

# Stop state suppression of Quebec student strike!

Socialist Equality Party (Canada)  
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Having failed to break the four-month Quebec student strike with their draconian Bill 78, the provincial Liberal government and the state have intensified their campaign of repression.

Last Tuesday, Quebec City Police arrested 65 people including Amir Khadir, a provincial legislator identified with opposition to Bill 78, for the “crime” of demonstrating. On Thursday police mounted coordinated dawn raids, including on Khadir’s house, and arrested six people, among them Khadir’s 19-year-old daughter.

The ostensible aim of the raids was to apprehend strike supporters suspected of committing acts of vandalism and public mischief. Their true purpose was to bolster the government’s months-long campaign to smear the strike as violent, so as to justify its state suppression, and to discredit Amir Khadir, his Quebec Solidaire, and defiance of the anti-democratic Bill 78.

Numerous facts attest to the calculated political character of the raid on the Khadir family home. Police informed the media in advance of the impending raid on Khadir’s house, so that journalists would be on hand to report and videotape it. They constructed an amalgam bringing together numerous cases, so that they could dramatically stage eight raids at once, thereby suggesting the existence of a widespread network of “violent” student activists. Subsequently, however, police had to admit that there is no connection between many of the alleged crimes; many of those targeted for arrest did not know each; nor were they part of a common organization. Last but not least, police raided the Khadir residence, although they knew they had no need to do so to apprehend Khadir’s daughter. She was already reporting regularly to police under a court order arising from a previous strike-related charge that has yet to go to trial.

Last weekend’s Montreal Grand Prix became the occasion for a further state provocation, aimed at inculcating fear in the population and legitimizing police

repression. Not only were police deployed in great numbers across much of downtown Montreal to “protect” the Grand Prix from disruption. Police targeted for arbitrary searches and questioning users of the Montreal subway system wearing the “red square,” the symbol of the student strike.

Mass arrests of peaceful protesters; arbitrary searches of suspected government opponents; police provocations aimed at depicting the opposition as violent, if not seditious; and the orchestration of frame-ups and smear campaigns against prominent government opponents—these are the methods of a police state.

This campaign of repression is being orchestrated from the highest levels of Quebec’s Liberal government. With its Bill 78, the government criminalized the student strike and made it illegal to stage a demonstration in Quebec, whatever the cause, without police permission. It was Premier Jean Charest who, distorting a stray remark from a student leader, claimed that there was a threat to the Grand Prix, declared that those behind this threat constituted a “menace” to Quebec, and vowed that the government would maintain order. And it is the government, aided and abetted by the corporate media and police provocations, that has depicted the student strike as violent. “We know what the red square means,” declared Culture Minister Christine St. Pierre last week, “it means intimidation, violence, it also means stopping people from studying.”

Workers in Quebec and across Canada must oppose the state suppression of the Quebec student strike and demand the immediate dropping of all charges against Khadir and his family.

The SEP, as it has made clear on innumerable occasions, has unbridgeable differences with Quebec Solidaire—a self-proclaimed “left” Quebec nationalist party that gravitates around the big business Parti Quebecois and the trade union bureaucracy and advances

a timid program for reforming capitalism.

But if Khadir is being politically persecuted it is because of his repeated denunciations of police violence against the students and because the ruling class fears that his status as a legislator lends legitimacy to defiance of Bill 78 and related police orders proclaiming demonstrations “illegal.”

Under conditions where Bill 78 is already opposed by large sections of the working class and has repeatedly been defied by students and their supporters, the ruling elite is determined that the entire establishment—including all the political parties in the National Assembly and the trade unions—stand united in insisting that the legislation be obeyed and enforced.

No one should underestimate what is at stake.

The Quebec Liberal government and the Canadian ruling elite are determined to stamp out the student strike because they recognize that the students’ opposition to drastic university tuition fee hikes constitutes an implicit challenge to their drive to make the working class pay for the global capitalist crisis. By defeating the students, they hope to intimidate all opponents of the dismantling of public services, privatization, and job and wage cuts.

Moreover, with Bill 78 and the police state measures of the past week, the Canadian ruling class is establishing new anti-democratic precedents and testing new methods for suppressing opposition from the working class.

Already the criminalization of social struggles has become the norm. Over the past year, the federal Conservative government has repeatedly used emergency laws to strip workers of the rights to strike and bargain collectively in order to support employer concession demands. Those targeted by such legislation include Air Canada, Canada Post, and CP Rail workers.

In December 2008, the most powerful sections of the ruling class supported the Harper Conservative government when it shut down parliament in order to prevent MPs from exercising their constitutional right to defeat the government and install a Liberal-NDP coalition. At the time, the SEP warned that if the ruling class was willing to violate basic democratic norms merely to prevent the coming to power of an alternative big business government, it clearly would be prepared to suppress democratic rights wholesale and employ state violence if challenged by the working class.

The trajectory of developments in Canada corresponds with that in all the advanced capitalist countries and is rooted in the same processes. Facing increasing opposition to its program of austerity, war, and social

reaction, the rival capitalist elites are increasingly turning to authoritarian measures and relying on the “bodies of armed men” that comprise the state to enforce their rule.

Students and workers must draw trenchant lessons from the clash between the Quebec students and the provincial Liberal government.

A struggle over any burning social or democratic issue will bring young people and workers into headlong conflict not just with their employer or the sitting government, but the courts, police and the entire state apparatus.

The defence of fundamental democratic rights and the fight for the social rights of working people to a free education and public services and decent jobs and pensions requires the independent political mobilization of the working class against the entire capitalist social order.

Such a movement will only develop in opposition to, and through an organizational and political break from the trade unions and the NDP. These pro-capitalist organizations are working for the defeat of the student strike just as they have systematically suppressed the resistance of the working class for decades. The Quebec unions have repeatedly sought to bully the students into accepting a sellout agreement with the government and have pledged to abide by Bill 78, including its stipulation that they must do everything in their power to ensure teachers assist the government in breaking the student strike. The NDP, the party of the unions in English Canada, has declared “neutrality” in the confrontation between the students and the Charest Liberal government and, by its silence, indicated its consent to Bill 78.

Workers must ensure that the students are not left to fight the government and state alone. Their militant struggle must become the catalyst for a cross-Canada working-class offensive against all job, wage, and social spending cuts and for the replacement of the Charest Liberal and Harper Conservative governments with workers’ governments’ pledged to radically reorganizing economic life so human need not big business profits become the animating principle.

The SEP is dedicated to building the international revolutionary party needed to realize this program.



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