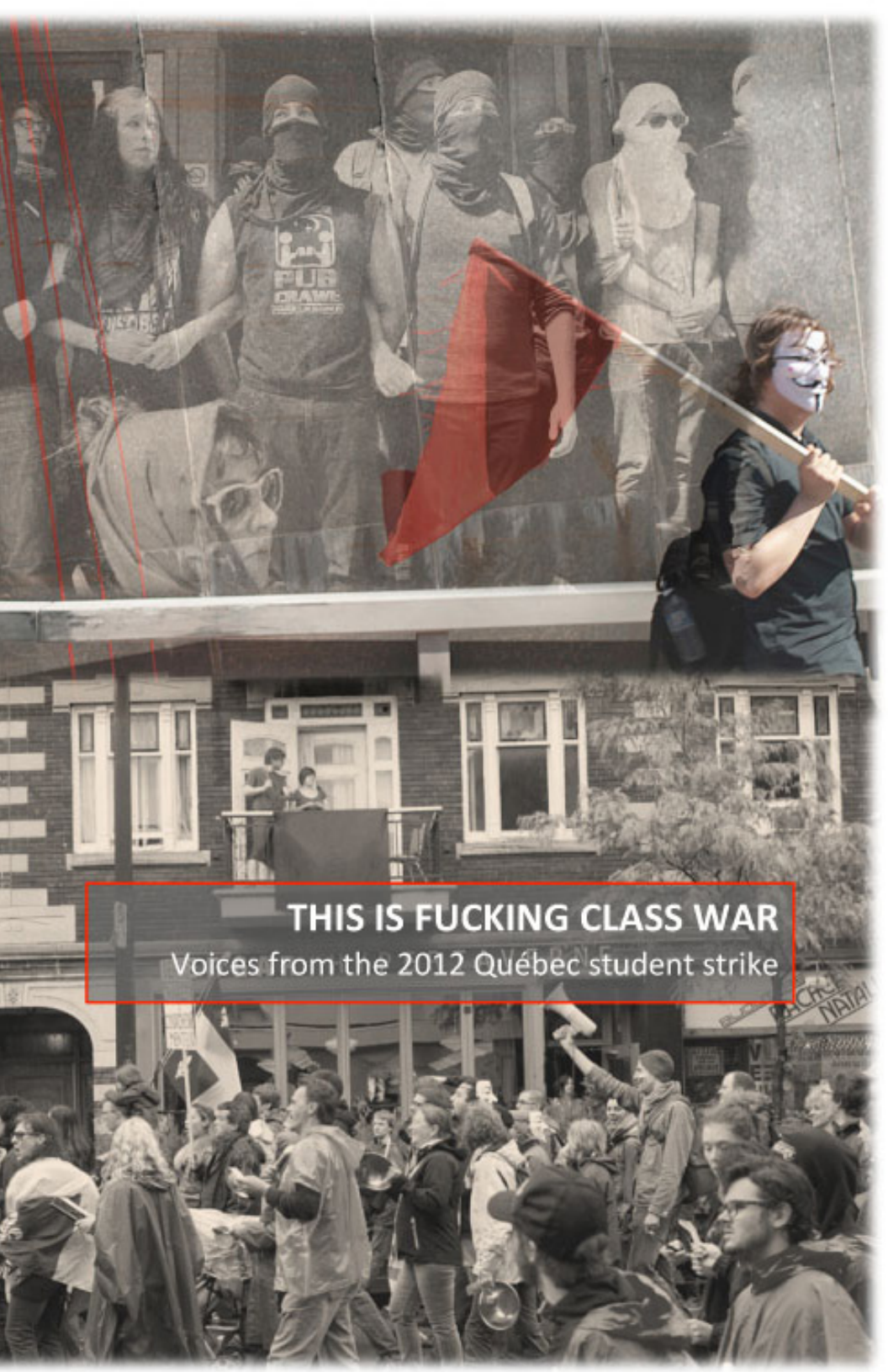

THIS IS FUCKING CLASS WAR

Voices from the 2012 Québec student strike

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Voices from the 2012
Québec student strike

Edited by the Collectif Dix Novembre

Table of Contents

About the Collective

The Collectif dix novembre was named for the November 10, 2011, day of action that set an ultimatum «abolish the hike, or this spring we strike!» It heralded the movement to come in many ways: the jubilant, unexpectedly large crowds in the streets despite inclement weather, and the violent interventions of riot police against students, faculty, and passerby as students staged the first occupation at McGill University in recent memory.

The collective brings together a diverse group of organizers involved in the student strike in various ways. In addition to our positions as students at all levels of post-secondary education, from cegep to doctoral work, we are also trade unionists, community workers, student union executives, anarchists, teachers, artists, activists, and more. We have sought to represent a variety of perspectives on the collective, including people from various racialized backgrounds, genders and sexual orientations, political affiliations, organizing traditions, and academic institutions, as well as both francophones and anglophones. As a result, none of us agrees with everything in this volume, and we leave it to the reader to explore a diversity of views on this complex and powerful movement.

The members of the collective include: rosalind hampton, Philippe Lapointe, Mona Luxion, Rushdia Mehreen, Joël Pedneault, and Molly Swain. We would also like to express our thanks to Patrick DeDauw, Michelle Hartman, Abby Lippmann, and Kevin Paul for their assistance with translation, to Jérémie Bédard-Wien

for his contributions to this conversation, and to GRIP-UQÀM and QPIRG-McGill for material donations that made this book and website possible. Special thanks are due to Matthew Brett, who initiated this project and has been deeply supportive throughout the entire process.

The title of the book is drawn from one of the most popular English-language chants of the strike: *1 - 2 - 3 - 4 / This is fucking class war! / 5 - 6 - 7 - 8 / Organize and smash the state!*

A note on structure

This book is structured around five themes which reflect debates and conversations that frequently emerged during the strike and in its aftermath. While the order of the book is not meant to be cumulative — that is, you need not have read earlier pieces in order to understand later ones — we do encourage you to read the pieces in each section in conversation with each other, as they bring out debates and contradictions that may not be obvious in each individual chapter.

In order to contextualize each topic, we have followed each section introduction with a word as part of the piece "On Communication As Solidarity: Reflections from Translating the Printemps Érable", written by translators and editors of the popular website *Translating the Printemps Érable*, who were in some sense our forbears in bringing the mostly francophone coverage of the events of spring 2012 to an anglophone audience. The short essays that accompany each word — manifestation, casseur, casserole, solidarité, carré rouge — attempt to translate the unique vocabulary and culture that at times makes the strike so impenetrable to outsiders.

1 Background

Introduction

Collectif Dix Novembre[1]

About this book

The spring and summer of 2012 saw the emergence of a massive social movement in Québec, centered around—but growing beyond—a student strike. The strike was called in opposition to a 75 per cent increase in university tuition fees announced by Québec's Liberal government under then-Premier, Jean Charest. From February 2012 until the following September, the streets of Montreal, Québec City and other towns in the province were alive with demonstrations and protest actions. Students walked out of class and stayed out, picketing their academic institutions and even holding barricades against police intervention; over 3,000 people were arrested over the course of those few months, new repressive laws were introduced and resisted, and solidarity between groups and across sectors was built and tested.

The aim of this book is both to provide a glimpse into the lived experience of this social movement for the benefit of those who were not a part of it, and to uncover some of the lessons that can be garnered from a reflexive look back at the movement. It brings together contributions by students and non-students, academics, parents, activists, anarchists, artists, and others, most of which were written as the mass mobilizations began to subside in the fall

[1] With input from Hugo Bonin, Arnaud Theurillat, and Guillaume Néron.

of 2012. The book is meant to be accessible to a wide audience, including those without previous knowledge of the 2012 strike or the Québec context. It is our hope that the information and ideas shared in the chapters that follow will inspire and inform reflection and future social movement action in Québec and elsewhere.

Québec and Canada: some historical context

Before delving into the origins of the 2012 strike, we believe it is necessary to provide historical context about Québec. We do not intend to convey the idea that the 2012 strike was possible only in the context of a specific set of 'local' or 'national' histories; nonetheless, we believe the 2012 strike was deeply influenced by a unique context whose basic contours must be sketched out in order to fully comprehend the role of student movement in Québec. Readers who might want to incorporate some practices from Québec's history of social movements into their own struggles may also draw valuable lessons from this section.

The roots of Québec's current sociopolitical context can be traced back to the 16th century, when colonists from France invaded and settled land along a few major 'North American' waterways. The lands along these waterways were being used by many different agricultural or nomadic Indigenous peoples, including Innu, Mi'kmaq, Wolastoqiyik (Malécite), Abenaki, Kanien'kehá:ka (Mohawk), Anishinaabe, and Huron nations, among others. Québec's two major cities, Montreal and Québec City, as well as the majority of the province's population, are still located along this waterway, often at the site of fur-

trading or military outposts established by the European invaders. Catholic missionaries, such as the Jesuits, played a significant role in the process of colonization, acting as both ideological promoters of the colonial project back in Europe, settler landowners (for instance, the entire island of Montreal was once owned by a missionary order), and as actors in an attempt to strip Indigenous peoples of their cultural autonomy in order to assimilate them into the settler society. As we will see, the Catholic Church retained a crucial importance in Québec society until at least the 1960s, but was not successful in extinguishing Indigenous cultures. The Church's strong presence this late in Québec history is an important factor shaping its society to this day.

The French colony of Canada was annexed by the British Empire in the 1760s, which imposed a military government on the former French colony while allowing certain Francophone elites and the Roman Catholic Church to continue exercising power over the French-Canadian population and Indigenous peoples. The Catholic Church's powers increased after anti-British rebellions led by liberal or republican political movements. In 1867, both existing parts of Canada (which later became Ontario and Québec) joined British colonies on the eastern seaboard as part of what is called Confederation, whose northward and westward expansion in a campaign of invasion, colonization, settlement, genocide, forced labour and enslavement of non-white people has created the contemporary State of Canada.

During the 19th century, the basic features of the current settler order in Canada were established:

Indigenous people were pushed into thousands of reserves, ostensibly with the purpose of doing away with the nomadic aspects of their livelihoods, in order to convert them into agricultural peoples. In practice, reserves are often located on remote land that is difficult to use for agricultural purposes—their function has overwhelmingly been to free up the best agricultural lands for use by settlers. During the same period, residential schools managed by the Catholic Church or other types of missionaries were established, in which children from reserves were taken to spend most of the year away from their communities, as an attempt at cultural genocide. These schools existed into the 20th century. Today, many Indigenous people in Canada do live off-reserve today. However, reserves continue to be bastions of cultural survival for Indigenous peoples in this country against the forces of assimilation and colonization, in spite of the poor living conditions on many reserves (which may include pollution, lack of running water, poor-quality housing, and under-funded educational facilities).

Although at the time of Confederation the French-speaking settler elites were originally more or less as powerful as English-speaking settler elites, Canada's expansion during the late 19th and 20th century meant that Québec, as well as French-speaking minority populations in other provinces such as Ontario and New Brunswick, became dominated by English speakers and therefore were unable to impose any sort of agenda beyond regional or provincial jurisdictions. Beginning in the early 20th century, this caused the rise of a nationalist movement based in Québec, which took on its current form more or less in the 1960s as nationalists shifted from

aspirations for greater autonomy for French-language speakers within the Canadian federation, to aspirations for national independence for Québec. Since this shift, the word 'national' as used in Québec most often refers to Québec, and not to Canada, which is referred to as a 'federal' level of politics. The conflict opposing federalists and those in favour of independence can be understood primarily, but *not exclusively*, as a struggle between two settlers nations over who gets to benefit from the colonial 'pie', with francophones in Québec vying to wrest state and economic power from the descendants of English-speaking settlers (this is discussed in greater detail below).

The fact that this conflict has been so foregrounded in official histories of Québec, with the implication that the primary form of oppression during these centuries was enacted by English-speakers against French-speakers, has erased the fact that other groups of people have lived Québec for centuries and faced oppression on a racial basis. For instance, Black people have been in Québec since the 17th century, most (but not all) arriving as slaves. Slavery existed in Québec under both French and British rule. Thereafter Black people remained in Québec, mostly in Montreal, working at the bottom of the occupational scale. By the end of the 19th century a Black community had developed in Montreal, with many Black people migrating from the United States and elsewhere in Canada, especially after Canadian-owned railway companies began hiring Black men working as porters. By the mid-20th century, changes to immigration policies led to significant increases in Caribbean migrants moving to Canadian cities including Montreal. These stories, and those of many other racialized communities in Québec such as people of

Chinese origin, are absent even from activist accounts of Québec's history.

The development of Québec since the Quiet Revolution

The 1960s witnessed a period of major reforms in Québec known as the 'Quiet Revolution'. During the 1960 provincial elections, a government whose power was based on corruption, populism, social conservatism, and its proximity to the Catholic Church (which, in the latter case, made it similar to virtually every provincial administration since the 1840s) was defeated by the Liberal Party of Québec, an established moderate political party that promised to quickly modernize Québec. Over a period of fifteen years, hydroelectric production was nationalized and expanded (although mostly in Northern territories unceded at the time by Indigenous peoples), roads were built, and a welfare state was created by taking away the Catholic Church's power over health care, social services and education and centralizing all these institutions under the provincial State. Many new educational institutions were also created during these years. The 1960s saw a rapid increase in access to education in Québec.

The 1960s and 1970s were also a time of intense social movement activity in Québec. Student movements took off in 1968 during Québec's first general student strike, whose demands included access to post-secondary institutions for working class youths and francophones, clarification about the government's plans for student financial aid, as well as more democratic universities. All these demands were issued alongside a general critique of capitalism. Fifteen out of the twenty-three existing CEGEPs (general

and vocational colleges, see glossary) went on strike for about one month. The strike accelerated the creation of the Université du Québec network, with campuses built in many of Québec's smaller regional centres in order to facilitate greater access to education to people not living in major cities. The 1968 strike also achieved the abolition of mandatory class attendance for students enrolled in CEGEPs—a first step towards recognizing the right of students to strike by not attending class.

The largest demonstration in Québec since the French-Canadian movements against military conscription during WWII took place in 1969: the march targeted McGill University, then one of three universities in Montreal and the bastion of a pro-Canadian, anti-Québécois, English-speaking bourgeoisie. The march was organized by a coalition of French language rights groups, left-wing militants, labour activists and nascent student associations; demands centered around transforming McGill into a francophone and working-class institution and increasing access to education for working-class and francophone students. These demands were partly met with the construction of the Université du Québec à Montréal (UQÀM), which opened in the fall of 1969. At this point in the late 1960s, left-wing, labour, nationalist, and student activists worked on the basis of an imagined convergence between working-class and pro-francophone politics. This convergence was, in the end, short-lived: nationalist and language politics in Québec rapidly took on a life of their own, eventually at the expense of working-class or revolutionary politics.

This period of time also saw the rise of a radical black political movement in Montreal. A Congress of Black Writers was held in Montreal in October of 1968, contributing to ongoing networking between Black intellectuals and activists on both sides of the Atlantic. In February 1969, students protesting institutional racism at the city's second English-language university, Sir George Williams University, occupied the school's computer center, an action that ended in a major fire, millions of dollars in damages to the computer center, and several arrests. The anti-colonial ideas that were tapped into and developed by black radicals in Montreal at the time also filtered into white, francophone settings, and some people on the left began to speak a language of anti-colonial struggle that was spreading throughout the world when analyzing the situation of Québécois people within Canada.

Since the early 1960s, a pro-independence revolutionary network of autonomous cells called the *Front de libération du Québec* (FLQ) had also organized bombings and other terrorist actions targeting the anglophone bourgeoisie and their allies. In 1970, one FLQ cell kidnapped a British diplomat as well as the provincial Minister of Labour. The latter ended up dead under nebulous circumstances, thus sparking the 'October Crisis'. Although many groups, including student associations at the University of Montreal and UQÀM, expressed support for the FLQ's goals (if not for its aims) during mass rallies, an unprecedented wave of arrests targeting social movement activists and even sympathisers was quickly orchestrated by various levels of government, alongside a very visible military presence in major cities across Canada.

Most social movements in Québec suffered from major demobilizations after the 1970 repression. For many years afterwards, the labour movement was the main oppositional force alongside strong Marxist-Leninist and Maoist far-left movements. A historic general labour strike was organized in 1972, and the labour movement became increasingly militant throughout this decade, with some of its structures (such as the Montreal Central Council of the CSN, formerly a catholic union federation but now Québec's major public-sector union) serving as a point of convergence between various non-labour social movements. Québec's major union federations also took qualified positions in favour of Québec independence in the 1970s.

A new wave of feminist activism also swept Montreal during the early 1970s, as English-speaking and French-speaking feminists developed a synthesis of anti-colonial ideas and the ideas developed by second-wave feminism in the USA. The result of this activism has been a lasting affinity, although by no means an unconditional support, of some parts of the feminist movement in Québec towards the ideal of national liberation for the people of Québec. The 1970s also saw Indigenous women in Québec—and eventually across the country—resisting the most sexist parts of the legal framework governing their lives and which stripped only women of their status if they married non-status-Indian men, a cause which earned the support of Québec's mainstream feminist organizing as well.

During that time Québécois nationalist members of the Liberal Party joined with other nationalists in Québec to form the Parti Québécois (PQ), which won the 1976

elections. The PQ worked towards a referendum on Québec's independence from Canada in 1980, drawing on the energy of many activists who were or had been involved in social movements. The referendum was defeated by a 10% margin; this struck another huge blow to social movements in Québec, which had placed many hopes beyond just independence in the outcome of this plebiscite.

Since the campaign leading up to the 1980 plebiscite, nationalist forces have been able to sideline left-wing activism around social issues by claiming these can only be effectively addressed after Québec has gained independence from the Canadian federation. This pervasive logic has taken a significant amount of steam out of social struggles in Québec, not least since another attempt at secession was made in 1995, again by a PQ government, but was defeated by a very slim margin (less than 1%).

The 1970s, 1980s and 1990s were an intense period of struggle over the political constitution of the new post-British-Empire Canadian state, beyond the two referendums over Québec sovereignty and beyond the conflict between the Canadian federalist and Québécois national projects: these decades were also a period of resurgent First Nations militancy. For instance, in 1990, when the town of Oka in Québec decided to allow a golf course to be expanded onto Kanien'kehá:ka (Mohawk) territory, a months-long military conflict involving Mohawk warriors, the Canadian army and Québec's provincial police was touched off. The events are commonly known as the Oka Crisis and they helped shift the balance of power a bit more towards Indigenous

nations in Canada, which appeared (again) as tangible menaces to the legitimacy of all levels of government within the settler State.

Current issues in Québec society and politics: the backdrop to the 2012 social uprising

Although Québec remains a province within the Canadian federation, the provincial State in Québec has acquired some of the powers that are usually exercised by the federal government in many other provinces. Parti Québécois governments may not have succeeded in leading Québec into full nation-statehood, but they have been relatively successful at creating a political space in which the federal state's decisions, and Canadian politics, at least *appear* to matter very little to people in Québec most of the time. Immigration policies are debated and voted upon at the Québec level; people pay most of their taxes directly to the provincial government; and when local police forces are unable to repress a demonstration in Montreal, the provincial police force (the *Sûreté du Québec*) is called in—not the Royal Canadian Mounted Police nor the army.

The effect of this has been that the Québécois political sphere has gained a high level of autonomy from the Canadian sphere. This process has been mirrored by a civil society of unions, community groups, and other movements (such as the student and feminist movements) which tend to focus on issues pertaining mainly to the decisions of the provincial government. This trend is encouraged by the fact that the Québec state is the force determining the level of spending and of income

redistribution within the welfare state—not the federal government.

An important caveat to the importance of the national question within social movements in Québec is that the question of Québec sovereignty has not been very present within the student movement since the campaign leading up to the 1995 referendum, when many student associations closer to the student federations FECQ and FEUQ mobilized in favour of sovereignty. This fact probably helped focus the discourse of the student movement in 2012 towards economic (as opposed to national) questions, with the probable effect of making it easier to mobilize support for the strike in English-language universities and outside Québec, on the basis of opposition to neoliberalism.

Of course, the relatively successful delimitation of a Québécois political space by nationalist governments, civil society and social movements applies much less to Indigenous peoples in Québec, whose lives are constantly affected by the federal government's decisions in an invasive way, since this level of government manages anything to do with so-called 'Indian affairs'. This being said, in the late 2000s and early 2010s, the Québec government had unveiled an expansive plan to ramp up the colonization of the Northern territories claimed by Québec and by Indigenous peoples. This plan, called the Plan Nord, was very contentious during the 2012 strike; Joël Pedneault's chapter provides more information about this plan, and explains the complexities of opposition to resource extraction projects affecting Indigenous peoples in Québec.

A few other issues affecting Québec nevertheless are still affected by the federal government's decisions, and have proved contentious: the constitutionality of pro-French language laws, criminal law, prison policy, military spending, gun control, and the ultimate enforcement of immigration decisions (ie deportations) are all currently under federal control.

In 2012, during the student strike, the Liberal Party was in government in Québec and had been for about nine years. In order to really account for the scope of popular opposition to this government, it is necessary to take into account the fact that this political party is both right-wing as well as pro-Canadian or pro-federalist. It is impossible to tell what proportion of the hundreds of thousands of people who showed up to a demonstration in 2012 were motivated more by anti-neoliberal politics as opposed to by Québec nationalism. The point, however, is that these two currents significantly overlap even within the same person in Québec, and that the right wing is rather more identified with federalism (although the Parti Québécois would be correctly described at times as a right-wing, neoliberal political party).

Student associations in Québec: organizing a movement

Since the 1968 student strike in Québec, there have been 11 general student strikes in Québec, including a first strike in 1968 and the one in 2012, which is the subject of this book. None have lasted as long as the 2012 strike, and the previous record was set in 2005. The longest gap separating two strikes has been nine years, with the

shortest gap lasting only two years. With the exception of the 1968 strike, most student strikes in Québec have mobilized around two central sets of issues, namely tuition fees and student financial aid.

The effect of these mobilizations has been to keep university-level tuition fees relatively low in Québec, relative to fees in other Canadian provinces. Student financial aid also continues to be given in the form of a set amount of loans and a variable amount of (non-repayable) bursaries. The amount of bursaries given varies according to various factors including a student's income, but annual loans are capped according to the type of program one is enrolled in (CEGEP degree, Bachelor's degree, etc.) This limits the amount of student debt that is taken on, although the total aid given is very modest and keeps most students well below the poverty line.

The history of the student movement in Québec since 1968 has been one of increasing organization and institutionalization. The informally organized and just-recently politicized student associations of the 1960s suffered major setbacks after the 1970 October Crisis. During the 1970s and 1980s, various more institutionalized student associations were created, often with the involvement of far-left militants affiliated with Québec's strong Marxist-Leninist or Maoist organizations. This being said, not every student activist in Québec has been involved in far-left organizing at some point: the student movement is a movement for and in itself, and can most certainly constitute someone's primary source of involvement for up to a decade.

In 1983, the PQ government adopted legislation that allowed for the increased recognition of student associations by school administrations and the State. This legislation, which is still on the books, requires that university or CEGEP administrations collect student fees directly from students on behalf of student associations, thus providing the latter with a guaranteed and stable source of funding. This arrangement is similar to the automatic union dues collection system, known as the Rand formula in Canada, and which is present across the labour movement in North America. The result is that student unions in Québec benefit from a very stable institutional setting.

The student movement in Québec remained autonomous from political parties until the late 1980s or early 1990s. It was dominated by one militant organization, ANEEQ, throughout the 1970s and 1980s, until internal tensions between moderate activists and revolutionary militants eventually led to the dissolution of the organization in 1990. ANEEQ was organized according to the principles of combative syndicalism, or syndicalisme de combat in French. Relatively unknown outside of francophone countries, combative syndicalism is structured around two principles: democracy and constant mobilization.[2] According to this perspective, it is only through the mobilization of a union's membership in order to establish a permanent position of power against political opponents (employers, administrations, governments) that members, whether workers or students, can expect to improve

[2] We are indebted to Alex Desrochers and Philippe Lapointe for this discussion of combative syndicalism in Québec.

their conditions.[3] In order to be able to establish such a position, members must control the union, through the general assembly and direct democracy, since it is «only the control of the union by its members that allows them to get involved and become politicized.»[4] Such control and ownership would be difficult to exercise if student associations had tens of thousands of members (such as an entire university's student body). Consequently, smaller associations such as those of colleges and university faculties and departments are deemed preferable for organizing and engaging in combative action. General assemblies, debates, workshops, etc., must also be held regularly according to this philosophy, in order to empower members to take control of the issues that affect them. This emphasis on direct democracy also aims to counter the tendency of social organizations to bureaucratize themselves and move closer to the established political order.

The hegemony of this political perspective within the student movement suffered a major set back in the late 1980s, as a much more politically moderate tendency began to consolidate itself by channeling a reaction against a wave of unsuccessful student strikes that were only separated from each other by a few years in that decade. Students (some of which may have been affiliated with the Parti Québécois' youth wing) created what later became FEUQ and FECQ, two federations representing student unions at the university and CEGEP levels respectively. These federations were originally based on the premise that

[3] Piotte, Jean-Marc, *Le syndicalisme de combat*, Montreal, Éditions coopératives Albert Saint-Martin, 1977, p.28.
[4] Piotte, *op. cit.,* p. 30. Our translation.

strikes should never happen again under their purview, although later on in the 2000s, these organizations would become involved in organizing student strikes.

In 1996, the Parti Québécois government decided to raise university tuition fees as part of a sweeping shift towards austerity and neoliberalism after the defeat of the second independence referendum in 1995. A coalition of institutionalized student organizations and looser, affinity-based activist groups joined forces and organized the *Mouvement pour le droit à l'éducation*, which led a successful three-week strike against the proposed fee-hike. This organization nevertheless fell apart amidst disagreements over the power given to affinity groups relative to student unions representatives empowered by their general assemblies to speak on behalf of a given membership.

This very issue was addressed during the creation of the *Association pour une solidarité syndicale étudiante* (ASSÉ, or, the Association for solidarity among student unions) in 2001, amidst a global context of anti-globalization activism and counter-summits such as the one in Québec City the same year. The newly created organization did not include student affinity groups within its structures. Instead, only student unions adhering to certain basic principles and in which the general assembly is the highest decision-making bodies could adhere. The creation of this association marked the resurgence of syndicalisme de combat model as a force within the student movement in Québec. It is important to stress that ASSÉ was created both in reaction to the politically regressive student federations, FECQ and FEUQ (as demonstrated by their willingness to negotiate with governments almost at any

cost, the careerism exhibited by their leaders, their lack of democratic decision-making, their loose but limiting ties to the PQ and the nationalist movement, and their exclusive focus on 'student' issues at the expense of a broad understanding of society)—*as well as* in response to the power of voluntary-membership, affinity-based groups within the student movement of the 1990s.

A major successful strike was organized in 2005 by a coalition created by ASSÉ (CASSÉE) against a Liberal Party government decision to cut $103 million from the student financial aid system. This strike is discussed at length in Xavier Lafrance's chapter in this volume, and we won't delve too deep into it here. Shortly afterwards, in the early fall of 2007, the Liberal government announced that the freeze on tuition fees that had been in effect since 1996 would be cancelled. The subsequent strike was unsuccessful at spreading beyond UQÀM and a few CEGEPs that are typically more politically active, in part because there had been only a few weeks or days of mobilization before strike votes were held in general assemblies (most student strikes in Québec have started during the winter semester to give people time to mobilize during the Fall). The strike petered out after a school-wide occupation at CEGEP du Vieux Montréal was heavily repressed by police (see Jaouad Laaroussi's chapter). In spite of this failed attempt, it was already expected at this point that an even larger fee increase would be announced by the Liberal government before the fall of 2012; student activists started talking about a strike in the winter of 2012. This possibility became more and more concrete when the Liberal government was reelected again in 2007 and in 2008, at which point it won a parliamentary majority

that would have allowed it to govern for at least four more years—had it not called early elections in 2012 in a last-ditch attempt to undermine a massive student strike.

Working towards the 2012 student strike

Now that the stage has been set to understand the background of our subject matter, let us turn to the introductory scenes of what culminated in the spring of 2012. By 2012, the Liberal government had been in power for twelve years. In addition to the opposition it faced for being an outspokenly federalist and right-wing party, the Liberal government was resented by a broad swath of public sector workers in Québec for having imposed special legislation during collective bargaining in order to impose contracts and avoid negotiating with striking workers, most infamously in 2005.

The issue of corruption and ties to organized crime was also an extremely prominent backdrop to the entire strike, as mainstream media reported on the findings of the Charbonneau commission, a public inquiry headed by a judge that continued to unearth widespread political party funding violations at the time of writing. The Liberal Party of Québec was deeply involved, it would seem, in illegal political funding mechanisms involving organized crime. No doubt many people who attended the numerous mass demonstrations in 2012 were primarily motivated by the desire to oust a corrupt political party from power.

Occupy Montreal, which despite its flaws was one of the longest-lasting Occupy movements in Canada, mobilized public sentiment against the government and its

austerity measures as early as October 2011. The Coalition Against Privatization and User Fees (*Coalition opposée à la tarification et à la privatisation des services publics*) and various feminist and community organizations were also mobilizing against proposed hikes to fees for public daycares, against a mandatory flat health tax to be imposed on all taxpayers across the board, and against increases to household hydroelectricity bills, to name just a few recently announced austerity measures.

In the immediate context of the student movement, the impetus to strike was confirmed in spring 2010, when the Liberal government first mentioned concrete plans to disinvest in higher education and increase student fees to make up the difference, starting in 2012-2013. Organizing built up when the amount of the fee hike was announced: $1625 per year for in-province students over 5 years, or a 75% increase over the 2011-2012 fees. A few years after from the short-lived and unsuccessful strike of 2007, the student movement was now ready for a large-scale mobilization, and the proposed hike was outrageous enough to bring together its different factions.

A student strike as conceived of by many student federations and associations is essentially a lobbying exercise for a change in policy. As such, arguments against and alternatives to the tuition hike were developed, most notably by the left-wing think-tank IRIS (see glossary.) Although the positions espoused by the FECQ, FEUQ, and ASSÉ differed, much of the argumentation against the hike focused on rebutting the idea of students needing to pay their «fair share», as the government insisted. Teach-in and mobilization materials maintained that education

was a public good which should be government funded, and proposed a progressive tax as a more equitable way of recapturing the individual benefits of education. Building off the critiques that previous strikes had developed about Québec's student financial aid system, those who opposed the hike also underlined that increasing loans and bursaries to compensate for a fee hike, as the government promised it would do, was an inadequate solution that did not make education truly accessible and which disproportionately burdened poorer students with debt

While striking was often presented as a last resort option to be used when all other strategies (i.e. petitions, protests, office occupations, one-day strikes) had failed, it was also understood by many to be the near-inevitable result of months of mobilizing and preparation in the face of a government that would cede nothing until something was at stake. In order to reach this expected end-point, a series of escalating pressure tactics were planned and carried out, from an occupation of the Minister of Education's Montreal office in September 2010 to teach-ins, days of action involving day- to week-long 'symbolic' strikes[5] and large demonstrations, banner drops, and blockades. The numbers kept growing: eighty students occupying an office. Twelve thousand students demonstrating. Twenty-five thousand students on strike, sixty thousand on strike.

[5] The term symbolic is used to denote the fact that shorter strikes do not create a tangible amount of pressure on the provincial government to attempt to negotiate with student unions in order to come to a resolution. The factorsthat make longer student strikes an economic pressure tactic are discussed below.

A national student gathering was called in May 2011, bringing together members of FECQ, FEUQ, ASSÉ and independent student unions to agree on a strategy for the 2012 strike. Important non-denunciation agreements came out of that meeting, which would give the strike strength when the terrain got rough in late spring of the following year. These resolutions prohibited any national student organization from denouncing another one's strategy or actions in the context of the strike. In exchange, it was resolved that the national unions would be prohibited from explicitly recommending a government offer to their membership (a decision aimed at preventing a repeat of the FEUQ executive's enthusiastic and successful acceptance of a regressive government offer during the 2005 strike), and that any organization would be prohibited from negotiating without the presence of all the other national student organizations, again, as the student federations did in 2005.

Subsequent to this meeting, a few key CEGEP associations that were affiliated with the college-level federation FECQ began pressuring their executive to distance itself from their more moderate and collaborationist sister organization at the university level, FEUQ. Some FECQ member associations also began attending ASSÉ or CLASSE congresses in the Fall of 2011, and a few, like the one in Saint Félicien, even joined the militant tendency within the organized student movement (see Guillaume Néron's chapter). These internal dissensions within FECQ, as well as the May 2011 meeting, probably helped temper any temptation on the part of FEUQ to negotiate without the rest of the student movement during the strike. As we will see, FEUQ chose not to do this in 2012,

unlike in 2005—a significant step forward for the student movement.

Finally, on November 10, 2011, more than two hundred thousand students went on strike and thirty thousand braved icy rain to take to the streets of Montreal for a national day of action meant to show the willingness of the student body to go on strike indefinitely. It was the first of many ultimatums that would mark the timeline of the strike, as well as the largest student protest in Québec since the 2005 student strike.

The logistics of striking

In order to understand how the strike unfolded it is necessary to understand the basics of the organized student movement in Québec. At present, there are four national organizations to which local unions can affiliate: FECQ, FEUQ, ASSÉ and TaCEQ, a smaller player which was less active in organizing during the strike. ASSÉ was mostly subsumed during the strike into CLASSE, the larger coalition it built that brought together ASSÉ member unions, independent student unions, and even dissident local associations affiliated to FECQ. In keeping with ASSÉ's commitment to direct democracy and its usual practices, the governing bodies of the CLASSE were its congresses, held as often as every weekend during the strike, as well as local unions' general assemblies.

For those unfamiliar with the concept, a general assembly (GA) is a meeting open to all members of a given student union (albeit only to its members). In most of the student

unions in Québec—and in all of the member unions of CLASSE—the GA is the ultimate decision making body. General assemblies can take up motions on any subject, though their functioning is typically bound by a set of rules (i.e. the Code Morin, which is Quebecois equivalent of Robert's Rules). Decisions taken in a general assembly then bind the union as an organization—especially the executive of the union, but also its committees—to carry out the relevant decision. In principle, therefore, the union executive is essentially in charge of the day-to-day functioning of the union, but not of its political direction. (In practice, members of the executive often exercise a great deal of political discretion.) However, during strikes, it is very common for associations to create 'strike councils' that meet up to once every day, in order to increase the organization of the membership and to serve as a forum to debate the day-to-day organization of the strike in an even more democratic manner.

Though typically general assemblies are regularly held but sparsely attended, during the strike the average attendance rate gravitated around 40% and in some cases rose as high as 60%. In unions on strike, general assemblies were held weekly to renew the strike and to take up any other relevant issues. In some cases general assemblies provided a forum for information-sharing, teach-ins, and debate on topics relevant to the motions. General assemblies also presented a new form of democratic engagement and a way to live out the ideals the movement was fighting for (Vincent Roy and David Clément's chapters both address some of these points). Attendance at GAs was the highest in student unions with a strong and established culture of democracy, particularly in urban CEGEPs that were

members of CLASSE and in university associations in the arts, humanities and social sciences. For the most part, campuses and associations that did not exercise direct democracy through general assemblies were not able to mobilize their members on a massive scale and/or did not take part in the strike.[6]

It is equally important to recognize that GAs could be highly charged spaces that weren't conducive to debate and learning, by creating overly bureaucratic hurdles to a transformative form of deliberation, They could be spaces in which interpersonal dynamics enacted and enforced power relations, thus silencing already marginalized voices.[7] Nonetheless, general assemblies were most students' entry point into the strike. Weekly 'local' GAs were the central space where students voted on various issues of both local (i.e. campus-specific) and provincial import, including participation in or organization of demonstrations, movement strategy and other political actions and positions. They were also where students voted on the pivotal question of whether or not to undertake, and continue, an unlimited general strike. In order to encourage rank and file members to get involved in carrying out the GA's decisions, open, informal committees were created, where finer points were discussed and motions were put into practice.

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[6] This discussion of direct democracy owes much to Rushdia Mehreen and Hugo Bonin.

[7] In certain more progressive student unions, mechanisms such as gender balance in speaking turns and preference given to first time speakers have been put in place to encourage minority voices and discourage dominant voices from monopolizing the general assembly time.

At the provincial level, CLASSE's positions reflected those taken by member associations in their own general assemblies, which were often circulated prior to CLASSE Congresses by each union through the CLASSE email list, and then voted on by delegates from all the member unions at these Congresses. Although Congress attendees were delegates in the true sense—mandated only to represent the positions taken by their union—the Congresses were far from a simple vote-tallying exercise. Debate, collaboration, and revision were common as the decision-making body struggled to come to nuanced positions, and to define the direction taken by a vast and multi-pronged social movement. Information about upcoming actions was distributed and organizers met like-minded people with whom ideas were hatched. Just as local union executives are bound to enact their GAs' mandates, CLASSE executives would then coordinate the process of carrying out the plan voted on by the Congress with the help of standing committees and members at large.[8] In the end, it was left up to the CLASSE spokespeople to distill the hours of deliberation and disagreement into soundbites for the mainstream media, with the mixed results one might expect. This process of intermediation between a democratic mass movement's complexity and the expectations imposed by journalists was a major point of contention within CLASSE, as exemplified by numerous

[8] By the end of the strike, CLASSE's Social Struggles Committee had resigned in protest, leaving in doubt whether direct democracy practices and delegation to ad-hoc committees suffice to combat systemic forms of oppression, or the marginalization of the struggles against these forms of oppression.

motions to censure the organization's spokespeople during the strike.

In the same way that demands and action plans were decided in a bottom-up fashion, any requests or communication to CLASSE coming from the government was also discussed by the movement's base. In April 2012, when the government imposed the condemnation of 'violence' as a precondition to joining in negotiations between the government and student associations, the two federations (FECQ and FEUQ) issued statements condemning violence within a few days, but CLASSE waited for its members to take a position on violence in their own general assemblies. Based on the GA mandates, the position of CLASSE on violence was discussed, debated and formulated at a Congress that spent most of the alloted time on this specific question. This moment revealed how the practice, and time-frame, of direct democracy was itself a disruption of State mechanisms that expect hierarchy and expediency above all else.

Direct democracy was upheld by members of CLASSE as one of the pillars of the student movement, with picket lines and even sometimes economic disruptions justified by the fact that a majority of students (in a specific faculty or CEGEP campus) had voted to strike. Assemblies were also used as a mobilization tool, under the assumption that when members were involved in making decisions they would subsequently feel responsible to take part in carrying them out. However, it is important to recognize that many of the people who lent strength to the movement acted on their own behalf: ad hoc groups such as Professors Against the Hike, Parents Against the Hike, as well as artists,

individual protestors, students from institutions not on strike, anarchist affinity groups, and others who were not represented in the official numbers of students on strike yet shaped the movement in the streets.

A timeline of the strike

In order to contextualize the chapters to come, we chose to provide something between an exhaustive timeline and a sketch of the way the strike unfolded, with major milestones highlighted. Although the architecture of the Québec student movement is necessary to understanding references throughout this book, the most exciting and inspiring elements of this movement are not the structures that framed it, but the moments lived in the streets, in general assemblies, at art happenings, in late-night organizing meetings and early-morning direct action meet-ups, in bars and student lounges and in cramped living rooms.

In late January and early February 2012, after the resounding silence with which the government responded to the November 10th, 2011 day of action, student unions in CLASSE began to adopt mandates for an unlimited general strike (*grève générale illimitée*), to begin when a certain number of other unions representing a certain minimum number of students had adopted similar mandates.[9] On February 13th 2012, the day a minimum

[9] This is a common device in Québec as the student movement gears up for a general strike: associations vote to go on strike only as soon as a minimum number of other associations have as strike mandate. For example, one association's resolution could have read that at least five associations with a total membership of 10,000 students

number of associations had voted to begin a strike, an impromptu snake demo wound through the streets of Montreal. The strike had begun!

With classes blocked or cancelled, striking students found themselves with time on their hands. Much was made of the fact that although students were not attending class, they were still expected to keep up with their academic work for when the strike ended, so the time was filled with read-ins, sit-ins, teach-ins, even a bring-your-own-chair moving classroom in the streets. Meanwhile, the number of students on strike continued to climb as higher strike ceilings were reached and more student unions voted to join the strike. A national demonstration on February 22nd drew thousands to the streets of Montreal, and those who attended on a one-day strike returned to their student unions full of enthusiasm and hoping to vote on a longer strike mandate.

As the number of students on strike grew, so did the pressure on the government to respond. The logic of a student strike is that in a primarily government-funded system, the cost of a cancelled semester—and thus a double cohort entering schools the following year—is simply too great for the government to accept. The strike thus takes on the air of a giant game of 'chicken', with students gambling their semester with the historically justified expectation that the government will be the first to give in. Given strict guidelines on the number of classroom hours

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had to have a similar strike mandate before its own strike could be launched. This helps to prevent situations in which smaller or more militant associations are on strike for weeks while waiting for others to join, and helps start the strike with a bang.

required for CEGEP programs to be recognized, and the amount of summer leave to be granted to unionized CEGEP professors, the government's leeway to let a strike continue indefinitely is somewhat restrained.

In light of these parameters and previous experiences, a tentative timeline called for the apex of the strike to occur in late March, with a joint demonstration called by the FECQ, FEUQ, and CLASSE on March 22nd (incidentally, the anniversary of the start of Paris' May 1968). Many FEUQ-affiliated unions planned on taking short strike mandates for that day or week. As time wore on, however, the government continued to refuse to even recognize the strike, ignoring it entirely or referring to a «boycott» of classes. In a context where the most common types of activity were awareness-raising actions and demonstrations that criss-crossed the streets of Montreal and Québec City without profoundly affecting the flow of goods and people, the CLASSE Congress called for a week of economic disruptions starting mid-March, in order to build pressure in the lead-up to the 22nd.

At this point our story becomes increasingly interesting and complex. The call for economic disruptions, followed by a growing call for a social strike,[10] opened up space for autonomous action. When the expected *denouement* did not occur after March 22nd, a carefully studied set of expectations based on previous strikes fell apart. The economic disruptions—in the form of early morning blockades or disruptions of capitalist gatherings—increased in terms of tactical ingenuity and disruptive power: sometimes multiple *manifactions* (direct actions organized

[10] A 'social strike' is imagined to include workers as well students.

by a small group of people in which most participants only know what the action is when they show up) were called on the same morning, either reinforcing each other or acting to divide the heightened police attention. By now, demonstrators had learned to carry bandanas and Maalox against pepper spray, and knew all too well the sound of batons rattling on shields that heralded an imminent charge by riot cops. Mornings in Montreal became the scene of daily confrontations between cops and strikers.

Despite the controversy these early-morning demos sparked, March 22nd was attended by a historically unprecedented number of people: approximately two hundred thousand people took to the streets in Montreal, including students, supporters, and others opposed to the Charest government. Plans were made for a repeat at the annual Earth Day demonstration, scheduled to happen exactly a month later (thus initiating a series of mass demonstrations occurring on the 22nd of each month, the last of which was on September 22nd, 2012 and the largest of which was on May 22nd). Meanwhile, 'creative' actions continued apace, drawing those unwilling to brave 7am meet-ups, or those already recovered from the early morning's exertions.

By mid-April, the strike had lasted two months in some student associations and Montreal's strikers had four weeks of economic disruptions worn into their running shoes. In his chapter, Joël Pedneault recounts how, furious at the government's reaction (which had only evolved from silence to taunts), at the daily police violence, at the looming spectre of a lost semester, and at the arrogance of holding a display of colonial and capitalist aggression

in the centre of an embattled city, students joined with anti-colonial activists, anarchists, and other anti-austerity demonstrators to attack a Northern Development job fair and networking event, in what turned into a memorable riot in downtown Montreal. A week later, the government announced its willingness to negotiate: as long as the student organizations denounced «violence» and agreed to a 3-day «truce» during the negotiations.

On the second day of these negotiations, a night-time demonstration was called, representing the growing segment of the strike movement that wanted nothing to do with a negotiated settlement or anything less than... a tuition freeze, free tuition, the end of capitalism, you name it, and wanted even less to accept a «truce,» whether imposed unilaterally by the government or by any self-appointed leaders of the strike. In other words, the movement declared itself ungovernable. In response, the Minister of Education held CLASSE responsible for the broken truce and negotiations broke down. A second night demo was called, with thousands of people filling the streets of Montreal with righteous anger, chants, and eventually a bonfire in the middle of an intersection in the Latin Quarter pf Montreal. Thus begins the next phase of the strike. With early morning militant actions continuing, and days already filled with symbolic actions, strategy sessions, debriefs, and general assemblies, a crowd of people gathered in Montreal at 8:30 pm every night to march through the streets together. Sometimes windows were broken and paint was spattered, sometimes the police kettled the demonstrators early, and sometimes the demos turned into long meandering walks through Montreal's central neighbourhoods, waving to residents with red

squares hanging from their balconies and bar patrons who either chanted along or yelled insults, all depending. At times, the night demonstrations grew to include tens of thousands of people.

The following weeks are marked by increasingly numerous injunctions against picket lines being imposed on various CEGEPs and institutions (and the exhausting physical resistance to them as people continue to hold hard picket lines in spite of police repression), a riotous May 1st anti-capitalist demo, and a counter-summit protest on May 4th outside the Liberal party's congress in Victoriaville. The latter is met with such police violence that several people have to be hospitalized, hovering between life and death because of wounds inflicted by plastic bullets.

During this demonstration, student negotiators from all four national student organizations are in Québec City, meeting with government representatives and, surprisingly, the presidents of the three major labour unions federations in Québec. Pressure from the labour leaders and the effects of dozens of consecutive hours spent in meetings push the student representatives into accepting a terrible deal, which is ultimately rejected by the local general assemblies in the following week.[11] It becomes evident that no one knows how this strike will end, and that the government is willing to defend the fee hike at whatever cost. Supporting

[11] The fact that this was a significant setback to the government's plans, and that the strike continued in spite of an offer being made, is a testament to the level of organization achieved by Québec's student movement at that point in time, and of the that power general assemblies had to determine the pace of events during this period.

the students' cause is becoming an unpopular risk to take, and calls to organize a social strike on May 1st and then May 15th go unanswered except among employees of some community groups. Meanwhile, some student activists have been barred from the island of Montreal, or from attending demonstrations, while awaiting trial (this topic is further developed in Section VI: Organizing Against Repression).

On May 10th, homemade smoke bombs are dropped at various stations in the Montreal métro/subway system, leading to accusations of terrorism (although no one was in any danger of being injured by these smoke bombs, unlike the numerous demonstrators at this point who have experienced broken limbs, traumatic head injuries, and more.) By the end of the week, the Minister of Education resigned, and her successor introduced a special law in the legislature, the infamous Bill 78, later known as Law 12 once it is adopted by the National Assembly of Québec.

Ironically, this bill, which was aimed at stopping all protest, breathes life back into the movement. Civil libertarians and supporters who'd watched in the sidelines quickly organized *casseroles*, which involved banging pots and pans, sometimes with kids in tow, sometimes on balconies, sometimes by the hundreds in a local public plaza. The movement becomes more broadly anti-Charest, anti-Liberal Party and anti-repression, and begins to shift out of the student unions—which now faced heavy penalties if they so much as endorse violations of the law—and into autonomous neighbourhood assemblies (APAQs), in addition to the existing affinity groups and collectives.

Three solid months of striking take their toll, however, and between the furtive nature of organizing under Law 12, the lack of a clear target, and the economic necessities that send students to work (sometimes outside the province) or back home for the summer, the energy of the strike has nearly petered out. In addition, in the context of Law 12, administrations closed academic institutions in order to «reduce» tensions on campus. This undermined students' access to common gathering spaces, limiting them to the outside of buildings. The annual arrival of the Formula One Grand Prix in June, with its orgy of capitalist and sexist excess, environmental costs... and its importance to the city's image, presents a last opportunity for economic disruption—and some perceive it as a dress rehearsal for when the strike «picks up» again with the return to school in August, according again to the provisions laid out by Law 12.

Several actions during the Grand Prix aimed to disrupt and denounce various characteristics of the event; a naked march, for example, highlighted the sexism that reigned in all of the cosmopolitan events around the arrival of the F1. The actions surrounding the F1 Grand Prix demonstrate the evolution of the student conflict and the broader social and systemic critique that shaped the movement. A strike that originally focused on the tuition hike transformed into a much larger struggle for a more just society. Chapters throughout this volume touch on the intensity of surveillance and policing enacted during that weekend, a climate that—it turns out—remained in place throughout that summer and into the following year.

We mentioned that the strike began to peter out in May 2012. Two chapters in this book (by Guillaume Néron and Vincent Roy) show that the strike was indeed more short-lived in some places in Québec outside Montreal. Student general assemblies stopped renewing strike mandates early in May 2012 in the two towns where they organized, well *before* the special law came into effect or any early provincial elections were announced. Why this was the case remains an open question. The dozens of local court injunctions that preceded Law 12 and made student picket lines illegal were no doubt a part of this equation. While these court injunctions were in many cases successfully resisted (but not always, as Guillaume Néron mentions), they may have accelerated the end of the strike by putting a negative pressure on the weekly strike renewal assemblies. Anti-strike injunctions may have created a sense on some campuses that defeat would come sooner or later and that the enemy had too many means at its disposal.

Perhaps, as well, the sense of being a part of a growing social uprising that was rapidly veering off the path taken by previous strikes and mobilizations, which was so present in major cities like Montreal, was much weaker elsewhere. The course of the strike no longer followed the 'usual' expectations about the timeline a strike was supposed to follow as soon as the March 22nd mass demonstration had no effect on government policy. As a result, non-metropolitan student associations may have been more open to demobilization, because expectations based on ideas about how previous student strikes, such as the one in 2005, had unfolded became of little use in the new context of repression.

Indeed, after a certain point in time, the realization we were a part of the longest student strike in the history of Québec (the previous record having been set at around 8 weeks), and that no end was in sight, changed many things. As we have seen, it opened up new possibilities for many, but it also acted as a discouraging factor for people who had favoured the strike to a point, but lost hope when faced with a perceived lack of results and an increasingly unpredictable and heavily repressed movement they may have thought would win come May. Coming to an understanding of the causes of this first wave of demobilization, which occurred prior to the special law and elections being called, will be important to organizing even more powerful strikes in the future.

The Aftermath: missed opportunities during the movement

Was the strike a success? For many of us in Québec, the question bears heavily on our collective conscience. Jean Charest's Liberal party was indeed overthrown, and their planned tuition hikes cancelled, but in many cases the same policies have simply been repackaged and presented under different names by their successors in the Parti Québécois. For some, the Québec Spring and its aftermath have highlighted the limits of naming and targeting easily identifiable, individual heroes and villains of a struggle—despite the power that a «good guys/bad guys» formula can lend to any mobilization. While former FECQ spokesman Léo Bureau-Blouin was inspired to run as a candidate for the Parti Québecois, helping his party to secure a minority victory in fall 2012 elections, most other

student activists have come to question social and political structures and systems of society that were previously taken for granted, and to think seriously about how they may be re-envisioned.

This book is also, then, an attempt to grapple with the complexity of the Québec movement, with all its successes as well as missed opportunities. The current post-strike climate calls for new and more complicated narratives that will broaden and deepen our analyses. Students and activists have been socialized by the systems that in many cases we wish to deconstruct and rebuild or destroy—how do we remain self-reflexive and constantly work to root out the oppression within our organizations and our selves? How do we build horizontal social movements that resist competitive individualism, for example, and include mechanisms for resisting the glorification of charismatic leaders? How can we disrupt normalized hierarchies such as those of race, class and gender, and facilitate the meaningful integration into mass movements of those who are silenced and marginalized in our societies? Despite the successes of CLASSE and the strategy of direct democracy in bringing and holding together a massive student strike, critiques point to the significant challenges that these questions posed for the coalition, the association (ASSÉ), and for the movement as a whole.

The need for the integration of an anti-oppressive, feminist, anti-colonial, anti-racist analysis has been raised repeatedly—although such considerations were seen by many student activists as divisive and/or as secondary struggles that only concerned particular affinity groups (such as queer students or people of colour), rather

than being integral aspects of the movement. Some of the popular chants heard on the street reflected this shortcoming, failing to recognize for example, the colonialism implicit in the call and response «Whose Québec? Our Québec!» and infectious sing-a-long «Tout est à nous, rien n'est à eux; tout ce qu'ils ont ils l'ont volé» (Everything is ours, nothing is theirs; everything they have they've stolen); or the sexism of the gendered mockery of then-Education Minister Line Beauchamp. The re-emergence, in the form of street theatre performed during demonstrations, of the metaphoric identification of Québec's working class and poor as «nègres blancs»—«white niggers»—coined by Québécois hero Pierre Vallières' autobiographical White Niggers of America (1970), alienated and outraged members of Black and other communities of colour; while chants mocking the Montreal police (SPVM) as the «SSPVM» accompanied by students marching with outstretched arms (as in Nazi salutes) stimulated condemnation of the students rather than of the police force. CLASSE spokesperson Gabriel Nadeau Dubois hinted that additional revenue generated through natural resource extraction and the development of northern Québec—at the expense of Indigenous communities— could be applied to educational funding as an alternative to tuition hikes (see the chapter by Joël Pedneault, in Section V). Inconsistent framing left the student movement open to dismissive criticism and accusations, and limited students' ability to build common ground across communities. It led to contradictions and problems in the movement's politics: for instance,

Ultimately, it is only through critical reflection and analysis that we can build stronger movements in the future.

We hope that this book calls attention to the importance of inclusive, intersectional approaches to movement building that incorporate and continue to develop critiques of capitalism, colonialism, patriarchy, and racism as we—in Québec, Canada, North America, and elsewhere across the globe—fight against neoliberalism and struggle to build stronger, more sustainable communities and societies.

Post-strike organizing

After the strike

While the content of this book focuses on the movement that developed between February and June of 2012, the strike did not officially end until early September, when the last student unions with strike mandates voted not to renew their strikes in light of the recently-elected PQ government's promise to cancel the tuition hike and abolish Law 12. During the summer, with campuses closed and student associations silenced by Law 12, neighbourhood popular assemblies (*Assemblées populaires autonomes de quartier*, or APAQs) formed and became the centre of resistance. In some cases, the APAQs provided a framework for long-time activists to come together on a neighbourhood basis, while in others they attracted a broader crowd. Most had at least one or two student members, and thus links to the organized student movement, though the majority of participants were not students.

As a result, action not only dwindled over the summer and became less militant, but also became broader in scope (though opposition to Law 12 and the Charest

government stayed strong), as well as more dispersed throughout the city. Night demonstrations ranging from a couple dozen die-hards to hundreds of participants made their presence felt at Montreal's summer festivals, but the air of daily street battles disappeared. And then, in late July, the Liberal government called elections for the month of September. The movement found itself suddenly facing the possibility that its named opponent could be gone from power in a few weeks, and (too) many activists and supporters turned their attention to the battle box.

Meanwhile, the return to classes loomed, and the student movement was left to restart a strike with none of its usual spaces accessible for mobilization. There is a reason most student strikes in Québec's history have taken place in the second, winter semester: it takes months of on-campus presence to prepare a strike and build the sense of solidarity that allows students to vote for a strike in full confidence that it will be effectively enforced. With student unions officially silenced, with students away from interpersonal networks, and with administrations ordering students not to strike, the possibility for remobilization was low. Léo Bureau-Blouin, the FECQ spokesperson turned PQ candidate, began to call for unions to suspend the strike until after the elections, and others soon echoed this demobilizing plan.

In the end, despite efforts to bring together APAQs and pro-strike activists from campuses still on break to form the sort of hard picket lines that had been seen against the injunctions, strike votes failed with no police confrontation at all of the CEGEPs that had been on strike through the summer. In addition to the general

demobilization, three factors are important to recognize for future organizing: first, the fact that the returns to classes (and strike GAs) were cleverly staggered by the government so the most moderate came first, with the result that each failing GA demobilized the next. Second, in each case, the first day of classes was cancelled in order to allow students to attend the GA, reinforcing the sense of business as usual and preventing the clashes between strikers and police that might have been enough of a show of strength to give the sense that a strike could and should be defended again. Finally, controversially, more radical members of the movement have pointed to the obsession with the appearance of democracy as essentially paralyzing. The fact that even the most determined opponents of the hikes bowed to the demand that GAs run their course and have their outcomes respected shows the power of the organised student movement, which draws its legitimacy from majority rule, even over autonomous actors who drew the legitimacy of their actions from ideals of social justice and on-the-ground organizing.

The picture was somewhat different on university campuses. With the support of professors who were furious at the administration's treatment of them, the return to classes at the Université de Montreal was marked by strong resistance—and an even stronger police presence, with the provincial police (SQ) setting up temporary headquarters on campus and holding students in classrooms. Nonetheless, within a few days the resistance was arguably moot as Pauline Marois' victory speech included a promise to cancel the proposed hike. The respite was brief, however. Once in power, the PQ government announced a summit on post-secondary education to be held in

February 2013, in order to discuss university governance, the involvement of the private sector, tuition fees, and other contentious matters. The process leading up to it was shrouded in secrecy and ever-changing information: in the end, four brief thematic meetings were held with student, administration, government and private sector representatives. Student demonstrators who tried to enter these closed-door meetings were met with locked doors and pepper spray, and with the meetings held in out-of-the-way locations, their presence went largely unremarked. The summit itself, ever-shrinking in both scope and time, eventually consisted of an 8-hour day and a short morning session (timed so as not to coincide with the demonstration called for that afternoon), at which an annual three percent tuition hike was announced and termed a «tuition freeze indexed to inflation» despite the fact that inflation has not been as high as 3% in years.

Since then, the PQ government has implemented some of the less popular hikes and fees announced by the previous Liberal government. Unfortunately, 2013's resistance was minimal, echoing a trend of extremely weak anti-austerity/anti-government activism since the end of the strike. The reasons for this ebb are unclear and likely multiple. Contributing factors include post-strike burnout and exhaustion, as well as the criminalization of many strikers; a lack of unifying cause and a scattering of activist attention between different issues and locations; and the Québécois nation-building and electoral processes that led many who gladly attacked Charest and the Liberals to be more wary of criticizing the Party Québécois.

But these are not the only factors weakening what has traditionally been an active protest culture, especially in Montreal. Police repression of activism has remained high even as activist strength has dropped. Montreal's protest-quashing bylaw P-6 (discussed by Jérémie Dhavernas in section VI) remains on the books and is used by the SPVM to kettle and ticket any march that seems the slightest bit radical. Police tactics developed during the strike are deployed regularly, while riot police are now an ever-present sight at any potentially political outdoor gathering. More people have been arrested in the context of mass arrests during protests after the end of the strike than during the strike itself.

Repression is equally perpetuated at the campus level, with the most blatant examples being the announcement by the administration at UQAM—traditionally an epicentre of student activism—that the area containing student union offices was being renovated effective immediately, with walls appearing overnight to block off access. The renovations have included whitewashing years' worth of activist graffiti murals, reducing the number of access points, and installing many new security cameras. Elsewhere, university budgets cuts and other austerity measures represent a more insidious form of backlash whose effects are only starting to appear.

Looking to the future

The long term impacts of the 2012 student movement—both for the geopolitical context and for the people who made it happen—remain to be seen. Nonetheless, coming as it does nearly two years after the conclusion of the strike, this book can start to outline some of these trends

and lingering questions. This is by no means an exhaustive list, and part of the hope of this book is to launch another set of ripples through sister activist communities and continue to build an ongoing legacy for this book.

Already, student activists across Canada, the US, England and Scotland are looking to the lessons that can be drawn from the Québec strike to strengthen their own struggles. It will fall to them to distill what works in their own specific contexts, but a careful study of the 2012 movement alongside the Québec social and political context can provide hints to what is transposable and what is not. Long-time student activists make the point that the strike movement that we have built in Québec is not an affinity-based movement. What allowed the strike to reach its strength in numbers and become such a lasting movement was that it was deeply anchored and institutionalized in a student union base (although organizing through affinity groups for disruptive actions gave the strike its firepower and was instrumental in radicalizing it). Activists in places lacking these structure should keep this context in mind when seeking to replicate the success of the 2012 student movement—although that does not mean that student activists' first priority should be to build a student syndicalist culture and an organizational structure along the lines of what exists in Québec—nor may this be a realistic goal, given the time required and the role of the Québec context in shaping what its student movement has become.

Beyond student activists, the 2012 Québec spring inspired many by showing a level of sustained popular resistance in North America that many had previously

associated with distant times or places. Whether or not the spring of 2012 will eventually touch off a wave of anti-austerity and anti-capitalist mass movements remains to be seen, but as the experience of Québec's strikers—and those who came from elsewhere to participate—spreads across the continent, the possibility remains present.

Perhaps the most exciting and visible sequel to the movement, however, can be found in the Idle No More, the Indigenous women-led movement launched in late 2012 to challenge colonialism across Canada. Although its issues, scope, and demographics differ from the Québec Spring, several Idle No More organizers have pointed to the mass movement built around the student strike as both an inspiration and a sign of changed times.

In a similar vein, we hope that readers—wherever they are, in whatever movements they are positioned—will find in this volume some of the joy, exhilaration, rage, and transformative reflection we and our thousands of fellow strikers experienced over the past years.

In solidarity, happy reading!

Communication as Solidarity: On Translating the Printemps Erable

Anna Sheftel

I founded *Translating the printemps érable* with my husband, in my pajamas, on Saturday, May 19th, the morning after the Charest government passed Bill 78. While I had supported the student movement from the sidelines since its inception; the special law was what kicked me into action. I did it because as a bilingual Anglophone Montrealer who was born here and who has lived here almost my entire life, I have long deplored the disparity between French and English media. The former is at least a large enough world that it contains multiple perspectives, while the latter caters mostly to knee-jerk conservative and Québec-phobic politics.

On this morning, I finally snapped. Over our morning coffee, my husband and I marvelled at the official editorial published in *Le Devoir*, which articulately denounced the

passing of such a draconian and anti-democratic law and called for its immediate repeal. I then switched on my computer, and found friends angrily sharing the *Globe and Mail*'s official editorial, which argued that the manifs had been so violent and disruptive that such an extreme measure was justified. My heart fell. I live downtown near UQAM, in the neighbourhood most affected by the clashes that took place for months as police kettled, pepper sprayed, launched tear gas and stun grenades at, intimidated, attacked, and arrested protesters. I could not believe that a national newspaper would publish something so cruel—and frankly, untrue—and that poured salt on the wounds of thousands of students and their allies.

Translation seemed like the quickest and the most direct way to redress this profound imbalance in media representation. At the time, just leaving our windows open in the evening would leave our eyes stinging with the after-effects of the pepper spray and tear gas being used a block or two away. As a result, I admit that I was

personally too afraid to be on the street for fear of being hurt or suddenly trapped in a police kettle.

Translating gave me something to do with myself to cope with the tremendous heartache I felt. It allowed me to contribute something meaningful to the movement. The first piece we translated and posted was that editorial from Le Devoir. We invited some friends to contribute to the project and they immediately rose to the occasion. Within a few hours like-minded strangers who felt a similar urgency to show the English-speaking world what was happening were contacting us. Within a day, we were getting thousands of hits on our website. I have never seen a project take off so quickly; it was my first and only experience thus far with something going «viral». From the beginning of the blog in May until September 20th when the tuition hike was officially suspended) we received over 92,000 unique visitors, and over 183,000 page views. We had a voice.

The idea was so simple; we were doing nothing but sharing information. Our translations were completed

quickly and we translated anything that gave important perspectives on, or texture to, the movement: newspaper articles, editorials, blog posts, first-hand accounts posted to Facebook, memes, and funny videos. We wanted everyone to be able to really see what was happening here. We wanted them to feel it.

Every movement needs to be able to communicate and to disseminate information. In this case, I think translation was an important tactic for doing so because it bridged gaps between Francophone and Anglophone Quebeckers, between Québec and the rest of Canada and English-speakers around the world. Initially, I had worried that the people whose work was being translated would be angry with us, or that newspapers would threaten to sue us. Neither happened; the authors of the pieces we translated frequently got in touch to thank us for helping them get the word out. They understood. It spoke to the important idea of solidarity; this was about supporting the work that was being done on the street, in the general assemblies, and elsewhere.

Translating can bring people together at profoundly divisive moments. What started as friends, acquaintances, and strangers all feverishly typing away in their own corners of the world turned into a vibrant community of engaged and kind people, many of whom are now good friends. Anyone who wanted to contribute was welcome, and we came from all over: some of us were situated in the middle of the action, while others contributed from afar. Some of us were students while others were allies. Some of us were Anglophone while others were Francophone. Like the movement we were a part of, we ran the blog collectively, resolved contentious issues respectfully, and we dreamed big. In the following sections of this essay, placed at the beginning of each section of this book, members of the *Translating the printemps érable* translation collective reflect on a crucial word or phrase that we struggled to translate, the place of translation alongside our activism, and how and why we were drawn to such a subtle yet impactful project as a means of making ourselves heard.

Direct Democracy, Grassroots Mobilization and the Quebec Student Movement

Rushdia Mehreen, Hugo Bonin & Nadia Hausfather

The 2012 Quebec student strike was the longest and by far the most radical of the nine general student strikes in the history of the province. One vital ingredient in the creation and sustenance of this historic movement was direct democracy. Thus, in order to properly understand the strike, one must first examine the concept of direct democracy and its practical application in the struggle.

In this chapter we start by introducing direct democracy, its concrete manifestation in Quebec's student unions, and its place within a wider frame of union-based organizing—namely, combative syndicalism (unionism). We then move towards an analysis of the role of direct democracy, grassroots mobilization and general assemblies (GAs[1]) in the 2012 student strike. Finally, we reflect upon post-2012 critiques of this model of direct democracy, particularly the GAs. We conclude with some thoughts about the long term impacts of direct democracy and grassroots mobilization on students and Quebec society in general.

Direct democracy and general assemblies

Democracy is an ambiguous term with a complex history—both conceptually[2] and in its concrete incarnations.

[1] Also known as General Membership Meetings (GMMs)

[2] For an analysis of the changes of the meaning of democracy in the 19th century, see Dupuis-Déri, Francis, "Histoire du mot 'démocra-

In order to clarify the term, we will define "democracy" as a "mode of political action,"[3] as the political practices of ordinary people taking charge of their own affairs. This conception of democracy—different from a mainstream understanding of democracy as a representative political regime—allows us to understand direct democracy as a form or incarnation of democracy.

Direct democracy is clearly not the invention of students in Québec nor of any modern social movement. To cite two examples amongst many, assemblies were held by medieval peasants in Europe[4] as well as by Indigenous people in North America.[5] However, by exploring direct democracy within the student movement and explaining its manifestation, we hope to provide additional clarity and insight into its historical and practical significance.

In most student unions in Québec (certainly those that are members of ASSÉ/CLASSE[6]), the general assembly is open to all members and is the ultimate decision making body.[7]This means that the GA can take any decision,

tie' au Canada et au Québec: Analyse politique des strategies rhétoriques", *Revue canadienne de science politique*, vol. 42, n°2, 2009, p. 321-343. Also see Dupuis-Déri, Francis, *Démocratie. Histoire politique d'un mot: Aux États-Unis et en France*, 2013, Lux Éditeur.

[3] Abensour, Miguel «'Démocratie insurgente' et institution», Martin Breaugh, Francis Dupuis-Déri (eds.), *La démocratie au-delà du libéralisme : Perspectives critiques*, Outremont, Athéna/Chaire Mondialisation-citoyenneté-démocratie, 2009, p. 186. Our translation.

[4] Gutton, Jean-Pierre, *La sociabilité villageoise dans la France d'Ancien régime*, Paris, Hachette, 1979, p. 141-146.

[5] Sioui, Georges E., *Les Wendats : Une civilisation méconnue*, Sainte-Foy, Presses de l'Université Laval, 1994, p. 248-258.

[6] More on ASSÉ/CLASSE later.

[7] For a more general definition of "general assemblies", see Baba,

including about how it functions, as long as the process follows a certain set of agreed-upon rules (e.g. Code Morin, Robert's Rules8[8], etc.). The decision then binds the union as an organization—especially the elected executive of the union—to carry out said decision. The executive committee exists to give life to a decision: its role is not to interpret[9] the decision nor to change it. A decision can be reversed or altered in a subsequent assembly following the aforementioned procedures.

In order to encourage rank-and-file members to also be involved in carrying out the GA's decisions, student unions create open, informal, non-elected committees[10] in which more technical questions are discussed and motions are put into practice (Figure 1). Thus with the help of members, the executive and other committees are able to carry out mandates voted in the general assembly.

Morjane, "AG", *Guérilla Kit*, Paris, La Découverte, 2003, p. 67

[8] These are mainstream codes of rules whose purpose is to order deliberative assemblies. Most student unions use specific procedures adapted from the Code Morin, a Québec code inspired by Robert's Rules. An adapted version of Code Morin can be found here: www.aecpul.com.ulaval.ca/pdf/codemorin.PDF CLASSE's Congress used an adapted Code Morin available at www.asse-solidarite.qc.ca/spip.php?article74. Last accessed September 27, 2012.

[9] In practice there is inevitably some degree of interpretation involved, though when it happens, it is often criticized by the student members to whom the executives are accountable (also see note 12).

[10] Whether committees are elected or not varies greatly accordingly to the student union; Committees are often open to everyone and manage a specific aspect of the union's work (student life, women's condition, mobilization, etc.). They have access to budgets but must work within the framework of the positions of the general assembly.

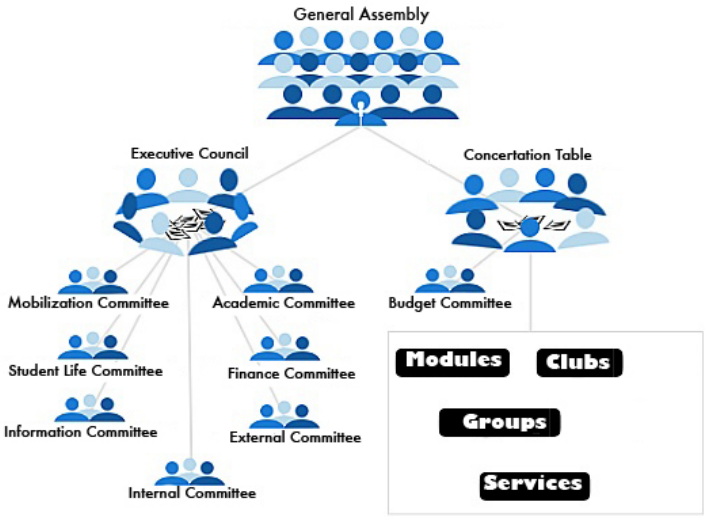

Figure 1. Example of the structure of a student union—CÉGEP St-Laurent

Under normal circumstances, assemblies are held once a month or so, with a relatively low turnout—typically from one to five per cent of membership in attendance. In contrast, in the context of a large mobilization, participation can increase drastically: during the 2012 movement, the average attendance rate gravitated between 40 and 60 per cent.[11] Beyond the broader political context, membership attendance is also strongly linked to the mobilization (promotion) efforts for a given GA, the topics on its agenda, and members' perceptions of its personal and political importance. GAs about budgetary and other bureaucratic affairs—although they are important in terms of transparency—are usually less popular than those

[11] Attendance was the highest in student unions with a strong and established culture of direct democracy, particularly urban CÉGEPs that were members of the provincial strike coalition, the CLASSE.

involving political debates and potential courses of action. During the Québec student movement, the GA was the place where students took back the control of their own affairs, thus creating (direct) democracy as a mode of political action.

In principle, GAs grant all the participants of a given student union an equal say about its collective decisions, while providing the opportunity to bring forth individual concerns. Students take part directly in discussion and deliberation without any intermediary. Moreover, the rules and regulations used during GAs allow each individual the equal right to speak and intervene. However, like with any endeavour, there are always challenges in practice: the boxed section further below will take a critical look at the dynamics within GAs and the aspects deployed to facilitate participation among diverse individuals and groups.

Finally, it is important not to overlook the fact that general assemblies can consume a lot of time and energy: organizing the GA and mobilizing students to attend involves a tremendous amount of work that cannot be underestimated. Furthermore, long and sometimes unproductive debates are not always a propos, especially in a context where students and unions face time constraints to make decisions on a number of issues. That being said, this does not mean that GAs should be discarded because they take time and energy to organize. On both political and strategic planes, the benefits of direct democracy outweigh its shortcomings.

Combative syndicalism

Before addressing the debates about the challenges of direct democracy practices in a diverse student population, we want to frame such practices within the larger frame of union-based organizing. Since the birth of the modern student movement in Québec in the 1960s, student unions have been inspired by the French notion of 'student syndicalism' that viewed students as intellectual workers;[12] some have been particularly influenced by *le syndicalisme de combat*—combative syndicalism, and its emphasis on direct democracy.

Relatively unknown outside of francophone countries (the concept is called *syndicalisme de lutte* in France), combative syndicalism is structured around two principles: democracy and constant mobilization. In this perspective, the only way that members (workers, students) can expect to improve their conditions is through mobilization of the membership in order to establish a constant leverage against political opponents (employer, administration, government).[13] Implicit in such a statement is the membership's control of the union, through general assemblies and other elements of direct democracy. It is "only the control of the union by its members that allows them to get involved and become politicized."[14]

[12] For a general history of the Québec student movement, see Bélanger, Pierre, *Le mouvement étudiant québécois : son passé, ses revendications et ses luttes (1960-1983)*, Montréal, ANEEQ, 1984, 208 pages, and Lacoursière, Benoît, *Le mouvement étudiant au Québec de 1983 à 2006*, Montréal, Sabotart Édition, 2007, 202 pages.
[13] Piotte, Jean-Marc, *Le syndicalisme de combat,* Montréal, Éditions coopératives Albert Saint-Martin, 1977, p.28.
[14] Piotte, *op. cit.,* p. 30. Our translation.

Such control and ownership could be difficult to exercise if the associations consisted of tens of thousands of members (such as an entire university). Thus in the student context, smaller associations such as those of CEGEPs, faculties and departments are preferable for organizing and engaging in combative discourse.[15] Regular general assemblies, debates, workshops, etc., further help to raise consciousness and empower members to take control of the issues that affect them. This emphasis on direct democracy is also a way to counter the tendency of social organizations—be they workers', students' or other organizations—to bureaucratize themselves and move closer to the established political order.[16]

In the Québec student movement, this relation between direct democracy and combative unionism is similarly intertwined. Direct democracy is present thanks to the strong presence of combative student unions, and those unions are combative because of the place of direct democracy in their structures. This relation also reiterates the strong connection between direct democracy, mobilization, and politicization in the movement: mobilized students participate in their general assemblies, thus they become aware of their agency as democratic actors, thus becoming more politically conscious.

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[15] For a discussion on the desired size and composition of a student union, see www.studentstrike.net/5-further-readings/building-local-student-unions/. Last accessed September 7, 2014.

[16] We can see general assemblies as "[…] deliberative processes that amplify diverse viewpoints, utilize heterogeneous sets of organizational resources, and maintain accountability structures that limit the negative influence of bureaucratic routinization and maintain openness to new practices". Walker, Edward T., "Social Movements, Organizations, and Fields: a Decade of Theoretical Integration", *Contemporary Sociology: A Journal of Reviews*, 2012, n°4, p. 584.

The role of direct democracy and grassroots mobilization in building the 2012 mass movement

> *"Existing as a permanent balance of power against the State, a combative student association that is based on the strength of numbers must operate through direct democracy."* [17]
>
> —*ASSÉ, the* Association pour une solidarité syndicale étudiante

The name *Association pour une solidarité syndicale étudiante* (ASSÉ), when translated into English, often misses the particular historical connotations associated to the term 'syndicale' as mentioned above. Indeed, both before and during the 2012 strike, for the student associations who were members of ASSÉ (and thus CLASSE[18]), direct democracy was practiced at all levels, starting with general assemblies. The processes of deliberating, debating and collective decision-making that took place in these GAs are key to explaining the strength and longevity of the 2012 movement. During the strike, weekly general assemblies were the central space where students at the grassroots level voted on issues of both local and provincial content, including demonstrations, strategies and other political actions and positions, and of course on the pivo-

[17] Association pour une solidarité syndicale étudiante, "Le syndicalisme de combat": www.asse-solidarite.qc.ca/spip.php?article1743&lang=fr#4.1 Last accessed September 27, 2012, our translation.

[18] CLASSE mostly followed ASSÉ's procedures. For further details, see official CLASSE website: www.bloquonslahausse.com/laclasse/a-propos/ Last accessed September 7, 2014.

tal question of the *unlimited general strike*[19]—and whether to accept government offers.

Students were empowered via their general assemblies to make their decisions and did so because *they* believed in accessible and free education and because *they* knew that a strike was the ultimate tactic against the hikes.[20] It was the students themselves who decided collectively in their general assemblies to go on strike based on the discussions and debates held with their peers.[21]

The strike movement thus was built from the ground up: the positions and mandates from the general assemblies were then debated among all the members in the CLASSE congress to decide upon a common course of action. The decisions made at the coalition (provincial) level were the positions taken by member associations in their own general assemblies (see figure 2). CLASSE executives would then coordinate this action plan, with the help of

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[19] In all CLASSE members associations, the strike was voted as unlimited general strike (GGI: *Grève Generale Illimitée*) which was «unlimited» in principle and in most of the associations, it was renewed in a weekly GA.

[20] This does not erase the fact that thousands of students were against the strike and that several student unions did not go on strike. It might be possible that anti-strike students were also empowered by GAs as they became more vocal through participating in the assemblies.

[21] It should be noted that grassroots mobilization was carried out on campuses starting 2010 , which was intensified leading up to the strike. Depending on mobilization levels on campuses some associations (on Anglophone campuses, in particular) continued grassroots mobilization for GAs and other actions during the strike as well. For details on this aspect, see www.studentstrike.net/ Last accessed September 7, 2014.

CLASSE committees[22] and members at large.

How did it all play out? Delegates from each association brought the mandates voted in their respective GAs to the congress. The mandates of each association were also posted on the CLASSE list-serve so that other associations could take a position on them. If at congress, the majority of members did not have a position (more abstentions than yes and no votes) on a given proposition, the position was tabled.

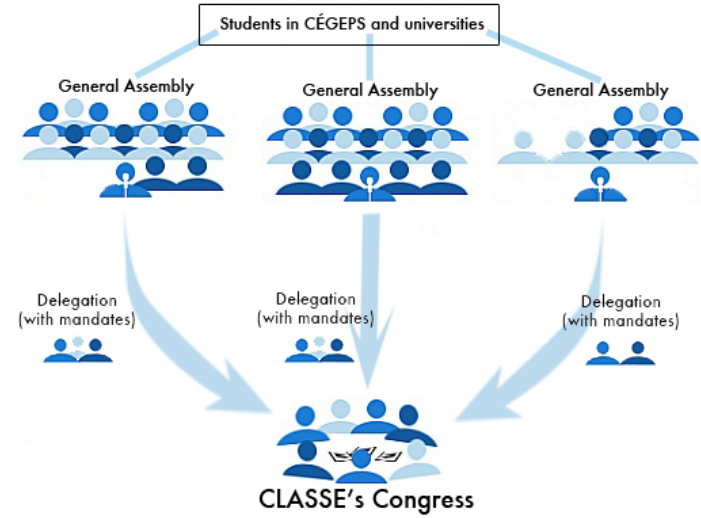

Figure 2. CLASSE (or ASSÉ) structure.

This way of operating emphasizes the distinction between a 'delegate' and a 'representative'. While normally representatives would make decisions on behalf of the

[22] See note 9. Also see some criticism of the structure in the resignation letter of the Social Struggles Committee to ASSÉ: orientation.bloquonslahausse.com/lettre-de-demission-du-comite-aux-luttes-sociales/. Last accessed September 7, 2014.

members of their union (members thus don't have a direct say), delegates to CLASSE would be expected to vote according to the mandates adopted in their GAs, thus respecting the principles of direct democracy. This continues to be the case for those associations who are members of ASSÉ and participate in ASSÉ congresses.

It should be noted that a CLASSE (and ASSÉ) mandate did not automatically become the mandate of a member association who didn't have a mandate from its own members. Local sovereignty was protected at all times, empowering the students at the grassroots, which in turn strengthened the movement.

Just as demands and action plans were decided from the bottom up, any requests or communication coming from the government that were addressed to CLASSE also followed these processes, each student association's general assembly voting on how to respond to the government's request or communication (or offer) and then bringing the positions to the CLASSE congress for another vote. Students at the core of the grassroots movement thus had the power to decide whether a government offer was acceptable or not, what course of action should be taken next, whether to condemn violence or not, or even what constitutes violence.[23]

This larger provincial impact that decisions made at the grassroots GA level could have was an important mo-

[23] In April, the condition to join the negotiations with the government was to condemn violence. While the two other federations condemned it soon after or within a few days, CLASSE waited for its members to take a position on violence in their own general assemblies. Based on the GA mandates, the position of CLASSE on violence was discussed, debated and formulated.

bilizing factor during the strike. We can attribute higher GA attendance during the strike to the level of influence students had on the local but also the Québec-wide directions of the movement. Since member students were involved in making decisions, such as when to hold Québec-wide demonstrations and what type of actions to put forward, they would also feel responsible to take part in carrying them out—on campuses and on the streets.

In this way, direct democracy was one of the strongest pillars of the student movement that lasted over six months. It is our contention that such a movement would not have been possible if it had been led by student union executives behind closed doors, making decisions about when and where the strike should take place. For the most part, campuses and associations that did not exercise direct democracy through general assemblies were not able to mobilize their members on a massive scale and/or did not take part in the strike. Strong direct democracy practices at the local student association level but also in the CLASSE thus played a vital role in mass mobilization and explain the stable number of students on strike for a long period of time and the turnout of hundreds of thousands to the streets.[24]

Post-2012 debates: GAs and oppression

Following the 2012 Québec student strike, many discussions took place across Canada about the methods and

[24] The demonstrations also included non-students but the critical mass, particularly at the beginning of the movement, was composed of students who were on strike, whose time was liberated to bring their case to the streets.

organization of the CLASSE and student unions in Québec. One point of criticism was that general assemblies are oppressive structures that don't encourage minority voices and perpetuate heterosexual, white, male privileges. Indeed it is necessary to note that GAs—especially large ones—can be intimidating and might not always allow for everyone to voice their concerns. Students, no matter their level of politicization, are not exempted from power relations and in some cases discriminative/oppressive statements and attitudes were witnessed in assemblies.

One of the first things to acknowledge, however, when addressing oppression and GAs is that racism, sexism, heterosexism and oppressive systems are structural parts of Québec's society (as in most societies) and are therefore reproduced inside the student movement and its structures. Hence, anti-oppression and other related training and efforts need to take priority on our campuses, in our student unions, and all its instances.

Some specific mechanisms were put in place in the case of the Québec student movement following the 2005 strike (and the reflections that came out of it) in order to make GAs more inclusive spaces and allow all, in particular minority voices, to be heard as much as possible. These include basic techniques, which are widely practiced, such as priority for first-time speakers and an alternation between men and women. Another more elaborate mechanism is the presence of a "mood watcher" (*gardien-ne du senti*), a person elected for the GA who is responsible for moderating the tone and pointing out any oppressive language or stances, and discouraging dominant voices from monopolizing the GA time. A specific time-limit is usually agreed

upon which is to be respected by all participants, so that no one gets to speak for longer than others. The use of microphones, unless the GAs are very small, can ensure that people with loud voices are not privileged in being heard over those with less assertive and/or audible manners of speaking.

As GAs more often than not gathered hundreds of students, some found them intimidating, as not everyone is comfortable with speaking in public for various reasons. In some cases the much smaller departmental GAs were preferred in order to have more healthy and inclusive discussions. In some cases during the student strike, affinity groups were created that focused on having minority voices heard. The creation of affinity groups along various lines—some more action-oriented around activities such as yarn bombing, others framed around identity and politics, such as the queer/feminist bloc or students of colour—also allowed for informal discussions and the preparation of propositions/motions to bring to the general assemblies for widespread discussion and debate. As a member of yarn bombing group Maille-À-Part explained, having an affinity group as a "safety net" allowed for members to speak more confidently at the GAs, as they knew at least the members of their group were in agreement with the idea being proposed. Another specific example of an affinity group was the Comité Femmes GGI (Women's Committee for the unlimited general strike) that was created at UQAM (*Université du Québec à Montréal*) and whose members were active at the coalition level as well.

Of course, all of this does not mean that GAs are absolutely 'safe spaces.' There is considerable room for impro-

vement and for introducing other mechanisms to make them more diverse and equitable for all. Additional mechanisms could include an alternation between racialized and non-racialized students (or prioritizing the contributions of racialized members) in addition to alternating speaking rights between self-identified male, female, queer and trans people. Ultimately, general assemblies are structures to facilitate direct democracy, so they can and should be modified and adapted according to the context, to be as inclusive as possible. It is a work in progress.

In the end, avoiding GAs by saying they are oppressive is a vicious circle as without the space for direct democracy, students at the grassroots would be disadvantaged rather than be empowered. The solution is to create general assemblies with mechanisms in place designed to address systemic inequalities and facilitate the participation of a diverse membership as well as to continue the efforts to make GAs a safer space and a tool for collective emancipation.

Conclusion

We have sought to illustrate how direct democracy played a key role in the mobilization of the students in 2012, and was possible due to the existence of structures in which such democracy could express itself and become a means of political action. Collective spaces of deliberation were the basis of the collective movement that was the 2012 Québec student strike.

We consider it to be too early to draw clear conclusions about the aftermath of the 2012 strike. The consequences

on the student movement, on Québec society and on social movements will probably be diverse and profound. But one thing is sure: the tens of thousands of students who participated, discussed and voted in their respective general assemblies were transformed by this experience. For example, their vision of democracy is likely to have shifted from a mainstream, liberal understanding of the delegation of political capacities through the ballot box, to the comprehension of democracy as a mode of political action.

In an analysis of assemblies in revolutionary France, J. Guilhaumou puts forward the idea that the practice of direct democracy transforms people on an intellectual level. Thus, individuals participating in assemblies are shaped by new "*cognitive practices* that reflect their resources and knowledge as every citizen becomes a judge in the field of legislative activity and political emancipation."[25]

By its size and length, the 2012 strike will certainly have repercussions for tens of thousands of students and the broader public, who had a taste of a more genuine democracy. And that's one hell of a victory in itself.

[25] Guilhaumou, Jacques, "Le mécanisme démocratique", in Marcel Detienne (ed.), *Qui veut prendre la parole ?*, Paris, Seuil, 2003, p. 344-345. Our translation.

2 A Diversity of Tactics

For those who were not in Québec during the spring of 2012, it may be difficult to conceive of the multiplicity of forms the strike took. Chameleon-like, the strike adapted itself to different circumstances and audiences, responding to the political and tactical terrain day by day, and becoming infused with the visions and talents of people from a huge range of backgrounds and perspectives. Student unions and afinity groups of strikers and supporters organized hundreds of thousands of events ranging from yarn-bombing to bank blockades, teach-ins and debrief spaces, and mega-demonstrations. By the end of the strike, tactics had included snake demos, *manif-actions*, sit-ins, art installations, *casseroles*, maNUfestations (naked demonstrations), informative/propagandist projections on buildings or other sites, 100+ nightly demos, property destruction of various sorts, giant parade-like demonstrations on a historic scale, campus blockades and levées de cours, baby blocs, masquerades, a masked "pirates versus ninjas" demonstration, ironic pro-hike demonstrations complete with individualist slogans, and more.

While Jaouad Laarousi reveals how the tactical transformations of the strike were a necessary part of a great game of cat-and-mouse played by strikers and police

across the landscape of Montreal (as well as the rest of Québec), the relatively low profile of on-campus action in 2012 marked a deviation from the traditional sphere of student organizing. Experienced student organizers point to the necessity of a strong campus presence for mobilization, discussion, and information sharing. Although that purpose was sometimes served in Montreal and Québec City by the huge numbers of people in the street, the rapid collapse of mobilization after the Law 12-imposed lockout proves the importance of campuses as an organizing space.

This tension between on-campus and street-oriented organizing corresponds, to a certain extent, with a similar tension felt between the organized student movement and autonomous organizing, both by students and others. The formal student sector launched the strike and in many ways provided the framework for it, but the autonomous initiatives that emerged to fill that framework were often accountable to no one but themselves, and it was in the back-and-forth between the various strands of the movement that the overall shape of the strike was forged. Thus, Xavier Lafrance's chapter on the lessons learned from the 2005 strike sets up the conditions within which the street tactics Jaouad discusses emerged.

Where Montreal's strike was visible daily in the streets, in areas with fewer major economic targets the strike tended to hold onto the tradition of being more campus-based. David Clément describes the mix of public demonstrations and campus occupations that characterized a critical moment in the strike's history: when the first injunction was served forcing students back to class, and the Sûreté du

Québec occupation of the Université du Québec campus in Gatineau (north of Ottawa) brought home that this movement might not be ended by demobilization or co-optation, as recent student strikes had been, but by force. Though the rumours the army might be brought in were never realized, the presence of armoured riot police with "less-lethal" weapons became an increasingly common sight from then on.

Manifestation

Anna Sheftel

Translating the word *manifestation* into English inevitably requires making an interpretive decision, as one must choose whether it means «demonstration» or «protest.» It seems telling that the French language sees no need to differentiate between the two; a *manifestation* is a *manifestation*; more generically, a «happening.» However, reading the mainstream English media's understanding of what happened here in the spring and summer of 2012, the gulf between a demonstration and a protest appeared enormous.

During the strike, the government and mainstream media outlets painted the idea of «protest» as violent, disruptive (is it so terrible to occasionally be

disrupted?) and chaotic. The word «demonstration,» on the other hand, seemed like the antithesis of violence; it evoked a dignified and peaceful way of voicing one's beliefs. And despite my profound disagreement with the ways in which those with power had perverted something as democratically healthy as protest to indicate a nefarious activity, I often took the less controversial way out, and translated *manifestation* as «demonstration,» and *manifestant* as «demonstrator.» It seemed like the less judgmental, less loaded term. My struggles with this single word always reminded me not only of the interpretive power of the translator, but also of the ways in which we become so protective about the language of the social movements with which we identify. I felt guilty for playing the game and shying away from such a noble word as «protest.»

What happened in this movement was far more complex, dynamic, creative and all-encompassing than a *manifestation*, a «demonstration» or a «protest.» We even invented new words to convey what we were doing; my English-speaking friends and I talked about going «casseroling» (in French, the equally made up «*casseroler*»), for example, a word with its origins in French but its morphology in English. Our *manifestations* became so routine that we all took to calling them the shortened and colloquial *manifs*. We were generating new vocabulary daily. And we opposed the heavy paternalistic hand of our government and the complicity of those with the loudest voice in our society by doing things that did not look much like protesting or demonstrating at all, but which very much were.

Social Movements and Self-Transformation: From the 2005 Student Strike to the *Printemps érable*

Xavier Lafrance

Veterans of the student movement in Québec will tell you that the preparation work for 2012 student strike was started in 2005. It is indeed the 2005 student strike that launched a cycle of transformation of the balance of power within Québec's student movement which culminated with the great strike of 2012, the aftermath of which is still ongoing. This last strike and the widely popular mobilization it entailed brought to the forefront the democratic and combative student unionism upheld by the ASSÉ and its member unions. This represents a major shift from the prevalence of a top-down, corporatist, and lobbyist mode of action under the dominance of the *Fédération Universitaire Étudiante du Québec* (FEUQ) and the *Fédération Étudiante Collégiale du Québec* (FECQ) since the early 1990s.

To understand how this process was launched in 2005 and unfolded over the years, it is important to analyze the successes as well as the failures of the ASSÉ during the 2005 strike, and since. These successes and failures become clearer and take their full meaning when analyzed in comparison with the accomplishments of the spectacular movement in 2012. Such an analysis reveals how the democratic and combative wing of the student movement was able to mature and to sharpen its political perspective and its strategic outlook between the

two episodes of heightened mobilization and how this evolution was facilitated by a shifting balance of power within the broader student movement.

The 2005 strike and the CASSÉÉ

In 2003, two years after its creation, ASSÉ launched an unlimited general strike campaign primarily aimed at blocking the substantial hike of institutional fees that had been announced in many CÉGEPs across the province of Québec. Though many student unions obtained strike mandates, the number deemed necessary to launch the strike was not reached and the campaign ended in a stalemate, which had a demoralizing and demobilizing effect on the organization. For the remainder of 2004, ASSÉ appeared to be more or less stagnant. The Political Science program student union at UQÀM formally reconsidered its affiliation to ASSÉ during spring of 2004, but remained a member by a narrow majority. The executive committee of the CÉGEP de Drummondville student union also made clear its intentions to leave ASSÉ in the near future. The Concordia student union did disaffiliate, though mainly for its own internal reasons, joining the FEUQ and taking a large financial contribution with it; ASSÉ was left with only seven members and a much smaller budget. The student federations (FECQ-FEUQ) were thus confidently asserting their domination over the student movement and were boasting about the eventual death of their rival organization, ASSÉ. But not for long.

Meanwhile, at the end of 2003 and again in its 2004 budget, the Liberal government of Québec announced a harsh reform of the province's financial aid system that

included the transformation of a $103 million bursaries budget into loans. In late spring and summer 2004, ASSÉ decried this reform and launched a campaign in opposition to it. The Association refused to limit its demands to the $103 million cutback, instead developing a platform that demanded not only the abolition of the reform, but the retroactive reinvestment of the sums that had been cut, and also a clear commitment from the government not to decentralize the CÉGEP network—which would grant powers to campus administrations that would lead them to compete with one another and to offer programs increasingly catering to the demands of private corporations. With these immediate demands came a longer-term goal to eliminate post-secondary tuition fees (that is, to institute free education), as well as to clear student debt.

After an escalation of pressure tactics, and facing an unyielding government that refused to even listen, ASSÉ launched the eighth general student strike in Québec's history in February of 2005. The student federations (FECQ and FEUQ) joined the movement just over a week later. In order to lead the strike and put forth its demands more widely, ASSÉ decided to invite non-member student unions to join forces within a broader coalition named CASSÉÉ. All student unions were welcome, including unions affiliated to the federations, provided they had democratically decided to join and adopted the coalition's platform in their general assemblies (or general membership meetings). The ASSÉ decided to form this coalition primarily in order to improve its balance of power in the face of the state. But another crucial motivation

behind this unprecedented move was to avoid a repeat of the 1996 student strike.

The seventh general strike (1996), launched in opposition to a 30 per cent tuition increase, had seen FECQ and FEUQ taking advantage of the leverage created by the mobilization—40 associations and 100,000 students on strike at its peak—to negotiate with the government without MDE (*Movement pour le Droit à l'Éducation*), a then recently formed national student union and, in a sense, the predecessor of ASSÉ. The federations, representing only a small proportion of the students on strike, reached a very disappointing agreement at the time.

To avoid such a scenario in 2005, ASSÉ created a broader coalition. The creation of the CASSÉÉ was met with unexpected and impressive success. It represented well over a third (70,000 out of the 185,000) of students that were on unlimited strike at the peak of the mobilization. Many student unions formally affiliated with the federations joined the Coalition, adopting its practices of direct democracy. Members of CASSÉÉ were also behind many of the numerous demonstrations and economic disruption as well as the plentiful and very creative artistic interventions, which foreshadowed the combative and powerfully imaginative mobilization of 2012. The Coalition met only once with the Education Minister but was excluded from the negotiation process for the remainder of the seven week-long conflict (a serious failure on the part of the Coalition, to which I will return below). Yet, from the streets and in the massive general assemblies where students throughout the province pronounced their will and positions, CASSÉÉ was able

to pressure both the government's and the Federation's representatives all through the negotiation process. The coalition brought a strong culture of direct democracy to the movement which imposed a constant pressure from below on representatives sitting at the negotiating table. Thus, in 2005, through a massive collective struggle, CASSÉÉ had already kickstarted a shift in the balance of power within Québec's student movement.

Maintaining the Coalition together during the strike, however, proved to be difficult. The Coalition brought a clash of cultures between student unions who were still new to democratic and combative (activist) student unionism, on the one hand, and on the other hand the ASSÉ's member unions, whose seasoned delegates could be immature and dogmatic on a number of points. For example, the issue of free education proved to be a sticking point. During a CASSÉÉ congress, a group of delegates voiced their opposition to the goal of free education, which they believed would not be popular in the media and would have the effect of marginalizing the Coalition. The members present at the congress, however, finally voted to preserve this broader aim. In retrospect, this was the right decision. It led tens of thousands of students on strike to appropriate (or at least to ponder) the idea that education is a right and should be free and publicly funded. It allowed the Coalition to present its immediate demands while also promoting a deeper vision of a free and decommodified post-secondary education. In the wake of what was at that time the largest and longest student strike in Québec's history, the Coalition's position actually brought the notion of free education out of its almost complete marginality into the public sphere as a

legitimate and debatable idea. In the months and years that followed the mobilization, many local student unions as well as many other organizations—among them the *Fédération des travailleurs et travailleuses du Québec*, the province's largest trade union federation—adopted positions in support of free post-secondary education.

The issue of "violence" was also problematic and proved quite divisive. CASSÉÉ was excluded from the negotiating table by the Minister—with tacit support from the Federations—on the ground that it supported violent actions. In order to be re-included in the negotiations, the Coalition was asked to officially condemn violence. In general assemblies and congresses, some of CASSÉE's student members dismissed the Minister's demand as a pretext for excluding the most democratic and radical student organization from the negotiating process (this was certainly true). A condemnation en bloc of undefined violence, members argued, would cut us off from tactics of economic disruption, sit-ins, occupations, etc. that provided us with much of our power in face of the state. Other associations and unions urged the Coalition to condemn violence in order to access the table. Yet others also insisted that militant actions and protests should be framed in a way that would please media. In the end, all sides abided by the false contradiction that had been set up between combativeness and a sound representation of the movement in the media. These debates notwithstanding, the coalition in general did believe in the importance of winning over "public opinion", in spite of discussions and proposed positions that often complicated the task. The spokespersons were left to play a delicate dance with very limited experience and resources.

The CASSÉÉ was not yet able to adopt the brilliant position embraced by the CLASSE in 2012, which condemned physical violence on individuals while asserting the importance and legitimacy of actions of civil disobedience. Even if it had, however, this would have offered no guarantee of inclusion in the bargaining process. Beyond the issue of condemning violence, what was needed for the CASSÉÉ to be included in negotiations was unity within the student movement. The FECQ and the FEUQ would have needed to show solidarity and defiance in the face of the government and refuse to negotiate without the Coalition created by the ASSÉ. The next challenge, then, was to build broader unity within the student movement, across organizational divides.

Some members of CASSÉÉ suggested approaching the Federations with a deal: the coalition would refrain from criticizing the FECQ and the FEUQ publicly in exchange for their promise to not engage in negotiations without CASSÉÉ. Such a deal was struck over the summer of 2011 at the *Rassemblement national étudiant* (RNE), where 88 student unions belonging to the ASSÉ and the Federations, as well as unaffiliated unions, met in preparation for the upcoming strike of 2012. Now, would such a deal have been possible in 2004-2005? Not likely. For one, the ASSÉ and many of its activists were probably too prone to attack the student federations at the time, a reflex that becomes understandable in the face of fifteen years of undemocratic and corporatist behaviour by the FECQ and the FEUQ.[1] The federations also showed disdain toward the ASSÉ

[1] Lacoursière, Benoît (2007). *Le mouvement étudiant au Québec de 1986 à 2006,* Montreal: Sabotart, 179 p.

and were actively trying to isolate and undermine the organization at the time.

If anything, the Federations were even more closed off to the idea of any collaboration between our organizations than was the ASSÉ. What allowed for the 2011 RNE deal to take place and ultimately forced the FECQ and the FEUQ to refuse to bargain alone in 2012, was fundamentally the transformation of the balance of power within the broader student movement. This began at the end of the 2005 strike when, even as they voted to go back to class, student unions representing a majority of the 185,000 people on strike rejected the deal reached by the Federations and the government, which had been publicly recommended to its members by FEUQ. After the deal was made public, many unions affiliated to the federations offered overt critics of their national organization. Some went as far as to occupy the FEUQ's offices to denounce its undemocratic manoeuvrings: negotiating with the government in the absence of an organization (CASSÉÉ) representing over a third of the students on strike, and publicly recommending an unsatisfactory deal at the request of the government, before a consultation of the student population through general assemblies could take place.

In the months and years that followed, and as a direct consequence of the 2005 strike and of the way it ended, member unions representing tens of thousands of students left the FEUQ, many of which went on to join the ASSÉ. The FEUQ's position in 2012 came in large part from the fact that it simply could not afford to suffer such a loss again in 2012. The FECQ, which had refused to formally recommend the deal in 2005, did not face a

similar backlash. In 2012, this organization was much less ready than the FEUQ to defend the CLASSE's right to participate in the negotiation process, and retained clearly anti-democratic patterns. The wave of disaffiliation it is currently facing can be linked to these patterns and practices.

ASSÉ made the sound decision in 2011-2012 to reject dogmatic (and even ritualistic) denunciations of the Federations and to take the initiative to build unity within the student movement on a democratic basis through the RNE, and later through CLASSE. But for this (shaky) unity to emerge, the internal context of the student movement had to be ready. The CASSÉÉ was able to launch this transformation through the struggle of 2005, which it initiated and which it infused with well-rooted democratic functioning and aspirations, in spite of its immaturity and of its mistakes.

So was that a defeat?

Many have depicted the 2005 strike as a defeat. The deal accepted by the student federations' executive committee and rejected by the CASSÉÉ (and many members of the FECQ and the FEUQ) was certainly unsatisfactory: the government's cancellation of the bursary budget transformation into loans was not retroactive to 2004, was only partial for 2005-2006, and it was entirely financed through federal transfers that should have been used to improve the financial aid system instead of compensating for provincial cutbacks. Moreover, the deal remained completely silent on the issue of the decentralization of the CÉGEP network. This powerful strike had the potential to win much more.

Yet, one of the principal gains was certainly that the movement demonstrated (yet again) so vividly that the defence and promotion of our social rights depends upon our capacity to mobilize collectively and democratically. Thousands learned this lesson in the school of the streets and of collective struggle. They developed activist capacities and adopted new political perspectives. In the wake of the cycle of struggles launched by 2005, we witnessed a reinforcement of the democratic and activist pole of Québec's student movement—to a point where CLASSE became the dominant actor throughout the 2012 strike.[2] This cycle forced the FECQ and the FEUQ to undertake certain transformations. They faced (and continue to face) many losses in membership and internal critics that led them to refuse the divisive game that they had agreed to play for the government in 2005. The federations also showed increased combativity as well as greater respect for democratic organizing principles during the "printemps érable" of 2012.

This whole evolution is rich in lessons for those driven by a desire to transform society. There is no revolutionary agent quietly waiting to be found. The working class (understood in all its internal diversity, to which students belong) is not simply asleep. It represents a community of interests that needs to be actively rebuilt through a process of struggles and systematic mobilization, punctuated with breakthrough and setbacks, from which we need to draw lessons collectively.

[2] During the 2012 strike, CLASSE represented a little more than half of the strikers and included 11 of the 14 CEGEPs that were on strike.

The Student Movement and Political Conflict in Space

Jaouad Laaroussi

Space, as a limited resource especially in urban areas, allows us to follow the lifecycle of social conflicts. Occupied spaces, spaces under attack, or patrolled spaces represent singular moments by which our collective action enters into history. Looking at the struggle for space during the student strike allows us to better understand power relations between the state and the spring 2012 insurgents—whether students, workers, or unemployed people—and this duality in the control of space makes visible the tectonic shifts caused by polarizing political events such as the student strike. Montreal's urban fabric, which was at the heart of the social struggle that rocked Québec in spring 2012, serves as the background for this story of spatial conflict.

The Occupation of Space

The recent history of Québec's student movement had been characterized by the use of occupations to affirm and defend political positions. During the 2005 student strike, several CEGEPs were permanently occupied by students both in Montreal and in the regions, giving striking students spaces to gather and organize. The CEGEP du Vieux-Montreal was emblematic of this reclamation strategy, and served as a convergence space for the entirety of the student movement during that strike. Occupied CEGEPs were at once spaces of political organizing and

of communal living. This arrangement brought with it questions of how to live collectively in times of struggle, and in fact strike GAs spent more time discussing how to organize daily life than they spent on how to organize against the state.

This occupation-based strategy was also present in our confrontations with the state. During the 2005 general strike the majority of actions taken by students relied on barricading themselves into a ministerial or business office in order to transform it. People spent hours, sometimes days, occupying these spaces, usually ending with a SWAT team breaking down the barricades and arresting all of the occupiers. By the end of the 2005 strike most of the people who had participated in occupations were criminalized by the state, forcing them into a spectator role for years to come.

In the seven years between the 2005 and 2012 general strikes, occupations continued to be used by students to reclaim our institutions and destabilize the political and economic elite in their comfort zones. However, the police tactics employed against occupations changed during this time. In Fall 2007, the Liberal government imposed a tuition hike that caused a stir among students. Although the campaign to mount a general unlimited strike was ultimately unsuccessful, several CEGEPs and universities voted to conduct a number of days of action and attempted to occupy their institutions. Notably, several hundred students at the CEGEP du Vieux-Montréal defied their administration's lack of approval for a bed-in and attempted to occupy the CEGEP. They rapidly erected barricades at the CEGEP's entrances as the arrival of riot

cops seemed imminent. In the end, a long night of clashes between students defending the CEGEP and riot police attempting to reclaim it ended in over 100 arrests and several injuries. This date remains known in the student movement as *le Mardi de la matraque* (Baton Tuesday). The intensified reaction of CEGEP administrations against occupations starting in 2007 prefigured the situation we saw in 2012.

In the two years leading up to the 2012 strike, a number of tactics were used to escalate the pressure on the authorities. This included a number of occupations of spaces of political and economic power, such as the offices of the Ministry of Finance and the Council of Regents and Principals of Québec Universities (CREPUQ) on the 24th and 31st of March 2011. No arrests were made during these occupations, as they did not use barricades and occupiers left of their own free will. Nonetheless, a few months later ten students were arrested at their homes under a variety of charges. These post hoc allegations of wrong-doing reveal the state's desire to criminalize all forms of occupation prior to the 2011-2012 mobilization campaign for an unlimited general strike.

In February 2012, when the latest strike began, the strategy of occupations seemed doomed to fail. We had proved unable to defend a space against several hours of police attack. On their ends, administrations and police forces had shown their complete unwillingness to tolerate any form of occupation and their intention to criminalize anyone making use of the tactic. Nonetheless there were several occupation attempts as the strike began. Notably, when the CEGEP du Vieux-Montréal went on

strike several hundred people converged there, creating an energized but uncertain atmosphere in the halls. The administration declared early in the evening that it would call the riot squad. When the police finally intervened the majority of the occupiers had decided to leave, as they had been unable to collectively organize a sustainable occupation. The evening ended with the riot police charging into the CEGEP and eventually arresting thirty students. This event effectively shut down any possibility of future occupations. The next day, the administration of the CEGEP du Vieux-Montréal declared a lock-out, preferring to shut down all CEGEP functions including those not affected by the strike than to allow students to reclaim that space. As a result, students found themselves without a permanent site from which to organize.

Wildcat demonstrations, blockades, and spaces of conflictual convergence

The defeat of the occupation as a tactic led students to modify our strategy for retaking control of space. The new tactics for reclaiming physical public space took four forms: the 'wildcat' demonstration, the blockade, the temporary autonomous zone, and the space of conflictual convergence.

Like any social movement the 2012 student strike was punctuated by numerous demonstrations in the streets of Montreal. Students formed almost daily demonstrations ranging from one hundred people to tens of thousands. One element of these demonstrations created regular tension with the police and more broadly with the state: the itinerary. In Montreal, and to a lesser degree in the rest

of Québec, non-collaboration with the police had been a widespread practice in social and student movements. In practice, this meant refusing to inform the police about plans for a demonstration, including its intended path, in order to allow the demonstration to retain autonomy and to make changes as appropriate in the moment. This freedom of movement in the streets of Montreal became an object of contention with the police and the government from the very earliest weeks of the strike. The SPVM proclaimed within the first few weeks that the strikers' demonstrations were illegal due to their refusal to reveal their planned itinerary. On March 29th, students held a demonstration making fun of the SPVM's position on masks and itineraries: under the theme of a "grand masquerade", 3000 masked students marched along four simultaneous paths blocking traffic across the entirety of downtown Montreal. This demonstration was meant to show that even when the trip was given, it was possible to disrupt downtown Montreal.

Beginning the night after CLASSE was excluded from negotiations with the government, a tradition of nightly demonstrations began. Ranging from festive demonstration to riotous march, the night demonstrations allowed for Montreal's population to express itself in immediate response to the current political climate. Making spontaneous decisions about their direction at each street corner, these demonstrations allowed students to reclaim control of the nocturnal urban space. In contrast to occupying academic institutions, this reclamation was done in such a way as to avoid police control and therefore transform the streets of downtown Montreal into a regularly occupied territory.

Demonstrations were one way in which the strike movement reclaimed physical public space. But the reclamation of Montreal's urban fabric was also achieved through the numerous blockades that began after the first large parade on March 22nd. Unable to occupy spaces or invent communal living from within them, the spirit of the movement turned to blockades, born from a desire to sabotage the routines of daily life first in CEGEPs and universities but eventually throughout the economic and political world. At its heart, a student strike aims to prevent access to teaching institutions. After a month of striking the blockade of universities and CEGEPs was stable and students began to expand economic disruption actions. The CEGEP blockades were extended to the nerve centres of Montreal's and Québec's economies in order to slow the flow of goods and capital. Very early in the morning hundreds of people would meet up at a given point to make their way towards one of the bridges leading onto the island of Montreal, the bridge to the Montreal Casino, the SAQ (Québec Liquor Control Board) depot, or a downtown office tower, with the aim of controlling access to it by physically occupying the space by which it was accessible. In other words, roving picket lines blocked, daily, the flow of goods and workers necessary to the functioning of capitalism.

Students' inability to occupy campuses permanently also did not stop us from reclaiming university spaces in a temporary way. In March, students at UQAM organized an event called a "craft night" whose goal was to reclaim university space by occupying it. The university administration promptly responded on the day of the event by declaring a partial lock-out. All university


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Poésie
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Spectacles (incluant Mise en Demeure !)
Jeux de société
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Shows
Et VOUS et tous vos projets
NUIT DE LA CRÉATION
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LUNDI 12 MARS DES 18H00 À L'UQAM

buildings except administrative offices were closed for the whole day. Very quickly, students converged in the De Sève building and began occupying it, redecorating the inside of the building. The highlight of the evening was not the occupation of the university, however, but the occupation of St. Catherine Street in front of the university. University furniture was brought outside, while three demonstrations and two general assemblies were converging on UQAM in order to occupy the street, which became a space of political and artistic expression. Spontaneously, musical performances were organized in the street while people wrote messages on the pavement and on the walls of the university. For a day, students turned the De Sève building and St. Catherine street into a temporary autonomous zone. This example illustrates how the difficulty of occupying our campuses in the face of administrative and police repression led us to leave the university setting to occupy urban space and mark it with our presence.

Political actions through reclaiming space can also be found in moments of conflictual convergence. The events around the Plan Nord salon and the Liberal Party convention in Victoriaville are such example. In what was called the Plan Nord Salon, the Liberal government brought together the political world and mining companies ready to invest in developing northern Québec; later, the Liberal party elite converged on the small town of Victoriaville for its convention. In both cases, the convergence called by the government was met with an answering convergence from the striking students. This double convergence of elites and insurgents turned in both cases into a violent confrontation between the police and the indignant crowd gathering outside. These moments created a space of

conflictual convergence that represented in physical space the social conflict happening in Québec's society.

A third example of this type of double convergence is found in the events around the Formula 1 Grand Prix in June in Montreal. Traditionally the Montreal Grand Prix sees North America's economic, sports, and cultural elites converge in Montreal. In the streets, this transnational elite encountered the spirited student movement. The occupation of space through conflictual convergence revealed the buried social conflict between students and their allies on one side and the political and economic elite on the other, gathered around the Liberal party.

State repression and the return to the neighbourhoods

In the face of these different tactics for reclaiming space, the state felt obliged to respond. The first legal response from the state to retake control of spaces blocked by students was a series of injunctions in CEGEPs and universities aiming to return campuses to order. These injunctions failed when heavy picket lines prevented a forced return to class, demonstrating the political legitimacy of blocking campus for as long as student associations are on strike. After the failure of this first strategy, the Liberal government adopted a special law, Bill 78 or Law 12, in late May. This law was most importantly designed to retake control of Montreal's urban space by targeting the tactics that had been developed by students over the course of the spring to derail the normal flows of daily life for Québec society.

First, Law 12 addressed the blockade of academic institutions by suspending the session, a response to the state's inability to reopen campuses. If such blockades occurred after the session was suspended, they were to be harshly sanctioned by the state, which gave itself the power to impose heavy fines on students and their organizations. The law also affected actions outside universities, making all demonstrations of more than 50 people illegal if they did not give the police their itinerary beforehand and allow the police to modify it as they chose. The special law also included a section specifically pertaining to economic and institutional blockades, providing for sanctions for anyone organizing or participating in one. At the same time as the Liberal government was adopting this special law, the city of Montreal was modifying its municipal by-law on illegal assembly: it became illegal to wear a mask at a demonstration, organizers of a demonstration were required to reveal their itinerary, and the fines to which violators would be subject increased.

In both cases, provincial and municipal, the goal of these exceptional laws was to retake control of the urban space that students had been occupying since February. The state acted on physical space by legislating the possibilities for the students' social movement to continue their political activities. The state acted legislatively to pacify public space, but the application of legislation depends on the armed forces. Following the adoption of the special law Montreal's Latin Quarter was ablaze three nights in a row with night demonstrations turning to riots. The SPVM, with the support of the provincial police, tightly patrolled the urban space around the Latin Quarter and specifically Emilie-Gamelin park, from which most demonstrations

departed. This heightened policing of public space reached its apogee during the Montreal Grand Prix when the metro and the island where the race track is located swarmed with police detaining and searching anyone wearing a red square. Urban space was thus forbidden to anyone who might appear to belong to the student movement. In the face of the students' creativity at reinventing their tactics and forms of struggle throughout the spring, the state was forced to also reinvent its way of responding to demonstrations by adding new weapons to its tactic for repressing public space.

After the imposition of the special law the movement did not drop dead from the state of exception imposed by the state. A "casseroles" movement arose as a way of circumventing the law by anchoring the struggle in the neighbourhoods in lieu of university spaces and Montreal's urban core. At 8:30 pm, every night, Montreal's population went out on their balconies with pots and pans and then came down into the streets to join their neighbours. Spontaneous neighbourhood demonstrations ensued, growing as more people joined at each street corner. This type of demonstration allowed for the creation of spatially-anchored communities of struggle, identifying themselves by their shared territoriality in Montreal's neighbourhoods. The spontaneous nature of these gatherings made it impossible for participants to give their itinerary to the police beforehand. The special law adopted by the Liberal government was thus contradicted by its inability to be enforced on such spontaneous demonstrations and on the family crowd that was mobilizing in Montreal and across Québec.

As we have seen, the spring 2012 movement in Québec existed in the physical space of the city of Montreal. The dialectical relationship between insurgents and the state was inscribed in this embattled space day after day. The concept of a diversity of tactics used by the student movement is illustrated in this narrative of spatial conflict. Each attempt by the state to control students' tactics of spatial reclamation led students to readjust their free movement in the urban fabric. The tactics mentioned above each in turn allowed the conflict to exist in Montreal's physical space while avoiding traps such as the criminalization of occupations and the exceptional laws voted at the end of the spring.

Let's Stop the Injunction, YO!

David Clément

For activists in the Outaouais region, the 2012 student struggle reached its climax during the week of April 16-20, after an injunction was issued that required classes to be held and forbade all demonstrations within 25 metres of any building at the University of Québec in Outaouais (UQO). This was the first university in Québec that faced a "general" injunction that attempted to force classes to resume in all departments. Therefore, this week proved to be an important test case to ascertain the balance of power in this new context of repression by the court system. This presented a serious challenge for activists in Outaouais, who were somewhat isolated both by their geographical location and by their relative lack of experience mobilizing in the past. Nonetheless, these activists were able to undertake actions on the local level that built up a certain momentum in confronting the storm of injunctions raining down on different CEGEPs and universities in Québec.

I will begin here by drawing a portrait of the four days of active resistance that took place from the 16th to 19th of April 2012. These four days led to a general suspension of classes, for an undefined period, as well as a new injunction imposing a so-called "Videotron" clause. I will return to this clause at the end of the essay. Since the strike committee was such an essential part of coordinating and radicalizing the movement, I will also briefly present the principles established within this committee and how it functioned.

Red week

Day One

On the morning of April 16, the injunction imposed on UQO took effect. This meant that courses should have been given beginning at eight-thirty a.m. At around seven-thirty, in response to a call made by the strike committee on social media titled *"Bloquons l'injonction YO!"* (Let's Stop the Injunction, YO!), a demonstration that had begun in a park near campus spontaneously entered UQO in order to "break" the injunction and ensure compliance with the strike. After a chaotic beginning due to the lack of planning, they made the decision to barricade themselves inside. Semi-organized affinity groups sharing tasks established the necessary logistical steps for the proper functioning of the occupation. All major decisions were taken by a general caucus. At this early moment, discussions and decisions that had taken place beforehand in strike committee meetings greatly helped the democratic organizing of the action and the demands that accompanied it.

The UQO administration promptly announced by intercom that classes in the two buildings affected by the strike were suspended for the day. The occupies refused to evacuate the premises, demanding the suspension of classes for the entire week, and eventually forced the UQO administration to ask the judge to lift the injunction. This request was denied, and the injunction was reinforced—allegedly because UQO did not do all it could to ensure classes would be offered. When this news was announced at about four o'clock PM, the people inside finally decided

to lift the barricades, after having negotiated with the police force that there would be no arrests—a commitment that was surprisingly respected.

Day Two

On April 17th, things were clear: UQO had become a bunker, heavily guarded by private security as well as the Gatineau Police force (SPVG). Some activists managed to get onto the property to observe the situation and the possibility for actions. Not long afterwards, a professor was arrested and anyone known for involvement in activism or wearing a red square was refused access to the building. Upset, people tried several times to force their way in but did not succeed.

At the end of the afternoon, a UQO administrator announced to the people present that they were now being considered "intruders" on UQO property and that therefore the SPVG had been given the authority to disperse them immediately. Faced with this affront, the activists spontaneously took to the streets to continue their protest. Despite the threat of arrest, the people there continued to walk on a busy main street until a major police operation was underway, with the riot police deployed in Outaouais for the first time in at least thirty years. At the conclusion of this first day when classes were held in spite of and against the strike vote, the SPVG announced in the media that from this moment on, any person demonstrating in the streets would be arrested.

Day Three

On the 18th of April, it was clear that the tone of the SPVG had changed, especially now that the Sureté du Québec (SQ) was present to provide backup. A large police deployment was organized around the Taché building, where the majority of actions were organized. Seeing that it would be impossible to enter because of the number of police officers there, the demonstration took to the street and marched towards the Brault building, a few hundred metres away.

The demonstration was kettled by the SPVG riot squad when it turned down a smaller road, and from ten o'clock a.m. to four o'clock p.m., more than 220 people were detained in the street, in vans, or on buses, and searched and photographed. The SPVG charged them with obstructing a public road under section 500.1 of the Highway Safety Code; at the time of writing those charges were still pending.

Day Four

By Thursday, people from elsewhere in Québec came to increase the number of activists to more than 700 people. Five solidarity buses came in from Montreal and Valleyfield as reinforcements, and a demonstration was held in downtown Hull. Back on campus, it was clear that the police forces would do everything necessary to not let the demonstrators enter any UQO buildings, especially the Taché Building, which was still a bunker controlled by the SPVG.

Despite this, a few dozen people managed to enter UQO twice but were pushed back out right away. A long demonstration down the roads leading to the Brault Building finally allowed protesters to move their actions to that building, which had the least active involvement and thus was also the least protected. Despite repeated and violent police repression, a door was eventually opened and a hundred or so people were able to enter the cafeteria, whose exits leading to the rest of the building were subsequently blocked by the SPVG riot squad, which was already inside. Meanwhile, the SQ lost no time closing the only other possible way out by pushing the support demonstration back outside. This occupation of the cafeteria, which ended with the arrest of 148 people, forced the closure of two buildings and suspended classes indefinitely.

"Red Thursday"—which finished at around four the following morning in the police station—marked the end of a week of confrontations between protestors and the police (the SPVG and the SQ). A total of at leas t370 arrests were carried out that week, the majority of which took place on Wednesday and Thursday.

Despite all of this resistance, the following Monday a modified injunction ordered UQO to end its semester, while requiring all work and exams to be done electronically without students ever coming to class: the so-called "Vidéotron" clause.[1] In addition to building closures and the harsh release conditions imposed on people arrested on the Thursday, the primary consequence of this situation was to render the usual organizing space

[1] Vidéotron is a popular internet service provider in Québec.

that UQO had provided inaccessible to other activists in the Outaouais.

Autonomous Organizing and the Principles of Struggle

During the week of April 16th to 20th, the work done beforehand in strike committee discussions proved necessary to the success of this campaign. Committee meetings took place every day in the morning and evening to make decisions about strategies, places to demonstrate and other actions. This was a space that activists considered to be central to organizing the strike and other actions related to it.

The UQO strike committee was initially created by activists from individual units on strike, following the failure of a general strike vote in the university's overall student association, AGE-UQO. Although at first the goal of the committee was simply to coordinate the actions to maintain compliance with the strike within specific academic programs, and to work toward a general strike affecting all of the students at UQO, once this objective was achieved important debates on strategy and tactics took place within the committee.

The strike committee combined the principles of direct democracy with strategies focused on direct action, and heated debates during its meetings archived a certain radicalization of activists. For example, the Outaouais activists began to hold "snake marches" with no official route during the strike, and later focused on blocking strategic locations at UQO and other public and private

institutions. The committee always operated through general assemblies, without a coordination committee or any other type of "management." To do this, meetings were initially scheduled for every week, then every two days; when there were large mobilizations, meetings of a few dozen people would be held both in the morning and at night.

Over the course of many weeks, debates unfolded that led to the adoption of organizing principles on concepts like direct democracy, direct action, support for a diversity of tactics, and non-collaboration with the police. With great difficulty, and often in a state of chaos that made "logical" analysis extremely difficult, these activist experiences were able to bring political principles and tactics that seemed to have disappeared years ago, back to life.

Notes from the Baby Bloc

Gretchen King

For months, the Montreal skyline buzzed with police helicopters. As a parent with two young children, I found it hard to ignore. I was also a student on strike at McGill University, and the 2012 student strike in Québec became a daily topic of discussion in my house. My children, 6 and 3 years old, are very inquisitive; we talked often about why mommy was on strike, and spent too many mornings talking about the police violence. They asked me what pepper spray feels like and why the police use sticks and poison gas. Both of them have been to protests since before they could walk, but neither of them had seen such consistent (at times, daily) violent repression of demonstrators.

Throughout the strike, actions and protests often included children. Indeed, there were a diversity of groups showing their solidarity with the students and against the government in the streets, including *Mères en colère et solidaires* and *Parents contre la hausse*. CLASSE called family demonstrations on March 18th and April 14th that I attended with my kids. There were also actions planned by and for parents and their children. These included kids and parents occupying an office of Québecor (the largest private media company in Québec), taking over an administrative office at l'Université du Québec à Montréal (UQAM), and claiming the space in front of then-Premier Jean Charest's office for a dinner party and outdoor movie screening. Many of these actions were supported by the

Comité de soutien aux parents étudiants (CSPE-UQAM), which also organized a baby bloc for the anti-capitalist May Day demonstration.

A baby bloc is a child-friendly space within demonstrations and protest actions. In Montreal, the baby bloc has a historical presence at anti-capitalist May Day and other marches. Building on the success of the May Day baby bloc, several parents started organizing baby blocs for the night demonstrations that began as the student movement became a broader social movement. We wanted to reclaim the streets as a safe space for our children, for student strikers, and for our allies. Baby blocs can provide a safer way for children and others to participate in a demonstration, while providing an extra layer of protection for the demonstration by delaying police aggression. With good organization of security protocols for the baby bloc, participants can avoid clashing with the police most of the time. During the May Day demonstration, stuffed animals tied to a yellow rope bordered the baby bloc, and yellow flags and balloons attached to strollers signalled our presence and movements. At most nightly demonstrations, we just stuck together at the rear of the crowd, with a plan to disperse at the first sign of police aggression. When the police did unleash concussion grenades, tear gas, rubber bullets, and pepper spray on the demonstrators, the baby bloc simply broke away from the march moving quickly to safety. To those who claim demonstrations (especially anti-capitalist ones) are too dangerous for children, I would respond that our baby bloc experience at the nightly demonstrations suggests that it is the police who are often the source of violence, and not the protestors.

Protestors in motorized chairs and wheelchairs as well as cyclists who had dismounted and were walking with their bikes often accompanied the baby bloc at the nightly demonstrations. Being at the rear did mean that we were followed directly by police, often on horseback and/or bicycles. So we made a game with our kids of counting the police or waving at them. Though police on horses and their militarized gear in general frightened most of the children, participating in the baby bloc helped my kids overcome their fear of the police.

Prior to the departure of the night's demonstration, parents and children gathered adjacent to the meeting place to form our baby bloc. We did face painting with the kids and used chalk to write messages and make drawings on the sidewalks. These child-centred activities clashed dramatically with the intimidation tactics of police, who were often observing and walking through the gathering crowd in full riot gear. We took this opportunity to talk with our

kids about how the police and the laws were being used to repress the strikers and our rights. Learning about the police gear and weaponry and criticizing the violence they inflict helped our kids understand the stress and fear they were feeling at the sight of riot police. Throughout the bloc, various children were able to begin to understand issues about racial and political profiling, and/or ways that a group, like the baby bloc, can keep you safe in the face of police violence.

A particularly powerful experience of the baby bloc for my children and me occurred at the night demo following the passing of Bill 78 into Law 12. That night about five families with small kids, some in strollers or bike trailers, gathered for the demonstration. Before we even took to the streets, two police officers warned me about my children's safety in the demonstration. This was the first time any officer had approached me at a demonstration about my kids. I assured them I was not worried for their safety among the demonstrators gathered in the square. As the protest moved into the street, it was declared illegal by the police over loudspeakers. Just then, two other officers, one on a bike, came to me to urge me to leave the demonstration as it was illegal. I was frustrated by their appeals but not frightened, so we continued to march at the rear of the demo with the baby bloc. Just before the corner, a line of riot police marched up behind the baby bloc. One large cop dropped his shield and baton to speak to me from behind his protective visor. He yelled at me, asking if I understood that I was in a riot and that I was threatening my security and the security of my children by remaining there. I insisted we were not leaving, because we were not doing anything illegal. He asked me again,

coming closer to perhaps hear me better in the noise of the casseroles.

At this point I got angry and a bit scared, so I yelled at him, "Leave us alone, we are staying and the real threat is you!" I added very loudly, "Stop intimidating me. You are stressing my kids out." He backed off and several demonstrators stepped up, helping distract my kids from the intensity of the moment. Other protestors assisted the baby bloc in turning the corner, navigating strollers and trailers through the car traffic that also blocked the riot police from advancing. As we moved up the street demonstrators asked if we wanted to stay or go, but the baby bloc wanted to stay and so we moved on together. The police did not approach the baby bloc again. This moment, and others like it, was a direct example for our kids of how parents and people can challenge authority and unjust laws.

We have every right to attend demonstrations with our children. Participating in the baby bloc at the nightly demonstrations was the best way for me to show my kids how they can respond when their rights are being taken away. Some argue that bringing kids to a demonstration imposes political choices on them, that children cannot understand what is going on or, worse, that they will be scarred for life. But people who do not bring their children to demonstrations also make political choices, and are teaching their kids that passivity and non-engagement is the way to participate and live in society. In contrast, our children were able to witness firsthand how the state reacted to the students and their allies. And they expressed how that made them feel—through the chants they made

up and through the images they drew in chalk on the sidewalk or painted on their signs. Plus they enjoyed the costumes, clowns, and fireworks that made the nightly demos festive.

Ultimately, baby blocs afford an opportunity for our children to directly witness the manifestation of people power. We can talk with our kids about being strong children and full participants in this society, but I believe it is also important for them to have their own experiences demonstrating in the streets. We form baby blocs so they learn to think very concretely about the more abstract concepts that we try to teach them. From the baby bloc at the nightly demonstrations, our kids saw firsthand thousands of individuals acting as a group and making political demands from the streets. This nearly yearlong uprising in Québec has offered a tremendous opportunity to teach our children about struggle. Thanks to all those on strike and in the streets, your resistance made the 2012 *Printemps érable* an excellent time to be a radical parent.

3 ‘Violence’ - Police brutality and *Casseurs*

The brutality of municipal and provincial police forces was one of the most sensational aspects of the Québec student strike, described repeatedly as the worse show of state repression in the province since the 1960s. Many students who had never been involved in confrontations with the police suddenly found themselves physically attacked by officers during demonstrations. In response, they began to learn and practice street tactics to protect themselves, such as wearing masks and ski goggles, carrying vinegar-soaked bandanas to help breathing through tear gas, and milk or antacid to counteract the effects of pepper spray. The ongoing and mounting violence of the police, rather than intimidating the movement out of existence, arguably contributed to the sense of comradeship among protesters emboldened by collective outrage and organized resistance. As the government and police repression increased, the broader Québec public became increasingly concerned and the movement gained popular support. Journalists and activists from outside of Québec even travelled to Montreal to partake in or report on the movement first hand, documenting the scenes of enormous police presence, kettling and mass arrests, and riot police wielding pepper spray, tear gas, rubber bullets and stun grenades.

This section offers testimonies and reflections about experiences of police brutality and the issue of violence in the student movement. Nicolas Lachapelle's beautifully evocative comic illustrates the personal conviction and frustration that led many to fight back against police repression. He writes, "As far as I'm concerned, I... want to hold on to democracy. If they attack it, I'll defend it, tooth and nail." Set during the protest outside the May 4 Liberal Party's convention in Victoriaville where the mass brutality against protestors by the police reached new levels, Nicolas's musings on violence reflect the sentiments of many who were involved.

Laith Marouf, an activist and journalist for Concordia University's community television station, CUTV, provides us with a comprehensive picture of the station's embedded live broadcasting from the strike, which quickly became a way for people to follow demos from afar, or to join up mid-way if they had missed the beginning of a protest. Reflecting on the CUTV crew's experiences, including those of systematic police repression and brutality, Laith describes how ultimately the station was able to break through walls of disinformation to play a critical role in challenging the historic French- English divide in Québec social-political organizing.

Finally, the testimony of Ethan Feldman in "We Were Supposed to Be in Class by Ten," documents one student's experiences at one of many early morning manifactions. Ethan describes the atmosphere in the streets of Montreal that morning, as two separate actions intersected and were mysteriously kettled. Ethan found himself thrown to the ground by a policeman, leaving him with a broken arm requiring surgery.

Casseurs

Margaret Fraser

I remember the first time that I heard the word translated into simple, logical English, coming from my mother's mouth and landing perfectly in my gut: rioters. She said she'd heard it on the news. "They aren't rioters," I told her, "they're *casseurs*."

"So what do they do?"

"Break things."

"So they riot," she said.

"No, there's more to it, I've felt it, there's something in the air here, something is coming. I explain it to other Anglophones like this: a rioter is and can only

ever be part of a riot but a casseur, well, a casseur is part of a manif, part of the physical manifestation of something."

"But what?"

"It's difficult to explain," I told her, "let alone translate."

I was walking in a *manif* one night through downtown Montreal, when all of a sudden the crowd started to hiss. A *casseur*. They surrounded him. He was pushed out of view, denied the little safety that our sheer size granted us, and the SPVM descended upon him. There was no cheer, no pride in having rooted the "evils of violence" out from among us. Something else was going on. Something I couldn't quite put my finger on. There was a time when I was among those who said "I am with the movement, but against the violence." But that night and for the

many nights that followed, the moral absolutes just didn't hold. After all, how else can we explain the violence of those who'd sworn to protect us? Or Bill 78? Or the fee hike for that matter? It seemed both sides were redefining right and wrong daily.

But then-Premier Charest and Education Minister Beauchamp still brought the issue of "violence" into the debates, as if they had the elusive moral high ground. We all knew what it was: an excuse not to negotiate. I remember hearing Beauchamp further denounce the "violence" on the radio and thinking: violent or not, we have been hundreds of thousands in the streets. Violent or not, we represent deep political unrest. Violent or not, we have the right to meaningful participation in our own government. And yet we have been ignored, been discounted, been marginalized. I wanted to scream. If you refuse to hear us, to see us even, then what do we have left if not violence? How else can we defend our

children's futures? And yet I knew deep in my heart that eventually I too would denounce violence, just like they wanted …

When we reach the understanding that, despite what our mothers told us, words aren't always enough, that it isn't as simple as right and wrong; that our words, our dreams can be turned against us all too easily; when we understand all of that, what, then, is a casseur? A human. Someone with hopes and dreams and frustrations, who has loved, who has made mistakes, who, like many of us, felt something building inside of them that brought them out into the street but who dared to express it physically and saw the world reduce them to that single act, as if it could be isolated from the rest of them, or from the rest of us for that matter.

Why, then, if words have such limits, did I dedicate so much time over so many months to translating them? Why was it so important for my mother to understand the complexity of casseur? Because when our own government tried to silence us with Bill 78, the linguistic barrier was on Charest's side and I was not. Once it was clear he wouldn't listen or cave under our pressure alone, increasing access to the narratives of and about the movement to Anglophones in Québec, Canada and internationally could only help. I think the same would be true for any movement. So, while we'd never be able to translate the space between languages, we had to try for the same reason we had to protest night after night, because a better future doesn't build itself. And that's something that everyone, regardless of language, can understand.

I Present You My Knees; I'm Going to Join Up with Fiery Friends

Nicolas Lachapelle[1]

I admit it … I threw a rock once …

Just one. Why?!

We had been keeping our hopes up for months …
a more just society, and lots of other things too …

We acted in a non-violent, constructive way.

But somewhere high up, they kept denying our right to dissent …

… they kept denying democracy. They said: "You can exercise your democratic rights every 4 years!"

Or: "Between elections, it's called governance!" Somewhere high up, they had forgotten that they worked for us. The people.

[1] Translated by Joël Pedneault

They wanted to get rid of our dissent. " …send [it] as far north as possible!"[2]

So, this rock … it's true, it's not as refined as an X in a box …

…but I have a feeling that it spoke volumes …That it was political …

[2] Translator's note: refers to a speech given by Jean Charest during which he joked that protestors should be given jobs that would force them to relocate to northern Québec.

As far as I'm concerned, I believe in / want to hold on to democracy. If they attack it, I'll defend it, tooth and nail.

There are three types of violence. The first one is institutional: it makes domination, oppression and exploitation legal; it crushes millions of men [sic] in its gears. The second one is revolutionary. It is born out of the willingness to abolish the former.

The third type of violence is repressive. It aims to strangle the second form of violence by allying itself with the first type of violence, which is the origin of all violence. There is nothing more hypocritical than to only identify the second form of violence as such, while one pretends to forget that it is spawned by the first and killed off by the third.

CUTV: Community media balancing the airwaves

Laith Marouf

Note: A version of this chapter was previously published on Laith's personal blog.

Broadcasting live and unedited from the streets during the strike, CUTV (Concordia University Television) gained iconic status as the web channel of the Québec Spring. As the strike grew so too did the popularity of and demand for CUTV's embedded coverage from within the movement, challenging the relevance and often the accuracy of mainstream news reporting about the movement. This chapter offers a first-hand reflective account about how this small campus-based community television station, mostly staffed by first generation immigrants and located in an Anglophone institution, positioned itself to become the image and the voice of the people during this historic moment in Québec history. Following an overview of the mandate and principles of the station, I reflect on my experiences reporting for CUTV and on the station's impact during the movement, particularly in relation to police behaviour. The role within and coverage of the strike by CUTV will be compared to that of the mainstream media with attention to notions of balance and objectivity, social media, citizen media, and freedom of the press.

CUTV policies and campus-community media

The CUTV concept is unique within the Canadian television sector but very familiar in the radio scape. CUTV provides its members—from both Concordia University and local Montreal communities—with access to the knowledge, equipment and space to produce video content that represents them, the communities they belong to and their interests. Our mandate also conceptually and legally positions the station in a separate broadcasting sector as defined by the Canadian Radio and Television Commission (CRTC). The CRTC categorizes radio and television stations under three separate licenses. First, public broadcasters, like CBC and Radio-Canada are taxpayer funded and represent a "mainstream bias" or respect for the status quo in their coverage. Second are private or commercial broadcasters, who form the majority of available radio and television programming. These broadcasters follow the editorial positions of their majority shareholders. For instance reports published and broadcast by Québecor owned media outlets repeatedly regurgitate the editorial opinions of CEO Pierre Karl Péladeau, highlighting the political influence of media owners. Ultimately, private broadcasters give us the opinions of financial powers in our societies.

The final category is campus/community broadcasters (C/C), designed to provide alternative programming to that of the commercial and public sectors, through the active involvement of the communities in which stations are located. This category does not exist in many countries and came to being in Canada after a long struggle and largely thanks to a long history of community radio

broadcasting by and for First Peoples.[1] Understanding this helps explain the rational for this sector and the significance of CUTV's mandate. Today there are hundreds of C/C stations across the country, and all of them have two objectives at the root of their work: democratization of access to the airwaves and self-representation for underrepresented or misrepresented communities. The CRTC mandates C/C broadcasters to add to the "diversity" of programming available for Canadians and to prioritize local, emerging, and underrepresented communities.

Understanding the CUTV mandate is important in assessing statements made by journalists in the mainstream media throughout the strike that called into question the "objectivity" and "balance" of CUTV and pointed to a supposed bias towards students. Many of us think that in fact CUTV fulfilled all aspects of its mandate in its programming surrounding and live coverage of the #GGI (see glossary). The station trained many student and community members to produce the programming, invested tens of thousands of dollars in equipment and staffing to sustain our coverage, and gave voice to the communities at the heart of the story -- the students and supporters of accessible education. Those who wanted to hear the opinions of government and financial powers on the issue had the chance to hear those opinions through the media produced by the other two sectors. CUTV's greatest success was in breaking the mainstream monopoly over the message, an important milestone for community organizing.

[1] Fairchild, Charles (2001). *Community Radio and Public Culture: Being an examination of media access and equity in the nations of North America.* Cresskill (New Jersey): Hampton Press.

In the beginning . . .

In February 2011, the Concordia Student Unionand Graduate Student Association, held a winter general assembly (GA) outdoors, a first in recent memory. The GA, at which the proposed tuition hike was a major topic, had a massive turnout visible from CUTV's balcony and on our cameras recording that day. To CUTV's News Department, significantly increased political engagement among Anglophone students suggested that the situation in the Francophone sector must be even more radicalized. Over the next several months, student organizers and activists built a campaign against tuition hikes, preparing masses of students for a variety of pressure tactics including an unlimited strike. As momentum grew leading up to a national student strike on March 22nd 2012, CUTV saw the need to invest in technology that would help us compensate for our lack of broadcast studios and cable or satellite distribution. With an annual budget equivalent to the production cost of one NFB feature-length documentary, the station worked to maximize every dollar and help students represent their case in French and in English to the rest of society.

By using cutting edge technologies exemplified by the LiveU mobile broadcast unit coupled with high quality internet broadcasting on Livestream, and a very busy social networking presence, the station was able to balance the starting disadvantage it had in relation to licensed and broadcasting television stations. This however, does not fully account for the tremendous number of viewers and effect that the station ultimately had on the #GGI once hundreds of student, community and alternative me-

dia outlets were on the frontlines and the social sphere. Ultimately it was CUTV's determination to uphold its mandate and the unprecedented amount of content and broadcast hours generated by the station over the span of the seven months that would account for its success.

CUTV timed its first live broadcast to coincide with the mass demonstration on 22nd of March 2012. After a few days of working out the technical kinks of the new LiveU systems, the investment had already started to pay off in viewer numbers by April 4th. That day marked the first time Montréal Police (SPVM) reacted inappropriately to the presence of our "live" broadcasting team. Students on strike had adopted the tactic of nonviolent economic disruption coupled with a war of attrition against policing resources through an overwhelming number of disruptive actions. The morning of April 4th saw two demonstrations happening back to back. CUTV arrived at the second, which started at 8 am. The first demo had entered a buffet at the Royal Victoria Hotel where an illegal attack by a security agent on the demonstrators led to a scuffle before the demonstrators dispersed with no arrests. Meanwhile our cameras followed the second demonstration, as it snaked through the malls and metros downtown and was surrounded by riot police on a small street in the gay village. Our team followed the arrests as they happened, bearing witness to the unnecessary use of force by the SPVM on a non-resisting group of mostly CEGEP students in their late teens.

As our team filmed, a few police officers did not like the prying eye of the media and began to try to remove us from the scene although we were not obstructing their

work and there was no imminent danger. The CUTV team was pushed, jabbed and roughed up by police officers until we were half a block away from the arrests and at the limit of the reach of our camera lens. The police claimed that our team was obstructing their work and that if we did not comply with their requests we would be arrested. Given that at no moment had our team gotten in the way of the police, as the Camera Operator on the scene I believed they were in fact obstructing my work and so I asked to speak to their superiors. I was subsequently detained for 7 hours and charged with obstructing a police officer. I was released with conditional banishment from the downtown core, except for work duties (which involved being in the downtown core more often than not). Eventually, the conditions were dropped and the charges were lessened to a municipal ticket of "loitering" or not circulating on a sidewalk.

The rest of the team had been roughed up but managed to convince the police to give them back the equipment to continue broadcasting. The SPVM then positioned city buses to block the view of all media and proceeded to search and arrest the many students they had kettled. Arriving on the scene late and kept at a distance, several reporters from mainstream media outlets justified the mass kettle by the earlier disruption at the buffet, failing to recognize that there had been two separate demonstrations involving two groups of protesters. Later female arrestees would inform CUTV journalists that they had requested to be searched by female officers and were laughed at by male officers who proceeded to "cup them" and call them "lesbians" and "bitches" in the course of their body searches. The practice of attempting to block

the view of reporters from the use of force by the SPVM would become a daily recurrence, reaching ridiculous proportions when police officers attempted to block our view by jumping and dancing in front of our cameras during the Formula 1 demonstrations in June 2012.

Day after day our teams broadcasted images of students using non-violent tactics such as using their bodies to block access to buildings, ports, bridges, and roads. And day after day the response from police was extreme violence: batons, pepper spray, tear gas, rubber bullets, concussion grenades and assaults with SPVM bicycles and cars. The intensity of police violence and perseverance by the students in overwhelmingly nonviolent response in front of our cameras, contrasted sharply with the mainstream coverage of the strike portraying the students as hooligans, vandals and the sole source of violence. We believe this mainstream media bias allowed the SPVM to become even more violent, including with independent and even some mainstream journalists. Our teams began to be targeted directly by police use of force and weapons. On April 18th our CUTV flagpole that identifies us to the police and protesters was pulled from our hands and snapped in two by an SPVM officer. On April 20th, the first day of Salon Plan Nord and the intensive protests of it by First Nations and student activists (discussed in Joël Pedneault's chapter in this volume), our team was pepper sprayed and an SPVM officer hit our camera with his baton, breaking a part of the lens.

The first day of the Salon Plan Nord also cemented the importance of CUTV's presence on the ground, not only to the student movement and the viewers who were visi-

ting our internet channel, but for access to information in general. Mainstream television stations began stealing CUTV images with no authorization and using them without accreditation. Some broadcasted our coverage live on their stations, out of context, with pundits spewing propaganda over it. Others went ahead and sold our images on the international wires to make money, for instance Al Jazeera-English and CNN paid the Canadian Press for CUTV images of the demonstrations. This popular success meant that we also became a much-hated opponent of the establishment that now had to deal with an international audience in the midst of a spring of resistance globally. The attacks on CUTV gradually intensified, matching the increase in violence used by the police on the demonstrators.

A May full of May Days

On May 1st, CUTV broadcasted from five separate actions throughout the day, as striking students joined masses of anti-capitalist protesters for the annual May Day demonstrations. It was the first night SPVM officers called our team members by their names and indeed, we too had started to recognize officers by face after two months of demonstrations. This fact is important to note as the month saw increasing police violence against the protesters, civilians and CUTV, and any claim by the SPVM to not recognize the CUTV crew as media was clearly propaganda. Following the mayhem of Salon Plan Nord and May Day, the Québec Liberal Party decided to move its May 4th convention from its planned location in Montréal, to the small town of Victoriaville. Protesting students and a host of other dissatisfied Québeckers followed and so did CUTV.

From its onset, the Victoriaville demonstration was escorted by a large helicopter flying at a height no more than 20 meters; a tactic that could only be explained as intimidation.. As protesters breached the police barrier outside of the convention centre and the "battle of Victoriaville" unfolded, CUTV reporters witnessed a man collapse after being shot in the back of the head with a rubber bullet by police. Some demonstrators guided our live team to the scene where medics had requested an ambulance that was being blocked by the Sûreté du Québec (SQ). The SQ refused to allow the ambulance through, although the crowds had cleared a space for the vehicle. Instead, the provincial police continued to rain tear gas around the unconscious man and the medics for 20 minutes before finally allowing the ambulance to evacuate the injured young man. The night ended with several protesters seriously injured. For the second time, a student protester lost an eye as a result of police violence (the first having been earlier in the spring in Montréal), and dozens of protesters were arrested in their busses returning to Montréal.

Many night demonstrations in Montreal later, on May 16th Premier Jean Charest proposed Bill 78, a Special Law, that would limit the right to demonstrate and financially penalize anyone, including labour unions, who supported non-sanctioned demonstrations. That night, tens of thousands of protesters filled Place Émilie Gamelin, forever remembered as the starting location of the "Manif chaque soir, jusqu'à la victoire!" (a demonstration every night until victory). As the nightly demonstrations gained momentum, the police repeatedly launched battles against protesters downtown, frequently attacking CUTV teams including three pepper-spray assaults in one night.

Despite the public outcry against it Bill 78 was voted in as Law 12 on May 18th. Masses of people defiantly took to the streets and the police violence continued. In a night demo on the 19th, our team filmed police as they attacked a non-violent female demonstrator and threatened another demonstrator in a wheelchair. Police retaliated by throwing our broadcast technician to the ground and disconnecting our cables. Later that night, the battle on a busy downtown street lasted for hours during which police entered bars looking for protesters and indiscriminately pepper sprayed and tear gassed patrons, and a bonfire was started at an intersection by some of the demonstrators. When Montréal fire fighters arrived at the scene to put out the fire demonstrators cleared way for them, but the SPVM requested that the trucks leave and then informed the media that the fire fighters had left because projectiles had been thrown at them. This false report was repeated without question by mainstream media outlets, even though the fire fighters refused to confirm the SPVM story and our broadcast showed demonstrators helping the fire fighters do their job.

The following night, the SPVM declared the night demonstration illegal even before it started, and for the first time SPVM officers verbally threatened the CUTV team that we would be treated as demonstrators if we did not stop our work. In the next several minutes, SPVM officers almost drove over our team with a patrol car and then attacked us and our camera with their batons and shields. The camera lens was broken but the broadcast was not interrupted. Minutes later in another confrontation in a back alley two blocks away from demonstrators SPVM officers attacked our team, damaging our sound transmit-

ters and causing our journalists to be separated from the camera operator. In the confusion of trying to regroup, we spotted the SPVM Commander of Operations standing alone at his pickup truck. Live on our broadcast, I asked him if he had given the order to attack our teams four times, he said "No." When I asked who gave the order and if he would order his troops to leave us alone, he replied by threatening to charge me with inciting a riot if I did not move along! I continued moving and found the rest of the team. We were attacked one more time by the SPVM before the end of the night. I woke up the next morning with pain and swelling in my ribs. The doctors confirmed I had suffered two fractured ribs in the police attacks the night before.

Casseroles demonstrations began on May 18th following the passing of Law 12 but really became the next tactic of the movement after the kettling and mass arrest of over 400 non-violent demonstrators live on CUTV on May 23rd. That night as the demonstration reached an intersection, protestors were met by two lines of SPVM officers, one blocking the direction south, another blocking west. We approached a police line to get a better shot, separating our crew from the demonstrators so we could be easily identified as media. A group of five riot police from the line blocking the west rushed our team from behind, running between our members while pepper spraying and smashing our equipment and bodies with their batons. This was directly followed by another attack from officers blocking the south direction, using their batons and shields as weapons. We were effectively pushed east where yet another line of SQ officers had formed and were closing the kettle on the demonstrators.

We called our lawyers and informed them that we were being arrested with the demonstrators and they contacted the SPVM. The on-site commander of operations that night received a call from his superiors to release us. First he extracted our Station Manager, Laura Kneale, from the kettle, and told her that she would be released but could face charges later. The commander then called to me, and live on our broadcast asked that I turn off the microphones and camera if I wanted to be released or that I would be charged as a demonstrator. At that point I lost my temper and told him that I would not comply and demanded he let me walk out of the kettle and do my job of filming the scene. He walked away and ordered the officers processing Laura to arrest her. A few seconds later his superiors, watching our live feed on their large screen at headquarters, called the commander on his cell phone. I would love to have heard that conversation, and I imagine it must have gone something like this: "You have made the SPVM look like tyrants that attack the media! Release them before you cause any more harm!" The commander returned and told the two police officers arresting Laura: "Release this piece of shit, she is a journalist." He then motioned to his riot squad to release the rest of our team.

The next night (May 24th), casseroles demonstrations erupted throughout the city. It could be argued that this marked the actual defeat of the PLQ and of the use of police force and violence to attempt to control the population. SPVM spokespersons declared they were unable to deal with the overwhelming number of protests across the island. The month of May can thus be understood as the most crucial time in the struggle to defeat then-PLQ leader Jean Charest and his austerity measures. The fact

the students intensified their actions and increased their numbers as a response to the escalation of State repression ultimately inspired the broader Québec population. The number of CUTV viewers during the month reached upwards of 10,000 simultaneous viewers and 100,000 unique visitors over the course of one day. Sometimes the station was out broadcasting for eight hours consecutively, contributing to over 90 hours of live broadcast of the Québec Spring in May alone. This translated into unprecedented access to the voice of the people, with thousands of interviews conducted by, for and about the community. The bond between the station and its communities was solidified with people seeing themselves and their struggles represented on our screens. When the station started reaching its financial limits and made an on-air call for donations the response was overwhelming: within a span of five weeks with no promotion campaign, viewers raised $70,000 for CUTV, covering all costs of the #GGI broadcasts for the whole six months.

The extraordinary attention CUTV was receiving lead to a clear echo effect for the coverage, as viewers reacted to and interacted with the scenes on our feed. Protestors started telling us "I wanted to know where the demo was so I checked your channel", or "I saw police hitting you and I had to come to help." Labour unions also began donating money to CUTV, and professionals in the field of media and technologies started contacting CUTV to volunteer their help. Professional camera operators from the major Québec networks volunteered with us, despite some being threatened by their employers in attempts to force them to stop. Help and collaboration on technology and internet operations flourished; Québec based web de-

velopment collective Koumbit offered immediate help in the months of March and April when two upgrades to our servers were required to keep up with the traffic to our site. Later in May, Koumbit's servers crashed because of the unprecedented numbers of hits to our site reaching thousands a minute, prompting the collective to request special permission for unlimited traffic to our site from their own larger provider. Many other collaborations happened, but none was as impressive as with http://manifencours.diametrick.com, a site that tracked demonstrations in real time superimposed on a map of downtown Montréal that included a tracking location for CUTV's live camera.

The long stretch to victory

The passing of Law 12 was intended, among other things, to stop the demonstrations before the beginning of the Montreal festival season, marked by the flow of tourists arriving to watch the Formula 1 Grand Prix race on the first weekend of June. Instead, persistent protestors, the closure of several downtown streets for the event, and thousands of tourists exposed the "special law" and its enforcement through police brutality. With our cameras rolling, the government's startegy backfired under the scrutiny of international audiences. On June 7th, our team filmed an aggressive police intervention against the protestors attempting to disrupt a Grand Prix fundraiser lunch featuring $1000 plates in the historically working class neighbourhood of Little Burgundy. Again our team was threatened with arrest if they did not stop filming, but it was later that day when CUTV was faced with the most shocking situations that our station had to deal with in the six months of the #GGI.

Our team was at the Formula-1 celebrations on Crescent Street when demonstrators showed up to make their cause known to visitors. On site was our newly hired News Director Aaron Lakoff and veteran CUTV reporter Sabine Friesinger. First, Aaron received his "baptism by fire" live on CUTV when police officers grabbed him from the crowds of F-1 revellers without cause or warning and slammed him to the ground, detaining him for several minutes before letting him go. Later on, Sabine noticed a man attempting to put something in our broadcast technician's backpack and tried to stop him. When she confronted him, the man responded by screaming: "She has a rock!" He began to grab her, and then ran behind a line of SPVM officers who stopped our team from pursuing him. The man escaped and officers on the scene refused to investigate the incident. CUTV believes that the man was an undercover agent tasked with planting the rock in our equipment in an attempt to delegitimize CUTV journalists as provocateurs.

In the months of June and July, CUTV's coverage diversified along with the array of tactics used by the movement. In addition to nightly demos that continued until the last days of the Charest government, CUTV broadcast from Nude demos (see glossary), symphony concerts for the #GGI, a Ninjas vs. Pirates masquerade demo, a Tattoo-a-thon, and a Parents' manifestation. We broadcast from a demonstration in Vermont that followed Charest to the New England and Eastern Canada Governors and Premiers Summit and, through the use of Skype-enabled reporting, from the Rio+20 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development where Charest was followed by Québec protestors who were joined by the Brazilian

students in a demonstration. The station's territory of operations spanned not only across all of Québec but for the first time crossed international borders. On June 22nd, the station organized a three-location broadcast from studio and the streets of both Montréal and Québec City.

In August, CUTV filmed the forced return to school under Law 12 from multiple locations, beginning in the early morning hours. The number of actions planned at various CEGEP and University campuses surpassed the capacity of our equipment and crews to cover. At this time, the station also began getting more involved in the debates around the provincial elections that had been called for September 4th. In collaboration with the Féderation des Femmes du Québec (Québec Women's Federation), the station aired the first national debate on women and gender issues in full broadcast quality. That was followed by CUTV's broadcast of the only English language debate between candidates in the most contentious election since the 1996 referendum (see glossary). Finally, CUTV marked election day with coverage from a benefit night titled "the Red Show" featuring all of the mascots of the #GGI: Anarchopanda, Bananarchy, the Rabbit Crew, and others. During this time, the station also launched and maintained a live weekly news show to answer to growing need for more in-depth analysis.

A fitting ending

Election night 2012 saw two firsts: the first woman elected Premier of Québec and an assassination attempt during the Premier-elect's acceptance speech. The perpetrator was allegedly motivated by Anglophone Canadian

nationalism, and watching the mainstream media coverage of the incident served to highlight the very conditions that can cultivate such hatred. It is here that comparing perspectives presented by the mainstream media and by CUTV during the movement really underscores the power and responsibility that comes with mass media. In the late spring as the #GGI and its vision of social justice became an unavoidable point of national discussion, Canadian and Québecois media outlets began framing the core issue as a dichotomy between Québec separatism and Québec exceptionalism. This attempt to whip up nationalist fervour in both the Anglophone and Francophone communities was designed to discredit and distract from the alternatives presented in the social justice model of the #GGI.

Watching CUTV's coverage of the movement must have been frightening to the Québec and Canadian elite not only because of the quality of the coverage, but because CUTV covered and was part of a movement that was giving people hope for a better world based on social justice. A station staffed by many people of colour, based at an Anglophone university had become the voice of the Québecois peoples' movement. Everyday on our screens the monolith of Québec identity politics carefully constructed over centuries by elites was being shattered. On a daily basis you could see Québecois carrying the patriot flag shouting "Thank you CUTV" in English, while Anglo-Montréalers identified as Québecois and visitors from Alberta apologized for not speaking French. Voices of Indigenous people were amplified along with those of immigrants and racialized communities, and common struggles brought a diverse range of people to better understandings of one another and of the province and country that we live in.

CUTV's embedded coverage of the Québec movement continued officially until the September 22nd national demonstration, marking 6 months of almost daily broadcasts. The phenomenal success of CUTV and its coverage must first and foremost be attributed to the perseverance of the movement and people — including staff and volunteers of CUTV — who made resisting oppression the top story everyday. Beyond that, the station succeeded in utilizing the best technologies in the field while upholding a community media mandate that enticed viewers to identify with the message without compromising for production quality. In the age of social media and masses of people uprising against neoliberalism, the station managed to wield the power of both. The station produced an unbelievable amount of material on the #GGI, with over 500 hours of content that documented the opinions of tens of thousands of people on one issue, amounting to the most complete anthropological video archive of any modern movement. CUTV's original programming on the #GGI, competing with the combined output of mainstream television channels on the issue, was arguably the most crucial reason that the government lost control of the message and the movement succeeded in becoming popular.

We Were Supposed to Be in Class by Ten

Ethan Feldman

The strike of Philosophy undergraduate students at McGill lasted one week. We had brought the war home and shut down nearly every class in our mandate and organized alternative classes with professors but the majority of our faculty voted to go back to class.

Strike mandates at McGill were generally hard fought and short lived, and student activists were marginalized as "a small group of radicals." Confrontations against security agents and Associate Deans grasping the Handbook of Students Rights and Responsibilities had progressed from irritating to boring — before our strike, some of us had proudly returned from protests and waltzed into our Marx class with bandanas soaked in tear gas. We were inspired and committed to building a new world. We figured it was time to get back on the streets anyway.

And so, with our strike mandate over, four of us chose to meet in the morning to participate in a manif-action to disrupt the economy of Montreal. We had no idea who had planned it; no one needed to plan these. Calls for actions spread through listservs, social media, the CLASSE calendar — and people just showed up. We were those kind of people.

Under the first rays of daylight we drank coffee, smoked cigarettes, and waited. For a half-hour we sat in the

public square, watching the small mass grow. We bet that most people — and the police — were at the other action which had started a half-hour earlier a few blocks to the east.

We had no idea as we donned our bandanas and hoods and began marching through the street chanting anti-capitalist slogans that others were already flipping buffet tables and shredding documents at the annual shareholders' meeting of the National Bank.

And we did not understand why the police descended out of nowhere and declared us illegal . . . until we turned around and saw 150 masked and hooded protesters in black shooting fireworks between the skyscrapers at eight-fifteen in the morning.

Our two groups met in explosive cheers and we marched north towards McGill until we were blocked by rows of police. We turned and entered the Eaton Centre and squeezed into the underground Métro en masse.

In the subway car I talked to my comrades, weighing the options of continuing the action or turning around and going to school. We were supposed to be in class by ten. Before we could come to a decision, a man dressed in black began shouting « on y va! » ("let's go!") Hundreds spilled out of the Métro in unison, sweeping us along as well.

We poured into the street and marched south onto an abandoned block and suddenly people started to run every which way. But it was useless: the militarized riot police

surrounded the whole neighbourhood, with all their weapons and armour.

Fear was present, but repressed; I walked instead of running and tried my best to search the crowd for my friends. We had been separated in the chaos. I knew this was bad.

It's usually a better idea to keep your eyes on each other instead of the police. When the Pigs charge, you can hear them bashing their batons against their shields. The purpose of this is indeterminate. Simply to maintain rhythm or a display of dystopian sophistication meant to intimidate? No one knows.

This morning, however, there was no auditory cue. I had no idea that I was being charged. Without warning, the Pigs ran at us, even though we were already surrounded.

I am a small man, delicate and dexterous. Short and thin. A product of biological facticity, economic class, and nightly marches across the city. I weighed just a hundred and fifteen pounds when I was admitted for surgery.

I looked bigger. I felt bigger. I was wearing a lot of layers.

I must have been a laughably easy target for that Pig to knock in the air with his shield.

While floating above the road, I thought briefly about the last time I had been hit from behind with a Pig's shield; how that time I hadn't even dropped my cigarette despite being on ice and wearing boots with the treads marched flat.

This time, I soared through the air for what seemed like an eternity — just long enough for me to use my arms to prevent my face from hitting the pavement.

And when I hit, I felt something change. I knew immediately that I was different.

My body melted flat against the ground. I could not move. My right arm had become useless. It felt both tight and loose, hot and cold. Both the most intense pain and inexplicable numbness engulfed me completely, until the officer kicked me in the back with his boot. This cleared my head.

I turned over onto my back after a second kick and begged «MONSIEUR!» I felt the first crick in my elbow as I raised my palms. White flags in black gloves. For a second, we made human contact — me with a red bandana on my face, him through his visor and sunglasses. He kicked me again.

His bright smile vanished quickly when he realized that I couldn't get up. I was kicked a third time, with less pomp. The others were corralled down the alley and getting beaten with batons.

I still couldn't move, as the kicks demonstrated, so I was grabbed by my jacket and thrown into the closest kettle. I was shuffled to the back, protected from further assaults. I started to understand more about the state of my arm, feeling it crack and move as I struggled to untie and remove my bandana.

Most of the group I had come with were on the other side of the street, surrounded by more officers. Now that everyone's masks were off, I realized that I was here with more friends than I had originally thought.

We were split in half, one side penned against a nursery school, with three-year-olds observing from inside tinted windows. The group I was in was penned against the fence of a construction site. Journalists from CUTV tried to film the police at work, but got pushed back for "obstructing justice."

I thought "you can still carve a space for resistance," and I booed the CUTV cameraman's arrest while applying pressure to my elbow. I still didn't understand the severity of what had happened to me. It took twenty more minutes before I gathered the courage to beg a line of militarized Pigs to see the equally armoured paramedics.

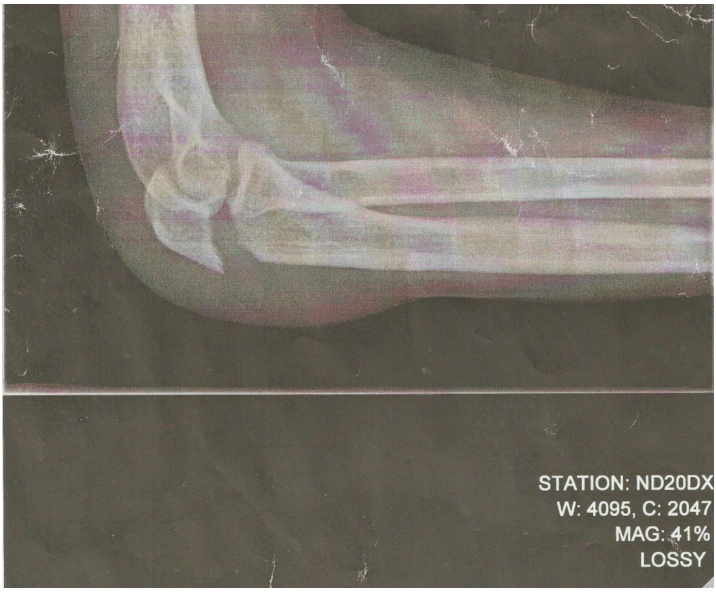
Away from both kettles, I peeled off my layers on the sidewalk under the watchful gaze of everyone, except the video camera, which had been smashed in the earlier arrest.

It was a cold morning — and lo and behold, my elbow was on display for the world, inflated and contorted.

The medics reassured me that I was going to the hospital instead of being detained unlawfully for hours, but the Pigs wouldn't let me go to the ambulance until I pulled my ID from my bag and answered questions for them.

Even if the charges are dropped, the punishment lay in the process. They told me that the ticket would come in the mail. I had no fixed address, but I didn't say that. I had been illegally locked out by my slumlord a few days earlier. I gave my friend's address so I could go to the ambulance. The ticket never came.

I have been harmed many times by officers during the student conflict — We all have. Worldwide, the armed representatives of power have been drawing endless quantities of blood throughout history, starting well before the existence of the liberal democratic nation state.



I got to the hospital alone, but comrades from across the city scrambled to support me and the others who were going to jail. The actions continued while I languished on friends' couches on painkillers. I watched other friends get beat down and tear gassed on live-streamed broadcasts.

Book learning does not give us the conceptual structure to understand this sort of solidarity. I will forever feel indebted to my known and unknown comrades. Forever uncertain that I am doing enough to show them the love I feel for those incredible people. The struggle continues.

A surgical team divided my arm with a scalpel and nailed my right ulna back together around eleven the next morning.

The surgeon who inspected me at the hospital said it was one of the worst breaks she had ever seen. She filed a police brutality report after seeing my X-rays. A lawyer later told me that the document she submitted was useless. All complaints filed through the police system are investigated by the police and they usually find fault with the victim.

I was supposed to be in class at ten.

4 Living (Through) the Strike

What was it like to be a part of a mass strike? How did this new reality fit into people's lives? The chapters in this section are all testimonies that convey a sense of the strength of the movement as a lived experience, of months punctuated by demonstrations, picket lines, general assemblies, and comradeship; by victories and defeats. The experience of sharing these types of events with many, many people – or perhaps the knowledge that thousands more people were in the same boat, people which one had for the most part never met – defines the contours of a collective subject that lives on to this day.

The fact that the strike happened on a mass scale did not, however, mean it was experienced uniformly across social and geographical space. The first three chapters in this section were written from two different margins of the strike movement, namely by women and by people outside Montreal (the so-called 'regions' of Québec). The strike movement was indeed often heavily influenced by the direction in which men and Montrealers took it, leaving women and activists in the regions to chart their own course – as well as people of colour and queers, amongst others. The fact that many people at the margins of the movement were not able to organize as sustainably as its dominant group(s) was one of many major limitations

to the strike's strength, and remains a challenge for the student movement in Québec to day.

Mélodie Chouinard and Myriam Arsenault-Jacques directly address the issue of the limits encountered by the movement from a feminist standpoint. They describe an uphill battle against media sources that focused on male-identified student spokespeople, and they talk about police repression of feminist direct actions and gendered violence – as well as the sexism they faced within the student movement, sometimes from people in the same demonstration as them. The strike movement's limitations also haunt Vincent Roy's diary, written before, during, and after the strike in Sherbrooke (a regional centre in south-eastern Québec), as well as Guillaume Néron's chapter on organizing in Saint-Félicien (a smaller town in the northern Lac-Saint-Jean region).

In Vincent's diary, he starts off as a student in his final year at the CEGEP in Sherbrooke who is skeptical of the idea of a student strike. He quickly joins the fray, and his deeply personal account of his involvement in the strike provides an idea of what it was like to be radicalized during the 2012 student strike in Québec – from a first strike vote, to picket lines, to demonstrations, to court injunctions, to defying court injunctions, to a final, unsuccessful strike vote.

In his piece on the strike in Québec's regions, Guillaume Néron paints a picture of impressive solidarity and growth in his town reaching beyond the student body, and charts a path for the development of a long-term regional student and social movement.

This section ends with a poem by Norman Nawrocki, a Montreal-based anarchist writer, that dovetails with the theme of new possibilities. Norman evokes the collective forces that emerged during the strike as they took revenge on the old world and give rhythm to something quite new.

Casseroles

Louis Bertrand

A baked dish? In the streets? I think the word "*casseroles*" is symbolic of the distance between French-language and English-language media. I wanted to translate it as "pots and pans," its literal meaning, but that was too utilitarian. But I was afraid Anglophone readers wouldn't get it. "Tuna casserole? Hmm, my favourite!"

When the editors of *Translating the Printemps Érable* told me translators were keeping it as casseroles, I felt it was the right choice. Just go with it. Trust that people will pick up on the nuance. "Pots and pans" wouldn't capture the unique character of the Montreal street protests. They were joyous, playful, cheerful. They united strangers – students,

kids, moms, dads, grannies and grandpas – in prankish fun, following a randomly picked route to thumb their nose at the police and the draconian law that demanded a published route eight hours in advance. The signs and banners were witty wordplays or proclamations of neighbourhood solidarity, and sometimes profoundly thought-provoking.

I speak glowingly of those protests, yet I never walked in one. I experienced them second-hand. I read about them in blogs (heck, I translated some of them), I saw them on Youtube, I watched the beautiful video *Le Printemps Québécois: Quand le peuple s'éveille* by Mario Jean. I wanted to be there, to be part of it, but somehow I never took to the streets.

You see, I live in boring old apathetic Ontario, bastion of smugness. Somehow pinning a ***carré rouge*** to my shirt and hopping in the car didn't feel right.

Throughout the summer, I kept wondering if something like this could happen in Ontario. Could students spontaneously organize around a "line in the sand" issue like the tuition fee hike? Much has been made of the fact that tuition fees in Québec are lower than elsewhere in Canada. To me it feels like Ontario students already missed their chance; the tuition fees are already crushing. When you're carrying the equivalent of a small mortgage and you're still a year or two away from graduation, it's hard to speak up if it means putting your school year at risk.

If you want to understand the distinction between Québec and the rest of Canada, the ***Printemps érable*** gives anyone who wants to look beyond the old clichés of separatists vs. federalists a glimpse of how the two cultures differ. In Ontario, it was all about "spoiled brats" and "cry-babies" but in Québec they said "hey, you can't beat up our kids like that!" In Québec, the protesters, the bloggers, and a few politicians with integrity made it clear that education is not a privilege to be sold to the highest bidder. The ***casseroles*** were loud and clear. Ontario should make the effort to listen.

We Were There: Organizing as Feminists During the 2012 Québec Student Strike

Myriam Arsenault-Jacques & Mélodie Chouinard

> We were there. Every day. In the streets, in student associations' offices, in general assemblies, in student union congresses. We walked, we yelled, we chanted, we wrote, we drew, and we gave workshops and interviews. We made phone calls, organized events and direct actions. We got pepper sprayed, we got clubbed, we got arrested.
>
> We walked and walked and walked again.
>
> We were there, proud of ourselves for participating in this life-changing experience. We were on strike. We did not flip the world upside down, but our determination brought change. We are now more recognized as legitimate spokespersons, leaders and organizers. We are women. We were strikers. We gave this strike a stronger feminine voice. Let's not forget this.

We are two women who were part of the Québec student strike movement. We respectively study law and intercultural mediation. We do not claim to represent every women in this movement. This piece aims to unravel some of the student strike's gender dynamics, since we lived them up close and personal. Our goal here is not to reaffirm the relevance of a feminist voice within the student movement and to review the progress that has been made, especially regarding women's visibility within the movement and in mass media.

Why was the feminist struggle important for this strike?

During the strike, feminist groups tried to make the public aware of the importance of education for women and minority groups. An understanding of tuition hikes as sexist could be found on banners, in articles and manifestos written by student associations, by feminist research groups and by organizations. We believe that the hike was not literally sexist in itself, but we do consider that these kinds of decisions affect women even more than they affect men. This derives from the fact that women in Québec earn around 70 per cent of what men earn. It therefore takes women a bigger percentage of their income to pay their fees and, in the long run, it takes them more time to reimburse their student loans, therefore paying more interest on their loans and ending up having a degree that cost them more than their male counterparts.[1] Finally, if tuition fees are too high, women and other people with a lower economic status might not even choose to begin a college degree, "since access is dependent on financial resources."[2]

It is partly for these reasons that a strong women's presence was important during the strike and that our discourses needed to be heard. However, women's visibility in the student movement was often very low compared to the amount of women students. During the strike, we had to fight our way through—sometimes literally—in order to be seen or heard. The amount of media attention given

[1] Simone de Beauvoir Institute, «Statement on Tuition Fees in Québec and their Impact on Women», Concordia University, February 2012.
[2] ibid.

to women spokespersons was also very low compared to the fuss around CLASSE's representative Gabriel Nadeau-Dubois and FECQ's president Léo Bureau-Blouin. In the next sections, we will look at some of the difficulties we encountered while striking and why we believe feminist affinity groups and the actions they organized were important to the movement.

When something feels wrong: striking as a woman

Striking is not easy, despite what right-wingers might tell you. While striking, we often experienced situations that left us puzzled and angry. Members of the police force often called us "slut", "bitch", "angry lesbian", which for us was not the end of the world, even if it was very offensive. However, when our male counterparts adopted sexist attitudes or appropriated some of our feminist actions, it hurt. It hurt real bad. More than once, we led a battle on two fronts (or more), making the whole experience of striking incredibly painful at times, but also rewarding. We will only mention a few examples here of situations when we were attacked or co-opted as women in the strike.

The first event happened at the very beginning of the strike. It was the middle of winter in Montreal, February 17th. An action had been called by a coalition of groups opposed to the increasing fees in so-called "public services" and consisted of a blockade of the Montreal World Trade Centre. One of the doors was specifically blocked by a group of women. When the police intervened, they targeted that door to make a breach, seeing women as weaker and an easier target. That had two major impacts in our opinion. First, from there on, women knew we would be a target

of choice for the police who wish to make "an example" of us. Second, it encouraged theperception that to have a group of women doing a direct action was not a good idea and would lead to failure. We subsequently suffered a great deal from this. It became obvious, as the strike continued, that direct actions called by women or feminist groups had a hard time getting people to show up, unless a "veteran man" would vouch for us. For most strikers, the man would be seen as someone whose judgment could be trusted and that his approval was needed to participate in an action called by "inexperienced and not so militant" women.

The second event ironically happened on March 8th, International Women's Day. A march had been organized by various feminist groups to bring attention to women's education issues. The march was quickly co opted by a large group of men filled with the strike's energy and adrenaline. Some men took control of the megaphone to yell nationalist slogans and were holding bluntly sexist signs. We do not accuse them of having bad intentions; however, we felt like we did not have a place in our own march. Some successful actions were nevertheless carried out by women. One of them took place in April 2012, at the Montreal Court House. A group of feminist law students entered the building and started reading a political text out loud about the impact and wrongs of the judicial sphere's intrusion in the student struggle. One by one, every woman was walked out of the building by special constables and banned from the Court House for the day! This action felt like a great success, not so much because of its media coverage or public attention, but because of the simple fact that it proved it is possible to organize an

action as feminist women. We were able to communicate directly what we felt so strongly about, with no distortion from the media, men or any other source.

There were a few men who accompanied us to show support and help. They understood clearly the importance of women leading and carrying out that action. By doing so, they made an example out of themselves, widening the possibilities and ideas of the role men can have in feminist or women's actions. For once, we had allies, we were strong and believed that we had our own place in the movement. Not just as strikers, but as women and feminists.

The increase of women's visibility in the movement

Québec's main three students associations had four spokespersons in total during the strike. Gabriel Nadeau-Dubois and Jeanne Reynolds represented the CLASSE, Martine Desjardins was (and still is) the president of the FEUQ and Léo Bureau-Blouin was the president of the FECQ. When Martine and Jeanne were interviewed on their experience as women spokespersons, they affirmed that the media treated them very differently. Compared to her male counterpart, Jeanne had almost no media attention and was seen as a calm and reasonable person. Gabriel and Léo were often depicted as strong leaders that would succeed in life, sometimes almost as knights that would save the province from its neoliberal downward spiral.

At the time of writing, the student movement now has four women representing it in the media and more and more women are running for and occupying student

associations' executive positions, thereby creating a more diversified environment and a greater visibility of women within and outside of the movement. We cannot hide that we are proud of some changes that occurred during and after the strike regarding gender dynamics, even though they are small.We will continue struggling as feminists, because if we did learn something from this strike, it is that gender issues are still very prevalent in leftist groups and in our society. This is why we walked, chanted and screamed our anger. This is why we organized in non-mixed groups. This is why we will put our bodies and our minds at risk in future struggles.

The Joy of Striking

Vincent Roy[1]

We are led to believe that with time, everything ends up taking care of itself.

In the very beginning of the student upheaval, I was simply a student who wanted to finish his CEGEP as quickly as possible, having run up against a few some bumps along the road. But there are special friends who make you take a step away from your everyday life in order to show you new things. Because I am in the habit of being closed to new things, since I am fine with what I have, I must have decided to be more open that, and I saw, I heard, I was in a General Assembly thanks to Loue B—, who after several tries finally convinced me that my outlook on life could be polished a bit. The assembly was to be held the next day.

– Tuesday, February 28, 2012

What good will come of this strike? More time in CEGEP? I had already made plans to move to Rimouski, as I thought I finally had the chance to restart my life from scratch. I followed Loue, worried, but I ended up participating in the General Assembly. There were many students, the whole gym is full. The assembly opens. A code of conduct is read out. A chair is elected. An agenda is read and adopted. The motive behind the assembly is receive a petition, whose intention is to create a rather unlimited strike movement. We also learned that the last

[1] Translated by Joël Pedneault.

assembly had been chaotic. If the government has decided to hike fees, there's for sure a reason behind it, let it be.

The debate is structured as plenary which goes on forever. It's long. It's hard. We finally learn that we are joining the 75,000 students on strike. I voted in favour. Why not?

– Wednesday, February 29, 2012

Break+strike week is long and boring. I have no job as of recently, I get bored and catch myself housecleaning. The next assembly is March 12 and I'll go back, this time, to vote against the strike. It will have lasted long enough, with no results. I want to get out of CEGEP. I hate it. It's boring. It's weird.

– Friday, March 9, 2012

The strike vote is renewed! I'm still happy to have a bit longer than a week's break. The strike will go on for another 4 days and a GA will be held, again, to renew it. There's also the announcement of a huge demonstration on March 22 in Montreal. Loue invites me to come picket the CEGEP so that the strike is recognized. I'm very hesitant at the idea of needing to get up in the morning to go do something that I don't know much about.

Finally, I'm off for the rest of the day.

– Monday, March 12, 2012

What a magnificent morning! We block the parking lots, symbolically, but in large numbers, as strikers do – so that no teachers have the ability to get to the CEGEP and teach. We stay there, from 7am to 8am in the morning.

Afterward, we are at least 300 people gathered in front of the guy with the megaphone (I'm not sure of his name, but they tell me Ra-Ma, something like that?) who tells us what's happening elsewhere in Québec, about the other institutions on strike. Astonishingly, our number is growing, and many plan to go on strike around March 22 to support the movement. The movement is bigger than I thought. So I return home with some slogans in mind that we had chanted while going around the buildings … "Students are angry, revolution" (*« Les étudiants sont en colère, révolution »*) … or "Charest, you're not my dad you can't tell me what to do, Beauchamp you're not my mom you can't tell to calm down" (*« Charest, t'es pas mon père tu m'diras pas quoi faire, Beauchamp t'es pas ma mère tu m'diras pas d'me taire »*).

– Tuesday, March 13, 2012

Today, I met Émilie P—, Amélie G— and Alexandre B—. They're some of the executives of AECS[2], those who we don't see as often because they're always in a meeting. We're gathered around a couch, with several individuals other than those named above. And yes, I'm at the *Artishow* bed-in (see glossary) for picketing the next day.[3] I was invited by Noémie, a new friend I made during various pickets. She told me that it would be relatively quite pleasant, that one would stay up and talk about this and that, and that that's what would happen. We ended up talkin, for hours, playing games, ate snacks, drank water, lots of water. There is an improvised fridge and a great

[2] AECS is the student association for the CEGEP in Sherbrooke.

[3] Artishow is a play on the French word for artichoke and is a cafeteria space at the CEGEP in Sherbrooke.

"food committee" that gives food and most importantly breakfast (with coffee) to the picketers.

About the next day's picketing: I could say that I liked the coffee, but I would be lying, because the coffee tasted like the bottom of an ashtray. But it's not a big deal, it's the intention that matters, and many people quite liked the coffee apparently. Anyway, what's important is that we're awake! We're ready to go picket! It's less eventful than at other points in time, we're fewer people, I notice that we're fewer and fewer, but what I notice is through all the news I get.

I was an idiot to have faith in this government. It is imposing an unjustified and unjustifiable hike, and I'm now able to read between the lines of what the media says. It's dumb to say, but it's as though it's a skill I acquired through multiple discussions I had with strikers and picketers, but also with family members who asked me what I thought. I meet Carl C—: what a clown! He makes me laugh and smile a lot with his movements and ways of speaking. I get along very well with him. I watch my bank account shrink before my very eyes, because I still haven't found a job and I travel a lot from North Hatley to Sherbrooke for pickets, activities … I'm stressed, worried even, about my situation … even so, I try to ignore it to spend more time getting involved in the strike. It changes my ideas, and it does me good. I am meeting people who I otherwise would never have met.

The assembly is held today, the strike is renewed, until March 23. I suppose the whole month of March will be one big holiday: scattered with pickets, peaceful and joyful demonstrations, activities and workshops?

– Friday, March 16, 2012

What a memorable day. I had never lived anything that gratifying, heartwarming, stressful in my entire life. I took the bus to Montreal, and on the way they explained what to do if we were arrested, pepper-sprayed, tear-gassed, etc. This part was stressful for a peaceful little newbie like me. Nevertheless, I took what was said very seriously and I took notes. I also write down the number of the AECS lawyer in case any arbitrary arrests are made. It's nice outside. We have signs and a lot of people. It's Pénélope (I finally learned her last name: D—) who is taking care of our group and our bus. So we go protest, and we take pictures and videos. The size of this demonstration is huge. In the middle of the march, we learnt that we were over 200,000 students in the streets of Montreal. I had expected 50,000, but we were way more than that! We tell ourselves that the government will have no choice but to retreat.

Nevertheless, at the end of the day, the government says nothing. I'm led more and more to follow news from CLASSE on Twitter. CLASSE is the coalition of which we've been a part, us, AECS, from the start, even before the strike. The students' spokespeople are outraged to see the government's inaction in spite of 200,000 people taking to the streets, because let me specify, at the end of the day, there were not only students, but workers, union members, "construction guys", young people and old people, English and French. It's a day that I'm happy to

have lived. We return to the CEGEP, to the *Artishow*, and I sleep there.

– Thursday, March 22, 2012

From now on, we do one demonstration after another to get our point across. We win the trust of many people each day, and we feel it. The city of Sherbrooke was behind us! I worry more and more for my future in Rimouski, should I cancel all my plans again? An injunction arrives at Université de Sherbrooke, and we have to help them, since together is the only way that we can make a difference. Fierce plans are discussed …

There's the demonstration today that changed me a bit, since I was leading it. We demonstrated at the University along three colored routes through the town. We were orange, and I had improvised myself a cardboard-megaphone. It was one of the last joyful demonstrations, because things were heating up …

– Thursday, April 12, 2012

The rumor of an injunction at CEGEP de Sherbrooke is confirmed. Classes will resume April 26, while our CEGEP is still on strike, until April 27 even, a Friday. We're destroyed.

This week will have been the richest in emotions I've ever lived. I swear. Let me tell you what happened …

After a classic picket, we met to talk. After this discussion, we left angry. We went walking toward the courthouse to hear the upcoming news about the injunction. Would it be granted by the judge?

Some people even thought the injunction would be refused. Indeed, a similar injunction was granted the week before with regard to Université de Sherbrooke, by a judge with ties to power, Gaétan Dumas. We learn that the injunction will be heard by the same judge. Fear returns to people's faces. Still, we knew one thing that we had never forgotten since the start of the adventure: we're together, and we're ready to move forward. So we advance toward the courthouse[4], provoking, chanting, angry. After hours of waiting in the cold and the wet, the injunction is granted. We're screwed.

We're so angry, we march toward the CEGEP de Sherbrooke. We begin to run learning that the "greens", those who requested the injunction, are already discussing the document with the administration of the CEGEP. We run from the courthouse to the CEGEP, and once we're on campus, we take building 5 by storm: we're looking for a damn entrance. Adrenaline is running really high. I see a friend, green apparently, who shakes his head at me ("no") from the other side of the door. I'm disappointed… For a short moment, I'm discouraged. I see two of my friends run into the corner to open the door for me and ignore the green who was in the way.

From now on I belong to this movement, I can't let them down, because I know they wouldn't let me down. And that's our strength.

– Tuesday, April 24, 2012

4 The author wrote *palais d'(in)justice*. Courthouses in Québec are called *palais de justice*; the author chose to parenthetically mention the injustice which they also embody

The bad news tumbles in hour by hour. After waking and picketing, we're tense, very tense. Gathered in a shed, we look at each other, we're together again, and we're sad. But we're here. The truce decreed by *Line la pas fine*[5] ends later today, at 4pm. We want to burn the town to ashes.

CLASSE is excluded from negotiations, and it's not up for discussion, because a demonstration "using their name" (allow me to express my doubt at this) was held, during the truce.

… what freaking truce?

Injunctions are raining down in Sherbrooke, and the town is starting to be ruled by little babies who can no longer be on strike, and so invoke justice in what is an unjust battle. Yes, we are "all naked in the street" (a quote from Stéphane Gendron), and we're getting lawyered up the ass.[6] Here is the world of injustice, the world that all the supporters of the injunction want. Woopde-doo.

Finally, we hear some good news. Finally. Fiiinally.

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[5] «Line» refers to the Minister of Education at the time, Line Beauchamp; *la pas fine* means she is not very nice. The truce in question was a truce the Minister announced as a condition for negotiating with student associations, who were in turn supposed to temporarily halt any actions that might disturb the social and economic order. The «truce» was originally supposed to last 48 hours (hence the reference to 4 pm on April 25th) but that day, Beauchamp also announced that the truce should last as long as negotiations were still being held. (Marc Allard, *«Négos: Line Beauchamp éxisge le maintien de la trève», La Presse* [Montreal], April 25, 2012.)

[6] Translator's note: The original text did indeed use an anal metaphor.

FECQ and FEUQ pull out of negotiations in light of the exclusion of CLASSE, which the Minister has wanted to see burnt at the stake for a while already. Some faith has been restored to humanity. A little party is planned, in order to maintain spirits.

– Wednesday, April 25, 2012

We stick together. Injunction, injustice. We stay strong. We help each other. We love each other. We hold on. We're together. We worry about each other. We don't give up. You are beautiful to see. You are brave, you are the people of tomorrow. I'm proud. I get shivers.

I couldn't stop myself from shedding a few tears when I saw the gathering of people determined to defend their General Assembly vote.

I get a grip on myself, I'm not alone, not at all. I start to split up the small crowd to block the main entrances of the campuses. "Send some people to the parking lot entrances, just like classic picketing!!" Stevette tells me. I do this right away. We're already split into five small groups. The police arrive on the other side of the street. *Estrie Against the Hike* (Estrie contre la hausse; see glossary) also arrives. A human chain is formed. People have coffees in one hand, their cell phones in the other.

An old philosophy teacher, with whom I hadn't lost contact, comes to see me, tears in his eyes. "Please be careful". I'm teary-eyed. I realize this is more serious than ever. I stop for a second. Someone comes to see me. I'm told "What is this?? We need a hard picket! Teachers are starting to try to force through the picket lines!" I get a

hold of myself. Again. I go toward the main doors and shout at people to not give up, the injunction – bla, bla, bla. I give a big speech. I leave while people chant, people are angry and aren't giving way. They put their coffee aside, and pull together. Copy-paste situation on the other door. I make my behind the human chain in front of building two and building five.

HEY. I just broke through the human chain from behind!! What is this?!

So I challenge those in the line at the front. Can they shout louder than Estrie Against the Hike? Chanting gets louder, on both sides. I see people trying to cross the lines. I see the media. I see the teachers. I see people crying, others laughing, others who are worried, but my job is done. The small groups don't give way, they're determined, numerous, but together. They are there.

The same teacher comes to see me; after an hour of running between small groups, classes are canceled. Classes are canceled. No one is injured. No dead. No anything. No UQO. No Valleyfield. No. Classes.

We succeeded.

We succeeded together. We march. We chant. Morale is at 1000%. I'm proud of my people. I'm proud of this morning. I'll remember it for the rest of my life because the moment still gives me shivers. I'm proud of you. We don't surrender. And it's our strength. Conviction and solidarity. I adore you.

– Friday, April 27, 2012

Nevertheless, May 3rd, after a week of morning battles, during which our comrade had his face trampled while he was arrested roughly and for bogus reasons; during which the greens confronted us, each morning; during which we fought; during which we were afraid of being cleared out by the cops or by the greens (gives you a sense of the latter's intensity)… the strike at CEGEP de Sherbrooke was not renewed. The results were 870 in favour and 1,119 voting against. There's some controversy when counting starts, etc. But I don't pay any attention.

Part of me is happy that it's over. I can finally finish my semester. I. I can go to Rimouski. I can finish CEGEP. I. I can't believe I'm thinking like this, but I can't stop myself. I'm sad that the strike is not renewed, I really shed tears, but there was a hint of relief as my eyes water. I accept it.

The Strike Movement in Québec's Regions: The Student Strike in Saguenay-Lac-Saint-Jean

Guillaume Néron[1]

February 20, 2012. The central plaza at the CEGEP in Saint-Félicien[2] is bursting with people. The members of the student association's executive committee can feel the pressure rising. We had been waiting on this day for months, having worked very hard to come to this point. People were gathered for the CEGEP's special general assembly on the possibility of launching an unlimited strike. After many hours spent debating back and forth, a motion is put to the assembly: "Be it resolved that the Saint-Félicien CEGEP student association (AECSF) begin a general unlimited strike starting on Monday, February 27th, 2012." A motion to put the motion to a secret ballot vote passes, which raises the already palpable tension in the room. With 55.6 per cent voting in favour, 41.2 per cent against and 17.2 per cent abstaining, the longest strike in the history of Saint-Félicien's CEGEP began.

This piece will lay my own analysis, which is grounded in my experience as a student activist in the Saguenay–Lac-Saint-Jean region, specifically in Saint-Félicien, rather than striving to paint a picture of what happened in every region of Québec. At times I will provide a chronology of

[1] Translated by Joël Pedneault.

[2] A regional town in Québec's Lac-Saint-Jean region, pop. around 10,000.

events, in order to draw links between the latter and the information I will share. This will shed light on the various realities of our contribution to the movement.

Although the Saguenay-Lac-Saint-Jean region is similar to other regions in Québec, access to post-secondary education is still a recent reality for a large number of families. A majority of university-level students who come from this region are the first in their family to reach this level of education. Unfortunately, it is also much easier in the region to espouse a populist, conventional worldview, rather than choosing the path of combativeness and direct democracy, which requires extra effort and deeper analysis.

The strike in our region began with a rocky start. Just as the Saint-Félicien CEGEP association (AECSF) and the Alma College association (AECA) were joining the ranks of CLASSE, FECQ, the more right-wing federation of CEGEP-level student unions, decided to put pressure on the executive committee members at the Jonquière CEGEP student association (a member association of FECQ at the time) to hold their strike votes before other student associations in the region. Having noticed, as FECQ had, that the state of mobilization and activism at the CEGEP in Jonquière was much weaker than elsewhere in the region, AECSF decided to hold its strike vote one week earlier than the one in Jonquière, so that the vote at the CEGEP in Jonquière would not have any consequences for other votes in other CEGEPs in the region. The gravitational pull of local strike votesis a force to be reckoned with, and if the CEGEP in Jonquière had voted against a strike before any other associations, that

may have signed the movement's death as far as the region was concerned. All this to say that on February 20th, 2012, during our strike general assembly, our association adopted a general unlimited strike mandate that was set to begin the next week. The Saint-Félicien CEGEP was the first in the region to vote in favour of a strike in 2012;at this stage, we had no idea that we would be the only ones to hold down the fort in Saguenay-Lac-Saint-Jean for almost the entire duration of the movement, despite being 300 km away from the next major city (Québec City) and 500 km from Montreal.

Although students in the region were very active on a regional level – especially those at the CEGEPs in Saint-Félicien and Alma and in striking departmental student associations at UQAC (University of Québec at Chicoutimi), the geographic location of each campus played an important role since it created obstacles to how long our strike could last. Far away as we were from the effervescence in Montreal, it was at times difficult for student associations in our region to remain creative during the longest strike in the region's history. Towards the beginning, people were very motivated and there was no shortage of new ideas. There were tight picket lines every morning in spite of cold winters in the northern part of Lac-Saint-Jean. Various actions aimed at increasing visibility, or aiming to disturb the normal course of things, were organized in order to turn up the pressure. As well, we organized a regional mobilization tour of other CEGEPs in order to show other campuses that the strike was not limited to Québec's metropolitan region. These efforts furthered students' (but also the local population's) process of thinking about the legitimacy of combative struggle.

It's worth reminding readers that combative syndicalism is less rooted in our region's popular culture than it is in Montreal's, for instance.

It is worth mentioning that our region's campuses are located many kilometres from one another and that the weather (especially in winter and spring) can be a significant impediment to mobility. The nearest campus from Saint-Félicien, in Alma, is an hour's drive away; it takes another hour to get to the metropolitan region of Saguenay. The distances covered imply steep costs, which is why hundreds of dollars were budgeted every week for moving activists around the region. Of course, it would have been possible for us to simply stay in Saint-Félicien, however it was crucial for us to stay active in order to bring in an element of diversity to the type of actions organized during the strike. In addition, we had to prove week after week that there was a certain mass of people struggling together, in order to maintain our coverage in the media and to prove that mobilization was alive and well in the region.

Add to all this the frequent trips away from the region during national demonstrations, which took place in Montreal most of the time, but often also in Québec City. Renting a single bus in order to participate in these demonstrations cost over two thousand dollars at the time! Getting to the large number of congresses happening every week in Montreal or often in Québec was also expensive. The student strike even left our association's finances in the red, in spite of help from better-off CEGEP associations. There is something paradoxical about the fact that student associations in the regions, which tend to be

smaller than urban associations, have smaller budgets and longer distances to cover, while associations in the major cities have more means and incur fewer expenses on this front.

During general assemblies, we had the opportunity to witness interesting and powerful debates. The local dynamic was such that many concepts were not yet understood in the region. This fact is perfectly understandable since many subjects hadn't yet been discussed and reflected upon in the region. Direct democracy, combative syndicalism, the legitimacy of disruptive and/or direct actions, feminism, neoliberalism, and many more concepts were all subjects that led to long debates during general assemblies. It would be impossible to minimize the significance of the positions that we adopted during that period of time.I believeAECSF and its membership progressed during the strike, since debates over these concepts took place at a time when general assemblies were well attended.

The biggest source of demoralization for the region's activists was no doubt a sense of isolation or being powerless to change the course of the national movement. We could not act as much as we would have liked. We were all very much conscious of the sweeping mobilization of Québec's students; the fact remained that various levels of government, Minister's offices, and the media are located in Québec's two biggest cities. In spite of this, we lobbied week after week for national actions to be organized in the regions more frequently, in order to create a network of solidarity linking all of Québec's students.

A small number of activists coming in from the bigger cities would also been the missing ingredient in order to organize actions in the regions which we could not have organized ourselves. This type of outreach would have demonstrated solidarity between striking students in different cities and would have contributed to breaking the sense of isolation of students in the regions. We regularly got comments from students who felt that they were no longer important within the strike movement. This feeling emanated from the nature of decisions made during the different CLASSE congresses. On the one hand, the amount of mobilization and travelling that was asked of students everywhere in Québec, for national actions as well as for other types of demonstrations, was astounding. On the other hand, we noticed that very little was set in motion in order to support the efforts of regional associations in return for their participation in a national movement. A measure of decentralization would have allowed us to keep up a sense of belonging to the strike movement amongst the region's students, and possibly to encourage support for the movement by the largest possible number of students.

Another significant part of this story is the late arrival of the Alma College student association (AECA) to our region's strike movement. This was very good news for the students that were already on strike, since it contributed to creating some regional solidarity. However, this good news was short-lived, since this student association was the first one in Québec to be subject to a court injunction against the strike. The national movement's reaction to this interference by the courts was noticeably weaker than everywhere else. Activists from outside the region

suggested to the local activist base that they should disrupt the resumption of classes; However, this type of disruption led to police lines being formed inside the school in order to search students and to enforce 'law and order.' This, in the absence of a sufficiently large and embattled activist presence, led to a sense of disempowerment. Although the idea of disrupting the forced return to class was a good one, it was unrealistic to think that the activist base from the CEGEP in Alma could have managed to interrupt classes in its own institution, while students everywhere else benefitted from broad activist support in order to succeed. The student union in Alma did not have the same level of support as other associations that faced injunctions later on. They never benefitted from external support in order to form hard the picket lines that would have been needed to defend their strike mandate.

The students at the CEGEP in Saint-Félicien ended up continuing the strike, alone again this time, alongside a few departmental student associations at UQAC who were already faced with their administration's disregard. Three and a half weeks before the end of our strike, with no more money left to organize major actions, AECSF organized a permanent encampment on the CEGEP's grounds. From this moment onwards, week after week, the strike continued with smaller and smaller percentages voting in favour. On April 30th, 2012, AECSF was mandated by its general assembly not to use the strike as a pressure tactic anymore, and the CEGEP student body resumed courses on May 2nd, 2012. If things had panned out differently, I believe it's a fact that many activists at the CEGEP in Saint-Félicien would have continued their strike till the very end. During future strikes, it will be important to consolidate

solidarity with Québec's regions, by introducing a form of decentralization through the creation or consolidation of regional-level student associations. We must continue to contribute to the development of civic participation in the regions in order to create a sense of belonging to a struggle, in order to reinforce the legitimacy of this struggle. The strike was not only characterized by hard times and fruitless attempts: the strike also rolled back the limits of the world for a significant activist base, and expanded our understanding of today's neoliberal system.

A more solid and combative activist base is now present in the Saguenay-Lac-Saint-Jean region. We now simply need to find a way to immediately consolidate the region's combative elements, in order to eliminate the population's lethargy and to maintain a culture of wakefulness and constant vigilance, especially against various organizations such as the student federations (FECQ and FEUQ). Thankfully, organizations like these, which take the steam out of popular movements and of civic criticism, won't be able to count on ignorance any more to further their organizational goals in our region. This will provide room for student associations as well as for various more combative movements to work on long-term social goals.

We Are the Earth Underfoot

Norman Nawrocki

We are the earth, the sand, the gravel,
rocks and bricks underfoot

We are the mud, the dog shit, cigarette butts
and dirt you step on

Black-skinned, brown-skinned, yellow-skinned
pink-skinned and no skin at all
dreamers without restraint
inheritors of a dangerous ancient rhythm

Today we beat pots and pans in the street
cheerfully

Tomorrow we could beat baseball bats,
re-bar, chains, 2 x 4's, steel pipe, pick axes,
tree trunks, bulldozers gone wild
and whatever else
will fit in our angry hands

We are your nightmare echo told to
'hold, please,'
as we now live yours 24/7
protesting it politely, civilly, respectfully,
we were trained to

We are the numberless stars
thickening the sky
the empowered defiant mass of
red sand blowing in from the desert

We are the churning black sea
restless, disobedient, flooding streets
waves smashing open every secured door

We are the tectonic upheaval
granite footsteps grinding fortresses to dust
making the ground reverberate
with our rage and determination
splitting the pavement exposing
the abyss from where you came
each precipice now inscribed
with your parking lot # and your name

We are the earth, the sand, the gravel
rocks and bricks underfoot
the dirt you step on today,
tomorrow is coming
tomorrow is coming
it beats another beat

5 Beyond the Strike

The potential for a social movement uprising, particularly long term, often lies in its ability to build solidarity across sectors; across the differences that usually keep various groups in society segmented and focused only on their own most immediate interests. The success of the 2012 strike movement in mobilizing Anglophone as well as Francophone students, for example, has been highlighted as one of the key factors that contributed to both the size and duration of the strike. The movement was further strengthened by its ability to tap into supportive relationships between student groups and professors, as well as members of the community sector, facilitating the call for a social strike by the end of the spring.

While the sense of solidarity framed by a shared class analysis worked across some differences, many activists involved in the Québec Spring also demanded an explicitly anti-colonial, intersectional analysis and organizing approach that took into account gender, race, sexuality, and im/migration status. These calls forced activists to work through tensions between traditional visions of student and working class struggles tied to Québec nationalism, and the desire to build an inclusive movement representative of contemporary Québec society. The authors in this section

reflect on their experiences of attempting to build such a movement, and of participating in the student strike as people who are members of community groups involved in ongoing, daily struggles for basic needs.

Fanny Jolicoeur describes how she and her colleagues in women's centres found a sense of mutual inspiration and support with the students and the movement. As Fanny points out, the link between the student movement and women's centres were not just driven by the gendered impacts of the tuition hikes (which were highlighted by feminists during the strike), but was also about defending a conception of the welfare state that both student activists and women's centre members saw being eroded.

In their chapter, rosalind hampton, Mona Luxion, and Molly Swain reflect on the importance of creating activist spaces that are inclusive of our whole selves as variously marginalized people. They emphasize the ways that direct action can be liberating in its suspension of usual hierarchies of knowledge, benefiting from input and contributions from variously located people with an array of life experiences. The context for this discussion is illustrated by Ilyan Ferrer, Farha Najah Hussain, Edward Ou Jin Lee and Lena Palacios in the following chapter. They underscore the racist, classist, and sexist nature of the proposed tuition hikes and the struggles of struggles of women and racialized, im/migrant, criminalized and queer/trans communities to raise awareness of the ways in which neoliberalism has and continues to impact already marginalized communities hardest, drawing on their experiences of education struggles as well as involvement in the parallel, ongoing and the impact of the federal

refugee law, Bill C-31, which was passed during the height of the student movement and protests against Bill 78 / Law 12.

Finally, Joël Pedneault takes readers through two days of some of the most memorable shows of strength and solidarity of the strike: April 20th and 21st 2012, when the Liberal government sponsored a job fair, the Salon du Plan Nord, to showcase its plans for natural resource exploitation and development in northern Québec. Joël describes the complex network of connections between anti-colonial struggles, anti-capitalism, nationalism, and the student strike that shaped the protests against the Salon du Plan Nord, and that continue to spark internal debate within the student movement and within the left in Québec.

Solidarité

Patricia Boushel

Many of us bilingual Québeckers have learned to fluidly navigate the often-dicey waters of our motley «national» identities. As we move through various spaces, we assert our linguistic identities, an act that troubles the lines of belonging, magnifying connections while also drawing out divisions. The latest chapter in Québec's social movements did not quell habits of linguistic or political labelling, but it did challenge the clear separations between many spheres: students and non-students, strikers and citizens, union sympathizers and capitalists, the entitled youth and the hard-working establishment. The lines between these categories are conveniently mobile and in many cases are used to paint an easy picture of what is a quite complex set of issues.

Having participated in a dozen or so manifestations come the implementation of Bill 78, I'd yet to know a moment where my feelings of solidarité with the movement had been trumped by the forces outside the movement that tried to drive wedges between us. This is why this word solidarité, this ultimate measure of union and fraternity between people, drew me to lend many hours to translating the movement's texts, in solidarity with its farther-reaching goals. Through this process, I began to grasp the meaning of this word in a way I felt was not available to someone who hasn't stood up alongside a group of citizens in a shared struggle.

Political rhetoric in our nation has not easily embraced the word. My sense is that it is evocative of syndicalism and socialism to the extent that our mainstream media avoids using it. It is a dangerous word. They might use it when speaking

of it negatively («Cracks start to show in Québec's student solidarity», claimed the Globe and Mail back in April) in order to show solidarity as being this large, shapeless mass that, when inspected more closely, is not as cohesive as it should be to warrant awe, nor as righteous as it ought to be to represent an encompassing purpose. But these journalists weren't on the streets alongside the students in order to write their reports. Had they been, perhaps they would have been awed enough to write elegies in support of the students' and sympathizers' efforts, along with many francophone journalists, teachers, parents, sociologists, philosophers, children, entrepreneurs, doctors and labourers who were dans la rue, avec nous (in the streets, with us; to quote one of the movement's most popular street chants). The rhetoric of the streets came to feel much more real than the rhetoric of most printed words, because it sprang from the moment itself, from the collective

spirit of an interacting community getting to know itself boldly, with few reservations. This exercise was new for many, and so too the experience and meaning of the cohesion, the solidarité.

Unlike the English solidarity, the French word solidarité has an accompanying adjective: solidaire. I found myself to be in solidarity with, but also I was solidaire. We could define ourselves as embodying this spirit, often times physically in a shared collective space, the effect of which tied us in with a greater social construct, a greater sense of history and community, making us feel like a more integral part of the broader narrative. Not only are we shoulder-to-shoulder (in solidarity), we are (solidaire). I came to believe that it is not only the experience of solidarity but also the affirmation of self as solidaire that is key to effecting change.

Beyond a sense of union implied by the word, solidarity yields an acknowledgement of social responsibility, which is essential in getting people out in the streets over the span of many months. The same sense of responsibility was bred through our translation collective. We played a part in democratizing the dissemination of information, a process through which we echoed the appropriation and re-localization of agency enacted by the movement. Such an awakening to these new meanings ensured the vitality of the movement and will help us as we reflect and build upon new and renewed connections, identities, and hopes.

Women's Centres in Québec : A Strong Base of Support for the Student Movement

Fanny Jolicœur[1]

As the weeks of the student strike turned into the months of the Québec Spring, some student associations, community organizations and unions joined their efforts, forming the cross-sector "Red Hand Coalition" to increase pressure on the government. The Coalition urged their members to take part in "social strikes" on May 1st and May 15th, 2012,and on April 26, women's centres throughout Québec received a filmed statement prepared by the provincial organization, *Regroupement des centres de femmes du Québec*, announcing their intention to participate in the social strike. While shocking to some, the eloquent message convinced several centres to organize themselves to answer this call.

The first women's centres in Québec emerged in the early 1980s to respond to the strong desire expressed by activists to have their own places from which to work. There are now hundreds of organizations working to improve the lives of women who are members of the large network known formally as the *Regroupement des centres de femmes du Québec* or, more colloquially, *"l'R."* All of those in *l'R* adhere to common principles detailed in a "Basis of Political Unity", which lays out their feminist position and comprehensive approach to intervention.. The primary function of these groups is providing living

[1] Translated by Abby Lippman.

environments that aim at breaking the isolation many women experience. They also offer various support services and educational activities, and they initiate and take part in political action. The greatest strength of these women's centres lies in the close relationships they facilitate with and between the women who are involved with them, and in the wide range of issues they address: violence, mental health, education, democracy, and resistance to poverty.

As a result of this basis of unity, the demand for an accessible education for everyone made by the student movement resonated with the women's centres. The women understood the proposed increase in university tuition fees to be part of a wider trend towards defunding of public social services. For the staff of *l'R*, what especially aroused indignation and inspired a sense of urgency to get involved in the strike was the ongoing police repression of the strikers and their allies. Police violence fuelled their anger along with mounting concerns that the current conflict had brought to the fore such as the privatization of health care, the Plan Nord, and rising electricity rates. As one employee said: "It was very emotional, we were fully occupied by this struggle. We had difficulty concentrating on our work… . Our mental health was in danger if we did not go into action."[2]

The women's centre in Longueuil, Vie Nous V'elles[3], shared this indignation and promptly announced its intention to strike. In a statement issued on April 30, the

[2] The testimonies quoted in this piece were collected by the author in the fall of 2012. Quotes were also pulled from the *Regroupement des centres de femmes du Québec* website.

[3] A play on words, can be read to say «new life.»

centre denounced the attitude of the police, describing their actions as a threat to democracy: "When you silence young people and those who support them with clubs and tear gas canisters fired at close range, democracy is at risk."[4] Seeing beyond the proposed tuition fee increases, the centre also worried about the future of provincial social programs: "The debate opened by the student movement goes beyond the simple question of tuition: it suggests the need to reflect on the kind of society we want. Do we want a totalitarian state at the mercy of economic magnates? Or do we prefer a state that deserves its capital S to reflect that it is a progressive State that ensures the common good? Now is when these choices must be made."[5]

The call for a social strike received quick responses in all regions of Québec, and forty-five centres were mobilized. One reason for the mass response was that women's centres have always welcomed student interns—and some of the interns were very active in the movement, giving the centres direct access to information and to the sense of excitement stimulated by the growing mobilization. This helped other workers at the centres feel "personally touched" by the cause beyond the appeals on social networks and in traditional media.

The Shawinigan Women's Centre took the opportunity to denounce ongoing systemic sexism: "In earning on average just 71 per cent of what men earn in their lifetime, women are faced with greater economic burdens. And if

[4] Vies Nous V'elles, *«Le mépris a assez duré: grève sociale»* (This contempt has lasted long enough: social strike), press release, April 30, 2012.
[5] *Ibid.*

we consider the long-term, women will take much longer than men to repay student loans because of their lower average wages …"[6] Women's centres in Montérégie responded by prioritizing popular political education for their members, including debates organized to clarify myths about the political left and right.[7] Choosing another approach, women's centres in the Bas-Saint-Laurent picketed the office of the Liberal MP for the riding of Rivière-du-Loup.[8]

In Montreal, a day of reflection and action took place on May 15, 2012. The Red Hand Coalition held a rally in rooms provided by the Centre-Sud Social Committee, a major centre of militancy in Montreal.[9] The event was facilitated by a representative from the Montreal women's centres and was very well attended. Representatives from ten women's centres in the region of Montreal and Laval were present. The atmosphere was electrifying as participants shared both their indignation and enthusiasm. This meeting also provided an opportunity to celebrate the courage, determination, creativity and openness of student associations with regard to their solidarity with union and community groups, inspiring the latter to participate in

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[6] Shawinigan Women's Centre, *«Le Centre de femmes de Shawinigan affiche son appui au mouvement étudiant»* (The Shawinigan Women's Centre expresses its support for the student movement), press release, May 1, 2012.

[7] *Regroupment des centres de femmes du Québec website,* www.rcentre.qc.ca

[8] *«Partout au Québec, des centres de femmes sont en grève dans la rue»* (Everywhere in Québec, women's centres are on strike and in the streets), press release, May 14, 2012.

[9] Centre-Sud is a working-class neighbourhood east of downtown Montreal.

the social strike and to take to the street alongside students. To conclude the day and as a way to protest the anti-mask law that had just come into force, participants were asked to gather in the afternoon for a political masquerade ball at Place Émilie-Gamelin in downtown Montreal.

l'R and its member groups were active in the spring mobilization beyond the social strikes they were called to support on May 1 and May 15. An intervention worker from a women's centre in the Petite-Patrie neighborhood of Montreal was one of the organizers of the highly visible group, *Mères en colère et solidaires.* She explained the reason this group was formed in these words: "When I took part in the student protests, I could not directly identify with young people. But as a mother, I feel involved in what they are experiencing … Several of us felt anxiety and outrage at the violence that students were experiencing and wanted to support them concretely. Other people, activists and workers at women's centres, who were also concerned about how their children and future generations might lack access to university education, also joined the movement."

The Québec Spring encouraged a great deal of popular education among members of the province's women's centres, with some groups and individuals experiencing a sense of empowerment through participating in their first political event or going out in their neighborhood with pots and pans in hand.[10] However, when the student struggle was at its peak in May 2012, the participation of activists at the women's centres began to decline. It appeared that the harsh police repression at some rallies

[10] As part of the nightly *«casserole»* demonstrations.

and demonstrations, such as occurred on May 4, 2012 at the Liberal Party congress in Victoriaville, may have cooled the passion of many participants. Following the tremendous violence in Victoriaville, some expressed fear that this scenario might occur again.

With the arrival of Pauline Marois as Prime Minister of Québec, plans to raise tuition fees were cancelled and Law 78 was abolished, providing some relief—as well as pride—for those, including the women's centres, who had demanded these changes. But in spite of these victories, other actions to counter the neoliberal policies that affect young people, women and the general population will clearly be necessary. Women's centres have been greatly inspired by the diversity and efficiency of the countless actions carried out during the student movement. Conversely, the students were able to rely on the unwavering support of women's centres throughout the spring. Given this successful collaboration and the clear convergence of interests that it illuminated, it is likely that other alliances between student activists and Québec's women's centres can be anticipated in the months and years to come.

Finding Space in the Student Movement for Both/And Identities

rosalind hampton, Mona Luxion & Molly Swain

One of the exciting things about the 2012 student strike was how many people understood themselves as activists for the first time and became more radical in their thinking, tactics, or both, building a stronger base for future activism. With this future in mind, the three of us have been engaged in an ongoing conversation about how and why our experiences of the 2012 student movement differed from anything with which we had been involved before. We share some of what has emerged through these conversations below, highlighting what we have learned in dialogue and action together about our identities, communities of solidarity, the importance of intersectional analysis, and the transformative potential of direct action.

Our conversation started on a cold afternoon in February 2012, as we sat together wrapped in sleeping bags and blankets in the #6party solidarity camp outside of McGill University's James Administration building (6partylive.tumblr.com). #6party was a five-day surprise resignation party for—and occupation in the sixth floor office of—the Deputy Provost Student Life and Learning. The *occuparty*[1] was in protest of the unilateral decision

[1] The idea of a festive action was important to the students involved as a way of dispelling myths about activists as violent and angry. Nonetheless, #6party was an effective, and intentionally political, disruption of the university's status quo. We use the term '*occuparty*' here, as it was used by participants, to highlight that

by the university's senior administration to invalidate the results of democratic referenda that had confirmed the continued existence of two important campus-community services funded by student fee levies: QPIRG-McGill and radio station CKUT. Additional motivations behind the actions of the student *occupartiers* included ongoing administrative attacks on student autonomy and input in decision-making, the university's ties to extractive and exploitative industries, and the senior administration's avid public support for the proposed provincial tuition increases.

On the morning of February 7th, once the group of student activists established their presence on the sixth floor, dozens of students and professors entered and claimed the first floor of the administration building. This secondary, 24 hour *occuparty* involved teach-ins, food service from the Midnight Kitchen (another campus-community service), a performance by a local trans activist and spoken word artist, meetings, and various groupings for study and conversation. On day two of the #6party, a support camp was set up outside of the administration building below the windows to which the sixth floor *occupartiers* had gained access. In the camp's impromptu shelters, students braved brutally cold temperatures to bear witness to events as they unfolded, providing around-the-clock moral and material support to the party upstairs and informing passers-by about the *occuparty* and its demands. Over the next five days, bonds were formed between students and

tactic of claiming space while maintaining some of the intended levity. It's worth noting, as well, that discussions about the colonial connotations of the «occupy» movement were in the air at the time and affected the choice of language to discuss #6party.

faculty across various areas and levels of study, political backgrounds and a range of experience in organizing. We shared our stories and perspectives, as well as all manner of resources: from those meeting basic needs to those exploring intellectual ideas and scholarship.

In the context of the inspiring exchanges that were happening, the three of us shared realizations about how the structures of the university reduce "diversity" to compartmentalized academic disciplines that fail to reflect our complex lived experiences of multiple, intersecting subjectivities. Despite institutional policies supposedly aspiring to "equity and diversity," there was nowhere at the university but in activist spaces where women of colour, queer and other usually marginalized people were respected and in roles of leadership. We were struck by how, within the group of activists in and around #6party, we saw many male, heterosexual, and white students stepping back, intentionally muting their privilege, and supporting and following Others. There was a commitment to addressing oppression that ran deeper than lip service, and a sense of responsibility and reflexivity.

In some of our conversations since then, we've reflected on what it was about the #6party moment and setting that facilitated comradeship among people with such varied experiences of oppression. It seems clear that in addition to a stated anti-oppressive perspective from many or all those involved, it was the intensity of the experience, as well as our forced dependency on each other, that catalyzed and intensified relationships and dynamics that might have taken longer to emerge, or not have emerged at all, under other circumstances. The decentralized nature of that

organizing—exacerbated by limited communication to the sixth floor and the ad hoc way in which support came together—led to an environment in which people had an opportunity to prove themselves and be respected on the basis of their contributions, rather than being prejudged and pigeonholed. Equally important, the critical nature of support work, typically scripted as feminine and racialized, was also brought to the fore when the largely (though by no means entirely) white, cis, male sixth-floor party had its access to food, internet, and electricity cut off by the senior administration and had to trust in the solidarity organizing outside.

As a Métis woman and a Black woman, Molly and rosalind were conscious of drawing on the historical importance of direct action for our communities. It wasn't just that we ourselves were radical people; when institutions have historically been designed to exclude you, radical action becomes the only way to effect real change! At the same time, while reading Marx and Bakunin might get you into an occupation, the skills and mentality of getting things done, getting people fed, and building networks and a supportive community are not only useful personality traits, they are part of a powerful tradition of Black and Indigenous women's organizing. It is no surprise that given the opportunity, women of colour organizers took on central roles in the #6party support camp.

Claiming and queering marginal space

> [Marginality] is also the site of radical possibility, a space of resistance. It was this marginality that I was naming as a central location for the production of a counter hegemonic discourse

> that is not just found in words but in habits of being and the way one lives. As such, I was not speaking of a marginality one wishes to lose, to give up, or surrender as part of moving into the center, but rather as a site one stays in, clings to even, because it nourishes one's capacity to resist. It offers the possibility of radical perspectives from which to see and create, to imagine alternatives, new worlds.
>
> — bell hooks (1990). *Marginality as a site of resistance.*

In late 2011, the Queer McGill Political Action Working Group published a short article discussing queer and trans folks in relation to the upcoming strike. The conclusion of that piece, which Mona was a part of drafting, read:

> Let us create a movement that fosters a respect for, and a proliferation of, diverse tactics. Straight, white, cisgender[2], abled men are taught to speak loudly and take up space. In meetings where their voices are the only ones heard, queer people become disenfranchized and excluded. You cannot count on our participation simply because our end goals are the same. To be strong, our movement must be united. As we work to build a powerful and lasting student movement, we call on our allies to actively seek out and include queer perspectives in every step of planning, action and, ultimately, building a better educational system.

This statement reflected conversations and thinking about what it meant to 'queer' something: how dismantling the structures that maintain straight and cisgender privilege is different from just creating a space specifically for queer

[2] Cisgender, *n.* Not transgender (from *cis-*, and *trans-*, Latin.)

people, and entails, in fact, de-centring and skewing the experiences of cis and straight people in that space as well as creating possibilities that have nothing to do with sexual orientation or gender specifically.

The #6party solidarity camp, however temporarily, created a new kind of marginal space that was diverse and empowering; we claimed and queered, Blackened, and worked to decolonize that strip of space alongside the Administration Building for all marginalized people in an action in defense of CKUT and QPIRG, whose social justice mandate benefits all of us. The *occuparty* and support camp opened up both geographic and conceptual space of radical possibility not only for our physical presence at the university but also for a broader discussion about marginalization.

These events have to be understood in the context of an intense response from the university security force, especially for those of us who were doing a lot of organizing on the ground and who were out there at the camp. The visible security presence on campus increased significantly, and students involved with #6party support were filmed, followed, harassed (sometimes by name), and constantly under threat of physical harm or legal/disciplinary retribution. This was some people's first experience with that kind of intense, ongoing surveillance, and it contributed significantly to building the deep empathy that emerged—not only between people who were constantly at the support camp or up on the sixth floor, but also for people who participated in activism on campus afterwards.

The surveillance of individual students (as confirmed in security reports later obtained through ATI requests) produced an inflated sense of visibility. For many of us this entailed an uncomfortable shift from feeling erased and invisible to feeling hypervisible as 'threatening others' on campus. For some being surveilled had the likely intended consequences of intimidation, shifting one's attention from the collective action to the potential individual consequences. But for many of us our hypervisibility and alienation from the campus mainstream increased our reliance on fellow "known student radicals" for camaraderie and collective care.

Through our participation in this action, we insisted on our self-determined collectivity, on the basis of political affinity, not race, gender, class, or position within the university. By stepping outside of our prescribed roles and assigned locations (e.g. within our separate disciplines and levels of study), we troubled the university's veneer of liberalism and revealed the extent of the institution's investment in constructing and controlling narratives and physical spaces in ways that uphold social hierarchies.

An outcome of this experience, and of the personal relationships that were built among the *occupartiers* and support organizers, was a broader disruption of normalized social hierarchies regarding whose input is valued and whose knowledge counts in our social circles and activist communities. Those of us who were touched by the events around #6party supported one another to the extent that we could expect to be heard and have our ideas and concerns valued—our solidarity was about us caring about each other, and realizing that our avowed politics don't

mean anything if we don't act on our love for each other when friends and comrades are being hurt. White activists listened when their comrades of colour called out racism; cis, heterosexual folks committed to understanding the issues of gender and queerness important to their friends.

For the three of us, this kind of bond is a prerequisite to lasting solidarity and allyship; you can talk about oppression for as long as you like, but unless people who are socialized to being centred come to recognize—and commit to actively negating—their dominance, that talk is not going to matter. Through the intense friendships formed in direct action—so intense that we felt unable to be very far away from each other for a while afterwards—we developed a lasting empathy for one another and by extension for the various communities we identify with, along with an understanding that we're in this together.

From occupartiers to student activists

The three of us found that the space created in and around #6party, and the strike organizing that followed within the community we had formed, was intersectional in a way unlike coalition organizing we'd each been involved in before. Rather than trying to bring people together across identities but ultimately tokenizing all of us as spokespeople for our groups, in the context of direct action we created a space that allowed for complexity and challenged us to listen to each other and learn from each others' lived experiences.

As people with fluid, both/and identities—"biracial," Métis and genderqueer—we found our corner of student movement activism to be a space within which we were not forced into the either/or positions we often experience as we move between mainstream and marginalized communities.

What was it that made that possible? Did the inclusion of so many diverse folks automatically shift power relations? How do we make it happen again, and again? We've come to suspect the answers to these questions are tied up with affinity and decentralization on the one hand (letting people do what they feel comfortable doing), and respect and trust on the other (letting people prove themselves but not making them prove themselves). And love, which seems so important but can be difficult to talk about without sounding like we're quoting platitudes. Nevertheless, the love is important and undeniable!

The urgency of the organizing during #6party—as well as the spatial disconnect between the initiators, on the sixth floor, and the more fluid membership of the support camp—compelled a process in which important decisions were not decreed by leaders and then delegated. Indeed decisions were at times realized conceptually and performatively at the same time, with our collective strategy and direction formed out of the accumulated actions of all of us who acted out our responses to the situation. In this decentralized and ad hoc collectivity, we acted individually or in varying small affinity clusters, at times our bodies moving before or as ideas occurred to us. Though many of us were in near-constant contact, the nature of our trust in each other allowed us, when necessary, to simply call on

each other for support and then confirm our consent in action, through verbal and nonverbal communication.

The community that was forged out of these five days lasted as student strikes were launched across Québec, and turned its energy largely toward mobilizing McGill students to join in those strikes. As that struggle spread the former *occupartiers* back across the compartmentalized and contested spaces of student association general assemblies, our trust in each other and interdependence continued to be tested and reinforced through direct action. The experience of having each others' backs in physical struggles in the streets directly translated to being prepared to support each other in challenging the ideological opponents we'd find both outside and even within the student movement.

On solidarity and being more than students

The potential for broader cross-sector solidarity emerged quite early in the mobilizations for the 2012 student strike, with a blockade of the stock exchange in February attracting students, long-time activists, and a variety of community based organizers and people who care about and are most affected by cuts to social spending. Different people took on different roles in this action, with mostly young, White, able-bodied students and activists securing the most vulnerable point of entry to the building, linking arms and standing off against the police who were attempting to undermine the action. When the police became violent, several older, racialized and disabled protesters moved into the area of conflict and disrupted the escalating confrontation with their presence,

providing a way for students and activists to integrate back into the larger demonstration. rosalind recalls being really conscious of her identification with members of both groups in this action; being with fellow student-activists with whom she had been organizing and encountering some Black elders who she knew from community work. The blockade demonstrated the potential of direct action involving a diverse range of students, many from affluent backgrounds, working in solidarity with Indigenous, racialized, and poor and working class communities.

At a campus demonstration around that same time Molly described solidarity as follows.

> What is Solidarity? We have been hearing a lot of talk about the "university community"—but what is community? Is it a group of individuals who inhabit the same general area? People who are thrown together without choice and are forced to coexist? I think this is the definition of community the university's senior administration uses: "you're here temporarily, so just shut up, keep your head down, and try to tolerate one another using the rules we have provided for you."
>
> Community for me is empathy. It's sharing a deep, encompassing empathy and love with people around us. It's rejecting the isolationist structure of this university and society in order to connect and really relate to one another. This idea of community is more than superficial jargon: it is about genuine inclusion and inclusion is about realizing solidarity. In a society that is so isolating and selfish, how do we build relationships? First, we have to open ourselves to radical amazement and radical embarrassment. Radical amazement allows us to believe change is possible & desirable. Radical embarrassment makes it personal, and forces us to reflect on our own privilege.

> Second, we must struggle together. Struggle is not just direct action, it's spending time together, eating together, taking care of one another, helping one another, creating together, fighting and forgiving, being stressed out, etc. Ultimately, struggle involves giving of yourself and accepting from others. Solidarity, trust, empathy—these things connect us not only to one another, but to the injustices that exist around us. Solidarity means wanting to engage with one another and create change, because if any members of our community suffer, then we suffer as well. Solidarity is also an amazing gift. Knowing without hesitation that you have a network of love and support that will be there beyond convenience and beyond popularity is unbelievably strengthening. Being able to provide for others—even when you're almost beyond the limits of your own endurance—is satisfying and fulfilling in a profound and indescribable way.

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In contextualizing the spring 2012 movement we often talk about the history of Québec student strikes, but in fact people who became involved in the student strike had been involved in community activism, in Occupy Montreal or Occupy movements elsewhere, or had watched what was going on in Greece and Spain, Chile and Egypt and felt implicated in that work. More closely connected to our context—what did it mean for people's politics, street tactics, and strategies, that the Toronto G20 counter-summit protests happened between the last student strike and this one? In our experience, activists brought to the 2012 Québec movement both new experiences and a historical sense of global social movement.

Relatedly, we found it misleading to think about student activists as students and nothing else: one of the

things that made the student movement really powerful for many of us was precisely the sense that we weren't fighting only as students, but as whole, complicated people from various communities and social locations. Many of us coming from that perspective cared much less, if at all, about what the hike meant for most current university students; rather, we were struggling about the way universities, society, or the economy are thought about and structured. It was very obvious that this hike would set a precedent for other austerity measures if it wasn't stopped, and things like hikes in healthcare costs, daycare prices, and electricity rates were already in the pipeline. For many activists, first-hand experiences of surveillance, profiling, media misrepresentation, and police brutality opened their eyes to some of the realities faced daily by Indigenous, racialized and poor communities and contributed to building solidarity with broader anticolonial and antiracist struggles.

For those of us with a more intersectional analysis, the failure of the strike's most visible spokespeople to meaningfully engage with these issues felt like a missed opportunity, especially as calls for a social strike grew more strident. In a way, #6party had been a unique and important early rallying point for our participation in the movement, because it framed the strike for us as being about a broader range of issues and identities from the start. Having that foundation undoubtedly gave us a different view and experience of the broader student movement than a lot of other people had, especially similarly marginalized folks. Where many of our friends felt the movement "wasn't for them," our experiences gave us a glimpse of something the

whole movement could aspire to, and occasionally lent us the strength to hold it accountable to that vision.

Our activism was and is about our whole selves, which in the context of the student movement often meant acting on two fronts: defending our position as students while simultaneously challenging the movement's assumptions about race, class, colonialism, and gender. Though our involvement in strike organizing took many forms, we found fruitful, challenging opportunities in the increasingly disparate, affinity-based organizing that began to characterize the strike after the initial movement timeline—which posited the CLASSE/FECQ/FEUQ demo in late March as a culmination point—broke down. To bring it back to the notion of both/and identities, we feel that we get to be whole people in the context of decentralized direct action. We're not just students, and we are not just our gender, or race or class identifications… we're all of these things. We're bringing this wholeness to it.

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Back on campus, following #6party we were able to navigate the space of the university with a much stronger sense of our presence there: building solidarity in action and across differences really helped us to practice fearlessness in challenging oppression, and in just being who we are in the face of broader Québec society. Mona, for example, probably wouldn't have had the confidence to begin writing a column in the McGill Daily and signing off publicly with gender-neutral pronouns if it hadn't been for the experience of being validated in eir gender identity

by people who weren't themselves immersed in the queer/trans community. Knowing what that could feel like led em to the realization that that level of self-determination and respect is something e both wants and deserves all the time.

Unlike a "community" defined by sameness and envisioned in terms of its parameters and the containment of people and ideas, the community that can be built in social action is necessarily diverse, porous and fluid. It can be a community that actively resists containment while engaging in critical and challenging acts of solidarity based on the belief that another university, and another society, is possible. It operates from a basis of embodied relationships, not only abstract principles, and in doing so recognizes the material effects of political principles. Although student unionism played an undeniable role in the strike, in our experience it was direct action and the formation of affinity-based organizing groups that lent the movement its transformative potential.

Building Solidarity : Searching for racial and migrant justice within the Québec Student Movement

Ilyan Ferrer, Farha Najah Hussain, Edward Ou Jin Lee, & Lena Palacios

Note: Another version of this piece was published in the Journal of Curriculum Theorizing.

> When we speak of solidarity and mutual aid, it is pertinent that we recognize the territory of our struggle. This territory is occupied Native land … Whether it is Premier Jean Charest and his Plan Nord au Québec or the Harper government that encourages mining companies to exploit resources on Indigenous land here and in the Global South, these realities should be recognized as integral to the neoliberal policies—based on free market and for-profit ventures—displacing entire peoples … from their lands. Neoliberalism, as a process upholds the reality whereby capital can move freely, while borders are closed to the very people that are displaced."

(Translated from the original in French, stated by a migrant justice activist at the *Rassemblement Populaire de la CLASSE*, 2012.)

As the 2012 Québec student movement gained momentum and grew into the *Printemps érable* Québec nationalist sentiment and rhetoric increasingly permeated the movement and framed its dominant discourses.[1] *Les*

[1] For more detailed historical context, see Rosalind Hampton, "Race, Racism and the Québec Student Movement." *New Socialist: Webzine* (July 8, 2012). Retrieved from newsocialist.org/index.php/627

Patriotes and Québec flags were ever-present in major demonstrations and the historical oppression of the poor and working class white francophone majority became the prevailing and overpowering story. While this discourse from within and about the movement contributed to the mobilization of a particular segment of the Québec population, it also served to erase Canada's historical and ongoing genocide and colonial violence against the First Peoples of this land[2] and failed to acknowledge the histories of racialized people, especially the Chinese and Black communities, in the formation of Montreal and Québec.[3] While this historical amnesia fed the mainstream media representation and perception of the struggle as a homogenous and "white" movement, a number of racialized students and community members challenged these narratives and asserted their place within the movement and its relevance to their communities.[4] For example, a motion written by members of Students of Colour Montreal (SoCM) passed by a clear majority of members at the congress on May 5th, 2012, calling on CLASSE to adopt "an official position of anti-racism and anti-colonialism in education … in communications, including but not limited to publications, media relations, speeches and congress proceedings."

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[2] T. Alfred, "Then and Now, For the Land." *Socialist Studies: the Journal of the Society for Socialist Studies* 6, no.1 (Spring 2010): 93-95.

[3] B.C. Chan and K.B. Chan, *Smoke and First: The Chinese in Montréal.* (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 1991); Dorothy Williams, *The Road to Now: A History of Blacks in Montréal.* (Montreal: Véhicule Press, 1998)

[4] Hampton, 2012.

The SoCM motion called attention to the colonial and racist nature of the proposed tuition hikes, stating that "the earnings gap between Québec Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals is more than 33 percentage points; individuals with Arab ethnicities are more likely disadvantaged in the workplace, are less likely to be able to find gainful employment, and will have a lower annual income than the Canadian average; Irrespective of age, education, language abilities, or occupation, Black women have lower total incomes than all other groups."[5] Racialized people, especially women of colour, systematically earn less income than their non-racialized counterparts, are two to four times more likely to live in poverty, are likely to encounter structural discrimination within the labour market and consequently, and are likely to take longer to pay off student debts.[6] Under this system of "economic apartheid,"[7] the proposed tuition hikes would systematically exclude racialized people even more from university education. In passing this motion, CLASSE acknowledged the structural and institutional racism embedded within the fabric of our society and accepted an anti-colonial, anti-racist mandate to confront and work to dismantle resulting systemic barriers to university education.

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[5] SoCM, "Students of Colour Montreal: Motioned by GEOGRADS for CLASSE Congress," In CLASSE (2012), *Cahier de préparation des delegations*, (April 20), pp. 9-10. Retrieved from www.asse-solidarite.qc.ca/documents/fr/instances/CLASSE/Cahiers/Cahier de Congres 22 avril 2012.pdf

[6] See Statistics Canada, 2006

[7] G.E. Galabuzi, *Canada's Economic Apartheid: The Social Exclusion of Racialized Groups in the New Century.* (Toronto: Canadian Scholars's Press, 2006)


COMMUNAUTÉS RACISÉ-E-S
ÉTUDIANT-E-S RACISÉ-E-S
UNIE-S CONTRE
L'OPPRESSION NÉOLIBERAL
ARRÊTEZ!
STOP
NON
C51
NON

In this chapter, members of SoCM share further accounts of some of the ways that racialized students and community members asserted themselves within the Québec student movement. Our narratives combine personal reflections with critical analysis in order to explore the tensions, conflicts and possibilities of making links between the student movement and broader struggles for social, economic and racial justice. In doing so, we humbly align ourselves with the educational activism spearheaded by people of colour, queer and trans people, and those from working poor and working class backgrounds both before and since the "Third World" student movement that exploded on North American university campuses in the 1960s.[8]

A group of local activists organized an anti-racist feminist art action during the summer of 2012 to make links between migrant justice and accessibility to post-secondary education.

Reflections on networking, building anti-racist feminist solidarity and movement building

Student Strike 2012: To engage or not?

In the midst of denouncing proposed draconian changes to immigration law[9] alongside fellow migrant

[8] R.P. McCormick, *The Black Student Protest Movement at Rutgers.* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1990)

[9] In February 2012, the Canadian Immigration and Multiculturalism Minister Jason Kenney brought forth draconian Bill C-31. The bill became law in June 2012, amending the Immigration Refugee Protection Act (IRPA) and the Balanced Refugee Reform Act (BRRA) with the pretext of expediting the processing of refugee claims. In

justice activists and migrant communities, and as someone who is no longer a "formal" student, I found myself completely inspired and humbled by the effective organizing and mobilization of the student strike. At the same time, I joined other migrant justice organizers and racialized comrades—including students—who did not know where racialized people fit in a student movement that was not only white dominant in terms of its demographics, but lacked a comprehensive anti-racist and anti-colonial analysis. Despite these limitations of the movement, we felt that it was important to navigate this catalytic political terrain, one where students were being radicalized, and discourses around anti-neoliberalism were being held. Tactics to disrupt Québec's economy were being implemented, analyses rooted in anti-capitalist thought appeared to be evolving on a mass scale, and statements of solidarity with students in the Global South were articulated.

Some progress with respect to asserting anti-racist and anti-colonial positions seemed to occur when CLASSE adopted the motion initiated by the Students of Colour Montreal (SoCM) collective that spoke to the realities of racialized and Indigenous people (especially women) and the lack of accessible education. CLASSE had also adopted a motion in support of non-status Mexicans

actuality the changes implemented a two-tiered discriminatory refugee system, giving the Minister the power to designate any group of persons as irregular arrivals, and order them to be detained. Rooted in Canada's historical and current colonial, racist, patriarchal, ableist, and classist immigration system, this law, along with cuts to the Interim Federal Health Program (IFHP) for refugees, are ongoing manifestations of the state's authority and violence against poor and racialized bodies.

and the Montreal-based group Mexicans United for Regularization (MUR). Attempts to push an anti-racist analysis and build solidarity, particularly with anti-capitalist comrades organizing within CLASSE seemed crucial in the struggle for transformative change during this time of student unrest.

Navigating Imperfect Terrain: Networking and Building Solidarity

Fellow anti-capitalist activists and I coordinated efforts with individuals within CLASSE on International Women's Day for a demonstration called by the Coordination and Action Committee of Women of Diverse Origins (WDO) whose 2012 theme was denouncing capitalist mining exploitation, from the Plan Nord to the presence of Canadian companies in the Global South. Soon after Women's Day, WDO received an invitation from women from *Le Comité aux luttes sociales* of CLASSE to attend a People's Assembly on April 9th, 2012.

As a way to express solidarity with the students, especially with women and marginalized communities fighting for accessible education, women-identified and feminist allies from migrant justice groups AGIR, Immigrant Workers' Centre, Dignidad Migrante, MUR, No One Is Illegal-Montreal, Solidarity Across Borders, South Asian Women's Community Centre (SAWCC), and WDO took part in the People's Assembly. Speeches strove to further an analysis against neoliberal projects within Québec and Canada, as well as to promote resistance against conservative agendas and racist immigration policies. Overall however, racialized speakers were a small

minority of those present at the assembly, suggesting a lack of networking between CLASSE and racialized grassroots groups. Furthermore, the scheduling of our speeches near the end of the event implied that they (and we) were perceived as marginal. Nevertheless, following the event participating migrant justice activists agreed to coordinate our efforts and amalgamate our energy against Bill C-31 within the context of the student movement, and to encourage ongoing reflection with respect to building anti-racist solidarity between students and community organizers.

The next phase of this collaboration of efforts was an invitation to women from *le comité aux luttes sociales* of CLASSE from the South Asian Women's Community Center (SAWCC) to elaborate a position on the student strike and its demands from an anti-racist feminist perspective, and to foster dialogue between these striking students and SAWCC community workers, youth organizers, and centre members. This discussion included a brief herstory of SAWCC's beginnings and its struggles against neoliberal, racist and patriarchal control of the community centre, and explored how tuition hikes and university tuition systematically impact and marginalize women, including migrant and Indigenous women, single mothers, and queer parents. The exchange highlighted the importance of linking struggles against neoliberalism from anti-racist feminist perspectives and the importance of learning about local herstories, particularly with respect to fighting neoliberal projects as they impact working poor and working-class migrant women. Having *le Comité aux luttes sociales* of CLASSE interact with grassroots migrant justice and feminist groups was an attempt to lay the

foundation for meaningful intergenerational dialogue, and building collective knowledge of stories of struggle that are often marginalized, especially in white/Eurocentric feminist circles in Québec.

In our quest to build a flourishing and healthy society based on justice and dignity, we organize ourselves within and as part of our diverse communities. As part of this organizing, it is pertinent to recognize the importance of and power in developing relationships with allies as part of the long-term process of building movements against capitalism, colonialism, and heteropatriarchy. The Québec student strike—despite its flaws—proved to be a time and space that allowed for meaningful exchange and the development of new relationships that lay the groundwork for solidarity in the day to day social justice organizing in Montreal.

—Farha Najah Hussain[10]

Building collective power and mutual solidarity on unequal terrain

In many ways, the fight against tuition hikes and the fight against Bill C-31 were parallel processes, the former being imposed by the Québec government, while the latter being imposed by the federal government. Although these struggles occurred during the exact same time period, they were mostly fought separately. However due to

[10] This author would like to acknowledge Karl Kersplebedeb and Dolores Chew for their constructive critiques and comments, as well as others who challenged me, informed much of my critical thought process, and with whom I had the privilege of engaging in discussions around strategies, social justice and movement building during the Student Strike of 2012.

being a graduate student and course lecturer, while at the same time community organizing with queer and trans migrants, I was engaged in both struggles. By critically reflecting upon my involvement in these struggles, in this reflection I explore my conversations with both students on strike about Bill C-31 and with queer/trans migrants about the student strike. These conversations were filled with a mix of uneasiness, inspiration and fear. Over time, as I continued to engage in these conversations—I began to see the possibilities for critical consciousness raising and building of mutual solidarity.

From Political Profiling to Racial Profiling

Many students became aware of the physical and psychological brutality of institutional repression and state violence for the first time through their participation in the strike. Many students that I spoke with talked about how shocked they were about being politically profiled by some professors and campus security while at university, due to wearing the red square. This political profiling extended into the streets, as students also faced police repression and violence. These direct experiences of institutional repression and state violence provided opportunities to engage in critical dialogue with white students, linking their experiences of political profiling and the intense forms of social and racial profiling and surveillance experienced by poor and working class racialized communities every day in Montreal.[11]

[11] Samir Shaheen-Hussain, Robyn Maynard, and Anne-Marie Gallant, «The Police Killing of Farshad Mohammadi: Exposing the Root Causes.» *Coop Média de Montréal* (January 21, 2012). Montreal. mediacoop.ca/story/police-killing-farshad-mohammadi-exposing-

Tuition Hikes and Refugee Laws

My conversations with students on strike included critical dialogue about the institutional repression they were facing and the kinds of structural violence that queer and trans migrants encounter on an everyday basis.[12] We discussed the devastating impact anti-refugee Bill C-31 would have on the lives of migrants. The response from many of the students I spoke with was quiet, yet profound. It led to a deeper, historicized understanding of the structural violence that was already embedded within immigration/refugee policy[13] and how it would get worse with the implementation of the new anti-refugee law.

After an intense period of student strikes and larger student movement protests, the newly elected Québec government has temporarily cancelled the tuition hikes. During the exact same time period, Bill C-31 was debated and passed by the federal government. This new refugee law expands the criminalization of racialized and migrant communities, increasing the surveillance and imprisonment of migrants. Even more migrants will be traumatized by experiences of detention and deportation. Many more will have to face the impossible choice of living in Canada undocumented or being forced to return to a country where they will continue to encounter violence and persecution. As students begin to strategize about

root-causes/9665

[12] E.O. Lee and S. Brotman, "Identity, Refugeeness, Belonging: Experiences of Sexual Minority Refugees in Canada." *Canadian Review of Sociology* 48, no. 3: 241-274.

[13] S.J. Aiken, "Of Gods and Monsters: National Security and Canadian Refugee Policy." *Revue québécoise de droit international,* no.14: 7-36.

the next steps in fighting for access to post secondary education, migrants directly affected by C-31 will be fighting for their lives and their humanity.

Building Mutual Solidarity and Collective Power

During the same period that I was speaking with students on strike, I was also engaging in conversations with queer and trans migrants about the student strike and the possibilities that come with building collective power. Many of my fellow community organizers were already directly affected by the structural violence that is embedded within the Canadian refugee process. Despite the threat of intense structural violence, some queer and trans migrants decided to fight back and worked together to develop a strategy to oppose Bill C-31.

During our conversations, I tried to identify the many victories throughout the student strike, in order to use the student movement as a source of inspiration. We spoke about the ways that students forced the government to negotiate and the power that came with collectively taking to the streets. Many of our conversations revealed the possibilities of collective power in pushing back against oppressive government policies and state violence. And some spoke of the ways that they were inspired by the student movement and actively participated in the protests and pro-strike activities.

At the same time, as migrants whose lives were already shaped by various forms of state violence, they could see the intensity of police brutality that met peaceful protests. If this is how the police treated students who are mostly

white and (documented) citizens, how would they treat racialized migrants without citizenship? Some were afraid to participate in student protests and marches because they feared being arrested and potentially placing their status at risk. Some were just struggling to survive and simply did not have the time or energy to spend on supporting the student strike. Of course, there were some queer and trans migrants who actively participated in various student-initiated protests, the nightly casseroles and in the Status for All march held on May 26th 2012.[14]

As the student strike and larger social protests continued over summertime, I participated in an anti-deportation campaign with a refused gay refugee from Mexico. Some student activists also became involved in the campaign, with one racialized student in particular providing direct support to the person facing deportation such as finding him a safe place to live, pitching in money to facilitate his release from detention, and even driving to the airport to say good-bye and protest his removal. While sadly, the government succeeded in deporting the person and he continues to live in hiding and fear of persecution in Mexico to this day, I remain inspired by the commitment made by this student in supporting queer migrant justice organizing.

This small, yet powerful example points to the transformative possibilities of what could happen if the student movement used its significant social and collective power in the service of broader social struggles striving for indigenous and migrant justice. It makes me dream of what might happen if the masses of students impacted by

[14] See www.solidarityacrossborders.org

the strike and their supporters were to engage in a process of learning in social action about how their struggle is tied to, yet different from the struggle of racialized and migrant communities. Building this kind of mutual solidarity on unequal terrain requires reflecting upon the role of poor/working class racialized students in shaping the direction of the student movement. What would the student movement look like if its analysis and actions centred the experiences of poor/working class racialized students and communities?

—Edward Lee

Struggle, sacrifice, and survival

My earliest and most pervasive ideas about education were shaped by stern lectures from my parents who would say: "Go to school, and study hard. That's all we ask of you." When gentle but firm encouragement was not enough, they would resort to fear tactics, instilling into my imagination the supposed horrors of receiving a poor education: "If you don't do well in school, you will end up on the streets." Though they never specified what were "the streets," their warnings were enough of a deterrent to never stray far from the books.

It took me years to deconstruct my parents' meaning of a good education. When they first arrived in Canada, my parents found work in the low-skilled, secondary labour market, where they encountered hardships in caring for our growing family. As I was growing up, they would recount stories of how they had expected to lead a materially secure life in Canada, only to relive the scarcity they thought they had left in the Philippines. They told me

about how they were sued by a landlord for failing to pay rent—a lesson that newly arrived immigrants were easy prey for slumlords. A repossession agent barged into their cramped apartment looking to collect items of value, only to find a poorly furnished apartment, and a small child with Down Syndrome (my sister) watching Sesame Street on the TV. The repo man walked away empty handed, not having the heart to take away from a family already hit up by hard times.

I remember my father returning home from work, unusually sullen and silent. As we sat around the dinner table, eating our usual rice and canned sardines, he sternly told me: "Study so that your life won't be hard." It was one of those raw and visceral moments that can forever shape the thinking of a young child—an acknowledgement that life is a struggle, and that he and my mother were barely surviving under the shackles of poverty. Looking back, it was this moment that I began to realize that "study hard" implicitly meant that education was a "ticket out." I later discovered that my father had earned a professional degree in the Philippines that was not recognized when he immigrated to Canada. As a matter of survival, he took on various menial and temporary jobs to ensure the survival of our family. He did everything … except the job he had assumed was waiting for him after receiving a letter from the Canadian embassy that read "We are pleased to inform you that your application to immigrate into Canada was accepted … "

Both younger and older generations of the Filipino-Canadian diaspora hold a pervasive view that life in Canada is better than in the Philippines. There is a

degree of truth to this as some first generation Filipino-Canadians, despite being regulated to the secondary labour market, have reached middle-class thresholds over time; enabling younger generations to access post-secondary education. Though first generation immigrants like my parents were able to valiantly defy and navigate against encounters of racism and economic marginalization, they find themselves trapped in their own narratives of success. The common belief is that since they have been able to overcome systemic barriers (related to discrimination/racism, access to education, and poverty), newcomers can and should overcome these hardships as well. This notion borrows heavily from the "model minority" ideal typical within Global North societies whereby im/migrants are expected to pay their dues in the secondary labour market and eventually transition into the welcoming arms of the middle class. It is simply, as my parents would say, a matter of hard work, luck of circumstance, and prayer. However such narratives are predicated on a fixed and static context. The dream of accessing higher education and reaping the rewards of upward mobility is no longer a matter of struggle, sacrifice, and survival; it has turned into a nightmare of high school drop-out, student debt, and the cycle of poverty that characterizes my community.

My organizing work with Kabataang Montreal (KM), a grassroots Filipino youth organization, opened my eyes to the inaccessibility of education in my community as I befriended young Filipino-Canadians who have gone through the traumas of family separation and reunification within the Live-in-Caregiver Program (LCP). The lived experiences of Filipino newcomers are best summarized by what a KM organizer described as "the sacrifice of the

Filipino family for the sake of the Filipino family": young labourers leave the Philippines so that they can financially provide from a distance, hoping to one day be reunited with their separated family (a process which takes up to five years). I met with adolescents who struggled with adapting to Québecois and Canadian society, learning a new language, and re-establishing bonds with mothers who they had not seen for most of their lives. I saw sacrifices not just by parents who worked two to three jobs under the table, but from the youth themselves who were taught that education was important, but were seeing their families crumble under the weight of poverty.

The Québec Student Strike of 2012 brought me intense feelings of ambivalence. On the one hand, student associations provided an accessible assessment of the tuition hikes, galvanizing the wider population to consider the increasing neoliberal privatization of Québec society. However I was disappointed by the movement's failure to acknowledge the structural inequalities felt so heavily by marginalized communities like mine. Filipino youth represent one of the cohorts most likely to drop out of high school in Canada[15], and yet the social movement seemed blissfully ignorant of the conditions of my ghettoized community. As an outreach activity to mobilize the Filipino community, KM organizers distributed red squares on the streets of a Filipino diaspora neighbourhood where they encountered both youth and parents who were unaware of how the strike affected them, reflecting how the movement had failed to reach marginalized communities. After learning about the nuances of the strike however,

[15] G. Pratt, *Working Feminism.* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2004).

nearly all Filipino parents and youth encountered proudly donned the red square on their shirts.

Though the overall movement largely ignored the struggles of racialized communities, SoCM created spaces where marginalized communities could highlight the realities that we face. We participated in monthly demonstrations, screaming chants like "Racist, classist, sexist shit: Fuck the hike, strike, resist!" with militant acknowledgement of the intersections between 'race', class, and gender in relation to the tuition hike. In April 2012, SoCM organized a "Beyond Tuition: Barriers to Education for Marginalized Communities" panel, where I was invited to speak about the growing inaccessibility of post-secondary education within the Filipino community. I thought that this would finally be an opportunity to discuss the issues that my community faces on a day-to-day basis; yet when it was my turn to speak, tears began to well in my eyes … my voice cracked, quivered, and then finally fell silent. Memories began to re-emerge: *"Study so that your life won't be hard." … family separation, reunification, racial profiling* … it was as if the collective voices of my community bore on me, so eager to be heard. Yet they weighed so heavily that they rendered me speechless because at the end of the day, people can hear about our experiences but they don't have to live through them. My community, like other racialized communities, continues to struggle, sacrifice, and survive. However we do so knowing that our ticket out (access to education) is no longer guaranteed. All the more reason for the struggle to continue.

—Ilyan Ferrer

Freedom *with* Violence or Freedom *from* Violence: What will the Student Movement Settle For?

I'm often asked "why does your research and activism focus on incarcerated people of colour, prison abolitionist and anti-violence movements, and transformative justice?" I didn't turn to these topics to answer some pressing questions that were unrelated to my own life as a queer Chicana feminist from a working-class background or to the predominantly racialized community I was raised in. The issue didn't hail me because I witnessed protesting college students get kettled, bludgeoned and arrested en masse by riot cops in the streets of Montreal or pepper sprayed directly in the face at my alma mater University of California Davis while protesting neoliberal austerity measures. Rather, a principled sense of mortal urgency has continued to propel me to act against the expanded usage of criminalization and cages as large-scale solutions to the socio-economic crisis brought on by corporate downsizing and massive global economic restructuring. Urgency drove me and other racialized activists to a lifetime commitment to waging war against the unnatural disappearance of entire communities by the neoliberal carceral state throughout the 1990s when California turned into a world-renowned "Golden Gulag."[16] Seemingly overnight, California became comprised of over nine hundred miles of concrete prisons overflowing with the caged bodies of the "surplus population" of racialized youth victimized by "The War on Drugs" and by other horrors that start with the letter

16 Ruth Wilson Gilmore, *Golden gulag: Prisons, surplus, crisis, and opposition in globalizing California.* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007)

"D": devolution, downsizing, deindustrialization, and dehumanization.

Over thirty years before Canada's neo-conservative Harper administration realized just how profitable and crisis-proof prison expansion is thanks to Omnibus Crime Bill C-10 or the "Safe Streets and Communities Act", California had already cannibalized its young through gutting K-12 public school funding (1978); implemented the Street Terrorism Enforcement and Protection Act which labelled youth of colour "street terrorists" (1988); excluded mostly Mexican and Central American immigrants from education and social services via Proposition 187 (1994); increased life sentences via Proposition 184 ("three strikes" [1994]); implemented anti-affirmative action policy within public sector education and employment with Proposition 209 (1996) and locked up more, mostly racialized youth, in adult prisons with Proposition 21 (2000). And the "hits" just kept on coming as they always do in a time of crisis.

By the time I graduated high school to become the first in my family to access postsecondary education, I had benefited from involvement in student, immigrant, labour, and anti-prison activism. I had organized against a 134 per cent tuition hike targeting the University of California system, and against the elimination of affirmative action, equity initiatives, ethnic studies curriculum and other programs that are linked to peoples' justice movements. I didn't need higher education to see the writing on the wall: there is a strong correlation between increased rates of incarceration of poor youth of colour and the inability

of our communities to access affordable education and the promise of a living wage.

For many of us, schools are just training grounds for long-stretches of prison time; the popularity of zero tolerance policies just reinforced the cradle-to-school-to-prison pipeline. When someone chants the catchy slogan, "Schools, not Prisons!" they forget that schools, for the majority of us without economic and racial privilege, are prisons: they look like prisons, they smell like prisons, and they incapacitate youth like prisons do. I've been schooled in underfunded public schools that look like prisons, schooled some more in juvenile detention facilities and now I feel that I've become permanently institutionalized at McGill University—home of elite, white Anglo power in Canada. It might be easy for me to settle for this "freedom with violence"[17] instead of a freedom from violence if it wasn't for my social location, life experiences, and political consciousness.

Growing up I witnessed the criminalization and racial profiling of youth of colour and the bloody, repressive, corporate-driven police response to striking longshoremen, of which my father was one. Although I had read about inter-racial, New Left student alliances that formed during the Civil Rights, Black and Brown Power movements and against the US war in Vietnam as well as the state-sanctioned murder of protesting university students at home and abroad, I never actually saw "up close" the privileged children of the middle- and upper-middle classes get killed or injured by baton-wielding, trigger-happy cops or armed militia. I did know folks who had

[17] C. Reddy, *Freedom With Violence: Race, Sexuality and the US State.* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011)

escaped the US-sponsored and -funded military juntas and death squads that had claimed thousands of lives, most notably those of youth and students throughout Latin America. I went to school with the children of those refugees who ended up facing even more brutality at the hands of school districts, police departments and the department of corrections. The violent state and police repression visited upon the students who participated in the Québec strike brought it all back home to me.

I don't wish to see university students finally experience their "fair share" of state-sanctioned bodily harm, to see more mangled bodies of students beaten bloody by cops or more activist youth acquire criminal records that can't be easily expunged. What I do want to see are more students critically engage in shared political struggles in opposition to the state's form and purpose alongside immigrants, workers, welfare recipients, criminalized communities of colour, and the over 2.5 million people incarcerated in North American prisons, jails, and detention centres. State violence is not an aberrant practice, but a standard operating procedure of white settler societies.[18] The sooner students formulate a radical understanding of the violence that they have personally experienced during their many demonstrations as structural and systemic, not 'extremist' or 'exceptional', the better. Only then, I believe, can we transform a protest against neoliberal austerity measures into a transnational social movement that will be a worthy opponent of global capitalism and its partner-in-crime, the carceral state.

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[18] See Sunera Thobani, *Exalted Subjects: Studies in the Making of Race and Nation in Canada.* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007)

Although I believe what my ancestors, the Maya, said to be true about the end of the world, I am still an optimist at heart and believe that the end of the world just means the end of the world as it exists now. I am hopeful that we can not only take power but make power to transform our world. We make power on a daily basis, through our everyday actions—our protests, chants, graffiti, cacerolazos, missives, pedagogy, scholarship—and our ability to learn in social action and build capacity. We do all this so that we can shake the ground with our heavy pounding of the pavement. In order to build the kind of movement that can outplay and outlive the hegemonic order we need to break our dependence on the racist capitalist state and prison regime; we need to envision life beyond the nation-state and beyond the borders and cages that separate us. Ultimately, we need to fully embrace the notion—treat it like a mantra or prayer—that violence produces power but violence does not produce all power.

—Lena Palacios

Closing thoughts

> Sometimes we are blessed with being able to
> choose the time
> and the arena and the manner of our revolution, but
> more usually we
> must do battle wherever we are standing.
>
> —Audre Lorde[19]

This battle was never just about tuition increases. From the outset it was clear that the Québec tuition

[19] Audre Lorde, "A Burst of Light: Living with Cancer," In *I Am Your Sister: Collected and Unpublished Writings of Audre Lorde* ed. Rudolph P. Byrd, Johnetta Betsch Cole and Beverly Guy-Sheftall (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press), 81.

hikes worked to embed corporate interests into university research processes, increasing the privatization of university space.[20] While student activists are to be commended for their continual resistance against tuition hikes and the neo-liberalization of the academic industrial complex, questions remain about whether these victories will improve the life chances of racialized and marginalized communities.

All of us, all of our communities are all implicated in either abetting or challenging the social and economic violence perpetuated by neoliberal austerity measures. An ongoing commitment to learning in social action and to documenting the complex and contradictory processes involved in social movement building can offer critical learning about how we can challenge the white supremacist, settler colonial neoliberal carceral state. Our collaborative work can also serve as an alternative to the isolating and individualizing model of academic knowledge production. As activist-scholars we aim to challenge exclusionary professional labels that discount the knowledge produced by community organizers, and to develop research and pedagogical practices that are actively engaged with, and in the service of, grassroots anti-colonial, anti-racist, feminist social movements.[21]

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[20] GEOGRADS, "Concordia Professors Oppose the Privatization of Universities." *GEOGRADS-Geography, Planning and Environment Graduate Students Association Blog* (2012). Retreived from geograds.wordpress.com/geograds-newsletter/concordia-professors-oppose-the-privatization-of-universities/

[21] J. Sudbury and M. Okazawa-Rey. *Activist scholarship: Antiracism, feminism, and social change.* (Boulder: Paradigm Publishers, 2009)

The *Plan Nord* Riot

Joël Pedneault

In April 2012, as the student strike entered a new stage of intensity, advertisements started going up all over the city of Montreal announcing a job fair at the Conference Centre. The job fair was organised to allow people to find jobs as part of the Québec government's *Plan Nord*, and to provide an opportunity for businesspeople to network. A gala-type event was also held and Québec's prime minister at the time, Jean Charest, spoke to a room of bosses and politicians about his government's plans for developing Québec's far north.

The *Plan Nord* can be understood as a massive effort to promote a series of resource extraction projects in the northern parts of the land mass claimed by the Québec State, land which is also rightly claimed by the region's Indigenous peoples as their ancestral territory. This Plan was already in the works by April 2012—its definitive implementation had been trumpeted in March 2011, at the same time as the government announced the massive tuition increase which sparked the 2012 student strike. The Plan continues to be opposed, amongst other things, on the basis that it will result in the destruction of Indigenous livelihoods, and because it is being used as an excuse to massively subsidise extractive industries using public funds. The election of the more centrist *Parti Québécois* has seen the *Plan* change names but continue unchanged.

On the Friday and Saturday when the *Plan Nord* job fair was held (April 20th and 21st, 2012), thousands of protesters converged outside (and for a few brief moments, inside) the Conference Centre. During the ensuing riot I had the powerful sense that we were living through a turning point in the development of the Québec movement. For those two days different struggles and movements whose paths rarely cross came together in protest; movements that are usually kept apart by class, differing politics on Indigenous issues and nationalism, hundreds of years of colonialism, and geographical distance… This is one personal account of what happened that weekend and its significance.

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Many different groups and organisations worked to get people out onto the streets against the *Plan Nord* job fair. After some discussion, CLASSE called for a demonstration on both days of the event. Stickers were made that could be put on the ads promoting the job fair; translating from French, the stickers read: "*Plan Nord* fair: CANCELLED" (*Salon du Plan Nord: ANNULÉ*). The demonstration that CLASSE called for that Friday was thousands of people strong, providing a lot of momentum to that day's street battles.

Students were joined by many other groups in the streets. A network of eco-anarchists and anti-civilisation activists organised a parallel gathering, setting forth a more explicitly anti-colonial and anti-capitalist analysis than that of CLASSE. Identifiable by their green and black flags, these folks participated in the confrontation with police that escalated when the CLASSE demonstra-

tion met up with other folks who had already gathered just outside the Conference Centre.

Day One: Friday April 20th

The crowd moved very quickly and became very militant once the CLASSE demonstration reached the Conference Centre. Very soon, protesters had broken the glass of one of the Centre's many doors, been pushed out of the area by riot police, and had moved on to the street to the south of the Centre. There, a barricade was built on the street (a fairly uncommon occurrence during the strike) out of chic furniture appropriated from nearby cafés and construction equipment. The barricade slowed the police's pursuit, and the crowd was able to get to the eastern entrance of the Centre, damaging the doors on that side of the building as well.

The insurgence continued this way, pursued by police from one locked-down entrance to the Conference Centre to another, until the protesters discovered a large unlocked back entrance on the north side of the Centre. A couple hundred people flooded into the Centre, soon to be confronted by a thick line of riot police who charged down a flight of stairs and escalators to push the demonstrators back.

This highly mobile, highly motivated protest action created such chaos that the organisers of the job fair had to turn attendees away for much of that Friday. Substantial numbers of job-seekers collected around the Centre's entrances and milled impatiently, adding to the number of people in the area and to the overall confusion.

The demonstration grew increasingly chaotic as the riot police charged the crowd, which split up into a groups of a few dozen to a few hundred people. The number of people and both the amount and particular nature of the geographic space allowed protesters to disperse and regroup again and again.[1] As a result, a considerable crowd kept converging on the Conference Centre.

At one point a group of demonstrators joined up with a group of Innu women from the Uashat Mak Mani Utenam community (in the vicinity of Sept-Îles, on the far northern coast of the St Laurence River) that had walked hundreds of kilometres to the Montreal to protest the *Plan Nord* and the destructive effects of colonialism and development on their ancestral land. A road extension located near the Mani Utenam community, for example, had already resulted in the construction of a new bridge over otherwise unaffected rivers that Atlantic salmon — a source of food for the Innu people in the area — use to spawn.

Towards mid-afternoon a fire hydrant was opened and spilled water out into the street. Around this point, I began to notice friends who had been at another action to protest a speech being given that morning by the Canadian Conservative government's immigration minister Jason Kenney. As this significant number of protesters joined in the *Plan Nord* protest, the police began to attack the crowd. We all happened to be near a large parking lot and people began to throw crumbing asphalt, along with garbage cans and construction material, at the police lines. The parking lot also served as a source of protection,

[1] My thanks to Smoke for this and many other insights about the tactical dimension of the events of that weekend.

perhaps because police were hesitant to fire tear-gas canisters, stun grenades and rubber bullets too close to the cars. Unfortunately however, it was at around this point that I was hit by a rubber bullet, and the rest of the day's events are less clear to me as a result. The day ended without any mass arrests, although there were reportedly targeted arrests of activists by police snatch squads in vans aided by a helicopter police detail, occurring as militants headed back home at around dusk.

A surprising aspect of that first day's events was the apparent disorganisation of the police forces outside the Conference Centre. Many groups of people were able to move around relatively unimpeded by the police. This was at least in part due to the overall pace of events during this stage of the strike. For weeks, early-morning militant actions (*manif-actions*) had been taking place on every weekday, and nightly demonstrations had begun gathering at around 8:30pm at Place Émilie-Gamelin on the eastern edge of downtown Montreal. The night demonstrations often lasted for hours, snaking throughout the city until the wee hours of the morning. Sometimes, major demonstrations would also take place in the middle of the day as well. By the weekend of the *Plan Nord* actions, the Montreal riot squad must have been significantly overextended, understaffed, and/or exhausted. The police force seemed overwhelmed by the numbers and perseverance of demonstrators, to the extent that at one point a group successfully intimidated a police line into retreating *away* from the Conference Centre. Satisfying video clips of police officers running away from advancing protestors, grabbing the air in front of them, were subsequently circulated through social media.

Day Two: Saturday April 21st

Saturday's action was more subdued than the previous day's memorable events. The major demonstration that day was a joint action organised by a group of politicised Innu activists called Innu Power, and activists from the *Réseau de résistance du Québécois* (RRQ), a loose network of Québec nationalists of a populist stripe, which I had thought were right-wing, but whose politics seemed more left of centre (although hardly anti-capitalist or anti-colonial) in the context of their opposition to the *Plan Nord.* Their gathering was not as confrontational as the previous day's had been; folks took up the microphone near where the previous day's demonstration had begun, to talk about Indigenous land claims (in the case of Innu Power) or to set forth a more social-democratic, nationalist politic decrying the Québec government's unwillingness to tax resource extraction to benefit the public purse, and claiming 'natural resources' for 'the people' in Québec (as opposed to various elite or foreign business interests). While it was not clear whether, and if so to what extent, this apparent contradiction was salient to Innu Power and the RRQ, I was surprised that this tension between the two groups' claims about land did not prevent a temporary alliance between them.

Rainy weather and exhaustion from the previous day caused many people to stay home instead of coming out to protest the second day of the *Plan Nord* job fair. Police manoeuvres were also more successful. When a relatively small group of protesters broke away from the gathering and took to the street as speeches continued peacefully in the park across from the Conference Centre, the demons-

tration was quickly dispersed by charging riot cops and stun grenades. A few dozen comrades who had made their way into a nearby office building were surrounded by police, arrested, and loaded into a few city buses to be shipped off to a police station for booking. Saturday's protests were not as successful at preventing access to the job fair as the previous day's actions.

What is the *Plan Nord* and who benefits from it?

In order to understand the *Plan Nord* and its political significance it is important to note the types of resources that are being extracted out of the landmass north of the 49th parallel in Québec and what this entails. Diamonds, gold and various rare earth metals and uranium are reportedly present in significant quantities in the area. Of course, the ores that are mined in the area need to be moved to where there are factories to turn them into something that can be bought and sold; which means that a major aspect of the *Plan Nord* is building a significant amount of heavy infrastructure in the vast region.

Road extensions into the northern and eastern reaches of this land have already begun and been blockaded by Indigenous protestors, especially in the area of Sept-Îles, on the far north-eastern coast of the Saint Lawrence River. Hydroelectric lines are also being extended onto Indigenous land, in some cases against the explicit will of the peoples who claim the land in question. For instance, the Innu community of Uashat Mak Mani Utenam held two separate referenda on the question of whether to allow hydroelectric line extensions into their territory, both of which showed the community is against doing so. In

spite of this, Hydro-Québec—a major stakeholder in the *Plan Nord*—has gone ahead with the hydroelectric development as planned. Other proposed infrastructure development projects include the construction of railways to move ore out of the region, as well as deep-sea ports that will also serve an effort by the federal Conservative government's attempts to militarise the region and claim "Arctic sovereignty."[2]

The *Plan* has also been linked to various other aspects of the state apparatus. As the government cuts funding and implements stricter regulations for the federal Employment Insurance program, for example, a *Plan Nord* section was added to the Emploi-Québec website, which serves as a state-sponsored job search engine. Stories have also begun to surface about more university resources being oriented towards mining companies' research and labour needs. For instance, the regional university in Abitibi-Témiscamingue (UQAT; the northern-most university in Québec) has begun to create programs specifically tailored to the needs of the mining industry, such as a mining management degree.[3] This aggressive re-positioning of the Québec state as an enthusiastic benefactor of resource extraction companies is perceptible across the board.

Strangely, the apparent effervescence on the part of the business class is contradicted by evidence that the price of metals (including rare earth metals) is entering a sharp

[2] Alexandre Shields, *Le Devoir*, July 4, 2012. «2 ports en eau profonde de plus qui serviront à militariser la région»
[3] Radio-Canada, September 7th, 2012, «UQAT : nouveau programme dans le domaine minier,» www.radio-canada.ca/regions/abitibi/2012/09/07/003-programme-gestion-mines.shtml

period of decline, in the context of a boom-and-bust cycle that repeats itself around every decade.[4] It would seem that the financial capitalists who bankroll resource extraction projects are becoming more stingy with their purse-strings, just as production costs are rising. This begs the question: what non-economic forces are at play that motivate this latter-day gold-rush?

One answer is suggested in an interview with a former Parti Québécois minister, Richard Le Hir, who states that certain major financial interests in Québec (he names the infamous Power Corporation, a pillar of monopoly capitalism in the province) may currently be concerned with moving their financial instrument-heavy investments into more "stable" sectors of the economy in order to ensure a more solid basis for their future money-making endeavours, in light of the 2008 financial crisis.[5]

Extrapolating from this claim, I suggest that the Québec State may currently be in the process of subsidising the overhead costs of an otherwise unattractive or unprofitable industry in an effort to encourage capitalists to participate (more actively) in a long-standing process of settler colonisation and the territorial expansion of the reach of the State. This process continues at the expense of Indigenous peoples, while the government rolls out an aggressive public relations campaign to convince the settler/Southern Québec population that this process is being car-

[4] Dansereau, Suzanne, *La Presse Affaires*, June 6th, 2012, «Des nuages noirs au-dessus du boom minier»

[5] Le Hir, Richard and Rémi Leroux, *A Babord* No. 47 (dec. 2012/ jan. 2013). «Entretien avec Richard Le Hir,» www.ababord.org/spip.php?article1592

ried out for their own benefit. Perhaps the Québec State is also taking cues from a shift in other Canadian provinces towards natural resource extraction as a way to generate the conditions that make so-called "economic growth" possible – a shift that includes, but is not limited to, the mining of the internationally condemned Tar Sands development in the province of Alberta.

Challenges to anti-colonial solidarity on the left

The Québec left's response to the *Plan Nord* has been ambiguous when it comes to the relationship between the (potentially) lucrative resource extraction projects the *Plan* encompasses, on the one hand, and public finances, on the other hand.

The centre-left, made up of major unions, political parties, and NGOs or coalitions with (some) state funding, has embraced the idea that Northern development can be carried out in such a way that it can fund the continued existence of the welfare state. Some groups have advocated a reformed version of *Plan Nord*, or a more equitable distribution of the wealth created by extracting resources.

This segment of the left has done little to act upon an understanding of the impacts of such development on the environment or on Indigenous livelihoods. Nor has there been much (or any) critique of the work-camp economy this type of development tends to expand, exacerbating a colonial division of labour where white people/settlers tend to get the better jobs in resource extraction industries, and Indigenous folks end up working in or around these industries for lower pay, while the their livelihoods

and the social fabric of their communities are undermined by environmental destruction and the appeal of survival through wage-labour (as opposed to traditional means of subsistence).

It is against these outcomes that Indigenous, anarchist and anti-colonial networks have mobilised to oppose resource extraction projects in Northern Québec. Networks have been created to support those Indigenous people—often women or those who are at odds with their local band councils[6] — who oppose industrial development on their ancestral lands, and who have blockaded roads and construction sites to stop development projects.

CLASSE's position during the student strike was ambiguous with respect to whether or not the funds generated by the *Plan Nord* should be used to make post-secondary education more accessible to low-income folks. At one point spokesman Gabriel Nadeau-Dubois told *Le Devoir,* Québec's left-of-centre independent daily newspaper, that revenue generated by the *Plan Nord* could be considered an alternative to raising tuition fees. His statement took the easy route of emphasising that foreign corporations were able to access mineral ore virtually for free (since at the time taxes on mining profits were very low).[7] These public statements led to debates in student general assem-

[6] Band Councils are a creation of Canada's Indian Act, and are a non-traditional form of governance that is tasked with representing by the federal government. Band councils often negotiate the terms of resource extraction on land claimed by Indigenous people, in exchange for material «benefits» such as cash payments for the community.

[7] Alexandre Shields, *Le Devoir*, February 20th, 2012, «Droits de scolarité: plus de 30 000 étudiants sont en grève»

blies and CLASSE's Congresses over whether this would be an acceptable "alternative" to the tuition fee increase we were fighting. Some associations resolved to oppose this type of solution that might deliver a short-term 'win' for the student movement at the expense of Indigenous communities and of the environment.

The divergence within the left regarding the extraction of natural resources has been exacerbated by the 2012 election of the *Parti Québécois* (PQ). The PQ has introduced slightly higher taxation on mining revenues; with the extra revenue being used to service the province's public debt payments (i.e. to contribute to major financial institution's profits), and not to directly fund social programs as some might have hoped. This debt reduction effort sees the extra money being transferred to a fund named the *Fonds des générations*, whose explicit goals are a) stabilising the Québec state's credit rating and b) not increasing other forms of taxation.[8]

Alongside these developments, the PQ government has stopped calling its intervention into northern resource extraction projects Plan Nord, instead choosing the (even more colonial sounding) slogan *Le Nord pour tous* ("The North for Everybody"), and has launched consultations with environmental groups in an attempt to "greenwash" (without significantly altering) its policies. Despite the demonstrations that happened around the 2012 *Plan Nord* job fair and suggested the potential for a common struggle

[8] Quebec Ministry of Finance, *Le Fonds des générations. Pour favoriser l'équité entre les générations, la pérennité des programmes sociaux et la prospérité,* 2006, www.budget.finances.gouv.qc.ca/fondsdesgenerations/lefondsgen.pdf

to be created, the critical mass of students who were active in the strike have been ambiguous about responding to the PQ's continued push to "develop" the North at the expense of Indigenous land claims. I hope that we will be able to move past this ambiguity and develop movements that can make demands regarding the redistribution of resources by the social-democratic welfare state (such as the demand for free education), while acting to facilitate the efforts of Indigenous folks and their anti-colonial allies.

6 Organizing Against Repression

Strikers and demonstrators involved in the spring 2012 movement were met with repression at many levels: campus surveillance and disciplinary action, special legislation as well as a repressive use of existing laws, police presence and brutality, and the use of the court system to hand down injunctions against picket lines, to approve harsh release conditions, and to bring criminal charges against activists. While other chapters in this book address the physical repression faced by activists and the way tactics evolved in response (see chapters by Laith Marouf, Jaouad Laaroussi, Ethan Feldman, David Clément, and others), this section looks specifically at how organizers resisted repression head-on.

We hear from two initiatives that emerged to defend student activists (and others): in their report-back written after the strike, the CLASSE Legal Committee reflects on what they learned about the importance—and challenges—of legal defence work, while in her piece on faculty organizing against repression of students on campus, Adrienne Hurley discusses lessons for unleashing resistance within the professoriate. The third piece takes a broader look at the situation: Jérémie Dhavernas explains how the vagueness of the law allows it to be put to political use, creating a «state of exception» at any time without the official trappings of martial law or dictatorship.

Together, these three chapters begin to reveal the amount of energy and resources put into combatting, and thinking critically about, repression during the strike and its immediate aftermath. What is less clear from the chapters collected here is the longer-term movement-stifling effect that repression can have. For example, release conditions banned some of the most dedicated activists from associating with each other, attending demonstrations, and even in several cases from setting foot on the island of Montreal. Jérémie and the CLASSE Legal Committee point to the high number of people who became involved in the judicial system, many of whom were still waiting for their cases to be heard at the time of writing. Although none of these were fatal blows to the movement, they did raise the cost of participating in the movement for many people, and strained or fractured the organizing structures that were emerging. Their legacy continues to be felt.

Although the popular narrative claims that students were victorious in stopping the tuition hike and that the repressive Law 12 was overturned, many activists have noted that legal repression worked together with electoral recuperation to essentially force the strike movement to its knees by late summer 2012. One of the lessons to be learned here is the strength of the lockout as a repressive tactic in the context of a strike, and the challenge of mass organizing without meeting places whether on campuses or in the streets. Finally, we must recognize that although they were used in sometimes innovative ways, the forms of repression imposed on the 2012 student struggle had been developed in other settings: lockouts had been used against organized labour, release conditions had been used against sex workers and other street-involved people, phy-

sical brutality and creative re-interpretation of laws had been used time and again against various «undesirables» individually or on a mass scale. It is only through organizing across beyond the current limits of our movements and by sharing histories and experiences that we can begin to tackle «political» repression across the board.

Le Carré Rouge

John-Paul McVea

Many articles written about the student protests spoke of *le carré rouge*, the small square of red felt that was the most visible, recognizable symbol of the student protest. There was a time in the summer of 2012 when it seemed like more people in Montreal than not were wearing this symbol.

"*Le carré rouge*" appears in many articles I translated. Sometimes it refers to a universal concept, as in, "*On sait ce que signifie le carré rouge* (We know what the red square signifies)." Sometimes, the same term refers to a specific instance of the symbol, as in, "*C'est pour ça que je porte le carré rouge* (This is why I wear the red square)."

Translated literally, "*le carré rouge*" is "the red square." Yet, as is the case with many literal translations, this simply sounds "false." If someone is wearing a cross around her neck, you don't say that she is wearing "the cross." Nor would you say that a person was wearing "the jersey" of the Montreal Canadiens, unless it was in a museum: "In this display case, we see the jersey the Habs (see glossary) wore in 1966."

English-language journalists hesitated to use the term "the red square." Often, they sidestepped the issue by speaking of them in plural: "Many people in the crowd wore red squares." Sometimes a newspaper would report that a specific person, such as a politician or student leader, wore "his or her red square." Occasionally, they would insert an adjective to soften the translation, as in, "Members of the band performed wearing the symbolic red square."

As the student conflict wore on and positions became entrenched, the term "*carré rouge*" took on a new meaning, as people riding the metro to Parc Jean Drapeau discovered: "Red Squares," they were told, "shouldn't ask too many questions."

I am an outsider. I was born far from Québec, in a province with different politics. Can I ever be a red square? The students won me over, as they won over many people. And yes, I pinned a red square to my backpack. But is that enough? Can I ever wear the same red square as someone who has lived in Québec her entire life?

I still wear my red square. And I believe that, someday, it will be possible to visit a museum and see "the red square," the small piece of felt that toppled a premier and that symbolized "*l'éveil d'un peuple* (the awakening of a people)." But, as a translator,

I am reluctant to interpret the same red square on every person who decides to wear this symbol. It is not up to me to speak for them.

I wear a red square, yes. But the day has yet to come that I can say I wear "*le carré rouge*."

In Anticipation of an Unleashed Professoriate

Adrienne Hurley[1]

"Within an organization, it is vital to continually foster trust by recognizing the totality of the other's existence, to train each other and build up each other's subjectivity."

– From "The Organization to Come" by Mitsuko Tokoro, tranlated by Setsu Shigematsu[2]

A friend recently reminded me of wartime sociology's tendency "to psychologize the enemy, to produce and interpret data on the enemy's mentality and behaviour" and how precisely this type of wartime sociology is being mobilized against students in general, and particularly activist students in the contemporary university. For example, we see this when administrative bodies deliberate on how to anticipate and respond to possible security problems posed by depressed or disgruntled graduate students and in disciplinary hearings convened to punish students whose activism disrupts university business. Although we might object to wartime psychologizing of the enemy in general, in the current context in which it is already being mobilized to manage and crush political dissent on campuses, turning the tables and psychologizing the well-behaved, anti-activist, and highly rewarded professoriate offers one

[1] My thanks to Rosalind Hampton, Michelle Hartman, Thomas Lamarre, Abby Lippman, and William Clare Roberts. They are not responsible for any errors or problems in this essay.

[2] Setsu Shigematsu, *Scream From the Shadows: the Women's Liberation Movement in Japan* (University of Minnesota Press, 2012) 43.

way to begin understanding the opposition disgruntled radicals face within universities today. To that end, the following is an attempt to turn the tables on a narrative that posits embracing (institutional) security as a sign of maturity, using an example from McGill University that played out parallel to, but partially outside of, the 2012 student strike.

Student occupations of McGill's James administration building on November 10, 2011, and from February 7-11, 2012, were met with a wave of disciplinary action against student activists, which built as strike-related actions took place thought the spring. Beginning in February of 2012, sixteen professors at McGill University organized support for and defended those student activists subjected to university disciplinary procedures. These efforts, some of which are ongoing, involved hundreds of hours of research, preparation, meetings, and time spent in disciplinary hearings and other proceedings. The group of professors came from departments across campus (though notably not the Faculty of Law) and included untenured assistant professors, tenured professors, and one emerita faculty member. While narrowly focused on defending and supporting students in their particular situations, the professors' solidarity organizing nonetheless warrants examination as an indication of the potential for an unmanageable professoriate, as well as the limits of resistance performed as a professor, or perhaps in any professional capacity.

Heavily trained to rely on and serve bureaucratic and institutional interests by adhering to or appealing to written policies and codes, professors tend to be among the

most manageable of workers and the least likely to step outside of officially recognized channels to take direct action against authority, particularly the authority of their employers. That a number of professors devoted a great deal of time and energy to defending actions decried by their employer—and with no anticipation of any professional or institutional recognition or reward—would be remarkable on its own given the extent to which academic labour demands a high level of careerist self-interest and self-management. The risks in this instance, minuscule though they may have been, were amplified by the nature of challenging one's employer on the employer's turf, as well as what one colleague aptly described as "a professorial desire to not be minoritized."

Those familiar with academic labour conditions will appreciate, for example, the disincentives untenured faculty face when considering whether and how to show solidarity with actions denounced by one's employer. Those unfamiliar with academic labour conditions may find it interesting that all of the university employees who served on the Committee on Student Discipline (CSD), or who otherwise provided labour necessary for the disciplinary proceedings to take place, were compensated in some way.[3] For example, professors are compensated for CSD service with professional credit considered for salary increases, promotion, and/or tenure. This was not the case for the professors who served as students' advisors and witnesses in the hearings. Unlike the members of the CSD, these professors were not appointed to their positions by any university process: relevant university policy provided

[3] The CSD includes student and faculty members, and is akin to a judicial board in disciplinary hearings.

a way for them to take on the roles of ersatz defence counsels as volunteers, but organizing among themselves and with students made it possible for them to do so.

Previous experiences in solidarity organizing contributed to the formation of the core group of faculty who supported student activists through the disciplinary process. For example, from September 1 to December 1, 2011, non-academic and non-managerial staff represented by the MUNACA union were on strike at McGill. Their primary demands were for pay parity and a say in changes made to pension and benefit policies. In fact, unilateral changes had been made to the pension and benefits plans by the senior administration of McGill, some of which impacted the professoriate and other non-unionized workers at McGill as well. A small but relatively visible *ad hoc* faculty solidarity network, MFLAG (McGill Faculty Labour Action Group), emerged to support striking MUNACA workers. The type and level of involvement varied from writing statements in support of the union's demands, to arranging for food and coffee for striking workers, to refusing to cross the picket line (thus losing a semester's salary). The professors who would later organize support for student activists were among the most active contributors to MFLAG. Some of these professors had additional experience in solidarity organizing with students through two campus-community organizations, QPIRG-McGill (the Québec Public Interest Research Group) and CKUT (McGill's campus-community radio station). These organizations have long served as nexuses for fostering ongoing student-staff-faculty-community solidarity.

In early 2012, after a referendum that demonstrated student support for the continued existence of these two groups—and in the immediate aftermath of the MUNA-CA strike—the senior administration of McGill refused to renew their memorandum of agreement with either QPIRG-McGill or CKUT, essentially ensuring the end of their existence.[4] Having exhausted the possibilities of institutional channels only to be rebuffed and dismissed by Deputy Provost of Student Life and Learning Morton Mendelson, many students, as well as some faculty and staff, came to the conclusion that the university's handling of this matter had to be challenged directly.

On February 7, 2012, seventeen students held a surprise retirement party for Mendelson in his office – complete with a cake, decorations, party hats, and music. A larger group of students, faculty, and staff held a solidarity party in the lobby of the administration building.[5] While the presence of campus security quickly dampened the festivities, the lobby party lasted overnight, and the party in Mendelson's office on the sixth floor of the administration building lasted until police were called in to shut the party down on the morning of Sunday, February 12th. The university alleged students had violated McGill's Code of Student Conduct by holding these parties in the administration building, and roughly fifty were singled out for disciplinary proceedings (ranging in their degree

[4] The administration claimed its refusal was based on the poorly-worded nature of the referendum questions, which, it should be noted, had been officially vetted in advance. Among other elements, the memoranda in question commit the university to collecting student fees to support each of these organization.

[5] For a further discussion of these events see the chapter by Hampton, Luxion, and Swain in this volume.

of seriousness). The Disciplinary Officer (DO) acted as the university's chief investigator and prosecutor for the student disciplinary proceedings (having previously and summarily banned several student activists from campus). The DO pushed for punishments ranging from fines to expulsion. No disciplinary actions were taken against faculty or staff who openly participated in the lobby party and/or publicly supported the party on the sixth floor, including faculty and staff who did exactly the same things as some students who were subjected to the punishing disciplinary process. (This last detail warrants underscoring if we are to appreciate how universities rely on a self-managed professoriate to avoid even the smallest risks.)

A significant contributing factor to the professors' efforts to defend student activists was the political culture in the area McGill occupies. Numerous political and social movements in Montreal set the bar very high for solidarity efforts in general, and local political cultures have generated a great deal of knowledge and practice that contributed greatly to the Unlimited General Strike of 2012, as well as a variety of McGill-specific or McGill-centred protests. Furthermore, networks of solidarity and knowledge and skill-sharing among students and faculty from Chile to Greece, the availability of anarchist news and information-sharing networks, independent media, the Occupy and Decolonize movements, as well as activist exchange/travel and participation in direct actions at G8/G20 protests all informed, to varying degrees, the alliances of solidarity that had already been emerging on the McGill campus.

For reasons too many to enumerate here, McGill provides mushroom soil for both direct action and alliances of solidarity. Thomas Lamarre explains the kinds of conditions that give rise to the disciplinary targeting of student activists at McGill (or perhaps any school) in "Outlaw Universities":

> Neoliberalism needs a high degree of extralegal latitude to exercise its prerogative to evoke and harness potentiality and to steal the future of youth, which latitude it finds today especially in universities. But it cannot control this potentiality. Anarchism, socialism, and other alternative forms of association have proven effective and will continue to be effective in student movements and popular protest, precisely because they are exerting pressure at the point where the neoliberal elite strive to harness potential freedoms for themselves via extralegal procedures of governance. This is why only social strike and direct action on university campuses will prove effective right now.[6]

Professors' generally cowed response to the conditions Lamarre explains is inextricably linked with their socialization to abide institutional authority and avoid career risks. Degree of risk is not simple to assess, even when small, and must be considered in relation to the general level of intimidation and repression, as well as individual situations that may be impacted by health, childcare responsibilities, immigration status, or employment security concerns, to name but a few. Thus the reasons for the limited number

[6] Thomas Lamarre, "Outlaw Universities," *Theory and Event*, Vol. 15, Issue 3, 2012 Supplement.

of professors who defended student activists are not restricted to ideological ones (such as support for the administration's position). Some who expressed support for the student activists in private were reluctant to take a more visible or active role in supporting students for fear of how it might impact their working conditions and job security. This was a particular concern for sessional/adjunct faculty and some untenured professors, though a number of untenured professors were also quite active in solidarity work and organizing. Finally, some attrition from professor solidarity efforts was precipitated by workplace intimidation and retaliation.

The specifics of particular cases and how professors made the arguments they made will probably not be of great interest outside the specific context of McGill, but the willingness of sixteen professors to take on varying degrees of risk and, in some cases, make substantial personal sacrifices to support student activists is perhaps one signal that the professoriate to come could be a very unmanageable one. The stereotypical image of professors holed up in a world of their own is not so far from reality, though that world is marked more by complicated bureaucracy and hierarchies than lofty thoughts. Theodore Kacynzki, who defected from academia, attempted to describe the psychology of university professors in *Industrial Society and Its Future* (the "Unabomber Manifesto"):

> [T]he oversocialized person is kept on a psychological leash and spends his life running on rails that society has laid down for him … The leftist of the oversocialized type tries to get off his psychological leash and assert his autonomy by rebelling. But

> usually he is not strong enough to rebel against the most basic values of society.

It is not hard to find this sad figure Kaczynski describes on university campuses. The leash is pulled hardest on those with a reason and/or a will to resist, as well as those whose resistance could be particularly disruptive to institutional operations. The shorter the leash, the more one's will to push limits might wane. In the saddest cases, one can find tenured professors who pull their own leashes. In some cases the reluctance to get involved can be a conditioned careerist response or the result of having been pulled back too forcefully one too many times.

As problematic and hierarchical as it is, the student-teacher relationship can lend itself to the mobilization of a group of professors for solidarity work and offer a way out of the professorial tendency towards conditioned and/or compulsive obedience. As one of the sixteen professors involved in the aforementioned efforts explained, "The 'oversocialized' professoriate may be especially susceptible to what others will think, but the student-teacher relationship, especially when your teaching interests attract student activists to your classes, can turn this affective constitution to good effect. Not wanting to disappoint one's totally amazing students is certainly a motive for me to be involved!"

The professors who served as advisers in disciplinary proceedings at McGill had months of solidarity practice leading up to the spring of 2012. Some had even longer histories of organizing together in activist settings. Some are continuing to organize together in ongoing solidarity

alliances. It appears there is something gained by practicing fearlessness together and through the relationships of trust built along the way that can sustain certain solidarity formations. Additionally, it seems significant that there is some ideological and rank diversity among the professors who took on the toughest and most time-consuming solidarity work in defending students in disciplinary hearings. The idea of a professoriate that unleashes itself can seem like a remote fantasy, but that professoriate is also already here.

The CLASSE Legal Committee: A Critical Look Back

Members of the CLASSE Legal Committee[1]

The motivation behind creating a committee to support arrestees grew out of the ever-increasing judicial repression of political dissent in we saw 2010 and 2011. First, the Toronto G20 summit in June 2010 was the site of the largest mass arrest in Canadian history,[2] which led CLAC (see glossary) to create a legal defense fund for the G20 arrestees, the *Fonds de défense légale des accusée-e-s du G20*. Shortly afterwards, section 500.1 of the Highway Safety Code[3] was used to forcefully end the Montreal demonstration against police brutality on March 15th, 2011; this section's constitutionality is currently being challenged. Additionally, about 15 targeted arrests of people on ASSÉ's elected decision-making bodies were carried out by the Montreal police's GAMMA squad,[4] in relation to two direct actions that happened in March of 2011. These arrests provided a taste of the harsh repression that the upcoming student strike was about to experience: the student movement has never been subjected to harsher repression at the hands of the police and the justice system than it was during the 2012 strike.[5]

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[1] Translated by Joël Pedneault.

[2] About 1050 arrests involving detention.

[3] This section bans actions whose aim is to block roads or highways, although this is the necessary effect of any demonstration.

[4] *Guet des activités et des mouvements marginaux et anarchistes* or «Surveillance of the activities of marginal and anarchist movements.»

[5] To name a few examples: the widespread use of section 500.1 of the Highway Safety Act; the first use of a special law against the student

Nevertheless, the principles of combative syndicalism required us to keep organizing increasingly disruptive actions in order to create or maintain a position of power. Thus we had to eradicate activists' fear of being unable to benefit from legal support for lack of money. The primary goals of a legal committee were, on the one hand, to build a line of defense against growing state repression, and on the other hand, to create good conditions for the type of civil disobedience that would reinforce the student movement. We wished to provide ourselves with the tools to support those who took the risk of facing state repression. The result was that an *ad hoc* legal committee made up of five members was created in September 2011,[6] and was later added to ASSÉ's structures and became a permanent feature of CLASSE's structures.

Four mandates kept the committee busy: first, to gather the necessary amounts of money in order to pay for bail, legal fees and lawyers' fees; second, to contact different activist lawyers willing to work with the legal committee to defend arrestees for a preferential rate; third, to produce critical information on legal issues for activists; and fourth, to provide legal, human and logistical support for those arrested from within the student movement, without distinction based on any affiliation or status as a student. This last criterion was fundamental since it aimed to avoid catering only to a specific membership's interests, and since it

movement and to promote 'public order'; government support for the dozens of injunctions filed against student association on strike; the explicitly political centralization of the court system's processing of these injunctions by a Superior Court judge; municipal by-laws adopted or amended to restrict the right to protest, etc.

[6] Four people added themselves to the committee over time.

lined up with the legal committee's goal of enacting solidarity. We were mainly motivated by the desire to bring financial and legal support to arrestees without regard for their charges or the probability that they had or hadn't committed the alleged actions. This was consistent not only with the legal idea that one is innocent until proven guilty, but also with our own basis of unity.

The ASSÉ arrestees fund / *Fonds des arrété-e-s de l'ASSÉ*

During the 2011-2012 school year, we requested funding and donations for the ASSÉ arrestees fund. This allowed us to raise a bit over $50,000, essentially from student associations in Québec and from a few unions. This money was simply added to ASSÉ's assets, and was maintained thanks to honest management by the staffers and executive. It appears to us, however, that this money could have been kept separate from the rest of ASSÉ's budget. Although ASSÉ's willingness to manage this fund was welcome, other initiatives had a broader mandate and benefitted from a useful degree of independence, from a legal standpoint. The *Fonds de défense légale 2012* (2012 Legal Defense Fund), for example, collected money in order to support arrestees, but also to pay for the cost of fighting injunctions and of challenging laws and other regulations, and helped people wishing to sue a municipal government for reparations after having survived police brutality. Another fund, *Je donne à nous*,[7] actually gathered the resources to organize fundraising activities in support of the student movement. In contrast, the legal committee

[7] In English, «I give to us», a mutual aid fund that was created during the strike.

had to turn down requests for us to support fundraisers, since this would have exceeded our own capabilities. Our experience brings us to say that it seems preferable for the legal committee to organise legal and logistical support for arrestees, and for separate entities (with which the committee maintains close relations) to raise the funds necessary to ensure they are well defended. Close relations are necessary in order to quickly access the fund when urgent payments need to be made.

Activist lawyers

After having contacted six or seven criminal lawyers with experience defending protesters, we ended up working with four lawyers in Montreal and one in Québec City. Their phone numbers were circulated during demonstrations, and we publicly committed to providing financial help to the arrestees represented by these lawyers. Their work was incommensurably valuable, as they took it upon themselves to ensure the arrestees were well-defended; some even had few hang-ups about being paid in a timely fashion, or were willing to answer questions of a legal nature at all times.

Although we were well-prepared to defend people accused of penal offenses, we had difficulty responding when ASSÉ was served notice of a motion seeking an injunction: the first of over sixty injunctions attacking students' right to strike. We acted quickly in order to find a lawyer's office that was capable of defending student associations against injunctions at a lesser cost. The law office we found ended up representing dozens of student associations facing injunctions, and CLASSE committed to paying the

legal bills of those associations with less money. The same legal firm also took on the task of representing ASSÉ as it challenged Law 12, known in bill form as Bill 78 (see glossary). It was crucial to be able to count on the support of lawyers practicing in the fields of labour and criminal law who shared our core values. The line between a political and a legal argument can be thin, and an organisation's political integrity must be reflected in the legal fights it takes on, if indeed it chooses to do so.

A mandate to inform

In response to requests by student associations and CLASSE, the legal committee put out information of a legal nature, including information on the law pertaining to arrests, the legality of strikes, the ins and outs of Law 12, as well as information on Québec's *Election Act*. We also published material criticizing police brutality and the criminalization of dissent. We participated in over thirty events in order to discuss these topics, mainly in the context of general assemblies or conferences. As much as we thought that everyone should know the consequences of their actions beforehand, we also did not wish to overly influence the activities organized by the members of the student movement. Nevertheless, we knowingly took the risk of demobilizing some people whose willingness to take action might be reduced when they became aware of all the tools which the State has at its disposal to prevent us from organizing.

We responded to the best of our knowledge to the multiple questions we received via email and through the committee's cell phone on a daily basis; we also enlisted

the help of lawyers. We took pains to remind people that we could not give legal advice since we were not members of the Bar. The cell phone, which was passed around between the various members of the committee, turned out to be an essential tool. We could get a dozen calls per day, either to warn us of imminent arrests, to request more information on legal procedures, to ask for help from a lawyer, from people who wanted to denounce the police brutality they had experienced and wanted to know about potential recourses, to request legal assistance while filing a complaint in front of the Police Ethics Committee, or to ask about whether a friend or loved one was being detained.

Support for arrestees

Our main form of support for people grappling with the justice system was to refer them to lawyers working with CLASSE and to make them aware of the financial support we had available to them, if they were unable to obtain funds from the public legal aid system. We explained the steps to be taken to obtain legal aid and we tried to demystify what their time in the court system would look like.

We also occasionally welcomed prisoners who had been released from police operations centres. We came along with arrestees to the courthouse; participated in vigils; paid for bail for those accused with no resources, or contacted people close to them who could commit to covering their bail. The idea guiding our actions was that we would never let anyone stay in prison for lack of resources.

As we enacted the necessary solidarity with those facing legal repression, our mandates and priorities had to shift. We were faced with the unexpected reality that the vast majority of people were not facing criminal charges, but rather were being accused of breaking city by-laws or provincial laws that allowed police to temporarily detain people and to slap them with extremely high fines, but which avoided giving people prison terms or criminal records. The widespread use of these purely penal accusations meant that most people were in practice unable to obtain public legal aid in order to mount a challenge. Using this strategy, the authorities detained over 2,500 people for many hours, in poor conditions, in order to put an end to demonstrations and to take the steam out of various actions. Since this was how the police carried out the heaviest political repression, we had to fight it by encouraging people to challenge their tickets. Since originally the funds we had collected were supposed to be used mainly for people facing accusations under the *Criminal Code*, CLASSE's congress changed our committee's mandate in order to help our actions respond more effectively to the police's tactics.

CLASSE also joined a project organized by the *Association des juristes progressistes*[8] and the *Ligue des droits et libertés*[9] which aimed at gathering testimonies from people who had experienced police brutality and political profiling. This endeavour's aim was to assist in denouncing the police abuse and discrimination on the basis of political

[8] An association of progressive legal professionals.

[9] Translator's note: Rights and Freedoms League, Québec's version of a civil liberties union.

beliefs that became an all too common reality during the strike.

On top of all this, we had been tasked with providing human support for the arrestees; unfortunately, for lack of time and people, we were unable to completely fulfill this mandate. We want to point this out as a problem, since one issue that comes up in times of struggle is the need for a network of solidarity in order to help people respond to the emotional difficulties that come up when one is submitted to police violence, and/or when one is faced with the court system and with the fear of what the potential outcome of one's trial could be. A psychological and social support group for arrestees would have been very relevant, and we are aware that this type of initiative is currently being organized outside of ASSÉ's structures.

Concerns with legalistic activism

The importance of challenging Law 12 in the court system derived from the danger associated with its implementation: it would have imposed heavy fines on the individuals and the student associations that continued to act in accordance with their strike mandates. The best way to challenge these fines was to strike down the law that made them possible; this seemed possible in light of the heavy criticism it had already drawn from Québec's Human Rights Commission (*Commission des droits de la personne et des droits de la jeunesse du Québec*)[10]. The path

[10] CDPDJ, «Commentaires sur la Loi permettant aux étudiants de recevoir l'enseignement dispensé par les établissements de niveau postsecondaire qu'ils fréquentent» (Comments on the Act to enable students to receive instruction from the postsecondary institutions they attend), LQ 2012 chapitre 12, juillet 2012.

of legal activism was also chosen when support was given to those challenging the amendments to Municipal By-law P-6 in Montreal[11], which forced the organizers of a demonstration to provide police with the route of their demonstration and banned people from participating in demonstrations while wearing a mask.

Logistical and financial support for both these initiatives was made possible, for better or for worse, by the presence of a legal committee within CLASSE, by its regular dealings with lawyers, and through its role in bringing legal concerns into an organization that prioritizes political struggle and has a legitimate measure of suspicion for practices that bring the struggle too far into the court system. Challenging Law 12 and defending student associations against injunctions imposed a heavy financial burden on CLASSE, to the tune of $100,000: civil law proceedings that might be considered unacceptable for an organization based on combative syndicalism. Let us add to this the consideration that this type of challenge is rarely resolved in a lower court; appeals drag the process along over many years and require truly astounding sums of money. These cases probably would have been referred to the Supreme Court if the incoming government had not abolished Law 12. When we step into the world of legal activism, we no longer limit ourselves to defending ourselves against the legal apparatus, but we try to grab it by the horns and use it to defend our own interests.

[11] *Règlement sur la prévention des troubles de la paix, de la sécurité et de l'ordre public, et sur l'utilisation du domaine public* (By-law «preventing breaches of peace, security and public order, and on the use of public spaces»), RRVM c P-6.

The risks that come along with legal battles are very real, although they may be justified by a concern with protecting activists from consequences that would put an end to mobilization: liberal discourses are inevitably chosen, and resources are wasted.

The dangers of reproducing legal elitism

Although the legal committee was supposed to serve a combative student movement by combining the work of providing legal information with a constant critique of the law, and although we sought to avoid conforming with the established framework of legality, we still were unable to avoid the ever-present danger of reproducing legal elitism. Against our best wishes, we kept alive the separation between legal knowledge, conceived of as a form of expertise, from activist work. The legal committee was the only committee to be made up exclusively of law students[12]; this made our work accessible only to legal professionals-in-training. In spite of ourselves, we stuck to the idea that it was necessary to benefit from prior legal knowledge in order to contribute to the committee's work; this made us into technocratic authority figures and gave us a troubling sense of immunity to criticism.

Although the work of most of CLASSE's committees was heavily scrutinized and understood as eminently more political and central to the organization, we acted separately from the rest of the organisation; the congress

[12] We were all students in the legal sciences department at UQAM; opening up this committee to students from other schools is an important step that has yet to be taken.

was not very interested in our internal decision-making processes or the extent to which we followed through on our mandates. It was an obvious fact that the newspaper committee would not be made up exclusively of future journalists, or that the women's committee would not be exclusively feminist studies students; why, then, separate the legal sphere (the exclusive domain of law students) from the rest? Doesn't this derive from an uncritical set of ideas about the elitist function of legal professionals in society? A very simple way of not perpetuating the dominant ideology would be to rename the committee, in order for its name to better reflect the work accomplished by the committee and to establish a clear distinction between its mandate and ideas surrounding legal "expertise".

In conclusion, we recognize that it is useful to have a committee working on the issue of the criminalization of struggle as part of the structures of an organization like CLASSE. We even believe this committee should become a permanent fixture. The danger of being caught up in the court system, however, is ever-present, and we must build lines of defense against it, all the more so since the accused's legal proceedings can last for many years. We also need to continuously gather what we can learn from those aspect of our struggle that have been appreciated by people who have to deal with the legal apparatus and by the organization at large. Nonetheless, we must exercise vigilance with respect to the conservative nature of the law, in order to make sure the contributions of a legal committee do not take away from the radical nature of the organization's tactics.

Law, Preventive State, and Dissent

Jérémie Dhavernas[1]

> In conformity with a continuing tendency in all of the Western democracies, the declaration of the state of exception has gradually been replaced by an unprecedented generalization of the paradigm of security as the normal technique of government.
> — Giorgio Agamben, *The State of Exception*[2]

The 2012 student strike disrupted the state of many affairs in Québec. There was the solidarity and the creation of new spaces for experimentation. There was a sudden entry of subversive and unsettling discourses into mass media. There was the advent of possible commons that had been previously unthinkable. Because of all this, and against it, one of the most repressive episodes in contemporary Québec's history was set in motion. Tasked with an assignment, the juridico-legal machine applied itself with rigor and serenity to completing its hard work. The official discourse tirelessly repeated the same formulas: stability, public order, and the monopoly certain institutions held on political legitimacy. However, the criminalization of dissent and the careful destruction of the first stammerings of counter-power would have been more appropriate ways of discussing the processes set in motion.

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[1] Translated by Kevin Paul.

[2] Agamben, Giorgio. État d'exception, 2003, Paris, Seuil, 2003, p. 29. Translator's Note: Translation pulled from exceptionsandnormality.files.wordpress.com/2007/11/agamben-state-of-exception.pdf.

By virtue of their stunningly cohesive common action, the executive, legislative, judicial, and police branches of State power revealed their unity. As always in a period of crisis, the State took off its mask and confirmed through its actions that the separation of powers is the foundational *myth* of liberalism, rather than its precondition. What if the state of exception did not need to be incarnated through a suspension of the Constitution? And what if modern democracies, parliamentary or republican, working through the juridico-police complex, already possessed all the tools to impose the rules of the game, and in the same move bypass them? The 2012 strike provides an example of the State's capacity for repression — innovative and infinite — in periods of crisis.

Political power and the birth of repression

May 18, 2012, some 3 days after talks definitively broke down between the Minister of Education and the student federations, Québec's National Assembly adopted Law 12, the *Act to enable students to receive instruction from the postsecondary institutions they attend*.[3] The term special law was used as well, but let us not kid ourselves: this was not a law of exception but indeed an ordinary law, simply one that was hastily adopted by Parliament. The law contained three parts: first, a section suspending the current school semester and laying out plans for resumption in mid-August with a condensed calendar, in order to both avoid the cancellation of the semester and halt the momentum

[3] *Loi permettant aux étudiants de recevoir l'enseignement dispensé par les établissements de niveau postsecondaire qu'ils fréquentent* («Act to enable students to receive instruction from the postsecondary institutions they attend»; L.Q. 2012, chapitre 12)

of mobilization; second, a section containing provisions aimed at preserving peace, order, and public security; last, civil, administrative, and penal sanctions for breaches of the above provisions.

With the adoption of this law, the legislative power—which in the Canadian and Québécois parliamentary system merges with the executive, since the party in power and the cabinet of ministers (i.e. the executive organ) controls the legislative organ, Parliament—enacted a change of paradigm. Beginning in the month of March, a bit more than a month after the start of the strike, Québec Premier Jean Charest started to substitute the word "boycott" for the word "strike."[4] Using a particularly rigid, legalistic argument, Charest declared that the strike is a concept that exists only in the Labour Code, specifically when there is an impasse in negotiating a new collective agreement in a unionized setting. Of course, the Labour Code may be the only codification of the concept of a strike in Québec law, but the right to strike is recognized as custom or practice[5] in other contexts, not least for student associations, and has been for over 50 years in Québec. But for the Charest government, that which lacked a purely legal existence was inadmissible. Students became users having paid for a service, and not going to one's classes was no longer a manner of carrying out a strike, but rather a simple boycott, like a consumer exercising (or not exercising) their buying power. It's their right, but they must not fetter the service; the free market and the free choice of the other consumer-

[4] *cf.* Comment la grève est devenue boycott («How the strike became a boycott»; in French): docs.google.com/document/d/1lzorbxztxgihf2q0qnh80brozbkjr_ecaha5y21owdw/

[5] Translator's note: i.e., extra-legally.

units would not permit it, the fluidity of capitalism takes precedence. This new paradigm of the strike was crystallized by the special law.

Under the new paradigm, those who intend to make the mechanics of the strike work just like before have to face the consequences:

> 13. No one may, **by an act or omission**, deny students their right to receive instruction from the institution they attend…

This means the end of picketing organized to carry out the strike mandate duly voted by student general assemblies. Note that fault by omission (not doing) is explicitly named in the law, which, in the newly codified domain of the student strike-as-boycott, leads us to worry about the extent that it can be interpreted very widely.

> 16. A person, a body or a group that is the organizer of a demonstration involving **50 people** or more to take place in a venue accessible to the public must, **not less than eight hours** before the beginning of the demonstration, provide the following information in writing to the police … :
>
> (1) the date, time, duration and venue of the demonstration as well as its route, if applicable; and (2) the means of transportation to be used for those purposes.
>
> **When it considers** that the planned venue or route poses serious risks for public security, the police force serving the territory where the demonstration is to take place may, before the demonstration, **require a change of venue or route** …

In other words, no more spontaneous demonstrations. Instead, we have the codification of police ability to interfere, to change the route of a demonstration at its discretion. This is a striking example of the delegation of powers that occurred from political power to police power. "We have faith in the work of the police," replied the Premier and the Ministers of Education, of Justice, and of Public Security in unison when questioned on the concrete application of Law 12.[6] Here, the political wing expressed a general will more than specific measures, and in leaving it to police power to make this will concrete created a political police.

But let's return to the notion of the state of exception. Law 12 states at article 9 that *the government may prescribe any other necessary change to the provisions of this Act*. No more amendments to the law, no more sanctions and no more obligation to operate in accordance with parliamentary procedure. Short-circuiting the usual process, the minister herself can make changes to her law. In our parliamentary system, legislative power is in the hands of the executive, which in the case of a majority government controls the Parliament. No one makes a big deal out of this blurring of lines. However here, they no longer even trouble themselves with the trappings of an official opposition and the process of amending laws in Parliament. The executive controls the political, without any restrictions.

[6] *cf.* Chouinsard, Tommy. «Loi 78: Jean Charest s'en remet au jugement de la police» («Bill 78: Charest to let police decide»), *La Presse*, August 8th 2012

Add to these considerations the fact that Law 12 violates the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, a constitutional document, and the Québec Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms, even according to the Québec Bar Association. But between the submission of a motion to a tribunal and the eventual trial many months may pass, years if we count the appeals process. Months or years of potential unconstitutionality are thus tolerated and, in a way, are rendered legal. The executive branch assumes then that it incarnates the State and is above the law. Such is a major characteristic of a state of exception. As is the presence of a political police, which we now turn to.

Police power and reinterpretation of the law

The student strike and the social movement that followed upon its heels generated more than 3300 arrests from February 16 to September 3, 2012, the biggest wave of political repression in the history of Québec.[7] These numbers are explained by the high number of direct actions and demonstrations that took place, but also by the quite particular room for legislative interpretation that the political branch of government placed in the hands of the police forces and that the police appropriated for itself.

Upon reading Law 12, we asked ourselves how the police would apply many provisions, above all those relative to the right to protest, since when the semester was suspended (as of May 18) there would no longer be any action on the campuses. The response never came. During

[7] *cf.* Collectif Opposé à la Brutalité Policière. *Plus de 3000 arrestations contre le mouvement étudiant (3e bilan final – 3 septembre 2012)* («Over 3000 arrests against the student movement, 3rd and final update, September 3, 2012») at cobp.resist.ca/

the 4 months when this law was in effect (it was repealed by the new government elected on September 4, 2012), the provisions relating to demonstrations were never applied. But they were nevertheless "in effect." And it was in this manner that police proceeded, by enforcing a change in the atmosphere. Time and again during the nightly demonstrations in the streets of downtown Montreal, the SPVM declared a march illegal (more than 50 people and route not stated in advance), but tolerated it. When you demonstrate under such conditions, you are de facto illegal. The supposed constitutionally guaranteed right to protest (made up of the right to express oneself and to freely assemble) no longer exists in this situation.

The most ironic part of the story is that the police never in fact needed Law 12. While Law 12 placed the crowd in a state of constant illegality, preexisting laws and bylaws, amply sufficient to "restore order," were used for arrests. For example:

- The City of Montreal's *Bylaw concerning the prevention of breaches of the peace, public order, and safety, and the use of public property*, in which article 3 prohibits **"obstructing the movement, pace, or presence"** of another citizen during a gathering.
- The Québec *Highway Safety Code*, which states at article 500 that **"no person may, without legal authorization, occupy the roadway"**.
- The *Criminal Code* of Canada, which allows the police, per article 63, to declare an **illegal assembly** and to order dispersal. Article 31 of the same code allows a peace officer to arrest an individual who they have **reasonable motive to believe** is about to take part in a **breach of the peace**.

The first two tools were used frequently, with 308 persons having been arrested in a single day (May 20), at the end of a nightly demonstration, for violation of a municipal bylaw.

Many charges were also brought under provisions of the Criminal Code. From June 7 to 10, 2012, the Formula 1 Grand Prix was held in Montreal. Following in the immediate footsteps of the height of the strike, several groups called for demonstrations against—or disruptions of—this event, rightly calling it a "paroxysm of the decadent chauvinism of the ultra-rich." The State and the elite became extremely concerned about these threats: To paraphrase Mayor Tremblay, who repeated the formula tirelessly throughout the conflict, Montreal's international reputation was at stake![8] Thirty-four people were thus arrested over the long weekend in conjunction with the event and countless more stops and searches were conducted in public transit and around the Grand Prix site. This was justified by claiming reasonable motive to believe there would be a breach of the peace, as per article 31 of the Criminal Code. What was the reasonable motive here? Accounts suggest that those who were apprehended were wearing the red square or had the misfortune of being under 30 years old. An arbitrary policing exercise, political profiling; in sum, a preventive State, which arrests the population to ensure that peace reigns rather than arresting the population following the commission of a crime. You are guilty before committing any crime and will be arrested on this basis; it's simpler that way.

[8] *cf.* Benssaieh, Karim. «Conflit étudiant: Gérald Tremblay se dit 'très, très, très déçu'» («Student unrest: [Montreal mayor] Gerald Tremblay 'very, very, very disappointed'»), *La Presse*, June 1st 2012

Such an interpretation of article 31 has been judged illegal by the courts, notably the Provincial Court of Ontario, which in the *Puddy* decision indicated that carrying out preventive arrests in the context of demonstrations is equivalent to penalizing dissent. The Court added that this interpretation can be a way of "metaphorically hijacking the message conveyed by those participating in demonstrations through the discrediting and de-legitimation that accompanies mass arrests."[9]

"SSPVM: political police!" chanted a group of anti-Grand Prix demonstrators, while surrounded and contained without any crime having been committed or any dispersal notice having been issued, all under the cover of a breach of an obscure municipal bylaw. Here, no War Measures Act or suspension of civil liberties is in sight. Police power responds to the demands of political power by criminalizing the "enemy within" by virtue of laws created for that explicit purpose, or laws already existing and imaginatively interpreted.

The judiciary: terrorism, paternalism, and rule by example

As we have seen, the criminalization of dissent was first instituted by political power and the creation of a discourse.[10] Police power extended this work further using

[9] Sylvestre, Marie-Ève. «Les arrestations préventives sont illégales et illégitimes» («Preventive arrests are illegal and illegitimate»), *Le Devoir*, June 12 2012. Translator's note: direct quote was pulled from *R. v. Puddy, 2011 ONCJ 399* ruling.

[10] Not least of which was the Minister of Finances at the time, Raymond Bachand, who told the Canadian Press that the movement was only made up of «a few radical groups who are bent on systematical-

political profiling and politically-motivated arrests. The role of judicial power remains to be seen: at the time of writing, no one has been convicted criminally for acts committed during the strike. We are still at the stage of challenging charges, among them some stemming from the *Anti-terrorism Act*.[11]

On May 11, 2012, after a police investigation that benefitted from media and informants for help identifying suspects, four people turned themselves in to the police, suspected of having thrown smoke bombs in the Montreal metro. The devices thrown on the tracks produced smoke, which led to a service interruption throughout the metro network lasting several hours. Charges of mischief and conspiracy to commit mischief have been brought, unsurprisingly, but also those of inciting fear of terrorist acts.

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ly destabilizing Montreal's economy. They are anticapitalist groups, marxists, they have nothing to do with tuition fees». «Bachand en a assez des groupes radicaux» («Bachand is tired of radical groups»), *Le Devoir*, May 15 2012.

[11] Anti-terrorism Act (SC 2001 c 41). This law has added anti-terrorism provisions in many previously existing laws, including the Criminal Code, the Security of Information Act, as well as the Canada Evidence Act.

Terrorist activity proper is defined in section 83.01 of the Criminal Code as:

- an act or ommission that occurs in Canada or abroad;
- is carried out in accordance with political, religious or ideological motives;
- with the intention of intimidating the public, or a segment of the public, with regard to its security, including its economic security, or compelling a person, a government or a domestic or an international organization to do or to refrain from doing any act, whether the public or the person, government or organization is inside or outside Canada;
- and endangers a person's life, causes death or serious injury, substantial property damage, or causes serious interference with or serious disruption of an essential service

> *Criminal Code, 83.231*: (1) Every one commits an offence who, without lawful excuse and with intent to cause any person to fear **death, bodily harm, substantial damage to property** or serious interference with the **legitimate** use or operation of property:
>
> (…) commits an act that, in all the circumstances, is likely to cause a **reasonable apprehension** that **terrorist activity** is occurring or will occur, without believing that such activity is occurring or will occur.

Let's look at the general interpretation of what is an incitation to fear terrorist activity. Per article 83.231, it is not a question of murder or homicide, but indeed of the fear of death, not of assault, but of fear of injuries, and not of mischief, but of fear of considerable material damage to property or serious interference with its legitimate use or operation. *Reasonably fearing terrorist activity; considerably; reasonably;* the law is full of fictions, of these magical adverbs that solve everything.

With the arrival of antiterrorist measures, we can observe a displacement of the notion of guilt in the theory of law. The charge rests here on an incitation to fear that the safety of the population might be in grave danger. A political notion (terrorism) and a crime of intent (incitation to fear, tending to scare) that no longer have anything to do with criminal law are grafted onto the traditional offence of mischief (having damaged property combined with the intention of doing so). When we compare the text of the antiterrorist provisions with the traditional mechanics of determining guilt, we are struck by the extent

to which these provisions clash, since they codify within the legal text *itself* the political and arbitrary character of the mechanics of determining guilt. That the first use of this article in Québec, 10 years after its creation, arises in the context of the student strike illustrates the political task shamelessly undertaken by the judicial branch. It remains to be seen how the magistrate presiding over the trial will rule. The trend set already in motion by Superior Court justices—which consists of imposing particularly restrictive release conditions for the accused in light of the allegations—does not bode well.

Lessons to be drawn

> Again, there is no liberty, if the judiciary power be not separated from the legislative and executive. Were it joined with the legislative, the life and liberty of the subject would be exposed to arbitrary control; for the judge would be then the legislator. Were it joined to the executive power, the judge might behave with violence and oppression.
>
> – Montesquieu[12]

> One of the essential characteristics of the state of exception—the provisional abolition of the distinction among legislative, executive, and judicial powers—here shows its tendency to become a lasting practice of government.
>
> – Giorgio Agamben, *The State of Exception*[13]

During the 2012 student strike, we saw a high level of coherence between the legislative, executive, judicial, and police powers, as much in their reading of events as in the

[12] Montesquieu, *The Spirit of Laws*, vol. XI, chap. VI

[13] Agamben, Giorgio. *État d'exception*, 2003, Paris, Seuil, 2003, p. 19. Translation pulled from exceptionsandnormality.files.wordpress.com/2007/11/agamben-state-of-exception.pdf

violent repression that they deployed. The close relations linking these levels of powers and their capacity for concerted action become apparent when the State, of which they are only the iterations, is faced with dissent in an instance of crisis. Formally, however, these powers remain separate, in keeping with the liberal myth of a self-regulating state. Nevertheless, while the security paradigm establishes itself more and more as a normal technique of government, this same security paradigm is brought in in a time of crisis, to repress the enemy with a single voice. The student strike serves as an example of this process.

Can the state of exception then quietly settle in during periods of crisis, in the midst of the ordinary business of democracy? Many people asked themselves this question during the events of spring 2012. It also applies to the political militants, activists, and dissidents of other western democracies that also confront the security paradigm. Admitting that the state of exception exists implies rethinking one's activism, one's role when faced with the state. In the end, it calls upon us to disentangle ourselves from legal illusions, in order to confront political powers better and more directly.

7 What Next? The Strike Creates New Possibilities

What political dynamics did the strike reveal that were less understood beforehand? How has the strike changed the way we understand the future of social movements in Québec? Our understanding of ourselves as activists?

The two short chapters in this section point towards new possibilities opened up by the student strike. Although it may be too soon to predict its long-term effects, the strike opened up new horizons even before it ended, as reflected by the manifesto adopted by a special CLASSE congress in the summer of 2012, which we have chosen to reprint. Written collectively after the strike had been underway for months, the manifesto represents an aspirational view of the movement which acknowledges that the stakes had already gone far beyond tuition. Although these aims were not always achieved, the manifesto speaks to a desire for a breadth of action – potentially reaching every aspect of society – that we felt we were beginning to attain as non-students came down into the streets with their pots and pans.

In her ode to disobedience and indignation — a word made popular in Québec in response to the Spanish *Indignados* movement — Laurence Guenette engages with

themes raised in preceding chapters, calling attention to the transformative learning that occurs through social movement activism and reminding us of the potential, and indeed necessity, of collective disobedience. Many students and militants went through burnout or extreme financial or emotional precarity during and after the strike; however, we also realized we could never be the same. Laurence's piece reflects this type of understanding of the strike's effect on our lives, but we should not forget that a fresh sense of militancy or determination can be a challenge to sustain if we do not make the conscious decision to care for each other and our communities as we struggle.

Share our Future: The CLASSE Manifesto

La Coalition Large de l'Association pour une Solidarité Syndicale Étudiante (CLASSE)[1]

For months now, all over Québec, the streets have vibrated to the rhythm of hundreds of thousands of marching feet. What started out as a movement underground, still stiff with the winter consensus, gathered new strength in the spring and flowed freely, energizing students, parents, grandparents, children, and people with and without jobs. The initial student strike grew into a people's struggle, while the problem of tuition fees opened the door to a much deeper malaise - we now face a political problem that truly affects us all. To find its remedy and give substance to our vision, let us cast our minds back to the root of the problem.

The way we see it, direct democracy should be experienced, every moment of every day. Our own voices ought to be heard in assemblies in schools, at work, in our neighbourhoods. Our concept of democracy places the people in permanent charge of politics, and by "the people" we mean those of us at the base of the pyramid - the foundation of political legitimacy. This becomes an opportunity for all those who are never heard. It is a time for women to speak up as equals and to raise issues that are too often ignored or simply forgotten about. The democracy we see does not make promises: it goes into action. Our democracy banishes cynicism, instead of fuelling it.

[1] The CLASSE Manifesto was adopted by a congress of delegates from CLASSE member unions on August 11-12, 2012. Translated by Rouge Squad.

As we have shown many times over, our democracy brings people together. Each time we take to the streets and set up picket lines, it is this kind of democracy that at last breathes free. We are talking about shared, participatory democracy.

Democracy, as viewed by the other side, is tagged as "representative" - and we wonder just what it represents. This brand of "democracy" comes up for air once every four years, for a game of musical chairs. While elections come and go, decisions remain unchanged, serving the same interests: those of leaders who prefer the murmurs of lobbyists to the clanging of pots and pans. Each time the people raises its voice in discontent, on comes the answer: emergency laws, with riot sticks, pepper spray, tear gas. When the elite feels threatened, no principle is sacred, not even those principles they preach: for them, democracy works only when we, the people keep our mouths shut.

Our view is that truly democratic decisions arise from a shared space, where men and women are valued. As equals, in these spaces, women and men can work together to build a society that is dedicated to the public good.

We now know that equal access to public services is vital to the common good. And access can only be equal if it is free.

Free access does more than simply banish prices: it tears down the economic barriers to what we hold most dear. Free access removes the stumbling blocks to the full flowering of our status as humans. Where there is free access, we *share* payment for *shared* services.

By contrast, the concept of price determination - the so-called "fair share" - is in truth no more than veiled discrimination. Under the supposedly consensual "user-payer" principle, a surtax is in fact charged to people whose needs are already at the bottom of the heap. Where is justice, when a hospital can charge the exact same fee from a lawyer as from a bag clerk? For the lawyer, the amount is minimal; for the bag clerk, it is a backbreaking burden.

This burden is one that we all shoulder, each and every one of us, whether we are students or not: this is one lesson our strike has taught us. For we, students, are also renters and employees; we are international students, pushed aside by discriminating public services. We come from many backgrounds, and, until the colour of our skin goes as unnoticed as our eye colour, we will keep on facing everyday racism, contempt and ignorance. We are women, and if we are feminists it is because we face daily sexism and roadblocks set for us by the patriarchal system; we constantly fight deep-rooted prejudice. We are gay, straight, bisexual, and proud to be. We have never been a separate level of society. Our strike is not directed against the people.

We are the people.

Our strike goes beyond the $1625 tuition-fee hike. If, by throwing our educational institutions into the marketplace, our most basic rights are being taken from us, we can say the same for hospitals, Hydro-Québec, our forests, and the soil beneath our feet. We share so much more than public services: we share our living spaces, spaces that were here before we were born. We want them to survive us.

Yet a handful of greedy persons, answering to no one, is hard at work devastating these spaces - and they are getting away with it, with projects such as Plan Nord, shale gas, and more. For these few, who view the future in terms of the next quarter's profit, nature has value only when measured in economic spin-offs. Blind to the beauty of the common good, this clique is avid and unpredictable, with eyes only for its faraway stockholders. It caters to those stockholders' whims in colonial style, with no consultation. The primary victims of this wholesale sell-off are Native women, far from the media, poor and easily ignored.

Fortunately, though Native peoples are displaced each and every time wealth is found under or on their land, they have kept up the fight. Some of these ruthless exploitation projects have been put on ice due to the women and men who have dared to defy them. These men and women have stood their ground against this plunder of resources, despite dire warnings that our economic survival depends on the speedy exploitation of our underground wealth, whatever the price.

Together, each and every one of us will be affected by the waste of our resources, because we are concerned, not only for those who will come after us, but also for the people with whom we now share these spaces - we want to think better thoughts: we want to think ahead.

This is the meaning of our vision, and the essence of our strike: it is a shared, collective action whose scope lies well beyond student interests. We are daring to call for a different world, one far removed from the blind submis-

sion our present commodity-based system requires. Individuals, nature, our public services, these are being seen as commodities: the same tiny elite is busy selling everything that belongs to us. And yet we know that public services are not useless expenditures, nor are they consumer goods.

Together we have realized that our underground wealth cannot be measured in tons of metal, and that a woman's body is not a selling point. In the same way, education cannot be sold; it ought to be provided to each and every one of us, without regard to our immigration status or our condition. Our aim is for an educational system that is for us, that we will share together.

Because education is a training ground for humanity, and because humanity does not bow to economic competitiveness, we refuse to allow our schools to bend under the weight of well- stocked portfolios. Together, we call for an egalitarian school system that will break down hierarchies, one that will pose a threat to all those men and women who still think they can rule over us with a free hand.

In providing everyone with the resources they need to develop their full capacities, we will succeed in creating a society where decision-making and the ways in which we organize our lives with one another are shared. This is the heart of our vision. Education is not a branch of the economy, nor is it a short-term training service. Our educational system, which is at the root of all knowledge, can allow us to pave the way towards freeing society as a whole; it can provide a liberating education that will lay the foundation for self-determination.

We believe that if our educational system is to be seen as a space where universal knowledge is shared, it must banish all forms of gender-based discrimination and domination. And yet a woman in the current educational system walks a path just as difficult as the one she walks in today's society. It is futile to believe that unequal status is no longer reproduced in the halls of academe: we are disgusted to see that the professions traditionally associated with women are still undervalued, and that it is still mostly women who study for these professions. We women are numerous in Bachelor's-level classrooms, but how many of us climb to the highest rungs of the academic ladder?

We are against prolonging this discrimination against women as well as against people who are in any way shunted aside by society. Our aim is to make our educational system well and truly a space where equality reigns and differences are respected. Our fervent wish is for an educational system that allows each and every one of us to blossom.

In choosing to strike, we have chosen to fight for these ideas. We have chosen to create a power relationship, the only mechanism that will allow us to tip the scales. Sharing this responsibility together, we can accomplish a great deal: but in order to do this we have to speak up, and speak up forcefully. History has shown us eloquently that if we do choose hope, solidarity and equality, we must not beg for them: we must take them. This is what we mean by *combative syndicalism*. Now, at a time when new democratic spaces are springing up all around us, we must make use of these to create a new world. Now is no time for mere declarations of intent: we must act. In calling for a social

strike today, we will be marching alongside you, people of Québec, in the street tomorrow. In calling for a social strike today, we hope that tomorrow, we will be marching, together, alongside the whole of Québec society.

Together, we can rebuild.

Share our future.

Ode to Disobedience and Indignation

Laurence Guenette[1]

Rebellion is a wonderful quality. In the face of injustice, impatient, solidarity-minded, disobedient rebels are right. They are right to be angry, to feel this uplifting, uniting, liberating, incendiary emotion. Rage that refuses apathy, rejects coddling, and prefers discomfort to indifference. To paraphrase author and political scientist Gene Sharp: "the virtue of intolerance grounds the will to resist."

The social movement that rocked Québec in 2012 opened unexpected doors and surpassed the initial expectations of the students who organized against the tuition hike. The contempt and intransigence shown by the government shed light on a fundamental societal debate that, for once, broke through the usual dominant narratives. These narratives maintain that austerity is necessary, profitable, and competitive. They try to convince us that our citizenship is limited to representative democracy; that obedience is appropriate. These narratives endlessly rain down on the people the world over who see their rights melt away like snow in the sun and their vulnerability and poverty grow at alarming rates. This rightward wind sends chills down your spine.

The extent of state repression we experienced, in all its forms, shocked more than one of us: police brutality has a way of pulling back the curtain, in a brutally honest way, on the nature of the system in which we live. We are still

[1] Translated by Mona Luxion.

surprised at such violence. However, the stakes of power are revealed: the real fear that the powerful experience at the possibility of the status quo being overturned by a decentralised social movement, subversive and hungry for freedom. No government (especially a democratic one!) should have to massively beat its citizens to maintain power. "A democracy starts to deny itself when it refuses to recognize its own violence as a failure," writes nonviolent philosopher Jean-Marie Muller. Serve *whom*? Protect *what*? Baton blows and rubber bullets bring clear answers, administered through violence. Repression should anger and revolt us; it must be thought about deeply and radicalize activists, students, citizens.

It is in part because of repression and the government's contempt that this social movement grew so large, that it was able to reach radical issues, instead of only addressing the superficial and symptomatic tuition hike. The 2012 student strike became for me and for many of my comrades a timeless moment, a space of collective and individual transformation. A laboratory of emotions and identities, a fertile ground where beauty and solidarity grew alongside the horror of violence. This period of intense resistance changed the flavour of our citizenship forever.

It's true; we have too often had the troubling sense that we are living in a very different world from that of many of our fellow citizens. Activists at the heart of an adversarial social movement have been transformed by this struggle. The things that we often named without *feeling* them became terrifyingly concrete realities: repression, prison, court, and profiling affect us deeply and permanently.

We would like for people to share this indignation which for us is felt as a mix of rage, solidarity, and despair that fills our souls. In the face of injustice, poverty, the lies of the rich and powerful, and oppression in all its forms, why are people unable to get angry, revolt, and disobey — or at least to want to? The established order — or disorder — depends on the collaboration and obedience of the population on which it rests. This is true for both democratic regimes and authoritarian ones. What does vary is the ratio of coercion to consent that ensures that obedience. If an authoritarian power uses mostly threats, fear, and violence to force the population to submit, a democratic power depends on consent or consensus that they manufacture themselves. This is the most powerful and subtle tool of power: promoting obedience and docility by relying on the idea that democratic power is unarguably legitimate.

Disinformation and media propaganda are also fully understood when we grasp their extent and power, and to see that they alienate a large part of the population. Mass media and the government teach people to associate the struggle for justice and dignity with a childish dream, and to see acceptance of antisocial austerity measures as a sign of maturity. They teach us to confuse complacency with resiliency, conformism with responsibility, resistance and violence. They also present us with a little nuanced message on obedience: obedience is good, disobedience is bad.

And when our disobedience is in the context of a struggle for social justice, in defence of our rights, we are im-

mediately confronted with the dominant discourses' ignorance and contempt of civil disobedience. Its detractors do not see it as a form of direct action and a tactic that is acceptable in a "democracy." In this line of thinking, we have no right to refuse to collaborate because laws and policies are put in place by our elected representatives, and too bad for those who "lost" their elections. At the heart of the struggle, in May 2012, the Québec Minister for Justice declared that, "disobedience is just a nice way of saying vandalism." Was this gross ignorance, or simply bad faith?

It is true that the idea of civil disobedience strays from the narrow confines of electoralism. Politicians rush to claim that civil disobedience is equivalent to disorder, danger, insecurity and the denial of the rule of law. All of that serves to pre-emptively demonize a phenomenon that is threatening to power: that of a population that is becoming aware of its strength when it refuses to collaborate. The population becomes one which may be thinking of no longer submitting, whose obedience is no longer guaranteed either by force or by consent.

Civil disobedience is a deliberate, legitimate, and principled act of non-collaboration: we disobey the law while accepting the possible consequences, made strong by the indignation we feel at the injustice enacted by the state. The act is illegal, but grounded in a sense of integrity and justice: civil disobeyers are speaking truth to power. Through civil disobedience citizens reclaim their political responsibility to think about collective wellbeing and justice, and realize the power of their consent.

It is true that the notion of civil disobedience imagines democracy as a much more living and lively system than the one that is currently on offer: a democracy in which citizens use their power instead of periodically delegating it. The idea of civil disobedience recognizes people's intelligence and offers them the possibility of defying authority and being free enough to be critical of power and the law. It is not a simple thing to substitute this form of civic responsibility for the current feelings of indifference and powerlessness. However, it is necessary: the obedience of the majority maintains the status quo. In this sense, the capacity to get angry and disobey is fundamental for any democratic society.

The population's widespread collaboration and cooperation with an oppressive system is the most pernicious and powerful obstacle to struggles for social justice. In contrast, disobedience is an empowering process for both individuals and collectivities. Gandhi had reflected on the necessary steps to arrive at this point of empowerment and disobedience. He thought it necessary that, "a psychological change occur, from passive submission to courage and self-respect; that the subject realize that his assistance and cooperation make the regime possible; to build determination to withdraw one's cooperation and obedience."

We have begun this change; the most important and least quantifiable gain from this Québec spring can be found without a doubt in this revolutionary spirit that rocked the society for the first time in many years, and made people realize the potential of their indignation. This common frame of mind and this awareness of injustice will be transposed onto coming social struggles,

whatever the cause they espouse. As austerity measures multiply, populations come under attack, and our rights, liberties, and truly democratic values are rolled back, it is up to us to keep resisting, to think critically, and to search nonstop for ways of continuing the struggle. We can at least be proud of having been a disrupting force, of having deepened our reflection, sharpened our convictions, transcended our fears, questioned our docility, destroyed our indifference and dragged a whole mass of people into an enthusiastic and outraged awakening.

But in Fall 2012 the students returned to class, and the movement snuffed out in a bit of a confused truce awaiting the electoral results. And then the Charest government fell, the tuition hike was finally cancelled, and our lives went back to normal after more than six months of struggle. These were difficult weeks, a strange and sudden "morning after," a curious and almost worrisome calm. Many people are surprised that some of us are bittersweet, disappointed, or unsatisfied with this ending. If we are suspicious of this electoral victory against the strike, it is because a return to sleep and to business as usual is lurking after the awakening and social mobilisation of the spring. The promises of a true collective uprising have caught us: from now on we will be impatient, intolerant, demanding. We are still outraged and we are right to be.

In January 2012 we were impatiently waiting for the "strike floor" of 20,000 strikers nationwide to launch our general unlimited strike. At that moment we would never have hoped to come so far in our struggle. All of our predictions and scenarios turned out wrong. If someone had told us what was coming, we would not have been able to

believe it: "In six months, you will still be on strike. There will have been a Special Law, a wave of disobedience, pots-and-pans demos, supportive professors, and the eyes of the whole world turned on Québec. Many protestors will have been injured, some severely. More than 3,000 people will be arrested. Like many of your comrades, you will go to jail and face criminal charges.

"When the struggle comes to an end, all of the streets and buildings downtown will be haunted by memories. Crossing back and forth through Montreal, you will still see the ghosts of a burning barricade, clouds of tear gas, squadrons of riot police with shining helmets, dark or colourful crowds moving in time to a common anger. You will remember at each street-corner an act of disruption, a demo, a kettle, your comrade who was hit with a rubber bullet, the feeling of baton blows to your stomach and head.

"You will be changed forever. You will cultivate that transformation to be sure that it never gutters out, that no return to 'normal' is possible. Finally if someone asks you if you would do it again, despite the horror that grew alongside the beauty of this struggle, despite the physical and judicial consequences, the exhaustion, the violence you experienced, you will say without hesitation that you would do it a hundred times over, that you aspire to be a rebel, free and full of indignation. And with the echo of the last chants and the smoke of the tear gas canisters barely faded away, you are already nostalgic for this struggle and this extraordinary movement."

Contributors

Myriam Arsenault-Jacques is a law student at Université du Québec à Montreal. She cofounded the Police Intervention Watch Group and has taken an active role in the student strike. She is also a member of the Feminism and Law Collective. Myriam is proudly vegan and straight edge.

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Hugo Bonin was a member of the CLASSE/ASSÉ Information Committee during the 2012 student strike. At the time he was also involved in the strike movement in Concordia University, through the Women's Studies Student Association. After completing a masters in political science from York University, he currently works as Mobilization Coordinator for the Dawson Student Union, in Montréal.

Patricia Boushel is a music manager, a cultural producer and activist from Montreal. She is the editor of T*ranslating the Printemps Érable* and offers free French classes in her kitchen.

Mélodie Chouinard is a self-identified anarcha-feminist woman that wishes she could be a pirate-witch. She is now completing her Master in Intercultural Mediation at the Université de Sherbrooke and hopes her degree and experience will allow her to make some real changes in the struggle towards a more equal and diversity-embracing

society.

The **CLASSE Legal Committee** was formed in anticipation of the criminalization and penalization of participants in the 2012 Student Strike. It had from five to nine members, all law students, whose mandate was to provide information as well as legal support for participants in strike actions regardless of political affiliation or student status.

David Clément coordinates *L'Association pour la défense des droits sociaux*, the Association for the Defense of Social Rights in Gatineau, Québec.

A lawyer by training, **Jérémie Dhavernas** has practiced in social law. Today, as a student in history he is interested in the state's violence towards marginalised people, from drug users to migrants as well as people in the psychiatric system and domestic political enemies. He was active during the strike, primarily in the street.

Ethan Kyle Feldman studied philosophy at McGill university and was extremely lucky to be an organizer, activist, and artist during the Québec student strike. He now works as a freelance music producer in Toronto.

Ilyan Ferrer is a PhD Candidate at McGill University's School of Social Work. His research focuses on aging, im/migration, and labour among transnational Filipinos. He has worked as a community organizer for the Montreal Filipino community.

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Laurence Guenette is a Montreal-based activist working with *Accompagnement Québec-Guatemala* since 1996. In 2012, she contributed to a report on discrimination against Indigenous women in Canada as well as another on non-violence and the student movement.

rosalind hampton is a PhD Candidate and educator whose current research draws on her background in community work and education to explore the historical and current structural and systemic relations between Black people and the University. She is the proud parent of a commercial and community mural artist.

Nadia Hausfather is pursuing her PhD at Concordia University about emotional legacies of 21st century general student strikes. She was involved in organizing students against tuition increase, for free education and for the 2012 strike as a member of the Concordia MobSquad, as co-founding member of Free Education Montreal and as elected councilor and vice-president external of the Graduate Students' Association.

Adrienne Carey Hurley is an anarchist who teaches East Asian Studies and Integrated Studies in Education at McGill University, where she is employed as an associate professor.

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Gretchen King is a doctoral candidate in the Communication Studies department at McGill University, completing her dissertation thesis based on fieldwork facilitated at Radio al-Balad 92.4FM, Jordan's first community radio station. Previously News Coordinator at Montreal's campus-based community radio station CKUT 90.3FM for ten years, she continues to work as a community media practitioner.

Formerly ASSE's secretary for collegial academic affairs, **Jaouad Laaroussi** is now a Masters student in the *Centre d'histoire des régulations Sociales*, a pluri-disciplinary consortium of seven higher-educational institutions.

Nicolas Lachapelle

Xavier Lafrance was external affairs secretary on the ASSÉ's executive and CASSÉÉ co-spokesperson in 2004-2005, and active before and after that in ASSÉ. Xavier is currently doing a PhD in Political Science at York University, Toronto, where his dissertation looks at class relations and social movement in France in an historical perspective, with an emphasis on current contemporary anti-neoliberal resistance.

Philippe Lapointe, former Secretary of Academic Affairs of the Association pour une solidarité syndicale étudiante (ASSÉ), is now active as a labour organizer and continues to be interested in the applications of combative syndicalism for student and labour movements.

Edward Ou Jin Lee is a PhD Candidate at the McGill School of Social work whose scholar-activism focuses on

queer/trans migration. Ed is also involved in community organizing with queer and trans people of colour and migrants.

Mona Luxion is an anticapitalist activist and academic whose visions of social justice include environmental justice, open borders, self-determination, and the subversion of heteropatriarchy. When not at a desk or in the streets, e is working on building resilient, sustainable communities of care and struggle.

John-Paul McVea lives in Montreal and is a student by distance learning at the University of Alberta, on the other side of Canada. John-Paul is also a musician, and for work he programs playlists of classical music that are broadcast on cable TV, over the internet, and using apps for Android and the iPad.

Laith Marouf has been a community media producer for 10 years. He has worked extensively on community media building in Palestine and Native communities in Turtle Island, as well as hosting «Under the Olive Tree», airing on CKUT (Montreal) and CFRC (Kingston) since 2002. Since 2010 Laith has served as the Equity Officer of the National Community and Campus Radio Association (NCRA) and has worked as the Program Director of Community University Television (CUTV), helping build the station to be the most viewed Campus/Community TV in the world.

Rushdia Mehreen is a Masters candidate at Concordia University and served on the Comité aux Luttes Sociales (Social Struggles Committee) of ASSÉ/CLASSE from

2012 to 2013. As a member of the Concordia Mob Squad, Rushdia played a central role in mobilizing Concordia students to an unprecendented unlimited strike. She has worked on issues related to accessibility of education since 2010, and previously was instrumental in creating her own departmental association and was since involved in organizing students across campus.

Norman Nawrocki is a Montreal cabaret artist, violinist, author, actor and educator. He marched and banged pots, published a collection of strike poetry, and is finishing a novel about the strike.

Guillaume Néron

Lena Carla Palacios is a PhD Candidate (Education and Communication Studies) at McGill University. She is a member and project coordinator of Life after Life, a Montreal-based collective dedicated to prison abolition and the de-criminalization of formerly incarcerated girls, women, and queer and transgender people. Her research focuses on transnational feminist prison studies, critical race theory, abolitionist education and transformative justice.

Joël Pedneault was involved with student organizing at McGill University in Montreal from 2008 to 2012, and worked for CLASSE during the late summer and early fall of 2012. He now translates various activist texts when he is not busy holding down a job as an office person.

Vincent Roy

Anna Sheftel is an Assistant Professor in the Conflict Studies department of Sait Paul University, where she works with oral histories of conflict survivors as well as the personal, social and political context of that remembering. She was a founder of *Translating the Printemps Érable*.

As President and Communications Coordinator for the Gender, Sexual Diversity, and Feminist Studies Student Association, **Molly Swain** helped to launch the GSDFSSA's first ever unlimited strike in 2012, McGill's longest and most successful student departmental strike. She also organized for student-labour solidarity during the MUNACA strike, and then for a campus-wide unlimited general student strike. Molly's research focuses on the links between decolonization, indigenous feminisms, and anti-capitalism.

Glossary

AFÉA-UQÀM *Association facultaire des étudiants en arts de l'UQÀM* (Association of Students in Arts-UQAM).

AFESPED *Association facultaire étudiante de science politique et droit de l'UQAM* (Faculty Association of Political Science and Law Students at UQÀM).

APAQ *Assemblée populaire autonome de quartier* (Popular, autonomous neighbourhood assembly)

ASSÉ *Association pour une solidarité syndicale étudiante* (Association for a solidary student unionism), a Québec-wide association of university and CEGEP student unions known for its use of direct democracy and its generally more radical position than the three other comparable organizations, FECQ, FEUQ, and TaCEQ.

Beauchamp, Line The Minister of Education, Sports and Leisure under Charest's Liberal government until she resigned on May 14, 2012, and was replaced by Michelle Courchesne.

Bed-in A bed-in is a common practice in striking CEGEPs, in which students occupy a large space such as a cafeteria or gym overnight in order to hold strong picket lines the next morning.

Bill 78/Law 12 (*La loi spéciale*, the special law) was passed as an emergency measure in May 2012 to crush the student protests and break the strike. In addition to ban-

ning protests that occured near educational institutions or without a permit and essentially decreeing a lockout of striking institutions until August, it made encouraging others to violate the law — or even failing to discourage student union members from breaking the law — punishable by crushing fines.

Casseroles, literally pots and pans, refers to a form of neighbourhood-based protest (inspired by the Latin American cacerolazos) that became the symbol of resistance to Bill 78/Law 12.

CEGEPs are post-secondary educational institutions unique to Québec. Students attending a CEGEP opt for either a 3 year technical program or a 2 year pre-university program. With the exception of a few private institutions, CEGEPs are provincially funded and students do not pay tuition.

Carré Rouge or Red Square. Often a piece of red fabric or tape worn on one's person. An ironic visual symbol that plays off the expression "carrément dans le rouge" - "squarely in the red". While the symbol was invented by Québec's anti-poverty movement circa 2004, it was quickly taken up by the student movement during the major 2005 strike against cuts to student financial aid. It remains a powerful symbol of student and anti-austerity struggles in Québec.

CASSÉE *Coalition de l'ASSÉ élargie* (Wider ASSÉ Coalition), the 2005 equivalent of CLASSE. A play on the word "cassé(e)" which can mean broken or broke (i.e. a person, financially speaking).

Charest, Jean. Leader of the Progressive Conservative Party of Canada from 1993 to 1998, after which he became the leader of Liberal Party of Québec, and Québec's premier from 2003 until the elections in September 2012. As premier, he strongly defended the tuition hikes, the Plan Nord, and other fees and cuts.

CLAC The *Convergence des luttes anti-capitalistes,* Montreal's Anti-Capitalist Convergence, a loose convergence of activists known for organizing the annual May Day demonstration in Montreal. During the strike, they issued callouts for anti-capitalist contingents at the night marches and most large demonstrations.

CLASSE *Coalition large de l'ASSÉ* (Large coalition of the ASSÉ) was a body formed specifically for the 2012 strike. CLASSE included striking unions that were not members of ASSÉ but banded together for strategic reasons during the mobilization period.

Coalition opposée à la tarification et la privatization des services publiques (Coalition Against Fees and Privatization in Public Services) brought together students, trade unionists, health workers, feminists, and anti-poverty activists, using both media tactics and direct action to oppose the broader context of cuts and fees (to health services, daycares, and employment insurance) within which the tuition hike occurred.

CSPE-UQAM *Comité de soutien aux parents etudiants* (Student Parent Support Committee-UQAM)

CRÉPUQ *Conseil des recteurs et principaux des universités du Québec*, the lobbying organization made up of all the university administrations in Québec until its collapse in 2013. Strongly pro-hike.

CUTV (Concordia University Television), an independent university-community media source that provided some of the most diligent reporting on the strike, most notably streaming video from most of the demonstrations.

Estrie Contre la Hausse (Estrie Against the Hike) According to their Facebook page, Estrie contre la hausse is a group of "citizens, parents, teachers, artists, activists, politicians and workers from all walks of life." They supported the student movement in 2012. Estrie is the region east of Montreal of which Sherbrooke is the main city.

FECQ *Féderation étudiante collégiale du Québec* (Collegial Student Federation of Québec), the more hierarchical, less radical provincial-level student organization for CEGEP associations. Many of FECQ's member unions also joined CLASSE during the strike.

FEUQ *Féderation étudiante universitaire du Québec* (University Student Federation of Québec), the university-level provincial organization known for its hierarchical structure and less radical politics, marked by the decision in 2005 to negotiate with the government in the absence of ASSÉ and accept, on behalf of the entire student movement, a settlement that was far less than the demands which had been put forth.

GA (General assembly), the basic unit of ASSÉ's direct democracy model, a meeting open to all members of a union, APAQ, or other body at which motions can be introduced, debated, and voted on by an open show of hands. General assemblies are often the highest legislative body of an association; for example, strike votes must be passed by the general assembly to be binding.

GGI *Grève générale illimitée* (Unlimited General Strike), originally a name for the strike tactic more generally, #GGI became the hashtag denoting the 2012 student strike specifically.

Green (square) Chosen in opposition to the red square, the green square (and by extension the colour green) came to symbolize support for the hikes.

Habs The Montreal Canadiens hockey team; also short for Habitants, the name that was in use between the 17th and 20th centuries for the French settlers in the region that is now Québec.

Hydro-Québec The national electricity utility in Québec; for some, a symbol of the welfare state and Québec nationalism, but also a symbol of the colonialism and resource exploitation of the Plan Nord, in which Hydro-Québec's dams, often built on land claimed by Indigenous peoples, figure prominently. The Hydro-Québec headquarters were the target of several economic disruptions due to its status as a state-run corporation.

IRIS *Institute de Recherche sur l'Information Socio-Economique* (Institute for Socio-economic Research), a left-leaning think tank, produced policy analysis reports that provided many of the arguments against the hike.

Kettling A police tactic of surrounding a large group of protesters to detain and/or arrest them all and/or issue them all fines.

Manifestation (*manif*, for short), alternately translated as protest or demonstration. Variations include ***manif-action***, a demonstration leading to an unannounced blockade or disruption of a strategic location, and ***maNUfestation***, a naked (or semi-naked) demonstration. Why not?

Mères en colère et solidaires (Angry Mothers in Solidarity), one of many groups of non-student allies that popped up to support the student movement. Based primarily in Montreal.

Métro, Montreal's underground subway system, site of La Ligne Rouge, a daily performance art piece in which silent red-clad commuters boarded each car of the subway between Montreal's two major francophone universities during the morning rush hour; of political profiling of red square-wearers, especially during the F1 Grand Prix; and of several smoke device detonations, the last of which resulted in criminal and anti-terrorism charges against three people.

MDE *Movement pour le Droit à l'Éducation* (Movement for the Right to Education), a former provincial-level student association with relatively radical politics; in other words, a predecessor of ASSÉ.

Mob Squad The name most commonly used for student mobilization committees on English-language campuses in Montreal during the strike (Concordia and McGill universities as well as Vanier College). Mob Squads typically benefitted from less support (material and political) from local student associations than mobilization committees in other, French-language campuses.

Nude demonstrations see Manufestation.

Parents contre la hausse (Parents Against the Hike) Like Mères en colère et solidaires, an autonomous group of supporters that was visible in many marches and creative actions against the hike.

PLQ *Parti libéral du Québec* (Liberal Party of Québec), the party in power at the beginning of the 2012 strike under Premier Jean Charest, which originally proposed the tuition hike.

Printemps Érable (Maple Spring), a pun on the *printemps arabe*, Arab Spring, this term became popular to suggest that the movement encompassed more than just a student strike.

PQ *Parti Québecois*, the nationalist party that came to power in the provincial elections of September 2012, riding on professed support for the students' demands which was fleeting once the elections were over.

QPIRG/GRIP (Québec Public Interest Research Group) PIRGs are student fee-funded incubators and resources for campus/community social justice-oriented groups and projects, including anti-racist and economic justice work.

Quiet Revolution, known in French as *la révolution tranquille*, the 1960s were marked by the rise of nationalist politics in Québec, which led to the creation of a welfare state that took over education and healthcare from the Catholic Church and nationalized electricity production (see Hydro-Québec). The turn of the 1970s saw the creation of the UQ system and *Opération McGill*, a 10,000 person union-driven march against McGill University's linguistic and economic elitism, which was ultimately unsuccessful.

Referendum Although there have been many in Québec's history, this most commonly refers to the 1980 and 1995 referenda for some form of Québec nationhood.

RNE *Rassemblement national étudiant* (National Student Gathering), Held in the summer of 2011, the RNE brought together all student unions in Québec to strategize for 2011-2012. It set important terms for competing branches of the student movement to work together.

Salon du Plan Nord (Plan Nord Salon), a job fair and networking event for the Liberal government's northern development plan of corporate natural resource extraction, which faced opposition from environmentalists and Indigenous activists (and still does, in its revised form under the PQ government). The Salon was the site of massive student and anti-colonial demonstrations that forced its closure.

SAQ *Société des alcools du Québec* (Québec Liquor Control Board), As a state-run corporation, the SAQ depot was targeted for economic disruptions that would impact the government directly.

SPVM *Service de police de la Ville de Montréal* (City of Montreal Police Department).

SQ *Sureté du Québec* (Québec Provincial Police) serves as the principal police force in Québec's regions, and was brought in to Montreal to serve as backup once the balance of power between student protesters and the SPVM tipped too far in the protesters' favour.

UQÀM *University du Québec à Montréal* (University of Québec at Montreal) is a part of the UQ system, which was designed to make education more accessible for first-generation and francophone students, and a historical bulwark of student organizing.

UQO *Université du Québec en Outaouais* is the branch of Québec's public university system in Gatineau and Hull, across the river from Ottawa, Canada's capital.