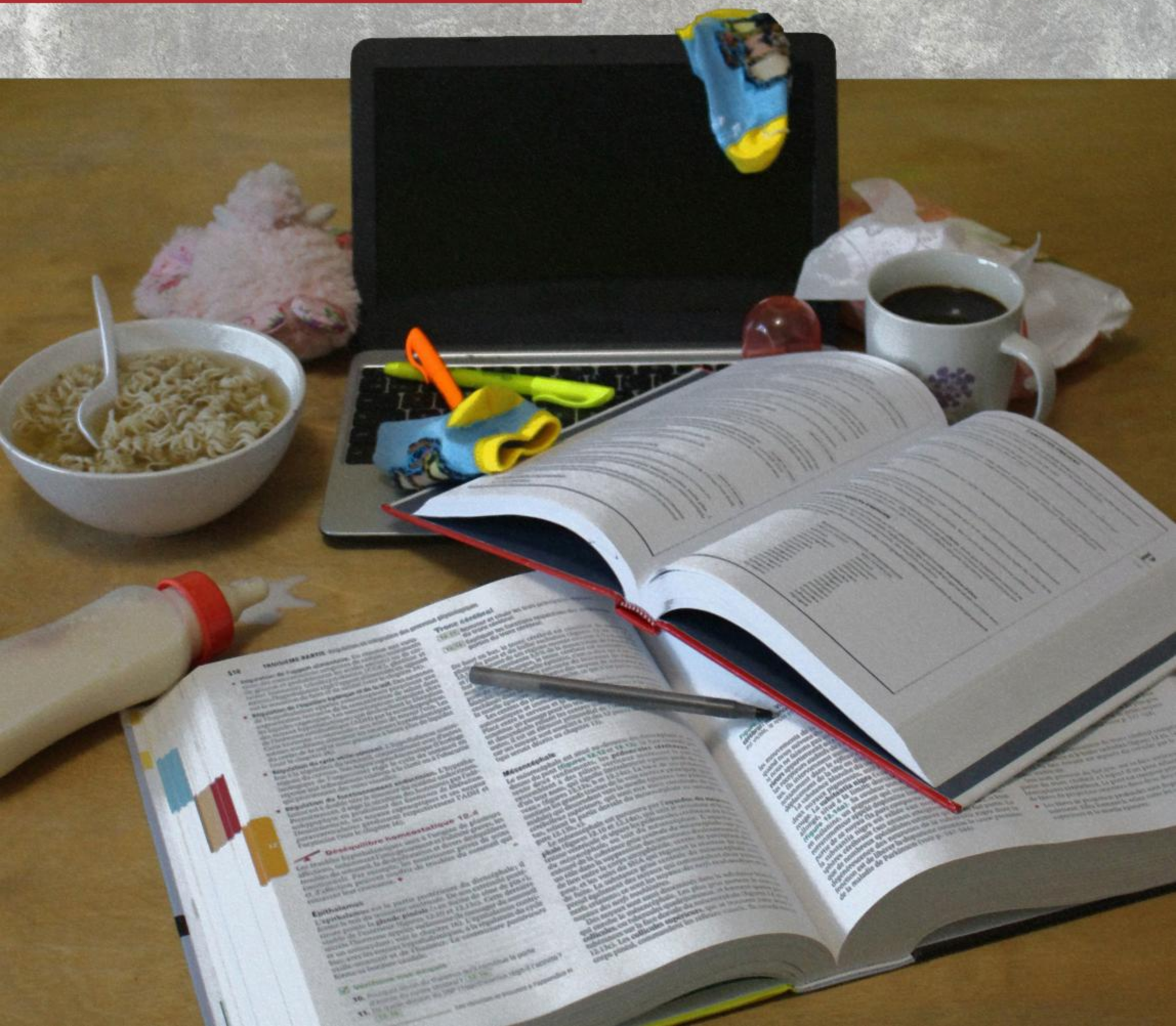


CUTE MAGAZINE

The Comités unitaires sur le travail étudiant's
Organizing Publication

Number 1&2

Fall 2017



CONTENTS

- 3 *Truth Comes Out From Ministers' Mouth*
- 5 *A Call for the Creation of a Committee on Student Work
at Concordia University*
- 6 *Interns' Strike, Women's Strike*
- 10 *The School That Puts You Back in Your Place*
- 15 *Chain Culture*
- 19 *Contempt as Our Salary*
- 22 *A Struggle for All the Studying Moms*

CUTE Magazine's team

WRITING AND REVIEW: Thierry Beauvais-Gentile, Sandrine Belley, Annabelle Berthiaume, Jeanne Bilodeau, Nicholas Bourdon, Félix Dumas-Lavoie, Pierre-Luc Junet, Louis-Thomas Leguerrier, Amélie Poirier, Mélissa Renaud, Etienne Simard, Valérie Simard, Camille Tremblay-Fournier, Geneviève Vaillancourt
TRANSLATION: Bernard Cooper, Frédéric Lebel

REVISION: Camille Allard, Guillaume Beauvais, François Bélanger, Marion Bilodeau, Dominique Bordeleau, Julie Bruneau, Fred Burill, Katherine Chartrand Pelletier, Isabelle Cheng, Ulred

Comba Rodriguez, Samuel Cossette, Clément Courteau, Alfred Kokou Gbidi, Jaouad Laaroussi, Jean-Michel Laforce, Gabrielle Laverdière-Pilon, Jilefack Ngami, Eva-Loan Ponton-Pham

ART: Corinne Lachance

COVER: Laurence Sallam

LAYOUT: Félix Dumas-Lavoie, Katherine Ruault

ISSN 2561-1100 (print)

ISSN 2561-1119 (online)

Truth Comes Out From Ministers' Mouth

The Minister of Higher Education has taken the lead in the debate on the internships remuneration. To the CRAIES¹, which petitioned for compensation for the fourth internship in teaching, and to the FECQ² which requests collegial internships to be paid in predominantly feminine programs, she responds with a substantive question: "Why, when sitting in a classroom, you're not paid, and when you are going to do an initial apprenticeship in the workplace, are you paid?"³. Although this is irony used by Hélène David to cast the discrediting the CRAIES while mocking the CUTE⁴ campaign on student work, who claim a student salary, her reply, like all witticisms, unintentionally reveals strategic indications that should not be overlooked.

First, there is the issue of **organization**. It has been more than ten years since the struggle for paid internships is segmented by program or field of study. There are the midwives on one side, the psychology students on their side, future teachers in the corner ... Each of their claims is treated as a sophisticated file that does not need any links with the others. Worse, they are often even competing: "situating them in psycho do more work without supervision than the trainees in teaching"; "Teacher trainees are responsible for more hours per week than the stages of social work"; "The shortage of midwives in the health care network and the priority payment", etc.⁵ Or these campaigns are visible on the ground of their abilities. The division of movements and the numberless demands do not allow the mobilization of a critical mass capable of meeting full satisfaction with the objectives set. Even the FIDEP⁶, after three months of internships' strike, resigned itself to accepting the government's first offer, knowing that the movement would not continue beyond a term.

That is probably what the minister has in mind when she spontaneously brings it back to a general question. In spite of its intention to put the various campaigns back and forth, to oppose them to one another, in the end it puts them all in the same basket, thus exposing a solution to revive these struggles: to make a general battle. By adopting a position that includes all internships, all programs and all levels of study. It is important to organize in such a way as to eliminate the competition and the hierarchy between disciplines, which reinforce the difference between paid and unpaid training.

Then there is the choice of the **means of pressure**. By closing the door to the very logic of remuneration for work placements, the minister indicates that the issue will not be settled amicably around a coffee table, in short without a movement forcing it to do so. Forcing the note is one of the most difficult steps to take at the moment. After the submission to the Ministry of Health and Social Services of a brief on the financial conditions of female midwives, the AESFQ⁷ did not know how to mobilize its members, who were too busy with their internships and too scattered throughout Quebec. Same thing for the CRAIES, which had nevertheless given new impetus to the struggle for the remuneration of "internship 4"; since the petition was presented to the National Assembly this spring, the horizon of this campaign is uncertain⁸.

Since last year, three months of strike were necessary for the Minister to grant a scholarship to interns in psychology, we can be assured that the threat of stoppage will have to be real before the movement is taken seriously by the State. If such an adventure is already possible in certain programs such as education or social work, it is necessary to rely on these dynamics to

1. Campaign for inter-university demands and actions for internship students, currently under the umbrella of the Union étudiante du Québec (UEQ).

2. Fédération étudiante collégiale du Québec (College Students Federation of Quebec)

3. "David closes the door to paid internships", *Le Soleil*, May 3, 2017. <https://goo.gl/7qC4wY>

4. Comités unitaires sur le travail étudiant (Unitary Student Work Committees), which publish the magazine you hold in your hands.

5. And it is without mentioning the programs where the fight remains at a standstill. In social work, for example, it is difficult to claim a salary, since the internships in community organizations and social services are already underfunded.

6. Fédération interuniversitaire des doctorant.e.s en psychologie (Inter-university federation of doctoral students in psychology)

7. Association des étudiantes sages-femmes du Québec (Association of Quebec Midwifery Students)

8. The CRAIES-UEQ strategy of betting on the election of the Parti québécois to win the case led the campaign to a cul-de-sac, especially since the PQ has little chance of being elected with a majority next year.

embark the students of as many programs as possible, especially those with mandatory unpaid internships. This involves taking the time to discuss with college students, such as special education, childhood education, healthcare, documentation, social work, etc. The strike of the internships as a new means of pressure for the student movement can unleash incredible forces and prove to be very effective. Internationally, there has been an increase in the number of calls to strike courses during the past year, such as trainee teachers in Grenoble and Morocco⁹, and the Global Intern Strike on February 20th¹⁰.

Finally, there is the **target**, and that is the most important element of what the minister is telling us. The latter puts forward an argument of logical appearance, of the common sense good comforting for his audience, which nevertheless conceals a significant lack of reasoning: most of the internships in the predominantly male domains are already paid. Thus the supposed separation between work and formation which it opposes to the claim simply does not exist! Hélène David is, of course, aware of the undervaluation of women's work and its effect on the non-remuneration of internships, her understanding of feminist issues is a well-known fact. But if the facade of his witticism aims to confuse us, the purpose is not to be false

By choosing to be determined not to recognize internships as deserving work as well as all studies, she tries to shovel the file into the neighbor's yard: the Ministère du Travail, de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale¹¹. Because it is the *labor standards*¹² to which she refers, standards that are not bound to be respected with respect to a "student who works during the school year in an institution chosen by a Education and under an induction-to-work program approved by the Ministry of Education and Higher Education"¹³. This provision exempts a boss from giving the minimum wage, or the least wage,

to a trainee. At the end of its *Rendez-vous national sur la main-d'oeuvre*¹⁴ last winter, the Government of Quebec announced that it would undertake a review of labor standards "as soon as possible", the first in 15 years¹⁵. Here is a target of choice!

It is important to put the organizational bases of the struggle now in mind in the coming months, because it is likely to prove tough! To take advantage of the unintentional good advice of the Minister, CUTE, with the assistance of executives of student associations, student parent committees, women's committees and student political groups, set up regional coalitions for paid internships. Indeed, to ensure that the different groups can take charge of the coalitions without removing them from their efforts and coming to invisibility, it seems preferable to favor coordination between groups on a regional basis. This offers more structural flexibility according to the associations and committees present in each region, and prevents a Montreal clique from becoming a "national", as has often been the case in the past decades in the student movement.

Thus, we encourage the creation of coalitions, similar or different, in all the regions of Quebec (and even elsewhere!) as well as the mutual assistance and exchange of information and resources between them. The diversity of structures and the actual and concrete control of the struggle through a mobilized base will allow for a greater efficiency of the movement and a better anchoring on the campuses and the communities.

By putting our efforts together, let's make sure that next year is the one where we will earn wages for all the internships! In the meantime, let us continue to have the ministers react, that may be helpful. ♦

9. On the movement of Grenoble:

<https://goo.gl/89UcRX>; about the movement in Morocco:

<https://goo.gl/JDQGwT>

10. For more information:

<https://goo.gl/pYC1MW>

11. Ministry of Labor, Employment and Social Solidarity

12. Loi sur les normes du travail

13. Act respecting labor standards, chapter II, section 3.

<https://goo.gl/XpoumD>

14. National Meeting on Labor

15. The Act respecting labor standards will be reviewed," *La Presse*, February 17, 2017.

<https://goo.gl/8rK4sP>

A Call for the Creation of a United Committee on Student Work at Concordia University

BY PIERRE-LUC JUNET

Since the spring of 2016, a campaign for the recognition of work done in a student environment is led by the United Committees on Student Work (Comités unitaires sur le travail étudiant, or CUTE, in French). The CUTEs are autonomous committees made up of students in an education institution and which, beyond the political ideologies on which they are based, chose to work together on this question.* This campaign focused first of all on the most visible aspect of the non-recognition of student work: unpaid internships. During the last year, we were able to determine that this demand grew in popularity on campus, and was able to link up with areas of studies traditionally more distant from student politics. The CUTEs were the main actors of this rallying mobilization which will continue this fall. The Concordia Student Union (CSU), the organization representing undergraduate

students at Concordia University, is also part of the movement and will make the issue of unpaid internships the priority of its action plan in the following months. It's now time that the struggle for paid internships goes into full swing at Concordia.

But the issue of unpaid internships is only the tip of the iceberg in the invisibility and non-recognition of student work. That is why the CUTE has put forward a critical analysis of reproductive labour applied to the whole student condition. What distinguishes in particular productive labour from reproductive labour, is the way it is valued: all that concerns productive labour is salaried whereas what is reproductive, that is to say all the work done outside traditional production locales (factories, offices, service locations, etc.) is viewed as a "natural" "basic" effort for life. Reproductive work is historically largely done by women and finds its justification in the essentialist attribution of gendered roles according to which knowing how to take care of others and the house, household chores to sexual efforts, is simply not work and should not be valued through a salary. Why? Where does work begin and end? Who decides? What value is to be given to work? To raise these questions concretely, is a reflection on what regulates the rhythm of our lives in this society, giving ourselves the collective challenge to rethink what is work.

The student condition is a transition zone between two stages: life where we depend on the family institution and that where we free ourselves economically from it by work. During this phase, we need to pay and get into massive debt. We will have to study, edit, create content; for many of us we go on to learn the job directly through unpaid internships, but for which we pay tuition fees. In reality, we are already workers, to whom



this status is denied. Our work is considered as by being one of reproduction: we are made apprentices in training who then replace other "real" workers on the labor market. The university is thus a diploma factory where we have to pay to have access and where the daily tasks of students are made invisible and viewed de facto as labour done for free. The CUTEs instead defend the idea that it is necessary to consider reproductive work in the light of what is valued as productive work. By demanding a salary for student work, it is as much an issue of putting an end to the corporatist vision of education that turns

us into user-payers, and of criticizing the separations between the various categories of workers.

A United Committee on Student Work (CUTE) will look at these issues this fall at Concordia. If these things are important to you and you wish to join a dynamic campaign already well advanced in several Cégeps and universities, do not hesitate to contact us at cute.concordia@gmail.com

* There are committees at Cégep Marie-Victorin, in the Cégep de Sherbrooke, at the University of Québec in Montreal, the University of Québec in Outaouais and the University of Montréal. ♦



FEMINISM

INTERNS' STRIKE, WOMEN'S STRIKE

BY AMÉLIE POIRIER AND CAMILLE TREMBLAY-FOURNIER¹

The idea of a women's strike is gaining ground¹. On October 2nd 2016, in Poland, women went on strike for abortion rights. On October 19th, women in Argentina went on strike for one hour in order to denounce the rape and murder of 16 year-old Lucia Perez, and to condemn the media's trivialization of hate crimes. A few days later, women in Iceland and then in France massively walked out of work on the exact minute at which they had worked the same amount of hours as men at equal pay. These movements all have in common the fact that they brought to light the direct link between the oppression of women and the exploitation of their reproductive labour. Around the world,

women are precarious because an important part of their labour remains unpaid, their primary tasks still not recognized as work. From unpaid domestic labour to free sexual services, the appropriation of women's time and bodies, as well as the unrecognition of their productive labour, forces them into a situation of increased vulnerability to their bosses, parents, boyfriends, and professors.

The strike led by psychology students in the fall of 2016 for paid internships is no stranger to these movements. It confronts the notion that student labour is done for free, the only compensation being grades and credits. This notion doesn't stand up to the question: why are some internships paid

1. This text is an abridged version of an article published by the web journal *Françoise Stéréo*. The original version [in French] is more detailed and contains several references.
<https://goo.gl/2fpr4k>

and others aren't? Opposed to the idea that internships are unpaid because they're part of one's personal training, we argue that the reason stems from the sexual division of labour based on a separation between fields of study and work considered to be either productive or reproductive. How else could we argue that internships in engineering or computer science are almost always paid, while those in teaching are never paid? Undoubtedly, unpaid internships primarily have in common the fact that they're related to sectors associated with caring for human beings and which women have historically occupied. For example, in Ontario, 73% of internships that are either unpaid or paid below minimum wage are occupied by women, and this rate reaches 77% in the United States². This is no coincidence: the free labour done in these internships reflects the hierarchy between "male" productive labour and free "female" reproductive labour. Even today, the jobs of social worker, teacher, childhood educator, occupational therapist, sexologist, nurse and midwife, among others, are associated with self-sacrifice and a supposedly natural tendency for women to educate and care³. We share the views of Colette Guillaumin, which states that care-based labour isn't less paid, it never is, except when it's submitted to the wage system rather than the patriarchal one. The unpaid internship therefore represents a capitalist exercise in the complete exploitation of women's time and labour. But why pay for internships in a sector where the work has always been done for free? Because not only is the theft of interns' time at stake, but so is the non-application of labour norms, the lack of financial security, as well as the inadmissibility to employment-insurance and maternity leave for the duration of the internship. Just like housewives, (neo) colonized populations, people of colour, people on employment-insurance, welfare, or people incarcerated, unpaid students find themselves in a situation of dependency with regards to people with wages. Ultimately, the non-recognition of reproductive labour allows the perpetuation of the exploitation of the most vulnerable populations and

a reduced compensation in work sectors traditionally occupied by women. It would appear as though this wage hierarchy reflects a supposed hierarchy between sexes, races, ages and nations⁴.

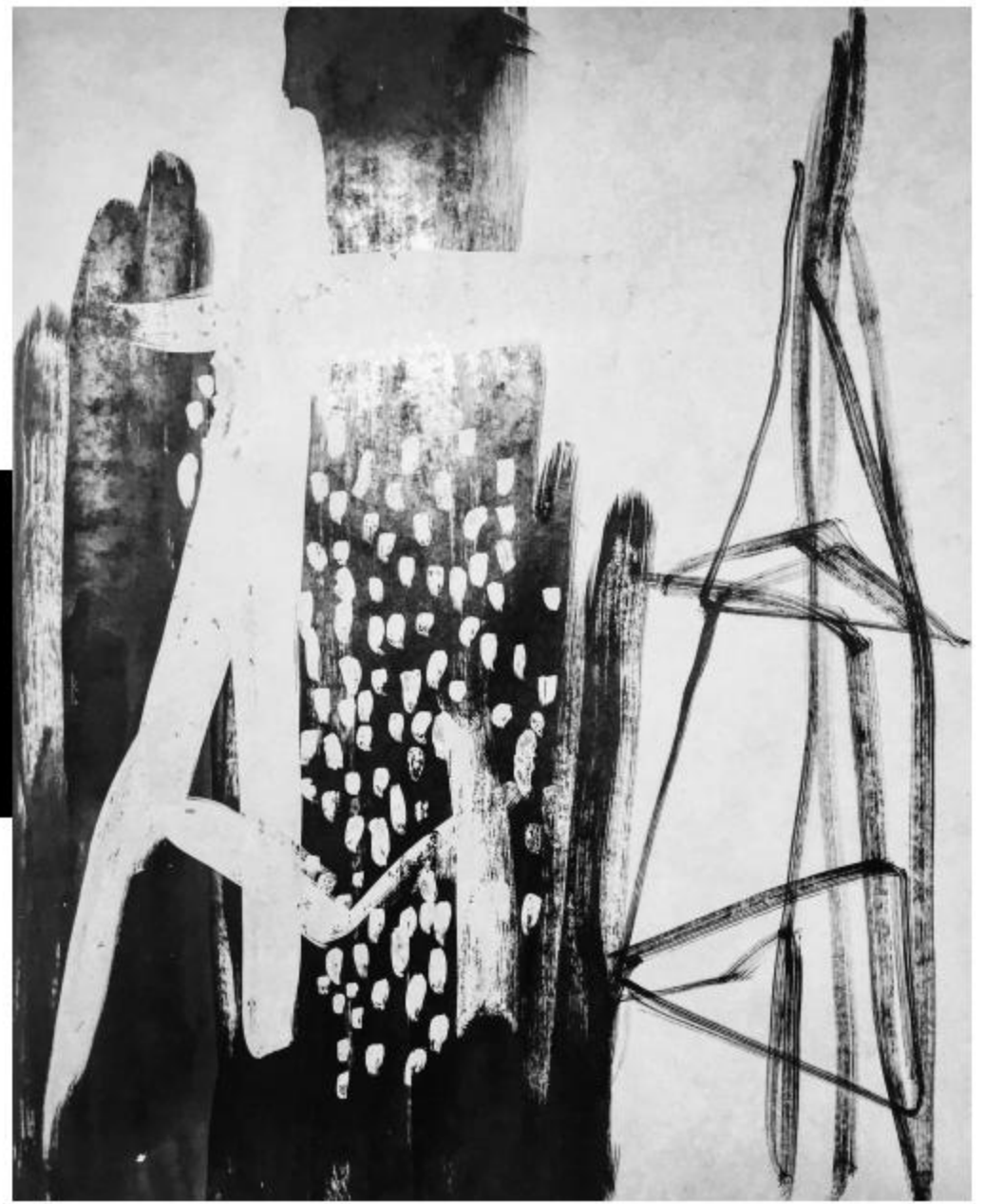
WE MAY BE SMALL, BUT THAT DOESN'T MEAN WE CAN'T BE TALL

The moment we recognize that internships are unpaid because they belong to sectors that are traditionally occupied by women, and not because interns are still in training, it becomes impossible to continue to justify the fact that all labour produced during school, both in the classroom and at home, remains unpaid. We argue that studies are unpaid because of the separation of labour between professors and students, which is also based on the distinction between productive and reproductive labour. In that sense, we understand that teachers' intellectual labour is recognized as work, since it's paid, whereas student labour isn't. However, studying is a form of social reproductive labour as it (re) produces the very merchandise at the base of the capitalist system: the workforce. We argue that from elementary school to university, students acquire standardized skills and knowledge in order to renew the workforce based on the labour market's current needs. But waving a magic wand doesn't do this acquisition: it requires work on behalf of the student. It's therefore paradoxical that a large portion of a teacher's labour, dedicated to increasing students' value on the labour market, be paid, while students' working hours remain unpaid. Yet we're the one doing the largest part of the work: the time spent learning is also time spent increasing the value of our future labour. Exchanges between students, namely in the writing of a common term paper, as well as exchanges between teachers and students, participate in producing value for both parties. The value produced by student labour is both a use-value, in the form of skills and knowledge, and an exchange-value, in the way that a degree increases a worker's monetary value in the labour market. Student labour is the result of an activity and can be appropriated by other

2. For Ontario, consult James Attfield and Isabelle Couture, *An Investigation into the Status and Implications of Unpaid Internships in Ontario*, 2014, p. 36. Online. For the United States, consult Gardner, Phil, *The Debate Over Unpaid College Internships*, p.6. Online. We didn't find any overall data for Quebec and Canada.

3. Reproductive labour being free is often justified by the difficulty to quantify it, since it's considered a calling, self-sacrifice, or an act of parentage or solidarity. Yet it has no real cost or limit precisely because it isn't recognized as labour; patience, listening, gentleness, smiles, these are all invisibilized tasks of women's labour because they're defined in terms of character, attitude, or intrinsic natural abilities.

4. The terms sex, race, age and nation of course not used here in their biological sense; they're constructed through social interaction.



people, such as teachers, administrations, and workplaces.

The recognition of studies as labour allows us to highlight how dynamic the learning process is and to politicize the conditions in which it's produced. This is where the subversive power of the demand for student wages resides: students would no longer be kept on the sidelines in matters pertaining to the curriculum, to how it's taught, in how learning is assessed, in how student production is valued, and in defining the parameters in which this production is used. The nature of our relationship would go from being "master and apprentice" to that of colleagues. Wages would therefore transform the nature of the authority between teachers and students, namely with regards to sexual and psychological harassment.

It's through, among other things, the nature of the hierarchal relationship between teachers and students within the educational system that violence is reproduced. This

truly is the hidden truth of how student labour is exploited⁵. If school, internships, occupies students' working hours and if obtaining bursaries or work contracts rests solely on the shoulders of teachers, how can we possibly respond appropriately to the appropriation and exploitation of students' bodies? Abuses perpetrated within the education system are generally trivialized, which gives free reign to situations of racism, sexism, harassment, as well as psychological and sexual violence. Supported by the State, school administrations impose discipline on this free labour, and in cases of violence, ensure the assaulters' impunity.

If granting wages for internships and all of student labour allows us to address the issue of violence between salaried staff and students, it would also allow us to better resist political repression. By considering students as workers, we'd be rid of the clientist or apprentice relationship that allows universities to more easily expel and filter out students who pay (too much) for the privilege

⁵ According to an investigation conducted on six Quebec university campuses in 2016, one in three people has been subjected to sexual violence since the beginning of their degree, and among all respondents, 36% report not having spoken about it to anyone else and the vast majority never filed a complaint. To learn more: Nadeau, Jessica, «La violence sexuelle, un fléau à l'université», *Le Devoir*, May 10, 2016..

to attend their institution. It's namely, but not exclusively, the lack of proper recognition (wages and decent working conditions) that reinforces the submission of students to a school's discretionary power.

ENOUGH TIME HAS BEEN WASTED!

In the wake of the psychology doctoral students' strike, the CUTE's political campaign aims to encourage interns to organize for a general strike demanding paid internships across all sectors of study. This women's strike can shed light on the true value of their labour. Women could demand an end to the theft of interns' working hours, the recognition of the reproductive labour through a wage, and the control over working conditions for all involved. This means opening the possibility of politicizing the schoolwork by discussing more broadly about student labour from a fundamentally feminist perspective.

An internship strike, led primarily by women against the historical reduction of their labour to an activity without any productive value, has the potential to reveal the contradictions within the capitalist and patriarchal systems by allowing us to consider the uncovered issue of unpaid internships in work sectors traditionally occupied by women. But that's not all. Although internships constitute the most visible part of the training process and therefore merit wages, the entirety of the training should be paid as well. Student labour being unpaid doesn't make it any less exploitable and, above all, the power relationship between students, professors, and employers in cases of violence and repression, is reinforced. Being unpaid doesn't necessarily mean being outside of the capitalist wage system's grasp, but rather means being completely submitted to it without any control over the conditions in which the work is carried out. Only when reproductive labour is removed from the informal and naturalized domains can it, through wages, cease to be taken

for granted and therefore can become the object of demands within social struggles. Of course, we continue to sell our labour as workers, but also attempt to seize a measure of control over it through struggle, therefore going beyond capitalist logic.

This struggle is, in a way, the student component of the struggle for the recognition of reproductive labour, namely for housewives, sex workers, and migrant workers. Student feminists have every interest in engaging in hostilities with the State on the issue of reproduction, of which school plays an integral part. Politicizing student labour contributes to our in-depth understanding of free reproductive labour and its implications in capitalist accumulation within the international division of labour. ♦

To know more

For a student critique of education practicum: Jeanne Bilodeau, « Les limites de la tolérance: Femmes et formation en enseignement », *Minorités lisibles*, No.1, 2016, p.34-39.

On the powers and paradoxes of the women's strike: Valérie Lefebvre-Faucher, «Grève de la reproduction», *Mots et images de la résistance*, 2015.

On the roles of housework, family and school in the capitalist economic system: Mariarosa Dalla Costa & Selma James, *Women and the Subversion of the Community*, 1971, p. 35.

For a synthesis of the struggle for paid housework in the 1970s: Louise Toupin, «Le salaire au travail ménager, 1972-1977: retour sur un courant féministe évanoui», *Recherches féministes*, Vol.29, no 1, 2016, p.179-198.

On the appropriation of women's time and bodies: Colette Guillaumin, *Sexe, Race et Pratique du pouvoir*, Paris, Côté-femmes, 1992, p. 239.

The School That Puts You Back in Your Place

BY SANDRINE BELLEY, NICHOLAS BOURDON AND VALÉRIE SIMARD

Thanks to Ulred Comba Rodriguez, student in social work at the Université du Québec à Montréal, Alfred Kokou Gbidi, an education student at the Université du Québec en Outaouais and Jilefack Ngami, a PhD student at the McGill School of Social Work for their testimony, corrections and time.

"Where is it, this multiculturalism ?! Jilefack asks herself when she discusses professional integration with other African immigrants. Indeed, many of her acquaintances who have immigrated to Canada find it difficult to get a job because, according to potential employers, they are not sufficiently steeped in Quebec culture and values. However, when we try to find out what they are, these Quebec values, the answer is rather evasive. Poor mastery of Quebec French¹, cultural codes, a particular corporate culture... there are many reasons cited for rejecting the candidatures of Mamadou, Marie or Ousman. Yet, it was because of the image sold to them of the open and welcoming character of its people that many made the decision to immigrate to Canada and settle in Quebec. They were also made to believe they would have the opportunity to get a job quickly, thanks to their qualifications and fluency in French. Multiple voices can be heard today denouncing this type of "systemic" racism, and we can't help but question the values of openness and tolerance in which Quebec public organizations and public figures take pride.

C'EST BIEN DE VALEUR

Since immigrant workers in Quebec are more often than not incapable of finding a job for which they are qualified, many of them are forced to work for free in order to accumulate working experience considered "relevant" in the eyes of the bosses. Yet the tasks they are asked to perform are those of

a professional. Jilefack reports, among other things, the testimony of a man completing an unpaid internship in an engineering firm who was asked to perform complex coding. Without prior experience, he would have been unable to carry out the required tasks. Lack of Quebec experience and potential cultural or linguistic differences are used as justifications for the difficulties encountered by immigrant students during their training courses².

For example, Alfred, a fourth-year undergraduate student at the Université du Québec en Outaouais, was forced to interrupt his third internship because of the racism he encountered. In his cohort, Alfred had only two racialized colleagues: one, like Alfred, took extra time to finish, and the other ended up dropping his studies altogether.

Alfred has 14 years of teaching experience in Togo, his country of origin. The first course, an initiation or observation period, was therefore credited to him. But difficulties arose at his first teaching experience in a school in the Outaouais region. Alfred first met the contempt of his associate teacher who seemed to want to discredit him in front of the students. As part of an educational plan that had been duly approved by the teacher, she corrected Alfred before the group on a grammar question that differed between the French used in Africa and the one in Quebec. The associate teacher also perpetuated the subordinate role of the trainee by refusing to give him the keys to the rooms, forcing him to wait outside the class before work. Finally, the associate teacher confirmed her bias toward black people when she left the following comment in her mid-term assessment: "One would expect that you would arrive late." In addition to assuming the responsibilities of the internship, Alfred must meet the needs of his family. To do this, he must work at

1. Jilefack conducts his work in an English-speaking context and asserts that mastery of the host language and accent is also a requirement of English-speaking employers.

2. Indeed, a recent study shows that immigrant students, as well as second-generation students, are over-represented among students in difficulty. Loslier, Sylvie. June 2015. The learning situation of Québec students from immigrant backgrounds: from theory to work experience. An exploratory study in the programs of Social Work Techniques, Nursing and Integration in the Nursing Profession of the Quebec <https://goo.gl/APR7tD>

night, 16 hours a week. Given the difficulty of reconciling work and study, he had once showed up at most with a ten minute delay...

These prejudices towards different cultural communities are maintained by employers and persist after training. As a result, many qualified individuals are denied employment and internships because they are perceived to be at risk of failing to understand certain social and cultural codes that are not explicit; they would not know how to deal with certain "clientele". In nursing and social work, for example³, working with a vulnerable or marginalized population seems to be an excuse for discriminating against immigrants.

Under the guise of defending diversity - openness to different gender and gender identities, different sexual orientations and different religious beliefs - employers and supervisors give themselves the right to question the ability of immigrant candidates to distance themselves from what they assume to be their values and beliefs in order to intervene adequately with a diverse population. This assumption further takes for granted that this openness is guaranteed among non-immigrant candidates, and forgets that the training course must notably be used to develop the know-how privileged by a profession.

« WHY DON'T YOU TALK LIKE ME »

When it is not "values" causing problems, it is the linguistic peculiarities, or even the accent of the immigrant. Although many immigrants have been educated in French, differences in vocabulary are often associated with incompetence. In the midst of the internship, the criteria of speed of execution is important and trainees are expected to already master all vocabulary specific to a profession. Again, this desire to find trainees who already possess professional skills blurs the boundaries between an internship and a job. For immigrant trainees, the pill is even harder to swallow. Faced with the non-recognition of their training and professional experience, they must again prove their



know-how in a context that is unfavorable to them.

These irritants are also present in the classroom as these students struggle to work with their non-immigrant colleagues. Some said they had been taunted in oral statements⁴, but the exclusion was often less visible. Supervisors seem to be especially worried about the quality of written French. Urled, a student in social work at the Université du Québec à Montréal, says she is often asked by supervisors how she copes with writing

3. On this subject, the research of Loslier collects many testimonials of students.

4. *Ibid*, p. 43

before they will agree to work with her. Since French is not her mother tongue, she is penalized in her work and examinations, which has an impact on the success of her studies.

« ...AND THINK LIKE ME ? »

Urled also witnessed the frigid reception of ideas and comments made by some of her fellow immigrants in the classroom. Sometimes confronted in their beliefs and cultures, many immigrants censor themselves. This concern is present among her colleagues, who refrain from participating in exchanges for fear of upsetting the sensibilities of Quebec students. In classrooms which are supposed to be a place of learning, exchange and emancipation, these students are prevented from fully participating.

In addition to their peers and teaching staff, students who are on probation must work in real-life situations, that is, with real students, real patients, and their real future colleagues. The support of the person in charge of the training thus becomes essential. When Alfred informed his associate teacher of the racist comments and messages he had received from students, she simply told him that she was aware of the lack of openness of the community to racialized people, but that she could do nothing about it. Alfred therefore had to resolve to end his internship

Other trainees are confronted with the impatience and barely veiled racism of their future colleagues. The rhythm and the frenetic working context in which employees evolve often do not make it possible to clarify the misunderstandings occasioned by mere marks of politeness, relationship to hierarchies and non-verbal communication. However, during the course, it is the whole person of the intern who is evaluated, and according to specific criteria that are localized socially and culturally. The many situations of ambiguity can cause frictions

with participants as well as with peers and have an influence during the evaluation process of the trainee.

AN OBSTACLE COURSE

Beyond the fact that the work situation can become unsustainable during the internship, the student has to find a placement ready to welcome them. In many programs, the trainees themselves must find an internship environment. The requirements of certain environments are high, equivalent to any job offer, and immigrant trainees are often penalized against their Quebec-born counterparts. Thus one of the students met by Jilefack had to resolve to accept an internship lower than that corresponding to her level of study because she could not place herself. Others are simply getting the door closed in their faces. This is the case of another student who confided to the researcher. While almost all of his colleagues of Quebec origin had already placed themselves, the student of Cameroonian origin and two other colleagues from Sub-Saharan Africa also applied to a company that sought trainees. They were then told that these places were no longer available ...

For her part, Urled explains that she is sometimes asked some very personal questions: she is asked, for example, to confide about the suffering experienced in relation to her migratory process. On the one hand, these types of questions constantly bring her back to her status of foreigner, that of the "Other". On the other hand, she also feels that she has something more to prove, as if she had to appeal to pity to be retained. This is without counting the many cases of students who must accept to be relocated, sometimes away from their family, to add a Quebec work experience to their resume. According to Jilefack, it is difficult for immigrants to meet the requirements of employers. The people she met made many sacrifices without getting great results.

TO BE LULLED BY ILLUSIONS

In an article published in *Maisonneuve*⁵, Robyn Maynard draws attention to the history of colonization and the racial violence committed in the history of Canada. With reason, she asserts that it is not enough to console ourselves by comparing this history to the shameful past of our American neighbors. Indeed, in order to defy the current climate of racial hatred, the activist explains that it is no longer sufficient to deny a past of violence and hate crimes, arguing that we need rather to break with this legacy in order to concretely put into practice the national narrative of openness and tolerance on which Canada prides itself.

For if common values have been evident in the last 10 years (at least), it is more a question of attempts to exclude and reject the other than the opposite. Discussions on accommodations raisonnables and a proposal by the Parti Québécois to adopt a Charter of Values, among others, have contributed to reviving racial tensions and providing a favorable context for right-wing groups such as La Meute, and illustrate the existence of a social context increasingly tainted by open racism and xenophobia. More and more groups⁶ and individuals are currently organizing in response to this rise of the extreme right, .

Just as it is no longer enough to denounce ordinary sexism and change its behavior on a daily basis, it is insufficient to denounce racism only its most spectacular form. Beyond the virtual indignation skillfully shared in a Facebook status and the systematic like of the latest intersectional flavored article, current and future struggles should tackle structures that reproduce discrimination and social exclusion. Without pretending that it is a panacea, the question of internships helps to put the spotlight on many situations of sexism and racism that have an impact on the living conditions of racialized and

immigrant people.

These situations also exist outside the student movement, where there is a decline in full-time jobs in favor of an increase in contractual and part-time employment (atypical work). In a context where employers continually seek to reduce their costs of production and social rights become more and more intangible, many people are forced to agree to work for free in order to accumulate the necessary experience to hope to be hired or climb the ranks. A struggle of this sort makes it possible to confront the non-recognition of qualifications gained internationally, especially in the countries of the South.

The journey, marked by the pitfalls of immigrant and racialized students, is an example that adds to an already long list which shows the real role of internships. Of course, it is a place of training and learning, but the distinction between an internship and a job is very fuzzy. But education and internships serve, above all, to put one back in one's original place, whether you are a woman, a racialized person, a person with a disability, a person born in a working-class family or all of the above. ♦

6. Emma-Goldman Collective, Antifa, Solidarity Across Borders, to name but a few.





Chain Culture

BY PIERRE LUC JUNET

Today's professional practice of visual arts is representative of the deep changes that have disrupted the world of employment in the last thirty years. Amongst the many new jobs related to the densification of the cultural industry, a large number require multidisciplinary notions and practices. This is due to the fact that cultural workers, for the majority, are not the specialized individuals that they were in the past, following the daily mechanical rhythm of the industrial work life. The factory in which they evolved has changed; it is no longer this place of attachment where the work was lived at the rhythm of the long hours ensuing in the hum of the machines. Where we would manufacture massive amounts of useful products, such as shoes or textile fabric, we now find objects with an exchange value that need to be fixed in a context of cutthroat competition.

The reconfiguration of globalized capitalism, with a major development axis in the growth of the cultural industry, reveals at least two truths: the deterioration in working conditions, which will become worse, due to the competition between self-employed cultural workers, and consequently the difficulty of elaborating any form of union solidarity. In fact, in this new world where everyday a new struggle arises on the wobbly cultural market, the absence of any cultural union is being sorely felt. When working happens to function along networks, restructuring itself following the intensification of the workflow, Where the watchwords are fluidity, dynamism and mobility, the possibility for colleagues to organize themselves for the long-term in a common workplace is substantially reduced. In order to prepare them for this new work, stripped from the overwhelming demands of the labour movement, students in these disciplines are for the most part conditioned very early on in their schooling to respect the law of the land. That is why we strongly

recommend for them to engage in non-paid internships, where they will have the chance to immerse themselves in an adapted working environment. There they will be able to get a feel of the industry, its rhythm, its actual needs, all this in the interest of self-promotion, in order to boast attention from the employer. In other words, the freedom associated to the status of freelance worker and to make a living producing culture comes with its own bondages, and it is this self-willed servitude that will be discussed in this text.

It was formerly the master who for years taught the fundamentals of a profession (the rudiments of the trade) to the student. This ancestral tradition, anchored in conservatism and the respect of authority, fostered a sense of belonging to a community of work. The labour movement has woven its web, reproducing in the union's manly brotherhood the factory and workshops toil. We should take note of the new working community which results from modern learning in the times where the global factory standardizes its massive cultural production. In the heart of this world stands the University, which has lost most of its public character while trying to adapt to the market's needs, turning into a private business; the exploitative internship is one result. These volunteer internships, of a relative length that can last several months, give the bosses the opportunity to take advantage of a workforce that stands below the status of precariousness. Here is a concrete example of this situation: a reputed Montreal movie festival is looking, while we are writing this, for an intern from September to December 1st. The selected candidate will have to work four days a week at the employer's office during this period, and also for all the days of the festival, and finally three days a week following the festival. The numerous tasks that this person will be responsible for include ground logistics, general coordination and public relations.

The compensation for this work will be... a entry pass for all the activities for the festival activities and an OPUS card valid for three months. In these conditions, who exactly can afford to give away this amount of time for free?

The argumentation in defense of the unpaid internship is based on the following arguments: since the bosses are highly qualified and most of the times the internships are for their part students without experience, the first would give away more than they receive in the process. It is the experience, the working environment and the contacts that constitute the value here. Provide a salary on top of it would be inappropriate, since the intern is not truly able to work according to the real needs of the employer. The employer gives minor tasks to the intern and provides him in the first place with a working environment by showing him what (he can do) are his own abilities. What is in this situation the true interest of the boss? To be a good teacher. It is a classic but shorter and stripped-down teacher-student relation. The master wants his students to take advantage of his knowledge because he loves his work, and so the wheel turns. The risks that the bosses take are of the same order as those taken in the name of the progress of the industry. We cannot give a monetary value to the intern's work, because he can and sometimes must make mistakes when the boss is unfailing. In any way, the people who truly want to succeed in their working field will have to sacrifice a lot for their career. Only the best will get a job. It is a discourse fed with conservatism that is being broadly shared. The reality is nonetheless slightly different.

In my field of study (cinema), the internship posts that I see do not correspond to this traditional idea of transmission that justifies the absence of salary. We now find ourselves asking the intern to perform and we give him or her tasks that are becoming increasingly complex. The selection process is classic: a reference request and interview. In reality,

the apprentices are not who they were in the past. The relevance of the traditional transmission process was based on the patriarchal figure of the family father that was binding the student to his teacher in a relation of submission. Today, it is with an enterprise or a freelance worker that we sign a short time contract without any concrete future perspective. It is now truly the part of learning that results from autodidact practices permitted by the sharing of knowledge through Internet, for example, that is considered by the employers that are in first place looking for those who are not ready to learn as much as they are ready to work right away. The cinema festival that we previously cited is a good example of that: the objective is not to open doors to an intern to reveal to him a working environment that he could one day be a part of, but to exploit this intern in using him for tasks that the people in charge don't want to accomplish, in such a way that the event can just happen.

What we suggest here is that the reality of the non-paid internship in the cultural domain reveals the crisis in the training process and the limits of the academic



teaching. My own Concordia department has going through a transition the last couple of years. It has acquired its reputation by offering sound knowledge in a domain that had been until recently very selective and specialized, and by affirming its artistic and experimental inclination. This upheaval in the industry (in this case the passage from film to digital recording), and more globally, the densification of the cultural industry in its totality has had notable consequences on the service offered by the department. The demand is simply not the same anymore: everything is now going much more rapidly, for the technological innovation, the learning process, and the increasing demand for interns coming from the production houses and festivals. Non-remuneration is in fact evidence that the university is not adapted to this reality. The interns are neither students nor apprentices; they are young workers who are aware of the needs of the market, because they cut off the intermediary between themselves and the student or the university.

We are thus asked not to sell our skills through wage-earning, just like any worker, but to

give them away entirely, in the hope, which is all relative, that "it will end up paying". And why would not it pay off right away? Academic credits, however, are bought at a very high price: that of wage labour which most students have to do in their spare time, that is to say, holidays. Work or not, for many, it is the indebtedness with the student financial assistance. One way or another comes precariousness, we have to live with the minimum wage or a little more than social welfare to cover the ends of month. In these circumstances, the price to pay for the diploma, in addition to this shameful practice of unpaid internships, far exceeds the time invested to obtain it. Its value is very low compared to the suffering caused by indebtedness and poverty spread over a few years. Internships are ultimately the final insult of the end of the course, where we are told that more must be given to receive less.

For cultural workers, the key to success is flexibility, autonomy and mobility: a certain capitalist conception of self-management in which they are freed from the constraints of old entrepreneurial structures and, in many cases, of its bureaucratic syndicalism, which can no longer be distinguished from the bosses so much the collaboration between the two is patent. These and these are thus at the image of this boosted capitalism and its constant quest for economic growth. This growth to be achieved is challenged by the new international competition resulting from the economic reconfiguration that followed the end of the Cold War. The counterpart of a competitive salary with no bureaucratic structure to consider: the employee, often contractual, provides on demand and engages for a limited time. To be selected, it must stand out. The versatility of the candidate is an insurance policy for the boss who expects the future employee to be able to work at different stages of production. Young workers are therefore asked to be connected and self-taught, as fast as a high-speed connection, and capable of responding to the frenetic demand for



cultural production. We prepare them for the labour market by expecting them to be already ready to face the cruelty arising from a logic that stimulates competitiveness and division of labour based on a meritocracy in which odious inequalities reign. Moreover, the sexual division of labour, as well as the difficulty that racialized people have in claiming the most prominent positions, are violently maintained by the bourgeois, white and masculine tradition of the industry.

The necessary learning of multitasking makes things even more difficult. One must be operational on several fields at once. When you're in the video business like I am, it's not uncommon for people to be responsible for both filming, sound recording, interviewing, video editing and post-production management. What's worse than working for shabby companies where you're specifically asked to do everything for nothing? We are made to understand that if we aspire to become a culture worker, we must sell ourselves to employers who will demand everything from us without understanding our work. Our economic autonomy depends on our ability to stand out and surround ourselves with the right people, that is, to place other cultural workers at our service. In order to carve out even a small place in this hostile world, one has to play the elbow and be an opportunist to death - elements that characterize those who are accustomed to political action: to the exception that here, sagacity and the political reflex are almost always at the service of personal success and almost never at the service of the common good. Formerly, artists had time to create because this time was free from work. Bourgeois and petit-bourgeois could represent the hard life of the proletarians and mingle in the great discussions about their future. Today, the very logic of work is integrated into the artistic process until it

becomes one with it, projecting artists in the historical time of Capital and making them proletarians of a new type.

In addition to the painful contradiction between, on the one hand, the need for these workers who are often deprived from organizing themselves according to the position they occupy in society and, on the other hand, the brutal competition that force them apart, one can also be distressed at the silence of many political organizations on this subject, and particularly in the so-called combative student movement. Although the number of students is still rising in programs with a cultural vocation, this movement is struggling to produce an analysis capable of reaching much of their immediate reality: the internships, the first contracts as part of their future job. This echoes the almost total absence of a political culture in this field, which obviously has repercussions in the world of work. This is borne out by the fact that organizations for the defense of cultural workers are essentially apolitical groups for the defense of rights confined to a juridical-legal support role, such as the Quebec Writers' Union and regional councils for culture. The lack of analysis and political strategy is overwhelming and reflects the difficulty of traditional social movements to renew their practices of struggles and their ways of apprehending these new categories of workers. The question of political organization then becomes urgent and it begins where the social relations apprehended at work are inculcated the most hastily: in the classes. Contesting unpaid internships is thus an opportunity to challenge the apathetic situation that characterizes the Quebec cultural milieu, not so much in its production as in the relationship of the workers of culture towards the economic powers who try to exploit it. ♦

Contempt as Our Salary

STUDENT WAGE

BY THIERRY BEAUVAIS-GENTILE AND LOUIS-THOMAS LEGUERRIER

Much more than a mere amount of money associated with a particular task, wage earning is a system, an institution, a social relationship enabling the collaboration between individuals on which the collective reproduction of society is based. The many critical theories of the capitalist system have shown that this seemingly simple social relationship in fact involves a struggle between opposing interests, a power relationship involving flights, violence and constraints, through which the workforce of employees is exploited by the employers who appropriated the latter in exchange for a wage. This exploitation of wage earners by the employers, who fix and dispense wages, is the central theme of what has been called the labour movement since the nineteenth century (and which is now falling into oblivion). Approaching the critical analyses of wage labour in depth is not possible here; it is simply a matter of recalling that it was because it was experienced and problematized as a relation of power between opposing interests that this one, as a social relation, gave rise to the emergence of the labour movement, whose action has been in many respects decisive for the social advances of the last two centuries. By allowing the constantly disadvantaged part of the wage relationship to assert itself and to claim a better life, the workers' struggles have brought to light the deeply political nature of wage labour. Thus, in the hope that the student movement will once again become the vehicle of an offensive against the right-wing policies of the government, we propose to you the beginning of a reflection on the practical necessity and the subversive potential of the demand for a student wage.

That which makes wage labour a space of struggle rather than the exercise of pure and simple domination, or in other words, that which gives a certain power even to

the most exploited of the wage-earners, is the recognition - implied by the existence the very existence of wages - that their work is precious, even indispensable for the patrons who appropriate it in exchange for a retribution. That is why employers must take over this labour force through the wage-earning system, thereby establishing a relationship by which they become dependent on the workers at the very moment when they exercise the power conferred to them by the ownership of the means of production. This conception of wage earning is more and more abandoned in favour of a so-called conciliation of the two parties and is rendered unrecognizable by the constantly repeated spectacle of the collective bargaining of collective agreements by trade unions. It is nevertheless reaffirmed whenever employees claim their right as possessors of a labour force essential to society. And such a situation has not ceased to happen again: even the current bankruptcy of trade unionism and the immense void left by the disappearance of the labour movement could not completely alter the consciousness that workers hold a certain power over their bosses.

Of such a consciousness, the students are, unfortunately, deprived. The Quebec student movement, having borrowed its organizational and ideological principles from the labour movement while practicing a unique trade unionism (since it is not governed by the Labour Code), has repeatedly asserted itself as a political force and social impact. This has been achieved in particular by triggering general strikes which, when the conditions are met, are likely to have an impact on society as a whole. However, since this balance of power between the students and the rest of society is not part of the social relationship of wage labour, it must be formulated differently by those who assume and defend it. Since they are

not employees, students who wish to combat the deterioration of their study conditions must first refute the idea that their activity, being totally unproductive and therefore unnecessary for society, represents a luxury whose costs should be borne by them.

Faced with such a situation, the student movement, through its campaigns and struggles, has developed a skilled discourse to demonstrate that since higher education brings benefits for the whole society, it is as a whole that society should help to support it; both morally and financially. In order to do so, activists who promote student demands and struggles must base their arguments on a projection in the future, inviting us to consider all that those who have had access to higher education can then realize on the market work. It is true that the official discourse of the ASSÉ, unlike that of the FECQ and the former FEUQ (now the UEQ), is much less focused on the future productivity of students - which would fall directly in the logic of the "knowledge economy" - and on the "right to education", in a citizen-like sense: education must be accessible to all, since it trains citizens. Now, in our capitalist society, citizenship taken outside the relations of production does not mean much. We know all the contempt to which the "citizens" are condemned, who for one reason or another are excluded from the labour market. Attempting to value the student condition by means of the concept of citizenship only places the students in the category of assistants, that is to say, of all persons whose activity is judged - unjustly in our opinion - unproductive and superfluous by political power. Rather than responding to this violent exclusion by giving it citizenship value, it would be necessary to redress the injustice it represents by forcing the power to redefine the notion of work.

By giving guarantees as to the future productivity or the civic value of the students who will later be employed, the delicate questions posed by the situation of the student are avoided compared to the rest of

society. The most burning of these questions is the following: is it possible to assert that students - as students and not only as part-time employees during their studies - are subject to what we have called exploitation above? We think so. Indeed, the activity of the students does not consist of making use of a service, which would be offered to them at a higher or lower price. It is a productive activity that society as a whole enjoys in the same way as it benefits from all other productive activities, even before the transition from studies to the labour market. This is obvious in the university, where the work of the students in the research groups coordinated by professors (paid only occasionally, often simply exchanged for school credits) directly fuels the university market, continuously providing new material that these teachers can use in their grant applications. The scientific articles written by these students are never remunerated, except indirectly in the form of scholarships obtained by competition in a totally elitist and unequal manner. This is also clearly the case for college technical training programs in which students perform tasks for which they will be remunerated once they have arrived in the labour market. That the years of training required to obtain a technical diploma are not considered to be work, whereas any period of training in a proper job is remunerated in the same way as the work done subsequently is an aberration that it would be high time to call by its name. And this name - let us repeat it at the risk of abusing a term practically disappeared from the current vocabulary of the left - is exploitation. It is as if the students were to suffer the effects historically associated with the social relationship of wage-earning, namely the objectification and commodification of their productive activity, but without benefiting from the wage which represents both a material compensation and recognition that the world of work is crossed by an irreducible balance of power between workers and employers.

The discourses that we hold about the

condition of the student never grasp the student as such. That is to say, as a person whose work is to study, but always as a future or as a part-time employee, or as a citizen. This is borne out by the current campaign by the ASSÉ on student precariousness, which insists on a revision of the system of student financial assistance and a raise of the minimum wage to \$15 per hour, while passing almost entirely in silence the question of the unpaid labour exploitation of student work. The fact of fighting against student precariousness and consequently demanding greater financial support for studies reveals the relationship between students and society as a relationship of assistance. It is precisely this relationship that must be broken by claiming the recognition that the activity of the students is productive and that it therefore demands to be an employee rather than an integral part of a system of assistantship which despises, infantilizes and dispossesses the students of their work. This stubbornness of the ASSÉ to denounce only a hindrance to the inalienable right to study is the most striking symptom of the present subjugation of the Quebec student movement. The official student union movement itself now reduces education to a simple service which requires at all times the benevolent support of the State and student work to the unproductive activity of a disadvantaged class. It creates this fad, which he calls a "student class," and thus encloses the students in their powerlessness by separating them from the class of the workers, while reinforcing the general blindness in the prism of which the education appears as a generous gift to the students who are still in service there for thousands of unpaid hours.

The most striking proof of the importance of the work done by the students in the present system is the formidable effectiveness of student strikes. It is always amazing to consider the inexhaustible source of problems for the managers of society, the interruption, even if only temporary, of an activity deemed as unproductive as higher

education. It is a strange spectacle (that we have witness in 2012) the one of a Prime Minister first asserting with a shrug that the strikers depriving themselves of the service they are given will be the only people penalized by the strike only to pass special laws in the National Assembly to force the return to class when the strike a few weeks later. It is only when he has no other recourse that the power resolves to name publicly what is the strength of the students, namely, that without their work nothing would go away. The explicit inclusion of their activity in the category of work, through wages, makes available to students the awareness of participating in society as well as the possibility of using this participation as a political power. The creation of committees promoting the demands of student wage earners and organizing themselves independently of ASSE, as well as of any other political group that does not officially recognize studies as work, seems to us the first step in a possible renewal of the fighting student movement in Quebec. ♦



A Struggle for All the Studying Moms

BY MÉLISSA RENAUD IN COLLABORATION WITH GENEVIÈVE VAILLANCOURT

June 12. 1 PM. We meet in a café to write the text on parental work. Our goal is to rework a presentation that Méliissa made during the panel on women's work, held at UQAM on March 8th. Baby Edgar, 3 months, accompanies us. It's too hot. He has not slept since 6:00 am, it is 34 degrees outside. He is so tired and overwhelmed by the heat that he constantly groans. We feel him: one coming from Saguenay and the other from Bas Saint-Laurent, the heat, it gets on our nerves. No way to get him to sleep in his stroller. Hold on. We'll move it to the other side of the table, so it is going to be easier to swing. Failure. Yet we were almost there! Resigned, holding the baby in one arm and the computer keyboard with the other hand, we're trying to find the main thread of this text, to stay focus through the screams, the pacifier falls, that we then have to rinse, before putting it back in his mouth. Genevieve offers her breast, the baby is not interested. Genevieve replaces her bra. Oops, we left the bottle at home! We're hoping not to need it. At worst, there is a Jean-Coutu nearby, we'll go buy one. Is it still worth spending money or shall we go home? What were we talking about already? Huh yes. Parental work through our experience.

I think it is important to look at my career as a social worker, since the jobs in that field are mostly occupied by women. I have been working for over 15 years now and have had to deal with really difficult working conditions. In shelters, the tasks are mainly related to care work: cleaning, preparing meals, bathing, changing incontinence pants, etc. All this for a salary that often approximates the minimum prescribed by law, without sick leave, with evening and weekend shifts. Once I had to leave work for a week, at my own expense, because my child was sick. Also, in this kind of services under the public-private partnership, there are generally not many "back up" employees. So when a colleague gets sick, you are asked to replace them, even if

you have just worked 5 or 6 days in a row. I have always felt a lot of pressure from my employers to comply with their requirements in terms of availability, which is really not easy when you have a child in shared custody. I constantly had to fight for a decent schedule, in keeping with my parenting role.

Besides, let's talk about the famous shared custody. I have already been told that I am not a true single mom, because every other week, I was in "child break". I would like to emphasize that shared custody does not mean shared responsibilities. When something goes wrong with school, the mother is called first. It was also me who handled the invisible work of reports evenings, Christmas concerts, medical appointments, etc. So even when my child is not at home, I remain his mother and I have things to manage. It's hard to get rid of the perfect and devoted mother's straitjacket. But little by little, I made small personal revolutions. I allowed myself to miss report evenings, Christmas concerts and delegated some appointments.

I started my undergrad studies in Social Work in September 2013. At that time, I was working full-time as a social worker. So I decided to go to school part-time. During my first university semester, I got ill. A little cold. Yet this little cold was hard to heal and my physical health really deteriorated. I went to the walk-in clinic several times, but I was told that it would go away, that I had to drink water and rest. I spent all my sick leave at first, and then, my accumulated overtime. Finally, a little before Christmas, I made an appointment with my doctor, because I was really at the end of my rope. She diagnosed me with pneumonia and on top of that, I was obviously having a burnout. So I went on sick leave. During the first few days, my doctor threatened to put me back to the hospital, because I was unable to rest. I had so many things to manage: unemployment, insurance, etc. Then, throughout my sick leave, I have been really "lucky" because my insurance agent has called me every week to find out how I was doing. He asked me on a scale of 1 to 10 how I was feeling, and then asked me when I thought I would go back to work. It is truly frustrating to realize that, despite the fact that one takes care of others, in the end one's not even allowed a



moment's rest to get back on one's feet. After four months, I went back to work. Obviously, a few weeks later, everything started again, because basically nothing had changed; I still had the same difficulties with my employer about my work schedule. I resigned shortly after my return.

I decided to start full-time studies. I wanted to take a break from my life as a full-time worker and invest solely in school. I thought that my life as a student would be really more relaxed. I also thought I could do it by tightening my belt a bit and by adopting a "simpler" lifestyle. But how to make it simpler when one is precarious? I was quickly disillusioned. I got almost nothing from Loans and Bursaries, because I had had too much income during the previous year. With a full-time courseload, I was unable to work enough to support my family. Then with evening classes and lots of group work, my life as a student ended up being not relaxing at all. At the end of that year, I almost dropped out, crumbling under bills and debts, but above all morally exhausted. Fortunately, I was hired at the Comité de soutien aux parents étudiants de l'UQAM (UQAM Student Parents Support Committee), which allowed me to have a little financial relief (while combining two other jobs "on the side" to catch up on my bills).

Even though that year was calmer, I still had a gray cloud hanging over me. I saw unpaid internships coming and I was wondering how I was going to cope with it financially. I once again thought of giving up. Fortunately, I have a good network of social and family support (strongly feminine, let's face it). My sister and sister-in-law offered me to live in the basement of their house in Longueuil with my son. I said yes, I did not have so many other options. I feel really grateful to them for hosting me, but it was not always easy. We have had some conflicts and I was afraid that the relationship between us would suffer from it. It is no easy matter to reconcile different lifestyles and share intimacy, with four people living in a small house. In addition, my son and I were uprooted from our social network thus we felt isolated a few times. I cannot help but think that if I would have had paid internships, I could have kept my apartment and we would not have been forced to live through all that stress and upset.

Moreover, this solution (moving with a family member) is a false good solution in itself, since it is an individual one that comes under my privilege of having a family network that supports me.

Despite my hardships, I am conscious of being a privileged person. I am white, I was born in Canada, I am a cisgender person, I already have a diploma and work experience, I have a good social and family network. Although there is no typical portrait of student parents, people asking for help at CSPE-UQAM are almost exclusively women (I leave it to yourself to draw your own conclusions), often immigrants and/or single parents. The experience of certain student parents is a true warrior journey: over-indebtedness, non-access to daycare services, evening classes, unpaid internships, lack of time to invest in their studies, difficulties related to immigration, violence of all kinds, etc. The situation is particularly intense for female students in education who must support a full-time study pace and complete four unpaid internships during their education.

4 PM: Three hours later, after we've moved to Geneviève's hoping to put the baby to sleep and to improve the text's language level, we're completely exhausted. Yet we realize that the thread we have been searching for hours was right there in front of us. We do not need to quote sociologists to make our point (even if it is not the desire to do so that is lacking, we're student parents and we like theory too!). Our paths, far from being isolated cases, illustrate very well our point: by their free and unlimited character especially, the parental and academic works are intimately linked to one another. Their logic of exploitation plays against women. It is to leave behind none of these moms that it is necessary to generalize the fight for paid internships without confining it to certain programs or levels of studies. We only have to improve the text here and there, between two bottles or sessions of duties. Satisfied with this, we're returning to our respective lives, those of soccer mom of a teenager and a mom of an infant, who try the best they can to be activists through all that. ♦



For our articles and more info:

DISSIDENTES
TRAVAILETUDIANT.ORG

ISSN 2561-1100 (print)
ISSN 2561-1119 (online)