

# ULTIMATUM

THE ASSOCIATION POUR UNE SOLIDARITÉ SYNDICALE ÉTUDIANTE (ASSÉ) NEWSPAPER

Spring 2003, volume 2, number 4

## CÉGEPs : A Strength for the Future of Québec. Even while veering to the right of the network??

Héloïse Moysan-Lapointe, Student at the Maisonneuve CÉGEP

Last February 20<sup>th</sup>, the Federation of CÉGEPs made public its "Policy Directions for the Future", adopted by the colleges after a period of reflection which began in the fall of 2002. These policy directions are contained in a report entitled *CÉGEP – une force d'avenir pour le Québec*. The hundred-page document lists nine major policy directions which set forth 66 analytical reflections. What is worrying is that many of these analytical reflections suggest concrete strategic changes in the objectives of CÉGEPs which, instead of guaranteeing a better access, clearly accentuate their privatization, an unhealthy competition between individuals and a race without limits for increased performance. In its report, the Federation of CÉGEPs makes a clear choice: schools are at the service of the private enterprise. This vision of education leaves no place for all the elements which make it a true collective wealth, such as the development of critical thought, cultural enrichment and the acquisition of fundamental knowledge.

### Democracy

From the beginning, we are confronted with what is frankly a disconcerting vision of democracy. The large consultations that the Federation of CÉGEPs boasts about do not mention anyone but college presidents and presidents of Boards of Directors. The teachers are strikingly absent. Furthermore, students are only present in the form of statistics and ultra-targeted studies. In brief, all those who rarely put foot in a college door were consulted and all who are directly linked with teaching or learning, which are the activities at the heart of the *raison d'être* of colleges, were left out. It is, therefore, not surprising that the results obtained move closer to the latest OECD publications on education and further from the urgent need for CÉGEPs to, above all, offer an accessible and quality education.

### Commercialisation

With its development plan for the college network, the Federation of CÉGEPs positions itself more clearly than ever in favour of an education system completely subject to the laws of the market. Competitiveness, efficiency and performance are sought after, and the report claims that it is in attaining these goals that studies will be made more accessible and the quality of education will be improved. Accordingly, we come across many lines analytical reflections that propose different measures for strengthening competitive and commercial schools and



others which aim to dissolve barriers to privatization. For example, adapting general training courses to each technique and possibly reviewing the content of the French overview exam for each programme has been proposed. In brief, instead of offering general and universal knowledge, students are given competencies which will only be useful to their employers. Despite boasting about their merits, para-scholar activities are geared towards developing a feeling of belonging to a college or a program while increasing competitiveness in students. This type of interpretation of success is worrying, as it further opens the door to an education system based on an exclusive and elite class of students (the best should be happy about having the privilege of finding themselves in such an elite program...).

Another example of the commercial view of education held by the Federation of CÉGEPs is the way in which the question of the program approach is addressed. This approach has already been installed in all CÉGEPs. It allows different departments to work together on education programs, which is laudable,

but, in doing so, it accords less and less importance to each subject (or what the person teaching must transmit) and more importance to the programs (that is to say the objectives of future employers). In other words, it is more form than content. While it may seem far too easy to claim that course content is directly linked to the wishes of future employers, the report reveals and affirms how proud the CÉGEP network is to have their collaboration in the revision of programs. Indeed, on page 37, we read that "study programs are, from now on, revised and developed in strict collaboration with the work world and according to a competency approach."

Market-oriented schooling also pokes its nose out when the Federation discusses research and innovation. While it is commendable to open the door to research and innovation in the collegial network, the fact is that the goal of this research is to bring in funds and encourage a CÉGEP-private enterprise partnership. At the same time, we can ask ourselves how students benefit from this arrangement. The thirtieth analytical reflection articulated in the report is the following: "Obtain from the government of Québec **conditions for the creation of a society which values technological research at the collegial level, as a reflection of societies which value university research, with a view to value and commercialize CÉGEP research**" (we underline).

All these elements fit well in the rising and dominant neoliberalization trend, already in action in all sectors. Since the Québec and Youth Summit, the consensus has been to make Québec schools shine in the international scene. The Federation now embraces this idea. In a context of globalization and the imminent advent of the FTAA, it seeks to develop niches to be sure that Québec's CÉGEP network is competitive on the global market.

In this sense, it proposes developing a business of long-distances courses and encouraging the adoption of information technologies and communications in teaching in order to prepare for an effective commercialization of education services. Once again, the principles of universality, accessibility and quality are placed aside to open the door for trade and the free market.

All is more clearer than ever concerning the question of financing.

Continued on page 2

# EDITORIAL

## For a Real Accessible and Free Education!

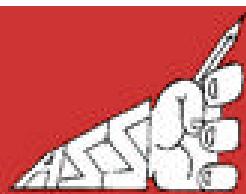
**The Executive of the Association for Solidarity Among Student Unions (ASSÉ)**

This is it – we're in election times. What better chance for different parties and their representatives to be heard. Students have an opportunity to stand before their demands and concerns in order to win concrete gains.

In the beginning of the term, ASSÉ launched a campaign on access to education. Among our demands are free schools, a massive reinvestment in education, a deep reform of the loans and bursary regime, a withdrawal of all quotas – including the abolition of the “cote-R” – and a minimum guaranteed income for all.

The Parti Québécois, after almost ten years in reign, has succeeded in creating havoc. Cuts of two million dollars in education, the establishment of conditional funding (performance contracts for universities and success plans for CÉGEPs), an increased presence of the private sector in our institutions, and more! This same government has also chopped the loans and grants program, which was under-financed in the first place! The effect of all these measures was to submit our education system to the logic of competition and profitability. And now the logic of the market is doing its work. We are witnessing program reforms and downsizing, an increase in the number of students in course groups, etc. We have a whole record!

The privatization process has clearly made its first cut into education. We have to react with force and vigour to make sure that the student voice is heard and listened to. In this electoral madness, the press and the parties cannot drown out or silence a wide-reaching mobilization. Access to education for all, free school and the end of student indebtedness are values we hold and must defend. Students are full citizens and hold the right to express their visions of society and the system within which they evolve.



**Association pour une  
Solidarité Syndicale  
Étudiante**

All reproduction and/or diffusion of information contained in the present newsletter is strongly recommended and warmly applauded as long as the source is mentioned!

### Continued from page 1

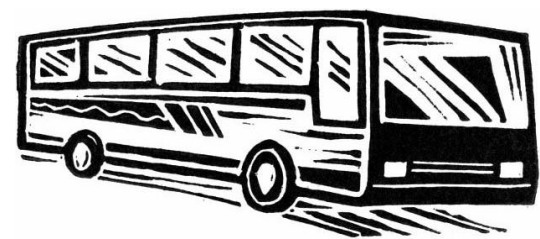
The Federation of CÉGEPs clearly asks the government to open the door to private sector contributions in technical programs, to seek funding in other ministries (presumably the Ministry of Employment), and to make a co-contribution to the CÉGEP foundations (in other words, to encourage private funding by matching its contribution). These are no longer just visions or vague thoughts, but concrete means of linking the enterprise and school more than ever before, while subjecting education to the private sector by rendering it a debtor

Forty years after partially-applying the Parent Report – whose proposals included a free and public quality education as a tool more for democracy than individual development - the state of the public education system has done nothing but recede. We have only mentioned but a few elements of the Federation report here. However, all the analytical reflections conform to a context of neoliberal globalization. Even though the Federation of CÉGEPs has never been a great defender of a free and public education of quality, it is worrisome to see it now position itself more openly than ever in the engine of the commercialization of education and knowledge. And what can we say to the warm welcome that the three most important political parties in Québec have extended to the report? We can no longer ignore the desire to make us perfect employees using government funds...which come out of our own pockets.

## The Budget and Public Transportation

**Gabriel L'Écuyer, Bachelor's student in International Law and International Relations (UQAM)**

Many believe that the government's announcement to grant a fiscal deduction to citizens who travel to work by public transportation marks an important step in reducing greenhouse gasses, while encouraging the middle class to use public transit. Yet I stand with those who feel that this small deduction is far from being efficient. Think about it for a moment. Would a person who makes \$60,000 per year in Montreal see a real advantage in buying a monthly transit pass when the new deduction only amounts to a small savings of \$146.79 in their annual taxes? I highly doubt it. The deduction will add up to \$174.53 in Sherbrooke and, very sensibly, the same amount in Québec, taking into account the higher cost of monthly fares.



But there is worse. In fact, because the incentive reduces taxable revenue instead of being presented in the form of a tax credit, it is less advantageous for workers whose low revenues mean lower tax rates. A person who earns \$20,000 per year and buys a monthly transit pass in Montreal will only profit from a savings of \$99.84 per year. This same person living in Québec would profit from a savings of \$115.01 per year, as would someone in Sherbrooke. The injustice is flagrant!

Instead of according a fiscal deduction for public transportation, an alternative solution would be to simply lower monthly fares significantly throughout the province. This measure could truly put the brakes on greenhouse gas emissions from automobile transport while allowing all to profit equitably. Meanwhile, the growing popularity of sports utility vehicles has also raised greenhouse gas emissions over the last few years and their owners are, in almost all cases, earning a high income. The creation, therefore, of a new sales tax could also contribute to Kyoto Protocol efforts. And even without a protocol, serious efforts must be made.

**Ultimatum** is the Association pour une Solidarité Syndicale Étudiante (ASSÉ) newspaper, produced by the newspaper committee : Gabriel L'Écuyer, Benoît Marsan et Jean-Luc Ratel. Writers for this number : Louise Boivin, Julie Descheneaux, Gabriel L'Écuyer, and Héloïse Moisan-Lapointe. Translation : Tamara Herman. Layout: Gabriel L'Écuyer, Impression: Payette et Sims, Distribution : Do your best, Tirage: 12 000 exemplaires, Courriel : ultimatum\_asse@hotmail.com. ASSÉ adress : see page 4.

# INTERNATIONAL

## Fighting Unions in French McDonalds

A special contribution by Louise Boivin, PhD student in Sociology

**A 115 day strike in a Paris McDonalds creates a snowball effect for other corporations who profit from precarious employment. New strategies for struggle and inter-sectoral solidarity appear on non-hierarchical bases.**

The strike at the Strasbourg Saint-Denis McDonalds began in November 2001, after five employees organizing a union were fired. In France, it is easier to unionize than in Québec - unlike here, the five big French union federations are not required to pass through a labour tribunal in order to be represented in the company by a delegate or to allow their members to exercise means of pressure during work contract negotiations. But managers do not resist any less. They often fire the most militant workers by accusing them of theft or inefficient work.

When the McDonalds personnel went on strike to demand that the employees who were fired be rehired, nobody imagined how long it would last or the repercussions that would follow. "The strike lasted more than three months because the manager wanted us to break and raised his iron fist", said 24 year-old Raja, one of the strikers. "McDonalds France supported the manager and offered compensation packages to those who were fired. They refused."

The success of the strike is explained by the determination of the strikers and the substantial support that came from outside. A Support Committee formed by young union activists from the restaurant sector found donations for the strike fund and organized pickets in front of different McDonalds. "By blocking the doors to explain the struggle to clients, we not only created financial pressure but we tarnished the brand image", explained Abdel Mabrouki, one of the Support Committee members. "And we had the public's support. Many of the people who passed by told us that they also had a family member who was exploited in a McDonalds!" Thanks to the information relayed by the Support Committee, solidarity actions took place in a dozen French cities, mobilizing unions, artists, organizations from the extreme left, student associations, anti-racist groups, anti-globalization groups, etc. The echo was heard in many other countries, including the U.S., where strikers were invited by a coalition of agricultural workers involved in fast food production.

After 115 strike days, on February 15<sup>th</sup> 2002, the employers ceded. For the strikers, it was a victory - at least until the next management offensive. The

protocol reached at the end of the contract recognized all their demands: Rehiring the employees who were fired, paying up to 45% of strike days, a promise not to exercise reprisals and...a new manager!

### Coordination at the Base

The strikers of the Saint-Denis McDonalds solicited solidarity from other precarious workers who shared their atrocious work conditions and salaries, restrictions to part-time employment, fast-paced shifts and demands for multi-tasking. These unqualified positions are often occupied by the children of immigrants. "Even if we were born in France, employers consider us to be foreigners and judge us without recognizing our capacities", affirms Dehbia, 28, one of the Saint-Denis strikers. "There is a barricade. For



example, supervisor positions are only filled by people of long-standing French origin."

Abdel Mabrouki, like others, continued working in the fast-food sector - for eight years in his case - to carry out a union struggle. He was fired twice from his job at Pizza Hut, but solidarity and judicial victories forced his boss to rehire him. "Employers in fast-food go for a high turnover rate to fight unionism", he affirms. "When we stay, we know how these companies work - their ways of managing and exploiting employees".

Abdel and other union activists, who went on strike and won at the Saint-Germain McDonalds in 2000 and the Opera Pizza Hut in 2001, came together

and unionized under the Fast-Food Collective of the General Confederation of Labour (CGT), a large French union. Their goal: finding means of organizing the struggle at the base through their experience on the ground. "To sustain our struggles, the federation of unions sent us staff from other sectors, like the post and railways, who weren't familiar with the fast-food sector and didn't consider it to be too important", explains Abdel. "Furthermore, by only organizing ourselves internally, the balance of power wasn't in our favour and we certainly weren't going to wait until the federation supported us. We couldn't even manage to find an office to meet in". It was from the Fast-Food Collective of the CGT that the Support Committee for the Strasbourg Saint-Denis McDonalds was formed, growing every week to touch exploited workers in precarious situations - who were also infected with a dose of union solidarity- in other companies.

The Strasbourg-Saint-Denis lead other young precarious workers to see that power could be taken against bosses by organizing. Walkouts followed in other McDonalds, where support pickets were held and union locals were created. Strikes of one or several days for satisfactory work conditions and against the firing of employees were held regularly in different service companies who profit from precarious employment: McDonalds, Quick, FNAC, GoSport, EuroDisney, Virgin, Maxi-Livres, Pizza Hut.

Those who came to support the strikers and the Support Committee circulated information and organized assemblies to facilitate a decentralized coordination of mutual support. And precarious workers began organizing on a local basis, including employees of one McDonalds and one FNAC (a book and music store) who synchronized their mobilizations on Champs Elysées Avenue, re-baptising it as "the most prestigious precarious avenue".

According to the latest news, this blossoming unionism continues. Among the recent actions undertaken by the Support Committee, now a member of the Stop-Précarité network ([www.stop-precarite.org](http://www.stop-precarite.org)), was support for a strike called by thirty women of African origin. The women were working in deplorable conditions for a sub-contractor (Arcade) offering cleaning services used by a large French hotel chain (ACCOR). The web site for this struggle features information on the resistance, actions and strategies ([www.ac.eu.org/actu-docs/arcade/arcade.htm](http://www.ac.eu.org/actu-docs/arcade/arcade.htm)). No, fighting unionism is not dead!

## W O M E N

## Feminists and ASSÉ

Julie Deschenaux, Bachelor's student in Sociology (UQÀM)

ASSÉ offers a distinct space for women and feminists. While it is clear that its fundamental principles articulate support for all progressive struggles, ASSÉ must do more than merely sustain the cause. In fact, the role of the Women's Committee of ASSÉ is not limited to that of a working committee. It exists a priori because it fits perfectly into the framework of ASSÉ's first goal of promoting the interests of

students, or, more specifically, defending them. In order to do so, it is necessary to fight the capitalist system, for it is a major force which drags the student population further into its alienation. The privatization of the system, success plans, reforms, cutbacks and others are concrete examples of the capitalist applications which ASSÉ resists.

Still, we cannot forget that another form of

domination prevents the student population from having access to a free and high quality education: Patriarchy. More than 50% of people suffer the consequences of this oppression, which we forget when we limit our struggle to capitalism.

Continued on page 4, see Feminists.

# Feminists

Continued from page 3

The failure of the loans and bursary regime to adapt to the reality faced by women, the reduced inaccessibility for mothers and the exclusion of women in traditionally male-dominated programs are examples which support the idea of creating a Women's Committee at ASSÉ. But its role isn't only to fight these circumstances, as the patriarchy is a social system and a global way of life.

Society conditions women and men according to precise models, which translate into choices of fields of study which are more or less different: political science, information technology and mechanics are often reserved for men, while nursing, childcare, and hair-styling are almost exclusively women's sectors. Confined to a social role dominated by men, women must free themselves from the patriarchal system if they wish to be freed. For example, values generally attributed to the male gender must not be seen as being worth more than those connected to women. In doing so, the result can be to reduce - and eliminate - the sexual-division of labour and, as a result, salarial inequalities and the increasing poverty faced by women.

Consequently, ASSÉ must do more than just draw attention to the feminist cause. Feminism must be an integral part of its demands if it hopes to defend students' and citizens' causes. Gains in the education sector alone will not abolish the gap between male and the female students who are still comparatively "disadvantaged".

## New Affiliates!!!

We have the pleasure of welcoming in our ranks the Faculty of Political Science at UQAM and the Faculty of sociology at U. de M.

## Important dates

May 1<sup>st</sup>, 2003: Montreal demonstration for the International Workers' Day.

May 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> : Annual Congress

## Message to our members

At the next annual Congress, elections will be held for the Executive Council, the Women's Committee and the Newsletter Committee. All those who are interested must submit a letter presenting themselves as candidates two weeks before the Congress begins. If you have questions concerning the candidacy processes, ASSÉ can be reached by phone or email and would be more than happy to answer your questions!

## Message to all

All those interested are welcome to submit articles to the Newsletter Committee. Send any and all articles to the Committee at [ultimatum\\_asse@hotmail.com](mailto:ultimatum_asse@hotmail.com).

To join us:  
Association pour une solidarité syndicale étudiante (ASSÉ)  
1097 St-Alexandre Street, suite 405  
Montreal, Quebec H2Z 1P8  
Tel : 514-390-0110  
[executif@asse-solidarite.qc.ca](mailto:executif@asse-solidarite.qc.ca)  
[www.asse-solidarite.qc.ca](http://www.asse-solidarite.qc.ca)

## 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.).

