

Quebec special law violates student rights and civil liberties

The Canadian Association of University Teachers is strongly condemning Quebec's Bill 78, the law tabled in Quebec to end the 14-week student strike, for violating fundamental freedoms of association, assembly, and expression.

"This special law is a terrible act of mass repression," said James L. Turk, executive director of the Canadian Association of University Teachers. "The Quebec government has opted to exert the heavy hand of the law as a weapon to suppress dissent."

Bill 78 makes it illegal to engage in peaceful assembly, a fundamental freedom guaranteed under the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. The law limits assemblies of 10 or more people, allows the government to defund student associations, imposes hefty fines on student demonstrators, and forces employees back to work. The law especially targets leaders of student associations who could be individually fined up to \$35,000 for continuing to demonstrate contrary to the law. For participating in a second demonstration, the fine doubles. For a student association supporting a demonstration, the initial fine is up to \$125,000 and doubles to \$250,000 for a second offense.

The bill changes the law for class actions so that student and other supportive associations can be more easily sued. It also reverses the burden of proof so that student associations, faculty associations and unions are liable for any damage caused by a third party in a demonstration unless they can prove that the damage was unrelated to the demonstration.

As well, the bill criminalizes anyone expressing support for demonstrations that are contrary to the bill – subjecting any individual Canadian to fines of up to \$5,000, organizational representatives to fines of \$35,000 and their organizations to fines of \$125,000.

Already, the bill has received strong criticism from the Quebec Bar Association, student groups, labour organizations, and civil liberties groups.

"Now, more than ever, the rest of Canada needs to be pinning on a red felt square showing their support for the students of Quebec and for civil liberties," said Turk. "Bill 78 needs to be defeated in the name of democracy or the rest of Canada should be joining the students on the streets."

The Canadian Association of University Teachers is the national voice of more than 68,000 academic and general staff in more than 120 universities and colleges.

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