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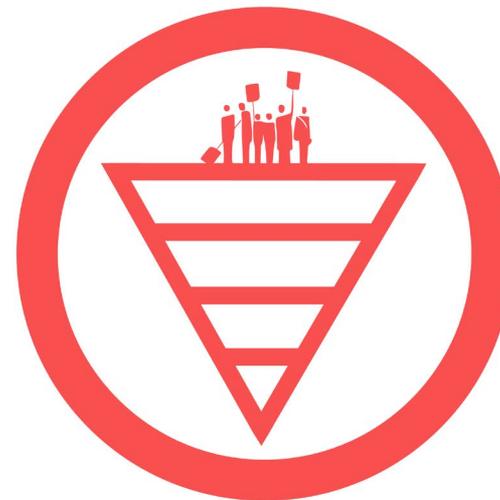


OUR DEEPEST APPRECIATION GOES OUT TO ALL THE COMRADES IN THE WSA,
COMMON CAUSE, IWW AND COMRADES FROM MONTREAL WHO TOOK THE
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A PRAIRIE STRUGGLE POSTION PAPER ON:

COMBATIVE UNIONISM

WAGING CLASS WAR WITHIN LABOUR

pects in a more satisfying manner. Stay tuned, it will be officially announced in the comment section of this article soon!

Sources:

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Benoît Marsan, Pourquoi le syndicalisme étudiant?

Recueil de textes sur l'histoire du mouvement étudiant

Le syndicalisme étudiant de combat

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For the folks who missed out on the tour, you can watch the video of the london stop here: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MwP9Ib-HLI&feature=youtu.be>

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I. INTRODUCTION

As anarchists, we at the Prairie Struggle Organization have dedicated much time and effort to agitation within the working class and its labour organizations. Despite our various efforts, wins, losses and relationships created we still find ourselves questioning the most effective method to agitate on the shop floors, within schools and in our communities.

Within the broader radical left it has been discussed many times by various organizations and non-affiliates, whether or not the labour movement can be an area to work towards positive change. Some have been very critical to the point of negating the usefulness “if any” of unions. Others have been completely uncritical, underlining every victory, and attacking any who voice critique regarding unions and the labour movement. We see this debate as jaded and in certain instances un-reconcilable. While acknowledging this debate exists, for us the question is not one of support for unions within this system, but one of *tactics* and what can be done under these conditions to promote revolutionary change. The question is not if we should be involved within the labor movement, but *how*?

In bringing forward insights that aim to make us more effective in reaching our goals as revolutionaries, here we lay the basis of our position paper. “Combative Unionism” illustrates a specific strategy that should be applied within the labour movement.

In this position paper we hope to contribute to the relevant work and theoretical development that has been done or is already underway. We salute our comrades within the revolutionary left that are active in undermining bureaucratic control over working class power.

that bring them under the spotlight, while the involvement of women is often much more invisible.

Feminist women activists in the student movement have worked relentlessly through the years, often under much criticism of their men comrades, to integrate feminist analysis of student issues and to institutionalize feminist practices in the movement.

Today, that work is most visible, for example, by the existence of women's committees in ASSÉ and some student unions, the common rule of alternation between women and men speakers in all types of meetings, and the integration of a team of “vibe checkers” that keep tabs on tensions and hostilities and call out participants when they use stereotyped language.

Conclusion

Obviously, despite the best my efforts at synthesis, of more remains to be said about the issues raised in this article.

Many important periods in the history of the student movement, such as the year 1982 when unions fought back against legalization to framing student unions, are relevant in understanding the challenges facing student unions today.

This history of the 2012 strike itself, which isn't addressed at all, also remains to be written. And lastly, much more can be said regarding the principles and day-to-day practices of combative unionism in Quebec student unions. Though these were addressed during the conference tour with audiences, this crucial part is missing for the written record. My hope is that an upcoming website which I'm working on along with several comrades of the 2012 student strike, titled “How we won the tuition fight”, will address these as-

by and for its members, combative unions need to promote and materialize their autonomy with regard to the state and political groups. Autonomy with regard to state structures because students don't stand to gain anything significant by participating, especially when the nature of their demands contradict the interests that control the state.

This also translates into a rejection of participation in summits and consultations, not least because these events are always used to legitimize future government decisions that run counter to the politics of the student movement.

Autonomy also with regard to political groups and political parties. Any political party, which includes as part of its program certain demands of the student movement, once in power would inevitably have to face the politics of compromise which are often characteristic of the parliamentary system. As such, a party's political stance issued from demands of the student movement is always subject to be abandoned in the name of political realism. A number of historical examples confirm this.

Feminism

Those are the three core ideas of combative unionism, which have been part of the student movement since the very beginning.

Hopefully, through the decades these ideas have been enriched and one of the ways they have been is by the incorporation of feminist thought and practices.

It's often apparent, whether it's in radical groups or mass organizations such as unions, that the voices of women are not heard as much as the men's or that more men tend to get involved in ways

II. THE REVOLUTIONARY LEFT: MARGINAL OR NOT?

Throughout the last 50 years in North America, despite a very active minority within labour such as the IWW (Industrial Workers of the World), WSA (Workers Solidarity Alliance), elements of NEFAC (North Eastern Federation of Anarchist Communists), and other elements within the broader revolutionary left, a majority of the left has moved away from organized labour and into campaigns regarding the more marginalized segments of our society.

The focus of these efforts touch on homelessness, unemployment, women's rights, queer and trans rights, racism, migrant rights and an endless list of other various oppressions/struggles, the majority of which having been abandoned by the contemporary labour movement. We feel these struggles should be taken up by revolutionaries and their organizations. When leading the battle of ideas in an effort to encourage working class control, every opportunity should be taken when it comes to defending all segments of the working class.

Historically, the revolutionary left has always played an important role within the labour movement and put forward a program of Bread, Roses and Revolution lead by the working class. So why are important segments of our movements today choosing marginality, which holds many limits, instead of finding ways to agitate within the broader working class and building solidarity by addressing root causes of all our struggles? The answer to this question is long and complex.

Tactically, it has been easier to organize within smaller segments and communities among the more marginalized. When viewed from a short-term perspective, outreach within communities that are more oppressed due to precarious conditions caused by home-

lessness, joblessness or citizenship status (to only name a few) are fruitful grounds for organizing because in some respects they are highly vulnerable and mobilize to fight for basic means of living and dignity. Other aspects of marginality are close to anarchism because they reflect a less urgent, but more lifestyle, discontented culture associated with anarchism (punk, dumpster diving, diy and zine culture etc.).

If we look at the long-term effects of such strategies, we can see that these tactics and ideas have produced positive results within the marginal sectors of the working class but in some respects only act to alienate the movement from our own class. Like oppositional lifestyle cultures, the concern becomes that organizing on marginal lines reinforces new binaries on the same lines of those they wish to abolish. Organizing to fight with the marginal is a goal, but not when these efforts result in redefining who is excluded, and especially not when these results act to exclude and/or reject the working class, a class within which the marginal are members, and is historically excluded and dispossessed. Unlike lifestyle cultures (that alienate by their sheer contrast to modernity), this form of alienation is dangerous because it commonly acts to remove these struggles from working class terrain, and acts to demobilize rather than organize. While in some instances this is successful, the revolutionary potential of this strategy isn't tested.

1. Prairie Struggle Organization understands that no revolution can or will occur without organizing huge segments of the workforce into a combative labour movement because ultimately, the ruling class gains its power through the wealth and privilege extracted from our labour. The overthrow of this system will ultimately rely on removing the source of their power, which is capital generated through our exploitation. In saluting the efforts of our sisters and brothers that are involved

That's why combative unionism, through mass mobilization and the power in numbers, seeks to build itself as a permanent counter-power that can force the satisfaction of student demands. The type of tactics it puts forth are a reflection of the unions themselves: by their members and for their members. In other words, direct action.

We have to reject the notion that direct action is necessarily violent or destructive. At its core, direct action is about the rank-and-file being at the forefront of all aspects, and not representatives or politicians. In the spirit of combative unionism, though, direct actions also need to be mass actions. The only way to do that is by taking into account the general state of consciousness among members of the unions and their commitment to the movement. In that sense, general assemblies need to have the larger role in debating and orienting tactics.

Combative unionism is also a refusal of confining methods of protest to the limits of legality. This flows from its ideas about the nature of the state. If the state is a tool in the hands of the few, it's only logical that the laws of the state are also designed to protect them. But it doesn't make illegality into a dogma either, only that different types of actions available to the movement should be judged based on their own merit and their usefulness to the cause, not whether or not they're sanctioned by the legal system. As a result of all this, a movement based on combative unionism will ally both common methods of protest like rallies, marches and strikes, with more vigorous actions such as occupations and blockades.

Autonomy

The third core idea of combative unionism is about autonomy. In the interest of preventing alienation from its own organizing

important because they allow students to engage each other and develop capacities for debate and critical thinking.

The power of executive boards is explicitly limited to implementing the decisions of the assemblies and running the day-to-day operations of the union. Unions, which practice combative unionism, also have minimal bureaucracy. Paid employees aren't a substitute for anemic participation in the structures of a union and instead of fixing the problem; it merely makes it permanent (ASSÉ has always had one employee). Dealing with administrations or higher authorities isn't based on the power of representation, but on delegation. Delegates have a clear mandate of which positions to defend and have no authority to accept any compromise.

Information is also key to a healthy democracy, so combative unions rely on alternative and autonomous media to inform their members. Whether its through posters, leaflets or newspapers, a combative union will use the means at its disposal to make relevant news available to students and use those as opportunities to directly engage with them and get them involved. In the same vein, transparency, on all levels of organization is made as real as possible.

Combativity

The second core idea of combative unionism, is, well, combativeness. Its militant tactics stem from an understanding that contrary to what the dominant ideology makes us think, the state isn't a neutral institution where all sectors of society have equal standing. In reality, the state is a tool in the hands of private business interests and completely submitted by the power of finance. As a result, we can't ever hope to shame or convince the government into accepting student demands.

within the various struggles mentioned above, we argue for the fundamental necessity to fight all oppressions. However, we stress the importance that revolutionaries need to make every attempt to agitate and mobilize the broader workforce despite the degree of marginalization or how un-marginal, un-receptive and unpopular they are among the left.

III. SYNDICALISM, AND ITS CORE PRINCIPLES

Here we offer a brief look at the CGT (General Confederation of Labour) in France which is one of the founders of syndicalism in order to understand the core principles of this theory and some of their union counterparts.

Before the arrival of syndicalism and the CGT in France, it is important to acknowledge that associations of workers of the same trade have existed since the Middle Ages. For the most part their purpose was to negotiate wages and working conditions; they resembled mutual aid organizations more than unions. Being banned by the Le Chapelier Law in 1791, which was later kept in the Napoleonic Code, these Workers' associations continued to exist underground and it was only in 1864 that they were permitted to come out as a tolerated body. In 1884 they were legalized.

In 1895 various trade unions and other workers' organizations joined together to form the CGT (Confédération Générale du Travail or General Confederation of Labour) which in 1902 declared its objective to be "the disappearance of the wage system and employers". In 1906, the CGT adopted at its congress in Amiens its core principles and points of unity. We have underlined core points from the "Charte d'Amiens" below (in a modern translation). We feel these points are paramount to the creation of a combative labour movement today:

"The General Confederation of Labour unites, independent of all political groupings, all workers who recognize the struggle to be carried on for the abolition of the wages system [. . .]"

"Congress considers this declaration to be a recognition of the class struggle which, on the economic field, places the

unions. Political groups alone can't hope to build a movement of the same nature that we've seen in Quebec because their aim simply isn't to build unity among students.

Combative unionism

Now, of course most campuses these days already have some kind of student-led structure. So obviously, it's not enough for students to organize into unions. There are different types of unions and there's different unionisms too.

The success of the student strike is a product of a certain kind of unionism that's called "combative unionism". In the context of Quebec, it's not something imagined by academics or dreamed up by industrial relations students. Combative unionism is the explicit strategy, and set of practices, promoted by the syndicalist tendency in the student movement. In a nutshell, it calls for democratic, combative and autonomous unions. This is what CLASSE is made of.

Democracy

First, combative unionism says a union should be run by its members, for its members, and the only way to do that is to practice direct democracy. It's a clear rejection of representative democracy. When disagreements and struggles are mediated by leaders who can act without grassroots support or consultation, it's inevitably the interests of authorities that are served, not the members.

The fundamental tool of direct democracy is the general assembly. Only in general assemblies can everyone voice their ideas on equal footing, and where these voices can produce collective decisions which are then binding on the whole union. These meetings are

Student unions are relevant

All through the history of the student movement in Quebec, the syndicalist tendency maintained that students need to organize into unions. It was true then, and it's still true today.

For sure, students don't form a homogenous class in the same way workers do. In any given campus, students with a really wealthy background might rub shoulders with others who can barely make ends meet. But despite different socio-economic backgrounds, students do form a community and they do have a certain set of common interests, independently of their political, philosophical or religious opinions.

Chiefly there's the issue of accessibility to education. With tuition constantly increasing, students being pushed deeper and deeper into debt, being forced into precarious jobs to survive, the dream of higher education is fast becoming a nightmare. The gap between the myth of equality of chances and the reality of this lie is getting deeper. There are also matters of the quality of education, in terms of student-teacher ratio for example. Access to appropriate study equipment: good libraries, study space, etc. There's also concern about corporate influence over the content of courses and how programs are structured, not to mention the orientation of research more and more towards the needs of big business while fundamental research (which doesn't serve industry profits) is gradually being abandoned. These are all issues that can cement support for student unions.

At the same time, lots of students are really deeply involved in different kinds of groups on campuses such as Public Interest Research Groups. They do a lot of hard work and they address important issues. But that kind of organizing isn't a substitute for student

workers in revolt against all forms of exploitation and oppression, material and moral, carried out by the capitalist class against the working class.”

“Regarding day-to-day needs. Trade Unionism pursues the co-ordination of the efforts of the workers, the increase of the workers’ welfare through the realization of immediate amelioration, such as the shortening of working hours, wage increases, etc.”

But this is only one aspect of its task. Trade Unionism is preparing complete emancipation, which can only be realized by the expropriation of the capitalist class. It favours as a means to this end the general strike and considers that the trade union, now a unit of resistance, will in the future be the unit of production and distribution, the basis of social re-organization.

“Congress declares that this two-fold task, for day-to-day life and for the future, arises from the actual position of wage-earners, which forces the working class and imposes on all workers, whatever their opinion and political and philosophical views, the duty to belong to the basic organization, the trade union. Therefore, so far as individual members are concerned, Congress declares complete freedom for every Trade Unionist to participate, outside of the trade organization, in any forms of struggle in accordance with his political or philosophical views, confining itself only to asking him, in return, not to introduce into the trade union the opinions, which he professes outside it.”

Anarchists were also involved in the elaboration of what we have come to know as Anarcho-Syndicalism. Here we find many similarities in Rocker’s Anarcho-Syndicalism despite being worded

differently:

the trade union, the syndicate, is the unified organisation of labour and has for its purpose the defence of the interests of the producers in the existing society and the preparing for and the practical carrying out of the reconstruction of social life after the pattern of Socialism. It has, therefore, a double purpose:

1. As the fighting organization of the workers against the employers to enforce the demands of the workers for the safeguarding and raising of their standard of living;
2. As the school for the intellectual training of the workers to make them acquainted with the technical management of production and economic life in general, so that when the revolutionary situation arises they will be capable of taking the socio-economic organism into their own hands and remaking it according to Socialist principles¹.

do it, though... They dropped the official announcement in 2007: a hike of 30%, spread over five years, with a further hike down the road in 2012.

Unfortunately, 2007 was a much less glorious chapter than 2005. ASSÉ took a bold stand to launch a general strike with the main demand of free tuition, no less. No more than just a handful of student unions got a strike mandate. The failure to block the hike in 2007 was a big blow, but as the student movement in Quebec has shown, it's got an ability to evolve, learn from its mistakes and do better.

Lots of different things were highlighted as having contributed to the failure. Bad internal dynamics in ASSÉ, not enough mobilization done on campuses, material not having been solid enough... The most significant element however, might have been the political miscalculation of having called for a general student strike on the basis of free tuition. In a way this was a break we can't help but notice that the largest and most successful struggles were given sets of realistic, immediate goals. In '68 you had the demand for democratization of higher education, in the '70s and '80s students fought for adequate financial aid and against hikes in tuition fees, and so forth. It's through these kinds of objectives that the movement is able to mobilize and grow.

Part of the success of the student movement in Quebec is based on an ability to relate to the concerns of regular students, to speak to their day-to-day experience, while at the same time being able to articulate all this to a wider political analysis that seeks to address the issues at their root.

¹ Rucker. R. Anarchism and Anarcho-Syndicalism. 1949 Retrieved on April 1, 2013 from <http://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/rudolf-rocker-anarchism-and-anarcho-syndicalism>

Five weeks into the strike, the leaderships of FECQ and FEUQ announced an agreement to end the conflict. That agreement would see the cuts reversed, but only partially for a few years, with the full amount being reinvested later. By undermining the unity and determination of the movement, the move succeeded in putting an end to the strike, with the most resilient unions ending the strike after the seventh week. In a large part because of the insistence of ASSÉ, however, that in the interest of maintaining democratic control of the movement, any outcome of negotiations be put to a vote, a huge number of general assemblies rejected the agreement while at the same time voting off the strike.

There was a lot of anger at FECQ and FEUQ's leaderships during and after the strike. A lot of students from all quarters of the student movement felt they squandered the movement's largest mobilization ever. Not only that, but the struggle made the political divide between the two poles of the movement obvious.

FEUQ eventually paid a high price. Between 2005 and 2007, three significant campus unions left the federation, including the huge McGill undergraduate student union. As is often the case when chapters of struggle come to a close, the 2005 strike left mixed feelings of victory and defeat. Victory, for one, because the strike happened, because it grew into the biggest student strike in history and because its power was enough to force the government into making a concession, however small. But defeat also, because the strike coalition built around ASSÉ wasn't strong enough to prevent FECQ and FEUQ from appropriating the movement and squandering the mobilization in exchange for tiny concessions.

Even though the Liberals reluctantly agreed to reinvest some amount into financial aid, their next step couldn't be clearer: a hike in university tuition fees. They didn't wait five years, until 2012, to

From these historic examples, Prairie Struggle Organization draws the following conclusions:

1. Business unions and Combative unions are organizations based on the class interests of the workers. They come to existence by the need of workers to organize on class lines and advance their own interests in opposition to those of the bosses².

2. Unions can perform a dual role. One of mobilising workers for day-to-day issues; and, secondly, providing the democratic organisational structure through which workers can seize and self-manage the means of production in the building of a new world.

² Berkman A. What is Communist Anarchism? 1929. Retrieved on April 1, 2013 from <http://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/alexander-berkman-what-is-communist-anarchism>

IV. STYLES OF UNIONISM

Prairie Struggle makes the distinction between four different kinds of union organizations. From the evolution of mutual aid groups, to the development of revolutionary unions that preceded the contemporary labour movement, the following styles of unionism are relevant today.

LOBBY UNIONS: THE DOMESTIC ENEMY

Even though Syndicalism has shaped modern unionism, in a huge way this does not mean that unions are impenetrable and cannot be co-opted to serve the ruling class. Even with state repression and law at the disposal of those who own the means of production and profit from the exploitation of the working class, there is no better tool to render unions ineffective than unions themselves. These Trojan horses carry with in their belly the effective tools of exploitation.

Lobby unions, despite having no official ideology aside from being unions for those who don't wish to be unionized, are characterized by the idea that within capitalism, no one exploits anyone. The belief within these unions is that society is based on the foundation of justice and democracy, which translate to the legal and just exchange of services for a honest days work³.

Lobby unions serve the ruling class as a way to stimulate sedition and artificial separation within the working class under the pretext that our struggle is one of the same between two radical antago-

no plans to join the strike. In fact, since the education minister had been replaced just a few weeks earlier, they wanted to "give him a chance".

Well, the student movement didn't concur. Within two weeks over 70 000 student were on strike in Quebec, including some from student unions affiliated with FECQ and FEUQ. The two federations were forced to join the strike or risk having some serious representation issues... That about-face turned out to be a mixed blessing. While the strike kept expanding in the following weeks, the issue of negotiations came up. After one meeting of the ASSÉ strike coalition negotiations committee, the education minister declared he wouldn't pursue further negotiations with the student group before it renounced "violence".

Of course, what he wanted the student unions to renounce was in fact occupation of offices, rowdy protests and blockades. In other words, the only tools at the disposal of students to effectively disrupt business as usual and force the government into negotiations. The issue was to create lots of debate among general assemblies and meetings of the strike coalition, but in the end, in part because of the involvement of anarchists and other radical student activists, the coalition maintained its commitment to combative militancy.

The student federations, on the other hand, immediately renounced violence and began closed negotiations with the government. At that time, the strike coalition represented about a third of the movement but also the longest striking unions, so the move created a lot of discontent, even among the rank-and-file of the student federations, some of whom launched a plea with their leadership to stop negotiating in the absence of delegates from the strike coalition.

3 Piotte. JM. Le Syndicalisme de Combat. 1977, Pg, 27.

international economy – more specifically in the relationship that builds between human populations and capital.

In 2003, however, the focus went from international to local with the election of a new Liberal government and its plans for “state reengineering”. It was a shock for the labor and community groups used to the PQ’s smooth approach of concertation. The Liberals wasted no time in implementing anti-social reforms, including in education. ASSÉ put out a call for a general strike in 2003 against a hike in ancillary fees, but it ultimately failed to get more than a few unions on board.

The lessons learned through that campaign came in handy when the next year, in 2004, the government announced a reform of student financial aid, converting 103 million dollars from bursaries into loans. ASSÉ reacted by organizing a wide consultation of student general assemblies in order to build a platform of demands and start building up momentum towards a strike action.

Tours of Cegeps and universities were organized, as well as massive distribution of material calling for the strike, demonstrations and even occupations of MP offices. Because it was conscious that a successful strike movement would necessarily need to include other unaffiliated student unions, ASSÉ began planning for a student strike coalition. The student federations, FECQ and FEUQ, adopted a wait-and-see approach to the strike. While ASSÉ activists were busy working at mobilizing students on campuses across the province, FECQ and FEUQ were content with “representing” student interests at Liberal Party meetings and the “Generations Summit” orchestrated by the government.

To add insult to injury, the day the general strike was launched in February 2005, they went on the record declaring that it wasn’t the appropriate time for student mobilization and that they had

nisms. The primary role is to stop the advance of business and combative unions so that collective agreements serve the interest of boss! More often associated with reactionary political forces, these unions favor social peace and in times of conflicts, systematic repression. Among many, we find within the ranks of lobby unions the Christian Labour Association of Canada (CLAC), The Specialty and Temporary Employers Union (STEU), and the Syndicat Quebecois de la Construction (SQC) to only name a few.

It is needless to say that we do not consider lobby unions as an area that revolutionaries should invest any time in. These unions are unfit to sport the title of “union” being as they do not exist to defend workers. They are the enemy within and should be dealt with extreme hostility.

BUSINESS UNIONS: CHAINS FOR COMPROMISE

The major difference between lobby unions and business unions is that the second was born within the working class for the defense of the working class. Despite their rich history of often being sparked by syndicalist tendencies, these unions have now become complacent.

Business unions, despite having roots in working class organizing, rely on a network of legal and bureaucratic channels. The effect has been the rise of a bureaucratic class within these unions that handles all or most aspects of the day to day functioning of the union. While these bureaucrats have often worked on the shop floor, and rose within the labour movement through active participation, their total removal from members affected by their decisions often leads to a lack of risk taking, and a lot of compromise

with the bosses at the expense of the workers.

The legal nature of these unions means that the fundamental tools used for self-defence by the working class, such as strikes and other job actions, are now subject to legal overview by contracts and by government.

Lastly, many union bureaucrats have extensive ties to political parties and governments. Prominent relationships include that between business unions and the Democratic Party in the U.S, and the New Democratic Party in Canada. The effect is that organizing often looks a lot more like a partisan campaign than an attempt to mobilize workers for gains.

Business unions can be characterized by the principle of "le partage du gâteau" or the sharing of the cake with the boss⁴. They don't develop class antagonisms, but they do offer services that represent workers and space to fight for better gains and protection in the workplace.

THE YELLOW PROLETARIAT?

The revolutionary potential that was present in the early history of the North American labour movement has been largely supplanted by the compromising positions of the business unions. Stemming back to the early 1900s, we saw a new political direction arising. Rather than engaging in class antagonisms, and adopting politics that are anti-capitalist and syndicalist in nature, these new groups and their affiliates were aligning their interests with political par-

4 Ibid; 28,

rallied students all across the student movement. As it did, it forced the federations, FECQ and FEUQ to respond with their own campaign surrounding NAFTA. But they couldn't bring themselves to get with a radical anti-NAFTA agenda, so they settled on a corporatist and responsible demand of "No to the inclusion of education in NAFTA".

At a large meeting of local student unions from all affiliations, only a tiny fraction decided to follow the student federations' campaign while the vast majority rallied behind ASSÉ and a clear rejection of NAFTA. On October 31st 2002, 10 000 participated in a Montreal march against NAFTA.

In the first few years of ASSÉ's existence, its struggles were about global dynamics on which the student movement had very little grab. The fight against NAFTA wasn't able to spark a mobilization outside the student movement. While the 2003 antiwar movement against the intervention in Iraq had a popular character from its inception, the student unions weren't able to underline any specific political objectives it could work towards. When it tackled the phenomenon of the "steering of education by market laws", it was campaigning against nothing less than the vast neoliberal restructuring of education, which, at the same time, was fast becoming a fact.

Nonetheless, ASSÉ was still able to build its base of support among students. In the context of wide opposition to international summits (NAFTA, WTO, G8, G20...), the student body responded enthusiastically to calls for mobilization. Through the experience of these first struggles, ASSÉ's activists were able to develop an open political vision and a deeper understanding of issues. A new frame of thinking made its way into the student movement: the roots of our day-to-day problems, including in education, could be found in the

question of sovereignty, leading up to the 1995 referendum.

But the second half of that decade really set the tone. The PQ's obsession with zero-deficit resulted in cuts of nearly 2 billion dollars in education alone. In 2000, during a "Quebec Youth Summit", the government agreed to re-inject public funds into education but under conditions to implement a series of reforms inspired by neo-liberal, free-market policies. It was baptized "plan Legault" after the PQ's minister of education.

On a global level, negotiations by states for a multitude of international trade agreements on capital and services pointed to a new era in the globalization of capitalism. Reports and investigations into these negotiations showed how far western states were ready to go to empower capital against people. At the same time, the WTO summit in Seattle revealed the extent of popular resistance.

Similar events happened in Washington, Genoa and Quebec City with the Summit of the Americas in 2001. ASSÉ's first activists were immersed in the anti-globalization movement. In the first months of ASSÉ, it renamed its campaign against the "plan Legault" as a campaign "against the steering of education by market laws". In doing so, it manifested a rejection of narrow and piecemeal understanding of state education policies. Instead by highlighting the role of "market laws", it sought to tie together the various reforms being implemented in Cegeps and universities and it also linked those changes to the dynamics of international trade agreements and capitalist globalization.

Even though it was off to a good start, the campaign ran out of steam. At this point ASSÉ was rather small and had only about a dozen member unions. It then decided to focus on opposition to the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). The campaign

ties, and failing to focus sufficiently on shop floor organizing.

This strategy has paid off for the business unions - some have managed to secure their status through the development of specific laws mandating the conduct of unions in all matters, including the strike, dues deduction, organizing, and contract enforcement. This legal direction enveloped unions into the pro-capitalist and oppressive framework of the state, making both the bureaucratic centralism of the unions and the new political strategies they adopted permanent and the dominant paradigm.

This strategy that focuses more on political allegiances rather than shop floor organizing has weakened the status of unions within their legal framework. The establishment of a bureaucratic class of permanent workers within the unions themselves is much to blame. The effect is they now function to coordinate the legalization of worker struggles, and the pacification of grassroots militancy. Further, because these bureaucrats effectively have a monopoly on the day to day functions of the union, they perceive themselves as having more experience and knowledge than the workers on the shop floor. The result has been detachment from the struggles as well.

While the ruling class has always worked against unions and workers, in the past 10 years the legal and structural weaknesses union bureaucrats have exposed our unions to is mounting. The very existence of unions is under attack from the erosion of laws; what's more, interpretations of laws themselves are increasingly favouring employers over employees. Many union workers are detached from the politics of class antagonisms, if not from the union altogether, and strikebreakers are beginning to move into the realm of

acceptance, instead of being labelled as the filthy scabs they are. Only when these changes have begun to attack union dues and the source of bureaucratic income and job security have they actually begun to acknowledge there is something wrong with their legal strategy.

Thus, we now see business unions engaging in more grass-roots strategies, such as the OurWalmart campaign, Fight for a Fair Economy, and the Fast Food Forward campaign. However, what must be noted is that these struggles are still bureaucratically controlled and directed. Therefore, moving forward with the realities this presents, Prairie Struggle Organization recognizes that we as revolutionaries need to take back these struggles from bureaucratic control rather than slip further into the collective coma that bureaucratic unionism has put us in. While it is wished that combative unionism would take hold in these unions, the current potential for this is slim. However, through radical organizing and engagement under the principles of combative unionism, we hold that confrontation and challenge to these bureaucratic orders from the 'shop floor' is a much needed step towards reinvigorating the base of these unions, the members. It is this process that will proliferate combative unionist ideas under the context of business unionism, and escalate antagonisms with the bureaucratic class to both expose and challenge their authority.

COMBATIVE UNIONS, A STRATEGY THAT HITS CLOSE TO HOME

AT WORK:

Combative unions derive from the principle of "by the workers, for the workers". Whereas business unions favour bureaucracy, combative unions and their militants favour member participation and

Before addressing this aspect, it's worth looking more closely at ASSÉ's history. (ASSÉ is the Quebec-wide student union that created CLASSE by opening itself to unaffiliated unions to join temporarily). Those who followed the strike more closely already know that it's been the main force, the main protagonist of that struggle. Getting an understanding of ASSÉ's history is key to better understanding the origins of the strike.

A brief history of ASSÉ

In 2001 the "failure tax", inherited from the dealings of FECQ during the 1996 strike, was taking its toll on college students. A coalition of independent local student unions formed around the project to launch a campaign to abolish that tax. Here, a few things started working in favor of creating a new syndicalist student union.

First, it quickly became obvious how working outside of the formal structures of an organization weighed down on the organizing efforts of the campaign. How are the costs to be shared? How can the resources of each association be pooled? Who will track general progress between meetings? etc. Second, while the student unions were confident they would be able to stir up a sizeable opposition movement (the failure tax was really hated), there was specific concern regarding the FECQ. As the group that agreed to the failure tax in the first place, the unions worried that it might appropriate the movement as its own and use it to negotiate another rotten outcome against the wishes of the rank-and-file.

Eventually, those preoccupations were confirmed when FECQ, who wasn't taking part in mobilizations at all, negotiated "student performance contracts" in exchange for dumping the failure tax. Outside the student movement, there was the broader political context. In the 1990's the first half of the decade was dominated by the

to its former glory, in 2001, several historically radical local student unions decided to unite under the banner of the Association pour une Solidarité Syndicale, which translates roughly to Association for Solidarity Among Student Unions. (Incidentally, the acronym, ASSÉ, in French is a play on words for “enough”)

This overview of the birth of the student movement in Quebec, 1968, the first syndicalist student unions, the battles of the '70s, '80 and '90 should give a feel for where the 2012 strike comes from. At this point, it's probably clear that there's a lot more to the origins of the strike in Quebec than mere spontaneity.

Furthermore, it's relevant to note that every student strike has been a major turning point in the development of the student movement. After '68 student unions were destroyed, the one in '74 gave rise to ANEEQ, in '78 we saw a new rift between radicals and lobbyists, after the success in '86 the lobbyists lost ground, the failure of '88 divided ANEEQ and the aftermath of another failed strike in '90 helped lobbyist student federations establish themselves permanently.

Quebec's student movement as it exists today was essentially shaped by mass, collective and syndicalist-type politics and action.

And yet, the student movement isn't homogenous, far from it. This vast general strike of last spring in Quebec gave an impression of a united front of the three main student unions: ASSÉ, FECQ and FEUQ. Underneath the media hype, the relationship between these organizations is a lot more complex – and caustic – than images of unitary student protests led on. But it isn't a parochial conflict: it's a question of fundamental disagreements on elements of both practices and political outlook.

dedication. Based and regrouped on the parameters of class, these unions draw a clear line between them selves and the boss. Their tactics are often decided on the criteria of effectiveness and disregard unjust laws put in place to limit their struggles. From top down of its structure we find the General assembly, Committees and executives to ensure the respect of direct democracy. A very important point to note is the massive use of alternative & independent media to assure the distribution of information and theoretical development within the membership.

Looking more particularly at the history of combative unionism within the broader workforce in the 1960's and 1970's, we notice that outside the student movement in Québec, combative unionism was not practiced by one union but by militant revolutionaries within most of the major federations of labour such as the “Confédération des syndicats nationaux” (CSN), The “Corporation des enseignants du Québec”(CEQ or now known as the CSQ), and small elements with in the “Fédération des travailleurs et travailleuses du Québec” (FTQ) like the Firestone workers who eventually joined up with the CSN. These militants actively strived for worker control within the federations and battle bureaucracy on a daily basis. While Combative unionism spawns from revolutionary intellectual circles, it had a hard time laying roots within the majority of the unionized working class mostly regrouped within the FTQ⁵. Despite these difficulties, revolutionaries still made sizable impacts on the positions of these federations. For example, in the 1970s the federations each released position papers taking clear anti-capitalist stances, a clear demonstration of the impact the revolutionary left had:

“Ne comptons que sur nos propres moyens” (We only count on

our own means) - CSN

“L’État: un rouage de notre exploitation” (The state: A gear in the system of our exploitation) - FTQ

“L’école au service la classe dominante” (Schools at the service of the ruling class) - CEQ

Despite the appearance of combative unionism within the workforce and student movement around the same time, these two groups disagreed on one fundamental element. Though both agreed that in the short term unions need to fight for bread and roses issues, and that in the long term, the preparation of a better world; they did not agree on how to achieve the last. The workforce movement advanced the idea of the creation of a political force. This political force would find its place within the idea of a revolutionary working class electoral party⁶. The student movement on the other hand practiced complete autonomy from any political parties. Prairie Struggle takes the position that partisan engagement dilutes our struggle and therefore, we agree with the autonomy put forth by the student movement.

IN THE STUDENT MOVEMENT:

More recently in Canada we have seen one of the most powerful and combative social movements emerge out of Quebec within its student union movement. Spearheading this movement is l’Association pour une Solidarité Syndicale Étudiante (ASSÉ). L’ASSÉ was founded in February 2001 and is responsible for the 2005, failed 2007 and 2012 student general strikes. L’ASSÉ who subscribe to “syndicalism de combat” or combative unionism counts

6 Ibid; 23

hike the fees, but with a catch. She would implement a new “failure tax” on college students, (a form of taxation on students that fail classes) a measure proposed to her by the leadership of the FECQ! That move was immediately considered as treason by the radical activists and rank-and-file who helped build the movement that stopped the hike in tuition fees. A lot of people were convinced that the strength of the mobilization could have gotten rid of the tuition fee hike, and that the trade-off was a move deliberately made to abort the strike quickly and help the FECQ get more credibility in the eyes of the government.

Even though this bittersweet victory consolidated the motivation of the student left to keep organizing, the MDE had a difficult time escaping marginality and gaining a significant membership. It died off in 2000.

However, despite its relatively small membership, the MDE kept alive radical ideas and practices. Its whole existence relied on the need to distrust leaders, on rank-and-file syndicalism and direct action. For example, in the year following the 1996 strike and the FECQ-FEUQ’s leaders sellout agreement with the PQ government, the MDE would continue to organize protests and occupations, demanding a substantial increase of minimum wage, a 32-hour work week as well as free and quality health and education systems. As such, MDE contributed to preserve combative syndicalism and to oppose FECQ-FEUQ’s lobbyist corporatism.

The prospective that the FECQ and the FEUQ would once again dominate the scene and that the student movement would gradually distance itself from its heritage as a combative and democratic force was too just hard to accept for many activists involved in the 1996 strike and the anti-globalization movement at the turn of the century. So in the hopes of helping the student movement return

justification for the hike by saying that better financial aid (bigger loans available) would compensate the effects of the hike on poorer students. At the same time, the student right got organized. A group of Cegep student unions opposed to the strike formed the FECQ and allied themselves with another recently formed university student federation, the FEUQ. As the successors of the pro-PQ, RAEU and FAECQ the two organizations promoted an essentially lobbyist strategy. Their hostility to mass mobilization marked a new break with the student movement's legacy of syndicalism.

Unfortunately, the 1990 attempt to build a general student strike was a big failure. Three years later, pulled down by intense internal strife, ANEEQ was disbanded.

For the next six years, FECQ and FEUQ would have free reign over the student movement, allowing them ample time and space to enroll a sizeable chunk of local student unions. The student left would only get reorganized around opposition to the federal Ax-worthy reforms in 1994. The reforms proposed would see transfers to provinces for health and education slashed.

Renewal of student syndicalism

Common initiatives between a few local student unions (protest organising, a mobilization committee and a radical student newspaper) eventually lead to the formation of the Mouvement pour le droit à l'éducation (Movement for the right to education), or MDE.

In 1996, Pauline Marois, the PQ education minister at the time, announced a hike in university tuition fees and Cegep ancillary fees. The MDE spearheaded a general strike movement, which unions affiliated with FECQ and the FEUQ eventually joined. After about three weeks of strike, Marois announced she would scrap plans to

more than 70,000 members. From L'ANEEQ (National Association of Quebec Students) to the MDE (Democratic student movement), these organizations have been leading the Québec student movement always in a more syndicalist direction. L'ASSÉ has inherited a rich history of student syndicalism that spans into the 1960's and has led the push for a democratic, combative and autonomous union movement. Other organizations such as SUD Étudiant in the French student movement also subscribe to combative unionism (Syndicalisme de Lutte). The Quebec student movement has in the past been a focus of Prairie Struggle Organization, and we have appended a document detailing the movement produced by the key speaker of our Canada-wide tour on the 2012 general strike below. (ANNEX A)

REVOLUTIONARY UNIONS, WORKERS COUNCILS AND ALTERNATIVES FOR THE MARGINALIZED

As we acknowledge in North America the existence and rich history of the IWW, we also notice Europe's history and the existence of revolutionary unionism via the CNT/AIT and CGT among many others. This form of revolutionary unionism attacks bureaucracy and corporatism by its methods of organization, which is reflected in their revolutionary anti-capitalist, and anti-hierarchical stances and positions. We also recognize that these unions constitute a major amelioration of the current problems related to unions, and reiterate that we are an ally of these organizations and fight along side them in the struggle for worker control of unions.

Despite being close to most of our positions on unions and the labour movement, Prairie Struggle does not foresee any endorsement to this strategy in our own context. We disagree that the creation of such revolutionary unions from scratch in this current state of affairs of North America is the most effective direction. We share

the need to establish a growing combative revolutionary union movement but disagree that this can happen outside the current labour movement and its unions. Our “ends” are the same but strategy is our point of disagreement.

Some advocates of workers’ councils point to the evolution of work, the rise of precarity, and the inability of business unions to effectively challenge capital as proof that these unions are no longer able to act on existing class antagonisms. While on the surface this critique makes valid points, the solutions proposed by advocates of workers councils raise more questions than answers. While we agree with most critiques of the current labour movement put forward by these advocates, we don’t agree the solutions to these problems can be found in pushing towards new forms of worker organizations that are aimed at radicalizing workers in trade wide networks. In theory, these solutions are extremely attractive, but the question that remains to be answered is how we organize rank and file workers towards this direction, and how these organizations themselves will differ from unions. Many advocates of the councils point to these organizations as a hotbed for radical organizers, but then the question that remains is, how will these radical council organizers avoid becoming yet another marginalized anti-capitalist ghetto? To sum up the argument, we view the dialectic of council communism as an interesting direction for the labour movement, and believe that at some point the position put forward in this paper intersects with some of these ideas; however, the question we are seeking to answer is not one of proposing alternatives, but a question of how we organize towards these alternatives meaningfully.

The current unions historically belong to the workers and many of its core members still see it that way. We argue that if workers are not capable or willing to fight for their own institutions in spite of

irrelevance. The next year, in 1986, the education minister declared that the tuition freeze should be abandoned. He went as far as saying there were “twice too many university students in Quebec”.

A few months later, ANEEQ, after a campaign of general assemblies and a 5000-strong demonstration on parliament hill, launched a general strike. The main demands, issued by GA's and adopted in a congress of ANEEQ members and non-members, were to force the government to promise to maintain the freeze, to dump university ancillary fees and again to improve student financial aid. Just two weeks into the strike in which about 25 unions participated, the education minister came out with a promise to maintain the freeze until the next election and temporarily abandon ancillary fees at UQAM. On the issue of student financial aid, he promised a series of meetings with students, in which the demands would be “considered”.

While the student unions decided to stop the strike, at least temporarily, a number of occupations of government buildings were organized the following year to keep up the pressure. Months went by and the negotiation meetings promised by the government didn’t produce any results for the students. So as a response, ANEEQ launched a call for a new general strike to try and materialize their demands for improvements to student financial aid. Unfortunately, the 1988 student strike never took off.

The Liberal party went on to be reelected, and in 1990 they announced a huge tuition fee hike, bringing them from \$500 per year to more than \$1200. At the same time, it gave universities the power to increase these fees by up to 10%.

Once again, ANEEQ’s student unions set off plans for a general strike. During the strike campaign, the government hammered its

occupied.

With the positive results from the third general strike, a renewed feeling of empowerment helped consolidate ANEEQ's radical leadership. It remained as a symbol of radicalism and mass mobilization until its very end. Advocates of conciliation and negotiation eventually formed their own, separate organizations.

In 1981, that happened when RAEU and the FAECQ were born. As brainchildren of PQ activists whose party held power, the new student unions were rapidly integrated in to the state's apparatus. Amazingly, they were also hostile to any form of mass mobilization. Their rallying cry was "the strike, never again!"

The 80's opened a gloomier chapter in the history not just of the student movement, but for the left in general. It was the era of the post-referendum, crisis inside the PQ, the worst economic recession since the Great Depression, the dissolution of revolutionary groups and difficult battles between the labour movement and the PQ's Rene Levesque government.

Internationally, Reagan and Thatcher ushered in the age neoliberalism. The welfare state was on its way out and policies of privatization and massive cuts in social spending became the order of the day.

The austere eighties and the downfall of ANEEQ

In Quebec, the Liberal Party succeeded the PQ in 1985. Under pressure from their youth wing, however, the Liberals promised to maintain the freeze on tuition fees. This regime change was bad news for the RAEU and the FAECQ, whose bodies were entirely controlled by PQ activists. Both organizations eventually collapsed into

faults, the creation or joining of a revolutionary labour movement is even more unlikely. We feel that confrontation within the current labour movement for more effective, combative and democratic means are what in the long run will establish a more revolutionary labour movement. With direct confrontation, and exposure of class antagonism within labour, radicalization is the outcome.

We acknowledge that some who identify with revolutionary unionism or council communism already practice Combative unionism in the perspective of creating a revolutionary labour movement out of the old labour institutions. We would like to clarify that our critiques are not pointed at them, but comrades who strictly practice these pure traditions.

ALTERNATIVE INSTITUTIONS

Looking at the current state of the labour movement, it is hard for some to see opportunities in possibly turning the tables to fight effectively against corporatist, lobby-like unions. Facing this obstacle, parts of the movement that are still loyal to a certain form of involvement within labor focus on alternative labor institutions such as worker's centers, solidarity networks or revolutionary unions. Historically, the labour movement once put much energy into building more alternative institutions. Mutual aid functions were provided through workers' organizations that would create a network of cooperative institutions like schools, daycares, popular soup kitchens, homes for the aged, health and cultural centers, insurance plans, trade related education, housing, etc. We recognize that even though much of these services are provided for most workers (though unfortunately not those people without status or citizenship), revolutionaries should actively strive to build self-managed social services that are controlled by the workers themselves. We also understand that with the coming of age of Neo-

liberalism, these services have been greatly reduced due to budget cuts and austerity measures.

Prairie Struggle Organization is an advocate of a dual power strategy, otherwise known as Counter power, which mandates a seizure of power over services rendered by the state and subsequently contests the existing power structures of state and capitalism. We take a position in favour of creating worker owned and run services under capitalism, on the basis that the working class benefits from these services. We believe that such institutions and programs open up space for experimentation of a limited form of self-management under capitalism. However, we stress that alone this does not constitute a strategy for revolutionary change and the overthrow of capitalism. Its subjects do not substitute capitalism peacefully. It must be integrated within a program that holds the tools to fight recuperation, appeasement and repressions

The Parti Quebecois era

The Parti Quebecois won the elections in 1976. At the time it was definitively a progressive party. Most importantly for the student movement, its political platform promised to abolish student debt, enact free tuition and implement a “pre-salary” program. It's no surprise: lots of activists in ANEEQ, and activists that experienced and organized the strikes in 1968 and 1974, were involved in the party. The election of the PQ to the government created a wave of enthusiasm among the entire left. Unsurprisingly, however, this enthusiasm was short-lived : the party's progressive platform was quickly shelved.

By 1978, there was a rift within ANEEQ. On the one hand, the more radical activists wanted to start organizing a general strike to try and force the PQ into implementing its own program. While on the other, you had activists loyal to the party, which defended a much more conciliatory stance towards the government, hoping to make progress on the issues by way of negotiation and dialogue.

Though both factions were about equal in numbers, the radicals, mostly Cegep students, won a crucial leadership election. Just a few days later, a single rural Cegep student union launched a general strike. Their demands: the PQ's own elections platform on accessibility to higher education. The strike gradually expanded, though not as fast as the previous one. After about three weeks, thirty Cegeps and a handful of university faculties were on strike. As the mobilization seemed to start dying down, the large UQAM student union entered the strike. Again, the government was forced into concessions during the strike. After two distinct announcements of improvements to student financial aid, the strike ended. As students started going back to class however, ANEEQ launched a campaign of occupations of MP offices. In a single day, six offices were

strike. But the Liberal government wanted to prevent any reoccurrence of the events of 1968, especially on an issue it didn't consider very important. Difficult negotiations with public sector unions made the prospect of a confrontation with students even less appealing. So it quietly retired its plans to introduce the tests, before the students got far ahead in the preparation of the strike.

Since the government's reversal was announced as temporary, students decided to press on. The feeling of empowerment from an easy victory inspired them to expand the platform of demands of the strike to include improvements to the student financial aid program. The strike got going with just a handful of student unions, but it quickly got much larger. In total, forty institutions, Cegeps and universities, participated in the strike. Four weeks into the struggle, the government announced an important set of concessions and the strike came to a close.

The success of that strike led, the next year, in 1975, to the creation of a new, permanent, Quebec-wide, syndicalist student organization: the National Association of Quebec Students, or ANEEQ. For the next twenty years, the debate between syndicalist unions and affinity groups was put to rest. By the time of the next large student mobilization in 1978, ANEEQ eventually grew not into the main student union, but in fact the only student union and quite literally representative of the entire student movement. Most importantly, however, it remained true to its origins by actively promoting and developing rank-and-file control of student unions and combative militancy.

VI. COMBATIVE UNIONISM: ITS CORE PRINCIPLES

Here we point to the core principles of combative unions using the student movement to draw out the relevant positions. It should be noted that while we use the Quebec student movement to draw out these points, most of these principles are also found in those practicing combative unionism within labour unions, and the workplace. If these principles do not already exist in the workplace context, part of the task for these militant workers is to create them.

1 - Working class orientation. These organizations are again oriented on the principles of class despite sometimes organizing within non-homogenous sectors of society containing both rich and poor. In the student movement, the emphasis on class derives from the "charter of student syndicalism" or later known as the "Charte de Grenoble". In 1946, the National Union of French Students, or UNEF by its French acronym, adopted this founding document which defined the student as a young intellectual worker.

Article 4: "As a worker, the student has a right to work and rest in the best of conditions and in material independence, both personal and social, guaranteed by the free exercise of syndicalist rights."

Article 7: "As an intellectual, the student has a responsibility – to seek out, propagate and defend Truth which entails sharing and advancing culture as well as drawing the meaning of history – to defend liberty against all oppression, which constitutes, for the intellectual, his most sacred mission" .

2 – Democracy. The idea of combative unionism is that a union is "run by its members. For its members", meaning that the use of a bottom up structure that is directly democratic through the gen-

eral assembly of the union as its decision making apparatus and a militant rejection of representative democracy.

Within unions affiliated to L'ASSE, the executive boards only implement the decisions of the assemblies and run the everyday operations of the unions. All executive positions are on a voluntary basis and are elected by its general assembly. These unions are militant in making a statement to limit the bureaucracy within the union by organizing members into the various union structures. L'ASSÉ only has one paid employee (secretary), and when negotiations are underway, delegates have clear mandate or positions to defend but have no authority to accept any compromise.

In order to stimulate member participation and keep members informed on all aspects of the unions, alternative and autonomous methods such as leaflets, newspapers, websites, posters and social media are used on a grand scale. In contrast to lobbyist student associations (like the Canadian Federation of Students) that spend most of their comparatively large budgets on PR campaigns and salaries, these combative unions operate at a similar capacity using a lot less financial resources.

3 – Combativity. Their militant tactics come from the understanding that the state is not a neutral institution where the whole of society has equal representation. They understand the state's role is the defense of business interests and finance. From this realization they see that the state is at the service of capitalism and that the laws confining their methods of action are also developed to protect capitalism and capitalist interests. The actions used by these militants, therefore, are not decided by the legality of the actions, but rather how effective they are in forcing the hand of the state to accept their demands.

student strike in Quebec's history. Even though, in the aftermath of the strike, the government created a new public francophone university in Montreal, UQAM, along with the University of Quebec network and a brand new student financial aid program, the strike action was perceived as a failure. It was perceived as a failure simply because the result didn't come close to the huge expectations. Even though the revolt spread across countries and started to look like revolution in a few places, the social outburst eventually died down. That sentiment, shared widely among student militants, was about to have pretty dire consequences. In the following years, many local student unions were disbanded. The UGEQ, whose membership was based in the student unions, also disappeared.

It's not that student activists were massively abandoning the struggle, but because they saw student unions as too bureaucratic. They felt unions held back student's militancy and the potential for radicalization. In disbanding student unions and reorganizing in smaller, radical political groups, they hoped to be able to build a truly revolutionary movement. Even though these critiques weren't entirely baseless, the decision to kill off student unions was made rashly and without hindsight. Unsurprisingly, the loss of the only structures and resources that could mobilize a mass movement led to a collapse of the entire student movement. As an added consequence, whole areas of student life on campus, which were built and under the control of student unions, fell into the hands of administrations. Obviously not everyone in the student movement saw all this in a positive light. It sparked a big debate in the student movement about which forms of organization were needed. Only 6 years later would the movement recover.

In 1974 the government announced plans to introduce university entry tests for francophone students. In response, a co-ordination of syndicalist student unions started organizing for a new general

At the time, society was going through secularization and the education system which was previously under the control of religious authorities came into the hands of the state. The old authoritarian reflexes of administrators and faculty weighed down on students' new sense of duty and responsibility. They wanted to participate in the important decisions that affected their institutions. The watchword became "student power".

Another important factor is that there was only one francophone university in Montreal, the Université de Montréal. It was elitist, expensive, and being perched up Mount Royal, was far removed from French-speaking working class boroughs in the city. Combined with the fact that the much smaller English community could count on two prestigious universities (Concordia and McGill), the sentiment of injustice would become gradually stronger.

So around this fight to democratize access to higher education, students coalesced around new, militant student unions and helped drive the development of the syndicalist tendency. Combined with a general uproar in labour, feminist and nationalist struggles in society, the student movement quickly became a force to be reckoned with.

In 1964, conscious of the need to co-ordinate the struggle, conscious of the need to build the financial and organizational tools required to maintain a permanent balance of power vis-à-vis the state, syndicalist students created the General Quebec Students' Union, or UGEQ by its French acronym.

Just a few years later, in 1968, as major students protest enflamed Europe, the upheaval crossed the Atlantic and reached Quebec. A huge wave of turmoil swept across the province and the fledgling student movement stepped in with the first unlimited general

Their main weapon is the general strike to force the state(or employer) into accepting their demands. The student movement pushes their demands by shutting down educational institutions and occupying them, and the general strike uses direct action outside these institutions to disrupt business as usual within the city to add pressure to negotiations. While they are not always successful in shutting down these institutions, and in other actions, mass mobilization, direct action and the general strike increases the potential to win student demands.

Typically, the intensity of actions is decided by involved members of the unions through mobilization committees. They are led by a principle or tactic called the "intensification of the methods of actions". Most campaigns and general strikes start with symbolic actions, protests, national days of strike and as the negotiations lead to an impasse, these one-day strikes and actions turn to general strikes, economic blockades and occupations. This escalation continues until the movement wins their demands or loses momentum.

4 - Autonomy. Participatory democracy leads to its logical conclusion through Autonomy. While not universally adopted by all combative unionists outside of the student movement, the members within the student movements (and many outside of it) control these unions and in order for this to materialize they practice complete autonomy from the state and its political parties. They see no point in participating in any state apparatus or political party when their nature is the defense of the ruling class. In order not to be co-opted for electoral goals, they practice autonomy from right wing and left wing political parties alike. Even though some of these parties incorporate portions of the student demands, these unions understand that these political parties will eventually compromise on their positions for their own gains. Regardless of this principle,

electoral parties still make attempts to co-op these unions under a guise of aid, and have potential to compel members towards this slippery slope. While some social democratic advocates within these unions defend the idea that there is something to gain by allying with political parties, at the heart of combative unionism lies the contradiction between direct action and electoralism. The former running counter to principles of representative rule while the other reinforces it.

fines the student as a young intellectual worker with specific rights and responsibilities which ensue from this particular status.

- Article 4: "As a worker, the student has a right to work and rest in the best of conditions and in material independence, both personal and social, guaranteed by the free exercise of syndicalist rights."
- Article 7: "As an intellectual, the student has a responsibility – to seek out, propagate and defend Truth which entails sharing and advancing culture as well as drawing the meaning of history – to defend liberty against all oppression, which constitutes, for the intellectual, his most sacred mission."

In its beginnings, French student syndicalism took off around concrete issues of decolonization and the Cold War. Those who upheld apolitical student associations were confronted.

Back in Quebec, the notion of student syndicalism didn't catch on until the early sixties. At that time, student associations in the province were still apolitical and centered mostly around organizing parties and providing student services. But in 1961, students in Université de Montréal, wanting to break with that tradition, wrote their own charter of student rights and responsibilities, inspired by the Charter de Grenoble.

It was a new ideological paradigm. Students, as young intellectual workers, developed a new awareness of their role in society as a whole. They were no longer content to concern themselves with student issues. They started getting involved in worker's struggles and identifying with the working class. As a result, more and more student activists subscribed to the idea of building student unions that could not only provide services but also organize struggles and thus take an active role in shaping society.

Birth and early history of the student movement

The strike in Quebec didn't happen because we "just do things differently". It didn't happen because there's anything inherently specific to francophone culture. If we want to help students and activists outside Quebec learn from our movement, we need to start by addressing the fog of "Quebec exceptionalism". One way to do that is to talk history. It's an interesting starting point because right there, we've got something in common.

We're all surrounded by the history of Kings, Queens, conquests and statesmanship. The elite's history. Quebec isn't any different in that respect. History of popular movement and resistance is overlooked unless it plays into the nationalist narrative of dominant political discourse. What the Quebecois student movement does have, however, is a strong tradition of sharing the legacy of student struggles.

The birth of the student movement can be traced back to the mid-forties, not in Quebec, but in France.

At the outset of World War II, a number of students, some with links to the anti-fascist resistance, sought to give a new direction to the national student organization. The apolitical / corporatist attitudes prevalent among student groups at the time gave rise to an ambiguous relationship with the Nazi occupiers during the war and so as a response, these students took on the task of transforming the student associations of the time into real student unions, modeled after labor unions.

In 1946, the National Union of French Students, or UNEF by its French acronym, adopted a founding document: the Charter of Student Syndicalism, later known as the "Charte de Grenoble". It de-

VII. MOBILIZATION COMMITTEES AND THEIR KEY ROLE IN THE CREATION OF COMBATIVE UNIONS

Combative unions have a multitude of committees and working groups to facilitate the everyday work of the unions, but in universities, colleges and workplaces where there is no combative union, these mobilization committees are what combative unionists use to undermine the bureaucracy and lobbyist unions.

These mobilization committees organize outside the current union structures knowing fully that the business unions they face exist to oppose any radical change to business as usual.

By organizing outside the union, the mobilization committee is used to unite the grassroots of their institution under the principles of combative unionism. Class oriented, they bring about the social glue needed to rally for the base under a program of free and accessible education for all (in the student movement). Democratic means of organizing assures everyone involved an equal standing within the group, laying the basis for radical change within the unions. Combativity breaks with the usual attitudes of unions that now more frequently resemble social clubs and political parties than organizations that fight to defend student and worker rights. Lastly, autonomy takes away ground from political parties to recruit and co-opt the union, making the union fertile ground for radicalization.

The mobilization committees attack union bureaucracy little by little. They mobilize the grassroots for general assemblies, putting in place an alternative media, proposing changes to the union constitutions in order to make the executives more accountable and mobilizing within non-combative unions along side the combative unions during strikes and actions. The mobilization committee

is key in undermining the bureaucracy and moderates who has hold on the union. They wage a war upon the apparatus of disinformation and expose the corruption and co-option taking place. It prepares the terrain for an eventual takeover of the union by its membership.

The history of the Quebec student movement and combative unionism (tour notes)

By Jerome Raza

In September 2012, shortly after the end of the largest unlimited general student strike in the history of Quebec, several class-struggle anarchist organisations in Canada along with a few local chapters of the IWW put together a cross-country tour to bring the history and experiences of the Quebec student movement to students and activists outside the province. Stopping in over a dozen cities from Toronto, Ontario to Victoria, BC, the tour brought a participant in the 2012 student strike to audiences in colleges and universities as well as union halls and various cooperatives. The article that follows is based on this conference. Special thanks to Jonathan from Zabalaza for editing help!

The student movement in Quebec has recently written an important chapter in its history. The strike that was launched back in February 2012, against the latest hike in university tuition turned into one of the largest social movements in the province's, and perhaps even Canada's, entire histories.

Of course, one of the interesting side-effects of the events of the last few months has been that news of the strike has spread outside the province, and many students and activists have taken notice.

We're not only happy that our struggle has inspired hope among the left about the ability of social movements to fight back in this difficult context where the state and business leaders seem to reign unchallenged. But we're especially excited to witness the fact that the strike in Quebec has sparked debates across borders about charting a way forward for the student movement.

ANNEX A

organizing effectively in many situations.

Organizing under the principles of direct democracy, combativity, autonomy and solidarity bring about the necessary framework needed to lead battles within our respective communities. From antifascist organizations, cop watch's, anti-gentrification committees, immigrant rights networks, neighborhood defense committees and many more, mobilization committees working under these principles can initiate struggles beyond the shop floors on issues that may not be related to labour at all.

Though this cannot be called combative unionism, its adaptation within different contexts of the principles advocated here such as direct democratic structures, combativity, autonomy and solidarity demonstrates clearly why we as anarchists should use this method within various struggles. There is no doubt that many, if not most strains of anarchist theory advocate as such, nor is there much doubt that many comrades organize with these same principles and find much familiarity with them. Our position is not one of inventing the wheel, but rather drawing conclusions from decades of revolutionary struggle within the labour movement, and putting them into practice.

Towards democratic, combative, and autonomous labour and social movements!

Prairie Struggle Organization

VIII. COMBATIVE UNIONISM: PRAIRIE STRUGGLE'S POSITION ON WAGING CLASS WAR WITHIN LABOUR

We believe that our organizations should aim to revolutionize the existing labour movement in the same manner that our comrades in the student movement have done and are currently doing. If the workplaces, neighbourhoods and schools are battlegrounds in the class war, so too are union halls. Unions and the broader labour movement reflect all elements we find within society, including class antagonism. Prairie Struggle Organization believes that the unions and the labour movement should not be spared in the battle of ideas to win over the working class to revolutionary politics and we stress that this cannot be done outside of it. Nestor Mahkno once said: "It is necessary to never forget that if trade unionism does not find in libertarian communist theory a support in opportune times it will turn, whether we like it or not, to the ideology of a political statist party." It is safe to assume that this is well underway and that much work is needed to empower the working class within labour.

Prairie Struggle Organization adopts Combative unionism as its organizational model within labour and social movements. Its adaptation of combative unionism is the following:

Principle #1. A movement by and for the working class

To bring sense and focus to our organizational efforts within labour, we organize with a working class orientation and make this the glue that binds our efforts. This also is used to identify class enemies within labour and society as a whole. If struggle changes everything, it is due in part to exposing class antagonisms. These antagonisms are what foster the ability to plant the seeds of radicalization.

Principle #2. Direct democratic structures

In order to facilitate the proper development of militancy and participation, we organize under the model of direct democracy and radically oppose representative democracy. It should be made clear that the objective is to give full decision making power to the general assembly and that executive powers are revocable at any time by the assembly. This empowerment through the general assembly is ground for experimentation and development for the basis of a new world.

Principle #3. Combative tactics

In opposition to reliance only on bargaining, we adopt militant combative tactics to win struggles as prescribed in the context of a continued escalation of tactics. Our ultimate weapon is the general strike.

If a tactic is effective, but not illegal, we believe it is only a matter of time until new laws are put in place to limit the effects of our tactics. In this view, we understand that the current laws are there to service the ruling class and their interests, and can be changed to serve this purpose. With this realization, we advocate when practical, the breaking of these laws and injunctions in order to make our tactics effective.

The question of violence is always a pivotal point when it comes to combative unionism and public opinion. The tactics we advocate come from the perspective of defending the rights of the workers and their legitimate strikes and actions. If these are under attack by the state and its apparatus of repression, we advocate when possible the use of self-defence. Tactics such as economic blockades, sabotage and the destruction of property do not harm anyone

IX: CONCLUSION:

WE ARE NOT INVENTING THE WHEEL.

Prairie Struggle Organization is not a vanguard, nor is it a party. We believe the role of anarchists, but also all those identifying as revolutionaries within the workplace is not to “lead” the workers towards revolution. We recognize that a successful revolution can only be carried out directly by the working class. The intention of this paper is not to theorize the path of every workplace struggle, but rather to argue principles that we, as revolutionaries, should recognize for their potential to radicalize, and proliferate revolutionary ideals meaningfully to all in our communities. As anarchists, we are an active minority within our workplaces, schools and neighborhoods. However, it is not enough that we as individuals put our efforts into legitimate social struggles. In order to be effective in the various areas of struggle, we see the organization as a place for anarchists to organize the active minority with the objective to radicalize mass movements and popular struggles where they exist, or agitate for the creation of such popular movements. In doing so we have the potential to combat authoritarianism and reformist tendencies giving way to the maximum political potential of revolutionary anarchist-communist ideas within the working class. We believe combative unionism gives us the political and organizational platform to do so and this is why we strongly believe that the revolutionary left should adopt Combative unionism as its model to organize through the use of the mobilization committee as its structure. We see the principles of combative unionism as being very close to anarchism if not being anarchist theory to start with.

We believe these principle can be adapted in many more places than the shop floor or union halls. The principles of combative unionism give us a structure and ideology from which we can start

more ease in separating the radical membership from the union altogether, and building a new organization. This is where we see intersectionality between combative unionism, and revolutionary unionism.

physically and therefore are not violent methods of action. This does not mean that we advocate the use of these militant tactics every step of the way. These tactics must be used when pragmatic and must be supported by the majority of the union membership.

Principle #4. Autonomy

As a class, we have our own interests. To defend these interests and the union from outside influences, we oppose any collaboration with the state or political parties and declare without compromise our autonomy from them. Despite the existence of political parties that are left wing and may embody many of the union's ideals and demands, we advocate that the union needs no one to represent its own interests.

Complete autonomy from the state and its institutions assures, to an extent, that no outside interest may interfere with the union's efforts. This does not mean that we oppose initiatives for unions to cooperate and mobilize together with in the same national organization. We believe that federalism is a decisive aspect of how effective a labour movement is, but see this federalism under directly democratic, anarchist lines.

Principle #5. The mobilization committee and working groups

It is obvious that storming the gates of our unions with these 7 points will not achieve any positive reaction from the union leaders, bureaucracy nor likely many of our fellow workers. The mobilization committee becomes the militant wing of the union where the active minority assembles, coordinates and plans its campaigns against those who oppose combative unionism and wish to keep control of the union. By organizing outside the union structure, the active minority use these 7 principles to organize within the mem-

bership so that the rank and file can progressively gain control of their union, and defend the interest of the rank and file.

Principle #6. Winning support, taking back the union

The mobilization committee's task within the union is no small one. Taking back our unions involves fighting an entrenched bureaucracy and reinvigorating a membership that no longer feels compelled to denounce and fight union elites. This is why combative unionism must be initiated with recognition that this is a long and delicate process of exposing internal class antagonisms and bureaucratic control, and that it will likely encounter many barriers, and defeats.

Principle #7. Bread , roses and revolution

It is important that the objectives of the committee be realistic and in touch with the union base. Radicalization can happen through propaganda, but most often happens through struggle for better conditions. This is why we see combative unionism through a process of bread, roses and revolution. We believe that the mobilization committees should strive for the amelioration of everyday working conditions and through the process of struggle and radicalization, place the foundations for a new tomorrow. Thus, progress made through the mobilization committees must build victories upon victories, and adapt to defeats to meet the membership's level of demand, rather than expect them to meet yours. Organizing on these directly democratic principles fosters this process, and ensures struggle is personalized rather than implemented from above. As a result, members gain an increased stake in the radicalization process, and are more likely to participate in the union, and in actions. Admittedly, while a prescription that instructs how this process unfolds is necessarily elusive, the central tenet is that

through involvement and struggle under the conditions we and our co-workers face, class antagonisms become increasingly visible, and when complemented by engagement with radical forms of organizing creates the potential for increased actualizations of revolutionary ideas, and social movement.

THE QUESTION OF FIGHTING FOR LEADERSHIP?

Combative unionism is an engagement that must be prepared to withstand powerful opposition, not only to create a situation of combative unionism, but also to sustain its existence. In a combative union, the aim is to combat resurgence of powerful bureaucracies, and authoritative leadership. This is not without need to exercise the struggle for leadership as a strategy in pushing authoritarians, bureaucrats and reformists away from control over the union's institutions. In an established combative union, this leadership acts as described above, merely as a tool to execute the decisions of the membership, and this is not to be stigmatized and opposed as many do. On the contrary, democratic leadership should be shared and held accountable. In business unions with militants actively mobilizing towards combative strategies, this level of engagement is next to useless. The constitution and bylaws that give power to bureaucrats, reformists, and national/international affiliations are still in place, and they will use tools afforded to them to isolate radical executive members. This is why we only advocate fighting for leadership in an already combative union, to sustain its democratic nature. In business unions, some militants may advocate this strategy as an act of desperation. This isn't necessarily a useless strategy. However, when these documents cannot be challenged from the membership level, and when a well organized, radicalized membership is being successfully oppressed by those wielding institutionalized power, the solution may be found with