

Major daily publishes fascist diatribe against Quebec student strike

Eric Marquis
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One of Quebec's principal dailies has published on its internet site a commentary from a senior Quebec government official that openly calls for fascist-type violence to be employed against striking students.

Titled "To be rid of student strikes," the comment—which was published by *Le Soleil*, Quebec City's "quality" daily, on April 12—urges that the actions the "fascist movements of the 1920s and 1930s" employed to "reconquer ground" from strikers and the left be emulated.

At the bottom of the *Le Soleil* "Viewpoint" comment, its author, Bernard Guay, identified himself as a "long-time anti-strike activist." Although not identified as such by the paper, Guay is also a senior official in the tax branch of Quebec's Ministry of Municipal Affairs.

In his diatribe, Guay denounces the two month-old strike that Quebec university and CEGEP (pre-university and technical college) students have mounted against the provincial Liberal government's plans to raise university tuitions by 75 percent. He calls the strike "wasteful and anti-social," while commending the violence perpetrated by fascist militias in the decades between the world wars of the last century.

"We must organize," declares Guay, "to regain lost ground. In the 1920s and 1930s, the fascist movements did this by giving leftists a taste of their own medicine. This lesson was so seared into their memories that three quarters of a century later, they still demonize this reaction of political good-health."

In other words, the intimidation, goon attacks, and murders that the Italian fascists and the Nazis employed against militant workers, Communists, and socialist-minded youth and intellectuals should serve as a model for the Quebec ruling elite in breaking the current student strike.

Hostile reader reaction to this paean to an ideology rightly associated by people all over the world with savage repression, bellicose nationalism, and the Holocaust quickly forced *Le Soleil* to remove Guay's comment and its editor-in-chief, Pierre-Paul Noreau, to offer a public apology.

In his apology, Noreau claims that *Le Soleil*'s editorial board read Guay's letter "much too quickly" and failed to take note of its "incitement to violence."

While condemning Guay's remarks, *Le Soleil*'s editor-in-chief, nonetheless sought to minimize their fascist character. "There is at times a thin margin between freedom of expression and its abuse," declared Noreau. "How should *Le Soleil* be judged in this difficult debate over tuition fee increases? On this error that was admitted and corrected as quickly as possible, or on the whole of its journalistic coverage?"

This explanation is simply not credible.

It is far more likely that *Le Soleil*'s editors viewed Guay's comment as legitimate and deserving of publication precisely because of the virulence of his opposition to the student movement, which, to the consternation of Quebec's elite, has insisted that quality education should be a social right.

Le Soleil, is owned by Gesca, a subsidiary of Power Corporation, a holding firm owned by the Desmarais family, billionaires who have been in the forefront of big business' push for the dismantling of public services in Quebec and across Canada.

Noreau is not being honest when he says that "It is quite clear that *Le Soleil* will never condone an incitement to violence." On the contrary, this is what the media, including the many newspapers published by Gesca, have been doing almost since the first day of the student strike. Quebec's dailies have published lurid accounts of "student violence," providing pretexts

for the brutal repression of student protests by riot police.

Isolated acts of vandalism, allegedly perpetrated by striking students, have been used by the ruling elite and its media to portray the students as a band of “looters.” Certain media commentators, such as Éric Duhaime of the *Journal de Montréal*, have gone so far as to characterize the student struggle as a “form of terrorism.”

At the same time, the police systematically repress student demonstrations and the courts issue injunctions, limiting or banning picketing, and forcing teachers to resume regular instruction and evaluation even if the vast majority of students are boycotting class with virtually no criticism from the media. Students are beaten, tear-gassed and pepper-sprayed, and even seriously injured (a student lost the use of one eye after a stun-grenade explosion), but the media focuses all its energies on denouncing “student violence.”

Violence against the students is supported at the highest levels, beginning with the provincial Liberal Government. Throughout the conflict, Education Minister Line Beauchamp has pressed universities and CEGEPs to defy strike mandates and picket lines, and force a return to class, making clashes almost inevitable

Students and workers must beware. The publication of a fascist diatribe in a major establishment newspaper is a warning that the ruling elite is increasingly abandoning any commitment to the most basic democratic principles.

As social inequality, poverty and economic insecurity intensify, the ruling class is turning more and more to violence and police state repression to impose its unpopular and anti-social agenda. Only a powerful movement of the working class, dedicated to the fight for social equality and the defence of democratic rights can repel this threat.



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