

# Student syndicalism

*Students have all the rights and obligations of free, young citizens.  
They must be given total freedom of thought, expression and action.*

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Press

English Canadian student politicians have just discovered (or think they have) a new political toy: student syndicalism.

These two words have become the magic expression, the key to the future, the only ideology possible in a world where ideologies are reported to be dead. If all goes well (that is if it doesn't disappear first), the Canadian Union of Students should soon become the first English-speaking student union in the world to accept student syndicalism as its official dogma. And this, 27 years after the French and 12 years after the Quebec students made that move. But as a

## background

If an ideology can be described as "in" or "the thing to do", student syndicalism is the perfect example. The whole concept of student syndicalism is often misunderstood or dismissed as too radical, but it is a movement that is rapidly gaining support.

Originally a French idea, it was quickly adopted by students in Quebec, and is just now drawing converts from the rest of Canada.

This article is a basic outline of the terms and definitions of syndicalism, stressing the rights and obligations of the student and student organizations.

The author is Daniel LaTouche. Some of you may recall him for his outspoken role at last year's Second Century Week, here at U of A. He is well qualified for the task of explaining syndicalism. He is a political science student at UBC, and an ex-editor of the University of Montreal newspaper. He was also a vice-president of the Quebec, syndicalist-orientated student union, Union General des Etudiants du Quebec.

Whether or not you believe in syndicalism is irrelevant. It is a growing movement, and one to be reckoned with in the future. Understanding the basic ideology, its goals, aims and ideals should be important to all students.

former CUS president once put it: "It doesn't matter how long it takes us, as long as we get there some day."

Here are a few useful notions about the whole concept of syndicalism; even if you don't become a syndicalist yourself it is always useful to know what people are supposed to be talking about.

## ITS HISTORY

Such a nice concept could have only originated in France, more precisely in post 1945 France.

After five years of German oc-

cupation, after the involvement of thousands of students in the military resistance, after the clandestine setting-up of hundreds of student associations devoted to the struggle of the French nation against the oppressor, the moment had come for a change in the basis for student action and student organization in the country. After six years of war, French students had realized that the only way to prevent future catastrophes was to take over or at least play an active role in the setting of the future.

At the same time they didn't want a come back to the world of the thirties, with its arch conservative social order; they hadn't fought or died to rebuild such a world all over again.

From the moment the idea of student syndicalism was born, it was to receive its official credentials with the publication a few years later of the basic document, the only one in fact, of student syndicalism: the charta of Grenoble (La charte de Grenoble). Ten years later in 1958 when student syndicalism made its first entry at the University of Montreal this charta was, and still is, considered to be the Magna Carta of the ideology. It is important for anyone planning to be called a syndicalist to have a good knowledge of this document, unfortunately it has never been translated in English.

## THE QUEBEC CASE

In the traditional Catholic province of Quebec it is Maurice Duplessis who was the real father of this "prise de conscience" of the student class. The general apathy toward the social good that reflects itself in the last years of the Duplessis rule had also its tragic consequences for education. Our primary and secondary school systems, the best in the world we were told then, succeeded effectively in forming human sub-products easily integrated at the lower echelons of our colonial economic structure.

At the university level the lack of government funds prevented students from reaching the university and also prevented the universities (the French-speaking ones, since McGill had enough money from private sources and didn't think, at that time, of complaining) from developing normally.

1958 marks the turning point. Bypassing the university administration's interdictions, the Quebec students went on a general strike. For months after the strike three students sat permanently at the door of the premier's office requesting a meeting. The movement had been launched.

Incoherent, contradictory and weak during the first years, it will finally reach its final consecration with the founding of the "Union General des Etudiants du Quebec" in October, 1964.

## THE IDEOLOGY

One usually gets disappointed once he has discovered the basis of this apparently complex and mysterious ideology. At the start there is one definition and one axiom from which everything else is drawn.

**Definition:** a student is a young intellectual worker.

**Axiom:** there is no such thing as a student problem, there are



AUTHOR DANIEL LATOUCHE

... "no place for pseudo revolutionaries"

only student aspects of socio-national problems.

From both this definition and the axiom the rights and obligations of the student association are drawn. As an example we will present the charta adopted by the University of Montreal students. Even though each student group in Quebec possesses its own charta

there are no great differences among these, since they are all offsprings of the Charta of Grenoble.

## THE STUDENT

The student has all the rights and assumes all the obligations of a free young citizen, who by his intellectual work within the university community, is an apprentice

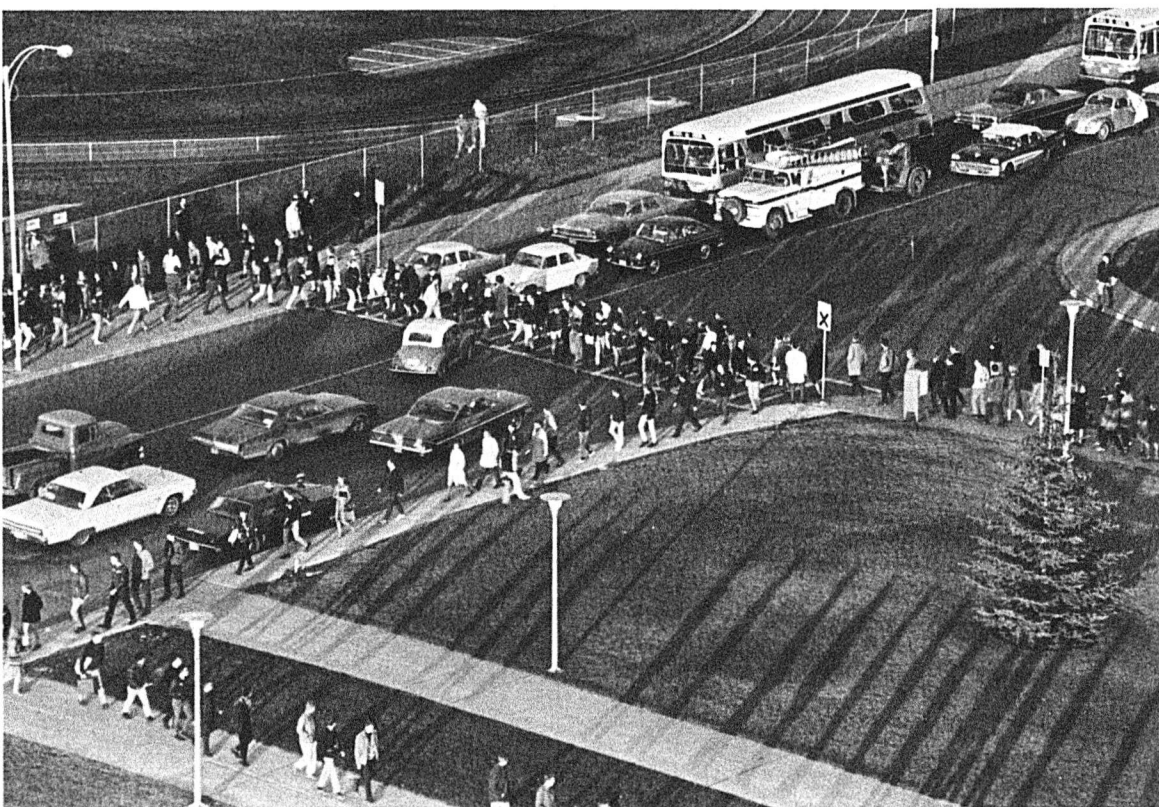
in a profession with which he will in the future serve society.

## RIGHTS OF STUDENTS

**As a free citizen:** The student is entirely responsible for his own actions, he is the first judge of his needs and interests. He must be given total freedom of thought, expression and action. This liberty must be complete. Consequently the university in respecting him must not interfere with affairs of the student and must not consider itself responsible for the actions of one of its students. No sanction or pressure must be undertaken by the university or the student body against an action or attitude of a student, especially when he is expressing himself (within the boundaries of the law) on questions of politics, morality, thought or religion. Except to protect itself against judicial measures, the student body must not exercise any control on the actions of its members, including those who have the courage to express their opinions through the student newspaper.

**As a young adult:** The student has a strict right to a future and a right to living conditions that will allow him to take over, to conserve and to develop the social heritage of his society. He has a right to influence social institutions and to contribute to their evolution. Youth must think over all cultural values and every social structure. He has a right to a dialogue with those in power since it is the contemporary youth who will inherit today's achievements. Youth must be prepared to judge what is being built for tomorrow since it will have to live under it.

**As an intellectual:** The student has a right to material conditions that allow a decent life of the mind. He has a right to bring society to give a primordial attention to cultural life. These last two rights are the basis of all stu-



A FORM OF SYNDICALISM AT U OF A

... Lister Hall students, taking advantage of their right to strike