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Susan Mann Robertson

Volume 5, numéro 1, 1970

Winnipeg 1970

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/030726ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/030726ar>

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Éditeur(s)

The Canadian Historical Association/La Société historique du Canada

ISSN

0068-8878 (imprimé)

1712-9109 (numérique)

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Citer cet article

Robertson, S. M. (1970). Variations on a Nationalist Theme: Henri Bourassa and Abbé Groulx in the 1920's. *Historical Papers / Communications historiques*, 5(1), 109–119. <https://doi.org/10.7202/030726ar>

VARIATIONS ON A NATIONALIST THEME :
HENRI BOURASSA AND ABBÉ GROULX
IN THE 1920'S

SUSAN MANN ROBERTSON

Université de Montréal

Prior to the 1920's, Henri Bourassa was a revered and awesome figure for Lionel Groulx. Groulx saw in Bourassa all the qualities of the ideal *chef*.¹ To Bourassa he attributed the national revival in French Canada since the turn of the century.² Modestly, he described his own rôle in *L'Action française* of the 1920's as one of synthesis and propaganda for ideas stemming from Bourassa, *Le Devoir* and the entire pre-war *école nationaliste*.³ Indeed, it was Bourassa, with his erudite monologues on world affairs in the cosy atmosphere of abbé Perrier's presbytery⁴ and his impassioned pleading of the French Canadian cause during the First World War, who really initiated Groulx, the priest and professor, into contemporary politics. And Bourassa had even led Groulx to his life work: Bourassa had been largely responsible for the establishment of a chair in Canadian history at the Université de Montréal.⁵ Henri Bourassa pervaded abbé Groulx's life.

During the 1920's, however, there yawned a great gulf of suspicion, misunderstanding and disappointment between Bourassa and Groulx. He was my follower, where has he gone? mourned Bourassa.⁶ He was our leader, why did he fail us? queried Groulx.⁷

¹ Pour nous un homme enfin était apparu sur la scène, homme d'idées, d'une large et belle culture, d'une merveilleuse intelligence, d'un talent qui touchait au génie et qui projetait sur nos problèmes de fulgurantes lumières. L'homme était, en outre, de saine étoffe, d'une conscience noble, escarpée, inaccessible aux basses tentations. Canadien français jusqu'aux moelles, catholique sans marchandage, catholique ultramontain, que demander d'autre à un chef? L. Groulx, *Mss. Mémoires*, IV, p. 18.

² L. Groulx, *Histoire du Canada français depuis la découverte* (Montréal, Fides, 1960), II, p. 345.

³ L. Groulx, *Mss. Mémoires*, IV, p. 148.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 17. Groulx claimed that Bourassa was one of two men he knew who had a truly international breadth of vision and interest. The other was Cardinal Villeneuve. *Ibid.* See also L. Groulx, "Henri Bourassa ou le causeur prestigieux", *Hommage à Henri Bourassa* (Montréal, Le Devoir, 1952), p. 119-125.

⁵ L. Groulx, "Henri Bourassa et la chaire d'histoire du Canada à l'Université de Montréal", *RHAF* 6 (déc. 1952), p. 430-439.

⁶ Interview with M^{lle} Anne Bourassa, Dec. 12, 1968; A. Bourassa, "Biographie d'Henri Bourassa", A. Bergevin, C. Nish and A. Bourassa, *Henri Bourassa. Biographie. Index des écrits. Index de la correspondance publique, 1895-1924* (Montréal, Editions de l'Action nationale, 1966), p. LIII.

⁷ L. Groulx, *Mss. Mémoires*, IV.

Bourassa's mourning involved some very bitter comments indeed about the current crop of French Canadian nationalists: they were ungrateful⁸ separatists,⁹ preferring their language to their faith,¹⁰ guilty of immoderate nationalism,¹¹ abettors of revolt against Catholic authority.¹² On the other side of the gulf, Groulx was less outspoken. He and his friends nonetheless did engage in some surreptitious speculation about Bourassa, ranging from "astounding abdication",¹³ to "sickness",¹⁴ to "folly",¹⁵ to "strange evolution"¹⁶ and even to a "morbid split personality".¹⁷ What constituted and what caused the great divide?

The question becomes all the more intriguing if one considers the numerous similarities between Bourassa and Groulx. On almost every major issue of political, economic and social concern to Canada in the 1920's the two men were in accord. In politics, for example, a common hostility to partisan politics could not hide shared preferences: both Bourassa and Groulx disliked Taschereau on the provincial scene¹⁸ and Meighen on the federal scene. Both showed

⁸ Bourassa complained to Anatole Vanier, secretary-general of the Ligue d'Action française, that the periodical *L'Action française* had benefitted from the publicity, the clientèle, the very existence of his newspaper, *Le Devoir*. In return, *L'Action française* had offered nothing. Henri Bourassa papers, Montreal, Bourassa to Vanier, 28 oct. 1921. Vanier replied, protesting love, devotion and a monthly loss of \$100 by having *L'Action française* printed by *Le Devoir*. *Ibid.*, Vanier to Bourassa, 3 nov. 1921.

⁹ H. Bourassa, "Patriotisme, nationalisme, impérialisme", *Le Devoir*, 26 nov. 1923. The term obviously had *mauvaise presse* in the 1920's; even the writers for *L'Action française* who toyed with the concept shied away from the term.

¹⁰ H. Bourassa, "Le Pape, médecin social", *Le Devoir*, 19 avril 1923.

¹¹ H. Bourassa, "Patriotisme, nationalisme, impérialisme", *Le Devoir*, 24, 26 nov. 1923.

¹² H. Bourassa, "L'Affaire de Providence", *Le Devoir*, 15-19 jan. 1929. This series of articles drove the last spike of division between Bourassa and his former followers. Treating the *Sentinelles* issue — a movement of protest by the French-speaking community of Rhode Island against having their parish funds used to finance English language high schools — as primarily a question of Papal sovereignty, Bourassa condemned *les Sentinellistes* as fomentors of discord, challengers of ecclesiastical authority, nationalist extremists. Friends of *La Sentinelle* in Quebec, Bourassa declared guilty by association. Bourassa's former friends and admirers were dismayed, appalled, disgusted. They were unable to make this Bourassa match the one who had so stoutly defended French language rights in Ontario.

¹³ André Laurendeau, "Armand LaVergne", *L'Action nationale*, 5 (juin 1935), p. 380.

¹⁴ Georges Pelletier, as reported by L. Groulx, Mss. Mémoires, IV, p. 60b.

¹⁵ Olivar Asselin in *La Presse*, 2 juin 1925, reproduced in *France-Amérique*, 20 (1925), p. 253.

¹⁶ [L. Groulx], "Les conférences de M. Bourassa", *L'Action nationale*, 5 (mai 1935), p. 258.

¹⁷ L. Groulx, "Henri Bourassa ou le causeur prestigieux", *loc. cit.*, p. 121. In this context, one should also study carefully the lengthy analysis of Bourassa in Groulx's Mss. Mémoires, vol. IV.

¹⁸ The provincial Liberals reciprocated the dislike, through the party organ in Quebec city, *Le Soleil*. For example, the newspaper spoke of Bourassa

an interest in the Progressive movement.¹⁹ Both were horrified by the implications of the Chanak crisis in September 1922.²⁰ Both sided with King in the King-Byng affair of June 1926.²¹ Both even had a number of acrid remarks to make about Confederation. In the realm of economics too, Bourassa and Groulx shared attitudes and remedies. Both feared excessive industrialization and urbanization; both saw the land as the true source of economic, social, moral and national strength.²² Both were highly skeptical of Premier Taschereau's readiness to alienate Quebec's natural resources to the Americans; both urged their compatriots to invest in French Canadian businesses and industries. And in the plethora of social ills besetting the cities of the 1920's, both Bourassa and Groulx frowned upon the cinema, the yellow press, the crime rate, feminism and divorce. The points of accord between the two men were therefore numerous : each could say amen to the other's most heated critique. Given such similarities, one might be tempted to immerse the divergences between the two in the proverbial tea-pot. But neither Bourassa nor Groulx would have it so.

Two issues were the fuel of the suspicion and misunderstanding : nationalism and separatism. Varying attitudes to the two caused Bourassa to find Groulx and his friends wanting in religious orthodoxy and caused Groulx to find Bourassa wanting in leadership. Mutual incomprehension made of the one a renegade priest and of the other a renegade *chef*. Nationalism and separatism, these two

as having a "nature vindicative", a "disposition égoïste et vaniteuse". "Au sujet d'un pédagogue", *Le Soleil*, 10 fév. 1923. As for Groulx and *L'Action française*, *Le Soleil* claimed that one could fit their brains into a nutshell. "Les songe-creux", *Le Soleil*, 26 oct. 1927.

¹⁹ Rumours had Bourassa running in the 1921 federal election as an independent but joining forces with a united farmers or progressive movement after the election. The same source revealed that the farmer-progressive group had asked Antonio Perrault, one of the directors of the Ligue d'Action française, to run. Institut d'Histoire de l'Amérique française, Groulx papers, Napoléon Lafortune to Groulx, 13 oct. 1921.

²⁰ R. Rumilly, *Henri Bourassa* (Montréal, Editions de l'Homme, 1969), p. 639; [L. Groulx], "Mot d'ordre de la dernière heure", *L'Action française*, 8 (sept. 1922), p. 157. Anatole Vanier, acting as secretary-general of the Ligue patriotique des Intérêts canadiens, sent a telegram to Prime Minister King suggesting Quebec's break from Confederation if the other provinces accepted the principle of official participation in men or money. PAC, King papers, Vanier to King, 18 sept. 1922.

²¹ Bourassa's reference to Lord Byng as Meighen's "titled tool" would have had Groulx's hearty approval. *Ibid.*, Bourassa to King, July 21, 1926. Groulx and his friends momentarily pondered the possibility of *L'Action française* taking a pointedly political stand during the elections of 1926. IHAF, Groulx papers, Albert Lévesque to Groulx, 22 juillet 1926; Antonio Perrault to Groulx, 2 août 1926; Anatole Vanier did send his best wishes to King. PAC, King papers, Vanier to King, 15 juillet 1926.

²² E.g. H. Bourassa, "Patriotisme, nationalisme, impérialisme", *Le Devoir*, 26 nov. 1923; Jacques Brassier (pseud. of Groulx), "La haine de la terre", *AF*, 10 (juillet 1923), p. 39-46.

issues constituted the great divide between Bourassa and Groulx in the 1920's.

Bourassa's was a rational nationalism: an equilibrium of aims and motives. Throughout his career he stuck consistently, even rigidly, to a two-fold definition of nationalism and of its emotional constituents. Stated negatively, Bourassa fought against imperialism and against bigotry. Stated positively, Bourassa fought for the complete development of Canadian autonomy and for a recognition of equality — linguistic and religious — between the French- and English-speaking peoples of Canada.²³ Motivating Bourassa's nationalism was an equilibrium of religion and patriotism. He recognized both, gave each its due, but, in spite of a pre-war and war-time penchant for speaking the language of religio-national intimacy, never confused the two. Catholicism was always the guiding, tempering force, never the handmaiden of particular patriotic sentiments.²⁴ When necessary, Bourassa could make a perfectly natural choice: Catholicism surpassed all.

Groulx's, on the other hand, was an emotional nationalism; an integrated, organic whole of past, present and future, of desire and will. He offered a very elemental definition of nationalism: "notre volonté et notre droit de vivre",²⁵ "notre" meaning, of course, French Canadian. Groulx took up the religio-linguistic aspects of Bourassa's nationalism, put all his energies into them, and wondered why Bourassa looked on dubiously. Although he made frequent nods to the priority of Catholicism²⁶ — Groulx was, after all, a priest — he never really believed that a choice between religion and nationalism had to be made. Indeed, he felt that any attempt to sever the religio-nationalist tie would introduce "un dualisme moral des plus douloureux" into the souls of young French Canadians. Any attempt at a division was a scandal.²⁷

In such terms, Bourassa, insisting upon the priority of Catholicism and querying the nationalist fervour, presented a truly scandalous

²³ E.g. *Le Devoir*, 23 déc. 1921; 26 nov. 1923; Henri Bourassa to Jean Blais, 19 fév. 1925, reproduced in *Toute la pensée de Bourassa sur le séparatisme*, *L'Action nationale*, 53 (mai-juin 1964), p. 883. In many ways Bourassa's nationalism remained that of the Ligue Nationaliste of the early twentieth century. See the exchange of views on the programme of the Ligue between Jules-Paul Tardivel and Bourassa in *La Vérité*, jan. 1904, 15 mai 1904, and in *Le Nationaliste*, 3 avril 1904. It is undoubtedly significant that the first newspaper Groulx subscribed to as a young student priest in the early 1900's was Tardivel's *La Vérité*. L. Groulx, *Mss. Mémoires*, IV, p. 3.

²⁴ E.g. H. Bourassa, "La presse et le patriotisme" — III — *Le Devoir*, 11 fév. 1921.

²⁵ L. Groulx, *Orientations* (Montréal, Editions du Zodiaque, 1935), p. 241.

²⁶ E.g. "Pour qu'on s'entr'aide", *AF*, 10 (déc. 1923), p. 321; "Nos responsabilités intellectuelles", *Le Devoir*, 10 fév. 1928; *Le Français au Canada* (Paris, Delagrave, 1932), p. 210.

²⁷ "Pour qu'on vive", *L'Action nationale*, 6 (sept. 1935), p. 58.

face in the 1920's. Here was the acknowledged mentor of nationalism, the "electrifying" orator,²⁸ turning on those who had once listened spell-bound and applauded feverishly. What had happened?

Abbé Groulx claimed to see the change in Bourassa as early as 1922.²⁹ He attributed it to an overly scrupulous temperament.³⁰ Since Groulx, the priest, had no doubts about his own nationalist position in a decade of increasing international hostility to nationalism, he could not understand Bourassa's wondering. What he failed to see, because he was never willing or able to isolate the factors of his own nationalism, was that Bourassa's first love had always gone to Catholicism. Bourassa would undertake any battle to protect his religion from an unsavoury association. In 1910, for instance, he lashed out at Mgr. Bourne, Archbishop of Westminster, for an argument that implied the use of Catholicism for the ends of Anglo-Saxon supremacy in North America — imperialist ends.³¹ In the 1920's, he lashed out at those people, Europeans or French Canadians, who implied the use of Catholicism for the ends of nationalism.³² Prior to the war,

²⁸ Jean-Marie Gauvreau recalled the excitement of Bourassa's speeches. Interview, December 5, 1968.

²⁹ [L. Groulx], "Les conférences de M. Bourassa", *L'Action nationale*, 5 (mai 1935), p. 259. Bourassa's biographer made of the Papal audience of 1926 the turning point in Bourassa's life. R. Rumilly, *Henri Bourassa*, p. 691-693. André Laurendeau seemed to agree in spite of his argument for consistency in Bourassa's nationalist career, for he corrected an earlier, flippant remark — "Bourassa était mort à Rome en 1923 . . ." (A. Laurendeau, "Armand LaVergne", *AN*, 5 (juin 1935), p. 354 — by remarking in 1954, "Il aurait au moins fallu écrire 'en 1926'." "Le nationalisme de Bourassa", *ibid.*, 43 (jan. 1954), p. 13, n. 1. Abbé Groulx was scandalized by Bourassa's allowing the nationalist position in French Canada to be so blatantly misunderstood by the Pope in 1926. Groulx could only explain Bourassa's abject acceptance of the Papal lecture on nationalism by a "crise de scrupule", *Mss. Mémoires*, IV, p. 19-20; 59. When Groulx was in Rome in 1931, he gave a twenty-minute lecture to Mgr. Leccisi, secretary of La Consistoriale, on the history of Canada — the kind of lecture he had expected Bourassa to deliver to the Pope in 1926. *Ibid.*, V, p. 74-75.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, IV. A. Laurendeau hinted at the same possible cause, "Le nationalisme de Bourassa", *loc. cit.*, p. 37.

³¹ The two speeches are reproduced in *Hommage à Henri Bourassa*, p. 137-157. Gustave Lamarche suggested that Bourassa was presenting less an argument for the French language (for which the speech would always be recalled) than a pro-Catholic, anti-imperialist argument. "La littérature sociale", *Cahiers de l'Académie canadienne-française*, 3 (1958) p. 167.

³² André Laurendeau suggested that Bourassa had read too much of Maurras and the French *Action française* into Groulx and the Montreal *Action française*. "Le nationalisme de Bourassa", *loc. cit.*, p. 42-43. Bourassa did in fact refer to the *Action française* in Montreal as the "sœur cadette de *L'Action française* (de Paris)". "Le nationalisme est-il un péché?" *Toute la pensée de Bourassa sur le séparatisme*, p. 945. So too did the Parisian daily refer to its Montreal homonym as "notre sœur de Montréal". *L'Action française* (Paris), 28 jan. 1923. The friendly remark was contradicted by an almost total ignorance of the Canadian group. Laurendeau was probably right in his immediate criticism but he missed the point of the triangular relationship. The Montreal *Action française* relied on both the French group and Bourassa for status and moral support. Bourassa's querying and the Papal condemnation of the French *Action française* in December 1926 left the Montreal group stranded, as well

the threat to Catholicism came from imperialism; after the war the threat stemmed from nationalism. Bourassa had to oppose them both. The change was not in Bourassa; it was in the source of the threat. But Bourassa's audience in 1910, among whom was abbé Groulx, chose only to see his magnificent defence of the French language. Groulx chose what he wanted from Bourassa; misunderstanding the essence of Bourassa's argument in 1910, he was bound to misunderstand Bourassa in the 1920's.

The particular issue of separatism allows one to delve deeper into the discord. The difference of opinion — Bourassa adamantly opposed and Groulx ambiguously in favour — was far more subtle than a similar and older bone of contention between Bourassa and Jules-Paul Tardivel. In that battle there had been humour, even generosity; in the battle of the 1920's there was ill-will and disdain. And where Groulx misunderstood the nature of Bourassa's nationalism, Bourassa misunderstood the nature of Groulx's separatism.

Bourassa had always frowned on separatism; his disapproval was no novelty in the 1920's. Separatism was as idle a dream in 1902³³ as in 1922. Some of the blackest periods in Canadian history were unable to convince Bourassa of the possibility or the desirability of an independent Quebec.³⁴ A separate state, Bourassa argued, could only subsist on the sufferance of English Canada, the United States and England; a separate state would necessitate the total abandonment of French Canadians outside Quebec.³⁵ Always more interested in dissecting current problems than in speculating about future ones, Bourassa saw only "chimère" and "péril" for French Canadians trodding down the garden path of separatism.³⁶

There was, however, one element of novelty in Bourassa's critique in the 1920's. He tended to equate separatism with nationalism, the type of nationalism that the Pope indicted in an encyclical, *Ubi arcano Dei*, in 1923, and that he specifically condemned in the French *Action française* in 1926.³⁷ Bourassa sensed hatred, racial discord, narrow-mindedness and bigotry in the nationalism of the 1920's, whether European or French Canadian. He associated suggestions

as disappointed and angry. See S. M. Robertson, "L'Action Française : l'appel à la race" (Université Laval, thèse de doctorat, 1970), ch. II and V.

³³ Conference at the Monument National, 1902, cited in *Toute la pensée de Bourassa sur le séparatisme*, p. 824.

³⁴ E.g. *Le Devoir*, 11 mai 1916; Henri Bourassa papers, Montreal, Bourassa to Gérard Simard, 10 juillet 1917.

³⁵ H. Bourassa, "Patriotisme, nationalisme, impérialisme", *Le Devoir*, 26 nov. 1923.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ E.g. H. Bourassa, "Le Pape, médecin social", *Le Devoir*, 19 avril 1923; "Nos droits sont-ils en péril?", *ibid.*, 7 fév. 1927; "Le nationalisme est-il un péché?" *loc. cit.*, p. 942-946.

of a separate French Canadian state with the internecine quarrels of a Europe drunk on the idea of national self-determination. Bourassa's novel critique set him on a collision course with abbé Groulx.

Abbé Groulx denied any European context for his separatist leanings.³⁸ He denied any fomenting of trouble; indeed, he avoided the very term separatism, for he, as well as Bourassa, felt its revolutionary import.³⁹ He insisted that *L'Action française*, in presenting the question of French Canada's political future,⁴⁰ was but responding to a political upheaval caused by the inherent absurdity of Canada. Geography, politics, race, religion, language all divided Canadians irretrievably. And, as Groulx so delighted in recalling, Bourassa himself had poked a finger at a crumbling Confederation in 1921.⁴¹ One need not, therefore, search for nationalist sanction in Europe in order to pose the question of the durability of Confederation.

Groulx's separatism was in fact highly ambiguous. It tended to be more poetic than practical; the idea was more intriguing than the reality. Groulx encased his separatist suggestion in a maze of ifs and buts, of hypotheses and subjunctives, of dreams and aspirations. He was always more interested in the powerfully cohesive, integrating and exhilarating force that the *idea* of an independent French state would exert on French Canadian minds than in the actual blueprints for a *Laurentie*. Groulx wished to create a state of mind, not a state of law. Separatism was a myth.⁴²

Groulx's creation of the separatist myth as mettle for the French Canadian will left Bourassa, sniffing rather a political programme,

³⁸ Except of course that of a declining Empire from which he partially deduced a declining Confederation. "Notre avenir politique", *AF*, 7 (jan. 1922), p. 4-25.

³⁹ Groulx specifically denied ever preaching "un séparatisme 'à la dynamite'", *Mss. Mémoires*, IV, p. 98; IHAF, Groulx papers, Groulx to abbé J.-Ad. Sabourin [1923]; Groulx to Pierre Chaloult, *La Nation*, 22 fév. 1936. Who in fact would ever have dreamed of associating the gentle, pacific and *petit prêtre* with a molotov cocktail?

⁴⁰ "Notre avenir politique", *AF*, 7-8 (jan.-déc. 1922). Abbé Groulx carefully planned the entire *enquête*, including the gist of each argument, in the spring of 1921. Joseph Gauvreau papers, Montreal, Groulx to Gauvreau, 13 juin 1921; L. Groulx, *Mss. Mémoires*, IV, p. 85.

⁴¹ Bourassa let slip an unintentional remark about the probable demise of Confederation: "Durera-t-elle vingt ans ou trente ans, je l'ignore, mais elle doit se dissoudre un jour." *Le Devoir*, 23 déc. 1921. A careful reading of the full speech delivered at a banquet for Armand LaVergne in Quebec city reveals the very minor part this remark played in Bourassa's speech; his comments covered the waterfront of his interests and the query about Confederation was the vaguest of all the strictures Bourassa had for his compatriots. So anxious, however, was abbé Groulx to have Bourassa on his side in the debate over French Canada's political future that he referred to this comment over and over again. E.g. *AF*, 8 (déc. 1922), p. 333-334; IHAF, Groulx papers, Groulx to abbé Sabourin [1923]; *AN*, 5 (mai 1935), p. 262; *Hommage à Henri Bourassa*, p. 28; *Mss. Mémoires*, IV, p. 26.

⁴² S. M. Robertson, *op. cit.*, ch. IX.

a dog – and Groulx might have added a mad dog – barking up a non-existent tree. Bourassa, the politician and journalist, dealing in practicalities, was unable to understand Groulx, the priest and poet, dealing in metaphors. And yet Groulx was convinced that the separatist idea was but one more step in the long road of French Canadian *réveil*, a *réveil* largely instigated by Henri Bourassa.⁴³ Groulx expected Bourassa to be *the* nationalist *chef* in the 1920's; when Bourassa refused to don such a coat of many colours, Groulx charged him with having “saccagé l'idéal d'une génération”.⁴⁴

Clues to the mutual misunderstanding and disappointment lie partly in the character of the two men, in their attitudes to *le chef* and in the First World War. The three wove a taut web of suspicion and distrust between Bourassa and Groulx in the 1920's.

The characters of the two men were both complementary and contrasting. There was a certain rigidity, a self-righteousness, an inadaptability on both sides tempered, or rationalized by, the religious impetus in both. At the same time, both experienced periods of doubt: Bourassa voiced his publicly; Groulx expressed his privately. As a journalist, Bourassa was interested in educating public opinion about specific issues; as a politician he was interested in working out practical advances in Canadian autonomy and in French-English *entente* in Canada. Abbé Groulx, on the contrary, was a professor, interested in preparing an élite, a poet interested in invoking the national conscience, the will of French Canada. Bourassa analyzed; Groulx synthesized. Bourassa wanted to know what Groulx's “veilleurs qui ne dorment jamais”⁴⁵ would do; for Groulx it was sufficient that they existed. In the 1920's, the similarities and the differences between the two men caused them to stumble over each other.

As *chefs*, the two men also tripped over each other. In many ways they were the falling and rising stars of nationalism: their point of interception was bound to cause friction. Bourassa took his pre-war and war-time position of nationalist *chef* for granted; he considered Groulx and his friends in the *Action française* disciples who had gone astray. He felt both obliged to guide them to the right track and also piqued by their wandering. Why, he demanded, had his disciples not consulted him before launching “Notre avenir politique”? He did not care to have his prestige and that of *Le*

⁴³ L. Groulx, Mss. Mémoires, II, p. 3.

⁴⁴ [L. Groulx], “Les conférences de M. Bourassa”, *loc. cit.*, p. 259. Groulx even suggested that Bourassa was responsible for the demise of the *Action française* in 1928. Mss. Mémoires, IV.

⁴⁵ Jacques Brassier (pseud. of Groulx), “La vie de l'Action française”, *AF*, 16 (oct. 1926), p. 251.

Devoir, upon both of which *L'Action française* had drawn heavily, associated with an unacceptable idea.⁴⁶ Groulx and the *Action française* had piqued the *amour-propre* of the *chef* Bourassa. At the same time abbé Groulx, although avoiding the title, was carefully acquiring all the attributes of a *chef*. During the 1920's he was as busily engaged in solidifying the nationalist substructure of French Canada as Bourassa was in doubting it. He had an enthusiastic forum at the Université de Montréal, an *avant-garde* periodical in *L'Action française*; he spoke all over the province. But Groulx was extremely self-effacing: he invoked but did not epitomize *le chef*. Groulx's poetry and Bourassa's pique blinded both men to the insurmountable hurdle in their relationship: the First World War.

The war was an incident in Bourassa's life. He considered it merely the logical outcome of imperialist tendencies dating as far back as the South African War. Given Canada's abject acquiescence in that war, the country was bound to end up in something even more serious. And given Canadian participation in the First World War, internal discords were bound to occur. The fanatic unity of English Canadians was a war-time phenomenon, a passing phase. Once the war was over, all the regional differences, so evident in pre-war Canada, would re-emerge. Because of his pre-war political experience, acquired actively in the federal and provincial parliaments, Bourassa was unable to be pessimistic, although not dispassionate, about the domestic repercussions of the First World War.⁴⁷

For abbé Groulx, however, the war marked his entire career. He tended to define the fundamental reality of Canada in terms of the war. Abbé Groulx had no pre-war political experience; he acquired his political initiation passively, in abbé Perrier's presbytery, during the war. His mentor was Bourassa. Drawing largely on Bourassa's war-time passion and his pre-war religio-linguistic speeches,⁴⁸ Groulx saw the real enemy not in Europe but in Canada, in the guise of Anglo-Saxon fanaticism, Ontario schools, conscription and the

⁴⁶ Bourassa to Anatole Vanier, 28 nov. 1923, reproduced in *Toute la pensée de Bourassa sur le séparatisme*, p. 871.

⁴⁷ Bourassa tended, however, to record his lack of pessimism only in personal letters. E.g. Henri Bourassa papers, Montreal, Bourassa to Roméo Savary, 27 déc. 1917; Bourassa to W. G. Redmond, 22 déc. 1917. When Groulx broached the subject of Bourassa's launching a monthly periodical along the lines of *Le Devoir*, Bourassa replied that although he agreed with the necessity of such a publication, it was perhaps even more important to produce some instrument of propaganda to reach English-speaking Canadians. This, *en pleine guerre!* *Ibid.*, Bourassa to Groulx, 25 juin 1915.

⁴⁸ The only two pre-war speeches of Bourassa that Groulx cared to recall were those of 1905 on the Northwest school issue and of 1910 at the Congrès Eucharistique. "Henri Bourassa ou le causeur prestigieux", *Hommage à Henri Bourassa*, p. 119; Mss. Mémoires, IV.

bitterness of the federal elections of 1917. Because of the war, Groulx refused to see Canada as anything but a purveyor of pain and humiliation for French Canadians.

The two men carried their divergent attitudes into the 1920's. Although Bourassa occasionally hinted at the force of the war as a catalyst for the separatists of the 1920's,⁴⁹ he refused to grasp its significance and he refused to allow it to take precedence over the imperial question.⁵⁰ Bourassa would not acknowledge that the imperial issue was dying or dormant in the 1920's.⁵¹ He would not accept any long-term consequences of the war's domestic divisions. But abbé Groulx, possessing neither the emotional ferocity of Bourassa's anti-imperialism, nor his pre-war political awareness, could do little else but base his political speculations on the pessimistic premises of the First World War.

In the 1920's, then, Henri Bourassa was in a quadruple solitude. The war had severed his contacts with English Canada; the separatist question had severed contacts with younger nationalists;⁵² the death of his wife sapped his moral strength⁵³ and the decline of the

⁴⁹ E.g. Bourassa to Père Kassiepe, 15 juillet 1925, reproduced in *Toute la pensée de Bourassa sur le séparatisme*, p. 887-888; Bourassa, speaking at the twentieth anniversary of *Le Devoir*, 3 fév. 1930, reproduced *ibid.*, p. 913-914; "Le nationalisme est-il un péché?" *ibid.*, p. 927.

⁵⁰ A kind of three-cornered misunderstanding shows up in Bourassa's verbally violent attack on the Parisian correspondent for *Le Devoir*, Joseph Denais, in 1921. Denais envisioned all of France's contemporary problems in terms of the war. Bourassa would not have this constant harping on the evils of Germany, for, he contended, we in Canada can only envision our problems in terms of the imperial relationship with Great Britain. If French propaganda made Germany into a perpetual villain, then England would be justified in tightening imperial ties in order to fight the barbarian. Henri Bourassa papers, Montreal, Bourassa to Joseph Denais, 28 oct. 1921. Blinded by the imperial issue, Bourassa could not conceive of others — Frenchmen or French Canadians — interpreting their country's problems in any other light.

⁵¹ Except possibly in the sense that he both talked less and wrote less during the period. Whenever he spied echoes of the imperialist issue reverberating through the 1920's, however, Bourassa summoned all his old passion and fervour. For example, Bourassa was convinced that the visit of the Prince of Wales to Canada in 1920 was a prelude to a political and military tightening of the Empire. "La propagande impérialiste", *Le Devoir*, 7 sept. 1920. He also saw an imperialist connivance between Lord Byng and Meighen in 1926. PAC, King papers, Bourassa to King, July 21, 1926. And he was determined to see another imperialist plot in the Balfour Declaration of 1926: autonomy was merely the carrot dangled before the donkey of Canadian participation in future Imperial wars. R. Rumilly, *Henri Bourassa*, p. 694.

⁵² Mlle Anne Bourassa expressed the double solitude and spoke of the second as one of the major deceptions of Bourassa's life. Interview, December 4, 1968.

⁵³ Abbé Georges Courchesne, a close friend of Groulx and another *habitué* of abbé Perrier's presbytery, asked Groulx anxiously about the state of Mme Bourassa's health: "Je prie à ce sujet, sachant quelle force morale cette femme est pour M. Bourassa." IHAF, Groulx papers, Courchesne to Groulx, 27 sept. 1917. Mme Bourassa died in 1919. Mlle Anne Bourassa said of her father: "Désormais il cherchera en Dieu la force de vivre." "Biographie d'Henri Bourassa", *loc. cit.*, p. LI.

imperialist issue undermined his most energetic pursuits. But a *chef* does not survive in solitude. Sensing the isolation, Bourassa lashed out at former friends and admirers. They in turn, seeking the sanction of a *chef* and hurt by Bourassa's censure, cast suspicious looks of disgust and disdain at the former idol.