



No victory with parades

The 2012 student strike in Quebec is the site of one of the largest social resistance movements in North America. It is not monolithic, and is not reducible to any given ideology or group. Different from past student strikes in Quebec, it is also not only limited to Francophone campuses. Both Concordia and McGill -- the two largest Anglophone universities in Quebec -- have thousands of students on an unlimited general strike for the first time in either university's history. Students on both campuses see the struggle against the tuition fee hike and other austerity measures as a social justice issue.

In our universities, where there is a limited or nonexistent history of student strikes, current student action is providing for new and powerful possibilities of solidarity and resistance across historically divided communities in Quebec.

The new resolve to create a place for ourselves in this movement has engendered a severe backlash on our campuses. Students are monitored constantly, with hundreds of pages of records compiled on their activities. Security, both plain clothed and in uniform, follows activists around campus. Private firms have been commissioned at both universities to bolster this security presence. They have repeatedly threatened and attacked those who are politically active. At McGill, over thirty students have disciplinary procedures pending. Four

people have been barred from campus for 5 days as a result of picketing departments on strike. The Concordia administration has ordered that students, faculty and staff immediately call security to report students who are participating in strike activities.

This brief summary of repression on university campuses comes in concert with a daily experience of state violence outside the university walls. Police violence has been normalized against homeless, poor, queer and racialized people. Throughout the student strike, those taking to the streets have felt the results. Day in and day out, we are pepper sprayed, tear-gassed, beaten, kettled, arrested, and have 'less-lethal' grenades thrown at us. In spite of the worn platitude that there is no space for such state violence on our campuses, we must begin to recognize the links between such police repression and the security and surveillance culture being exercised by these institutions.

While the tactics of administrations are an attempt to crush our blossoming solidarity and resolve, those of the state are aimed at thwarting the power of the student movement at large. The violence and repression that we experience from the state and university are an attempt to maintain their power and sustain the neoliberal economy responsible for creating this crisis.

They must fail. Targeting and secluding certain individuals will not quell the struggle. We shall not stand

down at threats or intimidation, nor will we retreat back into apathy or submission. No amount of tear gas or batons will make us obedient workers and compliant students.

We will maintain and expand the strike not only because of the future inaccessibility of post-secondary education the tuition hikes ensure, but also because of the ways in which the government's "fair and balanced" funding plan will fundamentally change the spaces we inhabit, and the knowledge we are able to explore and articulate. The privatization and commodification of education, the forced "profitability" of all academics, the military research, the administrative bureaucracy's centralized control, the racism, sexism, ableism and homophobia- we oppose it all. And it is the ability to make such connections and oppose the broader agenda behind tuition hikes that ultimately sustains our collective strength and power.

The university and state reaction to the strike can only build our resolve. In each act of aggression, a renewed dedication to solidarity and strength is built. As the strike enters its seventh week, there can be no backing down. Those maintaining the regime and reaping the benefits of austerity will not be defeated by spectacle. **We will not only continue; we will push harder, farther, with greater conviction.**

VIVE LA GRÈVE GÉNÉRALE ILLIMITÉE!



What is the point of education?

MARIE-PIER BÉLAND, SOCIOLOGY STUDENT

While it is still impossible to evaluate the impact that the tuition fee increase will have caused, the government has already announced its objective to continue raising fees even more violently. In order to convince us that this measure is necessary, the government is resorting to the same terms as those who oppose the tuition fee increase: social justice, quality of education, accessibility. These terms are used to portray two clashing visions and purposes of post-secondary education. As students, it is high time we choose our side.

THE ROOTS OF HIGHER EDUCATION

According to the Parent Report, post-secondary education was supposed to meet two objectives: on the one hand, it had to insure Quebec's economic and social development by forming a skilled labor force with competencies adjusted to the demands of an economy increasingly oriented towards science and technology.

On the other hand, institutions had to help foster individuals to becoming active citizens. This second objective implied the passing on of cultural, philosophical, political, historical and moral heritage. It was also concerned with the development of individuals' critical thinking skills, an essential aspect empowering them to

participate in Quebec's political and social scenes.

The Parent Report revealed important economic and social disparities amongst Quebec's population: declaring that everyone was equal before the law was not sufficient for the traditional outcasts that had always been excluded from the political and educational spheres (the working class and women, for example).

Post-secondary education was therefore supposed to be on the forefront in transforming social inequities. In this sense, the report's authors believed that incentives (free education, financial assistance for education) would allow everyone to participate by ensuring that financial matters would not keep anyone, especially the less wealthy, from pursuing higher studies.

THE TIPPING POINT

The fact that the argument is now being reversed is significant: the Montreal Economic Institute stated in a June 2010 document that, since many other factors discouraged young people from disadvantaged backgrounds from pursuing higher studies, freezing education fees or making it free did not guarantee a greater accessibility.

The belief that the state can and should be the engine of social transformation no longer exists. The example is interesting because it illustrates the discourse adopted by the authors of the manifesto entitled For a Clear Sighted Vision of Québec and other economists of the sort: their entire project is versed on the negative, or on "what Québec is not." Their discourse is not based on what could be sought or wished for and the means to achieving it, but rather, is based on constraints and economical laws framing any future projects.

As a consequence, education is solemnly viewed in light of its economical outcomes: the formation of a skilled labor force, the production of marketable knowledge, and the accumulation of patents. For the individual, education is reduced to a mere investment, having lost any connection to its fundamental objectives: to provide individuals with points of reference and a critical understanding of the world, so that they can participate in its future orientation.



Why income-contingent loan repayment won't solve anything

MARTIN ROBERT, HISTORY, CULTURE AND SOCIETY STUDENT

Quite the smokescreen, the income-contingent loan repayment (ICLR) program that was proposed by the Charest government! If the strike were to end following this offer, the Liberals would have not only entirely defeated us on the question of tuition increases, they would have also managed to make a decision that would have increased total student debt, a move that would actually benefit the banks.

Why would it be the case? In Quebec, private banks – and not the government – loan money to students as part of the loans and bursaries program. Those who incur debt in order to study get the loans from financial institutions, and these institutions cash in on the interest the loans generate. This being said, what the government is proposing through ICLR is not a reduction of student debt (since tuition increases would still happen), but a new method of paying back your loans. Low-income students would be asked to take the hit by incurring more debt to be able to pay for tuition increases, under the pretext that they will be able to reimburse this loan according to their income, when the time comes. Sounds a lot like “buy now and pay later” – with the added injustice that there would still be user fees in education, with all the effects this has. Sounds like a win-win situation for the banks.

If we dig a little deeper, we can see how ICLR is part of a broader trend towards privatizing the financing of education. The idea of ICLR is not new: it was first developed by the economist and theorist of neoliberalism, Milton Friedman (1912-2006). In his 1962 book, Capitalism and Freedom, Friedman talked about ICLR as a way of guaranteeing the capital invested in the form of student loans. Friedman writes: “Investment in human

beings cannot be financed on the same terms or with the same ease as investment in physical capital. It is easy to see why. If a fixed money loan is made to finance investment in

physical capital, the lender can get some security for his loan in the form of a mortgage or residual claim to the physical asset itself, and he can count on realizing at least part of his investment in case of default by selling the physical asset. If he makes a comparable loan to increase the earning power of a human being, he clearly cannot get any comparable security. In a non-slave state, the individual embodying the investment cannot be bought and sold. [...] A loan to finance the training of an individual who has no security to offer other than his future earnings is therefore a much less attractive proposition than a loan to finance the erection of a building: the security is less, and the cost of subsequent collection of interest and principal is very much greater.”¹

It then becomes apparent that ICLR guarantees investors a recovery of their capital from the very wages of those who find well-paying jobs, thereby compensating for their less fortunate colleagues. In this respect, ICLR is nothing less than the creation of an investment market in training, where banks speculate on certain students which they grant loans to, with the hope of having made a profitable investment.

Here's where things get interesting: even if certain loans aren't paid back, banks benefit from this type of system anyways. In fact, ICLR allows for an overall increase in the number of people contracting loans as well as an overall increase in the amount of money being loaned out at any given point in time. Banks suddenly have access to a mass of capital, accrued in the interval between the moment the loan is given and the moment it is entirely paid back, on which they can speculate. Banks can thus increase their profit margins thanks to the fact that it becomes easier for students to incur debt.

Besides, if the reimbursement of a loan is linked to the future salary of a given student, one could assume that banks might get cold feet when the time comes to

finance the degree of a young, precarious worker who wishes to work in a « low value-added » program. One might expect banks to give preference to students who are already solvent thanks to their social origin, as well as those who are headed straight to a lucrative career thanks to their field of study. This type of system, as Friedman suggested, opens the door to a case-by-case assessment of the credit-worthiness of people who take on loans – similar to life insurance companies.

To summarize, the introduction of ICLR by the government not only sets aside the real debate on tuition fees, but entrenches Quebec even more in the logic of user fees for public services. At best, it's a way to sugar-coat the hike, while allowing for the State to divest from education while privatizing its financing. In addition, by announcing this type of measure after seven weeks of strike, the government conveniently avoids any real negotiations with the student movement and pushes student strikes up against a wall a few days before the deadline to settle. If the government manages to throttle a strike movement unparalleled in the history of Quebec, it will have managed to perform the biggest scam in the history of education policy in recent years. In the current context, that would be no small feat.

¹ Friedman, Milton. Capitalism and Freedom. Chicago, IL, USA: University of Chicago Press, 2009 [1962]. p 119.

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Contact: journalultimatum@gmail.com
To join ASSÉ's office : 514-390-0110
or webmestre@asse-solidarite.qc.ca

Redaction : Alex Matak, Raul Charon, Nadia Hausfather, Rushdia Mehreen, Micha Stettin, Marie-Pier Béland, Martin Robert, Matthew Brett and collaboration of IRIS, Norma Rantisi and Free education Montreal

Revision : Frank Lévesque Nicol, Rushdia Mehreen, Micha Stettin, Jérémie Bédard-Wien, Matthew Brett, Trevor Smith, Nadia Hausfather, Yuseph Katiya

Traduction : By RougeSquad: Joel Pedneault, Giulietta Di Mambro, Isabelle Cardins, Florencia Marchetti

Graphism : Alexandre Antaki

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How can we pay for free education?

TEXT EXTRACTED FROM IRIS REPORT: *DO WE REALLY NEED TO RAISE TUITION FEES? FIGHT MISLEADING ARGUMENTS FOR THE HIKES.*

The government constantly repeats that there is a public finance crisis and that Quebec is “in the red.” So when students demand that the government stop raising tuition fees or institute free education, it’s easy for the finance minister to present these proposals as unrealistic. However, the government is largely responsible for its lack of budgetary resources.

In 2007 alone, the government denied itself \$950 million in revenues by granting households tax relief that especially favored the most affluent individuals.²⁶ By comparison, providing free education would cost only \$700 million.²⁷ And as Table 3 shows, this tax cut is not the only measure governments have adopted in the last ten years that cost more than it would to provide free education.

“If the political will were there, the government could provide free education at all levels without too many difficulties.”

Introducing free education or, at the very least, axing the current tuition hikes are not merely pipe dreams. If the political will were there, the government could provide free education at all levels without too many difficulties. Moreover, some people claim that low tuition fees or free education would be unfair measures. In their opinion, a good portion of university students have the means to pay high tuition fees, while others can look to bursaries or loans. By keeping tuitions relatively low, the government “would be subsidizing the rich.”

This argument overlooks the fact that tuition fees are not universities’ sole source of income. There is another more accurate and fair way to ask more affluent individuals to help fund education based on their incomes—income tax. Funding postsecondary education through taxes is the most socially equitable measure. It hinges on a simple

and effective public finance logic and could dovetail nicely with the institution of free education. It would mean free, universal access to education that the citizens of tomorrow could all help finance based on their actual financial means.

It’s probably no fluke that the “subsidizing the rich” argument makes no mention of the existence of the graduated income tax. The wealthy have effectively been trying for decades to disassociate themselves from society and minimize their tax contributions. The unbridled increases in tuition fees plays into this “everyone for themselves” logic where people are indifferent to the plight of others and have no regard for income inequality. Conversely, free education and graduated income taxes redistribute the wealth, partially neutralize the inequalities, and give everyone the chance to get an education regardless of their class or means.

more at www.iris-recherche.qc.ca

TABLE 3 Examples of Measures in the Last Ten Years That Cost More Than Instituting Free Education

Measures	Budget	Party in Power	Cost
Indexation of tax brackets	2000–2001	PQ	\$2 billion
Reduction of tax rates	2001–2002	PQ	\$1.2 billion
Tax cut	2006–2007	PLQ	\$950 million
Phasing out of capital tax	2007–2008	PLQ	\$890 million

SOURCES: 2000 to 2011 Quebec Budgets.

An Unlimited General Strike? What is that?

A student strike is a voluntary and collective cessation of activities in order to assert claims that would not be addressed otherwise. The word “unlimited” points to a confrontational stance with the government. It does not mean that the strike is limitless, but that its length is undetermined in advance. This

means that the strike goes on until demands are met or until students decide to stop the strike. As for the word “general,” it means that the strike involves a large movement that includes a significant number of student unions in Quebec, giving it strength and credibility.



Why the strike is our ultimate “weapon”?

An Unlimited General Strike gives students maximum leverage to make their demands heard. It is a way of getting the government to listen to students, while giving students real leverage when it comes to negotiations. It is a way for students to gain visibility, both in the media and among the public, to debate and to let their demands be known. Students who oppose the tuition increases may have great arguments, but these arguments can’t spread and take hold until a substantial movement captures popular attention.

Furthermore, the fact that students collectively decide not to attend school during a strike prevents those who want to participate in protest actions from facing academic penalty. But most importantly, when facing an Unlimited General Strike, the government is under pressure to quickly solve the conflict, due to several reasons:

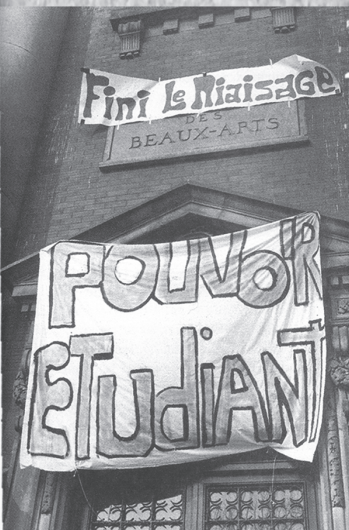
Whether classes go on or not, labour contracts with university/CEGEP faculty and staff still have to be respected. The same applies to paying for equipment and building maintenance. Thus, the strike costs the state millions of dollars per day; The strike threatens to extend the semester, but that also costs additional dollars; The strike threatens to cancel the semester; however it would be impossible to coordinate the institutional congestion generated by a whole cohort of students that would not graduate. Accommodating a double cohort would cost hundreds of millions of dollars.

The education system is a crucial part of the economy and it requires human capital (graduates) in order to survive. The socioeconomic cost of withholding graduates for a session would be enormous. No government wants to be responsible for this.

History of Quebec's student strikes

1968

The CEGEPs (junior colleges) have just been founded in Quebec and it's a dynamic period for social movements in Quebec and around the world. More than 4,000 students are refused admission into university in Quebec due to the lack of space and professors. Students demand accessibility for working class youth and francophones in post-secondary institutions; clarification about the Minister's position on the loans and bursaries program; and more democracy in the university, within a general critique of global capitalism. Fifteen (out of 23) CEGEPs go on strike for around one month. The strike speeds up the creation of the Quebec university network (UQ) and the construction of UQAM, and achieves the abolition of mandatory class attendance for students enrolled in CEGEP - a first step towards recognizing the right of students to strike by not attending class.



1974

There are two general strikes during the same semester, against two different reforms. The first strike in October opposes new aptitude tests for university studies (TAEU) that are required only of francophone students. With CEGEPs on strike for one month, the government cancels the TAEU.

The second strike in December 1974 is sparked after 300 students have to quit CEGEP due to financial difficulties because of changes to the loans and bursaries program. The strike includes 40 institutions on strike during its peak (mostly CEGEPs, but also universities and high schools), for around 2 weeks. Demands include substantial improvements to loans and bursaries, notably abolishing the parental contribution (the expected amount that all parents should pay). This second strike is also quick and effective, resulting in a promise on the part of the government to abolish the parental contribution in loans, and diminish the parental contribution in the case of bursaries.

1978

With the promises from 1974 not completely fulfilled, students demand free education and substantial reforms to the loans and bursaries program. The strike lasts around three weeks, reaching 100,000 striking students once UQAM joins the ranks of the 33 CEGEPs. The movement grows so quickly that the government makes concessions: Significant improvements are made to the loans and bursaries program.



1986

Responding to the Liberal Government's threat to increase tuition and to make cuts to loans and bursaries and to education budgets, students launch a strike. Thirty student associations (mostly CEGEPs) go on strike. After only 5 days of strike, they force the government to retreat from its plan to increase tuition for both university and CEGEP, to open negotiations about loans and bursaries, and to stop ancillary fees from being imposed at universities in the UQ network.

1988

Disappointed with the stagnated progress of the loans and bursaries negotiations, and fearing upcoming tuition increases, students strike up to 2 weeks, with 25 student associations for the strike (all CEGEPs except two), and 25 against it. Not enough CEGEPs participate: The Liberal government announces a tuition increase, though the pressure to improve the bursaries and loans program (AFE) indirectly contributes to most of students' demands about the loans and bursaries program being realized in 1989.

1990

The government increases tuition (from \$500 to \$1200) and allows universities a 10% margin to include ancillary fees. Ten thousand students hit the streets for a province-wide demonstration on February 14th. Yet the student movement is badly organized at this point, still recovering from a defeat two years earlier. Sporadic strikes take hold in a dozen student associations, including universities. The Université du Québec à Rimouski (UQAR) declares an Unlimited General Strike, becoming the first university association in Quebec history to go on strike for more than a week. Some associations call for a general boycott of tuition (encouraging students not to pay), but only 1% of students answer that call, so this strategy fails.



1996

The government plans to increase tuition by 30%. With more than 40 student associations on strike, including 100,000 students at its peak, it is a success: Tuition is frozen and stays frozen until 2007. Yet \$700 million dollars are cut, loans and bursaries become more restrictive, tuition fees increase for non-Quebec residents, and a tax is imposed on CEGEP students who fail classes.



2005

This is the most important general student strike in Quebec history. In 2004, when the government decides to transform \$103 million from loans into bursaries, students start organizing protests and other tactics, and start striking. It lasts 8 weeks and at its peak 230,000 students are on strike. It ends in a partial victory, preventing \$103 million in annual bursaries from being converted into loans starting in 2006 (yet completely losing the \$103 bursary funding for 2004 and partially losing it for 2005). Considering it was the longest and most popular student strike in Quebec history, the provincial student union that negotiated with the government could have asked for more. This time, in 2012, we will.

What we can conclude from this timeline is that every time there has been a major setback to accessible education, the strategy of a Unlimited General Strike was potent enough to scare the government into changing its mind. Never has the government backed down when it only faced demonstrations, petitions or symbolic actions. It was when the student movement was strongly combative and united in strikes that massive political victories were possible.

The '96 strike : what if history repeated itself?

ARNAUD THEURIAT CLOUTIER, PHILOSOPHY STUDENT

“Public funds are at an all-time low. We are going to have to make concessions. Students will have to pay their fair share.” Does it sound familiar? This speech does not come from 2011, but from 1996, when the PQ government held the same discourse the Charest government is serving us today to justify raising tuition fees.

The PQ used the pretext of a crisis in public finances in order to raise tuition fees, but they were abruptly stopped in their tracks: the student movement was able to freeze tuition by calling a general strike. As of 1994, federal transfer cuts that impacted higher education were used by Lucien Bouchard as a pretext to put forward his “zero deficit”



MDE's LOGO

policy, in an attempt to “cure” Québec public finances. On the other side, the government was given an ultimatum to act before October 23rd by the MDE (Mouvement pour le Droit à l'Éducation), a recently formed national student union and ancestor of CLASSE, with threats of a general unlimited strike and civil disobedience.

MDE demands included maintaining free access to CEGEP education, a tuition freeze at the university level, improving the loans and bursaries programme, and elimination of budgetary tightening measures. On October 24th, while many associations were already on strike, a first protest took place of roughly 1,000 people from which both FEUQ and FECQ were absent, having refused to participate or even envisage calling a general strike. What these federations did do, however, was participate in a socio-economic summit held on October 30th and 31st in the hopes of convincing the government of the validity of their positions. Unsatisfied by the failure of their lobbying tactic, they walked out of the meeting. Just outside the meeting, 5,000 had been brought together in a protest coordinated by worker unions, community groups and the MDE.

On November 6th, the education minister announced her intention to reduce loans and bursaries funding instead of raising tuition fees, and that she was ready to consider revising the way fees were calculated. This was clearly insufficient for a movement that was growing in numbers. At this point, 60,000 students spanning 24 CEGEPS were already on strike, and universities were beginning to join the movement. At the peak of the movement, the number of students on strike totalled 100,000. On the same day, the FECQ and FEUQ suggested the education budget be tightened by 150M\$ in order to maintain the tuition freeze. On the 14th of November, striking CEGEP student associations formed a coordination committee to which all were invited to join, claiming this committee was the only legitimate group entitled to negotiate a resolution of the ongoing conflict with the government. The FECQ firmly opposed this new group.

Pauline Marois, then education minister, took advantage of this division to discriminate between groups, choosing to recognize exclusively the FECQ and FEUQ as valid interlocutors.

A VICTORIOUS OUTCOME FOR THE STRIKE

November 18th marks the ministry of education's announcement that it would maintain tuition and related fees as they were; however, this promise came with a price to pay in the form of monetary and discriminatory measures: \$700 million are cut from the budget, restrictions are imposed on loans and bursaries, tuition is increased for non-Québec residents and a tax is imposed on CEGEP students who fail classes.

In its last breath, the student movement mobilized 10,000 people for a protest held on November 20th to contest these measures. The movement was towards its end, but came up with its head high: the unlimited general strike managed to maintain fees frozen until 2007.

Professors increase pressure tactics

MATTHEW BRETT, POLITICAL SCIENCE STUDENT

Over 330 professors from CEGEPs and universities across Québec are placing pressure on the Charest Liberals in support of the student movement. Meanwhile some teachers have faced disciplinary action or have been suspended for supporting the movement.

Professors began by signing declarations and offering messages of solidarity to students, but faculty opposition to the Liberal education plan gradually shifted to direct action and mass mobilization of teachers. Professors joined students in Montréal on March 20 to put Concordia university president Frederick Lowy's condo “for sale.” The protest was in reference to the fact that Lowy was provided with a \$1.2 million interest-free loan by Concordia upon becoming president, in addition to his \$350,000 yearly salary.

More recently, professors at McGill issued a public statement condemning the university administration for its “draconian and a completely inappropriate response” to student actions. Five McGill students have been branded radicals and barred from campus. “As professors, we demand that the senior administration of the university ceases interfering with McGill's commitment, which is also our commitment, to the education of our students,” the statement reads.

Dozens of Concordia professors have also issued

a public demand that the university reverse its March 23 notice threatening disciplinary action against students participating in picket lines. Concordia professors also denounced the university's hiring of external security guards to monitor and film students participating in picket lines in order to enforce such disciplinary action. Concordia professors have also emphasized aspects of the Liberal education plan that remain largely neglected in the mainstream media. In an open letter with hundreds of signatures, professors state that the education plan will require universities to increase private donations by \$54 million while encouraging researchers to commercialize their work. “The government's plan to privatize the funding of Quebec universities threatens both the accessibility and the quality of our education system,” the statement reads. “The broad-based student strike embodies the values of our society by opposing a Liberal agenda to privatize educational funding.”

A province-wide group of professors was created as the strike grew early this March. Profs contre la hausse is a network of hundreds of professors who have been actively organizing across the province (profscontrelahausse.org). Dozens of faculty unions at CEGEPS and universities across Québec have also issued public expressions of solidarity with the student strike movement.



GENERAL ASSEMBLIES

For all students to be empowered and have a voice

A general assembly allows for:

- Direct democracy – everyone can express themselves and have an equal say local sovereignty within the association
- Space for discussion and debate – everyone can propose and amend motions. Thus all students get to make collective decisions.
- A few people (executives or council members) don't decide on behalf of others. Those elected are accountable to the students; the General Assembly is the most democratic body that allows this in a transparent manner.

A general assembly (GA) is democratic because it can be called at any time by the student association whether departmental or faculty-level, as well as by any member who collects the minimum amount of signatures required by the association's by-laws (regulations).

A general assembly is also important because there is room for discussion and debate, for students to consider new opinions and solutions, and together decide what can be done collectively.

FEMINIST ANALYSIS

Gender dynamics of tuition and strike

MATTHEW BRETT, POLITICAL SCIENCE STUDENT

The Simone de Beauvoir Institute continues to actively participate in the general unlimited student strike across Québec, stressing the gendered dynamics of the Liberal tuition hike and offering a critical feminist perspective about this ongoing social struggle. The institute issued a public statement denouncing the Liberal education plan in February. Below is a short extract from the statement:

“For decades now, feminists have argued that women earn less than men for doing the same work. Recent statistics support this claim: the latest data available from 2008 demonstrate that women still earn 71 cents for every dollar earned by men. Asking individuals to contribute more to their post-secondary education costs, then, affects women in particular. Since women still earn less than men overall, raising tuition fees will impact women first. This is an example of social policy that perpetuates gender inequality.

“If we consider the case of single mothers (who still constitute the majority of single-parent families), it is clear that tuition increases will affect not only these women, but their children as well. Eric Martin and Maxime Ouellet, authors of *Université Inc: Des mythes sur la hausse des frais de scolarité et l'économie du savoir*, argue that a two-parent family would need to allocate 10% of its revenue to fund a BA for one child; in the case of single mothers, however, a woman would need to allocate 18% of her income to ensure her child obtains a BA.

“Educational funding policy which requires the contribution of individual consumers quietly bypasses the reality that such policy demands more from single mothers. Raising tuition fees in Quebec entrenches inequality for single mothers and their children, since they need to allocate more of their income to obtain the same access to state-funded institutions.”

To read the full statement visit: <http://wsdb.concordia.ca/about-us/official-position-on-issues/documents/2012SdBITuitionFees.pdf>

“ I have no choice but to accept that the tactic of stopping classroom instruction represents the collective, and thoroughly discussed, decision of our students [...] It would be unacceptable to me if a member of our community, whose political action was sanctioned by a truly democratic assembly, were to seriously suffer for that action ”

- one of the department Chairs at Concordia University.

Are Student Strikes Legal?

It is important to begin with the affirmation that all that is not prohibited by the law is legal. While the Quebec Labour Code limits the rights of workers to strike to certain circumstances, no such law governs student strikes. Because no such law specifically governs student strikes, the only applicable legal texts are the statutes and regulations adopted by the student organisations themselves. These statutes and regulations are required to comply with Quebec's Companies Act, which governs the legal framework of non-profit organisations. Student strikes are therefore bound to respect the provisions of the statutes and regulations of the student associations regarding the initiation and continuation of the strike (quorum for the general assembly, time frame to be respected for the notice of the general assembly, etc).

Student strikes are thus legal if they respect the statutes and regulations of the student associations that vote them into effect.



While student associations and labour unions are not governed by the same laws, it is useful to remember that

both types of organisations have similar structures and that the principal objective of student associations, like labour unions, is to defend the interests of their members while giving them the opportunity to take a collective position on the issues that concern them.

Moreover, once the highest governing body of a student association (usually the general assembly) takes a decision in favour of a strike, the executive committee of the association in question has therefore the mandate to carry out the democratic will of the general assembly. The members of the executive committee must ensure that the strike is effective and that classes are not held.

The refusal to recognize the student strike by the university administration is necessarily a political strategy that aims to put an end to the strike as quickly as possible. It is indeed the very essence of the strategy of student strikes to put economic pressure on the university administration and, in this manner, on the government. That is why it is important not to be misled by statements that are lacking in legal basis coming from the university and college administrations.

Combative syndicalism

JEREMIE BÉDARD-WIEN, SOCIAL SCIENCES STUDENT

The CLASSE, as a temporary structure built upon l'Association pour une Solidarité Syndicale, subscribes to confrontational syndicalism [syndicalisme de combat].

This movement affirms that the state and local administrations are, by definition, opposed to our interests. The state is not a neutral entity in which all stakeholders exert equal influence: rather, it must be seen as subordinated to certain lobby groups, particularly the employers', which reach across party lines. Following this logic, students become second-class citizens subject to every whim of the ruling elite. The only way to push for our demands therefore becomes building leverage through an escalation of pressure, in order to coerce our political antagonists into negotiations. The 2012 Unlimited General Strike is a good example of this escalation: over the last two years, we graduated from modest demonstrations to a full-fledged general strike. Additionally, we must not shy away from employing direct action in order to disrupt the activities of the state and cause real economic damage. Even if we cannot, as an organization, associate ourselves with every action, it is critically important to respect the diversity of tactics, the right for individuals who are part of our struggle to resort to more assertive tactics.

The success of any social movement depends on effective mobilization and information. To this end, CLASSE's structures are built according to principles of direct democracy, in order to surrender control not to a few executives but to the entire membership of local unions that are members of CLASSE. Elected members of councils and committees are bound by mandates adopted democratically in local General Assemblies and the highest governing body of CLASSE, the Congress. Moreover, confrontational syndicalism demonstrates our solidarity with other social movements and struggles. Indeed, we do not want to merely defend the material interests that affect us as students but what concerns us as members of society.

History has proved the effectiveness of confrontational syndicalism. We must continue to uphold it in order to better fight for our vision of education: a democratic system freed from tuition fees and corporate influence.

AN APPEAL BY A PROFESSOR

“ Be part of a broad sweeping movement ”

NORMA RANTISI, ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR, DEPT. OF GEOGRAPHY, PLANNING & ENVIRONMENT, CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY

Education is a universal right, not a privilege nor a commodity, and the threat to that right would be detrimental for many reasons. One of the most obvious reasons is that it would contribute to economic inequalities (access to skills and a degree that provides opportunities for job access and advancement in labour markets). But the reasons go well beyond the immediate 'economic' ones and also have to do with issues of social integration and political empowerment.

Schools are not just sites of skill and knowledge acquisition; they are also sites of critical reflection of what our roles are as citizens of the places we inhabit - reflection that is enhanced with collective modes of engagement. They are also sites of 'socialization', in that they provide students with social connections to other students and faculty. In a context of neoliberalism, where the 'individual' and the individualization of work reigns supreme, these social ties are increasingly critical for allowing individuals to look beyond the "self-managing, entrepreneurial model" and to provide support for one another, and especially for those who are locked out of already existing insular networks and exclusive employment opportunities. Moreover, these ties - when encouraged through teamwork and participatory classroom settings - can also highlight how knowledge production/reflection is a collective, not individual, process, and this can provide a basis for challenging the individualistic bent of the neo-liberal paradigm within the university and its over-riding emphasis on creating 'human capital' - to prop up the economy - at the expense of providing a context for life-long learning and critical reflection.

Finally, a policy today of raising tuition sets a dangerous precedence for the future. Whenever governments are 'cash-strapped' (in reality, they are just privileging certain investments over others and calling it 'austerity'), then tuition fees can easily become a target for future increases. It is better not to open the floodgate in the first place.

This is your chance to be part of a broad sweeping movement, like the Arab Spring and the Occupy movements. Everyone is watching Quebec - which could become the symbol for a larger struggle for universal education.

Higher education - and immigrants - are not market commodities

BY FREE EDUCATION MONTREAL

Despite its claim to multiculturalism, Quebec is becoming an increasingly hostile environment for international students. Since 2008, the provincial government has been allowing universities to increase international tuition fees by 10 per cent per year. The worst of these hikes came in the 2008-2009 school year, when Quebec completely deregulated international tuition fees in six programs - meaning universities could increase fees for these students as high as they please.

Some universities did not have the basic decency to warn international students of increases as high as 50 per cent, with serious consequences. Concordia University MBA student Mahmood Salehi came here two years ago from Iran with his life savings. The April 2009 acceptance letter from Concordia stated that “the fees for the John Molson MBA Program for the academic year 2009-2010 are approximately \$13,700.” He planned accordingly. It was tight, but he could just make it.

Yet when he arrived in Canada in August 2009, he was charged \$19,676.98 - an increase of around 50 per cent. Concordia University had given him no warning. Since then, Salehi has suffered from extreme stress, health problems, depression, homesickness, low grades and thus difficulties in obtaining a work visa. He obtained a \$2,000 remission from Concordia, but the greatest damage had already been done. “I hadn’t bought a winter jacket, I was waiting until January trembling to buy a cheaper one.” This experience also affected his view of Canada’s respect for human rights. “If a Canadian consumer that is overcharged by any company can take legal actions against them and the media and consumers’ rights associations would support him or her, it is painful to see that Canadian universities have found international students as their best so-called ‘development’ and nobody is there to listen to overcharged and helpless students.”

Another student in Salehi’s program returned to India because he couldn’t pay the increase, even with a scholarship from TD Bank. The six programs that the Quebec government deregulated for undergraduate international students in 2009 were administration, law, computer science, engineering, mathematics and the pure sciences. Yet the government is continuously increasing the differential fees for international students, not to mention the 10% increase allowance to the international tuition fee granted to universities in 2008. International students are starting to wonder whether it is worth it for them to come study here any more.

“Even though I love Montreal and Quebec,” says Concordia international graduate student Doug Smith, “I tell my friends at home not to come here. It’s just too unpredictable. I never know from one year to the next whether or not I’ll be able to stay in school.”

According to Statistics Canada, Quebec’s share of international students among Canadian provinces dropped from 37% in 1999 to 26% in 2008. The reputation that Quebec universities are developing among international students may not please Quebec’s Ministry of Immigration and Cultural Communities, whose report refers to international student graduates as bringing a “beneficial contribution to Quebec society” because they have “already lived on the territory for a while, they know and share the values of Quebec.”

“I never know from one year to the next whether or not I’ll be able to stay in school.”

Though difficult to calculate, in a recent interview with *le Devoir*, Daniel Zizian, head of the *Conférence des recteurs et des principaux des universités du Québec* (CREPUQ), estimated that 10 per cent of international

students end up staying in the province.¹ Across the country, according to a study by the Canadian Bureau for International Education (CBIE), 51 per cent of university international students and 57 per cent of international college students foresee applying for permanent residency, while 52 per cent and 71 per cent, respectively, plan to stay to work for up to three years after receiving their diploma.

Even if they do return to their home countries, international students generate around \$1 billion in revenue in Quebec while they are here.² Despite their active contribution to Quebec’s economic development through taxes and as consumers and future residents, they are faced with various challenges to their livelihood in Quebec beyond tuition, such as off-campus work restrictions while studying, insufficient on-campus job opportunities and high health insurance costs.

It may come as no surprise that 40 per cent of international students in Canada face difficulties meeting their basic needs, and that the number of international students from low-income families decreased, reports the study from the CBIE.

“I was constantly living with the uncertainty that I wouldn’t be able to pay the semester or eat that night,” said engineering student Diego Eibar. “And in those days it wasn’t even as bad as today, now that universities can raise the fees more frequently.” Eibar returned to his home-country of Argentina as the costs and stress were too high, only returning to study in Quebec recently because he

succeeded in receiving permanent residency status.

Out-of-province students also face obstacles. With some exceptions, Canadian students studying in Quebec pay supplementary fees that put their annual tuition at close to \$6000 per year - indexed to tuition rates in the rest of the country and therefore increasing every year. In order to be considered eligible for permanent residence in Quebec, and therefore avoid the ever-burgeoning differential fee hikes, out-of-province students must reside in Quebec for a year without being as a full-time student. “I couldn’t afford out-of-province tuition,” says McGill University graduate Fred Burrill, “but as a part-time student I wasn’t eligible for any bursaries or scholarships. So I ended up working two jobs while going to school and unfortunately had very little money or time for my studies that year.”

All of this stands in contravention of the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights, which states “higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit.” Education is a right, regardless of one’s nationality or place of birth. While the Ministry of Immigration and Cultural Communities advertises that Quebec society’s “well-developed health, education and social security services ensure the well-being of the entire population,” this does not seem to be the case for international students.

Furthermore, by charging such high fees to students often coming from countries with a significantly lower income-per-capita than Canada, Quebec is in effect perpetuating the cycle of wealth transfer from the Global South to high-income western countries.

The fee differences between international and out-of-province students and students from Quebec can make it difficult to forge a united movement for accessible education - a fact not lost on the Quebec government. Often concerned about their immigration status, international students have been hesitant to take to the streets. However, things are changing. For example, in 2010, a campaign led by international students and their allies at Concordia University students resulted in “Angry Week.” This forced the university to negotiate and partially modify their plans.

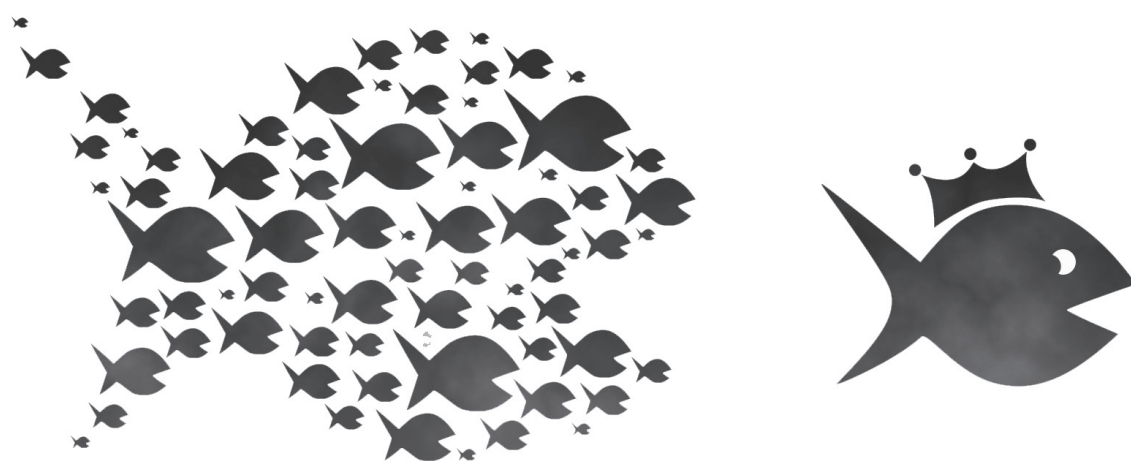
And international students are increasingly aware that universities may obscure the truth about their legal right to protest. Concordia University sent an official message to students on March 20th stating “international students arrested while protesting could face deportation and be denied future re-entry.” The letter conveniently omits that the Constitution of Rights and Freedoms, including the right to peacefully protest, applies to anyone on Canadian soil and that the most common offense for peacefully protesting (‘unlawful assembly’) does not affect a person’s admissibility to immigration in Canada.

International and out-of-province students have the right to speak up about the difficulties they face and they are an asset to the student movement. They bring their own experiences and new frustrations and energy to the Quebec student movement. From Indonesia to Nova Scotia to Chile, the move to privatize education is a worldwide trend, and we are stronger when we unite. Just as we reject the dominance of market logic in the education system, we cannot and must not allow students from outside Quebec to be treated like market commodities.

¹ Kathryn McMullen et Angelo Elias, Tourism and the Centre for Education Statistics Division, “A Changing Portrait of International Students in Canadian Universities,” hiver 2011, <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/81-004-x/2010006/article/11405-eng.htm> (10 décembre 2011).

² Lisa-Marie Gervais, “Portes ouvertes aux étudiantes étrangères,” *Le Devoir* 3 septembre 2011, <http://www.ledevoir.com/societe/education/330706/portes-ouvertes-aux-etudiantes-etrangees> (10 décembre 2011).

³ Ibid.



ORGANIZE!

The student strike is not a simple boycott

history and perspectives

By ASSOCIATION DES JURISTES PROGRESSISTES (SUMMARY OF LONGER STATEMENT)

Alleging that the concept of strike is limited to workers under the Labour Code (R.S.Q., chapter C-27), qualifying the movement as being a simple boycott, demanding that professors give the classes despite the strike votes taken by student associations, and threatening students with academic reprisals in case of absence or omission to give in papers; all these are political intimidation tactics based on historical errors coming from parties that are far from being neutral in this debate (the Conférence des Recteurs et des Principaux des Universités du Québec is a staunch supporter of the hikes). They are contrary to the spirit, if not the letter, of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (The Constitution Act, 1982, Schedule B to the Canada Act 1982 (UK), 1982, c 11) as well as Charter of human rights and freedoms, (RSQ, c C-12).

Firstly, the right to strike was not created by the Labour Code, originating instead from the working-class struggles of the 19th century. Historically, the issues raised by strikes have gone beyond “purely professional” motives, such as the anti-fascist strike of February 12th 1934, the massive insurrectional strikes for the Liberation, the 1958 strikes for republican liberties, the 1961 strikes against the Alger coup d’état, etc. “In these contexts, the strike is no longer just a product of modern democracy; it is also a guarantor of political democracy – which explains why it was long banned in most dictatorships”¹.

An international phenomenon of contestation, the right to strike was elevated to the rank of fundamental rights on an international scale through its recognition in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, dating from 1966, which was ratified by Canada.

The student strike can be traced as far back as 1443, at the Université de Paris, when students opposed the application of the crown’s criminal law to members of the university community. In the 20th century, student strikes emerged in various countries: in Haiti, against Duvalier’s dictatorship during the 1950s and 1960s, May 1968 in France, and the more recent student strike in Chile denouncing the privatization of the education system under Pinochet’s dictatorship.

IN QUEBEC, THE STRIKE APPEARED IN THE 20TH CENTURY.

- The first recorded strike was a one-day stoppage in 1958 to abolish student fees and give accessibility to higher education. The 21,000 students strike was followed by a three-month sit-in by three students from University de Montréal.

- The 1968 general strike demanded the democratization of teaching methods and institutions, the creation of a second French-language institution in Montreal and greater access to education (tuition freeze, loans and bursaries). This strike led to the creation of UQÀM.

- Other strikes happened in 1974, 1980, 1983 (in conjunction with the common front and also for the enactment of a law concerning the recognition of student unions, which was done), 1986, 1988, 1990, 1996 and finally in 2005. This last strike, peaking at 230 000 students, ended with

the government agreeing to not only bargain with at least a part of the student federations but also to reimburse the 103 million dollars it wished to convert into loans.

Contrary to what is alleged by the management staff of certain institutions, these strikes are not a “boycott” but real strikes in the working-class sense of the term. This misconception is derived from seeing the student as a “client” obtaining a service from a company, which in this case, would be the university (or CEGEP). The student is NOT a client, he/she is a worker, albeit an intellectual one, who contributes, through his/her learning and academic participation, to the collective knowledge of society.

A strike differs from a simple boycott in its goals and scope. Students do not aim to “boycott” educational institutions. We suspend our participation and intellectual contribution in order to obtain concessions on the part of the government which is in charge of managing, at least in part, the conditions of our education. In that sense, the movement is much more similar to a workers’ strike. A boycott would happen if, for example, students decided to stop applying to McGill and offer their intellectual effort elsewhere.

Some institutions have recognized the legitimacy of the movement from the onset and cancelled their classes outright and/or bargained strike protocols with the student unions (ex: UQÀM, UQTR and the Faculté des lettres et sciences humaines from Université Sherbrooke).

The Act respecting the accreditation and financing of students’ associations (RSQ, c A-3.01) was enacted following the student strike of 1983, and modeled after the Labour Code in many respects. Section 4 of this law guarantees the right of every student to belong to the students’ association of his choice and to take part in setting up the association, to participate in its activities and administration. The accreditation of a student association makes it the sole representative for the students, much like an accredited union under the Labour Code. And even though this law does not provide for a strike, it does not prohibit it either.

Consequently, we see student strikes as an essential part of the right to freedom of association. As such, we deem the unjustified repression of the right to strike to be in violation of our Charters.

We also view the imposition of academic reprisals against students by reason of their participation in a strike as discrimination based on their political opinions.

Finally, as jurists, we wish to remind all that despite appearances, a right is not created through legislation but won through political and social struggle. And to keep it, we have to use it. In such spirit, we say to the students: Long live to the right to strike. And, through it, long live to democracy.

Complete statement at: www.stopthebike.ca/vers-la-greve-generale/are-student-strike-legal/

¹ La Grève, Groulx et Pernot, 2008, « La Grève » Presses de la Fondation nationale des sciences politiques, Paris, p. 10.



BEFORE RECYCLING, PLEASE PASS IT ALONG

What is CLASSE?

The Large Coalition of the Association for Solidarity Among Student Unions (CLASSE) is a temporary national student organization that includes, across Quebec, more than 84,000 members from numerous student unions from both CEGEPs and universities. Its main position in the strike is against all tuition hikes with a perspective of free education.

What is ASSÉ?

The Association for Solidarity Among Student Unions (Association pour une Solidarité Syndicale Étudiante: ASSÉ) regroups numerous student associations from CEGEPs and universities across Quebec, with a membership of over 45,000 students. ASSÉ embodies the continuation of a movement that in the last forty years has been an important actor of Quebec society and an agent of social progress in education. ASSÉ is the core of the strike coalition CLASSE, which represents more than half of all striking students.

THE RIGHT TO EDUCATION

ASSÉ considers education a fundamental right for each member of society and not a privilege. To this end, each member has the right to a free, public, accessible, secular education of quality, which is free from any form of discrimination.

COMBATIVE SYNDICALISM: AN EFFECTIVE STRATEGY

Analysis and practice cannot be separated. A particular strategy needs to be deployed in order to adopt progressive demands, and break from the established order: a combative student unionism. First and foremost, this strategy involves the development of union practices that are dynamic and democratic. As such, we have to multiply the opportunities for discussions and practices for direct democracy. The General Assembly is the perfect place to do so. ASSÉ supports the idea to push this democratization as far as possible in a self-management perspective. Direct democracy empowers the members of the union: those who are most affected by policies of an institution should take decisions themselves: namely, students and workers.

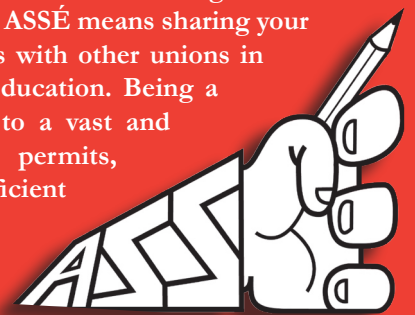
ASSÉ, IT’S ITS MEMBERS!

Within ASSÉ, each student association is sovereign. The decisions made in congress are based on positions taken in the general assemblies of member associations. Thus ASSÉ encourages and assists member associations to hold general assemblies regularly to give them the final say.

UNITED TO BE STRONGER!

In this sense, ASSÉ allows students to have an active role in democratic life of their institutions. For this structure to function effectively, it is necessary that ASSÉ members get involved and take charge. Being part of ASSÉ means sharing your unions/association’s resources with other unions in order to defend the right to education. Being a member means contributing to a vast and democratic movement that permits, on a provincial scale, an efficient combative strategy.

asse-solidarite.qc.ca



Dear Professor,

Please excuse _____ from class/exam today. (S)he has a serious case of solidarity and will not be able to attend.

**Love,
Dr. Democracy**