

# THE LAW UNION OF ONTARIO

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May 30, 2012

The Honourable Jean Charest  
Premier  
Government of Québec  
Édifice Honoré-Mercier  
835, boul. René-Lévesque Est, 3e étage  
Québec (Quebec) G1A 1B4

Dear Premier Charest,

The Law Union of Ontario expresses solidarity with the students in Québec who continue to protest the tuition increase and more broadly, the austerity measures that are being effected throughout Canada.

The student demonstrations in Québec have sparked widespread discussion on the accessibility of education. The tuition increase proposed by the Charest government comes from the view that the current method of funding post secondary education is fiscally unsustainable and that individual students should bear the burden of their education. This view heavily deviates from the goal of democratizing post secondary education identified by the Parent Commission and results in a number of unwanted repercussions, including the exclusion of equity groups that cannot afford a post-secondary degree. The red squares that many of us wear in solidarity of the student movement signify the impact that the proposed increase will have on student debt; it will leave students “carrément dans le rouge” (squarely in the red) and will trap students in years of debt.

Further, we recognize that the demonstrations are part of the greater struggle opposing neo-liberal austerity measures that are being proposed and implemented by various Canadian governments. The tuition increases, bursary cuts, and additional efforts to encourage donations from individuals and businesses are all part of the neo-liberal discourse of privatization. The Charest government’s proposals are indeed consonant with the way neo-liberalism operates—the use of state power to create an increasingly laissez faire environment while making efforts to decrease public expenditures. We see the hikes as an attack on some of the most vulnerable members of society and find parallels in our

commitment to oppose inequality that is fueled by government and corporate actors. By fiercely advocating against neo-liberal austerity measures, the students in Québec set an example for the rest of us to follow; they remind us that there is an alternative to passive acceptance of the status quo by taking deliberate steps to build a better, more equitable future.

We urgently appeal to the Charest government to repeal Bill 78: *An Act to enable students to receive instruction from the postsecondary institutions they attend* for the severe ramifications it poses to *Charter* rights. Specifically, Bill 78's provisions, which require protestors to give at least eight hours notice to the police force of the time, duration, and itineraries of lawful assemblies involving 50 people or more, and the various penal sanctions for failing to adhere to this protocol, will have a chilling effect on the section 2(c) right to peaceful assembly guaranteed in the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. The banal naming of the legislation is nothing more than a mask for the further criminalization of dissent. Further, we ask the Charest government to resume negotiations with students in good faith, and call for a moratorium on rising tuition fees. We condemn the police brutality, the arrests of peaceful protestors, and the intensification of policing activity surrounding the ongoing strike. Lastly, we protest the municipality of Montréal's attempt at hindering protestors by adopting the anti-mask bylaw.

Nous sommes solidaires avec les étudiants. Nous sommes ensemble.

-The Law Union of Ontario

cc Madame Michelle Courchesne, ministre de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport  
Fédération étudiante collégiale du Québec  
Fédération étudiante universitaire du Québec  
Coalition large de l'Association pour une solidarité syndicale étudiante

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The Law Union of Ontario, founded in 1974, is a coalition of over 200 progressive lawyers, law students and legal workers. The Law Union provides for an alternative bar in Ontario which seeks to counter the traditional protections afforded by the legal system to social, political and economic privilege. The Law Union is run by an annually elected steering committee. The Law Union has several collectives and working groups and has active chapters at many law schools.