

The Agitator

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ONTARIO TUITION FREEZE IS LIFTED

McGUINTY MUST PAY

Earlier this month, Ontario Premier Dalton McGuinty announced that tuition fees will increase by as much as 20% over the next four years. Tuition is expected to rise between 4.5 and 8 percent per year. Professional programs, including medicine and engineering are expected to be higher than the average annual increase. To put it simply, if you're paying about \$4500 for an arts degree, expect to pay over \$4700 next September. By 2009, it will be in the range of \$5400.

The announcement signals the government's desire to end a two year tuition freeze implemented in 2004 after province-wide student protests in 2002 and 2003. McGuinty had previously promised an extra \$358 million in student assistance, yet this will be wiped out by an increase in tuition.

In the meantime, 9,100 college faculty have gone on strike across Ontario demanding better work conditions, including smaller class sizes. In the past fifteen years, the number of college students have increased by 53% while per-student government funding has fallen by 41%. Full-time faculty has also declined in that period by about 22%.

The increase in tuition and underfunding of education is coming at a time when McGuinty is expected to announce a \$1 billion surplus. The federal government has also been running budget surpluses in the billions since the late 1990s.

McGuinty's attack on students and education workers is part of a decades-long offensive against affordable education, and social programs in general. McGuinty is in a long line of Ontario premiers who have done this, including Mike Harris, Ernie Eves and Bob Rae. The attacks have produced some awful results.

If tuition had gone up at the rate of inflation between 1990 and the present, average undergrad tuition would be about \$2300 as opposed to the approximately

\$4500 today. The only way students have been able to afford this is by going into record levels of debt. Students in a four-year program will have on average \$25,000 of debt. This is 300% higher than in 1990.

The only way to fend off these attacks is to fight back, and this is why it is important to support education workers in their struggles because their fight for better jobs results in better learning environments for students. It is also crucial that students mobilize in large numbers and make their voices heard.

And students can win. The two-year tuition freeze was won after a series of actions and protests by students, and the federal budget cuts of education in 1995 were blunted by a nation-wide one-day student strike.

The greatest inspiration and example we can take is from the Quebec student strike of 2005. When Jean Charest eliminated \$103 million in grants and made them loans, the student unions mobilized over a span of months with escalating action. When Charest refused to back down, a quarter million students struck, and on one magnificent day, 80,000 marched in the streets of Montreal. Charest backed down and agreed to restore the \$103 million to grants. Student strikes work. Quebec has had seven, and their tuition is the lowest in Canada and has been frozen for thirty of the past thirty-five years.

We also know from Manitoba that universities can function without tuition hikes. Manitoba is entering its eighth year of a tuition freeze and enrolment is the highest in the Western provinces. Newfoundland also reduced tuition by 25% and has a freeze until 2007.

The money is there and the lifting of the freeze is a declaration of war. Students can win but we can only do so if we build a movement from below capable of mass action. McGuinty must pay.

**ANTI
CAPITALIST
OPEN MIC**



Friday, Mar.31 8PM
Mike's Place, Carleton U.
suggested cover: \$3-5

Average Tuition Across Canada

	<u>1990</u>	<u>2005</u>
British Columbia	1808	4874
Alberta	1286	4940
Saskatchewan	1545	5062
Manitoba	1512	3272
Ontario	1680	4881
Quebec	904	1900
New Brunswick	1925	5037
Nova Scotia	1941	6281
Prince Edward Island	1874	4645
Newfoundland	1344	2606

MARCH 30
Carleton U.
Demonstrate for
Affordable Education

The Charlatan: What's in a name?

You would think that the Charlatan, a "student" newspaper, would give news of a tuition hike a little prominence. Instead, in the issue that first reported the story, we're left with a measly little article a few pages in, but not before we read the weekly digest about what's wrong with our student union, CUSA.

This year the Charlatan seems to have set its sights on CUSA regardless of whether criticism is warranted. Meanwhile, the university administration has hardly been on the hotseat. In fact, when reporting on the CUSA referendum regarding student building fees, the Charlatan chose to highlight a quote from VP Finance Duncan Watt in large letters. Watt's words menacingly informed CUSA that the Board of Governors would want

to know if the referendum was "conducted in a fair fashion".

It surprises me that the Charlatan would use Watt as an authority on democratic practices. Can someone remind me how Watt got his job, or all the other big-wigs that dominate the Board of Governors and run this university? I don't remember Watt and Co. offering us a referendum on athletics fees, or better yet, the destruction of Oliver's Patio.

It's no wonder Carleton students chose to deny the Charlatan increased funding in the recent referendum. That's because the Charlatan continually attacks CUSA, a democratically-elected organization which, flaws-and-all, is comprised of, and stands up for students.

In other respects, the Charlatan has also

failed students. This year in particular, important issues to students like tuition fees, student jobs, tenant rights, rental information and so on, have been all but ignored.

I'm not calling for the Charlatan to become a mouthpiece for CUSA - far from it. But if any group on campus merits serious scrutiny and criticism it is the university administration, not organizations that represent students. To put it simply, a student newspaper that reports and investigates in the interests of students would be a real nice change.

Editor's Note: an edited version of this letter, written by Doug Nesbitt, appeared in the March 16 edition of the Charlatan, Carleton's independent student paper.

French students occupy campuses

In France on March 7, over one million people took the streets in 200 cities. The action was called by France's major trade union confederations and student bodies.

The demand of the protest was to cancel a newly legislated labour contract. The new contract is for workers under the age of 26. It institutes a two-year probation period and allows bosses to fire the employee during that period at will, without even the minimal legal justification in the current job contract.

Universities occupied

In the wake of the demonstrations, university students have gone on strike, and half of the country's campuses are now controlled by students.

These universities are being occupied around the clock by students, with participation from teachers and university workers. The occupations are guided by daily mass assemblies of hundreds of students. Committees are elected for certain tasks and delegates are elected for the coordination of nation-wide actions. It is an impressive example of democracy from below.

As their popularity plummets, the right-wing government of Jacques Chirac has taken desperate measures against the university occupations. The most symbolic was the brutal evacuation of the Sorbonne. The Sorbonne hadn't been occupied by students since May 1968.

At this juncture, the direction of the movement has yet to be decided. Perhaps the real test will be whether or not the trade unions respond to the student call for a nation-wide strike on March 23.

Unity between workers and students is a crucial question, as history shows in the events of 1968 in France.

May 1968

Following World War Two, universities ceased to be the exclusive domains of the elite. Modern industrial capitalism required workers to be more and more educated, and the welfare state needed a larger state bureaucracy and workforce. Through the 1950s and 1960s, universities grew massively and the student body in every Western nation grew exponentially.

The archaic rules and regulations of the universities became increasingly restrictive for the changing cultural attitudes and increased political activism of students in the mid-1960s. Surrounded

by the civil rights, Black Power, women's rights, gay liberation and anti-war movements, it is little wonder students became radicalized.

In early 1968, in the suburbs of Paris, at l'Université de Nanterre, there existed a rule that male students couldn't enter female dorms. In March, to protest this rule, thousands of students took part in a "peaceful invasion" of the female dorms.

Inspired by this action, some students at Nanterre decided to hold a day of anti-imperialist teach-ins regarding the Vietnam War. The university responded by ordering riot police to attack the students on campus.

A series of escalating protests and police actions followed and by May, protests in the streets of Paris reached their thousands. Under constant attack from riot police, students responded by pulling up cobblestones from the streets and fighting back.

Running street battles erupted across Paris and spread to several cities. Barricades were put up in the streets and students began to appeal to car workers to come out on strike.

Within days, France was in the midst of the biggest general strike in history (at the time). Ten million workers were on strike out of a country of fifty million. Workplaces across the country were occupied. President Charles de Gaulle fled to Germany. It seemed a revolution was happening - in an advanced capitalist country!

Rebellion defeated

The French Communist Party was a massive party at the time and had enormous influence in the trade unions. But the party was a Stalinist organization which had discarded the principles of internationalism, socialism and workers' power.

The Communist Party helped defeat the rebellion in June that year and saved Charles de Gaulle's government. They did this by sending officials to one factory to tell the workers the factory down the road had stopped striking. This, of course, was not true.

By doing this, one by one the workers stopped their strikes and occupations. Without the support of the working class, the movement was defeated.

Two mistaken conclusions

In the wake of May '68, many radical

students came to the conclusion that the working class was no longer capable of revolutionary action. Many saw themselves - students - as the new agents of revolutionary change.

This philosophy led to a dead-end. History has also proved it wrong. Students, like workers have proven to be as conservative as workers at certain points in time. Also, workers have proven to be quite radical and not just in the Global South. Only six years after May 1968, the British miners brought down a Conservative government. Even in Canada, two years ago, workers occupied an aluminum factory in Northern Quebec protesting its closure and continued to process aluminum under workers' control (and with higher productivity!).

Another conclusion drawn by many radicals was to reject the concept of a revolutionary organization because of what the Communist Party had done. But they mistakenly accepted the CP as revolutionary, when it was in fact a workers party couched in revolutionary rhetoric, but in reality, a tool of Soviet foreign policy. This meant that the CP would subordinate the needs of the workers to the political desires of the elites running the Soviet Union.

Conclusion

The lessons of May 1968 are twofold. Had there been a rank-and-file network linking workers across the country, the lies of the Communist Party could have been countered and the occupations could have continued and perhaps develop towards worker-managed production. This network, however, would have required the creation of a new mass revolutionary organization capable of coordinating actions. The CP was missing this democratic, and revolutionary aspect.

The second lesson is that students cannot be the agents of a revolution. Students can play a key role in sparking off revolts, but in the end, students are far fewer in number than the working class, and they are also not in the strategic position of workers to take control of the land, the factories, the infrastructure, etc which is required to run and control society.

These are the lessons and dilemmas that face the movement in France today and in any rebellion that is sparked by students.

The polls we never saw

In August 2005, the British Ministry of Defence released a secret poll commissioned by senior British officers in Iraq. The poll made some headlines in Britain but most people in North America have never seen it, let alone heard it.

The results are startling even for those who have opposed the war. It destroys any of the claims made by the American and British administrations that the lives of Iraqis have improved and that the resistance is simply a band of isolated radical with lots of firepower.

source: The Telegraph (UK), Oct.23 2005

82%

of Iraqis are "strongly opposed" to the presence of coalition troops.

72%

of Iraqis do not have confidence in the multi-national forces

67%

of Iraqis feel less secure because of the occupation.

71%

of Iraqis rarely get safe, clean water

70%

of Iraqis say their sewage system rarely works.

45%

of Iraqis say attacks against British and American troops are justified.

43%

of Iraqis who believe conditions for peace and stability have worsened

>1%

of Iraqis who believe coalition forces are responsible for any improvement in security

College faculty strike is a fight for students

On March 7, 9,100 college teachers went on strike across Ontario. The workers are represented by the Ontario Public Service Employees' Union, OPSEU. The union's two main demands are reduced class sizes and the hiring of more faculty. The union membership voted 80.4 percent in favour of strike action last February. The offer made by college management was overwhelmingly rejected by the union membership: 96%

The strike is almost two weeks old and there is no sign of it stopping. On March 15, some five thousand workers and supporters rallied in downtown Toronto.

Students versus teachers?

The strike seems to have pitted students against teachers. This is generally how strikes on any campus are portrayed in the media. There is no doubt that students are inconvenienced, and news coverage will no doubt interview numerous students concerned with their academic future.

However, the current college strike is clearly in the interest of students. If the workers win, class rooms will be smaller and more faculty hired. The benefits can only be positive for students.

Unfortunately, the College Student Alliance (CSA), which represents most of the 150,000 Ontario college students, doesn't see it this way. For example, Tyler Charbois, the CSA director of advocacy was quoted in the March 16 *Charlatan* as saying "[Students are] paying for a service that they aren't receiving, and that's not fair to them."

This is a very dangerous view of education, where teachers and other workers are seen as machines to serve customers, sort of like a pop bottle dispenser.

Algonquin Student President = Scab

This view has been taken to its logical conclusion by the president of the Algonquin Students' Association. Michael Barrett, the ASA president sent out a press release on March 7 calling on McGuinty's Liberal government to legislate the striking teachers back to work and declare

college education an essential service.

Barrett is obviously ignoring the facts. The strike, if victorious, will obviously benefit students. It is also a well-founded demand. In the past fifteen years, the number of college students have increased by 53% while per-student government funding has fallen by 41%. Full-time faculty has also declined in that period by about 22%. Barrett needs an earful.

Divide and conquer

Last December a similar situation arose when the union representing OTranspo bus drivers and mechanics threatened strike action. The media portrayed a potential strike as an inconvenience to Ottawa commuters and conveniently left out the dispute over whether or not the future rail system would be maintained by unionized city workers or a profit-driven corporation. One only needs to look at Britain to see how a privatized train system leads to poor safety standards for passengers and workers, cost-cutting, cheap equipment and so on. Instead, we were told that the dispute was solely about wages, and not about issues that concerned everyone in Ottawa.

When labour disputes erupt, the media always does its job to divide people so popular support for strikes is battered down. As one strike bulletin of the Algonquin teachers correctly notes, "All the private media are owned by corporations and seldom if ever side with any workers in a labour dispute."

Solidarity

Students need to be vocal and visible in their support for the strikers. Letters to newspapers, union locals and to a certain student president need to be written. There is also a need for picket support, whether its carrying a placard for a few hours, bringing some food and coffee or honking as you drive by or a raised fist from a bus window.

Solidarity between students and teachers can help defeat the neo-liberalization of education.

Events Calendar

Mar.22, 7pm, Tory 215, Carleton U.
Socialist Movie Night:

"Good Night and Good Luck"

Mar.25, noon, Agora Bookstore
Socialist Coffee

Mar.29, 7pm, Tory 215, Carleton U.
IS Carleton branch meeting

Mar.30, time/location TBA, Carleton U.
Demonstration against tuition fee hikes

Mar.31, 8pm, Mike's Place, Carleton U.
Anti-Capitalist Open Mic
suggested donation \$3-5
hosted by the Gatineau/Ottawa IS

May 11-14, Toronto, Ontario
Marxism 2006 Conference
"Solidarity, Resistance, Liberation"
Registration Information: socialist.ca

About the Agitator

The Agitator is the Carleton University supplement to *Socialist Worker*, the bi-weekly newspaper of the International Socialists. *The Agitator* is published monthly by IS Carleton. If you would like to write for either of these publications, please contact the addresses below.

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