

# The Agitator

January 2012

## OCCUPY ACCESSIBLE EDUCATION ALL OUT FEBRUARY 1

**As the 1% tries to make students and workers pay for the economic crisis, people around the world are fighting back. On February 1 students across Canada will be mobilizing to demand accessible education for the 99%.**

The continual decline in funding to the provinces for Post-Secondary Education (PSE) has led to a sharp rise in tuition fees bringing record levels of student debt, with some students graduating with debts the size of mortgages.

According to Roxanne DuBois, National Chairperson of the Canadian Federation of Students (CFS), today "students collectively owe more than \$15 billion in student debt to their government and this is limiting their ability to persist in their education and to meaningfully participate in the economy."

As funding decreases and tuition increases, not only is the quality of education put at risk but PSE as a whole also becomes less accessible for many marginalized groups and communities.

### **Cuts against 99%, for the 1%**

The economic crisis is being used as a justification for governments across the spectrum to further raise tuition fees—including the NDP government of Nova Scotia that just announced fee hikes.

Public education has been under attack since the massive cuts to social spending initiated by the federal Liberals in the 1990s. But there are billions for bank bailouts, corporate tax cuts and escalating military spending. The money is there, but it's only going to the 1%.



### **Fighting Back Globally**

The economic crisis and the failure of social democracy to provide an alternative has created a series of fight-backs across the globe that have not been seen for decades.

All over the world, we see students, workers, communities experiencing systemic poverty, the unemployed and the disenfranchised rising up in resistance to a global agenda that puts profits before people. Time Magazine had no choice but to name "The Protestor" its person of the year.

Students in the United Kingdom protested the tripling of tuition fees by taking to the streets, occupying campuses, and even taking over a Conservative Party office.

Their Chilean counterparts organized nation-wide protests and shut down the education system by going on strike, calling for a more accessible and equitable education system.

Mohamed Bouazizi, an unemployed Tunisian student, lit his body on fire in protest, triggering the Arab Spring.

Egyptian students have been part of their revolution—protesting in Tahrir Square, occupying their universities and building solidarity with workers struggles.

In Quebec, 200,000 students went on strike in November as part of an escalating campaign (see page 2).

Finally, an anti-capitalist movement has re-emerged under the banner of Occupy, confronting the current system as being unrepresentative of the large majority of the population, now widely referred to as the 99%.

While the Occupy encampments were evicted, the next step is to take the movement to where the 99% study and work. This will not only increase the movement quantitatively by involving much more people, but also qualitatively by challenging dominant institutions—universities and workplaces.

From Chile to Egypt, youth movements are strongest when they mobilize students and connect with workers. Together we can change the world.

### **February 1st Day of Action**

Students across Canada have an upcoming opportunity to contribute to the growing global resistance. The CFS is calling on all PSE students across the country to take to the streets on February 1 to call on the federal government and our respective provincial governments to properly fund PSE by lowering tuition fees, increasing per-student funding, and making education more accessible.

As the energy of the Arab Spring and the Occupy movement spreads, students across Canada have the chance to follow the example of Quebec and stand up for accessible education.

### **Organizing on Campus**

The work of radical student organizers in Chile to launch a nation-wide student strike and in the United Kingdom to occupy dozens of campuses in the is crucial in the fightback against neoliberalism.

Here in Canada, like our sister organizations in the United Kingdom, Egypt, and many other countries, the International Socialists are working to build and strengthen this wave of resistance across campuses.

We recognize that the important work of progressive student, worker and community organizations requires participation of revolutionaries who want to see an end to a world filled with systemic injustice and oppression. The fight for accessible education is part of a broader fight for a better world.

All out February 1!

*Mohammad Ali Aumeer, Toronto*

# Quebec students strike

**In 2005 nearly a quarter of a million Quebec students went on strike and defeated the government's cuts to education. Facing new austerity measures, Quebec students are again striking, offering lessons for campus organizing across Canada.**

## **Resisting neoliberalism and war**

The successful 2005 student strike in Quebec took place in the context of broader social movements.

In 2000 the Quebec women's movement organized the World March of Women. In 2001, 70,000 people across Canada and Quebec joined mass protests in Quebec City against the Free Trade Area of the Americas. In 2003 the anti-war movement across the country reached its pinnacle in Quebec, where a quarter of a million people took to the streets—forcing the Liberal government to say no to the war in Iraq. In 2004 Quebec had its biggest May Day protest ever, with 100,000 workers marching against neoliberalism.

These movements also gave rise to a new left political party, Québec solidaire.

## **The 2005 strike**

Quebec Liberal Premier Jean Charest campaigned in 2003 with a promise to freeze tuition fees. Once in power, Charest went back on his word in the spring of 2004, transforming \$103 million of grants into loans, nearly doubling the debt of Quebec's poorest students.

This triggered a strike, but it did not happen overnight. In September 2004 student organizations began to campaign against the cuts, educating their memberships for months leading up to the strike.



On February 24, 8 local student unions (most represented by ASSE, a group calling for the complete elimination of tuition fees) began the strike.

On March 3, college students represented by the FECQ joined the unlimited strike, and on March 14 university students represented by FEUQ joined as well.

On March 15 the government tried to end the strike by offering minor concessions, but this only inflamed the student movement.

On March 16, FEUQ and FECQ called a demonstration that mobilized up to 100,000 students in Montreal, the largest student demonstration in Canadian history. The same day, almost a quarter of a million students were on strike—160,000 with FEUQ and FECQ, 50,000 with CASSE (a larger version of ASSE), and 20,000 unaffiliated.

The strike brought into the struggle unexpected contingents of students, including the whole business school of UQAM (15,000 students on strike for a

week), medical schools and small regional universities, usually uninvolved in this type of movement.

The strike wave also spilled over to other members of the university, with 5,000 CEGEP teachers going on half-day strike for their own demands on March 30—while supporting the student strike.

The mass strike also won over the broader population. Three quarters of the population supported the main student demand of transferring back \$103 million from loans into grants. Some polls also showed a majority of people willing to give up a tax cut in order for that demand to be satisfied.

On April 2 the government backed down, transferring the \$103 million back from loans into grants. The strike had won, and while it did not eliminate all tuition fees it showed that mass student strike can defeat government cuts and inspire broader fightbacks.

This mobilization and others is why Quebec has the lowest tuition in Canada.

## **New strike movement**

With the economic crisis there is a renewed attack on public services around the world. In Quebec the Charest government wants to increase tuition \$325 every year for five years—a 75 per cent fee increase. But Quebec students joined the 2011 year of revolt.

In January 60,000 students from ASSE went on strike. On March 31, 2,000 students protested tuition hikes in Montreal.

Then on November 10, 200,000 students went on strike across Quebec and 30,000 marched in Montreal—the largest student mobilization since the 2005 strike.

This is part of a campaign for another general student strike in the coming months, which could stop the fee hikes and inspire students and workers across Quebec and Canada.

The February 1 Day of Action across Canada is a chance to stand with Quebec students against attacks on education.

Solidarité!

*Jesse McLaren, Toronto*

# Movements for the planet, education and freedom

## Thousands campaign against tar sands

**After an intensive one month campaign by environmental organizations including ForestEthics and the Dogwood Initiative, a record number of people have registered to make oral statements to the panel that is reviewing the Enbridge pipeline proposal.**

The Enbridge Northern Gateway Project is a proposal to build a 1170 km long pipeline to ship tar sands synthetic oil from Alberta to a port in Northern BC. The proposed route will pass over 1000 salmon bearing streams and rivers, and will require over 200 oil tankers into and out of the port each year.

Not only does the proposed pipeline route go through some of the most environmentally sensitive land in the west; this land is unceded First Nations Territory. Besides being an environmental crime, the pipeline would amount to theft of First Nations land. A coalition of over 130 aboriginal groups has promised to blockade the route, with the support of environmentalists and allies.

The only way to prevent the environmental devastation that will come from spills along the pipeline route and along the coast is to stop the project before it starts.

In an attempt to make the review panel see reason, a campaign was launched to get as much opposition as possible into the review process. As a result over 4000 people have registered to make oral statements to the review panel. This is by far the largest number in Canadian history. If the panel limits each speaker to five minutes each, meets five days a week, from nine to five with an hour for lunch and breaks, it will take them almost ten weeks just to hear the oral statements. They also have to hear from

registered intervenors, governments, and read all the written submissions.

The next step in the campaign is to recruit people to put their opposition in writing and submit it as Letter of Comment to the panel. The deadline for letters is March 13 2012. Go to gatewaypanel.review-examen.gc.ca for all the official details, and contact ForestEthics [www.forestethics.org](http://www.forestethics.org) for help in writing your letter.

*Bradley Hughes, Vancouver*

## Support CUPE 3902

**On 29 November, CUPE 3902—the union which represents teaching assistance at the University of Toronto—concluded one of the largest strike votes in the university's history.**

Members voted 91 per cent in favour of allowing the Bargaining Team to call for a strike if need be. The union has been in negotiations since their contract expired on April 30.

Funding for graduate students has stagnated in recent years and the quality of education at UofT is declining, the union says. Upper year graduate students are left to fend for themselves after the university eliminated the Doctoral Completion Grant in 2010.

The union would like to restore this grant and ensure that their wages keep up with inflation. While the administration declines these demands, the top 100 administrators make an average salary of \$260,000 and gave themselves an 8.6 per cent raise last year.

UofT's often praised tutorial system, which are supposed to provide an atmosphere where students can get help in small classrooms have grown too large, such that 42 per cent of tutorials have 50 or more students.

The union returned to the

bargaining table on 5 December. The employer did agree to some minor demands—such as paternity leave, transparency and easier access to the hiring process, and gender reassignment leave.

However, they refused to discuss any of the major grievances the union brought up, such as upper year funding and tutorial sizes.

CUPE 3902 also demanded that the employer provide guaranteed work for unfunded PhD students, increasing several grants to keep up with inflation, child care benefits, and pay equity between instructors and undergrad TAs, all of which were either refused or watered down.

The university intends to apply for conciliation, a process that will take until January to appoint a mediator from the Ministry of Labour to assist them on the bargaining table. If they cannot agree, then it becomes legal for the employer to lock out the workers or for the union to call for a strike.

Like the issue of tutorial sizes, it's obvious that CUPE 3902 working conditions are students' learning conditions. If there's a lockout or strike it's crucial that students support their TAs on the picket lines.

*Chris Bruno, Toronto*

## Arab Spring

**Amidst economic crisis and the threat of Western intervention, the Arab Spring enters its second year continuing its demands for political freedom and socioeconomic justice.**

The Arab Spring that inspired the world began on December 17, 2010 when a desperate young Tunisian fruit seller, Mohammed Bouazizi, set himself on fire. He sparked an uprising in Tunisia against political repression and economic austerity, and four weeks later

the repressive government that ruled for 23 years came to an end after a general strike.

Tunisians participated in elections, but President Marzouki has called for an end to strikes and sit-ins, driving a wedge between political and economic aspirations, making the Tunisian revolution far from over.

Inspired by Tunisia, on January 25, a series of mass protests in Egypt demanded the resignation of Mubarak's government. On February 9 mass strikes erupted, and on February 11, Mubarak stepped down and a military council was formed. But brutality has continued—banning strikes, killing Coptic Christians, and assaulting women protesters. But this was followed by a 10,000-strong march of women, showing the determination of the Egyptian revolution.

As the largest opposition force to Mubarak, the Muslim Brotherhood received 40 per cent of the vote in recent elections, but have supported the military regime and called off strikes and demonstrations. Egyptian students and workers are continuing to organize, including independent trade unions striking for economic and political demands.

The slogan "People demand the fall of the regime" united Arabs in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Yemen, Bahrain, Syria, and Saudi Arabia in 2011—producing a major challenge to Western imperialism. NATO used the pretext of bloodshed to launch a war in Libya, reducing the revolution to minor changes, and threatens to derail the revolt in Syria as well. On the other hand, the same Western powers are silent towards Yemen, Bahrain and Saudi Arabia. The hope for a continued Arab spring in 2012 lies with the people of the region themselves, and a halt to Western military intervention.

*Yusur Al-Bahrani, Toronto*

# Activist calendar

**ALL OUT FEB 1**

REDUCE TUITION FEES • DROP STUDENT DEBT • INCREASE EDUCATION FUNDING

# NATIONAL DAY OF ACTION

## International Socialists

### LANGARA COLLEGE vancouver.socialists@ gmail.com

Tabling: Wednesdays 11am  
in the foyer of A-building

EDUCATION SHOULDN'T BE  
A DEBT CRISIS  
Wednesday Feb 1, 12:30pm  
room A334

STOP THE PIPELINE  
Letter writing workshop  
Wednesday Feb. 22, 12:30pm  
room TBA

**YORK UNIVERSITY**  
yorkusocialists@  
gmail.com  
Tabling Wednesdays 1:00pm  
Student Centre entrance

THE ORIGINS OF RACISM  
Wednesday Feb. 8, 6pm  
311C Student Centre

FILM: THE TAKE  
Wednesday Feb. 15, 6pm  
311C Student Centre

CHE GUEVARA: THE MAN  
BEHIND THE IMAGE  
Wednesday Feb. 29, 6pm  
311 Student Centre

**UNIVERSITY OF OTTAWA**  
gosocialists@yahoo.ca  
Club meetings thursdays  
6:30pm in room UCU 301

OCCUPY, STRIKE, RESIST  
Public Forum  
Saturday Feb. 4, 2-5pm  
Fauteux Hall, room 135

**UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO**  
international.socialists@  
utoronto.ca  
OCCUPY, STRIKE, RESIST:  
HOW DO WE BEAT THE 1%  
One-day conference  
Saturday Feb. 4, 11:30-5:30  
Galbraith Bldg, 35 St. George  
info: occupystrikeresist.com

BAYARD RUSTIN AND THE  
HIDDEN HISTORY OF THE  
CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT  
Wednesday Feb. 8, 5pm  
Bahen Centre, 40 St. George

BLACK LIBERATION AND  
SOCIALISM  
Wednesday Feb. 15, 5pm  
Bahen Centre, 40 St. George

THE POLITICS OF HIP HOP  
Wednesday Feb. 29, 5pm  
Bahen Centre, 40 St. George  
speaker MC Mohammad Ali

## Campaigns/movements

**OTTAWA**  
Regional planning meeting  
for Peace & Prosperity not  
War & Austerity, as well as  
discussion of the possible  
Canada-Quebec-Indigenous  
social forum  
Saturday Jan. 28, 10:30am-4pm  
CUPW Board Room,  
377 Bank Street  
(South of Somerset)

STUDENT DAY OF ACTION:  
MASS RALLY 12:30PM ON  
PARLIAMENT HILL  
-Carlton University  
10am meet in Atrium  
-University of Ottawa  
10:30am meet at Morrisset  
Terrace

**TORONTO**  
STUDENT DAY OF ACTION:  
RALLY 1PM UofT CON. HALL,  
RALLY 3PM QUEEN'S PARK  
-UofT St. George  
11am meet Sid Smith  
-UofT Scarborough  
10am meet Student Centre  
-UofT Mississauga  
10am meet Student Centre  
-York University  
10am meet Vari Hall  
-George Brown, St. James  
10am meet Student Lounge  
-George Brown, Casa Loma  
10am Student Lounge  
-Ryerson U  
10:30am meet Gould Street

For more info on day of action  
visit [educationisaright.ca](http://educationisaright.ca)

## Socialist Worker

A monthly revolutionary anti-capitalist  
newspaper of the International Socialists

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## The Agitator



*read*  
*write*  
*resist*

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To fight for a world without  
oppression, imperialism and war,  
join the International Socialists

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Or visit us at  
[www.socialistworkercanada.com](http://www.socialistworkercanada.com)