

Québec youth are transforming their society

By [Vincent Greason](#) | May 29, 2012 5:00 am | 1 Comments

An Open Letter

Greetings to my friends in the Rest of Canada:

I am writing because I am very concerned that English Canada is not getting accurate information on what is happening right now in Québec. Particularly lamentable is the CBC and the Globe and Mail coverage.

You are being presented with a lot of information about a few demonstrators who have a political agenda and who use aggressive tactics to get across their message. The media, and particularly the English media, are focussing all of their attention on this “violence” and are consequently missing the point.

Something is happening right now which is changing Québec. Québec youth are transforming their society. The current social unrest is happening entirely outside of the “traditional vehicles” of social protest: trade unions, community groups, the women’s movement. What started as a protest about “student fees” has become a questioning of the legitimacy of the State, brought about by the way in which the Charest government has managed the crisis.

Youth rage is articulate, focussed – and non-organizationally directed. Young people are determined to make the State accountable to the people. And young people are determined to have a say about the nature of the State which will be left to them by my generation.

Right now, young people are – as a generation, if I can speak very generally – very worried. And they are disillusioned. The legitimacy they accord to the State and the respect they have for the law have been seriously eroded because of recently adopted laws and regulations which are unjust, violate human right and are not enforceable. Further, the police, charged with applying the law, are behaving arbitrarily and (at least in Gatineau) in a way which does not incite respect.

However, the issue is no longer about student fees and it is not just students who are angry. The students have coalesced around them a large (how large is not yet fully known) part of the population.

All of a sudden, the issues become quite broad. Much of the population opposes Charest’s Plan Nord and his plan to develop the shale gas resources of the St-Lawrence Valley. The Charbonneau Commission investigating government corruption in its dealings with the construction industry opened last week: much of the population believes the Government to be corrupt.



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There is also huge anger in Québec directed against the Harper government: the dismantling of the gun registry, the purchase of the F-35s, the robocall scandal, the rejection of Kyoto and its embrace of the oil industry and the tar sands development.

With the announcement of changes to the EI legislation last week, I suspect that the unions are about to become very active and join this movement of social unrest. This is significant because the three major demonstrations related to the student strike (March 22, April 22 and May 22, each of which brought more than 200,000 people onto the streets of Montréal) were done with virtually no trade union involvement.

A small prophetic note: if the student strike is not settled, there will be another monster demonstration on June 22, two days before the Saint-Jean Baptiste celebrations. To the level of student mobilisation, add the nationalist fervour of the St-Jean and it will make an explosive content. But I digress.

My Québécois friends could surely nuance what I have just written. But I am sure that they will all agree – and this is why I am writing: the student strike is not about rock-throwing, shattered windows, Molotov cocktails and smoke bombs in the metro. Some groups use these tactics for their own ends – which have nothing to do with the student movement – not the FECQ, FEUQ nor la CLASSE.

The student strike is about hundreds of thousands of young articulate citizens organized in new ways; it is about creativity, about “la fête”, about tenacity and about political will.

The student strike is about hope – it is utopian. Utopia: not in the sense of what is not and can never be, but in the sense of that which is not yet but which is coming.

This is why thousands of people, day after day and night after night, are descending into the streets of Montréal, Québec, Sherbrooke, Gatineau, Rimouski and elsewhere. Some are wearing masks, some have wooden spoons and a pot and some bring their strollers. All of them are contributing, in their own way, to the “something” which is being born in Québec. Will you join us?

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P.S.: If you wish to get a better sense (than the mainstream media provides) of some of the issues at play, below are links to four videos I recommend watching. Some are in French, but hey, you all went to high school, right?

1. On the wearing of masks in demonstrations. Of course masks have been used for centuries to express political views. Not all masks are baklavas worn by urban terrorists. Unfortunately neither Montréal’s new regulation, nor Québec City’s, nor the about-to-be voted Federal law makes this distinction. Click [here](#) to view this video.
2. There have been three demonstrations during the student strike, each one bringing more than 200,00 people to the streets of Montréal. The first two were on March 22 and April 22. Click [here](#) to view a video documenting last week’s May 22 march.

3. Since the adoption of Law 78, popular discontent has only grown. Since last Saturday a new spontaneous citizen movement has sprung up: Les casseroles (Pots and pans). Total improvisation. At 8 pm precisely – in many Montréal neighbourhoods, in Québec, Sherbrooke, Rimouski – people come out of their houses with pots, pans, wooden spoons, their kids, dogs and they head to the nearest corner. Then one corner moves to another, the crowds becoming larger and the accompanying noise becoming louder. This is a political protest – in favour of the students and against the Charest government. Click [here](#) to view video.

4. A video which recently went viral. This is a letter from Christian Nadeau, a University of Montréal Philosophy professor, to his students. It is extremely moving and well done. Click [here](#) to view video.