

U L T I M A T U M

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FREE EDUCATION AT ALL LEVELS!

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The right to education is in a feeble state. Accessibility to studies, in particular, is about to undergo a new affront. For thousands of CÉGEP students, it will cost a little more from this term onward to enjoy their mythical free education. In fact, each term, the majority of CÉGEPs, have raised the fees that they demand from the student population.

A present from the FECQ...

During the summer, the Ministry of Education and the CÉGEPs began to put an agreement reached last December into action. The result is an increase in the amount that students pay! Yes, the agreement - reached in the name of all CÉGEP students in Québec - allowed for even more money to be squeezed out of their pockets. As a matter of fact, the document forecasts ceilings for fees within certain categories, but allows any other fees to rise without limit. For the price of schooling to rise, all that is required is a vote at the CÉGEP Board of Administration.

Recurring budgetary cutbacks

But the deeper cause of these fee hikes is not just the framework agreement signed by the FECQ. For many years - especially since the politics of 'zero-deficit' were decided upon in 1996 - we have been living in a period of severity in terms of public finances. For the networks of CÉGEPs and universities, this has manifested in cuts, budgetary cutbacks, service reforms, the gradual introduction of private financing and an increase in fees demanded from students, often for questionable reasons. The current situation has clearly arisen as a part of this trend. Last June, CÉGEPs were subjected to budgetary cutbacks in the order of 30 million dollars, which, not surprisingly, they responded to with cutbacks and the fee increases that we know so well. The Liberal party intends to sink us further into this trend: over the next few years, it projects tax cuts of



Illustration : Julien Lapan

\$5 billion, which will even further decrease the funds available to finance social programs such as education.

The struggle must continue

Nevertheless, in order to seriously struggle against the socially disastrous orientation of our

government, we must learn from the FECQ's attempt to place the fees within a legitimizing framework. We will never achieve any significant guarantee over the future of our right to education if we address the superficial problems. All of the attempts to preserve the so-called free education at CÉGEP will be in vain if we do not force the government to

reassess its politics on a profound level, starting with those which determine the level of financing for social programs. This will not be possible without a solid momentum of power based on aggressive demands. This is why we say: 'Free education at all levels! Towards an unlimited general strike!'

TOWARDS A GENERAL UNLIMITED STRIKE!

The struggle for the right to education : from past to present

Benoît Marsan, undergraduate History student, UQÀM

During an Extra-Ordinary Congress held on the August 16th, the member associations of ASSÉ called for an unlimited general strike, the eighth such mobilization in the history of the Québec student movement. In order to have a better grasp of the immensity of this campaign, it is necessary to take an historic tour of the previous strikes, and most importantly the strike of 1996.

Usually, when we speak of an unlimited general strike, we refer to a strike movement that lasts for at least a week and involves at least 15 or so post-secondary institutions. These statements certainly describe the strikes of 1968, 1974, 1978, 1986, 1988, 1990, and 1996. While the movements from 1968 to 1988 focused for the most part around the question of financial aid and from an offensive position (there were other issues, but for the sake of this article we'll leave it at that), the strikes of 1990 and 1996 were more defensive in nature, responding to threats of stopping the freeze on tuition fees. There is another important element: the two general strikes of the 1990s came about amidst a division of the student movement at the national level. The movement divides itself more or less along two lines.

1990, 1996 and 2003 - a divided student movement

On one side, there are corporatist organizations who are close to the Parti Québécois (FEEQ in 1990, ancestor of the FEUQ and the FECQ, which were present in 1996 and still

exist today). These organizations are not in favour of mass mobilizations or strikes and prefer to recommence with lobbying and negotiation, without first obtaining a popular momentum, in obtain small gains and have minor measures pass as if they were great victories...

On the other side are the organizations who appeal to student unionism, view education in the perspective of global society and favour mobilization, actions and the predominance of general assemblies as the only means of obtaining the popular

momentum necessary to achieve the demands (like the ANEEQ in 1990 and the MDE in 1996). ASSÉ is on this side of the divide.

This division of the student movement still exists right now, and it has not come about because of mere petty quarrels. It is, instead, the result of diametrically opposed analyses of education, the demands, the role of the student movement in society, and the ideas of mobilization and action. For example, the FECQ and the FEUQ are demanding that the government commit to laying down a blueprint law over

tuition fees. This sort of measure is very feeble, only serves to render their perception of the right to education more legitimate. ASSÉ demands, instead, that the rise of fees be stopped and that schooling be free of charge at all levels. The plans of action reflect the same situation. The FECQ and the FEUA see the strike as a distant possibility and a last resort, whereas ASSÉ is calling for a strike and is already organizing for one.

The Strike of 1996

The mobilization of 1996 is the most important one in the history of the Québec collegial student movement. Not less than 43 of the 45 collegial institutions were touched by the strike. At the height of the strike, thirty or so organizations were participating. The demands centered around the unfreezing of tuition fees, the abolition of the "R-quota" and cuts of 700 million dollars to education announced by the Parti Québécois. The strike lasted five weeks. It was only a partial victory, though, because although we retained the freeze on tuition, the R-quota and the cuts still went through. We should also take note of important cuts in financial aid and the putting into place of the "failure tax" negotiated in Catimini between the government and the federations of students (FECQ and FEUQ).

Because of the immensity of the strike, the student federations (who would have preferred to refuse the strike

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The shameless lies of the president of the Federation of CÉGEPs

François Baillargeon, undergraduate History student, UQÀM

The June 6th edition of *Le Devoir* informed us that Gaétan Boucher, president of the Federation of CÉGEPs, had called for a public debate questioning the principle of free education at CÉGEPs. There was nothing surprising about his position. For a long time now, at each of his public interventions, Boucher has been whining about the fact that, unlike the universities, CÉGEPs cannot impose tuition fees and therefore are more harshly affected by under-financing from the public sector.

Panic-stricken as the student movement raised its barricades and ASSÉ launched its call to strike, this

same Gaétan Boucher lost no time in trying to calm things down. On August 27, he stated in all seriousness that "Free education at CÉGEPs has never been put into question" and, as such, the student movement "was afraid of being afraid".

The next day, however, in the pages of *Le Soleil*, Boucher expressed his concern about the financial problems of the CÉGEP system. This particular quote is worth taking note of: "Forced to plead for [financing] from a wider array of sources, the president [of the Federation of CÉGEPs] is eyeing the federal government or private enterprise to keep its finances afloat".

We must also reconsider the idea of free education," he said." Not only did he argue for the privatization of the public CÉGEP school system, he also openly lied and contradicted his own statements about free education.

These faux-pas in public relations demonstrate that the Federation of CÉGEPs wants to avoid a student mobilization at all cost, even if it entails intentionally sowing seeds of confusion around the issue of free education. We can only assume that the Federation is counting on settling its financial problems by having the student population

pay more fees.

In terms of financial matters, even if Gaétan Boucher had chosen a side - which obviously would not be the side of the right to education - we would still have to thank him for pointing out what the other solution would be: the right to education, of course. Considering this, let's give him the last word: "If we, like the rest of society, choose to keep a lid on the right to education and on administrative fees, the only solution remaining would be increased government financing. This means that we would have to fund the CÉGEP system adequately with our taxes."

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A strike is the time to dream...

Marie-Michèle Withlock, Independent Student, UQÀM

Since the beginning of the fall 2003 term, there has been talk of a possible unlimited general post-secondary student strike. We often hear that student strikes are ineffective because students, unlike workers, do not produce anything. Nothing could be less true! Student strikes are effective!

Picketing and occupations of institutions

A CÉGEP/university strike puts pressure directly on the government, but above all it presents an opportunity to organize and to put other means of pressure into action. A strike is not the time to go home and wait for the next general assembly. Once the strike has begun, it must be respected.

CÉGEP and university administrators often seem to have this annoying habit of failing to recognize the democratic vote of students. In turn, we have to organize closed picket lines every morning to make sure that classes cannot start. Once the institution is disrupted for a few hours, the authorities will cancel the school day. Occupying the establishment is an especially effective action for ensuring the continuation of the strike.

An occupation, as its name indicates, consists of installing ourselves in the institution and barricading the points of entry and exit. One variation of this sort of action is a self-directed occupation. This entails not only occupying the institution but also organizing all kinds of activities that take place within the site of the occupation. These activities are diverse and our imagination is the only limit! For example, during the general strike in 1996 the students of CÉGEP Lévis-Lauzon organized, in solidarity with the

professors' unions and support staff unions, critical courses on neoliberalism, a political bed-in, a giant mural and much more....

Occupying offices

A strike is also a time to occupy government offices in order to increase the strength of the movement. These occupations aim to block the normal functioning of the machine by occupying key sites of government activity. For example, in 1996, the students of many Montréal schools occupied the Conseil de L'Éducation Supérieure, the bridge to the Montréal Casino and other government offices in the area. Some of the 1996 occupations lasted several days, thanks to the participants' enthusiasm and determination as well as the support of people who stayed outside. These actions directly affected normal government activities and increased the visibility of the strike and its demands. A general strike can permit occupations to last several days, with the pressure rising up a notch each day.

Demos and Protests

A strike is not a strike without mass protests. Protests are a form of mobilisation that encourages widespread participation. Demos give visibility to those on strike, and also allow the greater population to participate directly in the strike movement.

An educational opportunity

It's easy to think that going on strike means that everyone gets a vacation, but a strike is actually the opposite of a holiday, assuming that we are really ready to see education as more than just a diploma. As a former premiere of Québec once said, "Every

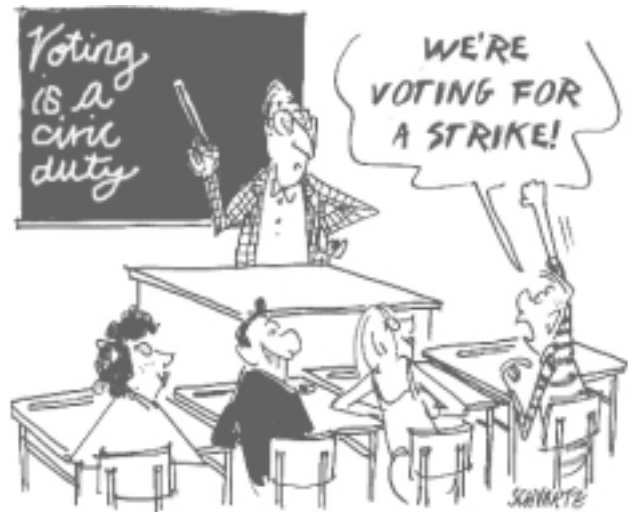
student must go on strike at least once during the period of his/her formal education." Participating in a strike allows us to widen our horizons and to discover other realities. . . In short, a strike allows us to discover the power of solidarity. Our lives in society extend far beyond the walls of the schools, and it is important, especially at this crucial moment in the history of our planet, to form our own opinions, both individually and collectively.

Building Solidarity

Our movement doesn't have to be centered around our demands alone. It is essential to situate our issues in a broader context, since it is not just students who are the targets of the recent attack on the social fabric of society. All sectors of society are under attack: electricity costs, public transport, five-

dollar daycare, unions, the environment, social assistance, etc... Nothing has been spared by the Charest government. A student strike could be the kick-off to start a larger movement engaging all of Québec's society. Therefore, we should make use of this momentum to reach and gather as many people as possible.

In the end, the idea that is important to grasp is that we have the opportunity to strike and that it is up to us to carry it out, employing as many means of pressure as possible. The more these actions block the normal functioning of the system and the more visible they are, the more our collective power and momentum will become insurmountable. It is not until this powerful momentum is built that we will attain the satisfaction of our demands being fulfilled. To dare to fight is to dare to win!



Mobilizing for a strike : a few practical tricks

Émile Fortin, social sciences student, Collège Lionel-Groulx

Society as we know it is not the fruit of the kindness of the world's powerful elite. It is the result of a relentless struggle of the people for their freedom. This struggle continues today, thanks to people who gather together around common ideas which they believe in and are prepared to work toward. This is how lobby groups form, and these lobby groups can influence the government by disseminating information and mobilizing people.

To mobilize is to convince people of an idea, in order to inspire them to act. For ASSÉ's campaign for

free education, the objective is to obtain a strike mandate by holding a general assembly for students, in which they can speak out democratically. For this assembly to be valid, there must be a minimum number of members present, called quorum. As this number varies according to your charter, make sure to inform yourself.

You will have to get a group together in order to launch your mobilization. To do this, you have to recruit people who agree with your ideas (in this case, an unlimited general strike), and who are ready to give some

time to the cause. Once this group is formed, you can begin to mobilize. Remember, the more people involved, the stronger the mobilization will be.

Contacts and Communication: Essential Tools

Now that you have a good group together, you have to communicate. In order to have a good overall view of the situation, it is important to stay in frequent contact and exchange important information often. You can never be too informed. Also, the more you know, the better you will

be at mobilizing others.

During your mobilization work, you will definitely meet more people interested in helping you out. Try to get a sense of what talents they could bring to the struggle, be it in the field of theatre or music, or students or teachers, etc. Perhaps they could add something to the campaign. Take their contact information, and invite them to join you. The larger your group gets, the more your political power and momentum will grow.

Continued on page 7, see Mobilization

Under-Funding and Privatization : It's up to the students to take the cuts again

Héloïse Moisan-Lapointe, CÉGEP Distance Education Humanities Student

Less money in education means not only more fees to pay but a catastrophic drop in the quality of education. And judging from the reforms that have taken place over the last few years, it will take more than the Liberals' sweet songs to guarantee a better and more accessible education of quality.

The First Step

In 1993-1994, the Quebec Ministry of Education (MEQ) set the first stone in the commodification of education when then-Minister Lucienne Robillard introduced competency approach. This approach entails a way of defining what will be learned in courses and is characterized by breaking knowledge into small, distinct units. These units must be defined as applied tasks that the student must reproduce in order to prove his or her proficiency in the course content. In other words, the competency approach allows for the fragmentation and then the standardization of knowledge. In fragmenting knowledge, we lose links which are essential to the comprehension of a given subject, and, in standardizing it, numerous subtleties are removed from course frameworks.

The second wave of privatization came shortly afterwards, in the trenches of the Socio-Economic Summit of the Parti Québécois and the zero-deficit. The zero-deficit meant fierce budget cuts for public services such as health, education, social assistance, or the protection of the environment. Evidently, these cut-backs could not be made without closing certain services and lowering the quality of those that remained. In order to balance this lack of public funds, universities and CÉGEPs didn't have any choice other than turning to alternative sources of revenue. The private sector established itself in schools more securely than ever through channels such as ads in toilets, exclusivity contracts, etc. Private financing became unavoidable. Consequently, the private sector's way of functioning has been progressively installed.

From the Ministry to the Classroom: What happened

During the Robillard Reforms, all general education programs were modified. We passed from four courses

in each of our fields of our programs (French, philosophy, phys-ed, and elective courses) to four French courses, three philosophy, three phys-ed, two English and only two elective courses. Furthermore, one course per discipline had to be adopted in fields of study.

By replacing general and universal courses with courses specifically oriented towards careers

success plans and "diplomation" plans, as well as other measures which sought to increase competition between schools were established. The government at the time boasted about having the endorsement of youth, but we must remember that at the SQJ there were more lobby groups, companies and deputy-ministers than students, youth groups, street youth, etc. In the end, the government tightened its grip on the

number of groups has also diminished. Concretely, we are talking about classrooms containing hundreds of people, with one over-burdened teacher who is disconnected from her or his students.

- Success and "Diplomation" Plans

They appeared in the trenches of the SQJ. The government demanded that CÉGEPs produce a plan, setting target diploma numbers which were completely unrealistic (for example, increasing the rate of diplomas granted in a given program by 10%) and outlining means to be implemented in order to attain these targets. The problem is that the money invested could never serve to repair fundamental problems, such as lack of space, over-crowding in classes or the diminishing quality of courses.

- Performance Contracts

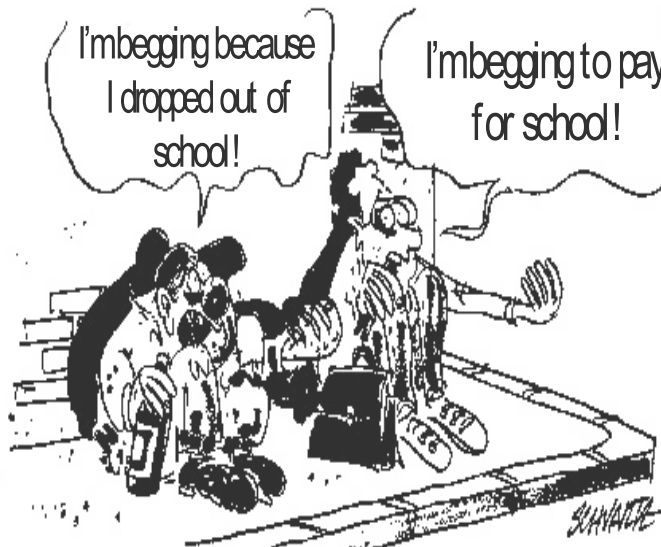
These are contracts between the Ministry of Education and each university which describes targets to attain in terms of diplomas issued, cutbacks, or others. Universities must attain these objectives or the Ministry cuts a portion of their funding. These contracts are, at present, the strongest form of conditional financing that our system has ever known.

-Private Foundations

Privatization foundations are present in almost all schools. They search for grants from corporations or individuals. The problem is that money never comes without strings attached. Whether it's for publicity spaces or to have an influence over course content, companies find an interest. Furthermore, schools are placed in a dynamic of competing with each other to win grants and maintain their image of excellence.

...Among other things

The conclusion which we can draw of the past ten years is inevitable: if public funding diminishes, the part which the private sector plays increases. Whether institutions are officially private or public does not change much. If they accept private funding and integrate the rules of the market, it's us - the students - who will pay the price. Competition, efficiency and free competition may be seductive concepts, but all too often, they result in sabotaging accessibility, equality, and the quality of education.



and the work market, the government showed us that it placed a higher priority on market needs without any concern for the fundamental values of our education system, such as a critical spirit, culture and open-mindedness.

We saw, little by little, courses being modeled to suit the needs of the private sector, many technical courses being transformed into a simple preparation for private certificates (diplomas granted by private companies, such as Microsoft, Nortel, etc...) and course grids being adapted to a study-work alternating cycle, which, in itself, represented a further warning of a lack of loans and bursaries. Even pre-university training was "professionalized", as it envisioned all as simple tasks to accomplish.

And that's not all...

The policies of the MEQ, in the years 1999-2000, were perfectly consistent with those of the preceding years, but at an even faster pace. The Quebec Youth Summit (SQJ), in February 2000, was the beginning of this new wave of privatization. It was at this moment that performance contracts,

public education network not to assure a quality education throughout Quebec but to accelerate the privatization of teaching institutions and to subject education to the laws of the market.

And contrary to their sweet song...

The fact that Liberal government prided itself in having placed education as a priority has not prevented it from under-financing the system. Concretely, this proves to us that the progress of privatization, in all its forms, will not be held back. On the contrary, it is when schools lack money that the pressure to run to the private sector for funding is heaviest. If we add to these circumstances the last report from the Federation of CÉGEPs, which proposes to further link schools to corporations - more for financial reasons than educational content - we can see that students are not out of the woods yet!

Privatization is ...

- Reforms

Since 1993-1994, the number of courses offered has greatly diminished. There are less choices in courses and the

The Federation of CÉGEPs Development Plan : A Mission Corrupted

A Special Contribution from Jean-Claude Drapeau and Renée-Claude Lorimier, Fédération Autonome Collégiale (FAC) members

The Competition Act

The Federation of CÉGEPs knew straightaway away that globalization was knocking at the door of the collegial sector. In its development plan, it considers globalization to be the most important element of an economic context which justifies "the need to change" (pg.21). For several years now, one has noted that colleges see themselves less and less like a national system in its entirety and more like autonomous entities competing in the same way that corporations seek to increase their share of the market. The publication of a list ranking CÉGEPs confirms this phenomena. Moreover, the institutional success plans and the strategic plans all colleges must be equipped with since Law 123 was adopted are presented as tools which permit CÉGEPs to distinguish themselves through their merits. If we go back further in time, the "empowerment" (l'habilitation) of CÉGEPs introduced by Minister Robillard in 1993 (article 32 of the RREC) had already launched a process to decentralize the network. Granting CÉGEPs the power to issue Diplomas of College Studies (DEC) instead and in place of the Minister should have rewarded the efforts of the local administrations to stand out from their neighbours and attain the Ministry's target numbers of diplomas delivered (the Marois target in 1997 and the Legault target in 2001).

But the Federation of CÉGEPs saw further. In the long term, accreditation - which grants CÉGEPs the power to award institutional diplomas - should be a hallmark of this trend. If colleges hold their status as superior educational

establishments so dearly, it is not merely because they wish to maintain excellence in education. It is, above all, because they aspire to hold the autonomy of universities and their funding model (a single funding envelope).¹

Finding itself too restricted in its room to manoeuvre, the Federation of CÉGEPs demanded, from the outset, a greater deregulation of Attestation of College Studies (AECs) (track 15). If its wish were granted, continued education would become the testing ground of a pedagogical model which would then be applied to the entire collegial system. In particular, technical training would appear as the next sector in the line of sight of the "managers [of the dismantlement] of the network" (pg.15), who would like to be able to adapt a portion of competences in specific training (track 6). In offering training tailored to the needs of local enterprises, colleges hope to close partnership deals. This is why the Federation is claiming, from the government, the right to solicit private grants (track 56). It is essential to remember that private grants represent approximately one third of the total budget of universities.

An Hierarchical Model for the Organization of Work

Adjusting to a new reality, for CÉGEPs, means not only entering a context of the globalization of education services (which represented \$2000 million in the year 2000), but also adapting schooling to the needs of the labour market and training sufficient numbers of graduates in niches where the demand is

greatest. Yet to enter the global training service circuit, business logic commands that colleges reach increased performance objectives through an "optimal use of resources" (pg. 73).

To attain these objectives, the Federation of CÉGEPs seeks to "institute a greater mobility in terms of teaching personnel, professional personnel and support employees, within a single employment category as well as different categories, with respect to the competencies of each person" (pg. 73).

"Our" Federation of CÉGEPs follows up on its ideas: Since the beginning of the 1990s, it has not ceased to demand that the departmental structure yield to the program structure and that teachers possess psycho-pedagogical training. Its intentions are clear: If teachers are selected on the basis of their disciplinary competencies instead of their psycho-pedagogical competencies, they will be in a position to teach several disciplines. It then follows that teachers would better respond to the needs of programs which fluctuate according to variations in the "student clientele".

The (Institutional) Party Poopers

If the Federation's wish were granted, the departments, which regroup teachers on the basis of their disciplinary specialization, would be reduced to serve as intermediaries for applying the Board of Directors' decisions regarding the strategic plan. As evidence, the Federations announces in track 51 its intention of "examining the role and the function [of the departmental structure] (...) in order to

improve its insertion into college life, to assure a better assumption of professional and institutional responsibilities, and to ensure a better sharing of responsibilities with committee programs" (pg.73). As spaces for exchanges on our professional practices, the departments are disruptive and seen as obstacles to the institutional logic.

The orientation promoted by the Federation favours the management's control over teachers instead of accomplishing work together with departments in a context of respect for the professional autonomy of teachers. At the same time, this new management model, inherited from the private sector, renders each professor individually responsible (as required for efficiency) and accountable, to management, for his or her success rate. Lastly, according to this approach, program committees would be responsible for attaining ambitious target numbers of diplomas issued (the ultimate criteria for returns in the education enterprise).

A Mission Corrupted

In our opinion, this development plan does not propose anything other than a diversion and abduction of college missions.

Since their creation, the CÉGEPs' mandate was to offer a superior education of quality to all members of the population in order to train not only workers, but free people and responsible citizens as well.

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Putting the brakes on student poverty

Jean-Luc Ratel, Masters student, Sociology, Université de Montréal

The increase in tuition fees announced for CÉGEPs and impending for universities will render post-secondary education even less accessible to the population at large. Let's not deceive ourselves: far from the myth of the student who is spoiled rotten by society, the truth is that a large majority of those attending CÉGEPs and universities live in precarious situations. And this situation drowns out any hope of accessibility. Current students are under a lot of pressure because of the difficulties of their social-economic conditions; and this leads a large number of them to have to cut their studies short or abandon them altogether. Their other option is start to drag the ball and chain of student debt offered to us by the student financial aid group (AFÉ).

We're not inventing anything.... The figures speak for themselves. According to AFÉ, 80% of university students live below the poverty line, with an average income of \$9600 per year. By raising tuition fees, which are

currently about \$1700 per year, we're only going to further impoverish the people who would have the most need for financial aid. Therefore, it is only with free education that we can improve the situation.

One could argue that the system of loans and bursaries can solve the problems of student poverty. However, as the majority of beneficiaries only receive loans, the Quebec Ministry of Education (MEQ) is saddling the student population with debt! And this gift of debt is not a spoonful of honey (or a knife-full!), since they generously offer an average debt of \$4083 to CÉGEP graduates, \$7036 to technical college graduates, \$14 435 to university graduates, \$21 726 to those who complete a masters program, and the fat sum of \$29 493 to those who hold doctoral degrees! In this way, the more you study, the greater your debt... so much so that we will have to change that well-known adage to " Qui s'instruit, s'appauvrit! " (Whoever learns, grows poor!). And this is not all. The bonus factor is that we will have to start paying

interest shortly after graduation. These interest payments will fatten up financial institutions which are certainly not among the most destitute in the world.... For that matter, in only seven years (between 1988 and 1995), the average debt for graduates increased by 67.4%!

Furthermore, loans and bursaries continue to be a necessity for the majority of students, since almost one third of them (30%) have to rely on these additional funds during their studies in order to make two ends meet. The worst of all of this is that the amount of aid distributed worldwide has decreased since 1996: 35.5% (\$293 million) less in 2000 than in 1996, while the number of recipients only fell by 23.0%! Finally, let's not forget that 25% of CÉGEP students are already living below the poverty line, while 10% are living in absolute poverty. Therefore, it is not by raising our various fees (which, thankfully, still do not include tuition fees, although the Federation of CÉGEPs is putting pressure on the Charest government to

this end) that we will improve the situation.

ASSÉ's whole campaign aims to better the conditions of life of current students and to allow those who have dropped out because of the school system to have access to a free, public, quality education without having to fall into debt. There is nothing unrealistic about these aims, as in reality this situation can be created and modified via the political power and momentum which organized groups can develop. It is, therefore, by uniting to reclaim an educational system that responds to our needs that we will obtain these objectives.

Fortunately, we are not alone: in all sectors of society, more and more people are rising up and organizing to counter the Liberal government's attempt to destroy the social fabric of our society. Let this autumn be a resistance against Charest-flavoured neoliberalism; a resistance that triumphs over a society under the economic control of a privileged minority!

The Québec Liberal Party : A Party at the Service of the People?

Julia Posca, Bachelor of Sociology Student at UQÀM

As school begins this year, the orientation adopted by our government on the issue of social services - including education - deserves all our attention. Effectively, the Québec Liberal Party (PLQ) does not hide the fact that it acts "according to Liberal values!" and, as soon as it took power, threatened Québec society with neoliberal reforms.

The PLQ's first assault on the education system is surely the budget granted to the Ministry of Education (MEQ) for the year 2003-2004. For example, although the Federation of CÉGEPs claimed \$50 million to cover the cost of the system, the government accorded a mere \$20 million to the collegial network. And again, the low level of investment in the network will force CÉGEPs to adopt a budget deficit, thereby violating its obligation to submit a balanced budget.

Yet if collegial establishments must exceed the laws in vigour, the network's funding problem has reached a critical point and does not offer any other choice. In effect, public investment in education does not correspond to the needs of the education system. With respect to the province's CÉGEPs, "the Federation of CÉGEPs, [...] estimates that the mode of financing colleges must be reviewed in-depth"². For the president of the Federation, this implies a rise in school fees through fees of another nature, and this measure has already obtained the green light from the MEQ.

We can ask who profits from these neoliberal policies, for if the PLQ affirms that it works "at the service of Québécois"³ (it is not specified that the party works at the service of Québécoises - sorry girls), it is certainly not through under-financing education that the party will assure the well-being of the population. On the contrary, it is moreover the interests of a few financial elites and corporate employers that our dear government seems to be dedicated to. Effectively, if the unveiling of the Séguin budget last June was far from unanimously supported by the Québec population, the Conseil du patronat du Québec (CPQ) was highly enthusiastic. Its president, Gilles Taillon, affirmed that "the first of the winning conditions for the application of the CPQ's plan is the arrival of a government in power in Québec whose program responds, in many respects, with the demands of the business world"⁴.

The CPQ, an organization which defends the interests of corporate

employers and the business world, developed a plan several years ago whose aims include a review of the role of the state, a rethinking of taxation and service sector reforms. The Liberal program is strongly inspired by the CPQ's recommendations, especially with respect to the size of the state. Thus, if the CPQ proposed to



considerably reduce the size of the state - thereby allowing for the interference of the private sector in the public sector - the PLQ has found its frontline army.

In the education chapter, it is interesting to draw a parallel between the PLQ program and that of the CPQ. The Council affirms in its 2002-2003 Action Plan that "in the era of the knowledge-based economy, the winning societies are those who are based on a qualified and well-trained workforce (...). We believe that a serious attempt must be made to review the organizational mode of educational services, as well as the structure of our system, notably in professional and technical training. We are also of the opinion that the de-freeze on university education fees cannot wait any longer"⁵. We can see that the Liberal Government's plan of action in education corresponds well to that of the CPQ. Accordingly, it becomes false to affirm that the Liberal Party works at the service of the Québec population. Mr. Charest's organization responds more to a desire for productivity and competitiveness of the Québec business sector.

If the CPQ is a very influential lobby force in terms of the Liberal administration, other organizations have also manifested their desire to see the Québec education system liberalized.

For example, the Montreal Economic Institute (MEI), with the introduction of its school vouchers, hopes to "introduce a market mechanism inside the public education system in order to ensure its optimal functioning"⁶. The Montreal Chamber of Commerce, on its part, has also positioned itself in favour of the liberalization of Québec's universities.

sector in order to increase available funding. It also proposes liberalizing school fees in order to reach out to the average Canadian and to render universities more heterogeneous⁷.

In the end, the Québec Liberal Party defends its actions as being in the interest of Québécois. Nevertheless, it would be fairer to say that with respect to education, the new government has oriented its social policies to suit the interests of the Québec corporate elite.

¹ Parti libéral du Québec, *Égalité des chances et réussite en éducation*, document de travail, mars 2003

² CAUCHY, Clairandrée. « Une douzaine de cégeps seront déficitaires », *Le Devoir*, jeudi 28 août 2003

³ *Un gouvernement au service des Québécois*, titre du plan d'action préélectoral adopté par les membres du Parti libéral du Québec lors du Conseil général tenu à Montréal les 27, 28 et 29 septembre 2002.

⁴ TURCOTTE, Claude. *Le CPQ voit l'avenir avec optimisme*, *Le Devoir*, vendredi 13 juin 2003, p. B9

⁵ Conseil du patronat du Québec. *Pour bâtir un Québec prospère*, programme d'action 2002-2003

⁶ BERNIER, Sylvain. *Le choix de l'école pour tous: un projet de bons d'étude adapté au Québec*, Cahier de recherche de l'Institut économique de Montréal, février 2003

⁷ Chambre de commerce du Montréal métropolitain. *Pour des universités montréalaises plus dynamiques*, mémoire soumis au ministre de l'Éducation, M. François Legault, 14 décembre 1999

Accordingly, in a memoir presented by former Education Minister François Legault, it suggests maintaining a state contribution in financing universities juxtapositioned with the introduction of a larger component of market logic and complementary support from the private

DID YOU KNOW THAT...

AT UQÀM, THE EDUCATION COMMISSION (A TOP-LEVEL DECISION-MAKING BODY) CREATED A SUB-COMMITTEE CHARGED WITH STUDYING A POSSIBLE INCREASE IN ADMINISTRATIVE FEES. HERE IS A SNEAK-PREVIEW OF WHAT THEY'RE DISCUSSING AT THE MOMENT:

- APPLYING EXTRA FEES FOR LATE REGISTRATIONS
- APPLYING FEES FOR ALL EXAMINATION REQUESTS ON GRADE APPEALS, WITH REIMBURSEMENTS FOR ACCEPTED APPEALS
- CALCULATING GENERAL FEES - WHICH ARE CURRENTLY FIXED AT \$20 - BY CREDIT FROM NOW ON.

THIS INCLUDES SCHOOL FEES DISGUISED AND MANAGED BY THE UNIVERSITIES. THESE FEES ARE NOT SUBJECT TO THE TUITION FREEZE AND ARE SUBJECT TO INCREASES AT ANY TIME.

-APPLYING FEES FOR INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGIES (TIC). CONCRETELY, THIS TRANSLATES INTO USER FEES FOR INFORMATION AND AUDIO-VISUAL MATERIAL LABORATORIES.

THIS SUB-COMMITTEE WILL SUBMIT ITS REPORT DURING THE SEMESTER. WE HAVE NO KNOWLEDGE AT THE MOMENT OF WHAT INCREASES WILL BE APPLIED NEXT WINTER OR LATER.

STRIKE SPECIAL NUMBER

ON THE ROAD TO A STRUGGLE!



Mobilization

Continued from page 3

Direct Mobilization

This kind of mobilization is the most effective, but also the most demanding. The concept is very simple -- it consists of meeting people and talking directly to them. The demanding part is the discussions. Since you will talk to many people, you will have to be very well-informed and able to develop a solid argument. In using this more direct approach, your aim is to engage people in discussion, as well as to give them a pamphlet or invite them

to a meeting or event like the general assembly. This is an effective method because it reaches people individually and gives you an opportunity to inform people who might not otherwise have access to this information.

For this kind of mobilization, you can set yourself up pretty much anywhere. Pick busy areas that a lot of people pass through. Kiosks are also good mobilization tools. Stock them with as wide a variety of information as possible in order to make them accessible to as many people as possible, decorate them with banners, serve fair-trade coffee, etc....These are all good ways to get people's attention.

The Action is Just the Beginning.

At last, your campaign has succeeded and you have achieved your demands. This does not mean your work is over, however, because the strike is not an end in itself. The strike has to be linked to all sorts of actions.

The goal of a strike, or of many other kinds of initiatives (protests, concerts, etc.) is not necessarily the event itself. It is also to encourage a greater level of understanding and political engagement amongst the masses. It is often during the campaign or struggle itself that people become the

most receptive to new ideas. It is therefore part of your work during the campaign to gather many motivated people together to join you.

All of these tricks and tools are just the beginning of what it takes to bring a mobilization into action. The rest is in your hands. Experiment, analyze the results, and start again. This is always the best way to keep the movement progressing.

Good luck! We're on our way to a strike!

Federation

Continued from page 5

The Federation of CÉGEPs, however, now maintains that its mission must be realized. It is asking government to carry out the legislative and regulatory modifications required for the application of its development plan (track 1). In the spirit of the Federation, the principal mission of CÉGEPs is to qualify and train graduates in sufficient numbers to respond to the needs of the job market and fill worker shortages. It also aims to "sustain the competitiveness of small and medium-sized enterprises" (pg.56). This is not surprising, as the Federation considers colleges to be enterprises submitted to the rules of the market. We are far from a mission of educating, instructing and socializing...

How can the Federation of CÉGEPs propose such a diversion from the colleges' mandates if the mission which governed at the time of their creation and was reaffirmed by the The Estates General on Elections in 1996? The

FAC maintains that such a deep reform in the collegial sector could not have been made without a social debate.

In our opinion, the Federation of CÉGEPs cannot go alone at its project of the network's development for long. Already, the President of the Conference des recteurs et des principaux des universités du Québec (CREPUQ), Pierre Lucier, warned against attempts to make proposals which touch other teachers in other institutions without making any consultations beforehand (Le Devoir, March 1st and 2nd, 2003, page A-5). As for us, we would be happy to respond to the invitation launched by the Federation of CÉGEPs to debate its development plan and our vision of collegial education in the context of the next collective agreement (page 72).

1. "It is necessary to aim to assure that all establishments receive financing adapted to their mission of superior education. In this spirit, it is particularly important to obtain global and transferable funding from the MEQ (...)" (pg.78). (Our bold)

N.B.: The text in parentheses is pulled from the Federation of CÉGEPs document "Le cégep, une force d'avenir pour le Québec"

Review

Continued from page 2

after the MDE had called it) had to join in, or else they would have suffered the political consequences. All that they could hope to do was to co-opt the movement and to make sure that it caused as little damage as possible to their ally, the Parti Québécois.

The MDE, since it had smaller numbers, then chose to call on a coalition of student associations on strike to coordinate the movement. In spite of it this, the federations quickly took control and became the only ones negotiating with the government. The result: the movement deviated from its original ideas and handcuffed by the agreement between the Ministry of Education and the student federations.

Lessons to learn from 1996 for this fall's mobilization

With regard to 1996 and the attitude of the MDE in the leadership of the mobilization, ASSÉ cannot just leave the movement and let it continue on its own. ASSÉ must ensure a strong leadership. Neither the strike nor ASSÉ are ends in themselves; they are tools. ASSÉ possesses a much greater political and ideological weight than the MDE could have hoped for in its time. The same can be said of resources.

ASSÉ must therefore give itself the means to ensure the fall mobilization and avoid at all costs the exploitation and sabotage that the federations are very capable of accomplishing. Let's not be mistaken: we don't fight to merely to obtain a

blueprint law, but against the rise in fees and for free tuition. ASSÉ will have to ensure that the power of the general assemblies is understood, and that they hold the last word. Furthermore, coalitions of local student associations, who are not members of ASSÉ but who support or relate to its action plan in their own plan of action and mobilization platform of mobilization, will have to make a choice to support this strike at all costs and to prevent the FEUQ and the FECQ from once again selling off the rights of Québec students at a discount price in secret negotiations with the government.

The idea of unity of the student movement at all cost is nothing but aberration and garbage. True unity can only come from below, from general assemblies and on a base of common demands and actions. Higher-level alliances between organizations who refuse union democracy and scorn the student population can only turn the student movement and the strike into wasted efforts. Without necessarily drowning in sectarianism while unilaterally and hegemonically imposing its vision of the mobilization to come, ASSÉ must stand its ground and ensure the leadership of the movement. It must also recognize its allies and work together with them. And while it may be more difficult - but nonetheless necessary - ASSÉ must identify its enemies and stop them in their tracks. We already know that the leadership of the FEUQ and the FECQ will do everything to limit the size of the demands and the mobilization. Their actions in the last few weeks, as well as their demands, are a testimony to this. It's up to us now to respond accordingly and to choose our side.

To join us

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What is ASSÉ

"ASSÉ" is the acronym for the **Association for Solidarity Among Student Unions. It groups together provincial student associations at both the college (CÉGEP) and university levels. ASSÉ aims to gather students across the province to call for:**

A Free and Public Education

For ASSÉ, education must be free because it is a right and not a privilege. As such, post-secondary education must not be reserved for an elite but accessible to all individuals, regardless of their class, origins, gender, sexual orientations or skin colour.

Education must be public because it is the role of society to ensure education and training for all. School must be a place for educating citizens and not reserved strictly for service-oriented training. It is also the responsibility of the government to fully finance education - and we have a government that has run from its responsibilities since it butchered almost two million dollars from the Québec education budget in 1994.

No counter-reforms

In keeping consistent with the neoliberal reforms raging in all four corners of the globe, the government of Québec has carried out a series of counter-reforms in post-secondary education since 1993. From the Robillard Reforms to the Legault Plans, the State has sought to instil competition between different CÉGEPs and universities in order to create a market for education. These changes fit very well into the demands of international capitalist institutions such as the OECD, the IMF and the World Bank - as well as the numerous existing and planned free-trade agreements (NAFTA, FTA, MAI, EU, etc.).

In practice, these attacks take the form of

performance contracts at universities and success and graduation plans at CÉGEPs. The direct effects of these measures are cutbacks and reforms in university programs (reductions in course banks, the abolition of programmes, rising professor/student ratios, etc.) and habilitation in CÉGEPs (destruction of the college network, diploma rates, increases in AECs, etc.). The general framework for diplomas is being shattered in order to emphasize overly-specialized training.

Militant unionism

For ASSÉ, students are young workers in training. It is from this theoretical base that militant student groups have organized on union bases in Québec since the 1960s. The base of union organizing is the General Assembly (GA). This is why the GAs held by student union members mandate and delegate comrades to the ASSÉ Congress, its highest body. The Inter-Regional Council, the Regional Councils, the Executive Committee, the Women's Committee and the different Working Committees are all found under the Congress. The work of these bodies must be based on training, informing, raising awareness and mobilizing. All members must feel involved.

Another fundamental principle of militant unionism is that a battle must be fought in order to win. There is an irreconcilable antagonism between the interests and needs of students and the will of local administrators and the Ministry of Education. Demands cannot be met without a shift in the balance of power. Negotiating without building this shift can only lead to failure. Practices like lobbying, co-managing and concerting lead automatically to a collaboration and an integration into the machinery of the state. This strategies caused incredible damage during the 1990s (tuition unfreezes, zero deficit, the Robillard Reform, Legault Plan, etc.).

