

NOVEMBER 10TH WAS NOT A VICTORY



IF STUDENTS WANT TO WIN, their struggle needs to get militant – and the sooner that happens, the better. So far, though, many students have yet to come to terms with this simple reality.

Right now, it isn't our enemies in the provincial government and the university administrations that are imploring us to stay calm, stay non-violent, and wait things out. If they did, then we would obviously be suspicious and analyze their motives. It's fortunate for them, then, that they don't need to say these things. It is our own politicians, like the members of the CSU exec, and our own propagandists, like those who write columns in *The Link*, that are trying to keep a lid on things.

It is proven by history that when things *go batshit crazy* and the capitalist economy can no longer function normally, that's when the people in power start making concessions to their rebellious underlings. That's how the students made the Liberals back off from their plans in 2005: we (well, not Concordia, but the francophones) made the economic machine that is Montréal seize up and stop working as best as we could. People ran riot through the underground mall. Gas stations were sabotaged. A blockade was set up at the SAQ depot, such that no alcohol could be delivered anywhere in the entire island. There were multiple clashes with the police. And much, much more.

In this light, November 10 was not a victory. To be clear, it cost us more than it cost them.

It's dizzying to think of all the posters that went up in the Hall building alone, all of the signs, handbills, and professionally-printed vinyl banners. How much got spent on all that slick graphic design, too? Then there were the buses from all across the province, even as far as Rimouski. The exec, whom we pay a substantial salary for their time, put many hours into this – and then there was all of the work that won't get reimbursed: the army of volunteers doing their honest best to fight for themselves and their peers, the people who took time out of their social lives and their schoolwork to come support the movement. All of this for an ultimately pacifying event, giving thousands of people the satisfaction of having *done something*, which is always a dangerous way to feel when you haven't done anything at all.

Numbers, by themselves, mean nothing. An example: on February 15, 2003, the largest protests in history took place. There were over whatever million people marching in the streets of cities big and small around the world, and in the West, they were almost universally non-violent. Back then, the point was to stop the invasion of Iraq. But there was no economic disruption, not even the threat of it, and the leaders were hellbent on war. We all know the story from there.

Today, we have a premier who is hellbent on a neoliberal economic model for Québec, one that is much closer to the North American stan-

dard. His approval rating is already in the dirt, and he knows that angry students won't vote for him in the next election either way. He is already entitled to a politician's pension of several hundred thousand dollars. He has a long and prestigious record of service in defense of elitist greed, something that any scumbag politician could look back on with pride. In fact, one of the only marks against his legacy is his failure to implement reforms to the loans and bursaries program in 2005.

It is delusional to think that a protest alone, no matter how big it was, is capable of stopping him. In October of 2004, before any of us were in university, there was a one-day strike much like the one on November 10. At the time, low estimates suggested there were eighty thousand people in the streets; high estimates suggested more than a hundred thousand. Then as now, the event was mostly without incident and almost everyone promptly went home afterwards. Back then, the Liberals ignored it and proceeded with their plans. In 2011, with the global economic crisis being used to justify much harsher austerity measures elsewhere, there was no reason to expect something different.

Another thing: **reasonable arguments won't work**. A lot of time, energy, ink, and paper has been devoted into winning "the war of ideas" by presenting and explaining – often with the help of graphs and charts – extensive (and expensive) research that disproves the provincial government's arguments for tuition hikes while indicating several ways that education could remain generously funded. None of this matters. At this point, we're degrading ourselves by assuming good faith with anything the government says. They aren't implementing austerity measures, including these tuition hikes, because they think it's the best decision for all residents of Québec. They're doing it because they want the working class to pay for the crisis that the ruling class created. We need to understand this as an attack on us, not just a disagreement about a matter of policy. Our best arguments are impotent unless we have the power to physically defend our continued access to these spaces.

Considering our situation, the leadership of the FÉUQ and the current CSU student government need to be challenged. So far this year, there has been no visible opposition to "the most progressive CSU exec since 2002" – not even from conservatives! The left-leaning student media has failed to critically examine the efficacy of FÉUQ tactics or the controversial history of that organization; instead, resources have been directed towards explaining in minute detail something that we already know. The government sucks, the administrations sucks, it's all true. But how are we going to *actually defeat them*? And what would our victory look like? And how wise is it to work within the framework established by the FÉUQ, an organization that many veteran student organizers from 2005 consider traitorous?

In 2005, the FÉUQ was on strike, but it didn't do anything substantive to pressure the government. Its leaders may have organized a few marches, but they mostly relegated themselves to pointing at actions being organized by others – either the more combative federation, ASSÉ, or by self-organized groups of comrades – and deciding, on a case-by-case basis, which were legitimate expressions of discontent and which were "hurting the student movement". They understood their role, as the elected representatives of Québec's student population, to be the ones who would enter into negotiations with the government – and that is what they focused on doing, distancing themselves from anything that could damage their legitimacy even as they capitalized on other things that they had never supported materially.

It is a truth generally lost on the FÉUQ that the militant actions they denounced improved their negotiating position. The Liberals refused to talk for a long time, but the generalized chaos on the streets of Montréal made them change their mind, and then they went straight to the people who could most easily be bought off. The FÉUQ demanded a repeal of the proposed changes to the loans and bursaries system, and that is what they got, and then they called off the strike. Essentially, they returned to the status quo without pushing

for more. With the government in a position of weakness, more pressure could have been applied and more concessions could have been won, getting closer to the ultimate goal of free education. Since then, tuition has gone up significantly. We had some ground and the FÉUQ gave it up.

On November 10, walking under the Sherbrooke bridge on rue Berri, one could look up and see a large banner that said, in French, ***The FÉUQ – 22 years of treason, and it continues.*** That sentiment is hardly marginal in the wider student movement – but on our campus, it is invisible. In fact, no one seems to know about the great sellout, or how students marched on the FÉUQ offices and released rats in their building a few days afterwards. No one knows anything about ASSÉ, the smaller student federation that wants nothing less than free education, is willing to use direct action to get it, and deserves more of the credit for 2005’s hollow “success” – which, if the FÉUQ had not seized on the first chance

to go back to school, might have been a significantly more resounding victory. Our point isn’t to glorify ASSÉ, because it certainly has its fair share of problems. The point is that, at Concordia, many students don’t know anything about the wider student movement, and the union and the newspapers aren’t doing anything to inform them. There is no debate about our goals: is it simply to stop this particular hike, or is it to change the way that the entire university system functions? There is no discussion of the fact that our union dues fund demonstrably ineffective campaigns, and at the same time, no money is being used to inform people about direct action tactics.

The Concordia Student Union, despite its name, isn’t true to what a union should be. Unions were, originally, *fighting organizations*. They fought on behalf of their membership, doing what they could to win the most possible concessions from the employers. Where there were laws that favoured the rich, they either broke the law with impunity or got around them somehow. The CSU, as

a legally incorporated entity, isn’t in the position to explicitly organize actions that would get its bank accounts frozen and its official union status revoked, but it could help facilitate – rather than sabotage – individuals from within its membership planning and executing actions autonomously. It could direct some of its money towards training people how to engage in militant street action, or how to effectively occupy university space, and it could put some money towards the legal fees of those who do.

But it doesn’t. In fact, the CSU (along with the FÉUQ as a whole) doesn’t just fail to support autonomous action – it sabotages those efforts in both direct and indirect ways. On October 4, a very large demonstration against the hike was organized at Carré Saint-Louis, but the CSU didn’t tell anyone about it. On November 10, the occupiers of the James administration building told the organizers of the main demonstration what they’d

be doing, but no one even mentioned it when the crowd had assembled on avenue McGill College and there was an occupation taking place less than two minutes away. At roughly the same time, there was an attempt to occupy Charest’s office, but members of the CSU exec – including President Lex Gill and VP External Chad

Walcott – stood in the way of the demonstrators who were (at their own risk, their own initiative) attacking the office with paint bombs, fighting the police defending it, and trying to enter the building. As if we needed another barrier between ourselves and the sources of the austerity problem! And, of course, *The Link* celebrated the brave actions of our leaders in the face of the “Black Bloc” infiltrators. (For the record, there was no black bloc on November 10; there were certainly people wearing masks and people willing to fight, but that’s not all a black bloc is.)

We can assume the best intentions on the part of the FÉUQ and the conclusion is still the same: we don’t need their micromanagement or their grand strategy so much as we need their in-

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formation and resources. If they think that invading an office is wrong, that is fine, and they are entitled to their opinion – but it is their obligation, as participants in a social movement, to let other people know what’s going on. People are going to make their own decisions, no matter what, and the only thing that hurts the movement is attacking each other when we should be attacking the government. When the politicians don’t respect this, their true role is revealed: they are gatekeepers, careerists looking to get jobs with the NDP, agents of control in our own midst, parasites. No matter what, we need to start out-organizing and out-achieving them – and if they get in our way, we need to be prepared to brush them aside.

Our situation is a little too desperate for the self-interested careerism, incompetence, feelings of self-importance, unwanted moralizing, and/or treason that politicians routinely offer. We the authors speak as the people who won’t just be paying a little extra, but who will actually be barred from completing school as a result of this hike. We speak as very angry people, and why not? We are the generation that will pay for the mistakes of the previous one. We are the ones inheriting a planet being decimated by the needs of capital, a surveillance society, and a world where all adventure has been rendered criminal. It turns out we actually want a lot more than free education: an end to wars and the police, an end to ecocide and the yuppification of every slightly interesting neighbourhood in this city, the formulation of a less repressed and less nihilistic culture. And we will have to fight hard for all of it. We are only going to GET whatever we can TAKE.

There is a wave of revolt sweeping across the world, and it has largely been leaderless. Recent events prove that, in an age of mass communications, people can organize themselves on a global scale without overarching authorities. It has also been proven that politicians’ feelings of self-importance are limitless: in every uprising, in every #Occupy action, there are political parties and cults and groupuscules claiming to have all the answers and looking for followers. It’s telling,

then, that they’ve been mostly unsuccessful. The driving force behind this revolution is against all the parasites – all dictators, democrats, bankers, bureaucrats, anyone whose role it is to make decisions for the rest of us.

We want to decide our own lives. If the ruling class is going to force us to fight for life with dignity, as they have always done, then we’re going to fight in the ways we want to, the ways that make the most sense to us. We aren’t going to fight for only a tuition freeze, either. The status quo is miserable itself. How many people are already colonized, imprisoned, and controlled to continue this system? And why not take on the entire system where the success of a few depends upon the suffering of others? Why not fight for what we really want? If we limit ourselves to fighting for what we consider realistic objectives, we’ll never get anywhere. If we fight for what we actually want – *total freedom*, let’s say – then we may never win it all, but at least we won’t let our lack of ambition prevent us from winning everything possible.

**LET’S GET
COMBATIVE!**

**Demonstrator shoots a fire extinguisher at riot police
who were guarding Charest’s office on Nov. 10th.**

