

Research article

Hidden in Plain Sight: Fascism in Quebec during the Second World War

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Hidden in Plain Sight: Fascism in Quebec during the Second World War

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Abstract

My doctoral dissertation on anti-Semitism and extreme right-wing nationalism in 1929–39 Quebec proved to be a thread that, once pulled, would reveal other aspects of Quebec history that had also been hidden in plain sight. The writing of the most prominent nationalists of the 1930s was available in most university libraries in Quebec. While some politicians acknowledged in their memoirs the influence of these intellectuals in their youth, the appeal of fascism and anti-Semitism was never mentioned. Their resounding silence was quickly shattered by reading the Université de Montréal (University of Montreal)'s *Le Quartier Latin* student newspaper, where articles praising fascism and denouncing the Jewish influence were common, and a little book that claimed that Pierre Elliott Trudeau had been a member of a revolutionary organisation that aimed at toppling the provincial government to establish an independent Quebec freed from democracy. Researching the French Nazi collaborators warmly received in Quebec after the Second World War led to a little-known man who became the personal ambassador to the Vatican of the premier of Quebec, Maurice Duplessis, during the Asbestos Strike of 1949. Combing through the files of some of the leading actors of that conflict in the Jesuits' archives would reveal that the miners' health threatened by asbestosis was a significant issue that the historiography of the event had neglected.

Keywords extreme right-wing nationalism; fascism; Nazism; France; Quebec; anti-Semitism; French Nazi collaborators; Asbestos Strike; Pierre Elliott Trudeau; René Lévesque.

Introduction

Evidence of anti-Semitism and fascism in a university library near you

Jerusalem, May 2013.¹ I am sitting in one of the Israeli Academy of Sciences and Humanities salons with Professor Emeritus Zeev Sternhell, a world-renowned specialist on fascism, especially French fascism.² I had been his student in the mid-1980s when I was doing a doctoral internship at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. For two years, he invited me to participate in a seminar he led at the Institute of Advanced Studies of university. Near the end of our conversation, I told him in French: 'La recherche et l'écriture de mes quatre livres ont été une aventure intellectuelle extraordinaire' ['Researching and writing my four books have been an extraordinary intellectual adventure']. To which he replied: 'J'en suis certain' ['I am sure']. I now share this journey with you.³

My doctoral dissertation was about anti-Semitism as expressed in the writings of the main French-Canadian nationalists from 1929 to 1939. Back in Canada as a doctoral student at Laval University, Quebec, I had read all the works by Abbé Lionel Groulx published during that period, the *Tracts* and the *Cahiers des Jeune-Canada*, all the issues of *L'Action nationale* appearing from January 1933 to January 1940, as well as all the issues of the daily *Le Devoir* from 1929 to 1939. The first three sources were used in toto, while 234 articles of *L'Action nationale* and 1,007 articles of *Le Devoir* were carefully examined for analytical purposes. Why did I read all of these writings in their entirety and not select a scientifically sound sample? For one reason: the more I read, the more I realised that the anti-Semitism expressed in these writings, especially in *Le Devoir*, was crude, violent and vulgar. All the characteristics of the Nazi iconography of the Jew were repeated ad nauseam.⁴ The sheer number of anti-Semitic articles would validate my claim that anti-Semitism was part and parcel of that group's nationalism.

Furthermore, the nationalism of Lionel Groulx and his followers had an obvious kinship to the extremist right-wing nationalism cum fascism that was gaining momentum in Europe at the time. To be more precise, the French variety of that extreme ideology found an audience in Quebec for the obvious reason of a shared language. Maurice Barrès and Charles Maurras were the most prominent French influence on Quebec nationalists at the time. Depending on the European or American historians or political scientists you read, their nationalism was extreme right-wing or a form of fascism.

To summarise the findings of my book: the fanatical Jew spewed out by their feverish pens had a pendulous, crooked nose which was evidence of its criminal propensity, crooked fingers and a repulsive odour caused by his dirtiness. He soils public parks. He is a criminal and suffers from mental illness. He is responsible for capitalism and communism and is bent on controlling the world, as demonstrated in the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. He is the devil incarnate. Capitalism is evil in itself mainly because it allows the Jew to exploit the nation and infect it with unnameable germs; democracy is evil because it is the tool of capitalism and of the Jews. Modernity incarnated in the cosmopolitan cities, the cinema and jazz is the work of the Jew because in it blossoms all cankers and putrefaction. In brief, he (the Jew) is genuinely the enemy in our midst.

But the Jew cannot rule alone. Enter his nefarious sidekick, the Traitor. The true French Canadian is entirely determined by the powerful forces of 'the blood, the soil and the past', wrote Lionel Groulx, echoing the famous expression penned by Maurice Barrès – 'the blood, the soil and the dead', but Groulx saw the ideal as very rare. Most French Canadians were 'too much like those we see cluttering the streets: beings without consistency, without dignity, without pride, whom one would say are from no race, no country; mockeries of men who are an insult to mankind, and above all an insult to Catholic education'.

Replicating the logic of Charles Maurras and his movement *L'Action française*, only French Canadians who follow his nationalism are worthy of being called French Canadians. The others are devoting their time and effort to helping the Jew to use capitalism, democracy and modernity, thereby destroying the province of Quebec and the world for his own benefit.

Although society is ravaged by miasmas, destruction and death brought by liberalism, the Jew and the Traitor, there is hope: fascism.

Weak minds which believe in democracy at the expense of the Church and Christ react with horror to fascism in all its shapes and forms. This, despite the fact that certain nations are currently very content, experiencing the most glorious kind of rebirth under this political system (... in Mussolini's country, for example, they would see how a real head of state goes about inculcating the taste and passion for greatness and resurrection in a moribund nation).

Such a national state would reconcile the 'de jure country from the real country', a leitmotif copied word for word from Charles Maurras and his monthly journal *L'Action française*. 'I mean by a French State ... a

re-establishment of the link or identity between the “legal country” and the “real country”.’

The economist Esdras Minville who founded the monthly *L'Action nationale*, successor to *L'Action française*, takes his inspiration for the future from the National Socialism in Germany as understood by Gonzague de Reynold: ‘If they mean to give it back its dignity, pride, independence, its love of living the German life, then they are doing wholesome, intelligent, deliberate work ... What Gonzague de Reynold wrote about Hitler and his brown shirts in 1933 could have been written today about Abbé Groulx and *L'Action nationale*.’

In a fascist cum Nazi national state, the young generation will become no less than Supermen and Gods as opposed to the previous generation, labelled the Dead:

Those young men and girls who have been smitten with an absolute ideal, eagerly pushing their personality development to the limit, will realize that their birth into the Catholic faith ... During the course of their spiritual development, this ideal can transform them, if they so desire, into supermen and Gods.

As for the Jews, they will be parked in ghettos or deported to Palestine.

In articles and books that teach the history of Quebec or Canada, the nationalism of the 1920s and 1930s (often until 1960) is classified as ‘clerico-nationalism’.⁵ Its prominent supporters were Catholic priests – foremost among them Abbé Lionel Groulx. Its goal was to preserve the religion and traditions of French Canadians which were threatened by the industrialisation and urbanisation of the province. Clerico-nationalism glorified a past incarnated by la Nouvelle-France (New France), saw the family as the fundamental social unit and envisaged agriculture as the key to the economic development of Quebec. Groulx’s writings stated that the political independence of the latter was deemed unavoidable but always postponed.⁶ The concept of clerico-nationalism glosses over the anti-Semitism and fascism of Abbé Groulx and his followers. Yet, I found their writings from the 1930s readily available in university libraries, including every microfilmed issue of *Le Devoir* from 1929 to 1939.

Memory is the structuring of forgetfulness

It has been written that ‘memory is the structuring of forgetfulness’.⁷ Euphemisms, lies and omissions also play a part in shaping memory.

These tactics were used by prominent French Canadians coming of age during the Second World War when they wrote their memoirs. Reading the memoirs of Pierre Elliott Trudeau, René Lévesque, Gérard Pelletier and others,⁸ I was struck by how little they reminisced about events they acknowledged to have been of tremendous importance.

René Lévesque, born on 24 August 1922, was a well-known journalist who became a Liberal minister in the provincial government. He shepherded the nationalisation of electricity companies in the early 1960s. In 1967, he launched the Mouvement Souveraineté-Association (Sovereignty-Association Movement),⁹ which morphed into Le Parti Québécois (The Quebecker Party), a political party advocating the sovereignty of the province of Quebec while retaining some economic association with Canada. Having joined the American Psychological Warfare Department as a reporter at the request of Phill Robb of the Office of War Information, he covered the war in Europe, where he claimed to have witnessed the first minutes of Hermann Goering's surrender to the GIs.¹⁰

Lévesque writes in his memoirs that he enlisted because of a 'ravenous hunger for war experience' and perhaps a desire to protect democracy.¹¹ However, according to his biographer, Pierre Godin, Lévesque made numerous attempts to dodge military service, which are not mentioned in his reminiscences.¹² Furthermore, on the day his memoirs were launched, the then-retired politician admitted that his account of Hermann Goering's surrender was pure fiction, as had been his witnessing the corpses of Mussolini and his mistress hanging in the street in Milan.¹³

Pierre Elliott Trudeau, born on 18 October 1919, was a lawyer, future Liberal Minister of Justice and Attorney General in the Federal Government and Prime Minister of Canada from 1968 to 1979 and from 1980 to 1984.¹⁴ Over the course of his political career, he steadfastly opposed the independence of Quebec and remained an unflinching advocate of Canadian Federalism. He was 20 years old when the Second World War broke out.

Trudeau writes in his memoirs that he was indifferent to the discussions his fellow students at the Université de Montréal (University of Montreal) had about the Battle of Britain and the London Blitz. Like many French Canadians, he doubted that it was a just war but rather that it was a 'settling of scores among the superpowers'. As an afterthought, he adds curtly: 'And then, of course, there was the conscription issue.'¹⁵

The conscription crisis

The conscription issue involved a plebiscite the Canadian government held on 27 April 1942, on the following question, 'Are you in favour

of releasing the Government from any obligations arising out of any past commitments restricting the methods of raising men for military service?¹⁶

Some 72.9 per cent of French-Canadian voters answered No, while in the other provinces, 80 per cent answered Yes. The League for the Defense of Canada was created on 22 January at the home of Abbé Groulx. André Laurendeau was named its principal Executive Officer. While this League had worked tirelessly to promote the No side, this was not its only goal. At its first public meeting on 11 February 1942, the crowd chanted, 'Down with the Gazette!' 'Down with the Jews!' At a youth rally at the Jean-Talon market on 24 March, the crowd jeered at 'the International Jewish Finance', 'the Toronto Two Hundred' and the English newspaper *Montreal Gazette*. A small group screamed, 'Kill them! Kill them!' and smashed the windows of shops believed to be owned by Jews. I learnt later that Pierre Elliott Trudeau participated in that event.¹⁷

As noted, the conscription issue was a vehicle to promote other agendas. A survey was held to ascertain why former members of *Le Bloc populaire canadien* (previously the League for the Defense of Canada) had joined the party. Only 5.4 per cent of former *Le Bloc populaire canadien* members mentioned conscription as the main reason for joining the party. Hatred of old political parties was invoked by 16.9 per cent of the 152 former members and 23.1 per cent by the influence of friends or the pressure of events.¹⁸ For André Laurendeau, *Le Bloc populaire canadien* was the 'instrument of the legitimate revenge of Canadians against their corrupt masters'. It would 'end the nightmare of the old party system and establish a social and national regime that will treat men like men'. There was indeed much more than opposing conscription in the minds of the members and supporters of the League for the Defense of Canada and of its successor. Maybe there was not even an alleged 'conscription crisis', suspected its leading architect and creator, André Laurendeau: 'In the full and formal sense of the term, conscription never occurred. Was this whole long story then nothing but a sinister farce?'

Trudeau and Lévesque, leaders of the great political divide in Quebec for more than four decades (1970–2010), helped shape the prevailing memory of the Second World War.¹⁹ Their memoirs considered the Second World War to be of minor importance in Quebec, save for the conscription crisis.²⁰

Sounds of silence

There had to be more to Trudeau's and Levesque's experiences of the Second World War than what they publicly revealed, especially since they had stated that they were keenly aware of its importance.²¹ What was their youthful stance on Pétain and the Vichy regime? On fascism, Mussolini, Hitler? A deafening silence resonated in their memoirs. Was it evidence of some truth that had remained hidden in plain sight? After all, the fascism and the anti-Semitism in the writings of Lionel Groulx, *L'Action nationale*, the *Jeune-Canada* and *Le Devoir* had been there all along for all to see.

I surmised that their uneasy silence hid their attraction, if not their support, for the government of Philippe Pétain, fascist Italy and perhaps even Nazi Germany. I was proven right to a large extent. In the 1930s, Lévesque and Pierre Trudeau, like so many others of their generation, had studied in classical colleges run by the Jesuits. They were fed a steady diet of extreme right-wing nationalism cum fascism, with its aversion to democracy, political parties and capitalism.²²

Both admired Lionel Groulx's nationalism and were impressed by his novel *L'appel de la race* (*The Call of the Race*), which claimed that people from different races could not reproduce without dire consequences. The children of the novel's protagonists – Jules de Lantagnac (French Canadian) and Maud Fletcher (English) – have severe intellectual and psychological issues bordering on mental illness. Quoting Maurice Barres, one of France's leading proponents of extreme right-wing nationalism, Groulx wrote, 'The races' blood remains the same through the centuries.'

François Hertel, the pen name of the Jesuit Rodolphe Dubé, taught at the colleges Jean-de-Brébeuf, Ste-Marie and St-Ignace. He became a lifelong friend of Pierre Trudeau. His book on 1930s youth, entitled *Leur inquiétude* (*Their Concern/Their Worry*), published in 1936, made a deep impression on future provincial and federal prime ministers. In it, he parroted much of Lionel Groulx's nationalism, which does not come as a surprise when one knows that this influential book was a collection of articles published in *L'Action nationale*. The conquest of New France by the British in 1759 was blamed for the Depression that plagued French Canadians in the 1930s. Three threats assailed them, as terrible as they were all-encompassing and vague: 'anglicization, denationalization and protestantisation'. Ottawa imposed parliamentary partisanship contrary to the French Canadians' national temperament. The French Canadians

have become water carriers since the industrialisation of the province of Quebec. The financial trusts crushed them economically. The rural exodus to the cities, where they came into contact with Protestants, interethnic marriages, radio, movie theatres, cars and political corruption, plagued the nation.

François Hertel, together with two other Jesuits and a layman,²³ established a secret society named Les Frères Chasseurs (also called les LX).²⁴ Its mission was to gather together intellectuals who would prepare the accession of Quebec to independence through revolution, violent if necessary.²⁵

At that point in my research, a friend gave me a book by a former LX member, François-J. Lessard.²⁶ He claimed that Pierre Elliott Trudeau had been a member of that organisation. Lessard asserted that Trudeau joined it in 1937 when he was 18. I met with the author several times to gather evidence of Trudeau's membership and activities in the LX.²⁷ I eventually gained access to François-J. Lessard's personal papers in the basement of his home. They were scattered in boxes among other items such as kitchen implements and rubber boots. In there, I found evidence of the involvement of Pierre Trudeau, Jean Drapeau and others in this secret society.

Some of Trudeau's unfortunate actions became public knowledge: he participated in a theatre play claiming that Nazi Germany would be as bad for French Canadians as the British Empire, and he gave a speech tinted with anti-Semitism supporting Jean Drapeau, the future mayor of Montreal²⁸ and a candidate for Le Bloc populaire canadien in Outremont. Other actions were left private, like his role as an intermediary between Lionel Groulx and Father Marie-Joseph d'Anjou when a split within the Bloc Populaire canadien threatened its existence.

Many members of the LX wrote in *Le Quartier latin* and joined the Bloc universitaire created in 1937. Trudeau was a member of the Bloc universitaire and was elected to its Montreal (regional) board at the end of March 1938.

In the summer of 1938, the Bloc universitaire organised a trip to Nazi Germany. In the 11 November 1938 edition of *Le Quartier latin*, under the pen name of Mercure, a student wrote that all German students were Nazis, which made Hitler happy because he had done so much for them, ensuring them a splendid future. Their intense nationalism made the Germans sound of character, wrote Mercure. 'Nazis believe that it is the best way to ensure the nation's common good, and that is the "raison d'être" of the universities.' Finally, asserts Mercure, 'Germans are pacifists and want to live in peace with everyone.'²⁹

Other articles published in the same student newspaper praised fascist Italy, the National Revolution of Marshal Pétain and the Portuguese dictator Salazar, and attacked Jewry for its communism and financial control over the world. Trudeau was a student at the University of Montreal from 1940 to 1943 and one of the editors of its student newspapers. While not authoring such articles, he was very likely aware of them.

Again, hidden in plain sight.

My biggest surprise came when I found a postcard, dated 10 October 1948, that Trudeau had sent to his friend François-J. Lessard and his wife, Lise, while he was travelling abroad. He muses on Mesopotamia, ‘cradle of humankind, Laurentie, cradle of the new world! To you, the responsibility to make it happen. And to me to come back as soon as possible.’ After the Second World War ended, the 29-year-old Trudeau still extolled the dream of La Laurentie – an independent Quebec – to a couple of fellow members of the LX. As late as 1947, Trudeau publicly condemned the ‘system of the political parties that poisons our people’ in *Notre Temps*.

In his memoirs, Trudeau remains mute on the anti-liberal and anti-democratic ideology of many of his Jesuit teachers at the college Jean-de-Brébeuf. He also fails to mention the support for fascism and Nazism in *Le Quartier latin*, his membership of Les Frères Chasseurs/LX and the Bloc Universitaire and his deep attachment to La Laurentie that lasted into adulthood.

Vindication

Four years after my third book, *Essais sur l'imprégnation fasciste au Québec*, was published, which included the revelations about Trudeau's youth, his biographers Max and Monique Nemni corroborated and considerably elaborated on my findings in their 2006 book, *Young Trudeau: Son of Quebec, Father of Canada*. Unlike me, they had full access to the former prime minister's personal archives.³⁰

Vichy French collaborators with the Nazi regime

Many Vichy French collaborators who took refuge in Quebec City after the Second World War³¹ were greeted with open arms by a handful of influential Quebec City and Montreal notables.³² For example, Dr Georges-Benoît Montel³³ was introduced to Premier Maurice Duplessis.

Count Jacques Dugé de Bernonville³⁴ remains the best-known case of Vichy French collaborators who took refuge in Quebec and became somewhat of a 'cause célèbre'.³⁵ He had come to Quebec City disguised as a priest under the name of Jacques Benoît. The city's nationalist elite received him warmly. Count Jacques Dugé de Bernonville was imprisoned on 4 September 1948, after a deportation order had been issued. He had requested permanent residency from federal authorities.

Two days later, the Committee for the Defense of Political Refugees was established to pressure the federal government into allowing Jacques Dugé de Bernonville and other French Nazi collaborators to become landed immigrants. Its president was Philippe Hamel. Five days later, a petition of 6,000 signatures favouring de Bernonville was sent to the federal government.³⁶ The champions of the exiles' cause were two former stalwarts of the Bloc populaire canadien, Philippe Hamel and René Chaloult, the latter being the most active.

Their fight continued their support for Marshal Pétain's Vichy France, Mussolini's fascist Italy and Salazar's New State (*Estado Nuovo*) in Portugal. Furthermore, Nazi Germany did not start the Second World War, wrote Philippe Hamel and André Laurendeau. According to the latter, 'The Polish Government has grave responsibilities to bear in the origin of the Second World War. Its intransigence, probably encouraged by Great Britain, brought on Hitler's armed coup.' Taking their cue from Pétain's National Revolution, they saw the hands of the Freemasons, the Jews and the communists behind the deportation orders received by de Bernonville and some other Vichy French collaborators. 'If Jacques de Bernonville had been called Bernovitch, if he had hunted down the noble Marshal of France, if he had been a Communist or an anticlerical fanatic, well then, all our Keenleysides and company would have embraced him tenderly and naturalized him Canadian,' René Chaloult cried out in the Provincial Legislative Assembly.

In the end, the Canadian authorities relented in four cases of Vichy French collaborators and granted them the right to stay but stood firm on the de Bernonville case. On 17 August 1951, he left for Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, where he was murdered in 1972, aged 71. The official explanation was that he had been strangled with his own necktie by his housekeeper's son, who claimed to have been possessed by voodoo. A Brazilian journalist disputed that explanation. Dirceu Aives, a reporter with the newspaper *Diário da Noite*, recalled that the victim's hands and feet were carefully bound, which suggested that the assassin was in full possession of his mental faculties and not a novice.

The reporter also suspected that there was an accomplice to the murder and wondered if Klaus Barbie's hand, one of Bernonville's old 'acquaintances' from Lyon, was implicated in the murder. Barbie then lived in exile in Bolivia under the name of Klaus Altmann. According to that version of events, Barbie, the former Gestapo Colonel and Chief of Section IV of the Sipo-SD in Lyon, feared what de Bernonville might reveal in the memoirs he was writing at the time of his death.

The personal and confidential ambassador of Premier Maurice Duplessis in the Vatican

I thought I had completed my research on the French Nazi collaborators when I phoned Berthe (maiden name Denis), Jean Bruchesi's widow. Bruchesi had been a writer and historian and the Under-Secretary of the province of Quebec during those years. I explained my research to Berthe, who exclaimed: 'This ungrateful Richemont! We helped him, and when we attended a party at his home in Westmount, he met with Duplessis in a private room and ignored us. After all we had done for him!' I had never come upon the name of Richemont. I commiserated with her on the regrettable ingratitude of some people and asked questions about Richemont. She told me that his real name was Paul Erwin Eberhard Reifenrath³⁷ and that he had lived in Alsace, France. Upon his arrival in Canada in 1947 or 1948, he used the name Leyzen. His real name was never to be uttered. He then changed his false name to Chambord after the street where he lived for a while.

When he came to live in Westmount, his name had become Paul-Éverard Richemont. Eager to know more about him, I read about Premier Maurice Le Noblet Duplessis (1890–1959), the head of the Union Nationale and the Premier of Quebec during 1936–9 and 1944–59.³⁸ I found in Conrad Black's biography of Maurice Duplessis³⁹ partial confirmation of what Berthe Bruchesi had told me and more: the premier had hired the Vichy French collaborator as a propagandist during the Asbestos Strike that lasted from 15 February to 1 July 1949. About 5,000 miners walked off the job at four asbestos mines in Asbestos and Thetford Mines.⁴⁰ Expanding the research done by Conrad Black enabled me to piece together the following story: Paul Erwin Eberhard Reifenrath, better known in Duplessis' circle as Paul-Éverard Richemont, had penned writings supporting Duplessis' stance in the Abestos Strike, foremost among them in the anonymous *Bulletin Custos (Custos Report)* and had

also acted as Duplessis' personal and confidential ambassador in the Vatican from May 1950 to sometime in 1951 'with the rank of minister'.

The rift between the bishops supporting the striking Asbestos miners and their colleagues opposing them had created some turmoil in the quiet corridors of the Vatican. Once in Rome, Richemont championed the cause of the premier 'of the only Catholic government in North America'. Richemont authored an issue of the *Custos Bulletin* (125 copies) to be put in the hands of the pope and cardinals of the Curia. Like its earlier and more extensive version, the *Custos Report* was full of worn-out, cliché-ridden stories about the Communist–Jewish–Freemason conspiracy (that he called the Subversion) for world domination. The unions were pawns in the hands of the nefarious Subversion, and Duplessis acted as a valiant knight against it. For reasons not clear, Duplessis trusted Richemont less and less, and in 1951 the latter left Canada and Italy for good and died in Peru in the 1970s.

The Asbestos Strike

I met with Father Jean d'Auteuil Richard, then Director of the Jesuits' magazine *Relations*, to learn more about the Asbestos Strike and the role played by Paul-Éverard Richemont.⁴¹ Father Richard told me that the strike originated from the Silicosis Scandal in St-Rémi d'Amherst and that the archives of the Jesuits in Saint-Jérôme were where I should research. Unbeknownst to me at the time, my fourth book was born.⁴²

I perused the files of the Silicosis Scandal and its main protagonists in the Jesuit archives in Saint-Jérôme, north of Montreal, Québec.⁴³ The *Alexandria Quartet* by Lawrence Durrell came to my mind. In the first two novels, the story is the same but told differently by each narrator, who has information that others do not have or has a different interpretation of them. Here are the bare facts.

In 1948, 11 months before the Asbestos Strike, Burton LeDoux and Father Jean-d'Auteuil Richard devoted an entire issue of the Jesuit magazine *Relations* to the devastating and sometimes fatal effects of silicosis on miners in Saint-Rémi d'Amherst. Their widows did not receive any financial compensation. Burton LeDoux accused the silica mining companies of criminal negligence, targeting the Timmins family of Canada. Some members of this family were minority shareholders, with seats on the boards of directors of Noranda mines which controlled Canada China Clay and Silica Ltd and ran the mining operations at St Rémi d'Amherst.⁴⁴

The Jesuit authors predicted that the same fate awaited those miners who would soon be working to extract iron ore in Ungava. The Timmins Group, the owner of the Noranda mines, exploited the iron ore in Ungava, a pet project of Maurice Duplessis.

The premier of the province of Quebec was incensed by the article and demanded a retraction from LeDoux and Father Richard. The Jesuit order dismissed the whole editorial team. On 12 January 1949, the newspaper *Le Devoir* published an article by Burton LeDoux on the ravages of asbestosis among the miners working in East Broughton in the Eastern Townships. On Sunday, 13 February 1949, some 2,000 miners in Asbestos went on an illegal strike, against their union leaders' wishes. The day after, 3,000 colleagues in Thetford Mines joined. On 24 June, they returned to work, followed by the Asbestos miners on 1 July.

Conclusion

The Franco-American Burton LeDoux is truly the unsung hero of the fight for industrial health in the province of Quebec. For him and Father Jean d'Auteuil Richard and, to a lesser extent, for the newspaper *Le Devoir*, the strike was first and foremost about the health of the workers threatened by asbestosis.

Premier Duplessis and his acolytes, including the mining companies, some bishops and Jesuits, blamed the strike on agents of communist subversion. The miners demanded 'a \$1 per hour wage, nine paid holidays, union participation in the management of the mines – a pension, and action to limit illness-causing asbestos dust'.⁴⁵ Pierre Elliott Trudeau had stayed just a few days in Asbestos during the miners' strike. Nonetheless, he edited a book⁴⁶ that created the myth surrounding the event and wrote that neither the place where it occurred nor the industry were significant. The Asbestos Strike of 1949 was the moment when the working class fought to gain its rightful place in society. Only by happenstance did it occur in Asbestos and Thetford Mines. It became recognised as a unique historical moment whose legacy was accepted unconditionally for a long time and by people who later became ideological opponents of Pierre Trudeau, including members of the Front for the Liberation of Quebec, an organisation devoted to establishing an independent Quebec, by violent means if necessary.⁴⁷

The miners actually gained very little from their five-month strike. Their wages were increased by 5 cents an hour. Many were not rehired.

The union's demand that the company submit all promotions, transfers and terminations to it was ignored, as was the health issue. It was only after a second asbestos strike lasted seven-and-a-half months in 1975 that the miners were finally adequately protected against asbestosis.

This is the end of my intellectual historical journey for now. Or is it? Just as I was finishing the article you are reading, I found out about a reel in the Conrad Black archives at York University entitled, 'Paul-Éverard Richemont and Maurice Duplessis, 1941–1959'. Could this be the prelude to another article?

Note on contributor

Esther Delisle has a BA in Political Science and Journalism and an MA and a PhD in Political Science from Laval University in Canada. She studied for three years at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem during her doctoral studies. Her postdoctoral fellowship was in the History Department at McGill University in Montreal. The abridged version of her PhD dissertation was a bestseller in Quebec (1993). Esther wrote two other books on the repressed history of fascism in Quebec and a third on the Asbestos Strike of 1949 in Quebec. A documentary was made about her historical work, *Je me souviens*. She has also published several articles and reviews. She has worked as an investigative, freelance journalist and translator and has been an academic tutor for many years.

Declarations and conflicts of interest

Research ethics statement

Not applicable to this article.

Consent for publication statement

Not applicable to this article.

Conflicts of interest statement

The author declares no conflict of interest with this work. All efforts to sufficiently anonymise the author during peer review of this article have been made. The author declares no further conflicts with this article.

Notes

- 1 Unless mentioned otherwise, quotations in this section are from Delisle, *The Traitor and the Jew*.
- 2 Zeev Sternhell (1935–2020) was an Emeritus Professor of political science at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and the author of several books, which were translated into many languages, and numerous articles. His books included: *La droite révolutionnaire, 1885–1914*; *Ni droite ni gauche: L'idéologie fasciste en France*; *Les anti-lumières*; and *Maurice Barrès et le nationalisme français*. He was elected to the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities in 2010 and to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences in 2016.
- 3 For the sake of conciseness and clarity, some chapters of my second and third books are not mentioned in this article. In my second book, *Myths, Memory and Lies*, for example, the chapter entitled 'Sleepless in Quebec City: The anxieties of an American consul', which is based on my research at the State Department Archives in Washington, DC, exposed for the first time the existence of the Iron Guard, a secret fascist organisation operating mainly in Quebec City; 'A tale of two statues' analyses the historical memory that crystallised around the statues of Maurice Duplessis and Lionel Groulx.
- 4 The Nazi affirmation that the 'press, art, literature, the cinema, the theatre are all areas where the young Hitler sniffed out the Jews who "behave like the worst bacilli and poison of our souls"' is of the same ilk. De Fontette, *Le racisme*, 74.
- 5 The term was coined by historian Paul-André Linteau. See Linteau, Durocher and Robert, 'Le courant clérico-nationaliste', vol. 1: *Histoire du Québec contemporain, 700–7*, to describe French-Canadian nationalism in the 1920s.
- 6 For Charles Maurras of L'Action française, royalism did not mean actually restoring the French monarchy by taking power but preparing public opinion to do so eventually. Creating true French Canadians came first. Maurras and Groulx were not interested in seeing their political movements seize power. They were happy to keep working indefinitely on creating a royalist or a nationalist mind.
- 7 Rousso, *The Vichy Syndrome*, 4.
- 8 Filion, *Fais ce que peux*; Gagnon, *Les Apostasies*, vols 1 and 2; Pelletier: *Les années d'impatience*. Gérard Pelletier became a minister in the Trudeau government and served as the Canadian ambassador to Paris. See Behiels and Cooper, 'Gérard Pelletier'.
- 9 Archibald and Harvey. 'Sovereignty-Association'.
- 10 Godin, *René Lévesque*, 99–100.
- 11 Lévesque, *Memoir*, 84–5.
- 12 Godin, *René Lévesque*, 99–100.
- 13 MacKenzie, 'Lévesque rectifies tales of Goering, Mussolini'; Aubin, 'Lévesque admits that his new book contains a lie'.
- 14 Whitaker, de Bruin and McIntosh, 'Pierre Elliott Trudeau'.
- 15 Trudeau, *Memoirs*, 32.
- 16 'Conscription Plebiscite'.
- 17 Unless mentioned otherwise, quotations from this part of the article are from Delisle, 'Sounds of silence', in *Myths, Memory and Lies*.
- 18 Comeau, *Le Bloc populaire*, 31.
- 19 In 'La province de Québec au moment de la grève', Pierre Elliott Trudeau qualifies the French-Canadian nationalism of 1900–50 as defensive, and there is a word on the anti-Semitism of L'Action nationale in the 1930s or its fascist leanings. According to him, nationalism in the 1930s and 1940s was unrealistic and characterised by authoritarianism. Delisle, *Essais*, 92–5.
- 20 In its 1998 edition, the most widely used history book in colleges and universities in Quebec devoted less than four pages to the Second World War: see Linteau, Durocher and Robert, *Histoire du Québec contemporain*, 124–7.
- 21 Unless mentioned otherwise, quotations from this part of the article are from Delisle, 'Fragments d'une jeunesse retrouvée'.
- 22 It predated the 1930s. See Pomeyrols, *Les Intellectuels québécois*.
- 23 Father Thomas Migneault, S.J., Father Marie-Joseph d'Anjou, S.J. and Jean Ouvrard.
- 24 It took its name after the Association des Frères-Chasseurs, which was a secret society that aimed to free Canada from British rule. It was founded by Patriotes exiles following their defeat in 1837. See Dagenais, 'Association des Frères-Chasseurs'.

- 25 For more on Les Frères chasseurs/LX by a former member and friend of Pierre Elliott Trudeau, see Roux, *Nous sommes tous des acteurs*.
- 26 Lessard, *Message au Frère Trudeau*.
- 27 As far as I know, I was the first to make the fact of Pierre Trudeau's membership of Les Frères Chasseurs public in my book *Essais sur l'imprégnation fasciste au Québec*, published in 2002. A question was asked in the Canadian House of Commons, where Pierre Elliott Trudeau acknowledged that he had been a member of a secret movement whose aim was to establish an independent Quebec by pacific means without mentioning its name.
- 28 Mayor of Montreal from 1954 to 1957 and from 1960 to 1986. McKenna and Lambert, 'Jean Drapeau'.
- 29 Many questions remain unanswered. Who hid behind the pseudonym Mercure? Who were the students who travelled to Germany? Could each student afford to do so during the economic crisis of the 1930s? If not, who provided the money necessary for the trip?
- 30 Nemni and Nemni, *Young Trudeau*. It has become part of the official biography of the former Canadian prime minister; see English, 'Trudeau'.
- 31 Unless mentioned otherwise, quotations from this part of the article are from Delisle, 'A strange sort of hero'.
- 32 The following is the list of the French Nazi collaborators that I could establish: Georges Simenon, Paul Erwin Eberhard Reifenrath, Jacques Dugé de Bernonville, Dr Georges-Benoît Montel, Dr André-Charles Emmanuel Boussat, Julien Labeledan, Jean-Louis Huc, Dr Michel-Lucien Seigneur, Roger Pau, Victor Keyserling, Gabriel Dorget, Dr Masquin, M. Jacquet, Robert J. Garry.
- 33 Dr Georges-Benoît Montel (also known as Gaston Ringeval) had been a member of the Parti Populaire Français, the Legionnaire Security Service, the Militia and the assistant mayor of Annecy. On 19 April 1945, the Court of Justice of Haute-Savoie condemned him to lifetime forced labour, with loss of citizenship and confiscation of property. He arrived in New York in 1946 and in Montreal in September 1946.
- 34 Count Jacques Dugé de Bernonville was named responsible for Jewish Affairs by the Vichy government. He organised the Legionnaire Security Service in Rabat. In 1942, in Paris, he was seconded to the Ministry of National Education and acted as Chief Officer of the permanent Franc-Garde of the French Militia. In Paris, in November 1942, he became secretary of the African Phalanx and founded the French Volunteer Corps. In December 1943, he became a member of the Eighth Brandenburg Unit of the Waffen SS. In January 1944, he was appointed Commander of the Forces for the Maintenance of Order in Lyon (under Klaus Barbie's authority). Finally, from 20 June to 14 August, he acted as the Military Governor of Lyon. De Bernonville stood accused of collaboration with the enemy, attacking state security, arbitrary arrests, willful arson, violence and theft. He was condemned to death *in absentia* by the Court of Justice of Toulouse and the Appeals Court of Toulouse, and fled to Canada and later Brazil, where he was murdered in 1972 by his servant's son.
- 35 Lavertu, *L'affaire Bernonville*.
- 36 As of 15 December 1950, 543 presentations, including 13 petitions, had been submitted to the federal government.
- 37 Paul Erwin Eberhard Reifenrath was a journalist. From 1932 to 1934, he acted as Secretary-general of the pro-Nazi movement Solidarité française and editor of the paper of the same name; he was a correspondent in Alsace-Lorraine for the ultra-nationalist paper *La Victoire*, run by the French politician Gustave Hervé. In 1934, Reifenrath collaborated with the weekly *Die Staatsreform* and *l'Union paysanne*. He was the main figure of the anti-Semitic movement in Strasbourg. On 1 January 1937, he became the editor of *La Voix d'Alsace et de Lorraine*. He was the author of the brochure, *Les Juifs en France mais surtout en Alsace* (n.d.) and the founder of the weekly *La nouvelle voix d'Alsace*.
- 38 Black, 'Maurice Duplessis'.
- 39 Black, *Maurice Duplessis*.
- 40 Kucharsky and David, 'Asbestos Strike of 1949'.
- 41 Unless mentioned otherwise, quotations from this part of the article are from Delisle and Malouf, *Le quatuor d'Asbestos*.
- 42 Delisle and Malouf, *Le quatuor d'Asbestos*.
- 43 Fonds La Silicose, Fonds Relations, Fonds Émile Bouvier S.J., Fonds Jacques Cousineau S.J., Fonds Arthur Dubois S.J., Fonds Adélarde Dugré S.J., Fonds Léon Pouliot S.J., Fonds Paul Racine S.J., Fonds Jean-d'Auteuil Richard S.J.

- 44 The Canada China Clay & Silica Ltd closed its doors and destroyed its installations a few months after the scandal of the working conditions of its miners erupted in *Relations*. Destroying the evidence of its wrongdoing was seen as an admission of its guilt. Delisle and Malouf, *Le quatuor d'Asbestos*, 17.
- 45 Kucharsky and David, 'Asbestos Strike of 1949'.
- 46 Trudeau, *La grève de l'amiante*.
- 47 Delisle, *Essais*, 130.

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