

The effects of austerity measures on space

By Comité GÉOSTÉRITÉ

Reproduction and diffusion of this novel is strongly encouraged for those who want to fight for a better world.

Comité GÉOSTÉRITÉ of geography students at UQAM

© Crédit photo : davebloggs007



Table of contents

GÉOSTÉRITÉ: Preface	1
Austerity: neoliberalism's weapon of choice	2-5
Regional Cuts: The Result of Economic Policy	6-7
Extractivist policies or the dispossession of rural territories?	8-11
The need to preserve local governance: The case of Montreal	12-15
The effects of austerity on the environment in Quebec and Canada	16-21
Research funding: a site of knowledge creation	22-23
L'avenir du développement territorial au Québec: source d'inquiétude	24-25
Building a geography of resistance	26-29

real need, but it remains to be seen if it is possible to construct in these bodies a well-defined space of struggle, or a democratic legitimacy.

Conceiving a movement against austerity will necessitate, at a minimum, pushing the limits of such a strategy of "place", without ignoring its central role, but also finding other scales, other spaces, and other geographies of struggle and solidarity.

Towards a geography of resistance

Here there is a tension between hope and realism. We know very well that our current strategies – provincial in their goals and means, centered on the general student strike, organized by coalitions of union organizations – will not suffice, at least not alone. It is also too easy to imagine strategies which in fact are not really strategies – those of a general, spontaneous insurrection. Austerity is an enormous beast to slay. A movement to put an end to it would be no less immense, and would move beyond, crucially, the "realistic" limits of neoliberal capitalism. Let us not forget that austerity as such is a hegemonic ideology which the very aim is to make "unrealistic" any collective effort to live differently.

But hegemonic powers are not indestructible. The geographies of power and the social space change constantly. Our strategies – our geographies of resistance – must change too. We cannot win without working hard, without self-reflection, without taking into consideration the enormously complex realities of our spaces of struggle. But victory is possible.



GÉOSTÉRITÉ: is a project of geography students at UQAM.



solitary strategy, that of the general student strike. However, student associations subject to Law 32 (Québec's student association accreditation law), and the labour unions subject to the Labour Code, face completely different legal frameworks.

In both cases – as opposed to the situation in Europe, for example – each “unionized” group of students or workers is grouped into a single association, which is financed with the mandatory dues of all members, and which holds a unique authority of representation (legal and explicit for labour unions, somewhat symbolic and little-regulated for student associations). An entire CÉGEP, university faculty or department, or a workplace becomes the “unique domaine” of a single organization.

However, the legal framework of strikes is completely different. In the Labour Code, which governs labour unions, the right to strike is “protected”, but any strike launched outside of the strict periods of contract negotiations is illegal, and there is no protection against the adoption of “special laws” which have put an end to almost all major labour strikes in the last several decades (notably of nurses in Québec in 1999 and elsewhere in the public since, but also in the private sector, with threatened laws ending potential strikes in air and rail transport industries). For its part, Law 32 which governs accredited student associations makes no mention of strikes, and the right to strike is only protected “in practice” by the political strength of student associations – fortunately, fairly well protected for now. Regardless, the threat of special laws is not absent, and the danger increases as social movements, especially allies in the labour movement, become weaker. However, it remains that the relative power of the student movement owes a lot to a more permissive legal structure and the militant culture which has been able to benefit from it.

Despite differences in legal framework, student and labour unions enjoy one key factor in com-

mon: a position of strategic strength which is well-defined, linked to a well-defined space (ie. the school or workplace). In that, they are distinct from, for the most part, tenants' rights organizations, womens' organizations, unemployed organizations, and environmental organizations.

Spaces of struggle and solidarity

Each of these movements has had to construct its own specific geography – a space of struggle, a spatial self-conception. But none of them have been able to find a space as concrete as the “workplace”. The unity of this place includes several aspects. It renders coherent the tactic of the strike, with spatial limits (picket lines) which are relatively easy to enforce. But as the student movement has clearly shown, these “spaces of struggle” can also become spaces of democracy, of collective decision-making, of which the legitimacy is easy to understand.

Recently, changes in the geography of labour (precarity, telecommuting, subcontracting, etc.) have led to the creation of new forms of organization, “neighbourhood” organizations (such as Montréal's Autonomous Popular Assemblies), as well as new unions which we could call “post-fordist” (the IWW, or “worker centers” in the US and Canada). Historically, union solidarity is presumed to be predicated on the daily proximity of workers which is entailed by industrial production. With automation, globalization and tertiarisation, fewer and fewer jobs are organized in large industrial complexes. The spatial organization of the labour movement will need to change, but it is not obvious how.

Efforts to coordinate a future social strike already show us examples of some of these challenges. In particular, the “Spring 2015” committees aim to move past the limits of the student movement in creating bodies which are open to anyone fighting against austerity on an individual basis. Such a structural openness responds to a

The unprecedented assault launched by the provincial government against the people of Québec is an emergency – but it is not unique. Austerity is in fact a global movement to cut public services, to undermine living and working conditions, and to break apart bonds of social solidarity. In doing so, austerity completely remakes the social space where people live their lives, a process we urgently need to unpack. Furthermore, it is critically important that geography as a discipline, and geographers as scientists, serve the society we live in. Geography gives us powerful tools to understand the world – and more importantly, it can help give us the power to change it.

In this first issue, we look at: the devastating effects of austerity on the environment, in Canada and elsewhere; the possible consequences of “austere” restructuring of Montréal's municipal governance; the role of austerity in the neoliberal restructuring of the state and the economy; the effects of cuts and neoliberal restructuring of research funding; the dispossession of rural areas entailed by extractivism; and cuts to regional services which aim to refocus all state support on Montréal, at the expense of every other part of the province. The final article is a reflection on the ways in which geographical

perspectives can inform our construction of a movement of resistance.

With GÉOSTÉRITÉ, we hope to contribute to a critical conversation about austerity – and we hope to help build a movement to end it. We call on students and others, in geography and across disciplines, in Québec and elsewhere, to join us. Austerity is a global threat – any movement to end it must be too.



Austerity: neoliberalism's weapon of choice

By Toutatis

Over the last few years, we have seen the rise of social movements challenging the economic policies of governments. Prominent examples include the Indignants Movement in Spain and Occupy Wall Street, both of which seized control of public spaces in major Western cities. In Quebec, the student strike of Spring 2012 continued this tendency by opposing government changes to the funding and management of post-secondary education. The common thread between these movements is their opposition to austerity politics, a body of reforms aimed at organizing a new social and economic order: neoliberalism.

Neoliberalism is broadly defined as an economic and political doctrine which is opposed to the Welfare State, and seeks to return to a market economy, free from state intervention. To this end, it supports privatization, the deregulation of the economy, and the reorganization of the labour market (which it achieves through the precarisation of work, outsourced labour, etc.). In order to have a better understanding of what exactly neoliberalism is, it is first necessary to return to its beginnings, and to examine the methods used in its implementation.

The Welfare State

As neoliberalism was born out of opposition to the Welfare state, it is necessary to understand the latter if we are to discuss the former. The Welfare state (or Keynesianism) is an economic and political mode of organization which grew from the theories of British economist John Maynard Keynes. The first application of Welfare state policies occurred during the economic crisis of the 1930s. As the crisis became more pronounced with time, threatening the stability of the political establishment, political elites chose to go against the traditional logic of *laissez faire* markets and intervene in the economy by limiting unemployment and stimulating consumption. The basic principle underlying

this decision is that when population has access to work with decent wages, the consumption of goods and services rises and stimulates investment, thus creating employment. With new employment, the population can again increase its consumption, growing the national economy.

In order to achieve this end, the State must take a central role in economic affairs. The State becomes an investor in public projects, as well as a major employer through new social programs. Additionally, the State begins to regulate and monitor the market. It ensures good working conditions through laws, and collaborates with unions to create social and industrial peace. Keynesian doctrine has three objectives: restart a global economy in crisis, ensure sustained growth, and ensure the political stability of Western regimes.

Keynesian reform in Quebec only began in the 1960s during the "Quiet Revolution". Public health insurance, the creation of a network of CEGEPs and the *Université du Québec*, and the nationalization of hydroelectric power are all examples of Keynesian policies adopted by the Quebec government to raise the quality of life. Additionally, the government began making massive investments to services in rural areas, while also incentivizing private investments in these areas. Under Keynesianism, the State becomes the motor of the national economy, as well as its protector and the guarantor of a fairer distribution of wealth. The State adopts a central role in the social and economic cohesion of Western societies.

Under the Welfare state, the West experienced no economic crises between 1945 and 1975. A number of simultaneous, global events explain the decline of the Welfare state model. Firstly, the development of new labour-saving technologies began replacing workers in production. Next, the globalization of the economy allowed firms to outsource their activities to more competitive countries, creating further loss in employment. Lastly, with

proximity, transportation costs, and the limits of various telecommunication technologies. Another concern is differences of political culture, or simply differences in political priorities or even daily life.

In this regard, recent developments create new opportunities. For example, the creation of many movements of struggle of a considerable scale in diverse regions – against oil pipelines, against hydrofracking, against cuts to regional development bodies, aboriginal struggles, and not long ago, against the partial destruction of Employment Insurance – form the basis of new solidarities, and of much broader movements.

In fact, in some aspects, the Couillard austerity program specifically attacks the regions. A central pillar of the "Québec model" under attack is its vision of regional development. For the modernising nationalists which built social democratic Québec, the "regions" were an integral part of the nation. For the neoliberal extractivist State, all of the territory under the control of the metropole is a great basin of resources to exploit, only valuable to the extent which it is profitable. Its inhabitants are reduced to a workforce, if there is profitable work to be done; if not, or when that work ends, they become simply the residue of obsolete occupations.

A unified movement would be strengthened by this diversity. It could also interrogate the relationships between the metropole and the regions. Such an interrogation is well needed; let us briefly consider the colonial character of Québec society which remains to this day, where discourse about regional development is often mixed with a felt urgency to "occupy the territory" and even to promote "colonization". In Québec, as elsewhere in Canada, the expansion of the national territory necessarily entails the dispossession of aboriginal peoples. Everything suggests that a new Plan Nord would simply recapitulate the same formula. It is not impossible for Québécois movements

to build solidarities with aboriginal peoples, but not without asking ourselves difficult questions.

Now, there remains, beyond very real logistical problems, a degree of indifference, misunderstanding, and sometimes even disdain, on a part of the Montréal activist community towards the regional activist community. There are many parallels here with the distance between a part of the student movement (centered at UQAM) and other social movements. In any cases, bridging the gap will take hard work, diplomacy, and patience; there will not be an easy or simple answer.

The student movement and the rest

A second fracture to overcome is the gulf between the student movement – and others. Since the 1980s, student associations have demonstrated a capacity to mobilize and put pressure on the government without any comparison in other movements, labour unions in particular.

The divide is not just cultural. The strength of the student movement in Québec is based on a single,



Building a geography of resistance

By Gavriolo Princip

In building a broad resistance movement, the sheer *scale* of the austerity program announced by the Couillard government presents enormous opportunities as well as enormous challenges. Opportunities, because it creates the possibility of joining many struggles – of students, workers, the unemployed, parents, regional struggles, environmental struggles, etc. – which are often quite separate.

Challenges present themselves at several levels. The first is definitional: what is austerity? Other questions flow from it: who is its target? who has the power to overturn it? and *wherewould* it be overturned? Others concern divisions already present within social movements in Québec – between movements, or between regions.

If geography is the science of scale, of space, of territory, of places, it is not necessarily able to give us immediate answers. But it can at least offer us some direction in how to think about these problems – and perhaps, one hopes, even solutions.

Austerity: who? what? where?

What is “austerity”? In the local Québec context, the definition is fairly simple: the Couillard government aims to balance the provincial budget, principally through cuts to public services. An other definition, much more broad, tells us that almost all the governments of Europe and North America are organizing against their respective populations. In this sense, we are witnessing attacks against social gains (not simply public services, but also labour laws such as the minimum wage, union rights, retirement age, etc.), attacks which aim to remake, or “neoliberalise”, the relations between individuals, societies, economies and the State.

The first definition seems more appropriate for the construction of a Québec movement against austerity. If austerity in Québec is a program of the provincial government, then resistance entails putting pressure on this prov-

incial government. However, the international reality of austerity is impossible to ignore.

For example, as many have noted, the Couillard government never made any reference to austerity during his electoral campaign. The decision was thus made by whom, and why? Consider that austerity is always presented to us as “necessary”, in many cases “necessary” whether or not the electorate agrees (even if some polls in Québec suggest that many voters are indeed currently convinced by the government’s arguments). This “necessity” is alleged to be based on several bases: the public debt and the credit score, constant increases in public spending, stagnation in revenues, etc. But whatever the arguments advanced, the fact that austerity was never a part of the electoral program of the Liberal Party means that it is objectively a non-democratic program (should we perhaps say “extra-democratic” or “post-democratic”?). Its presumed necessity suggests that this program is the product of forces, supposedly objective, of the global market, where states have (or give themselves) less and less power.

Indeed, the phenomenon of austerity in Quebec needs to be understood in its global context, both with respect to its ideologies, and with respect to any struggles against it. In building a movement of struggle to defeat austerity, we need to be conscious of it. Certainly, there needs to be a struggle against the provincial government. But if one ignores the role of the federal government, and in parallel its free trade agreements related international treaties, we have lost the fight before even beginning. This is equally true for the political economic infrastructure behind these facts; we ignore them at our peril.

Montréal and the other regions of Québec

For Québec social movements, the question of the unity (or its absence) between struggles in Montréal and elsewhere is constant. One of its origins is practical, related to issues of physical

a rise in inflation which could not be controlled through Keynesian policies, Western states began the process of changing their economic models.

The beginning of the neoliberal state

The election of Margaret Thatcher as British Prime Minister in 1979 and Ronald Regan as President of the United States in 1981, both synonymous with conservative political thought, marked the beginning of neoliberal hegemony in the West. Both of these leaders rode a wave of economic instability in order to advance policies opposed to the Keynesian model. The economic and political doctrines of neoliberalism principally originate from the works of economists Milton Friedman and Friedrich Hayek. During the 1980s, a period of significant fluctuation in inflation (which raised consumer prices) became an important issue for Western governments. The need to adopt an economic system which could control inflation became a priority.

These governments opted to implement neoliberal policies, radically changing the role of the State in the economy. Instead of stimulating consumption, increasing the level of private investment became the new gauge of economic growth. Market restrictions were loosened in order to ensure its free movement, with state regulation reduced to control over loans given by the central bank. Under neoliberalism, the increasing size of this new money supply acts as a measure of economic growth.

In order to achieve the level of desired prosperity, it became necessary to implement drastic changes to the structure of our societies. The reorientation of the Welfare State towards the neoliberal State is based upon three positions. The first of

these is the distribution of lucrative public project contracts to private, rather than public, enterprises. This led to the privatization of public services, and the rise of public interest projects maintained through Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs).

The second position is the distribution of financial incentives to corporations, such as tax breaks or credits, with the aim of creating an amicable climate for private investment. This explains efforts to deregulate markets, the exclusive role of the State’s central bank in controlling the rate of inflation, and the proliferation of free trade agreements which allow companies to invest with fewer economic and socio-environmental constraints.

The last position manifests itself in the services the State continues to operate itself. These services, which cannot be privatized, are forced to adopt the managerial model of private enterprise. This drastically affects the quality of service, whether in medicine or educa-

“The State also abandons its Keynesian role as the center of a unified national economy, and of society in general, in order to become an instrument in the service of private enterprise for organizing national and global economies.”





tion, and paves the way towards their eventual privatization. The State also abandons its Keynesian role as the center of a unified national economy, and of society in general, in order to become an instrument in the service of private enterprise for organizing national and global economies.

The neoliberal project does not end with State functions. Neoliberalism is a universal project, meaning that its theorists also envision the creation of a neoliberal culture, wherein each individual sees himself as an enterprise. This requires the dissolution of old social ties which bring people together around common values, replacing them with a competitive model in which each person must take on risks and maximize their gains. For example, we no longer view education as a means of liberating one's mind through discovery and learning, but as an investment in one's economic future.

The ultimate means of achieving neoliberalism: austerity

Austerity politics are generally defined as a body of negative measures adopted to defuse a threat. In the present case, the threat which justifies these measures is public debt. Western states have implemented large structural changes, now that they consider the debts accumulated under the Welfare state too large to continue sustaining its social programs. As we have seen earlier, neoliberalism does not merely demand a reduction in public spending, but a change in the fundamental role of the State. As public services are reduced to the point of becoming farcical, the financing of social services is shifted to the shoulders of private enterprises.

Historically, economists have noted that it is always easier to make sweeping economic reforms when the population is in a state of turmoil. Often, it is during natural disasters, like tsunamis, or human-made crises, like wars, that governments push radical economic reforms, limiting popular resistance to these measures. The example of

the 2008 financial crisis speaks volumes on this subject. At certain points of the crisis, the fall of major financial institutions plunged the world into a recession which was at certain points more severe than the crisis of the 1930s. Although the 2008 crisis indicated a need for massive State intervention in public affairs, governments instead preferred to rail about the dangers of public debt to justify further cuts to services.

Thus far, the political and economic elite have been relentless in creating fear about a potential debt crisis. They have repeated that national debt is a catastrophic issue which must be redressed with austerity budgets and policies. In Quebec, the idea of zero deficit has justified cuts in public spending since the government of Lucien Bouchard at the end of the 1990s. Since then, each government has pursued austerity measures under the pretext of reducing public debt. Despite this, governments like that of Jean Charest actually increased debt, in spite of numerous reforms of government programs. Austerity budgets, for all the rhetoric around reducing debt, are but another means by which governments implement neoliberal reform.

The transition from Welfare state to neoliberalism has had consequences which can be discussed as part of a geographic reading. Whereas Keynesianism created an important role for the State in social cohesion, neoliberalism has divested the State of this role. Large cuts to government programs have affected society's most vulnerable populations, leaving a vacuum of services behind them. In a new culture of maximizing one's gains, there is no room for solidarity or state structures. The provision of services, the organization of land, the environment, and geography as a discipline are all touched upon in this collection. Geography, as the science which studies the relationship between human phenomena and their ties to physical spaces, allows us to observe

les entreprises et les producteurs de services, tout cela afin de créer des interrelations et des collaborations qui facilitent la synergie et l'innovation.

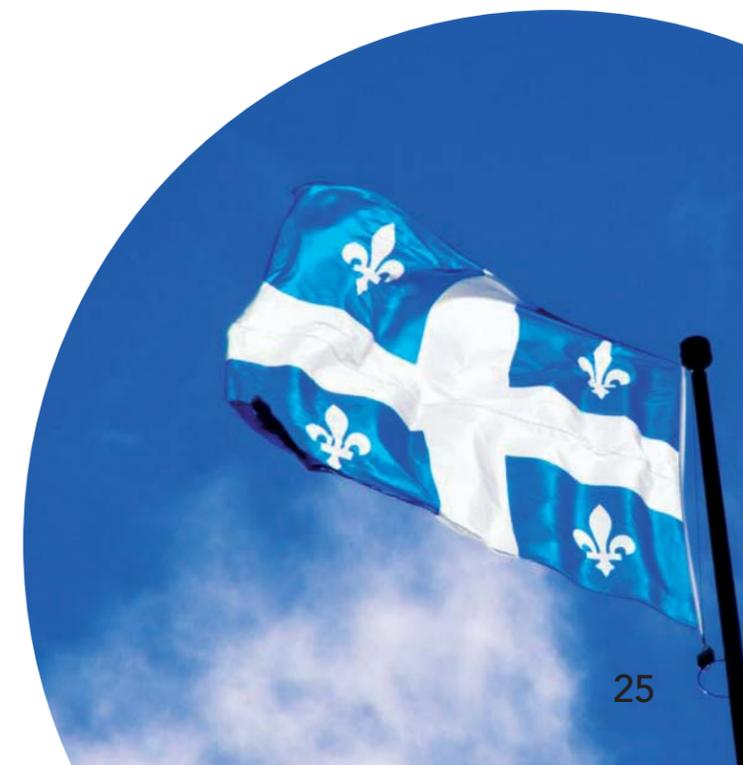
On pourrait penser que le seul fait d'habiter un territoire (région, MRC, municipalité, arrondissement, quartier) génère la collaboration entre les acteurs. La preuve a été apportée plusieurs fois que ce n'est pas le cas. Ce sont des instances et des actions vouées à la mise en réseau et à la coordination des acteurs qui peuvent le faire, et ce pour plusieurs raisons: 1) Parce que les réseaux se construisent plus facilement sur un plan sectoriel, soit la santé, l'éducation, l'agriculture, les secteurs industriels, la petite enfance, etc.; 2) parce que les ressources étant rares et les acteurs sont en concurrence; 3) parce que le développement des territoires se fait rarement sous le signe de l'unanimité, ce qui exige des mécanismes de concertation; 4) parce que la mise en réseau des acteurs demande des savoir-faire, des expertises nécessaires pour la planification stratégique, l'accompagnement et l'évaluation du développement territorial.

Est-ce que les instances municipales ou les entreprises, auxquelles le gouvernement confie la responsabilité du développement local et régional, suffisent à amorcer et entretenir des processus de développement territorial basés sur la mise en réseau et la coordination de l'ensemble des acteurs? La réponse est évidemment non. Elles sont cruciales, mais elles ne suffisent pas. Les entreprises, soient-elles privées ou sociales, n'ont pas cette fonction. Quant aux instances municipales, leur nature institutionnelle ne facilite pas la prise en compte des courants d'opinion, des acteurs et des citoyens qui n'y sont pas représentés. Leurs modalités de gouvernance n'assurent pas un rôle actif, en tant que partie prenante du développement, à la société civile, aux citoyens, aux opposants.

Pourtant, de multiples recherches démontrent que le développement des territoires est un proces-

sus collectif ancré sur la mobilisation commune des ressources, le leadership, la gouvernance diversifiée et inclusive, le sentiment d'appartenance à un territoire, l'identité. La place des organismes de concertation y est centrale, et ce, aussi bien en milieu urbain que rural, dans les territoires métropolitains et régionaux. Si on prend l'exemple des CDEC, il a été démontré qu'elles coordonnent l'action des acteurs, assurent une fonction de médiation entre divers intérêts, souvent opposés, et qu'elles agissent comme des intermédiaires avec d'autres territoires, d'une part, et entre des intervenants sur le terrain et les instances publiques, d'autre part.

Il est donc important de revoir les prémisses qui soutiennent l'actuelle réforme et de considérer les territoires comme des scènes où des acteurs agissent collectivement pour le bien commun, de façon concertée, et où la société civile a une place. Ce n'est que de cette façon que la performance économique s'arrimera au développement durable des territoires du Québec et de l'ensemble de la société québécoise.



L'avenir du développement territorial au Québec: source d'inquiétude

17 décembre 2014

Juan-Luis Klein, Professeur au Département de géographie, Directeur du Centre de recherche sur les innovations sociales (CRISES), Université du Québec à Montréal

Mélanie Doyon, Professeure au Département de géographie et directrice du Diplôme en Études supérieures spécialisées en Planification territoriale et développement local, Université du Québec à Montréal

Le texte est également cosigné par les professeurs du Département de géographie de l'UQAM: **Mario Bédard, Yves Baudouin, Stéphane Bernard, Claude Codjia, Robert-André Daigneault, Philippe Gachon, Daniel Germain, Laurie Guimond, Michelle Garneau, Anne Latendresse, Sylvain Lefebvre, Éric Mottet, Yann Roche, Jacques Schröder, Benoit St-Onge, Catherine Trudelle, Jean-Philippe Waaub**

Le gouvernement du Québec vient d'amorcer une vaste réforme de la gouvernance du développement régional et local qui risque d'avoir des impacts considérables sur l'expertise et la synergie des acteurs développées au fil des ans. Diverses organisations locales qui ont assuré un leadership dans le développement régional et local pendant des décennies (CRÉ, CLD, CJE, CDEC) ont été touchées. Selon le gouvernement, le développement des territoires doit être assuré par des instances municipales et des entreprises et non par des « structures ». Ce qui est inquiétant dans cette réforme est la désinvolture avec laquelle on se débarrasse de ce qu'on désigne comme des « structures », qui, en réalité, n'en sont pas. Ce sont plutôt des organisations qui regroupent des acteurs de différents secteurs, notamment de la société civile, qui reflètent le dynamisme et la spécificité des territoires et dont l'expertise a été reconnue par les gouvernements successifs indépendamment de leur allégeance.

Notre inquiétude est basée sur l'inconsistance de l'argumentation qui soutient la réforme en regard des connaissances que nous procurent les sciences du territoire, notamment la géographie

et la science régionale, en ce qui concerne la planification et le développement des territoires. À cet égard, deux éléments importants doivent être rappelés. Le premier porte sur la nécessité du développement des capacités, ce qu'on désigne comme l'empowerment. Seul ce type d'accroissement des capacités des acteurs et des citoyens peut permettre la réalisation de choix qui arriment le bien-être commun et les intérêts individuels. Or, ces capacités résultent de l'apprentissage collectif, des interrelations entre les acteurs économiques, sociaux, culturels, environnementaux, etc.

Le deuxième élément concerne l'entrepreneuriat local. À cet égard, diverses recherches ont démontré l'importance de mettre en place une économie de proximité. Mais cette proximité ne doit pas être que physique, elle doit être aussi et surtout relationnelle. Les auteurs en économie territoriale parlent de « proximité organisée ». Par qui? Évidemment, par des instances qui mettent en relation les entreprises, les organismes privés et publics qui produisent des services, les centres qui forment la main-d'œuvre, les divers organismes financiers, les institutions qui produisent des connaissances pouvant être mises en valeur par

the consequences of austerity through the lens of territory as a social and economic construction.

To learn more about the subject:

Harvey, D. (2005). *A Brief History Of Neoliberalism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

(Disponible en ligne via Virtuouse)

Klein, J.-L. (1995). De l'État providence à l'État accompagnateur dans la gestion du social: le cas du développement régional au Québec. *Lien social et Politiques* — RIAC, 33, 13-141.

(Disponible en ligne via Virtuouse)

Tremblay-Pépin, S. (2014). Comprendre le néolibéralisme. *Raisons sociales*, [En ligne]. (<http://raisons-sociales.com/articles/comprendre-neoliberalisme/>).

Association pour une solidarité syndicale étudiante. (2013). *À qui profite l'austérité budgétaire? Argumentaire 2013-2014*. Montréal.

(Disponible via <http://www.austerite.org/assets/pdf/fr/argumentaire.pdf>)

Regional Cuts: The Result of Economic Policy

By Joe Sakic

Since the announcement of several cuts to public services by the Couillard government, many voices have deservedly been raised to denounce austerity policies that have been in place for several years. Many voices are raised, certainly, but some of them have not heard their concerns being echoed. Many municipalities in the so-called remote regions have tried, for many years and now again for many months, to attract national media attention to the multiple regional issues that austerity has caused. Attention which dwindles in the face of seemingly more important urban problems.

With the constant drop in population in these regions comes the moment, under austerity, where public services are put under the microscope to evaluate their usefulness. Service providers are shrinking every year, and their usefulness is too often dictated by the financial views of policy-makers. In this sense, the demographic weight of a region inevitably plays a role in the budgetary cuts administered to different services.

For example, one cannot remain silent as to the large operation to end Canada Post services in the past year. In rural Quebec, the closing of post offices has been a long-term problem. One good illustration of this phenomenon and of the dynamic behind these cuts is the case of the municipality of Gaspé. After having seen the hours of operation in several of the region's post offices diminish, the city of Gaspé learned last November that Canada Post would install a private postal counter nearby the post office. According to the MP for Gaspésie-Îles-de-la-Madeleine, Philip Toone, "The opening of that counter confirms the fears that Canada Post employees in Gaspé have had, to see a private postal counter open up in the proximity of their office in order to voluntarily reduce the traffic on the rue de la Reine and justify, eventually, the closing of the post office."¹ Thus, behind the discourse of

budgetary constraint, there is also a vision, more and more present, of privatizing public services. This privatization naturally will not happen without the loss of more accessible services and of many well-paid jobs with good working conditions.

The repeated closing of different primary and secondary schools in rural areas is also worrying. Faced with falling numbers of students, the school boards often have no other choice than to close schools. The problem is that, in many cases, the transfer of students does not take into account the potential consequences of these changes. In Rouyn-Noranda, for example, the school Immaculée-Conception, which closed its doors some years ago, held the status of being a disadvantaged school (école défavorisée) and received additional resources. The students were transferred to the school Notre-Dame-de-Grâce, but this school could not receive adequate supplementary funds.² One might add that after transferring schools, the commute to school often becomes cumbersome, which can considerably lengthen the day for young students.

Finally, austerity not only manifests itself in cuts to public services, but also in the ending of subsidies to various necessary private services in the regions. The issue of transit might seem obvious to Montrealers, but in rural Quebec you find completely different problems linked to these services. In effect, they are linked to problems of access to work and even access to food and various other products. For example, last January 9th, the Basses-Côte-Nord learned that the winter maritime shipping of various products would be extended to March, but only for one year. One must understand that without this service, the region becomes more isolated, because route 138 ends at Natashquan and does not continue

careers because of revised funding priorities at that level, too. Since 2012, the Harper government has chosen to reduce funding to the National Science and Engineering Research Council (NSERC) and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) in order to facilitate links between research and businesses. As a result, we have seen the creation of programs like "Idea to Innovation", which aims to "accelerate the pre-competitive development of promising technology originating from the university and college sector and promote its transfer to a new or established Canadian company", rather than to offer financial support to research projects as other funds do.⁴ This is in addition to reductions in grants that began in 2011, with the number of NSERC grants for post-graduates dropping from 2,529 to 1,704.⁵

From the privatization of knowledge to its division

Research can now be assimilated as a mere expense for political decision-makers who completely disregard the value of the knowledge that research creates for society. While attempting to pass on the bill to private enterprise, they risk reducing the quality of knowledge generated by assigning a particular orientation to research. Applied scientific research is favoured to the detriment of fundamental work that addresses more global themes. In failing to provide equitable funding through bodies that are public and thus more neutral than businesses, there is a risk of either redirecting research towards the interests of those backing the funds rather than towards innovative thinking free of economic constraints or, even worse, the muzzling of researchers through the withdrawal of their funding.

For the discipline of geography, the consequences

of the integration of research into the market are visible even now. Already we are seeing the fragmentation of domains of study into more specific sectors: geography of health, geography of transportation, GIS, studies of natural risks. Regional or thematic studies that aim to treat multiple aspects of an area at the same time are now almost entirely absent – for example, river studies in which human elements are barely present and which deal almost exclusively with quantitative data.

A trend affecting diverse domains

This withdrawal of public financing from knowledge creation, though it does not touch all areas of study equally, is not restricted to geography. Fundamental research work across the sciences will be cut off from new data and new researchers if these policies of austerity continue. It is now more important than ever to unite within universities to preserve this funding – one of our university system's greatest strengths.



¹ Graffici (2014). Coupures chez Poste Canada : « la Gaspésie ne sera pas épargnée », Graffici.ca, 17 novembre 2014.

² De la Chevrotière, P. (2014). Absurdités administrées, La Frontière, 29 septembre 2014.

⁴ Summary of the « Idea to Innovation » program on the NSERC website at: http://www.nserc-crsng.gc.ca/Professors-Professeurs/RPP-PP/I2I-INNOV_eng.asp

⁵ Borde, V. Québec coupe dans la recherche : les étudiants vont-ils écopier?, L'Actualité, 10 December 2012.

Research funding: a site of knowledge creation

By Amy Winehouse

Located at the intersection of the natural, social, and technological sciences, research in geography is currently bombarded from all sides by funding cuts. Exercises in budgetary rigor are jeopardizing the future of fundamental research at the governmental level, as well as in our universities and the private sector. As these cuts progress, we risk privileging areas of study that are deemed more “profitable” when allocating research funding, at the expense of geographic research that is oriented towards a less tangible collective interest.

Governmental withdrawal

On the side of the federal government, funding reductions appear to follow a logic of an ideological nature. Cuts are made not for the sake of economic imperatives, but rather for their usefulness to conservative values. By way of example, we can turn to the termination of the long-form census, which had been enormously useful for human geographers because of its multiple scales of data and its socioeconomic questionnaires that were important for the analysis of study populations’ ways of life. On the physical geography side, we have seen the withdrawal of federal funding from the world-renowned Experimental Lakes in Ontario, which are now supported by the province.¹

At the level of the Quebec government, cuts stem from an attempt at a total re-engineering of the State through a policy of austerity. Agencies producing research at the regional scale are written off as bureaucratic structures and then closed. This has been the case for the Agences de la santé et de services sociaux (health and social services agencies), which suffer the wrath of Minister Barrette for failing to offer direct services to the population – a total denial of their scientific contributions.

Consequences in the universities

Governmental withdrawal from research has direct ramifications in the university context through the reduction or redirection of financing from funding bodies. Consequently, undergraduates wishing to pursue studies at a higher level will have a harder time accessing funds, and professors will have to redouble their efforts or else turn to the private sector to find the necessary money.

Cuts and reductions on the provincial level, begun during the Marois government, affect geography departments through the Fonds québécois de recherche – Société et culture (Quebec fund for research in society and culture – FRQSC) and the Fonds de recherche du Québec – Nature et technologies (Quebec fund for research in nature and technology – FRQNT), which are important sources of public funding for students at the masters and doctoral level. The initially-planned cuts, which would have reduced the budgets of the FRQNT and FRQSC by 30% and 13% respectively, were scaled back following mobilization by a number of researchers.² Despite this, research funding as a whole has had to absorb cuts totaling \$36.5 million. The directly-felt effects of this include the elimination in 2014 of the second round of the FRQSC funding competition, after investments were redirected in favour of the Fonds de recherche du Québec en santé (Quebec funds for research in health).³ The training of the next generation of geographers is affected, then, and the consequences of this will be visible in the long term – even in the private sector, which will encounter greater difficulty recruiting graduates.

Additionally, many graduates will find themselves unable to turn to the federal government for public funding as they pursue their academic

to communities in the rest of the region.³ This decision of the government, though welcomed by elected officials, was long in coming and it is not at all certain that subsidies to this service will continue in the years to come. A climate of uncertainty has settled in amongst the residents of that region who, faced with a negative decision in the future, might have no other choice but to leave.⁴

These service cuts and ended subsidies are only examples. One could add to them the closing of many ministry offices, the end of educational services in various schools, the centralization of hospital services for a vast territory, and several other examples. Governmental cuts to regional services are often made discreetly and sadly in the shadow of other cuts, but they are still significant shocks for these regions. Ending what seems like a banal service can have a very significant impact on small communities that are often deprived of necessary resources.

It would be easy to fall into a fatalist viewpoint and refer to the rural exodus to justify these attacks on regional services. Even before the Second World War the regions of Quebec, much like the rural regions of many countries in the same phase of industrialization, were emptied little by little of inhabitants who, otherwise, would have assured a real local dynamism.

Nevertheless, if you take account of the government subsidies and investments of the last few years in various sectors of the economy, it is remarkable the flagrant priority placed on the centres as opposed to the peripheries. The centres are principally the regions of Montreal and

Quebec City, and their suburbs. The peripheries are the so-called remote regions of Quebec: the Gaspésie, Abitibi-Témiscamingue or the Côte-Nord to name only a few. Following the dictates of the market, successive governments both federal and provincial have invested in tertiary and quaternary industries based in urban centres, like new information and communications technologies. They have closed their eyes to the many displacements of these sorts of enterprises, having forsaken the regions and stopped investment in industries like fishing. They have prioritized urban economic development.

This is also what austerity is: prioritizing one investment more than another. While the government insists that it must

make cuts to one service, in other areas there are no cuts. This is what happens with economic investment in rural Quebec. While they insist that there’s no money for certain industries, they find it for others in the urban centres. This is the ideology of austerity: they tell us that there is nothing to do, that there’s no money, that the rural exodus is sadly nothing but an issue of natural evolution. Yet it is completely different. Cuts to the services in these regions are the result of an economic strategy that diminishes rural communities. They are in fact the conclusion, the final objective of policies directed by people who want to see the regions die.

“Nevertheless, if you take account of the government subsidies and investments of the last few years in various sectors of the economy, it is remarkable the flagrant priority placed on the centres as opposed to the peripheries.”

² Article from the Fonds de recherche du Québec available at: <http://www.frq.gouv.qc.ca/nouvelles/publication-des-credits-des-fonds-de-recherche-du-quebec-pour-lannee-2013-2014> (French only)

³ Gravel, P. Un réinvestissement bienvenu, mais réparti inégalement, Le Devoir, 15 February 2013.

³ Paradis, S. (2014). Basse-Côte-Nord et île d’Anticosti : pas de desserte cet hiver, Le Soleil, 10 octobre 2014.

⁴ Paradis, S. (2015). Basse-Côte-Nord : la desserte maritime hivernale prolongée jusqu’en mars, Le Soleil, 9 janvier 2015.

¹ Press release from the office of the Premier of Ontario available at: <https://www.premier.gov.on.ca/en/news/26805>

Extractivist policies or the dispossession of rural territories?

By Gengis Khan

Following Philippe Couillard's autumn 2014 announcement that the Liberal government would dismantle Québec's local development bodies – the *Conférences régionales des élus* (CRÉ), the *Centres locaux de développement* (CLD), les Corporations de développement économique communautaire (CDEC) and the *Carrefours jeunesse-emploi* (CJE), organizations working in the field have stood up for development in the various regions of Québec.

Yves Maurais of the *Association des centres locaux de développement du Québec* (ACLDO) labeled the government's intended \$40 million in cuts to CLDs as "false economies", stating that "if we want to manage the deficit problem, it's by cutting producers of wealth."¹ Mr. Maurais is correct: recall that CLDs and CDECs have created or maintained approximately 180 000 jobs, helped 24 000 businesses with their difficulties, invested \$6 billion and increased the survival rate for new businesses from 35% in 1998 to 85% in 2010.² Every dollar invested by the CLDs/CDECs generates around \$10 in return on investment, while the return from CRÉs is \$5 per \$1 invested – this without counting the essential contributions by CJEs, which allow thousands of youths to find jobs in their home regions.³

Unfortunately, the Liberal government, obsessed with balancing the budget and reducing public debt, does not see these bodies' contributions to regional development and well-being in the

same light. The 2015 transitory fiscal compact cuts municipal transfers by \$300 million, of which \$40 million are earmarked for CLDs, which operate under a \$72 million budget, and the abolition of CLDs and CRÉs in favour of Municipalités régionales de comté (MRC) who will become the

primary actors in regional development from 2015, investing their funds with inferior local knowledge.⁴

Therein lies the main problem with the disappearance of the local governance bodies. These

consultative groups comprised economic and political actors as well as citizens, each with different development needs and interests, who sat around the same table to discuss the best means of making development a priority. Their ideas thus converged to make progress on the development of our regions, starting with the particularities of each territory and those who shaped them. These groups brought inestimable technical expertise and financial aid from economic, local, and rural actors in order to bring these various groups together, prioritize development projects, and facilitate existing projects to strengthen territories and the wellbeing of their populations.

These bodies are being abolished to establish a "new form of governance for regional development in order to streamline development institutions and more closely reflect the decisions of the population."⁵ Under the constraints of representation and accountability, the Liberal government is giving new powers to MRCs, but fewer human, technical, and financial resources to achieve them. At the end of the day, this logic of "doing more

"By reducing the regions' capacity to put alternative development models in place in lieu of large projects dictated by global capital, the Liberal government illustrates the dependence of rural regions on resource extraction."

¹ Rémillard, D. (2014). « Abolition de 120 CLD: de fausses économies », *Le Soleil*, 26 October 2014, [Web]. (<http://www.lapresse.ca/le-soleil/actualites/politique/201410/25/01-4812691-abolition-de-120-cld-de-fausses-economies.php>).

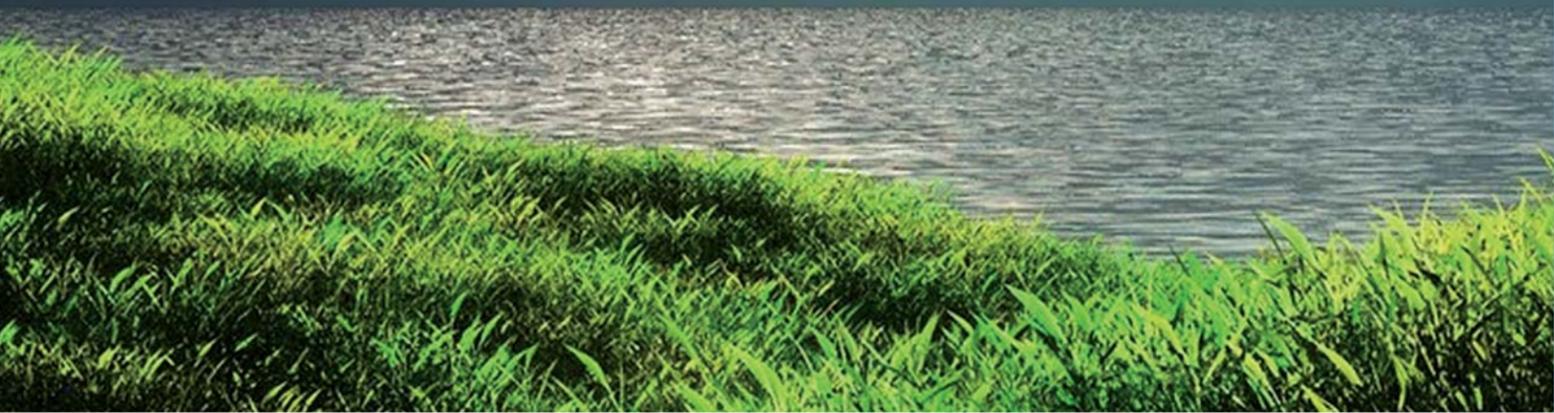
² De Sève, V. (2014). « Mise à mort d'un modèle de développement régional », *L'Actualité gouvernementale.ca*, 11 November 2014, [Web]. (<http://actualitegouvernementale.ca/message/mise-mort-drsquon-modle-de-dveloppement-rgional>). Accessed 03 January 2015.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ MAMOT (2014). « Pacte fiscal transitoire concernant les transferts financiers aux municipalités pour 2015 et une nouvelle gouvernance régionale », [Web]. (http://www.mamrot.gouv.qc.ca/pub/finances_indicateurs_fiscalite/fiscalite/Entente_signee.pdf). Accessed 03 January 2015.

⁵ *Ibid.*





Bibliography

ASSÉ. Évolution des services publics au Québec: enjeux et perspectives (2014) (page consultée le 18 janvier 2015). *Argumentaire annuel 2014-2015 de l'association pour une solidarité syndicale étudiante*, [en ligne]. (<http://www.asse-solidarite.qc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/argumentaire-2014-2015-v1p0.pdf>).

ASSÉ. À qui profite l'austérité budgétaire? (2013) (page consultée le 18 janvier 2015). *Argumentaire 2013-2014. Association pour une solidarité syndicale étudiante*, [en ligne]. (<http://www.austerite.org/assets/pdf/fr/argumentaire.pdf>).

Baril, H. (2014). Un chemin de fer vers le Labrador, *La Presse*, 5 juin 2014 [en ligne]. (<http://affaires.lapresse.ca/dossiers/budget-quebec-2014/201406/05/01-4772994-un-chemin-de-fer-vers-le-labrador.php>). Page consultée le 18 janvier 2015.

Bovet, S. (2014). Québec pose 7 conditions à TransCanada pour son projet Énergie Est, *Radio-Canada*, 19 novembre 2014 [en ligne]. (<http://ici.radiocanada.ca/nouvelles/politique/2014/11/19/004-port-petrolier-cacoua-conditions-heurtel-quebec-transcanada.shtml>). Page consultée le 18 janvier 2015.

Bronski, C. (2013). Le gouvernement du Canada musèle le journalisme scientifique, *World Socialist Website*, [en ligne]. (<https://www.wsws.org/fr/articles/2013/avr/2013/cana-a10.shtml>). Page consultée le 28 janvier 2015.

Cardinal, F. (2010). Climat: le fédéral coupe de moitié le financement de la recherche, *La Presse*, 16 mars 2010 [en ligne]. (<http://www.lapresse.ca/environnement/climat/201003/16/01-4261014-climat-le-federal-coupe-de-moitie-le-financement-de-la-recherche.php>). Page consultée le 21 janvier 2015.

Collectif (2008). Harper balaie l'environnement sous le tapis, *À Babord!*, [en ligne]. (<https://www.ababord.org/Harper-balaie-l-environnement-sous>). Page consultée le 21 janvier 2015.

CSN. Groupes communautaires et environnementaux: un cri du cœur contre les compressions. L'austérité frappe encore: l'environnement est dans la mire du gouvernement Couillard (2014) (page consultée le 18 janvier 2015). [en ligne]. (<http://refusons.org/lausterite-frappe-encore-lenvironnement-mire-du-gouvernement-couillard/>).

Éthier, D. (2010). *Introduction aux relations internationales*, 4^e éd. Montréal: Les Presses de l'Université de Montréal.

GREENPEACE. Cimenterie en Gaspésie: un mauvais projet dopé au coke de pétrole (2014) (page consultée le 19 janvier 2015). [en ligne]. (<http://www.greenpeace.org/canada/fr/Blog/cimenterie-en-gaspesie-un-mauvais-projet-dop-a/blog/48108/>).

GREENPEACE. #Budget2014: l'environnement balayé sous le tapis au nom de l'austérité (2014) (page consultée le 19 janvier 2015). [en ligne]. (<http://www.greenpeace.org/canada/fr/Blog/budget2014-greenpeace-inquite-de-laustrit-env/blog/49527/>).

IRIS. Budget Leitão: faire l'austérité sans la nommer (2014a) (page consultée le 18 janvier 2015). [en ligne]. (<http://iris-recherche.qc.ca/blogue/budget-leitao-faire-lausterite-sans-la-nommer>).

IRIS. État de la dette du Québec 2014 (2014b) (page consultée le 18 janvier 2015). [en ligne]. (<http://iris-recherche.qc.ca/publications/dette2014>).

Le Courrier Parlementaire (2014). Relance du Plan Nord. Création du fonds Capital Mines Hydrocarbures avec une enveloppe d'un milliard\$. [en ligne]. (<http://www.courrierparlementaire.com/article/12301>). (page consulté le 19 janvier 2015)

PEMBINA INSTITUTE (2014) (page consultée le 19 janvier 2015). *Climate Implications of the Proposed Energy East Pipeline*, [en ligne]. (<http://www.pembina.org/pub/2519>).

Piuzé, J. (2012). La recherche fédérale sur la pollution décimée par le gouvernement Harper, *La Presse*, 15 juin 2012 [en ligne]. (<http://www.lapresse.ca/le-soleil/opinions/points-de-vue/201206/13/01-4534525-la-recherche-federale-sur-la-pollution-decimee-par-le-gouvernement-harper.php>). Page consultée le 21 janvier 2015.

Québec. Ministère du Développement durable, Environnement et Lutte contre les changements climatiques (2015). *Plan Nord - Nouveaux engagements ambitieux et consultation publique sur la protection de 50% du territoire du Nord*, [en ligne], Québec. (<http://www.mddelcc.gouv.qc.ca/infuseur/com-muniquer.asp?no=1927>). Page consultée le 28 janvier 2015.

Shields, A. (2014). Environnement: une dizaine de groupes menacés de fermeture, *le Devoir*, 4 décembre 2014 [en ligne]. (<http://www.ledevoir.com/environnement/actualites-sur-l-environnement/425730/environnement-une-dizaine-de-groupes-menaces-de-fermeture>). Page consultée le 18 janvier 2015.

TRANSIT. (2014) (page consultée le 19 janvier 2012). *Budget 2014-2015 – Rien de plus pour les transports collectifs jusqu'en 2024, constate TRANSIT*, [en ligne]. (<http://www.transitquebec.org/2014/06/budget-2014-2015-rien-de-plus-pour-les-transport-collectifs-jusqu%E2%80%99en-2024-constate-transit/>).

with less" to decentralize powers in fact furthers the centralization of regional power. Instead of a consultative table of different groups helping each other achieve their development goals, we have a regional governmental body full of local elected officials with four-year terms. The provincial government thus gives the responsibility for the success or failure of regional development and its financing (by the eventual raising of property taxes to combat the deficit) to third parties, while the government dictates the rules ahead of time.

This situation has angered more than one municipal councillor, who feel betrayed by the provincial government and their local unions (UMQ or FQM) who negotiated the death of regional development. "There's no best way to kill the regions," explains Danielle Dover, mayor of Mont-Joli. By her side is Pierre Dolbec, Sainte-Catherine-de-la-Jacques-Cartier, who explains how this situation is "totally unacceptable. The rest of us manage our cities on a tight leash. We will be forced to raise property taxes for the first time in three years. It makes me furious. We have a union that doesn't protect us."⁶ Jean-Pierre Gagnon, mayor of Clairmont, adds, "I will no longer be a member of an organization that doesn't defend cities like ours, that doesn't represent our interests, and that advises such cuts to our budgets."⁷ Several of them are also against the mayors of Québec (Régis Labeaume) and Montréal (Denis Coderre), who have come out ahead despite budget cuts of \$20 million to Québec and \$75 million to Montréal. In effect, these two have just solved a serious financial problem with the retirement pensions of their municipal employees, thanks to the Liberal government's Bill 3 (with savings on the order of \$100 million to Québec and \$800 million to Montréal).⁸

So, other than balancing the budget, why does the Liberal government seem to be launching an unprecedented attack against the rural regions and their development organizations? The response lies in how they see the economic role of the regions. Essentially, the Liberals assign more value to extractivist policies in "resource regions" than to an alternative form of development based on local expertise more than natural resources. By "extractivism", we mean a national economy based on primary resource extraction on public property by private businesses and the sale of these resources on the international market, with the government charging royalties on sales.⁹ By reducing the regions' capacity to put alternative development models in place in lieu of large projects dictated by global capital, the Liberal government illustrates the dependence of rural regions on resource extraction.

⁹ Tremblay-Pepin, S. & Hébert, G. (2013). « Qu'est-ce que l'extractivisme? », IRIS, 12 février 2013, [Web]. (<http://iris-recherche.qc.ca/blogue/quest-ce-que-leextractivisme>). Accessed 03 January 2015.

⁶ Martin, S. & Gaudreau, V. (2014). « Pacte fiscal: des maires en furie contre l'UMQ », *Le Soleil*, 05 November 2014, [Web]. (<http://www.lapresse.ca/le-soleil/affaires/actualite-economique/201411/05/01-4816231-pacte-fiscal-des-maires-en-furie-contre-lumq.php>). Accessed 03 January 2015.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.*





It is thus no longer surprising to learn that the only regional development projects put in place by the Liberal government, in collusion with the economic elite, are extractivist: installing a cement factory in Port-Daniel in Gaspésie, putting in a port terminal in the St-Laurent river valley (Cacouna at present) to export crude oil from the bitumen sands carried by the Energy East pipeline, massive investments in forestry and mining projects across Québec, but especially in the remote northern regions (Plan Nord 2.0), etc. Furthermore, the fiscal pacts to follow will likely see municipal revenues raised by sharing royalties derived from natural resources (mines, forests, oil, gas) to the municipalities involved in extraction and from others through an equalization formula.¹⁰

It is possible that the abolition of development bodies in rural regions will not be put in place simply to try to balance the provincial budget, but also to subject rural regions to the dictates of world capital and the economic elite who control it. How else to explain the abolition of organizations which have been flagships of regional development over the last 15 years? They did, on several occasions, manage to reverse the trends of the rural exodus and revitalize the living environment in rural regions by working with economic/political actors and citizens. To claim that MRCs will be able to assume the task of regional development with shrinking budgets and a lack of technical and human resources reveals the most flagrant incompetency in the history of regional development in the province. Québec's Liberal government had better watch out, because we won't let them!

¹⁰ The Canadian Press (2014). « Les municipalités auront plus de pouvoirs de Québec », Le Devoir, 28 September 2014, [Web]. (<http://www.ledevoir.com/politique/quebec/419674/les-municipalites-auront-plus-de-pouvoirs-de-quebec>). Accessed 03 January 2015.



kilometers of old growth boreal forest, and opens the door to an environmental catastrophe of which aboriginal peoples would be the first victims.

What's more, \$450 million will be invested for the construction of the cement megaproject at Port Daniel. Its activities will be the single largest source of greenhouse gas emissions in Quebec, up to 2 million tons, increasing the province's emissions by 2% – all while the Quebec cement industry is currently working at around 60% capacity.

Forests aren't left out. Out of \$570 million budgeted for them, \$367 million will serve solely as direct subsidies for the forestry industry.

The Energy East oil pipeline, proposed by TransCanada and which seeks to traverse Quebec along the Saint Lawrence River, is also a part of the the Quebec government's extractivist economic policies. Despite the project being submitted to an environmental evaluation led by the BAPE and having now to respond to strict safety standards, leaks, breakages and accidents are still quite likely, and threaten the life, food and water sources of the communities living near the pipeline. The risks of spillages are even more serious because the pipeline follows the river for most of its length. Further, decision-making bodies have not taken into consideration the significant air pollution that the project entails. The CO2 emissions that it could lead to annually are around 30 to 32 tons, which is significantly larger than all of the emissions produced by all of the road vehicles in Quebec, as well as allowing increased daily tar sands production of between 650 000 and 750 000 barrels.

At the federal level, the political resources mobilised for the exploitation of tar sands are disproportionate. Any form of environmental alternative to this market is refused by the government, which insists unrelentingly on protecting the economic health of the Canadian tar sands

industry. Recall that the extraction of petroleum from tar sands produces three times as many greenhouse gas emissions and is five times more energy-consuming than the exploitation of conventional oil, and that each barrel of oil produced requires three times that volume in water (which will subsequently be saturated in chemicals and stored in leaky storage containers).

These projects will affect everyone in Quebec and Canada, because they entail the loss of national environmental wealth. Locally, those close to large projects will certainly feel more environmental damages. The pollution they cause, be it of the water, air or soil, will nonetheless affect an incalculable number of people.

The importance of dealing with real issues

At a time of important choices, the government must decide what it will leave to future generations. Between prioritizing measures which will help avert to severe environmental degradation, which now entails in the short term irreversible humanitarian disasters which will affect the entire globe; or, attempting to reduce a debt which has lasted for decades and which is, let's remember, proportionally much lower than that of the majority of OECD member countries (IRIS, 2014b); the choice is clear. Faced with that choice of paths, governments must make logical choices which seek to improve our real collective well-being and the sustainability of life as we know it. For that, investments in green energies must dramatically increase, environmental regulations must be severe, and economic development must be durable and must limit itself to the utilization of environmentally-friendly resources. The government has the duty to pull its head out of the sand and, as a responsible people, we ourselves need to revolt against these activities which put the future of our world in peril.



Canada as a whole, and even the rest of the world, will be affected by the cuts in the study of the environment, because our understanding of meteorological and climate changes will be limited. Predictions will be more difficult, severely harming among others the inhabitants of zones where the climate is unstable, as well as farmers. Cuts in subsidies to organizations which study the presence of contaminants in the environment will also be felt at the local and global levels. Citizens will be affected by cuts targeting environmental groups, which spread information and awareness to the general public.

Deregulation

Under neoliberalism, laws protecting the environment are seen as a constraint preventing private investment. At the federal level, the omnibus bills C-38 and C-45 of 2012 seriously reduced the legal protection of many water bodies as well as aquatic and bird species, directly affecting an incalculable number of animals, as well as allowing the general degradation of Canadian biodiversity. In addition, they modified the functioning of many bodies responsible for the evaluation of environmental impacts, such as the Canadian Environmental Evaluation Agency, which is seeing reductions in the lengths of its studies. Analyses of the long term effects of different chemical agents will thus no longer be able to take place, putting our health and environment in peril. The National Energy Board, a federal body tasked with evaluating future energy projects according to economic, social and environmental criteria, has indicated the appearance of a federal right to veto its decisions, which seriously obstructs its powers when its decisions are in opposition to the interests of the Conservative Party. It has also seen the disappearance of the requirement to demand conditions on projects for the protection of natural habitats, which makes possible projects which in no way

protect the ecosystems which support them, as well as the limiting of its studies to 2 years.

The deregulation of environmental protections will significantly increase pollution. This will affect, among others, bodies of water, where sources of drinking water are harmed, the soil, where we grow our food, and the air, which we breathe. Pollutants will be concentrated near industries, extractive sites and pipelines, but the currents of

rivers and winds will easily spread them. They will particularly affect people who live on local resources, such as aboriginal peoples. In the current context of globalization, they will also affect an indeterminate number of people

who consume exported Canadian food products, at the national and international levels.

Investment in non-ecological areas

Among neoliberal governments, the value of the environment is often only based on its monetary profitability. This is often linked to its exploitation, through agriculture, fishing, and logging, to the extraction of its mineral, petroleum, and gas resources, to its potential from hydroelectric or wind energy, or to tourism. The intrinsic value of biodiversity, landscapes and ecosystems is of limited priority, and their benefits to populations ignored.

The first Couillard budget is a part of a trend in political economic policy based above all on resource extraction. The Plan Nord Corporation, which has been given a budget of \$63 million principally to build roads, has been relaunched, and the government is promising additional investment funds of a billion dollars, the Hydrocarbon Mines Capital fund, for future investments in the mining industries which exploit resources under the Plan Nord. Let's recall that the latter allows mining exploitation over hundreds of square

“Faced with that choice of paths, governments must make logical choices which seek to improve our real collective well-being and the sustainability of life as we know it.”



The need to preserve local governance: The case of Montreal

By Rosa Parks

Just before the summer break, at the beginning of July 2014, Denis Coderre and his team announced their reform of the financing of boroughs. Given that the summer is not ideal for social dialogue and that it's often (if not always) at this point in the year when politicians uncertain of a policy choose to announce it, one can only worry about this new reform and the effects it will have on our lives. I do not understand why it's still tolerated in a society which claims to be democratic, and therefore which should want to encourage social dialogue, to be able to pass such important reforms at this point in the year, but in any case, it demonstrates how little faith Mr. Coderre has towards the reform and his cowardice in explaining it to the people who elected him.

When in addition, we learn that the municipal council of October 27 2014, which allowed the people of Montreal to pose questions and express concerns about the reform, limited "public" access to 30 people, squeezed in a noisy hall who tried to follow the exchanges via a video link, one cannot qualify the reform as democratic. Because indeed exceptional measures were perhaps necessary following the attacks in Ottawa, but equally exceptional measures should have been put in place to reestablish dialogue with citizens. And one should not have invited the people of Montreal to attend the municipal council when, despite many people going out of their way to attend, they would learn in front of the doors of the "house of citizens" (as Mr. Coderre likes to say) that only 30 people would be authorized to enter city hall. And while even the process of imposing the reform is part of such a struggle for democracy, I have not even begun to speak of the reform itself.

The reform fundamentally alters the balance and distribution of powers between the central municipal government and its 19 boroughs. We should however congratulate the municipal team for having waited 10 years to come back

to its promises of "strong and autonomous boroughs".¹ The double objective of the new model of governance from 2003, as stated by the City of Montreal at the time, was: "on one hand, to assure local services offered in the borough which respect the needs and concerns of citizens; on the other hand, to give the City of Montreal the means necessary to its development and vibrancy" (Ville de Montréal, 2005, p.1)

Concretely that entails that Mr. Coderre and Mr. Desrochers no longer want local elected officials to do their local work.² Local elected officials and their staff are supposed to be listening to citizens and connecting with the right people to resolve concrete problems as quickly as possible. Thus, if a person, an elementary school committee, a neighbourhood group, or anyone else wants to solve a problem, they will have to send emails to – it's not clear to whom – in order to never receive any response, even if the need is urgent. One could present projects which respond to every bureaucratic standard in the world, signed by 3 million people; we still wouldn't know who to send it to, and who would be responsible. For example, the ridiculous case of the strings of lights on Saint-Laurent³, where the borough mayor of Rosemont and the mayor of Montreal bounced the issue back and forth between each other; everyone gives up their responsibilities, and nothing else can be done about it, legally at least.

And it is this kind of administration which wants to take control of 52% of transportation arteries in the city (as opposed to 24% before the

¹ Ville de Montréal (2005). « Le partage des compétences », p.3, [En ligne]. (http://ville.montreal.qc.ca/pls/portal/docs/page/service_fin_fr/media/documents/budget-arr-2005-partage.pdf). Page consultée le 09 janvier 2015.

² Projet Montréal (2014). « François Limoges illustre les incohérences de la réforme Coderre », [En ligne]. (<http://projetmontreal.org/oui-video/francois-limoges-illustre-les-incoherences-reforme-coderre/>). Page consultée le 09 janvier 2015.

³ Pour en savoir plus: Vézina, R. (2014). « C'est réglé, les guirlandes! », Les Affaires, 18 novembre 2014, [En ligne]. (<http://www.lesaffaires.com/blogues/rene-vezina/-c-est-regle-les-guirlandes--/574071>) Page consultée le 09 janvier 2015.

québécoise en environnement have seen their funding cut. (Shields, 2014). While many groups are currently surviving on bank loans, some, like "Environnement Jeunesse" (ENJEU), are facing a forced closure. These cuts represent together a total of nearly \$450 000 (Shields, 2014).

In Canada, a plethora of environmental projects and organizations are losing their funding. The withdrawal from the Kyoto Protocol, on December 12 2012, principally explained by economic arguments, clearly demonstrates the priorities of the Conservatives, for whom the issue of climate change and its consequences appear to be futile. In 2010, subsidies intended for the Canadian Foundation for Climate and Atmospheric Sciences, which studies weather and climate in Canada in addition to disseminating information to the public and governments, were cancelled. The Conservatives have further decided to cut half of the funds given to diverse organizations which study the climate. In 2012, the omnibus bills C-38 and C-45 have eliminated other key programs, like the National Roundtable on the Environment and the Economy, tasked by the federal government to study ways of making the Canadian economy more environmentally sound. During the same year, the government abolished a program of research and monitoring of pollutants and chemical contaminants, which studied the presence in Canadian ecosystems of several substances dangerous to human health, led by the Department of Fisheries and Oceans and benefiting from an annual budget of \$12 million. Over the course of the last few years, more than 3000 environmental studies have been cancelled, research stations of Canadian national parks have been closed or seen their budgets reduced, sixty scientists have been fired from Environment Canada, and hundred from the Canadian National Research Council (Bronski, 2013). The federal government also took the decision to stop funding many non-profit environmental organizations,

on the grounds that their activities were against Canadian government policies. Many other programs, far too many to list here, have been transferred to the private sector or to universities.

While the state is progressively removing itself from economic life, many programs of regional development have been abolished or made precarious. Regions far from large centres, which often have an economy orientated towards extractive sectors (agricultural or mining), have seen the establishment of large extractive or energy projects, often polluting or involving environmental destruction, as the sole solution leading to economic dynamism. Citizens are thus caught in a corner, and many make the choice to approve projects, because alternatives are very often discouraged or ignored. They then have to deal with the environmental problems caused by projects like the Energy East oil pipeline or the Port-Daniel cement project. Aboriginal peoples, who often live far from large centres and whose way of life is still very dependent on the health of the local ecosystem, will also be principal victims of these measures.



The effects of austerity on the environment in Quebec and Canada

By WALL-E

At a time when 97% of scientists believe that climate change is real, is caused by human activity and is likely to cause an unparalleled environmental, humanitarian and public health disaster, in addition to causing a sixth mass extinction event, certain members of the political elite in charge of our governments still believe that our most important priority is paying back the debt. This flimsy excuse, which serves above all as a pretext for a neoliberal shift, is thus put forward to legitimize numerous cuts in different sectors of society, including the environment. Thus, austerity governments, which look principally to save money as a way of attracting foreign investors, have radically left aside the issue of the environment. Cuts in environmental protection and research, environmental deregulation, and investment in unsustainable sectors of the economy are all consequences of austerity measures which governments have taken, at both the provincial and federal levels.

At the provincial level, the consequences are recent. Their effects have been felt mainly in the past few years, most importantly since the election of Philippe Couillard's Liberal government. Despite their significance at the Quebec level, they match neither the scale nor the severity of what has occurred at the federal level since the coming to power of the Conservative government in 2006. Their arrival marked the beginning of a new area in Canada's environmental management, and the neoliberal character of their government brought unprecedented austerity measures to environmental programs. Last in line in the struggle against climate change, the country is recognized globally for the "Fossil Awards" that it has received for the past several years at global climate summits.

Resources cut

Under the pretext of eliminating the provincial deficit, public investments in environmental protection and research, which are not profitable in

the short term, are re-evaluated, and deemed not to be a priority. In Quebec, data from the Institut de recherche et d'information socio-économiques (IRIS; Insitute for Socio-Economic Research and Information) unveil that the first Couillard budget (2014-2015) includes cuts of \$37.9 million in the Ministry of Sustainable Development, Environment, and Climate Change, which constitutes a reduction of 19.4% from the previous budget, and which makes it the ministry having suffered the largest proportional reduction (IRIS, 2014a). In the budget, no specific amount is discussed for the reduction of greenhouse gasses, despite the fact that Quebec established a plan to reduce them, and the amount accorded to public transit is only 8% of the total budget of the Ministry of Transportation, while 23% is given specifically to road transportation (IRIS, 2014a). Further, no additional investment in public transit infrastructure is planned until 2024, a cut which, according to the Alliance pour le financement des transports collectifs au Québec (TRANSIT; Alliance for the Financing of Public Transit in Quebec), will obstruct the completion of all of the totality of public transit projects which were laid out in the Plans métropolitains d'aménagement et de développement (PMAD; Metropolitan planning and development plans). In addition, following the revival of the Plan Nord, the government recently announced new objectives to protect 50% of northern ecosystems (Québec, 2015). Paradoxically, no amount is allotted to accomplish this objective, which completely prevents it from coming to fruition.

Again in Quebec, the non-renewal of financing given to community organizations, in place since 2006 as a result of the government policy on community action, has been affecting, since last April, many environmental groups. Receiving annually a maximum budget of \$70 000, ten organizations, including the *Association québécoise de l'éducation relative à l'environnement (AQPERE)*, "*Coalition Eau Secours!*", and the *Fondation*

reform). All that while reducing the budget of Montreal, but look out! Mr. Coderre promises us that "services to citizens will not be reduced".⁴ When we see, after the publication of the budget, the increases in our taxes, despite the wonderful election promises of Mr. Coderre we have no choice but to worry about the quality of these services. Awaiting concrete solutions, Denis Coderre's team will be asked not to change the powers of boroughs, or the revenues directed towards them. This because, if the budget allotted to boroughs remains the same (\$990 million between 19 boroughs), it is rebalanced according to dubious statistics.⁵ The more that political bodies are distanced from the local population, the less they understand local realities.

And even if their budget is not officially attacked, their revenues are because "the announced reform would now impose revenue sharing for the autonomous revenues that boroughs take from activities on their own territory (construction permits, parking, etc.)". When we know that this administration foresees "revenues of \$175 million in parking and traffic tickets", which equals an increase of \$6 million from the amount projected in the previous budget, based on what we need to remember is an increase in the road network of the City from 24% to 52%, the mayor's team needs to explain to us how they are not going to be taking from the financing of the boroughs.

To close, let's return to the statistics of which the mayor's team is so proud and on which they base the "rebalancing" of borough finances. When we

"Mr. Desrochers and Mr. Coderre are playing the game of 'divide and rule' to destroy solidarity between districts and thus, overpass them."

hear Mr. Desrochers explain that he has not taken into consideration pedestrian traffic⁶, for example, because of missing data, even if he believes it is an important parameter to consider particularly for road maintenance, what does that imply to us? That implies that Mr. Desrochers wants to

put this reform in place as soon as possible, even if it is badly prepared and without planning any resolution mechanism in the event that, and quite certainly, this reform bizarrely does not work. And when a local elected official dares to criticize the reform but belongs

to one of the boroughs which is losing out, they are accused of being against the development of other boroughs. This means that in addition to not wanting to respond to questions, no longer being able to justify, Mr. Desrochers and Mr. Coderre are playing the card of "divide and rule", to break the solidarity between boroughs

⁶ Projet Montréal (2014). « La réforme Coderre: plus de bureaucratie, moins d'innovation, déplore Luc Ferrandez », [En ligne]. (<http://projetmontreal.org/oui-video/reforme-coderre-bureaucratie-moins-dinnovation-deploire-luc-ferrandez/>). Page consultée le 09 janvier 2015.

⁴ Radio-Canada (2014). « Des hausses de taxes de 1,1 % à 5,3 % à Montréal », Radio-Canada.ca, 29 janvier 2014, [En ligne]. (<http://ici.radio-canada.ca/regions/Montreal/2014/01/29/001-budget-montreal-denis-coderre-ville-bergeron.shtml>). Page consultée le 09 janvier 2015.

⁵ Pour en savoir plus: Guindoin, S. (2014). « La Ville Paramétrique, Proto Ville Intelligente », [En ligne]. (<http://dataholic.ca/2014/09/24/proto-ville-intelligente/>). Page consultée le 09 janvier 2015.



and therefore ignore their concerns. Indeed, I believe that the reform is little more than an way of taking over the powers of the boroughs.

The goal of Mr. Coderre, Mr. Desrochers and their team is not social dialogue, and they are imposing this reform on us while remaining vague about its effects and the centralization of powers it would entail. Should we really let politicians like this take even more power? No; we should give ourselves more power, more rights to be heard in defending our boroughs and our local representatives.

