

# Understanding the Unlimited General Strike in Quebec

by Anne-Marie Bergeron

A strike is a voluntary and collective suspension of activities. In an unlimited strike the duration is not given at the beginning- it will have to be renewed at regular intervals (every 2 or 3 days) in a general assembly by at least 10% of the members. A general strike must be started in several establishments at the same time, with a minimum number of participants, ensuring more credibility.



Photo: Yotam Marom, thevarsity.ca

March 2005 : Thousands of students were on the streets for weeks demanding the government to restore more than \$100 million to the government fund.

The strike is the means to put more pressure on the government, because of its enormous consequences: increased costs and governmental expenditure to pay professors and the support personnel of support, to alter the school calendar, etc.

Since autumn fall 2004, students have used many means of pressure to communicate their point of view and claims. This includes a demand that the \$103M in scholarships cut from the last budget be reinvested. In spite of this the government has remained cold and has not moved from its position.

The cuts are the most important in the history of the Quebec's financial assistance system. They make post-secondary studies inaccessible for students with economic difficulties, who at the end of their studies will face an amazing debt of approximately \$20 000 for each A level (baccalaureate). The government's moves discriminate against part of the population and the effects are palpable. Such a drastic increase in students' debt will probably discourage those who benefiting from loans or scholarship- they may even think twice before getting married.

The strike was not the first action considered. 10 000 students took to the streets to demonstrate against the measures, but this led to no change in the position of the government! The strike thus remains the most effective means to make ourselves heard.

If we were to let the government go on without raising our voices, the middle class is likely to weaken further and, in time, could even disappear. Education would be reserved only for the wealthiest, as happens already in the United States. To overcome from poverty, a person must be educated. But how can anyone have the means to get a high school diploma when, at the end of studying, he or she is sure to end up with a \$12 000 debt? This is the vicious circle of poverty. It is completely unacceptable to let the government forget its responsibility towards education.

The situation will get even worse if we do not take action immediately. We are even threatened by changes in school fees which would raise the collegial expenses from \$105 to \$700 and the university expenses from \$1000 to \$4000 per year.

We must act now so that the learning is accessible to all. Everything starts here, in small simple actions which show the support of all the Québécois.

Education is a right, not a privilege.

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**The Quebec movement turns 70 years**



PHOTO SHOT:



Some YCSers in Chicago at their weekly meeting, Sept 2005