

ULTIMATUM

THE ASSOCIATION FOR SOLIDARITY AMONG STUDENT UNIONS (ASSÉ) NEWSPAPER

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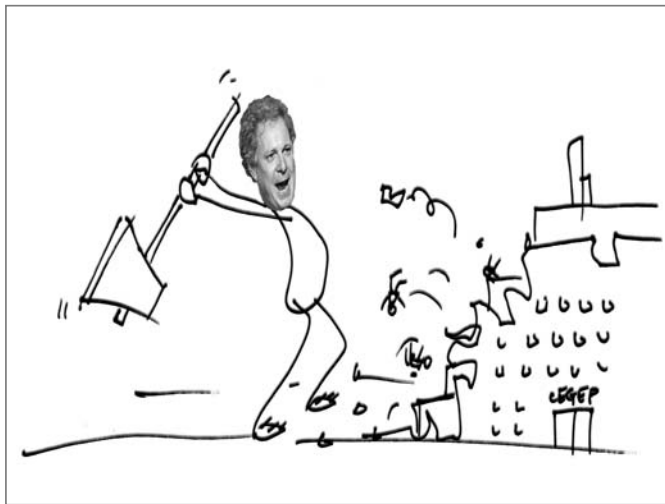
The Conversion of \$103 million of Bursaries into Loans

The worst attack on the right to education in 10 years !

François Baillargeon, Undergraduate History Student and Xavier Lafrance, Undergraduate Political Science Student at UQAM

If the fees faced by students hamper the accessibility of post-secondary education, the financial aid system in its present form has the same effect. Many prospective students refuse to begin post-secondary studies knowing that a debt of several thousand of dollars – if not tens of thousands of dollars – lies ahead. The reforms and cutbacks recently imposed by the Quebec Liberal Party greatly accentuate student indebtedness and, for a growing number of students, restrict the possibility of pursuing studies.

The poorest are the excluded. Due largely to recent cutbacks, the financial aid system as it exists today is inherently discriminatory against the less wealthy. It does not work to eliminate profound socio-economic inequities: it reproduces them in many ways. Student indebtedness has, for example, impacts on how far stu-



dents progress in their studies as well as the areas and types of education they choose. It discourages the pursuit of studies which take more time to complete and encourages technical and professional training, which lead quickly to employment. Moreover, financial insecurity and vulnerability greatly inhibit conditions of study which favour success and perseverance. In all cases, it is a dynamic which keeps working-class people in the lower ranks of the employment market and the social hierarchy.

A critical analysis of financial aid for students

Let's take a closer look at mechanisms which, in the loans and bursary system, are responsible for these concerns. As we progress, we will highlight the recent reforms and their consequences.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 6, SEE CONVERSION

CEGEPs the Target of (neo)Liberal Re-engineering

By Julia Posca, Undergraduate Sociology Student at UQAM

Judging from the events of the summer, the months to come should be decisive in the development of the public CEGEP network. At the impetus of the *Fédération des commissions scolaires du Québec's (FCSQ)* November 2003 publication of a performance report on Quebec's education system, collegial establishments have been called into question for once and for all. Denis Bédard, the report's author, literally proposes abolishing CEGEPs by combining both professional and technical training while distributing the two years of pre-university education between secondary school and university. For the author, the proposed re-modeling is the solution "which would have the most significant economic advantage. Not only would it improve the efficiency of administrative spending, it would also reduce expenses across the board due to the improved the cost-effectiveness of the entire educative system." (www.fcsq.qc.ca) Bédard's argument, structured according to a logic based purely on accounting, completely overshadows the pertinence of a CEGEP system on the premise that its disappearance would bring about a billion dollars in savings for the government.

Fortunately, the commotion and the grumbling created in the CEGEP environment by the release of the report was calmed by the Honourable Pierre Reid, Minister of Education, who affirmed that the abolition of CEGEPs was not on the Liberal agenda. Still preoccupied by the low success rate of the student population, however, the Minister declared that the collegial system would, without question, undergo changes in the months to come. And it was in view of remodeling the collegial system, and in a burst of unparallel democracy, that the Minister announced that a two-day forum on the CEGEP issue would be held.

Despite the controversy surrounding the fact that the forum was held too late (after the term had already finished), its lack of representativeness and the insufficient amount of time allocated for debates and speaking turns for those who were invited, the Minister released seven "promising courses of development" for the future "evolution" of the CEGEP system.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 8, SEE CEGEPS

EDITORIAL

Loans and Bursaries : It's Time to Fight Back !!

The Executive of the Association for Solidarity Among Student Unions (ASSÉ)

Once again, the right to education is under attack. The Liberal government is continuing its "re-engineering", this time by hitting students head-on with hundreds of millions of dollars in cuts to the financial aid budget and increasing the ceiling of the amount of aid granted in loans.

It's time to fight back! The recent "counter-reform" of the financial aid system is the latest on a long list of setbacks which the right to education has endured since the 90s. From the breach of the tuition fee "freeze" to cutbacks in hundreds of millions of dollars, from reforms favouring the privatization of education to multiplying ancillary fees, these setbacks have taken place without the large-scale student movement organizing and mobilizing necessary to stop them. The balance of power, therefore, between the student movement and the government has been leaning largely in favour of the latter over the last few years.

With this in mind, we can be sure that the school year which is beginning is pivotal. As the reforms of the loans and bursaries system and the CEGEP network clearly figure into a larger plan for the liberalization of tuition fees and the privatization of post-secondary education institutions, this year is crucial for the right to education. And it is also crucial for the student movement, which must put an end to the series of setbacks and block, by all means, the counter-reform of the financial aid system. Pushed to fall heavily into debt or to work, students will have less time, resources and energy to defend their interests. On the other hand, living conditions for students would improve dramatically if our demands regarding the cuts to the *Aide financière aux*

études (AFE) and the transformation of bursaries into loans were met. A victorious campaign leading to the abolition of cuts and moving towards the transformation of loans into bursaries would stimulate and revitalize student unionism. Yet apathy would allow the balance of power to tilt even more towards the state and business.

It is urgent to act!

In the face of the government's attacks, ASSÉ adopted a series of demands and a resolute but flexible plan of action during an Extraordinary Congress held last August 28th. This plan of action will foster a firm campaign to force the State to stand behind loans and bursaries but remain flexible enough for us to be prepared to fight on several fronts, as required by the current context (CEGEP network reforms, cuts in public services, privatization, etc.).

First and foremost, ASSÉ is demanding an end to the cutbacks, as well as to the reforms of the loans and bursaries system which Minister Reid



has put forward in view of a total conversion of all bursaries into loans. To all who label our demands as utopian, we respond that the measures we are fighting for are already in place in several European nations. Furthermore, the measures were a point on the Parti Québécois' very "respectable" programme (free education and pre wage-earning students) before it failed to be elected for the first time.

Following its Congress, ASSÉ also positioned itself for the preservation of the integrity of the CEGEP network and against the abolition of the State-regulated CEGEP diplomas (DECs), the fusion of collegial and university programs, and the integration of professional programs into secondary school education. Finally, ASSÉ is opposed to the hike in tuition fees for international students at Concordia and McGill universities.

In order for our demands to be met, a new balance of power must be built. Throughout the month of September, ASSÉ will work to inform the student population of the attacks that it is presently under. In order to do so, students will not only receive education materials but will be asked to complete a complaint form where they can describe their situation and the problems they face. They will also be encouraged to participate in their general assemblies to form their views and positions on the loans and bursary issues. These positions, as well as the information gathered through the complaint forms, will be used during a congress on September 25th and 26th to develop a platform which defines an ultimatum for the government. The congress will also define criteria which ASSÉ will use to react to the response given by Minister Reid to the ultimatum. If the ultimatum is refused, a congress will be held by October 25th, at the latest, to mount the pressure necessary to obtain our demands.

ASSÉ plans to make use of the protests around the Liberal Forum on October 13th and 14th to present our demands, in solidarity with the unions and social movements. To do so, meetings for reflections on the Charest government's pro-business and socially-destructive policies will be held locally and ASSÉ will either organize or participate in a demonstration against the Liberal Forum.

In the application of Reid's plan of action and in face of the catastrophic consequences of his counter reforms on the right to education, ASSÉ will not exclude any means for ensuring that its demands are met. Our means of pressure must escalate! We must begin immediately to gather our energies and prepare for a campaign for a general strike!

**Against student debt!
Against the cutbacks!**

**For the conversion of loans to bursaries!
For an accessible quality public education!**

A long struggle

The abolishment of student indebtedness is a historical demand of the student movement. The existence of the present financial aid regime and the fact that it hasn't been degraded until now is not due to chance or the good will of the State: It is the result of the struggles of the student movement over the course of the last decades.

Even during the first general student strike in 1968, students demanded a reform of loans and bursaries to permit greater access to post-secondary education. Their combativeness allowed them to obtain the reforms they had fought for.

Six years later, in 1974, the Bourassa government announced cuts to the financial aid regime. But, once again, the student movement's resistance and the organization of a general strike pushed the State to not only cancel the counter-reforms but also to make the improvements to the regime demanded by the

students.

Other large-scale student movement mobilizations in 1978 and 1988 brought about more victories and discouraged counter-reform projects to financial aid put forward by the State.

Remembering these struggles shows us the student movement's dedication to fighting against student debt. Moreover, the struggles show us that it is not only possible to fight the government's attacks but to win when students are conscious of their power and organize and mobilize to defend their interests.

Seeing that the balance of power has been leaning in favour of the State and business interests for a long time is not an excuse for us to be pessimists! We must analyse and understand the present context in order to make it work to our advantage. And, as the history of student struggle clearly shows us, this is more than possible!

EDUCATION

Students!! Beware of the "Dual-Status"!!

Florence Bergeron, Matane CEGEP Student

Free and Accessible Education for All: A principle to believe in and fight for! We're not utopians – we're very realistic!

We refuse to accept administrative regulations that discriminate against students. We're sorry, but education is a higher principle than that! Today we're denouncing an illegal practice that the CEGEP of Matane has applied since last year. By illegal, we mean that this practice does not adhere to any of the *Ministère de l'éducation's* (MEQ) laws.

To set the context...

We're speaking about control over school attendance here. In 2001-2002, the MEQ released a report in order to better control CEGEP students' class attendance. In a set of "terms of reference" outlined in the report, the MEQ proposed that CEGEPs adopt an internal policy which would require that students prove that they attend their courses. It was following this proposal that the deadlines of September 20th for the fall term and February 15th for the winter term were established as ultimatums for students to prove that they had been attending their classes since the beginning of the semester. After these dates, if students hadn't withdrawn from their courses themselves, the CEGEP would reserve the right to do it for them in compliance with the application of an internal policy which had been approved by the MEQ. **Furthermore, students "deregistered" by the CEGEP after the cut-off date would receive a failed course grade at the end of the term on their transcript.** This would mean a dual-status (full time on paper but part-time in reality) for students. In other words, these students would not be able to attend their courses because they'd been deregistered - regardless of their own decision - but they would receive a failing grade which would suggest that they were still enrolled. The CEGEP Management has responded by maintaining that this is the penalty reserved for irresponsible students who do not withdraw from courses themselves. We can safely say that the repercussions of this practice are quite unpleasant for students.

Repercussions

Let's take the example of Xavier, a full-time student enrolled at the Matane CEGEP. Due to a series of problems, Xavier is unable to attend his classes at the beginning of the semester. However, instead of choosing to drop out of his courses, he plans to catch-up on his work to keep from failing. He wants to avoid falling behind in his education because he hopes to maintain a good "Cote-R", which is important for his admission into university. The CEGEP, having come to the conclusion that Xavier doesn't attend his classes, convokes him to the academic advisor's office to inform him that he will be deregistered from a course. After being deregistered, Xavier loses his full-time status and is forced to pay part-time student fees for his courses. Even worse, due to his part-time status, interest on his student loans begins accumulating. In order not to fall far in debt, Xavier is forced to work and study at the same time. In the end, Xavier drops out of school because he is incapable of combining full-time work at minimum wage with his course work. And who knows if Xavier will enrol again next semester? Is it not better to allow students to maintain their full-time status and benefit from financial aid than to pull them out of a course and deregister them without their approval, only to see them drop out of school?

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The Matane CEGEP has been applying this measure since last year. And last

year several students fell victim to this obligatory deregistration process. In three cases students lost their full-time status but were billed for all their courses.

Following a student's complaint during the winter semester in 2004, we began working on this issue. **We made contact with other CEGEPs to see if this practice was being applied throughout Québec.** The dual-status student: full-time on the grade report and part-time in reality, otherwise known as deregistration from a course and a failing grade on the transcript, is the most flagrant aspect of this measure. Other CEGEPs have already abolished this measure following both student complaints and pressure from student organizations, in recognition of that fact that it is not a MEQ requirement but a proposal made to CEGEPs. Certain CEGEPs reimbursed students who had lost their full-time status and defrayed their tuition fees. **We are convinced that this practice can end.** We consider it the student's right to decide to withdraw from a course that he is not attending. The CEGEP does not have the right to interfere with the student's choice. And the student who has not, for whatever reason, attended courses at the beginning of the semester, has the right to begin studying again to obtain good grades. Losing a few marks is much better than a zero on a transcript.

We discussed this issue in a mixed committee with management and we have been met with a refusal to accept our three demands. We demand that this discriminatory measure be repealed, that the additional fees incurred in the three recorded cases be reimbursed or cancelled and that failing grades be eliminated from all transcripts.

Faced with our demands concerning this illegal practice, the management could never prove which law made this measure a MEC requirement. We want to warn students to look out for this practice this year and ask them to fight the CEGEP's compulsory deregistration.

For more information, don't hesitate to contact the Matane CEGEP Student Association and we can fight this together!
For a quality, free and accessible education for all!



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NATIONAL

Question Authority

David Bernans, Concordia Student Union

When Concordia BoG member and BCP President John Parisella got caught up in the federal advertising scandal last spring, the university administration supported him, quite literally, without question. The statement issued in Parisella's defense by Concordia's PR department said, "[his] integrity and professionalism are beyond question in principle as well as in our extensive experience of him."

Yet Sheila Fraser's February 2004 Audit suggests we should posing some pointed questions to Mr. Parisella. In the absence of any competition for \$65.7 million in advertising contracts awarded to BCP by Tourism Canada, Fraser concluded: "In our opinion, advertising contracts were awarded to BCP on a sole-source basis. There is no assurance that the government obtained the best value for these expenditures."

Fraser also had issues with a \$1.52 million contract between BCP and Health Canada signed on March 28 2002 for work to be completed three days later on March 31 2002. In fact when the contract was signed the work was already finished and the BCP-produced commercials had been on the air since March 3 2002.

So while the Rector's cabinet may be content to remain silent, it should forgive the rest of us who, following the lead of the Auditor General, ask a few questions. On the top of the list would be a query about any connection between the \$70,000 in Liberal Party donations made by BCP and the awarding of lucrative advertising contracts.

Universities have always had well-connected millionaires like Mr. Parisella on their Boards of Governors, but in recent years these corporate connections have become a greater cause for concern. As corporations acquire more power and influence, as corporate corruption becomes more rampant (witness Enron, WorldCom, Nortel, etc.), and as public-private partnerships are increasingly called upon to pick up the slack caused by cuts to public funding, the vigilance of independently minded students, professors and community members is more important than ever.

I have written elsewhere about the dangers of dealing with companies like BCE, Nortel, Pratt & Whitney and BioChem Pharma, making a point of alerting people to the shady actions of these Concordia partners. These companies have profited from the murder of union activists in Colombia, the shelling of Palestinians in the Occupied Territories, and continued inaction on the HIV/AIDS epidemic in the Third World. Rector Frederick Lowy, Engineering and Computer Science Dean Nabil Esmail and even the *Montreal Gazette* have criticized me for airing Concordia's dirty corporate laundry in public. The Rector even called on the provincial government to take legal action against the CSU for publishing my research. But interestingly, nobody has taken issue with any of the facts I presented. There is a simple explanation for this: all the facts are true and well documented.

CONVERSION

Calculating aid

In general, the amount of aid to which a student is entitled is calculated according to the following formula: allowable expenses minus contributions from parents or spouses, plus contributions from the beneficiary.

To begin, when the aid to be accorded is determined, the calculation of basic allowable expenses is so small that it pushes beneficiaries to the brink of poverty. Moreover, the amount of financial aid granted to students is reduced according to the salary of the parents, or a "parental contribution". For many, however, this "parental contribution" is non-existent (only an estimated half of all university students actually receive a parental contribution; more than 35% of those who do receive less than a thousand dollars, which is often far from the amount used for student aid calculations). When applicable, a "spousal financial contribution" is also considered in order to reduce the amount granted. Once again, this calculation is made without bothering to verify if a contribution actually exists. In addition to being constituted on completely arbitrary presumptions, which deny student aid beneficiaries essential funds, the effect of the criteria used for calculations is a systematic consolidation of the dependency of young adults on the "family institution", be it parents or spouses. This can only rest on a very optimistic, if not idealistic, vision of the family, which is often not the place of cozy support and blossoming that the Ministry of Education would like to believe exists. And it is even less so when burdened with economic dependency.

If the calculation of allowable expenses does little to promise more than poverty for the beneficiaries, the financial aid program fails to allow them to improve their living conditions in any significant way. This is because beneficiaries must also provide a personal contribution as soon as they begin working. The equivalent of approximately 50% of their

salaries is deducted from the aid that they would have been entitled to without working, which often means a real wage as small as approximately four dollars per hour. Not surprisingly, it is the bursaries which are cut first. This deduction is no more or less than a disguised tax allocated according to a regressive rate which touches students from working-class backgrounds.

Bursaries, hikes in student loan ceilings and debt

On April 30th, Minister Reid announced the results of the last modifications to the financial aid regime. The most significant reform was a raise in the ceilings of the amount of student aid granted in loans. Ceilings determine the amount of financial aid allocated in the form of loans before the beneficiary has the right to a bursary. Changes in the ceilings will result in a conversion of approximately \$100 billion from bursaries into loans. The savings will finance, on one hand, \$63 million in cuts to the bursary envelope announced during the release of the budget last March 30th. They will also compensate for the demand for financial aid, which has been grown in relation to previous years.

A new variable in the calculation of loan ceilings

Cutbacks aside, the recent regulatory modification has also brought about qualitative changes which could be crucial. From now on, loan ceilings will be calculated by adding a (fixed) basic amount to different (variable) fees required by educational institutions. In the end, ceilings will be calculated in relation to tuition fees. The regulation, in other words, allows for debts to automatically adjust and rise according to increases in tuition fees.

It is important to note that the measure provides a framework which makes increases in tuition fees more likely and moves us closer towards a policy of complete liberalization. This is a necessary step towards the creation of a market for education where institutions competing with one another would offer an education of varying qualities at dif-



ferent prices. As colleges and universities would be permitted to demand different levels of ancillary fees, the dynamic which would emerge would deeply affect the basis of our education system. This policy, however, is promoted by the very liberal and influential Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), which advises and steers governments across the world.

Conclusion

In the short term, it is essential to formulate a platform for the campaign before us which articulates one or several immediate demands while maintaining a long-term perspective. It is not enough to mobilize the student population in hopes of merely returning to our previous situation. This would be a narrow and limited vision. Our task is to construct a movement based on a fair and complete understanding of the issues and interests at stake. In conclusion, if we call for the immediate end of the devastating reforms to the Aide financière aux études (AFE), we must place our demands within a deeper critique of student debt. And we must do so in view of tackling the root of the problem by converting all loans to bursaries.

NATIONAL

The reaction of Parisella's BCP to independent researcher Jacques Keable's book on the federal sponsorship scandal produced an unmistakable feeling of déjà-vu for this muckraker. Keable's *Le dossier noir des commandites* (Sponsorships Dirt File) was targeted in a letter of warning issued by BCP's legal team on June 11 2004, demanding the publisher pull the book from the market. Keable's refusal to cave in to pressure tactics was exemplary: "They [BCP] have more financial means at their disposal than we do, but we have the law on our side. Last I heard, freedom of expression and freedom of the press still exist."

The existence of these freedoms is indeed instrumental for any attempt to question the continually growing influence of corporate interests on public education, but even more important is the existence of questioners. The Concordia administration has recently taken unprecedented draconian action to eliminate "troublemakers" from our campus. Some student and community activists have been banned from campus (most notably Jaggi Singh and Yves Engler), while others have been scared silent for fear of expulsion or arrest. To make student mobilizations more difficult, information tables have been banned from the Hall Building lobby (which has been transformed into a giant Starbucks). Undoubtedly, our incapacity to mobilize has given the administration confidence to push ahead with recent regressive changes to academic regulations (where "incomplete" grades become "failures") and the code of conduct, as well as the privatization of international student fees. Although opposition to these measures has been muted up to now, things can change quite unexpectedly.

Groups like ASSÉ can play a central role in our fight to keep independent critical thought alive at Concordia. Building alliances with students across Quebec in an organization committed to confronting the neoliberal education agenda will allow us to break out of our isolation. In unity there is strength.

*David Bernans is the CSU researcher/archivist although his opinions do not necessarily represent those of the CSU. He is also the protagonist featured in the satirical documentary about Paul Martin called **Waiting for Martin** (www.waitingformartin.ca). This article is based on a piece originally written for the CSU 2004-2005 Agenda. It was not published due to space constraints.*

The Hypocrisy of the Charest Government: Strike Back!

Julia Pocas, Undergraduate Sociology Student at UQAM

It has already been a year since the Quebec Liberal Party (PLQ) took over the reins of power in the province with Jean Charest at the head. Merely six months after its victory, the PLQ has already made its first stab at the destruction of the common good. Although Jean Charest insisted on the day after the election that his party would work to "build a government at the service of citizens", it was Finance Minister Yves Séguin who revealed the slogan of the PLQ's four-year mandate. When the budget was released in June, Séguin declared that "instead of asking what the State can do for us, let's ask what we can do without the State". The veil was lifted on the real face of the Party of "Change".

It is clear that straight from the beginning, the objective of the Liberal Party was to do more with less; or, in other words, reduce the size of the State (cut spending, reduce personnel, abolish services). What was promised was delivered, and the Liberal axe fell on health care, education, public daycare, the labour code, social housing and various cultural events and organizations, to name but a few. Jean Charest went forward with his programme, on the pretext that his party was elected on these same promises.

Meanwhile, the PLQ's hopes to "reinvent Quebec" (*Un gouvernement au service des Québécois*, 2002) have been, from the beginning, met with anger from many social movements. Different demonstrations have marked the growing opposition between the government and the people, including that of December 15th, 2003, which brought together all of Quebec's unions on

Parliament Hill. Other examples include the demonstration of April 14th, which marked one year since the PLQ election, and last May 1st, where various social organizations and unions marched in the streets of Montreal to express their dissatisfaction with the Liberal's governance.

In the face of this social uproar, several people have stated that demonstrating has no effect on the decisions of our elected representatives. An analysis, however, of the Liberal Party's strategy since it came into power proves the contrary. The Liberals, who began their term aggressively, have been forced to question their mode of implementing their backwards political agenda in order to calm the grumble of the masses. Instead of reviewing its programme, Jean Charest's party has modified its public relations strategy in order to make its neoliberal re-engineering an easier pill to swallow.

Since last spring, regional forums have been organized in order to "launch a dialogue and discuss together the reality, future and the choices presenting themselves in Quebec", as the Premier affirmed in February (*Le Devoir*, February 9th, 2004). With this vast undertaking of (false) popular consultation, the PLQ has found a way to carry out the political agenda it has developed under a cover of democracy and citizen participation.

As the autumn begins – marking what will certainly be a crucial time for the future of CEGEPs - it will be important not to be fooled by the fabricated strategy of Jean Charest's Liberals. We need only examine the forum on the future of CEGEPs to understand the "logic" hiding behind the Liberal

Matane News Brief

The Executive of the Matane CEGEP Student Association

On September 8th in Matane, eight people were elected to the Executive at the first General Assembly of the Matane CEGEP Student Association (AECM). A Newsletter Committee (*L'Interné*) and an Executive Committee for the Student Radio Station (CFOR) were also formed.

The year has begun in full force, and people seem motivated to revitalize student life. We have a much-appreciated staff person who gives us a hand, which is a great success in itself for our second year.

Besides the national campaigns (loans and bursaries, reform of the CEGEP network, etc.), we are negotiating an agreement between the association and the CEGEP management. Almost all the issues which directly and indirectly touch student life will be discussed. It just might stir things up!

We've also noticed that over the last few years the space created for extra-curricular activities has been progressively shrinking and now serves as a buffer-zone for all room-booking needs (teachers, psychologists, bank machines (!!!), etc.)

Outside of the student realm, a Wal-Mart is presently under construction in Matane. As if the economies of the regions wasn't bad enough! A group has finally formed to fight this capitalist mega-structure.

In brief, and hoping that all will go better at home and abroad, we wish you a good school year and a good year for our struggle !

stratagem (see *The Government Masquerade* on page 1). From the dubious exercises in public consultation we can conclude that in our political systems democracy does not mean "the power of the people", as the word's Greek origins imply. It signifies the ability of the government to make the people believe that they have power, when all decisions have already been delegated to a handful of deputies.

In reaction to the hypocrisy of the Charest government, we can safely say that a substantial social force has emerged since last year and must now consolidate itself. It is essential to fight for the survival of our social fabric, to overturn the masks of "democracy" worn by the Liberal Party and to demand that our social programmes be maintained and improved. We must not ask ourselves what we could do without the State – we must ask ourselves what we could do without Jean Charest!

W O M E N

A women's committee, what for?

Émilie Robidas, Sherbrooke College Student

At the beginning of every year, the Sherbrooke College Student Association (AECS) promotes its different committees: the women's committee, the mobilization committee, newsletter, environment, etc. While some committees are already active, others are less so. This was the case for the women's committee, which lacked organization and student involvement for several years.

A desire to improve and change the conditions faced by women led us to group together and revive the women's committee. Like other women, we have lived with gender inequalities since our earliest childhood years. The main goal of the committee is to make men and women more aware of the impacts of our social education.

In order to be fully active, we have already set the date of our general assembly on September 21st 2004 at 6 p.m. at the AECS office.

The main points to be discussed during the meeting include building links with other women's committees, student associations and community groups, as well as giving presentations. Popular education activities on women's issues – especially on the image of women, poverty and wage inequalities, loans and grants, *HLMS* (social housing) and single mothers – will also be on the agenda. Outreach and national-level mobilization for the pro-choice demonstration on October 3rd in Montreal, which will denounce the fact that women do not have the right to free abortions and demand this right, will also be discussed. We would like to have general assemblies in the week of the 8th of March 2005 with all college and university personnel and organise something at the national level...but all this is for later.

If you are interested and would like more information, you can go to the *Documentation* section of the ASSE web site (www.asse-solidarite.qc.ca) or contact us in Sherbrooke at (819) 346-1874.

TO COME...

Each year, those opposed to abortion - known as "prolifers" - gather in Montreal in front of fervent prochoice defender Dr. Henry Morgentaler's office to get their reactionary message out. This year, the Sorcières et Cyprine collectives are organizing a "counter-demonstration" in reaction to this demonstration. Come celebrate the right to abortion and, above all, the right of women to self-determination!

Join us at the **Feminist Festival** on Sunday, October 3rd from 11:30 pm to 3:00 pm at Lahaie Park (corner of Saint-Laurent and Saint-Joseph, near



source: www.drooker.com

IN THE PRESS

This summer, we read:

"Does multiculturalism justify the introduction of the Sharia into a country? A group of Muslims in Toronto think so and recently put a court of arbitration founded on Muslim Law into place in Ontario. The women of the community fear the return into force of religious principles which scorn their rights and are pressing the government to block the project" (*Voir*, Thursday, July 29th).

...And now:

"Salam Elminyawi, President of the Muslim Council of Montreal, recently sought the services of lawyers to study the possibility of establishing a mediation system based on Islamic principles in Quebec. 'The mediation would respect the legal framework applicable in Quebec. If the decision isn't contested before Quebec's tribunals, it would become enforceable', signalled Mr. Elminyawi, who recognized that the process was still in its earliest stages. " (*Le Devoir*, Thursday, September 9th)

INTERNATIONAL

Hegemony and International Organizations

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Hegemony at the international level implies a global society and state system where the dominant States and social forces maintain their position through an adherence to universal principles which must be accepted by a high proportion of social forces and subordinate states¹. As such, hegemony in a global political and economic system is not only based on inter-state regulation, but on a global concept of civil society as well. The current world is hegemonic and characterized by holding what we could call a "business civilization" at its head. It is sustained by a territorially-anchored central military agency which acts as a police force for the United States, the world's chief economic capitalist.² The use of such a concept evidently requires an explanation. The concept of civilization refers to an "intersubjective order (where) people understand the entities and principles upon which it is based in roughly the same way"³. Generally, in understanding the world this way, we reproduce it in the same manner.

We can begin by examining international organizations which actively participate in the global hegemonic process. International organizations (IOs) are, for neo-liberals, a means of increasing cooperation between states, and it is through the norms generated by these organizations that the international system is regulated. While the progressive norms of IOs are a means of creating new identities for constructivists, the neogramscian approach offers a substantially different reading.

For Robert W. Cox, a retired professor who once worked in international institutions, IOs are a mechanism for imposing and maintaining hegemony, which is understood to comprise a coercive and a consensual dimension. Effectively, IOs are the product of a world hegemonic order and embody rules which facilitate the expansion of this same order. Far from seeing international norms as neutral or progressive by nature, Cox, who worked for close to 25 years in various international institutions - notably the International Labour Organization (ILO) - considers IOs as a means of ideologically legitimizing norms. Moreover, it is principally through IOs that dominant social and economic forces are able to integrate the elites of peripheral zones, which is of primary importance for the maintenance and expansion of the hegemonic block. As such, counter-hegemonic forces which are created by a component of civil society (such as the anti-globalization movement, for example), are usually appropriated by IOs.⁴ We can think of a large number of NGOs who coordinated their actions with international or regional organiza-

tions out of financial necessity. As IOs "reflect[s] orientations favourable to the dominant social and economic forces"⁵, groups or organizations with whom they collaborate adopt fundamentally similar positions and do not question the established order, except occasionally through reformist ends.

Cox's reasoning does not stop at this point, but leads to an interesting conclusion. For him, "the world orders are grounded in social relations. We must shift the problem of changing world order back from international institutions to national societies"⁶. Following in the footsteps of Antonio Gramsci, Cox holds that bringing this struggle to the national level would imply the creation of a "war of positions". This "war of positions" stands in stark contrast to the "war of manoeuvre" put

porate powers in which the United Nations takes a subordinate but compliant place⁹. Cox agrees with the fact that, at the very least, UN institutions are a forum where the less powerful and influent have a voice which permits them to attempt to change or reform existing institutions. Nevertheless, demands for a new global economic order during the 70s demonstrated how this project and similar initiatives in developing countries and other subordinate forces were aborted or disguised¹⁰. Even if this does not eradicate the necessity of these forums, it introduces serious doubts as to the possibilities of seeing important structural transformations from UN agencies and other international institutions in the short term, with the possible exception of the G7, the OECD and similar forums. However, changes emanating from these forums are - and will continue to be - seriously doubted.



To conclude, the confidence that people once had in international organizations is largely eroded today, be it from scandals or failures in peacekeeping operations. The perception that efforts to put an international legal framework into place are actually veiled attempts made by the powerful to make the international system evolve in a desired direction are more and more shared among subordinate forces.¹¹ In this light, the only thing left to do is built a new world order...

¹ Robert W. Cox, « Structural issues of global governance : implication for Europe », in Stephen Gill (dir.), *Gramsci, historical materialism and international relations*, Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1993, pg. 265.

² Robert W. Cox, « Dialectique de l'économie monde en fin de siècle », *Études internationales*, vol. 21, n° 4, December 1990, pg. 698.

³ Robert W. Cox, « Structural issues of global governance : implication for Europe », in Stephen Gill (dir.), *loc. cit.*, pg. 265.

⁴ Robert W. Cox, « Gramsci, hegemony and international relations : an essay in method », in Stephen Gill (dir.), *loc. cit.*, pg. 62-63.

⁵ *Idem.*

⁶ *Idem.*

⁷ The historic block is the State/society complex.

⁸ This term, like the term « world economy », originates from Fernand Braudel

⁹ Robert W. Cox, *The political Economy of a plural world : Critics reflections on power, morals and civilization*, London : Routledge, pg. 39.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pg. 40.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pg. 36-37.

REMINDER

CEGEPs

The thread connecting all seven proposals was clearly the notion of autonomy. Effectively, while the idea of abolishing CEGEPs was dispelled by the Minister, decentralizing the management of the institutions was pushed largely to the forefront. The proposed plan was to award CEGEPs more responsibility in areas such as granting diplomas, program development and fundraising. This "area for possible development" was, however, far from gaining unanimous support. It was clear that the State's disengagement from the management of CEGEPs suggested a *laissez-faire* approach which, in the current context of an under-financed system, could have grave consequences for the quality, diversity and accessibility of collegial education.

Beginning this fall, we will see this "re-engineering", as it is known, articulated in the CEGEP system. If the government accords more autonomy to the management of CEGEPs, worrisome impacts could include, for example, the emergence of institutional *Diplômes d'études collégiales* (DECs, or diplomas of college studies) instead of the current diplomas, which are awarded by the State and adhere to national norms. This would provoke increased competition between schools, as each CEGEP would aspire to have a more valuable diploma. It could also lead to greater coherence between the needs of local enterprises, in terms of training and workforce, and the requirements for earning a technical DEC. The possible disappearance of general subject matter, judged by many to be useless for technical training in certain programs, would create a wedge between students in these programs and pre-university students with regards to general culture, the development of a critical spirit and autonomous thinking. As the scarcity of financial resources in the entire education system grows, we can also predict even more of the infamous partnerships with the private sector to which certain schools have already turned.

If the "disappearance of CEGEPs" thesis was turned down, the spirit of the proposals presented by the Minister at the June forum matches Bédard's report in that the planned reforms will not aim to improve the network but reduce government spending and its participation in the management of the institutions. As the collegial network is reformed, we can be assured that its integrity will be threatened. It is up to those who believe that CEGEPs are not simply workforce-production factories to defend and uphold their vision of what post-secondary education should be. This autumn, in parallel with a campaign on loans and bursaries, ASSÉ will launch a campaign to preserve the public CEGEP network. Join us in the struggle!

To join us
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514-390-0110
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Event

Demonstration at the government's *Forum des générations* in Saint-Augustin-de-Desmaures (near Québec City)

October 12th, 13th and 14th 2004



Association pour une
solidarité syndicale
étudiante

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, FTAA, 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.).