

Pierre Vallieres

In dire poverty, the germs of revolution

MONTREAL — CUP

Pierre Vallieres, one of the first persons to be arrested under special wartime powers, is a leading thinker of the Front de Liberation du Quebec.

Vallieres, 32, a burning idealist, has become a household word for many Quebecois since the day in September 1966, when he was arrested in front of the United Nations building in New York along with the sociologist Charles Gagnon, and charged with illegal entry into the United States.

But the real reason for their arrest was the charge by Montreal police that they were the leaders of a new wave of FLQ terrorism which had taken the life of Mrs. Therese Morin, 64, an office worker, who died when a bomb exploded at the strike-bound H.B. LeGrenade shoe factory May 5, 1966.

Negres Blancs d'Amerique (White Negroes of America), the fascinating 506-page autobiography and revolutionary manifesto which Vallieres wrote during his four-month stay in the Manhattan House of Detention for men has won international acclaim.

The book is a searing description of how Vallieres, a self-educated journalist, emerged from the depressing slums of Montreal to prominence in Quebec's predominantly middle and upper class intelligentsia.

Negres Blancs pleads for a "total multi-national revolution" in which the "negroes" — the downtrodden white or black of Quebec and the ghettos of the United States — would lead the way into an egalitarian society.

Pierre Elliot Trudeau and Gerard Pelletier, before their surprising leap into politics, chose Vallieres in 1963 as one of their two successors to head the left-wing review, *Cite Libre*.

The Prime Minister, who is once said to have compared Vallieres' earlier writings to those of John Stuart Mill, refused to appear as a character witness during a bail hearing for his former protege in 1969.

The nature of the charges brought against the two intellectuals — based on their ideas rather than their actions — and their long detention without bail became a cause celebre in Quebec.

Both men have been tried twice for the Morin killing and both were held in custody, Vallieres for 44 months and Gagnon for 41 months, and were repeatedly denied bail.

Their release earlier this year followed protest marches, press conferences and fund-raising drives by a special Vallieres-Gagnon defence committee, criticism of their

detention by Quebec's main labor leaders and the separatist Parti Quebecois and an investigation by the International Federation of Human Rights League.

Vallieres was convicted of manslaughter in the Morin killing in April, 1969, and sentenced to life imprisonment but the verdict was quashed by the Quebec court of appeals and a new trial ordered.

He was again tried by a lower court, found guilty again and is again appealing the verdict. The sentence he is appealing, rendered last December, was only 30 months compared to life for the previous conviction.

Gagnon's first trial on the Morin case ended in a hung jury and he was acquitted at a second trial in December.

Both men are awaiting trial on a variety of bomb conspiracy charges, some of which have been hanging over their heads for four years.

The only link alleged between Vallieres and Morin death is that he "illegally counselled or incited or (had) given his encouragement by his attitudes, his actions, his writings or otherwise to the explosion of a bomb."

Adding to the legal imbroglio and the publicity surrounding it was a decision by the crown to file sedition charges against Vallieres for his book October 31, 1969, almost two years after the first book was on sale.

Police seized all copies of the book in bookstores and at the home of publisher Gerald Godin where a new edition of the book was stocked. An abbreviated edition published in Paris last year appeared to have escaped seizure, at least until emergency powers were declared in some Montreal stores last weekend.

Godin, a well-known writer and journalist at the left-wing Sunday newspaper *Quebec-Presses*, was arrested at his home along with singer Pauline Julien.

There is little doubt that the prolonged, and largely ineffectual attempts to condemn Vallieres and Gagnon generated widespread sympathy and some outright support for the two revolutionaries.

Vallieres' own life as recounted in his book is a sharp reminder of how dire poverty — and the germs of revolution it contains — continues to fester amid the glittering wealth of North American cities.

His father, one of 14 children who left school in fourth grade, occasionally showed a flicker of hope for a better life and might have at one point become a political militant, Vallieres recalls.

"My father was silent, choking back his hopes as one chokes back tears sometimes he would smile as if to tell me without speaking that his dreams would come true.

"My mother complained of her headaches, the boredom of the radio programs, of the dirtiness of some neighborhood while trying to block my ears to what was going on around me; I listened to my revolt mounting and heating my blood."

Vallieres says his father's life and that of his friends and fellow workers "taught me more than all the theoreticians of socialism."

Vallieres blames the "capitalist church" for the failure of the Quebecois to revolt long ago — although there were several limited uprisings — against their fate.

"The church made of us — utilizing our exploited colonized uneducated condition — a people ashamed of itself, which feels guilty before it has even had a chance to make a free gesture, disgusted with life and seeking refuge in eternal celestial happiness."

He adds: "Fortunately, God is sparing a growing number of Quebecois from his grace. This is why Quebec has ceased to be a tranquil colony of Washington and the Vatican."

After meeting Caston Miron, the poet (also arrested Friday) in 1956 he came to know most of the left-wing intellectuals of the period in Montreal.

In 1962, he left for France where he stayed a year, working part of the time as a laborer among communist spanish emigres and worker priests in the Cote d'Or region.

"It was in this region that I discovered that Marxism and revolution were to be my truths," he recalls.

Negres Blancs d'Amerique traces Quebec's history from the beginning of New France and concludes:

"Quebec since the establishment of the first trading post in Quebec City by Champlain in 1608 has always been submitted to the interests of the ruling classes of the imperialist countries—first France, then England and now the United States.

"The Canadian confederation has been nothing more than a vast financial transaction pulled by the bourgeoisie to the detriment of the workers of the country and particularly those of Quebec."

Vallieres wants to build a classless society where capital will be abolished.

Negres Blancs d'Amerique finishes with a call to arms... "it is by force and not by resignation, passivity and fear that we will be free."

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