

Report of the Annual Meeting of the Canadian Historical Association Rapport de l'assemblée annuelle de la Société historique du Canada

Report of the Annual Meeting

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Volume 44, numéro 1, 1965

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/300632ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/300632ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

The Canadian Historical Association/La Société historique du Canada

ISSN

0317-0594 (imprimé)

1712-9095 (numérique)

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Citer cet article

Dubuc, A. (1965). Problems in the Study of the Stratification of the Canadian Society from 1760 to 1840. *Report of the Annual Meeting of the Canadian Historical Association / Rapport de l'assemblée annuelle de la Société historique du Canada*, 44(1), 13–29. <https://doi.org/10.7202/300632ar>

PROBLEMS IN THE STUDY OF THE STRATIFICATION OF THE CANADIAN SOCIETY FROM 1760 TO 1840¹

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For the purpose of this communication I shall take for granted that two of the main conclusions of the report of John Lambton, First Earl of Durham, "on the affairs of British North America" were : that the main political problems of Lower Canada originated in the clash of the two ethnic groups, of the two "races", as he himself used the word; and that the main economic and social difficulties of the colony had their foundation in the fact that the two groups were unequal by nature, one being superior, the other, inferior, according to the cultural criteria that were his. I shall also take for granted that these two main conclusions were used, not only as assumptions, but as real postulates by Canadian historiography in its study of Canadian society of the end of the 18th and first half of the 19th century. Political history, both Anglo-Canadian and French Canadian, used mainly the first conclusion, economic history, the second. It must be recognized that the two conclusions of the Durham report are very closely related to each other, since the two different groups of the second conclusion were originally defined in ethnic terms in the first conclusion.

My purpose is to present the hypothesis that the study of Canadian society at the end of the 18th and first half of the 19th century would be more "comprehensive" (in the Weberian sense of the word) if the cleavage between groups was analysed, not chiefly on ethnic lines, but primarily according to social classes. Recent studies, like Mason Wade's *The French Canadian* and Helen Taft-Manning's *Revolt of French Canada*, among others, have proved the effectiveness of such a view. The main assumption is, in sociological terms that, except for circumstances of severe political crisis, people attach more importance to their social status than to their belonging to an ethnic group, that their *social WE* is more significant to them than their *national WE*.

When I was first asked to prepare this communication, I felt so completely unprepared for such a task that I nearly refused. But I finally accepted on the condition that my paper would not present the results of a completed study but rather the initial lines along which

¹ This paper owes much to many people: first of all to my friend Abe Rotstein, who has discussed many unqualified affirmations and has contributed in translating an undifferentiated language into readable English; also to my colleague and friend André Raynauld who, by his constructive commentaries, has suggested many actual improvements.

research might be carried on. I will not present conclusions but questions that may be raised in future analysis. This will account for the fact that there will be so few bibliographical references.

My purpose is not to deny ethnic struggles, "racial" clashes, in Canadian history; that would be non-sense. My position is analytical, methodological: I only try to find an hypothesis that would permit to explain the historical reality more broadly, more correctly than what have done the studies inspired by the Durham report.

Economic foundations of social stratification

A social class can be defined by many criteria. I do not pretend to formulate sociological theory here, but I would suggest that in historiographical analysis, two sets of criteria have appeared to be the most useful: firstly economic criteria and secondly, social criteria. Economically, stratification differs according to the main economic structure and the stage of the development of the society. Classes will form according to participation in the ownership of the means of production and according to the structure of distribution of revenues. Socially, each class will define itself by collective consciousness according to certain specific values and by the determination to take collective action, pursuant to determined interests and objectives.

Thus, before describing the different social classes of the Canadian 18th century society, it would be desirable to sketch the main features of the economic structure of the period and the landmarks of economic development. Historians of capitalism have developed the distinction between commercial capitalism and industrial capitalism. There are significant differences between the two structures. The main economic activity is, in the one case, exchange of goods and in the other, production of goods, that is, transformation of raw materials into finished products through the use of energy and mechanical techniques. Profit comes, in the first instance, mainly from speculation in time or space, thus from the fluctuations of demand and in the other case from rational cost accounting, thus from variations of supply. Moreover, the typical entrepreneur is, in commercial capitalism, a merchant trader, in industrial capitalism, an accumulator of capital goods, if not an innovator. The society, in the first instance, is broadly oriented towards primary activities, in the second instance towards secondary activities, to use the classification of Colin Clark and Fourastié. Clearly enough, the two societies are completely different the one from the other, with the two economic structures very specifically defined. Individuals and social groups will behave in a very different manner, depending on the structure within which their activity will take place.

This distinction is particularly relevant for the study of the Canadian economy of the end of the 18th and beginning of the 19th century since

England was at that very moment experiencing the passage from commercial capitalism into industrial capitalism, outrunning all Western societies, including Canada; unfortunately, Canadian historians have not always been aware that they were borrowing from the analysis of British society the terms of reference they were using to describe Canadian society. More specifically, it might be completely irrelevant, as we shall see below, to designate by the same word "entrepreneur" without qualification, both the industrial producer of England, who was a man of a new type as Ashton and Mantoux have shown, as well as the merchant trader of Montreal or Quebec, the old mercantilist of the first Empire, so severely condemned by Adam Smith.

Economic development and social behavior

As for the landmarks of economic development, I believe that the long trends in prices and interest rates, called by Schumpeter "Kontra-tieff movements", are most significant for social history. As most of the authors have shown, these trends in prices have profound repercussions on real revenues, social behavior and, even, social pathology. It has been demonstrated that the more important transformations in social structure and collective behavior are more closely related to these long waves in prices than to any other fluctuations in economic activity. In economic history, the works of Schumpeter, François Simiand, Léon Dupriez, Ernest Labrousse, Johan Akerman, W. W. Rostow, Gaston Imbert, W. C. Mitchell, among others, have given brilliant illustrations of the richness of the method.

These trends, international in scope, are characteristic of the economic structure of the end of the 18th, of the 19th and of the beginning of the 20th century. Fernand Ouellet, in his more recent work, has shown how the Canadian trends are precisely the same as the international ones from 1790 to 1850. His recent Ph.D. thesis, presented in Spring 1965 at Université Laval, will no doubt mark an event in Canadian historiography. Using, perhaps too deferentially, the peculiar vocabulary of Ernest Labrousse, Ouellet has shown how the economic development of Canada was marked, during that period, by two long waves in prices, the one, upward, from 1760 to 1815, the other, from 1815 to 1850, downward. From 1760 to 1815, many factors contributed to the upswing of the economy, both in terms of prices and production: the fur trade, the opening of the markets of England and the West Indies to the wheat and flour of the St-Lawrence, the beginning of the great exploitation of the Canadian forest, etc. From 1815 to 1850 the trend was downward; this period was marked by the end of the fur trade, the over-population of the seigneuries, the frequent arrivals of large numbers of Irish immigrants, the great agricultural crisis in the lower valley of the St-Lawrence, and the subsequent emigration to the United States of numerous Canadians, the fluctuations of extreme amplitude in the export of lumber and timber,

the great number of economic crises, the structural distortions imposed by what my colleague, Jacques Boucher, has recently called "the commercial infidelities" of Great Britain,² all these contributed to the enormous economic and financial difficulties of the period.

With this difference in the economic background of the two periods, one might expect that the social groups would not be the same in the two societies. The way of looking at the future, the definition of the collective values, the class consciousness of participation in development, the determination and the means given to defend the interest of the various groups : in short, the social climate and social behavior must necessarily change from one period to the other.

Eighteenth century social stratification

To understand the social groupings in Canada at the end of the 18th century, it is essential to study both European societies and colonial societies of North America, especially those which became the United States. Two features must receive consideration : first, the aristocratic structure of society; second, the republican and democratic principles of a social group participating more and more actively in economic life and requiring official recognition in politics, namely, the bourgeoisie. It must be kept in mind that these new forces completely upset the equilibrium of Western societies as long as the bourgeoisie attempted to dominate in society over the aristocracy. These were among the social and political preconditions of industrialisation. Three revolutions were the result of the disequilibrium at the end of the 18th century : the industrial revolution in England, the French revolution and the revolution of the American colonies. The three revolutions were laid by the national bourgeoisie of each of the countries.

The bourgeoisie, as any other social class, can be defined by : participation in common specific values, collective consciousness, and determination to gain political prestige and privileges over other groups. The specifically bourgeois values are many according to the aspect which one prefers to emphasize : individualism, liberalism, radicalism, protestantism in some societies, laïcism in others, in certain economic structures internationalism, in others nationalism. All these, among many others, are values by which the bourgeoisie of a society will try to advance its collective destiny.

It has been noted by many social historians that in most societies, whether they were the municipal societies born from the communal

² Jacques Boucher, *Les aspects économiques de la tenure seigneuriale au Canada (1760-1854)*, in *Travaux et recherches de la faculté de Droit et des sciences économiques de Paris, série « Sciences Historiques »*, n° 3, Paris, P.U.F., 1964.

movement in medieval Europe, or the national societies of the industrial 19th century, whenever the bourgeoisie has succeeded in gaining power, the self-definition of the class was transformed. The group was no longer the revolutionnary class *par excellence*, as Karl Marx described them,³ or "les bourgeois conquérants", as Charles Morazé has given title to his history of 19th century France,⁴ but they had become the group "en place" the new conservatives; they were a new kind of aristocracy, "the financial aristocracy", Karl Marx called them.⁵ The definition of their social identity was changed, their view of the world was transformed, their political behavior was different : they were no longer the conquerors of a future order but the defenders of the newly established order.

The great Belgian historian, Henri Pirenne, in his famous speech in London in 1914, which is unfortunately sometimes neglected by social and economic historiography, on the periods in the social history of capitalism, has already demonstrated how, in the history of Western civilization since the middle ages, at each new phase of economic development there appeared a new class of capitalists. The entrepreneurs of one period seem unable to adapt themselves to new conditions and they transform themselves into an aristocracy of bankers. In their place, appear new young men, more dynamic, born out of the new economic structure, better adapted to the new situations, the real Schumpeterian innovators, as we would say. As he himself put it "there are as many classes of capitalists as there are phases in economic history".⁶

Indeed, for the purpose of this paper, it might be relevant to emphasize the social differences between the entrepreneurs of commercial capitalism and those of industrial capitalism. The merchant traders of the first structure maintained a solidarity of interest with the land owners as long as the former were buying and selling the products of the latter and as long as the merchants sold them the luxury products they imported from abroad. The industrial entrepreneurs, on the other hand, had an interest in keeping the cost of agricultural products, whether raw materials or food, at the lowest level possible. They were selling for mass consumption, and less and less for conspicuous consumption. The merchant traders were protectionists, as were the land owners, while the industrial entrepreneurs tended, in the 19th century, to press for free trade. This explains, I believe, why the clash between the bourgeoisie and the nobility was a good deal more violent during the period of industrialisation than it had been in previous times. The efforts of the bourgeois

³ in *The Communist Manifesto*.

⁴ Charles Moraze, *Les bourgeois conquérants, XIX^e siècle*, Paris, A. Colin, 1957.

⁵ in *The Class Struggle in France*.

⁶ Henri Pirenne, *Les périodes de l'histoire sociale du capitalisme*, Bulletin de l'Académie Royale de Belgique (classe des lettres), 1914, n° 5, p. 58.

entrepreneurs were more political than ever; they brought about profound constitutional transformations.⁷

But along with industrialization, new classes appeared, determined to partake in the advantages of the growth of the national economy. They upheld the same values for their own purposes as those that were used previously by the bourgeois entrepreneurs. This is why, at the beginning of the 19th century the republican and democratic values became the basic ideology for the rising new social classes. They inspired the great industrial strikes in England and France as well as the revolutions of the middle classes. In Canada, the rising of the new middle class, opposed to the great bourgeoisie of the merchant traders, provoked the rebellions of 1837, both in Upper and Lower Canada. One should bear in mind that broad context of social transformation in Western civilization when studying the social stratification in Canada at the end of the 18th century; such is my purpose.

A — THE ARISTOCRATIC COMPACT

When the British troops occupied Quebec at the end of 1759, not only had the colonial allegiance of the St-Lawrence valley changed but the seeds of social evolution were planted. First we may note the officers of the British army and second, the merchant traders accompanying the army as army contractors, or seeking the advantages of "the commercial empire of the St-Lawrence", mainly for the fur trade. The two British groups were of completely opposed social classes, the former of noble origin, the latter of bourgeois interest. It is misleading therefore to look at them under one heading as "the British".

The society of the new colony was to keep its basic aristocratic structures: such was the plan, developed at an early date in the colony and later accepted in London. The Quebec Act of 1774 embodied this strategy, while the Constitutional Act of 1791 respected its main philosophy. The purpose was twofold: first, to continue the domination of the people under the same rule that the French administration had elaborated; second, to master the republican bourgeoisie of the merchant traders so that their democratic aspirations, so "harmful" in the Atlantic colonies, would be restrained effectively. The means to this policy would be to support, on the one hand, the French seigneurial system and feudal tenure, and on the other, the Catholic Church. In the latter case, besides being one of the most important tenants, it was the first responsible institution for education and hospitals and was the provider of the useful religious values, so important in maintaining the characteristic qualities

⁷ For the differences in the interests of merchant traders and industrial entrepreneurs, see Paul Mantoux, *La révolution industrielle au XVIII^e siècle*, Paris, Génin-Médici, 1959 (many editions in English under the title: *The Industrial Revolution*).

of what was considered "an obedient people", (was this not for Canada the hour of the Evangelical movement in England?) Let us analyse briefly the three participating groups of this aristocratic compact.

1) *The British army*

Many studies have emphasized the role of the nobility and the gentry in the British forces, as was the case with other European armies, both during modern times as well as in the 18th century. Some Canadian historians have also described how, after their arrival in Canada, many of the officers of the British army entered into social relations with the Canadian gentry, manifesting spontaneously equality of status and class solidarity.

2) *The Canadian seigneurs*

Most of the seigneurs, at the Conquest, remained on their lands and were granted the social status they merited in an aristocratic society. Moreover, the feudal tenure and the seigneurial system were given official recognition by the British Parliament, except for the judicial rights of the seigneurs. Their status indeed, was elevated: contrary to what had happened during the French colonial administration, the seigneurs were invited to participate in the civil government of the new British colony. They became members of the executive council of the Governor General, held high offices in public administrations, were judges in the highest courts, officers of the army, and took an active part in the new political system. They bought houses in Quebec City and began a new life. Truly, the typical Canadian seigneur of the end of the 18th century was no longer the seigneur that Monroe, Trudel and others have described, that is, the humble small landlord, close to his peasants, who had received land mainly because he stood out among other peasants. Thus, we can say that the Canadian nobility, collectively, was not profoundly disturbed, at least in the short run, by the Conquest. On the contrary, this became the occasion to improve its status by acquiring the political prestige of participation in the civil government.

Economically, the seigneurs could define themselves, in an agricultural society, as entrepreneurs; indeed, they had a monopoly of investment. They had not only the obligation, but also the exclusive right to erect all the different mills necessary for the primary processing of produce on their seigneuries: wind and/or hydraulic mills to grind flour, saw lumber, card wool and full cloth. They also had the obligation and exclusive right to maintain the ferry-boat on the river. What is still an unanswered question in Canadian historiography is: Why, in a long period of rising prices, with the opening of new markets and increased production, did the Canadian seigneurs become impoverished? This raises an important question for economic theory, namely that of a class

of entrepreneurs refusing to seek the economic maximization of their advantages, which is contrary to the most fundamental postulates of the science. In fact, the signs of their impoverishment are many: the lowering of their standard of living and, ultimately, the sale of their seigneuries. It is evident that they became less and less interested in the direct management of their enterprises: they hired superintendents and leased their mills, which means that they were more interested in receiving a regular income rather than in taking advantage of fluctuations in prices and of speculating in land. More and more they became rentiers, and less and less entrepreneurs. Buying and selling was left to local merchants who enriched themselves; notaries became more and more important as collectors of savings.

It appears to me that perhaps sociology may offer some explanation of this phenomenon. The seigneurs were less and less interested in economic activity because they were now receiving their prestige and status from their participation in more "noble" activities. They were becoming more and more aristocrats. They were giving new definition to their status in terms of luxury consumption, social life in Quebec City, etc. Their new activities were: government, magistracy, law and medicine, learned and philanthropic societies, and the British army.⁸

Many historians have perceived the same phenomenon in other societies and in other times. Among them, Tawney has shown how the 16th century landed nobility of England had experienced the same fate before the rising of the new bourgeoisie.⁹ I do not know if the sociologists would accept the following interpretation, broadly received among social historians: that a social group defining itself as superior in status to the other classes of society will try to maintain, by a new type of activity and a new way of living, a prestige that lower economic functions may put in jeopardy. Thus would be explained the rise of conspicuous consumption, the prolixity of social life at the royal court or elsewhere, the aversion towards commercial activities, the reliance on constant revenues and the recourse to credit.

Nevertheless, in the long run, after a certain period of time, a social class, not basing its status on economic activity, will be unable to keep its prestige and renew itself; it will disappear as a class, as a collective entity. That is precisely what happened to the Canadian seigneurs at the end of the 18th and beginning of the 19th century. I do not believe

⁸ During the discussions, at the Vancouver meeting, Jack Madden pointed out that it was not proven that these new activities were not more remunerative than the traditional ones. The financial success of the merchants who succeeded the seigneurs in leasing the mills, selling the goods or even in buying the seigneuries would be part of the answer. Another part would come from the actual fading away of the ancient seigneurs from the wealthy group of the society.

⁹ See his long introduction to his edition of Thomas Wilson, *A Discourse Upon Usury*, also his *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*, London, Frank Cass, 1962.

that this sociological explanation answers the whole problem, but I think it is a valuable insight.

3) *The Catholic Church*

In New France, the Church had received, in addition to its responsibility for the diffusion of religious values among its flock and the aborigines, a monopolistic control over education and hospitals. For the execution of its task, it was granted rich seigneuries, the revenues of which were directed to supply colleges, schools, hospitals, churches and to the sustenance of religious orders, priests, teachers, etc. This was, what we could call, a system of social security with its own rationality. Through this system, the Church and the religious orders had become the most important land owners and seigneurs of the colony and had been recognised as the most influential group in politics.

From the Conquest, the Church had everything to lose, in religious matters as well as in economic matters, in political responsibility and prestige. Its situation was particularly difficult since there was no bishop in Quebec when the British troops entered the country. But the occupant had a substantial interest in utilising every traditional elite in order to extend as rapidly as possible its domination in all spheres of the conquered society. The advantages of using the Church were many: its organization, its social and cultural control, its doctrine of an aristocratic structure of society, its participation in the nobility through its extended lands and seigneuries, its domination over an organized system of education and hospitals, its main religious values related to fatalism, obedience and respect of the social and political order. Religious values were social values, before becoming, as in most cases of interethnic relations, national values.

But there were elements in the Church that were too strong to be acceptable to the British. The most "Popish" of the religious orders, which owned the most extensive colleges and richest seigneuries, had the greatest influence over the hierarchy, and had an alarming army-like organisation, was the Jesuit order; it could not be tolerated and was outlawed.

As some authors have emphasized, the recognition of the Catholic Church by the government of England and the acceptance of Catholics as members of the different Councils and judicial Courts, later as representatives in the Assembly, were almost incredible for Anglo-Saxon Protestants of the time. The role reserved for French-Canadians would continue to be refused to the Irish and English Catholics for a long time to come.

The history of the relationship between the colonial government and the Church is the story of the most exciting bargaining that ever took

place between two political powers, each one feeling itself unable to do anything without the collaboration of the other, but striving at the same time to protect its own interests against the infringements of the other party. The struggle was silent, the language diplomatic and each party respected the other. The two parties had an equal interest in seeing that there would be no public clashes. The aristocratic compact was as useful for the one as for the other: the Church succeeded in gaining a legal status and a monopoly over education and, finally, in taking part in the administration of the colony. As for the colonial government, it was successful in obtaining, in the most important instances, the official, if not always the hearty, support of the Church.

Another result, especially important for economic history, was that in giving exclusive monopoly over education and hospitals to the Church, and in recognizing the social efficiency of its religious values, the other groups, mainly the bourgeoisie of the merchant-traders, were able to obtain its tacit consent on all policies concerning economic development, investment, and public finance.

Thus it happened that the defence of the Catholic Church and Catholic values came from the political authority of a Protestant society and that the defence of the British political institutions came from the religious authorities of the French-Canadian society.

Thus, the strategy of building on the shores of the St-Lawrence River an aristocratic society, in order both to dominate the people and to restrain the republican aspirations of the rising bourgeoisie, was rooted in the existence of three groups, each one interested in the maintaining of an old regime structure: the British army officers and colonial administrators, the Canadian seigneurs and the Catholic Church. The aristocratic compact was really effective as long as new social forces did not strain the whole social organization.

B — THE BOURGEOISIE OF THE MERCHANT TRADERS

If the officers of the British army were new social elements introduced into the aristocratic structure of the Canadian society, the merchant traders were of a completely different social status. Army contractors or fur traders most of them, they grouped themselves together, conscious of the specific values that were their own and of the struggles they had to fight against other groups. Imperial trade was their occupation, protestantism and republicanism were among their specific values, the control of the political institutions of the colony was one of their aims.

The economic structure of the colony was that of commercial capitalism. The Canadian entrepreneurs of the end of the 18th and beginning of the 19th century were essentially merchant traders, interested in the exchange of goods, seeking profit mainly from speculation on produce and

on land; they were mercantilists, that is protectionists. For reasons of economic interest principally and incidentally, I would say, by accident of their ethnic origin, they were "imperialists" — they were British. They became in fact rapidly more British than they had ever been before because their main economic activity was related to the structure of the first Empire.

Donald Creighton has not been convincing enough in trying to prove that, as a class, these entrepreneurs had no ethnic preoccupation. He has given cases of partnerships between French-Canadian and British traders and of intermarriage between the two groups of the bourgeoisie.¹⁰ But he has not shown the importance in number and in volume of trade of these partnerships, nor has he proven the exact equality of all partners in each partnership. His conclusion of no ethnic barriers because of intermarriage would need qualification, if only for the reason of there being no statistical equality of opportunity for men of British origin to find the same number of women inside their own ethnic group.

On the contrary, the actual social evolution proved that, whenever a French-Canadian became an entrepreneur, he had to participate, in some way, in the values and behavior of the main group of entrepreneurs. It is one of my assumptions that the most binding values between individuals are of a social nature, rather than of an ethnic nature, but it should be admitted that the ethnic values may transform themselves into social values. Actually, because trade was exclusively inside the British Empire, save but for the exceptions stipulated in the British Navigation Laws, the bourgeois values were essentially British values, and French-Canadian entrepreneurs had to conform to these values; some of them even became Protestant. This is one of the strongest confirmations of the sociological theory of the ethnic class developed by my two colleagues Marcel Rioux and Jacques Dofny.¹¹

Among the objectives of the commercial bourgeoisie were the destruction of the aristocratic structure of society and the establishment of institutions of parliamentary democracy which they would control. The economic basis of such an aim was the great commercial expansion in fur, corn and later on, in timber and lumber in which they were the leading merchant-traders. But, as has happened many times in aristocratic societies, the leading bourgeoisie, after having accumulated a certain wealth in trade, was led to seek an aristocratic way of life and values: many of the great fur traders bought seigneuries, old McTavish, head of the Beaver

¹⁰ Donald Creighton, *The Empire of the St-Lawrence*, new edition, Toronto, Macmillan, 1956, pp. 33-34.

¹¹ Jacques Dofny et Marcel Rioux, « Les classes sociales au Canada français », *Revue française de sociologie*, 1962, III, 290-300; also, Marcel Rioux, « Conscience ethnique et conscience de classe au Québec », *Recherches sociographiques*, vol. VI, n° 1, janvier-avril 1965.

Club, was pleased to be called "the Baron". The same phenomenon, in a different society, would reappear a century later, with the construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway, when Mr. Smith, previously fur trader for the Hudson's Bay Company, became Lord Strathcona and of Mount-Royal and Mr. Stephen, president of the Bank of Montreal, gave his name to one of the summits of the Rockies, Mount Stephen, and then renamed himself after the mountain, adding a prefix: Baron Mount Stephen.

On the morrow of the American revolution, the Imperial government finally acceded to a legislative Assembly, but divided Canada into the Upper and Lower provinces and abandoned to the new Republic the great fur empire of the Ohio-Mississippi triangle. With the immigration of the United Empire Loyalists, began, in the Eastern Townships of Lower Canada, the most extensive land speculation; Father McGuigan, of the University of B.C., in his Ph.D. thesis presented in Université Laval, in 1963, has studied extensively this development.

In face of fur trade difficulties and growing land speculation, the entrepreneurs imperceptibly were becoming different: the seigneurs saw their influence declining while the great merchants of the fur trade transformed themselves into land owners and bankers (through speculation in the Townships, buying of seigneuries, and participation in the founding of the Bank of Montreal in 1817). Three other important factors influenced this evolution. First, there was the participation of the high officers of the Executive Council in land speculation and in manipulations of public funds, creating a solidarity of interest with the bourgeoisie of the merchant-traders. Second, we may note the passing of control of the legislative Assembly from the hands of both the seigneurs and the merchant traders into the hands of the rising middle class of professional men and small local merchants. Third, the strategy of the British Government (through officers of the Colonial Office and important groups in the Parliament) to restrain the political influence in the colony of what was feared to be republican merchants through the support of the aristocratic structure of the colonial society, was doubled, in the 19th century, by the support given in Parliament by some Liberals and Radicals to the constitutional demands of this new class of the leaders of the people.¹²

All these factors began to converge when, in 1815, prices ceased to rise and began a long downward movement. From then on, the economic structure of England was developing into industrialism and free trade. And the resources exported from Europe were not directed primarily to Canada, but to the United States, except for the surplus of Irish manpower who were landed in the valley of the St-Lawrence, at the low-point of the economic depression. Clearly enough, the economy of Canada was in a state, perhaps not of stagnation, but certainly of slackening.

¹² Helen Taft-Manning, *The Revolt of French Canada (1800-1835)*, Toronto, Macmillan, 1962. See chapters II and XVI.

In this atmosphere, the merchant-traders of Canada lost more and more of their dynamism and radicalism. They were the new conservatives trying to break every effort of the new middle-class to control, first the Assembly, then the Legislative Council. Through their actual influence on both the Executive and Legislative Councils, the merchant-traders became, by degrees, the defenders of the mercantile order, opposed to these British democratic institutions that the French-Canadian petit-Bourgeois were revindicating. They linked themselves to the conservative party in the British Parliament. Were they not themselves the Tories of the Colony? The British ethnic values were becoming more and more important in the collective definition of themselves as long as they were unable to fight for their position through economic activity and as long as they needed the support of the British Parliament and Colonial Office. They were the last mercantilists of the first Empire; republican values were no longer of any interest to them.

These are the reasons why I would suggest that it is irrelevant to draw a comparison between these merchant-traders of a commercial economy with the entrepreneurs of an industrial society.

Donald Creighton was, I believe, the first Canadian historian to create interest in the validity of the social cleavage over the ethnic cleavage in the study of Canadian history. But it seems that his purpose was to demonstrate a particular thesis, that is: the superiority of the bourgeoisie of the entrepreneurs over all other classes of society. This means that all other groups of society were interpreted in terms of inferior groups and it was expected that the inferiors be overcome by the superiors. As for the entrepreneurs, the terms used in England to describe the new dynamic industrial innovators served, perhaps without enough qualification, to define the merchant-traders of Canada. And so much emphasis was given to prove that there was no ethnic cleavage, that it was not seen that the values attached to belonging to the British Empire were among the essential values of the bourgeoisie. In Michel Brunet's view the French-Canadians had been irremediably vanquished because, at the Conquest, they had lost their bourgeoisie; and being deprived of that essential superior element of society, their fight for survival was helpless. It is true, indeed, that there was no real French-Canadian class of entrepreneurs, and this is a valuable point to offer against Professor Creighton's thesis. But, I think that it was not sufficiently proven that there had ever been real entrepreneurs in the French colony before the British conquest.¹³ And what is difficult to accept in Professor Brunet's scheme is the affirmation, without any qualification, that all collective clashes in Canadian his-

¹³ See Jean Hamelin, *Economie et société en Nouvelle-France*, Québec. P.U.L., 1960, pp. 127 ss.

tory cannot be interpreted except in terms of ethnic cleavage; for Brunet, bourgeoisie means national bourgeoisie.

Both authors have in common their belief that a *sine qua non* element for development is the class of the bourgeoisie, defined exclusively in social terms by Creighton, in ethnic terms by Brunet. And they also share in common the derivation of their inspiration from the two main conclusion of the Durham report: the former that the stronger must win over the inferior, the latter that Canadian history cannot be interpreted otherwise than by the "racial" confrontation.

C — THE MIDDLE CLASS

From the trade of the lower valley of the St-Lawrence with the British Empire, there emerged, from the agricultural parts of the society, through their new wealth, a class of professional men and small local traders. They did not take part in the great imperial trade, but they were intermediaries, middle men. From the time of the great agricultural crisis and overpopulation of the seigneuries, beginning with the turn of the 19th century, their collective definition of themselves was in terms of defenders of agricultural interests. Opposed to land speculation, mismanagement of public funds, mass immigration during the worst years of economic crises, privileges of the members of "la clique du Château" and defending the economic interests of the peasants and small local traders in the elaboration, by the government, of development policies, they were the recognized and accepted *leaders* of the people.

As such, they were contesting the domination over the people of the traditional elites. Were they not taking part in the collection of savings, as local merchants and notaries, a responsibility that has always been recognized as belonging to the seigneurs and the curates? Were they not competing with the seigneurs in the new activities in the liberal professions and public offices? They were assailing the Church both for its aristocratic conception of society, and for its political influence and religious values. And these new leaders were contesting the restraints imposed on social mobility by the class of the great merchant traders when the latter group had developed into the new financial aristocracy.

The most radical interpretations of the values of republicanism, democracy, laicism were borrowed from the three great political revolutions of the time: the American, the French and the Irish revolutions. At one time, the Imperial government gave support to that group as long as these new leaders, defining themselves as members of the agricultural groups, were checking the alarming rise of the British merchant traders; thus, the "Canadien" party received support in the Parliament of England from the Liberals and the Radicals and succeeded in gaining constitutional rights. But, when the influence of the seigneurs had vanished, when the

new popular leaders, having obtained a majority in the Assembly and control over the civil expenses, were requiring ministerial responsibility; also, when the bourgeoisie of the British merchant-traders behaved as a new aristocracy and the Liberals had come to power in the British Parliament: from then on the social and political landscape was completely changed.

The parties in the social struggle were different: it was no longer the fight of the rising bourgeoisie against the old aristocracy; it was the fight of the leaders of the people against the established bourgeoisie, the new aristocracy of business. The "gens en place" of the new established order had dropped the democratic and republican values they have used for their seizing of the political power. But these same values were now those of the leaders of the people who had more radical aspirations: they wanted democracy for all the people, and for this they needed for themselves the control of political institutions.

But, because the constitution of the country was a British constitution, because the "gens en place" were British merchant-traders, because the trade of the country was part of the trade of the British empire and because the two main British observers of the situation, John Lambton and Poulett Thomson, defined themselves as radicals in the Liberal government: for all these reasons, it was difficult to define the struggle in terms of the confrontation of social classes. It was easier and less incriminating to analyse the situation in terms of ethnic struggle, of "racial" strife between "superiors" and "inferiors" and to interpret the action of the middle class as having no economic motivation. All this was received ever since the publication of the Durham report without sufficient qualification by Canadian historiography.

As for the affirmation of the absence of economic motivation, mostly accepted by economic historians, it must be said that, because there is a drastic opposition between the economic rationalities of a stagnating agricultural society and an expanding industrial society, the former cannot be considered as having no rationality at all. When the leaders of the "Canadien" party were striving for control over public funds and public investment, over land concession, and required the end of land speculation, of administrative corruption and wanted for themselves the public patronage, they were infringing the interests and privileges of the British merchant-traders, but it cannot be said that their economic rationality was not a valid one.

I would suggest that in so far as agriculture of the lower St-Lawrence was in chronic crisis and the structure of imperial trade was impaired by the industrialisation of England, neither of the two opposing groups was able to find a powerful economic weapon in its fight for political domination. This is perhaps the reason why the clash of 1837, shifting to the political sphere, had to be violent.

D — THE PEOPLE

The most important group of the people of the lower valley of the St-Lawrence was constituted by the French-Canadian peasants of the seigneuries. To these were added, after the American revolution, some farmers coming from New England into the Eastern Townships and to the shores of the Ottawa river. When there began, with the turn of the long trend in prices, in 1815, the succession of industrial crises in England, the strikes of the workers fighting for the political recognition of their trade-unions, and the uprisings of the Irish people, there occurred a mass migration of English and Irish workers into Canada. This was part of an admitted policy of settling Lower Canada with English speaking inhabitants.

As long as the avowed purpose was such and as the occasion of this immigration was economic crises, the arrival of the immigrants provoked some disturbances among the French-Canadian people. Especially when they brought cholera with them.¹⁴ But, these were not profound and were overcome rapidly because more important links united all the groups of the people together. For Karl Marx, emigration of English workers and land speculation in the colonies meant the desire of the colonial bourgeoisie to create an urban labor force. In fact, most of the British immigrants in Canada lived in towns and the surplus population of the seigneuries could not find land in the unoccupied Eastern Townships but were forced to emigrate to the developing industrial centers of the New England States.

The policy of introducing English speaking inhabitants into the colony was a failure because, in spite of all the difficulties and ethnic barriers, the community of interest of all the groups who were excluded from the fair distribution of economic advantages and from participation in political life, was of paramount importance. Through their leaders they joined forces and supported the radical aspiration for democracy.¹⁵ But Western civilization was not yet at the hour of democracy; the army was used, both in England and France, to curb the strikes of the industrial workers seeking political recognition, and in Ireland to destroy what was intimately joined together: social and national self-determination. In Canada, both in the Upper and Lower provinces, the army was used to silence the constitutional claims of the leaders and the democratic aspirations of the

¹⁴ For the effect of Irish immigration on the Canadian labor market, see H. Clare Pentland, *Labour and the Development of Industrial Capitalism in Canada*, Ph.D. thesis (Political Economy), typescript, University of Toronto, 1960.

¹⁵ It could indeed be sustained that the Irish were behaving collectively as an ethnic group opposing the British; but to this it can be answered that the interpretation in terms of social class is also more "comprehensive" of the Irish revolution than the ethnic explanation.

people. (The subsequent history of the West would demonstrate that such were the normal reactions of the liberal bourgeois State.)¹⁶

This paper is more in the nature of an essay than of a rigorous scientific and positive demonstration. But such was my purpose to deliver the main lines of my preoccupations, the hypotheses inspiring my research, rather than the conclusions of a long, patient study, still to come. I am very conscious that there is substantial room for criticism, and discussion, and this would be my reward that all the material presented here would be questioned.

I have tried to use some economic and sociological tools and some conclusions drawn by historians of other societies for the analysis of Canadian social history. It is generally accepted that the report of Lord Durham has inspired most of the historiographical research in Canada. I think that Lord Durham was a man of a certain society, and social group, of a distinct period of economic development, and constitutional evolution. His report was a valuable document, but the social sciences have developed more efficacious tools for the study of society than the ones he used.

It is time to drop all the remnants of the nationalist interpretation of our history. The analysis in terms of social stratification does furnish more extensive factors explaining the historical development of our society. But no social history is possible without economic history, because among the defining characteristics of social classes, some of the most important derive from economic structure and development. Nationalism is indeed a profound social reality but it is related to the consciousness of social and economic exploitation as well as of political domination. The early Marxist authors attached no importance to nationalism, but every effort was directed at the study of the class struggle; they were right, perhaps, since they were looking forward for a world organization of society without classes.

The social sciences are now necessary for the study of history, but in the development of specialisation in these new sciences, history is taking a larger place. Since each science is studying a specific aspect of man and his collective behavior and is developing a particular technical vocabulary, hermetical to the other sciences, history is becoming the only accessible place where scientists of many disciplines can join together to study many aspects of social development; this joint session of our two associations is a proof of it.

¹⁶ See chapter I: "A Hundred Years Peace" in Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation*, New York, Toronto, Rinehart, 1957.