

Will we be accomplices of tuition rise?

Ultimatum reveals the three scenarios of the minister

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On March 30th, Quebec's finance minister Raymond Bachand announced that tuition fees would be raised in 2012. The amount of that raise remained however a secret: the government announced a "national consultation" would be held to determine it. In October, the "partners" of the education system will get together to share their point of view on the subject. As the Courchesne-Bachand duo itself seems to admit, it will only have the name of a consultation: it has long been decided that tuition fees would be raised in 2012. Ultimatum has obtained the scenarios that will be proposed during this meeting: a rise of \$500 a year, until tuition fees reach 80% of the Canadian average, attain Canadian average (\$5,350) in a four years period, or modulate tuition fees by study program. Do you want to get poorer, or a lot poorer? This is the choice Quebec's government wants to impose on students. We refuse to make that choice.

The strategy is not new to the Charest government: in June 2009, the minister Sam Hamad organized the pompous solidarity meeting, inviting the government's partners to discuss about the next plan against poverty. The maneuver was brilliant: the plan coming out of this exemplary exercise would have an incontestable legitimacy. A year later, when the plan came out, minister Hamad emphasized, triumphant, that it came out of a large consultation of Quebec's society. Of course, the historic demands of community organisms and unions were forgotten in the plan, while the priorities of CEOs and private foundations were its core. The trap was closing shut.

Little more than a year later, minister Courchesne attempted the same maneuver. Obviously, the goal stays the same: giving political legitimacy to a long-established decision. The rise of tuition fees is the masterpiece of the liberal's political agenda: the meeting over it is only there to give it a legitimate appearance. What is really asked of us is to negotiate with the government the amount of a tuition rise that will force thousands of Quebec students out of university, whatever the amount of that rise. ASSÉ, on its part, refuses to play a part in this masquerade. We firmly reject any hike of tuition fees, whatever the amount. The reason is simple: we must tend to a more accessible university, to the elimination of tuition fees, to free education.

Meeting in congress last spring, the student societies members of ASSÉ clearly announced their strategy: ASSÉ will do all in its power to block this government meeting. The office of minister Line Beauchamp was occupied on September 24th and it was only a warning, a small insight in our determination. ASSÉ will be

EXCLUSIVE! 3 scenarios of tuition rise that will be proposed by the minister of education at the University partners' meeting.

1st scenario :

Rise of \$500 a year until fees reach 80% of Canadian average.

2nd scenario :

The modulation of fees depending on study program.

3rd scenario :

Reaching Canadian average of tuition fees (\$5,350) in four years.

For Canadian and International students :

Who knows what they will do, but when the government attacked Quebec students in the past, they attacked Canadian and international students even more.

more numerous, more noisy and more disturbing as long as the Charest government doesn't come back on its decision to raise tuition fees in 2012. We will follow the government and its officers to their offices, to their illegitimate consultation.

We shall not play the liberal government's game simply because the results of the consultation are already known. We call on you: let's show minister Beauchamp and her colleagues that we refuse to negotiate our path to poverty, that we refuse any increase of tuition fees. To block this, we must organize. We must mobilize ourselves as we seldom have in Quebec history. Let's admit it; this rise is the last chance: as we've seen in other provinces, a massive rise of tuition fees systematically destroys student societies. When a year will cost \$5,000, who will have the time to fight? Who will want to fight?

This mobilization starts now!

THE RIGHT TO EDUCATION IS NOT FOR SALE!

Actions will be held this year to cancel this false consultation and its tuition raise!

2012 : The end of accessibility in Quebec

50,000 people ejected from university!

By Philippe Ethier, student in sociology and Élise Carrier-Martin, student in political science

Translation by Nicolas Chatel-Launay, student in environmental biology

More than ever, the Charest government seems determined to impose a new increase of tuition fees to the student community starting in 2012. It was actually announced in the Bachand budget that came out last March. Since then, not a week passes without having a university principal, a minister, one of the “lucides”, a neoliberal or a right-wing think tank defending the increase of students’ contribution as a necessity for the conservation of education’s quality and its competitiveness, when not simply for education’s survival. The ultimate goal would be the Canadian average, with or without a modulation by program. Against this unprecedented attack to the right to education, the student response must be as unprecedented. We must refuse to oppose accessibility and quality.

Keep in mind that in 2007, the government has raised tuition fees: an increase of \$100 a year until 2012. In the end, this hike of 30% will bring annual tuition from \$1,668 to \$2,168. Even more, according to a study conducted by the ministry of education, this \$500 hike will reduce student population by 6,000 to 13,000 people. If tuition fees were ever to reach Canadian average, 50,000 people would have to renounce a university degree for one reason, they are not rich enough¹.

We must acknowledge that a hike of tuition fees will have an immense impact on accessibility: it will eliminate the poor from our schools, going against the right to education of thousands of people, a right that is recognized around the world as one of the fundamental rights. The studies are coherent with one another: when fees increase, students coming from low-income families tend to abandon school. As an example, when medical school fees were raised in Ontario from \$5,000 to \$14,500, the participation of students from low-income families dropped from 23% to 10%². Some will say the number of students did not diminish... There may not be fewer students, but they are not the same ones.

Accessibility is already in peril: tuition fees are used as a “deterrent fee”

If the government has renounced to its deterrent fee in the healthcare system, it doesn’t seem ready to abandon tuition fees while, in both cases, they are similar mechanisms sharing the same principles and impacts: raising cost to reduce accessibility. While the government claims that reducing dropout rates is one of its priorities, its actions tell a different story. We have to recognize that all tuition fees are a barrier to academic perseverance. The data from Statistics Canada is quite interesting: financial obstacles are the reason behind 70% of postsecondary abandons³.

A study from the research and socio-economic information institute (IRIS),

that was recently published, demonstrates that the proportion of students coming from families earning less than \$25,000 diminished everywhere in Canada after a countywide increase of tuition fees that occurred in the beginning of the ‘90s. While in 1995, their proportion was of 30%, in 2001, only six years later, that proportion diminished to 20%⁴.

The fact is that the imposition of tuition fees, would they be of \$50, \$500 or \$5,000, is the result of a choice: the choice to favor the richest and to impede knowingly and voluntarily a part of the population from having an education. In that way, any increase follows the same principle and goes against accessibility and the right to education. We must reaffirm that only free education can really guaranty the existence of an education system accessible to all and without any economic discrimination.

With this new tuition hike, the Charest government attacks not only education, but the totality of Quebec’s system. Education’s accessibility is still the center of Quebec’s social justice. What will become of the province when all its universities will be reserved to the richest? More than ever, the students’ movement must mobilize itself to block this new attack and to oppose it with our social project: a public, free, accessible and good education!

1 VIERSTRAETE, Valérie. Les frais de scolarité, l’aid-financière aux études et la fréquentation des établissements d’enseignement postsecondaire, pour le MELS, juin 2007.

2 HURTEAU, Philippe et Éric MARTIN. Tarification de l’éducation postsecondaire ou gratuité scolaire?, IRIS, 2007, p. 4.

3 W. BOWLBY, Jeffrey et Katheryn Mc- MULLEN. À la croisée des chemins: premiers résultats de la cohorte des 18 à 20 ans de l’Enquête auprès des jeunes en transition, Statistique Canada, Ottawa, 23 janvier 2002, numéro au catalogue 81-591-XIF.

4 HURTEAU, Phuilippe, Guillaume HÉBERT et Francis FORTIER. La réolution tarifaire au Québec, IRIS, 2010, p. 24.

What is ASSÉ?

Association for Student Labour Solidarity (ASSÉ) is a union-type organization that, throughout Quebec, regroups approximately 42,000 members in multiple student societies of the collegiate and university level. It is the continuation of a movement that, in the last 40 years, has been an important actor of Quebec’s society, an agent of social progress in education.

For the right to education

ASSÉ considers education as a fundamental right in society and not as a privilege. In that view, every member of the society has a right to a free, public, accessible and secular education of quality, free of any form of discrimination.

For an efficient strategy: confrontation syndicalism!

In Quebec, as anywhere else, it was through important struggles that the people obtained most social measures.

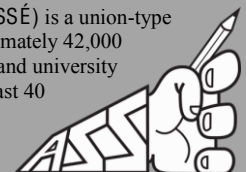
It implies the development of dynamic and democratic syndical practices. For this reason, we must multiply the occasions to debate, to collectively analyze our society, to accept the confrontation of ideas and to give a democratic space for decision making. General assemblies are the best method to attain this goal.

ASSÉ is formed of its members!

Inside ASSÉ, every student society is sovereign. The decisions taken by student representatives at the Congress do not automatically become resolution of each member union, it must first be accepted by each student society’s general assembly.

United to be stronger!

The best way to support and to participate to this vast movement is by joining ASSÉ’s activities, by getting involved in its structures, by going to general assemblies and by promoting the affiliation of your Student society to ASSÉ! Being part of ASSÉ means sharing your union’s resources with other unions as to defend the right to education. Being a member means contributing in a vast and democratic movement that permits, on a provincial scale, an efficient fighting strategy.



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