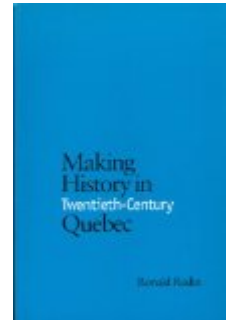


Ronald Rudin. *Making History in Twentieth-Century Quebec.* Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997. xiii + 285 pp. \$55.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8020-7838-4.



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Historical Writing and Social Change in Quebec

Prof. Ronald Rudin, a professor of history at Concordia University in Montreal, has written an impressive and controversial analysis of Quebec historiography in the twentieth century. This study which has already been translated into French, is the subject of continuing debates within the Quebec historical community. He is the author of several historical studies in the 1970s and 1980s and in general adhered to the "Revisionist" interpretation of Quebec history. Prof. Rudin states in the Preface that he was led to this study through his interest in Irish history, which had some of the same historiographical problems as Quebec history. In the Introduction, Prof. Rudin claims that his intention was to examine the relationship between historical writing and social change in Quebec. He describes the early role of "amateur" historians, the rise of the historical profession in Quebec and how it was molded by forces within both their discipline and their changing society. Also of significance was the impact of French and American historians on the

historical profession in Quebec. As an active member of the historical profession in Quebec, Prof. Rudin provides an "insider" point of view. During his research, Prof. Rudin had access to records of historical associations and private papers of some Quebec historians. In this study, he deals almost exclusively with French-speaking historians in Quebec.

In his first chapter, "Not Quite a Profession: The Historical Community in Early-Twentieth-Century Quebec", Prof. Rudin focuses on the life and career of Abbe Lionel Groulx. Beginning as a lecturer in Montreal during the First World War, Groulx followed in the tradition of other patriot-priests in submerged Roman Catholic societies such as Ireland and Poland and sought to teach history as means to defend his nationality and religion by promoting patriotism and nationalism. According to Groulx, the pivotal event in Quebec history was the British Conquest of 1759. As a result of this defeat, the population of Quebec, abandoned by France, became victims of oppression and subject to suffering and humiliation. Under British administration, the French-speaking popu-

lation was in great danger of assimilation. The short and long range objectives became simply La Survivance, the survival of the nation. All the energies of the French-speaking population were mobilized for this purpose with the Church in the forefront of this campaign. Depending on the specific political circumstances, the Church assumed aspects of an anti-colonial and passive resistance movement.

As a product of this century-old struggle, Groulx wrote his history from a Catholic and French Canadian perspective. While other early Quebec historians wrote about the positive effects of the British Conquest, Groulx wrote about a conquered people who through their own cohesion, determination, tenacity and "hard work" struggled to obtain their rights and to "make it". According to Groulx, the French Canadians were able to make great achievements in politics so that by Confederation in 1867 they were "on an equal footing" with the Anglo-Canadians.

In the second chapter, "Nuts and Bolts: Lionel Groulx and the Trappings of a Profession", Prof. Rudin continues to describe the university career of Groulx and his attempts to popularize his nationalist interpretation of history based on the negative effects of the British Conquest. Other historians are evaluated according to their support or opposition to this interpretation. For example, Robert Rumilly and more particularly, Maurice Seguin agreed with Groulx about the nature of the historical problem. They were in accord that the political and economic inferiority of the French-speaking population after the Conquest helped to shape contemporary Quebec society. Seguin took this analysis further and also advocated the seizure of political power by the French-speaking population to remedy this situation. In the 1960s and 1970s other historians carried this view even further, participated actively in Quebec politics and advocated political independence.

In addition to promoting his view of nationalist history, Groulx was also concerned about

building the historical profession in Quebec. He was aware of his own limitations as a researcher and as an academic and attempted to develop his professional skills through visits to European universities. As a researcher, he visited archives both in Canada and in Europe and based his writings on archival sources. He encouraged individual students to seek graduate degrees in history at American and European universities and groomed them to follow in his footsteps. Groulx was instrumental in the establishment of the Institut d'histoire de l'Amerique Francaise in 1946 and the *Revue d'Histoire de l'Amerique Francaise* in 1947. He also popularized history through public seminars and discussion groups and through readings on the radio.

The development and evolution of the Montreal School in contrast to the Laval School in Quebec historiography is described in the third chapter, "The Maitre and His Successors: The Montreal Approach". By the 1960s, approximately seventy-five per cent of the Quebec population lived in an urban environment and the historians began to focus on the role of French Canadians in modern society. Problems relating to federal-provincial relations began to dominate the news and serious questions were raised about the role of the Canadian federation. The historical problem which divided the Montreal and Laval Schools dealt with their historical analysis of the weak political and economic status of the French-speaking population of Quebec in relation to English Canada in the post-Second World War period. The Montreal School tended to explain this situation by referring to the British Conquest and the resulting colonial structure of society where the French Canadians were excluded from positions of wealth and power. This School advocated the need for more political autonomy within Confederation and the need for special status for Quebec. The Laval School proposed that the perceived inferior status of the French Canadians was due to obstacles which were internally generated within their society. For example, they claimed that the

Roman Catholic Church limited and prevented the development of secular education depriving French Canadians of the necessary skills to function competitively in North American society. The differences in the interpretations of the history of Quebec resulted in personal and public disputes among historians which in some cases, continued for decades.

Historians from the Montreal School were criticized for adopting a militant neo-nationalist approach to the writing of Quebec history. The Laval School was criticized as anti-nationalist and composed largely of "vendus" or "collaborators". In the 1960s, the Revisionist School began to emerge reflecting the changing political environment in Quebec and a growing generation gap among historians. The death of Groulx in 1967 also marked the end of an era in the historiography of Quebec. The Revisionist School pursued a deliberate scientific approach to the writing of history and avoided advocating a particular political orientation in their work. New approaches to the study of Quebec history were introduced by historians such as Prof. Fernand Ouellet who had studied in France. In 1970, the Institut d'Histoire de l'Amerique Francais became a professional association. By the late 1960s, the Revisionist historians began to characterize Quebec's past as "normal" in the North American context and denied the pivotal role of the British Conquest in shaping this history. They were interested in historical problems and social conflicts in terms of the class structure of society rather than in terms of language and cultural groups.

The approach of the Laval School historians to the writing of Quebec history is outlined in the fourth chapter, "Maybe It Was Our Fault: The Laval Approach". Some Quebec historians interpreted the British Conquest as a generally positive event introducing the first printing press and eventually a parliamentary system of government. Fernand Ouellet, for example, suggested that in the years following the Conquest, the econ-

omy of Quebec remained basically unchanged and therefore the Conquest had minimal effect on the lives of the general population. In their research and writing, the Laval School historians did not have a clear ideological profile. They were more interested in social and economic problems rather than in political questions and shifted the focus away from the Conquest. In their writings, they viewed the society in the post-Conquest period as fundamentally flawed with the French Canadians primarily interested in cultural matters whereas the Anglo-Canadians were market oriented and therefore able to take advantage of economic opportunities. Conflicts in society were between the conservative forces, that is, the professionals allied with the peasantry and the modern forces represented by the urban and merchant sectors.

In the fifth chapter, "Searching for a Normal Quebec: Revisionism and Beyond", the author analyzes the Revisionist School and their interpretation of Quebecois history. According to Prof. Rudin, the basic historical discourse which divided and also united historians dealt with the distinctiveness of Quebec society. A related problem revolved around the question of economic inferiority which had been perpetuated into the modern period. After 1960, the Quiet Revolution gave rise to new questions relating to secularization, urbanization and immigration. A new generation of technocrats and businessmen came to power and fundamentally changed the general perception of their relationship with the Anglo-Canadians, the immigrant and ethnocultural groups and the rest of North American society. The effects of the British Conquest and the role of the Roman Catholic Church in shaping Quebec society were minimized. The Revisionists tended to view the development of Quebec society as "normal". Historians such as Jean-Pierre Wallot and Louise Dechene placed a growing emphasis on the normalcy of the Quebec past and formed a transition between the older historians and the Revisionists. Dechene for example, claimed that the British

Conquest was not a pivotal point in Quebec history and, in fact, the Conquest could not be interpreted in either positive nor negative terms. Individuals were described as basically rational beings and the habitants were normal peasants and they acted accordingly.

The Revisionists were more interested in historical events which formed modern urban Quebec. They studied the emergence of an industrial and capitalist society and viewed conflict in terms of class distinctions. They minimized the historic role of the Catholic Church in Quebec society and downplayed differences between the English and French groups. By the early 1970s, the Revisionists became an influential sector of the historical profession in Quebec and continue to shape the policies and directions of the professional associations and journals. They avoided mention of Groulx and discredited his approach to Quebec history as a morality tale. Also, the historical profession had developed during these years to the point where young historians could complete their graduate studies at home rather than travel abroad as in the past. Rudin states that historians in contemporary Quebec are generally divided into two main groups; those who explain Quebec's history as either normal or unique.

In the last decade, the historical profession produced new academic journals which reflected these views. The *Bulletin d'histoire politique* founded by a team of historians headed by Robert Comeau in 1992 generally supported the Revisionist perspective. The *Cahiers d'histoire du Quebec au XX e Siecle* was founded by the Centre de recherche Lionel-Groulx in 1994. In concluding his study, Prof. Rudin states that the Revisionist interpretation remains the dominant perspective on Quebec's past. However, other historians such as Gerard Bouchard felt that the preoccupation with the "normalcy" of Quebec society has been overemphasized and that there was a need to explain the specificity of the Quebec experience. A post-Revisionist perspective emerged which at-

tempted to take into account both what was normal and what was distinctive in Quebec history. This view was partly the result of disillusionment among some scholars with what they perceived to be negative aspects of contemporary Quebec society. The interventionist role of the state and a modern consumer society certainly made Quebec appear as "modern". Yet, the benefits contrasted with the costs of this modern society with the high rates of dropping out from school, suicide, unemployment and lowest rates of marriage.

In his Postscript, Prof. Rudin summarizes his arguments and repeats one of his central points that Lionel Groulx was a fairly normal historian whose work reflected both the society in which he lived and the state of development of the historical profession. Groulx was engaged in a quest for a balance between using modern historical techniques to understand the past "as it was" and using history as a means of providing lessons relevant to Quebec society. One of Rudin's main achievements in this study is the rehabilitation of Lionel Groulx as a historian. However, other questions raised in this study could have been answered by a more incisive study of Quebec society. If one of the main purposes of historiography is to define the fissures and fragments of a society as reflected in the historical writings, then this study could have been enhanced by a closer examination of the relationship between historical writing and social change in Quebec society. The British Conquest was certainly the pivotal event in Quebec history and the basic discourse in Quebec historiography. The Quebec Act of 1775 and the Constitutional Act of 1791 created political conditions which may be described as an early version of colonial "indirect rule" and which allowed a small but influential class of professionals and officials to emerge. As in other British colonial societies, this class was divided between those who tolerated and supported the "status quo" and those who sought to change the political structure. This division has coloured the political history of Quebec up to and including the recent

referendums and is reflected in the divisions in the historical profession between the Laval and Montreal Schools.

After the unsuccessful uprisings in 1837, the Roman Catholic Church consolidated its position as the vehicle for nationalist aspirations and ambitions creating a powerful mix of religion and nationalism. The Church under Ultramontane influence adopted an aggressive policy in maintaining this leading role in Quebec society. In the 1860s the Church was even able to raise a military force to assist the Pope in Italy. The Church also took its role to ensure "La Survivance" seriously. As did other "resistance movements", the Church later asserted its control over labour unions and credit unions. Those who questioned its authority and "traitors" were dealt with accordingly. In the face of population loss to the United States and the rising tide of immigration to Quebec, the Church encouraged large families and the formation and occupation of Quebec territory.

It was in this tradition that Lionel Groulx lived and worked. He was a romantic nationalist who sought to fight assimilation by providing his people with a direction and meaning to their individual and collective lives and his vehicle for this purpose was history. He attempted to raise the level of national consciousness and promote social cohesion among the French Canadians through his historical writings. From his perspective, *La Survivance* in itself was a victory. As a nationalist, he certainly encouraged the "us versus them" attitude among French Canadians. Groulx was also a mortal and for his attacks on "outsiders" he was accused of anti-semitism and racism. He emphasized the distinctiveness of the French Canadian nation and subscribed to the European definition of a "nation". For many in Quebec, it was understood that the "state" was an integral part of the definition of a "nation". And this view of the Quebec nation led many to march under the banner of political sovereignty and attempt the "undoing" of the British Conquest.

By the 1960s, the Quiet Revolution changed the political landscape of Quebec. The provincial government adopted an interventionist role in Quebec society and economy and the French-speaking population felt empowered. *La Survivance* or mere survival was no longer the main goal. The provincial government in alliance with the leading political and cultural sectors of Quebec society went on the offensive. The Parti Québécois later came to power and the French-speaking population realised that they were no longer a perpetual minority but a majority in Quebec and acted accordingly. Quebec society was now modern, cosmopolitan, urban, secular and consumer-oriented. Young historians who began their academic careers during these years conceived Quebec history as a series of processes which took place within the larger framework of North American society. They were more interested in explaining these developments rather than researching and writing about the Conquest and its consequences, a definitely divisive issue. They were absorbed in the history of the territory of modern Quebec and the various regions, urban and population centers, industries and economic sectors which composed modern Quebec. Their historical examples and models were found in the United States.

As in other Canadian and American universities, labour and women's history became legitimate fields for study. Anglo-Canadians, immigrant and ethnocultural groups were perceived as integral components of this society and history. The Revisionists dissolved the "us versus them" view of society. Quebec was depicted as a normal society with a normal history in the North American context. The British Conquest and its apparent consequences were relegated to the margins of historical studies. By shunning this fundamental question, the Revisionists had confounded the definition of Quebec as a distinct society and its political destiny as a nation. Some have even claimed that the Revisionists work objectively for the "federalist" cause. Quebec historians may be

divided between those who subscribed to the European definition of a "nation" and those who did not.

The modern Quebec society produced its latter-day heroes - the technocrats and entrepreneurs - but also its casualties - the unemployed, the suicides, the drop-outs. Some historians and commentators were distressed at these developments which they blamed on the growing emphasis on consumerism and the proletarianization, indeed the lumpen-proletarianization of Quebec society. In the historical profession, they viewed with some concern the "fragmentation" of Quebec history and the emphasis on the "parts" rather than the "whole" society. They claimed that the Revisionists "de-nationalized" the history of Quebec and became nostalgic for the traditional nationalist interpretation of their history much as Lionel Groulx had taught, which sought to provide a "goal" or "mission" for their "homogeneous" nation.

This study is not all-inclusive and the author has omitted references to some historians especially those who did not have Ph.Ds and therefore were not "professional" historians. Also, some historical associations and publications were not mentioned. In other cases, he has made references to individual Quebec historians without including further information. In his analysis, Rudin groups the Quebec historians by age cohorts and while this method may be disputed by other historians, he does introduce a different periodization in the study of Quebec history. Written by an "insider", this study is more for other "insiders" and professional historians familiar with the profession in Quebec rather than the general reader. The historical profession in Quebec has always been a relatively small community where most professional historians knew each other well and where professional differences could become political and personal rivalries. These distinctions could make or unmake an academic career in history and in individual cases, led to ex-

ile. It remains a community where the publication of a new study on Quebec history is in itself a milestone and a contribution to the direction of this history. And the publication of this volume by Prof. Rudin is certainly a continuation in this tradition.

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