While the Iron Is Hot

CrimethInc.

August 14, 2012

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Part One: Student Strike & Social Revolt in Québec, Spring 2012

In February 2012, as the Occupy movement tapered off, a strike broke out against austerity measures in the Québécois higher education system. Prevented from occupying buildings as it had in 2005, the student movement shifted to a strategy of economic disruption: blockading businesses, interrupting conferences and tourist events, and spreading chaos in the streets. At its peak, the resulting unrest surpassed any protest movement in North America for a generation.

In this comprehensive report, we chart the strike action by action, from its awkward beginnings through the high point of the revolt and the emergency measures with which the government attempted to suppress it. At each stage in its development, we explore why the strike assumed the forms it did, and analyze the forces competing to push it forward, suppress it, or coopt it. Like the Oakland port blockade of November 2, 2011, the strike suggests a path forward out of the strategic impasse resulting from the Occupy evictions; it also demonstrates that building a capacity for confrontation is an *infrastructural project,* no less so than any community institution.

Cast of Characters / Glossary of Terms

The **CÉGEP system** is composed of every *collège d'enseignement général et professionel,* or *cégep,* in the province of Québec. Most Québécois students enter these schools at age seventeen, at the same time that students elsewhere in North America would be entering the twelfth grade. There are two main options at cégep: *pre-university programs,* which usually last two years, and *vocational training programs* which usually last three years and provide students with some kind of trade certificate at the end. For anarchists, the most interesting characteristic of cégeps is that they are full of teenagers who aren't yet quite as jaded as their older peers, and understand that criminal records before the age of eighteen are less serious.

FÉCQ, the Federation of Québécois College (i.e., Cégep) Students, and **FÉUQ**, the Federation of Québécois University Students, are two separate student federations that represent most students in the province of Québec. Although they represent different demographics, their politics and internal structures are very similar.

ASSÉ, the Association for a Syndical Student Solidarity, is the other student federation in Québec, representing students at both cégeps and universities. Unlike its counterparts FÉCQ and FÉUQ, the *raison d'être* of ASSÉ is to achieve free and universally accessible

education in the province. Its analysis has always been feminist and anti-neoliberal, but not anti-capitalist.

Immediately before the student strike of 2005 began, ASSÉ and several unaffiliated student associations formed a larger coalition to facilitate organizing. This was **CASSÉÉ**, the "enlarged coalition of ASSÉ," whose name rhymed with the French adjective for "dead broke" as well as the verb "to break." CASSÉÉ was dissolved after the 2005 strike ended.

A new coalition was formed for the 2012 strike, called **CLASSE**—the "large coalition of ASSÉ," whose name may reference either classes at a school or class relations.

CLAC, the Convergence of Anti-Capitalist Struggles, is an organization with a long history in Montréal. Besides organizing the anti-capitalist May Day demonstrations for the last three years, it was involved in the Montréal side of organizing against both the FTAA summit in Québec City in 2001 and the G20 summit in Toronto in 2010.

CRÉPUQ, the Conference of Québécois University Rectors and Principals, is an organization intended to represent the interests of university administrations across Québec. Its main offices are housed in downtown Montréal's Loto-Québec Building.

Québecor is a media and communications corporation that owns—among other things—the right-wing *Journal de Montréal* and *Journal de Québec* newspapers and the Sun News Network, an English-language television channel that could be considered the Canadian equivalent of Fox News.

Hydro-Québec is Québec's state-run hydroelectric corporation.

The **SPVM** is Montréal's municipal police force, whereas the **SQ**—the Sûreté du Québec, literally "the safety of Québec"—is the provincial police force.

The word "casserole" usually refers to a stove pot in French, but in May of 2012, it became an adjective that was appended to the word *manifestation* or *manif* in order to indicate something new: a demonstration in which people march in the streets banging pots and pans. In Montréal English, this is referred to as a **casserole demo** or simply a **casserole**.

Blocking entry to class is arguably what distinguishes a student **strike** from a student **boycott.** Both the media and those anti-strike students who find themselves trying to talk their way through a hard picket often try to explain things to militants: "You see, you're confused about what you're doing. This is a boycott, and because it's a boycott, other students shouldn't be prevented from going to class and professors shouldn't be prevented from teaching." The usual argument is that students are consumers, not workers; they are not withdrawing services, but refusing to use a product that they have already bought. This is deceptive. Universities are social factories; they produce the specially trained workers—not just skilled, but also *disciplined* and able to follow orders—that the capitalist economy of Québec needs to function. At the moment, they are actually producing *too many* trained workers, and so production needs to be ramped down. This threatens many people whose survival, or at least their quality of life, is currently tied to this system. One of the best ways to fight back is cease *all* production, to stop any part of the factory from functioning.

Some labor unions, while supporting the strike to a greater or lesser degree, insist that only labor unions can *legally* go on strike; therefore, what students in Québec have been doing is a boycott. Of course, there was a time when *anything* that could be called a strike was strictly illegal. The militancy of the labor movement was what encouraged states to

recuperate hierarchical unions into the ruling order and grant the right to engage in limited strike actions under certain conditions.

Background: Prehistory of the 2012 Strike

Ancient history: 2005.

The Liberal government had made the decision to turn most of the bursaries in the "loans and bursaries" student financial aid program into loans that would have to be repaid. All the major student federations, from the reformist FÉCQ and FÉUQ to the "combat syndicalist" ASSÉ, opposed the reforms.

The strike started February 21, when the anthropology students' association at the Université de Montréal—a member of CASSÉÉ—approved a strike mandate. Things really began three days later, on February 24, when more than 30,000 members of CASSÉÉ entered the strike. FÉCQ and FÉUQ called for strikes on March 4 and March 9 respectively, and by March 15, there were over 100,000 students on strike across the province.

The strike, which lasted a month and a half, was the longest and most disruptive up to that point in Québec's history. There were numerous *manif-actions* over the course of the strike: blockades of bridges, blockades of the port and the casino, sabotage of gas stations, disruptions of underground shopping centers. There were also confrontational demonstrations involving attacks on police and private property. For the government, the strike's negative effect on the economy became more significant than the savings that might have been derived from cutting bursaries.

The government eventually chose to negotiate with "the students"—meaning the leaders of FÉCQ and FÉUQ, not CASSÉÉ. Unlike the 2012 strike, in 2005 the reformist federations represented the majority of striking students, and the leaders of those organizations were happy to return to class as soon as the government withdrew its reforms. To be clear: they backed down precisely when the government was in a position of profound weakness, missing the opportunity to mount the pressure further and secure greater concessions. Militants associated with CASSÉÉ denounced the leaders of FÉCQ and FÉUQ as traitors; during one infamous action, they released rats into FÉUQ's offices. Yet isolated in the face of intensifying police repression, CASSÉÉ could not continue striking for long; it was soon forced to disband.

2005 was the first year that the student movement used the symbol of the red square, indicating that students were "squarely in the red"—an expression that works as well in French as in English. Without acknowledging its origins, the students appropriated this symbol from the direct action-oriented anti-homelessness movement that had been quite powerful in Montréal just a few years earlier. On March 30, 2005, some militants hung a giant red square from the giant cross on Mount Royal that overlooks the city; this became a lasting image of the strike.

November 2007.

Tuition had been unfrozen. University enrollment cost Québécois students $100 more than the year previous.

In an effort to begin a longer-lasting *unlimited general strike* in 2008, general assemblies at a few isolated schools across Québec—mostly associated with ASSÉ—obtained strike mandates for November 12, 13, and 14. Hard pickets were organized, including one at Dawson College, the first anglophone school ever to participate in a student strike. There was also an occupation at Cégep du Vieux Montréal, brutally repressed by the police in an event remembered as "the Tuesday of the batons." Because of the repression, efforts to block entry to classes were generally ineffectual.

There was no strike in 2008. The movement was disorganized. Tuition increased by another $100 the following year for Québécois students; the hikes continued for the specified amount of time, ending with the 2011/12 school year.

December 6, 2010.

The Liberal government in power since 2003 met in Québec City with representatives of CRÉPUQ and the three student federations. Busloads of students arrived from across Québec to demonstrate outside the summit, especially from Montréal. Inside, the government and CRÉPUQ confirmed to the student representatives that, beginning in the 2012/13 school year, tuition would increase by $325 each year for five years; they insisted that the decision had already been made and there was no alternative. This prompted the student representatives to walk out, after which a motley group of anarchists, party communists, and other militants attempted to get in: they infiltrated the building, spray painted walls, and attempted to build barricades and break down the doors of the conference room before Québec City police chased them out.

Better than nothing, but no repeat of the siege of Millbank Tower in London, England, less than a month before.

March 12, 2011.

The Alliance sociale—a coalition of seven labor unions plus FÉCQ and FÉUQ—called for a demonstration on March 12, 2011 to demand an "equitable budget." In a callout for an anti-capitalist contingent, anarchists denounced this organization, its rhetoric—particularly its appeals to the middle class—and its shortsighted strategy of trying to replace one gang of politicians with another. When the day actually came, twelve people wearing black were identified to the police as troublemakers by union peace marshals; they were arrested before the demo could begin, charged with criminal conspiracy and possession of weapons, and given non-association conditions with one another. The conspiracy charges were quickly dropped.

A spontaneous solidarity demonstration was called for that night; mostly anarchists showed up, and there were clashes with police. One popular slogan that night was *LE 15 MARS, LA VENGEANCE* ("March 15, REVENGE!"), referring to the annual anti-police demonstration a few days later. Unfortunately, the anti-police demo on March 15 was shut down after only forty-five minutes.

Further events in March 2011.

On March 24, the finance minister's Montréal offices were briefly occupied, and a disruptive march spontaneously followed. A week later, on March 31, during a "national" demonstration called by all three student associations, militants associated with ASSÉ occupied the offices of CRÉPUQ in the Loto-Québec building on rue Sherbrooke, with some anarchists participating. The occupiers quickly negotiated with the police to be let out of the building, but people remained congregated in front of it and refused to disperse until the police used flash-bang grenades.

These clashes were indecisive and at the time it was unclear what strategy was behind them. Yet they showed that some participants in the student movement were willing to interfere with business as usual.

Suddenly, Occupy Montréal.

Shortly after Occupy Wall Street failed to occupy Wall Street on September 17, people in Montréal—like others around North America—organized their own spinoff. Rather than building momentum for a strike, many people shifted their energy into Occupy (or *Occupons*) Montréal, a movement that quickly took on many problematic characteristics. These included strict pacifism, fetishizing the general assembly, and accommodating the participation of a nationalist militia that serves as a place for citizenists[1] and white supremacists to recruit new members. Whereas established anarchist scenes elsewhere in North America at least *tried* to engage with the local manifestations of the Occupy phenomenon, anarchist engagement with Occupy Montréal didn't last long at all.

While others were laboring to challenge the widespread notion that nonviolence offered a viable strategy for an anti-austerity movement, Occupy Montréal gave this fallacy a renewed credibility. As people sought to identify the specific ways that capitalist exploitation was intensifying in Montréal, Occupy Montréal embraced a simplified analysis needlessly imported from the United States. When militants were strategizing about *occupying something,* Occupy Montréal had the unfortunate effect of making many people shy away from that word lest they be associated with the 99% rhetoric.

[1] Citizenists range from affirming the privileges of citizenship to calling explicitly for non-citizens to be deported—or worse. Citizenism is structurally similar to white supremacism, and often overlaps with it; in the Québécois context, citizenists emphasize knowledge of French and acceptance of "Québécois values."

No matter the richness of Montréal's own traditions of resistance—they couldn't compete with a mass-produced cookie-cutter protest culture imported from south of the border.

November 10, 2011.

During summer 2011, FÉCQ, FÉUQ, and ASSÉ agreed to present an ultimatum to the government on November 10: concede to our demands or we strike. A staggering amount of movement resources was poured into promoting this ultimately pacifying demo. The involvement of FÉCQ and FÉUQ was controversial among more radical students, on account of their betrayal of the 2005 strike.

The day started with pickets at several schools. Some of these, especially on anglophone campuses like Concordia and Dawson College, were "soft" pickets that didn't attempt to block entry, while others were "hard"—although not always effective, as at UQÀM, where many workers and students were able to slip past the pickets into the school.

The demonstration started in the afternoon, with several contingents from the universities and cégeps in the downtown area converging on avenue McGill College. The demo marched around downtown for a long time, and when it finally returned to McGill College, there was a confrontation at Jean Charest's Montréal offices in which one militant was arrested; this was partially the fault of demo organizers associated with FÉUQ, who sabotaged efforts to attack the building. Several others were arrested nearby at an occupation of McGill University's administration building. Once again, the organizers of the demo, this time including ASSÉ militants, sabotaged the efforts of those who wanted to announce to the crowd of what was happening close by. The organizers insisted that it was time for students to get back to their buses, willfully ignoring the fact that a large portion of the crowd was from Montréal.

Fewer people would have been in the streets if November 10 had been explained as a day of confrontation, like the recent actions in defense of education in Italy, Greece, Chile, and even England. But how useful were the additional participants, if the result was a passive demonstration that the government could ignore? Even if we consider it desirable to present ultimatums to the government, wouldn't it have been more persuasive to deliver that threat by *doing something* and threatening to *keep on doing it?*

February 13, 2012.

The November 10 ultimatum had been ignored—so the strike began. Two departments at Université Laval and one department at UQÀM voted to go on strike and join CLASSE. From this point on, the number of students on strike increased every day for about a month and a half.

February 17: The Occupation of Cégep du Vieux Montréal

On February 17, 2012, the students of Cégep du Vieux Montréal voted to go on strike and join CLASSE. The school administration had already stated that, in the event of a successful strike vote, they would close the building and prevent the school from being occupied as had happened in 2005 and, briefly, in 2007. The strike vote took place online, but as soon as the results were announced, students voted in a general assembly—held in the cégep's cafeteria—to occupy the building. It is possible that, in the course of this discussion, it was agreed that barricades should be built; it is also possible that the possibility of doing so was merely *discussed.* In any case, some people began building them while others called for people to show up from other schools, and still others continued talking in the general assembly.

The brief occupation of Cégep du Vieux exemplified the negative influence of Occupy on the opening phase of the student strike. The general assembly has a long-established place in most francophone schools; in this case, a sizeable proportion of the participants treated it as an end unto itself, rather than as a tool unto an end. As more militants and police arrived at the school, the assembly continued, discussing questions less and less relevant to the situation at hand. Furthermore, the participants showed themselves to be completely out of touch with reality—exemplified by their continuing to discuss *whether* to endorse barricading the building even as others were already doing so.

Many students of the cégep, opposing the strike or simply dismissive of outside help, went around bothering people—particularly anglophones, especially those less capable in the French language—about what they were doing in "*notre* école." Those building barricades were threatened and provoked, although no actual fights broke out. Elsewhere, others vigorously argued with "outsiders" and "troublemakers" who had equipped themselves with fire extinguishers in preparation for the eventual police siege, ultimately frustrating those people enough that they decided to leave. Others used the fire extinguishers anyway, but by that time, many people had left the premises with a sense of how badly things were going to end. There had been a call for general participation, but this was immaterial for an angry minority that probably didn't want *anyone* getting unruly but found it easiest to attack those who couldn't speak French or who weren't studying at that particular institution.

There was no plan for the occupation, and while it's not certain that it could have been held successfully if there *had* been a plan, the lack of preparation didn't help. Many people had very little sense of the layout of the building, which is built onto the side of a large hill, giving the police the option to enter from one of the higher floors and progress downwards to the lobby where the general assembly and the bulk of occupiers had eventually moved. Certain militants started building tall barricades on the front steps and additional ones on higher floors. Other people drank and partied.

Throughout the occupation, no one took action to evict the school's security guards, who were allowed to roam freely, impotent to stop what was going on but collecting evidence that was used in criminal proceedings later. For the most part, cameras were not sabotaged, nor even covered up. One particular person filmed everything, evidently with good intentions, but the police later confiscated his camera and used his footage as additional evidence.

These failures to act, failures to think, and failures to tell people *Stop fucking filming, tabernak de câlisse!* cost dearly, as the subsequent police investigation turned up lots of evidence against those who had committed "acts of mischief" during the night.

The occupation lasted nine short hours altogether. A small group of students who had locked themselves in a classroom were the last militants in the building.

The brief occupation of Cégep du Vieux was the only attempt at a lasting occupation of a university or cégep building during the entire strike, and its failure had major ramifications.

In contrast to 2005, when many buildings were occupied, the police and the university administrators immediately sent the message that lasting occupations would not be tolerated. This is what forced people to take the streets day after day, making the 2012 strike more visible and disruptive than the previous one.

March 7–15: Things Heat Up

Two and a half weeks since the beginning of the strike, March 7 marked a turning point. By this time, there had already been many demonstrations and a few blockades of critical infrastructure, such as the blockade of the Jacques-Cartier bridge on February 23. Thus far in 2012, the SPVM had refrained from using flashbang grenades or tear gas to repress students, deeming batons and pepper spray sufficient. By March 7, it was high time for them to escalate tactics; it was a little surprising that they hadn't already.

The day reprised the events of March 31, 2011. As that day, the crowd converged on rue Sherbrooke in front of the Loto-Québec building, although this time, no one had infiltrated the CRÉPUQ offices. The intention, apparently, was simply to walk in and occupy the building. The crowd also dragged metal fencing to the area from elsewhere and used it to create barricades on rue Sherbrooke, a major downtown thoroughfare. Riot police attacked these barricades and went on to attack the crowd with pepper spray and batons, arresting a few people in the process. The crowd didn't disperse, and at that point flashbang grenades were used to get them running. Shrapnel from one of these hit one participant, Francis Grenier, in the face. Glass from the sunglasses he was wearing was forced into his right eye, permanently disabling him.

If this had just been a moment when a crowd realized that cops weren't their friends—yet another incident in which police maimed someone without facing any consequences—it wouldn't have been particularly significant for anyone except for the people affected. But things played out differently.

An Occupy-style assembly was called for Berri Square that night, with the organizers appealing for calm and promising people a chance to "express their indignation." Instead, when people gathered, angry militants who wanted nothing to do with the organizers' pacifying rhetoric told them to shut the fuck up. This small group of instigators, the most vocal element in the crowd, called for the crowd to take the streets; most followed them. In the course of the subsequent demonstration, projectiles were thrown at police officers, police cruisers parked at a substation on boulevard Réné-Lévesque were vandalized, and—in a truly epic moment—people used crowd control barriers as battering rams against the front

doors of the SPVM headquarters while the police nearby were still scrambling to put on their riot gear. Sadly, it was the peace police who wrested the barriers from the hands of the *indignéEs,* who were evidently not expressing their indignation in an appropriately passive manner in the eyes of the assembly organizers.

One of the prominent chants that night was *LE 15 MARS, LA VENGEANCE.* This had first been chanted a year previous, on the night of March 12, 2011. The implication was that the police would pay for their abuses at the upcoming annual March 15 anti-police demo. In 2011, this hadn't occurred; 2012, on the other hand, saw the largest demonstration in the history of the event.

In the week between March 7 and March 15, three developments paved the way for this. Anarchists fliered and postered aggressively for the March 15 demo. In addition, there was a crucial development in the political development of CLASSE, followed immediately by a very interesting day and night in the streets.

In stark contrast to FÉCQ and FÉUQ, every decision CLASSE makes as an organization is determined in a directly democratic fashion. Since February, delegates from CLASSE's constituent student associations plus independent activists have physically met for two days of decision-making each and every weekend; this is called a congress. Whatever the problems of direct democracy, the decisions that emerge from these congresses illustrate clearly enough the attitudes and political consciousness of those in attendance. On March 11, the second day of a congress held in Montréal, CLASSE's members voted to endorse the March 15 anti-police demo and encourage militants to attend in large numbers. This was unprecedented in the history of the student movement—CASSÉÉ's congress had firmly rejected the idea during the 2005 strike—and it had a tremendous impact on the streets.

Meanwhile, the social struggles committee of CLASSE organized a demo for March 13 connecting the struggle against austerity and neoliberalism—but not capitalism—in Québec to similar struggles in Greece, Spain, Chile, and Colombia. Outside the skyscraper that apparently houses the Colombian consulate in Montréal, a small group of black bloc militants fought police and spray painted a police car. A fight ensued between pacifists and militants who had come prepared for a confrontation. Images of this were broadcast throughout the media and used to highlight "divisions" in the student movement, or as proof that anarchists had "infiltrated" it. At this time, most sections of the mainstream media in Québec were trying to portray some students as legitimate and others as violent. This strategy changed later, when the entire movement was demonized and only "the 60% of students who oppose the strike and are quietly attending classes" were lauded.

That evening had been announced as Unlimited Creation Night at the Pavillon Hubert-Aquin on UQÀM's main campus. Militants at that school had called for participants in the movement, as well as the general population, to "come democratize art in the larger sense"—whatever that means. Although the propaganda was intentionally vague and surreal, it was clear that a university building was going to be occupied and used for *more creative* purposes than normal.

Not surprisingly, the school administration did not want this event to occur. In the days leading up to it, a small notice on the front page of the UQÀM website declared: "There is no event by the name of Unlimited Creation Night organized by students at UQÀM on March

13, no matter where the information comes from." On the day itself, Pavillon Hubert-Aquin—with its large courtyard and ample space—was closed and guarded by school security, and the few organizers and other militants who showed up at the beginning of the evening were neither willing nor prepared to break in. However, the administration had left another building open.

Pavillon J.-A.-DeSève, just next to Hubert-Aquin, was a less desirable space, but a giant party erupted in it and lasted long into the night. Furniture plundered from the building was placed in the street, free food was served from the lobby, and people started passing around alcohol and other intoxicants. The "democratizers of art in the larger sense" ran down corridors with paint rollers, graffiti blossomed in the area around the building, and participants sang anti-cop songs; it ended with an impromptu late-night march through city streets that saw attacks on police cars and widespread vandalism, before the participants escaped into the métro, smashing surveillance cameras.

All of this had a joyous tone very different from the so-called "festivity" of the average passive march. In addition to fleur-de-lysé flags and vapid rhetoric about democracy, such marches are usually depressing for anarchists because young, able-bodied people are cheering and having all the appearances of a good time when they have *absolutely nothing to celebrate*: they are hurtling towards impoverishment without doing anything to resist. On Unlimited Creation Night, people created something new and enjoyable, something worth defending and replicating—something that the state would do everything it could to snuff out as soon as it had the chance. The unlikeliness of the event, and its unexpected success, were worth celebrating in and of themselves.

This last aspect marks March 13 as very different from the events at Cégep du Vieux a few weeks previous. In the earlier occupation, the prevailing attitude—or at least the most obnoxiously visible one—had been that the occupation's only purpose was to put pressure on the administration and the government. Here, the occupation offered a glimpse of a different way of relating to each other and the urban environment.

This brings us to March 15. Since 1997, March 15 has been designated International Day Against Police Brutality, although Montréal is the only city where it has been consistently observed. The demonstration typically attracts a lot of youth—chiefly homeless kids from downtown and Hochelaga or black and Arab youth from across the city—as well as the usual anarchists, Maoists, and other militants, many of whom are prepared to fight the police. The demonstrations of 2010 and 2011 had been muzzled by an overwhelming police presence, pre-emptive arrests of organizers in the Collective Opposed to Police Brutality, and those organizers' poor choices of routes and starting locations.

This trend was completely reversed in 2012. With CLASSE endorsing the march, the numbers converging at Berri Square far exceeded anything from the past few years. Although, after they were attacked, the police were still able to split the crowd, this did not disperse the demonstration. Instead, for the first time in the strike, *several* rowdy crowds roamed different parts of downtown and the police were completely unable to control the situation. Condominiums, police vehicles, and corporate stores were attacked, graffiti bloomed everywhere, and some people even managed to loot a Future Shop.

It was not surprising that March 15 was confrontational; it's *always* confrontational, if not always *successfully* confrontational. There was no reason to think that this would change the character of the strike—and for at least a few weeks, it didn't. However, a much larger group of people attended than in previous years, and as in the resistance to the G20 summit in Toronto in 2010, they learned firsthand that those who fought back had a much better chance of escaping. The mass arrest—accounting for about 100 of the 226 arrested—that took place late in the evening near the Berri-UQÀM métro station targeted almost entirely people insisting on their right to demonstrate peacefully, long after the SPVM had declared the demonstration an unlawful assembly.

Having more people in the streets helped those who came to fight the police; even if most people weren't doing anything, this caused significant logistical problems for officers who were doing all they could to get people to disperse or at least return to the sidewalks. The unsettlingly warm weather was also a boon. Unfortunately, as in previous years, no one made an effort to forge lasting connections with the youth who always come out in large numbers on March 15 but rarely attend other demonstrations. There's little evidence that the most marginalized people in the city have seen the strike as relevant to them.

March 26 to April 19: Week(s) of Economic Disruption

In early March, CLASSE had agreed with FÉCQ and FÉUQ that another "national" demonstration in the same style as November 10, 2011 would occur on March 22, issuing a further ultimatum to the government: *this time,* if you don't concede to our demands, we are going to begin a concerted campaign of economic disruption. Once again, instead of threatening economic disruption by demonstrating what the movement could do to that end, the CLASSE strategy was geared towards winning over public opinion via the mass media. This is certainly important, but should not be prioritized over actually building collective power.

Anarchists attempted to organize a blockade of Montréal's port in order to give the day a confrontational aspect. Without the institutional support provided to the passive demonstration downtown, however, this wasn't as successful as hoped.

As anarchists anticipated, the government ignored one of the largest demonstrations that had ever taken place in the history of the Canadian state up to that point, with more than 200,000 people in the streets of Montréal. As hesitant as CLASSE's congress had been to support economic disruption, this drove almost all the members of the coalition to embrace the notion that *the time is now.* CLASSE threw itself into the project of halting the functioning of the capitalist economy in Montréal, Québec's economic engine. It went from simply promoting disruptive manif-actions on its website, most of which were organized by particular student associations or by informal groups, to organizing these actions itself. On Monday, March 26, the first *semaine de la perturbation économique* started. Many more followed.

The CLASSE-organized manif-actions brought huge numbers of people to the streets, but at other manif-actions—smaller ones organized autonomously of CLASSE with fewer

movement resources dedicated to them—the numbers were also significantly boosted. Trickle-down economics is bunk, but the trickle-down effect seems to work in popular revolts.

Before getting into how things played out, let's acknowledge all the manif-actions that had already been happening. ASSÉ militants had organized several manif-actions in the 2010–11 school year; its political culture—which was largely diluted by incorporating less militant student associations into CLASSE—was heavily oriented towards direct action. In 2012, student associations that had been members of ASSÉ before 2012 independently organized several demonstrations and actions in February: a march on Autoroute 40, an attempt to shut down the Centre du commerce mondiale, and a blockade of the Jacques-Cartier bridge. These were not all small affairs, though they were smaller than some of the huge actions that followed in April 2012.

The defining characteristic of the manif-actions of the 2012 strike was that they began very early in the morning, usually between 5:30 am and 9 am, but most often at 7 or 7:30. Their usual purpose was to disrupt the workday, either by delaying commuters trying to get to work or by preventing them from entering their workplaces when they arrived. There were many variations on these general themes. Once CLASSE called for economic disruption, there were suddenly *a lot more* early morning actions: many more people were getting up to participate in them, and space opened up for people to plan their own efforts.

Between March 26 and April 19, there were literally dozens of actions. The head offices of the SAQ, the state liquor distribution corporation, were blocked on March 27, and its Montréal distribution center was blocked on April 5. The port of Montréal was blocked for the second time in a week, and much more successfully than before, on March 28; thanks to greater numbers, reaching at least a thousand by the time militants reached their destination, the police did not move in for over two hours. There were further blockades on April 5 and April 10.

On March 29, four different marches—each color-coded to represent a different line in Montréal's metro—started at Square Phillips and roamed around different parts of downtown as part of a demonstration called the Grande Mascarade. Endorsed by CLASSE and organized with the coalition's logistical support, all participants were encouraged to wear masks. The reason was explicitly stated: to normalize the practice of remaining anonymous in the face of the repressive police apparatus. One participant was quoted as saying that the organizers of the demo were "not calling for violence, but if people do it, that's why we're in the streets, it's for that that we are on strike. It's to create the opportune moment."

Some militants *did* take advantage of the moment created by the Grande Mascarade to engage in acts of vandalism, but not many. Three people were arrested and charged with mischief, accused of being responsible for everything that had happened during the day; one of these was Emma Strople, who was later singled out for persecution by the police and the judiciary. Undercovers were instrumental in these arrests.

National Bank, the only Canadian bank headquartered in Montréal, was targeted repeatedly during this period. On April 4, their shareholders' meeting at the Queen Elizabeth Hotel was disrupted, resulting in the first mass arrests on the Island of Montréal since the evening of March 15: over 70 people altogether. On April 11, when a different demonstration with a

different target set out from Square Victoria every hour for twelve hours, blockading National Bank's headquarters was the first action of the day. It lasted a little over an hour. At the north-east corner of the building, businesspeople physically attacked militants and were beaten in return, until the police finally moved in with pepper spray. April 11's morning blockade was probably the most successful of any action in the "skyscraper blockade" genre.

Simultaneously, another manif-action—called by the student associations of several cégeps in northern Montréal and the suburb of Laval—interfered with morning commuter traffic by blocking the Viau Bridge, one of the links between the Island of Montréal and the Island of Jesus, for over an hour. Later on that day, demos departed from Square Victoria every hour, some of them causing further disruption. Militants ran through La Baie, a large department store, causing chaos, around noon, and in the afternoon, there were physical confrontations with security as demonstrators attempted to blockade the headquarters of Québecor and—later again—the Montréal offices of CIBC, another bank.

With enthusiastic outside support, militants based at Concordia University organized an ambitious action for the morning of April 13: the blockade of Concordia's Hall Building during the second day of exams. In a qualitative break from anglophone Concordia's response to every other student strike in the history of Québec, some departments there had gone on strike and there had been a number of small actions at the school—though compared to what had happened at francophone schools, the strike was still a failure there. The April 13 blockade failed when students who were eager to take their exams poured coffee on the tiled floor beneath the militants blocking the tunnel between the métro station and the Hall Building—and, on the count of three, charged and breached the human wall. The police did nothing until militants decided to take the streets, at which point they broke out the pepper spray.

On April 19, a morning manif-action billed as *ON SHUTDOWN LE CENTRE-VILLE* ("we are shutting down downtown") started at Square Phillips, immediately breaking into two contingents. One proceeded to the Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce's Montréal offices and blockaded them to prevent employees from entering; the other remained mobile, wandering around downtown to cause chaos and distract the police. Eventually, the mobile contingent joined the blockaders; they were finally forced to disperse from the building by the police. People kicked the cars belonging to civilians who tried to drive through crowds, a practice that became common even in very passive demos, since it is widely understood that motorists can hurt people.

In addition to mass actions like these, there were attacks on the economy that only required a small number of people, as well as attacks that could be considered less economic than political in their targeting. The latter continued after the movement shifted its attention from early-morning manif-actions towards a practice of marching in the streets every night. We can place the sacking of the education minister's offices in this latter category: buses of militants unloaded at Line Beauchamp's offices in the north of Montréal and proceeded to storm the building and destroy everything, leaving the employees frightened. The Battle of Victo on May 4, discussed below, in which the provincial Liberal Party's annual convention was targeted, is another example of political targeting.

Perhaps the most significant economic attacks were the ones that targeted the métro system during the morning rush hour. On April 16, bags of bricks were left on the rails at locations around the city, causing chaos. This happened again on April 25 when two smoke bombs went off on different lines, and then another smoke bomb went off in Complexe Desjardins, a shopping center home to many business offices. On May 10, there was much greater chaos as a result of four smoke bombs going off in some of the city's major métro stations. Those who are now facing criminal charges for that action will be the first in history to be charged with a certain provision in Canada's post–9/11 anti-terrorism legislation that forbids anyone from committing a *terrorist hoax,* defined as the creation of a situation in which it is reasonable for people to believe that terrorism is occurring or is about to occur.

Other attacks appeared less strategic, taken individually—graffiti, window breaking, nocturnal attacks on parked police vehicles—but together created an atmosphere of tension. Such attacks always occur in Montréal, but they increased in volume after the beginning of the strike. On the night of April 15, notably, there was a coordinated attack on four different government ministers' offices around Montréal, in which windows were broken and unignited Molotov cocktails were supposedly left inside the buildings "as a threat," although the logic behind such a threat is opaque. Other targets included SNC-Lavalin, the engineering firm that built the security fence in Toronto during the G20 summit, and the offices of *Le Journal de Montréal*.

These and many other actions could not have become as militant as they did outside of the context of manif-actions happening all the time, far more often than this best-of-the-strike list can portray.

April 20–22: Plan Nord, Plan Mort

In spring 2011, Charest unveiled a new marketing campaign and a plank for getting him and his party re-elected: Plan Nord. There was a flurry of attention in the media about "one of the biggest social and environmental projects in our time," as the government website described it; propaganda posters began appearing in the métro explaining how the plan would create jobs and bring prosperity to Québec. Anarchists were concerned, but at first it was unclear how to organize against the project.

Of course, Plan Nord is not a substantive thing in itself. It is simply the way that the government of Québec has chosen to brand its recently accelerated efforts to colonize the Labrador Peninsula, dispossess its indigenous inhabitants of their land and resources, use those resources to generate quick money, and restore confidence in the future of Québéc's troubled capitalist economy. The south of Québec has been colonized and exploited more thoroughly, and now this area is unproductive in comparison to other advanced capitalist economies of similar size. But there is no substantive difference between what is happening in "the north" versus "the south"; it's simply a matter of progression, with the development of the former lagging behind that of the latter for a variety of reasons. From the perspective of capitalists, it makes sense to identify potentially profitable areas that are not yet being exploited as efficiently as they could be—so the only real *policy* aspect of Plan Nord is a

commitment by the government to begin fixing this situation in earnest, with certain objectives twenty-five years down the line. The rest is marketing and propaganda.

In the Labrador Peninsula, the Québécois government will allow forests to be clear-cut, rivers to be dammed, and open-pit mines to be carved into the land, including uranium mines. An influx of workers will result in a population boom; there will be new housing in many northern towns, and probably many new towns altogether. There is even talk of constructing a deep-water port on Ungava Bay to take advantage of the Arctic Ocean's new opening to seaborne trade. To connect all these new mines, clear-cuts, and settlements, new highways will slice across the land.

Many such projects are already underway in the north, and were long before the announcement of Plan Nord. For example, Hydro-Québec, the state-owned power corporation, has been building new dams on the Romaine River since 2009 in spite of resistance by the Innu of Uashat mak Mali-Utenam. It also makes no sense to separate development in "the north" from the continuing project of squeezing profits out of "the south." Among other projects, capitalists would like to see a gold mine dug on Mohawk territory just northwest of Montréal, a new Atlantica-style highway linking Sherbrooke to New Brunswick across the forests of northern Maine, and a massive expansion of fracking all along the Saint Lawrence river valley. There is also the legislative project of loosening environmental protections, which will affect every part of the province. All of these efforts, alongside urban projects like the reconstruction of the Turcot interchange in southwest Montréal, are part of an integrated strategy of developing *unproductive* areas into *productive* areas across the entire Québécois territory.

Given that the development that is ongoing everywhere, there are specific reasons the government initiated a media campaign focusing on "the north."

First, greenwashing. The government promises that 50% of the territory north of the 49th parallel will be protected in perpetuity. For this, Charest has already won praise at the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, where he was compared and contrasted favorably with climate criminal and general bogeyman Stephen Harper. Liberal environmentalists, who might have otherwise caused trouble by starting a Facebook group or running an ad in the newspaper, will be satisfied that only *half* of Québec's portion of the Labrador Peninsula will be paved or otherwise destroyed. As a result, radical Earth defenders who don't compromise on these matters will be more easily isolated and smeared as unreasonable. Similarly, the government has emphasized how many indigenous leaders are completely on board and how the creation of "economic opportunities" for indigenous people will help end the "social problems"—caused by colonialism—in their communities. And what could be a nobler goal than ending indigenous poverty?

Second, manifest destiny. The distinct shape of the Labrador Peninsula has often been used as a symbol of national pride, and it is this shape that has become the logo for Plan Nord. It has been a dream of nationalist intellectuals for many years that Québec's great frontier should be tamed and settled by French-speaking Québécois de souche, both because that would strengthen a Québécois claim to the entire territory in the event of independence from Canada and because it is seen as desirable in itself—even if this project is being undertaken by a federalist government. Instead of the left-wing and social-democratic strains

of nationalism currently popular among young people, the development of the north offers a different vision of patriotism for those who would imagine themselves rugged individualists seeking adventure and opportunity: a nationalism that has better things to do than protest in the streets.

Third, inspiring confidence in the Québécois economy. Since spring 2011, the premier has flown around the United States, Europe, and twice to Brazil to present a flashy PowerPoint presentation to potential investors about the enormous wealth that is about to be torn from the ground. Québec has long had a bad reputation in international business circles because of its strong(er) unions, its bureaucracy, its (allegedly greater) corruption and organized crime, its frustrating (albeit widely ignored) language laws, and its (somewhat) restive population. In the context of global financial worry, the Plan Nord campaign emphasizes two points. First, that there is a solid *plan* to rocket out of Québec's socialist malaise, and second, that this territory is one of the largest remaining landmasses in the world that has not yet been thoroughly exploited—so there is a lot of cash to be made. The campaign also aims to inspire confidence in Québécois workers who might be concerned about job opportunities in the province.

Before the strike, resistance to Plan Nord had consisted of little more than a few speaking events, less-than-rowdy protests outside conferences and ministerial meetings, pranks pulled on apolitical engineering students, and workshops situating Plan Nord in the context of the continuing colonial processes of Canada and Québec. Once the strike started, this changed. In connection to the students' struggle against tuition, but looking beyond it, anarchists were able to mobilize significant numbers of people for actions.

On March 12, a week after the Sûreté du Québec dismantled a blockade that the Innu of Uashat mak Mali-Utenam had built on Highway 138 to defend their lands around the Romaine River, about two hundred people demonstrated their solidarity in Montréal in front of the headquarters of Hydro-Québec. On April 2, there was a morning manif-action blocking workers from entering a downtown skyscraper housing the offices of Golden Valley Mines, Quebec Lithium, and Canadian Royalties, companies that really have no business existing but which also happen to be heavily involved in the renewed colonization of the north. This action, which caused significant disruption for about an hour, presaged the larger skyscraper blockades that followed.

These actions were part of a growing wave of struggle against Plan Nord, but—along with almost everything else that had happened over the course of the strike up to that point—they were overshadowed by what occurred when Charest decided to bring his well-practiced speech to downtown Montréal at the Salon Plan Nord, a giant job fair and pro-development propaganda festival held on April 20 at the city's premier convention center, the Palais des congrès.

Four demos were called for April 20: one by No One is Illegal, one by a group of Innu women who were walking to Montréal from the Côte-Nord as a means of protest, one by anarchists (including those who had organized the events of March 12 and April 2), and a fourth—by far the largest—by CLASSE. All four started in the hour before noon, so militants had to choose between which one they wanted to attend. Anarchists largely opted for the smaller, non-CLASSE demos.

When people recount the story of April 20, the No One is Illegal demo is often forgotten. For one thing, it was the smallest of the three confrontational demos; for another, it had a different theme from the others. The participants in the other demonstrations might have opposed Plan Nord because neoliberal governments won't redistribute natural resource wealth in a properly socialist fashion, because the industrial death machine that is Civilization should be ruthlessly annihilated, or because of some other nuanced analysis regarding present matters—but all of them were going to the same place, to oppose the same policies, and hopefully to get uncomfortably close to the same despicable person. The target of the No One is Illegal demonstration, on the other hand, was an agent of the federal government rather than the provincial one: Jason Kenney, the immigration minister, a racist scumbag certainly deserving of some uncomfortable proximity in his own right.

Kenney was in town to deliver a talk called "Targeted, Fast, and Efficient Immigration Systems with Focus on Jobs and Growth" at the Hilton Bonaventure hotel. He was arguing, essentially, that the demands of the market should be the most important factor determining who can immigrate to Canada. About 100 people were on the steps outside the hotel in a non-confrontational demonstration. There were also two groups of people who intended to cause disruptions inside. The first group, ten to fifteen people, entered the building up to two hours before and waited, disguised as Starbucks customers. The second group arrived shortly before the event was scheduled to begin, brazenly running into the building before security could lock the doors. Both groups converged in the building, fought their way past the security officers in the hotel lobby, and shook the final set of doors off their hinges. They burst through triumphantly, and—to their surprise—found themselves in an empty room.

At this point, they missed the opportunity to overturn tables of expensive food and glassware, but their faces were not concealed and security officers were taking lots of pictures. The police who had been outside watching the demonstration at the steps arrived, but everyone managed to escape to the street. There were no arrests and everything was over by 1 pm, so the participants were able to participate in later events. Later on, once the speech had *actually* started—much later than planned—other infiltrators with tickets to the event disrupted it.

Meanwhile, the anarchist demonstration started at Square Phillips in central downtown. Four groups were collaborating on it: La Mauvaise Herbe (a green anarchist collective), the Collective Against Civilization, the Anti-Colonial Solidarity Collective, and PASC (*Projet accompagnement solidarité Colombie*, which organizes locally in solidarity with the struggles of people in Colombia). Whether or not all the members of these groups would describe themselves as anarchists, the discourse around the demonstration was explicitly anti-state, promoting self-determination and autonomous action. Green-and-black flags on bamboo poles were distributed in the crowd.

The original plan for this demonstration, decided long before the CLASSE demo was called for, was to march around downtown delivering speeches at specific locations—buildings housing the offices of corporations involved in mining, construction, and so on—and eventually reach the Palais des congrès where it could divide into a disruptive component and a more child-friendly component. This wasn't what happened, though.

While the demo was still roaming central downtown, participants received calls that there was an urgent need for more people at the Palais des congrès.

CLASSE's demonstration had started at Berri Square and marched directly to the palace to confront Charest, reaching the palace's eastern side on rue Saint-Urbain. Militants bypassed the line of riot cops at the front door by storming the parking garage. In the palace's eastern lobby, there was a prolonged confrontation between unarmored cops and demonstrators who were determined to ascend the escalators to the job fair. Eventually, riot cops arrived to push the crowd out of the building and then out of the area altogether. Many had already opted to withdraw before the police charge forced everyone out.

This was the news that participants in the anarchist demo were receiving from the Palais des congrès. Some of them wanted to cancel the original plan and rush to the palace; others wanted to stick to the planned route, while still others wanted to join the Innu women's demo outside the headquarters of Hydro-Québec, just up the hill from the palace. This debate, which took place bilingually in the middle of a moving demonstration, went on too long for those who wanted to proceed immediately to the palace; they split off. Shortly thereafter, the organizers announced that the remainder would be going to Hydro-Québec. This meant that both groups were heading in the same direction on parallel streets, with the first group about a block and a half ahead.

At this point, all four demonstrations were converging in roughly the same area, but this was still *a very large area* containing an enormous number of people. Some demonstrators were closer to the headquarters of Hydro-Québec on boulevard Réné-Lévesque, others on rue Saint-Urbain were in the process of getting chased from the east side of the palace by riot cops, while still others were grappling with unarmored cops and breaking windows at the west side of the palace, at the intersection of rue de Bleury and avenue Viger. At Hydro-Québec, many were pushing to move back down towards the palace, while others argued that people should leave so as not to bring repression upon the Innu elders; meanwhile, the riot police moved down Viger from the east side of the palace to the west side. Coming from the crowd on Réné-Lévesque, from the anarchist demo, and elsewhere, most militants who wanted to fight gravitated towards the intersection of Viger and de Bleury. This location became a continuous flashpoint.

Demonstrators tried repeatedly to approach the Palais des congrès, while the police endeavored to prevent this, bloodying the demonstrators in the process. At first, the riot police made several charges, at one point forcing the entire crowd down Viger as far west as Square Victoria. But people kept coming back, and they quickly figured out that they didn't have to run together in a straight line down the street, but could also escape into the open square southwest of the intersection or to the parking lot on the hill to the northwest. When the police sallied forth too far, they could be themselves surrounded: a whole group of riot officers was briefly encircled and pelted with stones before they used their superior weaponry and armor to force their way out. They could also be injured: during one police attack, two cops were felled by stones and had to be carried away, one appearing to be unconscious and the other suffering from a serious limp. For two hours, people attacked the Palais, ran away, then attacked again.

To the surprise of those in the streets, during this entire time, the small platoon of riot police protecting that side of the palace *never once received reinforcements.* The police were critically understaffed that day. Large numbers of officers were trying to monitor events throughout downtown, but Montréal frequently deploys *massive* numbers of riot cops to control riotous situations, even as many as three hundred, while this seemed to be about fifty or sixty. The obvious reason is that April 20 came on a Friday, the last day in a long week of manif-actions and passive demos—the police often did not know which would be which, and had to prepare for both—and this week came on the heels of several other weeks like it. The police force *as a whole* was worn out, not up to its best game. This is why it was on April 20 that the SQ was first called into the streets of Montréal: they were needed to relieve the pressure on the cops in the SPVM.

The events of April 20 showed the growing power of militants in the streets. Many of them had become experienced street fighters over the course of a few weeks; many were enraged after continuous police attacks on their demonstrations and pickets. It was not only pragmatic but also cathartic to attack these forces in return.

The geography helped, too. The Palais des congrès sits at a lower elevation than its surroundings, with a low hill on either side to the north and south. The area is full of tight streets and alleys in which militants in light clothing are more mobile than police, but also large open areas where it is logistically impossible to kettle demonstrators. The parking lot also played an important role: it provided cover from snipers shooting plastic bullets, a refuge in which to duck away from police charges, and a vantage point from which to throw stones. It also appeared that the cops were hesitant to douse the cars parked there in tear gas. Finally, that area of downtown was full of broken stones and debris for making barricades.

The confrontation at this intersection lasted for perhaps two hours. During this time, militants were frequently forced to move from place to place, but they held one location continuously: the intersection of rues Saint-Alexandre and de la Gauchetière, just beyond the top of the parking lot. There were anarchists gathered there at all times. The police never sallied forth that far, and it was out of the line of sight from the palace. Whenever street fighters got separated from their comrades, they could go there to find others they knew.

Even though events felt urgent and fast-paced throughout, in retrospect it might have been useful for some people to hold an impromptu assembly at that intersection to determine whether there were things that could be done to improve the odds for the street fighting. Could supplies have been obtained from elsewhere? There was time. Could a collective strategy have been hashed out? Probably not, but some problems could have been pointed out, such as the fact that many people were throwing rocks without masks in the full glare of media cameras. Exactly what should and what should not be communicated in the streets is unclear, but it's clear that information multiplies combat effectiveness and that this "safe zone" might have been a good place to share information.

When people decided to leave the flashpoint at the western end of the palace, they did so of their own volition, albeit without any discernable collective process. Participants found themselves gathered in large numbers at the safe zone after another police attack, certainly not defeated, but the crowd started cheering and moving towards Square Victoria. From

there, they marched rowdily to rue Saint-Urbain via rue Saint-Jacques, attacking the Centre du commerce mondiale and other locations on the way. At the eastern end of the palace, the bulk of demonstrators joined the "green zone"[2] part of the protest. Counter to the common conception of a "green zone" group, this one had been offering sandwiches and backrubs to street fighters that wandered over, including those in black bloc attire. They did this while making music and entertaining some would-be seekers of employment—who were locked out of the Salon Plan Nord for the duration of the chaos—with weird anti-civilization street theater.

On the eastern side of avenue Viger, at its intersection with rue Saint-Urbain, a line of unarmored police with nightsticks blocked the street. As some marchers proceeded north into the Chinese Quarter, militants attacked the cops with projectiles; others soon joined in. The cops backed up as militants approached, until they turned and fled west down the avenue to hide behind the line of riot police running east from the western flashpoint. Like sharks smelling blood, street fighters gave chase to the injured officers. This was the first time in the strike that a large number of police didn't just retreat slowly from an angry crowd, but bolted in fear. A certain body of theory suggests that events like this one are important for the morale of oppressed people; events shortly after April 20 seem to corroborate this. In the following two weeks, there were three other *extremely confrontational demos*: April 25, May Day, and May 4 in the town of Victoriaville.

The riot cops, unfortunately, attacked vigorously and forced militants back into the main crowd, marching north through the Chinese Quarter up to rue Sainte-Catherine.

It is unclear why exactly the march left the area. It is certainly possible that, by this point, after at least three hours of street fighting in that vicinity, people were simply bored of that spot and wanted to go wreak havoc on the rest of downtown. It was around this time, however, that the Sûreté du Québec finally arrived to relieve the SPVM of their duties defending the Palais, enabling Montréal's police force to regroup and mount a more relentless attack on the demo, ultimately breaking it up.

Many people had already left at this point, satisfied with what they'd accomplished, and everyone was fatigued. Before dispersing, the crowd walked past the headquarters of the SPVM on rue Sainte-Catherine and found many empty police vehicles in the parking lot; several street fighters ran into the lot, smashed windows with hammers, dropped cinderblocks on the windshields, and generally did as much damage as possible until cops in vans rolled in to attack them.

It rained heavily on the second day of the job fair. Only about 200 people showed up to demonstrate; supposedly a group of them once again entered the palace's parking garage and began vandalizing vehicles parked there. This was the SPVM's justification for arresting a total of 90 people that day.

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[2] At counter-summit convergences in the turn-of-the-millenium "anti-globalization" era, different demonstrations would often be classified as green zones, yellow zones, or red zones. Red zones were the most dangerous areas to demonstrate, often the places where street fighting would take place. Yellow zones involved less disruptive or confrontational forms of direct action, and were therefore considered less dangerous. All effort was made to make green zones "safer spaces" without significant risk of repression.

Sunday, April 22, the weather was nice again, and the joint demonstration for Earth Day and the student strike was larger than the last "national" demonstration on March 22. There were between 250,000 and 300,000 people in the streets.

Many consider the weekend of April 20 to be the moment that the movement transcended its limits as a *student* movement, or even an *anti-austerity* movement, and blossomed into a genuinely *anti-capitalist* and *anti-systemic* revolt with a more *total* critique behind it. Demonstrators' targets included the Liberal government, but also many institutions of capitalism, in particular the police. Perhaps this was because Plan Nord is going to add a tremendous amount of carbon to the atmosphere—a totalizing issue if there ever was one—and because it is a manifestation of capitalism in its most basic accumulative form. In any case, *it felt good,* and that feeling carried over into the following weeks.

April 24 to May 16: The First Wave of Night Demonstrations

Throughout the entire course of the strike—in fact, from December 6, 2010, when the student federations walked out of the meeting with the government and CRÉPUQ—the government had refused to negotiate with student representatives. Charest and his education minister, Line Beauchamp, were open to discussing the situation with the presidents of FÉCQ and FÉUQ, but categorically refused to sit down with CLASSE until the group denounced violence and reined in its rowdier members. They singled out comments made by Gabriel Nadeau-Dubois, a spokesperson for CLASSE, in early April for particular ridicule: "We [the executive of CLASSE] have no mandate from our members to advocate violence or to denounce it."

April 22, on the second day of their weekend congress, CLASSE approved a motion that was reported in the media as a denunciation of violence, sometimes as a denunciation of "physical violence." It was *not,* in fact, a categorical denunciation of everything that could be construed as violence; it was only a rejection of violence against people, and even here, there was a caveat allowing for self-defense. The membership would not have countenanced any stronger, but CLASSE's media committee spun the statement in a positive way and the media accepted it. This was enough for the government to announce on Monday, April 23, that it would sit down with CLASSE at the negotiating table, on one condition: no disruptive demonstrations during the negotiating period.

The CLASSE executive body agreed to this condition. This was both controversial and complicated. It just so happened that CLASSE had no actions planned for the next two days anyway, so it was possible that the exec was only committing to two days without disruption—although some believe that, without a mandate to do so, the representatives were cementing a truce that would have lasted longer. In any case, a demonstration that had been planned for the night of Tuesday, April 24, which was not organized by CLASSE itself but by a striking department at UQÀM. It was postponed for one night, supposedly because of bad weather conditions, even though *we're talking about Québec here*—people had been marching in snowstorms throughout February. Incidentally, the weather turned out to be great. Many saw this as the CLASSE exec putting pressure on the department,

although it could very well have been an effort on the part of the department to respect the truce negotiated by the exec—in which case one wonders why they made up the stupid excuse about the weather.

Some militants unaffiliated with the striking UQÀM department, and opposed to the truce, organized their own demonstration for the same time and place. It gathered at Berri Square and took off into the streets. Although only a small part of the crowd engaged in confrontation, there was practically no one present who wanted to interfere with others' efforts to throw rocks at the police or smash the windows of banks. Not much happened, and the police eventually dispersed the crowd, making five arrests. It was enough, however, for Beauchamp to kick CLASSE out of the negotiations on Wednesday morning. The CLASSE exec insisted that it hadn't endorsed the demo, that the demo had been organized against its wishes, but Beauchamp accused CLASSE of playing both sides, noting that the Facebook event for the demo was linked from the coalition's website. In solidarity with CLASSE's chastised spokespeople, the leaders of FÉCQ and FÉUQ walked out of the negotiations as well.

That night, April 25, the postponed demo—billed as an *OSTIE DE GROSSE MANIF DE SOIR*, which loses much of its charm when translated to "big fucking night demo"—was much bigger and involved a much wider *variety* of people, including a significant number of people more politically aligned with FÉCQ and FÉUQ, few of whom had participated in CLASSE's campaign of economic disruption. It's conceivable that many of them had only been in the streets in the large passive demonstrations organized by the reformist federations; when large numbers of people began fighting the police, it could very well have been the first time they had ever been around that sort of thing.

When the crowd gathered at Berri Square that night, many different groups bloc'ed up in different parts of the square, announcing their presence to each other using white bike lights. For whatever reason, they had chosen not to gather at the square together, but to keep their distance from one another; this is the only time this happened during the strike. When the crowd started moving, there was a group of about seventy street fighters at the front of the demo and another group of about fifty around the middle; the latter group was unaware of the first group until it passed through areas that had sustained considerable property destruction. Both groups began collecting stones and chunks of pavement early on, saving them in bags. Over the course of the night, police were consistently attacked and forced to retreat under a hail of stones. At one point, a police substation was attacked for several minutes; one media source reported that police officers were fearful during the attack that a Molotov cocktail might be thrown in. The riot lasted three hours.

> **"The SPVM's Neighborhood Post 21 was the target of *casseurs* [hooligans or thugs], with many of its windows broken. The police officers inside said they had been afraid to see a Molotov cocktail being thrown through the openings in the windows."**
>
> — an article in *La Presse* (French)

After April 25, the high point of confrontation for the night demos, things quickly calmed down as peace police—in French, *les paci-flics*, i.e., *pacifiste* + the word for "cop"—increasingly began attacking street fighters: sometimes simply trying to dissuade them, other times to demask them or render them directly into the hands of the authorities. Although confrontational actions continued throughout the period of night demonstrations from April 25 to just before the weekend of the anarchist book fair in May, they became a lot more dangerous. On several occasions in early May, the SPVM thanked "the collaborators" on its Twitter account. Anarchists continued to distribute propaganda critiquing pacifism and arguing for diverse tactics—but generally speaking, confrontational action died down until May 16.

Emma Strople, one of three people the SPVM accused of committing acts of mischief during the Grande Mascarade on March 29, had been arrested on Tuesday, April 24 for allegedly breaching release conditions forbidding her from participating in any demonstration that was declared an illegal assembly. She was released on Wednesday morning, with no modifications to her conditions, after the bail had been paid. That night, she was arrested a second time.

The SPVM reported to the court that Emma had once again breached her conditions. In fact, as security camera footage from the métro showed, she was not present in the demo at the time that the police alleged she was. Regardless, she ended up spending four nights at the Tanguay Prison for Women in the northern neighborhood of Ahuntsic; during this time, about 75 people showed up to participate in a noise demonstration that marched the sixteen blocks west from Henri-Bourassa métro station to the prison. When she was released on April 30, her conditions had been modified: in three days' time, she would no longer be allowed on the Island of Montréal for any reason. She had been exiled.

May 1: Creative Destruction in Montréal

In Québec, the major labor unions continue to observe May Day as International Workers' Day; this has generally been to the disadvantage of those who want to turn May Day into a day of confrontation with capitalism and the state. For many years, there was no discrete anti-capitalist demonstration. Instead, anarchists and party communists participated in the union march, collaborating in their own marginalization even as they distributed propaganda in hopes of "changing the consciousness of the workers" or something to that effect.

In 2009, a separate march of mostly Maoists and anarchists was organized downtown, which traveled to the financial district; there was no confrontation, because everyone was waiting for someone else to start things. In 2010, as part of its campaign to mobilize people in Montréal to participate in the resistance to the G20 summit in Toronto, the recently reconstituted CLAC organized a demonstration that saw a few banner drops and a little graffiti. Things heated up in 2011, where there was more significant confrontation with the police.

In 2012, CLAC endorsed a call from Occupy Oakland for a worldwide general strike on May Day, and called explicitly for "direct action" as well as "creative destruction". Perhaps because CLAC is not an exclusively anarchist organization, there was also a call for an

anarchist contingent during the demonstration that emphasized confrontation even more explicitly: “Make sure you know to stay tight and only throw from the front,” it says, addressing problems that continue to plague street actions in Montréal. It also called for people to dress in black.

The demonstration started on the Champ de Mars, just in front of Montréal City Hall, and quickly moved towards the downtown core. It may have featured the largest black bloc that has ever taken the streets of Montréal—perhaps 300 people. Unfortunately, this didn’t result in the resounding success of April 20.

The police were well-prepared for a confrontation, and acted more decisively to break up the march than they had at any other point during the strike. Before any property destruction had taken place, the police declared the demonstration illegal. A tactical group walking alongside the middle part of the crowd charged almost immediately after the declaration, breaking the march in two. At the intersection of rues University and Sainte-Catherine and nearby, street fighters confronted the aforementioned riot police and managed to hold their own for some time.

Soon, however, more police rushed in from the south, and chased the demonstration for several blocks. They did this by playing a sort of game of leapfrog. When demonstrators ran from a line of riot police, the slower police would load into a fleet of riot vans, which would then drive past another line of riot police already deployed ahead and quickly unload to chase the anarchists another short distance before repeating the process.

The relentless chase strategy had three effects:

1. It made it very difficult to counterattack, although some put up a heroic effort;
2. it made it much harder for demonstrators to determine strategically which direction to move
3. it exhausted many people, forcing them to duck down side streets or alleys to recover their breath.

During the chase, a small group of militants—a fraction of those who were bloc’ed up—tried to fight the police by running ahead, gathering projectiles, and then either falling back or waiting a moment so they could throw what they had on hand before running ahead again. It is possible that, if more people had attacked the police instead of running, things could have gone differently. In the event, though, this was not a very wide effort.

In one of the most memorable images of May Day, 2012, a group of masked militants taunted police with donuts dangling on strings from sticks. These cops were in the tactical group that managed to divide the demo so decisively. The donut gag was funny, and it still is funny. If even a fraction of the people in the streets that day had been ready to *strike first,* however, those cops would have been forced to retreat and we might have had a resounding victory rather than a cheap laugh.

If the general assemblies that later emerged out of the casserole demos—discussed below—had existed before May 1, it would have been interesting if an attempt at a general strike could have been organized, similar to what took place in Barcelona on March

29, with roving picket lines in neighborhoods and comprehensive shutdowns of many workplaces. It's unfortunate that workplace-oriented groups like Montréal's Industrial Workers of the World didn't take the call seriously despite inquiries from other anarchists. CLAC, for its part, deemed itself incapable of organizing a general strike.

2012 marked a further marginalization of the passive union demo. Whereas the year before, the two demonstrations had consisted of roughly equal numbers, at least twice as many people attended the anti-capitalist demo this year.

In discussing May Day, it's worth noting that the anarchist callout was controversial among anarchists themselves. Many assessed it as pure posturing that accomplished nothing except to draw more heat to the May Day demonstration, thus facilitating its repression. This critique assumes that, if not for the callout, the numbers of police—or their preparation, or their willingness to attack the demonstration—would have been significantly less, while the number of militants properly prepared for confrontation would not have been significantly less. It is impossible to know what would have happened, of course, but considering the recent history of May Day and the troublemaking pedigree of CLAC, it seems unlikely that the police presence *wouldn't* have been overwhelming.

May 4: The Battle of Victo

On April 29, the Liberal Party announced that it would hold its annual conference in the small city of Victoriaville, two hours from Montréal and an hour and a half from Québec City. The downtown hotel in Montréal where the event was previously scheduled to take place was too vulnerable to blockading, and the Liberals hoped that enough distance from the metropolis would prevent militants from causing too much trouble. CLASSE, other student associations, and some community organizations and labor unions swiftly announced that they would send buses.

The convention was held at the Hôtel le Victorin on the northwestern outskirts of town, in an area of empty parking lots and fields punctuated by low-lying buildings. Victo doesn't have its own municipal police department; consequently, defense was to be provided by the SQ, a force that is much less experienced with "crowd control" situations and less sophisticated in its approach to street fighters than the SPVM. With the adversary and the terrain so different, the Battle of Victo played out differently than anything that happened in Montréal.

On the strikers' part, some basic things weren't organized at all, which might have been less problematic if it had been communicated clearly in advance. Many people were under the impression that CLASSE was organizing a genuine convergence in Victo, for example, with a place where people could spend the night for the duration of the convention. It is unclear if anyone had any serious intention to do this. In theory, the Cégep de Victoriaville—at which the student association had rejected the tactic of a student strike, if not necessarily the movement's goals—could have been used for this purpose with the collaboration of pro-strike students there. Ironically, the Liberals saw to it that the school was closed on Friday, May 4, with the school administrators implying that vandalism might take place on the campus.

The buses unloaded in the parking lot of a Wal-Mart about twenty minutes' walk south of the Victorin. When enough people had gathered, they marched straight up the street and confronted the suited-up SQ police stationed behind low metal barricades just in front of the southernmost entrance of the hotel. Quickly, the police found themselves under a barrage consisting mostly of empty plastic water bottles but also a few smoke bombs, while all around them, people shook the barricades and started to dismantle them. It wouldn't have been particularly difficult to jump over the barricades and rush the visibly frightened police, and probably even breach the hotel—but people were hesitant to go on the offensive too quickly and the police were allowed to don gas masks in front of the crowd without concealing what they were doing.

Once again, militants were hesitant to attack first. The results were predictable.

Soon, tear gas canisters were launched and many people were forced to retreat from the hotel. This environment was unlike anything street fighters had known in Montréal. Much of the area was completely open: fields, parking lots, and empty roads, the locals knowing better than to approach the warzone. There was a residential subdivision nearby and many dug-up plots of land, providing more stones than could be found on the most crumbling downtown city street. Four different lines of confrontation appeared, with street fighters hailing projectiles upon the police at each, taking the green recycling bins from people's homes to shield themselves from rubber bullets while the residents looked on. The air was thick with a gas much stronger than anything that had been used in Montréal, and it was difficult for those who hadn't come prepared with gas masks or at least vinegar-soaked bandanas and goggles to stay close to the action. People did all the same.

Many reported afterwards that Victo was the most intense experience they had ever had. The number of injuries was staggering. One militant, Maxence Valade, became the second person to lose an eye, and another, Alex Allard, nearly died from injuries to his head. At least three other people were carried away in stretchers. The SQ, instilled since the 1970s with the idea that they might one day become the military force of an independent Québec, wear army-green uniforms reminiscent of Soviet soldiers and utilize armored personnel carriers. For the duration of the conflict, their helicopter flew terrifyingly low to the ground, presumably to intimidate.

An SQ riot bus that was surrounded by the crowd for quite some time wasn't given any attention by street fighters until late in the evening. At that point, people started smashing its windows and spray painting it, prompting a lone officer to tackle one vandal in an attempted arrest. Other militants responded and the officer was beaten until he released his captive. A patrol car lurking behind the demonstration tried to intervene, but fighters surrounded it and smashed its windows at close range with the officers inside; they retreated, abandoning their rescue attempt. It took a charge involving a large number of riot cops to save the lone officer.

There were only four arrests during the day. After it became clear that the majority of militants were no longer interested in being bombarded with projectiles, the crowd retreated to the Wal-Mart parking lot and mostly loaded into buses without incident. Three buses that left later than the others were stopped by the SQ on the way out of town, and one of these—the bus rented by organizers based at McGill and Concordia—was ordered to return to the

SQ station in Victo so the teargas-soaked passengers could be properly processed and charged. This was the only bus with criminal charges, though there was apparently a plan to intercept the other buses when they returned to Montréal; fortunately, the sympathetic bus drivers dropped people off at different locations than originally planned. At the station in Victo, people on the McGill/Concordia bus were kept in the vehicle for ten hours, under the watch of armed SQ guards that patrolled the aisle and prevented people from speaking.

Although the Liberal Party convention was delayed, the event was not canceled. In fact, since everyone had left town at the end of May 4 and no one was interested in spending another second there, the rest of the convention saw no confrontational protest whatsoever, only colorful signs. For those interested in direct action, this could be seen in a positive light. The point wasn't simply to *protest* what the Liberals were doing, but to breach the Hôtel le Victorin and physically engage with some of the people who are fucking us over in concrete ways. People made a strong effort to do so on Friday, May 4, and were no longer capable of doing it afterwards, going home to lick their wounds—a much better use of time than hanging around ineffectually.

Another lesson of the Battle of Victo: as long as militant resistance remains concentrated in Montréal, it is doomed to failure. In this particular city, it is normalized, to the point that it can be factored into the authorities' strategic calculations. Obviously, they intend to put an end to it eventually, but if it is contained here in the meantime, it is much easier to control. Whenever there are attempts to push the boundaries in other parts of the Québécois territory, there is hell to pay. This was shown not only on May 4, but also in the brutal approach that the SQ used against hard pickets of schools in the Outaouais and the suburbs north of Montréal. Despite this, the capacity to project our power into other regions of the province, and above all to foster cultures of resistance there, is critical for the future.

May 16–24: The Rule of Law and the Emergency Measures

On March 30, as a result of legal action by anti-strike students at a small cégep in the north of the province, Québec's courts had issued an injunction forbidding any demonstrator from doing anything to block a student of that school from going to class. In the following six weeks, at least 38 more injunctions were issued to similar effect. The pickets continued anyway. Notably in Gatineau and Sainte-Therèse, both outside Montréal, and at the Collège de Rosemont within the city, riot police were called in to break the pickets.

In Montréal, where the fighting spirit was the strongest, the injunctions proved impossible to enforce; there were simply not enough police to go to the schools and keep them open. Perhaps the most notable effort to defy an injunction had taken place on the campus of the elite Université de Montréal on April 12. Hundreds of militants broke into two buildings; thousands cheered as a battering ram was used in one of them. Participants painted graffiti and destroyed computer systems, snipping fiberoptic cables in over twenty classrooms.

With the second breakdown of negotiations between the representatives of the government and the student federations on May 10, it is suspected that Charest and his cabinet began to consider an emergency law to restore order and cripple the movement. A well-

publicized incident at UQÀM on Wednesday, May 16, is supposedly what pushed the premier over the edge: unable to prevent students from entering the building, one hundred masked militants instead roamed through the campus, entering classrooms and making efforts to prevent classes from taking place, ranging from screaming "Scab!" to physically removing people from classes. Such things had been happening at UQÀM for months, but with the help of the media, the government seized on the events of Wednesday morning to announce his party's crisis-ending *loi spéciale* on Wednesday afternoon. It was debated in the National Assembly the next day. By midnight on Friday, May 18, it was law.

Charest's law forbids any kind of demonstration from taking place within a certain distance of a university or cégep campus, and introduces heavy fines for anyone who does anything to prevent students from going to classes: from $1000 to $5000 for individuals, from $7000 to $35,000 for student leaders or union leaders, from $25,000 to $125,000 *per day* for student or labor organizations. It demands that any demonstration of more than fifty people submit an itinerary to a police agency at least eight hours before it begins, and grants the police the power to modify the route however they see fit to prevent threats to "the order and security of the public." For the 11 universities and 14 cégeps that were on strike when the bill was passed, it suspended classes for winter semester, stipulating that those classes would be completed in August and September in a special session. The law is set to expire on July 1, 2013, although it is possible that it could be renewed or that part or all of it might become permanent.

Coming into effect at the same time was the new version of Montréal's bylaw P–6, explained below. Despite the fact that, unlike the Special Law, mayor Gérald Tremblay's law has been used against demonstrators in Montréal consistently since May 19, and despite the fact that these updates to the pre-existing law are permanent, bylaw P–6 has gotten a fraction of the attention from the mainstream media, the revolutionary and reformist left, and anarchists. To be clear, every single demo that has so far taken the streets chanting *ON S'EN CÂLISSE LA LOI SPÉCIALE!*—roughly, "the special law, we don't give a fuck about it!"—has been declared illegal under the municipal law rather than the provincial law.

Bylaw P–6 was first introduced in 2001, and it stipulates that any demonstration can be declared illegal at the discretion of the police if they have reasonable grounds to believe that it will cause "a commotion" or otherwise endanger public order. It also forbids anyone from bringing blunt objects to demos, naming baseball bats as well as hockey sticks—famously used during the 2001 Québec City anti-FTAA demonstrations to knock tear gas canisters back at police. The first fine under this bylaw originally ranged from $100 to $300, with $300 to $500 for the second offense and $500 to $1000 for every subsequent offense. The new version of the law increases the fines significantly, such that the first offense is now $500 to $1000, increasing by the third and subsequent offenses to as much as $3000. Specifically naming scarves, masks, and hoods, it forbids anyone from concealing their face "without a reasonable motive." Like the Special Law, it necessitates total collaboration with the police, demanding that the complete routes of demonstrations be disclosed to them in advance.

On the evening of May 16, the largest noise demo that has ever occurred in Montréal took place at the Tanguay Prison for Women, in solidarity with the women being held there for their alleged role in the smoke-bombing incident on May 10, mentioned above, as well as

everyone else facing judicial repression for the events of the strike. After a massive display of fireworks, calling back and forth with the prisoners for ten minutes, and the release of a smoke bomb underneath an SQ vehicle—as it was the provincial police who were overseeing the event—well over 100 demonstrators returned to Henri-Bourassa métro station, flowed past the cops inside, hopped the turnstiles, and caught a southbound train leaving at the most serendipitous moment possible. A chant of "Berri! Berri! Berri!" started, and people got off at Berri-UQÀM station, joined the night demo, and participated in what was the first confrontational demo of that type in a few weeks. It was dispersed after forty-five minutes, several banks having been damaged.

It was Charest's announcement of the Special Law on May 16 that heated up the night demos again, not the consistent effort by a small group of anti-capitalists associated with CLAC to oppose Tremblay's mask law with explicitly pro-mask demos. This shows the problematic consequences of the popular focus on particular politicians as bogeymen. Since at least 2009, Tremblay had been trying to criminalize masks in order to tame the March 15 demonstrations, among others; now, he has used the opportunity of the strike to accomplish that and advance his project of turning Montréal into a respectable city for bourgeois colonizers and transnational capital. Montréal's city council, though, draws less attention than the ideologically heated National Assembly, nor is the mayor as polarizing a political figure.

Laws themselves can also serve as bogeymen, distracting from the root of the issue. There is a huge tide of popular resentment against the Special Law, which is widely deemed to contravene the Charter of Rights and Freedoms and which is currently being challenged in court. If that law was actually being *used,* this might have the effect of arousing more anger in the population. On the other hand, there is no controversy around bylaw P–6, even though it has been used to repress the movement. In fact, whenever there is outcry on Twitter that "this demo was declared illegal under that fascist special law!" the SPVM has been able to pacify the tweeting intelligentsia with a simple correction: "No, actually, that law was not used. Instead, the demonstration was declared illegal under a municipal bylaw." It shouldn't matter under which particular code it was made illegal, but somehow the unwillingness of the police to use the controversial law is seen as a moral victory for those who support the students, even if the same purpose is accomplished with other laws. Anarchists should take note of how many militants have failed to address *law itself* as a weapon that can be employed against us.

The night demo of Wednesday, May 16 was the most confrontational in some time, with pacifist opposition to confrontational tactics much more cowed than had become usual. People were angry. Over the next few days, anarchists from across the continent arrived for the Montréal Anarchist Bookfair, probably the largest annual gathering of anarchists in the territory of the Canadian state. It's tempting to assume that this influx of anarchists explains why the nights of the bookfair weekend were particularly crazy. In fact, that's unlikely. For many in Québec, especially in Montréal, Charest's Special Law represented a shift into *fascism* that they felt it urgent to oppose.

The demonstration on Friday night, May 18, was the third time that Molotov cocktails were deployed against police in the course of the strike. Two were thrown at police at the

corner of boulevards Réné-Lévesque and Saint-Laurent, failing to hit their targets. At that point, the police declared the demonstration illegal and began employing tear gas and flash-bang grenades; they only made four arrests during the night, however. The demonstration lasted until 3:30 am, with several groups roaming around downtown as well as the Plateau neighborhood a bit further to the north. After the initial clash, much of the night was passive, but not entirely: in the Plateau, banks and other corporate sites were attacked.

Saturday night was marked by a lot of people, particularly bar patrons, joining demonstrators in the streets, as well as a few instances of particularly random and unintelligent violence from the police. On rue Saint-Denis, as they were charging a group of militants, they began beating an older man who could not run fast enough. On the same street, they invaded the patio of Le Saint-Bock, a pub. Some of the patrons on the patio were wearing red squares—hardly uncommon in any crowd in Montréal these days—and a few of them may have berated the police who were attacking militants a few meters away.

There were considerable exchanges of projectiles between police and demonstrators at the gates of McGill University, then at the intersection of rue Ontario and boulevard Saint-Laurent. At the second confrontation, the militants were blocked from continuing south by the police line, but they had an uphill advantage and hailed enormous quantities of rocks on the police. If more riot police hadn't started moving east along rue Sherbrooke—their aim being to block Saint-Laurent from the north and kettle the demonstration—the demonstrators might well have broken the line on Ontario.

It was only after this confrontation that the demonstration continued east to rue Saint-Denis, where it encountered welcoming crowds of bar patrons. A mix of hardcore militants and drunk people looking for excitement built an enormous bonfire at the intersection of Saint-Denis and Ontario. When the police moved in, people retreated to Berri Square nearby, but were quickly dispersed as the police used an overwhelming amount of tear gas. A total of 69 people were arrested.

On Sunday night, the police were determined to arrest *a lot* of people; there were 308 arrests in total. The demonstration was marked by intense confrontation from the very start, with lots of militants taking the initiative to break up concrete and rain stones on the police. The SPVM responded by charging the demo repeatedly in order to split it into smaller, more manageable groups. In one instance, a large number of street fighters found themselves kettled. Rather than submit to arrest, they counted down and charged, breaking out of the kettle. Several of them were injured by police batons, but everyone got away. Unfortunately, many others didn't, including many anarchists visiting from other cities.

These were the nights when many out-of-town anarchists experienced the events unfolding in Montréal for themselves. This was the time when the strike was perhaps the most intoxicating and beautiful, too. The number of people in the streets, the ferocity with which they fought even in the face of the emboldened and intensely brutal SPVM, the knowledge that some people broke through a police kettle and escaped what would have otherwise been a mass arrest… Notwithstanding how many people *were* arrested and brutalized, these made for some good stories when visitors returned to their hometowns.

In the following days, street demonstrations became more passive, but that didn't stop the SPVM from attacking, harassing, and arresting people. Monday night's passive demon-

stration saw a brief reprieve from the chaos, perhaps because both militants and the cops were exhausted from the weekend. That demo did little more than walk to Charest's mansion in the rich neighborhood of Westmount, stand in front of it, and chant.

Tuesday, May 22, was the day for the "national" demonstration in Montréal and the 100th day since the strike had begun. An enormous mass thronged the streets—boosted by busloads of militants arriving from Toronto and other cities in Ontario to express solidarity, but above all by the large numbers of people who opposed the Special Law more than they opposed tuition hikes. At the beginning of the demonstration, FÉCQ president Léo Bureau-Blouin called for everyone to follow the route that the organizers had divulged to the SPVM so that people could protest "in all safety." Both CLASSE's contingent and an autonomously organized anti-capitalist contingent refused to obey.

The demo, estimated at 400,000, was impossible to control, even with significant numbers of peace police and (presumably) undercover SPVM officers. Taking advantage of this, street fighters thoroughly destroyed a section of downtown in broad daylight: banks and isolated police vehicles were attacked, and neither marshals nor cops could do anything to interfere. This was the only significant moment of violence by militants on Tuesday. Later on, when CLASSE's contingent defied the Special Law by leaving the preordained route and attempting to meet up with the night demonstration that was trying to leave from Berri Square at the same time, the atmosphere was not confrontational so much as *disobedient.* Both the night demo and the CLASSE march were brutally suppressed, with the SPVM reporting 113 arrests that night.

The night of Wednesday, May 23, saw the single largest number of arrests of any night in the strike: 506 people altogether, including 30 children who had been banging pots and pans with their parents. This was an almost completely passive demonstration—only a small number of people were wearing hoods or masks, and there were virtually no attempts to fight back despite numerous provocations from the police—but it defied the new restrictions on routes for demonstrations. Casserole demos converged on downtown from the neighborhoods; there were people all over the city. The police, emboldened by new laws and angry about recent events, cracked down hard. This episode puts the lie to the claim that "thugs always get caught."

There has been a certain amount of debate among anarchists about how much to focus on legal issues. We don't respect the law in any case, right? Yet it's obvious that, since May 19, the confrontational character of the strike has become much less evident. The law affects us. Even more, it affects those who have yet to reject the law on principle, whose participation in the movement and presence on the streets have been so important in creating this moment.

This is a problem, and the most obvious answer to it is propaganda. Anarchists need to present our ideas in opposition to the idea of the law. To start with, if people in Québec want to talk about fascism—and indeed, they're fixated on using that particular term, *fascism,* to the point that it's useless to try to persuade them to use more precise language—we should shift the object of popular concern away from specific laws or tyrants. Instead, we should highlight the fact that legal codes are weapons to destroy, and that like other weapons,

they occasionally need upgrading. We should point out that, in many different places and contexts, emergency laws have outlived the emergency.

Finally, there's the tendency to focus on the Special Law rather than bylaw P–6. If we *are* going to focus on specific laws, we should at least direct attention to the law that is actually being used. The provincial Special Law faces enormous public opposition as well as a legal challenge. Bylaw P–6, on the other hand, is invisible and seemingly benign. Anarchists need to peel back this veneer by loudly defending the practice of wearing masks while denouncing any law, government, or generalized sociopolitical system that seeks to suppress it. Direct-action-oriented anarchists are more likely to oppose the law in the streets than in the courts, but the usefulness of attacking it on other fronts is undeniable.

From May 21 on: The Rise of the Casseroles

It should be clear by now that the movement is not homogenous, and that many questions—about strategy, about ethics, about what is occurring in the first place—have been divisive. But generally speaking, when it comes to issues with which everyone in the movement has to grapple, anarchists tend to find ourselves on the same side. No hesitation about the first-person plural this time: we have rejected the strategy of pacifism; we have rejected "political solutions" and appeals to nationalism; we insist on autonomy in choice of action and solidarity with those accused of using more intense tactics, such as the defendants charged in the smoke-bombing case. There is at least one exception to this rule, however: we do not agree about the casseroles. There is no consensus about how the emergence of the casseroles helped or hindered the fight against capitalism.

Anarchists who view them positively are likely to emphasize that the casseroles are the most socially visible manifestation of popular rage against Charest's and Tremblay's anti-dissent laws. They have enabled the movement to spread into areas and demographics it would not have taken root in otherwise; they've also been replicated in cities across Canada and the world as a gesture of solidarity. They gave rise to popular neighborhood assemblies that bear within them the seed of a different way of making collective decisions. In some places, these assemblies have taken explicitly anti-capitalist positions, and they could initiate struggles against the specific forms that capital takes locally.

Anarchists who view them negatively are likely to emphasize that they emerged precisely when it was most critical for the night demonstrations downtown to maintain numbers. The situation coming out of the bookfair weekend seemed ready to explode, but it didn't—in part because of the casseroles that, according to some of those who initially spread the idea, were explicitly intended to "lower tensions" and "calm things down."

Clearly, there were worthwhile things about the casserole demos, particularly the ones that took place in the neighborhoods early on. They brought the strike to many parts of the city all at once, and because they involved large numbers of people and were dispersed geographically, they were difficult to police or control. They provided an accessible means for many people to participate in the movement in some capacity; otherwise, many people might only have read about it in the paper or heard stories from their kids, grandchildren, or

older siblings. The original idea was that on May 21, people should bang pots on their front steps, on their balcony, or from their window at precisely 8 pm for fifteen minutes: no more, no less. People seized on the idea and transcended the limits of its original conception as a stationary protest; by the night of Wednesday, May 23, there were roving casserole *demos* in the streets of Verdun, Villeray, Centre-Sud, Hochelaga, Ville Saint-Laurent, the Plateau, Saint-Henri, and elsewhere. Many of these started in their neighborhoods but eventually made their way to the downtown core, making the situation there all the more uncontrollable.

The casseroles also launched neighborhood assemblies, which offer the potential for people to make decisions with their neighbors that change the character of the place they live. These are still very young; it should be no surprise if some of them die out or turn into even more farcical repetitions of the worst aspects of Occupy Montréal—though many assemblies have taken measures to avoid its shortcomings. In many neighborhoods, anarchists have put a lot of energy into their local assemblies, which have become explicitly anti-capitalist projects featuring committees dedicated to continuing the strike via direct action. This bodes well for the start of the special semester on August 13.

So the casserole demos made the movement more visible and accessible to people who live in the neighborhoods. What the casseroles did downtown is a different matter. Essentially, they pacified the night demos for a second time. The night demos had emerged in late April as a raucous and uncontrollable response to the truce agreed upon by student leaders without the consent of the membership; it took nearly a week for the police and their de facto allies, the pacifist vigilantes, to impose a certain amount of order upon them. The weekend of the bookfair, militants overturned that order with pitched street battles more ferocious than the night demos of late April. The passing of the new laws, widely described as fascist by movement participants of all political stripes, prevented those who wanted to obstruct physical confrontation with the police from justifying their behavior with pacifist dictums. It is widely understood in Québec that *fascism* must be fought, perhaps even by violent means. It would have been useless for those seeking to calm things down to argue that the new laws were *not* fascist, because—given the hyperbolic political discourse popular in Québec—fascism isn't identified by objective criteria so much as by popular rhetoric. The partisans of pacification needed a new strategy.

This, of course, was the casserole. The word is a francization of the Spanish word *cacerolazo*, which means roughly "the hitting of a stew pot" and refers to a rebel tradition that first became widespread during the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet in Chile during the 1980s—another situation which many in Québec, but also many people elsewhere, would characterize as fascist. At a time when other forms of resistance could result in the death or torture of militants or their family members, the *cacerolazo* represented a relatively safe way for people to build a visible culture of opposition in Chile—though still one for which they could be punished severely.

The situation in Québec today cannot be compared to Pinochet's regime. No doubt things are bad and getting worse, but people here do not face the risk of extrajudicial execution for engaging in militant confrontations with the police, nor do they have to worry about their relatives being tortured in government jails. Some would like to pretend that the casserole demos have replaced confrontational night demos as the favored tactic of the movement

because the situation no longer allows anything else, but that is simply false. They have emerged because certain people want this kind of demo instead of another kind of demo. That is to say, these people want to express dissent with less risk to themselves.

When downtown Montréal is seized by street fighting, signals of disorder appear. Graffiti, broken windows, open fire hydrants, sirens, riot police… All of these make visible the social war that is always taking place in this territory, and they interrupt the aura of stability Montréal needs to attract foreign investment, tourists, and international business conferences. While loud demos that block traffic and adorn the streets with red square stickers can also do that, it is clear that they do it *less*; they are also less capable of holding their ground when the police want to keep them out of certain areas of the city, and they are easier to recuperate into the business-friendly image of a democratic Québec that welcomes dissent. Raymond Bachand, the finance minister, prefers casseroles to casseurs; he says he welcomed the new type of demonstration as good news. Perhaps he likes the message they send: that the movement is tired and no longer capable of the kind of economic disruption that could force the government to offer concessions in an effort to restore the social peace.

It should be stressed again that less confrontational demos aren't inherently bad. They are more accessible to people with anxiety or mobility issues, and people who want to bring their kids into the streets without fear of chemical weapons. Casserole demos that start at Berri Square and wander around downtown, however, will never be as safe as demos in the neighborhoods—and the initially large neighborhood demonstrations shrank significantly once the demos at Berri Square started drawing large numbers of people who might otherwise have marched closer to their homes.

In order for the revolt to spread and victory to be achieved, whatever that looks like, we need *diverse tactics* that complement one another. Riots downtown can work well with festive resistance everywhere else[3] because they make that festive resistance, which also presents demands contrary to the government's austerity program, look more palatable. But the casseroles' monopolization of the movement has decreased the power of both the confrontational *and* the festive forms of resistance.

Knowing that pacifists do their best to impose their preferred tactics upon every section of the movement, the challenge facing the rest of us is to find ways to keep different kinds of demonstrations separate, making it clear which kinds of activities are welcome where. It is difficult to define green zones and red zones, for example, when demos are happening every single night, but efforts were being made in June—when, unfortunately, the chaos in the streets began to die down—to associate certain nights with certain kinds of demos. In some neighborhoods, the lack of energy in the nightly casseroles prompted people to pick specific nights of the week to come out in force—Wednesday in Saint-Henri, Sunday and Wednesday in Hochelaga—while ignoring downtown. At the beginning of June, anarchists and others in CLAC attempted to organize specifically *anti-capitalist* demonstrations starting at Berri Square downtown every Saturday night. These were intended not only to welcome a diversity of tactics but also to exclude the fleur-de-lysé flag and marginalize those who wave it. Similar efforts could gain momentum soon.

[3] The author does not mean to insinuate that riots cannot be festive.

For anarchists elsewhere, it is important to dispel the myth that simply banging pots together in the streets can create a revolutionary situation. This is obvious, yet pot-banging still seems to be the most common expression of solidarity with the struggle in Montréal. That's great, the feedback is appreciated, but we'd much prefer for people to start *pulling things off where they are* than fetishizing what is for us, in a number of ways, a very frustrating element of the struggle. If you're going to fetishize anything, why not look at the headlines from a few weeks before the casseroles, when manif-actions often paralyzed downtown and drove the police to their wits' end?

June 7–10: the Canadian Grand Prix

When this report was drafted in the first week of August 2012, the weekend of the anarchist bookfair was the last period of intense confrontation. In comparison, the weekend of the Canadian Grand Prix wasn't half as crazy, but it was more intense than what happened in the weeks before or after it. It is difficult, perhaps ludicrous, to compare different moments in the strike in terms of an undefined *intensity,* but let's do it anyway: the Grand Prix weekend felt more like a microcosm of the time between the end of March and the beginning of April than the period from the end of April to the beginning of May.

To be clear, a sustained and militant confrontation with the police lasting four days, as happened from the afternoon of June 7 to the evening of June 10, would have been remarkable at any point before the student strike. For comparison, the period of March 12–15, 2011 was much less militant and involved fewer participants than the Grand Prix weekend, but was considered a very hectic time for the anarchists involved.

In the weeks after the passing of the Special Law and the modification of bylaw P–6, CLASSE stepped back as the main engine of the movement and other groups stepped up, including CLAC and some neighborhood assemblies. During the strike, the activities of CLAC had mostly been limited to distributing propaganda, organizing demonstrations against Tremblay's mask law, and the May Day demonstration. While others dithered, however, CLAC was the first to take seriously a strategy that was being considered in various circles of the movement: to disrupt Montréal's festival and tourism season. They did this by organizing a demo with a very confrontational discourse for the opening ceremonies of the Grand Prix weekend on Thursday, June 7, and called for disruption of the Grand Prix in general.

The Canadian Grand Prix, part of the Formula One World Championship, is the biggest tourist event of the summer in Montréal. There is something to be said about how Bernie Ecclestone, perhaps the most important person behind the F1 franchise, is a despicable misogynist and racist whose open sympathies with historical fascist leaders are well-documented. It's also worth mentioning that militants in Bahrain had called for the cancellation of April's Bahrain Grand Prix, part of the same franchise, because that event would benefit no one but the brutal regime in that country. Many militants here have been inspired by anti-capitalist and libertarian currents in the Arab Spring, and some are directly connected to struggles in that part of the world, so there was a strong push to express solidarity with the Bahrainis'

struggle. The most obvious motivation, however, was that the Grand Prix is a repulsive spectacle that generates huge profits for rich people in Québec and elsewhere while providing no benefit to most people here.

In fact, for many who live in Montréal, it is one of the most obnoxious times of the year. Downtown, bike lanes are closed, there is extra car traffic, and there are throngs of tourists and salespeople trying to sell them things. Much of this is concentrated on and around Crescent Street, where the local business association claims that "Crescent Street has always had a special connection with racing and cars." This is the site of the LG Grand Prix Festival, featuring musical performances and augmented beer sales for the street's bars.

The Grand Prix and associated festivities were an obvious target. People hoped that a successful mobilization would give the struggle the spark it needed to ignite again and stay fiery all summer.

On the morning of June 7, several people were rounded up in police raids, including Yalda Machouf-Khadir, an anarchist who is also the daughter of a prominent left-wing politician. She and her partner—who are now being charged for crimes at the Université de Montréal on April 12 and at the education minister's offices the next day—were arrested at her family's home and subjected to a great deal of media attention; journalists had been tipped off, so they were ready to take her picture as she was taken out the door in handcuffs. The timing of these arrests was clearly intentional: they were designed to intimidate militants and discourage large demonstrations later in the day. It is unclear how well this worked, but the crowd that gathered to participate in the CLAC-organized demonstration that afternoon was the smallest that had been seen for such a widely-publicized event in months: only several hundred people.

The target of CLAC's demonstration was a rich bastard's gala being held in a converted industrial building in the Little Burgundy neighborhood. It started at the corner of rues des Seigneurs and Notre-Dame, about two blocks from the target. Starting so close to the event was a strategic mistake. In what is probably the most open, alley-riddled, and courtyard-profuse neighborhood in the entire city, the demo gathered at an intersection that was already blocked to the west and south by riot police behind metal barricades, making it easy for lines of riot police to move into the streets leading north and east and create a kettle.

That is exactly what happened fifteen minutes after the demo was set to begin, at which point it was still immobile because people were still trickling in. Very few people were arrested, but there was a considerable pile of black clothing, fireworks, and makeshift weapons left in the middle of the crowd, all of which were confiscated. All in all, it took about an hour and a half for the kettled people to be released.

The autonomous neighborhood assembly of Saint-Henri, the neighborhood directly west of Little Burgundy, had organized a neighborhood contingent to march the short distance from Saint-Henri's eastern limit to the CLAC-designated meeting point in safer numbers. This contingent, probably consisting of less than 50 people, gathered on the open grounds adjacent to the Lionel-Groulx métro station—a large area that, like Berri Square, would have been very difficult to kettle. If CLAC had started the demo at this location or some other open area a little further from the target, it would have been harder for the police to repress it. It is clear from the amount of material that had to be abandoned at the intersection of Notre-

Dame and des Seigneurs that people were prepared for a significant confrontation. The beginning of a demo is always the most vulnerable period, and the SPVM was able to disarm the crowd because it began in such a vulnerable location. If the demo had been able to get moving, the open layout of Little Burgundy would have caused the police significant problems, not necessarily at the heavily-defended target building but perhaps on the commercial rue Notre-Dame and certainly downtown once the crowd joined the demonstrations going on there.

Although several hundred people were kettled, others were not. They marched around the residential parts of Little Burgundy, disrupting traffic and occasionally dragging things into the street. At one point, the crowd surrounded a police cruiser, forcing it to speed away as quickly as possible, and gave chase. Besides this, little happened until the kettled crowd had been released and everyone assembled to march toward Crescent Street downtown. A short battle ensued with the unarmored police guarding the southern entry to the street where the greater part of downtown's official Grand Prix festivities take place, and people stayed in the streets until midnight, joining up with the night demo and also the *ma-NU-festation*—naked demonstration—that occurred that night.[4] Despite the earlier disarmament of the crowd, street fighters still had fireworks and boat flares to use against the police; though they weren't able to approach Crescent Street again, disruption and property destruction took place throughout central downtown.

On Friday night, a demonstration—once again, much smaller than it should have been—set out from Berri Square and headed west towards Crescent Street. The SPVM tried to block all entry to a vast section of the downtown core, preventing the crowd from moving north of boulevard Réné-Lévesque for a long time. The crowd moved west along Réné-Lévesque; at rue Guy, the SQ attacked with rubber bullets and flashbang grenades, forcing people to retreat back east. They finally breached the police lines at Dorchester Square, a large open area which the police could not effectively line the entire way; most of the crowd made it through north to the crowded rue Sainte-Catherine, from which they were able to proceed west to Crescent Street. At the corner of Crescent and de Maisonneuve, one street north of Sainte-Catherine, the crowd stood around chanting slogans and failing to drown out a musical performance taking place a few feet away before the police pushed them out.

Saturday night, the police were even less successful at preventing people from penetrating the areas rife with tourists. People continuously took the streets, pulling fences into them to use as barricades and generally causing havoc. The police responded with pepper spray and tear gas, severely affecting many tourists and other bystanders who were passing through or watching events unfold. It was militants, of course, who treated these people with the medical supplies they had on hand. Several stores and police vehicles were attacked, including two cars parked outside the hotel where the Montréal conference of the International Economic Forum of the Americas was scheduled to occur the next day.

Sunday was fairly quiet on the streets, both during the day of passive protests against the aforementioned conference and at night.

[4] Pro tip: tear gas or pepper spray is very unpleasant on exposed genitalia.

Throughout the weekend, political profiling was the norm in the streets of Montréal and especially in the métro system, with the SPVM reportedly on heightened alert for any activity that might have sabotaged the transportation of people to and from the race site on île Sainte-Hélène—an island accessible only by bridges and the métro's Yellow Line. People wearing red squares were routinely harassed; if they took the métro line heading to the island, they were sent back to Berri-UQÀM station. There, they were issued fines for "loitering on the train," on the grounds that they went one place and immediately returned, or else told that they were banned from Berri-UQÀM station for life. One person was reportedly kicked out of the métro system because she was reading aloud from George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*; when she had the audacity to walk back into the métro, she was arrested and held without charges for the rest of the day.

In some respects, the mobilization against the Grand Prix was a success. Dave Stubbs of *The Gazette* wrote just before the weekend that "for the first time in memory, this weekend's 43rd Formula One Canadian Grand Prix is not expected to be sold out"—and indeed it wasn't. The economy was hurt, and the effects have continued over the course of the summer: in early August, it was reported in all the major newspapers that Montréal saw significantly fewer tourists in July than it had a year previous.

Yet the Grand Prix weekend did not succeed at recreating the spring in the summer. It was a brief period of heightened confrontation in a quiet phase. Of the many theories as to why momentum has died down, none is conclusive, and most lack analysis. Even before the strike, revolutionary activity has tended to die down every summer in Montréal; perhaps it isn't surprising that this summer is quieter than the previous spring, though far wilder than the summer before. That's no excuse, especially when our enemies aren't taking time off from gathering intelligence, planning, and preparing materially for the coming confrontations. In light of the conditions being endured by certain comrades and the very real possibility of prison time, this situation is even less acceptable. But if the movement isn't crushed in one year, the Canadian Grand Prix next summer may be disrupted even more significantly.

Part Two: Anarchist Analysis of the Revolt in Québec

To fill out our chronology of the unrest in Québec, we posed the following questions to our Montréal correspondent, who answered them with the assistance of other participants in the Printemps érable. The interview concludes with an epilogue bringing the action up to the minute, when a convergence to block the resumption of the semester is about to begin.

It's important to acknowledge that, while the strike has had effects throughout the province of Québec, our coverage focuses almost entirely upon events in Montréal. The strike has played out differently in this city, a multilingual and sprawling metropolis with dozens of overlapping anarchist scenes and a rich history of anti-capitalist resistance, than it has in the rest of the province. A large number of anarchists and other radicals inhabit a limited number of neighborhoods in a ring around downtown Montréal, making it an important flashpoint for struggle.

How did militant street tactics develop and proliferate in the course of the strike? What can anarchists elsewhere in North America learn from this?

Discussing the tactics that militants have employed in the streets of Montréal and elsewhere in Québec, and discussing how those tactics have changed, it is often said that tactics *escalated* over time, and whenever things were *pacified,* the implication is that the tactics were *de-escalated.* Entire demonstrations, some of which were extremely large, are described as *confrontational* or *non-confrontational.* This kind of language is woefully imprecise. These terms can communicate nothing more than a feeling, an ambience of the moment, leaving the specific mechanics of what was going on obscure.

This is not to argue that tactics can never be ranked in some kind of loose conceptual hierarchy, from those that are less effective at inflicting damage to property or those who defend it—and thus entail less risk—to those that are more effective and riskier. For example, from lesser to greater intensity:

1. giving riot police the middle finger,
2. throwing rocks at them,
3. throwing Molotov cocktails at them.

That categorization is arbitrary and its variable, *intensity,* isn't rigorously defined, but it can be useful to think about tactics in this way.

Compared to most North American cities, in Montréal, the use of certain tactics by street fighters—including anarchists, Maoists, and hooligans whose politics are less precisely defined—is more normalized, and less contested. This was true long before the student strike began in February. Black bloc attire and masks, constructing barricades or simply tossing traffic cones into the street, throwing rocks and other projectiles, breaking windows and looting stores… if a Montréal local hears that a hockey riot took place, she can make an educated guess as to which of these tactics might have been used before she gets the details. The same applies to days like March 15 and May 1, to reformist demos that anarchists deem worth intervening in, and to the spontaneous demos that have occurred after the police have murdered someone.

It is accurate to say that, over the course of the strike, a significant number of participants from diverse political backgrounds have escalated their street tactics to about the same level as those employed by the aforementioned anarchists, Maoists, and hooligans. Throughout February and March, as well as earlier demonstrations like the one on November 10, 2011, anarchists employing black bloc tactics or wearing masks were often the only ones physically confronting the police and destroying the property of capitalists, putting them at odds with many of the other people in the street and leaving them isolated. Later on, though the tension between pacifists and street fighters didn't disappear, the street fighters were a lot more numerous and some of them were running around with giant fleur-de-lysé flags—a sure sign that others besides "the usual suspects" were taking the fight to the police.

On the other hand, it would be *inaccurate* to say that anarchists on the whole have escalated their practice of street fighting. Since the strike began, anarchists have been doing the same thing they always do, the difference being that they are doing it *more often.* Every year in Montréal there are reformist demos at which anarchists challenge the organizer-imposed code of conduct, anti-capitalist demos at which the only ones trying to impose limits on the actions of anarchist street fighters are the police, and spontaneous manifestations of rage when the police do something particularly heinous. The strike has caused all three types of events to happen with a much greater frequency than would otherwise occur, but the anarchist approach to each has been essentially the same.

As to being *confrontational,* it's also inaccurate to say that the movement became more confrontational over time, because whether or not they were successful, there were attempt to blockade bridges and highways even in February and early March. What happened is that, in March, the congress of CLASSE made the decision to adopt a more confrontational strategy as an organization—after some of its constituent members had already been pursuing such a strategy for weeks. But this simply meant that there were more resources for those organizing confrontational actions, which is what led to a greater frequency and diversity of targets: the port, the government-owned alcohol distribution corporation's depot, and eventually downtown skyscrapers and events like the Salon Plan Nord. On campuses, the intention of classroom and campus blockades was, from the very beginning in many places, *to let no one in for any reason whatsoever,* and people used whatever tactics were necessary for that purpose.

It's possible to argue that, gradually over the course of weeks, militants selected targets and carried out plans more intelligently. But as to whether they were *trying to be more confrontational,* things were simply different at different times and varied between people. The truce between the CLASSE exec and the government, the loss of Francis Grenier's eye, the experience of seeing police run in fear… all of these, in complex ways, affected the courage and rage of different participants in the movement and, at certain times, contributed to a more confrontational attitude.

All that said, there have been some *innovations* on the streets. For one, rather than always seeking out rocks and other projectiles, more street fighters have started to bring tools—hammers in particular—with which to make the projectiles out of Montréal's crumbling streets. For another, street fighters have started counting down aloud in order to coordinate their efforts, whether before attempting to break out of a kettle—as succeeded on May 20—or hailing rocks upon police.

Another innovation has been shields, which hadn't been seen much at demonstrations for at least several years before November 10, 2011. The most conventional shield format is to drill together a combination of plexiglass sheets, foam, cardboard, and chloroplast—the stuff from which election signs are made. The idea of painting them to look like the covers of politically solid books, from *L'insurrection qui vient* to *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, came to Montréal from Rome, where student demonstrators used the tactic during the anti-austerity demonstrations in late 2010. Although shields hold promise, especially if they could be made of sturdy, light materials like the shields of the insurgent strikers in northwestern Spain, their actual use has been hit-or-miss and it's questionable how useful they would be in fast-moving demos on the streets of Montréal. They were useful on the open fields of Victo, and *would have been* useful on April 20 if anyone had brought them; on both those days, both sides were holding fixed positions, and there was less hand-to-hand combat and more use of rubber and plastic bullets. In a situation like May Day, on the other hand, it's unclear how shields—which are not usually carried by the most muscular people—could have been useful against unrelenting waves of riot cops. Thus far, shields have been used primarily for symbolic purposes: they are most common at passive demos like the one on March 22, perhaps in an effort to add an air of militancy to the carnival of fleur-de-lysé flags and papier-mâché puppets.

There have also been interesting *developments* in how things tend to play out in the streets. Particularly after the passing of the Special Law, people in black bloc attire—and what the media has *presented* as black bloc attire, i.e., anyone wearing a mask and looking vaguely "anarchist"—have frequently been approached by others in the streets and offered praise: "You're so brave to be doing that kind of thing." There is now a much greater degree of solidarity between people who are dressed to fight and those who aren't, with several instances of unmasked people putting themselves at risk in order to pull their street fighter comrades out of the clutches of the police. There is even a sports-fan-style chant—*ALLEZ LES NOIRS!*—which literally (and atrociously) translates into English as "go blacks!" Crowds of hundreds have chanted these words at the tops of their lungs.

It is now widely understood that it is a good idea to build barricades in almost any situation. This has occasionally resulted in *very good* barricades consisting of huge amounts of debris,

construction material, loose furniture from nearby cafés, and—more and more frequently—fire. However, more often, people simply drag an item or two into the street and no one else joins in. Sometimes, people dump garbage into the streets not even to find projectiles, but seemingly because they believe this will magically obstruct police vehicles. Not taking the time to build effective barricades, or not being able to get others to help you do this, is one thing. Doing something that has no effect on the police while making the streets more disgusting for the people who live there, unnecessarily annoying them in the process—that's another thing entirely!

Riot police are able to mount their interventions because they can move freely through side streets, but a more widespread practice of erecting strong barricades in a march's wake would not only interfere with the normal functioning of capitalism—it would make successful police interventions much harder to pull off, especially as the demonstration's speed increases. Montréal would be a good place to import tactics used by street fighters in many major European cities: flipped dumpsters and luxury cars pulled or pushed into the street could obstruct police far more effectively than a few traffic cones.

There has also been an increased use of Molotov cocktails, nearly unheard of in street confrontations in North America for a long time. Their use has been sporadic, and it's unclear what conclusions can be drawn here. It's worth noting, in any case, that *some* people are now willing to take things to that level.

At first, very few people wore masks or goggles in the streets, but the experience of police brutality and CLASSE's explicit call for direct action and economic disruption changed that very quickly. What had always been a small minority became the majority of the participants in many demos. All it took was a critical mass of people in March and April, augmented by efforts to vocalize support for normalizing the practice, whether via the distribution of texts or in CLASSE's explicit endorsement of March 29's Grande Masquerade.

In addition to the explosion in the use of masks and goggles, there has also been a significant increase in the use of black bloc attire by other militants at a time when many more experienced street fighters have begun opting for "light bloc" instead. "Light bloc" means wearing different clothes than one normally would and concealing one's face and other identifying features, but not attempting to achieve a uniform look, in hopes that individual criminal acts won't be attributed to anyone who is caught if arrests take place before the crowd de-blocks. The reasoning is that light bloc enables street fighters to disappear into a diverse crowd more effectively than black clothing, keeps street fighters from appearing as outsiders, and doesn't attract preemptive police attention. A lesson that many local anarchists drew from March 12, 2011—when individuals in black bloc attire were targeted and arrested pre-emptively—is that one should be skeptical of overusing or fetishizing the black bloc tactic. Many had been skeptical before that, but afterwards, black blocs practically disappeared until February 2012, whereas they had previously been a regular feature at anti-capitalist demos.[1]

[1] The only notable exception was the night of June 7, 2011, when a spontaneous anti-police demonstration took place in response to the shooting of two people in downtown Montréal the previous night.

Some experienced street fighters in the anarchist milieu have been critical of the recent propensity to habitually wear black in the streets, echoing constructive criticisms that followed the attempt at a general strike in Oakland on November 2, 2011. This habit distinguishes street fighters from those around them—arguably inhibiting confrontational behavior from spreading—without significantly improving anyone's ability to confront the police, since there is ample evidence that people can break the law and get away with it whether or not they wear black. Because street fighters in this city are frequently terrible at keeping tight, it is not uncommon for isolated individuals wearing black to be dispersed throughout the crowd, creating an unnecessarily dangerous situation.

Finally, there still isn't a lot of communication between fighters in the street. People stick to their own crews for the most part; different crews rarely stay tight for very long in a moving demo, and it's possible that many fighters don't know what to say to others they see in the streets or else they don't know how to say it. Even though it is clear that spreading information is important, it is almost certainly unclear what information needs to be spread at any moment, and the reality of social awkwardness is undeniable. As in a bar or at a party, people tend to stick to their friends rather than venturing out to meet new people.

This is all improving, albeit too slowly. One shift is that now, when fighters throw rocks at windows when people are on the other side of the glass, others more often approach them to suggest they use a hammer or metal garbage bin instead. When some throw from the back, others make a point of explaining that it's better to go to the front to ensure that only the intended damage is done.

There is also increasing debate as to whether the small economic damage caused by petty property destruction is worth it. Ultimately, of course, individuals will decide for themselves. This debate echoes the allegation that some anarchists tend to measure the success of an action *only* by counting how many windows were broken, how many police vehicles were torched, and so on. In any case, by such a standard, the strike has been an unqualified success. Rather than critique those who might think this way—or the ones who construct this straw man caricature—we could just accept that there are valid reasons to applaud damage to the property of capitalists, and acknowledge that wider and more frequent use of the tactics that can accomplish this—as seen in Montréal since February—is a laudable objective.

So now that we're deep into abstract hypothesizing, how might anarchists see the kind of mayhem that has recently swept Montréal in their own cities?

There is no easy answer. In Montréal, certain anarchists have been pushing for years to make sure that demonstrations transgress the limits imposed by the state—chiefly by the police—and sometimes also by organizers, movement politicians, and peace police. It is important to understand this as an *infrastructural* project. It involves procuring and constructing materials, gathering and disseminating information, laying plans and developing strategic acumen. All this organizing creates and replicates a tradition: confrontation with the police is now *normalized* in Montréal, more so than in most North American cities. But as much effort, energy, and passion as this has required, the reality is that Montréal's political culture, which differs from any neighboring city, has made this process easier. This

culture could not exist if not for Québec's unique history over the last fifty years; it cannot simply be replicated elsewhere.

Wherever a militant political culture comes from, however it is cultivated, it is important for anarchists to reach out to those who show themselves willing to fight. In Québec, that includes the students, specifically the students who have engaged in some way in CLASSE's campaign against the government. In many other parts of North America, it seems that—however *politicized* they might be—university students on the whole are rarely willing to translate their politics into any kind of action that might adversely affect their career prospects or weekend plans. If anarchists elsewhere—many of whom are students themselves—want to see their own towns erupt like Montréal has, perhaps they should start making connections with folks whom it might be a little harder to relate to, at least initially.

What forms has state repression assumed, and how have participants countered it?

The natural response of the state to resistance is repression. In Québec, there has been resistance at many different levels, and accordingly repression has taken a variety of forms.

We can designate three categories of repression here: the tactics school administrators have used to dissuade students from doing anything inappropriate; the physical violence the SPVM and the SQ have employed against people in the streets; and the conditions that Québec's judiciary, in collaboration with the police and the government, has used to prevent people from taking action again in the future.

The politics of the administrators vary from school to school. While many schools—especially the anglophone institutions—are governed by decided neoliberals, it is possible that some administrations are more *left* in some sense of the word. Regardless, on the whole the administrators have chosen to do their job: to control and suppress any tendency towards direct action among their students. Some have done this job less enthusiastically and less effectively, but they are not our allies—far from it.

Many schools have threatened students with a variety of academic consequences and other punitive measures, ranging from expulsion to a certain amount of community service. These measures include failing kids, expelling them, firing them from university-paid jobs, temporarily banning them from campus, and fining them—in short, pushing them out, or else pressuring them to drop out of their own accord. As one of the goals of the austerity measures is to shrink the postsecondary education systems that are exerting a net drain on capitalist economies worldwide, any drop in student enrollment is welcome. The university can inflict less pain than the courts, but administrators—whose role is comparable to the role of the police, in that it involves maintaining the normal functioning of capitalism—have frequently collaborated with police investigators to bring criminal charges against militants. Their actions impact people's family lives, their pocketbooks, and in some cases their legal status in Canada. Even bearing in mind our critique of schools and the soulless middle-

class lives that academics lead, it should be clear that it is unacceptable for people to be denied control of their destinies by these petty authority figures.

Several schools, in particular Concordia and McGill, spent hundreds of thousands of dollars on extra security to protect their campuses. On the topic of private security, there was often rhetoric to the effect that private security are not our enemies the way police are, that a lot of them are hard-working immigrants just doing their jobs, and picking fights with them isn't a good idea. This is ridiculous. Private security goons have been instrumental in gathering intelligence for administrations and for the police—and like the police, they frequently hurt people and get away with it.

Now let's discuss the repressive tactics of the police.

> "We are not for the establishment of a police state; we know that it is necessary to work with the population and create links. But there are groups for that. **Our job, as police officers, is repression.** We do not need a social worker as a director, we need a general. In the end, **the [SPVM] is a paramilitary organization**—let's not forget it."

These are the words of Yves Francoeur, the director of Montréal's police union, spoken in 2008 during a rebellion in Montréal-Nord. Considering that worker-employer relations couldn't be better at the SPVM, one can imagine that this statement reflects the entire leadership's understanding of their role. From the very beginning, and even before the strike began, Montréal's police force has approached the student movement with a counterinsurgency strategy.

According to the conceptual hierarchy of British imperialist Sir Frank Kitson, an insurgency has three stages. In the first stage, it poses no real threat and is only potentially insurgent; in the second stage, it disrupts the economy but is not genuinely threatening; only in the third stage can it actually threaten the government. The proper approach for a counterinsurgent force is to comprehensively surveil the movement while it is in the first stage, and its security practices are not very developed, in order to prevent it from reaching the second stage, then destroy it ruthlessly if does reach the second stage, in the hopes of preventing it from ever threatening the security of the state.

In 2012, the movement advanced from the first stage of Kitson's hierarchy to the second stage. The response of the SPVM has been somewhat more constrained than Kitson deemed appropriate for British subjects in India, Ireland, and Malaya. This is likely because, unlike colonial police forces, the police in Montréal often need to get people in elected office and the judiciary to support their plans—and the latter are often less strategically astute. Still, from the very beginning, the objective of the police has been to destroy the power of the movement. Two of the sources of the movement's power are, first, the numbers of people willing to take the streets and, second, the willingness of many of those people to transgress the limits imposed on protest. The approach of the police has been to dissuade people from doing certain things and, knowing the importance of picking battles, to dissuade people from *attending* demonstrations where those things happen, while permitting people to attend more passive demos.

Perhaps, early in the strike, the police were *a little bit* restrained when it came to dealing with the students. It's pointless to make assumptions about the collective psychology of the SPVM, but they may have genuinely believed that most students were good citizens and the unrest was only anarchist infiltrators instigating things. This changed quickly. The student movement, rather than collaborating with the police, chose to accommodate troublemakers; very soon, anyone wearing the red square could be appropriately treated as a troublemaker.

Physical violence, whether tactical or just the kind of generalized asshole behavior exemplified in this video, is one way to get people off the streets. Police made heavy use of pepper spray and baton attacks throughout the strike. Flashbangs were an early addition that quickly came to characterize almost every demo; plastic and rubber bullets have been used more sparingly. Over time, the authorities shifted from trying to contain demos towards actively attacking them via police charges. Relentless offensives, like the one seen on May Day, have been rarer.

There have been multiple reports of male police molesting female arrestees. They routinely subjected arrestees to as much pain as possible; when searching people's bags, they would open bottles of lemon juice or water and pour them over the other contents of the bag. Much of this sort of thing has been caught on tape, but the SPVM has a good PR position and a cozy relationship with the mainstream media. The fact that videos exist on YouTube doesn't mean that anyone is going to see them, and it seems that only those who already hate the police seek them out. In any case, there is strong support from a certain portion of the population for "giving CLASSE-holes what they deserve," and if the police get a reputation for being brutal and unpredictable, all the better for them.

In comparison to the rhetoric coming from Toronto's police after the G20 summit or the Vancouver police after 2011's hockey riot, the SPVM's spokespeople have rarely said anything to the effect of "we will catch everyone." They know that would be an impossible task. Instead, they imply that they will *punish* everyone. Everyone who takes to the streets will suffer for it, one way or another.

In addition, a few people have been specifically targeted for attack, with the full cooperation of the Crown (the government prosecutors) and the media.

Emma Strople, who was initially arrested and charged during the Grande Masquerade on March 29, was specifically targeted during on the nights of April 24 and April 25, the first two night demos. As the police arrested her, far from the demo which she had left before it had been declared an illegal assembly, they explained that they had it out for her and they were going to make her life hell.

Police raided the homes of Roxanne Bélisle and François-Vivier Gagnon—two of the four people who turned themselves in to police custody soon after their faces were published by the media, described by the police as wanted in connection to the May 10 smoke-bombing incident. Yalda Machouf-Khadir's house was also raided. The police conducted a search for black clothing and items that could link her to the attack on Line Beauchamp's office on April 13 or the events at the Université de Montréal the day before; they ended up mostly confiscating anarchist literature and anti-police flyers.

On June 11, one militant who had been dealing with problems unrelated to politics—he had been the first to discover the lifeless body of his sister after she had committed suicide—

was arrested while driving from Montréal with his family to attend his sister's funeral in the Saguenay. It is widely understood that the SQ, who pulled over the car on the highway about a half-hour's drive from the island, knew his situation and pulled him over at the worst possible moment in order to get him to cooperate, promising that he might still be able to attend the funeral if he did so.

These are isolated and particularly egregious incidents. More common behaviors include surveillance of "prominent activists"—although there are far too many of those for it to be an easy task—the application of non-association conditions or conditions that restrict a person's ability to participate in demonstrations, and a condition that has so far been applied only to Emma Strople and two others: exile. These three people are banned from the judicial district of Montréal—corresponding mostly with the Island of Montréal—for any purpose other than going to court. All three are people who have lived here for years. And even before they could get release conditions, however oppressive, many people have been denied bail and held in jail for periods of up to a few weeks.

On the streets, the police have deployed undercovers, sometimes in very large numbers, to facilitate the arrests of troublemakers—and possibly to gain control of the front of demonstrations to lead them in a direction that is favorable to police strategy, although this is difficult to confirm and may just be paranoia on the part of some militants. There will typically be more than one group of undercovers in any given demo, with at least one group trying to gather intelligence on those who are causing trouble and keep track of their location. A different group will follow them out of the demo, and often a third group will make the arrests. There is evidently a growing concern on the part of the SPVM, however, that their undercovers may be recognizable and could risk serious physical harm in the streets.

Anarchists have responded to all this in a number of ways, if inadequately. One thing anarchists have done well is to continue the tradition of prison solidarity noise demos, facilitating many more people participating in them. On March 29, there was a manif-action that disrupted the normal proceedings at the Palais de justice (yes, *the Palace of Justice*) in solidarity with those facing charges related to the occupation at Cégep du Vieux. On April 28, there was a solidarity demonstration of about 75 people at Tanguay Prison for Women, where Emma Strople was being held at the time; this was probably one of the bigger noise demos that had happened in Montréal up to that point. On May 16, there was a larger demonstration, consisting of over 100 people, expressing solidarity with three of the four people being held there in relation to the May 10 smoke-bombing—Geneviève Vaillancourt, Vanessa l'Écuyer, and Roxanne Bélisle—as well as every other victim of police and judicial repression over the course of the strike.

Despite these efforts, the response by anarchists—and by the movement overall—has been severely lacking. There has been no consistent campaign to disseminate information about the ones who currently face the harshest consequences of anyone in the movement. There has been no message to the effect that, if the authorities can get away with persecuting these people, that will empower them to do the same to everyone else. In addition, there has been very little in the way of response to those parasites upon the movement who denounce the ones who take greater risks or who, in positions of power, fail to take any action in their defense. The only thing that has happened is that, on a few isolated occasions,

some brave people have endeavored to avenge wounds inflicted on their comrades—as on the night of March 7, when militants took to the streets to avenge Francis Grenier's eye in the first night demo of the strike—and there have been demonstrations at the courthouse and prison in solidarity with comrades entangled in the criminal justice system. Both of these are good. Passion is important. But we need a strategy that can actually support these people, building a movement around them that will threaten our enemies and dissuade them from trying to do the same thing to anyone else.

How were decisions made throughout the strike? How did anarchists engage with these processes or intervene in them? What has been *anarchist* in decision-making throughout the unrest?

Whether they are manifested as the direct democracy of general assemblies, the representative democracy of certain states, or something else, democratic ideals are inherently authoritarian and contrary to projects of liberation. This has been argued effectively elsewhere. One has to understand this principle to understand anarchist participation in the strike.

There is a powerful tradition of direct democracy on francophone campuses. Directly democratic decision-making processes were a key component of the leftist social movements that challenged the state in the 1960s and, among other things, forced the creation of the cégep system and the Université du Québec. In the years after the so-called Quiet Revolution, the new Québécois welfare state's political class successfully bureaucratized labor unions and community-initiated health clinics; the people in power distrusted the population's ability to make decisions for itself. Such bureaucratization was much less successful in the schools, though, as professors continued to engage in radical politics and students developed autonomous and militant political cultures. This was particularly true of schools in and around Montréal.

It is broadly agreed among students that a widely publicized general assembly is the highest authority regarding what students should do in a strike, including what can legitimately be done to school buildings. If a general assembly votes for a strike, every student is obliged to go on strike. If there is a vote that a building should be occupied, many consider it indisputable that this should happen. Student associations and highly partisan professor faculties, as institutions, have reinforced these ideas with their propaganda and the lessons they teach in classrooms.

But there is opposition to these ideas from within the student milieu, most visibly from students who support Charest's tuition hikes—some of whom wear a green felt square in protest of the strike. They are roughly equivalent to Young Conservatives or Young Republicans in other parts of North America, the sort of people who would argue that "most students are leftists by default" and that the *truly* radical position to take on campus would be to support—wait for it!—*fiscal responsibility.* Echoing the Liberal Party leadership, they

usually rail against general assemblies for two reasons: first, because they don't conduct secret votes, so anti-strike students are made to feel intimidated for expressing their unpopular opinions; and second, because GAs have deemed themselves unaccountable to the rule of law.

Anarchist critiques of general assemblies are currently less visible—and, frankly, less coherent. Generally speaking, we have been arguing since at least the beginning of Occupy Montréal, in October 2011, that general assemblies should be spaces for communication and logistical coordination, not sources of legitimate authority. Some anarchists, however, often justified their actions during the strike as being consistent with the democratic decisions of certain student associations' GAs. This is particularly common during hard pickets and other disruptive actions at schools, when anti-strike students and faculty and pro-strike students and their supporters (including anarchists) have often found themselves talking or yelling at each other.

Perhaps some anarchists don't see the contradiction here, or perhaps they are using words cynically to achieve an objective, such as trouncing the green squares in an argument. Either way, this much is clear: these situations aren't the easiest venue in which to introduce a more nuanced anarchist perspective, especially when that perspective is that those who identify with different interests in the social war are irreconcilable enemies. But if we are anarchists, and that is what we really think, then we should say it!

Anarchists who happen to be students have been the ones who engaged most earnestly in general assemblies, sometimes going so far as to "rock the vote"—spending precious hours of their lives convincing people to show up to the GA to vote in a particular way. This might seem an even more glaring contradiction, but there is a qualitative difference between this kind of activity and, say, campaigning for a nominally more left-wing political candidate. Even if anarchists reject everything that makes them significant, successful strike votes have a *social effect* that creates a space where student anarchists can engage in the struggle—by going to demos, distributing literature, sabotaging public transportation systems, and so on—rather than worrying about their studies.

This, at least, was the theory. Yet successful strike votes have not protected students from collective punishment in the form of a forced return to class or the threat of losing their semester—something that is *expensive,* if nothing else.

Initial anarchist attempts to organize their own GAs, starting in the few weeks before the strike began, did not work out as intended. The idea was to bring anarchists from Montréal's myriad scenes together, to determine what different people were doing so as to coordinate *action* in a strategic way. These were not *open* assemblies; as a result, they were poorly attended, few people showed up consistently, and they weren't very productive. Most anarchists found that it was more rewarding to spend their time and energy outside of these assemblies, and it's hard to blame them.

It is easy enough to say that if only anarchists had dedicated more energy to this process of getting to know each other and figuring out how to cooperate, they could have had a more sustained and measurable effect on the strike. But the simple fact is that people weren't ready to come together at that time, and they still aren't. Montréal's street fighters

are segregated into a variety of cliques; putting an end to this segregation will be a slow process, if it is possible at all.

More recently, since the beginning of the summer, CLAC has attempted to organize anti-capitalist assemblies as spaces of communication. This is a good effort; so far it has produced some good results, including more anti-capitalist contingents at "national" demonstrations and more anarchist outreach such as the campaign against the elections.

Anarchist intervention in neighborhood assemblies—many of which were initiated by anarchists—holds the most promise. Every neighborhood assembly is different, but many of them—including Mile End, Saint-Henri, Pointe-Saint-Charles, Mile End, Hochelaga, and Villeray—have significant numbers of anarchists participating. They point to a different type of organizing, rooted in the immediate and pragmatic aspects of struggle rather than presumed ideological common ground.

Epilogue: Preparing for the Next Round

The strike is not over, so this report can have no tidy conclusion. Starting after the Grand Prix weekend, when we began writing, the movement's street presence has died down apart from a few events, but there have been developments on other fronts. Militants have traveled far and wide to spread news of the struggle in Québec to other parts of the continent. CLASSE has organized strategic consultas in just about every significantly populated place in Québec, as well as several cities in Ontario. The premier has called an election. Autonomous anti-capitalists have made their own call: from August 13 to August 17, they want people to come to Montréal and help to sabotage the start of the special semester stipulated in the Special Law—as many as ten weeks' worth of classes crammed into five, and the last chance that the government is offering to students at striking schools to make up the semester that was first extended into May because of the strike and then canceled altogether by decree.

Although it is the official policy of CLASSE to defy the Special Law—which has yet to be applied to militants as of this writing, despite being on the books for over two months—it seems that the organization is keeping back from organizing, demonstrations, or other actions to block the *rentrée,* the return to classes. This is sensible for their part, and probably useful to anyone who will need legal support. CLASSE has a lot of money, but its access to that money is precarious, and it's all too likely that violations of the law would be punished by an asset freeze or fines imposed by automatic withdrawal. This is not to say CLASSE is shying away from opposing certain provisions of the new law. It will continue to organize disruptive demonstrations that do not collaborate with the police, though it's likely that these demonstrations will target institutions other than schools.

Over the summer, CLASSE has focused on bringing its message to the people of Québec and the students of Ontario. From an anarchist perspective, this message can be charitably described as inadequate. The coalition's new manifesto, "Share Our Future"—the English translation of which makes the scrappiest Montréal anarchist translation job look pretty damn good—includes some tokenistic references to marginalized elements in

our society and other issues that anarchists in particular pushed to include, but that's it. Worse, instead of sounding passionate, it sounds like precisely what it is: the product of a consensus process among people whose politics and strategic approach vary widely. Consequently, it is a litany of lowest common denominators, not an inspiring call to arms.

In the meantime, the election is on, and Pauline Marois, leader of the Parti Québécois, is doing her best to divert the power of the strike movement into her election campaign. She and her star candidate Léo Bureau-Blouin, who was president of FÉCQ until June, have kindly asked the student movement not to cause trouble during the campaign, arguing that disruption will play into the Liberals' re-election strategy. And it probably will, but that *doesn't matter.* If the strike movement does not effectively sabotage the special semester, those who refuse to go to class will suffer the consequences and the movement's *rapport de force* with whichever government comes to power on September 4 will be significantly diminished. A large segment of the movement thinks the most important thing is to drive Charest from power—when, in fact, the most important thing is for the movement to become confident of *its own power.*

Student associations at a few schools have already voted to comply with the rentrée. Others, like the one at Cégep du Vieux Montréal—which, in the spring, voted to remain on strike until free education is realized in Québec—are going to fight it out.

For its part, CLAC has launched an anti-electoral propaganda campaign and disseminated a call for three demonstrations: one for the day that the election is announced; one for the leaders' debate, although apparently there will be several; and one for the day of the election itself.

It is unclear what the plan is for the first week of the *rentrée,* but a multilingual website has been set up to inform people of the plan as it is determined. There are three cégeps opening up on August 13 and fourteen in total for the week, but whether or not the student associations at each of those schools will have decided to renew their strike mandates on August 10 is unclear. Another website has been set up to arrange housing and transportation.

There have been two "national" demonstrations since the Grand Prix, one on June 22—a small and passive event of less than 100,000 people—and another on July 22, which was a little bit bigger and a little more exciting. An anti-capitalist contingent broke off from the main march in defiance of bylaw P–6 and the Special Law, although the militants involved did nothing more than disrupt traffic.

On the morning of August 1, Jean Charest announced the 40th Québécois general election. Incidentally, this was also the night of the 100th consecutive night demonstration, and both the student federations and the neighborhood assemblies had planned to give the demonstration more life than it had possessed in some time. Assemblies based in the neighborhoods to the north and the east of Berri Square organized marches that gathered more people as they passed through each neighborhood until they reached the square.

There were clashes with police. Bank windows were smashed out and dumpsters dragged into the streets. The police deployed their usual weapons: batons, pepper spray, flashbang grenades. A total of 15 people were arrested. The struggle continues.

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August 14, 2012

Retrieved on 29th November 2020 from crimethinc.com

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