

2012-2022

THE LEGACY OF THE MAPLE SPRING



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The living legacy of the Maple Spring

This issue of *Carnets* is devoted to the 10th anniversary of the longest and largest student strike in Québec history. To mark the occasion, FNEEQ decided to give the podium to several people who were directly involved in the tremendous student and community uprising that lasted nearly seven months, from February 13 to September 7, 2012. While the Charest government's planned tuition fee hike was the triggering event for the Maple Spring, it quickly became clear that the strike was addressing much broader issues that bore on Québec society as a whole.

At the time, FNEEQ condemned the neoliberal-inspired market-oriented approach to teaching and learning, which reduces higher education to a financial transaction that must be profitable for the state. Recently, however, the Legault government has taken this utilitarian view a step further by launching *Opération main-d'œuvre* (Operation Workforce) and creating *Perspective Québec* scholarships, which provide funding to students who choose the "right" academic programs, based on the government's priorities. But the struggle for free access for everyone to all levels of education is by no means over; we have to continue to fight alongside a new generation for this basic right and for a democratic, humanistic approach to education.

We all remember how FNEEQ members demonstrated their unwavering solidarity with the student demands through massive participation in demonstrations as well as by providing logistic support at the local level and Québec wide, mobilizing against the applications for injunctions and refusing to cross picket lines. The FNEEQ team also pitched in and shared its expertise, making financial contributions to student associations, holding a round of union meetings, providing legal support and negotiating return-to-work protocols.

We can say with confidence that the Maple Spring was an inspiring and unifying force for all of us. The 10th anniversary of the student strike is a reminder of the indispensable role of solidarity. Solidarity will be vital if we want to be able to address the urgent challenges that lie ahead: the pressing need to reinvest in education at all levels, the imperative of adequate funding for public services, the urgency of tackling climate change.

Forward, forward! We won't back down!

Caroline Frenkel



PHOTO: LUC BESSETTE

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The FNEEQ-CSN represents nearly 35,000 members in CEGEPs, private institutions and universities. It is the most representative higher education union federation in Québec.

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Enough is enough!

Camille Robert
LECTURER IN HISTORY AT UQAM

IN 2012, SHE WAS CO-SPOKESPERSON FOR CLASSE

Intense. That's the word that immediately came to Camille Robert's mind to sum up the Maple Spring. In 2012, at the age of 21, she did not suspect that the movement she was involved in would have such a deep historical impact. "We told people it would last two or three weeks and the government would negotiate to get us back in the classroom quickly." A decade on, she still gets emotional thinking about the six-month-long outpouring of solidarity and support across Québec, not just from students but from the general public as well. That level of social mobilization was unprecedented at the time and we have to look at it in context to understand it and grasp its import.

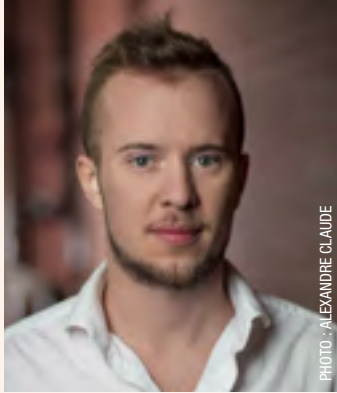
According to this former student activist, now a lecturer in history at UQAM, people had grown increasingly fed up with the austerity policies of Jean Charest's Liberal government. Many felt, with good reason, that they were paying more and more for shrinking public services. For example, the 2010 Bachand budget imposed user fees for health care services, in addition to electricity rate increases and cutbacks to public services. Then, on top of all that, came the tuition fee hike. Another key point worth mentioning is that the groundwork for the student mobilization had been laid well in advance through alliance-building with the unions, community groups and the Red Hand Coalition, which had been formed three years earlier.

Unfortunately, the conflict increasingly polarized the public, dragged on, and degenerated due to police repression, Camille recalls. "Some of my friends were injured and arrested. They inhaled tear gas and pepper spray trying to escape the police kettles." In all, there were some 3,000 arrests during this momentous period.

No exit strategy

Camille regrets that the election call in the summer of 2012 dampened the students' fighting spirit, after they had fought back against the special law and the injunctions. In her view, the election offered no satisfactory options. The Parti Québécois' proposal to index tuition fees and hold an Estates General on Education was a disappointing, half-hearted response, given the energy that had been expended during the student mobilization of the preceding six months and the balance of power, which had hitherto tilted in favour of the students.

"For me, 2012 was a political education and it confirmed my commitment to the values of social justice which I had subscribed to since I was a teenager." As a historian, teacher and member of the FNÉEQ, Camille is still interested in social movements, the history of feminist mobilizations and public sector labour disputes. In her view, the student movement's most salient legacy was that it politicized a whole generation, which learned the lesson that you can effect change through creative mobilization and by generating broad solidarity. We saw it with the environmental demonstrations and Black Lives Matter. Resisting efforts to repress the basic right to demonstrate is the only way.



We won!

Ludvic Moquin-Beaudry
PROFESSOR OF PHILOSOPHY AT CÉGEP DE SAINT-JÉRÔME

IN 2012, HE WAS THE COMMUNICATIONS DIRECTOR OF ASSÉ/CLASSE

In April 2012, the student strike had already been going on for some time. In fact, in size and reach it had already surpassed the first strike I had experienced as a first-year CEGEP student in 2005. So, fast forward seven years and I was one of the “veterans” of the student movement, who had benefited from the amazing political education that a student strike can offer. I was supposed to complete my Master’s degree in philosophy in August, but I ended up taking a little detour by way of the street.

In April 2012, after resisting public pressure for nearly eight weeks, the Charest government deigned to open a first round of negotiations with the Québec student associations. After the long weeks of walkouts, blockades, injunctions and demonstrations, morale was starting to flag in some quarters. When one person I knew quit (I can’t remember who exactly...people left every day), I said to a comrade-in-arms, “No matter how this story ends, we’ve already won.” We were witnessing a whole generation becoming politicized in short order; we were watching them awoken to the excitement of collective action and to the violence of the power structure, which turns a deaf ear. We learned to tolerate disagreement, to defend positions initially held only by a minority, to broaden our base of support and to rely on the slow process of democratic deliberation. We learned to look beyond our individual horizons and consider the common good.

April 2012 is when it became clear to me that, beyond taking part in the strike itself, I had a desire to contribute to our common intellectual advancement. What I want to do is help decipher the world around us, analyze the arguments we are presented with, pierce the veil of sophistry in everyday discourse, and arrive at an

understanding of our place in society as well as our collective power. And there are few more privileged circumstances in which to practise this socio-political pedagogy than teaching philosophy at the college level.

Today, in April 2022, I am a teacher. The generation that protested in the streets in 2012 is still involved in all manner of causes, and the following generation is drawing inspiration from the memory of 2012 to mount its own struggles in defence of the environment and for social justice. Today, it seems clear to me that, despite my youthful enthusiasm, I wasn’t wrong 10 years ago in believing we had won.



Learning disobedience

Philippe De Grosbois
PROFESSOR OF SOCIOLOGY AT COLLÈGE AHUNTSIC

IN 2012, HE WAS AN ACTIVIST WHO CO-FOUNDED *PROFS CONTRE LA HAUSSE*, AN ASSOCIATION OF TEACHERS OPPOSED TO THE TUITION FEE HIKE

Philippe De Grosbois had decided to run for the position of secretary of his trade union a year before the casserole demonstrations sent the clang of pots and pans ringing through the streets. The spring of 2012 was a baptism of fire for De Grosbois, a sociology professor at Collège Ahuntsic, who was an activist at heart. At the time, he was still feeling a lingering sense of disappointment over what he saw as half-hearted union support for the 2005 student strike protesting Jean Charest's conversion of bursaries into loans.

In 2012, he promised himself that he would offer more robust support for the students who were organizing against the tuition fee hikes. Philippe agreed with the principle underlying ASSÉ's slogan *La grève est étudiante, la lutte est populaire* (student strike, people's struggle) and demonstrated his support by co-organizing a meeting with a hundred colleagues from various CEGEPs to found *Profs contre la hausse*. They quickly drafted a manifesto and published it in the media. They also orchestrated a series of bold actions to swell the ranks of the student movement.

We are all students

Philippe was concerned then about access to education and free tuition, and today he continues to warn of the dangers of an educational system geared to serve a specific clientele. The trend makes him bristle: "Education is not a service that you buy; it's a right. We need to de-commodify education. Is someone likely to study literature or philosophy if they are going to wind up \$30,000 in debt at the end of the day? Career choices shouldn't be based on the pocketbook. What happens to critical thinking and the development of informed citizens?"

That's why he joined the protests in the streets in 2012. It was a propitious moment: the Arab Spring, Occupy Wall Street, and the Indignados in Spain all showed that there is strength in numbers and that, in combination with a radical perspective, was enough to move mountains. In Philippe's view, that's also the main legacy of the 2012 student movement.

The strike snowballed due to a far-reaching analysis of the issues and the cooperation of other organizations (unions as well as community and social organizations) which were just as fed up with neoliberal and austerity policies. "Tuition fees were symptomatic of the government's general approach. We were proposing a different model of public services and wealth distribution."

According to De Grosbois, the Maple Spring served to highlight the ideological divide in society. Authoritarian measures such as the special law and the injunctions compelling students to return to class were wrenching moments when the right of the individual to pursue their studies was elevated above the collective right to an affordable education.

While the substantive issue is still relevant, there are also concrete lessons to be learned from the 2012 movement. A more creative approach to mobilization is needed as are broader alliances. Ten years on, Philippe has faith in the power of disobedience, and is convinced of the need to defy laws and injunctions. He believes in the value of collective rebellion, as long as it is carried out in an organized way. In this respect, the recent climate strikes follow in the footsteps of the Maple Spring.



Democracy and lack of sleep

Carol-Anne Gauthier
PROFESSOR AT CHAMPLAIN COLLEGE ST. LAWRENCE

IN 2012, SHE WAS ACTIVE IN AELIÉS

In the spring of 2012, I was a member of the executive of AELIÉS, a graduate student association in Laval. Spoiler alert: I didn't make much progress on my thesis that year. I already had some experience as an activist through my previous involvement in union activities, but nothing could have prepared me for the frenzy of the Maple Spring.

On top of the challenge of organizing general meetings for 1,100 people on a few days' notice, this was my first experience with heated debates about the very nature of our democratic processes and practices. Should we stick to making our decisions at meetings or encourage the broadest possible participation by holding votes online? Are the meetings really deliberative assemblies or are they just a succession of pro and con speeches until the vote is called?

While I participated, like thousands of others, in the protests, the picketing, the arguments on social media and the family squabbles, what has stayed with me most vividly is the logistics, the democratic processes, and the lack of sleep. Another thing that left an impression on me was the fact that the president of AELIÉS—one of the brightest, hardest-working people I've ever known and a person of great integrity—resigned from his position with only a week or two left in his term because of the intense pressure and the inordinate demands of some of the members. After 2012, it was a few years before I ventured back into activism. Activist burnout is very common and we don't pay enough attention to it.

In 2015, I began my career as a CEGEP teacher. At one meeting, a colleague argued against voting for a strike mandate by pointing to a round of bargaining in the 1980s in which, she said, a strike had yielded nothing. That's when I realized there's still a little flame that burns in me. She was going back to 1982 (!) but I was thinking of 2012, when people believed in the cause firmly enough, and for long enough, to bring down a government.

What remains of that spring? I don't know. In the end, tuition fees increased anyway. With the rise of the right all over the world, including Québec, I don't know if that kind of movement could emerge right now. Let's discuss it on a terrasse over sangria ;)



PHOTO: ALEXANDRE CLAUDE

“La loi spéciale, on s’en câlisse!” (Screw your special law!)

Arnaud Theurillat-Cloutier
PROFESSOR OF PHILOSOPHY AT COLLÈGE JEAN-DE-BRÉBEUF

IN 2012, HE WAS ACTIVE IN THE ASSOCIATION DES ÉTUDIANTES ET ÉTUDIANTS EN PHILOSOPHIE DE L'UNIVERSITÉ DE MONTRÉAL (ADÉPUM) AND IN ASSÉ

The Université de Montréal was one of the first institutions to seek an injunction to break the student strike. On April 11, 2012, we learned that the injunction would prohibit our picket lines. That threatened to torpedo the strike, since what made it effective was the line of bodies outside the university.

On April 12, striking students from several departments met at the philosophy department. The philosophy students' association decided to issue an urgent appeal to protest that afternoon. Within a few hours, we had rallied more than a thousand strikers from across the campus around the unequivocal slogan: “Guy Breton, resign!” Rector Breton wasn't just the face of the administration's repressive measure. Twice as well paid as the Premier, he was also an outspoken advocate of tuition fee increases. He espoused the neoliberal view of the role of the university, having stated that its mission was to produce “brains suited to the needs of business.”

The protestors criss-crossed the campus with no defined destination until some suggested marching to the rector's office in the Roger-Gaudry building. There, the protestors were able to get around security and enter the lobby. Several people attempted to enter the rector's office using panels from nearby stands as battering rams. The solid wood door trembled under the impact of a dozen thrusts but never gave way. After a good half hour, we had to leave the building to avoid the arrival of the police.

The Université de Montréal administration then sought a stronger injunction but the court denied the request. For two days, we defied the injunction and maintained our picket lines. Forced to recognize that the injunction was ineffective, the administration decided to cancel classes in the striking departments.

By disobeying the injunction, we defended the democratic character of our strike and repelled the bid to break our movement. By standing together, we stood up to judicial intimidation. The wooden door may not have given way, but the rector's office did. Is it not a civic virtue to disobey a law that seeks to silence a democratic movement?

Stephen D'Arcy makes that argument in *Languages of the Unheard* and I'm convinced it's true. I still get a shiver of excitement when I think back on those big festive crowds in 2012 chanting “Screw your special law!”

BACK TO SQUARE ONE

Yves de Repentigny

VICE-PRESIDENT FOR THE REGROUPEMENT CÉGEP



The 2020-2023 collective agreement of CEGEP teachers in the FNEEQ was signed on March 1, closing a protracted bargaining process that had to be conducted in the midst of a pandemic and proved complicated up to the very end. Even after the agreement in principle was ratified by the general meetings in November, talks with the employer's bargaining committee (CPNC) on language for the new agreement, based on the agreement in principle, were slowed by a disagreement on grievances that were to be withdrawn by the unions under the agreement.

The upshot was that preparations for the next round of bargaining began even before the 2020-2023 collective agreement was signed. In February, the Regroupement Cégep adopted recommendations on the process, the timeline, sectoral and intersectoral alliances (within the CSN and also with other union organizations) and general priorities at the central table. At the same time, the FNEEQ bargaining and mobilization committee began its tour of general meetings to prepare a draft list of sectoral demands.

Programs under attack from all sides

The FNEEQ is continuing its fight to defend the Office System Technology, Accounting & Management Technology, and Business Management programs, which the ministry of higher education (MES) is still planning to abolish and merge into a single "multipurpose" program. In February, the Regroupement's coordinating committee held two meetings with teachers of these subjects to get their points of view and help them provide input into the MES's online consultation.

Our Federation also continues to support the coalition for the maintenance of the qualifying DEC in Nursing. The coalition is fighting the plans of the Ordre des infirmières et infirmiers du Québec (OIIQ) to make a Bachelor's degree the minimum requirement for entering the profession and it's preparing a social media campaign to raise awareness.

In addition to these attacks, there is the top-down approach of the CAQ government's Opération main-d'œuvre, which is supposed to help eliminate the labour shortage in some sectors. The planned measures under this initiative include Perspective Québec scholarships worth thousands of dollars, which would be available only to students in some programs, based on criteria that are unclear (the list doesn't include some programs leading to professions with attraction and retention problems) and the introduction of short programs (for credit or not), which are likely to threaten existing programs (such as the DEC in Early Childhood Education, which is already suffering a major drop in enrolment), hinder the job mobility of their graduates and undermine the development of informed citizens, as these programs would not include general courses.

ADDRESSING GOVERNANCE AND JOB INSECURITY TO FIGHT EXCLUSION

Christine Gauthier

VICE-PRESIDENT FOR THE REGROUPEMENT UNIVERSITÉ



A recent study by the Canadian Union of Public Employees found that Québec is the Canadian province where universities rely most heavily on lecturers. Almost 61% of courses are taught by lecturers in Québec, compared with 53% in Ontario and 56% in British Columbia.

But while lecturers play a key role in transmitting scientific knowledge and practices, and providing students with a high-quality education, as contractual employees they are still shut out of many governance structures and still face unacceptable, intolerably precarious conditions of employment. On both of these fronts, unions must continue the fight for real recognition and more job security.

Unprecedented mobilization to support our bargaining stance

Not surprisingly, many lecturers have responded to the lack of movement by university administrations by giving their unions strike mandates. After two years of COVID, after making gargantuan efforts to switch to distance teaching and support hundreds of students, *all without any financial compensation or any guarantee of a future in teaching*, lecturers are entitled to expect that university administrations would listen to their representatives' demands and bargain in good faith.

The lecturers in the Syndicat des professeures et professeurs enseignants de l'UQAM were crystal clear about their determination to improve their working conditions: they voted more than 90% in favour of an unlimited general strike mandate, to be used when appropriate. Other negotiations are in progress or about to start and it's clear that coordinated bargaining by the Regroupement Université will be a powerful lever in support of the aspirations of lecturers throughout Québec.

University governance: administrations are evading their duty of collegiality

The Regroupement also looked at the universities' governance practices. A clear conclusion emerged from our review of the situation: the erosion of collegial governance continues apace. Instead of really considering the points of view of the individuals and groups affected by their decisions and policy directions, universities are using various stratagems to circumvent their duty to consult.

For example, the unions representing lecturers are often asked to participate in sham consultations. After being excluded from the initial discussions, they are presented with finished texts and asked for their opinion when plans have already been finalized. So we are relegated to the role of backbench critics, which causes widespread frustration, dials up the tension and ultimately has the effect of avoiding problems rather than addressing them. It may bear repeating that informing people and receiving their comments isn't really the same thing as consulting them.

The lecturer representatives elected to university bodies are also prevented from doing their jobs: they are silenced by the rules of confidentiality imposed by some universities, and the unions are then locked out of the discussion on important decisions that directly affect their members and which we should all be hearing about.

Let's keep up the good fight!

AGREEMENTS IN PRINCIPLES DESPITE THE PANDEMIC

Léandre Lapointe

VICE-PRESIDENT FOR THE REGROUPEMENT PRIVÉ



PHOTO : DOMINIC MORISSETTE

Despite the extraordinary circumstances and the complex situation that still persists in our workplaces, the unions in the Regroupement Privé still wanted to renegotiate their collective agreements and redoubled their efforts to bargain for better

working conditions. The already-existing issues in our workplaces have been exacerbated in recent months and a number of members took the opportunity to propose concrete solutions. Teachers at Collège Esther-Blondin exercised their right to strike in the midst of the pandemic and obtained an agreement in principle in December. Staff at Collège Champagneur have just voted at a general meeting to ratify an agreement in principle that will bring their salaries up to 95-98% of salaries in the public sector, and potentially 100%, depending on future enrollment. After two years of bargaining with a particularly difficult employer, teachers at the Teccart Institute reached an agreement in principle to renew their collective agreement, which expired in August 2011. Finally, teaching staff in Mashteuiatsh reached in agreement in principle that better protects the rights of First Nations members. Congratulations everyone for showing solidarity when it counted!

The future of online teaching

The announcements made in recent weeks hold out the prospect of a return to normal. It's something teaching staff would welcome. The accumulation of learning lags and difficulties will make for a protracted transition period for teachers, who will be dealing with the impact on student success for some time. At both the primary and secondary levels, teachers did not have an overwhelmingly positive experience with online instruction. A number of recurring problems quickly emerged in relation to student autonomy, planning, the organization of learning and the ability to teach some subject matter online. Despite these difficulties, the education ministry is asking interested elementary schools and

high schools to participate in distance learning pilot projects. In our Regroupement, Collège Sainte-Anne-de-la-Pocatière and Kells Academy have signed on. Among other things, they will be developing distance learning courses for foreign students. The Fédération is watching these projects closely and urging the Ministry to consult broadly in order to identify the major stumbling blocks to non-classroom teaching at the elementary and secondary levels.

Data mining

On March 14 and 29, the education ministry met with elementary and secondary education union representatives to announce the first data mining implementations at the Ministry. They want to exploit the data they already have in their databases “to know, understand, anticipate and act more effectively.” The Ministry plans to use “smart algorithms” to help improve student success, building management and personnel management at a time of labour shortages. The goal is to “make informed decisions, measure the impact of decisions and reduce the administrative burden on the service centres.” These analytic systems will be introduced starting in September 2022 in the public sector and September 2023 in the private sector.



FROM THE FNEEQ ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

The environmental case for distance learning: Does it stand up?

The pandemic disrupted workplaces and many people think the shift to working from home, some of the time or all of the time, will outlast COVID. The new working arrangements will have wide-ranging impacts on transportation, urban planning and labour relations.

Education has also been affected by the trend. While most teachers and students balked at going online before the pandemic, many now look favourably on expanding the use of distance learning, including at the primary and secondary levels. The idea of going online on snow days is being discussed, and there are “carbon-neutral day” projects that include online learning.

Supporters of distance learning muster an array of arguments, some valid, others less so. Some point to the climate emergency as a reason to move in this direction. Does this reasoning make sense?

Digital pollutes more than you might think

It is estimated that digital currently accounts for 4% of global greenhouse gas emissions. According to France’s ecological transition agency, that figure could rise to 30% by 2030. Data centres are also very energy-intensive. And, according to the U.S. Energy and Information Administration, 64% of global electricity generation relies on fossil fuels. And obviously, you can’t choose your energy source when you connect to the Internet for a videoconference.

Then there’s the carbon footprint of the manufacture and use of the computer equipment. According to Freitag et al. (2021), those processes generate even more greenhouse gases than

digital networks or data centres. Working from home, including teaching from home, requires modern equipment that soon becomes outdated. During the pandemic, many people had to update their hardware. Some people bought a second monitor or headphones to use for videoconferencing.

The manufacture of computer equipment also raises other environmental concerns, in addition to greenhouse gas emissions. The mining of raw materials such as lithium and rare earth elements can have serious impacts on local populations: contamination of the water table, displacement of populations, war, etc. Computer waste is also a problem.

Laure Patouillard, a researcher at École polytechnique de Montréal, has calculated that one hour of videoconferencing (with video) generates approximately 960 g of CO². If we add in environmental amortization of the computer equipment, it comes to about 1.5 kg of CO² per hour of videoconferencing. So several hours of online classes per day are likely to produce more greenhouse gas emissions than teaching in the classroom, given that many members of the university community use public transit or have a short car commute.

The bottom line

Clearly, these calculations don't factor in all emissions. Student housing and campus food services also cause pollution. However, we can conclude that distance learning isn't the miracle solution to atmospheric pollution.

It should also be borne in mind that college and university campuses are sites of political socialization, including for environmental causes. Educational and extracurricular activities at elementary schools and high schools also raise students' awareness. Undermining places of instruction also undermines innovative environmental initiatives. So expanding distance learning is liable to have unsuspected consequences.

There are good reasons to develop high-quality distance learning services: to reach remote populations, to enable people to take continuing education and vocational retraining programs, to make it easier for single parents to take courses, etc. However, protecting the environment probably isn't among the good reasons.

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THE FOLLOWING ARE EXCERPTS FROM A TEXT
RELEASED BY THE SCHOOL AND SOCIETY
COMMITTEE ON MAY 1, 2012

A Québec spring: Students fight for the common good

Young Quebecers have mobilized to defend Québec's social pact and its legacy: equitable distribution of the wealth and the transmission of social gains to the next generation. The FNEEQ and the CSN are supporting their struggle, which is also ours.

Extensive mobilization

Throughout the months of March and April, the streets of Québec cities and towns thronged with demonstrators in numbers not seen in years. Citizens of all ages and all stripes came out to show their support for the common cause. Some have tried to depict this as a fight waged by an egotistical, immature generation that doesn't want to pay its "fair share" of the spiralling cost of education. In fact, young people are protesting a denial of representative democracy and they are getting their first taste of participatory political action. They have realized they must resist the government's cynical, contemptuous exercise of power. By raising tuition fees, the Québec government has chosen students as its first target in its attempt to transform the role of the State. It knows young people don't enjoy the protection of labour laws or other laws that shield the less wealthy. Most of them don't pay taxes, work for minimum wage and aren't entitled to welfare. They are ready scapegoats for an authoritarian government that seeks division and pursues regressive policies by imposing high user fees and increasing taxes for the poorest members of society. Young people are responding appropriately: this is a student strike but a people's struggle. Their victory will be a victory for all.



PHOTO : NORMAND BLOUIN

Societal issues

Higher education is a vital public service, the cost of which should be borne by society as a whole. It isn't an individual benefit, a commodity to be purchased. There is no collective investment that is more important for the next generations and the future of our society. People who lived through the Quiet Revolution knew it and encouraged their children, the baby boomers, to pursue post-secondary studies and go to university if at all possible. As Guy Rocher reminds us, the Parent Report, of which he was one of the authors, advocated free tuition up to and including university.

The students' struggle joins that of the broad coalition against user fees and the privatization of public services, against the erosion of our social pact, and for social solidarity. This coalition includes a hundred civil society organizations dedicated to defending the common good (among them ASSÉ and the FECQ). This is the core issue the students are fighting for today, as it is for all of us. The student protests are spurring an important public debate; they are challenging policies that threaten all social services and our collective future. Quebecers must not allow themselves to be divided on this issue, as some are trying to do by stigmatizing the student struggle through semantic pirouettes and demagoguery. One need only listen to the unanimous condemnation of the students from the right to realize the extent to which they are trying to drum up public anger at the strikers. This government strategy is a dead end. It is irresponsible, authoritarian and divisive. We must denounce it.

The end is nigh

The Liberal provincial government doesn't seem to understand the major social movement that is sweeping across Québec. For two years and more, it has been caught up in scandals. It can no longer cope with the crises it faces, and not just the student movement. A shaky government is a poor government, for it breeds anxiety rather than building social cohesion. The series of injunctions at universities and CEGEPs are indicative of our leaders' alarm. Private individual rights are being held up against the democratic expression of collective rights to curtail the right to demonstrate.

Québec is seeing the revival of an activist social movement. Many Quebecers are taking to the streets to defend the common good, as they did in the mass demonstration on Earth Day, April 22. There has also been a spontaneous protest movement against the tuition hike among teachers. Its members work with the students every day and are well aware of what's at stake.

The situation is ripe for Quebecers to go to the polls and kick out an irresponsible government that has done its time, a government that is selling off our assets at bargain prices, jeopardizing our social pact and undermining our values of solidarity. "Liberate us from the Liberals" sang Loco Locas. And liberate us from corruption, cronyism and cynical leaders!

2012 SCRAPBOOK: SOLIDARITY IN THE STREETS



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