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Pierre Beaudet's literary legacy

Friday 18 March 2022, by [BEAUDET Pierre](#), [BOUDREAU Philippe](#), [FIDLER Richard](#), [POULIN Richard](#) (Date first published: 16 March 2022).

Pierre Beaudet, [who died a week ago](#), left a rich legacy of published works, both books and articles, that will remain a valuable resource for present and future generations of socialists in Quebec, Canada and internationally. I cannot inventory all of them, but I do wish to draw attention to some materials of particular importance to today's activists.

Unfortunately, few of Pierre's writings are available in English. However, I will start with those that are readily available online. Most are translations from Pierre's original texts in French, although he drafted a few in English, which he spoke fluently. An example: "In Search of the 'Modern Prince': The New Québec Rebellion," in [Socialist Register, 2017](#). [1]

His articles on issues of the day appeared extensively in a number of English Canadian online publications. Some examples:

Socialist Project: <https://socialistproject.ca/author/pierre-beaudet/>

Canadian Dimension: <https://canadiandimension.com/articles/author/pierre-beaudet>

Life on the Left: <https://lifeonleft.blogspot.com/search?q=Pierre+Beaudet>

He published prolifically in French. The online Quebec journal [Presse-toi à gauche](#) reports that Pierre, who in recent years provided a weekly column, authored 579 of its articles.

One of Pierre's major projects was [Nouveaux Cahiers du socialisme](#) (NCS). Some years ago I translated (but apparently never published) an excerpt from an essay by Pierre Beaudet and others explaining its origins and how they saw the role of NCS. It is appended below. Pierre was without question the guiding spirit and foremost editor of NCS, although he relied on an editorial board representative of Quebec's varied left tendencies and trajectories.

Pierre Beaudet wrote and edited many books, some of them voluminous collections of texts related to his academic disciplines, progressive economic and social development studies. He authored two books of an autobiographical nature: *On a raison de se révolter: Chronique des années 70* (écosociété, 2008); and *Un Jour à Luanda: Une histoire de mouvements de libération et de solidarités internationales* (Varia, 2018). He introduced and edited a collection of documents and articles by leading protagonists analyzing the rise and decline of the Quebec left in the 1970s and 1980s: *Quel Socialisme? Quelle Démocratie? La gauche Québécoise au tournant des années 1970-1980* (Varia, 2016). And he co-edited a volume on the international workers' and national liberation movements of the 19th and 20th centuries which, strangely, largely omits the experience of the Communist International: *L'Internationale sera le genre humain! De l'Association internationale des travailleurs à aujourd'hui* (M Éditeur, 2015).

Three texts authored or edited by Pierre are devoted to the national question and its importance in

Quebec left politics. All three are available online:

Les socialistes et la question nationale: Pourquoi le détour irlandais? Kindle Edition
<https://www.amazon.ca/socialistes-question-nationale-Pourquoi-irlandais-ebook/dp/B01MCT5VJA>

La question nationale Québécoise à l'ombre du capitalisme: Textes choisis des Cahiers du socialisme (1978-1982), Introduction et édition Pierre Beaudet. Full text online:
http://media.wix.com/ugd/a54ab7_7f75347c75cc4435a04a21cde4bcd11f.pdf

Le Parti socialiste du Québec et la question nationale (1963-1967). Pierre's introductory essay is online here:
<https://www.cahiersdusocialisme.org/le-parti-socialiste-du-quebec-et-la-question-nationale/>

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The Collectif d'analyse politique and Nouveaux Cahiers du socialisme: an initial balance-sheet (2009)

by Pierre Beaudet, Philippe Boudreau and Richard Poulin [2]

In 2007, the Collectif d'analyse politique (CAP) launched simultaneously a number of projects (workshops, documents, activities). We had an ambitious program that sought to “develop original research on the structural dimension of contemporary capitalism, work out some concrete and practical anti- and post-capitalist perspectives, and participate in the development of new alternatives to help energize the social movements and the political left.”

We also noted the paucity of left-wing journals in Quebec. The publications that were common in previous decades—*Parti pris*, *Socialisme québécois*, *Cahiers du socialisme*, *Interventions économiques*, *Critiques socialistes*, etc.—had, for all intents and purposes, disappeared. In fact, there were no longer any intellectual left journals in Quebec although there are a magazine, *À bâbord !*, and a web site, *Presse-toi à gauche*, which play an important and complementary role. One of our explanatory hypotheses was that the “scientific” turn taken by the university-based social sciences periodicals, itself linked to changes in the conditions of production of “knowledge”, had worked to the detriment of their mission of stimulating intellectual thinking around the dynamics of social transformation. *Nouveaux Cahiers du socialisme* (NCS) specifically responds to this need: to partially overcome the vacuum engendered by the disappearance of a certain tradition of progressive thinking in Quebec, that of the left-wing journals.

Nouveaux Cahiers du socialisme

In January 2009, therefore, the CAP launched the first issue of NCS, on the topic of social classes. Four issues later, NCS seems to be off to a good start, with a readership of around one thousand per issue and an increasingly solid reputation among intellectuals and activists in the social movements. Each issue is prepared by a working group that includes some members of the CAP along with researchers and activists concerned by the featured topic. In addition to this bi-annual publication, there is a website updated daily with other articles and documents. In the coming months, NCS plans to deepen its thinking about ecosocialism, the work environment, health, education, the social movements and collective action, the unions and community movements, Marxism, the left in Quebec and North America, and many other topics.

Popular education

We initially explained that our perspective was a long-term one, and that we wanted to reconcile the need to participate in existing struggles with the necessity for critical thinking through some rigorous intellectual and political work. This is what we tried to do through some interventions, notably during the Quebec Social Forum where, in both 2007 and 2009, we hosted many workshops. The participation in these activities was excellent, validating our intuition about the need for deeper involvement within the social movements. This work was continued in the summer Université populaire, which we organized in August 2010: three days of intense discussions, hosted by more than 20 resource people, in which 150 people participated. In the fall of 2010, we also organized other events: a symposium on “40 years after October 1970” and a roundtable on “*les rapports sociaux de sexe*” [gender-based social relations].

A duty of diligence

From the outset we chose to identify ourselves with socialism, a banner (it must be said) that by the early years of this millennium was not unsullied. Beyond this proclamation, it seemed important to us to indicate that we were not reinventing the wheel, that we were part of a tradition of struggles and intellectual and theoretical work that had taken on many meanings and gone in many directions but that belonged to a “family of thought” inaugurated by Karl Marx and the *communards*, and which was developed subsequently by the great social movements of the 20th century. For historical reasons (to be explored and analyzed), a large part of this “family of thought” was subjected to a series of dogmas that later led many of the movements—identified with a certain “socialism”—to their downfall through some “adventures” and disastrous practical and intellectual authoritarianisms. There remain today innumerable lessons, insights, perspectives, that ought to be developed and modified, while creating some new ones. Nevertheless, these new perspectives require some intense work based on detailed empirical and theoretical studies, enquiries and explorations. In initiating the vast project of analyzing capitalism and post-capitalism, our “ancestors” gave us but few clues. Our program of work starts with these, but in the process it will open new trails not previously imagined.

At present the CAP has 30 members who come from the social movements, unions and the college and university teaching milieu. Not only is it inter-generational (which must still be improved) but it is also more multi-ethnic (to be improved) and it is trying to achieve parity between women and men. Above all, it is pluralist, bringing together individuals from the political and social left with a very great variety of nuances and currents, whether organized or not.

Richard Fidler
Pierre Beaudet
Philippe Boudreau
Richard Poulin

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P.S.

Life on the Left

<https://lifeonleft.blogspot.com/2022/03/pierre-beaudets-literary-legacy.html>

Footnotes

[1] Full text: <https://socialistregister.com/index.php/srv/article/view/27136/20141>.

[2] “Le Collectif d’analyse politique et les Nouveaux Cahiers du socialisme : premier bilan,” [Nouveaux Cahiers du socialisme, no. 1](#), Printemps 2009, pp. 11-13.