

Quebec: Protests continue against Bill 78 and the attack on education

A WSWS reporting team
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The vast movement of social contestation that erupted in Quebec this spring continues. Earlier this week students, who have been striking against the provincial Liberal government's plans to drastically increase university tuition fees for four months, held their 50th consecutive nightly protest demonstration departing from Montreal's Émilie-Gamelin Park. And in other Montreal working-class neighborhoods, opponents of the government's austerity measures and Bill 78 continued to hold ad hoc, festive late-day rallies, expressing their anger to the rhythm of clanging pots and pans. Reporters of the World Socialist Web Site (WSWS) visited some of these events and collected comments from participants.

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On June 13, more than 250 people demonstrated in downtown Montreal outside the Hotel Hilton-Bonaventure, where the Montreal Conference, an annual event bringing together the various representatives of international big business, was being held. The demonstration was organized by the "Coalition Opposed to User-Fees and the Privatization of Public Services" and was timed to take place during a speech by Alan Greenspan, the former chairman of the US Federal Reserve.

Addressing the crowd, a representative of CLASSE (The Broader Coalition of the Association for Student-Union Solidarity) explained that the protest was "organized against the financial elites assembled in the buildings behind us" and "against social inequality."

A participant explained to our team of reporters that "there is much confusion on what is communism and socialism" and wanted to know what the WSWS had to

say on this subject. After a discussion of about 20 minutes, he concluded, "People are beginning to see more clearly. Stalinism defiled communism. I agree with what you're saying."

Another participant, a Université du Québec à Montréal (UQAM) student, expressed his agreement with the idea put forward by the WSWS that students must turn to the working class. As an anarchist, he objected, however, to the need for workers to form their own political party. "We cannot," he said, "delegate the power of the people to a party; power must remain with the people, and I am in agreement with the soviets. But we saw in Russia how the party became dominant and again recreated the dominating and dominated."

Another person, a taxi driver who watched the event, commented: "I support the students. The cause of poverty is lack of education.

"I heard", he continued, "that one person has more wealth than all the countries of the Caribbean. There is something here that just does not work! There should be a much more equitable distribution of wealth."

Speaking of his own situation, he said: "We taxi drivers have great difficulty in providing for our families, in giving our children a good education. The situation has gotten much worse over the course of the past several years."

After about an hour, the police declared the gathering illegal and advised people that they could be arrested if they did not disperse. The protesters left the scene and initiated—in defiance of the dispersal order—a march through the streets of the city's financial district.

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Last Saturday (June 9), a WSWS reporter visited a "casserole" (pots and pans) event organized in a

working-class neighbourhood of Montreal. A participant, Francis, agreed to be interviewed.

According to Francis, the Liberal government's draconian Bill 78 should be defied. "That means demonstrating without giving the police the route, demonstrating spontaneously and without fear of being in the streets, and staying until police declare the demonstration illegal."

On the possibility of the Official Opposition Parti Quebecois (PQ) replacing the Liberals, he said: "I am very suspicious of the PQ. I don't think the PQ is a social democratic party. It is not a left-wing party, that's clear. They demonstrated this with their past policies. For example, during the *Journal de Montréal* dispute, where was Ms. Marois (the PQ leader) in defending the workers? The Quebec Amphitheatre, it was the PQ that endorsed that law (giving a sweetheart deal to Quebecor). This is not a party close to workers, close to the citizens."

Francis explained that "From the current political spectrum, I would vote for Québec Solidaire. They support nationalization, including that of wind power."

Regarding CLASSE, he said that it "is the most militant of the student organizations and has put the most on the line. It has the courage of its convictions."

When it was pointed out that in early May CLASSE had signed an agreement with the government accepting its tuition increases, he said, "I did not think that CLASSE would support an increase. I was not aware of the content of the talks. CLASSE's ultimate goal is free education; therefore in my opinion, if they accept an increase, they go against their fundamental principles. That would be quite curious."



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