

May - August

SOAP BOX

photo by Jessica Lajambe

A little bit of radical history for the spring

benoit

MAY DAY - THE INTERNATIONAL WORKERS DAY

On the first of May two years ago, I was participating in an action organised by Montreal anarchists in upper Westmont (where Montreal's upper-class isolate themselves from the rest of us). As a crowd of cheering activists with red and black flags passed by, many of the local big shots came out to watch the scene with confusion. One of them came and asked me what this was all about. I answered that it was the international day of worker solidarity and we were coming to visit some of Montreal's most high profile bosses. The only thing he could answer was: "But you are wrong, Labour Day is in September". Unfortunately, Montreal cops were not as confused as the local bourgeoisie. The infamous Montreal Riot Squad was already on the scene and arrested more than one hundred demonstrators as an act of "prevention."

I was even more surprised when I realised that some of the union members didn't have any ground on the historical context of International Workers' Day. As many of the anarchists, socialists and other young activists arrived at the gathering point of the unions, union security blocked the way, claiming that the rally was a workers' celebration and had nothing to do with anarchists. Because it is usually in the best interest of the ruling class for the labouring masses to forget their history and past struggles, I decided to write this brief history of May Day.

The 1880's in USA and Canada became a high peak of labour agitation. One of the main battles of the labour movement was the national implementation of the eight-hour workday. As the government and factory bosses refused to meet the basic demands of the workers, the movement radicalised. On May 1 1886, a national day of strike and protest was called. Over 350,000 workers went on strike all over the US. In Chicago, one of the most active cities, 40,000 workers went on strike and an estimated crowd of 80,000 marched on Michigan avenue¹. Many factories were paralysed. On May 3 the police opened fire on a crowd of striking workers at the McCormick Reaper Works, killing four workers and wounding many. As an response to the police repression, a group of anarchists called a public workers' meeting on the following day.

More than three thousand workers and activists gathered in Haymarket Square on May 4 to hear speeches by anarchist labour activists. As the hours passed and storm clouds formed, the crowd reduced to a couple hundred. When the last speaker was on the podium, the police gathered in the square to disperse the meeting. The workers protested the police action stating that the meeting was almost over. As the police advanced on the crowd, a bomb was thrown at the cops by an unknown person in the crowd, wounding many policemen and killing one. The police fired back at the crowd wounding more

than two hundred and killing several.

The Haymarket riot launched a "witch hunt" against militant workers. Eight anarchist activists were prosecuted for the bombing. Although there was no evidence of the implication of any of those men in the bombing (the only one present during the bombing was making a speech on the podium), they were found guilty of a crime they did not commit. The trial was clearly a frame-up. The closing remarks of the prosecutor speak for themselves: "Law is on trial. Anarchy is on trial. These men have been selected, picked out by the grand jury and indicted because they were leaders. They are no more guilty than the thousands that follow them...Convict these men, make examples of them, hang them and save our institutions, our society²." Four of the anarchists died by hanging, one committed suicide in prison and the last three remained in prison until they were pardoned six years later thanks to pressure of workers around the world.

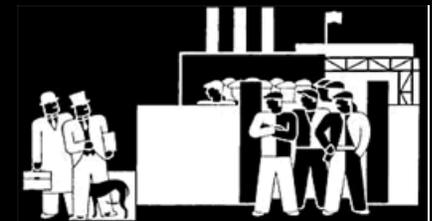
The witch-hunt against labour activist increased all over the US. Everywhere around the continent militant labour groups were shut down by the police. Because most of the Haymarket anarchists were immigrant workers, the anti-labour campaign also developed an overtly xenophobic and racist spin. Many US newspapers developed a line of rhetoric painting the most radical elements of the labour forces as "ungrateful" foreigners who posed a threat to the nation. The immigrant workforce became a main target of police and state repression.

However, at the international level the Haymarket incident developed world wide solidarity. In 1889 at an international socialist workers' convention in Paris, a motion for an international day of action was called for May 1 1890. This day of action soon turned into a yearly international event.

Today May Day, the International Workers Solidarity, is celebrated in most countries around the globe by workers, women, students, socialists, anarchists, marxists, homeless, "sans-papiers," and all those who are marginalized by a system which continues to be based on exploitation. Contrary to Labour Day, May Day stands for more than a simple and abstract "thank you" to the workforce. It is a day of struggle, as everyday should be, against exploitation, oppression, discrimination, racism, sexism, ableism, classism, hierarchy... It is a stand against exploitation in all its myriad forms.

Notes:

- (1) Howard Zinn. A People's History of the United States. 1995. P. 264.
- (2) Cited in. Andy McInerney. "May Day, The Workers' Day, born in the struggle for the eight-hour day." Liberation & Marxism. Spring 1996.



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jp savard

where chairs and heads are bolted to the floor, facing the front of the class, squeaking with uneasiness, and dusty blackboards look like televisions.

Tell me I forget
Show me I learn
Involve me I understand
(Chinese Proverb)

It is imperative that students at all levels of education recognize that the school system they are in is not a myth. When someone registers at Concordia, for example, no contract saying "welcome to the world of Real Education, please sign here to allege to our Real Education principles..." has to be signed. This Real World is based on passivity and submission, and anyone in a shopping-mall or watching thirty seconds of television can figure where its blueprints come from.

The majority of university classes have an enrolment of over twenty students. A report of the Science Council of Canada in 1984 showed that teachers are responsible for 80% of the talking in classrooms. In many rooms the desks are all lined up in rows, with a teacher standing up and talking in front. Most of the students have almost never seen one another. Such a scheme probably makes dictators, preachers, infomercialers, and company leaders foam with envy.

Apart from the initiatives of free schools and open schools, the only progress ever done regarding the design of classrooms is at the graduate level. Two hundred years ago, in An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice, William Goldwin was already demonstrating how education could help individuals be responsible citizens: "But the adherents of the old systems of government affirm,

'that the imbecility of the human mind, is such as to make it unadvisable, that man should be trusted with himself...' Nor is investigation only the best mode of ascertaining the principles of political justice and happiness; it is also the best mode of introducing and establishing them. Discussion is the path that leads to discovery and demonstration."

With François Legault, Sinister of Education, pushing forward the idea of performance contracts, the place for a student thinking critically and involved in the class material is going to disappear even more. "These contracts will lead to bigger classes and more user fees," says Mathieu Frappier, from CFS-Q.

This idea is not new either. In Ontario, the School Act of 1846 gave Egerton Ryerson, the Chief Superintendent of Schools, the power to centralize the decisional process involving schools. He could decide what would be on the class curriculum, what school administrators were supposed to do, and what were the criteria for hiring teachers. In this model of education, as in Legault's, students are a flock unable to think for itself.

Sandro Contenda, for his book *Rituals of Failure*, interviewed the principal of Cole Harbour High School in Nova Scotia, Angus McNeil: "We say that as a society we want independent learners, critical thinkers. I'm not so sure society really want that. If you put these guys out there who can think for themselves they're not going to be told what to do anymore.(...)I mean look, if we started today and said, 'every kid in this province is going to come out with critical thinking skills,' my god, they'd tear the place apart! They'd start saying, 'We're not going to kill any more of that ozone stuff and we're not going to create any more greenhouse effect. We're going to make the world safe to live!'"

Concordia Falun Dafa Club

When Concordia student Ying Zhu was arrested in China this summer on her way to visit her parents and ailing mother, she found herself in the middle of a murky war that the Chinese government has been waging against its own people for the past two years. After entering China, Ying a Canadian resident whose name appeared on a government blacklist, was arrested for her belief in Falun Gong. Thanks to the support and strong united voice for justice from Concordia University, the CSU and many concerned Canadians, Ying was released after 33 days of confinement and mental torture. Not everyone, however, is as lucky as Ying. Millions of Falun Gong practitioners continue to be forced to choose between their belief and severe consequences for not relinquishing it.

In July 1999, the Chinese government led by president Jiang Zemin banned Falun Dafa (also named Falun Gong), a practice of body and mind rooted in Chinese tradition. Falun Dafa, once highly praised and even practiced by made government officials, was outlawed because of its popularity amongst the Chinese populace. Since the ban, an extensive propaganda campaign to demonize the practice and incite hate against practitioners has swept across China, the world and has even made its way to places like Canada and Concordia University.

Tens of thousands of Falun Gong practitioners in China have been sent to hard labor camps without trials or sentenced to long prison terms. Many sane and healthy practitioners have been put into psychiatric hospitals. Others have received harsh punishments such as huge fines, loss of jobs, education, severe torture, forced abortion, rape,

public humiliation, and even beatings to death in police custody. At least 234 practitioners have reportedly died at the hands of police brutality and that number rises daily. New laws passed in June 2001, give the government the right to administer the death penalty to practitioners they wish to target, and anyone that provides foreign media or organizations with information about the persecution could be subject to harsh sentencing under these laws.

What is most incredible, however, is how Falun Dafa practitioners in China have reacted in their efforts to end this injustice. Through their actions, they have manifested the very principle of their teaching Zhen-Shan-Ren (Truthfulness-Compassion-Forbearance). They have sacrificed all self-interest for the well-being of this principle and the understanding of it by others. They have peacefully appealed for a dialogue with their government through all the proper legal channels, peacefully appealed to the international community to help in getting their basic human rights respected, and made every effort to let the world know the truth about Falun Dafa. Not one instance of a practitioner fighting back has been reported as practitioners strive to develop hearts of compassion. Like many great spiritual leaders of the past, they have understood the irony of "fighting for peace". An irony that has befallen countless nations and marred history with blood, scars and casualties. They have understood that to truly achieve and bring peace to any conflict one must first embody it themselves.

www.faluninfo.net

Also, please sign a petition calling for a peaceful resolution at the CSU office.

A Partial Victory Against in the Fight Against the Prison-Industrial Complex

Kevin Pranis

On May 22, 2000, little more than a year after its launch, the student-led campaign against private prison investors scored a major victory when Corrections Corporation of America CEO John Ferguson announced during the company's annual meeting that CCA's largest shareholder is pulling out under pressure from campus activists.

Students affiliated with the *Not With Our Money!* campaign against prison profiteering have targeted Paris-based multinational caterer Sodexho Alliance, which owned around 8% of CCA's stock. Since the launch of *Not With Our Money!* on April 4, 2000, Sodexho Alliance's North American subsidiary, Sodexho Marriott Services, has been the target of protests on more than 50 of the 500 U.S and Canadian universities where the company operates dining halls and food courts.

While we deserve to celebrate this victory we must also keep in mind that "the worst is yet to come." Pari Zutshi, a Hampshire College student who has helped to coordinate the campaign, reminds students that even after divesting from CCA, Sodexho Alliance still operates private prisons and detention centers in the U.K. and Australia: "[Sodexho CEO] Pierre Bellon obviously thinks that once Sodexho is out of CCA, students will forget about what's happening overseas. But I think this victory will energize students to finish the job. The human rights abuses that have taken place in Australian private prisons are no more acceptable than human rights abuses in American private prisons."

While students are concerned primarily with private prison companies' well documented record of human rights abuses, the campaign has put a spotlight on Sodexho Marriott Services' troubled record in other areas like workers' rights, and health and safety (for more information see www.EyeonSodexho.org).

Kate Rhee, whose group Prison Moratorium Project spearheaded the Sodexho campaign, say that, while the Sodexho effort would continue full force, the coalition would also begin to address the relationship of commercial banks to the industry. "We find it deeply disturbing that banks that profit from student loans, ATM contracts and university business have bent over backward to save CCA. We need to make them understand, just as we've made Sodexho understand, that trying to profit from human misery can be bad for business."

Kevin Pranis is an organizer with Grassroots Leadership/Prison Moratorium Project.

For more information, check out www.nomoreprisons.org.

anarchy and the desert

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Hillary Vipond

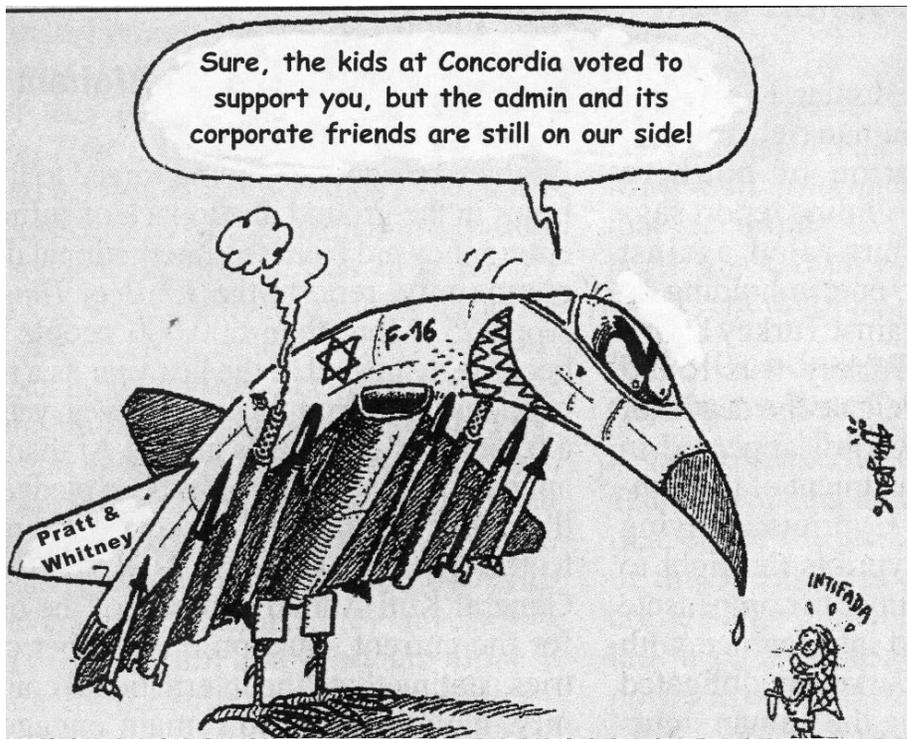
I ask that we look at ourselves. I have watched our many hands building. I have seen visions of a future birthed against the polluted background of capitalism, and I have felt my energies being pulled into the growing vortex of what activists are creating. The vortex worries me. There is a certainty surrounding the process of re-creation - a vision emerges, solidifies itself, and takes a forceful stance. This can become a problem. If we do not lay down our righteousness, righteousness will exclude. It is true that without certainty in our vision we expose ourselves to the ideological wastelands of post-modernism - a desert in which it is understood that all truths are created truths, in which one feels a terrible paralysis. It is true that mankind suffers when left alone and sterile in such a desert. And it is true that part of our existence involves defying that silence to appropriate right and to create truth. But let us create our truths with caution.

The righteousness that we claim out of the desert creates for us oases - and this is good. But with the coming of oases also come guards upon the sanctity of those oases. The safety of the created truth, of the emergent vision, lies in the

strength of the belief vested in it. The guards prevent dissent: as the truth becomes stronger the guards become more ferocious in eradicating dissent. The needs of many people become excluded. This is one of the things we are fighting - the alienation that occurs when a system exists for the needs of only a few.

Every government that has ever existed has been an oligarchy - the rule of the few over the many. This happens even in the wake of revolutions meant to change this (much to the dismay of wandering anarchists). Why? It is because some voices - through positions of power in former government (positions, incidentally, which allowed them to move things - for things to be changed in the first place) called out their vision with power and unlimited certainty in their voices. Theirs were the visions that became oases, oases against both the ferocious exclusion of another oasis, and against the desert itself. But their visions became oases' of such strength as to become exclusionary. So I ask you. Let us lay down the extremes of our righteousness, of our certainty. Let us allow the desert a place within our oasis - so that it does not become exclusionary, so that what we are fighting for is not another oligarchy with ourselves at its head.





Pratt & Whitney is a multinational producer in the aerospace sector. In the past, it supplied helicopter engines to the Indonesian armed forces occupying the country of East Timor. It has recently won the contract to produce F16 engines for Israel's air force - the same F16 engines that the Israeli government has used in its bombing campaigns in Lebanon and the occupied territories. These bombing campaigns are part of the Israeli state terror that has killed civilian men, women and children whose only "crime" is their nationality.

Pratt & Whitney is on the External Advisory Board of the Faculty of Computer Science and Engineering. It has purchased hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of research services from the university over the past four years. The company has pledged \$100000 to the University's capital campaign for the construction of an Aerospace Simulation Facility. They will also be providing \$1.2 million in funding for the creation of the Concordia Institute of Aerospace Design and Innovation (CIADI).

L'Union fait la force

M-A

Andre Munro

La croyance populaire veut que les grèves et autres moyens d'action directe sont inutiles et même nuisibles. Pourtant l'histoire des luttes étudiantes et syndicales nous apprend qu'il n'y a rien de plus faux. En fait, les étudiant-e-s ont pu défendre leurs droits que lorsqu'ils-elles se sont organisé-e-s collectivement et ont adopté des moyens de pressions radicaux. Les sceptiques n'ont qu'à jeter un coup d'oeil aux sept grèves générales étudiantes qu'a connues le Québec et les gains qu'elles ont apportés.

Les grandes mobilisations étudiantes

1968:

Il faut tout d'abord se rappeler le contexte de l'époque: partout à travers le monde, le mouvement étudiant est à son apogée, les cégeps viennent d'être créés suite au Rapport Parent mais le retour au pouvoir de l'Union Nationale met un frein aux réformes progressistes. Regroupé-e-s au sein de l'UGEQ (Union générale des étudiants du Québec) les étudiant-e-s exigent la création immédiate d'une deuxième université de langue française à Montréal, de profonds changements dans le régime de prêts et bourses et une réforme en profondeur des relations élèves/professeur-e-s/administration dans les cégeps. Au sommet du mouvement, quinze cégeps sur vingt-trois sont en grève de même que certaines facultés universitaires. Par ailleurs, plusieurs de ces institutions sont occupées par les étudiant-e-s. Proportionnellement à la population étudiante de l'époque, cette grève est aussi la scène de la plus grande manifestation étudiante de l'histoire du Québec, dix mille étudiant-e-s protestent dans la rue. Même si la plupart des étudiant-e-s perçoivent alors la fin de la grève comme une défaite, elle entraîne dans les faits plusieurs gains importants dans les années suivantes: création de l'UQAM la même année, réforme positive du régime de prêts et bourses et un gel des frais de scolarité qui durera jusqu'en 1990! Fait intéressant,

le conseiller politique du ministre de l'éducation du gouvernement de l'Union Nationale s'appellait Bernard Landry...Et oui, l'actuel premier ministre a commencé très jeune à faire passer les chiffres avant les gens.

1974:

Alors qu'en 1973 le gouvernement Libéral avait annoncé une amélioration de sept millions au régime de prêts et bourses il prend en fait des mesures qui diminueront l'accessibilité à ce programme: réduction de l'allocation de sub-

sistance, hausse de la contribution parentale, hausse de la contribution minimale de l'étudiant-e. La grève de 1974 donnera aussi ses fruits. Généralisée à l'ensemble du Québec, cette mobilisation entraîne la fermeture temporaire de plus de quarante institutions d'enseignement (cégeps et universités) et des milliers d'étudiant-e-s manifestent à Québec et Montréal. Cette mobilisation vise l'abolition



de la contribution parentale pour les mineur-e-s et la diminution de la contribution minimale de l'étudiant-e-s dans le calcul des prêts et bourses. Tandis que le gouvernement traite au milieu de la grève les demandes étudiantes d'«irréalistes», il cède finalement à la pression et se plie à la plupart de celles-ci. L'UGEQ est morte depuis longtemps et ont sens le besoin d'une organisation provinciale pour coordonner les luttes. L'ANEEQ sera créé et deviendra par la suite le plus grand et puissant syndicat étudiant de l'histoire du Québec.

1978:

En 1976, Le Parti Québécois arrive pour la première fois au pouvoir. Celui-ci renie alors ses promesses de gratuité scolaire à tous les niveaux et de pré-salaire étudiant. S'en suivra une grève réunissant plus de trente institutions dont l'UQAM, première université à fermer complètement à cause d'une grève étudiante. Les départements de sciences humaines de l'Université Laval et de l'Université de Montréal sont eux aussi en grève. Encore une fois, le mouvement contestataire réussi à arracher au gouvernement plusieurs améliorations.

1986:

Au milieu des années 80, l'élite adopte de plus en plus l'idéologie néolibérale. C'est l'heure des privatisations, des compressions...Tatcher est au pouvoir en Grande-Bretagne, Reagan aux États-Unis. Le Parti Libéral emporte le pouvoir en 1985 en promettant de maintenir le gel des frais de scolarité. Tout comme le PQ en 1978, il remettra en question cet engagement une fois les élections terminées. En hiver 1986, Le ministre de l'éducation Claude Ryan s'attire la colère des étudiant-e-s en déclarant qu'il y a <<deux fois trop d'universitaires au Québec>> tout en rejetant la promesse du gel des frais de scolarité. L'ANEEQ organise une grande manifestation sur la coline parlementaire puis convoque toutes les associations étudiantes du Québec à une <<Réunion extraordinaire du mouvement étudiant>>. La grève y est déclanchée, les étudiant-e-s réclamant le gel des frais de scolarité, le retrait des frais afférants et des négociations sur les programmes de prêt et bourses. Une trentaine de syndicats étudiants tombent en grève mais un seul d'entre-eux est universitaire (UQAM).Face au rapport de force de l'ANEEQ, le Premier-Ministre Bourassa est contraint de réitérer l'engagement du gel des frais de scolarité et le gouvernement entre en négociation avec l'ANEEQ sur la question des prêts et bourses. Par contre, les frais afférants ne sont pas abolis.

1988:

L'ANEEQ tente de déclancher une grève pour mettre de la pression sur la question des prêts et bourses. L'ANEEQ semble surestimer sa capacité de mobilisation et ne réussi pas à dépasser le plancher de 20 mandats de grève générale qui avait été fixé. Un <<repli stratégique>> est alors décidé pour éviter une défaite du mouvement étudiant.

1990:

Les Libéraux toujours au pouvoir annonce en pleine période d'examen une augmentation des frais de scolarité de 500\$ à 1200\$ en deux ans. L'ANEEQ ne réussi pas à récolter beaucoup de vote de grève, seulement une douzaine d'association y participe. Le gouvernement ne cède sur aucun point, c'est la première vrai défaite du mouvement étudiant et celle-ci sera un des facteurs déterminant dans la mort de l'ANEEQ.

1996:

Le Parti Québécois est de retour au pouvoir en 1994 et celui-ci a décidément adopté l'idéologie néolibérale. Le Sommet socio-économique est lancé où le gouvernement fait adopter un plan de déficit-zéro qui sera dévastateur pour tous les programmes sociaux. D'après l'agenda du gouvernement, la ministre de l'éducation Pauline Marois doit se prononcer en pleine période d'examen (la veille du congé de Noël) sur les questions de frais de scolarité et les budgets alloués au système d'éducation.La ministre sait très bien que dans cette période de l'année la mobilisation étudiante s'avère difficile sinon impossible.Mais les syndicats étudiants sont cette fois décidés à ne pas se laisser avoir au même jeux qu'en 1990 . L'Étincelle, journal du nouveau syndicat de combat MDE (Mouvement pour le droit à l'éducation) lance un mot d'ordre de grève générale illimitée. Le mouvement de grève se répend très vite à travers la province et culmine avec une quarantaine de syndicats étudiants touchés. La grève est intense, ponctuée de nombreuses manifestations, occupations (certaines durant plus de cent heures) et par le fameux blocage du pont menant au Casino. Les étudiant-e-s réussiront à maintenir le gel des frais de scolarité jusqu'à aujourd'hui.

Sur les sept grèves générales qu'à connue le Québec, cinq ont été victorieuses, une s'éteindra d'elle-même et une seule s'averera une défaite. Depuis ces débuts dans les années 60, le mouvement étudiant a adopté comme base idéologique le principe du syndicalisme de combat. Les syndicats étudiants québécois, influencés par les associations françaises ont inspiré leurs luttes de la Charte de Grenoble, document reconnaissant l'étudiant-e comme un-e <<jeune travailleur-seuse intellectuel-le>>. Depuis lors, c'est sur une base syndicale que les étudiant-e-s se sont organisé-e-s développant un contre-pouvoir dynamique et efficace contre les attaques répétées au droit à l'éducation.Il est important de comprendre que ce n'est que par des moyens de pressions radicaux (grèves, occupations, ect) et par la solidarité que les étudiant-e-s ont pu-e-s défendre leurs droits à une éducation libre, gratuite et de qualité.

SOURCES: *RENAUD, Benoit, Six grèves générales.*