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The Syndicalist view

by Daniel LaTouche

special to
Canadian University Press

Daniel LaTouche, currently studying political science at the University of British Columbia examines the possibilities of syndicalism in English Canada. LaTouche, a vice-president of the Quebec student union UGEQ at its inception, was previously editor of *Le Quartier latin* at the University of Montreal.

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 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 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:

THE IDEOLOGY OF STUDENT SYNDICALISM

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

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 student demands on society: abolition of fees, student salary, cultural centres, fellowships, libraries.

AS AN APPRENTICE: The student must be presented with an adequate education. His intellectual work must be considered as the exercise of a social, useful and indispensable function. For this the student has a right to a university free of constant financial problems and to a well-paid faculty doing research with all the necessary facilities in a milieu respectful of academic liberty. The student has a right in the education received, in the selection of faculty, and in the working instruments. The student must not be forced during the academic year to work extra-academically. During the summer such work must be in his discipline.

AS A MEMBER OF THE UNIVERSITY COMMUNITY: The student has a right to see that this community play a social role of guidance and innovation. He has a right to see that those who have received a university education live up to it. The university being a community of students and professors, many problems that arise in the community would easily find solutions if students could participate in the management of the university. The relations between the alumni and the university is of special concern to students for they will be judged by society. This forces the problem of the professional corporations in their function and roles.

AS A CITIZEN: The student must enjoy the rights and privileges of any citizen; he has the right to participate in the public life, in the task of defending democracy, in the responsibility of improving society. Not only has the student a right of being listened to. Society must be willing to respect his own rights, interests and obligations.

THE OBLIGATIONS OF STUDENTS

AS A FREE CITIZEN: The student must respect and defend liberty in all its forms and in every circumstance. He must be honest and subordinate his own interests to those of society.

AS A YOUNG ADULT: The student has a responsibility toward other young people. He must work to assure a constant renewal of his ideas and to prepare better conditions for those following him. Tomorrow he will take over in society; today he must prepare himself for this responsibility.

AS AN INTELLECTUAL: The student must participate fully with sincerity and honesty, in the intellectual life of his university community. He has the obligation to search for truth and to make known the results of his findings.

AS AN APPRENTICE: The student has the obligation to enlarge his horizons in his own discipline. He must integrate his studies with future needs of society. Study must be his principal activity, but he must not engage in this activity solely for his personal profit, but the entire social community must benefit from his work.

AS A MEMBER OF THE UNIVERSITY COMMUNITY: The student must be prepared to respect the autonomy of the university and its academic freedom. He is responsible for the good administration of the university. As an integral part of this community, he has the obligation to participate in its evolution and progress.

AS A CITIZEN: The student must play an active role, individually and collectively, in the social and political life of the nation.

WHAT DOES A SYNDICALIST STUDENT ASSOCIATION DO?

All the activities of the Student Union can be considered under three dimensions, those which perform services:

1. for the student
2. for the university community
3. for the society (or nation)

The services for the student includes such things as the traditional cultural activities, conferences, and debates. All these services must be free of charge in every single case: it would be illogical for the association to demand the abolition of university fees and itself create an equivalent discrimination in asking financial contributions to participate in activities.

But there is more than those traditional services: the student union must also work to end discrimination and privileges on the campus: this means the end of all fraternities and sororities, the existence of these organizations is contrary to the basic principle of student syndicalism.

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