
Donald Swainson
George-Etienne Cartier: Montreal Bourgeois is a thoroughly researched, tightly organized and well written study of limited aspects of Cartier's political, professional and business careers. The theme that is used to limit the scope of Young's concern is Cartier as a "Montreal Bourgeois." Unfortunately, the term is not tightly enough defined to serve the purpose adequately: "The theme of the present study is that Cartier can best be understood as a Montreal bourgeois. The term is admittedly an inexact one . . ." Young has other problems with his use of class for analytical purposes, as he makes clear: "The actions of Cartier, as an agent of the colonial, business, and religious elite, were determined by the exigencies of class conflict which, although sometimes ill-defined, formed the basis of mid-nineteenth century Montreal politics." What we get in the rest of the book is not really a class-based analysis. Rather, we are shown Cartier in relation to Montreal and Quebec society, business, professional life, institutions and politics. Little is said about other crucial aspects of his career: his relationship with John A. Macdonald; his role as an architect of confederation; his part in the national government's response to the first Riel Rebellion; his negotiations with British Columbia and especially his commitment to build a transcontinental railroad; and his political plight in 1871-73 and its role in the subsequent collapse of the first confederation government. Brian Young gives us a partial Cartier, but an increasing and provocative Cartier that must be understood.

George-Etienne Cartier's conservatism receives succinct and plausible, if somewhat conventional, definition. Young points out that the Rouge/Liberals "opposed Cartier's unremitting and systematic political conservatism. While they also spoke for factions in the bourgeoisie, they felt that Cartier exaggerated in his efforts to protect property, the propertied class, and hierarchical structures which protected these privileges. An anathema to many nationalists and yet a logical conclusion of his conservatism was Cartier's praise for the conquest, which had 'saved us from the misery and the shame of the French Revolution. The conquest ended by giving us the fine and free institutions which we possess today, and under which we live happy and prosperous.'" Cartier's conservatism involved the protection of the state against "popular elements" and an established church. The young and the poor should not be allowed to participate in public life. British models should be preferred to those from the republican south: "An enthusiastic monarchist, he opposed frequent elections, the secret ballot, and universal suffrage." Even his opposition to representation by population was grounded, at least in his rhetoric, in his conservatism: it would lead logically to universal suffrage. An appointed upper house in both Ottawa and Quebec City was an essential protection for the propertied classes. Cartier's conservatism was an important part of the nineteenth century and helps explain the fact that he no longer holds much of a place in the pantheon of Quebec heroes.

Perhaps the most important contribution made by Professor Young is his discussion of Cartier as a major infrastructure reformer. In the process he adds a new dimension to our knowledge of the union period, which becomes "one of fundamental social and economic change in which the La Fontaine-Cartier Conservatives — operating from a base of bourgeois values — succeed in giving new form to the basic institutions of Quebec society." (Presumably the words "bourgeois" and "conservative" are interchangeable in spite of the profound fissures within bourgeois society.) We have here a first-rate analysis of those elements that provided this "new form": the abolition of the seigneurial system; a revised commercial law; improved, "centralized, hierarchical, integrated" education; insulation of Francophone society against radicalism; and an expanded railway system.

Other aspects of Cartier and his Quebec are illuminated. For example, it is clear that Cartier was not really a section-wide or provincial leader: "although he spoke as a French-Canadian chef his real bailiwick was Montreal." This was especially the case in economic policy, where he was not interested in the effects of economic expansion on any part of Quebec but Montreal. Young does not diminish the corrupt, violent and patronage-ridden nature of nineteenth century politics in Montreal, but he underscores the point that patronage at least had a larger policy goal than electoral success: "Cartier never forgot La Fontaine's emphasis on patronage as one means of entrenching the francophone bourgeoisie."

Cartier's private life was fascinating and receives due attention. His disastrous marriage is explained, as are his social aspirations. Cartier, after all, "possessed a valet, a coat of arms, and a country estate." In spite of his membership in a very conservative and conventional society and his long intimate association with the Sulpicians, he lived openly and brazenly (as some of his colleagues had it) with Luce Cuvillier for many years. This material is of substantial interest, although Young probably makes too much of it when he concludes as follows: "His personal life offers an insight into the bourgeoisie society of his day: his mobility, shifting residences, and lack of traditional family life suggests a rootlessness that contrasts with the concentration of his social, professional, and investment activities within a few city-
blocks in the centre of Montreal. Another potential contradiction is posed by his political role as a ‘national’ leader and representative of a working-class constituency and his material condition as a prominent bourgeois who possessed a valet, a coat of arms, and a country estate.” A study of his life certainly does give insights into his class, but why should “rootlessness” be deduced from changes in residence and a failed marriage? What is incongruous about a “‘national’ leader and representative of a working-class constituency” who aspired to the upper classes? It happened all the time in the nineteenth century as it does today.

A few minor and surprising errors flawed the text. After 1849 the province of the Province of Canada did not rotate “every two years between Quebec City and Toronto.” Young notes that at confederation “most provinces opted for unicameral systems.” Actually, bicameral systems were initially established in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick as well as in Quebec. This pattern was subsequently followed in Manitoba and Prince Edward Island.

Quibbles of fact and interpretation aside, this book is a major contribution to our knowledge of the life and influence of George-Etienne Cartier. It should be read and used by those students and scholars interested in nineteenth century Canadian public policy and social history.

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While Wismer gives full play to Shulman’s apparently bungled accusations of 28 October 1970, his more significant speech of 5 December 1972, leading to the formation of the Royal Commission which Zanini himself had been demanding for years, only received mention in her bibliography. This speech, Shulman alleged that the illegal activities of contractors to obtain monopoly price fixing and fraudulent unions were accomplished through ties to organized crime and the provincial government. In detailing these sensational charges, Shulman focused on the bombing of the office of Acme Lathing. He asserted that these attacks were the work of Acme’s competitors in the lathing business: Northtown Drywall, owned and controlled by the Cesaroni brothers, and C. Romanelli Lathing. Shulman added that the Vice-President of Romanelli Lathing was Elvio DelZotto (a former Liberal party provincial election candidate) and stressed, “Elvio DelZotto controls C. Romanelli — and Romanelli is responsible for the bombings.” Furthermore Shulman stressed that Elvio DelZotto was “named periph-