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## **Educational Reevaluation, Political Transformation: Québec and Higher Education**

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### **Abstract**

This paper considers the history of Québec's higher education system and the reforms that have contributed to the role of education in the province. Québec's education system has repeatedly been a site for social and political transformation; most recently, reevaluation of education's role in the province has revealed a tension between ideologically opposed conceptions of higher education as a private good or as a public service. The continuing debate about education has been especially fierce in Québec and raises questions of access, funding, quality, and educational philosophies applicable to contemporary education systems throughout Canada and across the globe.

### **Résumé**

Le présent article examine l'histoire du système d'enseignement supérieur du Québec et les réformes qui ont contribué au rôle de l'éducation dans la province. Le système d'éducation québécois a été, à plusieurs reprises, le lieu de transformations politique et sociale; plus récemment, la réévaluation du rôle de l'éducation dans la province a fait apparaître une tension entre des conceptions idéologiquement opposées de l'enseignement supérieur comme un bien privé ou comme un service public. Le débat permanent sur l'éducation, qui a été particulièrement virulent au Québec, soulève des questions liées à l'accès, au financement, à la qualité et aux philosophies éducatives applicables aux systèmes d'éducation contemporains à travers le Canada et dans le monde entier.

### **Introduction**

Québec, with a population of just over 8 million, is the second most populous province in Canada (after Ontario) and the largest province by landmass. Québec is the only Canadian province or territory in which French is the official language; according to the 2006 Census, 80.1% of people living in Québec reported French as their first language. As of 2011, Québec had a human development index ranking (a comparative measure of life expectancy, literacy, education, and standards of living) just below the national average in Canada, which ranks 6th in the world. The Québécois population is most concentrated in Montreal, where 3.8 million people live, and Québec City, where 765,000 people live; the rest of the population is thinly spread across the vast province. Québec's institutions of higher education are located throughout the province, although they are predominantly found in urban areas. The history of postsecondary education in Québec began in the 1600s and has undergone many periods of

restructuring. The education system's reforms over the last half century have tried to address the implications of the system's transformation from a structure of elite education to one of mass education to one that now offers almost universal education. In 2005, Statistics Canada indicated that the rate of participation in postsecondary education in Quebec was 79%—this statistic includes participation in universities, CEGEP/colleges, and other postsecondary institutions (Statistics Canada, 2008).

This paper considers the history of Québec's higher education system with an emphasis on the reforms that have contributed to reevaluations of the role of education in the province. The education system in Québec has repeatedly been a site for social and political transformation, and most recently, reevaluation of the role of education has revealed distinct, ideologically opposed conceptions of higher education held by the Liberal government in power, university professors, university students, and other Québécois residents. Specifically, the Charest government's 2010 decision to raise tuition fees dramatically highlighted competing beliefs in Quebec about whether higher education is a private good or a public service, a question that has been at stake in Québec's consideration of higher education and its funding, accessibility, and quality since the 1960's. The continuing debate about education and the role of the university in society has been especially fierce and contested in Québec, and as this paper argues, it raises questions of access, funding, quality, and educational philosophies applicable to contemporary education systems throughout Canada and across the globe.

### **From French Colony to Canadian Province**

The contemporary political, social, and economic landscape of higher education in Québec is uniquely complicated in Canada and best understood within its historical context. The name "Québec" is a derivation from the Algonquin word "kébec," "where the river narrows." Prior to its colonization by France, Québec was inhabited by Algonquian, Iroquois, and Inuit peoples. In 1608, a French expedition headed by Samuel de Champlain founded Québec City, which was to serve as a colonial outpost for the new colony of New France. The era of the French regime was characterized above all by the role of the Roman Catholic Church in New France. The first schools in New France were created by private charities, religious institutions, and religious groups, including the Jesuits, Recollects, Sulpicians, and Ursulines, with the aim of bringing Christianity to the aboriginal population (Henchey and Burgess, 1987, p. 22). The first college in New France, Petit Séminaire, now known as Laval University, was established in 1663 by the Jesuits. The seminary was formed with a mandate to train the colony's religious, social, and political elite.

Québec's harsh climate posed challenges to the colony's survival. From its inception, the colony relied economically on the fur trade, but the population in Catholic New France grew more slowly than its neighboring Protestant colonies to the south in New England. Québec's small population meant that New France could neither monopolize the fur trade nor protect the large landmass to which the colony had laid claim. These social strains

culminated in the Seven Years' War<sup>1</sup>, which began in 1756 and ended in 1763 with the Treaty of Paris; in the treaty, France signed over its North American territory to Great Britain.

The British victory over the French in Québec had “profound political, social and educational implications for the young colony” (Henchey, 1987, p. 23). The universities and seminaries in France had served both as a model for the structure of the Petit Séminaire and as the grounds on which professors returning to Québec had been trained. As Mason Wade, an historian of French Canada explains:

If the French Canadians were to remain French under the aegis of a foreign power whose language, religion, laws and customs were very different, they would have to do so on the strength of their own resources.  
(Henchey, 1987, p. 22)

These resources included the Catholic Church, which continued to have a strong presence in the colony. The Church played a pivotal role in social and educational services for the French speaking population.

At the start of their rule, the British attempted to create a common, non-denominational school system from elementary school through university; the Catholic clergy, however, successfully resisted such efforts. It feared that a common school system controlled by the English-speaking, Protestant, political majority would lead to the “Protestantization” of French Catholics. Instead, a dual French-Catholic and English-Protestant education system was created in Québec. This dual system was firmly institutionalized with the introduction of the Fabriques Act of 1824. The Act shifted the responsibility of schools from central to local governing bodies. In particular, it authorized Catholic parishes to contribute up to 25% of their budgets to founding and maintaining schools in their parish. Thus an alternative school system to the English Protestant schools of the Royal Institution was legislated. By 1834, the school system in Québec was composed of a patchwork of common public schools, schools of the Royal Institution, *fabrique* schools, and private schools run by a variety of religious orders.

The 1840 Act of Union, in which Quebec and Ontario were united to form The United Province of Canada, shifted the responsibility of education from the jurisdiction of local government to that of the central government. In 1846, however, the federal Education Act was created. The Act established two fundamental pieces of education legislation: first, it shifted the locus of control over education from a central governing body to the individual provinces; second, in Québec, it afforded Catholic and Protestant minorities the right to dissent from the common school board (the majority of which were Catholic) and to create denominational school boards. The federal Education Act applied to Quebec and the rest of the provinces; it was embedded in the Canadian constitution in article 93 of the British North American Act of 1867, which states, “Nothing in any such Law shall

prejudicially affect any Right or Privilege with respect to Denominational Schools which any Class of Persons have by Law in the Province at the Union” (in Henchey, 1987, p. 24). This legislation thus created a constitutional basis for the dual Catholic/Protestant education system that, to some degree, persists in Québec today.

From 1867 through the 1960s, Québec's denominational schools were run almost independently of any provincial involvement. The Catholic Church feared that government involvement would lead to the secularization of education, and the English-Protestant minority feared that a French-Catholic majority government could lead to the loss of its educational privileges. Thus Catholic and Protestant school boards in Quebec acted independently to determine both the policies and the direction of a dual system of public education.

### **Higher Education**

The French Catholic system of higher education was strongly tied to the church, and the only entry into university was through pre-university education provided by the clergy in private, classical colleges (Jones, 1997). While these private colleges were the path into the French-language universities (Laval, Montreal, and Sherbrooke), they were accessible only to men and only to those who could afford the fees. In addition, they provided a classical curriculum based on the study of literature, philosophy, and art but neglected technology and the applied sciences. Thus, through the middle of the twentieth-century, francophone students who pursued postsecondary education completed four years of secondary school, four years of school leading to a baccalaureate, and three years of a university program. An Anglophone student in Quebec, by contrast, could go straight from secondary school (grade eleven) into a four-year university program. Not only was the francophone stream a longer route of study, but the classical colleges provided a general education rather than one that included applied science and technology—both of which were major postwar needs in Canada. The English-language institutions in Québec included two liberal arts colleges, Loyola and Marianopolis, and three universities, McGill, Bishop's, and Sir George Williams. McGill was under the control of the Church of England; the other two institutions, however, were not. All three English-language universities were progressive compared to their Catholic (French) counterparts: they were accessible to women from as early as 1890 and were public institutions accessible to wider socioeconomic groups of students.

The first French university in Québec, Laval University, was opened in 1852, although it “had existed since 1663 as the Petit Séminaire” (Jones, 1997, p. 163). The first English university in the province, McGill University, was founded in 1821, followed shortly by two additional English universities, Bishop's University in 1853 and Loyola College in 1896. The French university system's development lagged behind its English counterpart, but in 1878 Laval University opened a campus in Montreal that became the University of Montreal in 1919. Each of Québec's universities was established through private initiatives and was self-governing. The French

universities understood higher education as a locus for the transmission and preservation of knowledge and not as a place to pursue research and the creation of knowledge. This mandate was in stark contrast to that of the English universities, which saw pursuing research as a necessary responsibility of the university as well as a necessary part of preparing students for the contemporary work-force.

### **The Quiet Revolution**

In the 1960's, Québec and its higher education system underwent a period of significant social, economic, political, and religious change; this transformation is known as the Quiet Revolution. Until the 1960's, Québécois politics was dominated by a single political party, the Union Nationale; but in 1960, Pierre Elliott Trudeau and Jean Lesage, along with other Liberal intellectuals running under a political opposition party with the slogan "C'est le temps que ça change" ("It's time for a change"), won the general election. The previous two decades had witnessed an elitist political and social tradition mired in the church and divorced from economic concerns. The Quiet Revolution, by contrast, brought about a secular province based on an egalitarian philosophy that believed in change and economic equality. During this time, the Québécois people established a strong artistic, cultural, and linguistic identity. The continued success and evolution of these cultural and political developments required a highly educated population, and restructuring higher education thus became a primary goal of Québec's education reforms.

Before the Quiet Revolution, the post-secondary educational system in Québec was a patchwork of institutions that showed limited access, elitist institutional philosophies, and marked quality discrepancies between French and English language schools. Higher education faced four major issues identified in *Between Past and Future*:

How to expand access to post-secondary education from public secondary schools; how to re-orient post-secondary training away from classical and general studies to the new priorities of science, commerce and technology; how to establish a coherent system of post-secondary education that would integrate the variety of institutions and remove the glaring disparities between French and English structures; and how to do all these without inviting chaos and conflict among the powerful vested interests of the Church, the universities, the English and the traditional French elites (Henchey, 1987, p. 100).

The Quiet Revolution influenced Québec's higher education system by introducing a strong commitment to French language higher-education, the creation of a free, a unified college sector—Collèges d'enseignement général et professionnel (CEGEPs)—and "a shared understanding of the important role of cultural and educational institutions in defending and preserving Québécois culture within a predominately English-speaking

Canada” (Sorochan, 2012, para. 2). It also identified access to education as a major issue in higher education as the population in Québec increased by close to 30% between 1951 and 1961 (Jones, 1997). To address the full scope of the challenges of its education system, the Québécois government formed the Royal Commission of Inquiry on Education in the Province of Québec (more familiarly known as the Parent Commission) in 1963.

The work of the Parent Commission took place over a period of three years and involved extensive information gathering through public hearings, expert opinions, and site visits to institutions throughout Quebec and in other provinces and countries, including the U.S. and Europe. The report identified the need both for the democratization of education and for increased access to education as a means to achieve economic and social change (Edwards, 1990). The Parent Commission ultimately had two recommendations for carrying out reforms: first, a cabinet minister should be appointed to the provincial government and made responsible for overseeing all aspects of education; and second, a Superior Council of Education should be formed to act as a consultative body, helping to establish the priorities set out by the Education Minister. The report recommended “that college level enrollments increase from 16% of the population to 45% and that university level places be increased to accommodate 20% from 7% in attendance in 1961” (Jones, 1997, p.165-166). The report also recommended the creation of a unified college sector, Collèges d’enseignement général et professionnel (CEGEPs). CEGEP would begin after grade eleven. Each CEGEP was expected to offer three-year programs for advanced technical training leading to the workplace and two-year pre-university programs intended to prepare students for a general education or specialized competency for university. These pre-university programs were the only route through which French students could gain access to postsecondary education in Québec. With this framework, Québec hoped to improve access to higher education and to put French and English students on the same educational footing.

The Parent Commission not only addressed the economic implications of increasing participation in higher education; it also identified and placed value on “cultural diversity, that is, humanistic, scientific, and technical cultures, and the necessity of instilling in students different methods of perceiving reality” (Jones, 1997, p. 165). One manifestation of this mandate was that teacher training began to include training in psychology in its curriculum so that educators might better understand the personal development of students and help them evolve into critical thinkers with a complex understanding of society. This pedagogical philosophy led to “an activist pedagogy in the colleges. According to the second volume of the Parent Commission report, college teachers were to make use of seminars, group discussions, personal and joint projects in order to give their instruction an activist, dynamic spirit which would require students to participate and to express themselves” (Jones, 1997, p. 165). The Quiet Revolution reconceived higher education in Québec as an egalitarian system that worked to produce activist, informed citizens capable of a nuanced, critically complex understanding of the society in which they took part.

## **Carrying out the Aims of the Quiet Revolution**

In 1967 the first twelve CEGEPs were opened, and eleven more opened the following year. These first CEGEPs were created out of an amalgamation of existing institutions of higher education, each of which had its own administration, staff, and philosophical leanings. The administrative unrest with the unwieldy system within the institutions was mirrored by student unrest as enrollment numbers ballooned beyond capacity and 4000 students were denied admission to university in 1968 due to a lack of space. This led to a combination of demonstrations, occupations, and strikes in 1968 that closed fifteen CEGEPs for a month. Students wanted expanded university facilities, greater student governance of CEGEPs, and for universities to put an end to tuition fees entirely.

The government responded to the protests with plans to expand the university sector and to create greater communication between colleges and other sectors of higher education. These reforms began in 1969, and the next decade saw enrollment in the college and university sectors surge. CEGEP enrollments tripled in the three-year technical programs and doubled in the two-year pre-university programs (Henchey, 1987, p.103). The number of professors in the university sector increased from 4500 to 6500 to meet increased student enrollments, and finances increased from \$121 million to \$622 million (Jones, 1997).

In 1979, one of Québec's many consultative bodies, the Council of Universities, produced a report that guided the next series of higher education reforms in the province. The Council identified redundancy between college and university programs because particular universities, namely McGill and Laval, continued to offer a liberal education in the spirit of the Newman (1873/1976) ideal despite the fact that this was the intended role of CEGEP's. Other universities, however, were adhering to their intended role and offering a more specialized, economically driven education. The Council also noted that 61% of professors had become unionized compared to zero in 1969; it feared this unionization introduced the potential for bottlenecks in the system. Most importantly, the council found that universities were not fulfilling the mandate of offering a critical examination and understanding of society set out by the Parent Commission. Access to education had improved, which was evidenced by increases in enrollment, but the quality of education had suffered with those increases and a variety of roles once carried out by individuals, such as professors, became centralized as part of a larger administrative/management machine. The Council of Universities' 1979 report ended with three objectives for Québec's universities: first, for universities to shift conceptually from a quantitative accessibility model to a qualitative accessibility model; second, for universities to maintain the quality of education in the face of financial restriction; and third, for each university in Quebec to better prioritize its spending.

In the 1980s, higher education in Quebec was defined by continued growth in postsecondary enrollment that began to outstrip the education system's available resources. In addition, the province was hit by an

economic recession from 1981-1982; higher education in Quebec thus struggled with increased student numbers and fewer resources. By the late 1980s and early 1990s, participation in higher education had exceeded the goals set out by the Parent Commission at both the CEGEP and the university levels. Universities in Quebec were running high deficits that seemed financially untenable to the Robert Bourassa government, which decided to raise tuition fees.

### **Funding Education**

While the history of Québec's higher education system is different from that of any of the other provinces in Canada because of its triad of religion, social politics, and language, it has also been unique in its funding structure compared to the rest of the country and to many other jurisdictions. Under the British North American Act, provinces and not the federal government are responsible for education in their jurisdiction. On the one hand, the constitution names the provinces and territories as the guardians of postsecondary education; on the other hand, anything deemed a vital national interest is considered within the jurisdiction of the federal government, and since 1867, the federal government has provided financial support to postsecondary education in a variety of formats. In 1912, the first grants were made to provinces in support of post-secondary education—mostly technical and vocational programs.<sup>2</sup>

In 1951, following World War II, the federal government began delivering grants directly to universities and colleges. Québec saw this as a move that sidestepped provincial authority and thus as an infringement on its autonomy; it objected to the federal grants by directing universities in the province to refuse the grants, which the universities did. In turn, the government of Quebec increased the provincial funding for education, but the financial consequences of the absent grants were nonetheless profound. Under new political leadership in Québec in 1959, an agreement was reached in which the federal government agreed to transfer funds, in the form of tax abatements, to the provincial government of Québec and to allow it to decide on the allocation of those funds. In 1967, the tax abatement model was applied to all provinces and territories; the growth rate of postsecondary education, however, dramatically outstripped the estimated costs of the programs. In the first year, the provinces received abatements that exceeded the federal estimates by 40%; in the second year and in each subsequent year, the federal government saw a 30% increase in payments. The uncapped tax-abatement model was proving to be unsustainable, and in response to soaring costs, in 1972 the federal government capped the growth rate arbitrarily at 15% per year (Jones, 1997, p. 15).

A variety of funding arrangements with the federal government ensued during the late 1970s through the 1990s. Overall, the federal government cut funding for public programs including postsecondary education. In many ways, education was an easy sector to target because it was funded by a combination of federal and provincial grants as well as by user fees. The federal government believed that cutting funding would force students to

subsidize the cut funds, and from the early 1980s to the early 1990s, tuition fees at Canadian universities more than doubled and tuition at colleges more than tripled. Québec, however, was unique among provinces in that it resisted passing the cost of the federal funding cuts onto students. The government of Québec, unlike the rest of the country, identified education as a short-, medium- and long-term investment and chose to make it a priority in its public spending (Jones, 1997, p. 185). This social philosophy has become increasingly complex in the past two decades and has continued to play out in the financial decisions surrounding postsecondary education in Québec.

Despite increasing public spending to absorb user fees, Québec has raised tuition in the last twenty years. On one hand, supporters of these increases assert that between 1967 and 2007 tuition fees were frozen in Québec for all but five years, and CEGEPs have continued to remain free; they also note that despite these increases, Québec continues to have the lowest tuition fees for in-province students of any province in Canada. Increases are necessary, supporters argue, because Quebec universities run high deficits that cannot be balanced with public spending alone<sup>3</sup>. On the other hand, critics of the increases note the degree to which tuition has been increased to contextualize its rise: “Contrary to what some suggest, tuition fees in Québec have not been ‘frozen for many years.’ Between 1990 and 1994 under the Robert Bourassa government, fees tripled, going from \$540 to \$1668, then between 2007 and 2011, during Jean Charest’s first term, they increased by another 500\$--and this, without counting, each time, the increase of related expenses” (Asselin, 2012, The Red’s Demonization section, para. 10). In 2007, the Québécois government introduced legislation to increase tuition by \$100 per year, and in 2011, the Parti libéral du Québec (PLQ) led by Jean Charest announced it would raise tuition fees by \$1625, or 75%, between 2012 and 2017. These increases that were to begin in 2012 “would bring Québec’s tuition to a similar level as that found in other Canadian provinces. The government explains the increase as students needing to pay their ‘fair share’ of education costs” (Sorochan, 2012, para. 3). According to Asselin’s argument, the most recent plan to increase tuition by \$1625 over five years is thus part of an ongoing process of shifting education from a public to a private good that has only and barely been kept in check by Québec’s history of activist student strikes.

### **The Contest over Education: Private Good vs. Public Service**

In its 2011-2012 Budget, “A Fair and Balanced University Funding Plan,” Le Plan québécois des infrastructures (PQI) <[http://www.tresor.gouv.qc.ca/fileadmin/PDF/infrastructures\\_publicques/pqi.pdf](http://www.tresor.gouv.qc.ca/fileadmin/PDF/infrastructures_publicques/pqi.pdf)>, in a section entitled “To ensure that students pay their fair share: a gradual and managed increase in tuition fees,” asserts, “It is important for the government that students pay their fair share of the university funding plan. However, the government has sought to make sure that the tuition fee increase defined for that purpose will be managed and limited” (Finance Québec, 2011, p. 20). The term “fair share” has received much attention in the ensuing debate over tuition increases because it crystallized the Charest government’s conception of higher education. The 2011-2012 budget, with

the phrase “Their fair share,” identifies higher education as a private good and students as its consumers. According to this logic, students receive “symbolic and material advantages” from their education, and “education contributes to the creation of wealth by means of employment; in short, it is an ‘investment’ that is profitable first and foremost to individuals” who should, therefore, assume their “fair share” of its cost (Lamoureux, 2012, para. 4). The budget identifies other “partners” on whom it will rely to help decrease higher education’s deficit and underfunding in Québec: “individuals and businesses, through increased donations under Placements Universités; and universities, through the own-source revenue they will be encouraged to generate (Finance Québec, 2011, p. 17). The budget’s identification of private business as an essential funding source for public education further suggests the Charest government’s account of higher education as an economic enterprise.

By contrast, Québécois students and their associations have a civic conception of education, identifying it as “a public service that makes possible the formation of social and intergenerational solidarity, benefiting society as a whole and facilitating the individual’s entry into the labour market as well as the realm of citizenship” (Lamoureux, 2012, para. 5). This conception of higher education both resists and critiques the currently predominant neoliberal emphasis on markets, the economy of knowledge, and personal debt, which students fear compromises access to and the quality of education to market forces. With this belief, students strongly protested against the Charest government’s university budget plan. Darin Barney argues that the student associations’ “refusal to accept the government’s proposed 75% tuition increase is a refusal to cede post-secondary education to the logic and priorities of neo-liberal capitalism, a refusal of the social logic in which it makes sense to finance public education on personal debt and corporate investment, a logic that transforms the colleges and universities into purely economic enterprises” (Barney, 2012, para. 12).

### **The 2012 Student Strike**

The incompatibility of the conceptions of higher education as a private good and as a public service, along with the attendant question of how, in each case, to fund higher education, produced a fierce, political contest between the Charest government and higher education students. This contest was controversial at every step, from the government’s budget, to the student strike, to the government’s response to that strike. What was first articulated as a debate about higher education in Québec soon became a debate about public good, political efficacy, and human rights.

Following two years of protests, petitions, and occupations in response to the Charest government’s 2010 announcement of its future budget, students voted on February 13, 2012 to go on a general unlimited strike against the planned tuition increase. Preceding this vote, the government failed to acknowledge either the students’ basic demand for a tuition freeze or their more radical demand for—eventually—free higher education. In her essay “The Québec Student Strike—A Chronology,” Cayley Sorochan

writes, "Rather than treat education as an individual consumer investment, the students insist that education is a social good that should be paid for through a progressive tax system" (Sorochan, 2012, para. 5).

On March 22, 2012, in support of the student demands, 200,000 students marched in Montreal, the largest public demonstration in Québec other than the 2003 protest against the Iraq War. The government continued to refuse to meet with students. A strong picketing movement developed to enforce the strike mandate and froze teaching at most French universities and CEGEPs. Several students opposed to the strike filed court injunctions forcing professors to teach courses regardless of how few students attended class and prohibiting strikers from picketing or assembling on campus. Universities hired private security forces and riot police were regularly called onto campuses. In response to these events that "undermine[d] the democratic strike mandate," strikers began a strategy of economic disruption, practicing civil disobedience by blocking bridges and major streets, throwing bags of bricks onto the metro system tracks, and breaking windows (Sorochan, 2012, para. 7). Sorochan (2012) notes that although the majority of the demonstrations were peaceful, the Charest government deployed riot police who used chemical deterrents, stun grenades, and batons to break up crowds.

In April 2012, Line Beauchamp, the Québec Minister of Education, Sports and Leisure, agreed to meet with students to discuss the loans and bursaries program. After walking out of the talks, the Liberals presented a new plan to extend the tuition increase over seven years at \$254 a year, thus lowering the increase each year but raising the total increase from \$1,625 in the original proposal to \$1,788 in the revised one. The students refused the new offer and, "after the talks br[o]ke down, and following another massive march on Earth Day that attract[ed] 300,000 people, the student strike beg[an] to take on the dimensions of a broader social movement" (Sorochan, 2012, para. 9).<sup>4</sup>

In early May 2012, talks between the government and students resumed, and the government proposed the creation of a committee to oversee the management of university funds and to search for ways to decrease student fees at each university in Québec. The committee would only include four students, and the strikers rejected the deal. On May 18, the government passed an emergency bill, Law 78 (later referred to as law 12), that criminalized aspects of the strike. Law 78, subtitled by the Parliament of Quebec "An Act to enable students to receive instruction from the postsecondary institutions they attend," suspended the winter term of universities that had experienced the interruption of classes due to the strike and set out that the completion of the Winter term would take place in August and September (Bill 78, 2012, p. 1). Among its "Provisions to Maintain Peace, Order, and Public Security," the law made it illegal to interrupt classes and banned the assembly of people within fifty meters of an educational institution (Bill 78, 2012, p. 7). Law 78 prohibited any demonstration of fifty or more people that does not at least eight hours in advance provide "(1) the date, time, duration and venue of the demonstration as well as its route, if applicable; and (2) the means of

transportation to be used for those purposes” and criminalized any deviation from this plan (Bill 78, 2012, p. 7). The law allowed institutions to stop the collection and payment of student fees to any student association or federation in violation of the law, a provision which undermined students’ ability to represent their interests. “Most problematically,” Sorochan (2012) asserts, “the law declares that these penalties apply not only to those who break the law, but to student representatives or organizations that do not adequately prevent their members from breaking it” (May section, para. 1).

On the night the bill passed, people took to the streets in Montreal in an act of civil disobedience. Police fired rubber bullets and tear gas into the crowd. Nightly, people began meeting in the streets and banging pots and pans—an act of civil disobedience soon to be called the *manif des casseroles*—in defiance of the law and to express their outrage with what was perceived as the government’s extra-legal injunctions against the strikers. The police allowed the people to march without intervention, and the largest act of civil disobedience in Canada took place on May 22, as hundreds of thousands of people marched in downtown Montreal.

The Liberal government’s Law 78 set off a solidarity movement across Canada and the world, supporting the student strikers and situating their strike within wide-scale political movements concerning neoliberal economics, democracy, and state violence. Erin Manning argues, “A first call—for free tuition—is supplemented by everything its proposition opens up, which in this case is nothing less than the rethinking not only of education, but of the force of the public in its ability to collectively rethink what is at stake in a world that increasingly instrumentalizes that which should never be instrumentalized: thought, creativity, pedagogy” (Manning, 2012, section 7, para. 2).

The strike to situate education firmly as a common good in Québec ended on September 5, 2012 after Parti Québécois Leader Pauline Marois froze tuition fees and cancelled Bill 78 on her first day in office.<sup>5</sup> The debate, however, continues in Quebec. While particular provinces in Canada, such as Ontario, and other jurisdictions, such as those in the United States, have embraced the neoliberal model of higher education, there are also models in which education functions successfully as a public service. In Germany, for example, higher education has historically and continuously been regarded as a public good and has been funded as such. The strikers in Quebec and their supporters across the globe have created the possibility that higher education in Quebec, by the will of the public, has begun to fortify itself as a public good.

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## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> The Seven Years War is a Canadian designation; in the U.S. it is usually referred to as the French and Indian War.

<sup>2</sup> These grants were conditional on a number of terms that are beyond the scope of this paper.

<sup>3</sup> Québec Finance notes that “since 2005, Québec universities as a whole have posted a deficit at the end of each fiscal year, such that their accumulated deficit reached \$483 million in 2009” and that “The Conférence des recteurs et des principaux des universités du Québec (CREPUQ) believes that Québec universities are underfunded. The Conférence has

estimated the underfunding at \$375 million in 2002 and \$620 million in 2010. Québec universities are calling for reinvestment to address this situation” (Finance Québec, 2011, p.8).

<sup>4</sup> The Earth Day marchers protested the Charest government’s “Plan Nord,” which would “subsidize extensive resource extraction on the part of mining companies from the province’s northern regions” (Sarothen, 2012, para. 9).

<sup>5</sup> Jean Charest lost the seat in his riding in the 2012 election.

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