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MOMENTUM

Despotism is a seed that grows in any soil.

—Edmund Burke

He was an effortless speaker who enjoyed the spotlight and was in love with the sound of his own voice. Extremely tall and thin, almost frail, he had a military bearing and cultivated an ascetic mien. His angular features accentuated a kind of enigmatic charisma. Through his appearance and the way he expressed himself, Adrien Arcand created a distinct and somewhat contradictory persona. The man was certainly stiff, austere and impenetrable at times, but he could also be fun-loving and entertaining, and had a talent for sarcasm and humour, both in his writing and in his speaking.

Even after the disaster of the Second World War, Arcand continued to proudly espouse his fascist ideas. Harry Mayer, president of the League against Anti-Semitism in Montreal, attended a number of Arcand's lectures in 1952. Mayer wrote at the time:

It has to be acknowledged that Arcand is the most dangerous anti-Semite in Canada. He is genuinely eloquent, he knows how to make himself understood by people of his race, he can present a fallacy with consummate skill, he can put forward the worst lie with the utmost sincerity and

*under a guise so seductive that his audience, for the most part ignorant and even illiterate, accepts his lies as Gospel truth.*¹

Arcand worked as a journalist on major daily newspapers, but then left the mainstream press to toil, often on his own, in the fields of militant political journalism. Arcand had a sharp and effective pen. He had read widely and travelled a bit, especially in Britain and the United States. Like many of his fellow French Canadians, he loved to escape into nature. The woods, the outdoors, hunting and occasional trout fishing were special treats for him.

His father, Narcisse Arcand, was a carpenter and an active trade unionist. The elder Arcand was a member of the Labour Party, a reformist political party founded in 1899, the year Adrien was born. Adrien's mother, Marie-Anne Mathieu, was from the village of Sainte-Marie, in Beauce. She would become a school principal, organist and religious teacher. The Arcands were married by a priest in a church wedding on October 6, 1896. With their desire to influence society, Narcisse Arcand and his wife demonstrated from the outset that they would not be followers. Born in Montreal on October 3, 1899, Adrien Arcand was the fourth in a family of twelve children residing on Laurier Street in Montreal. He attended good schools despite growing up in humble circumstances.

Narcisse Arcand spent much of his life occupied with the Labour Party, which he formally joined in 1902. The Labour Party had been launched by labour activists who were disillusioned with the policies of Quebec Premier Félix-Gabriel Marchand and Canadian Prime Minister Sir Wilfrid Laurier. Endowed with a constitution in 1904, it relied on active militants, initially led by the columnist Joseph-Alphonse Rodier. Its members had as their stated goal to "fight any policy that adversely affects the interests of society and workers, and replace the current political system with a cooperative, social form of government for the good of the country."²

The Labour Party platform was modelled on that of the British Labour Party.³ It called most notably for free and compulsory



Adrien's father, labour activist Narcisse Arcand.

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education, health insurance, old-age pensions, universal suffrage, the election of judges by the public, a farm subsidy, a ban on employing children under fourteen years of age, establishment of public libraries, a ban on excessive interest rates and other measures considered very radical in Canadian society at the time. In that sociopolitical context, with social institutions devoted almost exclusively to the interests of a free-market economy as advocated by capitalist industry, the Labour Party's left-wing agenda was on the leading edge of progressive thought.

By 1900, Narcisse Arcand had also joined a carpenters' union, the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America. The union operated within the framework of capitalist principles and demanded a monopoly in all sectors related to construction. The elder Arcand felt sufficiently at home with this union model that he recommended the expulsion of a rival union in 1912. Within the Labour Party, Narcisse Arcand rose quickly through the ranks and soon found himself hosting political gatherings. As an organizer for the Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners, he dealt primarily with trade union activities. He directed the activities of the union's Local 134, the only one to be affiliated with the Labour Party.

On November 13, 1904, during a plenary session of the Montreal

Trades and Labour Council, he explained, along with his friend and colleague Joseph-Alphonse Rodier, the need to nominate labour candidates in the next election. Soon after, Narcisse Arcand spoke in favour of comprehensive electoral action. During the 1904 provincial election he was the organizer for Alphonse Verville, the Labour candidate in the riding of Hochelaga, then a suburb of Montreal. The newspaper *La Patrie* reported that “Mr. Arcand criticized both political parties that have had their turn in power for how little they have done to respond to the needs of the worker...and Mr. Rodier recalled the considerable progress that the Labour Party has made in England, France, Belgium, Germany and the United States on the parliamentary and political fronts.⁴ The elder Arcand soon became one of the labour movement’s most respected facilitators and speakers, and was active throughout Quebec.

In 1906, a by-election was called in the federal riding of Maisonneuve after the death of the sitting Liberal member. The campaign was short and intense, as was the custom at the time. Verville was the Labour Party candidate, and Narcisse Arcand was active in his campaign. His commitment and hard work clearly played a role in the result: Verville won by just over a thousand votes. He was later re-elected several times in the Montreal riding of Dorion.

In 1912, Narcisse Arcand himself ran as the Labour candidate in Dorion riding. His platform, which he defended vigorously, included, among other things, the municipalization of public transport services and electricity, the nationalization of the railways and the incorporation of referendum votes into the democratic process. The ideas Narcisse Arcand espoused led the historian Robert Rumilly—whom no one had ever suspected of having any sympathy for the left—to put his candidacy in the “dangerous” category.⁵ In the end, Liberal candidate Georges Mayrand won the election with 1,620 votes, while Narcisse Arcand finished third with 921.

Despite the ardour of its activists, the Labour Party experienced very little success. It met with stiff opposition from the all-powerful Catholic Church and other established institutions. In religious circles, opposition was based on fear that “foreign” ideas would have a negative

influence on French Canadians active in the party. When Narcisse Arcand arrived in Jonquière, still in 1912, to found a new workers' club, church authorities expressed deep concern. Arthur Saint-Pierre of the *École Sociale Populaire* summed up the clergy's xenophobic fears directed at the Labour Party:

A recent immigrant, whether Russian, German, English, French, Polish or Jewish, though coming, to our misfortune, from one of the older rejected European societies, can enter one of these clubs, or even found one with others like himself, if he sees fit. The Labour Party's stated declaration of principles is not likely to dissuade him from this project.

The "statement of principles" Saint-Pierre was referring to was the oath of allegiance that new members of the Labour Party were required to take: new members had to promise their word and honour to the party as human beings rather than as British subjects or foreigners. Saint-Pierre did not accept the party's egalitarian and openly internationalist approach.⁶ Narcisse Arcand, however, was not the type to change his mind, even when faced with opposition from the clergy.

To counter militant socialist labour activism, the bishop of Chicoutimi decided to form Catholic unions. In front of the church in Jonquière, posters were hung warning Catholic workers to stay away from the dangerous Narcisse Arcand and encouraging their submission to religious authorities:

*Catholic workers of Jonquière and Chicoutimi, what good can you expect from the socialists and Freemasons of Montreal?...If Mr. Arcand is a Catholic, as he claims, why does he come here to wage war against our bishop and our priests? Why does he not listen to the pope and his parish priest?*⁷

There was some truth to the church's assertion that the union movements of the early twentieth century were driven in part by foreigners. Jews figured prominently in these movements. Living in conditions that were often very difficult in their countries of origin, exacerbated

by pogroms and then by the Russian Revolution of 1905, thousands of Jewish workers left eastern Europe to come to Canada. Without resources, they naturally became involved in organizing the working class to improve their condition. Simon Belkin's history of Jewish involvement in the Canadian labour movement in that period tells their story.⁸

The Labour Party claimed it was open to all, but in fact it refused to include Chinese immigrants. Article 32 of the party's political platform, as published in *La Presse* on November 30, 1899, stated that its members called for "the absolute prohibition of Chinese immigration." At the time, Asians were brought to Canada where grateful employers welcomed them as cheap labour. Use of Chinese labour was especially prevalent in the construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway between Montreal and British Columbia. Nevertheless, immigration from Asia was actually quite marginal, although it may have been more conspicuous than immigration from other sources. Few Chinese immigrants came to Quebec. Those who did came mainly from southern China, and most of them settled in Montreal, gathering in the neighbourhood that became known as Chinatown.

According to the 1901 census, Quebec's population that year was 1,648,898. There were only 1,037 Chinese immigrants, 888 of whom were clustered in Montreal, in Chinatown, near St. Lawrence Boulevard. Elsewhere, a scant one hundred Chinese were grouped in the Lower Town of Quebec City, in the working-class district of Saint-Roch. Life for them was very hard.

The Chinese were subject to frequent taunts and were crushed by blows delivered with both words and fists. The newspaper *Le Soleil* reported on August 28, 1903, on how two Chinese shopkeepers were beaten by passersby for trying to chase thugs from their homes. Nor were English Canadians any more favourable to the Asian presence in the country than the French-Canadian community.⁹ Animosity against the Chinese appears to have been widely shared throughout the Canadian population.

By 1910, a group calling itself the "Anti-Yellow Peril League" was active in both Montreal and Quebec City, mimicking similar movements that had developed in the United States and western Canada.

The view of this openly Sinophobic group—that Chinese immigrants represented unfair competition to local merchants and workers—was tacitly shared by a larger part of the population, and there was mass resistance to the immigration of “yellows in Canada.”¹⁰

But in 1904, the section of the Labour Party platform that called for a ban on Chinese immigration was changed, so that it now demanded “immigration regulation.”¹¹ It was a legalistic cover for racist rejection of the Chinese. But these workers’ growing concern with the arrival of foreigners in the country sat uneasily with the fact that many party members were themselves foreign. Hence, the party focused on another concern: the best jobs were constantly out of reach of Canadian workers for lack of education. Therefore, to advance the interests of the working class, it was essential to take control of its training.

A 1909 Labour Party brief to the Royal Commission on Education demonstrates this approach. According to Narcisse Arcand and two of his comrades, Labour MP Alphonse Verville (Maisonneuve) and Trades and Labour Congress Vice-President Gustave Francq, “Because [workers] lacked training in the past, all the best industrial jobs have been filled by workers from abroad.”¹² According to the trio, it was necessary to improve the education of Canadians before accepting immigrants. Only in this way would workers be able to break the vicious cycle of perpetually poor working conditions.

The brief developed the party’s main demands in the area of education. In their proposed reorganization of Montreal schools, religious affiliation was of no concern to Arcand, Verville and Francq. “In the interests of the working classes,” they wrote, there must be a single school board in Montreal. Such conditions would promote equality among all the city’s residents.

The trio then called for free education, “on behalf of the poor and large families that we represent.” If this was impossible in the immediate, there must at least be “better and cheaper education.” Finally, Verville, Francq and Arcand insisted that a Department of Public Instruction be established “as the top priority among all reforms.” (This reform would not be implemented until 1963, when the Department of Education was created, and its chief promoter, Paul Gérin-Lajoie,

was appointed Quebec's first education minister.) For the three Labour Party activists, a Department of Public Instruction would serve as a tool in the effort to elevate French Canadians, for whom the Canadian job market was unfavourable because they were not prepared "sufficiently for the struggles of daily life." Their situation appeared almost catastrophic:

Any impartial observer is forced to recognize that the French-Canadian population, in spite of its natural talents, energy, ambition and hard work of all kinds, is relegated to second- and third-class status within Confederation. In the areas of high finance, big industry, upper management of railways and shipping, major utilities such as lighting companies, tramway companies, etc., the French Canadian has virtually no presence. We have found our place in small shops, in hard and painful trades, in the lowest situations and wherever the wages are paltry.

Not much had changed half a century later: in the early 1960s, one of the first studies of the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism concluded that French Canadians, from an economic standpoint, ranked second-to-last among the eighteen ethnic communities then identified in Quebec.

Part of the argument put forward by Arcand, Verville and Francq was based on comparisons with the situation in various American states and with France, Switzerland and Belgium. Clearly, these men were closely following social measures being applied abroad.

In 1917, Narcisse Arcand was delegated to create a new provincial branch of the party. As always, when it came to the working class, he was ready and willing to act. Even though the Labour Party fell into disarray in the early 1920s, Narcisse Arcand did not abandon it, but remained one of its most loyal activists. In the provincial election of 1923, he was one of four candidates put forward by the party. He ran in Montreal-Mercier where, of course, he was again defeated. After 1923, still convinced of the merits of his ideas for a better world, Narcisse Arcand devoted himself primarily to the United Brotherhood

of Carpenters and Joiners of America. He was active in the union until his death in 1927 at the age of fifty-five.

Despite having the wrath of the church upon him, Narcisse Arcand remained a Catholic, and his children were educated in the Christian faith. At his death, his coffin was deposited in sacred ground in the cemetery of the Côte-des-Neiges, where a small horizontal slab, similar to the one that his son Adrien would have for his final resting place, was placed directly into the ground to mark the location of his remains.

During his life, true to his principles, and always a strong supporter of education for all, Narcisse Arcand would do everything possible to ensure a better future for his children. His son Adrien studied at the Collège de Saint Jean d'Iberville and Collège Saint-Stanislas between 1914 and 1916, in the midst of the First World War. There he acquired a strong sense of belonging to a Christian civilization shaped by old France, although his education provided no explanation for the terrible conflict then destroying Europe.

Steeped in a nationalism whose inspiration came entirely from France, he sang in the choir about the glory of Joan of Arc, the country's saint, as expressed in the "words and music of French authors." This song continued to burn within him. As Arcand remembered in 1966, the chorus began with the words, "We are descended from the old knights of Gaul and Germania." If this is true, asked Arcand, why do we curse the Germans when we are descended from them? Arcand recalled that he first asked himself this question while singing in the choir with his comrades.¹³

He continued his studies at the Collège de Montréal from 1917 to 1919. This school was run by the Sulpicians, the religious order with the longest history on Montreal Island. Opened in 1767, the Collège de Montréal was one of Quebec's oldest and most established schools. It was among thirty institutions in the province that offered classical studies, an eight-year program that students followed after completing their primary education. Like many young men from the working classes, Adrien Arcand was directed towards the priesthood, and like many of his companions he thought for a while that he had the necessary calling to become a priest. In the end, his temperament and his

“weaknesses” led him to abandon this idea.¹⁴

Prayer, study and classes in turn filled the days, according to a fixed program designed less to prepare students for a career than to provide them with a general education that would train their minds through a kind of intellectual gymnastics. The college routine consisted of a monotonous series of predictable events. Students led an austere life with endless taboos. Life in such a college soon gave one the feeling of being cut off from the outside world. There was little variation in curriculum from one classical college to another.¹⁵ First came languages: French, Latin and Greek. English appears not to have been included—Arcand learned most of his excellent albeit heavily-accented English elsewhere. Also on the curriculum, in varying degrees depending on the institution, were religion, ancient history, French history, mathematics and philosophy. Science was all but completely absent.

The college teachers were poorly trained, generally appeared uninspired and were therefore uninspiring. One feature distinguished the Collège de Montréal from other colleges: for a long time many of its leaders came from Paris, as the Sulpicians, up until the First World War, came mainly from France.¹⁶ As a result, education in the Collège de Montréal followed the French model more closely than did other institutions.

According to Adrien Arcand himself, the Sulpicians exerted a decisive influence on him.¹⁷ Few sons of workers, especially those who came from large families, went as far in their education as he did. Some managed to do so thanks to the patronage of nuns or priests, who hoped that their protégés would eventually join the order. But it's safe to assume that Narcisse Arcand's political intrigues would have discouraged many clergy from financially supporting the education of his son. Adrien probably owed his place in college to his own good conduct and the fact that for a while he had wanted to become a priest, like many of his companions.

What was taught at the Collège de Montréal? According to Arcand, it was “the best school for rote memory, discipline, and above all self-discipline.” Even into his thirties, Arcand says he remembered Gospels he had learned by heart in Greek, chapters of the *Iliad* and homilies

of St. John Chrysostom. In keeping with his habit of dramatic excess, he probably exaggerated the details, but overall gave a fair sense of the education he had received at the Collège de Montréal. As a young student, Arcand was deeply religious and seemed to give his all to meet the difficult requirements of the college. It is also likely that his very limited free time was spent supporting his father's union activities. In 1947, at any rate, he told a journalist that he had been his father's secretary for fifteen years, without elaborating on the exact nature of his duties in this role.¹⁸

As he remembered later, at age twenty in 1920 he was "full of fire and passion," like many young people. "I thought I was immortal," he recalled.¹⁹ He set out to continue his studies at the Jesuits' Collège Sainte-Marie, an excellent institution that prepared its graduates for the ruling class of French-Canadian society in Montreal. Arcand, however, regarded the teaching at this institution as inferior to what he had received at the Collège de Montréal: "When I went to the Jesuit Gesù for philosophy, I was almost shocked by the carelessness and especially the social life that prevailed; my colleagues spoke only of their adventures with their sweethearts and others vaunted their homosexuality."²⁰ This was probably an *a posteriori* reconstruction of his time with the Jesuits, and the passing years had embellished his memories of the time. The more bourgeois atmosphere at Collège Sainte-Marie as compared to the Collège de Montréal may have been part of the reason for Arcand's later feelings about Jesuit education.

Since he was interested in science, he also registered for evening classes at McGill University, where he began a chemical engineering course taught by the engineer Paul de Guise. But he did not stay long at the renowned English-language institution. An attack of Spanish influenza prevented him from continuing his studies. This deadly disease made its appearance in Montreal in October 1918. The pandemic was global in scope. Many people died each day of the illness, and the decision was made to ban public gatherings. Theatres, cinemas, concert halls and meeting halls closed their doors. Spectators were no longer allowed in courtrooms. Even the Stanley Cup final, the climax of the hockey season, suffered.

The church thought it best to combat this disaster with prayer, although the Archbishop of Montreal, Paul Bruchési, granted his flock dispensation from attending Mass. He hoped that God would find a cure: "Above all, turn to prayer. Beseech the Lord to save our city and our country. Appeal to the Virgin Mary, Our Lady of Good Help, and faithfully say the rosary for this purpose."

The epidemic was horrendous. Funeral traditions had to be broken. No open casket. No keeping watch over the body. The dead were buried as quickly as possible, often with the only religious sacrament being a simple sprinkling of holy water. The authorities counted approximately 500 deaths in Quebec City and at least 3,500 in Montreal. Hospitals were overwhelmed. It was necessary to establish designated areas for emergency care. Arcand himself went to one as a patient. He therefore gave up on becoming an engineer, as he would explain to a student from Laval University, Réal Caux, in the winter of 1958.²¹

Since Arcand was a good writer and loved dealing with things that sparked his passion, he decided to try his luck as a journalist. He wrote his first articles in 1918. After several months off work because of the flu, he was hired by Eugène Tarte at the newspaper *La Patrie*. In 1920, he was responsible for a labour column in this very conservative newspaper. It seems the labour world had become a family affair.

It was most likely the following year that he began to work at the *Montreal Star*, where he was assigned to political news. From the *Star*, he made his final move to *La Presse*, the largest mass-circulation French-Canadian newspaper.

When Arcand joined *La Presse*, the paper was still feeling the effects of the crisis that followed the death of its founder, Trefflé Berthiaume, in 1915. Testamentary dispositions left by Trefflé, a shrewd printer who had become a successful businessman, led to numerous legal proceedings that deeply divided the Berthiaume family. It was Trefflé Berthiaume's son-in-law, a lawyer named Pamphile Du Tremblay, who emerged from the legal wrangling at the head of *La Presse*. Through all the turmoil Du Tremblay, the husband of Trefflé's daughter Angéline Berthiaume, managed to hang on, skilfully playing one group against another in his own interest. The big loser was Eugène Berthiaume,

Trefflé's son. Full of energy, Eugène envisioned himself directing a major media group. Instead he was forced to settle for the post of chairman of a board whose powers were actually quite limited.

While the young Arcand was not involved in any of this drama, this background explains some of the dismay he soon felt at *La Presse*, which led him on the road to politics. But let's not get ahead of ourselves.

On April 1, 1924, Arcand was sent by *La Presse* to cover the case of the Ontario Street tunnel, a story worthy of the adventures of France's famous criminal anarchist Bonnot Gang. Eight bandits attacked a Hochelaga Bank vehicle, killed the driver and fled before being ambushed by police. But unlike most new journalists, Arcand was not assigned exclusively to human-interest stories. He spent just as much time writing articles for the society page.

He would occasionally speak of yet another facet of his work at *La Presse*, as music critic.²² A violinist in his spare time, he took pleasure in attending the concerts of great musicians passing through Montreal. As he was not a mere spectator, he enjoyed some privileges typically granted to journalists operating in their professional capacity. Thus we learn from his correspondence that he was able to see the Polish virtuoso Ignacy Paderewski plunge his hands into boiling water before settling at the piano on stage at the Monument-National.²³

Arcand was also an early proponent of both a real concert hall and a permanent orchestra for Montreal. He wrote in *La Presse* on November 4, 1922:

We cannot begin to know how many of our artists' failures, how many instances in which they were unable to gain true success, can be blamed on poor acoustics. This city has spent millions of dollars on improving our cinemas. Why can we not spend one tenth that amount for high art? A concert hall is so necessary and so vital that it is difficult to understand why it was not built a long time ago.

As a privileged witness, he crossed paths with a number of famous and influential people of the time who added to the local colour when they visited Montreal or Quebec City. Arcand thus saw "Caruso,

Pavlova, Gilli, de Pachmann, Rosenthal, Cortot, Chaliapine, Jacques Thibaud, Cécile Sorel, Maurice Féraudy, Mary Pickford, Douglas Fairbanks, Queen Marie of Romania, Tom Mix, Isadora Duncan, Paderewski, Mario Chamlee, Vincent d'Indy, Maurice Dupré, 'Gin' deKuyper, Heifetz, Kreisler, Zimbalist, British Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin, Lord Birkenhead, as well as princes, politicians and well-heeled 'fanatics' during the 1920s. But all this was no more than journalistic experience, until my very bright assistant Jean Béraud succeeded me at *La Presse*."²⁴

He also would report having thrown "a half-gallon of water in W. L. Mackenzie King's face when a platform scuttled at the hands of the Conservatives collapsed on Chaboillez Square in 1924." He nevertheless received a souvenir from King—his cane—for having retrieved one that King had received from Sir Wilfrid Laurier.²⁵

Frankly, however, we still know little about just how much Arcand contributed to *La Presse*. Only a few reports offer specific information. In the newspapers of the time, articles were not signed. The cult of the reporter as author had not yet been established as a given in the media at the time. Of course, this practice keeps the person who mediates between information and the public behind a veil. For the press barons of the day, this had the advantage that journalists were more easily replaceable, and more easily exploitable. For the historian, however, it makes it difficult, at the very least, to track someone like Arcand in his daily activities at a newspaper. We simply cannot be sure of which articles in *La Presse* were his.

According to him, during his days at *La Presse* Arcand deployed "zeal and dedication" to the point that he managed to increase "the number of entertainment listings" tenfold.²⁶ Arcand, however, adopted early on the habit of creating his own legend; his words should therefore be read with a grain of salt.

Unquestionably, Arcand was very sensitive to the plight of his colleagues at the newspaper. Like his father, he was sympathetic to the advances made by trade unions in all types of industries, including the press. He therefore viewed the efforts aimed at launching the first union of journalists at *La Presse* very favourably—a view squarely opposed to



Arcand as a reserve officer in His Majesty's army. He dedicated this photo to his wife in English: "To my darling little wife, all my thoughts and my life."

Private collection

that of Du Tremblay. He wanted to step forward and let people know that journalists existed.

Between 1919 and 1923, the News Writer Union worked to organize journalists. The union, despite its English name, drew most of its members from the newsrooms of the French-Canadian papers *La Presse* and *La Patrie*. Arcand had no disagreement with the union, but it did not inspire him to become an active campaigner like his father—at least not right away.

In 1923, Arcand signed on as a reserve soldier in the Châteauguay Regiment of the Royal Canadian Militia, the 63rd Light Infantry Regiment. He quickly came to know all the French-Canadian officers—both the genuine military men and the “salon swashbucklers” dressed in their scarlet tunics adorned with gold frogging and their silver whistles, whom he evoked as a knowledgeable observer a few years later.²⁷ In

1924, Adrien Arcand was promoted to the rank of lieutenant—he was now a reserve officer.

During the First World War, his brother, Major Louis-George Arcand, was engaged in the fighting at the front. Part of a Scottish regiment, he fought most notably in Flanders. From the theatre of operations in Europe, he wrote letters to Adrien, all of which were censored. With his brother, who had experienced the horror of the trenches, Adrien Arcand designed the Châteauguay regimental badge. On the eve of the Second World War, he commented that his brother had fought valiantly in the war of 1914–18, that “other pathetic time.”²⁸

When he had time away from the activities required by his status as a reservist and the hectic life demanded of a journalist working for the largest daily newspaper in French Canada, Arcand liked to reflect and read. If you believe his admiring biographer Jean Côté, he frequently read the work of Pascal. Can we really imagine Arcand putting his thoughts in the mode of Pascal-like meditations? Arcand may have forgotten Pascal’s skepticism in the course of his strong defence of faith.

Jean Côté notes that Arcand also dipped into the work of Lionel Groulx. He no doubt read it, but he had little enthusiasm for it. Arcand did share some ideas with the priest-historian, including the idea that French-Canadian society as a whole should alter its course.²⁹ Arcand did not appreciate the strong tendencies towards political independence that appear at times in Groulx’s work from 1922 on. Unlike Groulx, Arcand saw no reason to question the membership of the Canadian political entity in the British imperial system. Arcand grew up in contact with English speakers in Montreal. He learned English fairly young. By his own account, he was quite simply “raised in an atmosphere not conducive to separatist and Anglophobic sentiments,” as if that explained his entire political view of Canada.³⁰

Arcand summed up Groulx’s thought in two variables that he categorically rejected: Anglophobia and separatism. Nevertheless, in the early 1930s he adopted much of Groulx’s social thought, which was admittedly shared by many nationalists in search of a leader who could save the people from the throes of the terrible Depression.

On April 14, 1925, Adrien Arcand donned a beaver-fur top hat to



Yvonne Giguère in 1925. In politics she stood centre stage along with her husband.

Private collection

marry Yvonne Giguère, who wore a white dress. Yvonne, who came from Quebec City, was very fond of him and would follow him closely in his various commitments. Unlike Hitler's women, who were infantilized and reduced to a decorative role in the private sphere, Yvonne Arcand willingly assumed a public role. Arcand usually called her "*ma bourgeoise*" in public and "*bijou*" ("gem") in private. The couple had three sons, Yves, Jean-Louis and Pierre.

It was not until the late 1920s that Arcand paid closer attention to trade union activities. Unlike his father, he steered towards Catholic unionism—a brand of unionism that was clearly more right-wing than the kind the Labour Party had advocated. In the late 1920s, he poured a great deal of energy into founding a Catholic union of journalists at *La*

Presse, and he became its first president. Arcand would say his activities were motivated by a desire to protect his “comrades against interference from that big selfish pig” Pamphile Du Tremblay.³¹

It seemed to Arcand that journalists, no less than typesetters, deserved greater consideration, both from their employer and from the population at large. His ultimate goal was to establish a real guild of journalists, which would administer “competency tests that one would be required to undergo to be admitted to active practice, following one’s studies.” The guild would establish standards of practice and would “provide greater assurance to the newspapers of employees’ competence; it would establish a tradition and set a standard of quality that could only grow.”³²

Once they were full members of the guild, journalists would benefit from a pension fund. Arcand thus envisioned a day when journalists would be better paid for the services asked of them. He sought “adequate salaries for these poor devils who, once they are used up, lose their jobs and are penniless as they face old age...Typesetters, who work much shorter hours, with no responsibilities, and who are only copyists, are much better paid.”³³ Arcand had a lofty vision of the journalistic profession: “Journalism is an honourable profession; its members must have the means to be and to remain so.”

However, his desire to reform the press through a union did not sit well with his boss, Du Tremblay, who fired Arcand early in 1929. Arcand would say that he had been forced out of *La Presse* “unceremoniously” for “refusing to give up the presidency in the Union of Journalists, during a truce that Du Tremblay had promised to respect, in the presence of Deputy Minister Gérard Tremblay and the representative of the archdiocese,” Abbé Boileau.³⁴ Arcand said further that the Archbishop of Montreal had written to Du Tremblay in late 1929, expressing “his hope of seeing [Du Tremblay] recognize the union.” The diocese’s director of social affairs, in a lengthy interview, also urged the newspaper’s representatives, Du Tremblay and Zénon Fontaine, to recognize the union in the name of humanity and Christian charity. It was all to no avail: Arcand would not be reinstated, and the union was silenced.

This devastating blow, he would recount, came as “a surprise, cruel

and hard, with the result that for six months my wife and two young babies suffered the effects of painful, abject poverty."³⁵ Their electricity and heating were cut off. In one of those great tragic flights that came so easily to him, he said they had only sugar water, heated by the warmth of their hands, to feed their children.

After being terminated so abruptly, Arcand was forced to suspend the activities of his union indefinitely. In theory, he was still the president, but all actions, meetings and contributions ceased. For all intents and purposes, the first journalists' union at *La Presse* died the day Arcand was fired. It wasn't just one man who was dismissed from *La Presse*; it was trade unionism itself.

Arcand was not the only one driven out that day from the *La Presse* building on St. James Street because of his union activities. Hervé Gagné lost his job along with him. In typical style, Arcand's account of this fellow sufferer is full of bombast and excess: "The young Gagné, who suffered the same fate as me, at the same time, for the same reasons, died less than a year later, lacking the moral fortitude to sustain the blow. His wife, starving, looked elsewhere for subsistence. His heart broken, he drowned himself in whatever alcohol he could find."³⁶ As was often the case with Arcand, this tragic picture contains a large dose of exaggeration. In reality, following his dismissal Hervé Gagné became one of the first editors of the weekly *L'Illustration*.³⁷

As a result of these difficult events, Arcand nourished a fierce and lifelong hatred of Du Tremblay, as we see from a letter dated July 11, 1939. Being driven from *La Presse* proved to be the key turning point in his life: a substantial part of what Arcand did in subsequent years had its origin in this injustice that he had suffered. He said so himself:

What Pamphile did to me, in the particular way that he did it, constituted a momentous event in my life. It was of a brutality that a human being cannot forget or subsequently ignore. Not that I believe in vengeance, but I do believe in inherent justice, that pure water that quenches one's deep moral thirst and without which human life has no value.

Up to that point, Arcand had lived and worked within recognized

and accepted social settings (journalism, a Catholic trade union, a well-established newspaper, his family). Now his life course was ruptured overnight. The young journalist no longer had the basic landmarks to guide his life in society. The humiliation he experienced at *La Presse* pushed him towards other types of activism, this time of a decidedly more political nature. In August 1929, Arcand founded a satirical newspaper, *Le Goglu*. The adventure of Arcand's life that generally interests historians begins at this point.