From Balconville to Condoville, but Where Is Co-opville? Neighbourhood Activism in 1980s Pointe-Saint-Charles

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From *Balconville* to *Condoville*, but Where Is Co-opville? Neighbourhood Activism in 1980s Pointe-Saint-Charles

Simon Vickers

Montréal playwright David Fennario introduced his play *Balconville* at the Centaur Theatre in the Old Montréal district in 1979. Set in the real-life neighbourhood of Pointe-Saint-Charles, only a few kilometres away, *Balconville* told a story that few theatregoers could likely relate to.[1] Unlike those with the disposable income to attend an expensive show at the Centaur, the characters in *Balconville* spent their free time watching the world from their balconies. Faced with deteriorating buildings, the threat of gentrification, and widespread unemployment, the adult characters reminisced about a time in which things were better, jobs were more easily available, politicians worked harder, and children were more responsible. The fact that Fennario's characters lived in a *ville* within the borders of the city of Montréal implied an isolated existence. The characters mentioned other places in Montréal such as Westmount, Verdun, and Park Extension, but as distant comparisons to their own neighbourhood.[2]

Fennario's *Balconville* identified a developing tension between the local lives of his characters and the growing threat of market-driven gentrification. The playwright, who grew up near Pointe-Saint-Charles, clearly loved his characters and was sensitive to the embedded linguistic, gender, and

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1. As in many places in Québec, the spelling of place names in Pointe-Saint-Charles is a touchy issue. The most commonly used English spelling by locals is Point St. Charles but I have chosen to use Pointe-Saint-Charles, the official spelling recognized by governments, when writing in my own words.

2. David Fennario, *Balconville: A Play* (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1980).

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generational conflicts that characterized their everyday lives. His play, however, also expressed frustration at the divisive politics that prevented his characters from pursuing their common class interests. As an active participant in city-wide activist communities, Fennario was not alone in his sombre predictions for the future of the Montréal left.[3] Many of Montréal's long-time activists have since characterized the late 1970s and early 1980s as a period of demobilization and the fragmentation of their networks. Faced with the rise of neoliberal social relations and the failure of the first Québec sovereignty referendum, these activist authors describe a process by which the hope and solidarity of the previous decade gave way to a deep sadness associated with a failed dream.[4]

Informed by the memoirs and publications of activists reflecting on this period, as well as the broader social, economic, and political changes that were brought on by the rise of neoliberalism, most historical work on the New Left in Montréal has depicted the early 1980s as the end of an activist era.[5] Lost through this narrative of decline, however, is how some organizers continued to confront and work through the material realities and organizational challenges that they faced in their own neighbourhoods. Drawing primarily from the rich internal documentation of neighbourhood organizations at the

3. Fennario describes his affiliation with the Socialist Labour Party and his familiarity with the student left at McGill and Sir George Williams University in *Blue Mondays* (Verdun, Québec: Black Rock Creations, 1984).

4. For an early example of such a memoir, which has been cited widely, see Jean-Marc Piotte, *La communauté perdue: Petite histoire des militantismes* (Montréal: VLB Éditeur, 1987). A more recent one is Pierre Beaudet, *On a raison de se révolter: Chronique des années 70* (Montréal: Éditions écosociété, 2008).

5. There are many reasons why historians of Québec, Canada, and elsewhere in the West have depicted the early 1980s as a period of decline for left-wing organizing. The rise to power of Margaret Thatcher in the UK in 1979, Ronald Reagan in the US in 1981, and Brian Mulroney in Canada in 1984 marked the beginning of a neoliberal era in which politicians dismantled the welfare state, emphasized law and order as a means to quell dissent, and took a strong line against labour unions. In Québec, the failed sovereignty referendum in 1980 was a further blow to many on the left who had hoped that a nation of Québec might take a different path from its neighbours. While social, political, and economic shifts affected activists on the ground, it is my contention that by focusing only on these macro factors historians (or other types of academics who do historical work) have de-emphasized the ways that activists continued to be agents of social change in the neoliberal era. On activist movements in Québec that ended during the late 1970s and early 1980s, see Léon Dion, *La revolution déroutée, 1960–76* (Montréal: Boréal, 1998); Jean-Philippe Warren, *Ils voulaient changer le monde: Le militantisme marxiste-léniniste au Québec* (Montréal: VLB Éditeur, 2007); Jean-Philippe Warren & Andrée Fortin, *Pratiques et discourse de la contreculture au Québec* (Québec: Septentrion, 2015). On the "red decades" of the New Left in Québec in the early 1980s, see Ian McKay, *Rebels, Reds, Radicals: Rethinking Canada's Left History* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2005), 187. Books about left organizing in Canada that cover a time period ending in the first half of the 1980s include Steven High, *Industrial Sunset: The Making of North America's Rust Belt, 1969–1984* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003); Dominique Clément, *Canada's Rights Revolution: Social Movements and Social Change, 1937–1982* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2008).
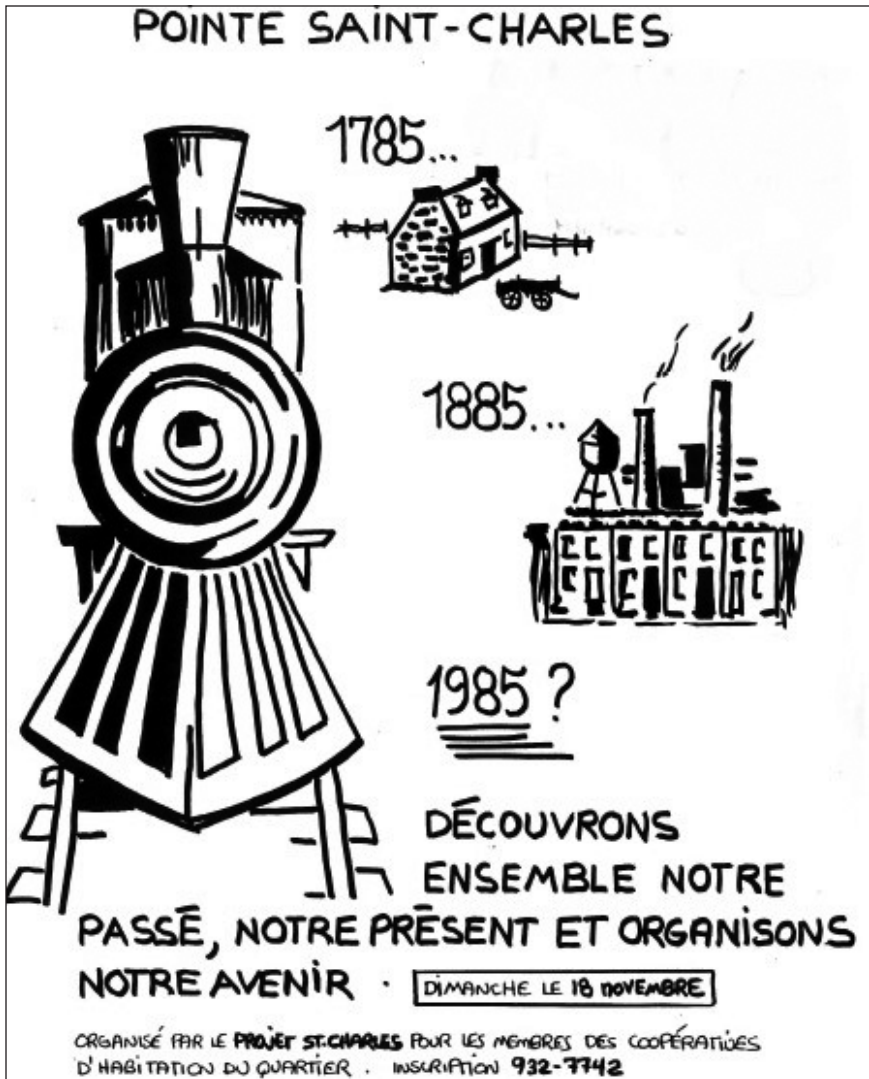
A poster circulated by PROJET activists in 1985.

Comité St-Charles, *Découvrons ensemble notre passé, notre présent et organisons notre avenir* (Montréal 1985), APPSC, 2008-0024.01.05.22., MUA.

Archive populaire de Pointe-Saint-Charles, this article explores the ways in which local activists fought against gentrification and achieved concrete gains well into the 1980s and 1990s. Unlike the defeated characters in Fennario's *Balconville*, the residents of Pointe-Saint-Charles founded a co-operative housing movement to protect their neighbours from displacement. Titled PROJET St-Charles, it set out to construct 500 new low-income co-operative

housing units over three years. These new units would bring the ratio of non-market housing in the neighbourhood to 30 per cent – a number that the authors of the PROJET believed would protect all existing residents from displacement and maintain the social fabric of the neighbourhood.[6]

Moreover, PROJET St-Charles was not only a plan to resist localized gentrification. Its founders were part of a growing network of activists in Montréal who believed that co-ops could serve as the basis for a democratic social movement led by poor and working-class people. In theory, by participating in co-operative movements, people in working-class neighbourhoods like Pointe-Saint-Charles would learn to live and act collectively and be inspired to organize with people across Québec to defend their interests. When applied in practice, however, the PROJET did not always proceed according to plan. Organizers quickly learned that few local residents could agree on exactly what it meant to be from the neighbourhood or what its future should look like. As in *Balconville*, internal language, race, gender, generational, and even class politics complicated efforts to create a unified co-op movement. Political and economic processes that affected the left in Québec and North America more generally (post-referendum linguistic politics, cuts to government spending, and continuing deindustrialization) also made it difficult for PROJET organizers to achieve their goals. In the face of these challenges, however, local activists adapted but never abandoned their radical critique of a housing system that privileged profit over people and, in doing so, produced very real and lasting results. Beyond housing people in need, by protecting this network of low-income residents from displacement PROJET organizers sheltered a sense of solidarity, social fabric, and radical critique in Pointe-Saint-Charles from the violent restructuring of the neoliberal city.

Imagining Co-opville

IN 1985, PROJET ACTIVISTS CREATED a poster to inspire a sense of urgency in local residents (see Figure 1). It was obvious to everyone that the moving train of history was rapidly pulling the neighbourhood out of its industrial period, but it remained uncertain whether local people would unite to determine its direction. The question mark next to "1985" also expressed a persistent ambiguity over what a citizen-directed future might look like. The text at the bottom specified that co-ops would be central to their strategy, but the designers of the poster chose not to illustrate their co-operative vision. This omission reflected a more general ambiguity among PROJET organizers over what co-operative housing was for and how it reflected the history of Pointe-Saint-Charles.

6. Comité Provisoire, *Plan de travail rattache au Projet St-Charles: presente par le Comité Provisoire au C.A. du R.I.L.* (Montréal, 1983), APPSC de Pointe-Saint-Charles (hereafter APPSC), 2008-0024.01.05.17., McGill University Archives, Montréal (hereafter MUA).

In reality, the meaning of co-operatives has always been fluid across place and time. Historians have too often treated disparate co-operatives as part of a more general Canadian or international movement without fully interrogating the social, cultural, and political context that shapes how and why members participate at the local level.[7] Often written to celebrate the merits of co-operatives in general, these "movement" histories rarely acknowledge that co-operation has been, at least for the last century, a fluid concept.[8] Residents of Pointe-Saint-Charles did not found co-operatives simply because they believed in co-operative principles; they approached PROJET St-Charles with different, historically contingent ideas about what co-ops were for and why they needed them. In the 1970s, the governments of Québec and Canada created standardized liberal meanings of co-op housing when they began to offer subsidies as part of their low-income housing strategies. This funding was essential to the workability of PROJET St-Charles, but local activists also drew from a radically expansive vision of co-operatives that had become increasingly popular among the Montréal left over the previous decade. To the founders of PROJET St-Charles, co-ops represented a radical locus for building class and community power. They imagined a co-operative neighbourhood, a Co-opville, as a path that would connect Pointe-Saint-Charles's distinct past with society's more just future.

For much of its history, Pointe-Saint-Charles (also known as the Point or le Pointe)[9] was connected to other neighbourhoods in the southwest of

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7. Historians and popular authors have often situated Canadian co-ops within an international movement that began in Rochdale, England, in 1844. The Rochdale Pioneers developed a series of principles that subsequent co-ops adopted for their own purposes. Brett Fairbairn, *The Meaning of Rochdale: The Rochdale Pioneers and the Co-operative Principle* (Saskatoon: Centre for the Study of Co-operatives, University of Saskatchewan, 1994).

8. Canadian historians (both academic and not) have devoted most of their attention to three co-operative movements in particular: the Antigonish and Desjardins movements and the Co-operative Union of Canada. See Ian MacPherson, *Building and Protecting the Co-operative Movement: A Brief History of the Co-operative Union of Canada, 1909–1984* (Ottawa: Co-operative Union of Canada, 1984); Brett Fairbairn, *Building a Dream: The Co-operative Retailing System in Western Canada, 1928–1988* (Saskatoon: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1989); Guy Bélanger, *Alphonse Desjardins: 1854–1920* (Québec: Septentrion, 2012); Santo Dodaro and Leonard Pluta, *The Big Picture: The Antigonish Movement of Eastern Nova Scotia* (Montréal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2012). Laudatory treatments of co-ops are often funded by the movements themselves or through university-based co-operative research centres. Two of the most prominent historians of co-operatives in Canada are linked to such research centres: Ian MacPherson founded the BC Institute for Co-operative Studies at the University of Victoria, and Brett Fairbairn was the former director of the Centre for the Study of Co-operatives at the University of Saskatchewan. For a critique of this tendency, see Ronald Rudin, *In Whose Interest? Quebec's Caisses Populaires, 1900–1945* (Montréal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1990).

9. For the remainder of the article, I refer to Pointe-Saint Charles (PSC) as "the Pointe," to keep the spelling consistent with Pointe-Saint-Charles without disrupting the English flow of the article.

Montréal through its proximity to the heavily industrialized Lachine Canal. Beginning in the 1840s, factories clustered around the shipping bottleneck created by the canal, attracting wage labourers from the rural periphery and overseas. Along with the present-day neighbourhoods of Griffintown, Little Burgundy, St-Henri, and Côte-Saint-Paul, the residential areas of Pointe-Saint-Charles expanded in the shadows of some of the largest factories in Canada.[10] Collectively labelled "the city below the hill" by 19th-century sociologist Herbert Ames, the neighbourhoods of the southwest contained a high concentration of poor industrial workers. Yet, the industrial ghetto that surrounded the canal did not constitute a homogenous working-class area, and different ethnic, language, and religious groups clustered within distinct residential neighbourhoods.[11]

Following World War II, shifts in the North American economy generated a restructuring of the geography and social relations in the area surrounding the Lachine Canal. Large-scale deindustrialization led to massive layoffs and inspired many former factory workers and their families to leave their neighbourhoods. Between 1961 and 1981, the population of the southwest of Montréal shrank from 107,011 to 54,749.[12] Those who stayed faced rising levels of unemployment, with rates increasing from 5.1 to 14.7 per cent over the same period.[13] The decline of local industry also altered the rhythm of everyday life. The loss of industrial jobs disrupted many of the union-based social and solidarity networks that had linked men and women throughout the southwest, and the canal zone that had once connected local wageworkers became an inactive barrier that divided residential neighbourhoods from one another. Many of the shops and taverns that had once served as social hubs for working-class people also began to close or move elsewhere.

The decline in population and employment exacerbated local hardship, characterized by a deteriorating housing stock, poor health, and ineffective local services. Appeals to the city government for help were ineffective, as Jean Drapeau's Civic Party had become obsessed with planning Expo '67. Drapeau, in fact, made things worse when in 1964 his party demolished the entirety of

10. Robert Lewis has characterized this area as one of Montréal's earliest industrial suburbs. Lewis, *Manufacturing Montreal: The Making of an Industrial Landscape, 1850 to 1930* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000).

11. Ames actually does not include most of psc in his area of study, arguing that people living south of Centre Street had (presumably middle-class) jobs at the Grand Trunk rail yard. He does point out that the residential neighbourhoods of Griffintown and much of northeast psc were predominantly Irish, and most of Little Burgundy and northwest psc were French speaking. Herbert Brown Ames, *The City below the Hill; a Sociological Study of a Portion of the City of Montreal, Canada* (1897; Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1972), 8, 82.

12. Service de l'habitation et du développement urbain, *Arrondissement Sud-Ouest: Dossier Urbain* (Montréal 1990), 13.

13. Comité pour la relancement économique et de l'emploi du Sud-Ouest de Montréal, *Sud-Ouest diagnostic*, report (Montréal 1989), 100.
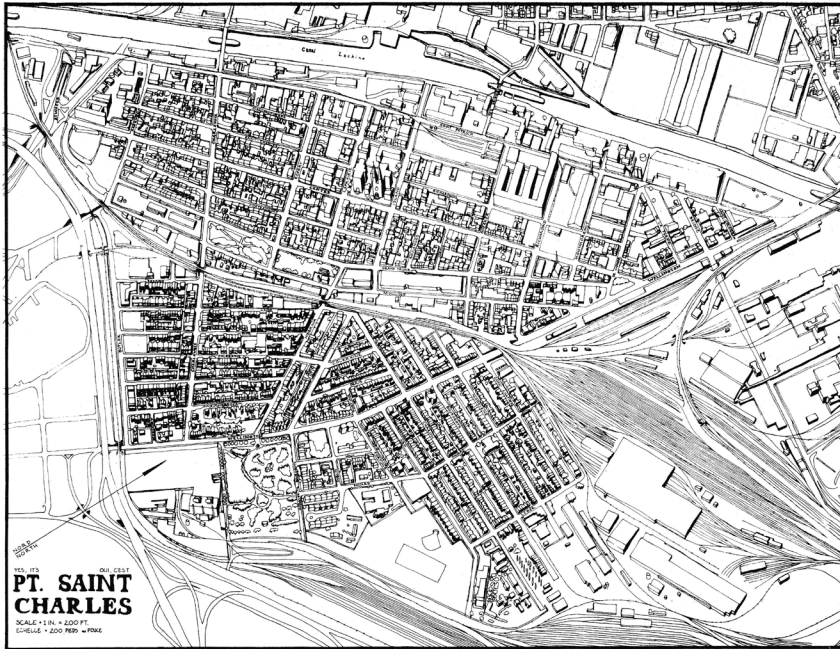
Pointe-Saint-Charles, bordered by the Lachine Canal (northwest), train tracks (south and east), and the former Grand Trunk rail yard (northeast). Victoriatown was beyond the rail yard.
Opportunities for Youth/Perspective Jeunesse, "Yes, It's/Oui, c'est Point St. Charles," map, *Adventure Playgrounds: Green Thumbs and Sore Thumbs* (Montréal 1971), 2.*
* This map – hand drawn by Joe Carter and Pieter Sijpkes, two McGill architecture students who worked in the neighbourhood – can be seen online: http://www.arch.mcgill.ca/prof/sijpkes/D+C-2011-winter/project-outline.html.

Victoriatown, a small isolated community to the southeast of Pointe-Saint-Charles, to make room for a sports stadium and the Bonaventure Expressway.[14] Angered by these near-crisis conditions in the mid-1960s, residents of Pointe-Saint-Charles began to organize with their neighbours or through their parishes with the goal of improving local infrastructure and services. Soon recognizing that their problems were not only a local phenomenon, these organizations joined the growing chorus of discontent coming from working-class neighbourhoods across the city. Influenced by a Montréal left permeated with the language of anticolonialism, organizations in Pointe-Saint-Charles began to interpret their problems as the product of distant bureaucracies that

14. Critics accused the Drapeau administration of wanting to remove an eyesore for tourists arriving via the nearby Champlain Bridge. Geoffrey P. DeVerteuil, "Evolution and Impacts of Public Policy on the Changing Canadian Inner City: Case Study of Southwest Montreal 1960–1990," MA thesis, University of British Columbia, 1993, 36–75.

served the interests of international business, not local people.[15] In response, residents and outside activists began to create locally run service alternatives. By 1970 the people of Pointe-Saint-Charles had founded the province's first community-run health clinic, a locally run adult education centre, a legal aid clinic, and an organization devoted to improving local housing conditions.[16]

In 1970, a Montréal-based organization called the Parallel Institute also selected Pointe-Saint-Charles as the site for one of the first federally financed housing co-ops in Canada. The Liberal Party funded co-ops like the one in Pointe-Saint-Charles with the idea that they might replace public housing as a low-income option. During the 1960s, citizen groups, urban reformers, and business interests across Canada had built diffuse, but nonetheless powerful, opposition to federally funded urban renewal and public housing projects.[17] The federal government responded by creating a task force in 1968 to explore possible alternatives. Headed by a housing minister who was critical of public housing, the task force recommended that nonprofit and co-op housing be considered as a cheaper option that could be integrated into existing neighbourhoods rather than replace them. Two years later, the Liberal government allocated $200 million to explore these options.[18] The Parallel Institute successfully applied for some of this money and enlisted the services of McGill architecture students to renovate and convert apartments in the Pointe into a co-operative. By September 1974, the Housing Co-operative of Point St. Charles became the first federally subsidized co-op in Montréal.[19]

Pleased with their experiment and seeking to persuade the New Democratic Party to support their minority government, in 1973 the federal Liberals amended the National Housing Act (NHA) to create a subsidized loan program for nonprofit and co-op housing.[20] Under the amended NHA, co-ops and

15. Sean Mills, *The Empire Within: Postcolonial Thought and Political Activism in Sixties Montreal* (Montréal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2010).

16. CourtePointe Collective, *The Point Is – Grassroots Organizing Works: Women from Point St. Charles Sharing Stories of Solidarity* (Montréal: Éditions du Remue-ménage, 2006).

17. On these movements in Canada, see David Ley, *The New Middle Class and the Remaking of the Central City* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996). For a more international take on the collapse of urban renewal, see Christopher Klemek, *The Transatlantic Collapse of Urban Renewal: Postwar Urbanism from New York to Berlin* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011).

18. Paul Hellyer, *Report of the Federal Task Force on Housing and Urban Development* (Ottawa 1969); John C. Bacher, *Keeping to the Marketplace: The Evolution of Canadian Housing Policy* (Montréal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1993).

19. Danhui You, "Long-Term Results of User Participation in Housing Rehabilitation: The Community Design Workshop in Pointe St. Charles," MA thesis, McGill University, 1998, 27–42.

20. After the 1972 election and the loss of their parliamentary majority, the federal Liberals needed to gain the support of the NDP to form a minority government. Peter Dreier and David Hulchanski, "The Role of Nonprofit Housing in Canada and the United States: Some

nonprofits could apply for long-term mortgages from the federal government and would be responsible for paying back only 90 per cent of what they had borrowed. Groups interested in founding co-ops could also apply for funds through the new federal Residential Rehabilitation Assistance Program (RRAP) to renovate substandard buildings and bring them up to code. Individual co-op residents received the benefit from these subsidies each month when they paid their part of the collective mortgage in the form of rent. By subsidizing co-ops, the federal government also downloaded some of the financial responsibility for low-income housing to the residents themselves, who were supposed to redistribute costs so that middle-class residents would subsidize the rents of lower earners. These new mortgage subsidies had an immediate effect on the landscape of Canadian housing, and over the next five years, people interested in co-ops acquired 7,700 units using federal money.[21]

Co-op activists in Québec also benefitted from their provincial government's growing willingness to shoulder the burden of low-income housing. Prior to the 1960s, the Catholic Church had organized most of the co-operative activity in Québec to compete with what it saw as the immoral influence of a modern, urban, capitalist society. In the early 1900s, for example, Alphonse Desjardins founded a series of rural credit unions to offset the immoral usury practices of mainstream banks.[22] During the Depression, the Catholic Church also began supporting the idea of housing co-operatives as a means to alleviate the cramped, unsanitary, and allegedly immoral living conditions that plagued low-income neighbourhoods in Québec's biggest cities. These cramped conditions only worsened with the onset of World War II, prompting the church to join with the labour movement to found house-building co-operatives and relocate working-class people out of crowded industrial neighbourhoods. Between 1941 and 1965, members of these co-ops built approximately 10,000 single-family homes, most of which lay in the periphery of large cities.[23]

With the advent of the Quiet Revolution in the 1960s, the provincial government took over many of the services previously administered by the church. In 1967 the recently elected Union Nationale government established the Société d'habitation du Québec (SHQ) as a provincial housing body. One year later, the Fédération co-op-habitat du Québec (FCHQ) acquired SHQ funds to build co-op housing across the province. Using a highly centralized Swedish model, the FCHQ launched an ambitious plan to build thirteen projects with 1,432

Comparisons," *Housing Policy Debate* 1, 4 (1993): 43–80.

21. Tom Carter, "Current Practices for Procuring Affordable Housing: The Canadian Context," *Housing Policy Debate* 8, 3 (1997): 596–605; Co-operative Housing Federation of Canada, "History of Co-op Housing," accessed 27 January 2018, https://chfcanada.coop/about-co-op-housing/history-of-co-op-housing/.

22. Rudin, *In Whose Interest?*

23. Jean-Pierre Collin, "Crise du logement et action Catholique à Montréal, 1940–1960," *Revue d'histoire de l'Amérique Française* 41, 2 (1987): 179–203.

units. A builders strike in 1969, however, delayed construction and pushed the FCHQ above budget. Co-op residents who expected to manage their homes collectively also complained that the provincial government refused to decentralize control. Amid these controversies, the FCHQ failed to meet its building targets and lost funding after only two years.[24]

The province resumed support for co-op housing with the election of the Parti Québécois in 1976. The PQ's emphasis on provincial self-determination initially leant itself to a philosophy of decentralization and popular control. In its 1976 platform the PQ promised it would push for co-ops in the labour, finance, consumption, and housing sector as a means to build democratic power over economic decisions. One year later, the PQ founded Programme Logipop to encourage working and middle-class people to found housing co-ops. Logipop provided financial help in the form of start-up funds for organizing co-operatives as well as subsidies of $1,500 per unit to make them more accessible to low-income residents. Perhaps even more importantly, Logipop funded groups of housing experts, called groupes de ressources techniques (technical resource groups, or GRTs) to navigate co-op subsidies and help guide new projects through to completion.[25] Logipop contributed to a boom in Québec co-operative housing, and each provision increased in number over the next four years. In Pointe-Saint-Charles, co-op residents and local activists used Logipop to found the Service d'aide à la rénovation de Pointe-Saint-Charles (SARP), as a local GRT. Led by Charles Guindon, a dynamic recent graduate of Université de Montréal's school of architecture, SARP employees were part of a growing network of advocates around Montréal who saw co-operative housing as a potential second front for organizing poor and working-class people.[26] In 1977 a group of residents representing more than 50 co-ops across Québec met in Sherbrooke to draft a manifesto advocating for the rejection of a housing system based on profit for a few. It its place they called for an "authentic co-operative movement within the housing sector," which would "educate its members and broaden their horizons to other dimensions and problems within their neighbourhood and society."[27] In Montréal, the housing

24. Marie J. Bouchard and Marcellin Hudon, *Se loger autrement au Québec: Le mouvement de l'habitat communautaire, un acteur du développement social et économique* (Anjou, Québec: Éditions Saint-Martin, 2008), 16–50; Conseil de la coopération du Québec, *Rapport du comité d'étude pour promovoir le développement des coopératives d'habitation au Québec*, report (Québec 1976), 1–10.

25. Société d'habitation du Québec, *Rapport Annuel* (Québec 1977), 20.

26. The term "second front" was first used by the influential president of Québec's public service union (CSN), Marcel Pepin, in 1968. Pepin argued that labour unions should open a second front beyond the shop floor that would organize workers as "consumers, renters, parents and citizens." Mills, *The Empire Within*, 164–166.

27. Assemblée d'organization des coopératives d'habitation du Québec, "Manifeste des co-opératives d'habitation" (18, 19, 20 March 1977), in André Poulin, *Coopératives d'habitation à capitalisation: exploration récentes (1980–1990)* (Montréal: École des Hautes Études

Logipop Subsidies in Québec, 1977–80			
	New co-ops receiving start-up subsidies (units within those co-ops)	Number of technical resource groups receiving subsidies	Total spent yearly on Logipop subsidies
1977	14 (367)	15	$124,000
1978	99 (1,534)	31	$954,500
1979	124 (1,939)	34	$1,798,500
1980	127 (2,622)	40	$5,520,000

Source: Société d'habitation du Québec, *Rapport Annual* (Québec 1977–81).

professionals associated with local GRTs committed themselves to these same principles. Predominantly trained in community-engaged architecture in the highly politicized departments at Université de Montréal and McGill, many of Montréal's GRTs saw themselves as more than professional co-op builders.[28] They sought to empower low-income people, and some began publishing an educative newsletter with the purpose of informing and mobilizing co-op residents to shape provincial and federal housing policy.[29] Their commitment to a working-class co-operative movement even put GRT employees at odds with their provincial employers. During a 1980 summit that brought GRTs from across Québec together with provincial representatives, housing professionals from Montréal and eastern Québec criticized provincial policy decisions that favoured middle-class residents and led to a "limited involvement of a potentially militant sector of the working-class." They further condemned the province for centralizing policy decisions and ignoring the social fabric and local knowledge that tied communities together.[30]

Like many of his former classmates across Montréal, Guindon and his colleagues in Pointe-Saint-Charles rejected the top-down development model favoured by the province and worked to build grassroots control over co-operatives. In 1978, Guindon helped create the Regroupement information logement de Pointe-Saint-Charles (RIL) as a mechanism for citizen control over

Commerciales, 1991), 87, my translation.

28. Both departments attracted students with a strong interest in organizing in and outside of the university. Students at Université de Montréal overthrew the chair of their department and elected Serge Carreau, future head of the SHQ under the Parti Québécois, in his place. At McGill, students in Joseph Baker's Community Design Workshop were also involved in Milton-Parc. Marc H. Choko, "La clinique d'aménagement de l'école d'architecture de l'Université de Montréal," in Association canadienne-française pour l'avancement des sciences, ed., *Aménagement et développement: Vers un nouvelles practiques?* (Québec: Les presses de l'Université du Québec, 1986).

29. *Hebdo Co-op* 1 (10 March 1979).

30. Based on a first-hand account by Suzan Ruddick; see Ruth Fincher and Suzan Ruddick, "Transformation Possibilities within the Capitalist State," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 7, 1 (1983): 64–67.

local housing decisions. Responsible to a general assembly open to the whole neighbourhood, but with an administrative council dominated by co-op residents and advocates, RIL prioritized new co-op development.[31] With this local infrastructure to help navigate government subsidies, residents succeeded in founding 16 co-ops with 221 units by 1982.[32]

Two high-profile neighbourhood movements elsewhere in Montréal also inspired activists in Pointe-Saint-Charles to imagine co-op housing as a way to build collective neighbourhood power. In Milton-Parc and Rosemont, citizens demonstrated how co-op movements could serve as a means for grassroots control over urban planning decisions. Beginning in the late 1960s, residents of the Milton-Parc neighbourhood near McGill University organized a citizens' committee to oppose the demolition of their homes for a private high-rise development. The struggle at Milton-Parc gained steam as prominent local citizens, neighbourhood-oriented activists, and students from neighbouring McGill joined the movement. With the support of their allies, in 1979 the Milton-Parc Citizens Committee finally persuaded the federal government to fund the transformation of the remaining housing into a 613-unit co-operative.[33] Outside the city centre in the neighbourhood of Rosemont, working-class activists and local merchants opposed the commercial redevelopment of the Canadian Pacific Railway's Angus Shops, once the largest industrial facility in the city. After a long period of negotiation, the Comité logement Rosemont convinced the city to zone the Angus property for residential development and persuaded the municipal and provincial government to allocate 40 per cent of the projected 2587 units for nonprofit or co-op housing.[34]

Beyond local concerns, the organizers at Milton-Parc and the Angus Shops also opposed the centralized decision making of Jean Drapeau's Civic Party. After hosting Expo '67, Drapeau moved on to plan the 1976 Olympics as part of his continuing efforts to remake his city for the world stage. Tired of the Civic Party privileging the interests of developers over people, Montréal neighbourhood activists, many of whom had gained notoriety through their work at Milton Park, founded the municipal Montréal Citizens' Movement (MCM) party in 1974. Running on a platform that emphasized participatory democracy, urban ecology, and, at least at the beginning, the needs of working-class

31. In 1980 the RIL administrative council consisted of nine representatives from co-op housing and only one each from private and public housing. RIL, "Reglements de regie interne du Regroupement information logement de Pointe St-Charles," 1980, APPSC, 2008-0024.01.05.553., MUA.

32. RIL, "Liste des co-operatives d'habitations," May 1982, APPSC, 2008-0024.01.05.552., MUA.

33. Claire Helman, *The Milton-Park Affair: Canada's Largest Citizen-Developer Confrontation* (Montréal: Véhicule Press, 1987).

34. Société Canadienne d'hypothèques et de logement, *Réaménagement de terrains Angus-Montréal* (Québec 2015), https://www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/fr/prin/celoab/celoab/reou/stetcaloab/idloab/rere/rete/index.cfm.

people, the MCM favoured the conversion of existing housing to low-income co-operatives over private or public redevelopment. Although the party suffered from factionalism throughout the decade and into the 1980s, it served as an institutional hub for neighbourhood activists, many of whom had interest in co-op housing.[35]

The challenge from the MCM motivated Drapeau to reconsider his urban development strategy. With his attention directed toward large-scale megaprojects, he had neglected the deteriorating work and housing conditions in the working-class neighbourhoods surrounding the downtown core. The proliferation of vacant and condemned buildings in these neighbourhoods was evidence that few people were choosing to move to the city centre, and in fact, the population of the city of Montréal had been decreasing since the 1960s.[36] In order to reverse this out-migration, in the late 1970s Drapeau instituted Opération 10,000 logement (later increased to 20,000), in which the government identified available property for renovation and resale. The municipal government soon created two complementary programs meant to revitalize older industrial neighbourhoods: Programme d'intervention dans les quartiers anciens (PIQA) targeted "grey areas" with the goal to "progressively bring the older areas back into the mainstream of urban life and the city economy,"[37] and the Société de dévéloppement industriel de Montréal (SODIM) provided money to redevelop commercial and industrial areas. Drapeau's government geared all three programs to bringing the middle class back into downtown Montréal by revitalizing poor neighbourhoods without destroying residential buildings. All three programs also disproportionately targeted southwest neighbourhoods.[38]

By the early 1980s, residents in Pointe-Saint-Charles were growing nervous about city interventions in their neighbourhood. On 8 July 1981, more than a hundred residents gathered anxiously in the basement of the local Église Saint-Charles to discuss the rumours that city employees had been inspecting aging residential buildings and forcing property owners to renovate them. Worried that these renovations would increase rents beyond what lower-income residents could afford, the crowd demanded that the city explain its actions. Drapeau's Civic Party soon confirmed the rumours and announced the launch of three PIQA interventions across the neighbourhood.[39] While

35. Timothy Lloyd Thomas, *A City with a Difference: The Rise and Fall of the Montreal Citizen's Movement* (Montréal: Véhicule Press, 1997).

36. Ville de Montréal, "Population totale," *Montréal en statistics*, http://ville.montreal.qc.ca/portal/page?_pageid=6897,67887840&_dad=portal&_schema=PORTAL.

37. Yvonne M. Macor, "Revitalization of the Montreal Urban Environment," MA thesis, McGill University, 1982, 111.

38. DeVerteuil, "Evolution and Impacts," 55–65; Benoît Lacroix, "Analyze de l'opération 20,000 logements," MA thesis, McGill University, 1989.

39. Macor, "Revitalization," 112–115.

many who had attended the church meeting would have agreed that local housing needed an upgrade, they also recognized the language of revitalization as code for gentrification. Having witnessed a similar process in other Montréal neighbourhoods, such as the Plateau, local organizations representing housing, health, employment, and education interests came together to found a collective neighbourhood action group, Action Gardien, to protect their communities. Over the next year, Action Gardien mobilized residents behind the slogan of "Oui à la rénovation, non à la hausse des loyers" and succeeded in delaying one of the three PIQA intervention zones in their neighbourhood.[40]

Despite this early victory, local activists at Action Gardien recognized that gentrification had not been defeated. To overcome the limits of its reactive mobilization, RIL tasked a research committee with developing its own Plan de travail for revitalizing the Point. By January 1984, the committee introduced PROJET St-Charles as a locally run, co-operative alternative to the city's plan for market-driven revitalization. In order to ensure local control, the Plan de travail allocated responsibility to a group of volunteer residents and activists collectively known as the Comité St-Charles and charged them with three primary tasks. First, they were to direct SARP to lobby the federal, provincial, and municipal governments for subsidies to build co-op housing. Second, they were to mobilize current and potential co-op residents to exert grassroots pressure on different levels of government to provide subsidies. Finally, the Comité would work within the PROJET's mandate to choose where the 500 units of co-op housing should go and who would occupy them.[41]

To ensure its ability to work quickly, once appointed the Comité St-Charles became an independent body without oversight from RIL. The Plan de travail mandated that the Comité hold general assemblies, but stated that its purpose would be to educate potential co-op residents, not to seek a popular mandate. Comité members instead based their legitimacy to represent the Pointe on their knowledge of the neighbourhood's past and present. In the summer of 1984, they introduced the PROJET to the wider community with a document that promoted co-ops as the ideal fit for the tightly knit working-class neighbourhood. The Comité described the Pointe as an isolated territory of 445 hectares, bordered by the Lachine Canal to the north, the Bonaventure Expressway to the west, and the Canadian National rail yard to the southeast.[42] These hard borders, they argued, reinforced local culture and served as physical barriers that isolated the Pointe from the surrounding area. As a

40. Comité Provisoire, *Plan de travail*, 1–2; Chantal Auger, "Des citoyens de Pointe-Saint-Charles s'élèvent contre les projets de la ville," *Voix Pop*, 14 July 1981.

41. Comité Provisoire, *Plan de travail*, 5–7.

42. The positions of these borders relative to the neighbourhood are based on commonly produced maps that place the canal at the top, making it appear that the canal runs along the northern border of PSC, but in fact it runs along the northeastern border of the neighbourhood.

PROJET for "les gens du quartier," the report emphasized the need to protect the social bonds and systems of mutual aid that had always characterized this working-class community. Unlike public housing projects, which destroyed existing communities, co-ops would preserve the collectivist culture of Pointe-Saint-Charles.[43]

Debating Co-opville

THE PEOPLE WHO IMAGINED CO-OPVILLE turned to their local history of activism and co-operative development for inspiration. Relative to the local population, however, the number of people with co-operative living experience was actually quite small. Even as the fight for co-op housing gained steam through the 1980s, many residents of Pointe-Saint-Charles would rarely hear about it. Although PROJET activists worked hard to attract media attention, they usually relied on political actions, word of mouth, and posters for publicity. A person's physical proximity to the areas with high concentrations of PROJET events or even their route to work affected whether or not they heard about political actions or meetings. During the 1980s, most PROJET events were concentrated in the area north of the railway tracks that divided the neighbourhood in two. These tracks acted as both a physical barrier that made passage between the two sides more difficult and a symbolic barrier between what many locals referred to as the French north side and the English south side.[44] The Comité held all general assemblies during the eighties on the north side of the neighbourhood, and most demonstrations took place near the Pointe's northern border close to the Lachine Canal.

The Comité St-Charles had ultimate power over the PROJET, and the six to fourteen men and women who attended meetings at any one time were subject to little neighbourhood oversight. The demographics of the Comité were not, however, perfectly representative of the neighbourhood. Over the years, both women and men joined the Comité in roughly equal proportions, but they conducted meetings exclusively in French. The original Comité St-Charles consisted of seven French-speaking residents; all but one had helped draft

43. Comité St-Charles, *Des logements pour les gens du quartier* (Montréal 1984), APPSC, 2008-0024.01.05.17., MUA.

44. Historically, the ethnic geography of Pointe-Saint-Charles was more complicated. Gilles Lauzon describes how in the early 20th century the south side of the tracks comprised predominantly English-speaking Protestants, while the north side of the tracks was shared by French-speaking Catholics in the west and English-speaking Irish Catholics in the east. Lauzon, *Pointe-Saint-Charles: L'urbanisation d'un quartier ouvrier de Montréal, 1840–1930* (Québec: Septentrion, 2014), 53–73. Most of the long-term residents of Pointe-Saint-Charles whom I interviewed as part of the "From Balconville to Condoville" project (led by Steven High through the Centre for Oral History and Digital Storytelling at Concordia University) distinguished between the two sides. For more information on the oral history project, see http://postindustrialmontreal.ca/.

the original Plan de travail.[45] Likely appointed based on experience in co-ops, RIL, or other neighbourhood groups, these original Comité members were nevertheless unequally prepared for the work ahead. At an early meeting in February 1984, they took turns expressing how they felt about the PROJET so far. Two members with experience in other community groups, Maryse Martin from RIL and Michel Bouchard from the Community Clinic, described how they felt relaxed and proud of what they had accomplished. Their sentiments, however, contrasted with those who were worried about the gravity of such a massive undertaking. Gaétane Dubé, a resident of the co-op Progrés, confessed that she felt overwhelmed by the PROJET and worried about her ability to contribute. Gilles Fournier declared that he would have to limit his participation because of his busy schedule.[46]

These less confident members confronted their first test when a conflict erupted over a challenge to the autonomy of the Comité. The original plan for the PROJET stressed that the Comité consist of volunteers, and that it remain autonomous from other local organizations or professional groups. RIL, however, challenged this principle of citizen control in early 1984 when it appointed SARP employee Charles Guindon to help hire a PROJET coordinator. The Comité was outraged, describing this violation of its autonomy as the beginning of a "guerre de pouvoir," and voted unanimously to cut ties with RIL unless the latter reversed the decision and reaffirmed the Comité's autonomy. Fearing that the PROJET would fall apart, RIL quickly relented and affirmed the Comité's right to choose the coordinator.[47]

The time and energy required by conflicts such as these proved too much for several of the original members of the Comité. Dubé resigned after only two months and two others soon followed, leaving only three of original members by July 1984. The Comité replaced these early exits with more experienced neighbourhood organizers. Two representatives from SARP, Nicole Beaudry and Edith Cyr, began showing up to meetings, as did Jean-Guy Casaubon from the administrative council at RIL. Others, like Andrée Lavallée and Marcel Sévigny, joined as seasoned veterans from co-op movements elsewhere in the city, and legal aid worker Thérèse Stanhope had experience in dealing with provincial housing policy.[48]

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45. The original Plan de travail stated that there would be nine people appointed to the Comité St-Charles. The actual meeting minutes, however, show that the number of people who attended meetings fluctuated. Comité Provisoire, *Plan de travail*, 11.

46. Comité St-Charles meeting minutes, 16 February 1984, APPSC, 2008-0024.01.05.559., MUA; Carmen Quinton, "Les practiques émancipatoires dans deux co-operatives d'habitation de la région montréalaise," MA thesis, University of Montréal, 1983, 80.

47. "Lettre du Comité St-Charles au C.A. de RIL" and "Lettre du C.A. de RIL au Comité St-Charles," 4 April and 5 April 1984, APPSC, 2008-0024.01.05.20., MUA.

48. Lavallée had occupied a leadership role in the movement to convert the Terrain Angus into co-operative housing, and both Sévigny and Lavallée were involved with the left-populist party

In spite of their similar experience in neighbourhood organizations, this new Comité rarely agreed on how best to pursue the mandate of the PROJET. Members argued over whether the goal was to build as many co-ops as possible or to build a co-operative movement that would represent the interests of working-class people. These tensions were more acute as the political climate became increasingly unfavourable to co-op development. Leading up to the 1984 federal election, the Brian Mulroney–led Conservatives seemed poised to take power away from the ruling Liberals. Running on a platform that promised less government management of the economy, a Conservative victory would also mean a possible reduction in co-op funding.[49] During the campaign, however, two members of the Comité allegedly insulted the local New Democratic Party candidate and PROJET supporter Mike Molter during a neighbourhood visit. Their actions provoked a reaction within the Comité, and after a divisive meeting, the other members of the Comité decided their conduct was unacceptable, arguing that they should be making strategic alliances rather than taking rigid political positions that might hurt their immediate cause.[50]

A month later, the Comité again disagreed over tactics when Maryse Martin, the head of a subcommittee in charge of publicity, presented a draft of an article announcing a strategy based on mobilization and confrontation. Some Comité members disagreed with the tone of the article and worried that if they did not discuss their strategy with the city before announcing it publicly they might sabotage any hopes of future negotiation. The dissenters also argued that publishing the article would demobilize the neighbourhood, presumably because they felt local residents were not comfortable with confrontational politics. After a tight vote, the Comité rejected the article, after which the members of the publicity committee resigned.[51]

These tensions did not abate after the federal election, and the Comité continued to disagree into 1985. Marcel Sévigny, a long-term Montréal activist who had moved to a co-operative in Pointe-Saint-Charles in 1982, was one of Comité's most vocal critics of a strategy that did not address the structural

the Montreal Citizens' Movement (MCM). Information about different members was gathered by cross-referencing the meeting minutes of different organizations found at APPSC, 2008-0024.01.05.554.; 2008-0024.01.05.559.; 2008-0024.01.05.720., MUA.

49. George Perlin, "Opportunity Regained: The Tory Victory in 1984," in Howard Penniman, ed., *Canada at the Polls, 1984: A Study of the Federal General Elections* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1988), 79–98.

50. Jocelyne Desbiens, "A Pointe St-Charles: Les citoyens présentent un important projet de 500 logements pour familles à revenu faible et moyen," *Voix Pop*, 28 August 1984; Comité St-Charles meeting minutes, 23 August 1984, APPSC, 2008-0024.01.05.559., MUA.

51. Comité St-Charles meeting minutes, 27 September and 11 October 1984, APPSC, 2008-0024.01.05.559., MUA.

root of the housing problem.[52] Sévigny outlined his vision of a popular move-
ment of co-op residents in an article:

They [co-ops] are a means of social advancement for their members; they are a new form
of nonprofit housing production and management; they subtract units from the private
housing market. It is a solution which, if pushed to the extreme, would allow collective
ownership of housing on a basis of self-management, and decentralization, giving the
housing a character of "essential good."[53]

The Comité's inconsistent position on the purpose of co-op housing frus-
trated Sévigny, and in February 1985 he drafted a critique explaining the need
to adjust to a political situation that was unfavourable to further co-op devel-
opment. He argued that unlike the 1960s and 1970s when neighbourhood
movements could rely on a widely mobilized left, the current political climate
required that PROJET activists focus on rebuilding grassroots power. Sévigny
suggested that the Comité adopt a more succinct plan of action and resolve
some ambiguity regarding its goals. Whom was the PROJET for? Whom was it
against? Why co-ops and to what end? Was the purpose of the PROJET revolu-
tionary? Was it a service for people needing social housing? Or was it to create
a more communal environment?[54]

These questions revealed the existence of different understandings of why
Pointe-Saint-Charles needed co-ops. As a form of housing requiring that poor
and disenfranchised people learn to live and act collectively, Sévigny saw
co-ops as a potential basis for a movement to contest a system that privileged
profit over people. He argued that government subsidies were unavoidable
for further co-op development, but that the government would only provide
them as long as the neighbourhood continued to exert pressure through
mobilization and protest. Other members of the Comité, however, saw co-ops
primarily as a form of low-income housing that would protect local residents
from displacement.

The Comité synthesized these conflicts in a 1985 assessment of its prog-
ress. Unlike earlier reports, the tone of the 1985 review was sombre and the
outlook toward future co-op development pessimistic. Ottawa and Québec
City had cut key funding sources for co-op development, and the city gov-
ernment was continuing its aggressive stance toward revitalizing the Point.[55]

52. Marcel Sévigny, *Trente ans de politique municipale: Plaidoyer pour une citoyenneté active*
(Montréal: Éditions écosociété, 2001); *Hebdo Co-op* 1 (12 June 1979).

53. Marcel Sévigny and Denis Tremblay, "Les co-opératives d'habitation (Locatives)," *Vie
Ouvrière* 31 (April 1981): 30–31, my translation.

54. Marcel Sévigny, "Analyse de la Situation (Bilan Partiel)," 10 February 1985, APPSC,
2008-0024.01.05.561., MUA.

55. The Mulroney government initiated cuts to the Rental Residential Rehabilitation
Assistance Program (Rental RRAP) that co-op activists used to renovate substandard homes.
The Parti Québécois cut funding to Logipop (now called Loginove) in 1985. Drapeau's city
government continued its aggressive revitalization of deindustrialized neighbourhoods.

Private contractors had begun to build new condominiums in the neighbourhood, signalling the arrival of "un vent de spéculation." The PROJET had also stalled due to major issues within both the Comité and the neighbourhood at large. Many residents seemed to be interested only in acquiring co-ops as a form of housing, and some Comité members wondered if they should seek out experienced co-opers from elsewhere in Montréal. They continued to disagree on the nature of their relationship with RIL and SARP. Some members felt that their continued relationship with RIL forced them to cater to the interests of housing professionals. Others argued that the PROJET had only progressed since the two organizations had begun working more closely together.[56]

In a follow-up document, the Comité revaluated its strategies to deal with the reality that, so far, the PROJET had been largely ineffective at preventing speculation. The most significant change was to abandon the absolute emphasis on co-operatives. The Comité concluded that not everyone was suited for co-operative living and that it needed to provide a larger role for public and nonprofit housing.[57] The Comité also decided that while it should continue to mobilize and politicize residents at the local level, it needed to focus on founding and filling co-ops. To accomplish this, PROJET activists would broaden their pressure tactics and collaborate with external activist groups. They decided to seek closer collaborations with other GRTs as well as the Québec-wide housing-rights advocacy group Front d'action populaire en réaménagement urbain (FRAPRU). Finally, Comité members determined that if their ultimate goal was to build housing to protect the neighbourhood, they would have to engage more with mainstream politics. With a city election one year away, the Comité decided to endorse Marcel Sévigny as a local candidate for the Montréal Citizens' Movement.[58]

Populating Co-opville

THE REASSESSMENT OF THE PROJET in 1985 reflected a shift away from mobilizing a broadly conceived working-class co-op movement and toward a concentrated effort at acquiring and filling as many co-ops as possible. The federal and provincial governments continued their retreat from funding co-op housing, but a glimmer of hope appeared when Jean Doré's MCM party finally unseated the Civic Party in the 1986 municipal election. The MCM had

56. Comité St-Charles, "Ébauche pour un Bilan," 1985, APPSC, 2008-0024.01.05.14., MUA.

57. Unlike social housing, which is managed by the government, non-profit housing is often (though not always) funded by the government but is managed by a third party such as a charity or religious group.

58. Comité St-Charles, "Les Grandes Lignes du Plan de Travail du Projet Saint-Charles pour L'Année 1985–1986," 7 September 1985, 4–5, APPSC, 2008-0024.01.05.13., MUA; Marcel Sévigny, "Dilemma: Pointe St. Charles in the MCM," in Jean-Hugues Roy and Brendan Weston ed., *Montréal: a Citizens Guide to Politics* (Montréal: Black Rose, 1990), 181–188.

run on a platform promising to curb unfettered housing speculation, and it announced support for the formation of co-operatives in different sectors. Montréal voters also elected two PROJET advocates on the MCM ticket, Marcel Sévigny for Pointe-Saint-Charles and Andrée Lavallée for Bourbonnière, who could bring the concerns of citizens directly to the party.[59]

The Comité's shift in strategy produced mixed results. The MCM had already drifted to the right leading up to the 1986 election and its positions on housing were surprisingly consistent with those of the previous government. In 1988, the police dragged occupying protesters from the Overdale block in east downtown Montréal to make room for an MCM-approved private development, provoking a strong reaction from left factions within the party. In Pointe-Saint-Charles, the MCM ignored Sévigny and his constituents' opposition to the conversion of the former Belding Corticelli factory at the north end of Pointe-Saint-Charles into condominiums. Sévigny, however, also admitted that participating in the MCM had resulted in some piecemeal concessions to the community. After a great deal of talk, in 1990 the municipal government allocated $28 million over five years to improve housing conditions in the southwest, some of which went to funding co-ops.[60] Sévigny's presence at city hall also gave PROJET activists additional exposure to make demands and to recruit new participants from the neighbourhood. Using these additional resources, the Comité accelerated its placement of low-income residents into housing. In 1987, the Comité submitted an application to the SHQ to fund eight new co-ops and nonprofits with 178 units, and over the coming years it devoted more meeting time to discussing the logistical problems of how to sort applicants and fill this mass of new housing.[61]

The subsequent increase in local co-op development, however, still fell short of housing all those in need and forced the Comité to adopt a standardized system for selecting residents. Potential co-op candidates first encountered a vetting process directed by members of the Comité, who compiled a list of acceptable candidates based on its mandate of providing low-income co-op housing for people from the neighbourhood. Individual co-op selection committees could only interview potential candidates from that list. In actual practice, however, determining who could claim to be from the neighbourhood, who would make a good co-op candidate, and who was in the greatest

59. The MCM was in fact a much more volatile and divided party. Several elected representatives resigned in their first term due to party infighting and a general shift away from its left-libertarian promises: Karen Herland, *People, Potholes and City Politics* (Montréal: Black Rose, 1992).

60. Sévigny, "Dilemma," 181–187; Thomas, *City with a Difference*; DeVerteuil, "Evolution and Impacts," 64.

61. Comité St-Charles, "Dossiers du Projet St-Charles Presentes a la SHQ," 15 May 1987, APPSC, 2008-0024.01.05.318–2009-0024.01.05.603., MUA.

need of housing was deeply subjective, and both the Comité and individual co-op selection committees often bent the rules.

To determine the most deserving candidates, the Comité created a hierarchy based on three selection criteria. First, the Comité adopted a quantifiable measurement of co-op readiness. People who completed PROJET-related tasks earned participation points, and the Comité mandated that all co-op selection committees give priority to the people with the highest number. Originally, points were granted only for attendance at political actions or educative general assemblies, intending them to reflect a co-op candidate's readiness to participate in both an individual co-op and a co-operative movement. Other volunteer tasks, such as posting signs or distributing flyers, did not have an educative component and therefore did not merit points. In 1987, however, the Comité reassessed the way it granted points – continuing to prioritize participation in actions and general assemblies, but giving a half point for each hour of volunteer labour.[62] This change to the points system reflected a more conservative conception of the PROJET. By rewarding work with points that could be spent on a place in a co-op, the Comité ceased to prioritize politicization as essential to further co-op development.

Second, the Comité was supposed to prioritize co-op candidates from Pointe-Saint-Charles. Without a formal citizenship system, however, the Comité had to clarify exactly what it meant to be from the Pointe. These meetings were often controversial, provoking one minute-taker to make a rare personal comment on how delicate and time consuming the process had been. Current address could not be the lone determinant of being from the neighbourhood due to the massive exodus of residents in recent years, and the Comité occasionally allowed eager candidates who had either left or never lived in Pointe-Saint-Charles to participate in the PROJET.[63] Near the end of the 1980s, the Comité added to the list of possible candidates an elderly woman who had participated in PROJET actions but had left the Pointe four years earlier for a room in social housing. On her co-op application, she stated that she had not wanted to leave, but her small monthly welfare stipend was no longer enough to pay local rents. The co-op selection committee accepted her, noting that she had strong roots in the neighbourhood and that she wished to return to be closer to her family.[64]

In contrast, there were occasions when being from the neighbourhood actually hurt a candidate's chances. The Pointe was tight-knit neighbourhood of only 14,000 people, many of whom had worked or gone to school together, and individual selection committees were known to deny candidates based on

62. Comité St-Charles meeting minutes, 26 March 1987, APPSC, 2008-0024.01.05.603., MUA.

63. Comité St-Charles meeting minutes, 29 October 1986, APPSC, 2008-0024.01.05.602., MUA.

64. Due to the sensitivity of these co-op and non-profit housing applications, I have been asked by the McGill Archives to cite only the range of folders in which they can be found. Co-op/ OSBL applications, APPSC, 2008-0024.01.05.318–2009-0024.01.05.342., MUA.

local reputation. Committees, which were particularly concerned with substance abuse, rejected at least two candidates after people on the selection committees identified them as alcoholics. In other circumstances, neighbourhood reputation had a positive effect on applicants' chances. One selection committee was at first unsure about a candidate who had attended very few meetings, but relented after another member who knew him assured the committee that he would make a clean and responsible neighbour.[65] In general, however, individual co-op selection committees were unconcerned whether candidates were from the neighbourhood or not and instead judged people based on whether they could convey positive co-operative qualities such as enthusiasm, experience, and cheerfulness. In a typical case, a selection committee approved a woman with no indication of local residency and only three points, because she was "interesting, young, and seemed to want to participate."[66]

The first two criteria were further complicated when considered against the third: actual housing need. The projet was supposed to protect local people from gentrification and was based on the premise that the Pointe was a low-income neighbourhood. In reality, however, Pointe-Saint-Charles had its own internal class dynamics and not everyone was under threat of displacement. In 1984, the average annual income per household in Pointe-Saint-Charles was only $14,198, but if one compared that to the high proportion of people who received social assistance (almost 35 per cent), one would expect to find a range of incomes. In addition, although the vast majority of housing in the neighbourhood was rental, 16.5 per cent of families were wealthy enough to own their homes.[67] In early 1987, Edith Cyr from SARP pointed out that the Comité's reliance on the point system had made their selection criteria too relaxed. She complained that middle-income residents could also acquire points, and these wealthier people might take housing away from the people who needed it most.[68]

Income was not the only determining factor in judging who had the greatest need for stable housing. At the onset of the projet, the Comité acknowledged that women, and especially young mothers with children, suffered disproportionately from neighbourhood change. The large out-migration over the previous decades had disturbed the tightly knit family networks that many considered to characterize Pointe-Saint-Charles. The average age of the population had also increased since the 1960s, suggesting that young parents with children were more likely to choose, or be forced, to move elsewhere. Of

65. Co-op/OSBL applications, APPSC, MUA.

66. Co-op/OSBL applications, APPSC, MUA, my translation.

67. Pointe-Saint-Charles Economic Program, *Situation socio-économique quartier Pointe-Saint-Charles*, (Montréal 1984), 3, APPSC, 2008-0024.01.05.21., MUA.

68. Comité St-Charles meeting minutes, 7 January 1987, APPSC, 2008-0024.01.05.603., MUA.

those families who remained, over 40 per cent were headed by single parents who, with the dual burden of providing childcare and earning income, were more likely to be priced out of the neighbourhood. Since the majority of these single parents were likely mothers, the Comité's commitment to housing families affected women more than men. The Comité further acknowledged that women, and again, especially women with children, were often forced to choose unsafe or potentially violent living arrangements to avoid becoming homeless.[69]

In order to maintain the family-oriented reputation of the neighbourhood and to accommodate the gendered nature of housing precarity, the Comité occasionally negotiated selection criteria to help women and children access co-op housing. In 1989, a selection committee from Co-op Bon Vieux Temps sent a letter to the Comité regarding the logic of two recent selections. The letter announced that the co-op had filled one unit with a woman who was not a member of the PROJET but who was well known in the community. The letter also mentioned that she was in desperate need of housing as her husband had just passed away and she had several children.[70] During their meeting the next day, the Comité expressed dismay that the co-op was not following its selection criteria and decided to assign someone to oversee future Bon Vieux Temps selection meetings.[71] In 1990, however, the Comité seemed to have lessened its insistence on PROJET membership when it negotiated its selection criteria to accommodate a new nonprofit that housed young mothers. Despite the ambiguity of the nonprofit's selection criteria (the Comité admitted it had no idea what age qualified a mother as "young"), the Comité eventually agreed to a system that would still give first priority to women enrolled in the PROJET, but after that the committee could select young mothers from anywhere.[72]

The Comité also recognized that people with mental illness were particularly vulnerable to the effects of gentrification. In 1974, local activists had formed a group named Action Santé to provide non-institutionalized help to people suffering from mental illness, depression, and isolation, conditions that they believed were exacerbated by poverty and precarious housing situations.[73] In the late 1980s, Action Santé decided to organize the Oasis nonprofit housing complex for people with psychiatric issues. As was the case for all specialized co-ops, the Comité negotiated a set of ranked criteria that Oasis

69. Between 1961 and 1981 the percentage of the population between 0 and 14 years old dropped from 35 to 20, while that of people over 65 years old increased from 7 to 11. Comité St-Charles, *Des logements*, 9; Comité Provisoire, *Plan de travail*, 6.

70. Yollande Villeneuve, "Compte rendu du comité de sélection pour l'octroi des deux logements disponibles," 23 May 1989, APPSC, 2008-0024.01.05.336., MUA.

71. Comité St-Charles meeting minutes, 24 May 1989, APPSC, 2008-0024.01.05.605., MUA.

72. Comité St-Charles meeting minutes, 22 November and 20 December 1989, APPSC, 2008-0024.01.05.605., MUA.

73. Comité St-Charles, *Des logements*, 5.

was mandated to follow while admitting residents.[74] At the next meeting, however, the Comité received a disappointed response to its requirement that all residents of Oasis be from Pointe-Saint-Charles. Action Santé argued that although it was a local organization it did not restrict its service to residents of the Pointe, and several members who needed housing had never lived in the neighbourhood. The Comité eventually conceded and amended its earlier criteria, earmarking 25 per cent of the Oasis housing units to people from outside the neighbourhood.[75]

As in Fennario's *Balconville*, in 1980s Pointe-Saint-Charles the French-English divide complicated efforts to build neighbourhood-wide solidarity. Although the majority of the neighbourhood spoke French, more than a third of the Pointe identified as English-speaking, as well as another 4 per cent who identified as "other."[76] The train tracks that ran through the Pointe reinforced this division by placing an understood spatial demarcation between the two linguistic communities. Since co-ops required that residents be able to communicate with one another, the formation of co-ops often replicated these divisions. English speakers who had many participation points and could be selective in their choice of co-ops began to congregate around the few designated English-language co-ops. The Shamrock co-op, for example, whose name reflected the Pointe's longstanding community of Irish Catholics, had become the co-op of choice for English speakers with the most participation points.[77]

The French-speaking Comité members were especially anxious to accommodate for linguistic difference during a heavy co-op selection period between 1988 and 1992. Since they conducted their educative general assemblies in French, the Comité was worried about reaching English speakers and would separate the linguistic groups into distinct blocks to accommodate translation. Because of this segregation, the Comité often attributed disinterest, disruptions, or disagreements at these meetings to the divergent interests of each language group. After each assembly the Comité circulated a survey to assess the participants' satisfaction and then would frequently analyze the data with the assumption that it reflected a linguistic divide.[78] Across all surveys, French speakers who responded outnumbered English speakers four to one, and in

74. Comité St-Charles meeting minutes, 24 October 1988, appsc, 2008-0024.01.05.604., mua.

75. Comité St-Charles meeting minutes, 23 November 1988, appsc, 2008-0024.01.05.604., mua.

76. Pointe-Saint-Charles Economic Program, *Situation socio-économique*, 6.

77. Comité St-Charles & sarp, "Réunion spéciale de coordination sur le processus de sélection a venir," 30 May 1989, appsc, 2008-0024.01.05.336., mua.

78. Comité St-Charles meeting minutes, 28 February 1990, appsc, 2008-0024.01.05.43., mua.

every meeting except one the satisfaction level among French respondents was higher than that of English speakers.[79]

The only meeting in which English speakers were more satisfied was during a 1990 general assembly where the Comité announced the next wave of co-op development. The meeting's facilitators described how space constraints were forcing them to concentrate three-quarters of the 120 proposed units around the former Alexandra Hospital, deep in the English side of the neighbourhood. The attendees reacted to the news along linguistic lines. French speakers protested that the Alexandra project was on the English side of the tracks and complained that the south side was too remote, inaccessible by transit, and too noisy due to the rail traffic at the CN yards. The English speakers countered by saying that it was a nice part of the neighbourhood, with trees and parks, and that it was, in fact, very well connected to the rest of the city. When the Comité asked whether attendees would consider moving south of the tracks, one group responded in French that they would only if there was no other option, and another rejected the possibility of moving there altogether.[80]

While the Comité worried about accommodating local English speakers, it did not devote the same attention to other linguistic or ethnic groups. At the launch of the PROJET, organizers had discussed whether to strike a sub-committee to represent ethnic groups, but had decided against it in order to "stay open to participation from diverse communities."[81] Nevertheless, it made a concerted effort to accommodate English speakers. Given the fraught linguistic politics of 1980s Québec, perhaps it was evident that the Comité would translate its communications into English, but this special accommodation also reflected the neighbourhood's long history as a home to people who traced their ethnic roots to Ireland, Scotland, or England. The PROJET's accommodation of English-speaking communities thus reflected an implicit understanding that the neighbourhood was white.[82] The Comité did not

79. These figures are based on a series of surveys conducted by the Comité St-Charles, following PROJET St-Charles general assembly meetings between 1988 and 1992, that asked attendees to review their satisfaction level. The Comité collected 822 surveys in total, though many respondents presumably filled in a new survey after each meeting. Review of General Assemblies, APPSC, 2008-0024.01.05.43., MUA.

80. Comité St-Charles meeting minutes, 25 April 1990, APPSC, 2008-0024.01.05.43., MUA.

81. Comité Provisoire, *Plan de travail*, 14, my translation.

82. In the 1986 census, the population of Pointe-Saint-Charles overwhelmingly claimed British or French origins. Of those who claimed a single ethnic origin, 92 per cent identified as British or French; only 2 per cent as Aboriginal, Black, or Chinese; and 1.5 per cent as another origin. The Pointe, however, borders Little Burgundy, where over 10 per cent of the population identified as Black on the same census. As I described above, co-op selection committees often admitted people who did not live in the Pointe if they possessed qualities that the committees associated with their co-operative neighbourhood identity (e.g., enthusiasm, willingness to participate). My point is that selection committees might not have extended this flexibility in neighbourhood identity to people of colour. This would become a more serious issue beginning

overtly discriminate based on skin colour or native language, but it only gave special accommodation to groups with the numbers or the historic weight to make claims on Pointe-Saint-Charles's identity.

Through the process of filling co-ops, the Comité St-Charles exposed the reality that the borders of Pointe-Saint-Charles were as much imagined as they were physical. The malleability of these imagined boundaries allowed the Comité to continue to build solidarity around the idea that Pointe-Saint-Charles was a homogenously working-class neighbourhood while dealing with a local reality that was much more complicated. The history of Pointe-Saint-Charles did not occur in isolation; global histories of racism, sexism, and class exploitation had always criss-crossed and influenced the geography and internal social relations of the neighbourhood.[83] Local factions had their own, occasionally conflicting, ideas about what the neighbourhood was and how to represent it in co-ops. In fact, the Comité often solidified these divisions by founding co-ops that catered to specific groups, such as English speakers, young mothers, or people with mental illness. As the climate for further co-op development became increasingly unfavourable at the close of the 1980s, the Comité's perception of what it meant to be from Pointe-Saint-Charles became frozen in co-ops.

Conclusion

In 1992, THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT discontinued another major source of co-op subsidies in the midst of a drastic shift in Canadian housing policy. Between 1986 and 1994, Ottawa phased out its funding for new social housing almost entirely, deferring responsibility to individual provinces.[84] In spite of these debilitating spending cuts, the neighbourhood of Pointe-Saint-Charles has been more successful than most at developing low-income housing. In 1996, social, co-op, and nonprofit housing reached an all-time high of 40 per cent of the neighbourhood's total housing, surpassing PROJET St-Charles's initial objective of 30 per cent by a wide margin. Since 1996, however, the proportion

in the 1990s, when many new immigrants from Asia, Africa, and the Middle East made Pointe-Saint-Charles their home. Sources of data were the Montréal census tracts 71–76 (which correspond with the boundaries of Pointe-Saint-Charles) and 67–68 and 77–78 (covering the territory between Atwater, St-Antoine, and Guy Streets and the Lachine Canal, which roughly corresponds to Little Burgundy), in Statistics Canada, *1986 Census of Canada, Montréal*, vol. 2 (Ottawa, 1988).

83. On the complicated nature of place-making and memory in Pointe-Saint-Charles, see Jessica J. Mills, "What's the Point? The Meaning of Place, Memory, and Community in Point Saint Charles, Quebec," MA thesis, Concordia University, 2011.

84. Roberto Leone & Barbara W. Carroll, "Decentralisation and Devolution in Canadian Social Housing Policy," *Environment and Planning C: Government and Policy* 28, 3 (2010): 389–404; Jeanne M. Wolfe, "Canadian Housing Policy in the Nineties," *Housing Studies* 13, 1 (1998): 121–134.

of social and community housing has been in relative decline – not because of the destruction of social housing, but rather as the result of a massive increase in new condominium complexes. To date, most of the large-scale condo development has been located along the periphery of the neighbourhood on former industrial lands, especially along the Lachine Canal. According to a recent report on housing in Pointe-Saint-Charles, this boom in condo development constituted 94 per cent of new housing built between 2000 and 2010, prompting local organizations to label that period the "decade of condos."[85]

In the midst of these changes, David Fennario opened a new play titled *Condoville* in 2005 at the Centaur Theatre. *Condoville* revisited the lives of the characters of *Balconville*, who had since founded a housing co-op to resist gentrification brought on by new condominium development. The characters still faced the menace of displacement due to cuts to social spending and continued to bicker among themselves rather than identify the true agents of their oppression, but this time they embodied the Pointe's history of struggle and occupied their building to resist eviction. In the end, however, their localized resistance was not enough to oppose the pressure of local condominium development, and the police forcibly removed the occupiers.[86]

For the residents of Pointe-Saint-Charles, the threat of gentrification did not disappear in the 25 years between *Balconville* and *Condoville*, and local rents continued to rise in spite of resistance.[87] Government cuts to social spending also placed pressure on the activists behind the PROJET to retreat from their outward-looking vision of a co-operative society and to concentrate on protecting the social fabric of their neighbourhood, a shift that was destined to exclude some people from Co-opville. Still, this article has introduced an alternative narrative to that of citizen activists being simply overcome by the invisible hand of neoliberal economics. During the 1980s, local activists confronted a new and rapidly shifting enemy, but adapted to protect both individual residents and local solidarity networks from the violence of gentrification. Their efforts have also had long-term effects: local protests still draw large crowds compared with those held elsewhere in Montréal, and in 2012, after three and a half years of organizing, a network of local activists succeeded in acquiring a

85. Action Gardien & Regroupement de Information Logement, *Living in the Pointe: More and More Expensive and Difficult to Afford* (Montréal 2013), 4.

86. Jodi Essery, "Condoville: Movin' on Up," review of *Condoville*, Montréal, *Hour Community*, 20 October 2005, http://hour.ca/2005/10/20/movin-on-up-2/; Sean Mills, "Fennario's Art and Politics in the Pointe," review of *Condoville*, Montréal, *Rabble.ca*, 22 November 2005, http://rabble.ca/news/fennarios-art-and-politics-pointe. The script of *Condoville* has never been published.

87. Between 2001 and 2006, average rent prices increased at a higher rate in PSC (17.7 per cent) than in the city as a whole (16.5 per cent). Clinique communautaire de Pointe Saint-Charles, "Portrait de la population de Pointe-Saint-Charles," Montréal, 2010, http://ccpsc.qc.ca/sites/ccpsc.qc.ca/files/Portrait%20de%20la%20population%20de%20Pointe_PAL_recensement%202006.d%E2%80%A6.pdf.

massive former CN workshop for use by neighbourhood groups.[88] By imagining, building, and populating co-op housing, activists in Pointe-Saint-Charles accomplished something much more radical than simply housing the poor. They sustained, in Pointe-Saint-Charles, the idea that co-operative ownership of housing was a desirable, and possible, alternative to the capitalist organization of urban space.

88. I have participated in several of these protests, one of which chose to pass in front of different co-ops in the neighbourhood. The exact plans for the CN workshop, called Bâtiment 7, are still undetermined. Pointe Libertaire, *Bâtiment 7: Victoire populaire à Pointe-Saint-Charles* (Montréal: Éditions écosocieté, 2013).