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Review: *Nous Sommes des Révolutionnaires Malgré Nous. Textes Pionniers de l'écologie Politique* [We are Revolutionaries, However Unintentionally. Pioneering Texts in Political Ecology]

By Bernard Charbonneau and Jacques Ellul

Reviewed by Yves Laberge

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Charbonneau, Bernard and Ellul, Jacques. *Nous sommes des révolutionnaires malgré nous. Textes pionniers de l'écologie politique* [We are revolutionaries, however unintentionally. Pioneering texts in Political Ecology]. Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2014, 218 pp. ISBN 9782021163025, paperback. €18.00. This title is part of the *Anthropocène Series*. This text is written in French.

This new book reunites four rare (or unpublished) essays written individually or conjointly by geographer Bernard Charbonneau (1910-1996) and philosopher Jacques Ellul (1912-1994). Titled "*We are revolutionaries, however unintentionally: Pioneering texts in Political Ecology*", these short essays were written in France between 1935 and 1945, thus its allusion to an unintentional revolutionary spirit and inspiration. No English translations are available.

In the opening essay (in the form of a manifesto), Charbonneau and Ellul discuss issues and social problems through critical lenses that derived from the philosophy of the environment. The underlying concept for most of these essays is the sense of nature ("sentiment de la nature"), presented as a kind of admiration for landscapes and the untouched nature (p. 124). Their overall sentiment regarding human actions is rather critical although not Marxist, and partly influenced by Catholicism. In fact, only one text is written conjointly; most essays only bear the unique signature of Bernard Charbonneau.

In the following essays, Bernard Charbonneau comments on various naturalistic trends and movements such as scoutism, rousseauisme, nudism, and others (p. 168). Within the context of capitalism, they even criticize tourism as a "bourgeois derivation of the sense of nature" (p. 156). Charbonneau questioned whether this sense of nature could be inscribed within the Left or the Right (p. 112). Elsewhere, the author's critique of common sense (p. 121), the myth of "progress" (p. 104) or the ideology of "progress" (p. 112) could seem simplistic for some 21st Century experts, but since these burgeoning texts date from seven decades ago, they can be seen as pioneering within the field of political ecology. Their overall attitude was best exemplified in the final speech from the fall of 1945 in which Bernard Charbonneau tried to moderate the general sentiment of a new technical prodigy as felt by the French media just after Hiroshima (p. 197). This vertiginous quest for technical progress in the new emerging nuclear era was tempered

and nuanced with some basic preoccupations related to human dignity and resources for everyone (p. 214).

This lesser-known book could possibly be helpful for historians of environmental thought in search of other perspectives related to the ideals and critiques of nature prior to the mid-20th Century, when even the term “ecology” was not commonly used. It is obvious these essays contain some ideas that are still valid today in fields related to political ecology. For example in a text from 1937, Bernard Charbonneau even referred to new ideals such as vegetarianism, pacifism, and social justice (p. 169). One should remember that Charbonneau and Ellul’s early exposés were not very popular outside France in the late 1930s, a troubled era when France had to face war and Occupation. Nevertheless, some of their intuitions can now be seen as innovative from a philosophical point of view. Perhaps some readers expecting more thoughts from Jacques Ellul might be disappointed to only find here one essay co-written by this influential philosopher and prolific writer.

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