

loin de se vouloir une condamnation de ce précieux outil, visent à faire d'une éventuelle réédition un instrument encore plus adéquat.

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Cinquante ans d'action ouvrière : les mémoires d'Alfred Charpentier, présentés par Gérard DION, Québec, Les Presses de l'Université Laval, 1971.

Alfred Charpentier's *Mémoires* are a welcome addition to Canadian social history. They offer us not only the personal testimony of a sensitive and dedicated individual active through a half-century of radical social transformation, but also a spirited challenge to conventional wisdom about the evolution of the Catholic labour movement in Quebec.

Charpentier's origins were entirely working class, and he began early in life the association with organized labour which led him to the presidency of the *Confédération des Travailleurs Catholiques du Canada*. As a youth he accompanied his father to meetings of the bricklayers' union and to workers' political rallies in Montreal. Obligated to leave school at thirteen (1901) to help support 12 younger brothers and sisters and apprenticed in his father's trade three years later, Charpentier himself joined the *Union des Briqueteurs* in 1907. Partly because he had continued to educate himself, he rose very quickly in the labour movement. He became president of his local in 1911, and devoted himself to it even through periods of family misfortune and unemployment. His conversion to Catholic unionism came "*dans la captivité d'une caserne*" (he had become a fireman) during the First World War, and actually occurred in two stages — "*de l'internationalisme au nationalisme . . . de la neutralité à la confessionnalité*." His conversion was complete: international unions were incompatible with Canadian patriotism, while religious neutrality could neither resist socialist ideology nor serve any positive function beyond the narrow economic interests of a few workers. By 1918 he doubted only the practicability of a Catholic labour movement, and soon thereafter was won over by the successes of Père J. Papin — Archambault in Montreal and Abbé Maxime Fortin in Quebec City — the former a propagandist and the latter already a talented organizer.¹

As an experienced labour man and fairly well known as a result of his frequent journalistic efforts, Charpentier was consulted and invited to hold office founders of the provincial federation and Montreal council of Catholic syndicates. We wrote for *la Vie Syndicale*, mouthpiece of the frequently more radical Montreal wing of the movement,² and in 1931 became Presi-

¹ This account is a convenient summary of CHARPENTIER's earlier work, *Ma Conversion au Syndicalisme catholique* (Montréal: Fides, 1946).

² *Le Travail* (Québec) was the C.T.C.C.'s official publication.

dent of the Montreal Central Council. In that office, and as President of the C.T.C.C. after 1936, Charpentier was required both to organize defenses against a variety of hostile forces (internationals, governments and employers) and to ease internal tensions which attended the transition from trade to industrial unionism. Following his defeat by Gérard Picard in 1946, Charpentier worked briefly for the C.T.C.C. and then accepted an appointment to the Quebec Labour Relations Board. During ten rather stormy years there (1950-60) he began to introduce historical accounts alongside his articles on contemporary labour problems, and accepted the suggestion of Abbé Gérard Dion that he compose his memoirs.

The autobiographical character of this account should not be minimized. In following Charpentier through the hardship of working class life in Montreal, the process of self-education and "conversion" to an ideal, and finally the sense of helplessness and betrayal with which he regarded the post — 1946 leadership of the Catholic labour movement, we receive above all a highly personal and subjective message. Nevertheless the student of Quebec's labour history can hardly be blamed for showing greater interest in the revisionist quality of the book. The two strains are of course intimately connected, since the interpretations to which Charpentier objects discredit (by simple omission or outright falsification) his own lifelong devotion to the interests of workers in Quebec. In any case the reader is forced to a realization that the historical reputation of Catholic labour has been shaped by friends of the rival non-confessional unions³ and admirers of Charpentier's opponents within the C.T.C.C.,⁴ unwittingly aided by self-appointed apologists for the movement who are exclusively interested in its spirituality and its conformity with Catholic doctrine.⁵

Charpentier's memoirs differ most sharply with conventional interpretation in describing the original nature of the movement (especially the early years of the C.T.C.C.) and the events of 1946-1949 (that is, from his removal as President to the Asbestos Strike). Regarding the earlier period, a succession of myths and biases are exposed. The Catholic unions were not, for example, highly favoured by Government or industry. Abbé Fortin, the first General Chaplain of the C.T.C.C., clashed with both the federal Minister of Labour and the provincial Minister of Agriculture in

³ H. A. LOGAN, *Trade Unions in Canada* (Toronto: MacMillan Company of Canada, 1948); Charles LIPTON, *The Trade Union Movement in Canada* (Montreal: Canadian Social Publications Ltd., 1967); Samuel H. BARNES, "The Evolution of Christian Trade Unionism in Quebec," in A. E. KOVAKS, ed., *Readings in Canadian Labour Economics* (Toronto: McGraw Hill Company of Canada, 1961).

⁴ P. E. TRUDEAU, ed., *La Grève de l'Amiante* (Montréal: Editions Cité libre, 1956), especially the editor's "Québec au moment de la grève" and R. BOISVERT, "La grève et le mouvement ouvrier." See also Miriam CHAPIN, *Quebec Now* (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1955) and Herbert QUINN, *The Union Nationale* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1963).

⁵ Esdras MINVILLE, *Labour Legislation and Social Services in the Province of Quebec* (Appendix 5, Royal Commission on Dominion — Provincial Relations, Ottawa, 1939); Jean HULLIGER, *L'Enseignement Sociale des Evêques Canadiens de 1891 à 1950* (Montréal: Fides, 1957).

1920-1921. The federal Department of Labour even under the Liberals recognized the Trades and Labour Congress as the exclusive representative of Canadian labour until at least 1925, while the Taschereau Government was more or less compelled to accord the two movements equal status. In accepting T.L.C. complaints of conspiracy among Church, State and Capital against international unionism, subsequent writers have ignored the fact that there was little need for such a conspiracy.⁶ If anything, Taschereau and the employers were apprehensive about their ability to control the new movement as effectively as they did the T.L.C.⁷

Unquestionably there were French Canadian clerics (and laymen as well) who supported Catholic syndicalism primarily for ideological reasons — because it was “deflective” from alternatives to religious orthodoxy or because it represented a step toward the achievement of some corporatist utopia.⁸ But to reject on this basis the sincerity of those clergy instrumental in founding or maintaining the movement (as Trudeau and others have done) is totally gratuitous. They threw themselves into labour organization and leadership only after the failure of non-confessional unions was manifest. At least some of these chaplains were indignant at the condition of the working class, at the abuses of laissez-faire capitalism, and even at members of the hierarchy who employed the epithet “socialist” to discredit legitimate demands. They were cognizant of their own limitations and determined to foster a corps of lay leaders capable of assuming their non-religious functions.⁹ Laymen such as Charpentier who brought education and experience with them into the movement were hardly proponents of clerical domination or even submissive; their respect (or lack of it) for clerical leaders depended on the knowledge and ability of the individual concerned, and their acceptance of hierarchical support was based on a realization that it was indispensable to the movement. Incidentally, neither Charpentier nor anyone else in the C.T.C.C. was at all embarrassed by the Church’s insistence that contractors in its employ give preference to Catholic labour. Naturally, this practice elicited vehement protest from rival unions; revealingly, it has also been condemned as immoral by later writers. Since this tactic was no more ruthless (just more successful) than those frequently employed against Catholic syndicates — such as physical intimidation or strikes by *employés clés* — one suspects that the judgement is heavily biased. It is really the end, Catholic unionism, and not the means which is being condemned.

⁶ These complaints centred on a strike by the International Typographical Workers Union in 1922 which was not in fact a typical case.

⁷ Such a movement could not be discredited with words such as “socialist,” “foreign,” “godless,” etc., and its leaders less frequently impressed by the prospect of government patronage. Politically the internationals had been effectively short-circuited by the Taschereau Government, but Catholic Action groups generally were suspected of supporting the provincial Conservatives.

⁸ M. K. OLIVER, “The Social and Political Ideas of French-Canadian Nationalists 1920-1945” (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, McGill University, 1956), p. 243 ff.

⁹ [M. FORTIN ?], *Mémoire sur le Syndicalisme catholique au Canada* (Montréal: Beauchemin, 1927). This was originally a confidential document addressed to the Quebec hierarchy following a meeting of union chaplains.

The *Mémoires* expose one other myth about Catholic unionism in the 1920's: that its "philosophy" was too abstract or other-worldly to permit any specific demands on government. While the T.L.C. alone supported compulsory education, on no other issue was it more advanced than the C.T.C.C. On the contrary, the latter was far ahead on questions of *droit syndicale*, did not hesitate to ridicule the incompetence and partiality of official inspectors and conciliators, and even (to Fortin's horror) demanded Quebec participation in the federal Old Age Pension scheme of 1926. It really should not have required Charpentier to point this out: a cursory reading of the C.T.C.C. *Procès verbaux, le Travail* and *la Vie syndicale* makes it quite obvious.

On the late 1940's Charpentier is somewhat less convincing, which is ironic because while his earlier "revisionism" is implicit, the author here becomes highly argumentative. On the other hand this approach, along with the subject matter itself, makes the account all the more interesting. He first challenges the interpretation according to which Picard's victory came on a platform of militance and marked the emergence of the C.T.C.C. from its age of passivity, exclusive clerical nationalism, and Church direction. In fact, Picard's reputation was built on his skill as a negotiator, not militance, and his victory engineered by a cabal which succeeded only because the election was delayed until a large number of Montreal delegates had departed. The move away from religious exclusiveness had long been supported by Charpentier himself, while greater militancy was a natural development held in check by circumstance (depression and war) which would have occurred with or without Picard. The rise of the Picard-Jean Marchand faction in general was not essentially a triumph of lay over clerical leadership. The "conflict" was to some extent generational, with laymen and clerics on both sides. Above all, however, it represented displacement by professional middle class bureaucrats of workers who had risen through the ranks and frequently devoted themselves to the movement without pay. This is of course something we already knew — but very rarely considered from the viewpoint of a man like Charpentier, deeply humiliated by the arrogance of the *arrivistes*.

Charpentier's hostility toward these people is even more evident in his account of the Asbestos Strike. Marchand, he feels, cared little for the real interests of the Johns-Manville employees (i.e. successful negotiation or at worst a legal strike following attempted conciliation); the goal was to provoke a showdown with the Duplessis Government.¹⁰ To this end, he sabotaged negotiation with revolutionary demands, misrepresented management's position to the workers, and through lack of experience and judgement incited them even beyond his own control. Marchand and Picard were by 1949 already accustomed to authoritarian control of the C.T.C.C. directorate, stifling any dissent by the force of their intellectual training. Now they completely ignored the prescribed method of seeking approval for their actions from their own federation. Both the justifications later offered for

¹⁰ The same argument appeared in the memoirs of Labour Minister Barrette (1966), pp. 107-136 (English edition).

illegal acts, and the “watershed” interpretation in which the strike was claimed to have been successful (in spite of great suffering and only moderate gains for the workers) were in Charpentier’s opinion flimsy rationalizations.¹¹ For expressing this view and later accepting a seat on the Labour Relations Board, Charpentier was soon branded a “friend” of Duplessis. This is outrageous, whether one looks at his activities as C.T.C.C. President under Union Nationale administration or at his assessment of Duplessis’ behavior during the Asbestos Strike. He did have some confidence in Labour Minister Antonio Barrette, but even so accepted his government appointment only with the approval of Picard.

The now widely accepted version of C.T.C.C. history attacked by Charpentier was originally developed in the pages of *Cité libre* and *Le Devoir*, and given its most complete expression in Trudeau’s *La Grève de l’Amiante*. This book has acquired practically biblical status in many quarters, and it is therefore regrettable that the author decided (or was persuaded) to exclude from his memoirs a scathing review of the work, especially the editor’s introductory essay.¹² Here Charpentier corrects errors of fact challenged only by implication in the published text, reveals faulty documentation and quotations used badly out of context, and identifies as intense anti-clericalism the source of many of Trudeau’s judgements. Some of it could in turn be rebutted, but it is probably pointless to analyze in this review material which did not appear in the final version. Hopefully some journal will publish it.

Alfred Charpentier was not himself immune to bias. To read his memoirs one would think he was never guilty of an unkind thought, word or deed. Perhaps understandably, he engages in a good deal of apologetic and rationalizing of his own. Moreover, even in retrospect he failed to grasp the full significance of deconfessionalization, the law of the jungle which his own morality could not displace in labour relations, or the objectives of Jean Marchand in 1949. On some questions, particularly the details of a strike or negotiation, there is no reason to trust his account any more than someone else’s. Nevertheless following his exposure to the perspective of Charpentier, the reader must at least question his faith in the “Authorized Version.”

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NAOMI GRIFFITHS. — *The Acadians : Creation of a People*, Toronto, McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1973.

Ce court ouvrage est une contribution intéressante sur le long débat concernant l’identité des Acadiens, comment s’est formé le caractère du

¹¹ The watershed interpretation has itself been pointedly questioned in C. NISH, ed., *Quebec in the Duplessis Era, 1935-1959 : Dictatorship or Democracy* (Toronto: Copp-Clark, 1970), pp. 74-75.

¹² Archives de l’Université Laval, Fonds Alfred Charpentier: “Mémoires: textes éliminés ou supprimés,” pp. 75-105.