

WHERE TO NOW,
STUDENTS?



ABERRANT PRESS

Not long ago, we stood talking around banners reading “la grève est étudiante, mais la lutte est populaire” (*student strike, popular struggle*).

Now we find the words dry in our mouths, hiding under our tongues. We have come down from our flights of fancy. The moments we fled the ordinary have receded, returned to fantasies. Only temporary ruptures in everyday life, and so they become ordinary. Like another national holiday, a little longer than Christmas, not quite annual.

Not long ago, we heard thousands screaming, rage exploding at the mere mention of ‘Charest.’ Now we hear the same shouts, with ‘Marrero’ standing in. Yet the shouts become whispers. The common will retreats to hiding in alleys, under windows far from the sun, hanging with the bats. Silent. A new king, a new queen, and again we cling to the coattails of the rich, drunk with trust, mouths stuffed too full of concessions even to speak.

The streets are littered with breathless slogans, the victory of false hopes in hi-definition, projected on the empty façades.

WHAT IS VICTORY? WHAT IS A STRUGGLE?

And all this passes as a blue curtain choking the air out of our dreams.

The associations, those who opened the invitation to strike, are the same who close it. Like usual. The radicals who pushed the Quiet Revolution to its limits are the same who now sit in the National Assembly, the same who hold a privileged voice in speaking toward the Quebec population on issues of economy, political relations, etc. Usual story.

There is no party line here to distill. This is no effort to go seeking warm blood to join one camp or another. It is an invitation to reflect, to ask ourselves what could come of our intentions, why we ran wild in the streets. To win a tuition freeze this year, only to vote in new hikes by the time we turn forty?

Or to chase the adventure we call insurgence to the ends of our lives.

We have learned of solidarity, of intention and passion. We have learned of joy, and how it feels to watch a line of pigs running from a crowd. We learned to speak of sexism, nationalism, colonialism, capitalism, and the state—not merely as abstract concepts, but as very concrete forces that touch us, and that we ourselves can fight. Was it all a big joke, or a piece of street theatre? Better still, a kind of real-life classroom, the better to write anti-oppressive behavior policies for offices and workplaces?

Let our answer be a ‘no’ that echoes from the cascades of collapsing institutions. Nothing is finished. We have won nothing, unless we remember the will to fight.

For a struggle without end...

We have won concessions. We have won memories. We did not win a struggle.

We have also won injured comrades, others banished from the island of Montreal, and monstrous piles of criminal charges. We did not win a struggle. And for it all, how many words has the dear Pauline Marois dedicated to our friends—criminalized, targeted, repressed? Not a one.

Already we see the aspiring managers of society coming out of the movement, their heads swollen up like a band of dicks in political science classes. The school of revolt, for them it has always been the school of recuperation, and control.

But what about the pious masses on their knees in front of Leo? I don't see them. Sure, plenty have already chosen sides. Those who see the social peace as a holy word: who believe to the ends of the world that in peaceful protest, and in the big head of the PQ, we will find a path to change (we can believe in). But are they the majority? Somehow, we don't think so.

Where are the festivals, the grand processions? Clearly, we don't seem terribly convinced. Or, convinced as we are that the earth is round and the coffee is decent at Tim Horton's. Yeah, the strike is over. So what? And we let it end there. Doesn't it make us think, to see that so-called victory doesn't yield the same passion as struggle?

We will never stay focused in class with the same intensity, the same clarity of intention we found in the street. As we broke the social peace, we also broke down the barriers that build up our atomized lives. We learned of the fevers and screaming wants we can find in crowds, unknown and anonymous. We learned to wake up at six and run to the blockades, joyful as if we were going out to drink with all our friends—even when we can barely roll out of bed at eight to go to school.

Before a student, still a student. Once in the struggle, and now already retired.

But this social struggle, the one spoken of in big words—where has it gone? Didn't we say that the red square was bigger than a few student demands? Of course, but we always say this shit! You didn't think we were serious?

We remember the grand arab revolution, the NATO bombs laced with freedom? The proud journalists raving about oil exports rolling out of Libya, not even twenty four hours after Khadaffi's death?

So? This isn't a revolt against our society. We're not idealists. As spoke the president of FÉCQ, "we used to work more with CLASSE. But now, not so much" (McGill Daily, September 20). No, we don't need words to understand each other. The intentions are clear enough. Us, we won. The rest of you, well...what? You're still here?

In the end, we wait only for the books printed MAPLE SPRING in big red characters in the store windows, the ink still fresh, just in time for the holidays.

Short films and slides of joyous young Quebeckers on the big screens in the Quartier des Spectacles, a lovely backdrop for the blue and white of a new nationalism.

So we return to the question. Where to, student? And the answer is simple enough. In fact, there is no question. We stay on, always in the same direction. A little pause on the road, then back to class. We could almost forget the strike even happened if not for the pictures on Facebook when we all gather around the laptop at friends' houses. Too often, the notion of victory comes with amnesia; the more we win, the more we find ourselves lost. And for what?

ON THE ROAD
OF DEAD IDENTITIES,
WE FIND
EVERYWHERE
ROCKS.