

MARCH FOR A REAL TUITION FEE FREEZE

A Parliamentary Commission will begin in Québec City on Feb. 17th that will deal with post-secondary education funding in Québec. One of the proposals being put forward is to raise tuition fees to \$4,300/yr.

Feb. 17th Québec City

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To get around the tuition fee freeze, universities have resorted to hyper-inflating ancillary fees, so much so that some schools charge more than \$800 in extra fees.

We demand a real tuition freeze which includes ancillary fees & prohibits hikes to Out-of-Province & International students' fees. We also demand full Government funding of education.

CANADIAN FEDERATION OF STUDENTS

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 **Ruckus**
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Charest wants to reengineer the state: at what cost?



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By TIM MCSORLEY

It is rare that community groups from across the spectrum unite for a common goal. Although all may be working towards a more just, equal and democratic society, each is often more occupied in their own sector to engage in a substantial, formal alliance in a common battle. Even less often do we see the groups uniting with the more institutionalised labour movement, particularly since unions have such great difficulty organizing alliances amongst themselves.

Over the past 10 months, however, we have seen such a network develop across Quebec. The amount of cross-sector organizing and alliance building has-n't been seen since 1972, when the major Quebec unions formed the Common Front in order to increase their bargaining power and establish the strong labour movement that still exists in Quebec today.

The reason for this sudden surge in co-operation? The policies of the Quebec Liberal government. So far he has managed to move in directions counter to what health care workers, daycare workers, low- and middle-income families, labour organizers, teachers, and others had hoped for when the Liberals announced during their election campaign that they would revitalize Quebec society.

It seems that the only two groups in Quebec who have been satisfied with the government's moves have been the Conseil du Patronat and the Montreal Economic Institute – two right-leaning institutions that are pushing for the further privatization of social services and for lower taxes.

Although post-secondary education has been rel-

atively free from government changes for now, there have been some worrisome changes over the past few months, and signs point to worse events in the future.

Over the summer, the government suspended its computer loan program, claiming banks provide the same services already, making it redundant – but unlike the government run program, banks often run credit checks which can eliminate students who need the help the most.

The Federation of CEGEPs, a coalition of administrators, floated the idea of implementing CEGEP tuition fees – a radical move considering CEGEPs have until now been considered “free.” And although the government refused their request, only a few weeks later it essentially deregulated CEGEP ancillary fees, which until now have been subject to government approval. This was a significant move, considering pressure had already been put on the government to ensure free CEGEP tuition and to begin regulation university ancillary fees.

In October, the big bomb was dropped. Since elected, Education Minister Pierre Reid had vowed not to raise tuition fees. But in a secret document leaked to the student union at the Université de Montreal, it was revealed that one of the plans included in the blueprint to re-engineer the state was to raise tuition after one year in office.

The Education Ministry was quick to deny this, claiming it was one of a possibility of scenarios, and that no raise in tuition was forecast.

Feb. 17th, though, signals the beginning of a par-

liamentary commission on funding for post-secondary education. Although Reid has said that tuition hikes will not be on the table, the Conseil du Patronat and various university administrations have said they will be asking for a raise in tuition rates. As we have seen with daycare prices, which rose from 5 to 7\$ this month, and the hike in electricity rates, both of which the government initially claimed would not happen, a sudden change of heart may not be so far off.

Over the next month or so, various union and community groups are planning demonstrations throughout the province to denounce Charest's plans. In order for them to succeed, students need to be out there with them as well. The rights and services they are fighting to protect directly affect students as well, particularly considering many of us are living below the poverty line and trying to pay for our education at the same time.

Like Mike Harris in Ontario and Gordon Campbell in B.C., Charest is looking to divide and conquer: groups that do not stand up and have a voice will be the first to see their sectors “re-engineered.” Although this means we as students need to have a strong voice on education issues, it also means we must work with all sectors of society, telling Charest that social services are not simply individual commodities that can be sold to the highest bidder, but, rather, are a network of essential services and that access to them is a right for all and not a privilege for the few.

Like Mike Harris in Ontario and Gordon Campbell in B.C., Charest is looking to divide and conquer.

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The Canadian Federation of Students-Québec Component (CFS-Q) is a non-profit federation of Québec student unions. Membership includes: the Post-Graduate Student Society of McGill University (PGSS Local 79), Graduates and Undergrads of Concordia University (GSA Local 83, CSU Local 91).

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Do you know who's running your school?



By ROBERT GREEN

A controversial proposal is being considered by a sub-committee of McGill's Board of Governors (BoG). It is a plan to reform the very structure of the BoG itself and it sheds new light on the increasingly corporate culture in the governance of Canadian universities.

The proposal itself, which was recently presented to McGill's senate by BoG chair Robert Rabinovich, would see the number of BoG seats reduced from 45 to 18. While this move would eliminate two of the four student seats on McGill's BoG, the percentage of student representation would actually increase very slightly from 9 to 11 percent.

But beyond the issue of whether these reforms increase or decrease representation, students need to be asking the more fundamental question of why is this reform is being proposed in the first

place and what are the forces behind this proposal?

In making his presentation to McGill's senate, Rabinovitch's explanation was extremely revealing. His only justification for the proposal was that it reflected a trend in the corporate world for boards to be “smaller and more efficient”. In other words the proposal had no origins within the university community itself. It was not the result of calls made by students, faculty, staff, or even alumni. It was simply the product of the changing culture in the outside corporate world.

Herein lies the real issue for students concerned about BoG reform. Governing boards are structured in such a way as to marginalize not only the collective voice of students, but indeed the entire university community itself. Constituencies of the community such as students, faculty, staff, and alumni are

given token representation, if any at all, while the great majority of seats are reserved for members of the corporate elite. We should not be surprised then that decisions taken by university governing boards are often more reflective of corporate values like ‘efficiency’ than they are of values held to be of importance by the community like ‘democracy’, ‘fairness’, or ‘academic freedom’.

Not only do these structures ensure that the governance of public universities is anything but public, they, along with the drastic cuts to public funding, make conditions ripe for conflicts of interest to emerge. Consider for example that banks profit every time fees are raised and students as a group become more indebted. Are we really to believe that bank executives sitting on university governing boards could consider the question of raising fees in a disinterested fashion? Or, how about biotech company

executives deciding on whether the humanities or the sciences should receive a new building? Are we to believe that in making such a decision the company's interests will be left behind?

Clearly, if we want to understand the decisions or proposed reforms of a given university's governing board, we cannot ignore the growing linkages existing between governing boards and the corporate world. In order for students to see just which corporate interests are represented on their university's BoG we have provided a list of the corporations represented on McGill and Concordia's BoG's. The Canadian Association of University Teachers has also produced a more comprehensive list of corporate linkages on all university governing boards across Canada available at <http://www.caut.ca/english/publications/linkages/default.asp>

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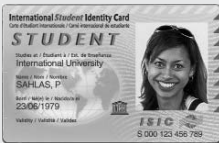
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Our civil liberties are slipping away: CAUT

By ROBERT GREEN

Ask your average Canadian what Canada's role has been in the US led "war on terror" and they will probably respond with comments about our participation in Afghanistan or our lack of participation in Iraq. Canada's anti-terrorism laws may be mentioned but few are aware of the specifics of these laws and the potential threats they pose to civil liberties.

A coalition of groups has come together to change this by launching a website – www.WarOnTerrorismWatch.ca – dedicated to monitoring the measures Canada and other governments have taken in the name of the "war on terrorism." Spearheading this coalition and hosting the site is none other than the Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT).

Together with the International Civil Liberties Monitoring Group (ICLMG) the CAUT has created a resource to both document and analyse anti-terrorism

legislation in Canada and abroad. "Since the attacks on the World Trade Center two years ago, our government has placed unprecedented powers in the hands of police, security intelligence agencies, customs and immigration officers, and other authorities" says James Turk, executive director of CAUT, in a message on the union's website. "The sheer number of these measures has never been fully documented until now. This site should be an invaluable resource for anyone concerned about privacy, civil liberties, sovereignty, and basic human rights."

"If anyone doubts the extent to which the Canadian government has bought in to the Bush Administration's assault on civil liberties, then they must visit this web site," says Roch Tasse, the coordinator of ICLMG, also in a posting on their site. "Here, in one place, you can access all the legislation and policy initiatives that our government, the American government, and others have taken since 9/11, as well as some of the best analysis available."



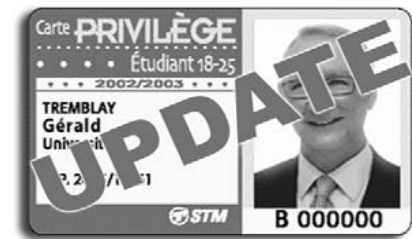
A student is a student is a student

By JOANNE O'NEILL

Student n. stu-dent
'stü-d'nt **1** a person who is studying, especially at a university, college, etc.

Although we may empower corporations to manage something as essential as public transportation, we should draw the line at letting them arbitrarily redefine our language. The Montreal Transit Corporation should yield to the authority and experience of the Canadian Oxford dictionary and scrap the quirky definition of "student" that they have imposed on Montreal transit users. According to the MTC, even if you are bleary-eyed and impoverished from a full course load, if you are over 25 years old then you don't deserve the discounted student fare.

Never mind that the average age of a student at Concordia is 27, or that the financial burden shouldered by older students with families may be even heavier than their younger classmates. There is a certain kinship among students and in many cases it is the bond of understanding what it means to cobble together a life below the poverty line. The MTC



should recognize that regardless of age students should be entitled to pay less because as a group they earn less. The thousands of public and private organizations in more than 50 countries around the world that provide discounts for International Student Identity Card holders already understand that the financial woes of full time study transcend age. The next time you fill out an application for one of these ISIC cards notice that they ask for your date of birth only as a way of confirming your identity; there is no age restriction.

Students in Montreal who are young enough to

qualify for a reduced rate on the bus and metro system will have less to celebrate in 2004. As an alleged result of the labor dispute with the maintenance workers last November, the price of a monthly transit pass has increased by 15% to \$31. This marks the third time in just 18 months that the MTC has whittled away at the discounted fare it offers to students. The price jump was made in spite of the fact that number crunchers at the MTC have already noticed that when fares go up by 10% ridership tends to drop by about 2-5%. Since regular adult fares also jumped by 10% in January, it's likely that in 2004 there will be fewer people on the buses and metros. It isn't hard to imagine how the MTC might compensate for this year's lost revenue.

So what can we do? Lobby the MTC and the provincial government to expand the definition of "student" to include anyone studying full-time regardless of age.

Send your comments to the MTC
e-mail: commentaries@stm.info
telephone: (514) 786-4636
fax: (514) 280-5666

O Martin, we hardly know thee

By DAVID BERNANS

"Paul-berta, Paul-berta, Paul-berta," was the deafening chant of Martin's adoring fans at the Toronto Liberal Party Convention. They were drowning me out as I tried to catch the soon-to-be-crowned Emperor of Canada on the way to his limousine.

"How long does it take a multimillionaire politician to fulfill a promise on child poverty?" I asked in vain. "Mr. Martin? Mr. Martin?"

This is a scene from the documentary film called *Waiting for Martin* (premiering at Concordia on March 30). Independent filmmakers Magnus Isacsson and Sophia Southam followed me following Martin for three years, as I tried without much success to engage the most powerful man in Canadian politics in public policy debate.

"Paul-berta, Paul-berta..." Days after the convention, the chant kept ringing in my brain like some kind of incantation, conjuring up images of Paul Martin's head on Ralph Klein's body. What does that slogan mean? I kept asking myself. I know it has something to do with how Martin is supposed to alleviate "Western alienation," whatever that means.

Somehow, I don't think more tax breaks and private health care will make federal politics more inclusive of the West or anybody else. Anyway, almost all Canadians, from East to West are alienated.

I mean "alienation" in the way Karl Marx used it to designate a situation where people confront their own hard work, sacrifice and creative energy as an external oppressive and "alien" force. The more people try to work their way out of the hole they're in, the more powerful they make their oppressor.

This describes perfectly the relationship most Canadians have with politicians like Martin. Since Martin took the helm as Minister of Finance, we have repeatedly been told we are living beyond our means,

sacrifices are needed, first to reduce the deficit, then to reduce the GDP to debt ratio, then to get rid of the debt altogether.

As our hospitals and schools stand in ruins, as one in six Canadian children lives in poverty, as hundreds of thousands of unemployed Canadians find themselves unable to access unemployment insurance, Paul Martin is congratulated for the "tough choices" he made as Minister of Finance. The accolades from



Courtesy of Lowtek Productions

the press are understandable given that corporate media owners were handed generous tax breaks over the course of Martin's reign as Finance Minister - a 50% cut to the capital gains tax, elimination of the 5% surtax on the super-wealthy and \$4.4 billion in corporate tax reductions to name a few.

But what is surprising is the extent to which ordinary Canadians have allowed Martin to claim credit for their own hard work. A "tough choice" is deciding whether to pay for food or heat. Deciding what social programs to cut produce the biggest tax breaks for

wealthy golf buddies may be difficult, but is it really "tough"?

Yet year after year Martin takes credit for the "Herculean struggle" in the "battle against the deficit" while the rest of us suffer the consequences. Like some kind of god, the more we sacrifice, the more powerful and awe-inspiring his feats become.

Somehow he paints himself as the saviour of the public education system. He tells us that the new global economy is a "knowledge economy" and Canada must be on the "leading edge" of education and research to remain competitive.

Back when Paul Martin was Finance Minister he cut the Canadian Health and Social Transfer to the provinces by 40%. These draconian cuts had the very predictable effect of creating an education funding crisis and massive tuition increases. This ought to make Martin's enthusiasm for the knowledge economy a little hard to swallow. But somehow Canadians have managed to keep his PR pabulum down, with the help of a little spoon-feeding from the corporate media.

Perhaps the public's willingness to put their skepticism aside can be explained by the truly terrifying nature of the alternative – to look upon the true face of Paul Martin. I've been doing it for three years running and it ain't pretty folks.

David Bernans is the star of the Magnus Isacsson and Sophia Southam one hour documentary Waiting for Martin, and the organizer of the Waiting for Martin cross-Canada tour (www.cinematlibre.com/waitingformartin). He ran for the NDP against Paul Martin in his Montreal riding during the 2000 federal elections. He is also the researcher/archivist of the Concordia Student Union although his opinions do not necessarily represent those of the CSU.

Van Gogh wouldn't stand a chance

By TOBIAS WHITFIELD

The new policy catchword in the area of university and research policy is innovation. Like any other catchword, it doubles as a codeword. In this case, innovation means developing new manufacturing techniques, finding new ways of marketing artistic work or discovering new ways of performing surgeries. An open and scaleable computer network (the Internet), ideas of liberal democracy and the paintings of Van Gogh would, however, not be considered innovations.

This might seem preposterous to many of us: certainly the first three examples are innovations, but how could the last three examples not be considered the same? In the words of the Expert Panel on the Commercialisation of University Research, innovation is "the process of bringing new goods and services to market, or the result of that process." The internet, liberal democracy, and Van Gogh failed to get a good or service to market quickly and efficiently with the retention of property rights, and thus are not valued in this definition.

(An article on Salon.com has recently questioned whether the internet could be created in the new academic environment. See: <http://www.alternet.org/print.html?StoryID=12168>).

There is real reason to be concerned with this new definition, mainly because of how it affects the way university research is funded in Canada. One of the largest research funding programs in the country is the Canadian Foundation for Innovation, which received \$450 million in the 2003-2004 federal budget. By comparison, three

federal research granting councils, the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada and the Medical Research Council of Canada, received \$67, \$154 and \$330 million respectively. The Foundation for Innovation receives a vast proportion of federal research funding, giving it much more power over the direction research is taking in Canada.

The goals of this new funding agenda seem valid, with an eye towards making federal research funding beneficial to the social welfare of Canadians. However, the difficulty is in how social welfare is defined and the values that are often left behind in the process.

The Canadian Innovation Strategy's primary focus is the ability to bring goods and services to the marketplace quickly, as it is the easiest way to evaluate the value of research.

One of the ways the government finds research that meets these criteria is to match research funds put forward by other agencies and corporations. For every dollar a corporation will invest, the innovation fund will match it.

There are many agencies in Canada that promote research in specific areas, such as cancer research, and there are also many companies that sponsor research in specific industries. The funding coming from most of these partners is geared towards specific, immediate goals, often using profitability as a yardstick, and ignores the value of pure science, social sciences, and humanities research. The result? Research projects that cannot find a business partner are just about dead from the get-go.

What is the Canadian Federation of Students-Québec (CFS-Q)?

The Canadian Federation of Students-Québec 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 globalisation 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-Q 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 great 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 30,000 students from the Post Graduate Students Society at McGill University (PGSS) - Local 79, the Graduate Students Association at Concordia University (GSA) - Local 83 and the Concordia Student Union at 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

Debunking the tuition freeze myth

By JOANNE O'NEILL, ROB GREEN AND PHILLIP ILIEVSKI

As the Parliamentary Commission gets underway to determine “who should pay for post-secondary education,” it is important to dispel some myths about tuition fees and ancillary fees. It is often stated that students in Quebec pay the lowest tuition rates in Canada at \$1,600/yr. It is however, seldom mentioned that no full-time student in Quebec actually pays \$1,600/yr. for university. As well, many university students in fact pay triple that amount per year and some (International Students) pay well over \$10,000 per year in tuition fees.

MYTH: Quebec has a tuition fee freeze...Full-time Students in Quebec pay only \$1600

FACT: After back door tuition fees are added on, most full-time students which are residents of Quebec pay over \$2,500/yr, and out-of-province and international students pay much more.

The official tuition fee “freeze” actually provides a smoke screen for backdoor tuition fee increases such as skyrocketing ancillary fees and huge hikes for out-of-province and international students. The reality behind the rhetoric is that while the base tuition for Quebec residents may be the lowest in Canada, tuition fees are actually three times what they were in 1990. For out-of-province-students, tuition fees are now 7.4 times as high, far out-pacing inflation.

MYTH: Quebec's legislated tuition fee freeze has prevented the costs of education from rising.

FACT: Since the implementation of the fee freeze, those fees not categorized as tuition (ancillary fees), have increased by over 86%

An example of ancillary fee charges: a Quebec resident studying as a full-time student (Undergrad or Graduate) at McGill University pays a base tuition fee of \$1,668.30, however, the following mandatory ancillary fees are then tacked on; services \$327, registration fee \$208.20, technology charge \$171.30, health and dental insurance \$144.60, and a copyright fee of \$10.50, ballooning the true cost to over \$2,500/yr.

Introduced in 1996, differential fees force students from provinces outside of Quebec and international students to pay radically higher tuition fees than Quebec residents. In fact, non-Quebec Canadian citizens and Permanent Residents pay over \$4,700/yr. in tuition fees while international students pay over \$10,500/yr (Undergraduate international students enrolled in an Arts in Science program at Concordia University pay \$10,518.30 plus ancillary fees and undergraduate international students enrolled in an Arts and Education program at McGill pay \$10,260.00/yr. plus ancillary fees).

Deregulation and Tuition Fee Freezes

When a provincial government limits the amount that universities can charge students, it is called tuition fee regulation. Conversely, when a provincial government removes limits, it is called tuition fee deregulation. Another term used most often in Quebec is, a (legislated) tuition freeze.

In recent years, conservative provincial governments and right-wing think tanks such as the Fraser Institute have been pushing for the deregulation of tuition fees. They are ideologically in favour of allowing the market to dictate what tuition fees should be set at, as opposed to having governments act as an equalizing force to ensure greater access to post-secondary education.



CFS-Q CHAIR CAROLYN ZWICKY-PEREZ & TREASURER TIM MCSORLEY (LEFT) MEET WITH FINANCE MINISTER YVES SEGUIN (RIGHT) PHOTO: PHILLIP ILIEVSKI

One submission to the Parliamentary Commission will come from the Conseil du Patronat du Québec (CPQ), which is strongly in favour of tax cuts for individuals and corporations. They see “low tuition fees” as an obstacle to their agenda, 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 approximately \$4,700 per year in fees.

After deregulation, at Memorial University, tuition fees for medicine skyrocketed from \$3,125 to \$12,500 per yr. Deregulation meant that students studying law at the University of Toronto saw fees climb from \$3173 in 1997 to over \$14,000 this year.

MYTH: For most young people the choice not to participate in post-secondary education is a personal rather than a financial one

FACT: Data obtained by Statistics Canada for the Youth in Transition Survey show that of the high school graduates who faced barriers to their post-secondary participation, over 70% cited financial barriers.

This blaring bias is a myth founded on the stereotype that youth are disinterested and apathetic towards education. As Statistics Canada shows, 70% of high school graduates feel the strongest barrier to their participation in post-secondary education is due in large part to financial restraints. These restraints are created and intensified each time the government threatens to raise tuition and universities decide to increase ancillary fees. These acts are a clear sign that accessibility to education is neither a priority nor a concern.

In 1980, prior to cross-country tuition increases, students from the wealthiest 20% of families and students from the poorest 20% of families participated in post-secondary education at approximately the same rate. By 1998, students from the wealthiest 20% of Canadian families were 2.5 times more likely to attend post-secondary education than students from the poorest 20%. Unfortunately, economic advantage rather than intellectual capacity is what is being considered the priority for enrolment in post-secondary institutions.

Tuition regulation not only benefits individual students, but also society as a whole.

The Quebec government estimates that by 2006 it will need to create 640,000 new jobs, of which ¾ will

require a post-secondary diploma. According to a 2002 Statistics Canada report, the unemployment rate for those with a high school diploma was 9.6%, for those with a Bachelor's degree it was 5.6%. The best way for Quebec society to guarantee that it will be ready to meet such challenges of the new knowledge-based economy is to guarantee that all Quebecers have access to post-secondary education. The best way it can do this is by working to reduce and even eliminate the number one barrier to post-secondary education – it's costs.

In the end the question we ask ourselves mustn't be, “Can we afford to maintain a tuition freeze, or even lower tuition fees in Québec?” But, “Can we afford not to?” Society can only benefit from having an educated populace. The Québec Component of the Canadian Federation of Students, has made a submission to the Parliamentary Commission on University Funding, in it we demand that tuition fees remain frozen and that the Government find a way to reduce fees. We also demand that the Government fully fund education in Québec and ensure through a legislative process that access to education is protected and improved.

AROUND THE WORLD

In 1999, the University of Western Ontario increased tuition fees dramatically for first year medical students. That year, only 7.7% of students came from families with incomes below \$40,000 down from 17.7% just a few years earlier. At the same time, the number of students from families with incomes over \$200,000 tripled.

Tuition fees were introduced in England and Wales in the mid-1990s (Scotland refused to implement the fees). Within only a few years a sharp reduction in participation from lower and middle income students was observed.

Ireland abolished tuition fees as a key component of its highly successful economic revitalization program. Ireland now claims its educated population as its primary competitive advantage in the European high tech sector.

Most of the world's most economically developed countries as well as some developing countries do not charge tuition fees at all. Of all the countries that belong to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (Canada is a member), the following countries do not charge tuition fees; Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Luxembourg, Norway, Poland, Slovak Republic, Sweden. It is important to note that many of these nations are worse off financially when compared to Canada.

From JEAN CHAREST to the FTAA Making the links

By TIM MCSORLEY

In the past months we have seen what would appear to be a success on the international front and a defeat at home.

Last November, the latest round of negotiations of the Free Trade Area of the Americas floundered. Latin American countries for the most part refused to be bullied by the US or Canada into accepting a hemisphere-wide trade deal which would see the new order of economic colonialism entrenched in a NAFTA-like document.

Meanwhile at home we have seen Jean Charest plough ahead with his plans to re-engineer the state in his own conservative image, following in the footsteps of Mike Harris in Ontario and Gordon Campbell in British Columbia. Although the Minister of Finance has agreed to public consultations on the upcoming budget, citing the need to listen to the population, considering how many promises the government has broken so far it is unclear exactly how much listening will be done.

Charest and others in his administration have denounced the broad-based coalitions of community, labour and student groups which have denounced and demonstrated against his policies, claiming that they are illegitimate representatives of the people since they are unelected. Yet at the same time, La Presse has published a poll stating 63% of Quebecers are dissatisfied with how the government is proceeding.

At first glance it is difficult to make the links between these two occurrences – how could large scale and very public negotiations fail (in large part due to grassroots organising and demonstrations) while the battle at seems like it is faltering.

First, it is important to look at what did come out of negotiations in Miami late last November: Although the large-scale FTAA has stalled, regional and bilateral trade agreements are now being negotiated. Canada has already established a trade agreement with Chile, and is working on others. The United States had already said earlier in the year, with the collapse of World Trade Organisation talks, that it would begin pursuing bilateral trade agreements if no global structure could be put in place. They are now attempting to do that across the western hemisphere as well.

What we see is the realisation among bureaucrats that it is necessary to “go local” first before expanding agreements internationally. This is most likely why NAFTA, despite protests and demonstrations in all three countries involved, has managed to remain in place. Then United States has just entered into CAFTA, the Central American Free Trade Agreement. Again, this is a regionally based organism. No many people in Canada have heard about it though, which is exactly what the governments are hoping for. We may be able to mobilise over 100,000 people when the negotiations are in our backyard, we can even get out 10,000 people when it



THE PRIVATISATION OF WATER - MAKING IT INACCESSIBLE TO THE POOR - IS SIMPLY ONE OF MANY POSSIBILITIES UNDER TRADE AGREEMENTS LIKE THE FTAA.

is in Quito, Ecuador, particularly when the trade negotiations do not involved Canada itself. But it is incredibly difficult to mobilise the broad base of people needed for effective civil disobedience or mobilisations when the deals are with only one other country or taking place in others parts of the world.

Bringing it all home

This strategy of going local is also what we see right now in Quebec. Although the Liberal government may not be purposefully carrying out these reforms to make international trade agreements easier to enact, that will be the eventual result if these changes do not go unchallenged.

The reason we see thousands upon thousands of Quebecers take to the streets on a regular basis in opposition to free trade agreements is because these pacts go against many of the fundamental beliefs of our communities. Although Quebec society is nowhere near perfect, the state has traditionally been based on the social-welfare state, the direct opposite of Charest, Martin and Bush's free-market society. The values have also, in part, been reflected in government policy over the past 40 or so years. When we see our society threatened on a large scale we make sure that governments notice our displeasure.

Jean Charest's plan seems to be to shift the status quo towards the right: implement gradual policies that will further privatise necessary services and put

more power in the hands of unaccountable private corporations, all the while diminishing the role of the state in society.

If this plan is carried through, it would not be surprising to the see the broad-based mobilisation against his policies fall apart. As the gap between the rich and the poor – the have and the have-nots – gradually increases, solidarity will decrease and alienation will increase. Community and labour organisations, although usually focussing on a specific part of society (workers, the poor, students, women), rely heavily on cross-community solidarity in order to defeat the type of attacks that Charest is launching.

The liberals are taking a familiar path that others have taken when dismantling popular resistance: take out the unions first, and the rest will follow. The labour movement has become symbolic of public strength in the face of government restrictions. With its broad networks and deep pockets, it is the labour movement which has the most resources to fight back. When the unions fail, quite often the rest of the resistance falters as well.

The government's hope, of course, is that future generations would become comfortable with this new direction, accepting this as the new status quo or “reality.”

And as things change locally, the resistance globally will falter as well. It will not seem like such a big jump to join international free trade if it simply reflects provincial and federal policies.

If Charest and the Liberals succeed in implementing their changes, there is nothing to stop the FTAA from becoming the ‘next logical step.’