Radical Protestant Currents in Montreal, 1930–1950*

Gregory Baum

Emeritus Professor of Theological Ethics and Sociology of Religion, McGill University

 ${f F}$ ollowing the famous thesis of Max Weber, sociologists have argued that the Protestant spirit of discipline and self-reliance had a particular affinity with the ethic of capitalist entrepreneurship. Equally true, even if more rarely acknowledged, is that from the nineteenth century on Protestantism has also inspired religious counter-trends at odds with the spirit of capitalism. In the England of 1848 the Christian Socialism of J.F.M. Ludlow and F.D. Maurice, reacting to the degradation of the working class, began a counter-current in the Anglican Church that over an entire century generated theological critiques of the reigning capitalist system, up to the social theology of Archbishop William Temple, who was appointed to the See of Canterbury in 1942 (Christensen 1962; Jones 1968; Terril 1973; Cort 1988). In the United States the rapid industrialization in the latter part of the nineteenth century, and the lamentable conditions of the working class produced by it, summoned forth the Social Gospel movement, a critical Christian reaction to the capitalist order (Hopkins 1940; Handy 1966). When a few decades later this rapid industrialization came to Canada, it also provoked the emergence of a Social Gospel movement. According to Richard Allen (1974), the historian of this Canadian development, the movement suffered decline in the decade after World War I.

A decade later, in the long years of the great depression, Canadian Protestantism generated a new movement critical of the inherited eco-

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nomic order. In 1934 we witness the emergence of a Christian socialist organization, the Fellowship for a Christian Social Order (FCSO), constituted by leading Christian intellectuals, many of them theologians. belonging for the most part to the United Church of Canada. The FCSO was enthusiastically supported by a large number of Canadian Protestants, even if the Churches themselves remained aloof and cautious. Some of the founding members lived and worked in Montreal: Eugene Forsey, lecturer in economics at McGill University, R.B.Y. Scott, professor of Old Testament literature at the United Theological College on the McGill Campus, and King Gordon, professor of Christian ethics at the same theological institution, until his socialist perspective cost him his academic position. In the dark years of the depression, the FCSO found considerable support among Protestants in Montreal, even if the organization was repudiated by the Montreal Protestant establishment.

Socialist Stirrings at McGill University

This leads us to the topic of this article: radical Protestant currents in Montreal in the thirties, forties, and fifties of this century. To tell this story we must look at several events that created a center of socialist thought and Christian radicalism at McGill University, even though the university as such was dismayed by this development.

In the early thirties the League for Social Reconstruction (LSR) was founded as the Canadian equivalent of the British Fabian Society with the aim of laying the intellectual foundations for an original, Canadian, democratic socialism (Horn 1980). One of the leading spirits of the LSR was Frank Scott, professor of law at McGill University, a gifted man who had a large following among the students. The LSR saw itself as the intellectual resource committee—the "think tank" as we would say today of the democratic socialist party, the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation (CCF), that was formally constituted in Regina, Saskatchewan, in 1933. The first draft for the famous Regina Manifesto, composed by Frank Underhill of the University of Toronto, was reviewed and amended by three Montrealers, Frank Scott, Eugene Forsey, and King Gordon, who later attended the founding convention at Regina as delegates of the Montreal CCF council.

In these same years the sociology department of McGill University wanted to respond to the conditions of poverty and unemployment in the country by uniting researchers from the social, economic, and political sciences in a multidisciplinary scientific enterprise that would lead to a better understanding of the social crisis and contribute to its eventual resolution. With the help of funds from the Rockefeller Foundation, the sociology department created the Social Science Research Project and hired as its director Leonard Marsh, an Englishman trained at the then left-leaning London School of Economics (Frost 1984, 187-209; Shore 1987, 195-223). The available funds allowed professors involved in the project to employ graduate students to help them in their research. The studies of Canada's social and economic problems produced by the McGill Research Project were influential among progressive Canadian political leaders and academics, yet they greatly annoyed Chancellor Edward W. Beatty and angered members of the McGill Board of Governors who played an important role in the business community of Montreal. Unhappy that it had become a center of socialist influence, McGill University decided to phase out the Research Project in 1941 and release Leonard Marsh and Eugene Forsey.²

In the years of which we speak, the influence of the socialist professors among the students was considerable. Active on the campus of McGill University were the Labour Club, an undergraduate society promoting a socialist perspective, and the Student Christian Movement (SCM), which at that time reflected the theology of the FCSO and supported the movement for a socialist Canada. King Gordon and Eugene Forsey who, as noted earlier, belonged to the LSR, the CCF, and the FCSO, were also active in the SCM at McGill, as was Frank Scott and several professors of the United Theological College.

What was the SCM? In the early twenties the YMCA and YWCA present on university campuses initiated the creation of the Canadian Student Christian Movement, a student organization with its own original orientation (Beattie 1975). First, the SCM inherited from the YMCA and YWCA the international outlook and the concern for peace and reconciliation in all parts of the world. Second, the SCM was an independent, student-run Christian organization that was not under the control of a higher ecclesiastical authority. The students themselves decided where they wanted their organization to go. Third, it was the policy of the SCM that membership in it was not confined to Christians but was open to all who were willing to test the truth for which the SCM stood. The SCM saw itself as a fellowship that included questioners and doubters. It wanted to be a movement, committed but open, on the university campus.

In the thirties, responding to the misery caused by the depression, the SCM adopted a radical Christian perspective. It was strongly influenced by the theology of the FCSO. The indefatigable Gordon King also played an important role in the SCM. Since socialist involvement was strong on McGill campus it is not surprising that the SCM at McGill became a center for Christian socialism.

In his political memoirs David Lewis (1981, 29) remembers this of

his days at McGill University. "Strange as it may seem in view of my background, I was quite active in circles of the Student Christian Movement. The SCM, as it was called, had a number of radical activists with whom I worked in the Labour Club and other campus undertakings. Eugene Forsey and Gordon King often appeared there. The religious aspect of the SCM was irrelevant to me; what was important was the commitment of so many to the struggle for social change." Not surprisingly the SCM exerted considerable influence on the students of the United Theological College and the Anglican Diocesan Theological College who were preparing themselves for ordination. In the thirties, then, there existed in Montreal a strong, radical current within Protestantism made up of members and supporters of the FCSO and on the McGill campus of students and faculty involved in the SCM.

Since I am not a historian I rely in the writing of this article on the research found in three unpublished dissertations, one dealing with the FCSO (Hutchinson 1975) and the others with two Anglican socialist organizations that I shall discuss further on (Hopkins 1982; Brown 1987). Unfortunately no equivalent historical research has been done on the SCM on the McGill campus, even though this student organization was an important center for promoting Christian socialism in Montreal.

A Canadian Theology of Liberation

Since I am a theologian, what interests me especially in this manifestation of Christian socialism is the theology that inspired and guided it. The theology of the FCSO, worked out in a collaborative effort, was eventually spelled out in a book, a collection of articles entitled *Toward the Christian Revolution* (1936), that made an original, Canadian contribution to the theory of Christian socialism (Scott and Vlastos [1936] 1989; Hutchinson 1975, 1989a, 17-27; 1989b, i-xxxiv). Three of the authors, E. Forsey, G. King, and R.Y.B. Scott, were Montreal based. Let me explain why I regard this theology as truly original.

The theology of the FCSO differed considerably from the earlier forms of the Social Gospel that tended to reflect an optimistic, progress-oriented imagination, inherited from the nineteenth century, anticipating that scientific development guided by good will would allow society to evolve beyond capitalist exploitation to socialist justice. Proponents of the Social Gospel often believed that God's coming kingdom preached and promised by Jesus Christ would become historical reality through the progressive transformation of human society. The influential American theologian Reinhold Niebuhr, at one time identified with the Social Gospel, shattered this easy optimism in the early thirties. Disruption and catastrophe, he argued, remain forever part of history. Niebuhr called for

a new Christian realism that would reject all social utopias as sources of illusion or possibly even legitimations of totalitarian regimes. The Christian mission in the political realm, according to this Christian realism, was to put into place checks and correctives for the most powerful institutions in society and to struggle for a greater balance of power as the best guarantee for rough justice and minimum damage.

The theologians of the FCSO took Niebuhr's critique very seriously. They refused to follow the Social Gospel in its theology of God's coming reign and its evolutionary understanding of history. They recognized catastrophe and failure as permanent human possibilities. At the same time they argued vehemently against Niebuhr's Christian realism. Their argument in defense of utopia and in favor of the socialist struggle was taken, not from Christian eschatology as the Social Gospel had done, but from the religious ethic contained in the Scriptures that demanded that those who believe the divine message extend their solidarity to the poor and oppressed. Confronted by a struggle between the powerful and the weak, Christians should opt to support the oppressed in their resistance. Even though there is no divine guarantee of the final outcome and the struggle may end in the defeat of the just cause—here the theologian of the FCSO agreed with Niebuhr—they held that the religious ethic of the Bible and the spirit of discipleship summoned Christians to side with the poor and defend what they saw as the just cause.

The theology of the FCSO here anticipated by several decades Latin American liberation theology that also refused to invoke God's reign coming into history and took as its theological foundation the biblically inspired, preferential option for the poor (McGovern 1989, 62–82). The theologians of the FCSO also shared with Latin American liberation theologians of the seventies the conviction that they still lived in a Christian society in which biblical language constituted an acceptable public discourse.

The disagreement of the FCSO with Reinhold Niebuhr went even further. According to Niebuhr the love of neighbor, the great commandment of the Gospel, summoned Christians to deny themselves and extend their love to those who were near them. But following a certain Protestant theological trend, Niebuhr believed that sinful humanity was so deeply self-centered that the love commandment challenged the believer with an impossible possibility. The love commandment, central to the Gospel, challenged Christians to transcend themselves and revealed to them that they were still sinners in need of God's mercy. The love commandment, according to Niebuhr, was meaningful only for individual Christians: it was not addressed to society. The task of society was not to become self-forgetful but to assure the well-being of its people by

seeking as much justice for them as possible under the circumstances.

The theology of the FCSO rejected Niebuhr's interpretation of the love commandment. The love to which Christians are called is not a forever unreachable, personal utopia, but a message of mutuality meaningful for personal and social life. To love one's neighbor as oneself includes the political effort to organize the whole of personal and social life on the basis of equality and participation. Love, understood as mutuality, questions the inequalities created by the traditional hierarchies and later by the unregulated capitalist market, the formation of monopolies, and the widening gap between the rich and the poor. While the theologians of the FSCO were not yet sensitive to the patriarchal heritage of church and society, the principle of mutuality they upheld and defended could, according to a remark by Ruth Evans (1989, 158), become the theological foundation for Christian feminism.

Let me add to these reflections that the social theory of the FCSO was also original inasmuch as it transcended the Fabian socialism and the social democratic theory characteristic of the democratic left in Canada. Moving beyond purely economic considerations, the FCSO offered a critique of North American culture, including its philosophical presuppositions, that blessed and promoted the capitalist system. According to the FCSO, modern Anglo-American individualism was ethically acceptable if accompanied by a commitment to equality, to the equal well-being of all individuals. The great obstacle to this was the understanding of human being as competitor, fostered by capitalism, which would have to be overcome by a moral and possibly religious conversion to a cooperative understanding of human being, in keeping with profound personal experience confirmed by the biblical story of creation and redemption.

In the years during the war the FCSO declined and eventually petered out. One reason for this was that these Christian socialists tended to be pacifists. Canada's entry into the war caused deep division among them. Another reason was that the popular support for the socialist movement declined because as Canada mobilized its armed forces and stepped up the war industry, unemployment gradually disappeared, largely leaving behind the misery caused by the depression.

Anglican Socialists

Yet Christian socialism did not die in Montreal. It was taken up by a group of Anglicans, mainly theological students later to be ordained priests, who came together in the early forties and eventually, in 1945, constituted the Anglican Fellowship for Social Action (AFSA). AFSA was to exercise considerable influence in the Anglican Church of Montreal and by means of the review The Anglican Outlook, which was sympathetic to their cause in the Anglican Church throughout Canada.³ What was the background of this new fellowship?

Early in the war, in 1941, the Malvern Conference of the Church of England, under the presidency of William Temple, then archbishop of York, examined in the light of the Christian message the crisis confronting Western civilization. Echoing a minority trend in Anglicanism started in 1848 called "Christian Socialism," the Malvern Conference was particularly concerned with the conflict between the economic system based on private ownership of the industries and the Christian understanding of human being. The Conference corrected the widely held Christian opinion that society could be changed by changing individuals and affirmed that structural change was also necessary. "The Findings" of the Malvern Conference were sent to Anglican Churches all over the world.

The Malvern Findings mobilized Anglicans throughout the Canadian Dominion. In September 1941 Charles Fielding of Toronto's Trinity College started a mimeographed newsletter, "Canada and Christendom," which was critical of the conformist stance of the Church in Canada. While Arthur Carlisle, the Anglican bishop of Montreal, was not pleased with the Malvern Findings, he did create a committee to address postwar problems, a necessary corollary of which was to study the Malvern proposals, making recommendations where appropriate. When in 1942 Temple became the archbishop of Canterbury and published his famous Christianity and Social Order, critically minded Anglicans in Canada were greatly empowered. In Montreal the social-service committee of the Anglican diocese became increasingly active, and the congregation of St. John the Evangelist started a so-called sociology group to deal with the relation of faith and social order. Some dedicated members of these committees began to talk about the possibility of founding a disciplined fellowship committed to social action. Among them was the dentist Dr. J.C. "Flynn" Flanagan, one of the few lay Christians of this group. He and S.L. Pollard, chairman of the social-service committee, had previously been members of the FCSO.

The group began to have influence on the synod of the diocese. Following the Malvern Findings the group urged that the Church not only work for the transformation of the economic order, but also change its own economic structure. What they proposed was that the parish clergy be remunerated with the same basic stipend accompanied by additional allowances that depended on the size of their family and their need for a car dictated by the geography of their congregation. This proposal was designed to correct the existing situation were the stipend of the minister varied with the wealth of the parish. The bold suggestion created great opposition. John Dixon, made bishop of Montreal in 1943, was at first

sympathetic to this dedicated group, but he soon changed his mind.

The members were further radicalized when they participated in the conference "Toward a Christian Society" organized by the FCSO in May 1943 in Montreal, attended by Christian activists as well as labor unionists, academics, and members of the CCF. One of the invited speakers, Joseph Fletcher, an American Episcopalian, was a leading interpreter of William Temple's social theology on the North American continent. At that occasion Dr. Flanagan invited Fletcher to return to Montreal in August 1943 to be the speaker at a meeting of the Anglican socialists who thought of founding a new fellowship. This meeting took place at Dr. Flanagan's house at Bevan's Lake near Arundel, Quebec. It was subsequently referred to as the first Arundel Conference. At the second Arundel Conference in August 1944 the guest speaker was Frederic Hastings Smyth, the founder of the Society for the Catholic Commonwealth (SCC) with its base in the United States, who represented a different perspective. We will hear more of his social philosophy later on.

The Anglican Fellowship for Social Action

The members of the group preferred to remain faithful to the spirit of William Temple. In 1945 they decided to constitute a new organization, the Anglican Fellowship for Social Action (AFSA). They published a manifesto that articulated their social-theological convictions and formulated seven rules they promised to observe.

The first three points of the manifesto are the following: (1) We believe that the Church ought to proclaim that it is God's will that men should live together on this earth in brotherhood, holding the natural resources of the earth as a common trust for all mankind; (2) We affirm that our present economic system frustrates brotherhood, as it appeals primarily to self-interest and its basis is competition: therefore this system is unchristian and immoral; (3) We maintain that the present social order cannot be changed without a change in heart and mind and will in the individual and a corresponding change in the political and industrial arrangements.

The fourth point of the manifesto deals with the reform of the Church: (4) If the Church is to witness without reproach for justice and brotherhood in the world, it must show itself serious and consistent in reforming abuses within its own organization and in promoting brotherhood among its members.

There were seven rules: (1) to bear together the burdens in the advocacy of these principles; (2) to meet at regular intervals for Holy Communion and discussion; (3) to read at least one book on social problems each month; (4) to produce and distribute literature in support of our

principles and to advance them publicly; (5) to work for a system of clerical stipends based on the Christian doctrine of brotherhood; (6) to cooperate with other groups, religious and secular, on fundamental issues of social righteousness; and (7) to pay a minimum membership fee of two dollars a year.

The members of the newly founded AFSA were W.J. Bishop, R. Bodger, Ken N. Brueton, C.J. Champion, J.C. Flanagan, John C. Kirby, John O. Peacock, Sam I. Pollard, Cyril Powles, Ernie Reid and M.A. Stephens. Dr. Flanagan was the only layperson among them.

Over the years the members of the AFSA involved themselves in many social struggles in the province of Quebec. For example: they argued for the right to collective bargaining; fought against the suppression of civil liberties; supported the 1946 textile workers' strike in Valleyfield; protested, as members of the Citizen's Committee, the use of provincial police to quell the industrial strikes; picketed in support of the Asbestos strike in 1949. AFSA published a pamphlet entitled "A Christian Economic System." In their political involvement they were closely identified with the CCF. The Anglican Outlook, a monthly that began publication in 1945, became increasingly open to the socialist perspective and willingly published the ethical-political commentaries of members of the AFSA. In their articles they advocated economic justice and the structural changes necessary to assure economic justice; they denounced the Padlock Law and the repressive actions undertaken against Jehovah's Witnesses, Baptists, Jews, and groups suspected of communist sympathies by the Quebec government under Maurice Duplessis. They wrestled against the polarization of international relations during the Cold War; against American foreign policy and the rapidly spreading "red scare"; and against what they felt to be an ideological bias in church reports regarding the Chinese Revolution. In 1949 the editorial board of The Anglican Outlook moved from Ottawa to Montreal, now chaired by H.H. Nick Walsh, member of the AFSA and professor at the United Theological College.

The AFSA was an activist community. Compared with the FCSO, the AFSA was much less interested in theology and social theory. The members accepted the social thought of William Temple in continuity with an older Anglican current, based on God-given "natural law" and the theological principle of Incarnation. The Anglican tradition did not share the Protestant emphasis on the disruption produced by human sin and hence had greater trust in the power of "reason" to decipher the laws of human well-being that God had sunk into the created order. This dimension of Anglican theology resembled the social teaching of the Roman Catholic Church. The Anglican theology differed from Roman Catholic ideas of

that time by its understanding of Incarnation as a doctrine affirming God's entry into history and God's continued presence and action in it. This teaching, I might add, became widely accepted in the Roman Catholic Church at the time of Vatican Council II (1962–1965).

Anglican social theology, as interpreted by Temple, differed from the Canadian Social Gospel and the theology of the FCSO. Because Anglican social theology relied on the order of creation, it did not invoke the eschatology of the Social Gospel; and because Anglican social theology held that with the help of divine grace human reason could uncover the laws present in the created order, it did not invoke the biblically based option for the poor that was central in the theology of the FCSO. Moreover the emphasis on Incarnation and divine presence gave a mystical dimension to Anglican social theology calling for prayerfulness, which tended to be absent in the more Protestant socialist theologies.

The fifties saw the gradual decline of AFSA. Many of its priest members left Montreal to minister in other parts of the world. Moreover the more conventional Anglican paper, *The Canadian Churchman*, began to publish articles directed against the AFSA. Eventually the remaining members discovered that their influence on the Montreal diocese and their political presence in the city were decreasing. After 1960, when *The Anglican Outlook* chose to become ecumenical, representing a wider spectrum of Canadian Christians and thus transforming itself into *The Christian Outlook*, the Anglican Fellowship disappeared. Some of its members have to this day remained active, progressive Christians in Montreal's Anglican Church. The sixties initiated a new phase of radical Christian involvement in Canada and Quebec, this time also involving francophone Catholics of Quebec. But this is not the topic of the present article.

The Society of the Catholic Commonwealth

The account of Christian radicalism in Montreal during the decades here considered would be incomplete without mentioning the Montreal branch of the Society of the Catholic Commonwealth (SCC), a religious organization within the Anglican Communion, founded in the United States by Frederic Hastings Smyth. Smyth was an unusual religious personality who joined together two philosophical stances that are normally regarded as incompatible. He was a high-church Anglican with strong sacramental and liturgical convictions as well as a materialist, a scientific Marxist, and until the early fifties a supporter of the Communist Party. This is not the place to analyze this complex human being. Of interest to us is that he was invited to serve as speaker at the second Arundel Conference in August of 1944, organized by the group of Anglicans in Mon-

treal who were about to form the AFSA.

While Smyth and the Anglicans who had invited him called themselves socialists, they had very little in common. The high-church sacramentalism represented by Smyth did not appeal to most of the Anglicans at the Conference, identified as they were with the mainstream of Anglicanism, respecting the sacraments but not giving them primacy. The members of the AFSA, as we saw above, were inspired by the social theology of Archbishop Temple whose understanding of Incarnation was historical rather than sacramental. For Temple the primary locus of God's redemptive presence was human history, not the Church's liturgy.

But even politically Smyth was at odds with the Anglican group in Montreal. He was dismayed by the reformist style of their socialism and their association with the CCF. As a Marxist close to the Communist Party he regarded them as stooges of the worst kind of reaction. Still, he kept coming to Montreal and eventually succeeded in attracting a number of followers and founding a branch of the SCC.

Smyth must have had a charming personality. His contribution to theology consisted of an original interpretation of the offertory during the celebration of the Eucharist. At the offertory, the priests offers the bread and wine to God as the fruits of human labor, representing all human productivity on the earth. This is consistent with traditional sacramental theology. What Smyth added to this was that this bread and wine, material fruits of labor, actually represent human productivity distorted and exploited by the capitalist means of production. At the consecration, Christ changes the bread and wine, material fruits marked by injustice, into his own body and blood, and in so doing, Smyth believed, reverses and overcomes the capitalist system of oppression. In celebrating holy Mass, therefore, the Church finds itself at the vanguard of the Communist revolution.

In 1948 John Wayland, a priest and member of the AFSA, decided to join the SCC. Soon he was followed by another priest, John Rowe, and an engineer, David Rigby, a member of the SCM—both had been close to the AFSA. They founded the oratory of St. John the Baptist, of which Wayland became ecclesiastical superior. Since the political analysis of the SCC was very different from that of the AFSA, the members of the oratory were asked to withdraw from their Anglican friends of the AFSA. The same year several other priests and their wives joined the SCC. 6

In the years that followed Smyth often came to Montreal. He regarded the Montreal cell as the most lively of his entire Society. The reason for this, he thought, was that the taboo against communism was so much stronger in the United States than it was in Canada. He urged the members of the Montreal Oratory to seek contact with the Canadian

Communist Party that in those years was called the Labour Progressive Party (LPP). They got in touch with Harry Binder, the Quebec organizer of the LPP, and together with him organized educational meetings in the Montreal area. The Anglican bishop, John Dixon, whom they informed of these developments, was not pleased. The RCMP became suspicious of the oratory and put pressure on Montreal's Diocesan Theological College to forbid their students to join the SCC.

But the oratory in Montreal did not have a long life. In 1950 Smyth himself became critical of the Communist Party. While he remained a Marxist, he came to believe that the Communist Party had become a political tool of the Soviet Union. As tensions in the SCC increased, the members in Montreal remained faithful in their political vision. Yet by 1952 their group gradually disappeared. The priests and their families moved away from Montreal to take on their work for the Church in other parts of Canada and in overseas missions. In subsequent years some of them became well-known personalities in the Anglican Church who continued to treasure the memories of their radical years in Montreal.

Concluding Remarks

This closes the brief historical account of the radical social movements in the Christian Churches of Montreal during the thirties, forties, and fifties. The focus was undoubtedly the SCM at McGill University. It was there that the FCSO exercised its greatest influence in Montreal. Later the SCM influenced many of the Anglicans who formed the AFSA and prepared some of those who joined the more radical SCC. It is a pity, if I may repeat myself here, that there exists as yet no historical monograph of the SCM on the campus of McGill University.

Endnotes

- 1. Fabian socialism, we note, was not Marxist; it was a utilitarian form of socialism that sought to demonstrate scientifically that socialist economic policies were more rational than the corresponding capitalists ones.
- 2. It is worth mentioning that the *Report on Social Security for Canada*, prepared by Leonard Marsh in 1943, exercised a determinative influence on the formation of Canada's social planning.
- 3. In my account of the Anglican Fellowship for Social Action I rely on Stephen Hopkins (1982).
- 4. For accounts of the (francophone) Catholic left in Quebec see Gregory Baum (1991, 67-90; 1992, 140-53).
- 5. In my account of the Society of the Catholic Commonwealth I rely on Terry M. Brown (1987).

6. These include John Wayland's spouse, Mary, Jack and Margaret Adam, Edgar and Margaret Assels, Dan and Alice Heap, Archie and Barbara Malloch, Bruce and Ann Mutch, Cyril and Marjorie Powles, and Robert and Barbara Wild.

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