

The Rise and Fall of Quebec Maoism: 1970-1982

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We print below an edited presentation by comrade Charles Galarneau at the Thirteenth National Conference of the Trotskyist League/Ligue trotskyste, held in the summer of 2013. This talk continues a series on the history of the left and the Quebec national question that began at a TL/LT conference in 2011. “The Communist Party of Canada and the Quebec National Question,” also by comrade Galarneau, covered the early history of the socialist movement in Quebec, and in particular the stance toward Quebec of the Communist Party from its origins to the late 1950s. This talk was published in *SC* Nos. 174 and 175 (Fall 2012 and Winter 2012/13). The series has also taken up the work of the early Trotskyists toward Quebec. A year ago, we reprinted an historical document on the Quebec national question written in 1945 by Ross Dowson, for many years a leader of the Trotskyist movement in Canada (see *SC* No. 176, Spring 2013).

This presentation addresses the transition of a significant section of leftist radicals in Quebec from left nationalism to Maoism in the 1970s. Both the growth of Maoism and its spectacular demise were heavily shaped by the national question—the special circumstances arising from the unequal and forcible confinement of the Québécois nation within English-dominated Canada.

From our inception in 1975 in English Canada, our organization strongly opposed Anglo chauvinism and defended Quebec’s right to self-determination—i.e., to independence. However, we did not take a position advocating independence until 1995, following an intense re-examination of the question.

In advocating independence for Quebec, we seek to lay the basis for the workers in both English Canada and Quebec to see that the enemy is their own exploiters, not “the French” or “les anglais.” In English Canada, that means a fight to break the working class from the chauvinist labour tops and New Democrats who push deadly illusions in Canadian capitalism. In Quebec, it means combatting the nationalist politics of the Parti Québécois, a capitalist party promoted by the Quebec union bureaucracy, as well as those of Québec Solidaire, which today postures as a left alternative to the PQ. While Quebec labour is now bracing for attacks by a right-wing Liberal government under Philippe Couillard, the PQ has shown during its repeated terms in office that it is equally a class enemy of the workers. The social liberation of the working people of Quebec requires the perspective of revolutionary internationalism embodied in a Marxist vanguard party.

Today most of the Quebec left tails the petty-bourgeois nationalists of Québec Solidaire, as it has tailed various forms of Québécois nationalism for decades. But it also contains another historical tendency, one that claims to reject nationalism in the name of Marxism: the Maoist groups of the 1970s and the much smaller Parti Communiste Révolutionnaire (PCR) of today.

Yet these groups have never offered anything other than a dead end for youth and workers, not least in Quebec. Indeed, if you’ve ever sold our press in Montreal, you’re bound to have run into a washed-out, cynical baby boomer telling you how he wasted his youth in some “Marxist-Leninist” group. Many of these people even became famous: Gilles Duceppe, Françoise David, even media mogul Pierre Karl Péladeau. In English Canada, we all know former CUPE national president and now B.C. NDP MLA Judy Darcy, a long-ago member of the Canadian Communist League (Marxist-Leninist). Even the PCR—actually its predecessor Action Socialiste—spawned the current president of the CSN (Confederation of National Trade Unions), Jacques Létourneau.

We will go into the Maoists’ history in Quebec and their politics. One focus will be their particular views on the Quebec national question, which were key in both their rapid growth and their ultimate

demise. Inevitably, their initially healthy rejection of Québécois nationalism, in the absence of a genuine Marxist compass, led them into the arms of one form or another of reactionary *Canadian* nationalism. We will look into this, as well as our own intersection with these groups in the 1970s, including some of the limitations of our intervention. But first, a little bit of history.

The Quiet Revolution and the New Left

Along with international events such as the Cuban Revolution, the Vietnam War and the struggle for black rights in the U.S., the growth of the “far left” in Quebec in the 1970s was conditioned by the Quiet Revolution and the social struggles of the 1960s. As we have documented elsewhere, this was a period of massive social and labour unrest. This upheaval led to both the modernization of Quebec and the displacement of the Catholic church in the public sphere, along with the growth of a new class of francophone capitalists, displacing the old Anglo capitalist aristocracy of Westmount. And it produced a very large, youthful leftist milieu and an increasingly militant working class.

This radicalization led to severe repression, culminating in Liberal prime minister Pierre Trudeau’s War Measures Act of October 1970, as well as increasingly intense class struggle that built up to the semi-insurrectionary general strike of May 1972. At the same time, a new, secular Québécois nationalism took centre stage, culminating in the election victory, with trade-union support, of René Lévesque’s Parti Québécois in 1976 followed by the PQ’s sovereignty referendum in 1980.

Right at the centre of events at the time was a young man whose trajectory and politics shaped the debates of both the 1960s radicalization and 1970s Maoism.

Charles Gagnon was born in 1939, the 14th child of a farming family in Le Bic, near Rimouski in eastern Quebec. He enrolled at the Université de Montréal in the late 1950s and rapidly became radicalized, in part by encountering the conditions of Quebec’s industrial proletariat for the first time. In 1963, he met Pierre Vallières, who would go on to author the well-known book *Nègres Blancs d’Amérique*. Together they worked at the left-nationalist journal *Parti Pris* and in 1964 founded a more radical one, *Révolution Québécoise*. By 1966, they were leading a reborn Front de Libération du Québec (FLQ), giving it a more leftist colouration than its earlier manifestation a couple of years earlier.

That same year, while protesting at the United Nations in New York against the imprisonment of FLQ activists, they were arrested and extradited to Montreal. They were jailed there on trumped up charges until February 1970. Rearrested in October, they were finally released again in 1971, at which time they parted ways—Vallières embracing the PQ and Gagnon going in a totally different direction. We’ll get back to that.

The central ideological debate in the Quebec left of the 1960s was over how best to ally national liberation and socialism. *Parti Pris* and other similar tendencies took it for granted that they must give some kind of “critical support” to Québécois nationalism and the francophone bourgeoisie as a first step toward social liberation. With Vallières and Gagnon, this political tension was also personified: Vallières tended to favour nationalism, while Gagnon leaned more to emphasis on “social liberation.” But during the 1960s, this never came to an open clash.

The “October Crisis” radically altered everything. Trudeau sent the army to occupy Quebec and arrest hundreds of leftist and union militants. He claimed he was crushing an “insurrection” by the FLQ, which had kidnapped two government representatives, but his real purpose was to put an end to the widespread social turmoil in Quebec. Trudeau and his Quebec allies such as Montreal mayor Jean Drapeau and Liberal premier Robert Bourassa wished to clamp down on radical struggle with the fist of repression, but what resulted instead was further radicalization and also a sharp realignment of the Quebec left.

The Rise of Maoism in Quebec

If you rejected the status quo, the choices became clear: either join the PQ and seek sovereignty through peaceful means as part of a bourgeois-nationalist government, or reject the present system entirely. After finally getting out of jail in 1971 Vallières did the former. Publishing a pamphlet called

“L’Urgence de Choisir” (published in English as *Choose!*), he hopped onto the PQ bandwagon along with countless others such as Pierre Bourgault, the firebrand ex-leader of the left-nationalist RIN (Rally for National Independence). On the other hand, Charles Gagnon embraced “Marxism-Leninism,” i.e., Stalinism-Maoism, of which he was to become one of the most prominent leaders in Canada.

However, he was not the first to do so. Before we continue this story, we need to fly across the country and backtrack to 1963. Soon after the split between China and the Soviet Union, a young South Asian student at the University of British Columbia, Hardial Bains, founded a journal called *The Internationalist*. Four years later, Bains traveled to a Maoist conference in London and came back to form a “Marxist-Leninist” movement. Eventually dubbing itself the Communist Party of Canada (Marxist-Leninist) (CPC[ML]), it first appeared in Quebec at anglophone campuses in Montreal in 1968, and around 1970 at UQAM and other francophone universities. By 1971 CPC(ML) could mobilize hundreds in Montreal; in May that year they clashed with Montreal police during a demonstration, leading to 66 arrests. In the wake of this, 200 of their members quit to found the Mouvement Révolutionnaire des Etudiants du Québec (MREQ).

By 1972, CPC(ML) had extended its influence far outside Montreal: some of their supporters reportedly participated in the workers’ occupation of Sept-Iles during that year’s general strike. While CPC(ML) was reviled by the rest of the left, including other Maoists, as politically deranged and physically violent toward other leftists, they maintained their influence. In 1975, they founded and led for a short time the Association Nationale des Etudiants du Québec (ANEQ), which would remain the main student federation in Quebec until the early 1990s. (I myself was part of the 1988 student strike organized by ANEQ, which was by then led by Action Socialiste; Jacques Létourneau was ANEQ general-secretary.)

As we saw, the New Left radicalization of the late 1960s crashed head-on into the severe state repression exemplified by the October Crisis. A myriad of small groups inspired by various movements around the world, as well as by the leftist rhetoric then emanating from the ruling Maoist bureaucracy in China, had formed and dissolved in Quebec in those years. One attempt at a “united front” of these groups came through Montreal municipal politics, with the foundation in early 1970 of the Front d’Action Politique, the FRAP, which sought to dislodge right-wing dinosaur Jean Drapeau from office. They failed, but FRAP activists were among those jailed during the October Crisis. Many went on to be active in the future Maoist groups.

After coming out of jail in 1971, Charles Gagnon proceeded to write the pamphlet “Pour le Parti Proletarien” (For the Proletarian Party), in which he came out in favour of the Maoist variant of “Marxism-Leninism.” In it, he mixed indictments of the Quebec nationalist left with an eclectic mix of Marxism, New Leftism and Stalinism. While critical of the mainstream nationalist leaders and of his ex-friend Vallières, he still presented Québécois nationalism as a potentially progressive force, something he would reject a couple of years later. This pamphlet led to a new group founded by Gagnon called “l’Equipe du Journal,” which published the first issue of *En Lutte!* on May Day 1973. From then on *En Lutte!*, as they became known, rapidly took off as the most influential Maoist group in Quebec for the next couple of years.

In the fall of 1973, *En Lutte!* and the ex-CPC(ML) members of MREQ worked together in something called the Comité de Solidarité aux Luttes Ouvrières (Committee to Support Workers Struggles) around the militant strike at Firestone Tire. *En Lutte!* made efforts to fuse with the rather sizeable MREQ throughout the next year. It held its first congress in November 1974, where it formally rejected the call for Quebec independence. In 1975, it was strong enough to open branches in Toronto, Winnipeg and Vancouver, where the group was known as In Struggle! (IS!).

But MREQ refused to merge with them. Instead, in October 1975, it was a founding element of a new Maoist group, the Canadian Communist League (Marxist-Leninist) (CCL[ML]), led by another South Asian, Roger Rashi. Contrary to the more eclectic *En Lutte!*, CCL(ML) posed as a hard-line “orthodox” Maoist group. It would soon grow exponentially and displace *En Lutte!* as the biggest Maoist group in

Canada. By 1979, by which time it was calling itself the Workers Communist Party (WCP), its membership was estimated at 1,000, with several times that many supporters and sympathizers. En Lutte! itself had over 700 members, and CPC(ML) also a few hundred. All the Maoist groups benefited from growing leftist opposition to the PQ, which came to power for the first time in 1976 and went on to implement austerity against workers and students.

Yet by the early 1980s all this evaporated, with En Lutte! and the WCP dissolving themselves and the CPC(ML) reduced to a mostly irrelevant rump. To understand the rapid rise and fall of these groups, we have to look first and foremost at their deeply flawed and contradictory politics.

The Dead End of Maoism

As a variant of Stalinism, Maoism is a nationalist petty-bourgeois ideology which cannot show the way forward for the international working class. Before dealing with the Quebec national question, we need to briefly review some of the dead-end international politics of the 1970s Quebec Maoists. Unlike in other countries where large numbers of would-be leftist youth were also drawn to Maoism, in Quebec the upsurge of Maoism came after the Chinese Stalinists had already entered into a counterrevolutionary alliance with U.S. imperialism. As early as 1972, the Maoist bureaucracy began to openly support the imperialist NATO military alliance against what it called “Soviet social imperialism.” That year Mao welcomed U.S. president Nixon to Beijing as U.S. bombs rained down on the Vietnamese workers and peasants. The common enemy of this criminal alliance between China and U.S. imperialism was the Soviet Union.

Our first *Spartacist Canada* polemic with the Canadian Maoists appeared in the spring of 1976. This denounced a thug attack by CPC(ML) at the University of Toronto against ourselves and the fake Trotskyists of the Revolutionary Marxist Group and the League for Socialist Action. The occasion was a CPC(ML)-organized meeting in support of the pro-imperialist UNITA movement in Angola, which China scandalously supported alongside apartheid South Africa in its war against the Soviet-backed MPLA in that country. As we wrote:

“The TL certainly has no illusions that the victory of the MPLA, FNLA or UNITA, all petty-bourgeois-nationalist formations hostile to the independent interests of the working class, would lead to the formation of a communist Angola, or of a workers state of any kind. However, the war in Angola today is not limited to a narrow, fratricidal conflict between these three movements—it has become an internationalized war-by-proxy between the forces of U.S. imperialism and the degenerated workers state in the USSR. In this context communists must call for the military victory of the Soviet-backed MPLA against the imperialist-led forces.”

—“Maoists Front for Angolan Anti-Communists—Stop CPC(M-L) Goon Attacks!” *SC* No. 5, March 1976

We upheld the Trotskyist program of unconditional military defense of the Soviet Union, a bureaucratically degenerated workers state, and our perspective of proletarian political revolution to oust the Stalinist bureaucrats in the Kremlin.

While the three main Maoist groups had varying degrees of differences on emphasis and methods, they all fundamentally shared the anti-Soviet worldview espoused by the Chinese Maoist bureaucracy in its traitorous alliance with U.S. imperialism. Perhaps the most famous consequence of this domestically was CCL(ML)’s open embrace of the Canadian army as a bulwark against the “two superpowers,” the U.S. and the Soviet Union.

In case you think I’m exaggerating, here’s an excerpt of an article from their newspaper, *The Forge*. In this article, headlined “Editorial: Safeguard the Independence of Canada” (3 June 1976), CCL(ML) vowed to fight alongside the Canadian army against the Soviet Union:

“In fighting to safeguard Canada’s independence the Canadian people and the working class join with the countries and peoples of the world in the united front of all those who are fighting

colonialism, imperialism, and particularly the voracious ambitions of the two biggest international villains, the United States and the Soviet Union. The latter's contest for world domination threatens the independence of all countries....

“Or in the case of armed intervention in Canada by either of the superpowers it would be necessary to fight, arms in hand, to resolutely defend the independence of our country.”

We headlined our sharp and effective polemic against these social patriots “CCL(M-L): Running Dogs of the Bourgeois Army” (*SC* No. 8, September 1976).

All Maoists followed the twists and turns of the Chinese (or later for some, Albanian) bureaucracy in international politics. Thus in 1979, they supported the Islamist cutthroats in Afghanistan. The Soviet Union's Red Army entered Afghanistan that year after repeated requests from the country's left-nationalist government, which had fought to seriously advance the rights of women and was under siege by CIA-backed “holy warriors.” The Chinese bureaucracy lined up with U.S. imperialism, and Maoists internationally shouted at the top of their lungs against “Soviet expansionism.” We said that the gut-level response of every radical leftist should be the fullest solidarity with the Soviet military. We declared: “Hail Red Army in Afghanistan!” and “Extend the social gains of the October Revolution to the Afghan peoples.”

But the event that first threw the Maoists into turmoil was the death in September 1976 of Mao Zedong and the subsequent bureaucratic infighting which eventually led to the rise of market-reformer Deng Xiaoping as the head of the Chinese deformed workers state. At first disoriented, CCL(ML) decided to stick with the Chinese to the end. CPC(ML) jumped to Enver Hoxha's Albania, which had broken with China in 1978, as its guide. Generally less dogmatic and slower off the mark, En Lutte! just procrastinated and eventually found itself an international orphan.

Maoism and Quebec Labour

In the meantime the various Maoist groups were able to keep recruiting large numbers of youth, and workers as well. I just want to briefly paint a picture of what the Maoists looked like on the ground at the time, particularly in the labour movement. All these groups were active in the trade unions (although En Lutte! had more of a base within “community groups”). The francophone hospitals in Montreal, for instance, were a major field of implantation for all the Maoists, partly due to a high turnover in support staff. The CCL/WCP was also implanted in industry, including in steel mills, while CPC(ML) had supporters in the construction industry and elsewhere.

The weight of the Maoists in the Quebec labour movement was not insignificant. As one illustration, the WCP reportedly had the allegiance of about 30 percent of delegates at the 1979 congress of the CSN. Interestingly, one of the main points of contention there was the question of forming or not forming a “workers party” based on the trade unions, which was incidentally a key plank of the fake Trotskyists. To the frustration of the latter, however, the WCP blocked with the top union bureaucracy in opposing such a move—the bureaucrats wanted to support the PQ, while the WCP wanted only to build its own organization.

This convergence between the Maoists and the union bureaucracy, while possibly incidental in this case, actually ran much deeper. As one example, one of our first polemics against CCL(ML) in 1976 targeted U of T library union bureaucrat Judy Darcy, then a supporter of this group, for selling out a strike there.

Despite their “revolutionary” and “anti-nationalist” rhetoric, even when they were not openly betraying, the Maoists were actually going along with the dominant trade-union consciousness in Quebec at the time, that of so-called “combat unionism” (“syndicalisme de combat”). This concept is still present in Quebec today, although in much more muted form. We need to look into it a little more here.

This “combat unionism” was a concept that sought to reject the business unionism of the most conservative union bureaucrats. But it is *not* a Marxist approach to work in the unions, which aims to

raise the consciousness of the working class toward the necessity of overthrowing the capitalist state and establishing the rule of the working class. Rather, it is a militant version of what Marxists call “economism,” implying that socialism will somehow be built through trade-union militancy.

In the Quebec of the 1970s, combat unionism was also cynically embraced by a section of the union bureaucracy, partly as a reflection of militant pressure from the ranks, but also because it didn’t fundamentally challenge their support to Québécois nationalism. Indeed, within certain limits, this militant trade unionism could perfectly well go hand-in-hand with a vote for the PQ every four years. Somewhat ironically then, combat unionism was essentially smashed by the PQ regime of the early 1980s, when an economic crisis became a pretext for the Lévesque government to crush union militancy in the public sector. This fostered deep demoralization in the working class and was another factor leading to the dissolution of the Quebec Maoists.

The Quebec National Question

This is the point where we must deal with the national question and the role it played in both the rise and the downfall of the Maoists in Quebec. As we know, having a correct Leninist approach to the national question is crucial to building a revolutionary workers party in Canada and Quebec. The leadership of the English Canadian labour movement and the social-democratic NDP endorse “Canadian unity” Anglo chauvinism, pushing the Québécois working class deeper into the arms of their “own” bourgeois nationalists. Conversely in Quebec, the bulk of the left and the union bureaucracy capitulates to Québécois nationalism and the bourgeois Parti Québécois, or to the petty-bourgeois Québec Solidaire today. At bottom, that’s why we advocate independence—to break through this impasse that fosters nationalism among both the oppressed and oppressor nations.

Charles Gagnon and the other Maoists of the 1970s sought to reject Québécois nationalism and the PQ, gaining them the allegiance of thousands of radical youth and workers who understood on some basic level that such nationalism was no solution to the all-sided oppression and exploitation of capitalism. The Maoists formally recognized the national oppression of the Québécois and at least initially called for their right to self-determination. But far from finding their way to the Leninist understanding of the national question, they instead veered toward Canadian nationalism.

In the late 1970s, our polemics with the Maoists were on the whole quite effective. As I mentioned, we lambasted the CCL(ML) for its line of support to the bourgeois army. We also shamed the rest of the left, and ex-FLQ leader Gagnon in particular, for refusing to defend former FLQ militants against the capitalist state. To wit, in late 1978, Jacques Lanctôt as well as Jacques and Louise Cossette-Trudel arrived back in Canada to face charges in relation to the kidnapping of British trade commissioner James Cross in 1970—they were condemned to two years’ imprisonment a few months later.

Calling to drop the charges and free these victims of state repression, we sharply took out groups like En Lutte! who remained agnostic on their defense. For instance, En Lutte! merely asked for a “fair trial.” Personally I must add that, as a former left nationalist, our defense of the former *felquistes* against state repression, while opposing their petty-bourgeois nationalist views and individual terrorist methods, was one of the key positions that won me to the TL in the late 1980s.

By reading *SC* articles from that period, especially from 1977 to 1979, one can see our good work in intersecting and combating opponents in the Maoist milieu, particularly En Lutte! We focused on En Lutte! in part, I think, because it had a formal policy of allowing open debates, which was a contrast with the other groups. CCL(ML) for instance ran an article in 1977 denouncing the Trotskyists as “agents of the bourgeoisie” and “vermin,” calling to “wipe them out” (*The Forge*, 28 April 1977). Not that Charles Gagnon’s En Lutte! didn’t exclude or even attempt to assault us a few times, especially toward the end of its existence, but generally they were more open.

Our work wasn’t limited to just paper polemics, however. In 1977 and 1978 we marched in both Toronto and Vancouver with other left groups against the “national unity” Pénin-Robarts Commission, intersecting both the fake Trotskyists and Maoists. Countering the anti-Québécois chauvinism in the

labour movement, our supporters fought in the unions for Quebec's right to self-determination. We also polemicized with *En Lutte!* and others at many demonstrations in that period, from a protest in Vancouver in defense of Chilean leftists to our sharply polarizing contingents calling for military victory to the Salvadoran insurgents in the early '80s, to annual International Women's Day marches, and more.

That said, our polemics with the Maoists suffered from two weaknesses. The first was objective: we had no established presence in Quebec where the Maoists had their biggest base, so we had to limit most of our interventions to their offshoots in Toronto and Vancouver. We did occasionally travel to Montreal for demonstrations and conferences, but overall we couldn't have been very visible there. And we hardly ever ran articles in French those days.

The other weakness, obviously, was that we did not advocate Quebec independence as a way to remove the national question from the agenda until the mid-1990s. In hindsight, our polemics with the Maoists in the 1970s suffered from this. Of course, our stand against Anglo chauvinism and for the right of self-determination for Quebec was the exact opposite of the Maoists' crude "anti-nationalism" and capitulation to the Canadian bourgeoisie. But this wouldn't have been so apparent to an untrained eye. As one example, our line on the 1980 sovereignty referendum—where we called for a boycott—was hardly distinguishable from that of the three Maoist groups, who called for spoiling the ballot.

Moreover, we rarely ever took out the Maoists for their line on the national question. Our articles in defense of the ex-FLQers or on the protests against the P  pin-Robarts Commission had sharp polemics with the pseudo-Trotskyists who capitulated to Qu  b  cois nationalism. But we did not take up the Maoists' line on the national question directly. Even our first article in 1976 denouncing CCL(ML) for their line in support of the Canadian army, which took up four pages of *SC*, did not mention the Quebec national question, a pretty glaring omission.

One interesting exception was a 1979 polemic entitled "In Struggle!: From Nationalism to Luxemburgism" (*SC* No. 35, April 1979). In it, we detailed the trajectory of Charles Gagnon's line on the national question from left Qu  b  cois nationalism to capitulation to Canadian "national unity." We pointed out:

"To deny Quebec's right to independence, or to postpone the resolution of Quebec's national oppression until the socialist future is to condone the continued subjugation of the Qu  b  cois within a capitalist Canada. In its fear of capitulating to Quebec nationalism, IS! capitulates to English-Canadian chauvinism....

"IS!'s evolution on the national question—from militant Quebec nationalism to a position which is in essence the same as the ruling Liberal Party's—is an aspect of its rightward political drift from its origins as a pro-working class current within the nationalist movement of the sixties."

The article is actually quite good. But it also has a schizophrenic quality due to our incorrect line on independence. We presented our line for the right of self-determination as opposed to *En Lutte!*'s "Luxemburgism," but it sort of ends out on a limb, which is unfortunate.

In 1982, both *En Lutte!* and the Workers Communist Party dissolved themselves. The reasons were numerous. We've already covered the two main ones: the contradictions of the Maoists' international policies and their terrible line on the Quebec national question. On the latter count, there were internal revolts against their line on the 1980 sovereignty referendum, in which the more militant sectors of the Quebec working class overwhelmingly voted "yes." Another factor that led to rebellion in the ranks of the WCP was the revelation that there was not a single francophone on their political bureau, even though they had hundreds of Qu  b  cois members. Other important contributors to the Maoists' demise were male chauvinism and anti-gay bigotry, which came to bite these organizations in the ass when bourgeois feminism in particular became a lasting phenomenon.

In the end, the individuals who ran the Maoist organizations went their different ways. We've already mentioned the successful careerists and cynical has-beens. A few others remained active on the left.

WCP *lider maximo* Roger Rashi is today a member of Québec Solidaire, where he stumps for environmentalism and class-collaborationist “unity.” Differently inclined, a hard-core Maoist grouplet called Libération came out of the WCP and later found a niche in their fusion with the student-based Action Socialiste, eventually leading to the founding of the PCR.

As for Charles Gagnon, he mostly drifted off in isolation, openly rejecting Leninist party-building but still attached to some kind of eclectic Marxism. To the end of his life he refused to support the PQ or any form of Québécois nationalism. Forever a chain smoker, he died in 2005, aged 66.

The disorientation of a whole generation of radical youth by the nonsense of Maoism was a tragedy. Youth who, however confusedly, looked to the proletariat as the social agent of liberation were ground down by their hopeless Stalinist politics and organizations. Today our comrades in Montreal have the thankless task of politically combatting the latter-day Maoists of the Parti Communiste Révolutionnaire, a group that parrots the terrible line of the 1970s Maoists on the national question. Worse yet, while the Maoists of the 1970s were at least subjective partisans of the working class, the PCR, operating in a different historical period, actually treats the industrial proletariat and trade unions as hopelessly “bought off.” But fully dealing with these characters would require a separate presentation. Let’s just say that I hope this short and admittedly incomplete presentation will help us go forward in combating the false ideology of Maoism in Quebec among newer generations.