

A Nation Beyond Borders: Lionel Groulx on French-Canadian Minorities by Michel Bock. Trans. Ferdinanda Van Gennip. Ottawa, Ontario: University of Ottawa Press, 2014. 277pp. ISBN 978-0-7766-0821-1

This book is a translation of *Quand la Nation Débordait les Frontières*, winner of the Governor General's Literary Award for non-fiction ten years ago. The author, Michel Bock, is now an Associate Professor of History and Research Chair in Francophonie Canadienne at the University of Ottawa. It is not as much a biography of the leading French-Canadian clerical nationalist Lionel Groulx (1878-1967) as essentially a commentary upon and analysis of historiographical debates concerning his ideology and profuse writings (evidenced in dozens of books, even including novels, as well as innumerable articles, brochures, and lectures, not to mention personal correspondence). Indeed, Bock does a masterful job of making sense out of all of this. Simply put (and it is admittedly no easy task to simplify Groulx), Lionel Groulx became the leading advocate of a French-Canadian nationalism that long pursued, with messianic fervour, the notion of a French-Canadian nation (or even a French legacy in all of North America) based in, but not coterminous with Quebec (which he nevertheless viewed as a French state), extending historically to all French minorities on the continent.

Covering the long lifespan of Groulx from his thirties during the First World War years through his eighties during the 1960s, the book astutely reveals the theoretical or ideological dilemmas which he consistently encountered. Groulx clearly viewed Quebec as a vital French homeland, while becoming increasingly wary of the politicization of this province, indicative of the provincialization of the nationalist movement. This, in turn, led to other basic ideological problems.

Groulx was obviously more concerned with broader French-Canadian nationalism than with a narrower Québécois nationalism or more generalized Canadian patriotism; he wrote and lectured extensively on how Canadian federalism interfered with a more natural French-Canadian loyalty. The emphasis of Quebec at the expense of the far-flung French minorities in the other provinces and states became a long-lasting preoccupation of Groulx. Initially, and continually, he was very critical of Quebec's perceived failure to support this francophone diaspora more adequately, then eventually cautious about the movement to recognize Quebec as a "French state" (during the thirties), and finally the preoccupation with Quebec separatism (since the sixties). While Groulx was increasingly criticized by federalists as a supporter of Quebec separatism, on the one hand, in later years he expressed his apprehension over the development of Quebec separatism during the Quiet Revolution concomitant with a new emphasis on modernization through industrialization, educational reform, and especially an increasing anti-clericalism which undermined his prophetic view of French-Canadian destiny.

Groulx believed that francophone minorities were an important extension of French Canada. His very traditionalistic nationalism emphasized the destiny and mission of all of French Canada, not just Quebec, so he devoted much of his energy and time to visiting and

supporting francophone minorities not only across Canada but also in the United States. His form of religious ethno-nationalism was, in fact, skeptical of Quebec separatism; he consistently advocated Quebec support of francophone minorities throughout North America.

However, as Bock has thoroughly documented, Groulx's traditionalistic nationalism eventually came to be viewed within Quebec—especially by social scientists, “neo-liberals”, and separatists alike—as anachronistic and irrelevant, while francophone minorities in the western provinces, Ontario, and the Atlantic provinces tended to take a dim view of what was perceived as Québécois dominance. Yet in this regard, the book could perhaps have gone further. There is very little mention of specific struggles of francophone minorities in the west, many of whom, in fact, immigrated directly from Europe, rather than Quebec, or were Métis. Appropriately, the author does describe in ample detail Groulx's support of the interests of French-Canadians in Ontario (at least in the southwestern region and Ottawa, more than in the northern and eastern regions), particularly over the French school question during the 1910s and 20s. Moreover, the Acadian relationship to Quebec is discussed at some length. The Acadians did not always consider themselves French-Canadians (if this term would seem to imply Québécois). As for Franco-Americans, Groulx often visited New England, yet the reader finds, perhaps surprisingly, little if any mention of the strong French presence in the Cajuns of Louisiana or Acadiens of northern Maine (two of the strongest Franco-American populations).

As Bock's study so clearly demonstrates, the strong engagement of Lionel Groulx, his almost messianic civilizing mission (whereby French-Canadianism in a linguistic and cultural sense was necessarily closely tied to traditional Roman Catholicism), and his profound commitment to the French-Canadian diaspora (constituting the main theme of Bock's analysis), had a lasting effect on the localized conservation of French-Canadian minorities, on their survivance. This served as a counterpoint to the later argument of Quebec social scientists emphasizing the rapid assimilation and dissolution of these minorities. Whether one agrees with such a particularistic, ethno-religious ideology or not, that Lionel Groulx was an exemplification of an “engaged scholar” seems self-evident given his strong commitment, empathy and longstanding influence.

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