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Fernande Roy. *Progrès, harmonie, liberté: le libéralisme des milieux d'affaires francophones à Montréal au tournant du siècle.* Montréal: Editions Boréal, 1988. Pp. 301. \$22.95.

Nominated for the Governor General's Award and winner of the Lionel Groulx Prize for the best history book of the year in Québec, this study by Fernande Roy should be in every college and university library in the country. It not only argues persuasively for a significant reinterpretation of an important period in our history, but this analysis of the francophone business press offers the reader a good introduction to the concerns and techniques of recent, mainstream, Québécois historiography. Written in a clear and often amusing style, this work illustrates both the strengths and weaknesses of this distinct, North American, historiographical tradition.

For those unfamiliar with the substantial progress in the writing of Québec history in the 1980s, the main argument of this book will come somewhat as a shock. Roy argues that liberalism played a significant role in

Québec at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries and furthermore that this liberal world-view was clearly and consistently articulated by the developing French-language business press of the period. This thesis directly challenges what had been the disciplinary consensus until the early 1980s and significantly enriches the growing body of current research that tends to minimize any exceptional, traditionalist, characterization of Québec before the Quiet Revolution.

Analysts from the nationalist right, such as Lionel Groulx and Michel Brunet, from the federalist centre, such as Fernand Ouellet and Pierre Elliot Trudeau, from the neo-nationalist social democratic left, such as Fernand Dumont and Jean-Paul Bernard, and even the neo-marxist social scientists, such as Gilles Bourque, Nicole Laurin-Frenette, and Denis Monière, had all agreed that the political and ideological history of Québec was dominated by a catholic, conservative world-view. Naturally these writers differed over why and for how long this was the case and indeed if this was a good thing or not, but, as Roy shows in her excellent review of the literature, until the late 1970s the disciplinary consensus was to treat the intellectual history of Québec for much of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as a monolith and in opposition to the progressive attitudes so prevalent elsewhere in North America. Notably through the Linteau, Durocher, and Robert textbook *Histoire du Québec contemporain*, the first volume of which was published in 1979, an opposing view on this impor-

tant issue gained credence. Instead of a monolithic conservative ideology, they argued there was a plurality of conflicting world-views within the intelligentsia of Québec. Furthermore, economic liberalism was presented as being the rising ideology of the last half of the nineteenth century in Québec as elsewhere on the continent. This argument in favour of the importance of liberalism, however, was weakened by a lack of analytical rigour: a discourse in favour of economic development and modernity was simply assumed to be a liberal discourse. As André Vachet has pointed out, an argument in favour of liberalism must go beyond the merely economic and establish the existence of a coherent and all-encompassing liberal world-view. Roy accepts this challenge and attempts to establish that a rigorously defined liberalism characterized the ethics, and the economical, social, and political thinking, of French-language businessmen in Montréal during the period 1880 to 1914.

Québécois historiography has been strongly influenced by European, notably French, traditions and as a result both the concepts and the terminology used appear to the uninitiated as distinctly foreign and apparently left-wing. Roy's study is no exception to this general rule, but to her credit she does explain clearly what she means when using terms like ideology and social class. In this study, ideologies are not determined by economic factors or social relations, but rather are unified, hierarchical, symbolic systems which give meaning to man in society. The

businessmen studied by Roy are not members of a social class, be it *moyenne* or *grande bourgeois*, but rather form a distinct social group defined by their internal associational linkages, in this case membership in the *Chambre de commerce de Montréal*. Despite the language used, therefore, Roy's study is very much in the mainstream of North American intellectual history. Historians are in history and Roy's denial of the importance of social class is in keeping with a more general trend away from critical social theory towards a centrist, pragmatic approach within Québec intellectual circles over the past decade.

How then does Roy define liberalism? Following in the steps of André Vachet, she defines the essential cornerstone of liberalism as the possessive individualism first discerned by C.B. MacPherson in his now classic analysis of seventeenth-century British political theory. The individual is free to own property and therefore free to be. Thus the two other major concepts of liberalism, liberty and equality, are not absolutes, but exist as part of a unified hierarchy of values defined by possessive individualism. Liberty is the freedom of the individual to exercise property rights, a freedom whose limits are defined by the property rights of other individuals. But equality should not be confused with egalitarianism, for it is merely an equality in the right to enjoy liberty. In this system of values, since primacy is accorded to the individual's right to property, the basis of liberalism is economical rather than political and rights are individual rather than collective. In the working out of her argu-

ment this economic, individual nature of liberalism becomes very important, because this non-political, anti-collective, philosophical basis means that, depending on the social context, liberalism can be a conservative political ideology. Indeed, Roy makes quite a convincing argument that in late nineteenth-century Québec, where the principal opposition was that of the collective rights of the working class, liberalism tended to be very conservative politically.

In order to establish the presence of a significant liberal current in Québec society during the period, Roy examines two weekly business publications linked to the *Chambre de commerce de Montréal*, *Le Moniteur du commerce* and the *Prix courant*. Her choice of these publications was in part justified by the pre-eminence of the Catholic Church in the intellectual life of the province and in particular its hegemony over the educational system, which meant, according to her, one should not expect to find liberal philosophical treatises being written in Québec. Her task, therefore, is to discern the existence of a liberal value system in both the regular reporting and the editorial commentaries of these papers. Roy chose not to do a quantitative analysis of discourse, opting instead for a qualitative thematic approach with numerous and sometimes extensive "representative" quotations from both papers, which are meant to elucidate the logic of the liberal world-view underlying the reporting. Four themes are examined in four distinct chapters (ethics, economic development, social, and political questions) and in each chapter

the period studied is treated as a single block, which permits her to mine her sources for appropriate examples over the thirty-five years examined.

The ethics of individualism are examined first. It is important for her to show that although certain issues or concepts, such as a desire for social harmony or a belief in the importance of material progress, might well be shared by other world-views, in this case they are rooted in a possessive individualism wherein liberty and equality are subordinate values and are therefore proof of liberalism. Life is a constant battle and material success the reward for hard work and individual initiative. Social and material progress is the result of the efforts of individuals in this constant struggle, but there are limits and logically enough the limits to competition are not those imposed by the social good or class harmony, but by the ability to make a profit. Unfair competition is unacceptable, because it impedes the rights of others to enjoy the fruits of their property. Interestingly enough, however, this insistence on the fair play of market forces does not extend to a critique of monopolistic practices, such as price fixing. Only when monopolies effectively disallow competition from entering the market place, as in the case of Holt's Montreal Light, Heat and Power Company, should they be controlled.

The analysis of economics concentrates on the role of the state, in particular the role of the federal government in economic development. It highlights the pan-Canadian perspective of these newspapers; French-Canadian enterprise is to be

encouraged, but should not be limited to French Canada. Government's responsibility is to ensure that the widest possible opportunity exists for the development of private property. Although Smith and ironically Say, rather than Malthus, Ricardo, or Mill, seem to be the economists of choice, there is little in the way of support for free trade or reciprocity. With the establishment of the National Policy in 1879, any modification to protective tariffs is seen as undue interference by the government which would negatively affect the business investments of individuals and firms.

The social question should be resolved by policies that promote harmonious relations between capital and labour; however the ideological roots of this position could hardly be more different than those associated with the much better-known Catholic doctrine of social harmony promulgated in the Papal Bull *Rerum Novarum*. Social harmony is possible due to the formal equality of all individuals, who can improve their situation when aided by an appropriate educational system. Excessive abuses may require state intervention, not however due to some greater social or moral interest, but because they constitute a form of unfair competition, while limiting individual growth. The material and social progress of society through the greatest expansion of individual property rights is what will in the long term ensure the greatest good for all. Similarly paternalism is eschewed because it is evocative of social or collective rights and obligations that may limit individual advancement. Through a constant celebration of the

self-made man and the importance of a strong individual work ethic, these newspapers tell the clerks and employees who might be among their readers that there is no fundamental divergence of interest between capital and labour.

Ostensibly non-partisan, these newspapers are on the whole quite conservative on political issues. The exception, and it is an important one for Roy's argument, is that the French-language business press campaigns strongly against the Catholic church's hegemony over the educational system in Québec. This campaign is stronger in the 1880s and early 1890s than after the turn of the century, but as Roy remarks elsewhere in her study this earlier period is one of encouragement of French-Canadian business progress, rather than one of celebration, which it will become during the Laurier years. The clerical control of education is seen as detrimental to the development of individual initiative and the necessary business skills for success in the modern world. Furthermore the curriculum of the classical colleges not only ill-prepares young men for the struggle of life, but diverts too many into the non-entrepreneurial pursuits of the liberal professions. Religion and religious values remain important, but they are fundamentally questions for the individual's conscience.

There are problems with this important study, particularly if viewed from a different paradigm than that of the author. The methodology used does not permit a scientific discourse of proof; another historian would presumably compile quite a different

collection of quotations from this same body of documents. The treatment by theme minimizes the significance of changes over time and in light of the significant rise in corporate concentration during the period, combined with the creation of two distinct capital markets in French and English Canada during these years, this abstraction from history is to say the least disconcerting. If history is the explanation of change over time, then this study does not significantly advance our understanding of the history of the French-Canadian businessmen or their community. The people who are ostensibly the subject of this study are notable by their absence. The analysis of the membership and nature of the *Chambre de commerce* is in this regard woefully inadequate.

In all fairness, however, this is not a study in business history, let alone a critical evaluation of the nature of capitalist development in Montréal during these years. The purpose of the book is to show that there was a significant liberal world-view in the city at the time and that it was articulated in a coherent manner by the business press. Here, too, one can raise objections, this time however from within the perspective of the author. This study posits that possessive individualism is the basis for liberalism; therefore, if one finds statements consistent with a unified hierarchical value system based on possessive individualism, then one has found a liberal discourse. The problem is simple enough. The concept of possessive individualism, at least as defined by its author C.B. MacPherson, is not the exclusive preroga-

tive of liberal ideology. In his classic study, MacPherson argued that all seventeenth-century British political theorists, from Hobbes to the Levellers, shared this perception. Liberal theorists, like Locke, built on possessive individualism, as did all his non-liberal opponents, because, at least according to MacPherson, it is the only definition of man that is consistent with the functioning of a market economy. In short, possessive individualism is the basis of bourgeois philosophy, not just the liberal variant. Few would disagree that the *Chambre de commerce* and its affiliated newspapers maintained a bourgeois discourse; one would hardly expect them to be campaigning for either feudalism or socialism.

Fernande Roy concludes her critique of the existing literature by saying that in order to understand liberalism what was needed was a study that used a rigorously defined problematic, which reflected the specific historical context of Québec at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries. I agree with her; we still need such a study.

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Roy Lowe. *Education in the Post-War Years: A Social History.* London and New York: Routledge, 1988. \$77.00.

“Social history” is a somewhat imprecise term, and the imprecision is