

The (unfinished) History of Floor Fellow Unionization

Created by the Floor Fellow
Unionization Committee
Summer 2014

Introduction

The purpose of this zine is to share information and historical context around why and how Floor Fellows came to be unionized. It's my hope that this information can be accessible to new hires and future Floor Fellows, any folks who are new to the McGill Rez community, and anyone who'd like to know. The idea of unionizing came up as a potential strategy to protect the rights of Floor Fellows and the principles of the position three different times. The first was in the academic year of 2008 to 2009, when the director of residences at the time attempted to change the alcohol policy in Rez from a harm reductive approach to a no-tolerance approach. Unionization was briefly talked about, but there was no attempted union drive. The second time unionization came up among Floor Fellows was in the winter of 2012. It came up as a reaction to the dismissal of two Floor Fellows. A union drive occurred but it was unsuccessful. The third time was this past year, 2013 to 2014. In the fall of 2013, Floor Fellows were surprised with a decision to re-organize the Hall Director structure in residence; going from part-time director in every hall to one full-time director per grouping of buildings. This year, a union drive was successfully passed.

This zine is a compilation of different experiences, stories, and perspectives from over the three mentioned years. I'd like to acknowledge that the experiences and feelings around unionization have been extremely varied within the Floor Fellow community and that the voices in this zine do not and can not fully represent that variety.

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The Power Structure of McGill Residences

Morton Mendelson 2005 – 2013

Dr. Olivier Dyens 2013 – Present

Deputy Provost, Student Life and Learning

Micheal Porritt 2008 – 2013

Janice Johnson 2013 – Present

Director of Residences

Ria Rombough 2010 – Present

Assistant Director of Residences, Senior Advisor

Hall Directors

Floor Fellows, Dons, MORE Fellows

*Taken from Annie Preston's zine about the Floor Fellow 2012 union drive

Q. What is a Floor Fellow and what do they do?

A. A Floor Fellow is a student like yourself who lives in a room on your floor or nearby. They are available to help you integrate into university living and are a great resources for information on campus life. They have extensive training and are able to handle many different situations. They will plan floor events and will be a reliable non-judgmental person for you to talk to at any time.

*taken from the "Life in Residences" booklet provided to first year students; Annie Preston's zine

2008 - 2009

Interview with Kira Page

When and where were you a Floor Fellow?

I was a floor fellow until 2008 to 2011, so three years. Two of them were in MORE, the last year was in Solin.

What year were there talks of unionizing?

Primarily in my first year. The first two months of the year that I started were with the old director, Flo Tracy, and then we were introduced to our new director that fall. It was a really hectic year—that was the first year there were talks of unionizing. And then the second time I remember it coming up in a big way was actually the first year after I finished, which was 2011 to 2012. I was no longer a Floor Fellow, but still very connected to the community and that was the year Drew and Danji were fired.

Can I ask why it was so hectic in your first year of floor fellowing?

When Micheal Porritt started in residences it went badly from minute one...the first director e-mail. There were a bunch of things. There were policy changes that were laid down on the table really quickly—primarily around our harm reduction efforts around drug and alcohol, particularly around alcohol. Porritt was coming from an Ontario and US context where the goal was to stop students from drinking at all costs, but that wasn't our context nor our approach. He clearly wanted to push for what he knew. That push also seemed to be com-

ing from the Deputy Provost's office—Student Life and Learning—who was Morton Mendelson at the time. Residence had operated pretty independently up until then, and it seemed pretty clear they were trying to bring Residence into the larger McGill structure, planning and strategic vision which was really focussed on liability at the time. There was tons of stuff happening around campus around liability; like “you can't use our name in these ways, blah blah blah”. The other thing that was that there seemed to be two different expectations of our positions coming forward. The first was that Porritt didn't seem interested in treating us as adult employees. We had previously had really trusting relationships with our directors and the director of residences overall—where we just trusted and felt treated like employees who were doing a job—and it seemed like Porritt was trying to treat us like kids, he was trying to bring us up as leaders or something. People reacted really intensely to being treated like kids. For example, he would dress up like a superhero for our meetings and stuff—it was super condescending and not subtle at all. Another thing was that—and this is more connected to the policy stuff—he clearly wanted us to take on more disciplinary roles, when at that time we had no disciplinary capacity. So people really resisted to that since the Floor Fellow position was primarily a peer support position. And lastly, he was an extremely unprofessional person; we would have meetings and he would start crying or he would send us these long e-mails about his family..

These would be mass floor fellow e-mails?

Yes! Or he would ask us to do favors for him. He was trying to make our professional relationship with him really informal, which could have been fine if we were actually treated as equals. But it was an antagonist context and, then, he would ask us to babysit his kids—it was pretty not cool. So all of that came to a head very quickly. He also started threatening to fire people, so that was a key moment of realization for us.

We realized, that we actually have no contract, no job protections, no disciplinary measures in place for us—none of us had really considered losing our jobs before and we realized if any of us were to lose our jobs that not only would we have no real protection in that but we would also lose our homes and source of food. It was just really scary.

So is that when you all started to think about unionizing as a way to protect your rights as employees?

Yeah, it really wasn't like the first thing that came up for us. And I think part of it is because we really didn't have a management-employee kind of relationship with our directors. It was really not how it functioned, so it felt really weird for us to think about using a strategy that would formally pit us against our directors who at that time were our close supporters. But it came up mostly because people were terrified of getting fired.

What were some of the other strategies that y'all used?

For the first few months, we mostly tried to keep it pretty internal. We fought it out in staff meetings. So in terms of alcohol policy stuff, we basically were like "we're going to make a huge fuss over this, you have to consult with us". So then there was this committee that was created—the Rez Life Advisory Group—and a bunch of us sat on it. That was the group that was going to develop the alcohol policy. Strategy one was to take all these institutional routes to stopping the policy changes. That was really frustrating because we'd have these things happen things where we'd have a meeting and decide on things and then Porritt would send out the minutes and they would look different than what we decided on—it was a really frustrating process. The other strategy was like..I mean... we just spent a lot of time talking to each other about what was happening and trying to get everyone on board with stopping what was happening. And there were a lot of

huge all-staff meetings that were super tense with people yelling at each other—well yelling at him mostly. So it was a lot of trying to fight it out in the work place for a while. We would book meetings with him because he was like, “I’m open to talking with you”. So we were like, “OK, fine”. We all had these meetings with him in his office trying to convince him, we put research together trying to tell him that we understand the law, but we also understand why students die, and why students die is because they cannot seek help because we are also disciplinary officers. And eventually, we wrote this huge letter to Morton Mendelson that outlined our concerns that were essentially harm reduction and unprofessionalism and had all the Floor Fellows sign off. With 80 people working at the time, 77 of them signed off on it.

So there was a strong consensus on the issue in the Floor Fellow community?

Yeah, but we had to hustle for that. So many intense conversations with people. Most people were very on board with the issues, but were really reticent to organize around it—as per usual. Yeah, it was a lot of hustling. Thankfully at that time, the directors were totally on our side and they were much less able to put their names on the line for various reasons, but they were super supportive and did a lot of work to talk to their staff about it and push for the same things. And they were having their own massive sets of conflicts with Porritt and the general direction of residences. We sent that letter to Mendelson and to Porritt, we didn’t get a reply, so we kept pushing. We eventually set up a meeting with Mendelson where we outlined those concerns. Obviously, consultation with McGill is not a viable solution so that didn’t really work out. Eventually the McGill Daily found out about what was happening and published a piece on it and we published a series of responses to that piece just to clarify what was happening. It’s still one of the top read daily pieces of all time, like it made campus news for a while.

Those were the strategy that year. That all took like six to eight months, and by the end of the year there was this massive All-Staff meeting that was just terrible and nothing was coming out of it. Except, what seemed to be happening was that Porritt was adding layers of middle management to residences. Whereas before it was basically the directors and us, suddenly there were Rez Life managers, Ria's position was created, all the Rez Life staff—there was a bunch of middle people. By the next year it seemed like the way he was moving forward was to minimize his contact with us in any way. So we kind of stopped seeing him or having very much contact with him for the next couple years, and we functioned independently of each other. We did succeed in getting an alcohol policy through that was ok with us, and most of that happened through that committee (Rez Life Advisory Group). In terms of the other harm reduction stuff—well the thing about the other harm reductions stuff is that it's hard to have a conversation about it because it's not legal, it's a totally illegal practice, well no not totally illegal, but it's definitely a gray zone. We were never really able to have staff level conversations about it. One thing that happened is that we tried to keep it kind of quiet. Like when we had trainings we would talk about the drug policy—like the whole envelope strategy and all these different strategies we have for encouraging students to tell us when they are taking illegal drugs—when he wasn't there.

With some minor conflicts over the next couple years, people kind of did their own things. But in the meantime the context of residence has changed in its culture, now the kind of relationship that I had with my directors is extremely far from the kind of relationships people have now with their directors. That sort of slower strategy of changing the way people interact with each other was much more successful in destroying the kind of relationships we had. The massive strategy of, “we're gonna make policy changes on day one”, didn't work

for them but, ya know...

What do you think worked well? What didn't work well?

This is just good campus organizer knowledge; the only thing McGill really cares about is their image. Going public is something that we were extremely reticent to do, but I think it is a much better strategy than keeping it internal. McGill's thing is to keep things hush-hush and deal with conflict internally, so if you can make it public..fuck it, ya know. I think we should have probably done that earlier than we did, but the problem with that is you have to put your name to things, and everyone's jobs were getting threatened so we were really scared. That became more realistic when the school year was close to ending and the people that decided to do that were people who were leaving.

The rest of it...I don't really know how well it work. I think what was key with not having contracts, really developing cultures of having each other's backs. Because Porritt's strategy was trying to isolate people and pit people against each other. Porritt kept referencing a couple people during meetings with us by saying, "well this person is doing all these things" and I'd be like, "you're making that up because I know that person really well". That was a big thing, we made sure to support the people that were getting publicly targeted. And not caving in to the, "There's a couple bad apples" line—which he kept using.

That sounds really moralizing?

It was all very condescending, moralizing, frustrating stuff. Thankfully we were a very tight knit group that year. The people he was picking out as "bad apples" were people who were so widely respected and loved. It was like, "There's a couple sneaky, manipulative assholes who are trying to destroy the residence system..ya we know, it's you hahaha!". And the oth-

er argument that they used a lot, that was hard to deal with, was “You’re just anti-change, you just can’t deal with change”. Which was interesting, because on the one hand, ya, we’ve had the same director for the last twenty-five years and we love it, so yes we don’t want it to change. That was kinda hard to deal with and I don’t think we had the overall level of analysis to be able to say “we are actually a group of people who learn and who change and who are into new approaches, but we have some basic principles that we work off of. And those principles are peer support and harm reduction, which are fundamentally at odds with McGill’s principles. So if you’re change is changing them, then yeah, of course. But it’s really difficult to articulate that.

Is there anything you’d like to say to future Floor Fellows?

To me, Floor Fellowing is a valuable position. It’s kind of amazing as a position that exists in the world, in the context of McGill anyway. It’s like, you are somebody who is there for peer support but who isn’t only there when people are in crisis. You develop longterm relationships with people and they can come to you at any point. You have zero disciplinary capacity. And that role is so far from anything this University does or will ever want to see in the world. And so, it will always be a conflict...It will always be a conflict. Since we’ve lost the protection of having this independently run organization, it will always be antagonistic towards the University. And to me, that means that people need to do whatever they can to protect those values because it’s kind of one of the few things that is worth anything at McGill at this point. And not only just protect them, but actually further them, and I do see Floor Fellows doing that in the last couple years. But taking those values further and not just acting defensively on them.

Is there anything else you want to add?

One thing I was talking to Allison and Danji about was when

we considered unionizing we dropped it fairly quickly, and that was largely because we had such close relationships with our directors and it just felt wrong at that point. I think people still bring that up as like, "but it's a collegial environment". It seems very clear to me that it's not anymore. When I've talked to current Floor Fellows about their work environment, it's obvious that it is now so different than when I was working there. That's super sad to me that now it's not just antagonistic towards McGill but it's a fight people are having with their employers who should be there to support Floor Fellows in a position that is incredibly difficult, challenging and draining. But yeah, just to say, that the reason we didn't unionize was that closeness with directors, and now it's gone. So, ya know, it's time.



NEWS | MARCH 30TH, 2009

Floor fellows clash with new boss

Written by Alison Withers

Selected Quotations

"Until recently, McGill had one of the strictest student residence alcohol policies in Canada, but only loosely enforced the guidelines. Now, the new Executive Director of Residences, Michael Porritt, is determined to close the gap between policy and practice – just one example of a changing philosophy that's hitting McGill Residences."

"We're open to changes that we feel will improve the community for our first-year students, but we also hold core values – like respect – that are non-negotiable," said Graham Smith, a MORE House floor-fellow, explaining that residence life has followed a harm reduction strategy and established close-knit communities of trust. "That is what McGill Residences are based on, and that's why we're so concerned about what might change."

One outgoing floor fellow, who expected to get fired if his name was used on record, charged that hiring Porritt was an extension of McGill's fears of liability.

"Being on that committee is 100 per cent defensive; it's always an issue of doing damage control to what he's bringing in" the floor fellow said. "There's a lot of us taking our own minutes so we can say 'no you didn't say that,' and 'no, we didn't say that.'"

"There are lots of people who are very wary of 'the new guy,'" said Porritt in an earlier email to The Daily. "The vast majority [of staff] have been very supportive and even excited to talk about how we can put their ideas into action."

(McGill Daily)

Kate Wardell

I never would have thought that a Greenbriar apartment could become an underground strategic headquarters or that a bunch of floor fellows would have to be furtive at BDP or that I would be scared to use my McGill email address for fear my messages could be read. Many of us thought that we would be fired, homeless and helplessly watching an institution we loved be destroyed. He tried to maintain this illusion of being a down-to-earth, logical and capable leader– I don't think anyone bought that anymore than the lip service about having an open door for communication with us. On multiple occasions I asked for a mediated group discussion to go over the concerns of the day. (Why mediated? Because talking to Porritt was like talking to the voice menu on 411 with cotton shoved in your mouth – the answer, if you get one, has absolutely nothing to do with your question.) He continuously shut down the idea of having a mediated discussion. Shortly after, the 3-page letter of grievances, signed by a vast majority of staff was sent. When the BMH meeting happened, and 50 people showed up he still managed to not listen, to not get the point and to treat us as tiny, irritating fruit flies that were swarming around the stench of “a few bad apples.”

COMMENTARY | MARCH 30TH, 2009

Editorial: Residence director must improve, or go

Written by

For years, students moving into residence at McGill have been asked to live according to two rules: “Respect,” and “Don’t fuck with the fire equipment.” From this, students were expected to understand the necessity of taking care of their building and fellow students. In turn, students could expect their floor fellows and hall directors to treat them like adults and look out for their best interests.

Recent interviews with some floor fellows indicate that Michael Porritt, the recently appointed Executive Director of McGill’s residence system, wants to change this. At a meeting with the entire residences staff earlier this year, he claimed that 18 year-olds don’t have the cognitive capacity to comprehend what the respect rule entails, and implied that floor fellows, at most only a few years older, might lack this capacity as well – though the law recognizes the great majority of McGill students as legal adults. As a result, Porritt sees the need to ensure that floor fellows and hall directors act in line with policies already on the books. As well, he plans to change policies where he feels it is appropriate.

But those changes appear to go beyond the simple enforcement of the policies already in place. For example, floor fellows say Porritt has suggested strengthening the University’s alcohol policy with regard to drinking in common spaces, but allowing alcohol to be consumed in unmarked containers – showing that Porritt’s desire to keep the University free from the liability of knowing about drinking is greater than his concerns about student safety.

He also reportedly despises a practice where floor fellows allow students to tell them about their drug use in a sealed envelope – to be opened only in the event an emergency – and told the staff

that if they don't feel comfortable sitting down with a student and strongly discouraging them from using drugs, that they shouldn't re-apply to be a floor fellow.

Porritt seems to neglect the positive effect of the harm reduction policies that prevail in McGill's residences. Floor fellows are there to look out for students' safety in a non-judgemental manner, and implementing a no-tolerance ethic in Rez will only keep them out of touch with students on their floors, preventing them from doing their jobs effectively and creating a more dangerous situation for first years. We're at university and we should be treated like adults, and trusted with making our own decisions. That goes for the team of floor fellows, whose primary aim must remain to support their students, no matter what circumstances arise.

Porritt's suggestions are representative of a larger trend on the part of the administration toward minimizing potential sources of liability and running the University increasingly like a business, from buying up student-run food services to revoking the rights of student groups to use the McGill name.

Porritt's attitude is all wrong for him to continue as Executive Director – a position that he is not well-qualified for to begin with. So far he has managed McGill Residences like they belong to a U.S. school, though we live in a province with cultural values and policies that are quite different. If his approach doesn't change soon, he should be removed from the position – either shuffled to another job, or dismissed. Further, a system of communication should be put in place within residence so that floor fellows' concerns can be an integral part of the decision-making process in the future.

Progressive harm reduction techniques that ensure the safety of students while leaving them the ability to learn and grow must continue. We must be wary of any efforts to restrict the rights of students in Rez, and stand in solidarity with them should such changes occur. We urge students to mobilize around this issue. To start, get in touch with your floor fellows, and discuss these concerns with members of the administration. Our system of residences is incredibly unique, and new students deserve to have the same experience that we had.

(McGill Daily)

Stuart Wright

It always seemed to me the great strength of the organisation as an adaptive body lay in its well-maintained personal relationships-- within staffs, among staffs, and between staff members and directors-- and in a healthy leadership culture, rather than in any formal structure. When it is healthy the organisation enacts/reflects/conserves the same Respect ideal that governs the whole system, and that resonating unity of purpose, operating among the staff just as much as with the residents, is really the true source of strength.

The main source of challenge in my experience of 2008-2010 was the university's attempt to impose an ineffective formally-oriented management on an effective system that didn't rely much on form. Our effort to resist detrimental changes came from a close-knit consensus culture and pockets of emergent leadership, and would not, I think, have been aided by having formal or adversarial structures such as union membership in place; I understand that conditions have changed in the time since, so I'm hesitant to offer any advice other than a general hoary caution against legalism. That being said, legal tactics are a great thing to deploy when and where they are not expected (i.e. when the formalists ineptly try their hand at informal management), so it's important to have people who can quote the Green Book to advantage.

2011 - 2012

February, often the most forsaken of Winter months, proved to be a dramatic time to be a McGill student this past year. On Tuesday, February 7th, roughly twenty students occupied Morton Mendelson's office in response to the administration's decision to override the successful existence referenda of CKUT and QPIRG-McGill. This occupation was called 6Party, the theme was a resignation party. Two of the students were employed as floor fellows at the time. The occupation lasted for five days, until they were peacefully evicted the following Sunday morning. After the eviction, the two floor fellows, Drew Childerhose and Danji Buck-Moore, were called into a meeting with Mr. Porritt. At this meeting both were threatened with the possibility of losing their jobs. Mr. Porritt decided to call a period of consultation, during which he allowed for floor fellows, and students living in residence to come and share their thoughts on the potential dismissal of Drew and Danji.

*taken from Annie Preston's zine about the 2012 union drive

Interview with Tyler Michaels

When did you work as a Floor Fellow and where?

I was a Floor Fellow for three years, from September 2011 to May 2014.

So in 2012, there were discussions about unionizing.

Yes, there were.

What happened?

As I see it, the discussions about unionization started before Danji and Drew had actually been fired, we started talking about it when it was still a threat that they might be fired. They got fired for protesting in the James Admin building and for occupying it—Drew for one day, and Danji for 5 or 6 days. They occupied Morton Mendelson's office who was our boss at the time. After, we had a staff meeting where Danji and Drew and Myrna (the director of Solin Hall at the time) let the rest of the team know that there were going to be serious consequences for them because of their political participation in the protest. I don't know if it was that day or a couple days later...I think it was that day...so after the meeting, either Danji or Drew suggested that maybe it would make sense for us to meet as a team without Myrna to talk as just Floor Fellows. And then we started talking about unionization. But maybe Myrna was there, I can't exactly remember. But anyway, we started talking about it pretty immediately. A few days later we found out that Drew and Danji were very likely going to get fired and evicted. So then the unionization discussions opened up to the larger Floor Fellow community. It was largely spurred by the fact that there was this crisis that two Floor Fellows were getting fired. And from my building, which why in that instance the Solin team was at the front of it. Yeah, that's how it got started.

Then it expanded into a larger discussion of how can we protect people. Most of us thought it was pretty fucked up that they were getting fired, so it was a conversation about how we could give ourselves some job protection. Then as the process of Danji and

Drew's potential dismissal went forward, they started talking the PSAC (the union that AMUSE is under). PSAC took on their case. They said they could help them liaise with the Regie des Normes du Travail. So they started talking with someone there, and they basically said "you're job conditions are kind of weird, they're not very secure, and it's not fair. You shouldn't be allowed to get terminated like this. And you're living situation is really precarious because you don't have a lease." So it expanded from there, everyone started to think about the other ways, in addition to getting fired for being part of a political protest, that our job was not that secure. So that was the beginning.

How did it play out from there?

There were a bunch of discussions and team meetings on our team, and I assume on other teams. We had one meeting of four or five us, I think it was Drew, Lena, Tyler Lawson and myself and maybe one or two other people. We had a meeting in the QPIRG office and talked about what it would mean if unionization was going to happen and what kind of info we would want to have. We created a Google Doc to serve as an FAQ sheet. By this point there were maybe a dozen people who knew about it, so it was a pretty quiet discussion. We decided to call a semi-secretive meeting—we weren't entirely sure what the laws were in Quebec and we thought it was possible that we would all be fired for even saying "union". So it was still pretty secretive. And we called a meeting and told everyone to come, circulated texts, and posted a somewhat cryptic message on the Facebook group. We had a big meeting in the SSMU building one day, a ton of people came. We had a big conversation about all the grievances we were having and how fucked it was that Drew and Danji were getting fired. And, then, we opened it up into a conversation about unionization. Some people coming to the meeting knew it was going to become a conversation about unionizing, some people did not. There were probably twenty-something to thirty floor fellows there. There were some people who had negative reactions at first. Some people who had positive reactions. We had a long conversation where we talked about people's concerns. And at the end, generally, people were interested in the idea of having a further conversation that involved, hopefully, every single Floor Fellow. So the plan was that we would find a non-McGill location to have a big meeting and try to get ev-

ery single Floor Fellow there to have a conversation. We got it together, messaged everybody, and pretty much everyone was there. It was on Parc, at the old building of the Ghetto Shul. There was a member of the PSAC and Amber from AMUSE to answer people's questions. Some people were stoked, some people were angry. In the end it became this intense, really emotional thing. People were ranging from like, "we have to unionize now" to "if we unionize I will never speak to anyone again". That kind of intensity of emotion. There were people yelling at other people, making personal attacks at other people...it was really fucking intense. There were a lot of friendships that were destroyed in the process of that union drive. We also had a lot of conversations about what was a democratic way of deciding to unionize. One of things that characterized the discussions the whole time was that it was really important for everyone that we not just get a majority of people, but that everyone was on board—it was an arbitrary, community thing that had nothing to do with the law. We created these weird ideas of about how we could do these secret voting things where people could go in and drop off their card and it would be signed or not signed and no one would know but them whether they had signed it or not, and they would walk out of the booth. We would only submit the cards if we received more than 60%, which is obviously not the way the labor code works. We were naïve and that's how we did it. It was important to the community that everyone was on board, especially for the people who were strongly against unionization.

In the end there was no real vote. We had a second meeting in Ghetto Shul, it turned out to be not very productive. The people who were against unionizing stopped showing up, well some did show up just to yell. And there were the people who were for it, but it was basically just a circle jerk of people who wanted to unionize talking about why we wanted to do it. It was like, "ok well, ya know, those who want to unionize will sign cards and those who don't won't". And that's what happened. That was the first union drive. It didn't work. There are people--who I think would have had strong feelings about unionizing--who signed them but never turned them in because they still had reservations about the process.

The hope behind this project is that new hires and future hires will be able to gain context and information on why it is that Floor Fellows are unionized. Is there anything you'd like to share with

future Floor Fellows?

Yeah, totally. I would say that it is pretty important to keep in mind that the history of Residences since Flo Tracy left and maybe before, I don't know, has been one of promises to consult and decisions made in spite of collective feelings about it. As unionization goes forward, I know there will be things that will be really shitty and that there will be things that will be hard to negotiate because, frankly, the labor laws in Quebec are not written like ours. So we fall through the cracks. As a result of that, there will be difficult negotiating and difficult bargaining and difficult compromises that will have to be made. But, I think that the most important thing that I would like to pass on is that in previous two times that unionization has come up there has never been a way to make McGill listen. And by McGill, I mean specifically the people who are at the top of the McGill administration food chain in residences. Residences, in the past, has always been able to do what they wanted in the end. Sometimes they choose to listen because that is what they feel like doing, but in times where it was really a conflict of interest, where administration wanted to do one thing overwhelmingly and Floor Fellows wanted a different thing to happen overwhelmingly. Floor Fellows have always been utterly powerless. I was recently having a conversation with someone who was a Floor Fellow about ten years ago, and she said that she wrote in when Danji and Drew were getting fired. She wrote to Michael Porritt, she wrote to Morton Mendelson, she signed on to the open letter that was being passed around. It was so shocking to everyone because the understanding was that when it came down to it, we were important enough that they would have to listen. And she said, "I felt the same way, I wrote in and I thought, 'if we can get all the Floor Fellows who have ever been Floor Fellows, faculty members'"--which we did, by the way, a lot of them-- "if we can get the community of alumni of this university and now the potential pool of donors to the university, if we can get all hundred and hundred of them to sign a letter, it would for sure make a difference".

We, the undersigned floor fellows of McGill Residences fully support Francis (Danji) Buck-Moore and Drew Childerhose and hereby attest to their character, responsibility, role-modeling, and decision-making capabilities. Regardless of political beliefs, we see their participation in the non-violent occupation of the 6th floor of the James Building as a testament to their dedication to their university community and engagement in student life at McGill. Furthermore, we oppose any decision to terminate their responsibilities as floor fellows, which would ultimately be made at the cost of both students on their floor and the entire McGill Residences community.

Signed,

*61 Floor Fellows
17 Alumni*

**from Annie Preston*

But in the end, Mike Porritt did what he wanted. I don't think that this year (2013-2014), with the decision to do the director re-org, was very different. It's part of the reason I didn't feel like that was a good place to focus our energy this year, because we had no recourse. Despite all the promises to always listen to what we have to say, nope..and we now know that unless you have a legal way to force them to be bound by your collective desires, they won't. They will only do what you ask of them when it's what they want to do anyways or when they have to. And by 'have to' I don't mean by the conscious, but by the law. The hope with unionization, despite the shitty things, is that finally there will be a way for Floor Fellows to actually get listened to and have binding results.

Chelsea Barnett

It was funny reflecting on the 2012 floor fellow unionization attempt; it seemed like the biggest thing in my world while it was happening, but in trying to write this reflection, in even just having an informal conversation about it in the wake of the successful unionization, I couldn't recall the details without reading a few Daily articles. What I did remember was the glamour of it all: the general secrecy, the meetings in the middle of the night, the tensions that arose within our little floor fellow community. I was just beginning what I fondly refer to as my "third-year politicization" so it was all very alluring. Floor following had been really good for me; it created a safe space for me to really explore my identity among a cohort of people with such diverse perspectives that I'm confident I would have never come across if I had kept doing my bonding over bottle service at Liquor Commission. I switched into Women's Studies, traded my soles for blundstones, and was so excited to be on the frontlines of a genuine labor dispute. The issue was clear: what the administration was calling "insubordination", we viewed as "wrongful termination" because our two colleagues had been fired for participating in a peaceful protest party. This raised questions about job security, which led to bigger questions about our autonomy and control in our roles as floor fellows. Or at least those were the facts as I remember them.

I happily attended the heated unionization meetings, which were starting to take up a lot of my time, spill into my day-to-day conversations, and consume all the energy I set aside for floor following. However, during one of these late night rendezvous, I screened nine phone calls from one of the students on my floor. After failing to connect with me, they search the building for different support, only to discover that all of us were out, and none of us mentioned where we were going. While I was hiding from rez, for reasons that I thought would actually end up bettering rez, I ignored potentially the biggest mental health crisis my floor faced that year. After

this, I had to stop going to the union meetings, and start spending time doing my job as a support worker on my floor. I distinctly recall putting a mixture of small change (I guess I couldn't find a toonie) in an envelope with my membership card and giving it to a co-worker from another building; by this point in time we were too divided on my own team to reveal a stance on the matter without contention, which proved to be more stressful than glamorous now that I had other things to worry about. To this day I don't know if that envelope made it to AMUSE, but I do know that that student got the help they needed.

Somewhere in these personal ramblings, I hope you pick up on my advice moving forward. I'm so proud of all the hard work that made this union happen, but don't lose sight of what this is all about. I made the crucial mistake of letting the 2012 attempt become all about my own political identity, I got caught up in the revolution (whatever that means), and in doing so, I forgot about the students that I was trying to protect. As much as labour politics matter, this union is about protecting a specific and special community, not just about general social reform -- which is rad and awesome, but defeats itself if the community implodes in the process. Support each other, support your students, and get the protection you deserve in doing so.

Interview with Annie Preston

When were you a Floor Fellow and where?

I was a Floor Fellow from the fall of 2011 until Spring of 2013, and I worked for MORE for both years.

While you were working as a Floor Fellow, when did thoughts about unionizing start coming up in the community?

My first year Floor Fellowing was the first year Drew Childer-

hose and Danji Buck-Moore got fired. So pretty much around that time period people were talking very seriously about unionizing. Basically, unionizing had come up a couple years earlier when Michel Porritt was elected into his position so a lot of the people who were part of my year's discussion on unionizing had friends who had been part of this previous discussion or had been floor fellows themselves at that time. We started talking about unionizing as soon 6Party happened. 6Party was the occupation that Drew and Danji participated in which led to their termination—well their position termination, they are still alive. As soon as Danji and Drew were fired things got really serious for about a three week period. That was in late February to early-March of 2012.

What was your experience like in all of this? Did you have a role?

I was pretty involved in it, at least one of the conspirators, some would say. So I was doing a lot of collecting of information which involved talking to somebody's brother who had gone to law school, AMUSE, and lawyers. I was also coordinating and facilitating meetings with other Floor Fellows. That year I was really, really entrenched in the Floor Fellow community. I had come right out of first year, most of my friends very quickly became floor fellows, I was really entrenched in this community and what residence was. That was one thing I think about a lot, when it was happening it was like "woah this feels so important to me because I'm really involved in it right now". And then, in the following year I was less involved in the Floor Fellow community.

This might be a really invasive question, but do you think that was because of what happened within the community, with the divisions that happened?

No, I think that's a good question. I think it's true. I think when we were talking about unionizing, it was very polarizing.

I think it was less polarizing this past year because there was even more infrastructure to talk about it, it was approached in a different way, there was less of a crisis scenario. Because when we were talking about unionizing, basically the situation was like, when Danji and Drew got fired it felt really scary to anyone who was involved in political stuff. It was the year of the student strike, so people were really politicized. A lot of us were really politicized in front of our students. And it was like, "what if we go to a march or participate in an action for the strike and we get fired". That was a lot of the conversation that was happening. So the thought was that we needed to freeze our working conditions. That was why we were talking about unionizing, above all things, it could freeze exactly what we had before things change. And so we were talking about unionizing in this, what felt at the time, very, radically intense way. But I think this past year, a lot of people who got involved with unionizing maybe would have not been in such an urgent way, but would have needed more time to think about it. I think that created a lot of divides between people who were in the unionizing game immediately and people who were like, "I like the idea of it, but I don't have enough information. We need to move more slowly". And then other people who were just like, "this is a bad idea, we shouldn't do this". There was definitely a lot of polarity. So I think coming back was really strange. There were a lot of new Floor Fellows the following year, I think it was one of the biggest turn over years. I think there was less than twenty of us who were returning, and I remember in orientation sitting in a room with all these people and having this open discourse about cooling the union fire, basically. Danji and Drew are no longer working here, we're not talking about unionizing, we're at orientation, we need to rebuild from last year. It was kind of like, what do we now. I think that conversation was really good and important, but now my reflection on it is that we didn't unionize, and nothing changed in my second year, but this past year a lot has changed.

What were you all hoping to achieve through unionizing in 2011/2012?

The primary goal was to freeze working conditions. To freeze the freedom Floor Fellows have had, to freeze the use of harm reduction, to keep the director system in place—because even at that time there were talks of overhauling the director system, and to have an institutionalized means of demanding Floor Fellow involvement and approval on major discussions. Because when Danji and Drew got fired, Mike Porritt, the director at the time, had these really paper thing consultations with us. Chelsea Barnett and I went into a consultation together, and we sat in front of with Mike Porritt for an hour and we said, “can you please not fire our friends...and these are the reasons why, and it’s not just because they’re our friends. This is why we don’t think they should be fired”. He did this with fifty Floor Fellows, but did what he wanted to do anyways. So, how do we find a way so that the higher up systems in Rez are legally bound to involve the undergraduate staff in discussions? How do we level power relations?”

Danji Buck-Moore

When our union drive attempt happened, it was in the middle of a complicated political moment in Quebec and at McGill specifically, that is, in the middle of the 2012 student strike / protests. This made it so that the union drive had a lot of tensions, considerations, motivations, suspicions, conflicts, dramas, etc surrounding it that were not only related to the specifics of what unionizing would mean for the floor fellow and rez life community itself, but also all of those other currents and events that were in the air and in everyone’s mind.

In one sense, this brought an urgency to the moment that helped things along. It was easy to see that that was an important moment to get something done, or to change things

that hadn't been working (that was kind of in the air that whole summer for a lot of students and non-students in Montreal). On the other hand, for some I think it made the whole effort look very reactionary and opportunistic.

This was of course due the specific events of myself and Drew having been fired from our floor fellow jobs that spring after participating in the occupation of Morton Mendelson's office (unfortunately our boss's (Michael Porritt's) boss : (). You know that story more or less I imagine. Basically what I mean to say is that it was hard to promote an environment for constructive discussion about what is best for the floor fellow community and our jobs and our futures and our jobs' futures without it being a pointed competitive and personal situation. I imagine you've run into something like this too in the past year or two, although perhaps the general on-edge situation given the strike the last time around made it more heated.

It has to come down to, somewhere, what are we trying to preserve in these jobs and positions? What is valuable? What is threatened by changes from above? What is slowly eroding and needs to be identified and written in stone right now so that it can't be slowly eroded away to nothing?

In the past this was all done very tastefully in a communal way between the directors, the floor fellows, and Flo. But now that we have contracts, it's all different, and we can't trust the situation as much unfortunately.

McGill residences is still a little jewel in the grand picture of North American residence systems, and it'd be nice to not see it totally disappear. And learning about organized labour seems to be a good idea too, if first-hand, even better. My biggest suggestion I guess is to keep your eyes on the prize, and try and have pragmatic conversations about what you're trying to preserve, what you're trying to strive for, what seems like might be changing in the bigger picture of the

administration, and how to strategize to keep our little residences boat floating and gracefully as possible in the middle of whatever storms might come about. In the end we're talking about facilitating comfortable safe and magic entries into a new city for a bunch of new people arriving in Montreal. What helps us do that? How can we make sure we're able to be taking care of that as freely as possible, and being taken care of ourselves?

Kai O'Doherty

The first time I thought about floor fellow unionizing was as a first-year student at Solin Hall in 2012. Although I was never involved with Solin's council, I had a great fondness for the community fostered at Solin, and loved the hard-working, strange floor fellows working there.

It came as a shock to me when McGill decided to fire two of our floor fellows that year for their involvement in the occupation of the James Administration building, citing their behaviour as against the floor fellow standards of conduct. Not only did this result in the almost-immediate loss of their housing, food and employment, but it left their students without their well-loved support systems for the remainder of the year.

A representative from McGill Administration came to talk with us to try to explain to us their justifications for firing these floor fellows. It was clear to most, if not all, people in the room that the Admin chose to fire these floor fellows as a message to the others involved in the occupation who they could not affect as directly. Their vague justifications for firing our floor fellows revolved around the idea that the occupation reflected lack of respect and responsibility. For many of us, their actions reflected exactly what a floor fellow should be – someone willing to call out and act on injustice in their community.

Of course, not everyone agrees on the politics around the occupation itself – and I don't believe that's necessary. The core of the issue for me was that these two respected, loved floor fellows were suddenly left without a job or home because of an action they made outside of the residence context, which happened to be in the building of someone more powerful than them at McGill. No real justifications were required, and they could be fired without consultation or argument. Working and living in such precarious conditions is clearly unfair and far from ideal, and that's when I started hearing people talk more and more about unionizing floor fellows.

As frustrated and confused first years, many of us didn't know where to put our feelings. We decided to organize a Floor Fellow Appreciation Party (FFAP) specifically including the recently fired floor fellows, and even made it themed around their aesthetics (mostly featuring beards). We wanted to show the Solin floor fellows (and the Administration) that we would actively continue to recognize these two people as our floor fellows, and to show general appreciation for the hard work that all of them had put in to making Solin a beautiful community for many of us that year. I am very excited that the floor fellows have now unionized, and that no future floor fellows will have to risk their job and living in order to pursue their own political convictions.

SOLIN HALL



FLOOR FELLOW
APPRECIATION
PARTY

SAT. MARCH 24TH
7:30 PM in the SOLUS-SOL

B.Y.O.B. and beards!

FREE
PIZZA!



NEWS | MARCH 10TH, 2012

Controversy over floor fellow dismissals

Students not satisfied with consultation process

Selected Quotations:

Two letters were sent to Micheal Porritt regarding the potential decision to fire Drew Childerhose and Danji Buck-Moore. One was signed by 61 of 67 Floor Fellows and 17 alumni. The other was signed by 300 McGill community members.

“Porritt told The Daily in an email that ‘I do not expect everyone to agree with controversial decisions of any kind, but I do hope people respect the extent of open consultation that I try to make a part of all of the important decisions in residence.’”

“I gave the Rez community open access to share their thoughts and feelings and hundreds of people did so with a wide variety of viewpoints. All of them factored into the decision,” he added.

A Solin student told the Daily, “All the consultation that the administration keeps saying we’re part of, it’s really just a check box,” Kai O’Doherty continued. “It’s just a reason for them to say they’ve talked to the students, but they don’t have to ever be accountable to listening and following up from the students, and that’s, I think, the biggest problem we were pointing out.”

(McGill Daily)

2013 - 2014

Christina Clemente and Arielle Baker

At the beginning of the year, Carrefour and RVC teams were told that we would be piloting a new director model in which one full-time director was responsible for two residence halls and temporary housing in Varsity 515. We were expressly told that because it was a pilot project, we would be asked for feedback throughout the year in order to adjust the model if necessary – I was made to understand that this decision was made primarily out of necessity (difficulty filling positions) and more as an experiment. I think that most of us were open-minded about the pilot project. However, as the year progressed, we ran into some issues yet were never asked about how things were going with the new model.

In November, when I heard rumours that this new model was being implemented across the board, I was confused – specifically as to why this decision had been made without any feedback from us about the “pilot” model. Moreover, the All Staff meeting at which this was explained reiterated the fact that this decision was being made unilaterally – without input from students, floor fellows, or even directors. I felt disillusioned because I had had a very different understanding at the beginning of the year about the nature of the model I had been working under.

This meeting in particular sparked a lot of feelings for many people within the floor fellow community. I felt that my trust had been broken when a serious decision that would significantly affect Residences, the place in which I live and work, had been made without any consultation (particularly

when we were already having issues under the pilot project). It also made me realize how insecure we are in our jobs and our living spaces. Ultimately, directors lost their jobs (or at least their job at a certain capacity), and we could be subject to that as well. These feelings were what led me to consider unionizing – I realized that my voice as a single floor fellow was much less powerful than the voices of the floor fellows united.

Timeline of Floor Fellow Unionization 2013-2014

by Allison Jones

Early November: Rez “ReOrg” (aka the new director model) is announced to Floor Fellows

Mid November: Some Floor Fellows begin to discuss unionization as a tactic to oppose changes to Rez structures

Late November to early January: Open information meetings are organized by some FFs to share info about unions and to discuss unionization as a possibility

Mid to Late January: Floor Fellows begin meeting more regularly with representatives from AMUSE and PSAC to find answers to difficult questions about unionizing. A thorough FAQ document is in the works.

Mid February: Another open meeting for all FFs is held, and a decision to move forward with the union drive by distributing and collecting cards is made.

Late February: Union cards and an FAQ document are distributed to all FFs through their team members. Cards are collected and returned to AMUSE

February 28th: Over 50% of FFs have submitted signed union cards.

March 3rd: Union cards are submitted to the Commission des Relations du Travail (CRT).

Mid March: McGill submits a list of present Floor Fellows, which includes 2013-2014 FFs as well as new hires for the 2014-2015 school year. AMUSE and PSAC decide to contest the addition of the new hires to this list. A date is set for a hearing at the CRT to decide this matter.

March 16th: The first Floor Fellow General Meeting is held at AMUSE's offices. The unionization process, AMUSE structure, and next steps and priorities are discussed. Representatives are elected.

Early April: A committee of Floor Fellows, made up of the elected reps and one representative from each building, begins meeting. This committee prepares for the upcoming hearing at the CRT as well as for bargaining.

April 30th: The hearing regarding the list of FFs is held at the CRT. Ria Rombough testifies for McGill, outlining FFs' jobs and working conditions.

May 6th: The CRT decision is released: the extra names are struck from the list of FFs, and Floor Fellows are unionized with AMUSE!

May to August: The FF committee and FF elected reps continue to prepare for bargaining in the fall. FFs are surveyed about their priorities for their Collective Agreement, and a draft is written, to be discussed by the 2014-2015 FFs at the FF SGM at the end of August, 2014.

Sara Sebti

In writing this piece I acknowledge that the views stated here are merely written from my personal experiences and perspectives as a floor fellow this past year. I by no means intend to speak on behalf of all floor fellows.

Effective dialogue and transparency, two pillars of meaningful and open communication, were absent this past year. Decisions' regarding the re-organization of hall directors was made without my knowledge, and actively altered my sense of agency as an employee. Unionization was not a reactionary impulse founded upon miscommunication, but rather symbolizes a fundamental rift in understandings of power and negotiation. Power was wielded and reinforced by way of escaping a process of transparent dialogue. Decisions were made without acknowledging the intimate ways in which I experience and am a part of the residence community. We unionized this year, as it became ever more clear that this rift in understanding was not simply a momentary lapse in communication. Rather such decision making is indicative of the ways in which power is wielded over those who lack the resources to counteract such actions. Unionizing ensures that divergent voices, in respect to resources and safety, are heard.

This is what

- Iain Childerhose,
- a Solin floor fellow of two years,
- brother of Drew Childerhose [one of two floor fellows fired in 2012/my first year of university]

Thinks of the process of unionizing & why it is beneficial important for the floor fellow community.

1

I remember in the winter of 2012 shortly after the dismissals of Drew & Danji, talking to my brother about the prospect of floor fellows unionizing. When I brought up this idea that I only thought about after reading the comment section on a Daily article, he quickly asked me if my floor fellow had told me about this, told me not to talk about this with any floor fellows. yikes. This is not to slander the 2012 union attempt but as I understand it there was an amount of secrecy. So when we began the same process in the winter of 2014 this was not the manner in which I wanted the movement to proceed. This was a decision that affects the members of the community for now & years to come so going behind the backs of those who were opposed/didn't favour forming a union seemed toxic & unhelpful. Throughout the process as many conversations as possible were had with anyone who wanted to chat about it; listening to the community members' (especially those most critical of unionizing) worries & concerns, hopefully putting them to rest or opening up our own perspective to address these concerns throughout the 'union push' & eventual formation of the CBA so that embodies the values & concerns of the community.

2

Secondly I guess I want to speak briefly about why I think forming a floor fellow union is important. Everyone knows that mcgill Residences works primarily off of the rule of RESPECT, and in my view the union is the only way to ensure that mcgill will ALWAYS respect us as workers. The way I see

it is that you might not always need a union but the moment you need it & don't have it, it is too late. Sure, we have RR+JJ in charge of Rez right now & I do believe they have rez's best interest at heart. Sure there are going to be some differences, such as life with employers & employees, but they act with a profound understanding & commitment to the rez community here at mcgill. If they leave or act in ways the FFs deem unfavourable the union makes certain that our position & mode of operation only change if we want//need them to. This means the porrits & the lisas of the world cannot change our job into something it is not wanted to be. We have a system that embraces & works with the mayhem that is student life. How we interact and choose to handle situations is not always going to line-up with how 'rez life professionals', & nor should it. Sometimes the best thing you can do for a student is go smoke a dart with them at 3am... & sometimes it is not but we get to decide that and is what makes our system worth preserving.

Interview with Tyler Micheals cont.

What were some of the difference and similarities between the union drives in 2012 and 2014?

Interview with Tyler Michaels continued

What are some of the differences and/or similarities between the union drive in 2012 and in 2014?

The thing is, unlike this time, the first initial stages there was an in group and an out group but I feel like it was less conscientiously a union drive. It was a crisis situation that resulted in discussions about unionization that had some people pro and some people against, all in similar circles. Whereas, this time, there was a group of people who really wanted to unionize and they endeavored quite a lot. They targeted

individual people to talk to them, not in an aggressive way or trying to bribe them, but because there were people who we thought would be into the idea of unionizing if they had more information. It was a much more conscious process this time. Whereas last time, it was much more reactionary.

Last time, the personalities that were at the center of things were big personalities. A lot of the people at the center of the discussions weren't necessarily putting much thought into how much space they were taking up in the discussions, it was like "gent your voice heard, yell it out". That was the way that it was. We never had a conversation about like, who is the right person to talk to so and so about this? Who is the right person to be the face of the discussion? Who is the right person to moderate? We really didn't have much of a conversation about that. Conversely, this time, it was definitely a subject of discussion. It was like, is it appropriate for me.. and I'm specifically talking about myself...to be one of the central organizers. I was pretty heavily involved in the first few e-mails that got sent this year about trying to create the e-mail Janice in response to the re-org and asking for more information. But after that, when it became a conversation about starting a union drive, a bunch of us at Solin had a frank conversation about who should be at the front of this. Who should fill what kind of role? Are there certain people who should be engaged in this conversation? Are there people who we shouldn't intentionally aggravate by trying to talk to them about it? Who is a good point person on each team? Who is willing to pass on information to their team? Also, there was a discussion this time around about the things that worked and the things that actively didn't work in the last one. One of the things that I think actively didn't work was the idea of large format, group discussions. What that resulted in was the people who were strongly for it going in yelling and the people who were strongly against going in yelling. And all the other people standing there on the side being like, "this is fucking annoying. This is terrible. This is a waste of

my time". It was decided that a more productive way forward would be to have smaller group conversations. The form of everyone being together in one space doesn't work because it is not a collective decision. There's a lot of ways we can engage collectively about it, but the ultimate decision of an individual to sign a union card or not is not the product of everyone—it's their individual decision.

I think it was an important thing that we never made meetings mandatory for everyone. The people who felt burnt out from the last unionization discussions. Someone said to me, "I went through this once and the last time was so fucking brutal. That I don't want to do it again. Out of deference to those people and also as a tactical decision among those of us who wanted make it happen, the decision was made to try do things in a way to allow people to opt out if they wanted to but also make an active effort for those may have been a bit lazy or apathetic, "oh yeah, I forgot about this, I had...to have a pedicure". We wanted to try to engage those people as much as possible, but the people actively wanted out were respected and able to have that out and not feel pressure to be part of the discussion.



NEWS | JUNE 1ST, 2014

Support employees welcome floor fellows into their union

AMUSE adds bargaining unit, talks MUNACA merger at general meeting

Written by Janna Bryson

AMUSE, just like the union of Floor Fellows, is a relatively new union. We formed in 2010, after a union drive for Work Study students expanded to include all casual and temporary non-academic support workers (about 1400 of us) at McGill. We're still young, but in the past few years we've grown stronger, signed our first collective agreement, become close to other community groups and other campus unions, and embraced a politicized vision of what labour organizing could be.

Of all the moments in our short history, however, I think one of the most important was the day in March 2014 when we submitted that big stack of union membership cards, all signed by floor fellows, to the Quebec Labour Board. This union drive represented a huge victory for floor fellows and a major change in campus labour history.

The push to unionize began once the work of floor fellows was recognized as work, as a job that comes with all the responsibility, challenges, stresses, and precarity of other campus jobs. It was done out of respect for your students, recognizing that we need to protect the way floor fellowing is done and that we can even make it better. It was also a pragmatic move, because even though residences might sometimes feel like a family, directors can come and go, with the ability to make broad changes regardless of what floor fellows want and need. Protecting your working conditions is something that can only happen collectively. And the better your own working conditions are, the better you can support your students through their challenging first year at university.

I'm so proud of what last year's floor fellows accomplished. I was around for both the 2012 and 2014 union drives, and I saw how hard the decision to unionize is when your workplace is also your home, and the home of so many people you care about – much more hangs in the balance. This zine is an important part of your history. So are the dozens of floor fellows from years before who worked hard to build a union. Take time to read this and learn from the floor fellow activists who fought to make your working conditions better!

In solidarity + <3

Amber Gross, President AMUSE-PSAC

