



One Man's View

## Of Student Syndicalism

(Editor's Note: The following article on the concept of student syndicalism has been compiled from a report written by a 24-year-old U of A graduate student in sociology, Peter Boothroyd. Boothroyd organized a seminar on the subject this May, and prepared a report on its portions of which appear below. The seminar was attended by 19 student leaders from across the West, who travelled to Fort Qu'Appelle, Sask. to meet Quebec students who briefed them on student syndicalism. The seminar was held with an eye toward possible implementation of syndicalist philosophy in Western Canada.)

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By PETER BOOTHROYD

Most often the discussion locked on to one of a limited number of specific questions regarding the nature or value of student syndicalism. Below is my attempt to present these questions as they were posed, and at present what I understand to be the answers as they evolved. You will recognize, of course, that both the questions and answers are couched in the terms most meaningful to me.

**Q. Is student syndicalism something of general application or just something that can be applied to Quebec today. i.e., is student syndicalism simply another manifestation of, and justification for, French nationalism?**

A. Certainly it is tied up closely with the general increased tempo of social and political activity of all kinds in Quebec today. The practice of it in Quebec obviously reflects the conditions of that nation, its history, aspirations, concerns. As a perspective on the student in his university and societal settings though, student syndicalism is a philosophy relevant to any university. Louis and Richard (the two Quebec students present at the Qu'Appelle seminar) urged us to examine our own history and problems in the West as a precursor to really understanding, let alone applying, student syndicalism.

**Q. Accepting that people should be concerned and active as citizens, should they as students concern themselves with social-political issues? Should student councils, elected for specific tasks, presume to speak for students on matters not related directly to student affairs?**

A. 1. The student union (or syndicate), in politics, an intermediary body. i.e., like professional associations, chambers of commerce, labour unions, home and school associations, etc., the student syndicate can apply power on the government to realize its demands. Intermediary bodies allow the individual to have more effect in the politics of his society. In order for the student to have any effect on government policies, (as he should, he must be a part of a body that maintains some influence.

The individual student is powerless, so, it is logical that he should express his concerns through a body with power.

2. The syndicalist definition of a student is one who is already actively contributing to society by developing knowledge, and to some extent disseminating it. The student maintains a special functional relation-

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Exceptional circumstances apart, no letter should be more than about 300 words in length. Short letters are more likely to be published promptly—and to be read.

ship to society, and he, like other groups, should speak from this position.

3. If student government leaders were to campaign, not only on issues relating to students (to the extent that they even to that), but also on stands and actions they will take on social issues, they would, once elected, be legitimately expressing student ideas when they took stands and actions as student leaders.

**Q. What difference does students taking stands on social issues matter anyway?**

A. Students can develop a form of power if demonstrations, representations, etc., are planned carefully, and with an eye to having the public understand the seriousness of intent of the students. The students themselves though, must be able to take themselves seriously to the point of calling a strike if necessary.

**Q. How does the student syndicalist concept affect the way students act on affairs directly affecting them?**

A. Very briefly, the answer is: by placing emphasis on education as an active involvement in learning rather than a passive receiving and accumulating of facts; by seeing the students in an active relationship to society with responsibilities and rights in that society as befits any group contributing to that society in a special way; by the demands of students to participate in the decision-making of the university and the rights of all persons with the talent to attend university without the severe financial burdens now placed on students, i.e., by seeing the student not simply as a customer in the academic store, not as a citizen-in-becoming, but as an actively-involved member of the university community and of society, the students' demands become not the childish demands of spoiled kids

wanting more and not sure why, but rather the results of a well-articulated understanding of the value and nature of education and of a well-articulated concern for society and the world. Students' power then, is seen as responsibility rather than self-interest. This helps the students to understand and act and the public and university officials to react favorably.

**Q. How about the West though? Students never have been actively concerned either about the quality of their education or their society, on the whole. Are there even any issues here?**

A. It is true, that in Quebec, the activity there in all areas, the general awakening, makes that province fertile grounds for developing student syndicalism. On the other hand, there can be seen throughout North America, the beginnings of what some have called a new student idealism. In the West, the focus of this idealism, albeit dim, is becoming the condition of the native Indians. This concern, if imaginatively grasped, could engage the student body in the complete range of issues and problems in this society.

Within the university itself, fee hikes are very much in the eyes of students. The University of Manitoba activities over this issue, indicate that students in the West will become very active in demanding a stop to fees rising. As the Berkeley situation shows, once underway on one aspect of the quality of the university and the status of the student in it, students can come to ask radical questions about their university, and therefore, become fully involved in their university. Of course, at Berkeley, the conditions were clearly much different than those in Western Canada, where university educa-

## Quiet Revolt Comes West

By DON SELLAR

FORT QU'APPELLE—French and English-Canadian student leaders met May 14 in this small settlement 60 miles east of Regina to discuss a new concept of student government—student syndicalism.

But when the two French-Canadian student syndicalists arrived to describe the left-wing movement which has swept Quebec universities during the last three years, they found three western universities absent from the seminar and the dialogue.

University of Alberta at Calgary and the universities of British Columbia and Victoria didn't show up for the seminar, sponsored by the University of Saskatchewan, Regina campus.

Student leaders from UBC and UCIV said before the conference they would stage an "intellectual boycott" because student syndicalism is not applicable to student government in British Columbia.

Sessions went on without the three universities.

The two U of Montreal syndicalist leaders, Richard Guay, 21, a law

student and Louis Legendre, 21, a science student, represented the Union Generale Des Etudiants du Quebec (UGEQ) at the three-day seminar.

UGEQ is the French-Canadian equivalent of the Canadian Union of Students. It represents 55,000 students from three Quebec universities.

The two French-Canadians told delegates student syndicalism has already gained advantages for Quebec students, and has helped to replace Premier Jean Lesage's "quiet revolution" with a deeper, economically-based one.

"In three years of syndicalism," said Mr. Guay, "we in Quebec have developed the best system of bursaries in Canada."

Next year, the Quebec government will provide students there with \$20 million in bursaries through a committee made up partly of students.

"But the committee is not always sufficient to ensure achievement of our objectives," UGEQ's vice-president said.

He explained the syndicalist student governments of Quebec are able

to put pressure on government by organizing extensive press campaigns, lobbying with labor unions, holding demonstrations, and ultimately, going on strike.

"But we march only when we are sure the public is with us. When you (westerners) march, it is actually an egocentric matter, with the public automatically accusing you of irresponsibility."

Both syndicalists claim Quebec's "quiet revolution" is merely a catching-up process which began shortly before the death of Quebec Premier Maurice Duplessis. They said the real revolution is yet to come, and when it does come, it will involve economic structures and social ways of life. Premier Lesage is gradually falling into disfavor among Quebec students, said Guay, because his government is steadily drifting to the right. "Slowly but surely, there is a ditch between the two generations which is leaving them farther apart."

"Lesage is slowing down because he wants to be Prime Minister of Canada, and is afraid of his image in Western Canada."

## Student Worker

FORT QU'APPELLE (Staff)—Student syndicalism began not in Quebec, but among the national union of French university students 19 years ago.

It is based upon the Charter of Grenoble, whose first article reads: "The student is a young intellectual laborer."

As the working man is a laborer, so is the student, according to the charter.

But French-Canadian syndicalists Richard Guay and Louis Legendre say the difference lies in the fact that the workman's labor is essentially manual whereas the student's is basically intellectual.

Since an apprentice plumber is paid to work in a preparatory productive activity, so should a student be paid in the form of a free education, syndicalists argue.

"No one pays to work," says Guay.

But in return for a free education, the Quebec students say students must involve themselves in the nation's social conscience instead of dwelling in apathy and a "what me worry" attitude.

This means students must fight for better salaries and society's general welfare.

University administrations, they argue, are coming between professors and students, who are both seeking to protect academic freedom and fundamental human rights, and as such are supposed to lead the academic community.

Student syndicalism, they say, is directed against impersonalization of the university by the administration.

The movement has two goals—to educate its members and the general population in order to make them conscious of society's problems so they may become responsible, obligation-fulfilling citizens, and secondly, to revindicate the rights of its members and the general population.

As another example, when protesting fee hikes, U of Montreal students carefully documented the fact, and spend much time pointing this fact out to the press, the government, etc., that poor people are prohibited from attending university because of the cost. Thus, the demonstrations are run not only on behalf of the present students, but as part of their social responsibility. The total student syndicalist concept makes such claims coherent and credible.

In France, student syndicalists have carried their concern for the impoverished student to the logical conclusion that students should be paid for attending university. Only then, can students who have financial responsibilities to their families, get as much university education as they have that talent for. Student syndicalism points out, that since students accept responsibility for society and are making a contribution to it by becoming educated, they should be paid as "intellectual workers."

**Q. If student syndicalism encourages full student participation, as a union, in the university and in society, what specifically have the Quebec students done in these areas?**

A. Within the University of Montreal, AGEUM is working on the basis of the "Parent" Commission's report on education in Quebec. Students are seeking complete jurisdiction over discipline, co-jurisdiction on administrative matters, and consultation on curriculum. Already, they have established their own financial sources through vending machines etc., and the right to spend this money as they see fit.

The Quebec students' involvement in society is manifested in the fact that their first strike was in sympathy with a janitor at U of M whom they felt had been mistreated.

UGEQ (Union Generale des Etudiants du Quebec) conducted a large sit-down demonstration in sympathy with the civil rights demonstrators in Selma, and has sought associate status in the international confederation for disarmament and peace (non-aligned federation of peace organizations), renouncing both the ISC and IUS, the two Cold-war (Washington and Moscow-orientated respectively) student federations.

Whether Western-Canadian universities should consider officially adopting the student syndicalist philosophy (as UGEQ) has is not really the questions. What is important, is that students responsible to the larger student body begin in earnest the process of learning about students' philosophies elsewhere, discussing these, developing their own philosophies, and then acting upon these according to their own situations...