

## **French Canada's Diaspora and Labour History**

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## REVIEW ESSAYS/ NOTES CRITIQUES

### French Canada's Diaspora and Labour History

André E. LeBlanc

Jacques Rouillard, *Ah les États!: les travailleurs canadiens-français dans l'industrie textile de la Nouvelle-Angleterre d'après le témoignage des derniers migrants* (Montréal: Boréal Express 1985).

CHINESE OF THE EAST. I first heard this statement as I sat uncomfortably in a dentist chair. Doc Harris, as we fondly referred to him, had been given the platform for a soliloquy. My mother used to refer to him as a "strange bird" and so he was: an intellectual, a parlour socialist, an atheist of Jewish background, an adoptive father of a multiracial brood - all of this quite out of keeping in a small, staid New England community nearly 25 years ago. Just as he started stuffing my mouth with cotton padding, I grunted to him that I had just finished a term paper on the IWW and the 1912 Lawrence textile strike. This was all he needed. He loved to talk and all I could do with his drill whizzing was listen and pray that he not hit a nerve. There was less of a shock from the drill, however, than from what he had to say about Franco-American strike breakers and the anti-union proclivities of this group. As a first generation Franco-American, I was already having difficulty living with my name — I kept being called Andrea Leeblank — and I forever feigned ignorance when I was asked if I understood French. Now, to use a dental pun, my roots were being torn out.

Doc Harris bore no malice. He said it as he understood it as I was soon to realize. I sheepishly left his office with a feigned smile determined to clarify the situation to my satisfaction. My mid-semester break was conveniently given over to rummaging through the shelves of my college library only to come to the conclusion that the Franco-Americans were indeed an elusive

breed with a checkered background in labour's eye: hard workers, friendly people, but not organized. This was the *summa summarum* of the literature that I could put my hands on in 1960.

It seemed so clear, but my gut instinct was as uneasy then as it has remained to this day. It was too simplistic and it did not match my own lived experience. My parents, one of *acadien* and the other of *québécois* background, were unionists to the core and proud of it. I was brought up with *The Carpenter* magazine on the coffee table, and experienced the 1950s as my mother, relatives, and friends were thrown out of work when the shoe and hat shops of the community closed down, most of them for good; this was definitely not the high-tech economy of present day New England. My father habitually hitched the 20-mile ride monthly to attend a union meeting to pay his dues. Even though he was lucky to find three months of work per year, his card meant something. Our family's union lore was abundant. Aunt Marianne recalled her naive involvement during the 1926 organizational battle at the Cohen Shoe Factory; the union obtained the majority, but the owners moved out rather than recognize its existence. One of the early signees when the United Automobile Workers moved to organize the Ford auto body plant in Somerville, Massachusetts in the mid 1930s was my uncle Harmel. Uncles Joe and Gerard did the same at the General Motors Fisher Body factory in Tarrytown, New York when the UAW made its bid.

These were born and bred "Canucks" — as we were referred to locally — who in the early 1920s came from the marginal farms of the Lower St. Lawrence and the Petitcodiac. The movement from a pre-industrial to an industrial mode of thinking was swift for them on all counts. It is for this reason that suspicion reigns when I ponder what history tells us of the Franco-Americans. Could the generation of the 1880s be so different from that of the 1920s? The imagery set by Carroll D. Wright, chief of the Massachusetts Bureau of Statistics of Labor, when depicting the Franco-Americans as the "Chinese of the Eastern States" is nevertheless there to confront and it has proven to possess enormous sticking power.<sup>1</sup>

Between 1820 and 1950 over 39 million immigrants made their way to the land of the bold and free. Of this number, an estimated 3,200,000, came from Canada and Newfoundland, with well over one million of them being French speaking.<sup>2</sup> The French Canadian component of this migratory movement was especially significant because it settled in one area. In the words of Carl Wittke, an early dean of immigration studies, New England became the "mecca of the French Canadian im-

<sup>1</sup> Massachusetts Department of Labor and Industries, *12th Annual Report of the Bureau of Statistics of Labor* (Boston 1881), 469. For a perspicacious analysis of this statement and its context written from the perspective of a French Canadian anthropologist see: Pierre Anctil, "'Chinese of the Eastern States,' 1881," *Recherches sociographiques*, 22 (1981), 125-30, and his "'L'identité de l'immigrant québécois en Nouvelle-Angleterre. Le rapport Wright de 1882," *Recherches sociographiques*, 22 (1981), 331-59.

<sup>2</sup> The monographic material on Canadian emigration to the United States is sparse and open to re-evaluation: Marcus L. Hansen and John B. Brebner, *The Mingling of the Canadian and American Peoples* (New Haven 1940); L.E.T. Truesdell, *The Canadian Born in the United States* (New Haven 1943); and Yolande Lavoie, *L'émigration des canadiens aux États Unis avant 1930* (Montréal 1972). Studies specifically on French Canadian immigration include: Ralph Vicero, "Immigration of French Canadians to New England, 1840-1900: a Geographical Analysis," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 1968; Albert Faucher, "L'émigration des Canadiens français au XIX siècle: position du problème et perspectives," *Recherches sociographiques*, 5 (1964), 319-70; Gilles Paquet and Wayne R. Smith, "L'émigration des Canadiens français vers les États-Unis, 1790-1940: problématique et coups de sonde," *l'Actualité économique*, 59 (1983), 423-53; and Bruno Ramirez and Jean Lamarre, "Du Québec vers les États-Unis: l'étude des lieux d'origine," *Revue d'histoire de l'Amérique française*, 38 (1985), 409-22. Finally, and in a class by itself: Yolande Lavoie, *L'émigration des Québécois aux États-Unis de 1840 à 1930* (Québec 1979).

migrant."<sup>3</sup> This event has just been celebrated in a universal sense with the commemoration of the 10th anniversary of the fabled Statue of Liberty. Yet the bombastic outpouring of this celebration does not negate the fact that the Franco-American barely possesses a historical visibility in their adopted land.

Nearly half a million French speaking migrants made their way south before 1900, although we know relatively little of this initial "mythic" period despite an abundance of written material.<sup>4</sup> These studies, especially those written before 1940, are prosaic and were often written to defend or to glorify an event or ideology. They were penned by protagonists from the inside looking out with all the limitations that this brings. As for the post-1900 period, the picture becomes a little clearer, yet even here there are tremendous holes and much work to be done. Needless to say, a solidly researched general history of the Franco-American experience is long overdue.

What is uncontested is that the French Canadian diaspora of the late nineteenth century came at a critical juncture in the industrial evolution of the United States. Not only did the French Canadians avidly give their brawn and sweat to the industrial work places of the burgeoning mill towns of the American northeast, they also became the gristle of its human exploitation. In return the host society and its institutions, including organized labour, found it convenient to criticize and denigrate these newcomers. As a recent observer remarks: "*Un des avantages décisifs dont ont pu profiter les propriétaires de moyens de production au mo-*

Magnan, *Histoire de la Race Française aux États-Unis* (Paris 1913); Bruno Wilson, *L'Évolution de la race française en Amérique: Vermont, New Hampshire, Connecticut, Rhode Island* (Montréal 1921); J. Arthur Favreau, *The Chinese of the Eastern States* (Manchester 1924); Alexandre Goulet, *Une Nouvelle-France en Nouvelle Angleterre* (Paris 1934); and Josaphat Benoît, *L'âme franco-américaine* (Montréal 1935). Starting in the 1950s several worthwhile productions appeared. Often written by individuals distanced from the events and by academics, these studies offer a much more accurate panorama. The first noteworthy piece is an essay by Iris S. Podea, "Quebec to 'Little Canada': the Coming of the French Canadians to New England," *New England Quarterly*, 23 (1950), 365-80. This is followed by the first contemporary history: Robert Rumilly, *Histoire des Franco-Américains* (Montréal 1958). This book presents all the small details and lack of solid synthesis that characterize the author's approach in all of his popular histories. The socio-economic dimension is lacking, although the political sphere and the interrelationship between Quebec society (and Church) and its United States hinterland is well fleshed out. Since Rumilly's book appeared there has been a steady flow of articles, books, and theses: Gerald J. Doiron, "The French Canadian Migration into Rhode Island," M.A. thesis, University of Rhode Island, 1959; Edmond J. Valade, "The Amoskeag Strike of 1922," M.A. thesis, University of New Hampshire, 1974; Robert B. Perreault, "One Piece in the Great American Mosaic. The Franco-Americans of New England," *Le Canado-Américain*, 2 (1976), 5-51; James H. Parker, *Ethnic Identity: The Case of the French Canadians* (Lanham, MD 1983); Louise Pelloquin-Farré, *L'identité culturelle: les Franco-américains de la Nouvelle Angleterre* (Paris 1983); C. Stewart Doty, *The first Franco-Americans: New England life histories from the Federal Writer's Project, 1938-1939* (Orono 1985); and Gérard J. Brault, *The French-Canadian Heritage in New England* (Montréal 1986). There is also a general bibliography that merits attention: Pierre Anctil, ed., *A Franco-American Bibliography. New England* (Bedford, NH 1977).

<sup>3</sup> Carle Wittke, *We Who Built America* (Cleveland 1967), 321.

<sup>4</sup> The first and still considered the standard work for the early period is Edouard Hamon, *Les Canadiens Français de la Nouvelle Angleterre* (Québec 1891). Hamon was born in France and emigrated to the United States where he became a Roman Catholic priest. His interest in his French Canadian flock was not necessarily the same as that of many French Canadian clerics who followed their flocks south or who were assigned to this missionary ground by the Quebec church hierarchy. Other books from this early period include: D.M.A.

ment de la révolution industrielle fut l'existence des barrières culturelles et nationales au sein même de la classe ouvrière en formation".<sup>5</sup> A fine bone picking exercise. Even the Irish immigrants who preceded the French Canadians in New England's puddling sheds, weaving rooms, and dye works were not alien to this cacophony; having endured, it was now their turn to seize what table crumbs industrial capitalism had to offer.

The Wright Report, for all its limitations, was an honest and fair statement in line with the reformist zeal that was then starting to coalesce in the United States.<sup>6</sup> Had half a million Hispanics arrived instead of the Lorenzo Surprenant's and the Jeanne la fileuse's,<sup>7</sup> the assessment would have been essentially the same. Unfortunately, the Scarlet Letter bestowed by the New Englanders on the exploited has hung for a long time. Doc Harris is proof.

The study of American immigration has been influenced by three successive schools of thought, the first two carrying forward, in one way or another, the canard of the Chinese of the Eastern States. Americanization was the primary concern of the first school that openly feared pollution by inferior stock. This was followed in the 1930s and 1940s by those who treated immigration as a process whereby the immigrants were stripped of their traditional cultures and battered into submission. The third school, now firmly in place, orients itself towards cultural continuity: the Old World melds into the New World with the distinctive flavour that this brings. For the Franco-American this third school promises — finally — the hope of a less jaundiced depiction.

<sup>5</sup> Anctil, "Chinese. . .," 128-9.

<sup>6</sup> For readable discussion of this reformist impulse, consult the two classics: Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform. From Bryan to F.D.R.* (New York 1955) and Eric F. Goldman, *Rendezvous with Destiny. A History of Modern American Reform* (New York 1952).

<sup>7</sup> Characters depicted in French Canadian and Franco-American literature: Louis Hémon, *Maria Chappelaine* (Paris 1921) and Honoré Beaugrand, *Jeanne la fileuse, épisode de l'émigration franco-canadienne aux États-Unis (Fall River 1878)*.

The winds of change first appeared in the mid 1950s in a magisterial, albeit largely unknown, work.<sup>8</sup> Barbara Solomon's desire to understand the "interplay of ideas, attitudes and social change" cut through the racist traditions of the New England elites, the so-called Brahmins. In showing how their "anglo-saxon complex" developed against the background of their loss of power in a rapidly evolving socio-economic infrastructure, Solomon pierced the hostile reaction of the opinion makers towards the new industrial proletariat of the nineteenth century. This laceration, as she pointed out, was rapidly cauterized: "After the turn of the century New Englanders displayed little interest in the French Canadian. . . . By then, the French Canadian was an acceptable part of industrial society, and a source of friction and antagonism more to other immigrant groups than to the native New Englanders."<sup>9</sup> The large scale movement of peasant stock from southern Italy and Sicily had begun, and as they settled in the U.S. northeast they in turn took-on "oriental" status.

Solomon's suggestive book obtained only polite attention. A study dissecting the racist foundation of the New England yankees was not timely at the outset of the Civil Rights movement. It took nearly two more decades for the dam to break, and this took place with the arrival of the new social history and the new labour history, both premised on anthropological sensitivities and insights. These new studies permitted a reconstruction and subsequent reinterpretation of the Franco-American experience, at least at a micro level. Silvia's work on Fall River, Guignard on Biddeford, Hareven on Manchester, and Walkowitz on Troy and Cohoes<sup>10</sup> have erod-

<sup>8</sup> Barbara M. Solomon, *Ancestors and Immigrants. A Changing New England Tradition* (Boston 1956).

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 163.

<sup>10</sup> The new social history and the new labour history has given us: Philip T. Silvia, "The Spindle City: Labor, Politics and Religion in Fall River, Massachusetts, 1870-1905," Ph.D. dissertation, Fordham University, 1973; Susan E. Jaffee, "Ethnic Working Class Protest: the Textile Strike of 1922 in Rhode Island," Honor's thesis, Brown University, 1974;

ed the restraints that for over half a century relegated Franco-American history to either a glorification or a castigation of a cultural fragment. Seconded and enriched by Canadian scholars,<sup>11</sup> who were able to appreciate the continuum and interplay of forces that encouraged many a French Canadian to say *je monte aux États*, the new historians also called into question the contention that only a few immigrant groups were at first viscerally indifferent to labour's call. Work on the Poles, Slavs, Slovaks, and Italians went a long way toward cleaning the cupboard of this particular chestnut.<sup>12</sup> This in itself returns some dignity to the original Chinese of the Eastern States.

Encouraging as all of this may sound, it remains that these pieces of the puzzle are just that: pieces. They are going to have to be connected, and for this much remains to be done. The new social and labour historians, at the

<sup>11</sup> Frances H. Early, "Mobility Potential and the Quality of Life in Working-Class Lowell, Massachusetts: The French-Canadians ca. 1870," *Labour/Le Travailleur*, 2 (1977), 194-228; Frances H. Early, "French-Canadian Beginnings in an American Community: Lowell, Massachusetts, 1868-1886," Ph.D. dissertation, Concordia University, 1979; Pierre Anctil, "Aspects of Class Ideology in a New England Ethnic Minority: The Franco-Americans of Woonsocket, Rhode Island (1865-1929)," Ph.D. dissertation, New School for Social Research, 1980; Frances H. Early, "The Rise and Fall of Felix Albert: Reflections on the Aspirations of Habitant Immigrants to Lowell in the Late Nineteenth Century," *The Quebec and Acadian Diaspora in North America*, eds. Raymond Breton & Pierre Savard (Toronto 1982), 25-38; Bruno Ramirez, "French Canadian Immigrants in the New England Cotton Industry: A Socioeconomic Profile," *Labour/Le Travailleur*, 11 (1983), 125-42; and Jean Lamarre, "L'émigration des Canadiens-français en Nouvelle-Angleterre: le cas de Warren, Rhode Island (1880-1895)," Thèse de M.A., Université de Montréal, 1985. One should also consider the popular chronicle prepared by Normand Lafleur, *Les "chinois" de l'Est ou la vie quotidienne des Québécois émigrés de 1840 à nos jours* (Montréal 1981).

<sup>12</sup> As early as 1960, David Brody in his *Steelworkers in America. The Nonunion Era* (Boston), ch. V alluded to this when referring to the immigrant workers from South and East Europe. This was further developed by: Victor R. Greene, *The Slavic Community on Strike: Immigrant Labor in Pennsylvania Anthracite* (Notre Dame, IN 1968); Henry B. Leonard, "Ethnic Cleavage and Industrial Conflict in Late 19th Century America: The Cleveland Rolling Mill Company Strike of 1882 and 1885," *Labor History*, 20 (1979), 524-48; John J. Bukowczyk, "The Transformation of Working-Class Ethnicity: Corporate Control, Americanization, and the Polish Immigrant Middle Class in Bayonne, New Jersey, 1915-1925," *Labor History*, 25 (1984), 53-82; and Mark Stolarik, *Growing Up on the South Side: Three Generations of Slovaks in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, 1880-1976* (Lewisburg, PA 1985).

Michael J. Guignard, "Ethnic Survival in a New England Mill Town: the Franco-Americans of Biddeford, Maine," Ph.D. dissertation, Syracuse University, 1976; Peter Haebler, "Habitants in Holyoke: The Development of French-Canadian Community in a Massachusetts City, 1865-1910," Ph.D. dissertation, University of New Hampshire, 1976; Tamara K. Hareven and Randolph Langenbach, *Amoskeag: Life and Work in an American Factory City* (New York 1978); John T. Cumbler, *Working Class Community in Industrial America. Work, Leisure and Struggles in Two Industrial Cities, 1880-1930* (Westport 1979); Anthony Coelho, "A Row of Nationalities: Life in a Working Class Community, the Irish, English, and French Canadians of Fall River, Mass. 1850-1890," Ph.D. dissertation, Brown University, 1981; James P. Hanlan, *The Working Population of Manchester, New Hampshire, 1840-1886* (Ann Arbor 1981); Gary Gerstle, "The Rise of Industrial Unionism, Ethnicity and Labor Organization in Woonsocket, Rhode Island, 1931-1934," Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University, 1982; and Tamara K. Hareven, *Family Time & Industrial Time: The Relationship Between the Family & Work in a New England Industrial Community* (New York 1982).

very least, must be credited with showing the way.

All of this brings us to a recently published book that is a cameo in the tradition of working-class history. *Ah les États!* by Jacques Rouillard, the major artisan of contemporary Quebec labour history, is an unpretentious excursion into the lives of emigrant textile workers in New England. Resting upon a sound assimilation of the existing literature, it portrays the Franco-American working-class experience through the memories of 50 *québécois* who sojourned in the American textile cities during the first half of this century. Delightful reading, the book is tastefully illustrated and captures in its own way the flavour of a not-so-bygone era. As I read the book it brought me back to my youth, to the *réveil-lon* and other extended family gatherings, to my grandfather waiting for the mailman to deliver his weekly "international" edition of *La Presse*. (I could not read it, but I never missed pouring over the Tarzan comic strip).

The book is organized in two distinct parts. In the first, Rouillard walks us through the emigration process. After setting the stage, he travels with the emigrant, explaining how the decision to leave Quebec was taken, how preparations to migrate were made, and how the emigrant was perceived by those left behind. Far from being the wrenching ordeal that one imagines when picturing the trans-Atlantic migration, Rouillard stresses that for the French Canadian there was more of a wonderment, a *mal des États*. Fear there no doubt was, but it was tempered by the recognition that if things did not work out, there was always another train to go back on. Upon arrival, the urgency of finding a place to stay and a job pressed upon all migrants. Yet for most this was not a major problem, at least not until the years of the Great Depression when work evaporated and restrictive entry legislation came into effect. Rouillard then looks at how the migrant adapted to the new milieu. Not surprisingly, the more cosmopolitan American life style became quite attractive to both young and old. Certainly the material benefits played their part, but so too did the awakening senses of independence and accomplishment. Values and perceptions shifted ever so slightly. For many, however, the migratory experience was just a

chapter in their lives. There were those who had come simply to put together a nest egg, as well as those overcome with the *mal du pays*, and those caught by the economic downturn. Over 10,000, it is estimated, made their way back to Quebec.

In the second part of his book Rouillard allows seven of the returned migrants to give their *témoignages*. Six women and a man whose childhood homes spanned the rural areas of the province, but whose adult years were spent in nine different textile communities in four states over the years 1899 to 1966, speak to us in this part of the book. The sense of awe is unmistakable, as is the recollection of times. None, however, indicate a wish to go back. Past is past. "*On remerciat le Bon Dieu de nous avoir donné de l'ouvrage.*" (151)

Rouillard's concern for the migrant textile worker does not come as a surprise. His early years were spent in Three Rivers, a community primarily known for its pulp and paper sector, although one with a long history of textile manufacturing. His mother even worked in a textile mill until her health gave way. In 1974 he published his *Les travailleurs du coton au Québec 1900-1915*,<sup>13</sup> an outgrowth of his masters degree studies at Laval University. As one can see, things have a way of reappearing. *Ah les États!*, nevertheless, is a very different work. It demonstrates the maturation of the historian, and there is breaking of new ground. For the first time in a significant monograph we see a *québécois* labour historian take measured steps along the path of working-class history. Although the seminal work of E.P. Thompson and other working-class specialists often receives credit in introductions and bibliographies of *québécois* historians, the actual impact on the finished product is far from discernable.<sup>14</sup> Rouillard,

<sup>13</sup> Jacques Rouillard, *Les Travailleurs du coton au Québec 1900-1915* (Montréal 1974).

<sup>14</sup> It is revealing to note that in two retrospective articles on working-class history that appeared at the turn of this decade, neither cited one [*québécois*] author: see Gregory S. Kealey, "Labour and Working-Class History in Canada: Prospects in the 1980's" *Labour / Le Travailleur*, 7 (1981), 67-94 and David J. Bercuson, "Through the Looking Glass of Cul-

in this volume, delivers the goods. He does so through an exploitation of oral history techniques that is also somewhat of a first. Oral history has rarely been used in a systematic fashion by Quebec academic historians, and this has a great deal to say about the elitist nature of their production — the educated and powerful get it down in writing! Rouillard's excursion is consequently symbolically important. His failure to give greater details on 43 of his 50 interviewees, however, unfortunately leaves his effort unpolished.

When examined from the perspective of French Canada's diaspora, Rouillard's book reinforces the historical studies outlined above. In opting for a survey of migration to the New England textile communities from the vista of the emigrant, he also acknowledges the importance of understanding the centripetal pull of the American Empire. In this respect his book adds to the work of European historians who have for a long time concerned themselves with emigration questions.<sup>15</sup> The subtlety of this emigration versus immigration approach is in the interpretive diorama that is produced. Can one for instance, fully situate the French Canadian worker of the Amoskeag mills without an in-depth understanding of their roots and cultural baggage? In a practical sense this has not been possible until present. The appearance of *Ah les États!* now inserts an appreciation and interpretation that has to be addressed. Tamara Hareven's work on Manchester, New Hampshire is hence set for a certain degree of transmutation, and this interplay is what sparks the creative impulse of the historian.

If the book transported me back to the halcyon years of my youth, it also riveted my attention on a series of distinct features that I think are most germane to a proper under-

standing of the French Canadian / *québécois* worker experience. *Primo*, more than ever it struck me as to just how elitist French Canada's historiography has been and to a large degree remains. The constitutional, nationalist, neo-nationalist, and ideological schools have all been recycling the same elitist hash: in essence a Whig interpretation from the loser's perspective. Rouillard's emigrants, however, were the survivors in the grand tradition of *la survivance*. Personal interests came first even over considerations of race. It was not the thunder of the Church, the lamentations of *Le Devoir*, and so forth that stopped them from going. And this is the submissive mass that historians of all hues have talked about! Perhaps the mental cobwebs of the New England yankees do not only exist south of the border.

My maternal grandfather — farmer, small-time livestock merchant, local postmaster, and seasoned Laurier organizer — could not put it together any longer in the Temiscouata region of Quebec. Following in the steps of his eldest son who had gone to Massachusetts and found work for himself in the carriage industry, my grandfather sold the farm to pay his debts, drew together five of the seven remaining children, and set out for a new start. He was part of a continuing exodus, the meaning of which we have only begun to appreciate because the historiography offers precious little insight on how the masses thought and acted.

A second observation that *Ah les États!* elicits touches upon the symbiotic relationship that exists between the traditional homeland of the French Canadians and the American northeast, what geographers refer to as the Upper Appalachians.<sup>16</sup> This extended area has all

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ture: An Essay on the New Labour History and Working-Class Culture in Recent Canadian Historical Writing," *Labour / Le Travailleur*, 7 (1981), 95-112.

<sup>15</sup> For a good overview of what is being done consult: Dirk Hoerder, "American Labor & Immigration History: Reports on the State of the Historiography Since 1945 in the European Countries," *Labor History*, 21 (1980), 261-76 and 392-419.

<sup>16</sup> It is important to stress here that the "Little Canadas" of Lowell, Manchester, and Fall River—the traditional big three—contained only a fraction of the diaspora population. Albert A. Bélanger, *Guide Officiel des Franco-Américains 1927* (Fall River 1927) identifies 237 communities in the New England states with Franco-American populations. Since this was based on Church records it ignores the many localities where pockets of Franco-Americans



of the features of a safety net for the French Canadian masses, and this appears to me to be quite relevant to the development of their working-class experience and consciousness. The emigrant work force of Rouillard's book, with its many birds of passage, raises a plethora of unanswered questions. What did these individuals bring to the American industrial communities in addition to their desire to work, and what did they derive from it besides material benefits? How did the American work milieu influence the working-class consciousness of the French Canadian and vice versa? What impact did this have on the perception and actual development of unionization in French Canada/Quebec? What impact did the diaspora have on the development of Quebec's textile industry, both in terms of its economic articulation and its shopfloor development. To imagine that all of this is neutral in the course of human events is to misjudge the impact of such a population ebb and flow.

According to family lore, my paternal grandfather (initiated by his father) trekked on a regular basis from the Moncton region to the granite quarries of Connecticut. Once the autumn crops were in this became the means whereby a family of 15 could live decently. It also set the stage for 11 of the children to migrate, seven permanently. Those who returned had the financial base to launch themselves in business or the job skills to command employment. Only two in the family continued to farm. All were profoundly affected by the events. What would have happened if the convenient railway links were not there to make such transfers possible?

Finally, if *Ah les États!* provided me with a comprehensive overview of the textile industry work force, it also stimulated my interest in the broader parameters of the diaspora work experience. Yes, life existed outside of the tex-

tile mills. French Canadians were significantly involved in shoe manufacturing, in the carpet trade, in ship building, in the carriage and early automobile body shops, in the hat manufactures, in the iron foundries, in the stone quarries, and in the construction trades to name only the more important sectors. It is too easy to forget this since one is often left with a one-dimensional view of the economic development of the American northeast because of the dominant position of textile manufacturing. In addition, one must not lose sight of the importance of the diaspora to the logging and pulp and paper sectors of northern New England, or its role in providing migrant harvesters for the Maine potato and small fruit crops and for Connecticut tobacco. And I must not forget my three aunts, imported to work as domestics for the Kinney wool manufacturing magnates. All of this enticing fodder for ambitious labour historians.

Jacques Rouillard's book has opened up new horizons and set a pace. Our knowledge of both French Canada's working men and women and its diaspora has been enriched, and a different conceptual paradigm with a new approach to source material has been applied with success. The timing of this could not be more auspicious since labour studies in Quebec at this point show signs of stagnation. The same people seem to be doing the same thing. Invariably, similar issues and themes appear in comparable packaging. Interesting and methodologically sound articles and theses continue to be published, but stimulating synthetic productions are elusive. *Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose. Ah les États!*, in this respect, may provide a welcome shot in the arm.

*My thanks to Bryan Palmer for his critical comments on an initial draft of this essay.*

lived without the benefit of a distinct French language parish. It is also important to realize that New England was not the only place where the French Canadians emigrated. Bélanger identifies them in 131 communities in ten other states. Jean Lamarre is presently preparing a doctoral dissertation at Université de Montréal that tries to fill-out the picture for the American midwest.