



Neighborhoods in the Balance

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At the end of the nineteen-sixties, Guilbault was a quiet little side street off Saint Lawrence Boulevard. At this time, the Main was well-known for its ethnic and commercial diversity; and Dominique Landry fell in love with the neighborhood, "at first sight," she remembers.

She has lived here for seventeen years.

In 1979, Joshua Wolfe moved to Saint Famille Street. He chose Milton-Park because it was near downtown and the Mountain. "I loved the spirit of the area. At that time, there were promises (for the first time) to get rid of the Pine Exchange," explains Joshua Wolfe.

He has lived here for sixteen years.

Things have changed since that time – or not changed, despite promises. Municipal administrations have been replaced, socio-economic realities modified.

Today, many Montrealers leave the city for the suburbs. There are many reasons. According to Dominique Landry and Joshua Wolfe, the situation for residents is impossible. Problems of cleanliness, of security and especially of noise seem to them insurmountable. And they are not alone. Citizens of Mile-End are frustrated to see the Saint-Michel Bath slated for possible destruction without consultation; merchants on Park Avenue have no say in decisions taken regarding the development of the traffic artery; residents on Hutchison Street can do nothing about rowdy students who prevent their children from sleeping at night.

Citizens have to fight to be heard by politicians and the administrative system they control. Most of the time, simple information or complaints must pass through elected officials or civil servants; results are long in coming – if they come at all. The civil service in place is clogged with its own bureaucracy and responds sluggishly to citizens' needs. It also costs a lot. Enough to discourage the hardiest of souls...

Hard Work for Nothing

For Dominique Landry, who is deeply involved in the struggle against the disco bar Tantra, the paralysis of the municipal system is especially obvious in the bar question. The neighborhood is being transformed without the citizens being able to say anything about it. Discotheques, bars and restaurants have taken over, bringing all their disagreeable side effects.

For Joshua Wolfe, a professor of Urban Studies at Concordia University, the problem of cars is equally important.

"The city thinks in terms of automobiles," he emphasizes. "Urban life suffers the consequences. Fewer parks, fewer trees, but more streets and cars which are noisy and pollute the air."

The smallest demands that the citizens have made regarding quality of life have been largely ignored at City Hall. At a time

when the city needs to retain its tax base, this is contradictory. According to Joshua Wolfe, change is necessary, but must come from the citizens.

"The question is simple: have we got community spirit? On the order of people strongly involved in our community, I don't think so." But will this change?

The choice before these citizens is simple: leave; or stay, and fight for change.

How to Change Things?

These people have been working tirelessly, each in his own way, towards goals which are slow to be realized. If each group worked in concert with others the problems could be attacked on a wider scale and perhaps weightier solutions could be found. The Bread and Roses March is a good example: dozens of women's groups united around nine points and took concrete action. The results were a great success.

The Need for Solidarity

By working together to decide collective goals and priorities, neighborhood groups could give themselves an indispensable tool: strong representation. This Round-table would have the power to safeguard the quality of life in the area. A community space, a Center for Urban Ecology, could be created as a resource to carry out the committee's decisions.

A Center for Urban Ecology would sensitize the community to the challenges of developing a more viable urban life. Social, economic and environmental problems could be tackled and discussed towards possible solutions. The Center could also start a series of pilot projects in security

improvement, waste management, urban agriculture, etc.

Why a Center for Urban Ecology?

Montreal life is regulated by numerous by-laws. For example, a bar can't open in a residential district. So how come families find themselves stuck with a bar next door?

This is what happens when urban ecology is ignored. Commercial zones border on residential ones; bars attract customers to quiet neighborhoods and the results are unfortunate for all concerned. If the city paid more attention to urban ecology, it would take into account the links between its citizens and their environment; between human beings and the rest of the nature; or simply those among human beings. The Center for Urban Ecology must also educate us about the connections between human life and animal and plant life in the city. These interactive ties form independent systems which are linked in turn to the vaster one of which we are all part. Ecology is not just air and trees and water: it is a complex network of activities, relationships and systems.

Act Now for Tomorrow's Results

With the creation of the Round-table to identify problems and the Center for Urban Ecology to provide citizens with tools to solve them, the community will have the means to understand its needs and its nature. A common front is essential to deal with decisions taken by municipal administrations or commercial interests which affect the neighborhood. The idea is launched: come and participate. Send us your comments! ♦

taux et d'ordre économique seront abordés et les approches possibles pour y remédier y seront discutées. Il doit également initier une série de mini-expériences dans les domaines de la sécurité publique, de la gestion des déchets, de l'agriculture en milieu urbain, etc.

Pourquoi un Centre d'écologie urbaine?

La vie montréalaise est régie par de nombreux règlements. Un bar ne peut, par exemple, ouvrir ses portes dans un quartier résidentiel. Alors comment se peut-il qu'une famille se retrouve avec un bar juste à côté d'une chambre à coucher d'enfant?

C'est que l'on n'a pas tenu compte de l'écologie urbaine. La zone commerciale a comme limite une maison de ville. Et il se trouve que la zone commerciale se termine par un des bars les plus achalandés du quartier... Quelle malchance! Si la ville avait tenu compte de l'écologie urbaine, elle aurait fait attention aux rapports qui existent entre les êtres vivants et leur milieu, entre l'humain et le reste de la nature ou simplement, dans le cas qui nous intéresse, entre humains. Le Centre d'écologie urbaine doit être un lieu d'éducation où l'on discute des rapports entre vie humaine, vie animale et vie végétale en milieu urbain. Ces rapports interactifs forment des systèmes indépendants mais qui sont reliés à un système plus vaste dont ils font partie. L'écologie ne se limite donc pas aux arbres, à l'air et à l'eau. Elle est un réseau complexe d'activités, de relations et de systèmes.

Agir maintenant, pour obtenir des résultats demain.

Avec la mise en place d'une table de concertation qui identifierait les problèmes et d'un Centre d'écologie urbaine qui veillerait à donner des outils aux citoyens, la communauté se donnerait les moyens de faire valoir ses besoins et ses attentes. Ce front commun de la communauté deviendrait incontournable pour toutes les décisions d'ordre municipal ou commercial qui seraient prises concernant nos quartiers. L'idée est lancée, vous êtes invités à y participer. Envoyez-nous vos commentaires! ♦

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