très puissants et contraires, de concilier des hommes qui se battent furieusement entre eux pour des intérêts, des idées ou des mirages qui s’entrechoquent. Et
Michèle Tremblay, "De Cuba le Flq parle," Montréal, Éditions Intel, 1975, 182

It must be noted that … McLoughlin has speculated in his recent book that "the DEFLQ was a creation of the Security Service, along with the CIA and likely the SIS and SDECE" and that Raymond Villeneuve was "duped into joining a Security Service enterprise, the DEFLQ." We do not find sufficient proof to affirm that claim and so refer to the DEFLQ as an entirely FLQ -duped enterprise, the DEFLQ."

La Révolution se concrétise par :…Une politique internationale, basée sur l’indépendance nationale, la coopération internationale, la lutte anti-impérialiste et le soutien effectif aux mouvements en lutte pour l’indépendance ou la libération de leur pays. » http://www.el-mouradia.dz/francais/symbole/textes/constitutions/constitution1963.htm (Website of the Algerian Presidency)


Cross, "Frozen in Terror: The Flq and the Global Struggle against Western Capitalism," 73.


Ibid., 191

It must be noted that … McLoughlin has speculated in his recent book that "the DEFLQ was a creation of the Security Service, along with the CIA and likely the SIS and SDECE" and that Raymond Villeneuve was "duped into joining a Security Service enterprise, the DEFLQ." We do not find sufficient proof to affirm that claim and so refer to the DEFLQ as an entirely FLQ-run institution.


(From a letter sent by the Délégation extérieure du FLQ in Algiers to acting Algerian president, Houari Boumediène on March 12, 1971) TREMBLAY, M., De Cuba le FLQ parle, Montréal, Éditions Intel, 1975, 182

Cross, "Frozen in Terror: The Flq and the Global Struggle against Western Capitalism," 73.

La Cognée no 34, p 3

"Gilles Legault a été assassine': "Gilles Legault, comme le patriote algérien Larbi Ben Mhidi, ne pouvant plus selon ses propres mots "supporter les barbares affolés et terrorisés, s’est pendu dans sa cellule à l’aide d’une lianière de cuir qui retenait sa jambe artificielle. » / "Depuis plusieurs mois, notre journal a dénoncé sans relâche, le climat de violence et d’illégalité, la torture physique et morale, qu’installaient au Québec comme en Algérie de 1954-1962, les sbires de la police politique, camouflés sous le vocable d’escouade anti-terroriste » Québec Libre, 18 May 1965 , vol. 1, no. 18

Cross, "Frozen in Terror: The Flq and the Global Struggle against Western Capitalism," 73.

La Cognée


Ibid., 171-2.


Ibid.


Weekend Magazine, 15 August 1970). (see Fournier, FLQ: L’Histoire, 208)


Ibid., 93.

Ibid., 94.


"Le pays qui nous a acceuilli et qui nous a tout donné, sans attendre rien en retour.”

Michèle Tremblay, De Cuba le FLQ parle, Montréal, Éditions Intel, 1975, 168.

Ibid., 120-21

Ibid., 182

" out of circulation » McLoughlin, Last Stop, Paris : The Assassination of Mario Bachand and the Death of the Flq 40. 80

Ibid., 80


La Cognée, 15 July 1965, No. 39
La Cognée 15 April 1965, No. 33


“J’ai été profondément ému et je me souviens que j’ai pleuré pour la première fois. Traités comme du bétail et humiliés comme nous l’étions pour avoir voulu faire du Québec ce que tant d’autres peuples ont réalisé dans leur pays, c’est-à-dire créer un État indépendant, moderne, ouvert sur le monde et non replié sur lui-même dans le cocon d’une confédération — Charles de Gaulle nous vengeait. » Schirm, Personne Ne Voudra Savoir Ton Nom, 99


This is the thesis of the book by McLoughlin, Last Stop, Paris : The Assassination of Mario Bachand and the Death of the Flq. 88


McLoughlin, Last Stop, Paris : The Assassination of Mario Bachand and the Death of the Flq,88

This is the thesis of the book by McLoughlin, Last Stop, Paris : The Assassination of Mario Bachand and the Death of the Flq.


Cross, "Frozen in Terror: The Flq and the Global Struggle against Western Capitalism."
VI. Through the Lenses of Black Power and North American Revolution: The FLQ reinterprets the Québécois identity

Despite the relative ethnic diversity of the membership of the Front de Libération du Québec, there were no black Felquistes. Between 1961 and 1971, the number of black people of all origins living in Canada fluctuated between 32,100 and 34,400. Throughout the decade, they made up only 0.2% of the total population of the country.\footnote{While a small long-established black community existed in Canada (most notably around Halifax, Nova Scotia), during the 1960s and in the next two decades that followed, the steadily rising majority of black people in the country were immigrants from the Caribbean, many of whom settled in Montreal.} Despite the relative sparseness of the Black community in Canada, black activism (with no direct link to the FLQ) was not absent from the events of the turbulent 1960s. On February 11, 1969, Sir George Williams University, an English-language institution in Montreal, became the scene of unprecedented violence in the history of the student movement in Canada. For nearly two weeks, several hundred students, mostly black activists and their sympathizers, occupied the university’s computer center in protest against the administration’s backing of a “racist” professor. The police were called in to clear the building and a confrontation ensued in which several people were injured, almost one hundred were arrested and two million dollars of damage was done to the facility. One of the student leaders, Roosevelt (“Rosie”) Douglas, from the island of Dominica, was arrested and incarcerated.\footnote{Beyond Montreal, the American Black Panther Party maintained a series of contacts}
in Halifax in 1968, serving as a catalyst to improve dialogue between black and white communities in Nova Scotia that suffered from racial tensions.⁴

The separatist movement in Quebec was greatly influenced by the ideology generated by both the French- and English-language “Black nationalist” movements of the postwar period. Developed by black intellectuals in France’s colonial empire, the works of the literary Négritude movement gained particular notoriety in Quebec. Its writers preached a twin message of ethnic pride and anti-imperialism to which many separatists could relate. In particular, Quebec nationalists identified with the racist oppression described by Frantz Fanon and Aimé Césaire (the Afro-Martiniquais co-founder of *nègritude* whose own *Discours sur le colonialisme* (1950) was a powerful denunciation of European colonial racism.)⁵

Beyond ideology, some aspects of the political strategy of separatist groups in Quebec were influenced by their much closer black neighbors within the U.S. Civil Rights movement. In the summer of 1965, the RIN launched a campaign of occupying public buildings in Montreal where only English was spoken and demanding that customers be served in French. These “sit-ins” attracted a considerable amount of publicity from the media—especially when police were called to forcefully remove the demonstrators. During the party’s convention in May of that year, RIN president Pierre Bourgault had announced that his party would begin to employ the non-violent resistance methods popularized by the Civil Rights movement in the American South. The announcement allowed the RIN to distance itself from the violence of the FLQ, with which the police and press had increasingly associated it.⁶ If the RIN opted to follow the pacifist example of Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr.,
the FLQ preferred the militancy of more violent black activist groups, which it greatly admired. In Jean-Daniel Lafond’s 1994 documentary *La liberté en colère*, Pierre Vallières recalled that the FLQ had taken seriously the Black Panthers’ slogan from the late 1960s: “burn, baby, burn!” Like the Panthers, said Vallières, the FLQ wanted to “make a clean sweep of the old system” through violent revolution.7

Even before Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale first drafted the political program of the brand-new Black Panther Party for Self-Defense in October 1966, the FLQ became involved with the Black Power movement through Stokely Carmichael (later known as Kwame Ture), an active member of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and future honorary member of the Black Panther Party. In 1966 Carmichael coined the words “Black Power” as a social and political slogan. The phrase “Black Power” became the name of a movement whose goals were in many respects as varied as those of the diverse Quebec nationalist factions of the 1960s. They ranged from promoting “Black pride” to combating discrimination in society and in the law to establishing separate social and economic institutions (Black separatism). But the Trinidad-born Carmichael saw “Black Power” specifically as a solidarity concept to unite all black individuals within a greater movement of civil rights that would extend beyond racial desegregation and fight the plague of American racism. He proclaimed that the 25 million African Americans of the United States should assert their pride in being Black and abandon the myth of the supremacy of the white race. Black Power, Carmichael explained, “means black people coming together to form a political force and either electing representatives or forcing their representatives to speak their needs.” He was also a firm believer in
reaching out to fellow revolutionaries, within the United States or abroad, fighting their own liberation movements.  

Carmichael saw nonviolence as more of a temporary tactic than a philosophy. Like a number of his associates, he believed there were limits to the progress that could result from the nonviolent resistance preached by Martin Luther King, Jr. The Black Power movement sought political power for Blacks "by-any-means necessary" and although its founders had ruled out the “systematic use of violence,” the movement became increasingly forceful. The Black Panther Party for Self-Defense, which emerged in October 1966 in Oakland, California out of the wreckage of the urban riots of the previous two summers, would unite the left-wing and militant wing of the Black Power movement. The Black Panthers were prepared to resort to armed struggle "as in other countries of the world where the people's autonomy is not recognized." They rapidly evolved into a paramilitary organization, active in cities across California, New York State, and Chicago, ready to take up arms to defend itself against the police, seen as symbols of “White Power.” They set up well-armed, black-bereted militia units trained in urban guerilla fighting, and initiated community self-help programs in the urban ghettos.  

Like the FLQ, the Panthers sought to elevate their own liberation movement, which had previously been seen as a domestic concern only, to the level of a worldwide revolutionary organization. The Panthers made a number of connections with groups abroad and adopted the language of anti-colonialism. The party leaders, Bobby Seale, Huey Newton, Eldridge Cooper, and later, Stokely Carmichael, were greatly influenced by the thinking of Franz Fanon, and their two aims for the Panthers
become "decolonization of the Afro-American nation" in the U.S. and socialism. The ideological similarities between the Black Panthers and the FLQ, as well as a mutual aspiration to establish cross-border contacts, encouraged members of the two organizations to forge a loose support network between the two countries.

**Chronology of FLQ Involvement with Black Activists in the United States**

(1965-1970)

Felquistes first established links with black activists in 1965, a dramatic year for the Civil Rights movement in the United States. On February 21, Malcolm X was assassinated in Harlem, probably by members of the Nation of Islam. The world watched the televised brutality of local police repression during three civil rights marches in Alabama, including the events of “Bloody Sunday” March 7, that left many severely injured and one dead. In the summer of 1965, 43 people died and 4,000 were arrested during the Watts Riot in Los Angeles. The previous summer, urban uprisings in the ghettos of American cities had driven many municipal police forces, in cooperation with the FBI, to form undercover units to counter “Black activism,” which was perceived as an extremely dangerous new phenomenon. In Washington, the FBI sorted its strategies for fighting Black, American Indian, and New Left radical movements into a single program called COINTELPRO (Counter Intelligence Program).

On February 16, 1965, in New York City, the FBI arrested a Quebec woman, Michèle Duclos for an attempted plot to dynamite the Statue of Liberty in conjunction with the Harlem-based Black Liberation Front. Another Québécoise, a
schoolteacher and card-carrying RIN member, Michèle Saulnier, had met Robert Collier, a black library clerk from New York, on a trip to Cuba in 1964. During their tour of revolutionary Havana, Collier told Saulnier about the plight of American blacks, while she told him about the fledgling FLQ. When he returned to New York, Collier founded the Black Liberation Front (BLF), inspired by the example of the FLQ, with a few others in Harlem. He hoped one day to launch a “large-scale guerilla warfare attack within the U.S.,” in which BLF demolition teams would sabotage military aircraft, attack the police with mortars and machine guns, and booby trap the homes of government officials. Collier had remained in contact with Saulnier since Cuba, and said the BLF should go to Montreal to learn how to use explosives from “the people up there who put bombs in the mailboxes.”

Meanwhile, in Montreal, Saulnier and her associates were trying to re-establish the FLQ, the last network of which had been dismantled by the police in the wake of a failed armory hold-up on August 27, 1964. Saulnier began planning with Michèle Duclos, the personal secretary to RIN president Pierre Bourgault, who allegedly desired to maintain connections between Quebec separatists and radical movements in the United States; she hoped that the groups could exchange keys to apartments in Montreal or New York City should they be pursued by authorities and forced to go underground. On the morning of January 24, 1965, Collier, who had hatched a plan to bomb the Statue of Liberty, telephoned Saulnier in Montreal for help procuring dynamite and detonators. Saulnier agreed to help Collier and called upon FLQ members Gilles Legault and Raymond Sabourin to obtain the appropriate supplies. The two agreed to leave the explosives in a box disguised as a shipment of
textbooks at the Cuban Consulate in Montreal, a poor choice of cover as the building was under constant surveillance by the intelligence branch of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. The Canadian police immediately informed their U.S. counterparts and arrests were made on both sides of the border. Michèle Duclos was stopped in New York on February 16 with twenty-two sticks of dynamite (not enough to topple a monument) in her car. The foiled BLF/FLQ plot aroused the interest of the Pentagon, which launched an enquiry into the “revolutionary activities” of Quebec called “Project Revolt.” The CIA also strengthened its ties with the RCMP, and based its own surveillance operation in the American consulate in Montreal and the embassy in Ottawa.\(^6\)

In 1966 the FLQ realized its goal of establishing a revolutionary network with Black liberation groups in the U.S. Vallières and Gagnon, who had recently established their own FLQ network in January, embarked on a summer tour of the U.S. to make connections with revolutionary organizations. Ultimately, they hoped to organize a coordinating committee of North American liberation movements. In Washington, D.C. they met Stokely Carmichael, future activist within the Black Panther movement. The meeting marked the beginning of an informal material and ideological alliance between the FLQ and the Black Panther Party.

Pierre Vallières and Charles Gagnon were still in the United States when they learned that their own network of the FLQ in Montreal had been infiltrated by the police and that they were wanted in Canada. They decided not to flee overseas but to go to New York to picket in front of the United Nations building on September 25. They held placards and shouted slogans to attract the world’s attention to the situation
in Quebec, and announced that they were going on a month-long hunger strike “to let the whole world know that there is a people’s liberation movement in Quebec” and for the recognition of jailed FLQ militants as “political prisoners.” 17 The next day they were arrested and imprisoned in a New York jail where they remain for four months before being extradited to Canada. 18

While they were being held at the Manhattan House of Detention for Men (nicknamed “the Tombs”), Vallières and Gagnon received a telegram from Stokely Carmichael addressed to “our brothers in the FLQ.” 19 The message expressed sympathy and hopes for increased cohesion between the two movements. Two years later, in 1968, Carmichael sent another letter of solidarity, this time in French, signed on behalf of the Black Panthers, at the moment of Vallières’ and Gagnon’s first trial in Montreal, in January 1968: “Take courage, my brothers. You have our full sympathy as true patriots opposed to tyranny. We are confident that you will be acquitted. We shall overcome.” 20

For their part, Vallières and Gagnon sent a message of solidarity to the Black Panthers after the assassination of Martin Luther King in April, 1968. His death had sparked riots in 125 cities, especially in the ghettos of Washington, Los Angeles, and Detroit, where the government had called in the army. Forty-two people were killed and 20,000 arrested. The FLQ message read: “The only possible answer to capitalist and racist violence is the liberating violence of the oppressed. We shall overcome, brothers and sisters.” 21 In October, Carmichael, who had become the “Honorary Prime Minister” of the Black Panther Party” was invited to speak in Montreal, at McGill University. “Get all the guns you can find,” he told the students, “You will
not be revolutionaries until you are ready to take up arms and kill to defend your brothers.” The message sounded a lot like that of the FLQ.

Thanks to the efforts of Vallières and Gagnon, a few wanted FLQ militants were able to take refuge at U.S. addresses provided by the Black Panthers, in 1969. Following the arrest of Felquist leader Pierre-Paul Geoffroy on March 4, which partially eliminated the 1969 FLQ network, Alain Allard and Pierre Charette, two militants who had belonged to the same cell as Geoffroy, escaped to the United States before the police could arrest them. They were able to hide out in New York with the help of Black Panthers at the party headquarters in Harlem, an address François Bachand had given them in case of emergency. Two other FLQ militants Normand Roy and Michel Lambert were able to take refuge in New York through the same Black Panther channels.

A year later, the FLQ returned the favor. Following Pierre Vallières’ release from prison on May 26, 1970 (after 44 months of incarceration) one of his first acts was to set up, along with Charles Gagnon who had been let out a few months earlier, a “Quebec committee for solidarity with the Black Panthers.” The committee was founded at a ceremony in Montreal in the presence of a Black Panther representative and the prominent French novelist Jean Genet, an ardent supporter of the Panther Party. At the time, the Black Panthers were under considerable pressure from the police. FBI Chief J. Edgar Hoover had just named them “public enemy no. 1” in the United States. The original leaders Bobby Seale and Huey Newton were in prison, “Minister of Information” Eldridge Cleaver was in exile in Algeria, and “Justice Minister” Rap Brown had gone underground. Panther Vice President Fred Hampton
had been shot and killed when the Chicago police raided his home. With the help of the “Quebec committee,” some Black Panther activists and sympathizers were able to find refuge in Montreal. Arthur Turco, a white defense attorney for the Panthers who was wanted in connection to a conspiracy to commit murder, arrived in Quebec in the summer of 1970. Rap Brown also came to the province several times while he was living underground. He later stated, “Quebec is a cornerstone of the North American revolution.”

“Spotlight on America”: The FLQ and the Black Panthers at the Vanguard of the North American Revolution

Among the most important developments in Quebec “postcolonial” thought, Charles Gagnon’s 1968 essay *Feu sur l’Amérique* (Spotlight on America) introduced to Quebec to the idea of a pan-North-American revolutionary movement that would unite all oppressed minorities: one popular liberation struggle out of many “national” liberation struggles. Written in his cell at the Bordeaux prison in Montreal between August and September 1968, *Feu sur l’Amérique* provides a unique synthesis between the ideology and strategy employed by the organized struggle of the Québécois with those of other North American ethnic groups, all of which were “alienated by American capitalism,” “Yankee imperialism,” and “Anglo-Saxon racism.” Gagnon declared that “America” (by which he meant the North American continent) had been dominated by those oppressive forces for far too long and must be destroyed and rebuilt from scratch.
Gagnon claimed that by encouraging the individual patriotisms of exploited peoples while maintaining links between them, the revolutionary process could reconcile “national liberation struggle” with “class struggle” and with the greater anti-imperialist fight. In this regard, Gagnon’s essay echoed the philosophy to which Felquiste contributors to Quebec nationalism had adhered in their uniting of local patriotism with proletarian revolution.

In essence, Gagnon was not calling for a single united revolutionary front across North America, but a loosely associated collection of movements that merged nationalism and social revolution just as the FLQ had done in Quebec. Gagnon was effectively advocating the dissemination of Felquiste thought across the continent. Minority liberation movements in North America would be most successful if they shared a common ideological discourse. Thus, “by fighting in New York, Chicago, and San Francisco…the Blacks will be able to help the…Québécois to liberate themselves, just as the Québécois, by fighting in Abitibi and in Montreal, will be most helpful to the oppressed people of North America and of the World” because the weakening of imperialism on one point of the globe would lead to its weakening everywhere.  

The one-for-all approach to transnational revolutionary unity was evident in the communiqué that the Libération Cell issued in October 1970 when it claimed responsibility for the kidnapping of the British diplomat, James Richard Cross: “The FLQ supports…all who are fighting for liberty, independence, and dignity. . .We believe that the only genuine and valid support we can offer these people in their march towards liberation is first of all to liberate ourselves.”

François Bachand, who
had been a member of the founding network of the FLQ, would later express his belief that the Québécois were in a position to be the first to “liberate themselves” among all the oppressed peoples of the North American continent. The Québécois, he claimed, were in a favorable cultural and geographic position to be able to synthesize both the “influences and experiences” of American radical political movements—due to their proximity to the United States, and of European ones—due to their cultural closeness to Europe by way of the French language.30

In *Feu sur l’Amérique*, Gagnon developed the idea that the Québécois, along with other oppressed minority groups on the continent, were in fact a Third-World people living in the First World. It was not just Latin America, Africa, and Asia that formed the Third World, he said, but many regions at the very heart of modern, industrialized North America. The Québécois living in the “slums of St-Henri and Mile-End” [low-class neighborhoods of Montreal] shared the same experience as the Métis on “reserves” in Manitoba, the Amerindians, the Acadians, the Mexican-Americans, the Puerto Ricans and Puerto-Rican Americans, and the American Blacks: they were all subject to systematic poverty and daily subjected to racism.31

According to Gagnon, among those groups it was the Québécois and the African Americans who had “already engaged the revolutionary process in North America,” as they had both undertaken to fight for the recognition of their status as “singular collectivities.” Gagnon believed that these two ethnically-based movements, if successful, would launch a new social order in the continent that conformed to the aspirations of the North American masses and was more “respectful” of the national character of ethnic minorities.”32
To support the idea of Québécois/Black-American cooperation, Gagnon pointed out what he believed to be a number of similarities between the social and economic positions of most French Canadians and African Americans. In his view, both peoples were considered sources of cheap labor by “American capitalists.”

Black vineyard workers in California earning 60 cents to $1 per hour were in the same position, he said, as the impoverished farmers of Quebec’s Gaspé region, a third of whom were unemployed six months out of the year. “White colonialism,” he claimed, was their common enemy: it had brought enslaved Africans to America to exploit them, and over the course of three centuries it had pushed the French of North America into the territorial confines of Quebec to facilitate their subordination.

However, Gagnon concluded, all groups who did not fit into mainstream Anglo-Saxon America were victims of the same pressures to assimilate and integrate: “to ‘speak white’ and ‘to be white’” (in English in the text). But for Gagnon, even poor English Canadians and American whites, who could be said to fit the social norm, were unknowingly “privileged slaves” of the capitalist and imperialist system. All of the oppressed groups of North America, following the example of the Black and Québécois revolutionary movements (represented specifically by the Black Panthers and the FLQ), should have recourse to popular liberation struggle to put an end to the “dependency, dispossession, [and] depersonalization” to which “centralist capitalism” and “uniformizing yankee civilization” had reduced them.
"White Niggers of America": A new Québécois identity:

“A struggle for the liberation of the workers of Quebec, the Nègres blancs d’Amérique. [white negroes of America].”39 This was how Pierre Vallières and Charles Gagnon described the FLQ movement just before their arrest in New York, September 1966, as part of a five-minute appeal issued from the United Nations studios and broadcast by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. Nègres blancs d’Amérique, which has been translated as “white niggers of America,” became the title of an influential book written by Vallières during his imprisonment in New York with Gagnon. The work was part “premature autobiography,” part socialist history of North America, but perhaps its most influential contribution was the idea, suggested by its title, that the working class French Canadians of Quebec, due to their present condition and history, bore many similarities to African Americans and should therefore act in solidarity with Black Power groups to secure their national and social liberation through revolution.

The idea had not emerged out of thin air. To fully understand the unique "borrowing" of black themes in Felquiste thought, one must examine earlier evolutions in Quebec "post-colonial thought" inspired by (what those thinkers supposed were) African or African American experiences. The famous Quebec journalist André Laurendeau, while serving as editor-in-chief of the Montreal daily Le Devoir, developed an idea that would become extremely influential among radical Quebec nationalists, “the negro-king theory.” In his editorial column of November 18, 1958, Laurendeau daringly denounced acting Quebec premier, Maurice Duplessis, as a “roi nègre” (negro-king), a puppet leader under the influence of the anglophone
élite in the province. The piece compared the status of Duplessis in Quebec to that of an indigenous ruler in a British African colony. The provincial government respected the interests of the English-Canadian business élite in Quebec, and for that reason, declared Laurendeau, some of the leaders of that élite tended to tolerate violations of civil rights and liberties committed by Duplessis that they would never allow from one of their own.⁴⁰ “The British have a good sense of politics,” explained Laurendeau,

They rarely destroy the political institutions of a conquered country. They surround the negro-king, they feed him fantasies. They allow him to cut off heads on occasion: these are the customs of the country. One thing never dawns on them: to ask a negro-king to conform to the high moral and political standards of the British. The negro-king must collaborate and protect the interests of the British . . . I do not extend these sentiments to the English minority of Quebec. But it seems as though some of their leaders believed in the theory and the practice of the negro-king.⁴¹

The “negro-king” theory was widely cited in the radical nationalist movement of the 1960s, especially within the intellectual circle of the editors of the FLQ newspaper, La Cognée. The paper published an editorial in January 1964 that compared French and British colonialism (a sworn enemy of the FLQ). The British policy of indirect rule (the basis for Laurendeau’s Quebec “negro-king theory”) was cited as the principle difference between the two. The British method of placing “negro-kings” in power, it claimed, was much more “subtle and Machiavellian” than the French imperial policy of imposing only French leaders.⁴² While its statements about European colonial policy may have been over-generalized, La Cognée made its point by implicitly associating British imperialism in Africa with “British imperialism” in Canada. In British Africa, as in Quebec, “it was harder for dominated
populations to realize that they were colonized people because, by all appearances, it was one of their own (the “negro-king”) who was exploiting them.”

The editors of La Cognée extended the term “negro-king” to apply to any contemporary French-Canadian politician, professional, or clergyman who was seen as having “collaborated” with English Canadian or American commercial, political, or cultural interests. The term appeared frequently in La Cognée. André Laurendeau himself became the target of such accusations. In July of 1963, the journalist had accepted an invitation from Prime Minister Lester Pearson to co-chair the new Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism. Although the Commission (which was partly a response to the wake-up call of FLQ bombs), was born of the solemn recognition by the prime minister that French Canadians had legitimate grievances, the FLQ only saw it as symbolic of the federal government’s stubborn efforts to enforce federalism.

A link was made not long afterwards between the “negro-king” theory and the idea that the Québécois themselves were “white negroes.” If most of Quebec’s politicians were seen as “rois nègres,” perhaps all the French-Canadian masses exploited by this élite were disenfranchised “nègres blancs.” Vallières was not the first to call the Québécois, “white niggers,” but the term can perhaps be traced back to a Felquist source. In a piece that appeared in the March 15, 1964 issue of La Cognée, “Hudon Lamarche” (probably a pseudonym) offered his interpretation of the economic and social situation of the majority of the Québécois:

The Québécois are no longer deluded. All this verbiage, this wave of myths, merely conceals the hideous wounds of corruption, powerlessness, abandonment, and slavery. These myths have but one goal: to [keep] the Québécois in their servitude. The Québécois are white negroes robbed of their
Cultural associations of French-speakers with black people were forced onto the French-Canadian community from the outside. There is much anecdotal evidence that the insulting expletive, “Speak white!” was frequently heard in the 1960s. The expression was apparently used by English Canadians to insult French Canadians when they spoke French in public. In 1963, André Laurendeau, as co-chair of the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism, recorded numerous accounts of the phrase being used against francophones in Quebec as well as in other provinces. “It is obvious,” declared Laurendeau, “that [the phrase] comes to us from the south of the United States and that it combines two insults.” Michèle Lalonde composed a poem that became famous in Quebec nationalist circles entitled Speak white that evoked the perceived pressures of Anglo-Saxon culture to force people to speak English and assimilate. It was recited publicly for the first time in October 1968, at a benefit show for the imprisoned Felquistes, Charles Gagnon and Pierre Vallières.

It was the appearance of Vallières’ book Nègres blancs d’Amérique that popularized the idea of the Québécois as “white niggers.” Although Vallières attempted to use the word “nigger” not only as a racial or cultural indicator, but as a social, class and power concept, he did not hesitate to highlight similarities between the actual Black ethnic group descended from African slaves and the pure laine French Canadians.

To be a ‘nigger’ in America is to be not a man but someone’s slave. For the rich white man of Yankee America, the nigger is a sub-man. Even poor whites consider the nigger their inferior. . . In Quebec the French Canadians are not
subject to this irrational racism [of poor whites against blacks] that has done so much wrong to the workers, white and black, of the United States . . . The liberation struggle launched by the American blacks nevertheless arouses growing interest among the French-Canadian population, for the workers of Quebec are aware of their condition as niggers, exploited men, second-class citizens. Have they not been, ever since the establishment of New France in the seventeenth century, the servants of the imperialists, the white niggers of America? Were they not imported, like the American blacks, to serve as cheap labor in the New World? The only difference between them is the color of their skin and the continent they came from. After three centuries their condition remains the same. They still constitute a reservoir of cheap labor whom the capitalists are completely free to put to work or reduce to unemployment, as it suits their financial interests, whom they are completely free to underpay, mistreat and trample underfoot, whom they are completely free, according to law, to have clubbed down by the police and locked up by the judges ‘in the public interest,’ when their profits seem to be in danger.  

Vallières maintained that although they had different color skin, spoke different languages, believed in “different prophets,” lived in “ghettoes that are foreign to each other,” the “niggers” of Quebec and of the United States were exploited by the same economic, political and social system and were both just awakening from years of reticence and ignorance. Both groups were rising up against the discrimination and exploitation that had made them “niggers,” realizing that their goals could only be won by strength of numbers and of arms. Both French Canadians and American Blacks “already have the numbers,” claimed Vallières. “The arms will come in due time.”

Vallières had an interesting perspective on the roles of nationalism and ethnic pride in the revolutionary movement. He denounced attempts to suppress national pride and patriotism in minority liberation movements. He praised Black Nationalism as “one of the most positive and progressive manifestations of the development of the American revolution.” Black Nationalism, he added, by no means represented “an obstacle to the class struggle, as [maintained by] certain so-called orthodox Marxists
(who are more obsessed with scholastic orthodoxy than with the urgent necessity of working practically, under given conditions, for the liberation of the working class).” He may have been referring to trends in the late 1960s within the Black Panther Party towards the condemnation of Black “cultural” Nationalism as “black racism” and its replacement with a racially nonexclusive socialist ideology. The “Revolution,” he maintained, “will have to take into account not only the ‘proletarian’ aspect of the worker, but also his culture, his ethnic origin, his traditions and customs, his particular needs and tastes; otherwise it will not be a human revolution, total and liberating.”

According to Vallières, Black Nationalism would provide the same safeguard to the Black liberation movement that French-Canadian nationalism provided to Québécois revolutionaries. In retaining nationalism, the revolutions would avoid the inevitable trap of “half-revolutions,” which, as soon as they are victorious, change into the oppression of racial, linguistic, religious, or other minorities. Vallières claimed that Black and French-Canadian nationalism (both of which had fostered—or been forced into—exclusivity, xenophobia, and insularism at various periods) taught “true respect for men in the equality of natural and historic differences...[leading to a] respect of man for man.” In a letter from prison, made public at the time Nègres blancs d’Amérique was published, Vallières declared that, “true patriotism... must inevitably lead to militant anti-imperialism. We, White Niggers of America, must follow the example of our brothers in the Black ghettos of the United States and undertake a decisive struggle, a fight to death.” He concluded Nègres blancs d’Amérique with an impassioned call to arms: “The sooner we niggers arm ourselves
with courage and rifles, the sooner our liberation from slavery will bring us equality and fraternity. Utopia? It is because I cannot bear to be a nigger that I joined the FLQ. I will stay in the FLQ until the white niggers of Quebec are victorious.”

Vallières’ book became very influential among socialist in indépendantiste groups in Quebec and beyond. It was translated into English, Italian, German, and Spanish and published in five countries. Nègres blancs d’Amérique enjoyed a larger world-wide circulation than any other “revolutionary” book published in Quebec in the 1960s. Upon its publication in English in 1971, White Niggers of America received praise in the New York Times Book Review from Québécois journalist and future Liberal Party politician, Laurier L. LaPierre. LaPierre referred to Vallières as “Canada’s Eldridge Cleaver and Malcolm X,” and wrote that some sections of the book were “profound” in their “assessment of men and events.”

In the wake of Vallières’ book, a few notable Quebec intellectuals began to expand Vallières’ comparison of African Americans with the Québécois. The historian Léandre Bergeron included a number of parallels in his popular socialist “textbooks” on Quebec history. He wrote that the relationship between a “colonisé”—which, he maintained, included the French-speaking people of Canada—and the colonisateur was like that between a slave and his master. He also maintained that those French Canadians who “have accepted their fate as colonized people and lick the boots of the English and American colonizers”—including those members of the élite whom the early Felquistes called “negro-kings”—were like “the American Black…who seeks to lose his black identity and integrate into white society.” In a similar vein, the Québécois who “works to free the Québécois people from Anglo-
Canado-American domination” was like the “American Black who refuses to integrate into white society and identifies not as Negro but as Black and wants to liberate all American Blacks from the oppression they have to suffer in American society today.”

Once again, FLQ thinkers had re-crafted the national identity of the Québécois. The Felquistes’ proletarian analysis of the Québécois national identity had already demoted it from its stoic, haughty perch in the sacred belfries of Quebec City to the working-class row houses of St-Henri and Montréal-Est. The concept that the Québécois were like the Amerindians, Mexicans, Puerto Ricans and Blacks of America, was, for the Felquistes, an even humbler qualification. By virtue of inserting the Québécois identity into the fiercely racialized American case, the idea of “white niggers of America” restored the somewhat old-fashioned—and to many, destructive—notion that strong ethnic division and discrimination existed within “bilingual, bicultural” federalist Canada. In that sense the Felquistes fostered a sense of being different and of being victims. However, in associating the Québécois’ struggle with the contemporary period, characterized by self-affirmation, of the Civil Rights and Black Power movements Felquiste thinkers lent the Québécois identity an empowering element. No longer would the Québécois grovel in their victimhood; they would take charge and overthrow the oppressive established order. In many ways, the slogans of the “Quiet Revolution” Liberals and of the RIN repeated that same message, but the FLQ was unique among Quebec groups in its material and ideological links with black liberation movements in the United States. Just as Black
Power in America had emphasized, explored, and empowered the black identity, the Quebec identity as reconceived by the FLQ was conscious of its exploitation but self-assured and ready to overturn the social order.

5 Green, "Toward Defining a Postcolonial Quebec Cinema: The Films of Claude Jutra."
7 “Il fallait faire table rase de l’ancien système” Spoken by Pierre Vallières in : Jean-Daniel Lafond La Liberté En Colère, dir. Jean-Daniel Lafond, perf. Charles Gagnon Pierre Vallières, Francis Simard, Robert Comeau, National Film Board of Canada, 1994. (Note: Jean-Daniel Lafond is married to Her Excellency the Right Honourable Michaëlle Jean, the current governor general of Canada.)
10 Ibid., 108
12 Fournier, F.L.Q. : The Anatomy of an Underground Movement 75
13 McLoughlin, Last Stop, Paris 48
14 Fournier, F.L.Q. : The Anatomy of an Underground Movement 75
15 McLoughlin, Last Stop, Paris: The Assassination of Mario Bachand and the Death of the Flq 239
17 Ibid., 103
18 Ibid., 103
19 Ibid., 108
20 Ibid., 121
21 Ibid., 127
22 Ibid., 139
23 When Charette and Allard arrived at the Black Panther Party headquarters on 125th street in Harlem, they were told by the local Panther leaders that they would not be able to find shelter in Harlem. : “La police effectue des perquisitions quotidiennes et deux Blancs sont trop facilement repérables dans les alentours. De fil en aiguilles, on se retrouve, le lendemain chez des camarades blancs, des Américains progressistes. » Michèle Tremblay, De Cuba le FLQ parle. (Montréal : Éditions Intel, 1975), 68.
24 McLoughlin, Last Stop, Paris: The Assassination of Mario Bachand and the Death of the Flq 239
26 Ibid., 193
27 Ibid., 194
28 C’est en luttant à New York, à Chicago, à San Francisco, etc., que les Noirs aideront le plus le peuples … québécois à se libérer, comme c’est en luttant à Québec, en Abitibi, à Montréal, que les Québécois rendront les plus grands services a tous les peuples opprimés d’Amérique et du monde. Le véritable internationalisme révolutionnaire réside d’abord là : dans la conscience que l’affaiblissement de l’impérialisme en un point du globe signifie son affaiblissement partout. » Gagnon, Comeau, Leroux and Carel, Feu Sur L’amérique 12
30 Bachand, Trois Textes De François Mario Bachand 49.
31 Gagnon, Comeau, Leroux and Carel, Feu Sur L’amérique 110.
32 Ibid., 134
33 Ibid., 114
34 Ibid., 113
35 Ibid., 115
36 Ibid., 107
37 Ibid., 115
38 Ibid., 102
40 André Laurendeau, « La théorie du roi nègre - I », in Le Devoir, 4 July 1958 : 4
41 « Les Britanniques ont le sens politique, ils détruisent rarement les institutions politiques d'un pays conquis. Ils entourent le roi nègre mais ils lui passent des fantasies. Ils lui ont permis à l'occasion de couper des têtes : ce sont les mœurs du pays. Une chose ne leur viendrait pas à l'esprit : et c'est de réclamer d'un roi nègre qu'il se conforme aux hauts standards moraux et politiques des Britanniques. Il faut obtenir du roi nègre qu'il collabore et protège les intérêts des Britanniques...Je ne prète pas ces sentiments à la minorité anglaise du Québec. Mais les choses se passent comme si quelques-uns de ses chefs croyaient à la théorie et à la pratique du roi nègre. » André Laurendeau, « La théorie du roi nègre - I », in Le Devoir, 4 July 1958 : 4
42 La Cognée, 15 January 1964, no. 4: 2
43 Ainsi, les populations dominées pouvaient plus difficilement prendre connaissance de leur état de colonisés parce que, en apparence, c'était un des leurs (le ‘roi nègre’) qui les exploitait. »
44 La Cognée, 31 March 1965, no. 31
46 Les Québécois ne s’illusionnent plus, tout ce verbalisme, cette vague de mythes ne font que dissimuler les plaies hideuses de la corruption, de l’impunité, de la défection et de l’esclavage. Les mythes n’ont qu’un but, [embouer?] [source text illegible] les Québécois dans leur servitude. Les Québécois sont des nègres-blancs dépouillés de leur économie, aliénés subtilement, réduite à ramper sur un sol...qui ne nous appartient plus. » La Cognée 15 March 1964, no.7: 10
http://classiques.uqac.ca/contemporains/moniere_denis/andre_laurendeau/andre_laurendeau.doc
50 Ibid., 52
51 Ibid., 53
52 Ibid., 52
54 Vallières, White Niggers of America: The Precocious Autobiography of a Quebec "Terrorist", 52
57 Ibid., 122
59 Bergeron, Petit Manuel D'histoire Du Québec.
60 « accepté son sort de colonisé et qui lèche les bottes du colonisateur anglais ou américain” / “le Noir américain (Le Negro) qui cherche à perdre son identité de Noir et à s'intégrer à la société blanche.” Bergeron, Petit Manuel D'histoire Du Québec 49.
61 « travaille pour que le people québécois se libère de la domination anglo-canado-américaine » / « Noir américain qui refuse l'intégration à la société blanche qui s'identifie non pas comme Negro mais comme Black et veut libérer tous les Noirs américains de l'oppression qu'ils doivent subir dans la société américaine d'aujourd'hui. » Bergeron, Petit Manuel D'histoire Du Québec 49.
Conclusion

In constructing their own Quebec nationalism, members of the Front de Libération du Québec took a *bricoleur* approach. They followed no standard set of rules and used only what ideas were already available to build up their unique ideology. They created a Quebec nationalism unadulterated by government opportunism, bourgeois class interests, or religious zeal, but one that the majority of Quebec’s citizens—working-class, urban, and French-speaking—could rally behind. FLQ thinkers launched the process by first reevaluating the core elements of the French-Canadian identity: their sacred past, French language and Catholic religion. Felquiste nationalists re-interpreted the old institutions of Quebec history, “national” language, and to some extent, the Church, in ways that made them potential catalysts for the political independence and the social liberation of Quebec’s least privileged.

In reevaluating the old strains of nationalism, the FLQ had extracted elements from the past to legitimize its violent and socialist political agenda as the natural extension of a home-grown movement, so that it would not be perceived as a dangerous foreign ideology. But Felquiste ideology was indeed largely influenced by revolutionaries abroad. On the international front, the FLQ incorporated ideologies that many may never have associated with a French-Canadian struggle. Nevertheless, the writings of Castro and Guevara, Fanon and Négritude authors made their way into the *bricolage* canon of Felquiste nationalism.

Finally, by paralleling the FLQ movement with that of Black Power activists from the United States, the originators of Felquiste nationalism made a powerful statement about the Québécois’ own struggle against “Anglo-Saxon racism” in favor of greater collective self-empowerment. In its amalgamation of revolutionary imports
and domestically produced ideas, the nationalism created by the Felquistes was unlike any Canada had ever seen.

The particular brand of Quebec nationalism created by the FLQ offered an alternative to previous versions that had become anachronistic. Felquistes captured one of the most important values in French-Canadian nationalism, the affirmation of the past, which the sanitized civic nationalism of the Révolution tranquille had preferred to replace with the “modern.” Just as it grafted a “people’s history” onto the traditional narrative of the province’s past, FLQ nationalism redefined the Quebec identity as pertaining principally to Quebec’s struggling farmers, industrial workers and students. Indeed, many Felquistes themselves hailed from these groups, and their amateur, do-it-yourself aspect of bricolage nationalism was perhaps a self-affirming process in itself. The general pattern in Felisque nationalist thought was a response to the rapidly transforming demographics of Quebec, whose population, since the FLQ had been founded, had just become majority working class and urban, concentrated in Montreal. In their nationalism’s incorporation of personalities and ideologies not native to Quebec, Felisque thinkers may have encapsulated Montreal’s recent maturation as a city that was increasingly open to the world and ethnically diverse. Violence was perhaps the aspect of Felisque thought that resonated least with French Quebec.

The kidnappings of October 1970 marked the climax of FLQ activity in Quebec and the beginning of its gradual decline over the next two years. The death of the FLQ can be attributed to a sharp drop in public support and the increased success of antiterrorist units within the Montreal police force, which planted informants in the FLQ and facilitated the arrests of more than twenty militants.¹

The FLQ left its traces not only in terrorist action, but indirectly, in the rise of the sovereignty movement in Quebec politics over the following decades. Popular support for René Lévesque’s Parti québécois (PQ) enjoyed a sharp rise after the October
Crisis and the obvious failure of terrorism to bring about Quebec independence. Lévesque warned young Québécois activists against the dangers of adhering to “childish cells in a fruitless revolutionary adventurism which might cost them their future and even their lives.”² The legal route to independence offered by the PQ became increasingly appealing even among FLQ members, who had once denounced electoral politics as a game of the “bourgeois.” On December 13, 1970, Pierre Vallières publicly announced that he was disassociating with the FLQ and abandoning violent action altogether. In 1971, he officially endorsed the PQ. Even the ever-militant Felquiste François Bachand backed the PQ in 1970.³

Indeed, the FLQ helped a number of political figures gain support. Public opinion of the Felquistes was manipulated by French-Canadian politicians throughout the 1960s. Pierre Trudeau used their attacks to equate separatism with anarchy and terror, and push his agenda of a unified Canada. René Lévesque, while he always denounced the terrorists, repeatedly called their agitation a reminder of the social ills that drew the youth to violent action. ⁴

Critics then and now dismissed the FLQ’s ideology, as revealed in its communiqués and manifestos, as confused, Marxist drivel. Yet Felquiste ideology, especially in its empowering bricolage conception of the Québécois identity, may have appealed to a great many in Quebec. The fact that nearly half of French Canadians responded positively to the “FLQ Manifesto” in 1970 demonstrates that Felquiste ideology resonated to a certain degree with the people in whose name the Front declared to be fighting.

While the memory of the terror that rocked Canada in the 1960s and 1970 has faded forty years on, Felquiste ideas, encapsulated in their writings, continue to make headlines. Just after midnight on Sunday, September 13, 2009, the “FLQ Manifesto” was read aloud as part of the “Moulin à paroles,” a public event which celebrated four hundred years of Quebec history in texts. The provincial government had declined to contribute funds to the event because of the document’s “call for violence.” No acts of violence ensued after Haitian-
Canadian actor and singer-songwriter Luck Mervil, boomed the FLQ’s 1970 message from a stage overlooking Quebec City. When he concluded his reading with an impromptu, “Vive le Québec libre!” rowdy cries of approval filled the night air over the Plains of Abraham. The FLQ’s legacy as agents of terror has lived on in Canada’s historical memory, but Felquist ideology, specifically its unique contribution to the ever-evolving discourse of Quebec nationalism, was the movement’s most innovative and most enduring vestige.

---

2 Ibid, 173
3 Ibid, 173
4 Ibid, 168


*Front de Libération du Québec, Primary Sources*


FLQ, *La Cognée*, 66 issues, from October 1963 to April 1967 (published clandestinely in Montreal)


*Film / Television*

Lafond, Jean-Daniel (director), *La Liberté En Colère*. (Released 1994). National Film Board of Canada, 73 min.

Lévesque, René (anchor) "La Guerre D'algérie Et Les Francais." (Broadcast 7 October, 1958). From Series *Point de Mire*. Television (Radio-Canada)
