

THE MILTON-PARK AFFAIR

CANADA'S LARGEST CITIZEN-DEVELOPER CONFRONTATION



CLAIRE HELMAN

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Hutchison Street looking south, May 1971 (*photo by David Miller*).

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Véhicule Press

MONTRÉAL

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INTRODUCTION

This is a story about what it takes to win, one way or another. You could call it a drama in two acts, the story unfinished as yet but with the major goal achieved, the creation of Canada's largest co-operative housing project. The overall theme concerns the tactics of two groups of urban activists, one from the turbulent sixties, the other from the pragmatic seventies. Both groups fought housing battles in the same neighbourhood but the outcomes were quite different.

Not all the events are here in step-by-step chronological order and some details, like the intricacies of finance, are left to others more expert in the field. Rather, like cream rising to the top, the following chapters attempt to hold the rich essence of this human-interest drama. If a label is needed, perhaps this could be called the social history of Montreal's inner-city neighbourhood, Milton-Park, from 1968-1983.

During this period, a 25-acre parcel of land near Montreal's downtown area which had been amassed by a private developer was partially demolished, a high-rise complex was inserted into its centre, it was sold for high profit, and then, phoenix-like, it rose from near destruction to be transformed into a daring community gamble. The tactics, wheeling and dealing, intrigue and pressures connected with this process at times contained elements of a spy story. On a small scale, this story may shed light on how power struggles are waged, tax dollars spent and how commitment must sometimes be laced with cunning in order for dreams to come true.

At the root of the action are the people: neighbours, activists, students, community organizers, government officials, architects, developers, even a millionaire or two, and two remarkable women from opposite ends of the social and philosophical spectrum who helped pull unlikely factions together. Heroes and villains abound; sometimes the same person is deemed to be both. Needless to say, the points of view expressed are diverse and sometimes contradictory.

I travelled through the Milton-Park district of Montreal on foot, by bus or car nearly every day of the thirteen years I lived nearby. I know many of the people appearing in these pages either socially, through

work or at least by sight. Since they were often colleagues or peers, my knowledge of them, however limited, does shape the telling of this story but also, I hope, enhances it by occasionally providing a more human aspect to details of organizing, negotiating, financing, renovating and the day-to-day task of living together.

The subject of affordable housing has become crucial to Canadians in the 1980s as our traditional dreams of the good life change. Perhaps some ideas and answers for citizens grappling with their own housing problems will come from this fifteen-year, behind-the-scenes urban drama.

DUROCHER

HUTCHISON

PARK AVENUE

JEANNE MANCE

STE. FAMILLE

ST. URBAIN

CLARK

ST. LAWRENCE BLVD.

PINE AVENUE

PRINCE ARTHUR

MILTON

SHERBROOKE



Chapter One

THE OLD NEIGHBOURHOOD

A tipsy, elderly man wandered in and slumped down at the counter of the Prince Arthur Bar and Grill. "Gladys," he called, to the bustling, red-headed waitress. She greeted him warmly. "Here," said the old man, "take my pension cheque and keep it safe." Gladys smiled, took the cheque and deposited it securely behind the counter. Then she coaxed the pensioner, one of her regulars, to have a little food.

A typical night-time scene in the Milton-Park area, circa 1967.

Montreal holds a special place in the Canadian urban context. Amidst the francophone majority, the city reflects many distinct cultural cross-currents — all-night bagel bakeries, Caribbean record shops, German- and English-language theatre, Chinatown's crowded streets, the Mediterranean atmosphere of the Greek neighbourhoods, Portuguese corner stores overflowing with wine grapes in season...it's a dizzying delight for tourist and resident alike.

There is an eclectic choice in ideologies and lifestyles as well. Despite a sometimes suffocating bureaucracy on the institutional level, there is a great sense of personal freedom in Montreal. Wildly varying lifestyles, cultural backgrounds and ideologies are often found side by side. Sometimes they touch, but more often than not they simply exist, each in its own geographical or psychological space.

The Milton-Park area has long reflected this cosmopolitan make-up in its history. Geographically, it lies just north of the city's downtown core. On a good day, it's a fifteen-minute walk from just about anywhere in the six-square-block district to Eaton's or Place des Arts, Montreal's concert hall and theatre complex. McGill University is just a few blocks away to the west and the Montreal campus of the University of Quebec is not far. There is also easy access to the Royal Victoria and Hôtel-Dieu hospitals as well as several other institutions. The street names making up its boundaries are Milton on the south side, Pine



Jeanne Mance and Prince Arthur (photo by George Bird/Montreal Star/Public Archives of Canada/PA-153961).

Avenue on the north, Hutchison on the west, and Ste. Famille three blocks to the east. It was once seen as part of a larger 'quartier,' which included Ste. Famille, bounded by Sherbrooke to the south and Pine as its northern boundary, enclosed by University on the west side and St. Lawrence Boulevard to the east. But the 'battleground' of the 15-year housing struggle was really the smaller area. Park Avenue is its main thoroughfare. A few blocks north, past the mountain, this street becomes very Greek — festooned with restaurants serving souvlaki and spinach pie to the largely Greek all-male clientele by day, then hosting the city's food-lovers by night. Just south of the parklands of Mount Royal, Park Avenue arrives at Milton-Park and its two-tiered population, one practically on top of the other. The modern high-rise complex known as La Cité (changed to Place du Parc in 1985) thrusts itself upward in the centre of the remaining Milton-Park community like an urban volcano, spewing forth neon lights and consumer goods — its boutiques, bars, tanning studio, restaurants, health club and disco are all the trappings of the yuppie lifestyle.

Development of the present Milton-Park district began in the 1860s when Les Religieuses Hospitalières de Saint-Joseph decided to build a new hospital, Hôtel-Dieu, on an estate willed to them. The first street to be opened in the neighbourhood was Ste. Famille in 1867. It was designed so that people looking north would see the Sisters' fine new chapel. At that time the only other buildings in the area were the handsome villas and mansions built by the British merchants who emigrated to Montreal in the first half of the 19th century. Architecturally and socially, the neighbourhood retained an Anglo-Saxon character as development began.

Two- and three-storey houses with carefully detailed greystone fronts, carved wooden dormers, stained glass windows and wrought iron balconies were built on the new streets of Ste. Famille and Jeanne Mance. Here and there, touches of past grace and workmanship still exist, tenacious survivors in a cost-efficient society. The architectural style was Victorian Picturesque (1870-1900), an outwardly ornate expression of an upwardly mobile middle class of merchants and professionals.¹

Strathearn School was begun in 1912, joining the several churches that began appearing around the turn of the century. Park Avenue became the commercial hub of the neighbourhood with restaurants,



Oriental Pastry, corner Park Avenue and Milton, 1971 (photo by Clara Gutsche).



Arsenault's newsstand, 1970 (photo by David Miller).

grocery stores, a cigar store, funeral home and whatever services small businesses could bring to the neighbourhood.

After World War II the area underwent a dramatic transformation. The now wealthy merchant and professional class moved to the adjacent residential communities of Outremont and Westmount and the suburbs. Automobile traffic increased, and with the construction of an interchange at Park and Pine avenues, traffic became even heavier. The housing demands of students from nearby McGill University contributed to the gradual subdivision of some of the houses, as did land speculation and increased taxes from rising real estate value. Only by subdividing these single-family dwellings and renting to more and more tenants could most landlords hang on to their property.

As most of the middle class moved on, their place was taken by students, low-income families — both French and English, young professionals, pensioners, single-parent families, and a smattering of new immigrants. According to the 1961 federal census, there were an almost equal number of French and English residents in the district with about 15% of the total being immigrants. The citizens who became the permanent residents of the neighbourhood were the pensioners, often living alone, and those who couldn't afford to move elsewhere.

They all liked the old, somewhat run-down neighbourhood for its surprising sense of community in an area so close to downtown Montreal. The small-scale housing itself helped greatly to create an urban village atmosphere — charming old duplexes or triplexes, with balconies, small gardens, winding stairs, adjacent alleyways as wide as some Montreal streets, low-rise apartments and rooming houses where the stairs weren't too difficult for elderly legs to climb.

For a glimpse of neighbourhood life in the 1960s, one had only to wander into the Prince Arthur Bar and Grill late at night. It was usually crowded around midnight, both with the usual crowd and passers-by. Gladys, the waitress, was like a den mother to the Prince Arthur regulars, the lonely old people who hung out there night after night. As in many inner-city districts, there were always more older people in Milton-Park than in most Montreal neighbourhoods. Often they were isolated, poor and without close family or friends. Social services for them were fragmented or non-existent. Places for them to go, aside from the occasional church event, were too expensive. The Prince

Arthur glowed like a beacon at night with Gladys dispensing left-over 'soup du jour' free to those of any age who wandered in late and were cold, hungry, or broke. Sometimes she even provided a place to sleep for the night. Gladys was the community's unofficial, and very efficient, social worker.

The unofficial community centre was Rosie's Variety Store on Park Avenue, part of Milton-Park for 37 years. There too, one could wander in at any time of day or night, and still find Rosie there, with her broad, beaming face and pictures of her children above the cash register. There was always someone to talk to or, better yet, argue with, around the space heater at the back, past the potato chips and magazines.

There was also Arsenault's, where the local intellectuals streamed in on Sundays to pick up their *New York Times*, perhaps stopping off at Oriental Pastry on the corner of Park and Milton for something sticky and exotic to accompany their rigorous reading.

Young and old mingled harmoniously: students, drifters, alcoholics, immigrant families, single-parent families, academics, professionals. There were experimenters trying the latest mind-expanding substance, political theory, or social movement on the street; there were political activists, and pale, shy women who had trouble counting their change or remembering their next clinic appointment; energetic young women who preferred health food to fast food; struggling artisans buoyed by the charm of the streets; gay couples, finally feeling at home in a tolerant neighbourhood. They were all there.

Individuals came and went but the varied texture of the neighbourhood didn't change much over the years and, despite the transient nature of some, the bulk of the population was quite stable, often living in Milton-Park five years or longer.²

As student Murray Hirsh put it in 1965, "We enjoy the mixture of people, the shops, the feeling of history mixed with continual change. Most of us appreciate the quality of Milton-Park life and would never change it for doormen and elevators . . ."³

Nevertheless, as McGill University students Marilyn Manzer and Rona Schwartz found while doing research for the McGill Urban Studies program in the summer of 1969, the charming run-down neighbourhood of Milton-Park in the 1960s could not be compared to a small-town neighbourhood or to a suburb.

It was a different sort of neighbourhood, an inner-city, urban one, and therefore had to be viewed differently. It was certainly a neighbourhood worth preserving, but the ones who were attached to it, who sensed the community feeling there, were the ones currently living there, not the ones who had grown up there...

It is in the nature of cities to have a highly transient population so that a great many people in an urban community may have no roots at all. But such a setting opens the way for a different type of community life which centers around corner stores, bars, tobacco shops, laundromats and especially sidewalks...'”⁴

Furthermore, residents felt that crime was not as much of a problem there as it was in other inner-city areas. All in all, it was a safe, diversified, low-rental district with a pleasurable degree of interaction amongst residents.

It was into this comfortable hodge-podge that Concordia Estates, encouraged by the prevailing attitude of Montreal's civic administration, reached its long arm of re-development.

Notes

1. Christine Cousineau, *Housing Ownership and Community Control*, Thesis for Master of Architecture and Master of City Planning, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1980, p.30.
2. Société du Patrimoine Urbaine de Montréal, *Action Plan*, 1980, p.46.
3. Marilyn Manzer and Rona Schwartz, *A Study of the Conflict Between Developer and Citizens in a Proposed Redevelopment Scheme for a Section of Downtown Montreal*.
4. Ibid.

Chapter 2

THE DEVELOPERS' DREAM

The ironies, both corporate and individual, are so stark that it would make a perfect subject for a Brechtian novel, a sort of Montreal Threepenny Opera.

— Boyce Richardson, *The Montreal Star* Sept. 13, 1969

Throughout most of the industrialized world in the 1960s, 'more' meant 'better.' Growth and progress were the twin goals of most government leaders. Among planners, developers and city administrators the key words were 'slum clearance, obsolescence' and 'redevelopment.' The old had to make way for the new, in a hurry, and in the case of cities, this often meant tearing down still useful buildings and homes in order to erect edifices perceived by those in power as more in keeping with 'progress.' No one knew then that huge increases in the price of oil would help throw economies in a panic, or foresee that peoples' incomes would simply not continue to grow, as they had throughout the fifties. In those days, families could still look forward, or think they could, to owning their own homes. City fathers saw no end to newer and bigger office buildings, and more shopping centres.

In Montreal, as elsewhere in Canada, civic administrators welcomed developers, especially after the astounding commercial success of the dynamic American developer, William Zeckendorf, in erecting Place Ville-Marie, the city's most ambitious downtown business and shopping complex. As Lucien Saulnier, Chairman of the Executive Committee of Montreal's City Council summed it up, "We are in the process, during this decade, of erecting a totally new city, the aspect of which will easily overshadow anything that's happening since the Second World War..."¹

One of the logical places to begin erecting the 'totally new city,' was the Milton-Park area. The city did not share the view of residents that this was a charming, friendly urban environment. Many property

owners had started to move out and a new population wave was becoming more visible. The Milton-Park area was perceived by many as a hot-bed of hippies and radicals — all of whom supposedly took drugs. These included McGill students, American resisters to the Vietnam War, members of the counter-culture and political activists.

The only real attraction of the neighbourhood to the City was in terms of the extra revenue that would come from redevelopment. Whether intentionally or not, the City was encouraging speculation in the Ste. Famille area by allowing permissive zoning regulations which led to a higher than normal density of population and increasing property values. Assessments on land and new projects adjacent to the Milton-Park area were escalating, leading to higher taxes and higher prices for property. Land was becoming more valuable than the buildings that stood on it.

In a curious turn of events, the ripple effect from Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev's 1956 speech denouncing Josef Stalin's repressive leadership was about to hit Milton-Park.

In the early 1950s, Norman Nerenberg and Arnold Issenman, like so many idealists of the time, had been active in the Quebec Labor Progressive Party, a creation of the Communist Party of Canada. Shortly after Khrushchev's speech they resigned from the party. A few days later, according to Gérard Fortin, one of their then-closest associates, they returned to party headquarters in Montreal to remove their desks, which had been their own personal property, and installed them in their new real estate office.²

Their new business venture began conventionally enough in 1956 when they became property managers. In 1958 they expanded into development and construction. Among the first pieces of real estate they bought were two properties at the corner of Park Avenue and Prince Arthur. Soon, the same zeal and hard work they had brought to political organizing was being expended in the marketplace. According to one student resident of the Milton-Park area, whose parents had moved in the same political circle as the new partners, "It was as if they finally realized that society wasn't going to change and they'd better make up for lost time by making a lot of money." It was a view of the partners shared by others in the neighbourhood, particularly students whose theoretical approach to life had yet to be tempered by the practicalities of the marketplace.



Ste. Famille Street couple in their front garden, 1972 (*photo by Clara Gutsche*).

The new company, Concordia Estates, was involved in the planning and construction of a number of developments, both in Canada and the United States. The corporate structure was diversified, with several companies grouped under the umbrella of Concordia Estates. There were other principals involved, but Nerenberg, as president, and Issenman, as chairman, were basically in charge. The partners still had dreams though, based in part on the social philosophy of their earlier years. They would do things on a heroic scale. Not content just to build high-rises, they intended to leave their mark on the city, just as Zeckendorf had done. One major opportunity arose when they built Place Bonaventure in the mid-sixties, a massive commercial development, with shops, offices, convention halls and a hotel, located in the south central downtown area of Montreal. It became a landmark in the city but just whetted the developers' appetite to construct something even more significant. What Zeckendorf had created for commerce, the Concordia partners wanted to do for apartment dwellings. They were frustrated by the limitations of constructing a single building and felt, personally and professionally, that for the city centre to continue as a vibrant, vital place, a bold new housing concept was needed.

The objectives that we wanted to achieve were to create a compatible environment for new development which would meet, within reason, criteria for open space, sunlight, uninhibited view and appropriate adjacent environment.³

Nerenberg noted that whenever they had built before on a small scale, "somebody came along next door to us and built a blank wall blocking all our windows . . .". Therefore, they concluded that the only way they could create the type of complex "that would be physically, functionally, and organizationally compatible and be worthy of the immense, long-term investment required," plus attract the type of tenant they wanted, would be to develop a whole new environment. They would not just build a building but create an entire neighbourhood — units spread over six blocks, 25 acres, with a multitude of recreational and consumer-oriented services. It would be an integrated architectural approach to high-rise living, urban renewal at its finest and most progressive.

One of their brochures for the new project proclaimed:

Cité Concordia has been conceived to stimulate human interaction. Around a contemporary village common, residential . . . commercial . . . cultural . . . community activity centers, in a dynamic whole, will give richness to civic life. First and foremost, Cité Concordia will be for people.

The question of what people wanted and the problems in store for the residents already living in the community did not occur to them just then. It was also a time when many financial incentives for urban renewal were offered to cities and developers. Concordia Estates anticipated that because of the somewhat run-down condition of its chosen area, its scheme would be declared an urban renewal project and thereby qualify for various government subsidies. If it did qualify, any lots Concordia still had not acquired, such as the alleyways, could be expropriated by the City for Concordia Estates.

In the early sixties, the company submitted plans to the City of Montreal Planning Department for total demolition of the six-block area (later to become the site of the Milton-Park co-operative housing project) and erection of a 50-story high-density residential and office space. The concept was so comprehensive and overwhelming, with so many unprecedented implications, that the City turned down the first plan. But officials in the Planning Department and on the Executive Committee were impressed by the scope of these Montreal developers and basically supported their idea. They were also pleased to learn that the Ford Foundation in the United States had been approached for funding by Concordia Estates. This opened up the possibility of an important new investor on the Montreal scene and led to a symbiotic relationship between the City and Concordia Estates for a brief period.

A letter from one of the developers to City of Montreal Executive Committee Chairman Lucien Saulnier refers to Saulnier's apparent acknowledgement that one of the conditions Concordia Estates needed before proceeding was a guarantee by the City that the developers would be able to make a profit and that Saulnier would lend help in obtaining financing.⁴ Saulnier did meet with the Ford Foundation and the Americans were approached for funding on the basis that the plan was a slum clearance project. The presentation was successful and the Foundation invested \$5 million with the anticipation of further financial support.

Between 1958 and 1968, Concordia Estates, using a variety of fronts and names, had acquired 96% of the properties on the 25-acre site bounded by University Avenue, St. Lawrence Boulevard, Sherbrooke Street and Pine Avenue at a cost of approximately \$18 million. According to an article by Boyce Richardson in *The Montreal Star*, September 13, 1969, Concordia Estates financed this enormous purchase with mortgage money from the Great West Life Assurance Company of Winnipeg as well as the Ford Foundation investment. Thus the partners were landlords to virtually the entire neighbourhood. Using different company names to purchase the properties may have been an astute business practice to prevent prices from sky-rocketing, but when Concordia Estates was finally identified as the new owners, this same practice served to increase the resentment of residents towards the developers.

A well-known firm of Montreal architects was hired for Concordia Estates' second attempt at a comprehensive plan. Ray Affleck, of the firm Affleck, Desbarats, Dimakopoulos, Lebensold, Sise (also known as ARCOP, for Architects in Co-Partnership) had already been associated with Place Bonaventure. Co-operating with his client, Concordia Estates, over Place Bonaventure, Affleck had evolved a flexible approach which allowed specifics of the project to be worked out between architect and builder as the structure rose. A similar method of co-operation was anticipated for Cité Concordia, with the project being open to adaptation to meet new circumstances during the design stage and construction.

A general design was formulated having a more fluid and organic approach than the original one. Over a ten-year period a \$250 million complex would be erected in three phases. This was the overall game-plan. It would be a 'contained environment,' not just an ordinary office-building-apartment complex. The concept of La Cité was very much a product of the atmosphere which accompanied the construction of Place Ville-Marie and Place Bonaventure. The La Cité plan for covered walkways, shopping promenade, office tower, hotel and residential units was acclaimed by 'progressive' architects and planners for providing unified development on a large scale rather than the piecemeal development of high-rises which characterized some districts in Montreal.

Five thousand units were planned for a proposed population of

6,000. The rents would be higher than usual for similar housing, paying for the more deluxe apartment designs, convenience and recreational services at one's fingertips. Given these prospects, it was highly unlikely that the new tenant population would include any of the current residents of the neighbourhood.

Initial optimism regarding smooth-sailing for the proposed project didn't last long. With one exception, none of the developers, architects or city officials had taken into account the temper of the times, the type of neighbourhood they wanted to redevelop and the kinds of people who lived there. The exception was a new member of the City Planning Department.

Andy Melamed, a wiry, energetic man who came to Montreal from Philadelphia in the 1960s, joined the Montreal Planning Department in 1966. His first major assignment was the Concordia Estates project. As he pointed out in a 1969 interview with Manzer:

The city probably really wants to replace the existing buildings with new and more expensive development, partly for the extra taxes, but also because the free-wheeling and unconventional lifestyle in the area embarrasses the city administration.

Melamed says he was supposed "to run interference for the developer to make sure that his plans would be acceptable to the city administration." Officially, Melamed was one of two staff people responsible for evaluation of the Cité Concordia project. However, what he found after he had really studied the neighbourhood put him in a growing conflict of interest.

In August 1968 I evaluated the neighbourhood, not the project. It became clear that the Cité Concordia rents would be 50% or more, even double or triple the existing rents . . . Even if the project were a paradise, it could not serve the needs of the people in the neighbourhood . . . it is not for them.

At least 85% of the houses were in generally good condition and to Melamed it seemed socially irresponsible to destroy these homes when the city had a desperate need of low-rental housing; demolishing thousands of such units to make way for urban renewal was not the answer.

Melamed was not the only one who thought the neighbourhood was in acceptable condition. The University of Montreal had set up a Study Group on Education to research the possibilities for student housing and educational facilities in the Milton-Park area. As the members of the research group told Manzer when interviewed in 1969:

The Quartier Ste. Famille is not prototypical of a downtown area because of the university and the hospitals and the large number of residents. Also, a city usually has slums right around centre city and this area is not a slum.

Unlike Zeckendorf, who had erected his towering success on commercial property, Concordia Estates was taking over a residential area. It bothered Melamed that because of the mammoth vision of Concordia Estates, "people are going to get hurt — everybody who lived there before." Melamed had been involved in tenant-landlord confrontations in the U.S. and it seemed to him that a similar process was bound to occur in Canada, as more people began agitating for their rights and organizing around social issues. According to Melamed, the developers were indeed innovators in terms of what they wanted to do, i.e., rebuild part of the city by restructuring it, and had what Melamed calls, "the general mentality of the enlightened technocrat. They thought they were doing well but they were thinking in terms of how they would reshape the city for ever and ever." At the same time he concedes that they did have pangs of conscience about the neighbourhood's existing tenants.

The issue, however, was clear to Melamed. It involved the rights of the residents of a community and the right of survival of a living neighbourhood on the one hand, versus the rights of property ownership and the right to realize a profit regardless of the human or social costs.

Despite being a new city employee, or perhaps because he was new and from a different setting, he disapproved of the municipal government's attitude towards tenants and its cavalier treatment of local residents. Was the role of government to act as a profit-making business or to provide services? As Melamed mulled over his position, two courses of action became clear. One was that he should try to modify Concordia's plans and /or the City's attitude towards them; the

other was that he should alert people in the area about the potential destruction of their neighbourhood, perhaps offering to act as a sort of undercover agent for them. Consequently, Melamed became a 'mole' for those who opposed the developers, offering them information and technical assistance.

Notes

1. Christine Cousineau, *Housing Ownership and Community Control*, Thesis for Master of Architecture and Master of City Planning, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1980, p. 34.
2. Gérard Fortin and Boyce Richardson, *Life of the Party*, Montreal, 1984, p. 187.
3. Marilyn Manzer interview with Norman Nerenberg, 1969.
4. Copy of correspondence, personal files, A. Melamed.

Chapter 3

THE COMMUNITY REACTS

RENOVATION NOT DEMOLITION—STOP CONCORDIA!

Milton-Park Citizens' Committee leaflet

Timing can be all, in everything from love affairs to elections. For Concordia Estates, the right time to redevelop without opposition was about to pass. If the company had been able to proceed in 1962 as originally planned, they might indeed have been hailed as urban heroes. The early part of the decade was still a period of relative political stability and economic expansion. Society's 'underdogs' had yet to be heard from.

By the late sixties the examples set by the American civil rights movement and opposition to the Vietnam War had motivated a skeptical generation to question, then oppose, many political and social policies. For many young people involved in these confrontations their actions represented a 'rite of passage.' This period was a watershed, determining the future direction of their lives. It was a decade for getting wrapped up passionately, in tumultuous situations, new lifestyles, anything different from one's parents. This generation was going to change things! So far as aghast adults were concerned, the younger generation certainly presented new irritants and problems, ranging from dress to behaviour. Their music was new, even threatening. So were the substances consumed while listening to music . . . and whatever else they were doing.

Perhaps real change in social and political directions was not initially evident, but as Myrna Kostash states in her book, *Long Way From Home*:

. . . there are thousands of people in Canada who have not forgotten

how they grew up and what they learned then and who are continuing to refine and apply this learning to their everyday work and family lives, in their emotional, political and cultural lives.¹

That seems to have been the case in Milton-Park. In 1968, those seeking significant change in their neighbourhood were still novices. Evidence of what they had learned would not appear until a decade later.

Montreal's post-Expo glow was fading. Universities were in turmoil, as students challenged administrations and questioned the relevance of what was being taught. The Front de Libération du Québec, the FLQ, was on the rise. The 'French fact' had emerged in Quebec but most anglophones still didn't perceive it. Young Americans were arriving daily in resistance to U.S. policies in Vietnam and joining the growing counter-culture. No doubt with knowledge of the events in the United States, nerve endings were quivering with the anticipation, or threat, of social upheaval. During this period the emphasis was on grass-roots participation on every question — from the running of educational institutions such as McGill University to the administration of welfare and the policies of governments. 'People Power' became the new rallying cry.

It was a time for tenants to be recognized, too. Even politicians began to acknowledge that the 20% of the population who owned property in Montreal and who were the only citizens entitled to vote in civic elections had far too much power compared with 80% of the population who were tenants and could not vote.

In many of the great confrontations which occurred during the sixties there was always a handful of people who clearly perceived the dimensions of the theoretical battlefield and a great many more who knew only that they were involved in something exciting and possibly worthwhile, for themselves and others. It was that way in Milton-Park.

The Milton-Park neighbourhood was the perfect cauldron for mixing people and their ideas. McGill University bordered the area and students of social work and urban planning, who either lived in the neighbourhood or had friends there, were often involved in community projects. They were able to take the theories of a favourite professor from the classroom to the streets or put ideas from a newly-discovered book into practice.

Looking at the names of activists who were involved with Milton-Park over the years one finds individuals who were mainstream in their views and others who espoused various causes or philosophies, from feminism and ecology to Eastern religions. Some have become professionals, others have entered the political arena. One person was involved in the FLQ kidnapping of James Cross. The Milton-Park area had a unique population to draw upon for the confrontation that was about to develop between those who wanted to save the area for its long-time residents and those who wanted to leave their signature on the city's skyline.

Among the first people to hear about Concordia Estates's plans in the summer of 1968 was Peter Katadotis, an energetic, decisive community organizer. Katadotis was based at the community centre on St. Urbain Street, known then as the University Settlement, and was also acting as a field-work supervisor for McGill's School of Social Work. As a former colleague remembers, "He knew all the answers and had a solution for everything. It was like he had an aura about him." His first news of Concordia Estates came from a rather disturbing source, his boss, Dr. John Frei. Frei was head of the Urban Social Redevelopment Project of the Montreal Council of Social Agencies, a pilot program using community organization techniques to raise social awareness and improve health levels of the Milton-Park district. Not only was Frei also teaching at McGill but he had just been hired by Concordia Estates as a consultant. Frei genuinely believed Concordia Estates' redevelopment plan was going to be a good thing for the community, so he saw nothing incongruous in his roles. But Katadotis certainly did. "I just told him that I thought it was a conflict of interest for him to be a consultant on this thing. He didn't agree with me . . . After this conversation, I knew that I would basically not get his approval for what had to be done." What had to be done, Katadotis decided, was to organize the citizens living in the area.

The person Katadotis turned to was Bryan Knight, a stocky man with an owlish look, acid tongue and English accent. Knight, a second year social work student was doing his field work placement as a community organizer with the Urban Social Redevelopment Project (USRP) and lived in the district as well. He had heard rumours that the area was going to be demolished, based on information passed indirectly from Andy Melamed to Lucia Kowaluk, another social worker at the

University Settlement who was also originally from the United States. "At the time," says Knight, "no one thought it was really going to come about so no one was yet doing anything about it." In general, most Milton-Park residents did not know what Concordia Estates was planning, even though the company was now their landlord.

According to Knight, Dr. Frei "had nothing to say about the ethics of guarding his knowledge that the area faced destruction. His way of operating was to fix everything up at the top levels." Knight and a few other students were critical of Frei's dual role. Frei, on the other hand, pointed out he was working with Concordia Estates on the idea of having student residences included in their plans, an issue of some importance to the crowded McGill campus.

Katadotis urged Knight to help organize some type of citizen protest, outside of his regular community organizing duties for USRP. It was a challenge to established authority very much in keeping with the mood of the times and a way of testing out if sheer numbers of people, properly organized, could win enough power to affect decisions concerning them directly.

For Katadotis, establishing a protest group in Milton-Park would add to the network of citizens' groups in the city that he was instrumental in establishing. By the end of 1970 there were over a dozen groups in Montreal and environs, including the Pointe St. Charles Equal Rights Movement, the Verdun Anti-Poverty Association and the Park Extension Anti-Poverty League. This self-help movement was concerned with a number of issues including the high cost of prescription drugs, arbitrary welfare policies and housing problems. There was an additional advantage in trying to organize in Milton-Park, since a portion of the population consisted of young, middle-class students who were 'poor' just temporarily. They weren't used to being pushed around, and, given their expectations, there was no way they had to take it. For those particular students truly interested in social change and frustrated by theoretical, too-traditional classes, working in Milton-Park gave them a real testing-ground and Peter Katadotis was just the guru they were looking for. The process was supposed to be the start of a community betterment process in which, as Katadotis stressed, "we did not see ourselves as spokesmen but as organizers." But at McGill's School of Social Work, for which Katadotis was a supervisor of field-work placements, and where Knight was still a

sudent, there was some consternation. It was, charged one professor, a question of using inappropriate and unprofessional methods. This was not professional social work, she fumed, but a kind of social agitation, pitting the poor against their masters, one class against the other!

David Woodsworth, the school's director, thought otherwise, supporting Katadotis. So did those caught up in the enthusiasm of organizing. As Katadotis says, his approach was "a lot more fun than the other stuff" the students did. (Later, with the Company of Young Canadians, he would help fund and staff the Milton-Park Citizens' Committee, [MPCC] leading to even more controversy.)

We decided to leaflet the area and to have a meeting at the Notre-Dame-de-la-Salette church, and I remember my boss Dr. Frei heard about it and was absolutely furious . . . and told me that I should not do this anymore. But it was too late, the group had been formed. I said . . . like it or not we would continue to staff it, or at least if somebody else didn't, I would. He could do whatever he wanted, i.e., bar us — which he wouldn't dare do . . . Two days later he called me into his office and offered me a co-consulting position with Concordia Estates.

Katadotis did meet separately with Nerenberg, then Issenman, later on. The former activists tried to convince him that their housing policies were progressive and would actually benefit the residents. But it was no use. They had lost the initial skirmish. It was a time for rallying people around issues and in Milton-Park the developers' role, and their plans, were the issues.

David Williams, an English professor at McGill who had arrived recently from the United States, received a leaflet and decided to attend the meeting.

I went to the meeting, which was a very curious meeting . . . 'animated' — as they used to say in those days — by two fellows, Bryan Knight and someone else from the Company of Young Canadians . . . There was quite a crowd there. I knew nothing: I'd never heard of Concordia Estates. It was a relatively short meeting, over in an hour. They said "If you want to pursue it, what you really ought to do is form a group of as many people who are willing to work on it. The first thing to do is to meet

with Concordia Estates. Are there any people here who would be willing to make that initial investigation?" Eleven hands went up and then I said, well, why not, and I put mine up. We went to the front of the room and the organizers simply left. And I didn't know any of the other people there with me . . . We were really sort of looking around, saying "Good God, how do we get in touch with these fellows again . . ."

Bryan Knight denies this 'sink or swim' account but perhaps the real point was that Williams felt catapulted into a tumultuous situation — one that was to totally occupy his free time for the next five or six years as he became president of the citizens' committee that was formed in Milton-Park, and also, like Andy Melamed, active on the board of the University Settlement. According to Knight, that first meeting was intended to promote the idea that the committee should be not only anti-Concordia Estates but pro 'the area.' In other words, people were encouraged to unite, not just to fight their landlord and potential evictor, but to plan and develop a revitalized community. As it turned out, however, the mood of the meeting was mainly 'Stop Concordia Estates.'

Following the first general assembly of the MPCC a core of activists emerged including Martha Borgmann, Nicole Durand, Jeanne L'Espérance, Ken Maxwell, Sue and Ron Alward and David Williams. They kept things running and initiated various sub-groups. As well as the general concern for housing — theirs or that of others — and the opportunity to put theory into practice, some people were drawn to the group for a variety of other reasons: the drama, fellowship, intrigue, good times. It was a place to belong in a turbulent time. It was also a time for getting involved, for painting things black or white, for naming heroes and villains, all of which the new group proceeded to do.

Some of the people who shared their recollections of those times and who related the workings of the citizens' committee were involved for many years with the committee or served in a key capacity. For others the Milton-Park affair was just a brief interlude in their lives.

Social work graduate and community organizer Sue Alward found the activities of the MPCC to be worthy of commitment. "I had been concerned about the fact that I was an organizer, but it was never really 'my problem.' " Now Alward felt that a project had come her way that affected her strongly.

Jeanne L'Espérance, now an art historian, remembers 1968-69 as a key period during which she passed through several stages, from intense activist to awakening feminist to university graduate with a case of personal burn-out. Hers was the dilemma of a young, well-educated, middle-class professional who took on what was essentially a working-class cause, and got caught between her idealism and the reality.

David Williams was perhaps the most atypical activist. At the time of the Milton-Park affair he was not only on the staff of McGill University (later to become the head of the English department) but he also bought a home on Ste. Famille where he was still living in 1981. He became virtually the only active home-owner on the committee. Students Marilyn Manzer and Murray Hirsh also were involved in Milton-Park along with many other active participants. It is from these people that the highlights of the activities of the citizens' group were drawn.

One of the first things the MPCC did to gauge public support, or possibly to stimulate it, was form a sub-committee made up of a teacher (Williams), a reporter, a shopkeeper, two students and an unemployed worker to survey the neighbourhood. They wanted to know if there was a mandate for the group to oppose Concordia Estates and to approach the developers on behalf of the residents. They found that support for the new group was overwhelming.

What was startling about the Milton-Park survey was not the outcome but the fact that people were even asked how they felt. No doubt similar results would have been obtained from other areas in the city facing demolition, but there were no eager crews of social work, sociology and urban planning student-residents to take the community pulse. Not surprisingly, the pulse-takers found that residents wished to remain where they were and that they favoured preservation and rehabilitation of present housing rather than demolition and replacement by high-rises. Of the people interviewed in 1968, 78% were Concordia Estates' tenants, 19% tenants of other landlords and 3% homeowners themselves. It should be noted that another survey¹ found that landlords generally welcomed Concordia Estates' move, not only because, presumably, they could sell for a substantial price, but because they saw the project as a way of stabilizing and generally rehabilitating the area.

Armed with this information and the figure of 92% of the 800

queried in support of the citizens' committee, Milton-Park spokespeople had a second, larger general meeting of 150 people to receive a mandate to meet with Concordia Estates' representatives. Out of that meeting the general demands of residents were articulated. They wanted Concordia Estates, their landlord, to make urgent and necessary repairs to their homes without delay; they wanted to see the architectural plans for the proposed project, and they wanted some participation by the community in the planning of the project. Reasonable enough requests for the 1980s, perhaps, but wildly radical then.

It was the first time in Montreal that local citizens prepared to oppose a private developer. Initially, some people thought they could work with the developers to get what the community wanted and were sincerely prepared to discuss the possibilities with Concordia Estates. Their goal, primarily, was to persuade Concordia Estates to repair and renovate their homes instead of tearing them down.

Concordia Estates, on the other hand, had paid \$18 million for the properties and needed to make money fast to meet the interest payments. They were anxious to start redevelopment as soon as possible but needed help in securing the massive financing necessary. When they tried, initially, to curry favour with citizens by involving them in some form of participation, their goal was to get community support, even pressure on the government, when applying for government grants and subsidies. If their project was seen as 'socially desirable,' it would also help smooth the way for other concessions they were seeking. With such divergent aims, the two groups clashed almost immediately.

On October 9, 1968, Concordia Estates met with several representatives of the MPCC, including David Williams, Nicole Durand and Jeanne L'Espérance. In some respects, their differences were as much of style as content. As L'Espérance recalls, one of the partners was like a "caricature of the rich capitalist. He was so contemptuous of the female committee members in particular that we were rigid with rage. He seemed to sum up the typical patriarchal arrogance of men," and although others on the developers' team were more conciliatory and made efforts to convince the committee that public housing would be provided for those residents who needed it, the net effect was that nobody on the committee believed them.

As for what the current plans looked like, Concordia Estates claimed

they really had no definite ones yet. Although the committee found this statement totally unbelievable, it was, in fact, in keeping with the ever-changing organic process that both Affleck and Concordia Estates favoured.

Manzer and a colleague had the opportunity to spend part of a summer in the architect's project office while doing research.

After two months we began to realize that the models and drawings then in existence would never be built. They were constantly changing . . . unfortunately the citizens of the Milton-Park area do not understand this method of architectural design. They think that if ARCOP (Affleck's firm) had been working for such a long time, there must be concrete plans in existence. Actually, what there really is, are concepts and criteria which these plans, when completed, are supposed to fill.

The committee was indignant that Concordia Estates would not share even basic concepts with them. For its part, Concordia Estates refused to be coerced into revealing anything to what they probably regarded as a group of antagonistic upstarts. When the sub-committee met to evaluate their first meeting with the developers, they began to realize how unlikely any sort of co-operation or consensus with Concordia Estates was. They also concluded gloomily, in their minutes, that Concordia Estates was "pretty much in control." Consequently, their working philosophy took shape. They decided there was a "moral, if not legal, right of people to direct power in the decisions which affected their personal lives and their communities."

Meanwhile, a meeting of a different sort seemed to offer the committee the forum they needed to gain public support for their cause. Earlier in 1968, a Task Force on Housing and Urban Development had been set up by the federal government to deal with growing urban problems facing the country. It was the first wide-ranging review of federal policies in the field since 1944. The chairman was Transport Minister Paul Hellyer, who was also responsible for federal housing policies. The Task Force — commonly known as the Hellyer Commission — received nearly 500 briefs and held hearings in 27 different communities.

When the Commission came to Montreal, it seemed to the fledgling citizens' committee like the ideal place to go public with their concerns. Furthermore, in the new Trudeau era of Canadian government, being

hailed as a 'participatory democracy,' the committee members looked forward to participating. Chiefly through the efforts of social worker Nicole Durand, a brief was prepared for presentation on October 9, 1968. A fairly low-key document, it simply pointed out that concerned citizens had formed a committee to stave off the proposed destruction of their neighbourhood. The hearing proved to be a rude eye-opener for those, including David Williams, who attended. As he complained in a letter published in *The Montreal Star*, October 29, 1968:

The committee was preceded by three young architects or engineers whose tales of a project to make future housing out of aluminium bubbles elicited enthusiastic prodding from the Commission. Expecting at least equal sympathy for our moral, immediate and tangible problem, the committee presented its brief.

The only response came from a Commission member, an Ottawa real estate developer, who gave what amounted to a lecture on capitalism. Because all five of the committee representatives were under thirty, he mused that time and a growing acquisition of wealth and property would bring us the consolation we now sought. When it was pointed out that one of us was already a landlord, the Commissioner wished me a high profit on my property and the Milton-Park brief was dismissed. We had begun our process of maturing through disillusionment.

The neighbourhood dynamics began to accelerate. By now the community group had a formal name, the Milton-Park Citizens' Committee, and meetings were held sporadically with Concordia Estates. One of the committee members was a young woman whose father was with the Ford Foundation. She wrote home saying she was involved in "an urban kind of thing, connected with Concordia Estates." Her proud father replied that he knew all about it and sent her photocopies of the latest plans Concordia Estates had sent to the foundation in the pursuit of funding. The MPCC could scarcely conceal its glee at this unexpected windfall.

At a meeting between the MPCC sub-committee and the developers, March 24, 1969, Concordia Estates again tried to enlist community support, which the committee perceived as a way of using the residents to convince the Ford Foundation that the area was behind the proposed

'urban renewal.' Once more Williams and the others asked to see plans of the project and once more they were assured there weren't any. With their trap carefully laid, the MPCC sub-committee triumphantly produced its copy of the latest plans. Recalls Williams, "It was the first time in my life that I was walked-out-on in somebody else's office. They were just furious. They turned all colours and stamped out of their own board room, leaving us sitting there. One of them finally came back and showed us out but we never met with them again formally." Although there was talk of another meeting with Concordia Estates, the MPCC decided to postpone what would inevitably be another discouraging confrontation. No doubt Concordia Estates would have been reluctant to meet with them again anyway. Further contact between the opposing sides was largely informal.

If it seemed that Concordia Estates was just going through the motions of pretending to consult the citizens' group, perhaps the MPCC was also going through a charade of its own. As their minutes from March 20, 1969, note, "On Monday we should gather information so as to decide whether to participate. Concordia Estates will not give plans to those that they feel to be hostile so we must seem co-operative." In the eyes of the sub-committee, and the host of eager activists and bewildered residents to whom they reported, the developers were clever, scheming people, which, in the climate of the times, was just what they should have been. There was a stereotype demanded of the developers and, one way or another, they filled it, even if it was a picture partially created by what was happening in the sixties.

Probably a few of the more inexperienced and idealistic committee members thought that if they could not work with Concordia Estates, they could at least stop them. Just as many more understood this was a dream, not a realistic goal. The more knowledgeable members urged the novices on anyway, perhaps expecting that the insight gained from the experience, and the frustration born of failure, would serve to radicalize people for future political efforts.

There was an additional factor which helped to mobilize people. In many ways, it was Concordia Estates' misfortune to be developing their grandiose ideas in the wrong place at the wrong time. By presenting plans for a massive project, Concordia Estates focused fear and resentment in one spot and thereby made the subject of takeovers a prominent public issue. If Concordia Estates had been a number of smaller

companies building individual high-rises, there probably would not have been much public interest. In fact, about 40 high-rises had already been built in adjacent areas with no particular public outcry. In a sense, Concordia Estates became a target simply because it was so easy to take aim at it.

When the MPCC realized Concordia Estates was not going to alter its project, that it was not intending to let them have a say in neighbourhood development, nor construct housing that anyone currently in the community could afford, committee members became more militant. Their weapons were peer pressure and the call for social justice. Their tactics were community organization, noisy demonstrations, and other activities which would attract publicity.

Notes

1. Myrna Kostash, *Long Way From Home*, James Lorimer and Company, Toronto, 1980, foreword.
2. Marilyn Manzer Roberts, *The Ownership of Old Rental Housing in an Appreciating Central Montreal Neighbourhood*, Sociology Department, McGill University, 1972.

Chapter 4

POLITICS AND PUBLICITY

CITIZENS' PROTEST MARCH ON CITY HALL CONCORDIA RESIDENTS WANT TO BE CONSULTED

— A headline in *The Montreal Star*, May 24, 1969

One of the ways in which the MPCC tried to establish its legitimacy was by attempting to attend meetings between the City Planning Department and Concordia Estates. The Planning Department agreed—but not Concordia Estates. Therefore, a series of basically benevolent but ultimately impossible meetings took place between the MPCC and city planning officials. In the eyes of the citizens, nothing happened in Montreal just because it made good planning sense or increased the stock of low-cost housing. It happened only if Mayor Drapeau wished it to happen. So nothing concrete came from these sessions except a strong reminder of where power really lay.

The atmosphere was tense whenever committee members were involved with any officials other than Andy Melamed. As well as supplying the committee with information, Melamed was also trying to educate them regarding their role and strategy at a time when both were still nebulous.

I kept it very cool. I played it on my terms. The committee asked me to show them the developer's plans. I said no because, as I put it, "I don't want you to decide that you can negotiate the future of other people in the neighbourhood by saying this is O.K. or this isn't. You either oppose the project on principle without knowing what the plans are or forget it."

Melamed felt that the committee had to stand up to the developer,

and not just go along with any minor changes that were proposed. Concordia Estates for example had proposed a total demolition of the neighbourhood to build something else, as a first plan. And the citizens' committee didn't really have access to or input with any of the developer's four or five subsequent plans.

At times, Melamed, in his role of friendly undercover contact, tipped off the citizens' committee whenever meetings were arranged between Concordia Estates and the City Planning Department. "I would tell them when meetings would be held, in case they ever decided to bust in and sit in on one." Once, when a particularly crucial meeting was scheduled the committee decided to do just that. Four representatives were sent to crash the meeting. Not surprisingly, the Concordia Estates people stalked out.

Jeanne L'Espérance recalls another meeting with city officials in a long, narrow room with a tapestry hanging at one end. After they had talked for a while, Lucien Saulnier, Chairman of the City's Executive Committee, appeared from behind the tapestry-covered wall. MPCC members wondered afterwards if Saulnier had been waiting to see if they were "communists or dangerous" before deciding to come out and talk. As a result of this meeting and other contacts with the city, the committee proved to itself that the civic administration would not take them seriously or negotiate the redevelopment of Milton-Park. This left them free to pursue other tactics.

For their part, city officials found the committee naive and difficult to deal with, even while sharing some of its concerns. Mr. McLemore from the City Housing Department was appointed to be an intermediary between the committee and Concordia Estates. But he found himself powerless, trying to fulfill a role that neither side really wanted. As he noted gloomily, "I don't see how you can bring the citizens and the company together and I don't see how the project can be stopped." He would have been even gloomier if he had realized his intended role was actually being filled by 'undercover man' Melamed.

Aimé Desautels, Director of the City Planning Department, felt that no matter what the outcome of this particular confrontation, "... a new pattern is being set and the time is gone when anyone can bulldoze with the assurance that he can complete his project. There will have to be time to take care of such things as relocation. It is unlikely that any

future developer will operate in an area that doesn't have a citizens' committee and developers will have to be more cautious with their projects in the future.''' Ironically, his words would pertain most to this very neighbourhood a dozen years later, though the context would be quite different.

But whatever the view of others, the citizens' committee was unwilling at first to concede that Concordia Estates could not be stopped. Thanks largely to the efforts of Melamed and Desautels, the developers did suffer one major setback. When the Planning Department sent its report on the proposed project to the city administration, the planners asked in effect, "Why are you running interference for private developers, evicting the poor and being confronted with the problem of rehousing them, while the housing isn't in such bad condition and the neighbourhood has a sense of coherence and spirit?" On the basis of this report the administration decided not to support Concordia Estates' application as an urban renewal project nor expropriate the remaining privately-held land or the alleyways.

Once this stand was taken, the developers were obliged to consult the city on the appropriateness of their project design. Since there was no zoning in the area at the time, virtually everything, such as the height of buildings, was open to negotiation and, presumably, pressure.

While the planners and technical people at City Hall held mainly neutral-to-sympathetic views of the MPCC, the committee's relations with top-level administration continued to deteriorate, much as they had with Concordia Estates.

In the spring of 1969, the MPCC decided on a forceful new tactic. On Friday, May 23, they marched to City Hall bearing a petition with 800 signatures, asking council not to approve any plans that were not acceptable to the citizens. Naturally, that tactic captured media attention. The committee began holding press conferences explaining what the social effects of the project would be, what the citizens of the area were like, why the area should be preserved, and made determined efforts to garner public support.

As a result of the citizens' protest march on City Hall, *Montreal Star* reporter Sheila Arnopoulos, who had recently been given the 'welfare beat,' was assigned to do a story on the Concordia Estates project. Since she had recently done a widely-praised series on the problems of im-

migrants from their point of view, she decided to approach this story in similar fashion by focusing on the citizens. The report, appearing in the first edition May 26, 1969, caused considerable consternation at *The Montreal Star*.

According to Arnopoulos, the editor-in-chief, Frank Walker, was very upset and there was talk of pulling the story from the second edition. A bright young reporter and one of the first women at the paper to cover general news, rather than 'women's news', Arnopoulos could not understand at first what the problem was. She was, however, aware of angry meetings concerning the story, and continuing repercussions. "I'm very clear in my mind there was pressure being exerted," Arnopoulos recounts. Nevertheless, the story remained in later editions, spreading strategic information and raising such questions as whether developers should be able to do whatever they wanted with land.

Arnopoulos' article pointed out that the City was being schizophrenic in its attitude towards redevelopment and the need for low-cost housing. On the one hand both Lucien Saulnier and Aimé Desautels said the city needed all its low-rent housing areas. And it was agreed by all, including Concordia Estates' own architect, Ray Affleck, that the Milton-Park area was architecturally sound and for aesthetic and historical reasons, worth keeping. Yet, in the past 10 years public and private redevelopment projects had done away with 18,000 low-cost housing units. They had been replaced with housing that was largely too costly for the original residents.

The article also indicated that the investment arm of the Ford Foundation had so far put \$5 million into the project, after receiving assurances that it was 'socially desirable.' In effect, wrote Arnopoulos, "the Ford Foundation is 'investing' in real estate to knock down low-rent areas and then turning around to give grants to build low-rent buildings somewhere else" from its social programs funding.

Both the University of Montreal, which had received a grant from the Ford Foundation to do research on student housing in connection with Concordia Estates, and Dr. John Frei, Concordia Estates' consultant, received critical mention. It was also pointed out that the company had been trying to placate citizens by offering token participation and a variety of public relations gestures in the guise of social services.

On the other hand, the citizens' case was given a most sympathetic and logical presentation. While conceding "the only rights the citizens

have are human rights," the article presented the committee's vision of establishing a non-profit corporation to apply for funds from the Quebec Housing Corporation "to buy the property and renovate the houses. Rent subsidies through city programs could keep the rents reasonable for those who might otherwise have to move." It was almost a blueprint for the plan that would succeed some dozen years later. But for now the vision would go nowhere.

Arnopoulos was never again assigned to cover the evolving MPCC-Concordia Estates story. Instead, *The Montreal Star* carried several stories that concentrated on the developers and the financial impact of the project in terms somewhat more flattering to Concordia Estates. It was too much for one particular reporter to take. Although he was required to write one of the stories he asked that his by-line be removed.

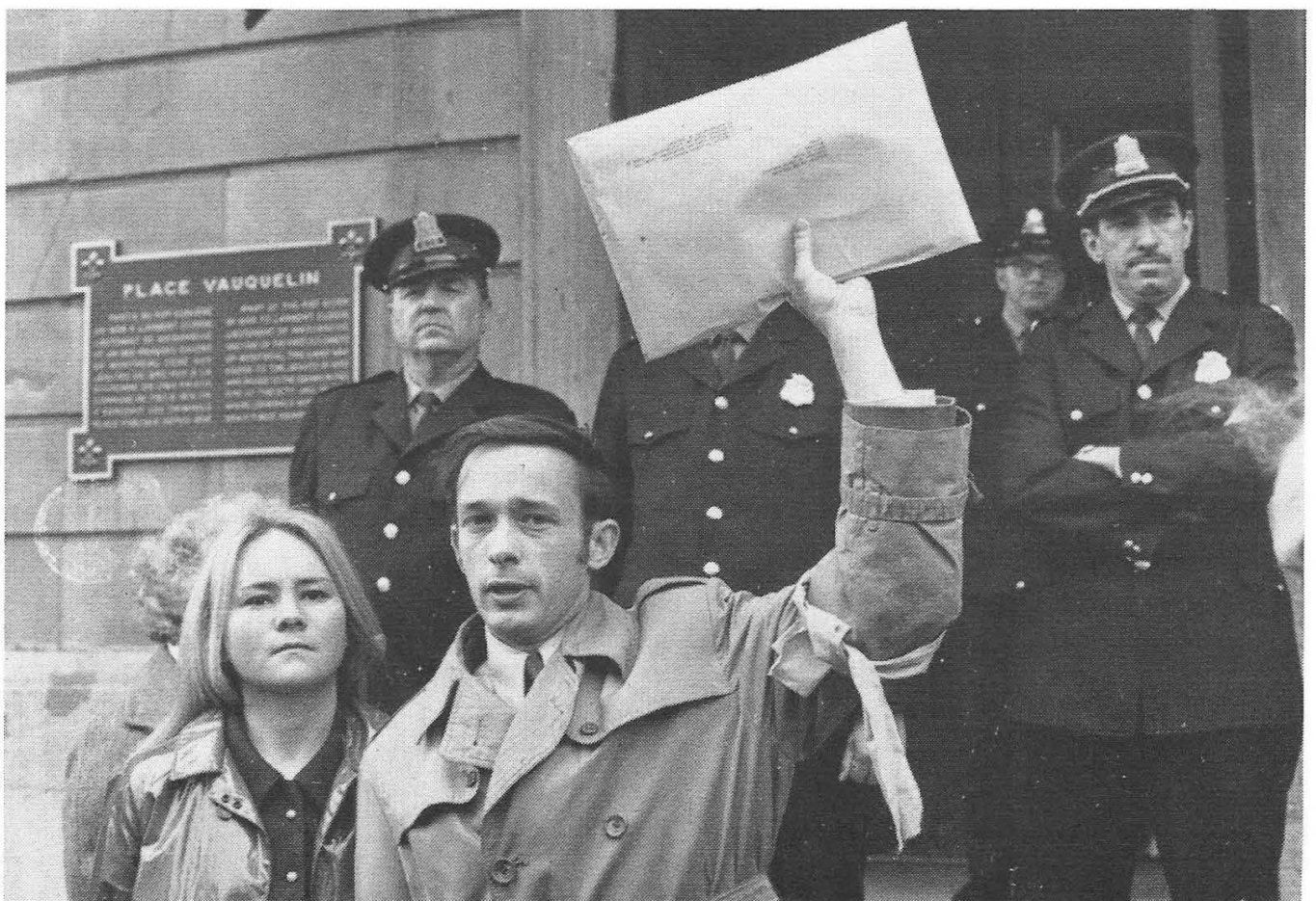
While the noisy Friday night march had garnered considerable publicity for the MPCC, Lucien Saulnier was able to deflect it with ease. Interviewed on Sunday, two days later, on radio station CJAD's Civic Report program, Mr. Saulnier pointed out that the Concordia Estates project was a private project and Montreal had no legal power to impede the development. Regarding the MPCC, whose motives he questioned, Saulnier related how the group 'demanded' a meeting with him on less than two days' notice. Pointing out that his agenda did not permit such flexibility, he concluded smoothly that he hoped they would request another rendezvous at some mutually convenient time.

The committee hastened to present its side in one of its, by now, numerous press releases.

... M. Saulnier claimed he was 'ordered' by the committee to meet with them on Friday, May 23rd. Actually their letter asked him politely if the citizens could meet with him on that day. M. Saulnier also claimed that the letter arrived only two days before the date suggested for meeting. In fact, it was sent Registered Mail on May 13th, and M. Saulnier's own reply to it is dated May 16th. He therefore obviously had the 'seven or eight days notice' he is reported as requiring for a meeting. He also claimed that the citizens refused the invitation to meet with the head of the City's Housing Department because 'they preferred a demonstration to an interview.' Actually the citizens accepted the invitation and their representatives were prepared to meet with the Housing Department on Friday afternoon, but the meeting was cancelled by the head of the Department on Thursday ...



MPCC march on City Hall, May 24, 1969 (photo by George Bird/Montreal Star/Public Archives of Canada/PA-153958).



The MPCC marchers at City Hall, May 24, 1969. Nicole Durand with David Williams. The envelope contains petitions and photos of area to be handed to the Chairman of the Executive Committee (photo by George Bird/Montreal Star/Public Archives of Canada/PA-153960).

The MPCC challenged Saulnier's claim that Concordia Estates had not asked the city for any concessions. They revealed that Concordia Estates needed city permission to close streets, to create an overpass at the Park-Pine interchange, to re-route traffic circulation within the area and to buy the lanes, which were city property.

The MPCC kept emphasizing the views held by some involved with the project that the area was structurally and socially sound and worth keeping intact for aesthetic and historic reasons.

It is difficult therefore to understand on what grounds M. Saulnier claims the area is ripe for urban renewal. The only possible reason could be that destruction of the present low-cost housing in the area and its replacement by high-rise, high-income buildings would increase the city's tax revenue. Finally, M. Saulnier claims that all residents who wish to stay will be relocated in a housing bank built up by Concordia Estates. As 80% of the buildings are eventually to be destroyed the relocation will only be for a two or three year period and there is certainly no provision in Concordia Estates' plans for permanent rehousing of the present population . . .

After such an exchange, the committee could forget about Saulnier's public statement that they should request another rendezvous at a 'mutually convenient time.' Just for the record, though, Nicole Durand did try.

. . . At the beginning of July I sent a letter to M. Saulnier asking for a meeting with him on the 16th, 17th, or 18th of July . . . On July 8, I telephoned M. Saulnier's secretary to find out his response. She said that she would find out, but when I told her that we would not be able to meet him until the next week, as we had stated in our letter, she said that she did not want to bother him. She told me to call again the next week . . . On July 15, I phoned again . . . She said that I had cancelled the meeting the week before and that M. Saulnier would not see us, but would call residents from the area himself . . . ¹

The MPCC were being brushed aside like pesky gnats. It appeared they were having little impact. But in the midst of these events there was a significant development on the human level which led to a crack

in Concordia Estates' façade.

In their few contacts with Concordia Estates, there had been one hopeful sign for the committee. The architect, Ray Affleck, had seemed willing to share information and plans with them. Affleck was, in fact, relatively sympathetic to the MPCC on a person-to-person basis, even if their views did not coincide. A tall, lean man with thick red hair and beard, he could often be seen striding to work downtown from his Westmount home and was known on occasion to wear work-boots with a tuxedo at formal occasions. But even such a seemingly independent individualist was not immune to criticism.

When the project began, Affleck already had a comfortable relationship with the developers for whom he had done Montreal's imposing Place Bonaventure hotel and shopping concourse. But now he found himself facing delicate pressures and conflicts between his home life and the board room. Betty Ann Affleck, his wife, happened to be a social work student at McGill. She was gaining social work experience first-hand in Pointe St. Charles where she dealt with tenants living in sub-standard housing, and some who had been displaced by rising rents. One of her McGill colleagues was Sue White Alward. Alward and other social work friends underlined the discrepancy between what was happening to people and buildings in Montreal. At the same time, another of Betty Ann Affleck's friends was the social worker wife of developer Arnold Issenman. For Ray Affleck, it became increasingly difficult to leave the Concordia Estates project on the drafting table at the end of a day's work.

For about a year and a half, Affleck struggled on in his difficult role, feeling that he could accomplish more by staying than by leaving. As his wife summed up his predicament, "He was attempting to be the peanut butter between two slices that wouldn't stick." For a time he was the one who was instrumental in setting up meetings between his clients and the committee, some more formal than others. These factors, plus Affleck's own temperament, combined to place him more in the role of a mediator between the citizens' committee and the developers. As David Williams recalls, "There appeared to be a conflict of interest between Concordia Estates and the architects, the latter seeming more willing to share information and plans" — but discreetly. Bryan Knight pointed out that Affleck, "told us quite a few things but always drew the line at telling us anything useful because of his con-

flict of interest and high principles.”

On the same day, and on the same page as the Arnopoulos article, *The Montreal Star* reported that Jane Jacobs, the internationally-known writer on cities (and author of *Death and Life of Great American Cities*), had called plans to change the Milton-Park area “outrageous.”

Jacobs had also, according to the story, commented that techniques for “urban renewal” are age old. “First developers find the city’s most exciting and talented architect and proceed to corrupt him.” For Ray Affleck, whom Arnopoulos had described as having a ‘crise de conscience’, it was just about the final blow.

Finally the friction became too much. In mid-summer of 1969 Affleck resigned from the project, much to the consternation of his partners. The decision was to cost him heavily in his professional life.

At the time it was tough on me. I like doing my art. I like doing good, complex projects. So that in that sense, it was quite unfortunate for me finally when I had to resign. Everybody in my profession thought that I was absolutely insane . . . including my own firm. Our partnership broke up . . . I suppose some people in the citizens’ group thought they were manipulating me. I really resigned out of respect for my client.

He realized he was in a conflict of interest, no longer believing in the project as Concordia Estates saw it. One major regret was he “would have loved to have been a hero in bringing it all together.”

Affleck feels now he learned a great deal about professional responsibility from the episode although at the time he wasn’t aware of it. “I can’t claim that I became a very early critic of the thing. I tended to learn more from the critics outside of the profession. The whole thing was a learning process, as it was for many people.”

According to Affleck, it was a confrontation, not just between business and socialists, but about a new consciousness, new ways of thinking about cities, new kinds of democracy and people power. The architect got caught right in the middle and had to begin thinking about his responsibilities as a human being, a citizen, and as a professional. Even though Affleck later advised the citizens’ group from time to time, he makes it clear that “I’m basically concerned about the art of architecture as an art form. It’s important to me and to society. I get very annoyed when that aspect of architecture is treated as less impor-

tant than somebody's political ideology." His resignation, therefore, was not to be counted necessarily as a victory for the MPCC.

Andy Melamed saw Affleck as a prime example of someone caught between social and professional demands.

He's obviously a humanist, he's also an architect and he's done some pretty big projects. Place Ville-Marie, Confederation Centre, McGill University construction, Expo theme pavilions, lots of major projects in an architectural firm which was a co-op — enlightened, with a conscience.

According to Melamed, Affleck worried that if he dropped the project, someone else would take over who would not show as much concern or sensitivity as he did. The talents of Ray Affleck were not, in fact, entirely lost to the neighbourhood. After his resignation in the summer of 1969, he became an informal consultant together with the Design Workshop at the McGill School of Architecture, to the citizens, on their own plans for the alleyways.

The members of the MPCC were as surprised as everyone else when Affleck resigned. Their goal, after all, was to have Concordia Estates, not the architect, quit. Nevertheless, they interpreted the resignation as a victory for their side. Perhaps it was a success on another level. Jeanne L'Espérance describes it best:

When Ray resigned, this one man, it was a tiny victory in the sense that one little chink appeared in the façade of seemingly impregnable male power. I know that probably looks very stupid now but in terms of 1969, it was significant.

(Ten years later the role of women would be more significant as two women, one an architect, the other a Milton-Park resident, would spearhead the drive to retain Milton-Park for its residents.)

There was one other temporary stumbling block encountered by Concordia Estates; the question of who actually owned the lanes running behind the streets in the project area. Supposedly the City did, according to the City Planning Department. A search through documents however, failed to turn up the necessary deeds and the lanes reverted to the remaining individual property-owners.

This upset Concordia Estates considerably because in the past year

they had been buying up an enormous amount of property and were in a hurry to get their expensive project started on time. Tenants had to be advised by January 31, 1970 to vacate, but without the all-important lanes the project would be uneconomical, and certainly less attractive, to implement. As Concordia Estates president Nerenberg warned, "... with the financial climate the way it is, who knows whether we wouldn't have to give up if there were delays."

The solution was a private member's bill passed unanimously by Premier Jean-Jacques Bertrand's Union Nationale government in December 1969. The City of Montreal's own lawyer, Michel Coté, helped prepare the bill and also represented the City's interests at the hearing. *The Montreal Star* noted the contradictions in the case when it reported, "The National Assembly's private bills committee upheld their request for possession" but "the same committee had earlier told the parish of Ste. Adèle to take a similar case to a court of law."

The MPCC was annoyed with the whole lanes issue for another reason as well. In the dossier Concordia Estates had prepared for the Ford Foundation, the lanes had been described, in words and photographs, as unpaved, muddy tracks where the poverty-stricken children of the neighbourhood had to play, often in danger of being hit by oil-delivery trucks. While there was an unpaved section in one of the lanes, on the whole they were like pleasant little tree-shaded back streets and greatly treasured by residents. The MPCC sent a telegram requesting a hearing before the private bills committee. Chairman Remi Paul shrugged them off "because they are only tenants, not property owners."

Concordia Estates was 'let off the hook', as the story headlined, and ownership of the four vital lanes passed to them. Ironically, this act that was so opposed by residents in 1969 became a distinct asset some ten years later when the parcel of land and the buildings remaining after the erection of the first phase of Concordia Estates' project were sold, intact, to a group representing the Milton-Park community.

As time passed, and Concordia Estates experienced financial difficulties, they offered to sell undemolished homes back to the city, which promptly rejected the idea. Not only did the city not wish to be perceived as the slum landlord of a seriously deteriorating district but the administration's clear preference was to disperse the members of this troublesome neighbourhood.

During the latter part of 1969, the political climate in Montreal, throughout Quebec, and for that matter across the country, was worrying officials everywhere as they saw suspicious networks of radicals forming around them. This was certainly evident from a 1969 interview with Lucien Saulnier by Marilyn Manzer.

What is your attitude toward the Milton-Park Citizens Committee?

... I am not satisfied that they represent the citizens of the area. They will not be received, but I will invite residents, dozens of them. I have received a petition, so I have an obligation. But I have no obligation to see professional agitators.

What is your attitude toward low-income people living in centre city?

The city of Montreal cannot afford to subsidize people who would like to live on the most expensive land. No city legislates as to where people live.

What is your opinion of the idea of citizen participation in planning for urban renewal?

Citizen participation is a good thing provided it is spontaneous, and not the expression of so-called 'animateurs'.

Are you referring to the CYC — the Company of Young Canadians — volunteers?

Yes. I do not believe that one government has a right to subsidize agitators who are active in fields which fall under the jurisdiction of other governments. It is equivalent to the federal government subsidizing a political party that is fighting two other levels of government with public money. This is a scandal.

As Saulnier had indicated, support from the Company of Young Canadians was the last thing that was acceptable to City Hall. The Company of Young Canadians was 'The Children's Crusade' as Ian Hamilton's book of the same name implies.² It was supposed to be a volunteer body of enthusiastic, idealistic young people sent into local communities, or found within them, who, financed by Prime Minister Lester Pearson's Liberal government, were going to revolutionize, in a worthy manner, the way things were run. Formulated in 1965, the CYC burst into Canadian communities looking for radical new ways to experiment with social change. In the province of Quebec, the CYC

took on a life of its own, a strictly Quebec-based orientation devoted to 'democratic participation.' For this, the alarmed city fathers of Montreal and elsewhere read 'Marxism,' coupled with separatism, 'subversives,' as Mayor Jean Drapeau and Saulnier later told a parliamentary inquiry during the troubled times of 1970.

Meanwhile, CYC-financed personnel burrowed deeply into housing, welfare and recreation issues. Assistance to the Milton-Park Citizens' Committee was arranged through Peter Katadotis who held an executive position with the CYC. What the CYC people were doing so upset Drapeau and Saulnier that a federal inquiry into CYC activities was held late in 1969, leading to the virtual dismemberment of the 'crusade.' Consequently, in the eyes of many, any project staffed by the CYC — as the Milton-Park Citizens' Committee was for a time — was bound to be tainted.

Initially, the battle over Milton-Park was waged largely with words — in newsletters, meetings, and press conferences. Now, with one demonstration concluded, another stage in the confrontation began.

Notes

1. Marilyn Manzer research papers, 1969.
2. Ian Hamilton, *The Children's Crusade*, Peter Martin Associates Ltd., 1970.

Chapter 5

PUBLIC RELATIONS VS. COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION

It would be a nightmare trying to write a factual account of this. Better to fictionalize it.

— Bryan Knight, 1981

Concordia Estates was in a bind. The heroic dream was turning into a nightmare. Instead of being hailed for their vision, the developers were being harassed by their tenants. Clearly, they had to restore some of their lustre. They were not without supporters within the community and agreement on the MPCC's position was far from unanimous. Some residents noted that, compared with other projects, Concordia Estates' plan had a number of interesting new features. Therefore they were prepared to listen to what Concordia Estates had to offer.

Meanwhile a cycle of physical deterioration was accelerating in the neighbourhood. The developers were not inclined to repair and restore houses which they hoped to soon empty and then tear down and the tenants were not prepared to paint buildings, do major repairs or fix up the lanes since this was not their responsibility. Hostility increased on both sides as the deterioration of the houses became further justification for Concordia Estates' determination to demolish.

Andy Melamed described the situation this way: "Concordia Estates blasted the bleeding-heart liberals who wanted to keep people in those rat-infested dwellings. But it was Concordia Estates who should have been responsible for calling in the exterminator . . . you can take care of the rats without kicking the people out."

Instead of being able to go about their business quietly and efficiently, the developers found themselves bogged down in mounting financial, political and social problems. As Concordia Estates partner Norman Nerenberg lamented, "We never dreamt it would take all these years." And every day of delay increased the costs of financing, labour

and materials.

Since one of the strongest arguments against the project was its location, it is quite possible that the venture could have proceeded more quickly if Concordia Estates' chosen site had been a little further south. As Manzer noted, "If you wanted to look at the urban situation sensibly, there were enough vacant parking lots two blocks further downtown where they wouldn't have had to demolish a viable city neighbourhood." Apparently just such a solution was raised by Concordia Estates, in terms of a land exchange, but the city was not interested.

Meanwhile the developers, criticized in Letters to the Editor of local newspapers, had to defend themselves before students at day-long seminars at McGill University and were, on one memorable occasion, even cornered in their own offices by hostile militants. Worse was yet to come.

In an ironic move, Issenman and Nerenberg turned for help to one of their old comrades from the Communist Party days, Gérard Fortin.

Now they were in a real jam. A citizens' committee had been formed which was accusing them of being slum landlords, interested only in gouging out the maximum profit from the poor. We all paused for a moment, thunderstruck at the very absurdity of the way that . . . former comrades had strayed among the wolves.

"You must have been a little bit responsible," I muttered, "being the owners." They had been preoccupied with other business, so busy building elsewhere that they'd neglected their six blocks of old houses. They'd failed to notice that the administrators they'd left in charge were incompetent and indifferent to the welfare of their tenants. Now they understood the enormity of what they'd done, and they wanted to make amends.

"Gerry," they said ". . . we want you to be the ombudsman, for the tenants. We want you to go in there between the tenants and the administration, find out what the tenants want, and we are prepared to give you authority to get it done, whatever the cost. . . ." ¹

Fortin, still the enthusiastic worker on behalf of the underdog, accepted. As soon as word of his appointment got out to the 1,200 or so

tenants, he was inundated with complaints. "About ninety-nine per cent of the complaints were justified: but the administrators were still reluctant to act." Fortin's real job, he soon learned, was not processing renovations, but relocating tenants to a bank of empty apartments within the district so that Concordia Estates could demolish the old homes and begin Phase One of the project.

The project was going to proceed in phases because, as their architect had pointed out before resigning, if they demolished 25 acres at once, it would resemble a war zone. Concordia Estates would be unable to attract new tenants until the entire project was near completion but the marketing of so many units at once would be too complex. Furthermore, construction expenses would be massive, especially without tenant income.

Concordia Estates, wanting to be perceived as the 'benevolent developer,' and still being guided by vestiges of social conscience, especially on the part of Arnold Issenman, reacted to community criticism with a barrage of sophisticated public relations gestures. Whether in reaction to the MPCC or because of a finely-tuned sense of the times, they offered concessions unheard of before from a local developer. Besides hiring their ombudsman, they held public information meetings, arranged for extra garbage pick-ups, offered to relocate tenants and pay three months rent for them, offered small businessmen store space in the new complex at their old rent, consulted residents on the location of mini-parks which they then established, offered to renovate some units rather than demolish them, and, in what appeared to be a sincere offer, maintained they would provide student housing and subsidized units for pensioners and low-income families. (Apparently Concordia Estates did sound out the possibility of applying to the Quebec Housing Corporation for subsidies to make this plan possible, but there is some dispute as to how hard they really tried and whether or not they would have gone through with the plan if the subsidies had been available.)

In another apparently benevolent gesture they offered rent-free premises to a youth clinic providing free medical services. The clinic was frequented by young drug-users seeking help and this upset established, older neighbours. Some moved out of the district, thereby enabling the developers to benefit indirectly.

The developers also held a popular series of neighbourhood coffee and

information parties, by invitation only. Active members of the Milton-Park Citizens' Committee were not on the invitation list.

Nevertheless, their apparent policy of 'benign neglect' of the houses continued. The more rapidly the houses deteriorated, the more rapidly tenants moved, and the sooner demolition could start without spending money on temporary repairs.

These promotional activities were a difficult act for the MPCC to follow, lacking the same kind of funding or expertise, but the committee also launched a series of innovative and beneficial community projects. Its first concern, however, was just getting its own operations in order.

In the eyes of Concordia Estates, the civic administration and the curious on-looker, the MPCC appeared to be a collection of counter-culture stereotypes. However, those who actually attended meetings were impressed with the variety of active participants, young and old, professionals and students, people on welfare or pensions, long-time residents and short-term ones, all working to see that their neighbourhood didn't disappear.

It was difficult to find 'average,' residents who could devote enough time and energy to the work of the MPCC. Although the initial meeting attracted 116 people, and subsequent ones sometimes reached nearly 150, there were only about 20 or so members who were active at any one time, and even this core group suffered from a high turnover. In view of these figures, the issue was often raised as to how representative of the community the MPCC really was. As Bryan Knight saw it:

I think the question is a foolish one to begin with. . . . What institution do we have that is representative? Our municipal government certainly is not. Of course the MPCC is not representative of everyone. There are people who are not interested in doing anything. One can only expect a minority to act, especially at the beginning. I think most of the people in the area are against Concordia Estates. They are opposed to the project, they don't like the idea; but they don't all act on their feelings. There must be some people who are for Concordia Estates, but I haven't found any who are 100% for them.

According to my definition, the MPCC is representative in that it

represents the concern of people in the area for people, not buildings. We want to preserve the buildings for the sake of the people who call them home, not for the sake of the buildings themselves.

There is a sprinkling of all types of people in this area and the MPCC is more representative than the City Council of Montreal.

Yet, he ruefully conceded that, "everybody was full of advice for what the MPCC should be doing. Community organization is very difficult. The day-to-day work occupied so much time that sometimes we didn't have time for the long-range planning." This was especially true as members often engaged in long meetings that went on until one or two in the morning. There were comparatively few residents who had the time, energy, and perhaps ability, to plan strategy, evaluate actions, produce briefs and newsletters and perform the myriad other tasks that effective counter-action to Concordia Estates required.

It is not surprising, given the diverse character of the community, that only a small percentage of the neighbourhood became actively involved. Most people were either too busy, too tired, too apathetic, too frightened or were moving anyway. The wonder is the MPCC accomplished so much with so little over such an extended period, 1968-74.

In keeping with the fiercely democratic sentiments of the time, the MPCC at first refused to be structured. When they met, a person was chosen from among those present to chair the meeting. There was no president, vice-president, treasurer, secretary or formal committees. The work was going to be done by those present at a specific meeting and by those capable of doing certain tasks. Because of this lack of structure, the meetings were sometimes chaotic and frustrating. There was, however, a potentially valuable spin-off from this approach. As David Williams pointed out, a lack of formal structure helped save the more active members from possible legal action later on.

Matters were not helped by the appearance of hard-line Maoists at the early meetings. Other participants, being relatively naive, found it impossible to argue with them. Not only did the Maoists' involvement hinder the development of the committee along lines that made sense to most of those concerned, but their lifestyles, as perceived by others both inside and outside the community, didn't help the committee's image

problem or foster support. Some of the radical splinter groups attending meetings began to put out press releases in the name of the Milton-Park Citizens' Committee which conflicted with the main purposes of the core group. "Because of the looseness of the organization," says Jeanne L'Espérance, "it was very easy for anybody to think they represented the MPCC. There were constant meetings of people talking about other people all the time. I would go to one or two meetings a week for about a year. They took the whole evening . . . every argument had to be heard."

While there were many concerned, long-time, low-income residents in the neighbourhood, they seldom attended meetings. Meetings were for the articulate, middle-class students like L'Espérance who had both the time and the inclination. On occasion the young idealists became anxious and uneasy about what they were doing and for whom.

Once, at a meeting, L'Espérance spied an Australian woman whom she recognized as living on Ste. Famille Street. Although not much



M. Côté in his Hutchison Street workshop, 1972 (*photo by Clara Gutsche*).

older than L'Espérance, the woman looked middle-aged at first glance and was dressed rather shabbily. L'Espérance was thrilled, thinking that at last a 'welfare mother' had come to one of the meetings. "Afterwards," says L'Espérance, "I went to speak to her and, of course, she was just as middle-class as me!"

Whatever the actual composition of the MPCC, their rallying cry, as printed in one of their bulletins, was "No matter what it looks like, it's HOME and we're staying."

The issues involved were numerous and complex and included the role of the City in planning; who controlled development and who benefited; how to preserve the character of the area; preservation of existing buildings; student housing for McGill University and the junior college CEGEP du Vieux-Montréal; access to open spaces; recreational facilities; heterogeneity of population; physical relocation for residents; subsidized rents; even the possibility of residents buying the property through the Quebec Housing Corporation.

All were issues discussed in endless meetings and taken to several initial meetings with Concordia Estates when it still seemed a possibility, however remote, that perhaps somewhere in Concordia Estates' grandiose three-phase plan, there would be places for people who wanted to remain in Milton-Park. A phrase scribbled on a paper in a file containing Milton-Park committee meeting minutes sums up some of the frustrations: "At what point does citizen participation become meaningful? Meaningless?"

One of the significant ways in which the MPCC made contact with its constituency was by constantly knocking on doors. Active members fanned out through the neighborhood, taking surveys, getting petitions signed, and encouraging attendance at meetings by offering an escort service for the elderly.

A community newspaper called, aptly, *The Bulldozer*, was started. It was published for six years and at its peak printed 6,000 copies per issue. English professor David Williams could say, with justification, that the quality of the writing was high and represented one of the most significant contributions to the community by the committee.

The committee established contacts with a broad base of support groups, ranging from a McGill University housing committee and a variety of citizens' groups and anti-poverty organizations, to established social agencies. But while these groups provided much-needed

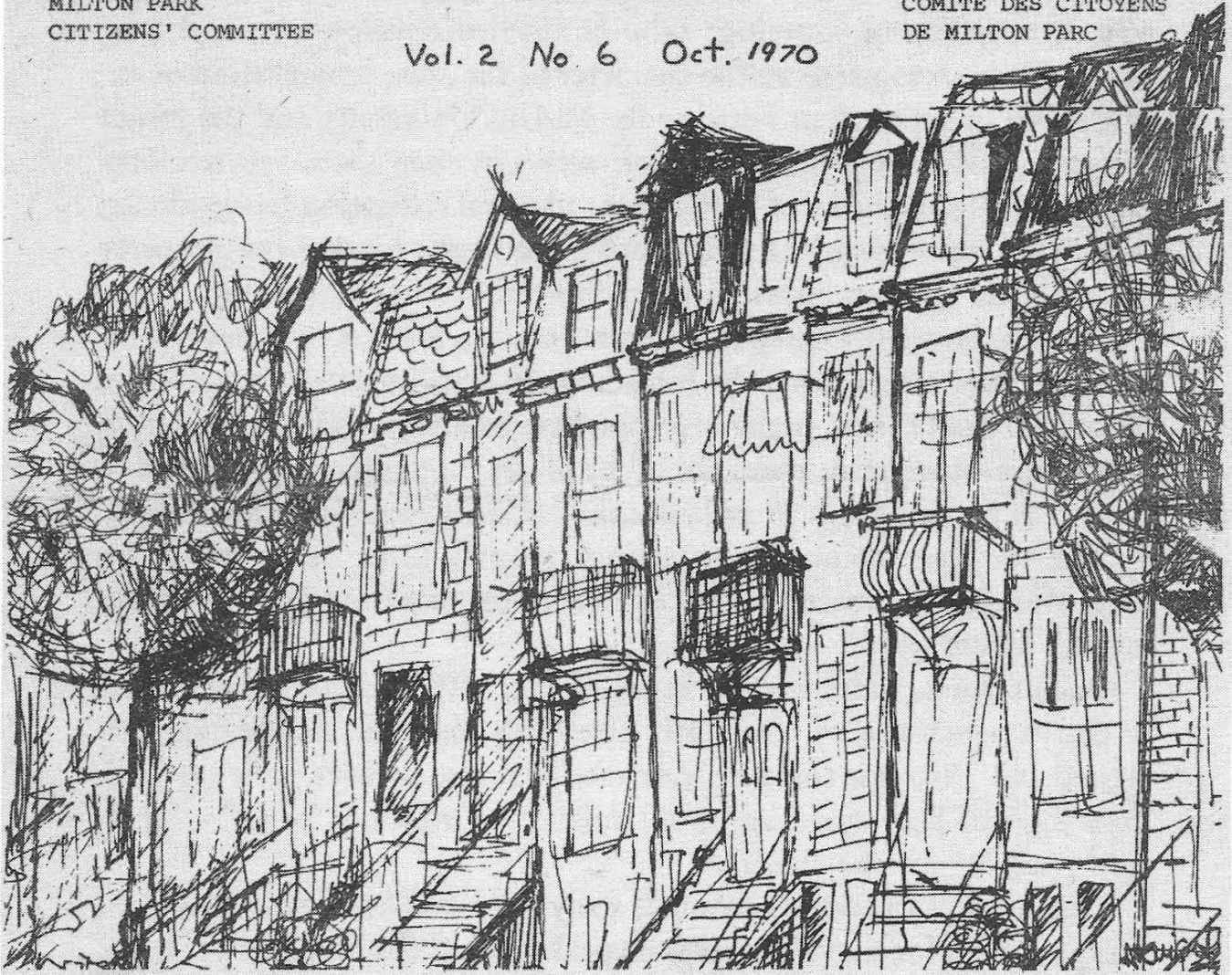
RENOVATION

BULLETIN OF
MILTON PARK
CITIZENS' COMMITTEE

BULLDOZER

Vol. 2 No. 6 Oct. 1970

BULLETIN DU
COMITE DES CITOYENS
DE MILTON PARC



**pas/not
demolition**

Assemblies- chaque mardi soir
8 P.M.

3553 St. Urbain

General meetings- every
Tuesday evening
8 P.M.

moral support and resource people, they were, ultimately, quite powerless.

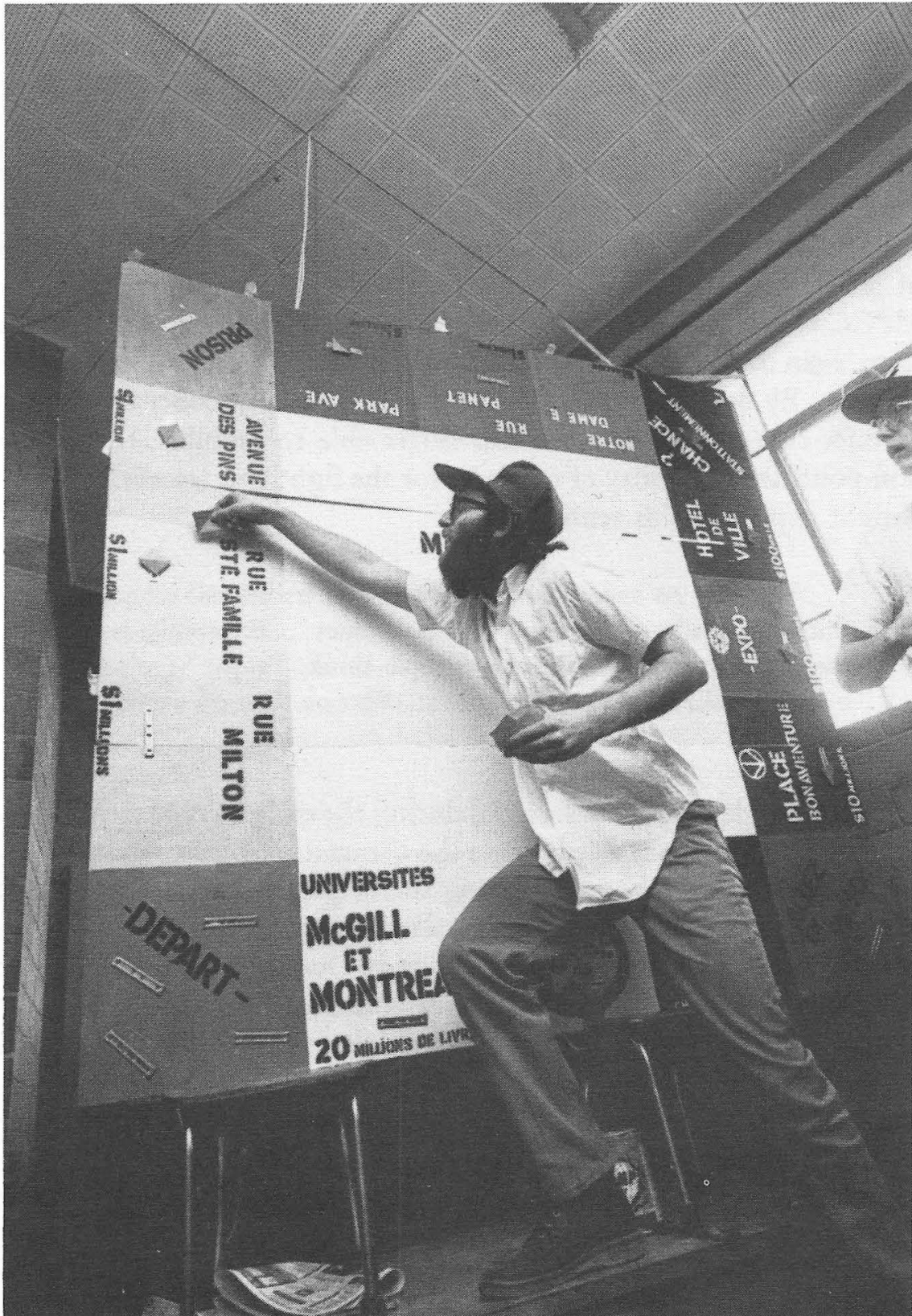
More important, perhaps, were some of the spin-offs from MPCC activities. A family clinic was established at the University Settlement, providing free medical and psychiatric services. A day-care also began operating at the University Settlement, owing at least some of its impetus to MPCC members. There was a food co-op, too. Even the idea of a community laundromat was explored. A Community Design Workshop, partially sponsored by McGill's School of Architecture and assisted by Professor Joseph Baker, was established on Park Avenue. Three architectural students worked with citizens on innovative plans for the alleyways and vacant lots. For a light touch there were fun-filled, albeit politically-tinged, street festivals. By providing a network of affiliated community services with community participation, the MPCC clearly hoped to convince every one — Concordia Estates, the City, even local residents — that there really was a community worth keeping. By developing tangible resources instead of concentrating on abstract concepts, they were also better able to mobilize the largely non-politicized majority of residents for the fight that lay ahead. Bryan Knight expressed this sentiment:

... We have to overcome the problems of traditional economic thinking standing in the way of social values... Economics is not the big obstacle; it is the way people think. People have to be made to realize that they can have an effect on their own environment.

One bold idea that first surfaced during the early days of the Milton-Park Citizens' Committee became the cornerstone of the next wave of community effort devoted to saving the neighbourhood. The concept of co-operative housing had been talked about locally ever since the group presented its first brief to the City in October, 1968, but the idea was ahead of its time. Even if the bureaucratic mechanisms had been in place, which they were not, it is unlikely that sixties-style tactics alone could have brought the co-op idea to fruition. Nevertheless, the confrontational tactics of that era sparked the beginning of another process that would succeed a decade later. Meanwhile, the MPCC was about to experience organizational failings and subversive tactics that threatened to undermine its whole operation.

Notes

1. Gérard Fortin and Boyce Richardson, *Life of the Party*, Montréal, Véhicule Press, 1984, pp 221-222.



Concordia Estates' mock trial at the University Settlement, December 8, 1969
(photo by Peter Brosseau/Montreal Star/Public Archives of Canada/PA-153970).

DIRTY TRICKS AND POLITICIZATION

*You couldn't be sure, to put it in simplistic terms,
who was on their side and who was on our side.*

— Bryan Knight

Once Concordia Estates had amassed the land it needed, its project could begin in earnest. As the company moved towards expropriation of houses and eviction of tenants, the boarding-up of stores and dwellings and the eventual demolition of 255 homes, the energy of the free-wheeling Milton-Park Citizens' Committee was increasingly consumed by a series of protracted internal battles. At least some of these were apparently set in motion by Concordia Estates.

There were continuing conflicts between the more conservative and more radical elements of the committee, with additional tensions from a sprinkling of anarchists and Maoists. There was also suspicion of possible infiltrators, spies, and agents of one kind or another working on behalf of Concordia Estates, as well as signs of general incompetence or confusion on the part of a few committee members. At first there were just minor irritations such as crank calls. According to MPCC minutes, March 25, 1969, one such call came from someone claiming to be Robert Lapalme, a local home-owner who was a well-known artist and personal friend of Mayor Drapeau. The caller criticized and attacked the MPCC on a number of points. When contacted later, Lapalme denied he had called or had attacked the committee in any way. Another call came from a City of Montreal fire inspector who threatened to condemn the MPCC's offices. Again, a check confirmed that there had been no such call from the city.

The harassment was not totally one-sided however. The MPCC, in a sense, had less to risk than Concordia Estates did and could employ

some outrageous tactics. Concordia Estates, with greater assets and prominent contacts, could employ more sophisticated resources. In the most bitter moments of the battle, both sides did their utmost to discredit the other. For instance, there was a suspect article in *La Presse* which dwelled on the supposed insolvency of Concordia Estates. As Nicole Durand conceded later, "It was an error. It was put in by one person and not discussed by the committee." Error or not, it was not far from the mark, though, unfortunately for the committee, somewhat premature. Then, a number of things started to go wrong for the committee. A young lawyer volunteered to work for the committee free of charge because he believed in the cause. Necessary work such as taking out an injunction against Concordia Estates did not get done as promised. The committee tried to get tenants facing eviction to go to the Rent Control Board. When they convinced a few to try, the volunteer lawyer either didn't show up or was unfamiliar with the case.

One committee member removed financial records from the office at the University Settlement, "because it was too cold to work in the office."¹ A CYC volunteer, who was then signing officer for the committee, signed a few blank cheques for his fellow committee member. The signing officer was soon confronted by various people, including one restaurant manager, demanding to know why certain bills had been paid by his colleague with N.S.F. cheques drawn on the committee's bank account — or not paid at all . . . The combination of inexperience and a few undesirable members was beginning to show.

But there were even more insidious, and potentially damaging events.

In October 1969, the Milton-Park Citizens' Committee gained a new member who, for the purposes of this book, shall be known as Moe Shamus. "He did everything," according to Manzer. "He was involved in every single committee and sub-committee that we had. If there was a job to be done, he volunteered for it. He worked on all the legal stuff. He worked on setting up the committee as a corporation; he worked on the newsletter; he was in charge of finances. He knew everything." As Sue Alward points out, "We were very open, naive, I guess. Anyone who was enthusiastic and wanted to work could join the executive committee. Within a month or so of him being around, he was right in there working with the gang. He was in all the strategy meetings — everything."

It wasn't long before Shamus's behaviour began to arouse suspicion.

People wondered whether he was just the eager taxi-driver / resident he claimed to be. Bryan Knight recalls that Shamus came to him once with a suggestion that he knew some women who would be available for group sex in a hotel in the east end and tried to interest Knight and other committee members in such a sexual adventure. He also suggested showing pornographic films to raise money. Another time, a young couple leaving the neighbourhood tried to involve Knight in breaking into Shamus's place, saying there were papers the committee would be interested in. Knight assessed that move as some sort of trap, in view of other curious events connected with Shamus.

He tried to get me involved in a fight with some union people meeting at the University Settlement who were anti-Semitic. Shamus was going to provoke one of the union men into saying more and more outrageous remarks so I would lose my temper. Then presumably he was going to call the cops. He had several ideas like that . . .

It was apparent his purpose was to get people active on the committee into compromising positions and then, presumably, blackmail them into dropping the fight against Concordia Estates or taking them out of circulation if it was illegal enough to put them into jail — either way, discrediting them in the eyes of the community.

Sue Alward remembers Shamus trying to involve her and her husband in drugs at a time when she became convinced that her phone was being tapped, albeit crudely, as clicks and other strange noises were occasionally audible. As Knight acknowledges, "You couldn't be sure, to put it in simplistic terms, who was on their side and who was on our side. There was a lot of paranoia around," and the suspicions being aroused by Moe Shamus represented only a part of the many vexing problems, both internal and external, with which the committee had to cope.

David Williams recalls one MPCC executive meeting which was interrupted by a phone call purportedly from a professional employee of Concordia Estates who wanted to disclose important information to the committee. The call was first taken by one committee member who passed it on to Williams. When Williams spoke to the caller, an ap-

pointment was arranged at the man's home. Williams decided to keep this information to himself. When he arrived, there was no answer. When Williams finally contacted the Concordia employee, the employee refused to disclose anything and discouraged further contact. Some time later, when Williams was meeting with Herbert Auerbach, project manager for Concordia Estates, he was amazed to hear Auerbach refer to the incident, leading Williams to conclude that Concordia had been able to get to the man first, perhaps via the person who first took the call at the MPCC.

While some committee members treated it all as part of the fun and drama of the times, others felt these incidents were actually evidence of a sophisticated Concordia Estates offensive involving the very heart of the group, its executive committee. This became more apparent when the MPCC tried to change its status.

At the end of 1969 the MPCC applied to become legally incorporated as L'Association des Citoyens de Milton-Parc Inc. This move would give the group a stronger position as they pursued new avenues, such as applying to the Quebec Housing Corporation for a grant to purchase and renovate one of the buildings through the formation of a housing co-operative. The executive committee went on a campaign for new members to demonstrate renewed strength and to show that, although there were only about 20 members in the active core group, this nucleus really did speak for the whole community. Between January and March 1970, they signed up 300 dues-paying members, including a few maintenance men who worked for Concordia Estates and lived in the area. Despite the Concordia Estates connection, the committee felt confident the men were residents first and employees second.

By March, the last hold-outs from Concordia Estates' proposed first phase of demolition were served with eviction notices. The rest had already moved from the first streets designated for demolition. Morale was wavering but the committee plunged ahead with new ideas and projects. One was their plan for an alleyway project on Basset Street which was presented to the City of Montreal's Planning Department. The plan requested financial aid to demolish dangerous, old wooden sheds which had formerly held coal, and also to create walkways and mini-parks. Although there was no response then, about 10 years later the City did introduce a plan which would subsidize property-owners who wished to tear down sheds. This was no doubt motivated by a rash



Architects and developers examine model of proposed Cité Concordia project with Premier Robert Bourassa, June 22, 1970 (photo by Alan R. Leishman/Montreal Star/Public Archives of Canada/PA-153973).

of serious inner-city fires which invariably began in these back-alley sheds. The City also created a program to beautify downtown residential lanes.

The committee tried to plan innovative by-laws for their constitution, still determined not to sink into the standard form of most organizations. At that time, David Williams, Tim Jones, Roy Crowe, Nicole Durand and Martha Borgmann were among the active core group. According to Marilyn Manzer, although they had to have a board of directors in order to become a corporation, it was not their intention to have the board be all-powerful. It was meant to exist on paper only. Instead, a management committee, whose membership would turn over periodically, would continue running their affairs. In that way, it was hoped, the committee would still operate in a very democratic, leaderless, co-operative way. But in order to function this way, the membership would have had to be fairly homogeneous, composed of people with basically the same attitudes and values and in agreement with the committee's approach.

Because of the very success of their membership drive, original committee members soon found themselves rubbing shoulders with an

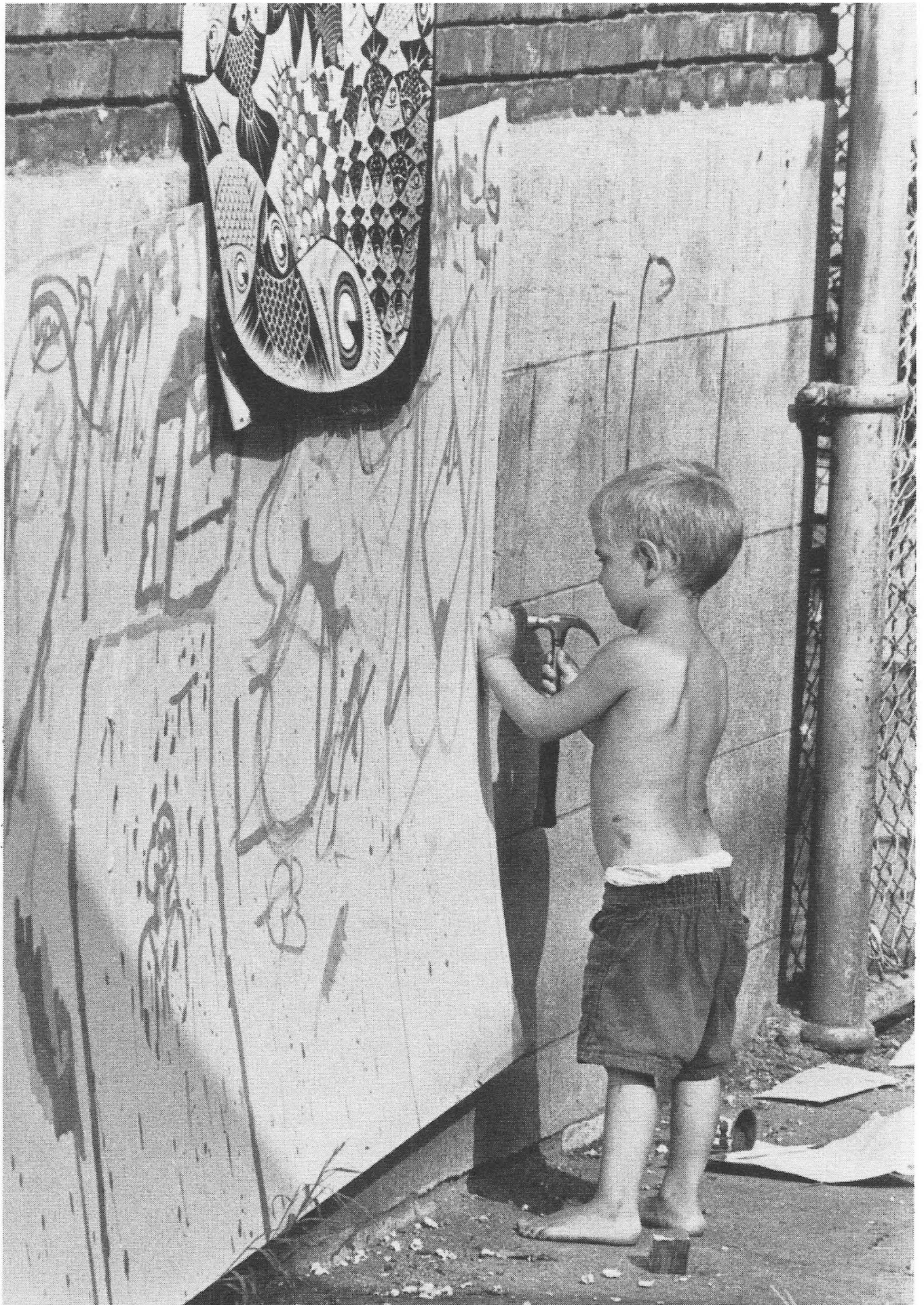
older, more conservative, largely French-speaking component of the Milton-Park population. One of the new members was a florid, dramatically-dressed craftsman named Jean Basilières who was an antique dealer as well as a creator of unique electrical fixtures. A resident of the area for 40 years, with his business also located there, he was eagerly welcomed at first by the committee who fancied his presence a breakthrough in the neighbourhood. The commanding Basilières, with his flaring eyebrows and eloquent speech, was promptly elected chairman of the board of directors at the corporation's first annual meeting on May 10, 1970. Almost immediately, Basilières began issuing statements to the press on behalf of the Milton-Park Citizens' Committee that left no doubt that he was prepared to work with Concordia Estates — and intimated that the residents were too.

At first, the activist regulars from the committee thought Basilières just did not understand his function or the situation. But as confusing statements continued to be issued on behalf of the committee and residents, indicating a new period of proposed co-operation with the developers, Williams, Knight, Manzer and the others realized they had been blind. Their new president seemed more like a Concordia Estates' man. For his part, Basilières cheerfully agrees that his role on the committee was to get residents to accept Concordia Estates' offer. He maintains he was working to get the best possible deal from them for the residents and for himself. Basilières had, in fact, been in contact with Concordia Estates and their architectural firm when he worked on the lighting fixtures for Place Bonaventure. With good reason he might have believed that he would be getting the contracts for La Cité. Therefore, in his eyes, and possibly in the eyes of those who elected him, he was the natural choice as a go-between.

Basilières dismisses his critics on the committee as "students who were able to study because their parents had made a buck, but were unwilling to let Concordia, or home-owners in the area, do the same thing." Basilières feels he was there mainly as a spokesman, as an alternative to those who had been speaking out so far. Basilières left it to the ubiquitous Shamus to handle the politics and strategy of the internal battles that now broke out. He was unprepared for the vociferous antagonism that erupted when he began to enact his role as he saw it. In the tumultuous weeks following his election, the glass in the front door of his home was shattered. Although he had no proof this action was



Milton-Park street festival, July 27, 1970 (photo by Bill Robson/Montreal Star/Public Archives of Canada/PA-153964).



Youngster displaying his painting at the Milton-Park street festival, July 27, 1970 (photo by Bill Robson/Montreal Star/Public Archives of Canada/PA-153963).

connected to his opponents, it contributed to the mounting tension.

Whatever the formal connection, if any, between Basilières and the developers, it seems that he did not realize the political dimensions of the situation or what he was really getting into. Perhaps his attitude was also evidence of the generational and class split that plagued the whole Milton-Park movement.

There were still participants, such as Alward, who maintained that committee members should not let their paranoia about each other destroy their working relationships. But the problems were multiplying. Finally, as Manzer recalls, "We figured we had to get rid of Basilières. There was no way the committee could function. So we planned a meeting to depose him. Shamus was supporting Basilières and we still hadn't caught on that Moe wasn't on our side."

According to Knight and Manzer, they decided to stack the next meeting in their favour. They and a few others went out and sold — and paid for — new memberships, mostly to French-speaking students in a nearby hostel. When the crucial meeting was held on June 2, 1970, there were 146 present. Many were the newly-purchased supporters.

During this critical meeting, Moe Shamus left the hall to use the phone. Instead of calling from the University Settlement where the meeting was being held, Shamus crossed the street to the lobby of Jeanne D'Arc Hospital. Murray Hirsh managed to follow him and much to Shamus's consternation, overheard part of the conversation in which Shamus was 'reporting' to someone. Finally, there was some evidence about Shamus's true role.

Back at the University Settlement, the objectives of the activists were realized. Basilières was removed and a new board of directors as well as a new management committee were elected. The next day a writ was issued on behalf of Jean Basilières and Moe Shamus who were suing the corporation and the new management committee, including David Williams, Ron Alward, Bryan Knight, Marilyn Manzer, Bruce Jacks and Roger Jochym of the American Deserters' Committee. Basilières was able to obtain the corporation's letters patent and official seal from the lawyer who had volunteered to help the MPCC, items deemed essential for the corporation to operate.

The lawsuit effectively made the corporation non-functional. But they never went to court. At each court date there would be a postponement on the part of the plaintiffs.

The fact that the plaintiffs did not pursue the case, but just left it hanging over the heads of those charged, convinced the committee regulars that this was a Concordia Estates tactic to harass them and tie them up in knots.

The corporation was, in fact, snarled in technicalities for the next year and unable to go ahead with anything else, such as their plans for the experimental housing co-operative. The management group also discovered that the corporation by-laws had never been published, as was legally required. This job had been left to Shamus. Without publication, the corporation was not legally functional.

In a final legal blow, the lawyer who had supposedly volunteered his work left the firm, which then promptly billed the MPCC.

Meanwhile Hirsh had contacted a cousin who had known Shamus in high school. The cousin described Shamus as being a private detective now, though formerly he had "hung around the poolrooms with two friends named Blackie and Pickle." Hirsh found a 'Shamus' listed in the telephone directory. He called saying he was a friend of Moe's, and asked for his whereabouts. He was given an address far from the Milton-Park area. Committee members concluded that Concordia Estates had hired Shamus and rented a room for him in the area, which explained why committee members never found Shamus at 'home' no matter what time they went looking and why Basilières recalls him wearing a telephone paging device.

More evidence of surveillance came to light when Alward went to the City of Montreal Police Department to request a permit to hold a demonstration. While she was there, she spotted a file with the committee name on it and managed to get a look.

I saw this file with hand-written notes in it, copies of notes from me to other people, notes about organizing things and I thought to myself, "What is going on here?"

There was this whole file on our organization and I couldn't believe it . . . He had far better records than we did. I started to laugh and told the policeman, "I wish we had you for our record-taker. Ours aren't nearly as nicely ordered as this."

When I talked about the demonstration, the policeman said, "Oh yes," and looked in his file. I said, 'How do you know about it?

Can I see that?" And I leaned forward to look. Then he got very angry — and I found it very funny.

In some ways, the committee, as Hirsh noted, was actually rather pleased to find that they were being taken seriously enough by Concordia Estates and the City to have all this attention paid to them. On the other hand, the knowledge that they were under various forms of surveillance led the group to suspect others within their midst. Paranoia erupted everywhere. Who else had been bought off by Concordia Estates? A CYC worker? Were residents being paid \$5 each by Concordia Estates to attend meetings and report back? Nothing was as it had seemed to be — and hardly anyone knew whom to trust.

In August 1970, the core group met with a new lawyer and formed a new corporation, a fact not generally known to the public for almost a year. Meanwhile, Concordia Estates was now in a position to proudly unveil its plans to the press and public. This success pushed the remnants of the opposition into an increasingly militant mode.

Despite the internal disarray on the organizational level, the Milton-Park Citizens' Committee could take pride in a number of successes and breakthroughs. There had been some significant meetings between the MPCC and the city administration. Even if they had not gone well by most standards, it was the first time that such meetings between the City and a community group had occurred. The process provided a model for other citizens' groups and forced the city to examine how it was going to deal with the public in an organized fashion the next time the occasion arose.

In the months following the Basilières debacle, the group concentrated more on those functions that presented the area as a vital, viable neighbourhood. *The Bulldozer* was still being printed and distributed. The community expertise gained by MPCC members was helpful in running the day-care centre, the medical clinic and the food co-op at the University Settlement on St. Urbain Street, as well as contributing to the operation of the Community Design Workshop.

Sometimes the links with these groups were fragile, based somewhat on sharing space with each other at the University Settlement. People working on these community projects did not always totally identify with the goals and methods of the committee. Nevertheless, a sense of neighbourliness was being fostered, and that too had been one of the



Milton-Park Music Workshop. Joanabbey Sack (with her son Adam) instructs Janet Best. The workshop was an Opportunities for Youth project which taught music free throughout the summer of 1972 (photo by Paul Legacé/Montreal Star/Public Archives of Canada/PA-153965).

original aims of the MPCC.

Part of the reason these community-related activities were strengthened was because MPCC member David Williams became president of the board of directors at the University Settlement. Andy Melamed was on the board as well and, due to similar ties, there was something of a symbiotic relationship between the two organizations. The Milton-Park area was, in fact as well as theory, a fertile field for social activism.

The MPCC claimed, probably accurately, that it was because of their efforts and the need to counteract them, that Concordia Estates had launched its numerous community-minded services and extensive public relations program. For example, all tenants living in houses that would be demolished by Phase One of the project were re-located to other housing in the area owned by Concordia Estates, often at lower rents. Sometimes relocated tenants received better lodgings for the same rent they were paying previously.

A small mini-park was also created and maintained by Concordia Estates and a promise made to include some community recreation

facilities at La Cité. When the complex was finally opened, a small skating rink was provided at the entrance to the shopping promenade. It was more decorative than useful to the few youngsters still left in the area and it frequently posed a hazard to shoppers because of the absence of a fence between the ice and the walkway leading to the main entrance. It no longer exists. In many ways the pressure generated by the MPCC was effective. Although it did not stall the developers at the time, it resulted in the best treatment that Montreal tenants facing eviction had ever received.

The committee also strengthened its connections with a variety of other community groups, including organizations bent on political reform, just as Quebec was about to enter a period of great turmoil. Supporters included The Montreal Council of Social Agencies, le Conseil de développement social du Montréal métropolitain, L'Association coopérative d'économie familiale, The University Settlement of Montreal, McGill University Faculty Union, McGill University Urban Studies Program and Le Conseil central de la confédération des syndicats nationaux (CSN).

Some of the verbal support offered had the potential of becoming a political asset with the emergence of the Front d'action politique (FRAP). FRAP was a loose coalition of citizens' groups and labour unions that were entering municipal politics for the first time in 1970. Williams and his wife Adèle Chène-Williams were politically active and Chène-Williams was one of three FRAP candidates in the St. Louis district, which included Milton-Park.

For the most part, the largely francophone, lower-income membership of the St. Louis section of FRAP did not know what to make of their anglophone supporters in the MPCC, particularly since Williams was a home-owner. FRAP organizers brooded that maybe this particular citizens' group, which was largely English-speaking, was opposing Concordia Estates mainly because they wanted to create a chic area out of their neighbourhood. Did the anglos truly have a social conscience? Eventually FRAP built into its election platform a plank that discussed the Concordia Estates issue but the hesitancy about supporting the MPCC lingered.

Whatever support might have been gained from this alliance was shattered by the events of the October Crisis. In early October 1970, when members of the Front de libération du Québec (FLQ) kidnapped

British Trade Commissioner James Cross and Quebec Labour Minister Pierre Laporte, (later killing Laporte), Mayor Jean Drapeau and his Civic Party effectively used the resulting social and political crisis to ensure a complete sweep at the polls on October 25. With the War Measures Act in full force, for the first time in Canada's peacetime history, an election took place with the military patrolling city streets. Montrealers were in no mood then for a change, and responded when Drapeau tarred FRAP with the same brush as the FLQ. Despite this, a few FRAP candidates such as Adèle Chène-Williams (who worried about the FLQ communiqué received by the Milton-Park Citizens' Committee and kept an overnight bag packed in case of arrest) received about 20% of the vote.

The end result of this political activity for the MPCC was that the election effort exhausted a number of the members and morale was at an all-time low. The members who remained were tired of community action. They just wanted to concentrate on the projects that were already operating, such as the clinic and the newspaper.

What they didn't realize immediately was that the political events of October would seriously damage investor confidence in Montreal, undermining Concordia Estates' financial stability to the point of ultimately destroying their grandiose concept of La Cité, although not stopping construction of Phase One of the project.

With their backs to the wall, the inner core of the MPCC began a shift to a more militant posture. This process was hastened by the ongoing prompting of more radical theorists and activists in the group. From sympathetic insiders, Williams learned that the 'opposition' felt they should try to take over the committee, as it was obviously polluted with a bourgeois element (i.e., its president was a home-owner whose real interest was to replace Concordia Estates and become a bigger landlord). In its early days, the MPCC had been such a rag-tag group that nobody could really take control. In 1971 it was a demoralized and frustrated group. Those remaining would be ready for different tactics and new leadership once they had breathing space.

Among the more recent arrivals to the Milton-Park neighbourhood were two individuals who would set the course of its destiny for the next decade. They were Lucia Kowaluk, who had been working as a community organizer at the University Settlement and her husband, Dimitri Roussopoulos. They were a study in contrasts. Kowaluk was

tall, blonde, composed, dedicated to whatever cause she took up, persuasive without being aggressive. With very few exceptions, she managed to garner the respect and admiration of most people she dealt with during her Milton-Park crusade. Roussopoulos was a pillar of the anti-nuclear movement in the late fifties and still is. He is best-known as the publisher of Black Rose Books in Montreal and the editor of the journal *Our Generation*, founded in 1961. The journal published articles on “theory and practice of all forms of change.” Roussopoulos made the greatest impression on those who knew him through his activities in a variety of organizations. A tall, dark, outspoken man with a brilliant mind and an alternately charming and scathing tongue, it was impossible to be indifferent to him and for many, difficult to like him. Kowaluk and Roussopoulos had previously been interested in the Milton-Park struggle but had refrained from being active until they actually lived in the affected district. When they moved onto Jeanne Mance Street into Bryan Knight’s former home, — they plunged into MPCC activities. Both had visions of neighbourhoods made up of housing co-operatives and run by a council of residents. While Roussopoulos seemed to thrive on intellectual confrontation, Kowaluk got things done through her own brand of gentle, firm persuasion.

People like Marilyn Manzer found themselves gradually ignored or shunted aside on such interesting issues as the possibility of co-ops. She had given up on the idea of housing co-ops in mid-1971 and felt that the MPCC’s role in any co-operative project would be hampered by the high turnover rate of its membership and the committee’s basic lack of structure. Because of Manzer’s understanding of rental housing she also wasn’t convinced that the community could actually run its own housing. She “figured that the only way was to go with existing landlords — there were still a few private ones left.”

Other members of the MPCC didn’t agree with her. Landlords were perceived as capitalist exploiters. Dimitri Roussopoulos was becoming more and more involved with the committee and Manzer felt that the more politically active elements were trying to discredit her and other moderates. Roussopoulos was now effectively ‘running things’ in terms of strategies and was ready to confront Concordia Estates. According to Manzer “he hadn’t been doing it for years like I had. The membership of the committee had really changed at that point. . . the people were different. I couldn’t identify with what they were doing

anymore. I didn't see it as preserving the neighbourhood."

Community organizer Peter Katadotis had long since become immersed in the problems of other neighbourhoods. Bryan Knight, although involved from time to time with the MPCC, was also largely working on projects in other areas. L'Espérance, burned out by her involvement, had turned to the women's movement. Hirsh was devoting himself to Subud, an Eastern religion. Now Manzer departed.²

The Milton-Park situation was now defined as a class struggle both by Roussopoulos, the tenacious anarchist who saw the neighbourhood as the perfect testing ground for experiments in local ownership and self-government, and by the Maoists who itched for a dramatic confrontation with 'the capitalists.' Perhaps what happened here would gradually spread to other neighbourhoods and then throughout the city, even beyond. On with the experiment!

By the early 1970s, there was a Tactics Committee with a sophisticated political edge. Position papers warned that "the highly individualistic lifestyles of most of our supporters is a very important factor in holding back the development of human and social solidarity and mutual aid."³

New faces appeared at meetings, people such as Henry Milner, a CEGEP (junior college) teacher and later one of the few anglophones in an influential position within the Parti Québécois; Nigel Barry Hamer, the long-lost 'sixth' member of the FLQ cell that had kidnapped James Cross; Klaas Bylsma, the Milton-Park representative on the Greater Montreal Anti-Poverty Co-ordinating Committee begun by Katadotis; and Joe Gough who wrote extensively for *The Bulldozer*. Now the tactics were changing even though David Williams, still chairing meetings, continued to bring an air of calm to proceedings.

Previously there had been no need for a debate about theory and tactics. But after four years of struggle with no success, tactics had to change, according to Henry Milner in a policy paper written for the MPCC:

... By spring of 1972, the actions against Concordia Estates reached a new level of militancy as demolition forced the membership into direct, illegal, action, marked by a spontaneity, a toughness, and a solidarity new to the MPCC. The group grew larger, its composition changed somewhat, and the meetings grew more tense and action-oriented.⁴

As Milner noted, “... signatures on petitions, court injunctions, detailed alternate plans for the houses, etc., were not about to move Concordia Estates or its supporters.” Probably nothing else would either, but that didn’t mean the newly vigorous committee wasn’t trying.

One of the first of the more visible, militant tactics was an Action Day on June 26, 1971, called to protest the shutting down of many of the neighbourhood stores. As a leaflet advertising the action proclaimed, “Crime Against the Community... Concordia Estates does not have the right to close down our stores. We are going to take action to stop this crime against the community.”

That was just a warm-up to the protests and actions of the following year which would include a hunger strike, the occupation of vacant houses, a sit-in at the offices of Concordia Estates, and a trial.

Notes

1. Letter from Ken Maxwell, CYC volunteer, to the MPCC finance committee, April 11, 1970.
2. By the 1980s, Peter Katadotis was Director of English Programming at the National Film Board, Bryan Knight was an author and operated a shop specializing in chess, Jeanne L’Espérance was an art historian.
3. *Program Outline: From Social Action to Community Organizing*, Autumn, 1972, Milton-Park Citizens’ Committee, Minutes file, author unknown.
4. Henry Milner, “Some Ideas on Policies for the MPCC.”

**LETS OPEN
THE
CLOSED HOUSES
IN MILTON-PARK**



m.p.c.c.

Chapter 7

LAST-DITCH EFFORTS

No More Craters in Vietnam. No More Demolition in Milton-Park

— Placard carried by demonstrator

Throughout the latter part of 1970, houses and shops had been abandoned along Park Avenue and Jeanne Mance, the site of Phase One of La Cité. There were a few establishments still operating on a week-to-week or month-to-month basis, but on the whole the streets had assumed a ghost-town atmosphere. The houses that had not yet been abandoned were deteriorating rapidly. Debris began piling up on vacant lots, graffiti proliferated. A slum was being born.

Concordia Estates had boarded up 255 houses over a period of 22 months and there were still no signs of demolition. These low-rent houses were vacant at a time when the city's stock of such housing was vastly under-developed. Largely habitable homes had been allowed to deteriorate almost beyond repair.

During the winter of 1972 the MPCC began planning a demonstration to be held around the issue of closed houses. It was the start of the MPCC's most prolonged and vigorous direct action, taking advantage of Concordia Estates' increasing signs of economic failure. The committee also attacked with renewed vigour the federal government's housing policies.

On March 25, 1972, *The Gazette's* lead article proclaimed "Giant project idle." The article went on to state, "Since 1969, a series of announced 'target dates' for the start of construction have come and gone, a great deal of verbal mud has been flung by opponents and proponents of the plan, but not a spadeful of earth has been turned."¹

The problem was money and nervousness on the part of Concordia Estates' principal backers, Great West Life Assurance Co. of Winnipeg and the New York-based Ford Foundation. The economy in North America was sagging and investors' confidence in Quebec had never

picked up since the events of October, 1970. Even as Concordia Estates was trying to attract new investors in Switzerland with glossy brochures, the company was unable to pay the interest due to its committed investors.

The federal government was also criticized. As a task force on low-income housing charged in a report done for the Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC),² federal government housing policy virtually ignored the needs of the poorer half of Canada's population.³ The report called on the CMHC to divert money from low-income housing projects, which seemed to be benefiting the builders primarily, and instead, pump it into rehabilitation and maintenance of existing low-rental homes.

What better time for the MPCC to try to bring their cause to the centre of public attention! A mass demonstration would probably involve arrests, a trial, and a chance to publicly plead their case under the spotlight of publicity.

The inevitable confrontation finally occurred on the streets of Milton-Park. Even though it was a last ditch effort, it got the adrenalin flowing and provided a focus for the committee's activities.

Whether or not Concordia Estates would be able to proceed with Phase One would ultimately depend on factors other than MPCC actions. But the timing of the planned demolition was important to the MPCC in that considerable attention could be generated just when Concordia Estates' financial vulnerability was becoming apparent.

Under the capable leadership of people such as Dimitri Roussopoulos and Klaas Bylsma, two months of preparation would lead up to the most dramatic phase of the MPCC. According to Lucia Kowaluk the houses had stood empty all summer and fall of 1971 and throughout the winter of 1971-72. Concordia Estates wouldn't hear of any plans to reopen them, although the MPCC offered plans and kept trying to meet with them.

On February 5, 1972 a demonstration demanding that the closed houses be opened and renovated for public use was held. According to the *Milton-Park Community Press* (formerly *The Bulldozer*), the citizens were asking the City of Montreal to approach Canada Mortgage and Housing for a loan so that a non-profit citizens' corporation would eventually own and control the housing.

The MPCC met with John Lynch-Staunton of the Executive Committee of the City of Montreal who firmly responded that the City still



(photo by David Miller)

supported the Concordia Estates project and until it had officially collapsed, would continue to support it.

On Friday May 19, 1972, the day before a planned MPCC demonstration, Concordia Estates announced that demolition had begun. Workmen from a demolition company were doing preliminary work as the announcement was made. The following day the citizens arrived en masse. The plan was to occupy the houses to demonstrate that they could be lived in. Though the utilities had by this time been turned off, a few people slept overnight in sleeping bags. The occupation had been planned as a symbolic act.

The editorial call-to-arms in the Milton-Park paper was rousing and positive, urging residents to turn out by the hundreds to do repairs, provide food and money to the squatters and publicize the occupation through the media. People were also encouraged to visit the squatters and to hold peaceful demonstrations to show solidarity. The call was answered. The hundred or so people who took part in the event created the atmosphere of a street celebration. Kowaluk recalls that:

There were flowers put outside, the places were swept clean. A

lot of community people who wouldn't go so far as to sleep overnight there, would sort of hang around and cheer and give winks. One woman, who's now an active member of a housing co-op, gave flowers.

There was symbolic renovation with the aid of mops, brooms, paint and brushes. It was a lively weekend until the workmen returned. On Monday night the MPCC and their supporters met to plan more direct action, one that they hoped might lead to some arrests so that they could have a forum for their arguments.

Mindful that the occupation was not leading anywhere, a small group decided to march from the occupied houses to the Park Avenue offices of Concordia Estates. Some members such as David Williams did not totally support this pressure tactic, but belatedly added support. The plan was that 10-12 people would be arrested for sitting in, including Roussopoulos and other well-known community activists such as Claire Culhane and Bob Silverman.

Culhane is one of those indomitable people who never cease struggling for social justice as they perceive it. A silver-haired former nurse who worked in Vietnam, she was, according to one of her admirers, "always good for 30-35 people for a demonstration. She ran a sort of 'rent-a-body' made up of people from the anti-poverty groups, the American War Resisters Association and all those groups that used to hang out at the University Settlement."

Consequently, it was perfectly logical for her to bring a placard to the demonstration with the words, "No More Craters in Vietnam, No More Demolition in Milton-Park." Was there really any direct connection, financial or political? "No," says Culhane, unperturbed, "but it's all part of the same thinking..." Culhane had worked some years before in the Young Communist League. One of her colleagues there was Norman Nerenberg. At one point during the MPCC demonstration, the two former comrades, now settling into middle age, came face to face.

"Claire," demanded Nerenberg, "what are you doing here?"

"Norman," she countered accusingly, "what are *you* doing here?"

Events continued to escalate. As Kowaluk describes the scene on May 26:



Occupation on Prince Arthur Street, May 23, 1972. Activist Claire Culhane holds placard, centre of photo. *(Photo by David Miller).*



Demonstration, Prince Arthur Street, May 23, 1972 *(photo by David Miller).*



Demolition begins on Prince Arthur (near Park Avenue), May 19, 1972 (*photo by Peter Brosseau/Montreal Star/Public Archives of Canada/PA-153955*).



Negotiations with police during occupation on Prince Arthur, May 23, 1972. From the left (clockwise), Klaus Bylsma, Johnny Goedike and Bruce Roberts (*photo by David Miller*).

There was a fairly large demonstration of people supporting the occupation. The police arrived and were circling the crowd which had formed in a horseshoe out from the doorway. The police were chatting with people. I went out of my way to talk to the policemen. I believe that one of the purposes of these demonstrations is to try to talk to people. So I was talking to this guy. I had my son with me; he was two and a half. Suddenly at one point after an hour, this particular young police officer said to me in a really low voice, "We have orders to arrest everybody soon, so if you want to step behind me you may."

I thanked him. I hesitated for a moment. I felt disloyal doing that but then there I was with my kid, although Joanabbey Sack, who was more courageous than I — did get arrested. So I did, I stepped behind him. Then the police suddenly did what, obviously, they had planned to do, and that was, they stood close together, effectively linked arms and cordoned off the demonstrators along with the people who were sitting in. They then . . . drove up with the paddywagons, arrested everybody and carried them off.

According to Kowaluk, this was not what people had expected. There were a number of supporters who were ambivalent about actually putting themselves in a position to be arrested. The police action solved their indecision by arresting them all. The MPCC was later able to ensure that anyone who was an American draft resister, or who had other potential legal problems, was released without being charged.

It was a long, tiring day for the demonstrators as it took until 4:00 a.m. for everyone to be booked and released. People were hungry and tired. One demonstrator, Joanabbey Sack, was a nursing mother who became agitated and uncomfortable at being separated from her baby so long. Dimitri Roussopoulos experienced the excruciating pain of a kidney stone attack for the first time in his life, but police thought he was just faking.

Of the 59 arrested and charged with private mischief, eight had charges dropped and more than twenty who pleaded guilty were given a conditional discharge, which meant they would have no criminal record if they kept the peace after a period of probation.

The Milton-Park newspaper conceded after the September court appearance of those pleading guilty:

Judge Stalker presided with such affability over the state's defense of Concordia Estates' right to obliterate our community that it was impossible not to be charmed.

He was the nicest guy in court — well, almost. Freedman the prosecutor was even nicer. The mask of the liberal beamed down upon us, and we were as juvenile delinquents in the face of a paternal social worker . . . ⁴

Although several of the accused were francophone, the majority were anglophone. Those who pleaded not guilty elected to have a trial by jury in French. This was the MPCC members' way of indicating who they felt were their real peers. The trial was scheduled for February 1973.

Against the advice of its lawyer, the MPCC was determined to broaden the case and to make it into something of social significance. However, the hoped-for platforms were not available. The media were not interested. Aside from one sympathetic article in *La Presse*, there was only one small notice in *The Gazette*. National news sources yawned with indifference when contacted. The strategic planning that went into the trial went largely unnoticed.

Andy Melamed testified that the buildings could still be renovated; Joe Baker of the Community Design Workshop testified that people had been willing to make alterations. And Claire Culhane made a speech somehow connected with the war in Vietnam. According to Culhane the jury was so moved that members came up to her in the corridor following the trial to congratulate her and three telephoned her to say they agreed with her. Although everyone was actually acquitted, the verdict was based on a legal technicality, not the social issues. It was not the kind of victory the group had sought, and there was little rejoicing at the end. Melamed points out:

They wanted to have their case defended on the basis of renters having rights — that people who live in the neighbourhood have rights. The expert testimony was window dressing. There's nothing that is as sure to destroy the morale of a group than to lose battles and lose them badly.

Preparations for the trial and the trial itself covered a period of eight

exhausting months. The irony of winning their case on a technicality and in relative obscurity was simply the last note in the swan song of the Milton-Park Citizens' Committee.

Concordia Estates moved in quickly once the demonstrators had been arrested and by the end of July 1972 had demolished 255 houses. The fight appeared to have been lost as Concordia Estates proceeded with construction of Phase One. But fate, in the form of Quebec's poor economic situation, intervened. Instead of the extensive plans for La Cité, only about one-third of the area was actually cleared for the high-rise apartment complexes, hotel and office tower. The remaining properties originally slated for demolition, along with the hopes of their occupants, drifted in limbo as Concordia Estates faced a growing financial crisis.

Notes

1. George Radwanski, *The Gazette*, March 25, 1972.
2. On July 1, 1979 Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation became Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation.
3. Brian Johnson, *The Gazette*, March 25, 1972.



Hélène Brisebois poses with her parents for a First Communion portrait, Milton-Park, May, 1972 (*photo by Clara Gutsche*).

LASTING EFFECTS OF THE MPCC

Soon Concordia Estates' high-rise apartment buildings and hotel blocked the view from David Williams' house on Ste. Famille and the generator on the hotel roof spewed noise pollution into his living-room and into other adjacent homes. An additional irony for Williams and other politically active MPCC members was the fact that new inhabitants of the high-rises would hold the balance of power in the local polling stations at the next municipal election. The concept of 'community representation' would be thrown into disarray.

Andy Melamed's under-cover role at the City Planning Department had been blown. He was removed as head of the planning group and pushed into a corner designated 'research and statistics.' There he did virtually nothing until leaving in 1976 except to feed information whenever he could to various reform-minded groups.

Practically speaking, the MPCC was dead as a movement although members such as Roussopoulos still made pronouncements in its name. Meetings were attended by only five or six people and at last even David Williams took the opportunity of an up-coming sabbatical to withdraw from the MPCC in 1974. What, finally, had been the role of the citizens' group and what had it accomplished?

The original group had been an amalgam of enthusiastic young people, a sprinkling of determined, long-time residents, and a few newly-minted community organizers. What they shared was a staunch belief that somehow they could truly effect social change. It was a naive but genuine goal, as was their belief that social processes could and would change in the sixties, heralding a braver, better world for the coming-of-age generation and a host of 'have-nots' — the elderly, people on low incomes, and others who deserved a break from the system.

The next, shrewder wave of Milton-Park militants had seen the situation basically as one in which they could showcase their political and economic beliefs, backed by an organization, or at least the name of

one, that had already gained some sympathetic attention and a certain momentum.

One of the major ironies arising throughout this period of racing passions and confrontational tactics was that the fight against Concordia Estates was actually the glue that held the neighbourhood together. If there had been no La Cité to rally against, the Milton-Park district would probably have disappeared piecemeal as individual owners sold their properties and tenants moved to other neighbourhoods. As the fight against Concordia Estates developed, separate networks within the community were put in touch with one another and were united, at least to a limited extent. In turn, this networking resulted in the establishment of new services, which further shored up a renewed sense of neighbourhood.

Surprisingly, to Sue Alward and other militants, it remained possible to have a viable neighbourhood feeling even with La Cité looming over everyone, "... you look at street level and Concordia Estates is mostly way up there. What you're looking at are the neighbours and dogs you've been meeting for years on the streets. Concordia Estates affected us, but it didn't destroy us."

She had felt depressed when the houses were torn down by the company to make way for their development. It seemed that all the years of struggle had ended in failure. After a few years had passed she came to realize that the efforts of the MPCC had, indeed, been a success. Never again would a developer be able to move in and demolish the core of a neighbourhood.

By having one, large, visible target, which seemed to pit big capitalists against the little guys, the neighbourhood had gained a high profile. That image had repercussions as the developers were forced to respond to public scrutiny.

Concordia Estates had tried to achieve good press and friendly relations with those in the community who might be responsive. Where else were there coffee and donut parties for tenants and for local institutions such as churches? Who else provided even token gestures such as a community relations agent or mini-park or small skating rink, or promised rent-free premises for a medical clinic or offered to relocate tenants?

All this and more could be attributed to the need to counteract the Milton-Park Citizens' Committee. Ironically, if the developers hadn't

retained vestiges of their former political bent, they might not have bothered trying to deal with the community at all or put the effort they did into public relations. In a sense, if Concordia Estates had not tried to build something bigger and at the same time, better, there might not have been such an obvious behemoth for the MPCC to challenge.

It is also possible that the clamour raised by the MPCC did succeed in killing off the remainder of the project by making the business community nervous. According to David Williams, Herbert Auerbach, Concordia Estates' project manager, once confided that the MPCC was too disorganized to recognize that they had succeeded in scaring away potential investors. However, as other events in Quebec made business so cautious, and the economy throughout North America also faltered at the same time, it is difficult to claim that the project as a whole had failed because a handful of residents succeeded in making themselves heard. The efforts of the MPCC probably had less effect on Concordia Estates than on the neighbourhood itself, sensitizing residents to issues and rights most didn't dream existed or could be attained.

That kind of social cross-pollination and the raising of consciousness would be invaluable a few years later when the next wave of neighbourhood activity started in earnest, leading to a dramatic community success in the eighties.

Sue Alward savours one example of what 'success' in Milton-Park meant to her later on, even after the demolition of the houses.

Something happened recently that made me feel pretty good. I was having coffee with Joanabbey and we heard these two young people at the table next to us. One guy said, "Gosh, I've got to get out. The landlord's raised the rent and it's just terrible." And the other one said, "No, you don't have to. There's the Rent Control Board. Don't you remember the Milton-Park Committee and all that?" Joanabbey and I just looked at each other and said, "Isn't that great."

For a few people, such as Jeanne L'Espérance and Marilyn Manzer, the MPCC and its struggle was the great political experience of their youth and helped shape many of the beliefs they still hold. For students, in particular, it was a chance to put into practice the social and environmental ideas they had discussed in and out of class. It was an opportunity to work with their own neighbours on the types of issues and

actions they had heard about and admired elsewhere.

For the students who wouldn't be moving on after they finished their studies and for those in the neighbourhood who were not middle-class, perhaps the situation and their expectations were somewhat different. This is Bryan Knight's perspective:

In terms of ordinary people from the area, instead of university professors, there was a real shortage. The reason for that was they — ordinary people — were indifferent either because they knew they were going to be butted around by whoever was in power, or they were pre-occupied with scraping together a living that they hadn't the time or energy to get involved in community battles like Milton-Park.

Knight, who later became an author and owner of a chess specialty shop, still believes in stating the case passionately. His chief regret is that, "We were too naive in the sixties to think up nice, evil things to do."

Whatever they had accomplished, the MPCC still lost their main battle. They could not save the houses demolished for Phase One. The largely unsuccessful struggle of the MPCC underlined the need for a type of organization and a level of skills which most of them, at that time, did not possess. Nor did they have the support base that could really have made a difference.

Knight feels that if the MPCC had been able to garner the financial support of social agencies such as Red Feather (the forerunner of Centraide) and the backing of business people who supported and controlled Montreal's charitable institutions, "we could have ruined their whole project!" The MPCC would have been in a stronger position to investigate the business dealings of Concordia Estates and could have made their own presentations to the Ford Foundation and other potential investors.

The MPCC lacked adequate manpower, expertise and resources to counteract Concordia Estates effectively. "We couldn't zip over to Switzerland and slip down to Chicago to make presentations," says Knight. "Lots of letters were sent around but if you're sitting in a trust company in a foreign country and you've received glossy brochures from respectable architects like Affleck . . . and it's got the blessing of

the City . . . and then you get a hastily-typed letter from a few residents of the area who are against the thing, who are you going to listen to?"

It was a series of mistakes that the Milton-Park visionaries did not make the next time around.



Third MPCC street festival, Ste. Famille Street below Milton, August 5, 1972
(photo by David Miller).

KEEPING THE COMMUNITY SPIRIT ALIVE

What keeps a movement rolling or a cause alive? How do ideas remain vibrant when all support seems dead? How are visions sustained in the face of indifference and apathy? Someone remembers, and believes, and keeps talking, educating, and fanning the flame. In Milton-Park, it was Lucia Kowaluk. She became more involved after the trial when others were worn out. Kowaluk simply did not think in terms of the MPCC dying completely.

It was, however, withering away, alive largely in name only. A bustling new entity was drawing attention to itself, the Jeanne Mance Street Committee. This committee's initial objective was to change the traffic patterns arounds the huge high-rises of La Cité. As a result of Phase One of the Concordia complex being erected, Jeanne Mance had been turned into a one-way speedway for vehicles travelling north. Furthermore, students at a private primary school (formerly Strathearn School) on Jeanne Mance just below Pine Avenue were at considerable risk. There was not even a stop sign to slow the onrushing traffic.

The street committee was Kowaluk's creation. Among those working with her were 'Bicycle' Bob Silverman, a crusader for (among other things) rights for cyclists; Michael Fish, an architect involved in campaigning for the preservation of Montreal's historical sites; and Joanabbey Sack, a Jeanne Mance resident then studying urban planning at McGill. Most of their efforts went towards trying to persuade both the City of Montreal and Concordia Estates to give the remaining residents of Milton-Park better treatment, or at least curtail the traffic racing by.

To dramatize their demand, the street committee used a number of attention-getting tactics such as a picnic in the middle of the road, a mock funeral, and other methods that slowed traffic to a crawl and brought their cause right to the driver's door.

The actions and 'guerilla theatre' of the Jeanne Mance Street Committee and of another committee a few blocks away garnered a considerable amount of publicity and resulted in some concrete changes from the city. Sidewalks were repaired, trees planted and no further houses were torn down. Even a stop sign (and, much later, a traffic light) was erected at the corner of Jeanne Mance and Léo Pariseau, site of the primary school. Although the committee's prime objective of changing the traffic patterns throughout the neighbourhood was not achieved, the meetings, bulletins and more provocative activities of the street committee kept alive continuing interest in neighbourhood issues.

Meanwhile, a new avenue of action had opened up as more Montrealers became aware that the way to progress was not necessarily through the wrecker's ball. In 1974, *The Gazette* published a series of articles, called 'Montreal at the Crossroads', (later to become a book) which focused attention on the battle by concerned groups to persuade the city administration to re-examine its urban planning policies. Spearheading the movement was a citizens' coalition called Save Montreal founded in the fall of 1973. Lucia Kowaluk represented the MPCC, Andy Melamed and Michael Fish were among those on the board of directors.

Many Montrealers, including some in the media, were finally becoming alarmed at the wholesale destruction of some of the city's most distinctive architectural features. It was time to take action. Protest rallies and demonstrations occurred at various prized sites.

One pessimistic writer pointed out in a Letter to the Editor following a demonstration, "You must have recognized from the outset that these would be futile efforts; the financial commitments had been made, the plans had been drawn up and the alternatives had been rejected after presumably careful study. How could any group of citizens expect to stop the wrecker's ball at that stage?"

He wasn't talking about Milton-Park but he could have been. Mayor Drapeau, on the other hand, did talk about the decision to demolish part of Milton-Park. In an interview for 'Montreal at the Crossroads' he maintained that "neighbourhood areas become dilapidated like Milton-Park, and their use changes. Then people have to move — unhappy at first — such people are usually happier in their new homes."

In reply to the mayor, Michael Fish wrote, in a Letter to the Editor, appearing in *The Gazette*:

Concordia Estates and company were systematically buying non-competitively in the area for years and systematically letting buildings run down so that prices would fall, so that neighbours would be forced to sell, so that more buildings could be allowed to run down, so that prices could fall, etc. The use of the neighbourhood changed, due entirely to city tolerance of gross private neglect and unfair business practices befitting a bank holdup, not the free enterprise system.

The question now was, would the city protect the remaining area in Milton-Park by re-zoning for low-rise residential use? Lucia Kowaluk pointed out in another letter that Mayor Drapeau seemed to have forgotten that Concordia Estates had asked the City Planning Department to declare the neighbourhood an urban renewal area, but the City's own inspection had found the houses generally solid and not in



Phase One of Cité Concordia underway showing foundation structure for new building, April 6, 1974 (photo by Gerry Davidson/Montreal Star/Public Archives of Canada/PA-153966).

need of destruction.

She concluded prophetically, "Fortunately, we will soon have an election with which to concretely cry stop" to the destruction of Montreal's architectural heritage. As it turned out, in the 1974 municipal elections, 18 members of the Montreal Citizens' Movement were elected, thus giving Mayor Drapeau and his Civic Party their first effective opposition in years.

Meanwhile, Phase One of La Cité had finally opened its hotel, shopping promenade, office tower and high-rise apartments. Although Milton-Park residents wandered in and out of the public areas of the complex, the shops and restaurants and expensive health spa were clearly not in their price range. The one notable exception and main lure for the locals was the supermarket giant Steinberg.

MPCC die-hards generally refused even to enter La Cité, let alone spend money there. However, the supermarket offered the lowest prices in the area on many items. Once when an MPCC stalwart was seen emerging from Steinberg, she blushed and explained, "I only came because there was a sale on toilet paper today."

In 1976, Montreal City Council, acknowledging the devastating and somewhat adverse economic effects of too much high-rise construction in the downtown area, drafted a by-law that would immeasurably help the remaining activists of Milton-Park. The by-law limited the floor space of new downtown apartment buildings to six square feet for each one foot of land the building stood on. This meant that the height or bulk of new buildings would be limited to four storeys. It was indicated, however, that if Concordia Estates wanted to request an exemption, the City would listen with a sympathetic ear.

Dimitri Roussopoulos, then chairman of the board of the University Settlement, and Bob Silverman, representing the MPCC, were quick to call a press conference denouncing any exemption for Concordia Estates. They also claimed that it was the work of the citizens' committees that had led to this by-law.

John Gardiner, a Montreal Citizens' Movement councillor elected in 1974 and later an organizer in the Milton-Park area¹, pointed out that the by-law had been requested and backed by local merchants who could no longer afford the huge costs associated with high-rise construction. It also gave MPCC remnants a badly-needed boost to morale. For the time being, neither Concordia Estates nor anyone else could put

up more buildings to tower over remaining homes.

In fact, Concordia Estates was no longer in a position to proceed with further phases of La Cité for financial reasons and had begun searching for buyers on whom to unload not only the rest of the recalcitrant neighbourhood but Phase One itself.

By 1977 the Olympic construction scandals had begun to surface and disillusioned citizens who had basked briefly in the two weeks of exhilaration provided by the 1976 Olympics were beginning to realize just how much they had to pay for one of Mayor Drapeau's big dreams. With the unfinished Olympic Stadium and its eternal construction cranes forming a seemingly permanent part of the cityscape, most people had the choice of either shrugging their shoulders or wincing. Whatever their attitude, they would still have to pay off the staggering costs of the Olympic Games which had somehow grown from \$310 million to \$1.3 billion.

Despite the criticism, bad publicity and even court trials of close associates, Mayor Drapeau and his Civic Party retained their supremacy in a dramatic way by reducing the opposition to just two seats. Although the MCM had won 18 council seats in the previous municipal election, Michael Fainstat retained their only one in 1978. The other opposition seat went to former MCM councillor Nick Auf der Maur of the rival Municipal Action Group. How could anyone challenge the status quo now?

Notes

1. In the 1986 Montreal elections, the Montreal Citizens' Movement swept to power. John Gardiner assumed responsibility for municipal housing and was appointed a member of the powerful Executive Committee at City Hall.

MAKING KEY CONNECTIONS

In December of 1977, Lucia Kowaluk was continuing her tireless search for ways of improving her neighbourhood. She and her friend and working partner, Michael Fish, met with Norman Nerenberg who now headed Paxmill, a holding company for Concordia Estates, to discuss the problem of traffic in their area. They feared the level of traffic would become worse if Concordia Estates went ahead with plans to tear down a building on Jeanne Mance Street. At one point Fish argued that instead of destroying the building it should be renovated. "Would you be willing to sell it?" he asked. "Make me an offer," countered Nerenberg, surprising both Fish and Kowaluk. They left Nerenberg's office excited about an idea that had often been discussed in various Milton-Park households — renovating neighbourhood buildings and turning them into housing co-operatives. Kowaluk felt certain that the residents would be enthusiastic about the possibility of having good housing and some control over it.

Her next move was to approach James (Jamie) McGregor, director of the Conseil de développement du logement communautaire, an architectural service for co-operatives, in the working class district of Pointe St. Charles. McGregor, a relaxed-looking young man who favoured blue jeans, was very much involved in establishing housing co-ops. He was generally regarded as the godfather of a number of Montreal urban planning projects. McGregor suggested doing a feasibility study on co-operative housing in the neighbourhood, focusing on the most promising block — the one on which Kowaluk resided. It was a particularly good time to consider such a project because the provincial government, following the 1976 victory of the Parti Québécois, had adopted a much more positive attitude towards co-ops.

McGregor also agreed with Kowaluk that they should approach Heritage Montreal, the fund-raising arm of Save Montreal, a coalition of 23 citizens' groups, for a small grant with which to do the study.

Heritage Montreal was concerned with funding and promoting urban conservation programs. It promoted the rescue and restoration of historic buildings such as the Grey Nuns' Mother House (now the new Dawson College campus), the Monument Nationale theatre (which housed the English section of the National Theatre School), and other sites that give Montreal its distinct character. The founder and driving force behind Heritage Montreal was architect Phyllis Lambert, daughter of the late Seagram's Distillery magnate, Samuel Bronfman, and probably the most interesting member of the wealthy Bronfman clan. An articulate individualist and an extremely private person with an abundance of intellectual energy, she had little to do with the glamorous social scene evoked by her family name. Intense, with short, dark hair and round, metal-rimmed glasses, Lambert's usual attire then was a pair of work overalls or colourful ethnic garb. Often her large, black dog accompanied her to the office or to meetings. Lambert had the air of a visionary, but also of someone who would brook no argument from non-believers.

Kowaluk, on the other hand, with her fair hair pulled back into a knot and conservative dress, reflected her then-current roles of wife and mother of a school-age son. Hidden to others, until they began dealing with her, were her persuasive powers and incredible reserves of patience and perseverance. Initially it would seem that Lambert and Kowaluk were at opposite ends of the social and political spectrum but, in fact, they had worked together on the board of Save Montreal and sometimes attended the same fund-raising events and social gatherings. During their various meetings Lambert learned of Kowaluk's preoccupation with trying to form co-ops in her immediate neighbourhood. "Lucia and I talked about this a lot. Obviously she lived and breathed it," says Lambert, so when Kowaluk formally asked Heritage Montreal for funds for a feasibility study on renovating a one-block section along Jeanne Mance Street, the organization promptly agreed.

With \$2,000 for a feasibility study in hand, and with James McGregor providing technical assistance, Kowaluk could now look for other competent individuals to help her. She didn't have to go far. Jean Lesiège, a colleague from the Jeanne Mance Street Committee was unemployed at the time. Lucia spied him one day sitting idly on his front steps and asked him to participate in organizing the study. As he recalls, "She got me involved from nine to five. It was worse than a job



Aerial view of Cité Concordia, February 14, 1976 (*photo by Gerry Davidson/Montreal Star/Public Archives of Canada/PA-153967*).

... Lucia and I were in meetings every night of the week, out shopping around for information, seeing lawyers. Every resource person we could get our hands on, we went to see."

One of the requirements of the feasibility study was to gauge support for the co-op idea among residents. Kowaluk and Lesiège organized meetings to explain the concept to the neighbourhood and drum up enthusiasm. At first there was so little response and so many potential problems that even Dimitri Roussopoulos concluded that Kowaluk was wasting her time and everyone else's. The first meetings in the area drew only a handful of people. Among them was Jean Perras, a professional social animator-organizer who lived on Park Avenue, one street west of Jeanne Mance. After a few meetings it seemed to Perras and a few others that nothing would be solved for the community by talking about turning only one block into a co-op, or working on a block by block basis. Perras went to City Hall and painstakingly looked up the evaluation of all the civic addresses in their 'quartier.' The total came to \$5.3 million. Interestingly enough, there were still a few buildings and lots in the area that were privately owned, having never been sold to Concordia Estates. It was the first time anyone had worked out what the area in question would cost. The idea of the whole-neighbourhood-as-a-co-op was taking root. However, some people who attended early meetings did not favour this concept and became an increasingly critical minority as the project progressed.

Meanwhile, Kowaluk had finished the one-block feasibility study. On the basis of what would be workable as a trial project, Kowaluk and her supporters considered making an offer to purchase that block on behalf of the residents. It was hoped that recently-announced federal government co-op aid programs, administered by the CMHC, would finance the trial project and ultimately the remaining blocks. They soon learned from business contacts that Paxmill would not be interested in such a minor deal. Action was brewing elsewhere.

Gradually, as Kowaluk had made more and more requests for aid from Heritage Montreal, Lambert, the woman concerned with saving Montreal's architectural uniqueness, became increasingly aware of the Milton-Park area and its people. Milton-Park activists welcomed this involvement but some were concerned that Phyllis Lambert's and Heritage Montreal's priorities were buildings rather than people; structures rather than the human beings who lived in them. Andy Melamed

shared that concern. He had agreed to sit on the board of Save Montreal to try, along with others, to concentrate more on the human element of neighbourhoods. According to him, a "process of education for a woman whose background naturally excluded many of the grimmer realities of life," began taking place for Lambert as a result of her involvement in plans for Milton-Park.

For Lambert, it was a foregone conclusion that people would naturally benefit if certain sites were protected from the continued trend of, as she put it, "destruction in the name of progress," which seemed to be the hallmark of Mayor Drapeau's regime then. The only question was how best to protect the physical space while also developing some type of neighbourhood involvement. As groups and committees deliberated, time was running out.

Kowaluk's request to Heritage Montreal had alerted various individuals in the business community that the properties might be up for sale. At the same time, interest rates had been rising and Paxmill would soon face mortgage payments of \$3.14 million, while revenue was only \$1.9 million.

Various offers and plans began to evolve for the properties. McGill University, wanting to guarantee a stock of student housing in the district, considered purchasing the properties. That idea was abruptly dropped after an influential member of the Board of Governors objected. Mark Feldman, a lawyer with the firm advising McGill and who was also working with Heritage Montreal, then approached Phyllis Lambert with a plan for private development. Heritage Montreal would supervise restoration. The developers would handle the actual renovations and manage the properties. Feldman was able to raise \$2.75 million privately to offer the Ford Foundation, but it was not enough. While this was happening, another group led by residents who opposed the Milton-Park activists was also studying the possibility of a private purchase.

Heritage Montreal put out feelers to CMHC, the federal government housing authority, to see if that agency would be interested in purchasing the properties for the amount of the evaluation. It soon became obvious that considerable time would elapse before getting an initial response from CMHC — let alone a final answer.

Concern then arose that if Paxmill was unable to meet its mortgage obligations, the properties might be sold off one by one, thus destroy-

ing the integrity of the neighbourhood. Something had to be done quickly. What was needed was someone with sufficient cash who could act quickly and decisively without the need to consult bureaucrats, advisors, committees and boards of directors. That person turned out to be Harry Mendelsohn, a wealthy Montreal pawnbroker and real estate bargain-hunter. Mendelsohn was approached by Feldman and the developers to put up interim financing until a reply was received from CMHC. Within 24 hours Mendelsohn had offered \$4.5 million to buy out the Ford Foundation and take control of the Milton-Park properties from Paxmill. Although Heritage Montreal was aware of this plan and apparently approved of it on a Saturday, by Monday the developers found they could no longer contact Lambert. Within a few days, they were called by an official of CEMP Investments, the trust fund set up for the four Bronfman children. The official, who also sat on the board of Heritage Montreal, announced that the foundation was severing all connections with the developers.

The implications of what could happen to the community under the proposed plan had probably not been fully realized by Heritage Montreal until that fateful weekend. With CMHC backing the private developers, Heritage Montreal would simply supervise the physical restoration. Although renovated units would be offered to local residents first, and there was talk of possible co-ops, it is likely that rents would have been raised to match prevailing market rates. Such increases would make them unaffordable to most Milton-Park residents and the concept of neighbourhood control would perish.

Phyllis Lambert's intention had been to save the neighbourhood for the residents.

I loved Milton-Park as an architect and was absolutely convinced that unless people are involved in managing their own cities, their own neighbourhoods, as an architect I'm not going to be able to do a bloody thing that's significant, nor is anybody else . . . We would not do it if it meant that the people who lived there could not afford to stay there.

The introduction of Mendelsohn, known for his interest in acquisition, not development, became particularly galling to Lambert, Kowaluk and the others. As Lambert put it, "He'd take a property, a

house, the way you'd take a silver mug and he'd say, 'Take this, if you really want it you can put something down and buy it on terms. Put down so much every month.' "

Mendelsohn now owned the properties in question. Aware that the area adjacent to the properties was showing signs of gentrification, it seemed likely that he would do little or nothing to the buildings but wait and sell them off individually at a substantial profit. His erstwhile partners did remodel one unit on Park Avenue for \$40,000 as a demonstration, but Mendelsohn called a halt to further renovation. With the ideal of community control hanging in the balance, Heritage Montreal persuaded Mendelsohn to keep the properties together pending an answer from CMHC.

Mendelsohn's actual role is not clear to outsiders. For the next six months he simply held on to the properties while Phyllis Lambert and the Milton-Park activists sought another way of realizing the dream of a co-operative project.

While Heritage Montreal was exploring ways of financing the project, Kowaluk, Roussopoulos, Lesiège, Perras and others set up a flurry of community meetings to promote their ideas for Milton-Park. Their main goal was to remove the buildings permanently from the private market and end real estate speculation and profit-making in the neighbourhood. This action, some hoped, would inspire others so that parts of Montreal would eventually become a series of small, self-governing neighbourhoods.

But not everyone favoured these activities. For instance, Kowaluk found, to her frustration, that initially Notre-Dame-de-la Salette church on Park Avenue would not rent them space for mass meetings, perhaps perceiving the organizers as radicals bent on taking over the neighbourhood. Of more concern was the splinter group which opposed the neighbourhood-as-co-op concept. One of the most adamantly opposed individuals was Elmer Fecteau, a resident who insisted that people should also have the option of private ownership of buildings in the area. Fecteau eventually formed his own dissident organization, Maisons St-Louis de Montréal, to represent those who wanted to buy their homes privately. At its peak Maisons St-Louis had about 80 members, but the core group was only about 12 to 20 residents. Nevertheless it had to be taken seriously. Any organized opposition could have jeopardized the project at that point. A meeting was arranged bet-

ween Heritage Montreal and Maisons St-Louis de Montréal, in effect between Phyllis Lambert and Elmer Fecteau. They agreed verbally that any proposal to CMHC would include the option of private ownership. Fecteau describes that agreement as, “the carrot held out to get our support.” Lambert’s position then was that her main goal was to save a heritage area from destruction. She was neither committed nor opposed to the co-op concept as a means of doing this. Furthermore, no one was really familiar with the rules and regulations of the new housing programs. As Lambert put it:

... we didn’t know what the problems were. At first when I talked to CMHC, we were hoping that people in the community could buy their homes. I didn’t even know the thing was one big chunk of land and all the complications of breaking up a big piece of land for the various owners to buy. So we said sure, people could own their own homes individually, whatever that means. Nobody knew what all those definitions were.

Feeling that the community was behind them, Heritage Montreal met with CMHC asking them to finance the purchase and renovations of all the Milton-Park properties at once, while allowing Heritage Montreal to manage them during the renovation period. Gradually, the properties would be turned over to residents as they formed co-ops and received financing under CMHC programs to buy the buildings themselves. The local CMHC office balked at the first proposal. For one thing it was unprecedented to ask the agency to acquire property on behalf of a third party. For another, officials found the size and scope of the proposed project mind-boggling. Lambert’s reaction to that first frustrating meeting was to walk out. “I took my pencil and slammed it across the table and said, ‘I don’t know what I’m doing here’ and left.” Some reaction at the national level was not supportive either. One CMHC official reportedly sneered, “Houses are like clothes. They should be bought or rented, not shared.”

Notwithstanding resistance to this project, co-operatives of all varieties had, by this time, become popular in Canada. Housing co-operatives were particularly valued as a means of giving consumers access to good housing at a reasonable price. It is noteworthy that, throughout Canada during the late seventies, as interest rates shot up to 21%, co-ops began to appeal not only to low income people, but to the

middle class as well. By 1981, there were approximately 14,000 co-op dwellings across the country, housing some 60,000 people.

But the Milton-Park proposal was highly unusual in many respects. Housing co-operatives are commonly initiated by like-minded individuals in similar social circumstances — senior citizens, members of the same ethnic group or good friends. Usually, co-op members build their housing from scratch, such as the Simon Bolivar Co-op in Kitchener, the William Lyon MacKenzie Housing Co-op just north of Toronto and the Access Housing Co-op in Vancouver.

In contrast, the Milton-Park plan was intended for existing residents, no matter who they were, and how little they had in common. All the buildings were to be renovated; none were to be torn down. Initially, until individual co-ops were formed, the whole area, comprising about 700 dwellings,¹ would have a single owner, making it the largest development of its kind in Canada, probably in North America. The proposed plan also called for co-operative control of most of the alleys within the six-block area and of buildings containing several dozen small businesses such as pizza parlours, barber shops and grocery stores. They were all part of the \$5 million land parcel.

Trying to fit the project into existing CMHC programs was like trying to squeeze a bulging, angular body into a standard size 10 dress. At that time, CMHC thinking could not stretch to accommodate. Neither could it envision spending the then huge sum of \$5 million to do so. A CMHC official in Ottawa put it this way: "In effect, a neighbourhood was saying to a federal government agency, 'Buy me and keep me.' It was very audacious." CMHC's stated reason for rejecting the first proposal was, basically, that Heritage Montreal had not proposed an adequate organizational structure or involved sufficiently experienced people to deal with such a large, complex project. As Jean Lesiège comments sourly, "It would have been fine if, for example, the president of the Bank of Montreal happened to be a tenant . . . if we had that type of people in charge."

Someone as determined as Phyllis Lambert could not take no for an answer. In consultation with Kowaluk, other neighbourhood activists and Heritage Montreal board members, she began to mobilize support for the project from various sources. In the course of her efforts, she decided to call the CMHC national office herself. CMHC was then headed by William Teron. An Ottawa builder appointed head of

CMHC in 1973, Teron was a creative individualist with vision, who would not allow himself to be hampered by bureaucracy. Nevertheless, as Teron recalls, "We were always getting phone calls from people trying to get around various local and regional offices. So we had six secretaries to handle and screen calls." By a stroke of luck, Lambert's call was answered by Teron himself. By further coincidence, he had recently visited the Milton-Park district and agreed with her that the old, original dwellings were far more appropriate in that particular neighbourhood than high-rises. Although Teron did not know Lambert personally at the time, he was aware of her clout and the fact that she could bring practical expertise — real estate and financial managers — to this idealistic project. He was willing to help.

Fortunately, as well, a federal election was about to be called, which meant that politicians would be particularly receptive to lobbying efforts over the next few months. Phyllis Lambert had no compunction about using her connections. "We had to go the political route. We had to speak to the ministers and convince them that this was something that could be undertaken properly," she recalls. She spoke to several political figures. These included André Ouellet, then the minister responsible for Urban Affairs and CMHC, and also Quebec campaign manager for the federal Liberals; Donald Johnston, MP for Westmount and Treasury Board head; and Serge Joyal, at that time a Liberal member of Quebec's National Assembly.

The community, for its part, would have to demonstrate that it was solidly behind the proposal. It was decided to send a well-publicized collective telegram to CMHC. Enthusiastic volunteers canvassed Milton-Park streets for signatures for the proposed telegram and on February 27, 1979, the text was read aloud at a general community meeting. The telegram urged support for a plan that would allow Milton-Park residents to form co-ops out of the Paxmill properties or for individual residents to buy houses privately. This reference to individual ownership was included, at Phyllis Lambert's suggestion, to prevent opposition from Maisons St-Louis, but its inclusion would later haunt the project organizers. On March 2, 1979, the telegram, signed by 200 people, was sent to William Teron and André Ouellet.

Undoubtedly, this missive had some effect, but it was not as effective as Phyllis Lambert's personal contacts of a political nature and the blue-chip board of directors she was assembling to administer the project. In

addition, glowing reports about the proposed project were appearing in the press. All these factors led to concrete results. On April 26, 1979, Jacques Guilbault, Liberal MP for the area, held a sidewalk press conference to announce a \$16 million, 613-unit housing project that would more than double the number of co-op housing units in Montreal. It was the largest renovation project on a co-op basis that had ever been attempted. The purchase price of the 200 buildings was \$5.5 million, a million more than when they changed hands six months ago. Renovation costs were estimated at \$8.5 million. Carrying costs and miscellaneous expenses would be another \$2 million. These costs would be covered by CMHC, as well as by the City of Montreal and the provincial government, which together would supply an additional \$1.5 million. It sounded like a neat package. But first press reports indicated trouble brewing.

There were contradictory statements from Jacques Guilbault and Lucia Kowaluk about what residents would have to pay for their housing. In an April 30, 1979 editorial, *The Montreal Star* warned that:

... the project's awesome scale also presents the risk of unwieldiness ... if all goes well there could be many more (co-op projects). If not it could become a dinosaur undermining the credibility of the co-op movement as a whole ... Will the project's manager, the private, non-profit Heritage Montreal, be able to engender such a spirit of co-operation when there are so many different groups? Now the hard part begins.

By no means the least difficult part was simply dealing with local CMHC officials. Politicians come and go, depending on election results, but lower level civil servants usually outlast their elected superiors and continue conducting affairs as they see fit. Sometimes, of course, the local office may be better able to assess the situation, but at a time when there were strong separatist feelings in Quebec anyway, local officials of a federal department were even more likely to insist on acting autonomously. Eventually, Phyllis Lambert could say, "Our relationship with CMHC was wonderful after a certain period of time," but there were to be many more months of difficult negotiations, even after the project was announced.

The papers actually formalizing the agreement were not signed until

May 16, 1979, just six days before the Progressive Conservatives were elected in the federal election. By a close call, Heritage Montreal and the Milton-Park community had achieved their first goal while whatever political leverage they had could still work.

The agreement between Heritage Montreal and CMHC was the fruition of many years of struggle by community activists, beginning with the efforts some ten years previously of the Milton-Park Citizens' Committee to save the neighbourhood from demolition by Concordia Estates. During the early years of the process, while the Canadian economy was still growing and before the community had anything to lose (such as concrete promises of government funding), neighbourhood activists felt free to make extravagant demands. The current economic climate had become increasingly difficult, requiring a more practical, hard-nosed approach from community organizers. Now that an agreement with the government was at hand, they had to cope with the ensuing responsibilities and work within its limitations.

There were millions of dollars at stake, rents from hundreds of dwellings to collect, renovations to supervise, government policies and programs to interpret, and an amazing array of demands from new sub-groups forming within the neighbourhood now that the main goal had been achieved. It was not, at this stage, a project that could be handled by an inexperienced community group. Although a few of the approximately 2,000 residents could organize themselves into co-ops and tackle the paperwork necessary to obtain charters, apply for grants and supervise renovations, most could not and the few that could were unlikely to be able to reach and teach all those that had to be involved.

The demonstrators of the late sixties had fought with blue jeans fervour. The negotiators of the late seventies were more likely to don a corporate image. Heritage Montreal formed a new, non-profit organization called La Société du Patrimoine Urbain de Montreal (SPUM), which signed a three-year contract with CMHC and acquired responsibility for Milton-Park.

SPUM's blue-chip board of directors included Phyllis Lambert; James Raymond, an investment advisor from CEMP; Jean-Marc Côté-Pouliot, a member of Save Montreal and a high-powered fund-raiser and manager; lawyer Mark Feldman; James McGregor; and another lawyer, Bob Cohen, the only newcomer involved. One or two representatives from the community were also to be named.

As a September 1, 1979 editorial in *The Montreal Star* noted:

Heritage Montreal and its creature, the Société du Patrimoine de Montréal, are in a slightly anomalous position at the moment. They are . . . the landlord to about 2,100 people who have a strong local tradition of fighting with their landlords. They have raised the rent and avoided improving the properties just like previous landlords. The only essential difference is that they are obliged to re-sell to co-ops or non-profit associations of occupants on terms yet to be announced.

Bob Cohen, who became SPUM project co-ordinator, now assumed a pivotal position in the negotiations. A large, shy, man with a shambling gait, he had worked at the Pointe St. Charles legal clinic for six years. That store-front office in the working-class Pointe became the virtual model of Quebec's legal aid system later set up by the Parti Québécois. Cohen had also run unsuccessfully for city council under the banner of the Montreal Citizens' Movement (MCM). After years of battling for the 'little guy' on legal issues, Cohen looked forward to his new role in the housing field.

The staff hired to work with Cohen were also known for their devotion to community causes. Sue Moorhead, hired as a social animator, had worked on a similar, but much smaller co-op in the Pointe; John Gardiner, also a community organizer, had served as an MCM city councillor and as a commissioner on the Montreal Island School Commission; and John Bradley, another organizer, had also run as an MCM candidate and had worked with the elderly. It was an enthusiastic, dedicated team in which secretaries and organizers alike radiated warmth and concern for the community.

SPUM set up an office on Park Avenue, started publishing a newsletter and held meetings every Tuesday night with those in the community who began to become involved. It also undertook a door-to-door survey to establish what renovations the various buildings needed. The first major task was to draw up a plan, as called for in the contract with CMHC, showing that the project was viable and how it would proceed. The plan was to be completed within three to six months. Because of the change in government, there was pressure to quickly justify a project that had been partly the result of a last-minute Liberal campaign gesture.

SPUM members and staff worked furiously to produce it on time. It was a glossy-covered, 163-page document detailing the goals and objectives of the project — the financing, the architectural assessments, the renovation procedures and the community development strategy. Also included were descriptive models for community services and a new neighbourhood co-operative lifestyle, to which SPUM was highly committed, but which the federal Conservative government was less interested in. SPUM produced the *Action Plan* primarily to impress the politicians. It was not intended as a blueprint for the project. Unfortunately, it was seen as such by the community and by the government once details had been set down in black and white. This led to problems. The document was based on a general preliminary assessment of building conditions. Architects found out later that the renovations needed were far greater than anticipated. Planners, too, would later be strapped with unrealistic purchase prices, given actual building conditions. John Gardiner later lamented that, since it could not possibly have been carried out anyway, SPUM should have spent only two weeks, not six months, preparing it.

Note

1. At various times, different press releases and stories used different figures. After eliminating sub-standard units and adhering to strict CMHC building codes, the total number of renovated dwellings was 597.

THE NEIGHBOURHOOD-AS-CO-OP

The idea of renovating and creating co-operatives out of an entire neighbourhood for existing tenants was a noble one. It meant that 'What you saw was what you got' — both in terms of buildings and residents.

Some of the buildings were hardly worth saving. One, for example, was tilted at an alarming angle; others were boarded up, having been declared uninhabitable in years past. Since the CMHC was committed to buying the entire area as a package, it had to take the bad bargains with the good, the dilapidated with the sound.

The population of Milton-Park was also a diversity of religious, ethnic, socio-economic and political backgrounds. There were social activists and isolated alcoholics, transients and long-term residents, well-off apartment dwellers and poverty-stricken roomers. All these people, with their different values, were expected to form co-operatives and work together as a cohesive community.

One resident, Jean Perras, paints an interesting picture:

... half French, half English. A little more women, maybe. All kinds of nationalities. All kinds of religions: Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, Presbyterian. All political tendencies ... federally, we have everything from the Conservatives, NDP, to the Liberals. Provincially, we have all of the parties — Péquistes, Liberals, Union Nationale. We have Communists of all hues — pro-Albanian, pro-Russia, pro-Chinese, pro-nothing. We have anarchists; we have apolitical people; atheists; we have 'freaks'; we have very straight people; educated, non-educated people; and we did it. I don't know how, but we did it. Or almost did it.

A co-op, like a family, can be organized in many different ways. Some are patriarchal, some matriarchal. Some are authoritarian, others democratic. A co-op formed by people who have similar values has a

good chance of running smoothly. Given the variety of people in Milton-Park there was bound to be conflict as residents tried to work together with people very different from themselves.

The complex, democratic process of forming co-operatives and making collective decisions was foreign to many residents. This is hardly surprising. Although we live in a democratic society, only a few of us participate actively in its mechanisms — in riding associations, unions, school committees and other groups that enable individuals to exercise their democratic rights. The majority confines its involvement to voting in elections every so often, and some fail to do even this. In the summer of 1983, for example, when the future of school boards in Quebec was threatened, and when a show of support was crucial, only the usual 16% or so of those eligible to vote bothered to do so. Similarly, in Milton-Park, only a small, albeit significant, number of residents were actively involved in organizing the community and were fully aware of the implications of the co-operative project. The rest of the community was somewhat bewildered and fearful at first about what was happening. These residents had an inkling of what was going on — but not a thorough understanding of it — in the way that people who scan headlines have only an inkling of events. They did not fully understand the SPUM board's relationship to the neighbourhood and felt that their private lives were being interfered with. Some even whispered that the project was part of a Communist plot.

In order to be informed, residents were expected to attend meetings, meetings and more meetings. Many were intimidated at first by unfamiliar terms such as 'purchase price' and 'low end of market' being bandied about. Many anglophones had difficulty understanding meetings which were held largely in French, in keeping with the spirit of the times. There were stories of anglophones within a largely French co-op or meeting, plodding determinedly on in their sub-standard French until even the francophones pleaded that the proceedings be held in English.

People in the area who already knew each other and shared ideals were able to organize themselves into co-ops fairly quickly. However, these early co-ops — some formed even before the project agreement was signed — had members scattered over several blocks, which complicated the renovation and maintenance process. The later co-ops were cohesive geographically, but it took much effort and time for them to

consolidate themselves in other ways.

There were factors that hindered the community organization process. Although co-operative living meant that everyone was to be considered equal, existing economic disparities meant that, as the saying goes, some people were more equal than others. Some residents had good incomes and lived in spacious quarters. Should their rents be subsidized too? It was a controversial issue.

There were doubts about the organizers — the SPUM board — who lived outside Milton-Park, yet seemed to have their own, massive scheme for the neighbourhood. Residents wondered if it wasn't just the same as having Concordia, or Paxmill as a landlord, only more time-consuming. Some complained that it would be better for residents to buy their own homes, or remain regular tenants.

Worst of all was the realization that, if houses were to be fully renovated — and not everyone wanted this — people would have to move out temporarily. It was not clear where, when and for how long they would go. And at whose cost? Consequently, certain people felt that opening the door when the community organizers came knocking was somewhat like opening Pandora's Box.

Not everyone was well-suited to co-op living, no matter how flexible the arrangements. The very old or the infirm were unable to take full responsibility for their own affairs. Others were not interested in group efforts. To accommodate those who did not fit into the co-operative scheme, non-profit housing associations, run by community institutions rather than individual residents, were later set up.

Meanwhile, in the SPUM office, a small, hard-working staff was trying to clear up some of the confusion. The task was formidable. Bob Cohen recalls that even his own in-laws had trouble understanding the purpose of the project, as was evident by their reaction to a lengthy article in *The Gazette*. "Can middle-class people get a deal like this?" they asked. Apparently this was the only point that had sunk in. Says Cohen:

Bear in mind we're renovating 600 units. We're dealing with 20 groups; we're dealing with three levels of government . . . and they all have to be in concert. We've negotiated with all three levels at various times. And it's a process in which we're wearing different hats. We're the owner; we're the landlord; we're form-

ing or helping to form co-ops, animating groups and planning for the renovations.

It was an imposing three-year agenda. SPUM had to 'pull off the project' financially, socially and technically. It also had to deal with all the public and community relations matters — handling the media, going to court on various technicalities, mediating community grievances (or trying to anyway) and explaining and justifying the project to government officials.

Since CMHC could not legally finance the renovations directly, the ownership of the properties had first to be transferred to SPUM. When each co-op started renovations, it signed management agreements with SPUM and then shared responsibility for the work with SPUM. Until that point, duties such as rent collection and maintenance were carried out by Gestion Ste-Famille, whose employees were, for the most part hold-overs from the days of Concordia Estates. It was a practical arrangement, but it contributed to the feeling among some residents that they were dealing with yet another Concordia Estates-style landlord.

The main element of the SPUM staff was the Groupe de ressources techniques (GRT), the technical resource group. GRTs are organizations used throughout the province of Quebec (and now in other provinces) to give technical assistance to subsidized co-op housing projects.¹ Most GRTs are ongoing, but the GRT Milton-Park was to exist only until renovations in the neighbourhood were completed and properties transferred to the co-ops or non-profit organizations.

The GRT Milton-Park had, at its peak, 20 staff who were chosen for their expertise in finance, law, planning and real estate. There were four architects and five draftspeople to do most of the planning and on-site supervision. Outside architects, such as Michael Fish, were hired to help with surplus work. In addition, there were five 'chargés de projet,' community organizers/resource people, who dealt directly with the population, organizing them into co-ops. They knocked on doors, set up the first 'kitchen meetings,' assisted with technicalities such as interpreting confusing regulations, and helped organize the structures, committees and working cores that would keep a co-op viable both financially and socially.

The Conseil de développement du logement communautaire (CDLC) was also involved in the project. Its role was to determine how

to fit the residents of rooming houses, often isolated individuals with few resources, into the grand plan. (CDLC planner James McGregor sat on the SPUM board.) In addition, several local community institutions such as churches and health centres became involved in setting up housing for the elderly and infirm, as well as the roomers. What it all looked like on paper, the 'organigramme' as Bob Cohen calls it, was as follows: SPUM was a corporation set up by Heritage Montreal to own the properties and oversee the project. The technical professionals of the GRT were SPUM's 'crew.' Bob Cohen was the man in the middle — the link between the GRT and SPUM as the official director of the GRT as well as the manager of SPUM's day-to-day affairs.

Although the SPUM board was the official decision-making body, the GRT was equally important and often made the day-to-day decisions, with the SPUM board only guiding and advising rather than providing all the answers. Even the architects had a fair degree of autonomy, a surprising fact given Phyllis Lambert's and Heritage Montreal's concern for the architectural nature of the neighbourhood. While Lambert often put forward suggestions and did not hide or dilute her opinions, she did not dictate the blueprints.

Eventually the SPUM board also acquired a few community representatives, people who though not chosen by general assembly were natural leaders and were involved with certain neighbourhood groups. Such community participation was considered essential, nevertheless it could occasionally be problematic. One of the new board members from the community, Jean Lesiège, became highly dissatisfied with the way SPUM operated. Lesiège, who had been instrumental in organizing the Co-op du Nordet, found SPUM's decision-making processes too slow and paternalistic. He felt, and he was not the only one, that a structure was being imposed on the community by outsiders. As Lesiège recalls:

I joined the SPUM board and our first meeting with Phyllis Lambert was a massacre . . . I figure, hell, you're running this, but it's my life you're running . . .

I could have written a book about the screaming matches that Phyllis Lambert and I had . . . We had good times as well . . . She also happens to be a nice person that I like, outside of SPUM. I

think the things we quarreled about were on finances and helping the other co-ops in the project.

Of course it's fine for a person who makes a million to say you should help other people. But when that person is talking to others who make an average of \$15,000 a year, to ask them to pay an extra ten dollars a month is a lot of money. We drink Cuvée des Patriotes . . . she allows herself Chablis. It's a totally different world. I mean, she may work in overalls, but she also drives a BMW. I put a ticket in the metro every morning . . .

At one point, Lesiège called a meeting of co-op representatives to debate some crucial financial matters and refused to let Bob Cohen attend. He threatened to throw Cohen out if he appeared, or cancel the meeting entirely. Fortunately, Cohen's sensitive assistant, Giselle Gingras, was allowed to attend and was instrumental in negotiating a compromise between Lesiège and SPUM. Over the years SPUM had to resolve many other conflicts between itself and the residents, CMHC, the municipal or provincial governments, individual board members — the list seems endless. Fortunately, so was the patience of SPUM's members and staff.

The *SPUM Bulletin* provides an overview of some of the problems that beset the project during these early years. The August 1979 issue was devoted to explaining the virtues of housing co-operatives, a sign that many residents still had to be 'sold' on the idea. Another issue featured an interview with James Walker, a long-time resident of the area, giving a pep talk of sorts. The main issues that preoccupied the *SPUM Bulletin* and consumed much of the staff's energy at the time were two concurrent battles. One was with CMHC over rents; the other was with Maisons St-Louis over the question of private ownership.

The battle with CMHC arose as the project organizers tried to determine the rents of units after renovation. This depended largely on the amount of subsidies available, which was a matter of some confusion. The project was being funded under a number of federal, provincial and municipal programs, each with its own regulations. As a special case, Milton-Park was not always subject to the same strict rules regarding grants and subsidies that were applied to other ventures. Nevertheless, SPUM still had to fight, wheedle and coax to obtain extra funding or to

be able to use funds in innovative ways.

SPUM's chief concern was to set a rental figure based on what residents had been paying prior to renovations. This came to be known as the 'acquired rights' method. CMHC, on the other hand, insisted on a 'low end of market rent,' a complex formula, which was arrived at, in part, by averaging the rents in adjacent neighbourhoods, including the up-scale La Cité high-rise complex. These areas were already becoming gentrified and expensive. Under such a formula, the rents would become too high for existing residents. On average, rents after renovations would rise by 44%. A single room would rent for 20% more than the current price, while a four-bedroom apartment would be 59% more. Such increases would negate the whole purpose of the project.

One of the GRT staff members most directly involved in the rent issue was Sue Moorhead, a dedicated and experienced organizer who spent many long hours navigating her way, via computer, through a maze of complicated calculations. 'Sue and her computer' became legendary in the neighbourhood. Because the computer was a relatively new tool, as was the program she was employing, Moorhead experienced considerable difficulty in extracting the type of information she needed and in verifying it. In Jean Lesiège's words, the system was "so half-assed that nobody can understand it, including the ones who created it." Nevertheless, Moorhead persisted in her efforts to estimate appropriate post-renovation rents and her calculations were used in subsequent negotiations.

During the spring of 1980, the rent issue came to a head. For five months Cohen, Lambert and others, including a committee of residents from the eight existing co-ops and two OSBLs (*organismes sans but lucratif* or non-profit housing associations), had tried to persuade CMHC to change its rent formula, but to no avail. The regional office director blocked the group at every turn. Moreover, the project's old ally, William Teron, was no longer with CMHC and his successor supported the regional office's decision. Once again, timely political events and pressure saved the project.

The Parti Québécois government had decided to seek a mandate from the electorate to negotiate the issue of sovereignty-association with the rest of Canada. During the winter and spring vigorous campaigning was going on for the historic referendum to be held in June. The federal Liberals wanted to ensure a resounding 'no' vote on the issue and,

therefore, were particularly anxious to curry favour with Quebecers at the time. Bob Cohen was able to use this anxiety to advantage when, during an acrimonious meeting between CMHC and SPUM, he threatened to go public with the issue. He was armed with a six-page press release designed to create headlines such as: "Federal Government Forces Residents from Homes with Demands for High Rents." The Liberals would appear to be decidedly anti-social at a time when the PQ was launching a number of progressive housing programs.

Cohen's threat went straight to Ottawa. The issue was taken out of local hands and a new, global policy was formulated for all co-operatives based on the acquired-rights principle of determining rents. (The Federation of Housing Co-operatives, an Ottawa-based group, had also been pushing for such a policy and shares credit for its realization.)

The agreement for the new rent scale negotiated between SPUM and CMHC was signed April 30. The first units in the renovated co-ops would have no more than a 7% rent increase while a few would have no increase at all. SPUM was able to announce proudly to skeptical residents that the average rent-after-renovations for a one-bedroom apartment would go from \$124 to \$133; a four-bedroom unit would cost \$185 instead of \$173. All that was still needed to convince the rest of the community to form co-ops was for renovations to begin. Before this could happen, the dissident group, Maisons St-Louis, forced a confrontation that changed the nature of the entire project.

Note

1. There are approximately 40 accredited co-op housing resource groups in Canada. *From the Rooftops*, Co-operative Housing Foundation of Canada, N° 91, 1986.

THE DISSIDENTS

If you want apple juice and they want to give you tomato juice... they'll say 'I'll give you a choice between to-may-to juice and to-mah-to juice' and you say, 'but I want apple.' You do that 40 times... a person gets so thirsty that he eventually takes tomato juice.

— Elmer Fecteau, President
Maisons St-Louis de Montréal

In the headlong effort to acquire the Milton-Park properties while they were still available, Heritage Montreal had promised the dissident group, Maisons St-Louis, that individual ownership of units would be an option for those who did not want to live in co-ops. But as often happens with such 'campaign promises,' the project organizers had second thoughts once victory was assured.

To their great frustration, the members of Maisons St-Louis soon found that their calls to Heritage Montreal / SPUM were often ignored. When they did get through, they were given a new version of the project, one that included co-ops and non-profit associations (also known in Quebec as OSBLs, organismes sans but lucratif) but not individual ownership. Elmer Fecteau and the others felt betrayed. After all, they were the same kind of people who started the first co-ops — educated professionals and community activists — and they were being shunted aside. One of them, lawyer Ziggy Finkelstein, had even worked with Lucia Kowaluk on landlord-tenant problems and on the Milton-Park Citizens' Committee. Several of the Maisons St-Louis group had elected to live in the inner-city core for the sake of rebuilding the neglected houses. Others were conservationists who did not own cars, even though they could afford it. They preferred to walk or use the subway instead.

Not all Maisons St-Louis members were affluent and could have afforded to buy their own homes. Some simply wished to remain tenants

in a particular building rather than become involved in a co-op. It was a bright, active group, with drive, skills and education on its side. It therefore had more clout than objectors in co-op projects normally have.

As James McGregor put it: "In every co-op project, there's always 1% of the people who would like to buy their buildings . . . one person, a single private citizen who wants to buy. There's no question of buying it. Mostly they don't have the money to do so." In this case, the percentage of the neighbourhood that wanted the option of buying their homes was almost 10%. The group was therefore a serious threat to the project.

The co-operative enthusiasts could not understand why Maisons St-Louis members were so adamant about private ownership. Daniel Mettarlin, a notary working with SPUM on the complex deeds of sale, was exasperated that Maisons St-Louis members did not seem to appreciate the good deal they were being offered under the new CMHC program that provided a subsidy to bridge the gap between a mortgage at 2% interest and one at the market rate, which was 10 ¾% in mid-1979.

"I met with them and I remember telling them, 'Look, you guys have a bonanza here. You're crazy to fight for ownership. You have 2% mortgages for 35 years; you're living in the centre of town; you can have 100% co-op loan insurance.'"

On July 17, 1979, Bob Cohen issued a press release depicting, in glowing terms, the advantages of organizing co-ops immediately and getting renovations underway. The next day, representatives of Maisons St-Louis met with him to declare that they wanted no part of SPUM's plan. It was a conflict SPUM had hoped would not escalate.

Much of the ensuing battle was fought through the media because of Maisons St-Louis' frustration with lack of response from SPUM, Heritage Montreal, CMHC and local MPs. There were headlines such as "Milton Area Tenants Press for More Freedom of Choice." On July 24, Elmer Fecteau stated the Maisons St-Louis case in a lengthy letter to *The Montreal Star*. He pointed out that the association was organized months before SPUM existed, that it had been induced to support Heritage Montreal by the assurance that "our goals were the same," and that it too was against speculation, gentrification and absentee landlords in the neighbourhood.

Denis Samson, another Maisons St-Louis member, went on the CBC television program, *Quebec Report*, explaining that the group was not against co-ops per se but that the members had envisioned a pluralistic project that would revitalize the area by giving residents a range of options — co-ops, condominiums, co-ownership, individual ownership and rental arrangements. Furthermore, they had been led to believe all these options were possible.

The main difference between the opposing forces was ideological. Maisons St-Louis saw private ownership as a freedom-of-choice issue. The co-op advocates feared the possibility of real estate speculation, to which private ownership often led. Fecteau maintained that the housing would be held by a non-profit corporation, and then re-sold at a price of no more than the down payment, plus renovation and cost-of-living adjustments. Maisons St-Louis even had schemes to prevent speculation in the neighbourhood, and, to some extent, their arguments made sense.

James McGregor conceded that the SPUM board did give Maisons St-Louis' ideas some consideration.

In my head, and those of us on the board, this was supposed to be a non-profit project, and we looked quite seriously, at one point, at trying to set up some private form of non-profit ownership or non-speculative ownership; however, negotiations didn't really go that way. They, MSL, had disagreements within themselves, I guess. Some of them were prepared to limit profits . . . others were not prepared to limit anything . . . some . . . clearly wanted bucks . . .

However, SPUM members were determined not to dilute the co-operative concept. They doubted that the long-term effects of varied ownership could be controlled sufficiently to safeguard the community. And they questioned whether government funding should be used to purchase homes for private ownership, particularly since some of these potential owners were not 'in need.' Another concern was Maisons St-Louis' desire to renovate buildings according to individual interests. In some cases, this might have led to forms of modernization out of sync with Heritage Montreal's vision of a neighbourhood restored to its original, classic style.

Throughout the summer, the tensions between the two groups continued to spill over into the media in the form of Letters to the Editor,

articles, interviews and editorials. One of the most vindictive of these was a letter in *Le Devoir*, August 13, 1979, stating that the Vietnamese boat people, who were pouring into Canada at the time, would be well-suited to the project because it was a dictatorial environment, just like the one they had fled. Another letter referred to “la ‘soviétisation’ galopante de nos logements.”

In addition to these ideological attacks, there was occasional anti-semitic mudslinging aimed at the chief figures of both Heritage Montreal and SPUM. Lucia Kowaluk finally capped the publicity war with a long, forceful article in *Le Devoir*, September 2, 1979, in which she described the ten-year battle for the neighbourhood and the principles underlying it. As she pointed out again, in *The Montreal Star*:

Rarely in our society, do people of limited income have an opportunity to control their residences. Co-operative ownership gives them this opportunity. Dozens of us are working very hard, as we have for 10 years, to see that this can happen.

Kowaluk and the others maintained that, during the negotiations with CMHC, it must have become clear to everyone involved, including Maisons St-Louis, that the deal was “all co-op or nothing.” She added that if Maisons St-Louis could afford to buy houses in Milton-Park, they could afford to buy them elsewhere. Leave Milton-Park for the pensioners, the roomers and all the others who had no other options, she stressed.

Meanwhile, Maisons St-Louis and SPUM members went into the streets of Milton-Park and waged what amounted to a house-to-house battle for converts to their respective sides of the argument. Sue Moorhead claims that what Maisons St-Louis conveyed about the project upset and confused some residents, particularly the elderly.

Rumours would circulate in the neighbourhood and you’d meet a couple of old ladies from Co-op du Nordet and convince them that co-ops were a good thing. Then they’d talk to someone on the street the next day. And they’d say, “Well, I heard that . . .” — something completely untrue about co-ops. Then you’d go back and counter the rumours again . . . One thing that was important was once you got a few core people that lived in the building knowledgeable about co-ops and actively involved, then

it was easier for them to sort of stay on top of rumours and counter the false information.

One of the complications in this street battle was confusion over what constituted a co-op. For a group of residents to form a co-op, the majority — 50% plus one — had to agree to the idea. This much was clear. But people weren't sure whether it meant a majority of people in each building, or in a designated block, or in some other designated area.

Because of this initial confusion, Maisons St-Louis was able to block the formation of some co-ops through legal actions and various delaying tactics. This led to great tension between neighbours in 'enemy camps.' Kowaluk and Roussopoulos became virtually isolated in their own house, since three of their neighbours joined Maisons St-Louis. Nevertheless, SPUM's organizing continued.

Eventually, according to Sue Moorhead, many of the senior citizens found that being more neighbourly and talking to each other at meetings made a big difference. After developing social relationships with each other they found it easier to join a co-op.

The summer of 1979 was a tense one for the neighbourhood. But the members of SPUM, Heritage Montreal, Co-ops Jeanne-Mance, du Nordet, and La Petite-Cité did not anticipate problems when they scheduled their third general assembly in June at Notre-Dame-de-la Salette church on Park Avenue. The meeting, which attracted about 55 people and which was originally designed to celebrate the progress of the project, demonstrated the mood of conflict that prevailed.

The organizers — Dimitri Roussopoulos presiding — came armed with glowing reports about the eight co-ops that had already acquired charters from the provincial government. These were: du Nordet, Milton-Parc, La Petite-Cité, Ste-Famille I, Ste-Famille II, Concerto I, Concerto II and La Tour des Alentours, altogether comprising 150 units. Two OSBLs had also been incorporated.

Along one wall of the gathering, architectural students had mounted a display showing the type of landscaping possible in some of the commonly-owned areas such as the alleys. Nearly half the neighbourhood was now organized and, with luck, renovations could soon begin, the meeting's leaders announced. This news prompted anxious murmurings in the room about how people would be moved,

what rent they would pay in their temporary lodgings and whether they would be able to return to their original dwellings. An information sheet distributed during the meeting stated flatly that people had the right to return to their former homes, once renovations were completed. The handout also pointed out that the rent increases after renovations would be approximately 7% for co-op members, or even less for low-income members, but that rents might rise for those who remained mere tenants.

The information sheet made more promises. If someone's temporary dwelling cost more than the old home, the co-op would pay the difference. The co-op would pay moving and storage costs. And, heating bills would likely be reduced after renovations because of improved insulation. The murmurings and mutterings continued. Some clearly doubted what they read. Some, particularly older residents, were overwhelmed at the thought of assuming responsibility for their own housing. A few people asked hostile questions and were hissed at by others in the room.

Throughout the meeting, Phyllis Lambert, wearing bright beads, multi-coloured ethnic skirt and sneakers, sat, composed and friendly, near the back of the room with her dog. She seemed oblivious to the few slightly hostile comments that had been directed her way. Meanwhile, organizers, students and some of the more enthusiastic residents at the meeting tried to convince the gathering of the benefits of the project. However, the project's gains were being offset by legal roadblocks thrown in the way by Maisons St-Louis since the spring.

According to the project plan, SPUM was to arrange to transfer title of the buildings and CMHC funds to each co-op as it became organized. All the properties were to be transferred and renovated during a three-year period, a timetable that had to be adhered to rigidly to avoid cost escalations due to inflation and other factors. But Maisons St-Louis had gone to the Quebec Rental Board in March to challenge SPUM's right to act on behalf of all the tenants in the neighbourhood, arguing that not everyone wanted to become co-op members.

At that initial hearing, it was established that the Quebec Rental Board did indeed have jurisdiction over this case. The entire Milton-Park project was designated as a 'housing complex' and therefore subject to Rental Board regulations. (This was later challenged in Quebec Superior Court and superceded by new provincial legislation.) A deci-

sion arising out of this ruling was that a housing complex could not be subdivided and sold in parts without another hearing before the Board to ensure that the rights of individual tenants were being respected. Consequently, when the first two co-ops were ready to proceed with renovations and wanted to acquire their deeds, SPUM had to appear before the Rental Board again to win approval for the sale.

On June 26, 1980, Bob Cohen, on behalf of SPUM, and Ziggy Finkelstein, on behalf of Maisons St-Louis, faced each other at a crucial hearing being held at Notre-Dame-de-la Salette church. While the Rental Board administrator attempted a little informality by slipping off his sports jacket, the opposing lawyers faced each other dressed in conservative suits. The two opposing groups of citizens they represented looked almost interchangeable.

The audience of about 60 or 70 people included a number of elderly residents who drifted out as proceedings dragged on, to be replaced by younger people — a portent of things to come in the Milton-Park project.

Lately the opposing groups had been arguing over who had the majority of members throughout the neighbourhood. Over the six-square-block area, the combined total of SPUM members in the eight existing co-ops and two OSBLs accounted for a majority of the population, but not necessarily in each block or even each building. In order to qualify for certain funding, SPUM groups had to have a membership of '50% plus one.'

The Rental Board hearing was over the question of whether SPUM could transfer properties to two co-ops, du Nordet and Milton-Park. The property under discussion was 15 buildings of 29 units. The two co-ops had 26 members living in 29 of the units. Maisons St-Louis contested the transfer on the grounds that several tenants did not want to join the co-ops. In fact, in several buildings, the majority of tenants were not co-op members. In addition, Maisons St-Louis wished to purchase one of the buildings itself. SPUM argued that an individual building should not be sold to Maisons St-Louis or any other outsider because it would interfere with the project's overall financing.

The Rental Board administrator's ruling favoured SPUM's global concept. The co-ops would be able to own the properties, even though the membership goal of 50% plus one had not been achieved. The administrator also ruled that SPUM could order tenants to move out of

their dwellings temporarily during renovations, but that tenants had the right to return. These rulings sparked some angry reactions. It seemed as if only those who favoured co-ops would be able to live in the neighbourhood. And SPUM appeared to some like a corporate landlord steamrolling over the little people, the residents. Eventually, as Maisons St-Louis added up the social and financial costs of their dispute, they decided to give up their fight for individual ownership. Instead of forming co-ops, however, they organized four non-profit housing associations, in 30-odd dwellings, which included a number of non-voting tenants.

This type of legal wrangling set the project back several months, during which time financing charges rose at an alarming rate. CMHC subsidies for purchase, renovations and development could not be touched while the government agency was still the legal owner of the properties. Therefore, to sidestep this problem SPUM adopted a legal manoeuvre of its own which would ensure that renovations could begin before more costly time rolled by.

SPUM could not have title to individual properties transferred to co-ops or OSBLs without permission from the Rental Board. The law did allow, however, for the transfer of the entire 'housing complex' to a new owner. Accordingly, in October, 1980, a new non-profit organization called la Société pour l'Amélioration de Milton-Parc, or SAMP, was formed which could acquire title to all the properties from CMHC. SAMP was virtually the same as SPUM — the two boards were very similar — but it was a new legal entity.

While the move was expedient, it angered some co-op members who had been looking forward to becoming independent. They resented having to live under the benevolent thumb of SPUM-SAMP for an indefinite period.

When SPUM assumed its new legal identity as SAMP, its role and significance in the community changed considerably. SPUM's mandate was not restricted to Milton-Park; originally the idea was for the organization to become involved in other community projects as the neighbourhood got on its own feet. SPUM was to be only the temporary owner of the properties, a landlord in name only, not in spirit. SAMP, on the other hand, was to concern itself exclusively with Milton-Park, and, as it turned out, would hold onto the properties for a long time before being able to transfer them to the residents. The deci-

sion to create this new entity caused considerable dissension in the community and required much soul-searching on the part of the GRT (Groupe de ressources techniques de Milton-Parc).

The pros and cons of the change were outlined in an internal document circulated within the GRT. On the positive side was the fact that the action would allow renovation in a number of the co-ops to begin by fall. Secondly, the community would gain time to battle Maisons St-Louis on the legal front. Furthermore, as an OSBL, SAMP could take advantage of a higher renovation subsidy than was available for a co-op.

Disadvantages were also foreseen. The delay meant that costs were rising and the project would no longer be eligible for an interest rate of 10 $\frac{3}{4}$ % with CMHC to finance the purchase of the properties.¹ The new organization would also quickly have to draft efficient and credible structures and by-laws. Transferring the properties again meant high notarial fees. Moreover, the organizers themselves were aware that they, or others in positions of power, might be tempted to maintain the new structure of one large, efficient OSBL, instead of adhering to the ideal of self-sufficient co-ops. SPUM also realized that community activists who had already organized themselves without the help of SPUM/SAMP would not accept this new, all-encompassing structure without heated argument.

Nevertheless, SPUM decided not to have additional community representation on the new board. Echoing CMHC's concerns of a year earlier, SPUM declared that "a community board would not necessarily have the ability, let alone the will, to own and manage \$6.9 million worth of property containing 650 residential units." Those few residents who did have the ability, SPUM's report concluded, were already overburdened with other community responsibilities.

Indeed, few community members were equipped to deal with the maze of government programs and regulations involved in the project. A number were rankled by SPUM/SAMP's paternalistic assumptions. They felt that the project was being run by benevolent dictators in three-piece suits. They resented the fact that of the eleven members on SAMP's board, only five were community representatives, while six, a majority, were appointed by SPUM, a sign, some people felt, that Heritage Montreal and/or CMHC intended to control the project. The five community board members may have been natural leaders in terms of personality and abilities, but they did not necessarily represent

anyone in the neighbourhood other than themselves or small groups of activists. One of the central SAMP appointees was GRT staff member and community organizer John Gardiner, an experienced 'street fighter' in civic politics. A realist, Gardiner had little patience with those who fumed about "outsiders and professionals" running the project. He felt that ultimately the community would benefit from SAMP's assumption of responsibilities. As Gardiner accurately observed, "governments make the whole procedure so technically demanding that unless they (the residents) were all unemployed accountants and architects, they'd have a lot of trouble doing it." Gardiner also down-played the idea, held by a few activists, that the project should help politicize residents. To him it was enough that people learned sufficient skills to manage co-ops and that their homes were renovated.

Gardiner, and some others on SAMP's professional staff did concede that SAMP should have worked to put itself out of business sooner so that residents could genuinely be in control of their own housing. Failing that, there should have been a better system of community representation on the board or a community co-ordinating committee that genuinely represented the residents. Acting as a link, or sometimes a buffer, between SAMP's board and the fragmented community, the GRT tended to make most of the important decisions on a day-to-day basis. When unsure of how to proceed, the GRT called a general community meeting for direction. But if the staff did not like what the assembled community was saying, it would turn the matter over to the SAMP directors.

All in all, the SAMP structure was efficient and necessary for that period. The community board members were dedicated, energetic insiders who did consult with as many of their own co-op members and other residents as possible and provided valuable feedback to Bob Cohen and the rest of the GRT. However, because SAMP so effectively took control of the project, the overall social development of the neighbourhood was stalled during 1980 and 1981. Instead, it was a time when people's energies were occupied with details of how and where to relocate during renovations and with meetings of their own particular co-op.

One community organization — the Conseil Milton-Parc — did emerge during that period to challenge SAMP's power. Consisting of two members from each co-op, plus a representative of the GRT, the

Conseil was designed to be the true voice of the community. But only a few of its members — Dimitri Roussopoulos among them — became actively involved.

In one instance, the Conseil became entangled in a dispute with SAMP over whether a community evaluation should be done in Milton-Park by a Carleton University professor at the request of CMHC. Cohen was in favour of the evaluation feeling that it would keep the project “on its toes.” But Roussopoulos worried that the evaluative process might be used to impose structures on the community, change the project’s direction or, ultimately, control the community. The issue was brought to the Conseil Milton-Parc to devise a community response.

Meeting in a community building at Pine Avenue and Park that had once been a bowling alley, then a Hare Krishna temple, the Conseil members gazed through their fourth-floor windows at La Cité’s hotel and discothèque. Someone commented that it was unfortunate Park Avenue could not be blocked off for a pedestrian mall. Another replied cheerfully, “La Cité should be used to block the street — horizontally!” Then their attention turned from the ever-present corporate tower in their midst to their current antagonist, SAMP.

At this meeting, the Conseil consisted of five co-op members, including Roussopoulos and Jean Perras, and two GRT members. The Conseil hammered out a compromise position regarding the research proposal, not wishing to refuse it outright or appear to be at loggerheads with Cohen. The Conseil would attend the CMHC meeting where the proposal was to be discussed and suggest that the study be done by someone selected by the community or experts known to be friendly to the project. That way, as one member explained humourously, CMHC’s expert could argue with the community’s expert over methodology and no one would be too concerned about discussing all the political pressures exerted to get the Milton-Park project started!

Other items then discussed included efforts to organize new community groups, the various aspirations of existing co-ops and general communication problems in the neighbourhood. The small group was concerned about how representative it could be. Jean Perras counselled a pragmatic approach.

Look, someone has to decide which bank to use, how to deal with the City over repairs, how to get insurance for the community centre. With over 2,000 people . . . it's all right to talk about democracy, but someone has to do these things now.

There was concern that if the Conseil did not exert itself, SAMP would.

Despite their efforts, the Conseil had to disband within a few months because of lack of community interest; dissent continued to simmer off and on until it boiled over again in early 1982. By this time, it was felt by some that Milton-Park, because of its political connections, was receiving special treatment from CMHC — treatment which was not extended to other projects.² Resentment over this within the co-op movement meant that Milton-Park organizers were not in a position to advise or provide leadership to other co-op ventures to any extent. Although Milton-Park represented a large proportion of housing co-ops in Montreal, it was, at that time, still marginal to the co-op movement because it was considered atypical — the co-op members still did not run their own affairs.

Milton-Park's apparent special status was galling to the ever-present anarchist and anti-establishment types in the neighbourhood who often congregated at a small cafe and library, Café Commun-Commune. They published *Le Projet*, a community newspaper in the tradition of the *Jeanne Mance Street Committee Bulletin* and the *SPUM Bulletin*. *Le Projet* entered into an internecine battle of philosophies with the GRT's *What's New* newsletter. "Are some co-ops more equal than others?" asked one article in *Le Projet*. "Co-ops outside the Milton-Park area do not generally benefit from paid moving expenses, subsidized fridges and stoves, very large apartments . . . or work on aesthetic aspects of the houses, façades and woodwork . . . These unfair practices of the CMHC are causing potential co-op projects to be dropped. Others are forced into accepting final rents which can't be paid by ordinary or low-income people . . . Let us demand that CMHC treat us all equally."

Fortunately, for Milton-Park, harassed CMHC officials were indeed committed to treating everyone equally and therefore cut back on the generous terms they had been pressured into. Otherwise, the neighbourhood might have made many enemies in other communities. Eventually it forged alliances with other projects.

But *Le Projet*'s criticism was not limited to the matter of Milton-Park's special status. The newspaper became a focus for discontent on such issues as renovation problems, unforeseen rent increases and lack of community autonomy. At one point, the newsletter was able to report that Co-op du Nordet had threatened to disband over the question of gaining ownership of their homes. The co-op had been organized, renovated and running smoothly for a long time and resented SAMP's reluctance to cut the apron strings. Although du Nordet did decide to stay with the project, its members remained angry with SAMP for a long time.

SAMP's reluctance to relinquish control of the properties was largely due to its determination to ensure that the original goals of the project — preserving the architectural and social character of Milton-Park — would be adhered to over time. The organization therefore wanted to see that appropriate stipulations, known as servitudes, be written into the deeds of sale, so that the properties could be sold only under certain conditions.

There was overall consensus among residents with some of these conditions — for example, that new construction generally conform to the architectural character of the neighbourhood and that the rooming houses be maintained. It was also agreed that speculation be prohibited in the event of resale of the properties and that the other co-ops and OSBLs would have right of first refusal.

Other servitudes, however, created controversy. People disagreed over whether to exclude any high-rise construction from the project and whether to prevent changes in the building façades without community approval. SAMP also wanted to ensure that housing would continue to be available to low or modest income residents. There was disagreement over who should or should not live in the project.

SAMP could not impose servitudes on the community. However, it could delay transfer of the properties to the co-ops until all parties agreed on conditions of sale. Some residents saw this as an abuse of power.

Notes

1. By 1981, the interest rates soared to 21%.
2. Because of escalating costs, CMHC had to spend more of its Quebec budget on Milton-Park, thereby delaying funding for other social housing projects.

CHOOSING NEIGHBOURS

A major issue that the Milton-Park community had to resolve was determining who would be allowed to live in the project as vacancies arose. Those who already lived in the neighbourhood were, of course, assured of a place, since the purpose of the project was to provide housing for existing residents. As with any neighbourhood, the population of Milton-Park was constantly shifting, particularly since this downtown area housed many young and single residents with relatively transient lifestyles. Some people never moved back to the neighbourhood after the renovation stage.

Additional dwellings were created in Milton-Park when badly deteriorated houses were saved and renovated despite the high expense involved. Nevertheless, the total stock of housing in the area shrank somewhat as a result of the project; some small, sub-standard units, which could not be brought up to par, were eliminated. There would certainly be more potential residents than units available and so some kind of selection process was necessary.

Each co-op was to have a fair amount of control over the selection of new members. Had Milton-Park been like other co-op projects, perhaps its participants would simply have chosen people similar to themselves to be their neighbours, which would be understandable. Because of the diversity of Milton-Park's population, this kind of 'natural selection' was unlikely. For example, Co-op Les Tourelles consisted of, among others, a retired Greek Orthodox priest, school teachers, a metal worker, health workers, aging hippies and labourers. Some of the co-ops also consisted of very different types of units — from family-size apartments to bachelor units and rooms. This would contribute to the mixed membership. Many residents were definitely of modest means and could possibly qualify for subsidized housing, others were in a higher income bracket. The dominant language groups were English and French but there were other languages in evidence as well.

Moreover, only a small minority in Milton-Park were community activists with experience in co-operatives, so this in itself could not be a selection criterion.

The various elements in the project — the co-ops, SAMP and CMHC — all wanted a say in determining selection. CMHC stipulated that 15% of the vacancies were to be reserved for people on low incomes, such as old age pensions or social welfare. This proved to be a problem because, as Bob O'Callaghan, president of Co-op Les Tourelles pointed out, filling vacancies with those of inadequate means meant that you would have to subsidize those people by increasing the rent paid by other co-op members.

Lucia Kowaluk of Co-op Milton-Parc describes some of the careful deliberations that went into selecting new members for her co-op:

We had two large houses and two small places (apartments) to fill and at that time SAMP had about 600 applications. . . . We wouldn't give a big house to just a couple, except in the case where they were definitely planning to have a family. For example we wouldn't give a big place to a gay couple, but if it were two gay couples applying for one house, that would be all right.

Need is based on income, having to move quickly, a particular type of family emergency — a combination of things. We recently gave a large 3 1/2 to a single parent with one child living with him and a plan to have another child with him half the time. He was in a temporary, cramped place without a lease. In addition, he was a person who knew about co-ops and brought skills with him. The combination of all these things made him an obvious choice, even though there were four other applications for that particular opening.

Despite the painstaking methods of the co-op selection committees, conflicts arose. A couple of long-term residents pulled up roots and left the district when they were unable to bring a relative into the project. Another applicant was turned down because he was earning too much money, even though he had worked hard to establish co-ops in the area.

Sometimes the best intentions backfired. When a working-class couple petitioned to have friends of theirs move into a co-op, the largely middle-class selection committee was delighted. Then they learned that

these friends were not themselves working-class. The husband was a well-paid civil servant whose wife also worked.

On the whole, those selected to move into the project after 1979 were mostly young and well-educated with relatively high earning potential. It seemed as if the residents who originally organized the co-ops, the middle-class professionals, were choosing people like themselves to fill vacancies. This led to pressure from SAMP and other co-op members to create a more consistent, socially just selection process. In time, co-ops would occasionally advertise for potential members who were elderly or on subsidized incomes.



Deteriorating wooden sheds at the rear of houses were replaced with metal galleries and spiral staircases (*photo by Mark Goldman*).

RENOVATIONS BEGIN

I'm so excited. I wasn't able to sleep at all last night. It's finally happening.

— Lucia Kowaluk, October, 1980

On a sunny October morning in 1980, a fleet of blue moving vans rolled onto Jeanne Mance Street. While workers loaded furniture from one greystone triplex, the plaster in another was already being torn down. The hubbub was not part of an eviction-and-demolition scene as had been the case ten years earlier during Concordia's reign. The activity signaled the rebirth of the neighbourhood as residents moved out of their homes temporarily so that renovations could begin. It was the first visible sign that the project was not merely a dream.

The neighbourhood facelift would include not only the charming Victorian houses that were still numerous in the area, but would also apply to other deteriorating, sub-standard buildings, giving everyone a home to go back to. Certain co-ops had buildings that were boarded up and uninhabitable. These had either been condemned by the city, or ignored by Paxmill who had expected to demolish the buildings. Some had suffered fire damage. In a regular co-op project, buildings in this condition would most likely not have been accepted by CMHC. Since CMHC had decided to purchase the whole project, they were obliged to accept all buildings.

Renovation costs were now estimated at \$7.4 million and such a high sum would be an ongoing concern, but again another issue loomed — the question of who would decide on how a dwelling would be renovated. It was not clear who was the home-owner, the architect's client. Was it SAMP, the co-op, the resident of the unit or CMHC? Did Phyllis Lambert and Heritage Montreal have a say in the matter?

There were also many building codes and other regulations to adhere to as CMHC insisted all units be brought up to strict, nation-wide stan-

dards. Sometimes 'improvements' were made that residents didn't want, such as putting a bedroom where a kitchen or bathroom used to be. At the same time, CMHC imposed its 'criteria of modesty' in order to keep costs down. For example, the 32 units of Co-op Milton-Parc were allotted a maximum of \$101,200. This left no funds for special renovations such as fireplaces or skylights, although some people did pay for these special touches out of their own pockets.

Pierre Beaupré, senior architect with the project's design team, noted how difficult it was for the professionals to satisfy everyone when they were dealing with 16 to 25 people in a co-op instead of one individual or organization.

In Co-op du Nordet, some of the buildings have three floors. People on each floor want their bathroom in a different place. We need to find solutions.

Lucia Kowaluk expressed the residents' point of view in describing what happened to her own Victorian home. In the early stages of renovations, the architect had suggested building a closet in one of her rooms. Kowaluk asked that the room be left as it was, but despite her request, the closet was built.

Not only is it where I didn't want it, but in order to put it there, the workmen had to move the door-frames; they had to take the woodwork down, in the course of which they split it; then the floor had to be patched.

Kowaluk also regretted the removal of her old-fashioned, copper-lined toilet, which did not conform to city standards. She had seen a picture of one like hers in the Smithsonian Institute's History of Plumbing section. Fortunately, she adds, a friend was able to use it for decorative purposes, "so at least it has a good home."

The renovations done were basic. They provided excellent plumbing, heating, insulation and other necessities, but sometimes fell short on restoration or conservation. Some architectural features were painstakingly retained, but others, whether because of work crew errors or the architect's intent, were lost forever. All in all, residents did not have the same freedom to renovate their homes that they might have had if they had owned the buildings privately. A further complica-



Lucia Kowaluk (photo by Alain Laforêt).



Louis Muhlstock in his studio on Ste. Famille, 1971 (photo by Clara Gutsche).



Interior view of house on Jeanne Mance in process of being demolished (*photo by Clara Gutsche*).

tion was that members of the same co-op did not necessarily value the same kinds of renovations. For example, one member felt ill to learn that her neighbours, who had never been able to afford anything new, had casually tossed away a beautiful Victorian door-knob and were happily ripping down historic plaster rosettes and moldings. There were many such value differences that co-op members had to reconcile. Gradually, by sitting down together, again and again, they learned to deal with most of their differences and the limitations imposed upon them all.

They also learned to cope with architects, contractors, plumbers, electricians and other tradespeople. The experience, a new one for many of the members, brought them closer together. It also helped them to learn how to fight their own battles. As Kowaluk recalls:

- The renovations committee met every week. People sometimes complained to them and they would fight for things they thought should have been done better than they were being done . . . The initial paint job was very poor. Also, they didn't give us any choice. If you got one colour on the walls, you got the same colour on the ceiling. People were very unhappy about that, but we were told we couldn't afford anything else. The renovations committee fought for a change — and lo and behold, we got white ceilings.

The renovation process was a difficult balancing act between individual choice and collective needs, between community participation and practical requirements. Gradually, neighbourhood renewal took place for all the Doubting Thomases to see.

During 1981, sections of Jeanne Mance Street were quiet and empty, awaiting renovations. Most windows were empty except for the occasional 'Notice of Construction' and a sign put up by one hold-out who had written 'Pas de construction dans cette maison.' Some housing units were almost finished. In one of them you could see plaster cherubs forming a border around the living-room ceiling and a fine brick fireplace in working order. The apartment had not been robbed of architectural uniqueness as other units had been.

Behind the buildings, bulldozers cleared backyard debris, evidence that more liberties were being taken with the design of the backs of houses than with the fronts, most of which were preserved in the original Victorian style. Modern features such as sliding doors and

patios were added at the backs of buildings, while potential fire hazards such as wooden sheds were removed. Sometimes a partial wall separated one neighbour's patio from another, but generally the backyards were open places where neighbours could meet and chat.

By the end of 1983, there were 597 rehabilitated dwellings in 135 buildings. The 14 established co-ops had 339 units, the seven non-profit associations had the remainder. Altogether there were 118 boarding rooms, 69 studio apartments, 175 one-bedroom units, 109 two-bedroom units, 98 three-bedroom units, 21 four-bedroom units and seven apartments with five or more bedrooms. The total estimated capital costs of the project had soared to \$30.7 million, considerably higher than the figures of four years earlier. One major reason was that the initial figures were prepared before careful professional appraisal was available to reveal the true condition of many buildings. Legal delays had also added to the costs, as had inflation and the extent and type of renovations necessary to meet stringent government building codes. Altogether, it was not a totally unreasonable escalation and to many, the results justified the expenditure.

Bertha Baker, a bubbly, round-faced, white-haired woman who had been living in the neighbourhood for 20 years, summed up her feelings about the project:

I'm tickled pink . . . The co-op people were very good to me. They helped me move, and I'm the only one to get a closed porch . . . just like I asked . . . It's a bit of a hassle at first but it pays dividends in the long run.

The renovation stage brought negative feelings into the neighbourhood as well. Some people, usually newcomers, felt that there were individuals who got much more than their fair share of renovated housing, while outsiders, tax-payers all, wondered at the idea of co-op members having the privilege of modernized, low-rent housing at all. At one post-renovation house-warming party, for example, members of some other co-ops grumbled disapprovingly about the two-storey, beautifully renovated unit that housed their host — a single person. The unit in question used to have cramped, crooked stairs, a drunken tilt and a dingy air. It now sported gracefully curved stairs, a bright, spacious interior and a splendidly remodeled bathroom. The

host, a long-time resident, still somewhat bewildered to find himself part of a co-op, kept describing the new style as 'Marxist folkloric.'

Ironically, while Milton-Park's physical environment was improving, the community's interpersonal and organizational relationships were coming under great stress.



Mrs. Bertha Baker and Mrs. Rasdrobny outside building to be demolished, January 29, 1970 (photo by Gerry Davidson/Montreal Star/Public Archives of Canada/PA-153956).

MEETINGS AND ANXIETIES

Sixteen members of a Milton-Park co-op — one of the last to be organized — have just received notice from SAMP that they will have to move out of their homes by the first of the month. Most will go to units rented for them in a nearby high-rise. The news arouses fears, anxieties.

Crowding into the small apartment of one member, they listen anxiously to their executive and discuss the future. A GRT staff person is present but tries to be as inconspicuous as possible. The issues raised at this meeting are typical of the concerns that preoccupied most of the co-ops as the project evolved.

“What will the new rent be?” an old man in the corner calls out. He and the others are assured that the co-op will receive money from SAMP to subsidize the difference between their present rent and the one in the temporary apartment. But the rent in their renovated homes is still to be determined. Inflation and costly delays have pushed the price of these units considerably higher than the earlier ones. This group faces much higher rent increases than anticipated. Eventually the problem will be resolved, but for the moment it is a thorny issue. Another problem area is deciding who to include as a co-op member. The discussion focuses on an elderly man, not at the meeting, who is ill, smokes a lot and sometimes leaves water running. What happens if he starts a fire or causes other damage at the temporary residence? Will the co-op be responsible?

“But we can’t throw him out in the street,” objects one of the younger members. “Who are we to decide he shouldn’t stay in the new place?”

“We’re trying to evict him,” worries another.

“No, no,” someone else argues, “It’s not a question of eviction. We can refuse him membership in our co-op.”

The co-op president interjects: “I’m in the process of talking to this

tenant's social worker. We'll find the best placement for him during renovations. When it's time to move back in, we'll decide then what to do. After all, he's a very sick old man. We don't know what his condition will be in six or eight months."

Then the subject of the janitor, who recently moved in with a woman and her child in one of the co-op's buildings, is discussed. Ordinarily, free rent is part of the janitor's salary. Because of his new family situation he will need a larger apartment during the relocation. Moreover, during renovations, he will be out of a job. Should the co-op still pay for his rent and for a larger apartment? How will this affect his unemployment insurance? Will he continue to be janitor after the renovations? These questions provoke heated discussion.

"We should be like a family," says one person. "He lost his job, his salary, and now that he needs a larger place, we expect him to pay rent."

"Yes," agrees a young radical. "It was Gestion Ste-Famille and Paxmill that gave him a dumpy, little apartment instead of a bigger salary. We shouldn't take advantage of that deal too."

The janitor and his girl friend look as if they wish the topic had never come up. One member comments sourly on their 'living arrangement.'

"It's none of your business," the janitor says firmly. "Stay out of my affairs."

"But it is my business," the same one insists. "It's the co-op that will subsidize you in your new apartment."

The president intervenes. "It's sad, but we're not a charity or a bottomless purse of money. We're a co-operative."

The vote on the issue is a tie. As the president prepares to cast the tie-breaking vote, the members protest saying, "We didn't agree to this procedure."

Finally, the co-op agrees to pay about 80% of the janitor's rent, and he will pay the rest. On to the next issue — the mechanics of moving, which the co-op will arrange and pay for. Each tenant is allotted a certain number of boxes with which to pack, but the number is too small for one woman.

"I need special boxes for my antique mirror and dresser."

The members vote for an extra \$12.50 for her special boxes.

"By the way," someone calls out to the treasurer, "are we rich or poor?"

The treasurer pulls out his calculator and a pile of bills and invoices. He does some figuring and announces an amount that satisfies everyone. But he warns that people must pay their rent promptly on the first of the month.

"Now it's our own money. We can't pay late," he says.

Despite the many disagreements during the meeting, the members adjourn in a friendly mood. They'll meet again next week, and the week after, and they will wrestle with similar topics. Difficult tasks are learned: how to manage finances, how to run meetings and how to draw the line between individual and group rights.

New situations and problems emerge at each session. The group must draft suitable by-laws, set up a board of directors, establish committees. There are planning and development issues that would tax the most experienced experts. For example, renovations in this co-op could lead to larger apartments, but would existing tenants be able to afford them; should the co-op hope to attract new, higher-income residents? Discussion about units for the handicapped also leads to controversy because of the question of how to divide up the \$4,000 subsidy available for each unit.

In this co-op, at least initially, there is little consensus. There are always votes, often close ones.

Gradually, members gain new perspectives, learn new skills. A woman who knows few people in the area is sent as a delegate to an all-co-op meeting. A man who sat silent at meeting after meeting finally speaks and successfully directs the group away from a theoretical debate, back to the issue at hand. People stretch and grow in ways they could never have foreseen.

One of those who has broadened his horizons considerably during the project, and has observed a similar process among his neighbours is musician Bob O'Callaghan. A tall, curly-haired former American, O'Callaghan could often be found performing on the streets of Montreal or at Bar Mitzvahs or leading church choirs. He had once been married to an urban activist involved with the Milton-Park Citizens' Committee. O'Callaghan who had little interest in housing issues during his marriage eventually became president of the Les Tourelles co-op. He describes the experience:

I didn't feel like a president, because I had no experience with

meetings, or that kind of thing . . . but that turned out to be an advantage . . . you're forced to function on common sense and logic . . . I found from a lot of meetings that I went to, even though people were following rules, Roberts' Rules, they weren't necessarily very logical or reasonable. Like people would get shut up in the middle of saying something, because of some procedural error that somebody who knew the system better would impose . . . sometimes it seems easier to function just on common sense.

While presiding over meetings at Les Tourelles, O'Callaghan learned about the importance of maintaining a balance between communal and private life in order to avoid losing either one's individuality or one's sense of community. Observing how different people participated in the co-op taught him much about human nature. Certain members were always gung-ho, others were reclusive, still others were somewhere 'in the middle.' There were members who saw co-op life as strictly business, for others it was a social outlet, a 'bridge club.' Some members resisted meeting in other members' apartments for fear of intruding. O'Callaghan aspired to encourage compromise out of all the different opinions and needs expressed.

To me, it would be a success if there's some way to balance all of that. So that nobody really feels like they've been completely ignored, or intimidated, or coerced into something, but that's difficult.

Greg Brent, formerly of Maisons St-Louis, became a member of OSBL Village Jeanne-Mance where he learned to keep financial records for the organization, a skill which eventually led to employment as an office administrator. He talks about the frustrations of collective decision-making.

Groups are asked to answer yes or no to a, b and c. And they'll say at a meeting, 'Well, I'm a delegate from group X. We've discussed a, but we haven't discussed b and c, and we're not sure whether we want to say yes or no to a. So we'd like to propose d.' And then that will be discussed for some length of time. Then everyone comes to the conclusion that it's either valid or it's invalid. Meanwhile, it's 10:30 and everybody's ready to go home . . .

But to Jean Perras, a long-time resident of Milton-Park and a professional animator and political scientist, the effort was all worth it because of the community development that occurred.

When this all started, there were five or six leaders. And I can say now there's 200-300 people that know what a budget looks like; who know how to go to the bank and negotiate a mortgage; and know how to deal with architects, how to deal with community organizers; that know how to deal with media; people that know how to build an agenda for a committee or a board or a general assembly; that know how to balance books. To me, that's leadership.

Perras points out that over the years co-operative living would teach many more residents such leadership skills and enable them to become active and involved in their community. Rotating jobs among co-op members, including the job of co-ordinator, would ensure that "nobody builds an empire." He also speaks of how rehabilitating the neighbourhood physically strengthened the community's social fabric because, "people feel better in a place that's not run down." He also points out that people have become "neighbours instead of total strangers next door." He claims that sometimes it takes Milton-Park residents three-quarters of an hour to cross the street for a newspaper because everyone has to stop to talk to one another, as in a small village.

Perras sees such an active community as a building block for genuine, city-wide grass-roots democracy — a means of bringing political power back to individuals "the way villages in Quebec were run before."

THE ELDERLY AND THE LONERS

Ninety-year-old, blind Mrs. Fogarty relaxes in her spacious, one-room apartment reminiscing about her high-living days as a nightclub dancer teamed up with her husband. She earned good money in those days doing the big-city hotel circuit — \$50 for a three-minute dance — much of which she would spend on rounds of drinks for her friends.

Like many of the elderly residents of Milton-Park, Mrs. Fogarty is an independent spirit and somewhat of a loner. She's the kind of person who would suffer deep psychological trauma if placed in an institution with an over-abundance of interfering 'care' and a minimum of stimulation. And such institutionalization is usually the fate of unattached old people in our youth-oriented society which has an 'out of sight, out of mind' attitude towards the elderly. Instead, Mrs. Fogarty is spending her old age in a pleasant room with a separate kitchen in a renovated two-storey dwelling. Two other elderly people live on her floor, while a middle-aged couple lives downstairs to oversee the residents.

Mrs. Fogarty is fortunate enough to reside in one of the most socially significant components of the Milton-Park citizens' project. A non-profit corporation, or OSBL, the Yellow Door/Porte Jaune adapts some of the co-op living principles to the needs of seniors and the handicapped. It consists of about 20 renovated units in a connecting series of two-storey houses.

This housing project, a joint undertaking of the Yellow Door Coffee House, the YMCA and McGill University, is situated at the western edge of Milton-Park. Milton-Park has about twice the number of senior citizens as other city neighbourhoods do. A training ground for students in health and social services, the Yellow Door also has a stock of volunteers available for community services such as visiting the elderly and providing a hot lunch.

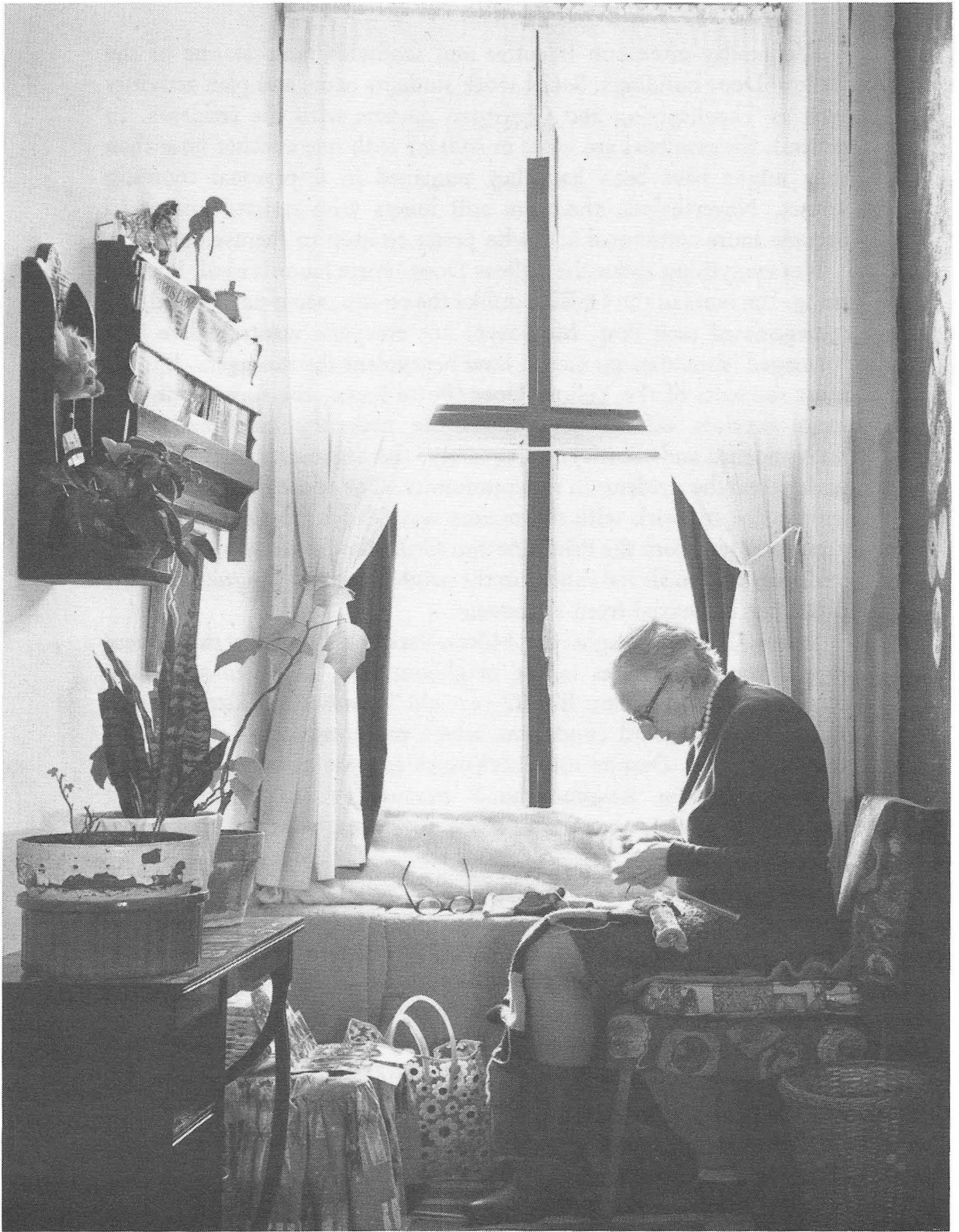
With Roger Balk, of the McGill chaplaincy service at the helm, the

Yellow Door became the benevolent godfather to a new non-profit housing corporation. Initially, the Yellow Door drew on residents already using its services or living in the buildings on Jeanne-Mance Street which the OSBL had acquired. The rest of the project's occupants were referred by other social service organizations in the area. Many were elderly, some out-patients from psychiatric hospitals, some borderline alcoholics, usually living in single rooms with inadequate facilities. Quarters were often single rooms with inadequate, shared kitchen or bathroom facilities. Despite the poor housing conditions they were attached to the neighbourhood because it was familiar and gave them some sense of community. After all, they could always wander into Rosie's Variety Store, a Milton-Park landmark for 37 years.

The OSBL structure is realistic for the elderly and disadvantaged. It demands far less direct involvement than a co-op and is administered by a board which includes Balk and concerned individuals from the Yellow Door, the YMCA and McGill University. The Yellow Door/Porte Jaune project means a vast improvement in lifestyle for most of the residents — good, secure accommodation; intercoms connecting the apartments with the building supervisor, and real kitchenettes in their rooms, not just hot plates as before. There is also an attractive common room decorated with posters and paintings. Most important there is plenty of company and human contact with social work students, nurses and others checking in regularly.

One of the mainstays of the Yellow Door/Porte Jaune is Noel Salmond, janitor, animator, friend and gardener. Along with Pierre, an exceptionally active resident, Salmond collects rents and does odd jobs and janitorial duties. He is a kind of friend and confidant to the residents; he knows most of their names, their physical ailments, and how often they drink, visit the doctor and receive their income cheques. Salmond tells of one man who was very hard of hearing but reluctant to buy a hearing aid, even though he could afford it. "I had to go with him to Simpson's to make sure he got it," Salmond recalls. Salmond is also responsible for two large garden plots which are available for the many avid gardeners among the residents.

"Sometimes I feel like a UN peacekeeper. Someone plants morning glories and then someone else comes along and plants something else on top of it," he says, amused.



Mrs. Roach in her Jeanne Mance home, before renovations (*photo by Clara Gutsche*).

Wednesday afternoon is coffee and sandwich time at one of the Yellow Door buildings. Social work students come and plan activities such as Thanksgiving and Christmas dinners with the residents. In general, the residents are more in contact with one another now than they might have been had they remained in impersonal rooming houses. Nevertheless, there are still loners who resisted efforts to become more communal and who prefer to keep to themselves.

Not everything about the Yellow Door / Porte Jaune is ideal. For one thing, the rents in the OSBLs, unlike the co-ops, must be adjusted and re-negotiated each year. Moreover, not everyone wants to live in a 'managed' situation, no matter how benevolent the managers. But for most residents of the Yellow Door / Porte Jaune, the supervision and social services offered give them the necessary combination of independence and security. Fortunately, the organizers of the project understood the residents in the community. One of the first people they approached to work with the seniors was Gladys, the warm-hearted, night waitress from the Prince Arthur Grill who for so many years was a friendly soul to all and sundry in the neighbourhood. Regrettably, she could not be coaxed from retirement.

When CMHC bought the Milton-Park land package there were several rooming houses in the neighbourhood, home to some 100 roomers. Most of them, like 82-year-old Valentine Locksmith, were living in substandard conditions where cockroaches and other pests were the norm. Despite this, Locksmith and the other roomers liked their downtown neighbourhood because it was familiar and convenient, giving them easy access to stores, churches and social services.

If not for the Milton-Park project, people like Valentine Locksmith would probably have been forced out of the neighbourhood. Rooming houses were rapidly disappearing from downtown Montreal during the 1970s and 1980s. From 1977 to 1982, 40% of Montreal's rooming units — some 5,200 rooms in all — were eliminated as landlords rid themselves of the unprofitable, dilapidated buildings. Many of these were purchased and renovated by young professionals. Developers also purchased these properties to create condominiums and fully refitted houses for people moving back to the city they had abandoned for the suburbs, twenty or thirty years ago. Central Montreal was again fashionable and the older buildings were charming and cheap.

By the early 1980s, Montreal newspapers were beginning to pay attention to the problem of disappearing rooming houses and the displacement of roomers. "Renovation Craze Puts Squeeze on Low-income Roomers," announced one headline in *The Gazette*. A 1982 study predicted that 4,000 of the remaining 10,800 rooms in Montreal would be gone by 1984. In December 1982, *La Presse* warned that the 5,000 Montrealers homeless and out in the streets would probably double in a few years unless governments took action to preserve rooming houses.

In a letter to *The Gazette* in August 1981, a former rooming house resident described what happened to one of her former housemates when their building was gentrified:

"Old Mr. H. seems to have disappeared with his wine bottles. Someone told me that someone else was letting J. sleep on the floor of a basement room. D. reports that he now sleeps in the field beside the Shaughnessy Mansion; he agrees with me that this is a summer solution and not a permanent one . . ."

As all this was happening, concerned planners, representatives from community groups, CLSCs, and universities began to discuss ways of alleviating the problem. This group formed a commission on rooming houses in Montreal and demanded that city and provincial governments protect roomers' rights and subsidize the renovation and creation of rooming houses. At the time, neither level of government had such programs.

Similar recommendations later appeared in a very detailed study of Montreal's rooming house problem done by Luba Serge (member of GRT Milton-Park) and James McGregor. These planners, and others, were worried about the future of the rooming house population in Milton Park. It seemed as if the only way this population could be saved from traumatic displacement would be through inclusion in the overall project. But such inclusion had to be fought for.

The roomers, for their part, would have to be motivated to become involved in the project, and this was no easy task. They were ill-informed about the threats to their living quarters and about the alternatives — co-ops and OSBLs — being discussed by their

neighbours. As GRT organizer Sue Moorhead put it:

The roomers were the most difficult people to organize. They were so used to being stepped on all their lives, and not having any rights. It was only in 1979, I think, that the law was changed to include roomers getting protection under the Rental Board. Before that, they didn't have any protection whatsoever . . . they could be kicked out at a moment's notice.

Though fearful and disbelieving, the roomers gradually became more organized through the efforts of the project leaders. Eventually, an OSBL called Maisinous was created to manage the roomers' buildings. As with the Yellow Door / Porte Jaune, such a non-profit association was more suitable for the population in question than a co-op. It would ensure that the homes would be taken off the speculative market and renovated for existing residents, but would not require the same degree of energy and involvement from residents as did co-operative living.

Maisinous was a pioneering step, the first effort by a non-profit group in Montreal to keep rooms and roomers in their neighbourhood. Establishing this OSBL took two years of struggle and lobbying before provincial subsidy laws were changed to include rooming houses and before a viable structure for Maisinous could be determined.

Finally, on June 18, 1983, GRT organizer John Bradley was able to announce the renaissance of Milton-Park's rooming houses on CINQ-FM, Montreal's inner-city community radio station:

. . . We are putting . . . approximately three to four million dollars in renovations into 24 rooming houses . . . Everyone who was there before renovations has the absolute right to return after . . . out of the 105 rooms, 75 of the rooms are already occupied and will be re-occupied by the people who were there previously . . . single people, and people on low incomes . . . old age pensioners, people on welfare, workers on minimum wage . . .

Bradley went on to explain that the renovated rooms would not cost residents much more than they did previously. People in need would receive government subsidies to keep their rents down to 25% of their incomes. Buildings would have fewer units, but with more amenities. Electrical systems, heating, plumbing, windows, and so on, would be

updated. A home-like atmosphere would be created by shared spaces such as kitchen areas.

In a *Gazette* article Bradley was quoted as saying:

... here in Milton-Park, from the outset, we've considered rooming houses not as a marginal kind of housing, but as a kind that meets the needs of single people and people with low incomes.

The June issue of *Liaison St-Louis* boasted a large photo of a Milton-Park façade and the following story:

The Milton-Park neighbourhood will be the theatre for a 'première' in Montreal. The rooming houses there will be renovated, offering roomers the possibility of continuing to live in the neighbourhood at a low price, in a healthier, homier environment. (Author's translation.)

It was a roomer's dream, a planner's dream, an organizer's dream — an urban success.

GROCERY STORES AND BARBERSHOPS

*Social usage . . . people's feelings vs. commercial properties and cash flow:
somewhere between the two lies the truth.*

— Commercial Properties Ad Hoc Committee Meeting

Included in the Milton-Park land package that CMHC bought from Paxmill and would eventually hand over to the community were about 25 to 30 commercial properties that housed grocery stores, laundries, barber shops and other small businesses. It was highly unusual for the federal housing agency to acquire such business establishments; it was just as unusual for a co-operative housing project to become landlord to business owners. There were no precedents; therefore it took much deliberation for the community to decide what to do with and how to manage these properties.

Some of the business owners moved out of the area, not wishing to deal with the upheavals facing the neighbourhood. For others it was 'business as usual' while the Milton-Park residents slowly became organized, formed co-ops and OSBLs and tackled all the problems of acquiring the deeds to their properties and getting renovations underway. During this interim period, Gestion Ste-Famille continued to act as landlord to the business owners.

The future of the commercial properties had been under discussion since the early days of the project. At first, it was thought that the Conseil Milton-Parc, a self-generated committee comprised of delegates from existing co-ops and OSBLs, would supervise the properties on behalf of the community. But established somewhat prematurely, before the entire community was organized, the Conseil ran out of energy and dissolved in the middle of 1982. The GRT then set up a committee, similar to but more viable than the Conseil, to deal with

the commercial properties.

Starting as an ad hoc group, this committee eventually became the Société de développement communautaire Milton-Parc. It was a novel organization — a community-wide non-profit association acting as landlord to businesses and collecting rents from them on behalf of the community. Theoretically, everyone in the community had a say in how the commercial properties were managed. In practice, the governing group paid more attention to those most directly affected by the businesses, that is, the co-ops geographically affiliated with the properties.

At issue in discussions over the commercial properties was how to ensure that the businesses could remain viable and profitable while serving certain social purposes. It was deemed important that some businesses in the neighbourhood continue to cater to a variety of clients, those of modest as well as ample means. Already the area had specialty shops geared towards well-heeled customers from condominium developments. It was hoped also that the properties would benefit the community through surplus revenue from rents, which the Société intended to eventually use for collective services such as a day-care, a community centre or a central co-op office.

One mechanism for ensuring that the Milton-Park businesses served community interests was to draft a Code of Ethics which would be attached to all leases and posted in public view in each establishment. This included regulations about matters such as noise, hours of business, types of business permissible, traffic and parking, delivery times, garbage disposal and pest control. The Code was designed to minimize problems such as build-up of garbage around grocery stores, overly noisy restaurants and clubs and discriminatory hiring practices among business owners.

As with most other issues in the Milton-Park project, the Code of Ethics was agreed on only after lengthy deliberations on the part of Société members. Some were concerned about infringing upon the civil liberties of business owners through regulations that were too heavy-handed. Others insisted that the Code was necessary to make it clear to the merchants that a non-profit neighbourhood group with social goals was their new landlord.

The Société's control over the length of commercial leases would give it leverage in enforcing the code. A number of the merchants were

planning to renovate their properties at their own expense (CMHC could not subsidize rehabilitation of commercial real estate). Desiring long-term leases from the Société to make their investments worthwhile, these merchants would likely be anxious to comply with the Code of Ethics.

The various small businesses in Milton-Park contributed significantly to the flavour of the neighbourhood, a flavour that project organizers wished to preserve. But it was inevitable that some of the old, popular establishments would disappear. Businesses don't stay around forever. Rosie's, the all-night newspaper-candy-variety store is gone, as is Pine's Pizza. In ten or fifteen years the neighbourhood, which hundreds of people fought to preserve, will be different. New businesses will replace the old, familiar ones. Nevertheless, communal ownership of the commercial properties will continue to influence the business profile of Milton-Park. And the neighbourhood businesses will likely continue to contribute to the character of the community.

If the character endures, it will also be thanks to a successful battle over the fate of a vacant lot on Park Avenue which, for some reason, was not included in the package that CMHC bought from Harry Mendelsohn. During the days when Concordia Estates was trying to appease the neighbourhood and mitigate opposition to its project, it turned the lot into a mini-park, an arrangement people thought would become permanent. Two years after the sale, Mendelsohn called Bob Cohen and announced he still owned the property and offered to sell it to the community for \$100,000. Flabbergasted, Cohen hung up on him.

Mendelsohn soon sold the property to a young man who promptly signed a deal with Steinberg, the supermarket chain with a branch in La Cité. The lot was to be the site of a new La Maisonnée franchise—a Steinberg version of the *dépanneur*, or convenience store. This was anathema to SAMP, but it seemed powerless to stop the transaction.

One morning Lucia Kowaluk received an agitated call from a friend working in the SAMP office near the lot. "There's a bulldozer here," the friend said. "They're tearing up the trees." Kowaluk raced over, sized up the situation and swung into action using all her street-fighter instincts.

"Something told me the timing was right," she recalls. "I just felt we could stop it." Not everyone agreed. Other than about a half-dozen

supporters, the community was not ready to take a strong stand or act quickly. Nevertheless, Kowaluk and her supporters were still determined. They tried to block work at the site and were arrested. Despite fears of a long, drawn-out court case arising from this arrest, they tried another tactic. A few days later just before the Easter weekend, long lines of shoppers were at the check-out counters at Steinberg, their carts brimming with groceries for the holiday. As a number of them reached the cashier, these special 'shoppers' suddenly remembered they had no money and abandoned the loaded carts in the check-out aisle. While this plan was unfolding, other activists were outside handing out leaflets urging people to boycott Steinberg.

Before long, Mitzi Dobrin, head of Steinberg, was on the phone to Bob Cohen urging him to stop the boycott. After the call she took a taxi to the project office to work out a compromise. The stumbling block was the prospective young franchise owner who did not want to change his deal with Steinberg or give up the lot for a reasonable price. The price tag was now \$150,000.

Steinberg was not prepared to fall into the same morass of community opposition that Concordia Estates had experienced. The balance of power had changed permanently. At the official opening of the Milton-Park project in September 1983, it was announced that Steinberg had bought back the lot after all and planned to donate it to the community for a park.

A FINAL LOOK

Although La Cité has dominated the Milton-Park neighbourhood physically for a number of years, it has failed to attract enough business from the surrounding populace. Neither the architecture, nor the economies-of-scale of La Cité are suited to the area. Even the gentrification trend has not been enough to sustain adequate business for the shopping promenade's few restaurants and boutiques.

The first major public sign of problems appeared at the hotel. Loews, the original hotel management group at La Cité, operates a world-wide chain of quality hotels. Their venture on Park Avenue in Montreal failed to attract the expected upper-scale patrons or enough guests, of any kind. Occupancy rates were so low that the Loews management group withdrew and a new team, geared to less pretentious tastes, took over. The adjacent restaurant and discothèque were modified to make way for a complex of less expensive restaurants catering to the student crowd and businesses in the district. As a member of the new management group explained, "We have to adapt to the financial situation which exists, not the one we would like to exist." Reality had finally sunk in, fifteen years later.

A casual stroll through the shopping promenade revealed the extent of on-going financial difficulties. Instead of the expected variety of shops, there were decorated boards covering spaces never rented. Instead of thriving boutiques and restaurants, there were going-out-of-business sales and undelivered mail gathering forlornly before locked shop doors.

Most telling of all, at a time when Montreal's vacancy rate was 1.7%, there is evidence that La Cité (and similar buildings) had a vacancy rate of 30 to 40% (*The Gazette*, November 17, 1982). In 1983 when Milton-Park residents were paying about \$200 a month for a newly renovated two-bedroom apartment, renters at La Cité had to pay from \$365 for a bachelor unit to about \$900 for a two-bedroom apartment

with a patio.¹

La Cité's residents became so desperate at one point that, once again, 14 years later, Concordia Estates was confronted with an irate tenants' group — middle-class tenants that the developers had attracted to the area. The individuals were different, but the complaints were much the same — high rents and poor maintenance. According to a document prepared by Robert Mayrand, president of the La Cité tenants' association, the rents had become exorbitant; promised privileges such as membership in the health club had been withdrawn; the elevator service was pitiful, and the laundry-room facilities often failed to function — to name just a few of the complaints.

The tenants soon found they had to negotiate with a new landlord when Morguard Trust Company, acting as trustee for two foreign firms that held mortgages on the property, repossessed it in November 1982.²

Of La Cité's 1,352 apartments, at least 400 were empty, Mayrand claimed. In contrast, the Milton-Park project's selection committees were sifting through hundreds of applications to fill the few vacancies in their 597 units.

Although the hotel and shopping promenade had been financed separately from the apartment complex, Concordia Estates soon lost these as well to Morguard Trust. By March 1983, Concordia was finally 'out on the street,' much like the people it evicted years ago.³

One of the great ironies of this story is that in terms of financial and organizational chutzpah, the Milton-Park housing project wins hands down, when compared to La Cité. The fortunes of the once-promising housing and commercial complex crumbled during the early 1980s, while the buildings that Concordia Estates threatened to demolish are renovated and, it seems, financially viable.

Of course, the huge complex remains to tower over the area. According to a local businessman, La Cité's "bad karma" has lingered on. These are the words of Alan Lieberman, owner of La Croissanterie, a successful chain which has one of its locations in La Cité. Still long-haired and sandal-shod in 1983, Lieberman's formal appearance would have fitted right in with the Milton-Park demonstrators of 15 years ago. He eventually became president of the La Cité merchants' association.

On September 23, 1983, cheerful posters on walls and doors

throughout the neighbourhood announced a gala celebration to mark the official opening of the Milton-Park housing project. These opening ceremonies had been called for in the contract between the Milton-Park community and its benefactor, the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation. Although the project was not yet complete — renovations were still underway at some co-ops, and none had acquired their deeds — many people had returned to their renovated homes and the time seemed ripe for a celebration. The weekend community party was full of ironies for those who could remember the neighbourhood's history.

The festive affair began at the First Presbyterian Church at Milton and Jeanne Mance with a VIP reception featuring wine, music and congratulations all around. Various federal, provincial and municipal agencies seized the opportunity to trumpet their participation in the project with press releases and the speeches of their representatives. Most of these very agencies had criticized, stalled or opposed the project in its early stages. Perhaps the project's 'fairy godmother,' architect and ardent conservationist, Phyllis Lambert, thought about this when she spoke to the assembled celebrants. In his speech, Bob Cohen made a point of thanking several dozen people individually and paid tribute to the hundreds of other, hard-working residents who had made the project possible.

The next day was devoted to a street fair along Park Avenue. The City of Montreal closed this main thoroughfare to traffic and gave its blessings to the fair. Seven years earlier, members of the Jeanne Mance Street Committee had tried to call attention to the problem of traffic in the area by bodily halting the flow of cars with a volley-ball game in the middle of their street. Their reception from city officials and police was very different then compared to the co-operation they were now receiving.

Eleven years earlier, residents had tried to prevent the demolition of hundreds of houses and the subsequent construction of the La Cité complex. They were at least partially responsible for limiting the size of this imposing redevelopment project. Now in 1983, the hotel at La Cité was hosting a free dinner for the community at Notre-Dame-de-la Salette church — the same church that had first refused to rent meeting space to the community organizers.

The hotel also distributed free maple syrup candy on the street and



The VIP reception at the First Presbyterian Church marking the official opening of the Milton-Park housing project, September 23, 1983 (*photo by John Sleeman*).



Dimitri Roussopoulos in conversation with Marc Anger, one of the architects involved with Maisounous, the non-profit association created to manage buildings for roomers.



Phyllis Lambert and Bob Cohen at the gala celebration marking the official opening of the Milton-Park housing project, September 23, 1983 (*photo by John Sleeman*).

several local restaurants set up food stands on Park Avenue. The people strolling outside, listening to Québécois fiddlers and buying crafts from neighbourhood artisans and seniors, were a very different crowd from the patrons who sat inside the restaurant in La Cité's Promenade. To the restaurant patrons, the street scene they observed through the plate-glass windows was largely meaningless. The area's two distinct populations, the high-rise dwellers and co-op residents, rarely mingled except at the supermarket.

On a stage at the intersection of Park Avenue and Milton Street, Lucia Kowaluk was introduced as the 'grandmother of the project.' While she spoke about her role during the long years of struggle, her beaming husband, Dimitri Roussopoulos, strode about in a Greek sailor's cap like an admiral surveying his triumphant fleet. His air of satisfaction was understandable in view of the role he played throughout the battle for the neighbourhood. Off to the side, Bob Cohen stood hunched up in a bulging parka, worrying, as usual, about whether everything was running smoothly.

Residents who had worked on the project for years joined in the weekend celebrations, enjoying the reconciliation between the community and the 'authorities.' Some residents ignored the event, considering it mere obligatory window dressing. Their ambivalence was perhaps due to their awareness of the stormy history leading up to the grand opening and the fact that there were still issues unsettled, some differences still unresolved. Nevertheless, the weekend of inauguration festivities was a milestone in the redevelopment of Milton-Park.

Anyone walking up and down the streets of Milton-Park in those days could easily pick out the homes already renovated. For one thing, their presence was proclaimed by large signs — red and white for the federal government, blue and white for the city — taking credit for making this housing possible. More significantly, the renovated homes were distinguishable by their solid, tidy appearance, which sometimes included an eye-catching personal touch. Staircases and balconies of wood and steel were sturdy yet graceful and new windows and doors were in striking contrast to the few still unrenovated neighbouring buildings.

When the Milton-Park project was first planned, enthusiasts hoped it would serve as an inspiration to people on the borders of the neighbourhood, galvanizing them into action to take control of their

housing, to create new co-ops and spread the concept of community. This may yet happen. But the visionaries reckoned without the condominium boom and the rapid development of the real estate market.

Surrounding streets have become fashionable. Many people — especially those with money and few, or no children — want to live downtown. Consequently, a great number of the buildings adjacent to the project have blossomed into condominiums. By 1986, even the Presbyterian church in which the inauguration ceremony was held had been turned into luxury condominiums by a private developer. Some wonder if the Milton-Park project itself has accelerated this gentrification.

One of the persistent criticisms of the project has been that the properties were obtained through Phyllis Lambert's social, financial and political connections. This criticism overlooks the 11 years of struggle prior to 1979 by David Williams, Lucia Kowaluk, Dimitri Roussopoulos and scores of others to save the buildings and lay the groundwork for a self-governing neighbourhood. The criticism also overlooks the ongoing commitment of the individuals who continued to keep the cause alive during the seventies, even after it seemed as if Concordia Estates had won the fight.

Timing, of course, was of critical importance to the project's initial acceptance. As Kowaluk notes, if the rent-level issue had not been settled before the referendum, then "no matter how many people were sitting in the streets or how much Phyllis Lambert applied pressure, we would have had nothing."

If the community leaders had stuck with the tactics of the sixties — demonstrations and confrontation only — they would have been naive and much less successful. The new times called for new strategies and new organizational structures. If professional polish and corporate clout were required at times and were, amazingly enough, available, why not add them to the arsenal? The Milton-Park activists were certainly not 'sellouts.' On the contrary, the visionaries of Milton-Park remained true to their ideals. They simply sought support for their goals from one of the acknowledged sources of power in our society — the business world.

It is also interesting to note that determined visionaries such as Lucia Kowaluk and other hard-working residents were ultimately more successful in realizing their goals than the corporate developers behind La

Cité. Not only did the residential sector of the complex go bankrupt, reverting to CMHC ownership, but it took several years to find a new owner. Once again, perhaps, timing was a factor favouring the Milton-Park project. What with the rapid rise in value of real estate in downtown Montreal, and the gentrification of the immediate area, La Cité might have had a different fate, had it been built later.

One can also look back, with the wisdom of hindsight, and see how the project might have been better managed. If the professional planners and organizers of the housing project could have spent less time on legal and financial matters, they could have devoted more to developing local leadership, organizing the co-ops, strengthening community ties, and averting the discrepancies in costs between the early and later co-ops. The Maisons St-Louis controversy might have been avoided by finding a formula whereby people could own their own homes and also avoid the spectre of real estate speculation. This too would have required more time for the organizers and a better understanding of finances and real estate trends.

Now that the speeches and self-congratulations are over and most of the carping and criticisms stilled, what remains to be said about Milton-Park? The bottom line is that 135 varied and charming buildings in a six-square-block area have been saved from the wrecker's ball and, for the foreseeable future, from speculation. Moreover, 597 dwellings have been fully renovated and brought up to the standards of the most stringent building codes. And these buildings have been preserved as a low-rent oasis.

The project has also been largely successful in preserving the area's architectural heritage, despite the sacrifice of a few features due to high costs. Although the Milton-Park homes are more modest than some of their privately-owned neighbours, the project certainly does not bear the uncomfortable stamp of 'public housing' that has marred many earlier social housing ventures. But the goal of the project was much more than preserving buildings. If the spirit of the community withers away; if the co-ops acquire a rubber stamp mentality and are dominated by just a few strong individuals; and if residents remain in the neighbourhood merely because of low rents, then one could say of the project 'the operation was a success but the patient died.'

The vision was to preserve the mix of people who over the years were drawn to the neighbourhood — the immigrant families, blue-collar

workers, older residents, roomers, students and academics, artists, political and social activists. Some had gravitated to the area largely for economic reasons — because of the original low rents and transportation savings to be had. Others had been attracted to the character of the area. The idea was to give all groups an opportunity to remain in Milton-Park.

The issue of the resale of properties will continue to be a thorny one as market values rise, making it more and more tempting to find ways of selling at a profit. One of the tenets of co-operative housing — that individuals may not benefit from selling shares or dwellings at a profit — could be threatened in the future if legislation regarding co-ops were to be modified, as was discussed by the provincial government in 1983. Pressure could mount for residents to be able to earn limited profits on their co-op investment under a program of limited equity or equity sharing. Although this idea may not apply to Milton-Park, such proposals could influence residents' attitudes and commitment to the co-operative system.

Nevertheless, the community is now largely organized, which means co-ops have time and energy to help one another solve problems and to become involved in neighbourhood issues city-wide. Moreover, the OSBLs for the elderly and the handicapped can serve as models for such accommodation for the rest of Canada.

But it is unlikely a project of the scale of Milton-Park will ever be attempted elsewhere in the country. Nowadays, CMHC would not be willing or able to finance a development of this size and complexity. Nor would CMHC purchase buildings and land for a third party. By September 1983, federal, provincial and municipal programs had allocated \$30.7 million to rehabilitate 597 units in Milton-Park — about \$50,000 each. Such allocations are unacceptable today. CMHC is concerned about defaults on its loans, its rapid acquisition of unwanted real estate and internal reports concluding that non-profit and co-operative housing programs are expensive and do not really meet the needs of the country's poor. Furthermore, private builders are urging the provision of individual rent or shelter allowances rather than the building subsidies that now exist.⁴

Still, community housing projects are very much a going concern. Perhaps the best forecast is that neighbourhood redevelopment of the magnitude of Milton-Park is unlikely again but small-scale redevelop-

ment and restoration of older buildings will continue to win favour as people and governments come to appreciate the value of our architectural heritage. Some imaginative people are devising ways of converting empty schools and other buildings into housing. The experienced co-ops in Milton-Park and SAMP can and do provide advice and support to such groups.

Meanwhile, Milton-Park has its new look and its new community structures. Dimitri Roussopoulos may occasionally sigh that "it takes so much effort to make so little change." But Lucia Kowaluk smiles serenely and says, "I don't mind saying thank you. We have our houses."

The ghost of the Milton-Park Citizens' Committee has faded from the scene. Most of the professionals have packed up their briefcases; their mandate is over. SAMP, however, still maintains a distinct presence in the neighbourhood. As of early 1987, a host of legal, financial and political problems concerning final ownership of the properties remain to be solved. For most of the residents, however, daily life in their well-maintained new dwellings has underscored the value of social housing programs and the vision of activists and organizers. Now it is up to the people of the neighbourhood to ensure that the spirit of Milton-Park lives on.

Notes

1. By 1986, the rate for a five-and-a-half room, two-bedroom co-op duplex was \$310 for a member, \$360 for a tenant.
2. In the spring of 1984, CMHC took over the residential portion of the property and was unable to find a buyer until December, 1986.
3. By the summer of 1986, the commercial segments of the property, the office tower, hotel and shopping mall, were about to change hands again.
4. Changes to CMHC programs announced in November, 1986 now link co-op mortgages to the prevailing interest rate.

Appendix

A WORD ABOUT FINANCES

CMHC PROGRAMS FOR CO-OPERATIVE AND PRIVATE NON-PROFIT HOUSING, 1978-82

It may be of interest to look more closely at the CMHC programs of the time and how they affected the Milton-Park project. In 1978, new provisions were added to both the co-op and non-profit housing programs. Because they were so new, these provisions were subject to considerable variation in interpretation and to various pressures, both because of the scope of the project and the nature of those connected with it.

The terms of the new co-operative housing assistance available to all new projects included: loan insurance of 100% guaranteed by CMHC over a period of up to 35 years; financial assistance to subsidize mortgage payments from the going market rate (about 9% at the time), to as low as 2% for the term of the mortgage, i.e. 35 years; funding, up to a certain level, for repairs and modifications; and funds covering development plans.

The mortgage interest assistance bridged the shortfall between the charges required to pay off the mortgage at the current interest rate and the payments that would be made if the interest rate were 2%. Meanwhile, interest rates climbed to 21% by 1981.

The true operating charges included the costs of acquisition, renovation, interest, mortgage payments and other fees. The assistance, or subsidy, went to reduce the rent for all the co-op occupants to what was termed the 'economic' or low-end-of-market rent. In Milton-Park, the economic rent included the costs of what became very extensive, and expensive, renovations. Instead of being based on a comparison with rents for adjacent areas, including La Cité, the project organizers won the concession from CMHC that the rents be based on what people had been paying previously.

Money from the mortgage assistance subsidy was also to be used to

subsidize low-income residents. It was expected by CMHC that they would make up 15% of the co-op population. Provincial rent subsidies were also available. The basic criteria of this rent-to-income scale was that no one should pay more than 25% of gross income for rent. (This has been raised to 30%.)

The guaranteed loan insurance and mortgage assistance were available to the non-profit housing associations as well. However, while the co-ops had their rent set for a period of three years, the non-profit associations had theirs adjusted yearly according to the interest rates. Again, the higher the proportion of the subsidy needed to cover the shortfall, the less available to keep rents down.

Following the three-year set period for co-op rents, increases of 5% yearly could be introduced. This measure was intended to phase out the subsidies to individuals who could afford the market rate.

SPUM worried that delays in reaching agreement with Maisons St-Louis would cost them heavily. Instead of being able to proceed with renovations under the original plan, when the interest rate was 10 $\frac{3}{4}$ %, the new terms would be based on a much higher rate. Inflation would have pushed up the renovation costs as well. Furthermore, those Milton-Park co-ops that were the last to incorporate had much higher carrying charges than those that incorporated earlier. To help them out, SPUM/SAMP initially had to pressure the co-ops that were in better shape to lend money to their less fortunate neighbours.

CMHC found they were liable for more funding for the project than anticipated. One reason was more mortgage assistance was required as interest rates soared; another was because the renovation costs for the whole project were much higher than those predicted by the Action Plan. Consequently, funding for Milton-Park used up a great deal of the co-op money earmarked for Quebec and probably deprived other projects in Quebec of CMHC funding or, at least, delayed their receiving federal funds. Fortunately, some provincial funding was available as Quebec was considerably more supportive of co-operative housing than other provinces.

The Milton-Park project would never get off the ground today for a variety of reasons. For one thing, mortgages are now tied to interest rates. There are no more bargains at 2% interest. For another, CMHC is much more stringent in specifying that government-assisted social housing be targeted for low-income groups or those with special needs,

such as the handicapped. More programs are now delivered by the provinces under new federal-provincial cost-sharing agreements.



(photo by Mark Goldman)

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THE MILTON-PARK AFFAIR



Milton-Park Citizens' Committee march on City Hall to protest the Concor-
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In the early 60s a developer submitted plans to the City of Montreal for total demolition of a six-square block downtown area to make way for a massive apartment/hotel/shopping complex. *The Milton-Park Affair* vividly chronicles an inner-city community's dramatic 15-year struggle to preserve its neighbourhood and create Canada's most ambitious co-operative housing project.

Intrigue, politics and the tactics of two groups of urban activists — one from the turbulent 60s, the other from the pragmatic 80s — make this social history of Milton-Park of interest to the urban specialist and the general reader.

Claire Helman is with the National Film Board of Canada where she writes and directs audio-visual productions for schools.

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