

Fighting for our rights

Student movements and strikes: a brief history

By MATHIEU FRAPPIER

Quebec tuition fees (for Quebec residents) are the lowest in Canada and this is intimately linked to the strength of our student movement. The student movement in Quebec is well known for its vitality and quick response to any attack against the right to education. Going back to the 1960s, students in Quebec have fought a long battle for accessible, quality, public education.

The newly elected Liberals seem to have already begun an attack against the right to a free, public and accessible education. Already, many students are organizing the resistance under the form of a general strike projected for the fall. This ambitious action plan must be placed in the perspective of the history of the student movement and the results of this kind of struggle in the past.

Although the student movement in Quebec is nearly 40 years old, here are a few of the more recent important dates in the history of the student movement.

1986: Early in the year, education minister Claude Ryan says that "there are two times too many university students in Québec" and that "promising the tuition freeze was a mistake". Many students are worried and angry.

March: The provincial budget cuts \$25 million from the loans and bursaries program.

April: Quebec wide student association ANEEQ, organises a 5,000-person demonstration in Québec City demanding that the Liberals keep their promises to students.

October: The fourth student general strike lasts for two weeks, and involves about 30 CÉGEPs and one university (UQAM). Premier Bourassa finally commits to keep the tuition fee freeze until the end of his term. Negotiation takes place on the financial aid program. However, a \$100 per-student ancillary fee is adopted by the cabinet and implemented in September 1986 (and at UQAM in September 1988).

1990: March-April: Sixth national student strike. Only about 15 student unions participate, some

of them for 3-4 weeks. The government response is to repress student protests using police.

1993: The Post-Graduate Students' Society of McGill University (PGSS) joins the Canadian Federation of Students (CFS), becoming local 79.

1994: The Concordia Graduate

October-November: The seventh general student strike takes place. More than 30 student unions are involved, including university departmental associations. After three weeks, the education minister is forced to announce that the tuition freeze will be extended until the end of the mandate, that no tuition fees will be introduced in

Youth Summit. In February 2000, the CFS demanded that the Québec Government propose some real solutions to the crisis in education. CFS helped in setting up an alternate summit which was attended by various student and youth organizations.

In response to the wide mobilization of students against the Summit, the Government partially gave in to CFS demands. The Government agreed to restore a substantial amount (1.1\$ billion) of the funding which had been cut from education

2001: A strong year for activism in Quebec. The Summit of the Americas in Quebec brought attention to the movement against the implementation of the Free Trade Agreement of Americas (FTAA) and the effects it would have on social programs such as education and healthcare among other issues. CFS launches a massive popular education and mobilization campaign, organizing transportation for over 5,000 people, helping to found FTAA Alert, participating in the Groupe Opposé à la Mondialisation des Marchés, helping many small community groups, providing materials, etc.

The People's Summit was successful and had a high profile with more than 70,000 people demonstrating in opposition to the FTAA.

February: L'Association pour une Solidarité Syndicale Étudiante is founded. More than 20 student associations attend the event.

2002: Spring: CFS and ASSÉ organize a 3,000 person demonstration in Québec City for accessibility to education

Fall: On October 31st, CFS and ASSÉ organize a 10,000 person demonstration in Montréal against the FTAA.

2003: Students organize against the war in Iraq. Students are now in the midst of fighting against ballooning ancillary fees, defending the tuition freeze and for the extension of it to include all students studying in Quebec.

2000 : The year saw a massive mobilization around the Quebec



Students demonstrate on Feb 21st, 2002, in front of the National Assembly in Québec City to demand an extension to the tuition fee freeze

Students' Association (GSA) joins the CFS as local 83. Opening of the provincial office of the CFS in Quebec.

1995: January: In one of largest demonstrations in the history of the student movement, an unprecedented 16,000 students participated in a protest on January 25, including 5,000 from McGill and Concordia. Students took to the street to denounce cut back of close \$1 billion in transfer payments to Quebec.

May 13th: The Mouvement pour le Droit à l'Éducation (MDE) is founded

1996: September: The MDE calls for a general student strike against cuts to education, the zero-deficit policy, and a probable abandonment of the tuition freeze.



The good news is that tuition fees are frozen, the bad news is the university says I have to buy their hat to graduate!

Will Montréal extend student fares to all full-time students regardless of age, as promised? -Pg. 9



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Liberals maintain freeze, but plan parliamentary commission on "who should pay for education"

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The crow, the fox and the WTO

By Carolyn Zwicky-Perez

Ever hear the one about the crow, the fox and the piece of cheese? It goes like this: on a fine morning, a fox walks by a crow engrossed in the process of eating a sumptuous looking glob of cheese. The wily fox tricks the bird into dropping its bounty by praising its good looks and songs.

Moral? Don't trust machiavellian foxes or egotistical birds. In 1994, after drooling over the lucrative potential of public services, the World Trade Organization lobbied its member governments to place these big cheese institutions, of which education alone represents a 250\$ billion business, under corporate control. With the signing of the General Agreement on Trade and Services, the WTO achieved just that. At least the fox and crow were cute and cuddly.

Is The Cheese Spoiled?

Effectively, the goal of the GATS is to liberalize education and other services, or rather to eliminate all barriers to international trade within the services sector. Government-funded education is such a barrier, because it prevents companies from investing in and making profits from schools.

WTO advocates would argue education can be excluded from the GATS because the agreement states that services provided in the exercise of government authority may be the exception to the rule.

Unfortunately, to reap the benefits of this clause education would have to be entirely funded by the government, which is far from being the case: in Canada alone, only 55% of the cost of post-secondary education is funded by

the public sector. Finally, in complete emulation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), the GATS also adopts the principles of National Treatment and Most Favoured Nation. In other words, foreign based companies enjoy the same privileges as domestic investors when overtaking schools, as all investors from WTO member nations must be treated equally in the run for profit. Since 1990-1991, this so called race has had the effect of causing tuition to rise at more than 20% above the inflation rate for this same period.

In the case of education 'liberalization', the chunk of Gouda did not fall all at once. Over the last decade, the insidious presence of corporations in schools has been gradually increasing.

Hoping to gain both mindless consumers of their products and eventual robot-like cogs in their factories, companies already enjoy a place in the classroom. For instance, Cuning Stunts Communications in England pays university students to sport ads on their foreheads at peak hours.

Right here in Montreal, the U de M made a contract with Pepsi whereby the company would pay them \$6.4 million for selling 820,000 bottles of Pepsi over ten years. Should that quantity not be met, the contract would be extended for three years or until the rest are sold, with no further funds from Pepsi.

Also in U de M, engineering students found themselves designing war planes as a final class project. Not a surprise when considering that it was the Bombardier corporation sponsoring the program.

Ouch! My Brain Crashed

Finally, the advent of E-learning makes it very easy for such trends to

become the norm. Cutting aside such 'collateral costs' as teachers and classrooms, e-courses are set up by actual companies. These so-called Educational Maintenance Organizations encourage universities



Get Up! Stand Up!

And so, when reading between the lines of the corporate agenda for education, it is obvious that the privatization in question is of the facilities, yes, but also of the mind. Universities have historically been a haven for critical thinking, for sharpening society's collective wit.

If our brains are to be considered as a mere piece of dairy to be haggled between vultures, how then can we still lay a claim to freethinking? From November

20th to 22nd, our own continental chapter of the WTO, the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) will be meeting in Miami. On November 20th, let's take to the streets of Montreal to make it very clear that students are not products, that teachers are not tools, and that universities are certainly not factories.

Here in Canada, the effort to create a Virtual U is directed by Kodak, IBM, Bell Canada, Novasys, Microsoft, Nortel, MPR Teltech, Unitel, Rogers

Cable systems, Prentice Hall and McGraw-Hill.

The project proposal for this \$50 billion industry emphasizes the fact that these efforts would be consolidated under the premise of an intellectual

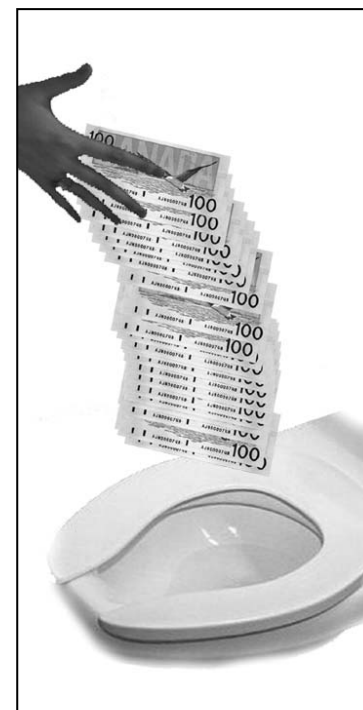
property right, meaning that research done by students or teachers would belong to the corporation in question.

Currently, the MEQ has approved 22 of these plans. It is easy to think the MEQ will allow others to raise their fees as well. Known hikes so far range between \$10 to 50\$ per semester per student. CEGEP is theoretically free, but this is becoming less and less true. For example, CEGEP Ste-Foy has raised both fees for three years in a row.

The problem with private

A look at what happened at TECCART

By Mathieu Frappier



On May 12, 2003, students at the Teccart Institute were advised that despite their academic effort and expensive tuition fees (\$3,500/year, with some students even paying three years in advance to benefit from a 10 per cent rebate) the school was not able to uphold their part of the contract.

The institute was forced to close indefinitely as of June 12, 2003, because it was going into bankruptcy.

The financial situation of Teccart was the result of bad management and dubious deals between the school and Groupe Teccart, the larger group owning the institute.

The teachers union (belonging to the FNEEQ-CSN) was willing to help the institute by putting 10 per cent of the teachers' salaries into a union operated account to help revitalize the school. In addition, compromises were made to working conditions.

The union, the employer and Emploi-Québec were part of a committee established to find solutions for the future of the school. Teccart agreed to implement any recommendations that the committee made. Just two weeks before the publication of the recommendations, though, Teccart's administration announced the school's closure.

The direct results was that \$600,000 in salary was not paid, some teachers saw their healthcare reimbursements refused because the employer hadn't paid its part of the insurance premiums and students learned their year would not be completed despite having paid their tuition.

Teccart also supposedly forgot to renew the bylaws of the student association so it was impossible for them to become a creditor of the institution. In response, students decided to organize and tried to establish their own autonomous student union. Due to Ministry of Education bureaucracy, though, it was impossible to establish the union in so short a time period over the summer.

In spite of this, students began to place public pressure on the school through a media campaign backed by demonstrations and solidarity letters from students and teacher unions. Students wanted the MEQ to force Teccart to complete the education of those who were supposed to be graduating this year.

But despite the fact Teccart was receiving generous subsidies from the government and that some classes were directly funded by Emploi-Québec and Hydro-Québec, it took until August 13 before it was made official that the school's teaching license will be transferred to Group Lasalle (another private education business) and that classes would continue.

Between the shut-down announcement and the license transfer, the teachers union and students asked the government to hold a public inquiry to discover what really happened at Teccart.

Up to now, the government does not seem to have the intention to carry out this investigation.

More worrisome is the fact the Liberals are actually claiming that the private sector is needed in education. Is Teccart a model for the "new" education system in Québec?

CEGEP students face rising costs

Charest government deregulates ancillary fees, allowing administrators complete control

By Mathieu Frappier

A few weeks after entering in power, the new Quebec Liberal government opened the door to a fee hike at Quebec CEGEPs. In CEGEPs, there are two different kinds of fees that are charged to students. One fee is regulated (this doesn't mean frozen) by the MEQ, but the second fee is left to the discretion of every CEGEP administration and later approved by the ministry. Up to now 31 CEGEPs (out of 48) have presented financial plans for the year to the MEQ that include fee hikes.

Currently, the MEQ has approved 22 of these plans. It is easy to think the MEQ will allow others to raise their fees as well. Known hikes so far range between \$10 to 50\$ per semester per student. CEGEP is theoretically free, but this is becoming less and less true. For example, CEGEP Ste-Foy has raised both fees for three years in a row.

Even worse, the Fédération des CEGEP (consisting of all CEGEP administrations) wants the introduction of tuition fees similar to those at universities

(La Presse June 6, 2003).

According to Gaetan Boucher, president of the Federation, the CEGEP network will have to cope with a \$30 million deficit this year due to a lack of government reinvestment into the system. Originally \$400 million was supposed to be added to CEGEP funding, but the Liberals have cut this amount to \$0.

The Federation of CEGEPs has also announced it wants their schools to directly compete with universities to attract more private funding. "Quebec's 48 CEGEPs should begin their fall sessions this week and on Monday, with new aspirations about generating academic research and becoming less dependent on government funds....We want to be in competition with university researchers," wrote Boucher (Gazette, August 21st 2003).

This can drastically change the purpose of CEGEPs from a mandatory bridge for Quebec students from high school to university into a more community college type of arrangement, where they would provide an alternative to universities. The

result could be even higher fees for CEGEP students.

More worrisome news is that the provincial Liberals have appointed a Parliamentary Commission for this winter that will study the situation of university tuition fees. Historically, the Liberals have always been strong advocate of unfreezing these fees, which have remained the same for seven years.

There also seems to be a media campaign to help facilitate this move: it's no coincidence that McGill's principal is publically advocating of a tuition hike (Gazette May 14, 2003), or that La Presse held a summer long campaign strongly supporting unfreezing tuition.

These campaigns have undermined the fact that free tuition or reducing fees is possible. Many places around the world have zero tuition policies, including Ireland and Germany. And we don't have to even look across the Atlantic for an example of reduced fees. Newfoundland-Labrador decided last year to reduce their tuition fees.

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The Canadian Federation of Students unites over 475,000 students accross Canada. The over 40,000 strong membership of the Québec Component of the Canadian Federation of Students includes: the Post-Graduate Student Society of McGill University (PGSS Local 79), Graduates of Concordia University and Undergraduates of Concordia University (GSA Local 83, CSU Local 91).

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Looking beyond the blackboard

Student activists must keep in mind the broader threats of neo-liberalism

By YVES ENGLER

In mid August student organizations from around the world came together for a conference at the Université de Montréal to discuss “globalization’s” negative effects on post-secondary education.

Student groups want to block the World Trade Organization’s possible inclusion of education in the General Agreement on Trade in Services negotiations.

They worry that if GATS negotiations include education, this could seriously imperil public post-secondary institutions. If the WTO’s “non-discriminatory” clause came into effect it could require governments to provide at least equal amounts of funding to private enterprises (universities) as is given to public entities, irrespective of tuition and housing rates that are levied at private institutions.

This would seriously undermine public post-secondary education (PSE) around the world.

While blocking any inclusion of education in WTO or Free Trade Area of the America negotiations is certainly a laudable objective, defenders of public PSE need to broaden our analysis. Capitalist globalization harms public PSE in a myriad of ways.

What is commonly termed “globalization” is actually the process of restructuring the world economy in the interests of transnational corporations and international investors. It is being orchestrated through the ascendance of neo-liberal ideology.

Neo-liberalism can be summarized as free trade and investment, privatizations or commercialization and a reduction in social spending (corporate subsidies seem to be okay). Basically, neo-liberalism is an attack against social entitlements through the championing of capitalist entitlements and the capitalist marketplace.

All of which harms public PSE.

Attack of the acronyms

Central to the process of corporate globalization are “free” trade agreements, which in a more honest world would be known as free investment agreements. Agreements such as the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), WTO and the proposed Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA), reduce governments’ ability to fund social programs. These agreements give corporations and their wealthy shareholders increased power to demand lower taxes to “compete” with lower-taxed regions. This reduces governments’ ability to tax corporations and

their wealthy shareholders, thwarting the necessary redirection of this money toward social spending.

According to a Financial Times editorial, “since 1996... among the 30 industrialized countries of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development ... the average tax rate has fallen from 37.5 to 30.8 per cent ... The reason: Competition.” In Canada, then-finance minister Paul Martin reduced the corporate tax rate from 28 per cent to 21 per cent in 2000.

Governments have entered a race to attract businesses by driving down the rates at which they levy tax on companies.

Similarly, there has been a reduction in personal income taxes, primarily benefiting of the wealthy. These reductions are sometimes justified with references to ideology but proponents also often claim they attract corporations whose ‘skilled’ (high-paid employees) desire lower taxes.

While the business friendly Financial Times may praise a reduction in corporate taxation, the benefits to those of us not connected to the corporate world are less evident. In fact, a reduced tax base usually leads to a decline in spending on important social services like university funding.

According to Statistics Canada, between 1990 and 2000, government money as a percentage of the Post-Secondary Education (PSE) budget dropped from 69 per cent to 55 per cent.

The effects of a decline in funding are many, but most importantly, at least from a student’s (and probably societal) perspective, is a reduction in accessibility through rising tuition. In August the Globe&Mail reported that “undergraduate tuition climbed 175 per cent since 1990, while the Consumer price index rose by only 30 percent.” Families in the bottom quintile of Canadian wealth, for example, would have had to put aside 14 per cent of their after-tax income in 1990/91 to pay the costs of university tuition and fees, but by 1998/99 they would need to devote 23 per cent.

Basically, poor and working class

children are being told that unless they have terrific grades or that they are willing to incur huge debts, university is not for them.

It would be wrong to attribute reductions in government spending on public post-secondary education and tuition increases solely to reduced tax bases brought about by government’s need to “compete” for investment. Aside from promoting trade and investment agreements that weaken government’s ability to tax corporations, neo-liberal ideology opposes social spending (of course roads and “security” spending doesn’t seem to count).

At its core neo-liberalism is antagonistic to social entitlements, preferring capitalist entitlements. Neo-liberals oppose the concept of people’s universal right to PSE. Similarly, dominant discourse today is that the individual who benefits from education should pay for it. In this conception of society, PSE has little social value. PSE is only about getting a better corporate job.

In addition, neo-liberalism claims that the private sector does a better job in providing services, PSE included — privatization is central to neo-liberalism.

The public becomes private

After tuition increases, the replacement of government funding with private “donations” is one of the most obvious ways by which universities recoup lost public moneys. While some donors are alumni who earnestly care about their alma mater, in the majority of cases this money is coming from corporations and others with their own agenda.

Around 20 per cent of university financing now comes from private sources. For example, the Gazette reported that “in 2000, Canadian universities and teaching hospitals received \$161 million from industry for medical research and development, most of it from drug companies. This exceeded the total contribution from all provincial governments combined and was more than half the amount received from federal sources.”

Where this leads is clear. A recent

report by a team of Canadian professors concluded that “drug firms compromise research.” The National Post says “the contracts researchers sign with pharmaceutical companies routinely prevent the scientists from disclosing drug risks to patients and the public.”

Stop stealing our research!

Part of the rise of capitalist entitlement is the ubiquitous ‘privatizing of the commons’ which at universities has occurred through a shift of focus towards patenting research for business interests.

The effects of this change go beyond simply allowing universities to profit from research. It’s part of a process of shaping universities in the interests of the private sector. The commercialization of research pushes universities to focus on private profit instead of the public good. It’s also intertwined with an ideology that demands an increase in funding for research at the cost of other aspects of the university.

Money is being moved to areas that are more conducive to innovation (i.e. private profit) while students become increasingly neglected. David Robinson of the Canadian Association of University Teachers claims that, “in the current climate, research is weighted far more highly than teaching is, and it creates a culture where professors are rewarded for bringing in research and corporate funding.”

The numbers corroborate Robinson’s fear. The Globe&Mail reported that “in the decade ending in the 2000/2001 school year, the operating grants collected by universities for every full-time student dropped from \$8,607 to \$6,991 in constant year-2000 dollars. Over the same stretch of time, federal research grants rose by \$455 million a year, to \$1.51-billion.” Governments are choosing research funding over accessibility.

Essentially, then, there are three major components to neo-liberal globalization’s assault on public PSE: (1) A reduction in government tax bases due to trade and investment agreements that increase the power of corporations and investors to demand lower taxes thereby reducing public spending on education; (2) Neo-liberal ideology’s antagonism towards social entitlements, PSE included, and its advocacy of capitalist entitlements and marketplace; (3) The institutionalization of the process of privatization through making post-secondary education a commodity in WTO or FTAA agreements.

When we take to the streets in support of public PSE on November 20 while the FTAA ministers meet in Miami we should keep this in mind.

Sticking together

Why university and CEGEP must work in unison this fall

By TIM MCSORLEY

During the lazy, hazy days of the summer, the Charest government made an announcement that few people outside of school – or even outside of CEGEP, for that matter – noticed. They declared that although CEGEPS could not raise their tuitions, they would be allowed to raise the ancillary fees they charge to students.

This fall, the Association pour un Solidarité Syndical d’ÉtudiantEs (ASSÉ) is calling for a province-wide student strike in protest of these increasing fees beginning Oct. 24. We at the CFS-Q plan to back them every step of the way.

Since our membership consists of only university students, some may ask why we would put our energy behind a mainly CEGEP-centred campaign. University students will most likely ask similar questions about why they

should participate when we begin campaigning at McGill and Concordia. Why should university students care at all?

CEGEPs are viewed as post-secondary education, but in fact are similar to grade 12 in other provinces since it is necessary in order to attend university (unless you attend in Continuing Education). Dropping out of CEGEP in Quebec can be likened to dropping out of high school anywhere else in the country.

Now imagine high schools outside of Quebec decided to start charging an extra \$50 to be able to attend grade 12, and that the government told schools they could continue raising those fees as much as they like every year. The rate of accessibility to university would obviously suffer.

That is what is happening in CEGEPS.

The lowest extra amount any

CEGEP student can expect to pay in the fall semester is \$15; the highest is \$50. This isn’t a lot to begin with, but considering that public CEGEPS, on average, only charged around \$100 per semester until now, that’s a 20 to 50 per cent increase.

If that trend is followed every year, it is not an exaggeration to say CEGEP tuitions could soon increase to over \$500 a year, possibly to over \$1,000 in the next decade. Not much compared to university, but a lot for grade 12.

Of course, there is a more self-serving reason for university students to support the CEGEP struggle. It is highly likely that CEGEPS are the first step in a longer plan. Although universities in Quebec already have power over



their ancillary fees, they are itching to raise tuition. If the student movement – both CEGEP and university – simply roll over and accept these fee increases, the Liberals may see no problem in deregulating university tuition next.

At the end of August, Education Minister Pierre Reid announced that university tuition was safe, but at the same time he is organizing a committee to examine tuition rates over the winter. Such a mixed message shows he is testing the waters to see where the student movement is at.

Students must come out this fall in one loud voice to tell the government that education is not a privilege, but a right, and must be accessible to all.

Student aid programs must be reformed

By TOBY WHITFIELD

As tuition fees, books, and living expenses increase for Canadian students, they are forced to finance their education more and more through loans. The trend in university policy has been that students should work, and parents should contribute as much as possible, while the remaining portion can be funded by student loans. However, the government is very anxious to keep the loan-amount down, thus decreasing their costs of providing subsidized loans. As a result, they tend to decrease loan allowances based heavily on student income. The result is that students who can earn some money during the year have a great incentive to hide their income, ultimately leading to

faking their tax returns.

The loans programs for Canadian students, jointly administered by the provinces of which they are permanent residents and the Canadian government, are supposed to help fill this need.

In Quebec, we have a better situation than many other provinces. Tuition is lower (at least for Quebec resident students), and the government loans program is relatively more generous in providing bursaries than many other Canadian provinces. That said, though, a student in Quebec can see up to 30 per cent of their yearly earning deducted off of their loans. This may not seem like much, but for people who are earning little money, and have limited opportunities to earn money due to time con-

straints, it is a significant dent in the benefits a loan could provide.

Add to this the fact deductions are first taken off of a student’s total bursary amount and not off of their loan, and the appeal of working in order to alleviate the financial pressures of student life is decreased significantly.

All this adds up to a large incentive for students to hide their earnings. Doing this means under-reporting income on tax returns, a very serious offence. But when students do not have enough money to get by, it is more likely they will feel justified in lying about their income.

For students studying in Quebec but getting their loans from other provinces, the situation is even worse. For them, the higher out of province tuition fees, combined with less generous bursaries, makes it even more likely that they could benefit from hiding earnings. For a single student from Ontario earning \$1,000 and with no parental support, the loan

amount is around \$9,000. After tuition and books, this leaves very little money to live on, and creates the conditions under which becoming “creative” about income in order to get a higher student loan is likely.

There are a couple of simple things that the federal and provincial governments could do to alleviate this problem.

First and most importantly, if university educations were less expensive and students had more support, there would be less motivation to try and work the system by lying about income.

There is also the opportunity for loan programs to be administered in such a way that faking forms is less likely. Instead of taking the whole reduced assistance portion off of the bursary in the Quebec plan, the reduced amount should be split between the loan portion and the bursary portion. Although these administrative details of loan programs seem trivial, they can have serious consequences for many students.

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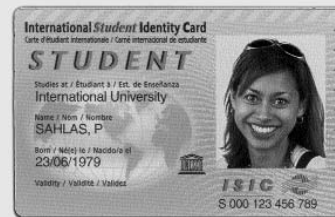
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The Infrastructure of Learning

Designing the ideal washroom

BY BRIANNA HERSEY

The building where I work is undergoing renovations. I sit on the committee charged with leading the project. We recently had to “scale down” the construction, resulting in prioritizing certain projects and eliminating others.

When discussing the design for the washroom facilities, it soon became apparent that my colleagues and I were speaking different languages. The discussion centred around the notion of “access” and what it means for McGill university to be an accessible space.

Early on in the project, it was agreed that a single unit, private, wheel chair accessible, gender neutral washroom would be placed on the first and third floors. The idea was embraced as key in improving the accessibility of the space.

The washroom facilities currently in use preclude students with disabilities, transgendered and gender variant students, and students with children from utilizing the washroom with ease and dignity.

Unfortunately, the commitment was short lived. I had assumed that accessibility was a priority for the committee. It turned out that access was a “non-essential” that could be cut when finances were tight. Access costs money – “too much” to those who already have access.

This sentiment of “access-but-only-if-its-cheap” is systemic within the university context.

McGill proudly states that 90% of its facilities are wheel-chair accessible. \$100,000 is allocated towards improving the accessibility of infrastructure each year.

Despite the appearance of commitment, many renovations on McGill campus proceed without consideration for the standards of accessibility. And when consideration is given, there is no common understanding of what an accessible space is.

“Access” to able bodied and gender normative folks usually means what they think the rest of us need. It usually means what is perceived to be accessible.

Access means something different depending on who you ask. To me, accessible infrastructure means a space in which everyone (regardless of ability, identity, or situation) is able to equally utilize the space with ease and dignity.

Unfortunately, to many, “access” is narrowly defined as a wheel chair ramp and a wheel chair accessible toilet within a gender segregated washroom.

The individuals who are defining “access” are not the individuals who need it. The manner in which people use the washroom varies tremendously. The only means of accommodating every person in their unique situation is to have a private, wheel chair accessible, gender neutral washroom clearly marked in every building.

The context in which learning occurs can tell you a lot about what kind of learning you will be doing. The fact that I can only use the washroom on the 5th floor in a building where my class is in the basement tells me that my experience as a gender variant person with a disability is not worth learning about.

The infrastructure of learning is directly linked to our ability to equally participate and benefit from educational institutions. My identity is complex. However, the fact that I am something other than a gender variant person who is chronically ill means nothing when the infrastructure of the every-day prevents me from thinking and being this.

How am I supposed to learn about the “Politics of Socialization” in a building that doesn’t permit me to use the washroom? The anxiety associated with being in an inaccessible space is consuming.

It is for this reason that a common understanding of access needs to be developed and employed. And this is

what the building committee in my work place charged me with doing. It was my job to put down on paper concrete terms of what it means to be an accessible structure.

I quickly discovered that I am not the first to be assigned this task. The Office for Students with Disabilities published a comprehensive booklet in 1996 entitled McGill Standards for a Barrier-Free Campus. It clearly states, “A barrier-free washroom shall be provided at the main entrance level of every McGill building” (25). So, what’s the problem?

Although standards of accessibility exist, it is the economic argument that wins every fight. The integration of persons with disabilities and transgendered and gender variant persons is too costly.

I reject this argument. The money is there – it is simply a matter of priority.

As for the building renovations where I work, they have yet to begin.

When I reported back to the committee, I told my colleagues, “How come it is a priority for you to be able to pee with ease and dignity, and not me?” The decision is still pending, but I’m hopeful that our building will be a model of accessibility that allows everyone to equally access the infrastructure of learning.

Brianna Hersey is a student at McGill University. She works in a building on campus. Brianna’s thoughts reflect her individual experience and situation. Brianna speaks on behalf of herself.

Wealth Correlated with Post-Secondary Education Participation: Statistics Canada

Families on the lower end of the socioeconomic scale have significantly lower participation rates in post-secondary education, according to a study released today by Statistics Canada.

“The upfront cost of post-secondary education is clearly an insurmountable obstacle for thousands of Canadian families,” said Ian Boyko, National Chairperson of the Canadian Federation of Students. “Without a national system of needs based grants and significant reductions in tuition fees, our public system of higher education is becoming more elitist every year.”

The report entitled Access, Persistence, and Planning: First results from the post-secondary education participation survey documents an 83% participation rate for young people (aged 18 to 24) whose estimated family earnings exceeded \$80,000. Those from lower socio-economic strata had progressively lower participation rates. 67% of youth from families earning between \$55,000 and \$80,000 had some post-secondary education background, and only 55% of youth from families earning less than \$55,000 had some college, university, or CEGEP experience.

What is the Canadian Federation of Students? CFS-Over 475,000 Students

The Canadian Federation of Students exists to fight against high tuition fees and for better access to post-secondary education, for adequate financial aid for students, and for more democracy in post-secondary education. Our efforts don’t end at the local or provincial levels, we also focus on global issues. The Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) and the World Trade Organisation (WTO) threaten access to education, health care and other social programs. The CFS has been on the front lines in the fight against the privatisation and corporatisation of education. The most “lucrative” areas which private interests seek to penetrate in Québec and in Canada are health care, education and water. Together those sectors are thought to be worth \$3 trillion per year on a global level. Private interests are attempting, through The WTO, to “liberalise” those sectors in order to open them up to extract profits from them, to the detriment of society as a whole. Tuition in Canada has increased in some cases more than 10 times higher than the rate of inflation over the past decade and average student debt has risen to \$25,000 upon graduation (up from \$8,000), as Canada has followed the lead of the U.S. and the advice of the IMF in privatising education. We will continue to apply criticism to and oppose such the privatisation of education.

In Quebec, our membership includes over 40,000 students from the Post Graduate Students Society of McGill University (PGSS) - Local 79, the Graduate Students Association of Concordia University (GSA) - Local 83, and the Concordia Student Union of Concordia University (CSU) - Local 91. The CFS-Q also works with many grass roots groups, unions and other student associations. Through campaigns and mobilisation, students have won battles against privatisation and have forced the Quebec government to reinvest \$1.1 billion dollars into post-secondary education. Students have come together to support issues here in Montreal, in Quebec and around the globe, using information as a tool to inform students and to encourage their action. Our primary goal remains to make education in Québec fully public and fully accessible, through full government funding, lower tuition and higher bursaries.



www.education-action.net

Holding the mayor of Montreal to his promise

Tremblay tries to pull a fast one on reduced student bus fares

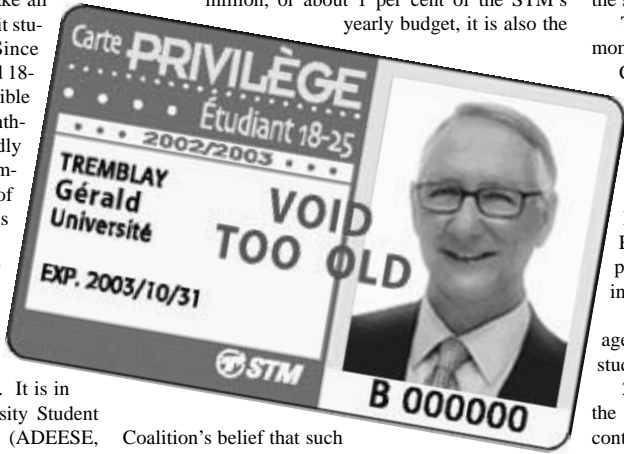
BY IVES LEVESQUE

During the City of Montreal electoral campaign of 2001, Mayor-to-be Gerald Tremblay promised the students of Montreal that “we will make all full time students eligible to the mass transit student fare, regardless of their age”. Since January of 2002, all full-time students aged 18-25 living on the island of Montreal are eligible for a 50% reduction on the cost of the monthly pass. In April 2003, the STM proudly reported an 8.3 million increase in the number of transit users on the island of Montreal, attributable to the success of this program.

While students recognize Mayor Tremblay’s efforts, there remains an obvious discrimination against full time students aged 25 and over, who account for 35% of full time students currently studying in one of Montreal’s universities. It is in this context that the Coalition of University Student Associations of the Island of Montreal (ADEESE, AEP, CSU, FAECUM, PGSS, and SSMU) was formed, after it became clear that the Tremblay administration would not hold its promise to Montreal’s university students.

Including over-25 students in the reduced fare pro-

gram would benefit the STM with a considerable increase in ridership, as well as contributing to the general awareness for mass transit usage, a viable solution to urban environmental issues. At a cost of \$5 to \$7 million, or about 1 per cent of the STM’s yearly budget, it is also the



Coalition’s belief that such a measure is affordable.

Consider that student debt increases when a student reaches graduate studies, and that a university student, regardless of the level of studies, earns an average gross annual income of \$12,123.73. Combined with

the knowledge that full time students cannot work more than 15 hours per week without seriously compromising academic performance, it is difficult to believe that a 26-year-old student has the means to pay the same transit fee as a full time worker.

The campaign recently has gathered considerable momentum, leading up to the press conference held at City Hall on the evening of the first City Council meeting of 2003-04. A petition of 7,300 names was presented, and extensive media coverage was received, with live interviews on RDI, 690, and Radio-Canada, as well as coverage in La Presse, Le Devoir, The Gazette, and Le Montreal Metropolitain. Coalition spokesperson Jonathan Harvey also took part in City Council’s question period, where City officials simply reiterated their intention to fulfill this promise within their mandate. The Coalition has asked that the abolition of the age criteria for reduced rate bus passes for full time students be included in

2004 budget discussions and that the city provide the money needed for the implementation. We will continue to pressure the STM and the City of Montreal until all full-time students of the Island of Montreal are afforded the reduced transit fare.

Ives Levesque is president of the Post-Graduate Student Society at McGill University.



Concordia Graduate Student Association:

The GSA represents graduate student interests on all committees and decision-making bodies of the University. These committees need graduate student input, particularly during these times of cutbacks and restraint. The GSA is a democratic organization and your participation is essential.

All graduate students are welcome to visit and use the facilities and services available at the Grad House, located at 2030 Mackay. The GSA provides a computer lab, secretarial services, a study room, and a lounge with pool table, cable TV, fridge and microwave oven. The GSA also provides financial assistance for student projects and conference subsidies.

GSA hours: M to F from 10am to 11pm, and Sat and Sun: from Noon to 6pm. Tel. 848-7900, e-mail: gsa@alcor.concordia.ca.



Post-Graduate Students' Society of McGill : Evolve & get involved!

When you register as a graduate student or postdoc at McGill, you also become a member of the PGSS. The PGSS is McGill's largest contingency of researchers, students and teaching assistants.

The PGSS strives to provide a vehicle for the academic and ethical rights of its members in the administrative and political arena of McGill. We also work to improve quality of life on campus.

The key to the success of PGSS is the participation of its members in its constant evolution. We invite you to share your voice, get involved and evolve with us.

For more information call 398-3756 or visit Thompson House, 3650 McTavish http://www.pgss.mcgill.ca



Concordia Student Union:

The Concordia Student Union is the voice of all undergraduate students at Concordia - regardless of faculty, full or part-time status, or age!

We serve as the primary liaison between the student body and the University administration and faculty, as well as other universities, student associations, and the government. We also provide valuable student services and student space, organize events, and are responsible for most student clubs and associations on campus.

If you need something, be it serious or not so serious, and you're not sure where to go, stop by the CSU!

**Concordia Student Union
SGW - Hall Building, 6th Floor (H-637) LOY - Campus Centre Building (SC-115) http://csu.qc.ca/
Main Reception: (514) 848-7474**

AUTONOMOUS YOUTH ASSOCIATION/ REGROUPEMENT AUTONOME DES JEUNES (RAJ)

RAJ is an autonomous, grassroots, youth-based organization concerned with the social, political, economic and cultural interests of people between 18 and 35. Our group is composed of young people excluded from the job markets, students, workers and activists, among others. As such, we hope to provide a space for youth to organise on issues of employment, unionisation, access to education, feminism, anti-globalisation, anti-capitalism and many, many more. We believe in a society free from sexism, racism, homophobia, ableism, or any other kind of discrimination. We realise the importance of mobilisation and direct action in our struggle for a better and more just world. Contact us for more info on campaigns, actions or to become a member:

http://www.naga.ca/~raj/
tel : (514) 278-2211 fax (514) 278-6211



Tuition goes up, quality of living goes down

By JOANNA REES

Completing a graduate degree is getting tougher and tougher each year for Canadian students. Tuition fees are rising and funding is being cut.

"Graduate students are not getting enough funding, completing the degree is not an easy experience for most," emphasizes Judi Stymest, the Director of the McGill University Student Aid department.

The rising price of tuition is turning graduate degrees into an elite commodity and seriously hurting the quality of life of graduate students. Quebec graduate students pay an average of \$3, 800 in tuition while out of province students studying in Quebec pay up to \$6,000 in annual fees.

Moreover, graduate tuition continues to rise despite a government ordered tuition freeze. Tuition is raised through university ancillary fees that allow post-secondary institutions the power to

increase the fees despite the tuition freeze.

The national average for tuition raises is between three and five percent annually, with graduate and PhD students at the University of Montreal facing the biggest increase: a tuition raise of \$434 per session.

The length of time needed to complete a Master's degree is also becoming a problem for perspective graduate students. For graduate students, the average time it takes to complete the degree is eight sessions, two years longer than the standard textbook program. Doctoral students take an average of 15 sessions to complete their degrees, an average of six more sessions then expected to finish their program.

Consequently, when embarking on graduate studies students must have the resources to pay an average of three years tuition and living costs. The lack of available graduate funding further

prolongs the time students need to complete their program, as most students only receive an average \$500 in institutional funding per year. Although funds are available for teaching assistant positions and research fellowships, the number of jobs available is limited.

Due to the difficulty in completing a degree, one third of all Master's students drop out of their program, with half of all doctoral students doing the same. Some graduate student drop-outs can be explained by the lack of adequate day care for students with families. Only an average of one in ten students who applies for university subsidized daycare receives a place for their child and must wait an average of three years on a waiting list.

Much of the institutional decrease in funding is a result of Jean Chrétien's \$10 billion reduction in transfer payments to provinces for post-secondary education. The decrease in federal funding has had

a giant effect on Canada's post-secondary education system.

Canadian universities have suffered a loss of 4,000 full time teaching staff between 1991 and 1998, a raise of 277 per cent in average student debt between 1990 and 1999, and a 14 per cent drop in federal post-secondary cash contributions.

Considering students in countries like Denmark and Germany receive fully subsidized post-secondary education, Canada has a long way to go in providing accessible graduate education since most students receive little or no funding at all. Could the Canadian government not lower or erase tuition fees and put more money into scholarships and grants?

Statistics used are available in: Elysia Pitt, *Graduate Student Funding, Concordia Graduate Students Association, 2002.* www.gsa.concordia.ca

Keeping a clean record



Plagiarism continues to plague students

By SARA COLLIN

Every year hundreds of university students are forced through a stressful and anxiety-ridden process that could potentially damage their academic career for life.

Plagiarism is described differently depending on what school you are attending, but it generally refers to the use of someone else's work as your own, without proper acknowledgment, for academic gain. Each year, both Concordia and McGill charge hundreds of students with plagiarism. In fact, there are so many plagiarism cases in front of the Concordia academic hearing panels that, as of this past August, any new hearing cannot be scheduled before January or February, 2004, because of an extreme backlog.

Some of the accused are guilty, some not. But the amount of cases, the confusion that students feel when they find out they've been charged and the sometimes complicated process that follows has forced universities to set up student advocacy centres at both campuses.

McGill was the first to develop an advocacy centre through the McGill Legal Information Clinic in 1989 called the Student Advocacy Programme. Run by volunteer law students, the programme's mandate is to facilitate discussion and negotiation between McGill students, university officials, and administrators as well as help students who wish to file a complaint against a university member. It also advises and represents students that are charged with disciplinary offenses, like plagiarism.

In 1991, Concordia followed McGill's lead and opened the Student Advocate Program which is run through Advocacy and Support Services. Its

advocates are not law students, but are trained Concordia students. Concordia's program offers the same services as its McGill counterpart as well as much more, including help with student requests and grade re-evaluations.

In this past year, after years of informally advocating on behalf of many students, the Concordia Student Union opened the CSU Advocacy Centre. The CSU centre provides many of the same services as the two others. As well, it can help students who are faced with issues that fall outside of the university community.

Different explanations, same charges

The CSU service helped about 500 students last year with small and big cases; the Concordia Student Advocate Program estimates they opened almost 120; and the McGill service averages 150 a year. Though their numbers

may differ, the administrators of all three services agree that plagiarism cases are increasing with the years.

"I think the reason the number of disciplinary cases are increasing is because alertness is increasing," said McGill's programme director Andrew Bryan. He said that because teachers are more alert to plagiarism, more students are being charged even when they did not intend to plagiarize. Many times, he said, a student will be charged with plagiarism even if they simply made an editing error or handed in a paper with sloppy attribution.

CSU director Jean-Marc Bouchard and Concordia's advocacy program administrative assistant Angela Ghabban agree there seems to be an increase in the number of charges being

laid. To counter this trend, both Concordia services have recently created presentations and workshop meant to inform new and current students about the meaning of plagiarism, how to avoid it and what the sanctions are. "We want to get to the students before they write their papers," said Ghabban. Ghabban said she doesn't think plagiarism is a bigger problem at Concordia than it is in other Canadian universities. She believes the high number of charges is caused partly by genuine mistakes and problems resulting from the increased use of internet sources.

Bouchard, however, has a different take on the increase of plagiarism charges. He said that, though Concordia

heavily recruits international students, it has not yet recognized cultural differences with respect to word appropriation.

"Concordia simply takes for granted that every student that walks through its doors should know how to write a proper research paper," he said. "Concordia has chosen to punish international students who are ignorant of the rules of Western research, rather than take the opportunity to teach them."

Whatever they believe to be the root cause, all three advocacy workers believe that prevention and awareness are key to reducing the number of plagiarism charges laid each year. Though sanctions are much stricter at Concordia, a plagiarism charge, if upheld, can lead to failed classes and tarnished academic careers. Students beware. And be aware.

Sara Collin is a student advocate at the CSU Advocacy Centre and a freelance journalist.

Let the banks handle it: Libs

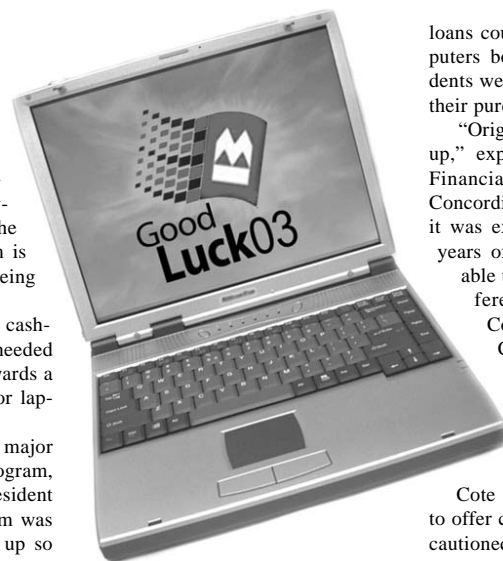
By TIM MCSORLEY

The Quebec government isn't making life any easier for university students.

In June, the government announced it would be "seriously reviewing" the provincially-run computer loan program. The result is that the entire program is suspended, with little hope of being restarted.

The loan program provided cash-strapped students with much needed funds for computers: \$2,000 towards a desktop computer and \$3,000 for laptops.

The government cited two major reasons for cancelling the program, which benefited 6,000 Quebec resident students last year. The first claim was that since the program was set up so



loans could only be put towards computers bought at student co-ops, students weren't getting the best price for their purchases.

"Originally that's how it was set up," explained Roger Cote, head of Financial Aide and Awards at Concordia University, "but eventually it was expanded." After the first few years of the program, students were able to buy computers at many different stores, including the Concordia computer store, said Cote.

The government's second claim was that the service they provided was redundant with services provided by many banks. While

Cote agreed that banks have begun to offer computer-loans to students, he cautioned that differences in the appli-

cation system could result in fewer students being able to take advantage of the program.

When a student applies for financial aide, said Cote, the only thing that is taken into consideration is his or her financial situation. Applying at a bank is a different story: they run credit checks on all applicants as well. If a student has no credit history (ie no credit card or loans to date) they most likely will not be eligible for the program. If a student has already defaulted on a previous loan or had credit card problems, they probably shouldn't even bother applying.

The result? Last year, nearly 200 students received cash for computers through the Concordia Financial Aide office. This year students will have to look somewhere else – and who knows what the banks will say.

less of political, philosophical, or religious opinions, and work together with the CFSQ for a post-secondary system that is Free, Accessible, of Quality, Non-Discriminatory, and Public. Keep a look-out for joint CFSQ-ASSU actions and events in 2003.

For more information on ASSE, check out: www.asse-solidarite.qc.ca or call: 390-0110.



What is ASSE?

The CFSQ works closely with the Association for Solidarity among Student Unions (ASSU, or ASSE - L'Association pour une Solidarité Syndicale Étudiante), a student organization that formed in 2001 and has student members from seven francophone CÉGÉPs and four universities in the province of Québec, including the Concordia undergraduates. The ASSU stands for students' rights regard-

What can you get for 92,290?

By TIM MCSORLEY

In a recent Globe & Mail article, Rick Carrick reported that within the next 15 to 18 years, university tuition costs could reach \$92,292 for a four year bachelor's degree. Ruckus decided to look into what else, apart from four years of education, this amount of dough could get you:

168 Bachelor's Degrees from customdegrees.com at \$546.63 each (US\$399.00)

70 top-of-the-line Athlon Notebooks from Futureshop at \$1299.99 each

419 Palm m130 palm pilots from Futureshop at \$219.99

36 years worth of \$0.99 pizza (six slices a day)

1,230 acres of Rainforest at \$75 an acre through Adopt-An-Acre

617 years worth of Globe and Mail subscriptions

4 110-day Around the World Cruises from Cunard Cruises (using www.vacationstogo.com discount)

13,592 piano neckties at \$6.79 from ebay.com

13,492 "Sloth loves Chunk" Goonies t-shirt from ebay.com at \$6.84 (US\$4.99)

5,613 copies of "Spaced Out: The Very Best of William Shatner & Leonard Nimoy" CD from ebay.com at \$16.44 each (US\$12.00)

3,418 cases of beer (at 27\$), or enough beer for 37 years if you drink 6 per day.

3,577 hardcover copies of "Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix" by J.K. Rowling

8,390 boxes of condoms at about \$11 a box

11,536 kilograms of honey roasted peanuts at \$0.80 per 100g

HAPPY SAVING!!

If you believe that one...

After only 5 months in office, students are already finding it hard to trust the Charest government

By PHIL ILJEVSKI

Business as usual?

On August 25, under intense pressure from all quarters of the Quebec student movement, Quebec Education Minister Pierre Reid announced that tuition for Quebec residents would remain frozen for the rest of their mandate.

But keeping in mind the recent cuts to \$5 a day daycare, the decision to allow CEGEPs to increase their ancillary fees, the dismantling of the provincial student computer loans program, the further rise of university ancillary (user) fees as well as out of province and international student tuition fees, we remain skeptical.

On the one hand the Liberals are stating that they will keep their promise to freeze tuition fees until the end of their mandate, but on the other hand they are planning a parliamentary commission dealing with "who should pay for education in Québec." Many students are asking why a commission is even necessary, unless the Liberals intend to break their word.

Former Québec Liberal education critic Jacques Chagnon, in an interview with Ruckus Magazine last year, expressed his admiration for the education policies of former Ontario premier Mike Harris' Progressive Conservative government. Under the Harris Government, tuition fees rose higher than ever before in the history of the province of Ontario, an average increase of 250 per cent. During the interview, Chagnon clearly expressed his desire to raise tuition fees in Québec. Although Chagnon was not awarded the post of Education Minister in Charest's new government, he is a member of Charest's cabinet.

Outside of government, various lobby groups, including CREPUQ (Conférence des Recteurs et des Principaux des Universités du Québec - the council of rectors and principals in Québec) and the Conseil du Patronat du Québec (CPQ), a business community lobbying group, which has strong ties to the Liberal Government, have advocated for higher post-secondary tuition fees.

The CPQ is strongly in favour of the tax cuts the Liberals have promised to deliver. They see "low tuition fees" as an obstacle, as funding targeted to keep tuition fees frozen could be used to fund tax cuts instead.

"Tuition fees (for all Québec residents) should be

increased to the Canadian average," stated CPQ Vice-President Communications Ms. Lebel in an interview with Ruckus. That would result in Québec students paying \$4,025 per year plus ancillary fees. Ms. Lebel said that the CPQ will be bringing the recommendation to Québec's National Assembly, and will also call for an increase in loans. Lebel said individuals in Québec pay the highest taxes in Canada, and that low tuition fees are a "burden on the tax system." The CPQ wants more funding to be allocated to specialized private trade schools which better serve the needs of business.

'Politics as usual?'

The Liberals are clearly attempting to pull a "bait and switch" as they claim the money is no longer available to fund education because of the former government's mismanagement.

During their election campaign last Spring, the Liberals sought to clearly distance themselves from Mario Dumont's Action Démocratique de Québec (Dumont promised to raise tuition fees by indexing them to inflation) by promising an increase in funding for healthcare and education and sternly promising to keep the freeze on tuition fees in Québec throughout their mandate if elected. The Parti Québécois were making these same promises.

Charest campaigned as, "No Dumont-Lite." He deviated from his conservative past by courting the progressive vote (typically a PQ constituency), promising to fully fund education and healthcare. However, just a month after taking power, Charest's Liberals stated that no ministry would be safe from cutbacks.

Students must prepare to face-off against the Québec Liberals and defend the victories of student movement. It is time to start questioning the integrity of the Liberal Party. At least one can clearly state that the Liberals failed miserably in their role as Québec's opposition party by not keeping proper tabs on what the former Government was doing. Although the question

remains; why was the deficit underreported, the bigger question is; why were the Liberals party to it? They certainly had access to the same financial records that the Government had. It is the duty of the Opposition Party to be a watchdog.

Cheapest Tuition Fees in Canada?

The continuous mantra coming from the mainstream media, CREPUQ, and the CPQ is that Québec universities charge the lowest tuition fees in all of Canada. The fact is that tuition fees have skyrocketed in Québec.

When we in the Liberal Party propose something, we mean what we say and we do what we have committed to doing during the last election campaign.

-JeanCharest, Sunday Aug. 17, 2003, Québec Liberal Youth Wing Convention.

McGill U studying Medicine pay \$10,518 per year in tuition fees, plus ancillary fees. For Dentistry, they pay \$17,860 per year, plus ancillary fees. Seldom mentioned in the debate over tuition fees, is that Québec universities have circumvented the tuition fee freeze by drastically raising ancillary fees (fees such as registration fees, graduation fees, etc.).

Statistics Canada reports that, "Undergraduate students will pay an average of \$623 in additional compulsory fees for the coming academic year, up 9.0 per cent and average additional fees will increase in every province." At McGill, full-time students pay \$163.50-\$196.50 in registration charges, \$85.65 per term for an information technology charge, application fees are \$60, and when all such fees are tabulated they amount to the highest ancillary fees for any university in Canada.

Concordia University charges \$733.80 in ancillary fees. It is important to note that when the chorus starts ringing about how little Québec students pay in tuition



at \$1,600 per year, no full-time student in Québec actually pays \$1,600, the average student really pays over \$2,200 per year in tuition fees.

Access denied

According to Statistics Canada, throughout the 1980s there were no significant differences in participation rates for post-secondary education between those from the lowest socio-economic backgrounds and middle class Canadians. However, after tuition fees were deregulated and increased in many provinces, throughout the 1990s, a pronounced gap began to develop.

A recent Statistics Canada study found that by 1998 individuals from families in the highest income group are 2.5 times more likely to attend university than those from families with low incomes. Another study found that after medical school tuition fees were deregulated at the University of Western Ontario, participation from lower income students was cut in half.

In the latest Statistics Canada report on tuition fees, it states that from 1990/91 to 1999/2000, undergraduate tuition fees rose an average of 9.6 per cent per year. Increases in user fees (tuition fees and ancillary fees) have far outpaced the rise in the Consumer Price Index during the same time period.

The more we move away from accessible education with low tuition fees, the more we move towards "a race to the bottom," and an American-style post-secondary education system in which those who come from more affluent families are much more likely to attend university and those who come from less affluent families are much less likely to attend university.

When the Liberals seek to make good on another promise, cutting taxes for high income earners (while at the same time increasing many user fees such as Québec Hydro fees) will they renege on the promise to keep the freeze on tuition fees throughout their mandate? That will depend on the force of opposition from students.

To find out what you can do, check out the action plan at: www.education-action.net

Working together for a SUSTAINABLE CAMPUS

By JENN DAVIS

It's a bird! It's a plane! Wait, no – it's something new happening at Concordia University! It's a rebirth of idealism, creativity, and empowerment led by those who dare to be the change they envision.

These individuals have come together from many backgrounds – over 100 students and faculty from all different academic disciplines and levels of study, administrators from different sectors, and support staff from various service departments – to converge on community issues passionately felt. We call ourselves the Sustainable Concordia Project (SCP).

This student-driven sustainability initiative began in July 2002, quickly generating university-wide participation with the painstaking work of Geneva Guerin and Melissa Garcia Lamarca, who gathered the expertise of the campus community to address pressing global issues affecting our local community.

The SCP is founded on the '3 pillars of sustainability', which recognizes sustainability as simultaneous ecological integrity, economic prosperity and social equity. Sustainable ecological integrity involves recognizing the planet as a closed system with finite resources, and requires living within the carrying capacity of ecosystems in such a manner that human activities, resource consumption and waste production do not undermine the ability of the planet to sustain the well-being of all life.

Sustainable economic prosperity requires a triple bottom line approach that considers economic, ecological, and social criteria in economic decision-making, which moves beyond solely the allocation of wealth, incorporating scale and distribution of wealth as well.

Sustainable social equity requires a fair and equitable distribution of wealth that meets basic needs, which respects human rights, and which includes broad and meaningful participation by individuals in decision-making in order to nurture community vitality. This ultimately makes it possible to meet today's needs in a globally equitable manner, without compromising the ability for future generations to meet their own needs.

Hoping to create a more sustainable Concordia, the SCP is strategizing on many levels. Our first project was to conduct a sustainability assessment of the

university, which was successfully completed this summer. It is among the most comprehensive analyses to date, painting an in-depth and holistic perspective of the school's ecological, economic, and social activities. This assessment includes recommendations on how to improve Concordia's sustainability in each of the researched areas.

The long-term goals of the SCP include the development of implementation strategies for our assessment recommendations, as well as establishing a framework for which subsequent campus sustainability assessments will be produced every two years to measure progress or regress of the state of Concordia University's sustainability. GEO 398 is a new course this year, created to meet this goal.

This September the SCP is launching the sustainability assessment, and beginning the long trek towards sustainability.

We have already begun work on some of our assessment recommendations. For example, we are exploring alternative fuels for the shuttle bus fleet, like bio-diesel – which is being piloted in lawn mower engines – and trying to expand our electric vehicle fleet. Other innovations are under way around the university:

no-flush urinal cakes, the Greening of Mackay, and drafting nonexistent or lacking university policy on the environment, sustainability, and corporate social responsibility.

The SCP is also extending to other Montreal universities to develop a unified front on paper purchasing policy, which could bring ethically purchased, recycled, post-consumer paper to 14 of Quebec's universities.

An excellent way to plug into all of this excitement is through the Sierra Youth Coalition's Sustainable Campuses Conference being held at McGill and Concordia this October. The conference will feature speakers such as Elizabeth May and Bill Rees; workshops, lectures, and panel discussions will cover everything from intensive university auditing, and sustainable engineering, to social activism, not to mention bike maintenance workshops, and copeira; you can even take a trip to the dump!

And this is just the beginning...

Jenn Davis is a volunteer with the Sustainable Concordia Project

