



The Association of McGill
University Support Employees

Le Syndicat des employé(e)s occasionnels
de l'Université McGill



2015 Drummond Street, Suite 901
Montréal, Québec
HG3 1W7
<http://www.amusemcgill.org/>
communications.amuse@gmail.com

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Monsieur Michel Arsenault
Président
Fédération des travailleurs et travailleuses du Québec
565 boulevard Crémazie Est, bureau 12100
Montréal, Québec
H2M 2W3

SUBJECT: Call to concretely and clearly support the Coalition large de l'Association pour une solidarité syndicale étudiante (CLASSE)

M. Arsenault,

Last May 28th, as President of the FTQ, you wrote to the President of the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) a letter which was made public during the month of June. In this letter, you described your analysis of the present state of the student conflict in Quebec. You wrote: "Despite their apparent strength, the student associations are exhausted and worried about what comes next."ⁱ You further stated that: "more radical wings are calling for a social strike and we do not believe that this is THE strategy to be promoted for the moment." These opinions, despite their personal nature, were addressed to local unions affiliated with the CLC who had decided to financially support CLASSE and stand in solidarity with the students' struggle. Your intervention, in your own words, sought to give these unions "a better understanding of the situation" and to discourage them from actions of solidarity which might prolong the standoff.

Even though you did not mention CLASSE by name, it is understandable that in the current context numerous unions affiliated to the CLC understood your comments as a call to halt monetary donations to CLASSE, the coalition which called for a social strike, and the coalition which is clearly the biggest manifestation of mobilization and action. Fortunately, many unions, such as SCFP-Ontario, continued with their planned donations to CLASSE because they believe "that these struggles [for equity, equality, and a better world] cannot continue through words alone."ⁱⁱ

As a union including many student workers, and as unions affiliated to the FTQ, **we dissociate ourselves from your personal analysis of the situation.** We do not consider CLASSE to be an isolated wing of the student movement as it includes the large majority of students who are still on strike. We do not consider CLASSE exhausted, nor as an organization who only wants to throw fuel on the fire. **We believe that CLASSE, as it makes concrete steps to fight for free education, advances principles also held by the FTQ.**

As members affiliated to the FTQ through our status as workers, and as students (for many of us are also affiliated with CLASSE), **we invite you to contact us so that we can "better explain the**

situation” on the ground. We invite you to not interfere so quickly in a movement which first and foremost belongs to those who are actually on strike. The unique status of Quebec within Canada should not be used as a pretext to spread fear in the face of Law 12 (Bill 78) or to dry up donations going to those student associations who have strike mandates.

In the clarification of your comments to the CLC, published on Facebook last June 21st, it is indicated that you neither denounce nor reject “the support of Anglophone unions in the student struggle. Yet you do not revisit your previous analysis of the situation, which was clearly unfavorable to the CLASSE in particular and to the state of the student movement in general. And yet, where you see a decline of mobilization, we see an unprecedented rise of popular mobilization in defiance of Law 12, not only from the voices of the courts but also from the daily sounds of casseroles and illegal demonstrations. Where you see a loss of momentum, we know that this is only the calm before the strike picks up again in mid-August. Many students are currently benefiting from the lockout imposed by Law 12, as it allows them to work. More than 150,000 students still have strike mandates.

Regarding the social strike, you wrote: “we do not believe that this is THE strategy to be promoted for the moment.” We would like for you to explain this “we,” because general assemblies of the unions affiliated to the FTQ were not consulted on this question. It is up to them, and them alone, to decide on the legitimacy or relevance of a strike in support of the student movement and what forms it would take. In this regard, the horizontal organizational and decision-making structures of CLASSE are inspiring.

We therefore call on the unions of English Canada and of Quebec to continue to donate en masse to CLASSE to allow the continuation of the strike in the student associations who democratically voted to strike. These donations are essential, especially given that Law 12 allows for the revocation of student association fees, and that many militants are facing arbitrary imprisonment and costly legal battles.

In the hope that you hear our concerns and respond in solidarity, please receive our sincere regards.

In solidarity,

The Board of Representatives of the Association of McGill University Support Employees



ⁱ <http://zinelibrary.info/files/FTQ-Students-2012-05-28-EN-1.pdf>

ⁱⁱ <http://cupe.on.ca/d1947/solidarite-avec-mouvement-etudiant>