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# THE McGill Daily

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## Montreal roller derby

Exploring the sport's history and culture

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# STUDENT JOURNALISM WEEK 2017

MONDAY FEB. 20 TO FRIDAY FEB. 24

### FEB. 20: How to launch your career and avoid burnout

Panel with Matt D'Amours (CBC, *The Link*), Chris Mills (BGR, *The McGill Daily*), Cecilia S McArthur (CBC, *CKUT*), and Kalina Laframboise (CBC, *CUP*).

6:00 p.m., McConnell 12 (3480 University St.)

### FEB. 21: The Other Side of Journalism: Talking to press relations people

Panel with Doug Sweet (McGill PR), Danny Payne (Raison D'Être Media), and Talar Adam (Leisa Lee Group).

6:00 p.m., University Centre B-29 (3480 McTavish St.)

### FEB. 22: Alternative journalism: How to start local

Panel with Jason C. McLean (Forget the Box Media), Ethan Cox (Ricochet), Gretchen King (GroundWire News), and Lorraine Carpenter (Cult MTL).

4:00 p.m., University Centre Club Lounge (3480 McTavish St.)

### FEB. 22: How to pitch the best stories: Pitching Workshop

Workshop with Philippe Gohier (VICE Quebec) and Andrea Bennett (Maisonneuve).

6:00 p.m., University Centre B-24 (3480 McTavish St., Daily/Le Délit offices)

### FEB. 23: Cyberjournalism, privacy, and you

Workshop with David Goulet, Pierre-David Oriol and Lex Gill.

6:00 p.m., McIntyre Medical Building 208 (3655 Promenade Sir William Osler)

### FEB. 24: Student Journalists Panel

Panel with Julia Dick (The McGill Tribune), Ralph Haddad (The McGill Daily), and Ikram Mecheri (Le Délit).

6:00 p.m., University Centre, Madeleine Parent Room (3480 McTavish St.)

# Marching against Islamophobia

Speakers emphasize compassion after the Quebec City attack

MADISON DUENKLER  
News Writer

On Saturday February 4, around two hundred people marched through the streets of Montreal to take a stand against Islamophobia and support Quebec's Muslim community.

Around thirty people initially gathered at Place Émilie-Gamelin at noon on Saturday, holding signs with slogans such as "united we stand, divided we fall" and "Jews for Muslims." The march started on Berri, turned onto Maisonneuve Est, then onto Saint-Denis, and back onto Berri.

Despite the snow, the crowd grew rapidly as the march proceeded. As people walked through the streets, they chanted, "Muslims attacked, Quebec is shocked," "this walk is a hug [...] for the orphans," and "no, no to hatred [...] yes, yes to peace" in French.

Bel Agir, an organization committed to supporting the Muslim community in Quebec and Canada, planned the march in response to the Sainte-Foy shootings at the Quebec City Islamic Cultural Centre, which killed six people. On the event page, the organization expressed their desire to "convey a message of unity, love, and compassion" through the march.

Bel Agir also posted a call for demonstration on their website, stating the main objectives of the march were: "to [...] express our unity and support for the victims against terrorists and their supporters" and "[demand] that our politicians take concrete measures to end all speech of Islamophobia, hatred, and violence, which has long been tolerated, largely media-tized, and recently decriminalized."

Along with signs, there were many attendees carrying Unifor flags – Unifor is Canada's largest private sector union.

When asked about Unifor's presence at the event, an attendee replied in French: "We're here for the march against hate and for peace and for love around world. We are here to support each other and our brothers who died as martyrs, those who died in the last attack in Quebec, and their children. We're supporting each other. We are against racism, against discrimination, either for race or sex. We are against all forms of discrimination that exist."

The march ended back at Place Émilie-Gamelin and speeches commenced. The first speaker was Thomas Dowd, a bishop in the Roman Catholic Church. "Hello my friends, my brothers, my sisters,"



Demonstrators at Place Émilie-Gamelin.

ELLEN COOLS | The McGill Daily

he began, in French, "it's an honour to be here with you today to share this moment of solidarity. We saw, at the beginning of the week, a horrible event, but I think we will see the best of the Quebecois people to come. We say, 'you always hear the tree that falls but you never hear the forest that grows' but here, we hear the forest."

Dowd went on to explain his position: "I am a bishop. You may know the title of priest, which is used for our religious leaders. A bishop is a leader of priests. I represent the Catholic Church in Montreal."

"In solidarity with all Christians, we are here together for peace," he continued.

Dowd also referenced a passage from a text published by the Catholic Church. "In the sixties, we had a great coming together of all the bishops throughout the world in Rome [...] During this meeting, there was a text, which was published on the relations in between Christians and Muslims, and I find this text prophetic and I would like to share it with you."

He then quoted the text: "The Catholic Church looks with great esteem upon Muslims [...] If, through the centuries, many dissensions and hostilities manifested themselves between Christians and Muslims, the council exonerates them all and forgets their past and puts itself fully to mutual comprehension. Therefore, together we will protect all men, social justice, moral values, peace, and liberty."

The next speaker, Haroun Bouazzi, director of Muslims and Arabs for Secularism Quebec (AMAL-Quebec) a feminist, pluralist association of Quebecers, according to its website, also spoke of hope, liberty, and unity. He first thanked Bel Agir.

"I would like to thank Bel Agir for having brought us together today, for having pushed us to march. There have been many, many things that have been said this week, many beautiful things, lots of compassion, lots of union, lots of strong words from our politicians and many messages of love from the people," he said in French. "I think we can really be proud of the reaction from the Quebecois people, no matter where they are from, after this tragedy that has touched us all."

"Today we marched for the memories of the dead; today we marched for the love that unites us, for the justice for which we are going to fight," he continued.

Bouazzi also stressed the importance of remaining active against hate. "The work will begin by demanding for our politicians, for the media, for our enemies, to put into place real political action against Islamophobia, against racism. We need to demand from our media that there's a minimum of ethics in public debate. We will remind them, message after message, phone call after phone call, that after what happened in Quebec City, we will never accept again the stigmatization [...] And us too, as citizens, our responsibility is immense because without us, nothing will happen."

Samantha Lustig, an attendee at the march, shared her reasons for attending the demonstration with The Daily. "My best friend in elementary school was Muslim, I had a number of friends who were Muslim women throughout my life, teachers who are Muslim women [...]. I just feel like every person who lives in Canada deserves to feel safe. I am an English as a second language teacher. I have students who want to immigrate to Canada who are Muslim, and it's necessary for them to feel safe here and to know that they are loved."

"Today we marched for the memories of the dead; today we marched for the love that unites us, for the justice for which we are going to fight."

—Haroun Bouazzi  
Director of AMAL-Quebec

When asked if she thought the Canadian government was doing enough to support the Muslim community, Lustig replied, "Nope. The immigration cap is garbage and everyone should contact their local MP [Member of Parliament]

stating that removing the immigration cap is essential for Canada."

"The immigration cap is garbage and everyone should contact their local MP [Member of Parliament] stating that removing the immigration cap is essential for Canada."

—Samantha Lustig  
Attendee

Nada Abdelhak, another attendee, felt differently about the efforts of the Canadian government.

"The Canadian government of Justin Trudeau actually I think is the best that we've had since I came to Canada," Abdelhak told The Daily. "I've never felt as Canadian as I'm feeling now. I think that he is doing enough."

While a lot of the speakers at the event focused on the stigmatization of the Muslim community, Abdelhak said, "People are so concentrated on terrorism, they associate it actually to Muslims and they don't see that this is what divides us."

# A moment or a movement?

## Panel talks The Women's March at Washington, intersectionality, privilege

**NORA MCCREADY**  
The McGill Daily

On Thursday February 9, a group of students and community members gathered in Arts W-20 for a panel discussion focusing on the question, "Women's March on Washington: a Moment or a Movement?"

Organised by McGill Students for Oxfam-Quebec, panelists included Shelley Clark, a professor of sociology at McGill, Gillian Sonin, one of the organizers of the National Women's March in Canada, and Alia Hassan Cournol, one of the coordinators of, and spokeswoman for, the Montreal's Women's March.

The panel began by discussing the nature of the march, and whether they believed it was an isolated moment or the beginning of a movement.

During the talk, Sonin argued that the 'or' in "a moment or a movement" is detrimental to the image of the march, and emphasized why the march was both a moment and a movement.

"I believe that it was a big moment, clearly, it was the biggest demonstration in U.S. history," she said. "[However] we are a coalition of women from coast to coast to coast who spent our days and nights in constant contact with one another to figure out how to mobilize that moment [...]. That coalition in and of itself is a movement and that coalition exists and continues to exist and we still are in constant contact with one another to figure out what that movement is moving forward."

Cournol continued that, "It became a movement when we started understanding that a structure of political opportunity had opened. [...] Donald Trump was the structure of political opportunity because he's so misogynistic, because he's so xenophobic, because he's so racist, it all became political."

The panel touched on the differences between the Women's

March in Washington D.C. and other protests. Both Sonin and Cournol identified the March's intersectional approach as one of its strengths.

"There has always been intersection in women's movements but certain voices were not [...] heralded and brought up as the leaders of these movements [...]. There were definitely some groups that were omitted [at the Women's March]," Sonin said. "It wasn't perfect, but I think that holding something to perfection is a way to tear it down," she added.

To contrast, she brought up the diversity within the national team of the U.S. Women's March and claimed, "It was a moment of intersection for this movement, and that was a big theme for the march."

Cournol identified her personal efforts to make sure the Montreal march was intersectional.

"Quebec has a long history of feminism, but a long history of white feminism [...] I work in a community organization that is focused on anti-[racism] and islamophobia, so that's why I jumped into the organization to have our speakers be as diverse as possible."

Clark brought up the wide participation by men as a difference between the Women's March and past marches. "I saw many more men at this march than usual, especially young men and when [the women] chanted, 'My body, my choice,' the men echoed equally loud, 'Her body, her choice,'" she said. "Part of intersectionality is men. And we can't overlook that."

Clark also discussed why the march was termed a "women's" march, as opposed to something more broad. "The U.S. as a country faced this decision between electing the first female president ever or someone who was proud and bragged about being a serial sexual assaulter. That contrast, that juxtaposition, was a great catalyst for people saying we're going to put



The event's panelists.

CONOR NICKERSON | The McGill Daily

the issue [of women's rights] front and centre."

Sonin transitioned into discussing how the march has influenced action around different issues. "It created a culture of protest [...] So when [Trump] announced the travel ban, protests were going on at all the airports and consulates, so it immediately created a culture of protest."

The panelists also discussed how the media reacted to the marches.

"We had six hundred thousand people marching in the Women's March in D.C. and maybe 250,000 at Trump's [inauguration] but all that got covered was just the numbers at his [inauguration] and his preposterous claim that there were 1.5 million people there," said Clark.

She continued: "He managed nonetheless to control that media cycle [...] I really think our media

needs to become more savvy in not allowing [themselves] to fall into these kinds of traps because that then distracts from the other numbers and the other events going on."

Sonin felt more positive about the media coverage because media outlets' shock at the enormity of the protests was evident in the coverage.

"I came home from the march in Montreal and I turned on CNN and there were these photos and video of the marches happening across the U.S. and around the world. And it shocked the media so much that they didn't even have necessarily a frame for what the story was going to be. They were just broadcasting the images [...] It was this moment of catching the media off guard. They couldn't tell the story for you. You got to tell it."

During the question and answer period, Sonin responded to a ques-

tion concerning what this movement means for Canada by condemning the attitude that the Canadian government is beyond reproach. "[There is] a lot of patting ourselves on the back," she said, "[but] that's a slippery slope to get into: to compare to what is worse so then you become stagnant."

She added that "I think what we need in Canada right now is to get out in the streets and demand that the liberal government live up to its promise of the rights that they have guaranteed to our Indigenous brothers and sisters."

Cournol added a reminder aimed at encouraging action and mobilization through privilege: "Just remember one thing, you are here at McGill, you are in a place of privilege. And a lot of other young people around the world or even here in Montreal, they cannot be here. They don't have the means."

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# SSMU Council debates anti-Zionist tweet

## Internal regulations motion tabled until next Council session

**MARINA CUPIDO**  
The McGill Daily

On Thursday February 9, the Legislative Council of the Students' Society of McGill University (SSMU) convened for an exceptionally long and confrontational meeting, with Council lasting over six hours and ending at one a.m..

During the first two hours of Council, people speaking during Question Period primarily voiced concerns over a tweet by Arts Representative and former Daily editor Igor Sadikov, which has drawn intense criticism for its alleged incitement to violence.

Furthermore, a motion to amend SSMU's internal regulations was debated extensively and then postponed until the next Council meeting, on February 23. Council also discussed six notices of motion and three other motions.

### Councillor Sadikov's tweet

The day before the Council meeting, on Wednesday February 8, a recent tweet reading "punch a Zionist today" had surfaced online.

The tweet, which was posted to Sadikov's personal account after working hours on February 6, was a reference to the recent "punch a Nazi" memes which circulated online following the viral video of white supremacist Richard Spencer being punched in the face at the inauguration of United States President Donald Trump.

The tweet in question has since been deleted, but not before screenshots of it had been widely shared within the McGill community and beyond.

Over the course of the following day, Thursday February 9, an intense storm of criticism developed around Sadikov and his tweet, with many at McGill and in the wider world portraying it as an incitement to anti-Semitic violence.

This interpretation rests on the conflation of Zionism with Jewishness which, while widely believed, is in fact a misconception; many Jewish people do not identify with the settler-colonial ideology of Zionism or the goals and actions of the state of Israel.

Moreover, it should be noted that Sadikov himself is Jewish, a fact which has been ignored by many media outlets and in the discussion surrounding this controversy.

On Thursday morning, the Arts Undergraduate Society (AUS), of which Sadikov is a council member as one of the Arts Representatives to SSMU, published a statement on their

Facebook page condemning the tweet and asking for his resignation.

Meanwhile, Christopher Manfredi, McGill's Provost and Vice-Principal Academic, issued a public statement calling the tweet "disturbing," stating that disciplinary action was underway on the grounds that the tweet violated McGill policy, despite being sent from a personal account after working hours.

Sadikov has been harshly criticized within certain segments of the McGill community, and in a variety of local, national, and international media outlets. Nonetheless, a movement in support of him has also developed.

A number of student groups and individuals in the university community expressed public support for Sadikov, using the hashtag #Biased-McGill to call attention to what they perceived as a disproportionate and unjust response to his tweet.

### Question period

It was in this incendiary context that SSMU Council met on Thursday evening. While such meetings are generally only attended by the councillors themselves and a few members of the student press, this one had attracted a crowd of roughly 50 students.

Some came with the intention of confronting Sadikov for perceived incitement to violence, while others wished to stand in solidarity with him and call attention to what they saw as political bias underlying the attacks against him.

After a number of lengthy presentations which were previously scheduled for that Council meeting, a question period began during which members of the gallery could air their concerns, and have them addressed by members of Council.

Arts student David Naftalin opened the session by telling those assembled that he personally felt frightened by Sadikov's tweet, and didn't see "how a member of this board has a right to be here based on the SSMU constitution, which prides itself on inclusivity and diversity."

In response to this, engineering student Laura Khoury said that as a Palestinian, she felt unsafe due to the presence of Zionists on Council.

"Since SSMU has a social justice mandate," asked Khoury, "why does it allow Zionist councillors on Council, when Zionist ideology is inherently [linked to] ethnically cleansing Palestinians?"

"Your question I think is really inappropriate," replied Social Work Representative Jasmine Segal, "because freedom of speech [means that]

people are allowed to believe what they want."

Segal publicly identified herself as a Zionist, and characterized Sadikov's tweet as a "hate crime." When this statement elicited criticism from some in the gallery, she stated that she had consulted thoroughly with her constituents before the meeting, and was using vocabulary which they had endorsed.

Much of the question period involved heated debate over how exactly to define Zionism, and over who had experienced violence.

Iris Madeleine asked Council what would be done "to guarantee Igor's safety after this hateful campaign against him."

AUS President Becky Goldberg, who was present in the gallery, replied to Madeleine, making it clear that she was speaking as an individual, not as the voice of her Society.

"It seems to be a little bit of [...] a political witch-hunt," said Goldberg, "and I have tried to ensure Igor's safety just in providing my personal support [...] but we have been contemplating formulating a statement that does not condone the use of [...] defamation or [...] the promotion of harm in response to something that people perceived as harm."

Indeed, on the following day, AUS published a second statement on its Facebook page, condemning the violence enacted or threatened against Sadikov in recent days.

"I am grateful for President Goldberg's support provided on a personal level," responded Sadikov at Council. "That said, I'm in agreement with [Madeleine] about the need for institutional support. Over the past 24 hours I have received hundreds of insults and threats on social media, my personal information has been posted online, it has been reported to various institutions and authorities. I cannot say that [...] I feel safe."

### Internal governance reforms motion

Following the question period, Council discussed a motion to reform SSMU's internal regulations which had been moved by Sadikov in collaboration with SSMU VP University Affairs Erin Sobat. In essence, the motion aimed to improve accountability at the level of the SSMU Board of Directors (BoD).

Last year, a series of reforms were passed which significantly increased the BoD's power, in an effort to allow Council to function more efficiently. In doing so, however, reforms failed to put in place adequate checks and balances; as a result, the BoD, an un-



SSMU Council.

CONOR NICKERSON | The McGill Daily

elected body, currently has the unchecked ability to make substantive decisions independently of Council in certain cases.

The motion brought to Thursday's Council meeting aimed to address this problem by obliging the Chair of the BoD to present a full report at every meeting of Council.

The motion also made a slight adjustment to the regulations surrounding the ratification of opinions from SSMU's Judicial Board (J-Board). Currently, every time the J-Board issues an opinion, it is presented to the BoD to be either ratified, returned for further consideration by the J-Board, or overturned. In order to overturn an opinion, a four-fifths majority of BoD members is required; this threshold can be difficult to reach in certain cases, resulting in institutional paralysis.

As Sadikov put it, "At the BoD, we had this situation where the Board was not able to ratify [a certain] opinion, nor overturn it. So this opinion is basically not in effect because it hasn't been ratified, nor overturned, so it remains in this procedural gray area or limbo."

In order to address this issue, the motion proposed by Sadikov and Sobat only required a simple majority of BoD members to overturn an opinion from the J-Board. However, this small procedural change sparked a heated controversy. Many students had expressed firm opposition to the motion in the days leading up to Council, contending that this change was motivated by a desire to thwart J-Board favourable opinions towards Zionism.

Some of those who spoke against the motion during Thursday's Council meeting referenced the judicial opinion issued in May 2016 which ruled that a General Assembly motion in support of the pro-Palestinian Boycott, Divestment & Sanctions (BDS) campaign had violated SSMU policy. This controversial J-Board opinion

was never ratified by the BoD; nor was it overturned.

In addition to allegations that Sobat and Sadikov's motion was politically motivated by anti-Zionist intentions, some of those who spoke against the motion at Council appeared to be under the erroneous impression that the BoD does not currently have the power to overturn J-Board opinions at all. Notably, VP Operations Sacha Magder argued repeatedly and at length that, as he put it, "as you allow J-Board decisions to be overturned, you remove its separation from some of the political levels of governance."

Magder's confusion about the precise nature of both the motion at hand and SSMU's own governance structures was emblematic of the protracted debate which followed. Ultimately, Environment Representative Tuviere Okome expressed the opinion that "this motion was badly explained," despite the fact that both Sobat and Sadikov had explained it at great length beforehand, and that notice had been given at Council two weeks previously, as required by SSMU bylaws.

Close to midnight, after more than two hours of debate on the motion, Council voted to postpone the discussion until the next meeting, on February 23.

### Other business

The motion regarding the endorsement of the McGill communities' council letter to the Board of Governors was tabled until the next meeting, as well.

The motion regarding the amendment of the SSMU electoral timeline and the motion for SSMU to advocate for an immediate suspension of the Canadian-U.S. safe third country agreement passed.

At the time of publication, the SSMU executive team had yet to release a statement regarding Sadikov's tweet or the events of the Council meeting.

# Committee talks climate strategies

## Attendees voice concerns that Canada will not meet its goals

**LIZZIE GRIECO**  
News Writer

Students gathered on Wednesday February 8 at the McGill University Faculty Club to discuss the challenges of transitioning to a low-carbon economy with the Senate of Canada's "Standing Committee for Energy, the Environment and Natural Resources."

The open forum, organized by the Trotter Institute for Sustainability in Engineering and Design (TISED) based in McGill University's Faculty of Engineering, allowed students to present their opinions and questions concerning new environmental technology, the economic costs and benefits of carbon reduction, and the University's role in conducting carbon-reduction research and promotion.

In attendance was the Committee's chairman Richard Neufeld, deputy chairman Paul Massicotte, and committee members Diane Griffin and Rosa Galvez.

The purpose of the committee, Neufeld said, is to identify "what solutions and technologies exist today or

that are in development to reduce emissions and fight climate change."

The forum mainly consisted of questions concerning the committee's opinion on where the focus of carbon-reduction should be. Students and community members alike promoted a new focus on a multitude of factors.

Certain attendees encouraged the committee to stay focused on carbon-reduction technologies that already exist rather than directing their resources at new innovations. Others combatted this idea by arguing for an increase of funding towards university research and the development of new technology.

The main point of contention, however, was whether the Canadian government's goals will be reached by 2030, goals which include limiting global temperature increase to two degrees Celsius.

While Galvez presented an optimistic vision of achieving these goals by attacking from different angles and creating a culture of change, Neufeld responded that he is "very concerned that we will not meet our targets."

Instead of focusing on current carbon-reduction targets, Neufeld proposed that we "worry about the consequences of climate change, [...] organize our society, [...] and get prepared for the eventuality of maybe not achieving [our current reduction target of] two degrees Celsius."

A common concern among attendees was the change in quality of life that may result from new carbon reduction technologies and practices. The committee responded to these points by stating that Canadians will have to change their way of life to ensure that carbon emissions are reduced.

"We have to change our habits and the way we consume some types of products and replace them," asserted Galvez. "Researchers are making efforts to replace materials with renewable materials [...] we have to put emphasis on these problems."

While most of the questions focused on specific suggestions for the committee, certain students questioned the committee's stance on controversial economic and environmental government measures.

One particular question pertained to the Kinder-Morgan expansion of the Trans Mountain Pipeline and its impact on Indigenous peoples.

"How is [the federal government]," asked a student, "justifying extending an oil project [...] on the land of the Tsleil-Waututh nation?"

Neufeld, acknowledging his previous involvement in the oil and gas industry in British Columbia, insisted that oil will continually be used as a natural resource in the future.

"We have to change our habits and the way we consume some types of products and replace them."

—Rosa Galvez  
Committee member

"It has to get out to markets" he claimed, "to actually keep us enjoying the type of life that we have today."

"How is [the federal government] justifying extending an oil project [...] on the land of the Tsleil-Waututh nation?"

—Attendee

Massicotte added, "it's a very complicated issue [...] the government overall is quite receptive and all of us wish and hope for better relations with our First Nations [...] but that doesn't mean you shouldn't have serious discussions and disagreements on certain issues."

# AMUSE files injunction against McGill

## Motion submitted on behalf of Floor Fellows

**ELLEN COOLS**  
The McGill Daily

On February 7, the Association of McGill University Support Employees (AMUSE) announced in a press release that they have filed a motion in Quebec's Superior Court on behalf of Floor Fellows. The motion is an injunction to require the University to pay Floor Fellows immediately, which would make the case an emergency.

The motion comes following the University's decision to veto an agreement with AMUSE's bargaining team regarding Floor Fellows in late January. The agreement had been reached through an independent arbitrator in December 2016. Among other aspects, the agreement had stipulated salaries for Floor Fellows.

### A motion several years in the making

In an interview with The Daily, AMUSE President Claire Michela said that AMUSE and Floor Fellows decided to take the issue to court because "it's been several years that we've been trying to negotiate for a collective agreement and the injunction's purpose is to make things, specifically the payment of Floor Fellows, happen immediately."

"It's been long enough, they've waited long enough," Michela continued. "It's time for justice for them."

Isabelle Oke, AMUSE VP Floor Fellows, told The Daily in an email that "the action was about accountability, keeping McGill accountable for the time they wasted in bargaining by not

providing [the administration's] team with a clear mandate, and backing out of an agreement in a way that broke negotiation conventions."

"It's been long enough, they've waited long enough. It's time for justice for them."

—Claire Michela  
AMUSE President

The motion itself is an individual recourse, which means that it has not been filed as a collective representing all Floor Fellows. Instead, individual Floor Fellows have signed onto a declaration agreeing to be part of the injunction.

Michela noted that 35 out of seventy total Floor Fellows have signed onto the motion, "which makes it quite strong."

Oke added that she thinks the proportion of Floor Fellows supporting the motion "shows how fiercely determined we are to make McGill move towards equitable labour practices and acknowledge the role Floor Fellows play in residence."

When asked about the Floor Fellows' reaction to the legal action, Oke said that "reactions were a mix of enthusiasm, anticipation, and ner-

vous apprehension because of the big steps we're taking and the multiple outcomes it could lead to."

Another Floor Fellow, Helen Ogundeji, told The Daily via email that "it's great to know that the union reps are continuing to pursue Floor Fellows' interests. As someone who is not part of the active mobilizing on [AMUSE's] end, it is comforting to know that there are people who are consistently on our side and ready to figure out the next steps in this ongoing battle."

Other unions, particularly McGill University Non-Academic Certified Association (MUNACA), have supported AMUSE's legal actions.

According to Michela, MUNACA will publish AMUSE's letter to the Human Resources committee of the Board of Governors on its website. MUNACA has also published a Journal de Montreal article discussing AMUSE's legal action.

"I spoke out at a couple of stewards meetings that they had about it, so they're really showing solidarity with us and they're flabbergasted that this [the University reneging on the agreement] would happen," Michela said. "I can't imagine it happening to any other group."

### The injunction hearing

On Thursday February 9, the injunction hearing took place.

In an email to The Daily, Michela said, "The judge did not accept that it was an emergency, because we could have filed an injunction at any point between May 2014, when Floor

Fellows were accredited (and not getting paid), to now."

"However, the judge decided that there should be an interlocutory hearing, which should take place in short order, with more information from both sides," Michela added.

"[The number of Floor Fellows] shows how fiercely determined we are to make McGill move towards equitable labour practices and acknowledge the role Floor Fellows play in residence."

—Isabelle Oke  
AMUSE VP Floor Fellows

She added that dates have been set to gather more information and there will be another hearing on May 5, where "a decision should be rendered as to whether Floor Fellows should be paid before the collective agreement is finalized in arbitration."

According to Michela, this is a short time frame for a court to make a decision.

When asked whether AMUSE chose to take legal action because lines of communication with the administration had broken down, Michela said that lines of communication remain open.

"There was an official meeting between the arbitrator, the University, and our representative this Monday, February 6, so those lines of communication are still open," she explained, "but the University doesn't see our side, our point of view, at all."

Michela noted that there are dates set up for arbitration hearings, but "we have shown that we are unhappy with what's happened in the recent past."

With the injunction declared a non-emergency, AMUSE is planning mobilization efforts.

"The mobilization is hopefully going to be really visible and we're going to try to get a lot of student support," Michela said.

"I think to Floor Fellows the most important thing is justice. It's not necessarily getting paid per se, they do what they do because they're amazing people. But I think we have decided to proceed this way because it's the strongest course of legal action we can take right now," she concluded.

When asked to comment, McGill's Director of Internal Communications Doug Sweet told The Daily that "the University never comments on matters before the courts or on labour negotiations that are in progress."

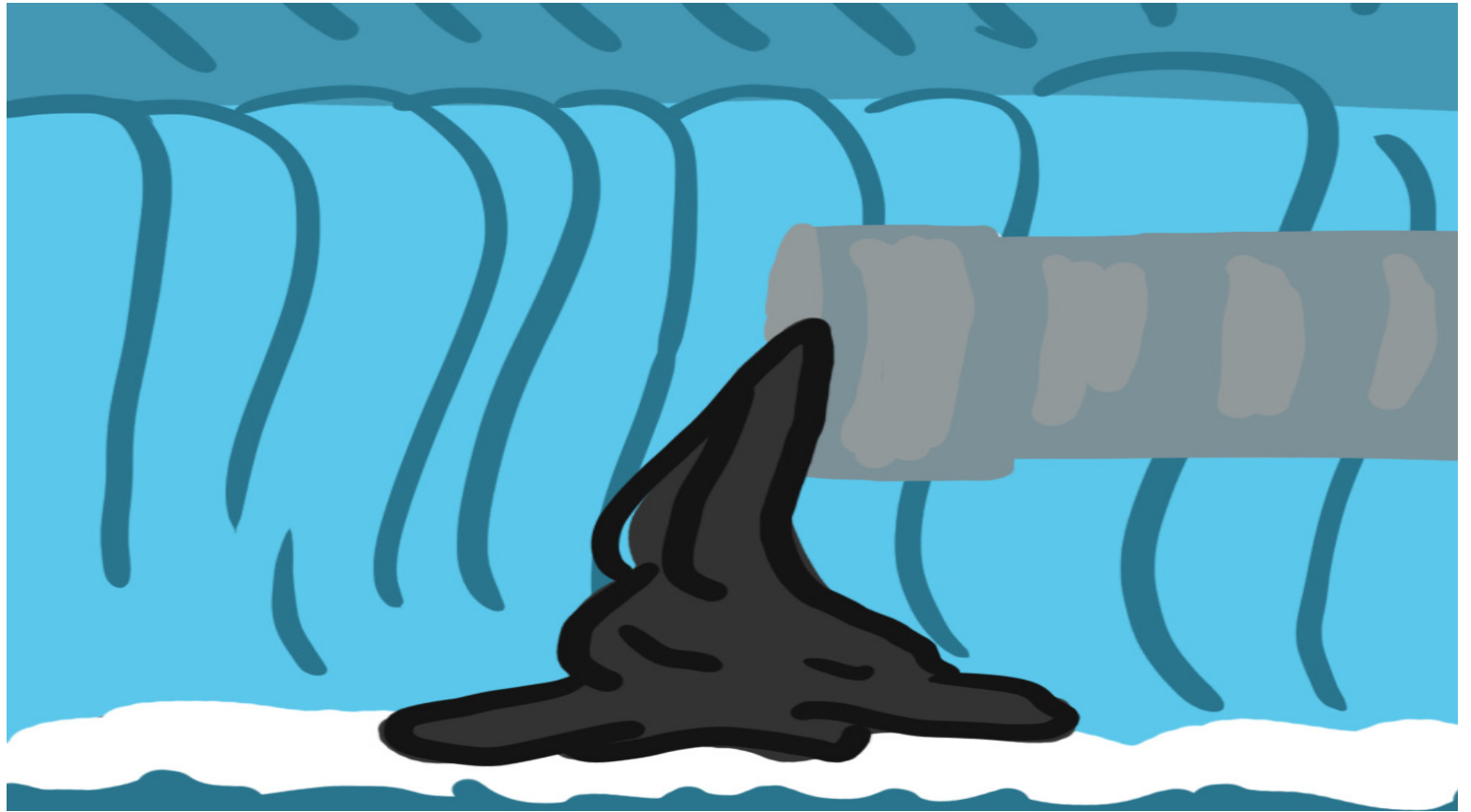
# Climate governance under Trudeau

Environmental sustainability shouldn't be expected from Liberal party

**RYAN SHAH**  
Commentary Writer

Neoliberalism is a system of economic governance that embraces free trade, deregulation and the deconstruction of the welfare state and has become an intrinsic aspect of western political culture. In Canada, though our politics and policies are diverse, all of our major political parties generally agree that politics must be maintained within the confines of global neoliberal discourse. Many commentators have chided neoliberalism, and the parties that practice it, for its perpetuation of inequality and violence. Whether or not you agree with this assessment, one thing is abundantly clear: the Liberals under Trudeau have been strangely immune to this critique. The Liberal government revels in a centrist, neoliberal approach to governance that, despite its veil of progressivism, embraces liberalized market solutions such as the selling off of public assets and using private investment to fund infrastructure development. The problematic nature of this double-edged brand of politics is nowhere more apparent than in the environmental policy being advanced by the Liberal government. Despite the increasingly grim climate consensus, neoliberals have doubled down on environmental deregulation as the only legitimate solution to slow growth. Although Trudeau speaks the language of sustainability, boldly asserting that “you cannot separate what is good for the environment and what is good for the economy,” Liberal policy is doing precisely that. The recent approval of the Kinder Morgan pipeline, and the government's adoption of Harper's pro-Keystone XL stance demonstrate that the Liberal government is interested in enhancing Canada's reliance on fossil fuels. Though Trudeau rightfully asserts that you cannot separate what is good for the environment and good for the economy, further investing in the oil sands, to the tremendous detriment of the environment, is a patent example of such a separation. Despite the pro-environment rhetoric of the Liberal government, it must be made clear: the Liberal Party is not a party of sustainability.

The Liberal government was voted in on the dual promise of economic revitalization and confronting the grave reality of climate change. Despite a false narrative of embracing sustainability, the government has only pledged a measly \$200 million annually for developing and adopting renewable energy which, is a drop in the bucket compared to in-



**SONIA IONESCU** | The McGill Daily

vestment industry wide. The Liberal government, unable to enact policy that would have a systemic impact on the sustainability of the Canadian economy, has been forced to walk an equivocating line between neoliberal-minded economics and sound environmental policy. Emblematic of this equivocation is the government's recent decision to nix Enbridge's Northern Gateway pipeline, despite the approval of the proposed Kinder Morgan Pipeline. The rejection of the Northern Gateway Pipeline should not be interpreted as careful enviro-economic pragmatism but rather as a rhetorical device that salvages their credibility as a party of sustainability. Though ecologically-minded Canadians have been quick to demonstrate their disapproval of this decision, Ipsos reports that the wider Canadian populace has responded positively to the decision.

It would perhaps be unfair, or at least misguided, to place the blame for environmental mismanagement entirely on the shoulder of the Liberal government. They are, after all, beholden to an electorate that is chiefly interested in economic security and growth. Though the voters understand deregulatory policy as essential for economic growth, the favorable reception of the pipeline despite its environmental consequences should be understood in the larger context of environmental policies within the confines of neoliberalism. This situation typifies the broad political strength of attitudes against environmental regulation in times of economic downturn.

The extreme unpopularity of the Alberta NDP's recent carbon tax is a further example of this. The Alberta NDP government has recently implemented a modest carbon tax to incentivize carbon neutral consumption and production.

Despite the pro-environment rhetoric of the Liberal government it must be made clear: the Liberal party is not a party of sustainability.

The Liberal government's pragmatic, unprincipled approach to policy, most visible in their handling of the Kinder Morgan and Northern Gateway pipelines, is one that neglects the deeply disturbing realities of climate change. The Kinder Morgan Pipeline buttresses Canadian reliance on fossil fuels – the core goal of the pipeline is, obviously, to make the oil sands a more lucrative project. Though most defenses of the pipeline have framed it as a necessary short-term evil to improve the Alberta job market, it is an additional long-term barrier to the development of green jobs as it makes the oil sands a more attractive and

profitable venture. Though it would obviously be misleading to deny the growth-based impetus for giving Kinder Morgan the green light, it would be equally misleading to deny that there exist other policy options that the government could have implemented to jumpstart job creation in areas hit by weak oil prices.

The Liberal government is now directly responsible for the continued violent expropriation of land from Canada's Indigenous communities. Though the Liberal government has been keen to point out their willingness to confer with Indigenous communities over which pipelines traverse their treaty-protected land, they have been less forthcoming with the fact that over two thirds of the impacted Indigenous communities have opposed the approval of the Kinder Morgan pipeline – this has obviously not been taken into consideration by the government. Deciding on policies that impact the livelihood and sovereignty of Indigenous peoples without taking guidance from them is not only a disaster in itself, but it rebukes the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People to which the Liberal government has asserted their commitment.

Despite this, one might opt to embrace the Liberal's lukewarm commitment to environmentalism and laud their efforts for making the best of a bad situation. The Liberal government has, after all, committed itself to instating a carbon tax which would hypothetically help wean our country of its fossil fuel dependence which is responsible for the

egregious degradation of the planet. If the lessons of the Liberal government's handling of pipelines and the Alberta NDP's recent experience with carbon taxation are to be instructive, it is evident that the carbon tax regime produced by the Liberals will be one that is a product of political convenience. Unless the Liberals are willing to make systemic changes to the economy to facilitate substantive changes in our patterns of resource consumption, the carbon tax that the Liberal government produces will likely be a watered down compromise that neglects the climate reality of the 21st century. Though green activists have steadfastly opposed the Liberal's first politicized environmental decision, it is evident that the logic of neoliberalism which dominates national discourse political economy will quite uniformly favor the economy. If 2016 should be any indication, Trudeau and his Liberal government will continue their attempt to haphazardly jam environmental policy into the neoliberal framework in a wholly counterproductive way. Despite the promise of a greener, fairer economy that they were elected on, it seems evident that this government will continue to defer substantive climate change policy and instead embrace politically convenient market outcomes. Put simply, if you are a Canadian who cares about the environment, the Liberal government is not your friend.

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# Is socialism dead? I sure hope not

A response to Angelo Manaloto's "Is Socialism Dead?"

ZACH MORGENSTERN  
Commentary Writer

On January 23, The Daily published an article by Angelo Manaloto entitled "Is Socialism Dead?". His answer was an emphatic yes. Manaloto's argument, however, is based on a fundamental misunderstanding of what socialism is. Manaloto tells us that socialism fails because human nature is "inclined to greed and selfishness" which leads to dictatorship and disappointment.

Socialism is an egalitarian ideology, and because of its ambitious, benevolent intentions, many mistake socialism for a utopian dream. It is for this reason that writers like Manaloto are able to make the sweeping generalization that socialism has been a failure because no socialist country has succeeded at abolishing poverty or ending state violence. If one expected the initials U.S.S.R. to stand for Utopia of Sparkling Socialist Rainbows, then indeed socialism has failed.

But socialists, especially those in the Marxist tradition, are not utopians. Socialism is not about envisioning a perfect society, but rather is based on the understanding that capitalism is a fundamentally unjust system that inevitably leads to crisis. Advocating for socialism is not about building a perfect world, it's about building a bearable one. As Fidel Castro once said "They talk about the failure of socialism but where is the success of capitalism in Africa, Asia and Latin America?"

Socialism is an egalitarian ideology, and because of its ambitious, benevolent intentions, many mistake socialism for a utopian dream.

Capitalism is a system wherein wealth is not shared, but competed for. As such, it is a zero-sum game in which the accumulation of billions by some leaves only crumbs for others. Capitalists argue this problem can be overcome because economies can grow. But growth cannot happen unless capitalists pursue new sources of wealth. In practice, this can look like brutal invasions to secure the economic resources of countries in the global South (for example, as Donald Trump crudely puts it "taking the oil"). It can also look like the fossil fuel industry

spewing toxins into water supplies and disregarding the problem of climate change as they seek out fuel sources like tar sands.

This is a problem that plagues all capitalist systems. Imperialism and extraction are not just on the agendas of hardliners like Trump and Dick Cheney, but are also seen as essential by more likeable capitalists like Justin Trudeau. After approving the Kinder Morgan and Line 3 tar sands pipelines (while rejecting a third pipeline), Trudeau explained that his position was a way of reconciling Canada's environmental and economic interests. Given that climate change has the potential to destroy substantial amounts of infrastructure and make much of the world uninhabitable, one could easily argue that approving pipelines is not in Canada's long-term economic interest. However, from a capitalist, constant pro-growth perspective, Trudeau's approach makes sense.

Capitalism is a system in which wealth is not shared, but competed for. As such, it is a zero-sum game in which the accumulation of billions by some leaves only crumbs for others.

Socialism is not a utopian view that can be assessed in a vacuum. It has to be evaluated relative to the current capitalist system. When Manaloto claims a government planned economy will fall victim to human greed, he neglects to mention that in capitalism, greed is a legitimized part of the system. Politicians like Mitt Romney and Paul Ryan argue that eliminating environmental regulations, cutting minimum wages and lowering taxes create jobs. This is a mainstream, legitimized capitalist viewpoint even though it is essentially code for, "If we allow the wealthiest in society (who fund our election campaigns and media coverage) to have additional millions of dollars on top of their billions of dollars of wealth at the expense of workers and the environment, maybe they'll create a job or two."

Similarly, Manaloto makes a sweeping generalization when he claims that socialist states inevitably become dictatorial. For instance, he



CINDY LAO | The McGill Daily

cites Venezuela as an example of an authoritarian state, which is a highly contested assertion, to say the least, he fails to contrast it to capitalist societies, which may not have dictatorial single-parties, but are subject to the rule of the 1 per cent (dictatorship of the bourgeoisie, as Marx called it).

In the last U.S. presidential election, voters were forced to choose between two candidates whose views left many people unrepresented. Voters who support open borders had to choose between a party whose last president (Obama) deported a record number of people, and a party whose candidate ran on an explicitly anti-immigrant platform. Voters concerned about police brutality and racial injustice had to choose between a pro-death-penalty candidate who had historically advocated for mass incarceration, and a pro-death-penalty candidate who has vowed to combat what he calls a "dangerously anti-police atmosphere." America's imperialist foreign policy had to choose between a candidate who has championed disastrous interventions in

Iraq and Libya, and a candidate who openly calls for torture and imperial plunder. Voters concerned about state civilians had to choose between a candidate who insists on trying Edward Snowden and a candidate who has hinted at a desire to execute Snowden.

Socialists, especially those in the Marxist tradition, are not utopians.

Manaloto concludes his argument by saying we can only pursue justice by looking beyond systems and instead focusing on values like fairness. But no matter how we reframe our thinking, we can't change the fact that our world is organized into economic hierarchies, and that these hierarchies limit how we behave. In 2015 Greece elected a new government headed by prime minister

Alex Tsipras that sought to end EU imposed austerity. Tsipras, however, insisted that Greece stay a member of the European Union, an organization that essentially forces member states to maintain capitalist, often neoliberal (right-wing) economies, and as such has continued making welfare cuts, introducing regressive tax-increases and privatizing state services, much as his right-wing predecessors would have wanted.

Building socialist systems can be a challenge — history has shown us that. But the destructive potential of capitalism means that our current system of economic inequality, imperialism, racist police violence, and environmental destruction cannot continue. We must heed the words of Rosa Luxemburg who said: "[we] stand at the crossroads, [and must] transition to Socialism or regress" and answer Che Guevara's call to "be realistic [and] demand the impossible."

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# On Valentine's day

A look into toxic relationships on the day of love



ALAINAH AAMIR  
The Looking Glass

Content warning: emotional and physical abuse, toxic relationships

Love is volatile – people are much more so. Today, with Valentine's Day tomorrow, I will paint a picture at the progression of relationships and the way in which they can become unhealthy, eventually becoming completely detrimental, this leads not only to the deterioration of the relationship, but of both the people in them.

It starts like this: there has to be that 'some thing'. You can't quite tell what it is, but it pulls you towards them – maybe they're reading your favourite book, maybe they even dog-eared your favourite parts, maybe you saw each other in a crowded room and conversations began to flow, maybe you took a class together and you fell in love. Next, it's a friend request, an exchanged number, and suddenly you're really hoping they'll call. They do. Things begin. Magic happens. You find yourself watching the sunset from a rooftop and thinking, "This feels so right."

Until one day it doesn't feel

Suddenly you're really hoping they'll call. They do. Things begin. Magic happens. You find yourself watching the sunset from a rooftop and thinking, "This feels so right."

quite so right anymore.

In this piece, I'm trying to focus on the kinds of relationships that are generally aren't classified as toxic. This isn't necessarily about relationships that are explicitly physically, emotionally or sexually abusive, but instead focuses on the implicit ways in which relationships can become toxic. The term 'toxic' is one that has varying meanings for different people. The dictionary definition of the word is "containing or being poisonous material especially when capable of causing serious injury." When put in the context of a rela-



*A couple kisses passionately on the banks of the Seine.*

JUDE KHASHMAN | Photographer

tionship, this definition helps provide an explanation for the way that relationship between two people can sour to the point that staying in a relationship any longer will only bring an abundance of unhappiness.

Not all relationship become toxic before ending. Sometimes people simply realize that it isn't working anymore, and they make their peace with it. The problem is when the realization does not come although it should, and instead, the state of your deteriorating relationship leads you to fight in more indirect ways. These fights skirt around the actual issues: both of you are slowly becoming more and more conscious of the fact that you are not happy together anymore. Instead of confronting this reality, you will fight about how they always fall asleep without sending you goodnight texts, about how they always chew their food too loudly, about how they came to brunch with your family in an unironed shirt.

"Little things reflect big things," a friend of mine would say each time she found herself attempting to justify her endless rants about a colleague. That did not stop the same friend from staying in a relationship for three years even though she was crying almost every night about the latest way her partner had hurt her. Little things become big things when your partner of three years breaks up with you via text message, expressing that they simply do

not love you anymore. Little things become big things because we let them, by sweeping our mess under the rug until the mess becomes too big to ignore any longer.

These fights skirt around the actual issues: both of you are slowly becoming more and more conscious of the fact that you are not happy together anymore.

Once a relationship has become toxic, it is not much longer before signs of emotional, sexual and physical abuse will begin to appear. Being in a toxic relationship often consists of arguments and fights that stem from seemingly meaningless or insignificant misunderstandings. The perpetually hostile environment this creates often leads individuals to feel as though they have been pushed against a wall – they become constantly defensive, and it is not too long before forms of aggression begin to manifest

themselves into the behaviour of individuals. At this point, the relationship becomes about control, control is implemented through emotional and physical abuse.

It is important to understand that gender is one that has a significant impact on the way people handle unhealthy relationships. Women and femme are more likely to stay in toxic relationships simply because of the unspoken understanding that relationships do not compliment women, but rather that they 'complete' them. The grand narratives in love stories are the same ones that keep women in unhealthy relationships. This is all owing to a misguided understanding of what it means to love "unconditionally." Women should never be forced to remain dependent on their partners – in fact, no one should.

"What to do if you're single on Valentine's Day," the headlines for magazines read every February. This confuses me: what difference does it make to be single one day, if you're single every other day of the year as well? Each time I make a post on my personal blog detailing the latest example of the way sexism gets under my skin, at least one comment will tell me that my recognition of structural inequality is actually just an implicit cry for a boyfriend. I only laugh in response. Then I write more articles.

Maybe the reason relationships become toxic is because we are

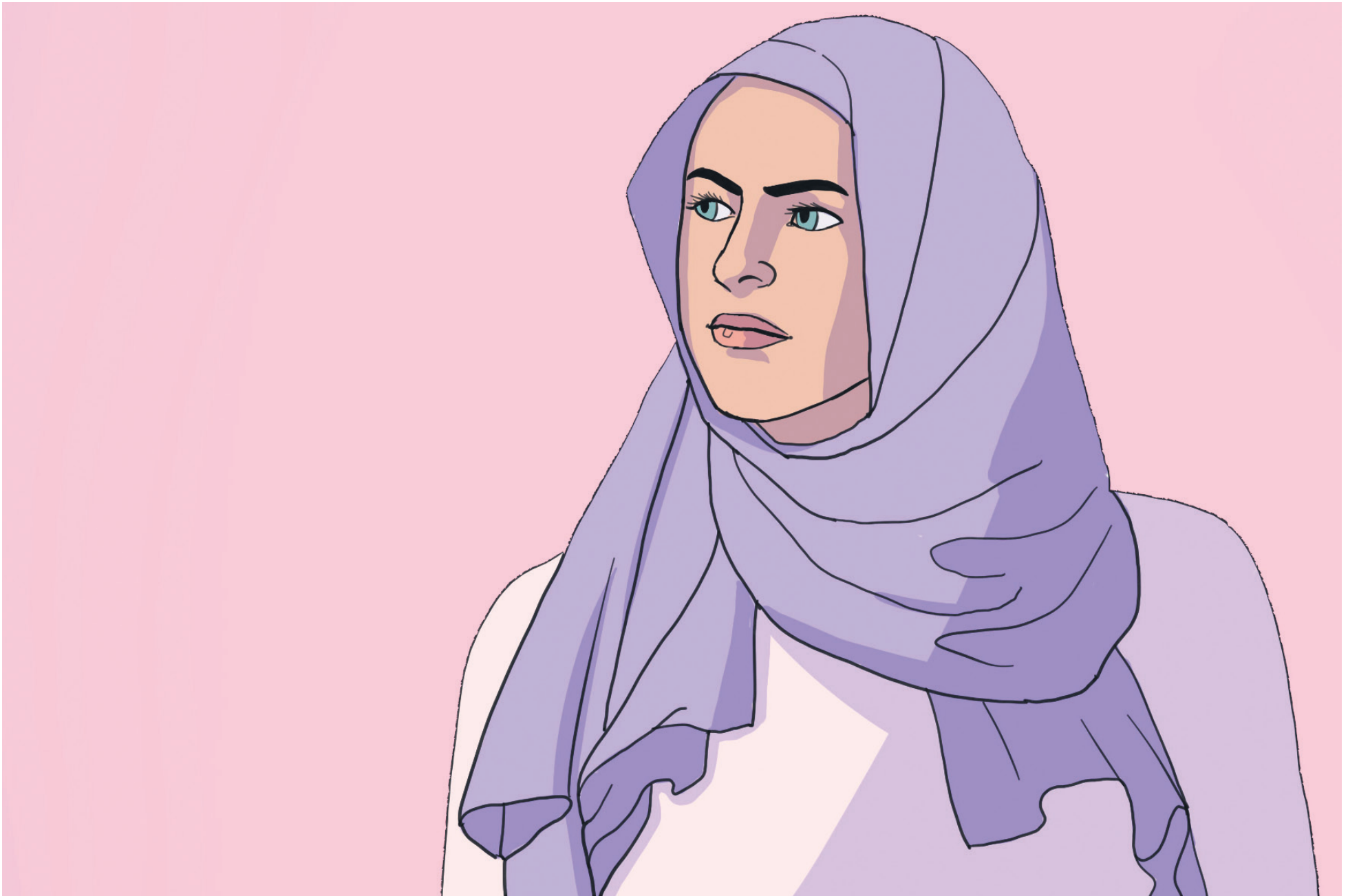
taught to want them so much. Maybe we want to avoid being alone so much that we are content with being miserable alongside our significant others, as long as we have a reservation for two at a nice restaurant for February 14.

Gender has a significant impact on how people handle unhealthy relationships.

My mother has a very active 'sixth' sense. I sometimes feel she thinks that it is the most important one of our senses as far as making decisions is concerned. Because of the way she has taught me to trust my own intuition, I find that I have been able to avoid many a potentially catastrophic situation. It works like this – first you have to realize that the situation is dangerous or toxic, and then you have to walk away from it. It is probably the most difficult thing in the world, but the moment you do it, you're free.

The Looking Glass is a column based on the author's reflections on mental health and first-year life on campus. To contact the author, email [thelookingglass@mcgilldaily.com](mailto:thelookingglass@mcgilldaily.com).

# HOW MUCH DOES A PROMISE COST?



MARINA DJURDJEVIC | The McGill Daily

## On Islamophobia in McGill classrooms

WRITTEN BY SARAH SHAMY

**A**s an Arab Muslim woman, I expected to run into some issues at an elite colonial institution like McGill. However, I could never have imagined just how much bigotry, racism, and sexism ebbs and flows in the institution. I am in my first year at McGill and I can confidently and truthfully say this: McGill is not an academic institution that cares about its students. From a very young age, I accepted the fact that I will never fully feel like I belong in a classroom. This feeling of isolation and alienation is one that I am familiar with, and it is deepened because of my religion, race, and gender. This was partly the reason why I decided to double major in African Studies and World Islamic and Middle East Studies. After all, I thought, how can I not belong in an academic field that overlaps with my own

identity? Taking a class in the Islamic Studies department was the worst decision I have ever made. My expectations for this specific class were very low. I naively believed that McGill would protect me and provide me with safe spaces. That was the first lie I believed.

Personally, this class has always made me tense. I assumed that a class in the Islamic Studies department would be diverse; however, upon seeing that the majority of students were white, I had my initial apprehensions about how the material would be received. This is not to condemn ANY non-Muslim or non-minority people who take ISLA classes. I believe that the more we know about something (in this case – Islam), the less easy it is to be dismissive of statements such as “Islam is terrorism.” It prevents people from being

ostensibly arrogant and naïve in the twisted mainstream interpretations regarding Islam. However, that being said I immediately allowed myself to become very critical of the statements made by the professor; for example, he said: “ISIS does not invent any Quranic verses or hadiths,” which undoubtedly implies that Islam is compatible with terrorism. That is when I decided to discuss my discomfort with the teacher. I voiced my concerns to him and he seemed very eager to take in my criticism. He claimed that he had given adequate warnings about Islamophobia, but given my concerns he promised to address Islamophobia more frequently. Three days later, in Quebec City, six of my Muslim brothers were killed in an Islamophobic terrorist attack at a mosque.

As a response to the tragedy, the professor walked in, poised and grinning, and suggested enthusiastically that we take a moment of silence for the innocent lives taken. After the moment passed, he sparked a debate in which we began to argue with a hypothetical Islamophobic uncle. As soon as he uttered these words, the charismatic, charming, grinning professor was eclipsed by an unruffled man who used the tragedy as a platform to express any students’ internalized and/or externalized Islamophobia, instead of using it as a platform to incite change. Of course, this is wrong for many reasons, all of which I will address soon. However, during this debate, he repeatedly interrupted me (a visibly Muslim woman) and did not give me enough time to properly articulate any of my thoughts. A

friend of mine in the class decided to send a personal email to the professor the night of the lecture to explain her discomfort with both the timing and framing of the debate. In his trademark boundary-less approach, he decided to respond to her by sending an email to both her and myself, even though I did not email him regarding this issue. He asked us if we would be available after the next class to discuss the issue of Islamophobia, and invited us to voice our concerns. I accepted his offer to meet with him – after all, who was I to deny a man his right to redemption?

This feeling of isolation and alienation is one that I am familiar with, and it is deepened because of my religion, race and gender.

On the day of our scheduled meeting, the professor brought up the personal email that my friend had written to him in class. He asked the students if anyone else thought the debate was offensive, to which a student bravely declared that it is inappropriate to have a forum in which he expects students to raise their hand at that question. He dismissed her comment and said that he still thinks it would be useful to open up the discussion, after which, I raised my hand and voiced my discomfort. I explained that it was not so much the nature of the debate that was the issue, but rather the timing. I felt like framing Islamophobia as a debate with a fictional 'Islamophobic uncle' was demeaning to the tragedy that had transpired a few days prior. I did not believe it was appropriate to expect students to reason with an Islamophobe and provide arguments to

refute Islamophobia, especially in light of recent events. I explained that if there was an argument that could stop Islamophobes from being ignorant, then there would be no Islamophobia. I stated that although I didn't doubt that the professor's intentions were genuine, and perhaps even noble, that the way he approached the issue created a platform for Islamophobia. I expressed my discomfort in having to rationalize with a fictional Islamophobic uncle, who isn't actually fictional. This is a reality that many Muslims must face. I didn't (and still don't) understand why we were expected to exclusively discuss it within hypothetical, academic contexts.

Despite clearly voicing this, some fellow classmates, who are non-Muslim, took it upon themselves to state that the debate was "needed" and "necessary" especially after a terrorist attack. They made statements such as "I'm going to speak on behalf of the province of Quebec" (disregarding that I, myself, was born and raised here and this is as much my province as it is theirs). One particular female student tried to excuse the terrorist's wilful ignorance by saying that Quebec city is "homo-Quebecus" – which is not truthful (unless she has taken it upon herself to discuss "alternative facts"). Statements like these exclude the entire Muslim community of Quebec as well as other minority groups, because they are implying that fellow minorities aren't really 'Quebecois.' The environment was hostile and deplorable – it had an overall effect of "us versus them." In this case, the 'us' referred to me and those who spoke up against the debate during the class. My white, privileged classmates, who have never faced the consequences of Islamophobia or racism, raised their hands in response to the question of whether they thought the debate was effective. Halfway through, I ended up walking out of the class.

The environment in the class was extremely hostile and uncomfortable. The professor continuously disregarded Muslim women's feelings and, instead, relied on white women in the classroom. He

repeatedly interrupted me; however, when a white classmate defended our position and simply reiterated my and other Muslim women's arguments, the professor gave her his full attention and validation. When I dared assert my right to speak freely, and spoke over anyone who tried to interrupt me, the professor asked me not to interrupt anyone – even though he gave me the platform to speak when he called on my raised hand, and let himself and the students freely and repeatedly interrupt me. He validated white women's opinions and thoughts over Muslim women's blatant discomfort. We were made subordinate and unimportant. He did not provide Muslim women a platform to express our concerns, nor did he allocate us enough time to do so. Ironically, the professor likes to promote his class as being a safe space for everyone; but this sense of safety seemed to be exclusively allocated to non-Muslim students. If he truly cared about the discomfort of his students, as he has often stated, he would have waited for our scheduled meeting. However, I think we can logically deduce that he does not care about how his students feel. He has proven himself to be inept at handling difficult situations, though I still cannot understand how difficult it is to be respectful and mindful of marginalized people's concerns.

I expressed my discomfort in having to rationalize with a fictional Islamophobic uncle, who isn't actually fictional.

Student journalism is the only venue available to me at McGill that allows me to voice my concerns. The institution has provided me with no other resources to ex-

press my grievances. McGill seemingly condemns violence against Muslims, but will allow Muslim women to feel unsafe and marginalized in the classroom. Muslims don't need token pity. We need action. We need promises that will not be broken. The true violence was not in the debate itself, but in his (and my fellow classmates) inability to recognize the act as being inappropriate, or to provide a shift in attitude through empathic understanding. Everyone who participates in this oppressive social order is complicit in it. However, given that the sweeping majority of them were Caucasian – they were unable to recognize their privilege. The classroom depicted the world as an easy fix, to be solved by enthusiasm and academic debates.

I am tired of having to walk the streets of my city, nervous and afraid. I am tired of feeling like everyday needs to be a battle, in which I must both protect myself and defend everything I represent. I am tired of feeling like I don't belong in an academic institution that continues to boast about its diversity and acceptance. I am tired of taking classes where I can (finally) feel like I relate to the material on a fundamental level, only to find students trying to quench their white guilt and using marginalized people as a venue through which they can exempt themselves from any responsibility. I am tired of having people call upon my tolerance and demand I be lenient in the face of violent behavior. I am tired of feeling guilty for being angry, and feeling responsible for people's conscious decision to remain ignorant and violent. I am tired of feeling irredeemably broken and fragmented. I am tired and I am only 19 years old.

I am not only holding accountable the students who contributed to Muslim women's feelings of discomfort in the classroom; I am also holding accountable the professor who made it possible for Muslim women to feel unsafe and uncomfortable in what is supposed to be a safe space. I am holding the Islamic Studies department accountable for turning a blind eye to the ongoing

violent behavior; I am holding accountable the institution of McGill, which has made it clear that the comfort of their students is not a priority, if even a concern; lastly, I am also holding accountable the reader of this article. You have a duty to stand up for what is right, you have a duty to prevent the further marginalization of marginalized peoples in classrooms. You have a duty to be human and to treat others as such.

Student journalism is the only avenue available to me at McGill that allows me to voice my concerns. This institution has provided me with no other resources to express my grievances.

Upon coming to North America, my people were promised freedom. Upon coming to this land, we were promised rights. Upon coming to Canada, we were promised peace. Upon coming to Quebec, we were promised acceptance. Upon coming to Montreal, we were promised multiculturalism. Upon coming to McGill, we were promised safety. These are promises that have all been broken; and with it, so have the spirits of my beloved minorities. The price of a broken promise is the dreams of all the students who have ever felt unsafe within this institution.

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# NOT QUITE “THE REV.,” BUT WE’RE GETTING CLOSER

IN 2012, MCGILL STUDENT PROTESTERS REIMAGINED THE UNIVERSITY.  
IN 2017, WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM THE MYTHICAL MOB SQUAD?



WRITTEN BY HANNAH KAYA | VISUALS BY MARINA DJURDJEVIC

It’s day five of the occupation – February 10, 2012. Poster board placards and paper signs with witty slogans pepper the linoleum tiling on the sixth floor of the James administration building. It looks as though a group of insurgent clowns have moved into a space that, on a regular day, houses the quotidian operations of McGill’s administration. The protesters have radically reimagined the possibilities of the space: students pass the time composing impassioned manifestos, catching up on readings for classes they aren’t attending, discussing strategy, theory, imagining beautiful, queer, classless futurities – the expropriation of private property! The radical redistribution of wealth and privilege! The eradication of systems of dominance and oppression! The dismantling of the white supremacist colonial cis heteropatriarchal nation state! One particularly playful student reads aloud from the *Communist Manifesto* to the guards sent to keep watch.

A few months later, over 250,000 students would take to the streets demanding, free and accessible post-secondary education, among other things. Later still, night demos would begin, in protest of the still in-effect Law 78, along with the now infamous tradi-

tion of banging on casseroles (pots and pans) as a show of indignation. The night demos ran for a hundred consecutive nights. Black Blocs marched beside baby carriages, often to a combination of delight, curiosity, and chagrin from all parties. There were weeks of targeted economic disruption. A provincial election was forced, neighborhood assemblies strengthened, communities forged. It might not have been “the rev,” but the 2012 student strikes achieved a lot, and McGill students, for the first time in a long time, were right on the frontlines.

**The 2012 student strikes – and the shadowy group of student activists behind them – have become the stuff of myth.**

The above image of the 6party occupation is part real, part imagined (the Marx bit is, incredibly, real). It is, however, based off of stories. Stories I’ve read, stories I’ve been told, stories I’ve overheard

murmured between song breaks at a basement punk show. This article will focus on the Mob Squad, the name commonly used to refer to the 2010 to 2012 student mobilization committee at McGill, and the role it played during the strikes.

The 2012 student strikes – and the shadowy group of student activists behind them – have become the stuff of myth. And, in a way, the mythographic process of accumulating these stories, experiences, and reflections imitates the way the 2012 student strike is experienced by undergraduate students currently at McGill. But this feature is about the real people, the real situations, and the real challenges behind the mythical Mob Squad. This will not be a nostalgia piece, nor will it try to force some kind of totalizing moral narrative on the past. Historic strategies of resistance cannot be simply imputed directly into our own contemporary context. Even so, it’s important to learn from those who came before us.

**How did Mob Squad form?**

6party, the infamous multi-day occupation of the sixth floor of the James administration building, was a response to the administration’s unilateral decision to invalidate the

results of the Fall 2011 existence referenda for CKUT and the Quebec Public Interest Research Group – McGill (QPIRG). The action developed out of the much larger and more nebulous Mob Squad. The Mob Squad functioned as a mobilization committee similar to ones present at other francophone universities in Quebec – such as at l’Université du Québec à Montréal (UQAM) – and was not the first of its kind at McGill. While it was affiliated with the Students’ Society of McGill University (SSMU), having been spearheaded by 2010–2011 VP External Myriam Zaidi and remaining vaguely within the Vice Presidential mandate until its dispersal following the end of the student strikes, the Mob Squad acted independently of SSMU and was not directly answerable to it. While this relationship was not without contention or opposition, it did allow for Mob Squad members to access the considerable resources at SSMU’s disposal.

It’s impossible to provide one totalizing definition of what the Mob Squad ‘was,’ but that’s part of its beauty. The Mob Squad was intentionally many different things to many different people. The group quickly adopted an organizational model that distributed decision mak-

ing power throughout its members, which allowed for adaptability, self-determination, and spontaneity. Unlike current, global systems of power that operate through domination and control, and wherein a small group of people seize authority over the lives of the masses, a decentralized framework is an organizational model in which each individual is understood to have autonomy over their own actions, and power is dispersed throughout the group rather than concentrated on one individual or a core group of “leaders.” In Mob Squad, a decentralized framework meant that members could pitch actions, contribute skills, or engage in outreach, taking from the group what they found most useful, and giving back according to their abilities. As no one member had veto power to police the actions of any other member, Mob Squad served primarily as a node of common interest, where rad cats could find other rad cats who were also interested in radical organizing, a fluid network of diverse and sometimes contradictory words and deeds. Mob Squad established a space for like-minded student activists and radicals to converge and organize around issues at both a university and provincial level outside of the avenues of conciliation that were

being presented to students by the administration at the time.

Plans for the 2012 student strike date back to at least 2007, when the government announced a tuition increase of \$500 over five years. When it became clear that the strike planned in response to the hike wasn't going to be successful, students started planning for the next one – and this time, they would do it right. Opportunity arose when, in the spring of 2010, the Quebec Liberal Party, then under Premier Jean Charest, announced in the budget that, among other cuts to social spending, his government planned to increase tuition by 75 per cent – the largest tuition increase Quebec had ever seen. Things began to escalate from there, as a series of interrelated events took shape which would lead to the radicalization of many students on McGill campus, solidifying growing interest in developing a McGill Mob Squad. An encounter with police brutality by a McGill contingent at the G20 summit protests in June of 2010 incited many to apply their experiences in Toronto to foment dissidence in Montreal. In October 2011, students participating in actions taken by striking McGill University Non-Academic Certified Association (MUNACA) workers became interested in further organizing. On November 10, 2011, over a hundred riot police brutalized students on McGill campus during an occupation of the James administration building. The Mob Squad attracted students from diverse groups on campus: some were environmental activists, others worked with CKUT radio, QPIRG-McGill or other social advocacy groups on campus, but most had very little experience organizing. The learning curve for Mob Squad members was steep, but the process led to a series of victories and powerful actions that put McGill on the map of the student movement.

Both Myriam Zaidi and Joël Pednault, who sat as VP External of SSMU during the 2012 student strikes, saw their position within

the group as one of facilitation and resource provision, as opposed to one of leadership. Because of its decentralized framework it would be wrong to call Myriam the group's "founder," as that language inaccurately implies authority or hierarchy. That said, Myriam's background as someone who grew up in Montreal meant that she was already familiar with the Quebec student movement prior to arriving at McGill. Her experiences with activism through CEGEP organizing meant that she was acquainted with the culture of militant organizing that is particular to Quebec, and her ties to other francophone universities in the province – many of which have a long standing culture of mobilization committees – convinced her and many others that McGill needed to step up its game.

**“When we did start this Mob Squad, I knew that there were activists on campus [...] it was just a question of putting them all in the same room.”**

—Myriam Zaidi  
2010-2011 SSMU VP External

Myriam and her peers established the Mob Squad to make space for students who wanted to be involved in activism on campus. McGill is notorious for attracting and arguably incubating an apolitical student body, especially when compared to more politically militant university populations at Quebec's francophone universities, colleges, and CEGEPS. McGill's administration is deeply committed to maintaining its image as an 'elite,'

'apolitical' institution, and this student apathy works to its benefit. “It is challenging [to organize students on campus],” Myriam told me in a telephone interview, “but at the same time, when we did start this Mob Squad, I knew that there were activists on campus. There are student activists, there are people who go to demonstrations, there are a lot of very critical students and so it was just a question of putting them all in the same room and being like, ‘This is happening. The tuition hike is going to come and there's going to be mass mobilization against it and we just need to organize.’ And people wanted to organize.” For Myriam, the newly minted Mob Squad wasn't in itself revolutionary, but it was a vital step in combatting the effects of austerity on campus.

Despite the stereotype of the “McGill bubble” full of apathetic Anglos, Myriam doesn't buy that students weren't active on campus before 2012. “Yeah, maybe we don't have decades of student organizing and strikes at McGill, but we had gender neutral bathrooms. We had things present at McGill that were absent from a lot of other campuses in Quebec.”

#### What Mob Squad fought for and against

One of the student activists who became involved with the Mob Squad was Molly Swain, who graduated from McGill and now runs the “unapologetically Indigenous, unabashedly female, and unblinkingly nerdy” podcast *Métis In Space*. Molly first became involved in Mob Squad in October 2011 when, like many of her peers, she was drawn to the group for its solidarity work with striking MUNACA workers. Once the MUNACA dispute was resolved, many students were starting to question what role McGill students would play in the inevitable student strikes that were just around the corner. “We started talking about what McGill's role was in Quebec as kind of an Anglo, white-supremacist institution, very elitist, and what its history has been in student strike

and student movement stuff,” she told me, recalling conversations happening within the Mob Squad at the time. “We wanted to use our power and privilege as McGill students to fight these tuition increases and to fight against these austerity policies of the government.”

Student activists at McGill applied an intersectional approach to their analyses of tuition hikes, with the understanding that high tuition disproportionately impacts racialized and Indigenous students. Federal governments have been chronically underfunding the Post-Secondary Student Support Program (PSSSP), a federal program that allocates funds to subsidize education for Indigenous students seeking to pursue higher education. Education is a treaty right, and it is a disgrace that the government continues to deliberately underfund this program. The Indigenous populations of Canada are the highest growing populations, meanwhile Prime Minister Trudeau has yet to follow through on his promise of \$50 million per year in funding for the PSSSP. Inaccessible education affects the composition of our campuses; it's no surprise that closing off access to post-secondary education behind a multi-thousand dollar paywall will target the poor and underprivileged. As Canada's deep income divide tends to fall along ethnic and racial lines, it's not hard to imagine that without a radical reconsideration of what the educational system can do and who can access it that these divides will only become increasingly entrenched. Many Mob Squad members believed in the goal of free and accessible post-secondary education, while simultaneously questioning the trend of university diplomas being a necessary precondition for fulfilling and fair employment, as well as the racial and class dimensions to increasing tuition fees.

At their best, the student strikes in 2012 were fighting against the ongoing neoliberal process of austerity, which cuts funding to social services such as healthcare, childcare, and affordable housing, as well as to education. The Mob Squad members who I spoke with stressed that the struggle for free, accessible post-secondary education must simultaneously be a struggle to reform the very foundations of a society dominated by the predatory and extractive logic of neoliberalism.

#### How the Mob Squad fought: Direct action and education

The Mob Squad's actions ranged from direct action to community outreach. They organized class talks providing students with information about upcoming strike votes and possible means of engagement, they put together informational leaflets, and – once faculties and, later, departments started having successful strike votes – the Mob Squad organized to pass further strike votes

and to convince students to respect the strike and not go to class.

However, the Mob Squad is most famous for its participation in direct actions. The distinguishing feature of direct action is that it implies unmediated activity, exerting power directly towards the desired goal. In contradistinction to reformist actions such as lobbying, voting, or attempting to capture political clout through the media, direct action is a way for activists to assert their own power while refusing to concede to the illegitimate authority of existing institutions which maintain the status quo. Some direct action tactics include blockades, occupations, wildcat strikes, and the destruction of property. Students in 2012 participated in all of the aforementioned actions, and often disrupted the day-to-day functionings of capitalism as a way of exerting pressure on an already buckling political order by arresting the free flow of capital and the mercury-smoothness of the machinations of state power.

**“We wanted to use our power and privilege as McGill students to fight these tuition increases.”**

—Molly Swain  
Former Mob Squad member

Molly Swain is a firm believer in direct action. “I believe it's an incredible tool, not only to get your message out there and to get people talking, but to also just directly affect what's going on,” she says. “It changes your relationship to where you are, because suddenly everything seems possible. You feel like you can win. And it's amazing. All of your preconceptions, everything they tell you you can't do falls away, because you're doing it!”

Direct actions undertaken by Mob Squad members reorganized and recontextualized their relationship to the geography of Montreal. Bridges, sixth floor offices, and public streets were transformed from their daily 'apolitical' uses to become spaces for a radical engagement with democracy. By demonstrating that space could be used in ways that transcended – as opposed to merely criticized – the status quo, the protesters expanded the window of acceptable discourse and acceptable action. As Molly described, through direct action the protesters self-transformed from docile, consumptive bodies into playful, active agents. The protesters' habitual ways of moving and being in urban spaces had been disrupted by traumatic encounters with police brutality. In response, a burning cop car or a smashed bank



window opened up a new world of seemingly limitless possibilities: a new relational framework between self and other, self and space.

It is important, however, to resist the hierarchy of activism, where direct action is seen as the most important, legitimate, or effective form of dissidence. Migration status, race, job precarity, trauma, and other forms of precarity all factor into someone's decision whether or not to take up direct action. Jaime Maclean, another Mob Squad member, also supports direct action. She emphasized, however, that at the time she believes there was a pervasive and problematic belief that direct action was the only effective tactic. "There can be this valuing of direct action as 'the best thing.' But no, it's one tactic that's being often used during this movement because it's one tactic that's actually effective right now," she told me. A successful direct action is one node within a constellation of successive actions, strategies, and tactics towards a larger, long-term goal. Often the best way forward is through a diversity of tactics which allow for broad-base participation – and Mob Squad's decentralized structure allowed for such a range of tactics. Stapling together the same two pages for five hours to produce a flyer or manifesto isn't particularly glamorous work, but in many ways it's that kind of grunt work (often, if unsurprisingly, undertaken by women and femmes of colour) that provides the groundwork for any successful action. You can't hold a demo without bodies, but the movement will flounder if all energies are devoted solely to mobilization while educational and agitational work suffer, and the organizers of Mob Squad recognized this. Molly refers to this work as "paperwork for the rev." Sometimes it's just as vital and insurrectionary to pass out leaflets as it is to blockade a classroom, and the Mob Squad took on both roles.

### Community standards, or lack thereof

Establishing trust and solidarity within emergent communities of resistance is perhaps the most vital and yet most challenging aspect of organizing. At McGill, fragmentation, individualization, and competition is endemic to the academic culture. It doesn't help that these traits are further validated and condoned by a neoliberal system whose survival depends on our isolation, consumption, and rivalry. Trust developed organically amongst Mob Squad organizers through necessity – often it was incited by the binding power of collective experiences of trauma through exposure to the appendages of state violence, as well as the discursive violence of being a KSR (Known Student Radical) on an often openly hostile campus. A core group of Mob Squad organizers was unofficially

established, and members began to rely heavily on each other for both emotional and political support, and many of the friendships forged through struggle remain to this day.

However, the Achilles heel of decentralized organizational frameworks is that they lack accountability measures. Activism does not happen within a vacuum, and activist spaces are not immune to the same systems of power and oppression articulated within dominant culture. Every member I spoke with noted that, regardless of the "best of intentions," often organizing meetings would be dominated by men, with the role of regulating those behaviours falling to the women, femmes, and people of colour in the group. Many expressed their wish that there had been more discussion around mutual care and accountability, both to prevent burn out and to create safer activist spaces. While many of those in the group held anti-hierarchical beliefs, to say that the group itself was non-hierarchical would be to erase the very real, though sometimes subtle, power dynamics which existed.

### Through direct action the protesters transformed from docile, consumptive bodies into playful, active agents.

The core group of organizers developed an informal and only somewhat effective model for discussing their feelings and attempting to work through conflict, but Mob Squad was a nebulous and endlessly mutating group. Depending on what was happening at any given week Mob Squad meetings could see a turnout of eight to sixty students. With that kind of fluidity, it can be difficult to establish binding accountability measures, especially when taking into account the frenetic pace with which the strikes moved. Strategy, in general, seemed to be of the "by the seat of your pants" variety. I spoke with Jaime about the effectiveness of this method. "There were instances of macho aggressive behaviour which, over a period of time, is a little abusive. Especially when they're people you're friends with and have relationships with outside of this political argument." She says members never thought of group dynamics as being "identified as 'we all need to be accountable to one another' or 'we need to work through conflict,' so much as 'we all have a lot



of feelings today and we're going to try to get together to talk about it.' And it wasn't super successful, because it wasn't as important to some people as it was to others."

Most conflict resolution depended on members' willingness to participate in debriefs or community discussions, and there weren't concrete measures in place to regulate who had access to these spaces and when. The ineffectiveness of this method became horrifically apparent when, after the strike had subsided, a number of sexual assaults were disclosed. Many women and femmes had been forced into daily contact with their perpetrators, some of whom were very involved within the student movement. Jaime confides that "there were a lot of instances of sexual assault during the student strike among student activists who were doing the strike everyday for months. After it was all over and the dust settled a little bit [...] it came to light that there were all of these people who were crossing boundaries and causing harm to one another. Because it was a really misogynistic environment."

### Is this the rev? Or, what happened after

By late spring of 2012 things had become hectic. Those I spoke to describe the harrowing details of their lives once the strike was in full swing: early morning studying before 6 a.m. manif-actions, running late to class covered in pepper spray, actions on campus every day and night demos every night. Most sacrificed all other pursuits and dedicated themselves entirely to the strike. The Mob Squad began focusing on organizing departmentally, focusing on smaller scale strike actions, mobilizing students around strike votes, and convincing students who were on strike not to go to class.

Self-preservation is essential to any sustainable movement, but most of the Mob Squad-ers I spoke with admitted that self-care hadn't

been high on their priorities. Myriam pointed out that activists are not immune to the ideological indoctrination that they receive as members of a neoliberal society. "It's hard to resist the capitalist idea that your worth is determined by how much you produce," she says, highlighting that this way of measuring worth is exclusionary to people whose positionality, (dis)abilities, or other traumas might circumscribe their ability to engage in activism in conventional ways.

### After the strike had subsided, a number of sexual assault were disclosed. Many women and femmes had been forced into daily contact with their perpetrators.

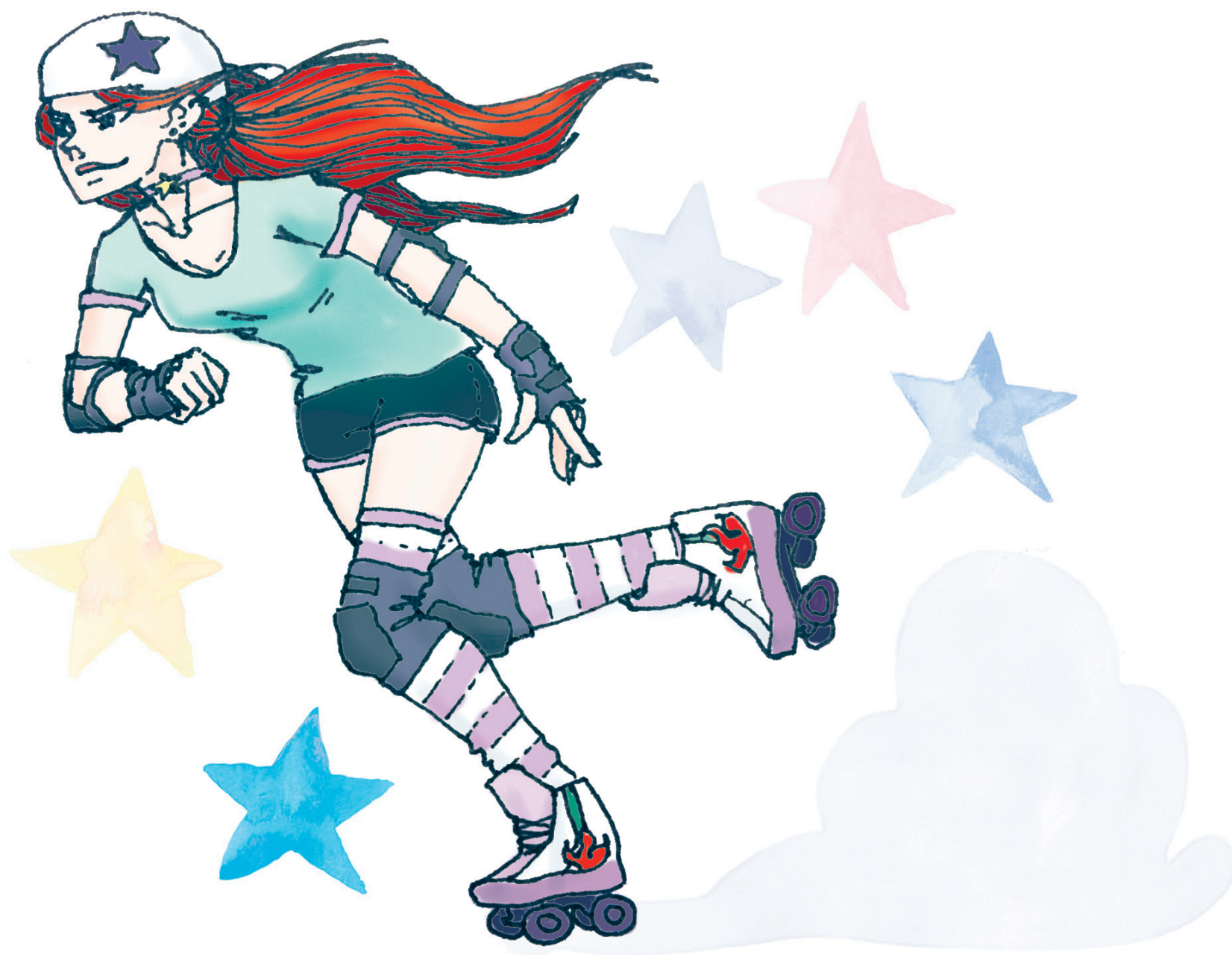
For many, once things were heating up and more and more people were becoming involved, it really did feel like the "rev." They describe a frenetic, forward-oriented momentum that devoured all that came in its path. When the students voted not to go back on strike in August, for many it was initially devastating. Eventually, most redirected their energies towards different community-focused organizing. One ex-Mob Squad member I spoke with has dedicated himself to nurturing the anti-oppressive, anti-capitalist rave scene in Montreal. Danjo Francistico, who met me in the back of Casa Del Popolo, is a DJ and community organizer. He recalls the strikes as being a time of intense learning and growth, of radicalization and trauma, but, above all,

a time of beauty. "Even the tear gas, yeah, that was beautiful too," he says with a hint of nostalgia.

**"Even the tear gas, yeah, that was beautiful too."**

—Danjo Francistico  
Former Mob Squad member

Nostalgia, however, is deadly for communities of resistance. The line between thoughtful reflection and forward propulsion can be challenging. The Mob Squad members I spoke to all saw their participation in the 2012 student movement as a continuation of past resistance movements – from anarchists in 1930s in Catalonia, to the revolutionaries of May 1968, to the Occupy movement that was simultaneously sweeping the globe. Historic strategies of resistance cannot be simply imputed directly into our own contemporary context. It is, however, arguably still an important project to know about those who came before us, what their challenges were, what they saw their goals as, what became of them when those goals weren't necessarily realized. This compounded history of the Mob Squad and its affiliates has been just one more addition to an already overflowing activist library that tries to retrace the student movement at the time of the strikes, and has been in no ways extensive or definitive. But just as they were hungry for theory, for history, for new ways to imagine the world around them, we too must be hungry for stories which remind us that there is institutional memory within the student movement. The work of the Mob Squad can help us to imagine radical, just futurities, and if we really try, we can learn from their successes and failures so that this time, as every time, we have something of a fighting chance.



MARINA DJURDJEVIC | The McGill Daily

## Of whips and wheels

MONTREAL DERBY WOMEN ARE ON A ROLL

Written by Amy Currie

“A lot of people don’t know what [roller derby] is, and a lot of people think it’s like really badass and we are just beating each other and ripping each other’s hair and stuff,” Julia Rodriguez, a fourth year McGill student and a former member of Montreal and Denver’s roller derby leagues, told me over tea. Until recently, my only knowledge of derby came from the 2007 classic *Whip It!*, which I had only really seen because of my closeted crush on Ellen Page.

It took three years in Montreal for me to finally explore the derby scene. My only regret is waiting so long to do so.

I had heard that, in Montreal at least, derby culture is imbued with a feminist and queer vibe, and I had to see it for myself. “It’s not reflective of every individual or every league,” Rodriguez said of the assumptions of queerness

often attached to derby players, “but it definitely rings true for this league.” In terms of structures, rules, and community dynamics, she said, “derby is basically like a sorority of athletic queer positivity, which is great!”

My first derby experience wasn’t disappointing. The match was hosted by a drag queen, the players were unapologetically rough and determined, the beer was cheap, and the spirit itself was both competitive and lighthearted. “I’m not sure how it developed in this way,” Rodriguez said, “but the values associated with derby are community, acceptance, and general positivity.”

“Most women’s sports are watered-down versions of the men’s sports, whereas derby is like kind of the opposite,” Paula Youwakim, a current member of the Montreal league, told me. Unlike

other female-dominated sports, such as figure-skating or volleyball, derby is a contact sport. “Women’s derby matters so much more than men’s and it’s just as physical, just as tough,” Youwakim added.

“Derby is basically like a sorority of athletic queer positivity, which is great!”

—Julia Rodriguez  
Former member of  
Montreal Roller Derby

Roller derby, however, wasn’t always like this. Originally part of an endurance sports craze in the twenties, roller derby used to be a long-distance race lasting several

days that followed imaginary routes across the U.S. Participants skated laps that were equal in distance to these routes. Much like a relay race, skaters would switch in and out when exhaustion hit them, and if a team could not complete this distance, it was eliminated.

Governed worldwide by Women’s Flat Track Derby Association (WFTDA), the roller derby we know today is a result of a revival in 2000 in Austin, Texas. Physical contact is permitted, and the scoring system rewards teams for overtaking opponents. Up to five players from each team play in each two-minute round called a ‘jam.’ Each team selects a ‘jammer’ to score points by lapping members of the opposing team, and a ‘pivot’ to block the opposing team’s jammer. If the jammer in the lead wishes to end the jam before the two minutes are up, she taps her hips, and the game moves on.

Overall, WFTDA and the associated leagues have worked to create an inclusive and friendly culture and environment for all players. “I once went to a training camp close to Boston and they told me, ‘do you wanna stay over with someone here so you don’t have to pay for hotels?’ We are competitive on the rink, but as soon as the game ends people are like, okay let’s go out for drinks!” Youwakim recounted. Rodriguez added that, “you can even drop in on other leagues’ practices, so the system is really flexible. If you wanna skate somewhere most places will let you.”

Women’s sports, by and large, suffer from a lack of sponsorship and funding. As a growing sport that has remained largely mysterious in popular culture, roller derby can be financially inaccessible to current and prospective players. Although the games often draw

large crowds, the Montreal league is primarily funded through participants' dues. In Montreal, players essentially run the league: be it coaching, refereeing, or organizing events, the league is the result of the players' voluntary labour. For league members, the bare minimum of attending practices can amount up to ten hours a week, and you can be placed on probation if you can't make 75 per cent of practices. The players may be dedicated, but "at the same time," Youwakim said, "you can't live off of derby."

"A lot of people think [Roller Derby] is like really badass and we are just beating each other and ripping each other's hair and stuff."

—Julia Rodriguez  
Former member of Montreal Roller Derby

Other leagues have found different strategies to fund themselves. For example, as Youwakim explained, the Rose City Rollers of Portland, Oregon, requires new league members to bring three sponsors in order to join the league.

Echoing Youwakim's sentiment, Rodriguez added that, "[derby] is an expensive sport to play. Equipment is really expensive as an upward investment [...] You have to do maintenance on [the skates]

and buy different wheels. I've gone through four different kneepads until I found the right ones."

The lack of funding, Youwakim said, could explain why the growth of the sport has been so strained. "A lot of leagues don't have the people to train them or they don't have access to the equipment and it's really expensive," she said.

Founded in 2006, the Montreal league comprises of around 150 members. It is the first derby league in Canada and the first non-American league in the WFTDA. Seasons run November to August for home teams, and to playoffs – often in September – for travel teams. "A lot of teams in Canada look up to Montreal, because we're also the biggest league in Canada," Youwakim told me.

Last year, Montreal Roller Derby hosted the International Championships playoffs. Montreal's "A" travel team, "The New Skids on the Block" (or just "The Skids"), became the first Canadian team to make it to the Championships, but lost 116-217 to Angel City Derby Girls, and was eliminated early-on. Regardless of the defeat, Rodriguez was optimistic about Montreal's success, "At least they made it," she said. In defense of the Skids, she added, "Canadian derby just isn't as well developed as in the States. It just hasn't been played here for as long."

Another distinguishing factor of roller derby is the players' unique nicknames. Two of the players in The Skids, for example, are called Al K. Traz and Russian Crulette. And let's not forget Terror Me Suzie of Montreal Sexpos, the league's "B" team, and "Hipsqueak of Les Contrabanditas," one of the league's home teams.

"Sometimes [nicknames are] given to you," Youwakim, also known as Falafel la Gazelle of the Sexpos, told me, "especially in Montreal, because you go through bootcamp for three months and you don't have a name when you start, it's either something you choose or you get. Sometimes after that three month experience we already have a name for someone and it's like 'okay, you can't change now, this is what we've been calling you for three months [...] It's just a fun thing."

"We are competitive on the rink, but as soon as the game ends people are like, okay let's go out for drinks."

—Paula Youwakim  
Montreal's Sexpos player

Racially, roller derby is often a white-dominated space. As the only Arab person in the Montreal league, Youwakim said that the Montreal league's lack of racial diversity can be an effect of self-perpetuating social networks. "I don't think the [Montreal] league has made the effort of going and reaching through other communities to try and bring in other people," she added.

Still, derby can be diverse in the types of people you meet. "You meet super young people from the juniors, you have like 45 year old moms [...] you have students, you have doctors, you have

designers. You have everyone," said Youwakim. Overall, Rodriguez added, "If you can skate it doesn't really matter who you are or what you are, you can do it."

Both Youwakim and Rodriguez told me that the community they have built through derby has been important to them. Having gone to Catholic school, Rodriguez said that, "It was really cool as a teenager to be around people who were like, 'no, you're unique,' and encourage that. [Within derby] I was meeting people who were more like me in the sense that we were weird. Everyone was different, and no matter what you wanted to be you could be that. The community was bonded by the fact that we liked the sport."

Developing sports, especially derby, often have to modify the rules regularly, and with new rules each year come new strategies and new injuries. Last year, Youwakim said, rib injuries were widespread in the league. Rodriguez added, "At first it was just fun, party, get kind of drunk, skate, and hang out. I think as the sport has become more serious, the community is focused on equipment being approved and concussion prevention. But I also I think this came a little late."

For those wishing to participate in roller derby, keep in mind that Montreal Roller Derby is especially tricky to get into. Rodriguez explained that, "People who are perfectly capable skaters sometimes don't get in, which is a bummer." This is partially because, as Youwakim elaborated, the league's expansion could make its management very difficult: "The bigger the league, the more complicated and bureaucratic it gets."

The mandatory rookie bootcamp takes place in August for three

months. There are five tests: four on skills and one on the game's rules. If you pass, you are officially in the league, but not necessarily on a team, as drafting takes place later. Also, those planning to leave Montreal can still join the Montreal league and ask for a transfer to another league later. As Youwakim told The Daily, however, people can show up on Mondays to the rink and often have the chance to rent equipments. She said, "Usually people start training before bootcamp, so come Mondays, there's always people to help." Men and children can also try roller derby through La Ligue Montréalaise de Roller Derby Masculin or the Montréal Junior Roller Derby.

[Two players] are called Al K. Traz and Russian Crulette. And let's not forget Terror Me Suzie of Montreal Sexpos [and] Hipsqueak of Les Contrabanditas.

Age-wise, anyone who can skate and play is welcome to try out. "Most people stop playing sports at a certain age, like when they leave university and it's not available to them," Rodriguez told me. "I haven't played in a while, but I always feel like I can go back at any time."





Falafel la Gazelle playing with Motntreal's Sexpos.



Falafel la Gazelle and her brother.



Motntreal's Sexpos.



Falafel la Gazelle playing with Motntreal's Sexpos.



Motntreal's Sexpos

PHOTOS COURTESY OF PAULA YOUWAKIM

# The road to carbon neutrality

## An accelerated evolution of clean energy



**CÉDRIC PARAGES**  
Sci+Tech Columnist

Following the agreements and goals set out by the Paris Climate Change Accord signed into action in November by China, the United States, the European Union, among others, the race to transition energy production and consumption from unclean energy, like coal and petroleum, to clean sources, such as wind and solar, has begun. What started as a race to lower greenhouse gas emissions and reduce the accelerating rate of human-caused climate change, is now becoming a race for dominating the fastest growing energy market in the world.

Investors are strengthening clean energy by investing capital worth over one billion dollars in a global innovation fund, with these investors total cumulative net worth currently at 170 billion dollars. Major countries, such as China, are devoting much more public funding renewable energy, with 350 billion dollars to be invested by 2020. The question is no longer whether or not clean energy is a worthy investment, as big oil and coal industry lobbyists have been attempting to argue against for years, but how fast all of these accelerating investments can be put to the best possible use. Many countries like Costa Rica, the Netherlands and the United States are innovating and experimenting with new clean energy technologies, such as electric powered transportation, hydroelectricity and upgrading their power grids. By doing so, they are inspiring newly found optimism for climate change researchers and innovating start-up companies around the world.

A newly published study from the Environmental Defense Fund's Climate Corps program in the U.S. has found that renewable energy is creating new jobs twelve times faster than the rest of the U.S. economy. Solar and wind jobs are growing by 20 per cent annually, and sustainable energy related jobs have grown from 3.4 million in 2011 to 4.5 million jobs today. These jobs do not only originate from clean energy production but also consumption, such as making home and industrial appliances energy efficient and transitioning transportation systems from using fossil fuel to electric.

While cars like Tesla are at the forefront of the electric transportation market, other companies are also designing and building electric buses and trains around the world. In the U.S., some New York and Chicago districts have already started to implement electric school buses. Not only are these school buses tremendous for cutting down on carbon emissions, they are also safer for not carrying a giant tank of combustible gasoline. According

to the U.S. National Fire Protection Agency, an average of six buses, which includes school buses, caught fire every day from 1999 to 2003.

Electric powered trains are already being used in countries such as in the Netherlands. The Dutch government announced in 2015 that all of its electric trains would run completely on wind power alone by 2018. The program was so successful that it was completed much ahead of schedule, and on January 1 of this year, the Dutch government announced they have now one hundred per cent efficiency from wind power for these trains. Not all of this wind energy comes from the Netherlands alone however, with wind farms in Belgium and Finland also contributing, demonstrating that the European power grid is adapting to transporting and conserving clean energy.

The innovation needed to eventually make commercial aircrafts run entirely on electricity is also much closer than we think. The Solar Impulse is a one seater airplane designed by Swiss engineers and entrepreneurs Andre Borschberg and Bertrand Piccard that has been prototyped and developed since 2009. This aircraft not only runs on electric energy, but is also completely self-sustainable thanks to the solar power cells completely covering its outer sphere.

In August of 2016, the Solar Impulse II finished the first ever flight around the entire globe without using any fuel, taking a year to do so and touching ground in 16 different countries. The flight over the Pacific took five days and shattered the world record of the longest air flight duration by one pilot. Despite its great achievements and promises, there is still a long way to go for similar planes to be developed commercially as the flight speed is slow. Yet, it definitely demonstrates that such possibilities are within our very near future.

Many European countries are in the process of completely phasing out coal from their energy consumption. The first country in Europe estimated completely phase out from coal is Finland, which in 2015 only had eight per cent of its total energy powered from it. Not only will they be the quickest to phase out coal, but they are also passing legislation to completely ban the burning of coal in the entire country by 2030. Similarly, French president Francois Hollande announced in November of 2016 that France will also completely phase out coal from their energy use by 2023, France is one of the biggest manufacturers of nuclear power in the world, even selling it to neighbouring countries.

However, France is also currently undergoing a minor crisis due to its nuclear power, as many of the plants are outdated with old steel, have parts prone to fracture, and concerns



HAYLEY MORTIN | The McGill Daily

of forged and falsified past quality reports about critical components. Addressing these concerns, Hollande has claimed that the time window of six years will enable France to fully address these issues and meet their goal of phasing out coal.

Similarly, the U.K. plans to phase out their coal consumption by 2025, with fifty per cent of electric consumption being powered by clean energy, representing an increase from twenty per cent in 2010. Beyond electricity consumption, Germany is dedicated to phasing out 95 per cent of unclean energy from the country by 2050 to shortly after become completely carbon neutral. It seems the most important first steps for accomplishing carbon neutrality are phasing out coal from electricity consumption, transitioning modes of transportation to electric power, mass manufacturing clean sources of energy, and upgrading power grids to transport and store this energy.

The most ambitious country in the world to achieve carbon neutrality is Costa Rica, which famously achieved 75 days in a row in 2015 powering their electricity entirely from clean sources. After this achievement however, many analysts doubted their ability to continue this performance in the long-term as the main electric production source of Costa Rica is hydroelectric and dependence on rainfall. In 2014, Costa Rica endured a major drought which was the worst in fifty years, and researchers are concerned that climate change will make these droughts more frequent in the future.

Nevertheless, Costa Rica disproved these concerns in 2016 by having 250 full days of the year running entirely on its clean energy, with 98 per cent of the whole year's energy

being from clean energy. Costa Rica is planning to achieve total carbon neutrality by 2021 and may even achieve that ahead of schedule. This precedence of this country achieving a worldwide goal is a tremendous achievement and demonstrates to other countries around the world that they can dedicate themselves to clean energy, and profit from the current spike in international investment and innovation. Planning to do just that, forty seven nations have signed agreements into the Paris Climate Accord at the November Climate Vulnerable Forum to cut out all their unclean energy sources between 2030 to 2050. Many of these countries have pledged to update their domestic energy policies by 2020, a great achievement for the worldwide battle against carbon emissions.

Many of these achievements at the end of last year have been grossly overshadowed by the election of Donald Trump to the U.S. presidency, who famously claimed climate change is not caused by humans, but is instead "a Chinese hoax." His vehement disregard for the clean energy industry and research from federal scientists and agencies like NASA has put the country into a strange identity crisis, as states like California are innovating and transitioning quickly toward clean energy, and state departments have tweeted out facts about climate change in defiance to the president. While Trump can try to shut down their twitter accounts and their voices, there is actually little he can do to stop states from continuing on as they were before. He will attempt to cripple the Environment Protection Agency's Clean Power Plan introduced by Obama in accordance with the Paris Climate Accord, and remove U.S.

funding from the Accord altogether, but all this will do is scare away foreign investment into great new American technologies such as Tesla, and slow down the creation of jobs into one of the fastest growing industries in the country.

While Trump may want to help the 200,000 or so coal workers in the country by subsidizing coal more than ever before to keep it profitable, research into coal efficiency and cost of production demonstrates that coal will simply not keep up with natural gas and clean energy at all. In contrast, there were 770,000 clean energy production jobs in the United States in 2015, according to a report by the International Renewable Energy Agency. Some states, such as Massachusetts, are already introducing legislation to phase out all non renewables by 2035 and all fossil fuels by 2050.

Meanwhile, China is building three football fields of solar panels per hour with government money, and they have proposed a 50 trillion-dollar plan for a global power grid for clean energy by 2050. While it is impossible to know exactly how much of the world's carbon gas emissions we will be able to slow down by these timelines, the amount of innovation, dedication and production for clean energy sources right now are simply astounding. The Paris Climate Accord and countries like Costa Rica are showing the world that it is possible for a globalized world to functionally work together to achieve concrete goals and change domestic economic policies successfully.

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'STEAMPUNK FISH'  
MICHELLE TAKAMORI



'UNTITLED'  
LAURA BRENNAN

# An exploration of resistance

## Never Apart's vernissage celebrates Black and Indigenous histories

**SARAH SHAHID**  
Culture Writer

Located near Jean-Talon Market, Never Apart is a non-profit gallery with a powerful vision of bringing social change and supporting local communities through the arts. The gallery's winter 2017 vernissage, held on January 26, celebrated Black and Indigenous heritage. The exhibitions included a multitude of narratives from Canadian and non-Canadian artists focusing on issues such as resilience, identity, displacement, and surveillance.

The ground floor displayed Sandra Brewster's "Assemblage," which consists of several photo-montages exploring the anonymity and generalization imposed on black individuality. The collages consisted of silhouettes called "Smiths" made out of cutouts from a phone directory listing "Mohammeds." Often, the silhouettes were coated with white paint, and sometimes with black paint, obscuring the content. *Untitled Smith (White Out)* and *Untitled Smith (Black Out)* were positioned against adjacent walls in such a way that the viewer had to walk over to see each piece in isolation, even as the titles referred to each other. Brewster's exhibition demands serious contemplation from its viewer on the stereotypical notion of monolithic Black communities, humouring the idea that all Smiths or Mohammeds are related.

In the small theatre next to the main gallery, a short film by Akosua Adoma Owusu played on loop. The black and white film *Reluctantly Queer* showed a young diasporic Ghanaian individual going about a restless day while a letter to their mother is narrated in the background. The letter exposes a conflict between being queer and being with family in Ghana, where homosexuality is politically controversial. The film resonates strong and conflicting emotions of displacement and identity. Similarly, artist Mikael Owunna's "Limit(less)" depicted the lives of African immigrants in documentary-style photography, navigating aesthetically the space between being diasporic and being queer. Josué Azor's "Erotes: Love, Sex, Magic" took a spin on this angle, exploring the LGBTQ culture in Port-au-Prince, Haiti. Owunna and Azor's pieces, exhibited across each other in the same room, conveyed a sense of intimacy in the way the photographers portrayed their models.

Owunna and Azor's pieces were in contrast to Kali Spitzer's "An Exploration of Resilience," which blurred the lines between intimacy and detachment. Spitzer's exhibit took up most of the upper gallery with portraits of Indigenous and mixed heritage people from the artist's own community, celebrating their expressions of resilience. Using traditional stylistic techniques of portraiture, Spitzer challenged the voyeurism associated with representations of Indigenous



Never Apart hosts its winter vernissage.

communities in mainstream media. Each portrait exhibited the personality of the subject, incorporating props, poses, tattoos, among other elements. While each portrait carried a strong sense of self, thereby addressing the viewer intimately, it was the same element that also detached the viewer from the artwork. The viewer was not the agent in comprehending these portraits because each subject's understanding of themselves was secure enough to resist any exterior interpretation. In this way, the artist subverts the gaze on these portraits and the communities from which the portrayed indi-

viduals come from in a collective act of resilience.

The night concludes with Dries Depoorter's "Jaywalking" in a small room of the upper gallery. The digital art installation combining private data of the artist and other strangers walking across a street light. The installation contains a red buzzer which the viewer can press in order to report a jaywalker to the police. The artwork confronts the viewer with the violent nature of surveillance and policing in contemporary society. In the backdrop of Black History Month, this artwork takes up new meaning, antagonizing issues of surveil-

**SARAH SHAHID** | Photographer

lance disparity subjected to Black and Indigenous communities.

Finally, we must recognize and celebrate the contributions of curator Andy Williams, who was able to depict the multifold layers of being Black and/or Indigenous. Independent projects like Never Apart's exhibitions highlight the need to create spaces for marginalized groups to tell their stories in their own way. As opposed to larger commercial galleries and museums in Montreal where the majority of curators are white men, Williams' exploration of Black and Indigenous identities through young and contemporary artists is refreshing and vital.

## Imagination in 360°

### Phi Center's Virtual Reality Garden promises to break barriers

**ELÉA REGEMBAL**  
Culture Writer

Since January 2016, the Phi Centre has been presenting a series of exhibits in its Virtual Reality Garden, a permanent installation which uses 360° storytelling to shatter the boundaries of art and technology. Their new animation-themed installment runs until March 12 and features four short films and one of Ubisoft's first virtual reality video games, *Eagle Flight*. Through multimedia simulations, the exhibit lets the viewer embody different perspectives and creates a sensory experience. Such a technology would be effective in exploring pertinent political and social issues, which the installation unfortunately fails to do.

The experience begins as the intrigued viewer puts on a headset and is instantly spirited away into an overwhelmingly detailed and unknown environment. The first component, four ten-minute films, create alternate experiences of aging and growth by exploring the relationships formed along the

way. *Minotaur* begins by taking the viewer on an abstract journey through life, death, and rebirth. The emotional trajectory experienced by the creature portrayed in the film – and by extension, the viewer – ranges from anger and fear to love and finally serenity. The next film, *The Rose and I*, is inspired by *The Little Prince*, a French novella about a stranded pilot encountering a young prince who fell from an asteroid. Set on an imaginary planet, the film explores the gentle relationship between its only inhabitants: a rose and her human companion. The touching and poetic film was presented at the 2016 Sundance Film Festival. Emmy-award winning *Henry* tells the story of a lonely hedgehog and his lifechanging birthday wish. Narrated by Elijah Wood, it was brought to life by some of the creators behind *Brave* and *Toy Story 3*. Finally, *Lost* follows a robotic hand's quest for its body, in a dark forest populated by fireflies. This short immersive experience was equally presented at Sundance Film Festival in 2015.

Each work reveals a poetic and inventive universe, where head movements become similar to camera motion, producing the illusion that the viewer creates the work they witness. It sparks a desire to move closer, to stretch out a hand, in order to feel a physical presence within the animated environments. When turning your head means catching a glimpse of a hedgehog's bedsheets through a doorway, or of the movement of a distant planet hovering away, the immersion is complete. However, awareness of the virtual illusion is often present as the viewer's body is never materialized within the screen.

The short films are followed by the presentation of a first person-video game, Ubisoft's visual masterpiece, *Eagle Flight*. The player becomes an eagle soaring over Paris, fifty years after the extinction of the human race. Emblematic monuments are overgrown and populated by elephants, deer, and other animals who have escaped from the zoo. The game provides an experience of overwhelming freedom that

creates unprecedented physical sensations. The player can choose to fly through the rusty arms of the Tuileries Ferris wheel, the buttresses of Notre Dame cathedral, or explore the depths of derelict metro tunnels and gardens surrounding the Eiffel Tower. It becomes possible to catch fish in the Seine or uncover hidden passages in narrow streets, as well as complete challenges in story mode or compete against other birds in multiplayer.

Overall, the installation provides an aesthetically pleasing experience. However, the messages the films deliver prove disappointing in their lack of power and relevance. The videos demonstrate the boundless potential of immersive technology in engaging the viewer, without yet providing a challenging content closer to current issues. With such advanced technology and talented creators, narratives could convey a more socially or politically relevant message, rather than stories of lonesome hedgehogs and fragile roses. The short films, though emotionally powerful and

creative, failed to provide thought-provoking material involving the viewer's visual participation, who instead experiences pure physical sensation without the potential to act on it.

To understand the viewer's relationship to a work of art, it is essential to consider the art form itself and how it makes the work accessible to the public. The Phi Centre's exhibit is free, which means that anyone can watch the sunset hovering between two imaginary planets or over an abandoned Paris, though not everyone has access to information concerning the exhibit, or the time and physical capability of going there. These contextual problems aside, the technology itself has potential to break socioeconomic barriers, create interactive artistic experiences for all, and allow spectators to define their relationship to and perception of the work. The Virtual Reality Garden shows the powerful and promising results of creating a dynamic relationship between artist and viewer, between art and technology.

# To entertain is to consider

Sitting down with the director and cast of *Intractable Woman*



Performers Deena Aziz, Laura Condlln, and Warona Setshwaelo in *Intractable Woman*.



RAHMA WIRYOMARTONO | The McGill Daily

**RAHMA WIRYOMARTONO**  
The McGill Daily

“Some people pay with their lives for saying aloud what they think,” said Anna Politkovskaya, a Russian journalist, writer, and human rights activist. Well-known for her coverage of the Second Chechen War and vocal criticism of the policies of Russian president Vladimir Putin, she was murdered in 2006 in what is widely believed to be a contract killing.

More than a decade after her death and an ocean across from where she did most of her work, Montreal’s Imago Theatre has produced a theatrical memorandum to Politkovskaya in the form of *Intractable Woman*. The play details her fight for freedom of the press and freedom from state censorship as she exposed aspects of the war in Chechnya.

Without asserting sanctimonious moral claims, the play nudges the viewer to reflect independently and conscientiously. This encouragement for autonomous interpretation is fundamentally linked to the artistic philosophy of the play’s director, Micheline Chevrier. Speaking to me on the topic of art’s ability to subvert a mainstream line of thought, Chevrier explained that “the good plays are the ones that really ask difficult questions and don’t provide answers, so they trigger in us a reflection and an urge to investigate things that we probably wouldn’t normally.”

“That’s what I love about good art,” Chevrier continued. “It doesn’t tell me what to think or what to feel, but it asks me what to think or what to feel.”

Imago Theatre is one of Montreal’s longest running independent English-language theatre companies. As the Artistic and Executive director of the company, Chevrier has refocused its mandate to “[highlight] the feminine perspective.” This refocus aligns with Imago Theatre’s mission to be “a catalyst for conversation, an advocate for equal representation, and a hub for stories about unstoppable women.”

I sat down with *Intractable Woman*’s all-female cast – comprised of performers Deena Aziz, Laura Condlln, and Warona Setshwaelo, who all play Politkovskaya – and inquired about the universal relevance and timeliness of Politkovskaya’s story.

“That’s what I love about good art. It doesn’t tell me what to think or what to feel, but it asks me what to think or what to feel.”

—Micheline Chevrier  
Director

“Here we are, in this dangerous, anxiety-filled time, so what a better time to lift [Politkovskaya’s] story and her words,” Condlln began. “We want to share it with as many people as possible because of course, safeguarding the right to free speech and the necessity of truth in trauma, in atrocity, in disaster, in troubled times – is a necessary action.”

Aziz elaborated on how journalistic freedom in Canada is not always guaranteed and that Canadian audiences should be self-reflective when analyzing the context in which Politkovskaya worked.

“We’re certainly not immune to this, in Canada. Most particularly under the Harper government, there was so much clamping down on the freedom of the press,” Aziz said. “It would be a mistake to imagine that we are somehow above this.”

Setshwaelo further spoke about how the arts can bring urgent, pressing questions into public consciousness. “It’s important to program stuff like this and not just if something is happening, because you don’t know what is actually happening. There’s no way that this just came up all of a sudden in the last two years. It was still there two years ago – we just didn’t know. That’s why it’s important to always tell these stories, because they’re always relevant.”

“I think somehow we use entertainment in the wrong way,” Chevrier said, expanding on the role of theatre in society. “To entertain something is to consider it and entertainment to me is that: ‘consider this.’ And I think that’s what theatre does.”

**Anna Politkovskaya and the Second Chechen War**

Stefano Massini, the playwright of *Intractable Woman*, had this to say of Anna Politkovskaya: “It’s as if conjuring this woman’s name could suddenly put the broken shards of the Russia-Chechnya mirror back together.”

The Russian-Chechen conflict dates back to 1785, with low-level

insurgency persisting today. Politkovskaya reported throughout the Second Chechen War during a time of heightened violence, receiving death threats as she detailed the desperation civilians faced against Russia’s oppressive army.

“Safeguarding the right to free speech and the necessity of truth in trauma, in atrocity, in disaster, in troubled times – is a necessary action.”

—Laura Condlln  
Performer

“Blood, snow. Blood, snow. Blood, snow,” on stage, Condlln’s Politkovskaya repeats, her mind struggling to break free from the inflicted violence. The droning mantra lasts for minutes as the play nears its culmination. At this point, the audience has followed Politkovskaya through harrowing ordeals: beatings, arrests, death threats, and state-sanctioned censorship. Her repeated calls contrasts blood – warmth and humanity – with snow – coldness and indifference – revealing the hopelessness of living through a war that seems never-ending.

When I asked why Chevrier decided to cast three performers for the same role, she stressed that

the struggles Politkovskaya went through as a journalist are neither isolated to her life nor her socio-political context.

“Even though the play is about Anna Politkovskaya and she was a Russian journalist, [...] there are many journalists from all over the world who suffer the same challenges and consequences,” Chevrier explained. “It was important for me that it wasn’t just relegated to one part of the world, or one kind of person, so I wanted to have a representation that was asking us to think about that.”

“When you’re [...] one third [of a character], you’re all relying on each other to literally finish each other’s sentences,” Setshwaelo added. “Working so closely, there’s always an unspoken energy that surrounds the three of us that we have to have in order to feel safe to do this. It’s pretty exposing, vulnerable stuff up there.”

Condlln added, “what we are doing right now with our art, with this play, is dangerously parallel to what is happening [in the real world].”

Politkovskaya’s fight for freedom of the press and freedom from censorship continues to have pressing relevance, which Imago Theatre underlines in its message to the public: “be intractable in your defence of a world that fights for freedom from censorship; a world that embraces a plurality of perspectives.” *Intractable Woman* inspires us to always make space for marginalized voices and challenge dominant narratives.

*Intractable Woman* runs from February 9-18 at the Centaur Theatre. Each showing has a Pay-What-You-Decide option at the end of the play.

# Batting a thousand

Opera McGill strikes gold with *Die Fledermaus*



Opera McGill's production of *Die Fledermaus*.

COURTESY OF OPERA MCGILL

**CARLY GORDON**  
The McGill Daily

When Opera McGill announced its landmark 60th anniversary season, Johann Strauss II's *Die Fledermaus* seemed an odd, lacklustre choice for their centrepiece performance. Composed in 1874, *Die Fledermaus* is an Austrian operatic staple, a lighthearted sitcom-in-concert portraying the whims and wiles of Vienna's late 19th-century upper class. It's a delightful opera, to be sure; but it's also an ordinary opera, frequently performed and musically familiar. It stands in contrast with the company's 2015-16 lineup, which included Mark Adamo's 1998 operatic adaptation of *Little Women*, and Handel's seldom heard Baroque gem *Rodelinda*. Celebrating six decades of top-notch opera education and production, could Opera McGill not take on a more monumental, extraordinary project?

The January 28 performance at the Monument-National Theatre was the final installment of a three-show run and took place in front of a full house. Esteemed alumni of McGill's opera training program returned to the stage in crowd-pleasing cameos to celebrate Opera McGill's decades-long history. The company delivered nothing short of an extraordinary performance – brilliantly executed by the student performers in a production that was, for a change, decidedly not racist, as their previous production of *Alcina* was.

*Die Fledermaus* tells a tale of romance, revenge, and mistaken identity. Charged with a misde-

meanor crime, ingenuous aristocrat Gabriel von Eisenstein – zestfully sung by baritone Jonah Spungin – is served an eight day prison sentence. The night he is to leave, he lies to his bumbling lawyer Blind – tenor Torrance Gricks – and tenacious wife Rosalinde – Toumine, sneaking out instead to attend an extravagant ball hosted by the exceedingly wealthy and chronically bored Prince Orlofsky – mezzo-soprano Simone McIntosh – for one last night of debauchery before his imprisonment.

[Opera McGill] delivered [...] an extraordinary performance – brilliantly executed by the student performers.

Baritone Igor Mostovoi thrilled the audience as Eisenstein's conniving friend Doctor Falke. Over the course of the evening, the moustache-twirling prankster tries to exact his vengeance for an embarrassing drunken incident that once left him passed out and costumed as a bat (hence the titular fledermaus) only to awaken to public ridicule in the town square. Falke pulls more strings than even a caffeinated Frank Underwood possibly could. He invites Rosalinde, disguised as a Hungarian countess, to witness her husband's unfaithful flirtations at the Prince's ball, along with the

good-natured prison warden Frank (lanky baritone Paul Winkelmann) to catch sight of Eisenstein living it up on the dance floor instead of behind bars.

Tenor John Carr Cook commanded heavy laughs in the role of Alfred, a lecherous opera singer and former lover to Rosalinde, now bent on winning back her affections despite her marriage to Eisenstein. The determined Casanova climbs to serenade Rosalinde from her balcony. To protect Rosalinde's reputation, he impersonates Eisenstein – lest she is caught at home with a man who is not her husband. However, the plan backfires, and Alfred ends up taking Eisenstein's place in jail. Carr Cook sang with a confident voice that balanced melodrama with majesty: Alfred's pompous, seeming improvisatory invocations of Mozart and Puccini might have been equally at home on the Met stage, or on an American Idol outtakes reel.

Meanwhile, soprano Gina Hanzlik stole the show as the Eisenstein's stagy housekeeper Adele, who sobs and pleads for a night off work to care for her dear, sick aunt, but instead steals a dress from Rosalinde's closet and high-tails it to Prince Orlofsky's party. There, she masquerades as an up-and-coming actress, charming the guests – including a disguised Eisenstein – and shaking the lethargic Prince from his sighs of boredom. Hanzlik's spry charisma and sparkling voice took centre stage. Her command of comedy seemed natural as she floundered, flirted, and kvetched, while her rendition of the famous "Laughing Song" – accompanied by captivating, waltz-

ing harmonies from the McGill Symphony Orchestra – lilted with effortless magnetism.

True to form, the students onstage outshone the behind-the-scenes professionals. Director Patrick Hansen, Professor of Opera Studies, concocted a trilingual version of the originally German script. While the performers navigated every codeswitch – German to English to French – with convincing precision, the mere presence of all three languages onstage seemed excessive. This over-complication might stem from the feeble reasoning behind Hansen's linguistic decision, which he explained in his Director's Notes as "just to make things interesting" and "[to bring] a nice flair to the story."

While French, the language of the 19th-century Russian court, sounded at home in the Russian Prince's mansion – and, of course, fit right in on a Montreal stage – Hansen's rendition saw Adele and her flirtatious sister Ida (soprano Jacoba Barber-Rozema) alternating between Viennese German and Estuary English. This choice demanded backstory: how did two working-class Londoners find the resources and motivation to up and move across the Channel? Ultimately, the choice was a superficial one: it added little to the production, other than predictable laughter at Hanzlik's exaggerated outbursts of "Oh, bugger!"

Set and costume designs by Vincent Lefèvre and Ginette Grenier, respectively, were heavily advertised as drawing inspiration from the symbolist art of Gustav Klimt. True, Lefèvre and Grenier borrowed Klimt's propensity for gold leaf and

concentric squares, but they neglected the subversive eroticism central to Klimt's work. The result was an extravagant and visually engaging turn-of-the-century aesthetic, but the purported Klimt inspiration seemed shallow and unnecessary. But then again, Klimt's work did thrive in a culture of excess – the opulent upper crust of Viennese society, a world in which the Eisensteins would have felt right at home. And, after sixty seasons, Opera McGill well deserves some gold.

The choice [of having three languages] was a superficial one: it added little to the production.

Like the characters blundering through Prince Orlofsky's lavish ball, privileged and insulated from the outside world, the audience at Monument-National capped off a long week by watching an opera – an art form so often seen as elitist and inaccessible. But opera should, and often does, engage with societal issues in ways both subtle and broad. In Opera McGill's *Die Fledermaus*, an extraordinarily talented young cast took the stage, made musi, and landed jokes with utmost professionalism. The audience, entranced, was far from insulated. Instead, after a week of difficult headlines, *Die Fledermaus* was the perfect coda. We could all use a laugh right now.

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## Canada must abolish solitary confinement

**A**rlene Gallone, a Montreal woman who spent nine months locked in isolation in a cell “the size of a washroom,” is suing Correctional Service Canada over her time in solitary confinement. She is spearheading a class action lawsuit demanding \$10,000 in compensation for anyone who has spent more than 72 hours in solitary confinement in the past three years. Gallone’s case is far from unique: Canada still uses solitary confinement as a punitive measure in its prisons, despite the fact that it has been condemned by the United Nations and is regarded by activists and scholars as psychological torture. It is also known to be disproportionately used against those who are Black, Indigenous, and mentally ill. Described by a U.S. judge as “virtual incubators of psychoses,” solitary confinement units subject people to extreme sensory, emotional, and social deprivation. This practice is a sickening violation of human rights, which calls into question why it continues to be enacted in Canada. As evidenced by the experiences of Arlene Gallone and others in solitary confinement, Canada needs to eliminate its use of solitary confinement.

Gallone’s case is not without precedent: In 2016, the Canadian government’s treatment of Adam Capay sparked national outrage. Capay is an Indigenous man who spent four years in solitary confinement while awaiting trial at Thunder Bay Jail, where 90 per cent of imprisoned people are Indigenous. Capay was confined to a basement cell sheathed in plexiglass with the lights on 24 hours a day – conditions which induced memory and speech problems. The statistics provided by Ontario’s Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services for October to December 2015 reveal that 19 per cent of the people imprisoned in the province’s facilities (4,178 people) were at one point placed in solitary confinement. Of those, 38.2 per cent (1,594 people) had a mental health alert on their file. Roughly 1,383 of these people were isolated for 15 days or longer (remaining in solitary confinement for more than 15 days is considered

torture by the UN). In October, Ontario’s human rights commissioner accused the province of “alarming and systemic overuse” of solitary confinement. “I felt like an animal,” Gallone told the CBC, speaking of her experience. “You do not lock a dog in a cage for three months.”

Correctional facilities, mirroring the societies that create them, inflict disproportionate violence on marginalized people. Black Canadians, for example, only make up three per cent of the general population but they make up ten per cent of the federal prison population. Furthermore, solitary confinement is disproportionately used to punish Black people, and they are victims in nearly 15 per cent of all instances of brutality by authorities. Similarly, while Aboriginal people make up 4 per cent of the general population according to the Canadian government, as of February 2013, 23.2 per cent of the federal inmate population is Aboriginal (First Nation, Métis or Inuit). Indigenous people are also overrepresented in cases of solitary confinement, accounting for 31 per cent of all cases.

Proponents of solitary confinement argue that people are often isolated to protect their own, or others’, safety in prison. However, the conditions of solitary confinement are not simply ones of isolation, but also of physical and psychological torture. This argument further fails to understand that the project of prison reform is simply a step towards prison abolition. Prisons are violent institutions that perpetuate violence – and isolating people in prison from one another will not solve that violence. The only way to eliminate the violence of the prison system is to abolish it altogether. We call for Canada to abolish solitary confinement, as part of a larger movement towards prison abolition. More immediately, though, Gallone and other people who have been in solitary confinement deserve government compensation for the harm inflicted on them.

—The McGill Daily editorial board

## CONTACT US

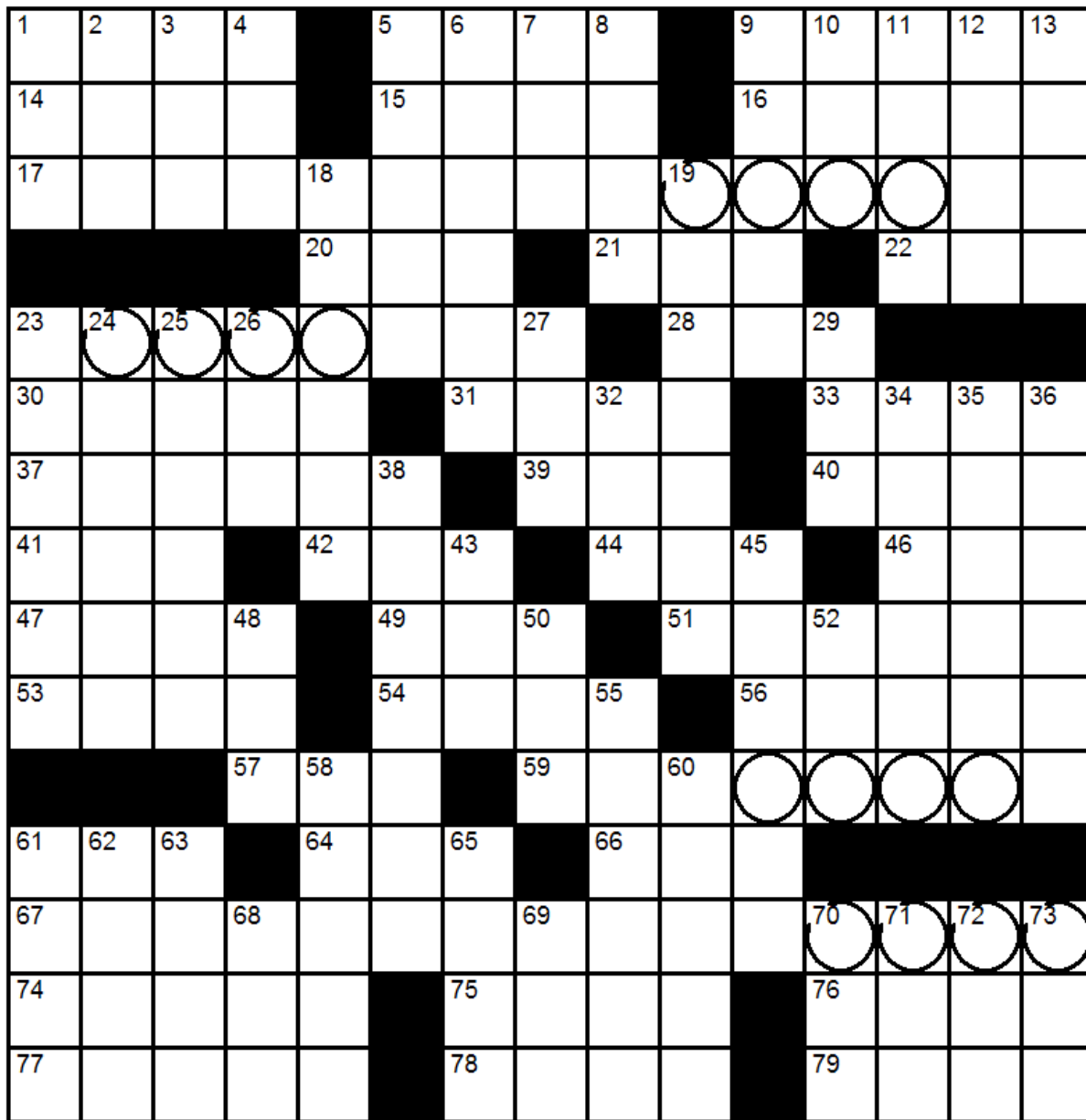
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Lies, half-truths, and a four meter sneeze.

## Crossword

JAY VANPUT  
Official Crossword Wizard



### Across

- 1 Pi\*radius<sup>2</sup>, for a circle
- 5 Prodigious perennial plant
- 9 Hook for holding things together
- 14 Lacking in structure
- 15 Swollen mark on the skin
- 16 Carribean island St. \_\_\_\_
- 17 Rare variations of trefoil
- 20 A shocking suprise for a scuba diver?
- 21 An H in baseball
- 22 Part of a volleyball trio
- 23 Messy or dirty
- 28 1/3rd of a Tbsp
- 30 Thing this puzzle is printed on
- 31 Yes, slang
- 33 Things found on a phone or menus
- 37 Common Lipton drink
- 39 Prefix meaning 3
- 40 Female garment from South Asia
- 41 Pistol, for example
- 42 Governing party for the Democrats (US)
- 44 Container for drinks
- 46 Small freight vehicle
- 47 \_\_\_\_ and zeros
- 49 Type of tooth or year.
- 51 Arthurian wizard
- 53 Exclamation for an impressive entrance
- 54 The Beehive state (US)
- 56 Nursery Rhymes Mother
- 57 Nothing
- 59 Chuck Berry's "\_\_\_\_ Beethoven"
- 61 "\_\_\_\_ and you shall receive"
- 64 Poke at
- 66 \_\_\_\_ v. Wade, famous abortion court case
- 67 TV trope apparel for bikers
- 74 Mr. T's group
- 75 Fencing sword
- 76 Descended
- 77 Mouthpieces for woodwinds
- 78 Units of time in a week
- 79 December holiday, abbr.

### Down

- 1 Alien in a 1980s sitcom
- 2 Home of Christ the Redeemer
- 3 Ostrich's cousin
- 4 Yearly cost for borrowing money, abbr.
- 5 Youths aged 8-14
- 6 Honestly
- 7 Race from Middle Earth
- 8 \_\_\_\_ A Sketch
- 9 Blockages in a blood vessel
- 10 Textese for the circled clues
- 11 More than just passes a test
- 12 Man of authority
- 13 Type of tense
- 18 Gazed at maliciously
- 19 Ion found in rechargeable batteries
- 23 Faucet or tap
- 24 A missing part
- 25 Unobstructed
- 26 Place you take a sick animal
- 27 "Are we there \_\_\_?"
- 29 Faux \_\_\_\_
- 32 \_\_\_\_ de triomphe
- 34 Well known conditioner?
- 35 Speak highly of
- 36 Person in the hands of an angry God, according to Johnathan Edwards
- 38 Type of momentum
- 43 "Let the \_\_\_\_ out of the bag"
- 45 Prosthetic for a pirate
- 48 \_\_\_\_ Francisco, California
- 50 Average in golf
- 52 Kanga's son
- 55 Child's name for an equestrian's pet
- 58 Things
- 60 Fails to place at the podium
- 61 Not near
- 62 Place on the ground or the web
- 63 Largest joint in the body
- 65 Made an emotional appeal
- 68 Type of fly that Socrates was to the Athenians
- 69 US government organization for the protection of nature
- 70 \_\_\_\_ bro (type of lacrosse player)
- 71 Aquatic pink salamander
- 72 By ways of
- 73 Aliens, abbr.



## “Do it for the ‘gram.”

MATTHEW WOLF  
The McGill Weekly