

Dear Levellers, it is with warm hearts and great pride that we bring you this 10th anniversary edition of *The Leveller*.

On February 9, 2009 we published our first issue with the cover story “Ottawa buses are back,” a reference to the end of the bus drivers’ strike.

What led to that first issue and story?

At the time a small handful of left-leaning graduate students were frustrated over the anti-union political climate that permeated the local media. The OC Transpo strike suffered from unsympathetic coverage and continuous backlash. It was in that climate that CUPE 4600 members (your TA and Contract Instructor union at Carleton) voted ‘no’ in a strike mandate vote.

It was clear that students and the community at large needed a progressive newspaper, one that didn’t shrink behind the bullshit façade of being “neutral” or “non-biased.” These students decided to act, recruiting friends to write for them, editing as a team, and fronting the money for the first issues themselves. *The Leveller* was born.

Since then, we have consistently and unabashedly “sided with people over property” and organized around an anti-oppressive framework, as explained on our second page flag.

The very first Leveller editorial — “Two-sided stories? Not in *The Leveller*” — proclaimed these striking words of wisdom: “We are not in the business of printing unbiased news, partly because we don’t believe unbiased news exists, but mostly because we think news that proclaims itself to be objective is less interesting to read and to write, and ultimately less valuable as news.”

Since this truth-drenched proclamation, we have published 61 print editions of the newspaper — you’re currently reading our 62nd!

Over the years we have evolved and re-moulded ourselves, to our current place with one foot on campus and the other in the community. Students still make the paper, but not just grad students and not just Carleton students — and many community members have joined *The Leveller* team.

Our primary funding base still comes from Carleton graduate students — supplemented by our entirely uncorporate advertisers, a stellar crew of local businesses, unions, and progressives organizations that we’re genuinely proud to be associated with.

How did this funding come about?

Two years in, the core group of Levellers were still using their scholarship slash rent money to pay for newspaper-associated expenses. They decided it was necessary to try and secure a funding base if the paper was to survive.

In 2010, that funding was secured when Carleton graduate students voted in a referendum to institute a levy, or ancillary fee, paid per student per year. The initial amount was \$1.50 and it has since climbed penny-by-penny to its current rate of \$1.69 — it is pegged to the Consumer Price Index, as all levy fees are at Carleton as a result of another referendum victory.

So, there’s our back story. But where do we go from here? As we publish this 10th anniversary issue, we face an existential threat.

As you may have heard, Doug Ford’s Conservative government plans to restructure the Ontario education system, using the Ontario Student Assistance Program (OSAP) and a so-called “student choice initiative” that is aimed at killing... *The Leveller*.

Ok, ok, not only *The Leveller*. We’re not that self-centred. We know that the main objective behind Ford’s legislation is to threaten all progressive student organizing.

As we wrote last issue — and as this issue once again ably demonstrates — the 10% reduction in tuition is nothing but a red herring, thrown into the mix at a Tory brainstorming session where the main objective was to once-and-for-all silence the on-campus voices of social justice, the advocates of equality, and the critics of power.

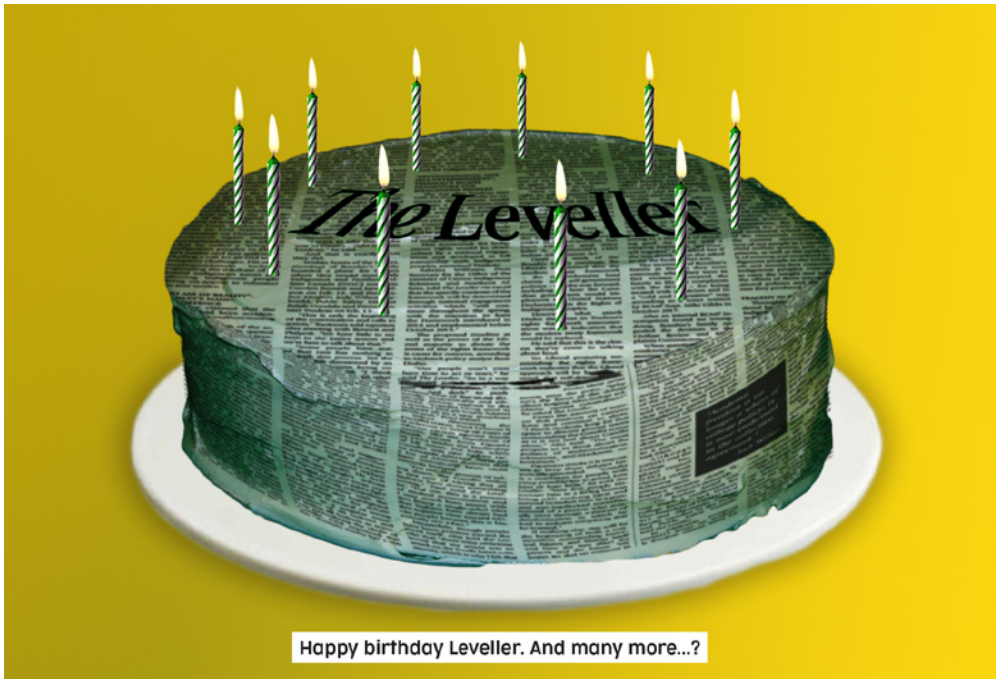
So what do we do? Do Ontario students have the determined mass militancy to fight back and force Ford to reconsider?

Well, we believe new and powerful social movements can emerge — almost at any time and rarely as self-appointed pundits predict. (And we will do everything we can to help kick off and cheerlead any such movement.)

Yet an honest assessment of our history and strategic situation has to start with an admission that a powerful mass student movement would be a new thing in Ontario. So far the demonstrated strength of the leftist student movement in this province is in the area of lobbying and campaigns.

We have yet to see the kind of mass, militant mobilizations that happened during the Quebec student strikes in 2012. This moment used people power and a general-assembly style of democratic politics to generate mass support for strikes and mobilizations, which shut down campuses, took to the streets, and targeted the corporate economy for disruption. This movement was

10 YEARS OF *The Leveller* WILL THIS YEAR BE OUR LAST?



Happy birthday Leveller. And many more...?

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so effective that it led to the collapse of the provincial Liberal majority government under Jean Charest.

The problem is, Ontario-style lobbying and non-disruptive protest actions are not going to bring Ford to the negotiating table.

Our only hope for political action might be some sort of broad coalition that brings together students and other groups under attack by Ford’s austerity regime — something like what the good folk at the Ottawa Coalition Against Ford are trying to get off the ground.

Broad solidarity is crucial. It’s important to understand that austerity measures always aim to silo different communities, so that we’re all fighting for survival individually and ineffectually.

In this case our community of student organizations has been targeted for elimination in a precise and politically calculated move. In fact by appealing to students’ wallets — by tokenistically making some fees optional and giving a small 10% tuition decrease — Ford is trying separate students from the organizations that defend their interests.

Ford’s Conservatives have been much cannier than Charest’s Liberals. Charest’s 75% tuition increase had the subtlety of a sledgehammer to the gut. Each and every student in the province, regardless of their political awareness or affiliation, could immediately and viscerally understand how this change would hurt them.

Not so with Ford’s rejigging of OSAP rules. Students *will* be financially hurt by these changes, almost universally. But this will happen more slowly and subtly, through rule changes that take some time and attention to understand — and that will often only play out over the course of years, as students make loan payments.

Charest’s tuition cut also did not target student unions or the infrastructure students had at their disposal for resistance. Ford is bribing students with a 10% cut now so he can destroy this infrastructure. If he succeeds, we would not be surprised to see a 75% increase — or more — in the future, all justified by the latest manufactured austerity crisis. With student unions and media eviscerated, how would such a move be resisted?

So where does this leave us, here and now? If political action falters, are there legal grounds to challenge the so-called “student choice initiative”? Maybe.

Student-funded organizations are completely independent, non-profit entities. Yet we rely on university administrations to collect our funds when students pay tuition. These funds then pass through the student unions and into our hands. We have fee agreements with the unions, who are required by law to transfer the funds, and the unions in turn have agreements with the university.

Yet our fee agreements will be useless if the student associations collapse, which is the implicit goal of Ford and his cronies. Perhaps these unions can mount some sort of legal challenge before this point, when it comes to their contracts with university administrations. Would this work? It’s unclear.

What is clear is this. Suppose implementation goes through for the opt-in system that Ford is ordering every university to have in place come June of this year, when students register for Fall 2019 classes. Student-funded organizations like us can expect a very small portion of students to check those dozen or so boxes to hand over the extra few dollars it takes to collectively keep groups like us afloat.

Carleton University tried a system like this about 15 years ago. The opt-outs were massive and systemic. There were stories of even volunteers opting out of groups that they were involved in.

And we don’t blame them! Faced with massive tuition and a decades-long debt load upon graduating, students are not going to pay those extra few dollars for groups they may not even be familiar with — even if they contribute to the greater good, the collective, extracurricular experience of the university body.

It is one thing, psychologically, to decide as a group of students in a referendum to support a worthy cause, where we all will pay equally. It is a completely different thing to be asked to pay a service fee that you know other students are skipping out on. This is the individualizing, destructive logic of charity and consumeristic choice, as opposed to solidarity and democratic choice.

Do we personally like everything students fees get us? Do we go and see plays organized by Sock n’ Buskin? Do we read *The Charlatan*? No, of course not. We’re cranky leftists with too many projects and not enough time.

We have community gardens to plant, anarcho-socialist newspapers to put out, post-structuralist manifestos to read! (Nevermind the soul-sucking shifts we have to slave our way through to pay landlords and corporations to supply us with the food, shelter, and entertaining cat-memes we need to survive another day under late capitalism.)

But we agree that we should first and foremost respect students’ democratic decision to fund these organizations — and that students *do* benefit from having a wide range of services and experiences available to them.

Do conservative students like OPIRG, read *The Leveller*, or listen to CKCU 93.1 FM? Hell no. They think we are all a bunch of Commies conspiring to undermine their privilege, confront their hate speech, and challenge their tainted views on abortion. They see campuses as training

grounds for a left-wing Communist conspiracy that will send them to the gulag once the dictatorship of the proletariat is established.

(Should we tell them? You know, that here at *The Leveller*, we hate authoritarianism, conformism, orthodoxy, coercion, violence — especially state violence — whatever its flavour or political packaging, left or right? Our dream, our agenda, our political programme is simple: radical freedom and equality for everyone, now. People over profit. Power to the people.)

Ahem. So. What can we do to keep pushing that agenda forward through independent, power-challenging journalism?

We can’t rely on non-disruptive political tactics to sway Ford.

We can’t rely on the university administration to do the right thing, declare all fees essential and accept the democratic will of students.

We can’t even rely on social democratic politics to save us.

(We love you Joel Harden, but let’s not be naive and think that the NDP are going to swoop in and save us, or that the Canadian Federation of Students is prepared to shut down Bay Street. Perhaps if the CFS and all of the student associations across the province banded together to shut down campuses and start a fruitful discussion... but we are quickly running out of time.)

Can we rely on you instead, dear reader?

First, to all our readers who are grad students at Carleton: thank you. For the past eight years, you have been the goddamn wind beneath our wings. You have made this absurdly idealistic and ambitious little rag work, enabling all that we do. And if this past decade is all we get, it’s been a good run.

But we appeal to you. If this poison pill student choice initiative goes through, please think carefully before ticking that box. What would you rather have?

Would you like to have a progressive newspaper that holds the university administration to account, that helps level the playing field for you? Would you like a consistent journalistic outlet that exposes far-right hatred, counters the austerity rhetoric that only benefit the corporate elite, explores policy alternatives that would foster equality and growth, and tells the stories of the ecological and economic resistance that we desperately need to even survive on this planet?

Or would you like the pack of raman or really shitty coffee that extra \$1.69 could get you instead?

We get it. It’s hard being a student and every dollar counts. But we would like to humbly submit, that without organizations like *The Leveller*, without student newspapers and unions, it’s going to get a hell of a lot harder.

Second, to all of our readers out in the community. Thank you for reading us. Thank you... for writing us!

Because in the past ten years, *The Leveller* has gone from being a paper by and for students to something much bigger — something by and for all of Ottawa. From day one we’ve had an open call for articles that “challenge power and privilege and sides with people over private property” — not only on campus, but throughout the city and wider world.

And issue after issue, amazing new submissions from amazing new contributors keep coming in. Issue after issue, we’ve expanded our distribution network throughout the downtown Ottawa core and beyond. Issue after issue, you keep reading us, your favourite rabble-rousing, muckracking, hot mess of a friendly neighbourhood newspaper.

During the past ten years, we’ve watched as thousands of local and community newspapers have closed. And we, improbably, have endured.

In ten years, we’ve never asked readers for anything financially. The paper has always been free. (And always will be, as long as it exists.) But as we try to honestly face up to this crisis, we can’t help toying with a monetization scheme or three. Should we try a subscription program? Open a Patreon account? Search for grants? Appeal for readers to support local, fiercely independent media?

We sure don’t want to become one of those crass charity cases. But we also don’t want to die without giving you, our dear readers, a chance to help. If we’re going to survive and flourish into the future, we probably need to establish some sort of alternative funding model.

Will our tenth anniversary be the beginning of the end, or an opportunity that opens up a new chapter in our history?

The answer to that question will probably depend on how well we’ve served our community and you our readers.

Will you help us write a new chapter?

As always, *The Leveller and its editors welcome you to get in touch with letters of love or hate at editors.theleveller@gmail.com — or at all the usual social media places.*



A MESSAGE FROM THE LEVELLER

FUCK FORD

Doug Ford’s so-called “Student Choice Initiative” threatens the existence of *The Leveller*.

In 2010, Carleton graduate students voted in a referendum to fund *The Leveller* with \$1.50 per student per year, pegged to the Consumer Price Index.

Ford’s initiative is aimed at wiping out progressive voices on Ontario campuses and will destroy student associations, campus newspapers, and campus-based radio stations — alongside numerous other independent, non-profit organizations.

University administrations do not control our groups and neither does the government.

It is students that choose to either fund or defund us — and to increase or decrease funding — by voting, on questions that are brought forward by students.

In the past decade, right-wing students at Carleton — the tiny Tories who cut their teeth on university campuses and who are now slithering through the ranks of the provincial and federal Conservative political parties — have invested considerable resources trying to take over student unions. They even succeeded when it came to Carleton’s undergrad union, CUSA.

They also ran multiple defunding campaigns against their declared enemies, such as the Canadian Federation of Students (CFS) and the Ontario Public Interest Research Group (OPIRG). But students have chosen to continue funding these organizations.

Facing defeat after defeat, these right-wing assholes have now conspired at the level of provincial politics to eliminate these important organizations once and for all.

Ford’s restructuring of postsecondary education in Ontario is a political attack on the independence and very existence of democratically-mandated student organizations.

Fuck you Doug Ford — and your little minions too. Get your grubby fingers off of our student organizations!

The Leveller