



The OWL HOOTS

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Massive funding cuts at Dawson

Board of Governors will vote next week on a proposal to increase student services fees by 42% in order to recoup 500k

Dawson is facing a funding cut of approximately 1.9 million dollars for the 2015-16 year. The college has responded preliminarily by proposing a modification to its bylaws governing students fees in order to allow them to increase student services fees.

Student services fees apply to regular students as well as Continuing Education students. The latter

group pay the same amount despite their often limited use of such services that are for the most part offered during regular business hours.

This proposed flat fee increase, like many of the increases being proposed across the province, will certainly adversely affect the most vulnerable of our students.

Cegep teachers launch May 1st Social Strike to protest austerity

28 cegeps, more than 10000 teachers vote to strike, more to vote

On February 24th teachers from cegep de Sherbrooke voted to go on social strike on May 1st under the conditions that they were joined by at least 9 other unions and that they were backed financially and legally by the CSN.

As of April 23rd, they have been joined by 27 other cegeps and have received the backing of the CSN and will thus go on strike.

At a DTU General Assembly held on April

"We, the teachers of Cegep de Sherbrooke will be present to discuss and explain. This is the essence of our vocation. We believe however that the seriousness of the current situation requires that we take action. We have chosen the social strike on May 1st 2015.

On May 1st we will take to the streets with all of the groups who are fighting against the dismantling of Quebec Society."

- excerpt from letter published in La Presse on March 29th (translated from French)

16th, Dawson teachers voted unanimously to hold a strike vote to decide whether or not to join the social strike movement.

The DTU strike vote will begin on Monday April 27th at 4pm in the multi-purpose room 5B.16 following the General Assembly.

Voting will continue the next day in the upper atrium from 9:30am-6pm.

Why we strike on May 1st

Excerpts from the Cegep de Sherbrooke Teachers' Union position paper

Why May 1st?

May 1st is International Workers' Day and has thus historically been a rallying day for workers and trade unions.

With the first year of this government's mandate ending and the devastating consequences of its policies apparent, May 1st seemed like the most symbolic day of action since many austerity measures directly target workers, whether it be those who work in the public sector or those who benefit from its services.

Cuts to school boards, cégeps, municipal employees' pension plans, increase in daycare fees, cuts to welfare etc. have led various groups to come together in protest against the dismantling of a society that we believe in.

Is it possible that we incur penalties as a result of a May 1st strike?

Yes.

According to the Labour Code and as is generally the case in North America, a workers' strike cannot take place other than in the context of contract negotiation. The Labour Code allows for penalties of up to \$50,000 per union per day of un-sanctioned strike. Employers may also choose to cut workers' pay.

CSN employees will be present at the April 27th General Assembly to answer any questions regarding financial penalties.

Who will cover the cost of potential fines?

If our strike vote respects the procedures of our constitution and that of the CSN rules then the CSN's FDP (Fonds de défense professionnelle) will cover all fines related to the strike.

And what will have changed on May 2nd?

The fact that we are holding a social strike, one that is not sanctioned under the Labour Code, sends a strong message. In fact, there has not been a social strike in Quebec for dec-

ades.

We often question the usefulness of a strike, especially under the constant menace of special laws and decrees. A day of social strike sends an important message to the government: we will not be intimidated by unfair laws. This day will be an important step in the building of a movement, not only in the context of public sector negotiations but also in the fight against austerity.

Through this strike and this struggle, we will seek to recover a part of our freedom!

What are we fighting for?

Locally—for a College that is properly financed so that it can live up to our and our students' ambitions.

In the context of negotiation—for a contract that values our work and contributions to society.

Against austerity—for a government that seeks progressive sources of revenue.



Austerity for Quebec's schools

By Robert Green, Westmount High School

During the most recent election campaign Quebec Premier Phillippe Couillard stated that protecting the quality of education would be one of his government's main priorities.

It is now clear, Phillippe Couillard was not telling the truth.

Since coming into office he and his hapless Minister of Education Yves Bolduc have done nothing but propose policies that will harm the quality of education in Quebec.

By insulting teachers with a contract offer that will likely see their real wages eroded by at least 7 percent over five years, the Couillard government is sending a clear message that it does not value the teaching profession. Quebec's teachers are already the lowest paid in Canada with some of the most difficult working conditions. If this initial offer is any indication, the government is intent on ensuring that this wage gap with teachers in other provinces not only remains but in fact widens.

What is the cost for students and for society when quality teachers are driven out of the profession, or worse, when high quality candidates choose not to enter the profession in the first place? Sadly, if Couillard has his way, we may soon find out.

Perhaps even more insulting to teachers is the government's proposal to increase our workload. What Mr. Bolduc doesn't seem to realize is that past increases to our workload have made it such that teachers already cannot accomplish the task they have been assigned

Perhaps the most obvious example of the Couillard government's total disregard for public education is his proposal to remove limits on class size.

within the hours they are paid. Despite this fact, the vast majority of teachers, because they are committed professionals, choose to take marking home to do during evenings and weekends. It is also extremely common for teachers to use their sick days to catch-up on marking. Each time teachers do either of these things they are in effect making a personal donation to Quebec's public education system and helping to cover-up the fact that past governments have not made adequate investments in education.

To threaten to increase the workloads of teachers in such a context where the vast majority of teachers are already working an untold number of unpaid hours from home demonstrates that Couillard and Bolduc are either utterly ignorant of the realities of Quebec's teaching profession or reckless ideologues that simply don't care. The government is risking alienating teachers to the point where we

stop working hours for which we are not paid. If that happens we will not need to strike because the system, which is being propped up by the thousands of volunteer hours donated by Quebec's teachers, will fall apart.

Perhaps the most obvious example of the Couillard government's total disregard for public education is his proposal to remove limits on class size. This was accompanied by Bolduc's astonishing claim that there is no evidence to suggest that class size reductions improve educational outcomes. That Quebec's Minister of Education is unversed in the enormous body of research demonstrating the contrary is disturbing enough; that he apparently didn't even bother to do a little research before making this announcement demonstrates a shocking level of disregard for the public interest.

Of course the government claims that these tough decisions are necessary to tame Quebec's ballooning deficit. The problem with this claim is that in many places around the world where austerity measures are being implemented economic growth is harmed and deficits end up growing. Since 2012 the IMF has made repeated warnings against further austerity because of its demonstrated capacity to harm economic growth. (continued on page 4)

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The other problem with the government's claim is that our current deficits were not in fact caused by spending. Since the early nineties government spending in Quebec has been trending downward. Quebec's public sector has time and again done its part to help government achieve the goal of deficit reduction. The real cause of our current deficit is a series of tax cuts enacted since the early 2000s that have disproportionately benefited Quebec's wealthiest citizens to an enormous degree. For example, according to *l'Institut de recherche et d'informations socio-économique* the \$950 million in tax cuts the Liberals offered in 2007-2008 provided absolutely nothing to households with \$25,000 in income, \$110 to households with \$50,000 income and a whopping \$1859 to households with \$150,000 in income. The cut to taxes on capital gains which began in 2005-06 was essentially a massive gift to the banks that deprives Quebec's public coffers of 1.9 billion annually.

The real cause of our current deficit is a series of tax cuts enacted since the early 2000s that have disproportionately benefited Quebec's wealthiest

Reversing these two tax cuts alone would almost eliminate Quebec's deficit. Instead Couillard is asking vulnerable school children to pay for these tax cuts. This is not a necessity; it is a choice he is making.

If Couillard wants Quebecers to believe that he is anything other than a reckless right-wing ideologue intent on protecting the interests of the wealthy he should explain how cutting a public education system that benefits all Quebecers is preferable to reversing

these tax cuts which have benefited so few.

About the author:

Robert Green is a history teacher at Westmount High School and creator of the blog: montrealteachers4change.org a forum for analysis on matters related to public education, primarily in Quebec.

Note: this article was first published prior to Yves Bolduc's retirement from politics

The impact of austerity on women

By Fanny Theurillat-Cloutier, Sociology teacher, Cegep Marie-Victorin

Firstly, why focus on the impact austerity has on women? Have we not long settled the question of women's rights? Have we not achieved gender equality? I hope to answer these questions in this essay.

How does austerity affect women? It does so in at least three different ways: 1) as workers in the public service 2) as community workers 3) as citizens, users of public services and beneficiaries of financial support.

Women make up 75% of the public service. In certain sectors, such as Health and Social Services, over 80% of the workers are women. In Education they make up 60% of the workforce. Why? Because many traditionally female jobs that were held first by women in their respective households, then by female clergy members are now attached to the public service. Tasks such as taking care of the elderly, the sick, and the disabled and educating our youth were women's responsibilities. (continued on page 5)

Négo 2015
Teachers United

The most recent negotiation info is available at DTU.QC.CA by clicking on the Négo 2015 link

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Most of these tasks, now careers, are still undertaken by women, due to the fact that gender roles remain enforced in our society. On a related note, in an attempt to draw women into the traditionally male-dominated fields of science and technology, the women-only science contest called "*Chapeau les filles!*" was created. It was recently announced that the government would cut its funding and that the 2015 competition would not take place.

Austerity will reduce the number of jobs in the public sector, and with the negotiation underway, it seems, also reduce the quality of such public sector jobs. The CSSS (Centre intégré de santé et de services sociaux) Laval has already seen a 15 million dollar cut to its budget. What we have seen is that it is the jobs often occupied by women that are cut and in sectors where the move from the public to the private sector can be disadvantageous. Compare, for example, the average salary of a daycare worker in the public sector to that of one in the private sector. Numerous women in the health, social service and education sectors will be adversely affected.



To compensate for the cuts to the public sector, the Liberals have proposed calling upon community organizations. Finance Minister Leitaou said last October: "il y a énormément d'organismes communautaires qui peuvent livrer des services sociaux. Ça coûte moins cher que s'il s'agit d'un réseau." ("There are numerous community organizations that can provide social services. It costs less than if we are dealing with a public network.")

While it is true that for many decades such community organizations have supported the public service, they have done so with salaries and working conditions that are often worse than those in the public service. Ironically, this sector (whose workforce is over 80% women), being called upon by the Minister to fill the void caused by cuts to the public system, is itself under attack, suffering large funding cuts on both the Federal and Provincial levels.

In addition, what happens in the health sector when we seek, for example, to reduce the length of hospitalization in order to make up for lack of space and personnel? People returning home prematurely will require home care and the Liberals will turn to the private sector to provide this care. The Government's Law 10 favours a centralized *hospital-centric* model, that is, a health care

system based on in-hospital care but not pre- nor post-hospital care. We are creating a model where family and friends will have to provide services previously offered by healthcare workers. Once again, women will primarily be called upon to serve as caretakers, while simultaneously working. Women will be forced to reduce their hours of work in order to care for their loved ones. This can have a huge economic impact on families, in a context where it has become very difficult for households to make do on a single income.

An example often cited is that of the rise in the cost of daycare. Some women are now calculating whether or not it is actually cost effective to work rather than stay home and take care of their children.

What we are seeing is a state that once provided services withdrawing itself from the public sphere, forcing women to take its place. This has financial implications but also implications on a woman's personal autonomy. For example, the Government has proposed changes to parental leaves and retirement plans. In the latter case, women tend to contribute for fewer years due to maternity leaves. Women's salaries also remain lower than those of men. The effect of the proposed changes to retirement will be markedly higher on women.

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Meanwhile, the new Liberal trend is to avoid using the word austerity, replacing it with “relaunching prosperity”. So how is the Government relaunching prosperity? By investing in mining and infrastructure, sectors where jobs are held primarily by men.

Québec, like other provinces has an independent body that makes recommendations regarding gender equality, le Conseil du Status de la Femme. The Government will close all regional offices of this body by the end of the year.

On this year’s International Women’s Day (March 8th), IRIS published a report on austerity and its effect on women with a much more detailed analysis than that which is presented here. I encourage you to read it. It is available free of charge on their website: iris-recherche.qc.ca.

Policy can appear neutral while having vastly different effects on one sex over the other. Austerity is a great example: women will be particularly affected, whether or not they work in the public sector. This government is not only austere; it is also sexist!

This article was translated to English from French.
For further information: Eve-Lyne Couturier et Simon Tremblay-Pépin, *Les mesures d’austérité et les femmes: analyse des documents budgétaires depuis novembre 2008*, March 2015, en ligne: <http://iris-recherche.qc.ca>

Consequences: Austerity in Education

The following is a non-exhaustive list of immediate consequences that have been reported at various educational institutions as a result of budget cuts.

Cuts to cegep funding: 41 million

- reduction of student services in several cegeps
- elimination of the College nurse position (Saint-Félicien)
- 47% increase of associated fees (FX-Garneau)
- 42% increase in student services fees (proposed Dawson)
- closure of the swimming-pool within 2 years (Sainte-Foy)
- layoffs planned, starting next year (Trois-Rivières)
- fees increase in several cegeps

Cuts to elementary and high school funding: 217 million

- school tax increases
- reduction of student services, in particular for homework assistance
- elimination of professionals posts
- possible elimination of important programs (*Secondaire en spectacle, École en forme et en santé*, etc)
- reduction or elimination of library book purchases
- possible elimination of special education classes for students with disabilities

Cuts to university funding: 172 million (though some universities claim it is 300 million)

- Increase in class sizes (UQO)
- salary decrease of 2% for all employees (including teachers) (UQAM)
- elimination of 150 courses (UQAM)
- elimination of 50 posts in Arts and Science Faculty (UdM)
- termination of Ethnology Department (Laval)
- elimination of 27 courses (Laval)
- 3-million cut in teachers’ total payroll (Sherbrooke)
- possible elimination of 83 posts (Sherbrooke)
- elimination of 85 courses (UQ Chicoutimi)
- cuts in research funds (Trois-Rivières)
- elimination of 20 posts (UQ Rimouski)
- hiring freeze (McGill)