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“Thunder Gusts”: Popular Disturbances in Early French Canada

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See table of contents

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Article abstract

L'auteur se penche sur les quelques occasions où les habitants de la Nouvelle-France se sont regroupés ou assemblés pour manifester collectivement bien que cela ait été illégal à l'époque. En général, ces démonstrations avaient lieu en temps de disette et de cherté des prix — particulièrement pendant les années 1704 à 1717 et 1757 à 1759 — mais il arrivait également qu'on s'assemble pour protester contre les corvées, ou encore, pour faire part de son mécontentement à l'égard de certaines mesures politiques ou religieuses.

Ces contestations se déroulaient sensiblement de la même façon et pour les mêmes raisons qu'en France sauf qu'elles étaient, ici, à la fois moins fréquentes et moins violentes. On s'assemblait dans un but précis, on s'armait souvent et on proférait parfois des menaces mais, plus souvent qu'autrement, on se dispersait après avoir été entendu ou lorsque les soldats étaient appelés sur les lieux. Il faut dire que les autorités étaient indulgentes à l'égard des participants, probablement parce qu'elles considéraient ces attroupements comme quasi légitimes.

Cette forme de contestation diminua pendant les trois premières décennies du régime britannique ; cependant, on trouva quand même moyen de résister à l'enrôlement dans la milice durant les années 1764, 1775 et 1794 de même qu'à la loi sur les chemins en 1796. Ceci se manifestant dans certaines des paroisses qui avaient fomenté des démonstrations populaires sous le régime français, l'auteur suggère qu'il y a là une tradition de contestation transmise d'une génération à l'autre. En somme, si les assemblées populaires ont, un peu partout, secoué la société au dix-huitième siècle, au Québec, elles n'ont pas suscité de changements radicaux avant l'avènement du dix-neuvième.

"Thunder Gusts": Popular Disturbances in Early French Canada

TERENCE CROWLEY

Popular disturbances in the form of crowds, mobs, and armed uprisings were an intrinsic part of society and government in the Western world during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Although the word "revolt" was often used by those in authority to describe these momentary but frequently violent upheavals, such a term is generally inappropriate at least before the 1760s when revolutionary ideas became more widespread. Popular disturbances were essentially defensive and reactionary: people reacted against what was perceived as a departure from traditional ways, especially in the form of new taxes or seigneurial obligations, or to prompt authorities to relieve situations such as food shortages. Seldom did they involve petitions or any general ideas other than those surrounding the specific grievance at issue. In France, the period from 1620 to 1650 was particularly rife with peasant uprisings. The imposition of new taxes provided the fuel that ignited the wrath of the peasants in the uprisings of the *croquants* of Saintonge, Angoumois, Poitou, and Périgord as well as the *nu-pieds* in Normandy in the 1630s. These violent outbursts occurred during the chaotic reign of Louis XIII and were abetted by local officials influenced by ideas of resistance to tyranny. Yet even during the reign of Louis XIV, there were large-scale uprisings such as that of the *torrébens* of Brittany in 1675, which was principally directed against the domanial rights of seigneurs.[1] The uprisings of the millenarian *camisards* of Languedoc, combining what has been described as "the explosive mixture of prophetic neurosis and antitax ferment", was the last of the great French peasant uprisings of the *ancien régime*.[2]

By the eighteenth century peasant uprisings were more common in Eastern than Western Europe, but mobs and crowds remained as forms of popular protest in the towns and countryside, even though they were more restrained than in the preceding century. One of the prime reasons for this change was that merchants and governments

1 The literature on this subject had grown considerably. See B. Porchnev, *Les soulèvements populaires en France de 1623 à 1648* (Paris, 1963); Roland Mousnier, *Peasant Uprisings in Seventeenth-Century France, Russia, and China*, Brian Pierce, trans. (New York, 1970); Leon Bernard, "French Society and Popular Uprisings Under Louis XIV", Raymond S. Kierstead, ed., *State and Society in Seventeenth-Century France* (New York, 1975). For a review of the more recent literature, Louis Lavallée, "Les soulèvements populaires en France dans la première moitié du dix-septième siècle", *Histoire Sociale/Social History*, XX (1977), pp. 427-33.

2 Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, *The Peasants of Languedoc*, translated with an introduction by John Day (Chicago, 1974), p. 286.

had begun to construct national markets in grains to ensure the movement of the substance of life.[3] Yet food shortages remained as the most common circumstance fomenting collective protest. France alone witnessed some twenty major food riots from the late seventeenth to the early nineteenth centuries.[4] Collective protest became more common in urban areas where the circumstances prompting such activity were more diverse. Urban disturbances were associated less frequently with food and more often with political and religious issues, customs and excise, public rejoicings, counterfeiting, depressions in industry and trade, and military and naval recruitment.[5]

George Rudé, the foremost student of popular protest in this period, has attempted to differentiate those popular disturbances he calls the "pre-industrial" crowd from what became more characteristic in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Eighteenth-century popular disturbances, Rudé writes,

> tend to take the form of direct action and the destruction of property rather than of petitions or peaceful marches or demonstrations; and this was as true of peasant rebellion as it was of industrial machine-breaking, the imposition of the 'just' price in food riots or the 'pulling-down' of houses or the burning of their victims in effigy in city outbreaks. Yet such targets were generally carefully selected and destruction was rarely wanton or indiscriminate. Such movements tended to be spontaneous, to grow from small beginnings and to have a minimum of organization; they tended, too, to be led by leaders from the 'outside' or, if from 'inside', by men whose authority was limited to the occasion. They were generally defensive, conservative and 'backward-looking', more concerned to restore what had been lost from a 'golden' age than to blaze a trail for something new; and, accordingly, such political ideas as they expressed were more often conservative than radical and they tend (with some notable but rare exceptions) to be borrowed from conservative rather than radical groups.[6]

Rudé also notes that political issues tended to play a relatively insignificant role in early eighteenth-century protest and that England, with its measure of political democracy, witnessed disturbances that were more militant, sophisticated, and coloured by political concerns than were their counterparts in France.[7] The same observation may also be applied to the English colonies in North America where the frequency of crowds and mobs increased as the conflict with the mother country intensified in the 1760s and 1770s.[8]

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3 Charles Tilly, Louise Tilly, Richard Tilly, *The Rebellious Century 1830-1930* (Cambridge, Mass., 1975), p. 17.

4 Louise A. Tilly, "The Food Riot as a Form of Political Conflict in France", *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, II (1974), p. 24.

5 George Rudé, *The Crowd in History: A Study of Popular Disturbances in France and England 1730-1848* (New York, 1964); Max Beloff, *Public Order and Popular Disturbances 1660-1714* (London, 1963; reprint of 1938 edition).

6 George Rudé, "Popular Protest in 18th Century Europe", Paul Fritz and David Williams, eds., *The Triumph of Culture: 18th Century Perspectives* (Toronto, 1972), p. 278.

7 George Rudé, *Paris and London in the 18th Century, Studies in Popular Protest* (London, 1970), pp. 8, 18.

8 Jesse Lemisch, "The American Revolution Seen from the Bottom Up", Barton J. Bernstein, ed., *Towards a New Past: Dissenting Essays in American History* (New York, 1969), pp. 3-45; Jesse Lemisch, "The Radicalism of the Inarticulate: Merchant Seamen in

POPULAR DISTURBANCES IN FRENCH CANADA

In Canada the systematic study of popular protest and collective violence is in its infancy. Labour historians have naturally been interested in strikes in the modern period, but studies of popular disturbances have been largely confined to the nineteenth century—apart from Kenneth McNaught's interpretive essay on collective and governmental violence in Canadian history.[9] In examining the two preceding centuries, information is less diverse in origin and rich in detail. Like historians of seventeenth-century France, the colonial historian must rely on official sources, what Pierre Goubert has called the archives of repression.[10] The official correspondence of the governors and intendants remains the principal primary source because there were no newspapers in New France, relatively few diarists and memorialists, and the participants in these events were rarely brought to trial. As there is little descriptive documentation for popular movements in Canada before 1760, such as the informative letters written to Chancellor Séguier between 1633 and 1649 which have permitted French historians to examine French peasant protest during the *ancien régime* at its height, only rarely can the faces in the crowd in New France be identified or an estimate given of their numbers.

The nature of settlement in New France and the small number of colonists precluded popular protest on the scale or frequency of that witnessed in France, while the absolutist inspiration of French colonial government inhibited the formation of political disturbances that were seen in England and her colonies. France and England had total populations of over thirty million people by the early eighteenth century; Paris had grown to one-half million residents by 1700 and London to 575,000 by 1750.[11] In contrast, the population of the Quebec colony, generally referred to as Canada, numbered only fifty-five thousand in 1754, with some eight thousand people residing in the town of Quebec and four thousand in Montreal. The population of the French colonies on Prince Edward Island (Ile Saint-Jean) and Cape Breton (Ile Royale)

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the Politics of Revolutionary America", A.F. Young, ed., *Dissent: Explorations in the History of American Radicalism* (De Kalb, Ill., 1978), originally published as "Jack Tar in the Streets: Merchant Seamen and the Politics of Revolutionary America", *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., XXVII (1970), pp. 3-35; Pauline Maier, *From Resistance to Revolution: Colonial Radicals and the Development of American Opposition to Britain, 1765-1776* (New York, 1972), especially Chap. I; Gordon S. Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776-1787* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1969), especially pp. 319-28. On colonial Latin America, see Chester Lyle Guthrie, "Riots in Seventeenth-Century Mexico City: A Study of Social and Economic Conditions", *Essays in Honor of Herbert Eugene Bolton* (Berkeley, 1945), pp. 243-58.

9 See Martin Galvin, "The Jubilee Riots in Toronto", *Canadian Catholic Historical Association Annual Report*, (1959), pp. 93-107; Gregory S. Kealey, "The Orange Order in Toronto: Religious Riot and the Working Class", Gregory S. Kealey and Peter Warrian, eds., *Essays in Canadian Working Class History* (Toronto, 1976), pp. 13-34; and Michael Cross, "The Shiner's War: Social Violence in the Ottawa Valley in the 1830's", *Canadian Historical Review*, LIV (1973), pp. 1-26; Kenneth McNaught, "Violence in Canadian History", John S. Moir, ed., *Character and Circumstance: Essays in Honour of Donald Grant Creighton* (Toronto, 1970), pp. 67-83.

10 Lavallée, "Les soulèvements populaires en France", p. 428.

11 Rudé, *Paris and London*, pp. 35-6.

amounted to 8,596 in 1752, with nearly one-half residing in the capital of Louisbourg.[12]

Conditions that often fomented popular discontent in the mother country were not present in her colonies. Settlement in New France was greatly dispersed and there were ony six villages outside of the towns. The most common cause for French peasant revolt, high taxes, was absent from the colonies. Taxes on the export of beaver pelts and moose hides were removed in 1717, leaving the 10 per cent customs duty on wine, spirits, and tobacco imported into Quebec as the only continuing form of taxation.[13] Seigneurial obligations in Canada were controlled by contract and subject to regulation by the intendant. Seigneurial dues appear to have been relatively light during the French regime and *corvées* were rare.[14] The tithe for the church was not heavy either, for although it had originally been set at one-thirteenth of the fruits of human labour and production of the soil, it was subsequently reduced to one twenty-sixth.[15] "Si, en France", Louise Dechêne concluded in her study of seventeenth-century Montreal, "la paysannerie d'Ancien Régime est définie par rapport à la classe qui l'exploite et la domine, au Canada, la population rurale est autre chose: des petits propriétaires parcellaires, à qui le régime demande un certain nombre de tributs—redevances, corvées, milices—mais qui, sur le plan matériel, bénéficient d'une sorte de trêve."[16] Nor in the towns were there large numbers of journeymen apprentices who were a frequent source of disturbances in England. Only at the St. Maurice forges, the Quebec shipyards, and Louisbourg were there any concentrations of skilled craftsmen. In Quebec that gave rise in 1741 to the first recorded strike in Canadian history, but among craftsmen recently arrived from France rather than among the Canadian workers.[17]

Despite these differences the distinction between the colonies and the mother country can be exaggerated. New France was far from being a pastoral paradise inhabited only by prosperous farmers and freedom-loving coureurs de bois. Demands placed on the people, especially by means of the three tributes of seigneurial dues, *corvées*, and militia service mentioned by Dechêne, did produce discontent. Runaways among apprentices and indentured servants and desertions from the ranks of the colonial regulars also testified to grievances but, apart form the Louisbourg mutiny of 1744, such discontent did not assume collective expression in the form of mobs and

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12 Canada, *Censuses of Canada 1665-1871* (Ottawa, 1876); J.S. McLennan, *Louisbourg: From Its Foundation to Its Fall* (London, 1918), p. 372.

13 W.J. Eccles, *The Canadian Frontier 1534-1760* (Toronto, 1969), p. 81. Taxes were even lower at Louisbourg. See T.A. Crowley, "Government and Interests: French Colonial Administration at Louisbourg, 1713-1758", (Ph.D. thesis, Duke University, 1975), pp. 256-7.

14 Richard Colebrook Harris, *The Seigneurial System in Early Canada* (Quebec, 1968), pp. 63-70. Allen Greer, "Seigneurial Tenure in Quebec: The Examples of Sorel and St. Ours, 1670-1850", (paper presented to the Canadian Historical Association Annual Meeting, Saskatoon, June, 1979).

15 Cornelius Jaenen, *The Role of the Church in New France* (Toronto, 1976), pp. 84-90.

16 Louise Dechêne, *Habitants et marchands de Montréal au XVII siècle* (Paris, 1974), p. 486.

17 Peter N. Moogk, "In the Darkness of a Basement: Craftsmen's Associations in Early French Canada", *Canadian Historical Review*, LVII (1976), pp. 399-439.

crowds.[18] It was the conditions created by war that were most likely to lead the people to protest in New France, just as in the mother country the increased tax burden during periods of military conflict was the most conspicuous harbinger of opposition from French peasants. In the century and a half of settlement in Canada during the French regime, there was only one period of extended peace between 1713 and 1744, and even that was marked by localized conflicts such as the Anglo-Abenaki and Fox Wars. Militia service was compulsory for all men sixteen to sixty, a heavy burden on the population and one which certainly caused resentment, but surprisingly little is known about the operation of the militia organization on the local level.[19] The billeting of regular soldiers in the towns of Quebec and Montreal also caused disputes. More significantly, however, war interrupted shipping to the colonies and aggravated the unstable economic situation created by pre-industrial agriculture and rudimentary communications sytems.

On at least a dozen occasions, people in New France took to the streets, paraded to the walls of towns, or otherwise assembled for direct action in defiance of the law. Food shortages were the root of at least four demonstrations and commodity prices were at the centre of an equal number. Religious issues and resistance to forced labour for the government accounted for other forms of collective action. In several instances, officials and the middle classes used such disturbances or collective violence for their own purposes, but more often the motivation and leadership came from within the crowd than from without.

Demonstrations were the only collective means by which the habitants and lower classes could influence those in authority, although they were sometimes used for political purposes. Governmental structures in New France were highly autocratic, just as they continued to be during the opening decades of the British regime. Power was concentrated in the hands of the governor and intendant who reported to the Ministry of Marine in France. Merchants, seigneurs, and favoured individuals were able to exercise a continuing though informal influence on the administration by virtue of their economic power, social prestige, or proximity to decision-making; but the lower classes were totally excluded except when the intendant authorized a local assembly to discuss a specific matter, such as the construction of a church or the price of beaver.[20]

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18 Jean-Pierre Hardy and David-Thiery Ruddel, *Les apprentis artisans à Québec 1660-1815* (Montreal, 1977), pp. 74-80; André Lachance, "La désertion et les soldats déserteurs au Canada dans la première moitié du XVIII siècle", *Mélanges d'histoire du Canada français offerts au professeur Marcel Trudel*, Cahiers du Centre de Recherche en Civilisation Canadienne-Française (Ottawa, 1978), pp. 151-61; T.A. Crowley, "The Forgotten Soldiers of New France: The Louisbourg Example", French Colonial Historical Society, *Proceedings of the Third Annual Meeting*, Alf Andrew Heggoy, ed. (Athens, Ga., 1978), pp. 52-69. Allen Greer, "Mutiny at Louisbourg, December 1744", *Histoire Sociale/Social History*, XX (1977), pp. 305-36 suggests that the desertion rate among colonial regulars on Cape Breton was lower than in France, but uses a specious comparison in which the French figures cover a time period during two wars, when desertion was highest, while those for the colonies cover only a period of peace.

19 Dechêne, *Habitants et marchands*, pp. 356-61, has advanced our knowledge of the militia on the local level, but has found no generalized discontent in Montreal before 1715.

20 Representation in various forms is discussed most fully in Gustave Lanctôt,

Otherwise, assemblies were unlawful in a time and place where there were no political rights, only privileges inherited through custom or bestowed by the king. Following Colbert's dictum that "chacun parle pour soy, et que personne ne parle pour tous", collective petitions were also prohibited although they appeared occasionally.[21] In New France the Church alone provided the only continuing means for collective popular expression and representation when parishioners gathered annually to elect churchwardens for their parish.

The first large protest erupted in 1704 during the War of the Spanish Succession and assumed the form of an attempt by rural habitants to force a reduction in the price of an essential commodity, salt. In France such conduct was known as the *taxation populaire*, which usually implied price setting by the crowd through force, generally seizure of the commodity or of premises. Salt was in short supply in New France in the fall of 1704 due to the failure of the ship, *La Seine*, to arrive at the port of Quebec. As salt was vital to the preservation of meat at the time of the annual fall slaughter of animals which could not be maintained over the long winter, Intendant François Beauharnois decreed a set price for salt in the Quebec district. Seeing the opportunity to turn a quick profit, some Montreal merchants quickly purchased all available local supplies of salt at prices ranging from three to ten *livres* a bushel. Angered by this injustice, habitants from the vicinity around Montreal gathered on November 18 and marched on the town. The commander of the garrison ordered the gates closed, but asked the superior of the Sulpician Seminary and seigneur of Montreal, the Abbé Belmont, to speak to the people. Asked what they wanted, the demonstrators replied that they were not intent on insurrection, but only desired that the price of salt be reduced to four *livres* and that the reprehensible merchants be punished. When told that such gatherings were illegal, they disbanded. However, the governor of Montreal, Claude de Ramezay, subsequently met with merchants, established a set price for salt, and inventoried supplies in the town with a view towards rationing.[22]

Philippe de Rigaud de Vaudreuil had been governor general of New France for barely a year when this incident occurred. Informed of the upheaval four days later, he determined to go to Montreal and deal with the situation himself. Ramezay had overstepped the bounds of his authority in setting prices, since this prerogative belonged to the intendant. Vaudreuil therefore rescinded his order, but satisfied the people by having the merchants return their excessive profits.[23] Beseeched by Belmont and local notables not to deal harshly with the protestors, the governor himself

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L'administration de la Nouvelle-France (Montreal, 1971, reprint of 1929 edition), Chap. VII, "La participation du peuple dans le gouvernement". On the influence of factions and interest groups, see Guy Frégault, "Politique et politiciens", *Le XVIII siècle canadien: études* (Montreal, 1968), pp. 159-243; and Crowley, "Government and Interests", pp. 283-316, 367-81.

21 Colbert to Frontenac, 13 June 1673, *Rapport de l'Archiviste de la Province de Québec* (1926-27), p. 25, (hereafter *RAPQ*). See also Francis Hammang, *The Marquis de Vaudreuil, New France at the beginning of the Eighteenth Century* (Bruges, 1938), Chap. I.

22 Yves Zoltvany, *Philippe de Rigaud de Vaudreuil, Governor of New France, 1703-1725* (Toronto, 1974), p. 57.

23 Vaudreuil to Pontchartrain, 4 November 1706, *RAPQ* (1938-39), p. 163.

sympathized with their plight. They had only demanded justice out of misery, he noted to his superior, the Minister of Marine, Jérôme de Pontchartrain, and, once they had made their voice heard, they had returned to their homes without violence. Not desiring any retribution, Vaudreuil simply promulgated an ordinance forbidding any such gathering under penalty of being considered seditious.[24] He did not take stronger action, he informed France, because he believed "qui'il convenoit mieux d'Entrer dans la misère du peuple que de le réduire au desespoir."[25] Moreover, disquieting rumours of an impending assault on Canada, following a successful English raid on Port Royal the previous July, had unsettled the people and so had counterfeit money then circulating in the Quebec district. But Lamothe de Cadillac, the governor's arch-rival in the colony, interpreted Vaudreuil's clemency as weakness in a letter to the minister. Pontchartrain adopted this criticism and accused Vaudreuil of lacking firmness in handling the demonstration.

Having shown clemency, Vaudreuil had little alternative but to act more resolutely when a second disturbance in the Montreal district erupted in the fall of the following year. Despite attempts by the local administration to alleviate the problems caused by the salt shortage, they could do little: Canada needed seven to eight thousand bushels of salt per year and only two thousand had arrived in 1705.[26] Prices paid to producers remained low while the cost of merchandise was high, and the habitant was further distressed by the failure of eel fishing in the St. Lawrence. Emanating from Mille Isles and Lachenaie on the north shore across from Ile Jésus, the protest spread to Boucherville on the south shore. The exact nature of this second demonstration is not known, but this time Vaudreuil ordered Governor Ramezay to arrest two habitants, François Séguin *dit* Ladéroute of Mille Isles and Jean-Baptiste Lapointe of Ile Jésus. A trial was instituted by the intendant in the Conseil Supérieur and information gathered in the Montreal district by the intendant's sub-delegate. A total of nine witnesses were called, but there was insufficient evidence to make an example of Ladéroute and Lapointe. On 6 January 1706 they were released with a reprimand and a fine of ten *écus*.[27]

In 1714 the Quebec district provided the scene for a similar protest, the only one in that district during the French regime. The prospect of a meagre harvest and a rise in commodity prices had fomented discontent in the parishes of Lorette and St. Augustin. People decided to express their grievances and demand remedy, but the means were not initially agreed upon. The local curé named Desnoyers had counselled against a march and in favour of a request directed to the intendant, but his advice went unheeded and people gathered to demonstrate before the walls of Quebec. Some of the mob were armed and threatened to enter the town if their remonstrances were not

24 Pierre-Georges Roy, ed., *Ordonnances, Commissions, Etc., Etc. des Gouverneurs et Intendants de la Nouvelle-France, 1639-1706* (Beauceville, 1924), p. 326.

25 Vaudreuil to Pontchartrain, 28 April, 30 October, 1 and 4 November 1706, *RAPQ* (1938-39), p. 109.

26 *Ibid.*, Vaudreuil, Beauharnois, and Raudot to Pontchartrain, 19 October 1705, p. 82.

27 *Ibid.*, Vaudreuil and Raudot to Pontchartrain, 30 April 1706, pp. 112-13. Pierre-Georges Roy, ed., *Inventaire des ordonnances des Intendants de la Nouvelle-France conservées aux Archives provinciales de Québec* (Beauceville, 1919), I, pp. 5, 8.

heard. Their object was to force merchants to lower the cost of their merchandise, but Governor Vaudreuil and Intendant Bégon were unsympathetic and moved quickly to end the protest. The officials were willing to acknowledge that the cost of goods had increased, but felt that the value of crops had risen more than apace. Wheat that had been selling for three *livres* a bushel the previous year had risen to eight in 1714.

The governor assembled the colonial regulars and the militia of the town to march against the crowd, leading it to disperse and flee for the cover of nearby wooded areas.[28] Court proceedings were begun in the Conseil Supérieur by the attorney general on 2 September 1714 and a councillor, François Mathieu Martin de Lino, was delegated to investigate. Louis Dugal, a thirty-five year old resident of St. Augustin, was taken into custody and questioned by de Lino, but was released because authorities apparently believed his assertion that he had been falsely accused by his enemies.[29] Other testimony led the attorney general to conclude that Laurent Dubault of St. Augustin and Charles Routtier of Lorette had gone from house to house in the area inciting people to join the demonstration. Routtier was imprisoned and not released until 12 August 1715 when he was sworn to remain in the town for further questioning.[30] The court decided that more information was needed, but the matter was not again discussed in the Conseil Supérieur.

While uprisings in response to the imposition of new taxes were a common and frequently violent source of popular protest in France, one would not expect this pattern of behaviour to have been repeated in the colonies where the tax burden was so much lighter. Yet the imposition of the *corvée* in 1717 did lead to a similar response in the seigneury of Longueuil, where the men who participated were heavily armed. This protest had its origins in the review of colonial defence undertaken by the Conseil de Marine following the death of Louis XIV in 1715. As a result, the Court had decided not only to build a massive fortress at Louisbourg, but also to construct a seventeen-foot wall around Montreal. Louisbourg was totally financed by the Crown, but the construction at Montreal was to be partially funded by an annual tax of two thousand *livres* on the Seminary of St. Sulpice and four thousand on the other religious communities and residents of the town.[31] Habitants in the area were forced to provide their labour through the *corvée*.

All segments of the Montreal district were disgruntled with this new head tax, but rural people were doubly concerned. *Corvées* for royal projects were much more

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28 Vaudreuil and Bégon to Pontchartrain, 20 September 1714, *RAPQ* (1947-8), p. 277.

29 Archives Nationales du Québec à Québec, NF 13-1, Matières de Police, 30 September 1714, 98 ff.

30 *Jugements et déliberations du Conseil Supérieur de Québec* (Quebec, 1891), VI, pp. 834-5, 837-9, 997-1000.

31 Mémoire du roi à Vaudreuil et Bégon, 15 June 1716, *RAPQ* (1947-48), pp. 302-3. See also *Inventaire des papiers de Léry conservés aux Archives de la Province de Québec* (Quebec, 1939), I, pp. 43, 45; Zoltvany, *Philippe de Rigaud de Vaudreuil*, p. 66; Camile Bertrand, *Histoire de Montréal*, vol. I: *1535-1760* (Montreal, 1935), pp. 191-2; Robert Rumilly, *Histoire de Montréal* (Montreal, 1970), I, pp. 321-3; Gustave Lanctôt, *A History of Canada*, vol. III: *From the Treaty of Utrecht to the Treaty of Paris, 1713-1763*, Margaret Cameron, trans. (Toronto, 1965), p. 10.

uncommon in New France than the mother country, even though work for a seigneur was frequently included in the contract by which land was ceded to the censitaire. This particular *corvée* had come at a distressing time. Rains had failed in 1715 and 1716, harvests had been reduced, and fires had scoured the countryside. When the following year was also unusually dry, public prayers for rain were offered and it was estimated that three-quarters of the colony's farmers would have difficulty reaping an amount equivalent to what they had sown that spring.[32] Moreover, rural residents failed to see why they should be forced to work on a wall which would afford them little protection if the Iroquois again ravaged the area at a time when they were needed on the farm to tend what appeared to be yet another meagre harvest.

In August, 1717, farmers in the seigneury of Longueuil took up arms and refused to submit to forced labour. Vaudreuil, who had been in Montreal since March to oversee the construction, crossed the St. Lawrence and met the dissidents in the manor house of Longueuil. During these discussions some men who answered the governor impudently were jostled by Vaudreuil's guards. As a result no satisfactory resolution to the conflict was found. The governor returned to Montreal, but received word that the armed demonstration continued. This time he determined to make an example of the demonstrators, but the curé of Boucherville, the commandant of militia for the South Shore, and several others pleaded with him not to deal harshly with them. When Vaudreuil ordered the arrest of ten men identified as ringleaders, they gave themselves up voluntarily and were thrown in prison in Montreal. Feeling that his point had been made, the governor released them before winter for, as he wrote, "les cachots de Montréal sont si affreux qu'ils courreroient risque d'y périr."[33]

Over the next three decades such collective protest in New France subsided, despite either disastrous or very poor harvests in 1736, 1737, and from 1741 to 1743, as well as the War of the Austrian Succession. Conditions created by the Seven Years' War once again led people to unite to demand action from the government. Harvests were poor beginning in 1756 and shipping was interrupted by the British navy. The augmentation of the colonial garrison and the presence of several thousand French army regulars created additional strains and led to food shortages. The outbreak of smallpox during the winter of 1757-58 probably had a further unsettling effect on a war-weary population. In December, 1757, when the Marquis de Vaudreuil-Cavagnal, son of the previous Governor Vaudreuil and himself Governor General of New France, was at Montreal, shortages necessitated the termination of the one-quarter pound of bread distributed to the people. And as this was the time of the fall slaughter, the administration decided that only a combination of one-half horsemeat and one-half beef would be provided to the public at the reduced price of six *sols* per pound.

Women appeared at the door of the governor's residence in response and demanded to speak with him. Vaudreuil acceded to their request and found that they had come to demand bread. The governor replied that he had none to give them, nor even to the troops. The king was not obliged to furnish bread to the people, Vaudreuil continued but, to assist them in this time of scarcity, the governor had arranged to have

32 Guy Frégault, *La civilisation de la Nouvelle-France 1713-1744* (Montreal, 1969), p. 70.

33 Archives Nationales (hereafter AN), Colonies, C11A, 38: 121, Vaudreuil au Conseil, 17 October 1717.

cattle and horses slaughtered and offered for sale at a reduced price. Unsatisfied, the women retorted that "elles avoient de la répugnance à manger du cheval; qu'il étoit l'ami de l'homme; que la religion défendoit de les tuer et qu'elles aimeroient mieux mourir que d'en manger."[34] Vaudreuil dismissed their claims as a figment of their imagination; horsemeat had always been eaten. To ensure quality, he said, he had ordered that the slaughter be conducted in the same manner as for beef. It was the only assistance he could give the people in such trying times. To allay their fears, the governor ordered the Marine commissary, Martel, and the lieutenant general of the Montreal royal court, Jean-Joseph Guiton de Monrepos, to conduct the women on an inspection of the butchery to observe for themselves the fine state of the meat. The women agreed, but continued to protest that "elles n'en prendroient pas, ni personne, pas même les troupes."

Having handled the demonstration with some acumen, Vaudreuil let the women depart for their tour with the threat that, if they rioted again, he would throw them all in jail and hang half of them. The Chevalier de Lévis, who recounted this incident, noted that, while the commissary and lieutenant general were supposed to have arrested the ringleaders of the demonstration, they did not in fact do so. The attention of Lévis, at least, was directed more towards the conduct of the soldiers of the Béarn regiment and that of the Marine troops in Montreal who, influenced by the popular agitation, twice refused to accept their reduced rations in November and December and who also complained about having to eat horsemeat. By force of argument, threat of punishment, and the example of eating horsemeat in the company of Béarn grenadiers, Lévis calmed the mutinous spirit among his soldiers.[35]

Protests during these years did not end there. In April of 1758 the women of the town of Quebec took to the streets. Bougainville remarked in his journal that "La misère augmente. Le peuple de Québec à été réduit à 2 onces de pain. Il y a eu un attroupement de femmes à la porte de Mr Daine, lieutenant général de police."[36] For the next month the food situation remained extremely critical, but further protests were averted by the arrival at Quebec on May 21 of nine ships from a convoy of twelve. The next winter food scarcity was again a problem and the response was the same. There were rumours that bread rations, already costly, would be lowered to only one-quarter pound a day. This time the Marquis de Montcalm noted "Grande misère à Québec."[37] In this last popular disturbance of the French regime, some four hundred women paraded to seek out the intendant's palace and protest the rumoured reduction in bread. François Bigot, the intendant, assured them a half-pound a day and had wheat brought from Lachine in order to fulfill his promise and avert the further wrath of *les femmes québécoises*.

34 Henri-Raymond Casgrain, ed., *Collection des manuscrits du maréchal de Lévis*, twelve volumes (Montreal and Quebec, 1889-1895), vol. I: *Journal des compagnes de Lévis en Canada de 1756 à 1760*, pp. 118-9.

35 *Ibid.*, pp. 112-24. Similar disturbances among the soldiers have not been noted in the town of Quebec, nor are they mentioned in Gilles Proulx, "Soldat à Québec, 1748-1759", *Revue d'histoire de l'Amérique française*, XXXII (1979), pp. 535-64.

36 "Le Journal de M. de Bougainville", *RAPQ* (1923-24), pp. 318, 320, 321.

37 *Collection des manuscrits du maréchal de Lévis*, vol. VII: *Journal du marquis de Montcalm*, p. 492.

The same indignation that led people to assemble against the government also produced resistance to Church authority, but generally in a less dramatic or individual manner. In religious matters the extreme piety apparent in the early years of French colonization was displaced by greater social convention. As in all pre-industrial Western countries, the parish church in New France provided the only institutional focus for rural life outside the family and as such it reflected a people characterized as "remarkably independent, aggressive, self-assertive, freedom-loving and outspoken."[38] But the power of the Church, despite the occasional threat of religious or civil sanction, rested largely on moral suasion and the hierarchy accepted the role of mediator in local disputes. The election of churchwardens to the *fabrique* (church council) and the calling of parish assemblies under the authority of the intendant when contributions were needed to build or repair church buildings tended to reduce the need to resort to extrainstitutional means. Still, the tithe or payments of any kind to the Church were frequently the object of popular contention. Many individuals refused to pay, while others attempted to defraud by calculating the tithe on only part of the harvest or making payment in inferior grain. In one dispute at Ile-aux-Coudres in the 1740s, people joined together to prevent the curé from taking the sacrament to the sick and, at St. Antoine de Tilly in the same period, a gathering of habitants levelled the rectory fence in a protest centering on the use of the rectory for meetings. Some forty men in the parish of St. Thomas at Pointe à la Caille, rent by internal divisions, collectively objected to the priest naming those who had failed to attend Easter Mass, a time obligatory for religious observance but also one before which all tithes were to have been paid.[39]

Next to contributions, rural habitants were most vociferous regarding the church they would attend when a new parish was erected or an existing one divided. As this was a matter that directly affected communal life, people made their opinions known to the Church hierarchy. On one occasion, at least, the bishop's refusal to accede to local opinion led to both concerted action and threat of violence. In 1714 Abbé Belmont, the grand vicar of Bishop Saint-Vallier, provided for the divorce of Côte St. Leonard from the parish at Pointe-aux-Trembles and attached it to the newly erected parish at Rivières-des-Prairies. The people of St. Leonard protested to the bishop but, when Saint-Vallier decided in favour of his subordinate, some parishioners decided to take matters into their own hands. A group set out to meet Joseph Pepin, a young man of twenty-six, as he was carrying the communion bread to Rivière-des-Prairies. They tried to persuade him to take it to the old parish church rather than the new but, when

38 Jaenen, *The Role of the Church*, p. 155.

39 Archives de l'Archevêché de Québec, Registre C, fol. 164-5, 166-7, "A Saint-Thomas: Divisions", 8, 23 November 1741; Registre C, fol. 200, "A Saint Antoine de Tilly: Desordres au Presbytère", 23 October 1749, in Claudette Lacelle, "Monseigneur Henry-Marie Dubreil de Pontbriand: ses mandements et circulaires", (typed copy in the possession of the author, 1971), pp. 114-20, 193-4; A. Mailloux, *Histoire de L'Ile-aux-Coudres depuis son établissement* (Montreal, 1897), p. 5. I would like to thank Claudette Lacelle of Parks Canada (Ottawa) for allowing me to consult the above manuscript as it contains all the unpublished *mandements* and circular letters issued by Bishop Pontbriand. They are not included in the M.A. thesis of the same title that she presented to the University of Ottawa in 1971.

he refused, they snatched the bread from him and made off for the home of the man identified as their ringleader, one Jean La Chapelle. The priest and churchwardens of Rivières-des-Prairies instituted court action and a bailiff was sent to serve writs.[40] Word of his presence in the parish spread rapidly and, when the bailiff neared the La Chapelle house, he discerned in the distance eight women and a man who, he said, threatened "avec des roches et des perches en Les mains pour massasigner." He attempted to avoid them, but they came after him across a swamp shouting "areste voleur nous te voulons tuer et jette dans le marais."[41] The bailiff had little alternative but to beat a hasty retreat to Montreal.

Different in kind from these protests that sprang directly from the lower classes were those that originated in political disputes. Such outbreaks were less spontaneous, involved fewer people, and were more likely to cause bodily harm. The first two such demonstrations occurred in the latter part of Frontenac's tumultuous first term as governor general when the Quebec administration was irrevocably split into a fraction supporting Frontenac and another backing Intendant Jacques Duchesneau. While personality differences strongly influenced these quarrels, there were also disputes over policies concerning the regulation of the fur trade which masked pecuniary interests. Little is known about the first incident in 1677 except that, due to what was termed a seditious movement in Montreal in which a *syndic* had participated, Frontenac promulgated an ordinance prohibiting "aucune assemblée, conventicule, ni signatures communes."[42] By the following year two gangs of youths had formed in the town, seemingly with the encouragement of Montreal's governor, François-Marie Perrot, in order to counter new regulations limiting the activities of the coureurs de bois. When Jean-Baptiste Migeon, judge of the Montreal royal court, and some of his bailiffs tried to arrest one of the coureurs de bois for contravention of the regulations, they were met by the two gangs armed with clubs and by Perrot who brandished both a club and a sword. One of the bailiffs was wounded and Perrot quite unwarrantedly threw Migeon into jail. When the Conseil Souverain attempted to intervene, Frontenac, who was at this time an associate of Perrot in fur-trading activities and his protector, forbade the court to take any action. The conseil referred the matter to France where a royal edict was issued prohibiting local governors like Perrot from fining or imprisoning individuals without orders from the governor general or Conseil Souverain.[43]

40 Archives Nationales du Québec à Montréal, Archives Judiciaires, Feuilles detachées, Déposition de Courtois, 5 October 1715, Delafosse, 11 October 1715, Information, 14 October 1715.

41 *Ibid.*, Déposition de Delafosse, huissier, 14 October 1715.

42 Ordinance of Governor Frontenac, 23 March 1677, *RAPQ* (1927-28), opposite p. xvi; E.-Z. Massicotte, "Répertoire des arrêts, édits, mandements, ordonnances et règlements conservés dans les archives du Palais du Justice de Montréal, 1640-1760", *Proceedings and Transactions of the Royal Society of Canada*, 3rd ser., XI (1917), ordinance received 3 April 1677; Dechêne, *Habitants et marchands*, p. 369.

43 AN, Col., C11A 5: 38v, Duchesneau to Colbert, 10 November 1679; C11A, 6: 112-112v, Extrait des lettres du Canada (n.d.); W.J. Eccles, "François-Marie Perrot", and Jean-Jacques Lefebvre, "Jean-Baptiste Migeon de Branssat", *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, I (1966), pp. 540-2, 508. Dechêne, *Habitants et marchands*, p. 177, omits the political context of this demonstration and conveys the impression that it was larger.

A protest at Louisbourg in 1720 was similarly motivated by political considerations and involved royal officials. At issue was the price of wine and brandy which had been recently fixed at two *livres* a *pot* for brandy, a *livre* for red wine, and fifteen *sols* for white wine. In that year, a new man, Jacques-Ange Lenormant Demesi, had arrived to become the chief commissariat official of the colony (*commissaire-ordonnateur*). A jealous and irrascible defender of the nobility of the robe, Demesi immediately clashed with Governor Saint-Ovide de Brouillan. A series of personal and jurisdictional squabbles nearly immobilized the administration. One of these concerned the setting of wine and brandy prices. Demesi was seemingly not consulted before the governor promulgated the ordinance and decided to embarrass the governor publicly. When some fishing outfitters expressed their displeasure with the set prices, the ordonnateur grasped the opportunity to lead the disgruntled residents to the governor's residence. Saint-Ovide was away but, when they regrouped the next morning, the governor disbanded them. Demesi said that only seven or eight individuals were involved, but the governor discerned "l'air de révolte."[44] Displeased with this breach of public decorum and open challenge to the governor's authority, French officials reprimanded the ordonnateur and threatened both officials with punitive action if they did not settle their differences.[45] Still, the demonstration was not without effect since spirit prices were lowered.

Collective protest in New France was, therefore, more common than historians have previously recognized. Popular disturbances were not simply spasmodic reactions of mindless people succumbing to momentary whims or losing themselves in the collective identity of the crowd. As in Europe, people in New France assembled to seek remedy to immediate but well-defined grievances, to "representer la misère de la Coste", as one witness to the disturbance of 1714 admitted.[46] Demonstrations emanating from the countryside appear to have originated among the local residents themselves rather than had leadership from outside the area. They were not declarations of political principle, but requests for official intervention or indignant reactions against what were perceived as unfair practices or unjust impositions by government. The discussions preceding the 1714 march, the steadfastness of the men of Longueuil protesting the royal *corvée* in 1717, the impudence of women confronting Governor Vaudreuil in 1757, and even the reactions of the officials themselves suggest that such forms of collective behaviour were accompanied by some notion of legitimatization, which revealed that the protestors were supported by the consensus of the larger community or were defending a traditional right.[47] But in contrast to Europe, no disturbances associated with popular festivities or feast days have been uncovered in New France. The charivari, or mock serenade of newly married couples, was imported into the colonies from the mother country and created the raucous behavior normally associated with that public ritual. Although the

44 AN, Col., C11B, 5: 166, Saint-Ovide au Conseil, 22 June 1720; Col., F3, 50: 90-1, Reglements de police faits à l'Ile Royale depuis le début de 1720 jusqu'au présent (n.d.).

45 *Ibid.*, 5: 78, Conseil, 20 August 1720.

46 Archives Nationales du Québec à Québec, NF 13-1, Matières de Police, 30 September 1714, 98 ff.

47 E.P. Thompson, "The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century", *Past and Present*, L (1971), pp. 70-136.

charivaris did not burst into anti-government or anti-Church activity, Bishop Laval found that they lead to "désordres et libertés scandaleuses" where "des actions très impies" were committed, and he officially banned them in 1683.[48]

The study of collective protest quickly turns to an examination of the society which first produced and then reacted to it. The essentially non-political character of most of these disturbances and the absence of large-scale popular protest fomented by the middle classes reflects not only political structures during the French regime, but also the mentality of the middle classes and their numerical weakness in the social structure.[49] There were no Bacon's or Leisler's rebellions, nor any Regulators, in New France as there were in the English colonies. At the same time the strong military presence in the French colonies accounted for at least part of the restraint shown by demonstrators. New France was an armed camp where authorities could threaten effective counter-violence through the use of garrisoned regulars. There were no police forces as such but, unlike officials in England and her dependencies, French colonial administrator did not have to rely on only the "hue and cry", the *posse commitatus* or the militia for law enforcement in such situations. Towns were garrisoned with colonial regulars ready for the call and French officials showed that they were prepared to use force if disturbances persisted or became unruly. Officials even argued that the garrisons should be increased because soldiers were necessary "pour maintenir l'ordre de la Colonie et reprimer L'insolence des habitans."[50]

Popular protest in New France was sparked more by a sense of injustice, a fear of privation, and a desire to invoke government protection than it was prompted by any single economic factor. There is no mechanical correlation between the incidence of popular disturbances and the price of the dietary staple, wheat. Demonstrations in 1704 and 1705 occurred when wheat prices were falling, while those in 1714, 1717, and 1757-58 transpired within the context of advancing prices being paid to producers.[51] More important than the price of wheat was the nature of markets during the *ancien régime* and its effects on popular psychology. Markets in the colonies demonstrated the same characteristics as those described by Pierre Goubert for France: limited in extent, poorly provisioned, inelastic, and subject to speculation. As a result, the popular mind was haunted by "la peur panique de la cherté et de la disette, nourrie par des souvenirs collectifs (souvent exagérés) des famines anciennes."[52] New France did not experience famine where people died as they did in Europe, but shortages due

48 See Henri Têtu and C.O. Gagnon, eds., *Mandements, lettres pastorales et circulaires des évêques de Québec* (Quebec, 1887), I, pp. 114-5; and Jaenen, *Role of the Church*, p. 140. For France, see Yves-Marie Bercé, *Fête et révolte, Des mentalités populaires du XVI siècle au XVIII siècle* (Paris, 1976).

49 The character and composition of the bourgeoisie in New France continues to be hotly contested. For an introduction to the debate, see Dale Miquelon, ed., *Society and Conquest: The Debate on the Bourgeoisie and Social Change in French Canada, 1700-1850* (Toronto, 1977).

50 Vaudreuil and Bégon to Pontchartrain, 20 September 1714, *RAPQ* (1947-48), p. 277.

51 Wheat prices are discussed and charted in Dechêne, *Habitants et marchands*, pp. 324-36, 521; and in Jean Hamelin, *Economie et société en Nouvelle-France* (Quebec, 1960), pp. 58-62.

52 Pierre Goubert, *L'Ancien Régime*, Tome I: *Le Société* (Paris, 1969), p. 42.

to interruptions in shipping or poor harvests and rapid escalations in prices were sufficiently numerous to alarm people when such indicators first appeared. For this reason protests erupted in the fall or spring when the prospect of a difficult winter loomed ahead, or when shortages were beginning to be perceived before the arrival of ships or the appearance of spring crops.

Fears that a difficult situation might suddenly deteriorate further, or indignation that others had denied them access to essential commodities, were nurtured by the fundamental instability of pre-industrial markets. Fears and indignation as elements of popular psychology help to explain why popular protest erupted more over food or prices than actual instances of destitution or starvation. Similarly, Charles Tilly has concluded that in modern Europe conflicts over the food supply occurred not so much where people were hungry, but where people believed that others were depriving them of food to which they had a moral and political right.[53] That such conflicts in New France never reached the level of great societal redressing rituals that they attained in Europe is indicative of better economic conditions in the New World and a lesser degree of social antagonism. It also testifies to the success of government regulation of the economy of New France. Older historians of New France such as Francis Parkman, George Wrong and L.H. Gipson, who were imbued with the principles of nineteenth-century *laissez-faire* liberalism, saw such government activity as a fettering of trade, excessive benevolence, and a paternalism which hampered the untrammelled free spirit.[54] W.J. Eccles, in contrast, has more recently argued that government intervention in New France was inspired by the aristocratic ethos of the age and dictated by the nature of the colony's economy.[55]

Government intervention in the marketplace during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries derived not just from concepts of society and Canadian economic deficiencies, but also from the practical necessity of overcoming deficiencies in pre-industrial economies in order to avoid popular protest in the form of crowds, mobs, and riots. Consequently, Britain and her American colonies practised the same regulation of supply and prices as did the French colonies and their mother country, but a serious study of differing amounts of regulation in the French and British Empires remains to be undertaken. E.P. Thompson has found that one of the threads running through eighteenth-century English crowd activity was the attempt to invoke government intervention for the greater good, what Thompson refers to as the "moral economy of mercantilism".[56] The need for such regulation was apparent because markets were unstable largely due to their dependence on agriculture and poor transportation facilities. Agriculture "as an industry was always in difficulty" in the

53 Charles Tilly, "Food Supply and Public Order in Modern Europe", Charles Tilly, ed., *The Formation of National States in Western Europe* (Princeton, N.J., 1975), p. 389.

54 For a review of these interpretations, see Yves F. Zoltvany, *The Government of New France: Royal, Clerical, or Class Rule?* (Scarborough, Ont., 1971), pp. 36-55.

55 W.J. Eccles, *Canada Under Louis XIV 1663-1701* (Toronto, 1964), pp. 57-8; *Canadian Society During the French Regime* (Montreal, 1968), pp. 13, 43-4; *The Canadian Frontier 1534-1760* (New York, 1969), p. 75.

56 Thompson, "The Moral Economy of the English Crowd". For the American colonies, see Carl Bridenbaugh, *Cities in the Wilderness* (New York, 1964), pp. 198, 201-3; *Cities in Revolt* (New York, 1955), pp. 37, 83-5.

early modern world, Fernand Braudel has written.[57] The central problem of agriculture in New France, as in Western Europe, was an overconcentration of one crop, wheat.[58] Life depended on the production of wheat, but wheat crops were sensitive to climatic changes and insect manifestations. Poor or disastrous harvests were recorded in New France in at least the following years: 1689, 1691, 1714-17, 1723, 1732, 1736-37, 1741-43, 1750-51, and 1756-58.[59]

Officials during the French regime regularly set the price of wheat, flour, bread, and meat, as well as a variety of services, just as town and provincial authorities did in the English colonies. In years of scarcity when harvests were poor, the Quebec administration requisitioned supplies from merchants and required farmers to sell, at prices it had established, an amount of grain or flour required for the colony as a whole. In 1714, the year of the march on Quebec, the intendant had issued an ordinance in August allowing Quebec bakers to requisition wheat from farmers for eight *livres* a bushel wherever individuals had more than a three-month supply. The next month another ordinance required that all habitants in the Quebec district bring a fifth of their wheat crop to the king's stores in Quebec within six months. This was followed by a third decree in October which ordered residents of Neuville, Les Ecureuils (the two parishes closest to St. Augustin and Lorette where the demonstration had originated), and Pointe-aux-Trembles to bring a tenth of their wheat to Quebec to feed the townspeople.[60] In particularly difficult times, officials withheld part of the grain from the market so that it could be distributed as seed the following spring and exports were prohibited.

Special attention was paid to the towns, for it was in and around the towns that popular disturbances could and did erupt most easily. The terrible crop failures in 1736 and 1737 reduced many habitants to wandering beggars who migrated to the towns in search of assistance. In 1738 the Intendant Gilles Hocquart wrote:

> Je ne puis vous exprimer, monseigneur, la misère causée par la disette qui se fait sentir dans toutes les campagnes. Le plus grand nombre des habitants, particulièrement de la coste sud, manquent de pain depuis longtemps et une grande partie ont erré pendant tout l'hiver dans les costes du nord, qui ont été moins maltraitées, pour y recueillir des aumônes et quelques peu de bled pour semer. D'autres ont vécu et vivent encore d'un peu d'avoine et de bled d'Inde et de poisson. Les villes on été remplies tout l'hiver de ces coureurs misérables qui venaient y chercher quelques secours de pain ou d'argent. Les habitants des villes, particulièrement les journaliers et artisans, sont dans une situation aussi fâcheuse manquant tous de travail.[61]

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57 Fernand Braudel, *Capitalism and Material Life 1400-1800*, Miriam Kochan, trans. (New York, 1973), pp. 81-2.

58 See Ralph Davis, *The Rise of the Atlantic Economies* (London, 1973), pp. 111-20.

59 Alice J.E. Lunn, "Economic Development in New France, 1713-1760", (Ph.D. thesis, McGill University, 1942), pp. 95-105; Hamelin, *Economie et société en Nouvelle-France*, p. 65.

60 *Inventaire des ordonnances des Intendants*, I, pp. 142-4, ordinances of 18 August, 23 September, and 27 October 1714.

61 Emile Salone, *La colonisation de la Nouvelle-France* (Paris, 1905, reprinted Trois-Rivières, 1970), p. 375.

Hocquart was forced to provide aid from the king's stores just as officials in Louisbourg did when shortages were experienced in 1729, 1733, and 1737. Following the caterpillar infestation that devastated the crop in 1742, Bishop Pontbriand lent Church support to such government activity through a *mandement* which enjoined the rural faithful to bring their harvests to town.[62]

The last intendant of Quebec, François Bigot, was acutely aware of the possibility of popular disruptions in the towns. Alarmed at how fast the town of Quebec had grown, he promulgated an ordinance in 1749 which prohibited anyone from establishing in Quebec without his express permission. If the pace of the town's economic growth slowed, he reasoned, those who had left the countryside to work there would soon find themselves "réduits à la mendicité, ce qui pourroit exposer une partie d'entre eux à de facheuses suites, et de venir à charge au public."[63] In 1751 Bigot took quick action to avoid any trouble in Montreal and Quebec when poor harvests resulted in shortages of bread. Some areas in the Montreal district that year were able to reap enough wheat for only four months of subsistence. By the beginning of November, Montreal was without bread. Bigot noted that "L'Emeute se mettant dans le peuple qui manquoient de pain, on Eut recours à moi."[64] He and Governor LaJonquière set the price of wheat at five *livres* a bushel, since it had been selling for up to seven. But as the price of bread was already too high and bakers dared not raise it more, there was no initiative for securing the flour and making bread. The governor and intendant therefore commandeered wheat in the Montreal district and paid farmers the set price, just as they did in the Quebec district during the winter. Some grain was kept for seed while the rest was converted into flour, distributed to bakers, and warehoused for use by the troops. Only the arrival of supply ships from France in the spring averted starvation.

That New France did not witness popular protest on the scale or frequency observed elsewhere may therefore be partially attributed to the activities of her officials. Through intervention in the marketplace they by-passed the buyers and their agents, who filtered through the countryside to purchase farm products, and either moderated or prevented speculation and price collusion among decidedly small merchant communities in Montreal and Quebec. Official regulation of the food supply in New France was made easier and was ultimately more successful than that in many areas of France for two reasons. As settlement during the French regime was strung out along the avenues of the St. Lawrence and the Atlantic, the colonies did not experience the transportation difficulties encountered in parts of France where there were few waterways and only poor roads. Secondly, despite the weaknesses inherent in agriculture at the time, Canadian agriculture was at least as efficient as that in France as a whole, although it was dependent on clearing new lands.[65] Even with poor harvests, early Canadian agriculture was able to feed a rapidly expanding population

62 Têtu and Gagnon, *Mandements*, II, pp. 22-4, 28-9.

63 *Arrêts et régulations du Conseil Supérieur de Québec et ordonnances et jugements des Intendants du Canada* (Quebec, 1855), pp. 399-400.

64 AN, Col., C11A, 98: 111, Bigot to Rouillé, 8 May 1752.

65 Dechêne, *Habitants et marchands*, pp. 326-8; W.J. Eccles, *France in America* (Toronto, 1972), pp. 121-2.

and export surpluses of wheat and other foodstuffs to Louisbourg and the West Indies from the 1720s to 1751. Only in 1743 and 1744 was it necessary for Quebec officials to import wheat from France and the English colonies to feed the Canadian population.[66]

These procedures to avoid popular disturbances and the leniency with which the protestors were handled suggest that colonial authorities, like their English counterparts, unofficially recognized the legitimacy of demonstrations as long as they acted within certain bounds.[67] Governors and intendants were overtly hostile to such manifestations in their correspondence with their superiors in France, but their actions belied their words. "Sedition", "mutiny", "revolt", and "riot" were terms they used to describe popular disturbances, but punishments were never harsh. This is explained not only by the non-destructiveness of the crowds, but also by the opinion among colonial officials that the people had no other way to express their plight. Officials in France, especially early in the eighteenth century, feared outbreaks as violent as those seen in the mother country and argued for stiffer sentences. Their subordinates in New France chose, rather, to remedy the complaint and exact only enough punishment to reinforce the appearance of authority.

In 1768 the *New York Journal* referred to the popular tumults that occasionally erupted as "Thunder Gusts" which "do more Good than Harm."[68] By providing a channel for collective expression with a minimum of violence, popular demonstrations can be said to have had a beneficial effect in New France. The British victories of 1758-60 and the transfer of Canada to Britain in 1763 temporarily ended this form of popular expression. Under alien rulers direct collective action would have been considered as insurrection and brought severe reprisals by the British troops now stationed in the colony. Demonstrations protesting food shortages and commodity prices appear to have died completely, less due to the presence of a foreign army than as a result of the return of peace, sound economic policies implemented by British officials, a reduction in inflation, better harvests, and increasing prosperity for rural habitants. Quebec did not, therefore, experience the greater frequency and intensity of popular movements observed in Europe after 1760 by George Rudé or the upswing in the number of revolutionary crowds, riots, and popular uprisings that Jacques Godechot has characterized as the Atlantic Revolution between 1770 and 1799.[69]

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66 Lunn, "Economic Development", p. 101.

67 David Grimstead, "Rioting in Its Collective Setting", *American Historical Review*, LXXVII (1972), p. 362.

68 Cited in Maier, *From Resistance to Revolution*, p. 23.

69 Rudé, "Popular Protest in 18th Century Europe", pp. 295-7. Jacques Godechot, *France and the Atlantic Revolution of the Eighteenth Century, 1770-1799*, Herbert H. Rowen, trans. (New York, 1965), pp. 3, 5. While agreeing with elements of the "common context" of the Atlantic interpretation of Godechot and his followers, Rudé argues against forcing all protest in this period into a similar mould. He advocates placing each form of popular protest in its national as well as the international context. This is as essential for understanding popular disturbances in Quebec after the British conquest as it is for such events as the Gordon riots in England, the Pugachev rebellion in Russia, or the French grain riots in 1775.

POPULAR DISTURBANCES IN FRENCH CANADA

Popular protest was not altogether absent in the opening decades of British rule in Canada, but initially it assumed an individual form and was essentially passive. During the period of the military regime from 1760 to 1764, habitants removed wheels from their carts to avoid unpaid work on the roads and refused to sell wheat to the British on the mere promise of payment.[70] The collective behaviour of Quebec's habitants in this period, especially during the American invasion of 1775-76 and during the French Revolution, has been studied extensively by others.[71] The intention here is not to retread old ground, but simply to draw links to popular disturbances seen during the French regime and the collective psychology that accompanied them.

The same sense of fear and injustice that impelled people to collective action during the French regime was now channelled into resistance to British authority whenever the question of enlistment in the militia was raised. Fear of deportation—the fate of the Acadians in 1755—provided a continuing link in the passive resistance that greeted Governor James Murray's attempt at militia enlistment in 1764, Carleton's efforts in 1775 when the presence of American soldiers on Canadian soil allowed more concerted action, and the Militia Act of 1794 passed by the newly formed Assembly of Lower Canada. Some of these incidents occurred in the places where there had been popular disturbances during the French regime. Lachenaie, involved in the protest of 1705, was one of four parishes just north of Montreal that offered resistance in 1775 to the Sieur de la Corne when he attempted, through violence, to coerce men into enlisting. In the Quebec area, militia officers in Saint-Augustin, the site of protest in 1714, refused the king's commission in 1775. Ancienne Lorette and Jeune Lorette (the former also implicated in 1714) refused to recognize militia officers named by Governor Guy Carleton in 1775 and were two of the four parishes that mounted armed patrols against the enforcement of the 1794 militia law. The repetition of collective protest in such localities suggests the development of a tradition passed on orally through the generations. Local folklore may help to confirm such a contention.

Debate among historians continues about the effect of the French revolutionary ideas spread through the press and by emissaries in Quebec during the 1790s. Despite the limited dissemination of some revolutionary propaganda among the masses, popular protest which erupted in Quebec in the 1790s shared the same general characteristics of that earlier in the century: spontaneous generation, limited targets, restraint in the use of violence, and defensiveness in the cause it espoused. War

70 Hilda Neatby, *Quebec: The Revolutionary Age 1760-1791* (Toronto, 1966), p. 25.

71 S.D. Clark, *Movements of Political Protest in Canada 1640-1840* (Toronto, 1959), pp. 93-102, 176-89; Michel Brunet, *Les Canadiens après la conquête 1759-1775* (Montreal, 1969), pp. 51-80; Gustave Lanctôt, *Canada and the American Revolution 1774-1783*, Margaret Cameron, trans. (Toronto, 1967), pp. 57-8, 68-75, 80-2, 116-9; Claude Galarneau, *La France devant l'opinion canadienne (1760-1815)* (Quebec, 1970), pp. 235-48; Jean-Pierre Wallot, *Un Québec qui bougeait, trame socio-politique du Québec au tournant du XIX siècle* (Montreal, 1973) pp. 254-69; Raoul Roy, *Résistance Indépendantiste 1793-1798* (Montreal, 1973), pp. 107-23; Fernand Ouellet, *Le Bas Canada 1791-1840, Changements structuraux et crise* (Ottawa, 1976), pp. 70-3. In 1812 there were again demonstrations against militia enlistment, but they were localized in the Lachine area. See J.P. Wallot, "Une Emeute à Lachine contre la 'conscription' (1812)", in his *Un Québec qui bougeait*, pp. 107-32.

between France and England, rumours circulating in the countryside about the Militia Act, the appearance of a French fleet in the St. Lawrence, poor harvests, high prices, and French revolutionary propaganda emanating from the United States created a climate of instability. Not only was there armed opposition to militia enlistment in 1794, but in April of that year a crowd in Montreal seized the pillory where Joseph Léveillé, a canoeman convicted of fraud, was being exposed and threw it in the river. They then proceeded to the home of a magistrate, Frobisher, to demand pardon for Léveillé. When Frobisher consented, the crowd dispersed.[72]

Popular demonstrations were much more widespread in reaction to the roads law passed by the Assembly in 1796, because it reintroduced the *corvée* for the upkeep of royal roads and bridges or required a payment in lieu of labour. Even with French intrigues and revolutionary propaganda, the crowd continued to take direct limited action in opposition to the roads law, as it had during the French regime, rather than expressing generalized ideas. In the summer of 1796 residents of Quebec removed the wheels from their carts in opposition to the law and, when five leaders of the demonstration were arrested the following day, a crowd of some five hundred women hurled insults at the arresting officers.[73] A constable in Montreal, sent in October to collect a fine imposed against Luc Berthelot for contravention of the roads law, was attacked by several assailants. Berthelot and the attackers were ordered arrested, but could not be apprehended. A mob formed in the Place d'Armes outside the court house two days later when judges convened to determine their course of action in the case. Berthelot himself appeared, was recognized, and arrested by the sheriff, but then snatched from the sheriff by the crowd. An even larger assembly to protest the law was held in the Champs de Mars the following week, but it dispersed when so ordered by magistrates. In the Quebec district there were similar crowd activities. At Saint-Roch on October 9, an assembly called to elect roads inspectors turned into riotous confusion and had to be dispersed. In January, 1797, a mob at Pointe-Lévis led nine roads inspectors to the centre of the parish and forced them to renounce their positions. Court officials later sent to arrest the leaders of this demonstration were driven back across the river to Quebec.[74]

Popular protest revealed in these demonstrations as well as those during the French regime has been described variously as "first stage", "communal", and "reactive", as it invoved localized groups outraged by some decision and determined to make their case known through popular demonstration.[75] After more than three decades of adjustment to British rule, the crowd had reemerged in Quebec during the 1790s impelled by the same sense of injustice seen in New France and prepared to take

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72 William Kingsford, *The History of Canada*, ten volumes (Toronto, 1877-98), VII, p. 396; Galarneau, *La France*, p. 242.

73 Wallot, *Un Québec qui bougeait*, p. 268.

74 Thomas Chapais, *Cours d'histoire du Canada* (Montreal, 1919-32), II, pp. 118-21; Galarneau, *La France*, pp. 248-50.

75 Mousnier, *Peasant Uprisings*, pp. 306-7; Charles Tilly, "Collective Violence in European Perspective", Hugh D. Graham and Ted Robert Gurr, eds., *Violence in America: Historical and Comparative Perspectives* (New York, 1969), pp. 14-6, 38-40; Tilly, Tilly, and Tilly, *The Rebellious Century*, pp. 49-52.

the same form of limited collective action. What had changed was not the crowd, but attitudes of officials, the Church, and Quebec's elite towards popular protest. Aware that crowds and mobs elsewhere had led to insurrection against the government and traumatized by the revolutionary terror in France, there was no intercession by the clergy and local notables to deal leniently with the protestors as there had been in 1704 and 1717. British officials in particular feared revolutionary uprisings against the government at nearly every turn. Consequently, the authorities moved swiftly against the protestors and exacted greater retribution. Nineteen people were brought to trial in March of 1797 in Montreal and thirteen were sentenced to fines and imprisonment varying from three months to a year. Twenty-four were arrested in the Quebec district, with all but one being convicted and sentenced to terms of up to six months in prison.[76]

Crowds and mobs in eighteenth-century Quebec may have been the thunder gusts of popular sentiment, but they did not bring any revolutionary storm. Revolutionary ideas of liberty, sovereignty, and the Rights of Man had only a limited impact on Quebec and they seldom reached the lower classes. Revolutionary ideas must be taken to the people, Lenin argued, and before 1800 Quebec lacked an indigenous group willing to transmit such an ideology. Only in the nineteenth century would popular protest reach the next stage of "associational" or "proactive" violence intent on claiming rights, privileges, or resources not previously enjoyed by at least one segment of the population. Out of the legislative confrontations beginning in the opening decade of the nineteenth century would emerge the leadership capable of channelling popular protest into a force more threatening to the political structure.

76 Galarneau, *La France*, p. 250.

Résumé

L'auteur se penche sur les quelques occasions où les habitants de la Nouvelle-France se sont regroupés ou assemblés pour manifester collectivement bien que cela ait été illégal à l'époque. En général, ces démonstrations avaient lieu en temps de disette et de cherté des prix — particulièrement pendant les années 1704 à 1717 et 1757 à 1759 — mais il arrivait également qu'on s'assemble pour protester contre les corvées, ou encore, pour faire part de son mécontentement à l'égard de certaines mesures politiques ou religieuses.

Ces contestations se déroulaient sensiblement de la même façon et pour les mêmes raisons qu'en France sauf qu'elles étaient, ici, à la fois moins fréquentes et moins violentes. On s'assemblait dans un but précis, on s'armait souvent et on proférait parfois des menaces mais, plus souvent qu'autrement, on se dispersait après avoir été entendu ou lorsque les soldats étaient appelés sur les lieux. Il faut dire que les autorités étaient indulgentes à l'égard des participants, probablement parce qu'elles considéraient ces attroupements comme quasi légitimes.

Cette forme de contestation diminua pendant les trois premières décennies du régime britannique; cependant, on trouva quand même moyen de résister à l'enrôlement dans la milice durant les années 1764, 1775 et 1794 de même qu'à la loi sur les chemins en 1796. Ceci se manifestant dans certaines des paroisses qui avaient fomenté des démonstrations populaires sous le régime français, l'auteur suggère qu'il y a là une tradition de contestation transmise d'une génération à l'autre. En somme, si les assemblées populaires ont, un peu partout, secoué la société au dix-huitième siècle, au Québec, elles n'ont pas suscité de changements radicaux avant l'avènement du dix-neuvième.