

6 Organizing Against Repression

Strikers and demonstrators involved in the spring 2012 movement were met with repression at many levels: campus surveillance and disciplinary action, special legislation as well as a repressive use of existing laws, police presence and brutality, and the use of the court system to hand down injunctions against picket lines, to approve harsh release conditions, and to bring criminal charges against activists. While other chapters in this book address the physical repression faced by activists and the way tactics evolved in response (see chapters by Laith Marouf, Jaouad Laaroussi, Ethan Feldman, David Clément, and others), this section looks specifically at how organizers resisted repression head-on.

We hear from two initiatives that emerged to defend student activists (and others): in their report-back written after the strike, the CLASSE Legal Committee reflects on what they learned about the importance—and challenges—of legal defence work, while in her piece on faculty organizing against repression of students on campus, Adrienne Hurley discusses lessons for unleashing resistance within the professoriate. The third piece takes a broader look at the situation: Jérémie Dhavernas explains how the vagueness of the law allows it to be put to political use, creating a «state of exception» at any time without the official trappings of martial law or dictatorship.

This is Fucking Class War

Together, these three chapters begin to reveal the amount of energy and resources put into combatting, and thinking critically about, repression during the strike and its immediate aftermath. What is less clear from the chapters collected here is the longer-term movement-stifling effect that repression can have. For example, release conditions banned some of the most dedicated activists from associating with each other, attending demonstrations, and even in several cases from setting foot on the island of Montreal. Jérémie and the CLASSE Legal Committee point to the high number of people who became involved in the judicial system, many of whom were still waiting for their cases to be heard at the time of writing. Although none of these were fatal blows to the movement, they did raise the cost of participating in the movement for many people, and strained or fractured the organizing structures that were emerging. Their legacy continues to be felt.

Although the popular narrative claims that students were victorious in stopping the tuition hike and that the repressive Law 12 was overturned, many activists have noted that legal repression worked together with electoral recuperation to essentially force the strike movement to its knees by late summer 2012. One of the lessons to be learned here is the strength of the lockout as a repressive tactic in the context of a strike, and the challenge of mass organizing without meeting places whether on campuses or in the streets. Finally, we must recognize that although they were used in sometimes innovative ways, the forms of repression imposed on the 2012 student struggle had been developed in other settings: lockouts had been used against organized labour, release conditions had been used against sex workers and other street-involved people, phy-

sical brutality and creative re-interpretation of laws had been used time and again against various «undesirables» individually or on a mass scale. It is only through organizing across beyond the current limits of our movements and by sharing histories and experiences that we can begin to tackle «political» repression across the board.