

4 Living (Through) the Strike

What was it like to be a part of a mass strike? How did this new reality fit into people's lives? The chapters in this section are all testimonies that convey a sense of the strength of the movement as a lived experience, of months punctuated by demonstrations, picket lines, general assemblies, and comradeship; by victories and defeats. The experience of sharing these types of events with many, many people – or perhaps the knowledge that thousands more people were in the same boat, people which one had for the most part never met – defines the contours of a collective subject that lives on to this day.

The fact that the strike happened on a mass scale did not, however, mean it was experienced uniformly across social and geographical space. The first three chapters in this section were written from two different margins of the strike movement, namely by women and by people outside Montreal (the so-called 'regions' of Québec). The strike movement was indeed often heavily influenced by the direction in which men and Montrealers took it, leaving women and activists in the regions to chart their own course – as well as people of colour and queers, amongst others. The fact that many people at the margins of the movement were not able to organize as sustainably as its dominant group(s) was one of many major limitations

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to the strike's strength, and remains a challenge for the student movement in Québec to day.

Mélo die Chouinard and Myriam Arsenault-Jacques directly address the issue of the limits encountered by the movement from a feminist standpoint. They describe an uphill battle against media sources that focused on male-identified student spokespeople, and they talk about police repression of feminist direct actions and gendered violence – as well as the sexism they faced within the student movement, sometimes from people in the same demonstration as them. The strike movement's limitations also haunt Vincent Roy's diary, written before, during, and after the strike in Sherbrooke (a regional centre in south-eastern Québec), as well as Guillaume Néron's chapter on organizing in Saint-Félicien (a smaller town in the northern Lac-Saint-Jean region).

In Vincent's diary, he starts off as a student in his final year at the CEGEP in Sherbrooke who is skeptical of the idea of a student strike. He quickly joins the fray, and his deeply personal account of his involvement in the strike provides an idea of what it was like to be radicalized during the 2012 student strike in Québec – from a first strike vote, to picket lines, to demonstrations, to court injunctions, to defying court injunctions, to a final, unsuccessful strike vote.

In his piece on the strike in Québec's regions, Guillaume Néron paints a picture of impressive solidarity and growth in his town reaching beyond the student body, and charts a path for the development of a long-term regional student and social movement.

This section ends with a poem by Norman Nawrocki, a Montreal-based anarchist writer, that dovetails with the theme of new possibilities. Norman evokes the collective forces that emerged during the strike as they took revenge on the old world and give rhythm to something quite new.