

**During times
of universal deceit,
telling the truth becomes
a revolutionary act**
George Orwell



a bulletin for the student left

The Agitator

Only in the Agitator can you find regular coverage and reports of campus activism and politics from across the country. Beyond this regular coverage of anti-corporatization campaigns, counter-recruitment actions and picket lines, are discussions of strategy and tactics for activists, features on radical political theory, and commentary on key national and international political issues. The Agitator is more than just news, it's a forum for the student left; a vehicle to build a pan-Canadian student left network.

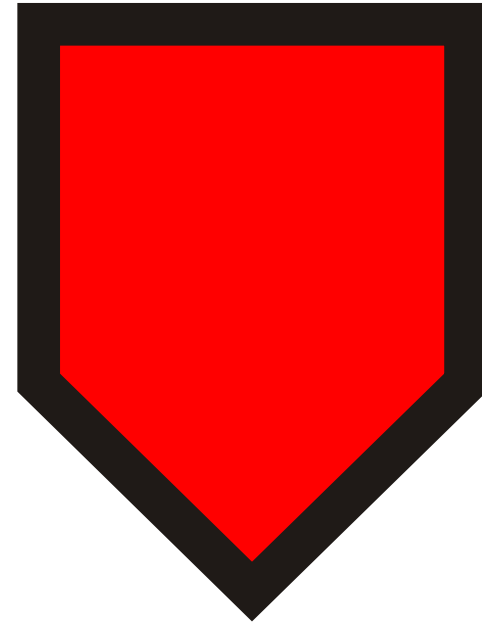
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an agitator's guide to



**building a
UNITED
STUDENT
MOVEMENT**

why we need a **UNITED** student movement

When students unite in a mass movement around demands for accessible, high quality post-secondary education, we can win. We saw this in Quebec in 2005, Mexico in 1999 and Canada in 1995. Since then, we've seen it in seven of ten provinces where students have successfully campaigned to drop fees, replace loans with grants, and more. The most effective way to achieve these goals is through a united student movement that can bring thousands of students - and workers - into action, whether through petitions, rallies or strikes.

Such mobilizations have the potential to force the government to concede reforms because over three quarters of Ontarians support tuition fee freezes and reductions. The Drop Fees campaign organizing towards November 5 has the potential to increase political pressure on McGuinty's Liberal government and force it to freeze or even reduce fees as they were in Manitoba and Newfoundland and Labrador.

Yet, while CFS-Ontario members are building a broad-based campaign to drop fees, there a number of student unions in Ontario who are not part of CFS-Ontario. Most of these student unions are affiliated with the Canadian Alliance of Student Associations (CASA). CASA split from CFS in 1995 when CFS led a 100,000-strong student strike against Income Contingent Loan Repayment schemes which would have dramatically increased tuition fees. ICLR schemes were part of the 1995 federal Liberal budget, a budget which made the deepest cuts to social programs in Canadian history. The CFS-led strike engaged and mobilized tens of thousands of students - and workers - and defeated the ICLR scheme.

CASA was formed by Liberal and right-wing student leaders and was actually funded by the federal Liberals who opposed the united CFS-led student movement which derailed its ICLR scheme. The federal Liberals gave CASA leaders a national platform that their small numbers could never have otherwise warranted. In many ways, the establishment of CASA was a state intervention to divide the student movement. CASA was a vehicle to re-launch the campaign for ICLR and higher tuition. Many former CASA leaders were rewarded for their loyalty with federal and provincial government jobs.

But the leadership of CASA is not the same as its rank-and-file members. As has happened before, even on campuses where student union leaders oppose campaigns to drop fees, rank-and-file students can be won to a strategy of mass participation in support of broad demands.

The Drop Fees campaign can help do this. In the process of winning new layers of students to action, many will question why their student union is not a part of CFS-Ontario, and can begin to build a constituency for a change in their student union. Campaigns oriented on mass mobilization are precisely what will help unite the student movement.

why we need a **REVOLUTIONARY CURRENT** in the student movement

Students need their student unions. Students also need to be united by progressive organizations like CFS-Ontario which have an orientation towards engaging students through large-scale campaigns. The Drop Fees campaign that we are a part of is but one example.

But elected student leaders are accountable to all their members, including both left-wing and right-wing students. This reality can undermine the confidence of progressive student leaders to take positions on issues that fall outside obvious "bread and butter" education issues. It can also slow the speed at which elected student leaders are able to respond formally to such issues when they arise. This helps explain why holding elected positions can have a conservatizing influence on even the most progressive student leaders.

Some radicals will say this is evidence of the ineffectiveness of student unions and that provincial and national student organizations are "part of the problem". But this criticism misses the point: a student union can only be as radical as its membership. Student union leaders who embark on a radical course with no meaningful base of support from the membership will ensure a backlash, such as electoral defeat to the right, and possibly a defederation campaign from CFS. This top-down "left-wing" strategy has to be discarded.

Alternatively, student radicals who abstain from engaging in student union elections can cede electoral ground to right-wing students who, if elected, won't hesitate to put the collective resources of the student union to work on reactionary projects. Right-wing student leaders have opposed freezing and reducing tuition fees, blocked progressive initiatives, and squandered student resources on defederation drives intended to divide and demoralize students and weaken the movement as a whole.

On every campus there are right-wing students and left-wing students, but the vast majority fall somewhere in the middle, carrying a mix of both progressive and conservative ideas. Radicals need to focus on winning this middle majority away from the right and towards the left. This can't be done through denouncing, bullying and intimidating them, only through patiently winning them to effective action and coherent politics.

This is why student radicals need their own independent organization. It's not to divide radicals from the student body, but to make the efforts of radicals within the broader student movement more effective in winning all those students in the middle to actively supporting a progressive movement from the bottom up. Revolutionary organization helps radicals to educate themselves and others about the lessons of past struggles, while also allowing radicals to collectively and quickly respond to new issues and developments that arise.

If this makes sense to you, if you're committed to fighting for a better world, consider joining the International Socialists.