

# A BRIEF HISTORY OF PUBLIC SERVICES IN QUEBEC

# OUR PUBLIC SERVICES ARE SINKING! OUR PUBLIC SERVICES ARE SINKING!

# SERVICES DRIFTING AWAY

## TWO COMMISSIONS TO CUT EVERYTHING

Philippe Couillard's government established two commissions to institute its austerity program and pillage public services:

1. The Commission permanente de révision des programmes, established immediately after the election, whose mandate is to reduce public expenditure by \$3.2 billion;
2. The Commission sur la fiscalité, whose goal is to free up \$650 million in fiscal savings and to propose major administrative reforms to the public sector.

## EFFICIENCY AT ANY COST?

If the government intends to condense the public sector, it also proposes to remodel it so that it stays efficient. To be efficient, public services would be transformed into private businesses. Employees would consequently be asked to be more profitable and more productive, and a "user-pays" model would be introduced in which citizens would pay out of pocket to use a service. The quality of services would be reduced and the poorest among us would suffer considerably from reduced access - but it has not even been demonstrated that the privatization of public services makes them more efficient!

## THE STATE ABANDONS ITS MISSION

If the government is reducing its expenses, it is to reduce public debt and to stimulate economic growth. On one hand, it is attacking the social safety net and public institutions, with disastrous consequences. On the other, it is investing massively in private enterprise and handing out lucrative tax credits. In this way, the neoliberal State turns its back on its mission to be at the forefront of the interests of the population. Its only objective is to line the pockets of employers and of the richest citizens.

**1960** The public services that we know today have been in place since the 1960s. They emerged from a conception of the State's role that foregrounds the well-being and emancipation of citizens. These objectives would be achieved via free and universal public services, progressively and equitably financed by the population.

**1980** During the 1980s, with the implementation of austerity policies and public administration reform inspired by neoliberalism in the US and the UK, this conception of the State began to lose ground.

**2000** Neoliberal ideas became more firmly entrenched in Québec at the end of the 1990s and the beginning of the 2000s. Austerity was defended as a means of reducing Québec's public debt.



#services  
publics.org ASSÉ

#services  
publics.org ASSÉ

# CHILD CARE



## PROVEN BENEFITS

Since they were put in place in 1997, educational child care services have transformed the way we conceive of early childhood education: we understand it to be a collective responsibility and a right, like the right to free primary and secondary education. The child care network allows for better school integration and quicker screening for learning difficulties. Single parents, most often mothers, can return to the workforce and get out of an often precarious situation.

## THE NEOLIBERAL AXE DESTROYS AN IMPORTANT SOCIAL GAIN



Since 2003, fewer and fewer low-fee daycare places have been funded; instead, funding is increasing for subsidized places in private daycares. In addition, the Couillard government has indexed fees to inflation, raising the fee from \$7 to \$7.30 per day. Still further, \$75M in budgetary cuts are planned for child care centers (CPEs) from the surpluses currently being used to improve the quality of the children's education.

## COMMERCIAL INTERESTS VS. CHILDREN'S WELL-BEING



This tendency undermines the fundamental goals of accessibility and universality which the network had embraced from the start. The fee increases and reduction in places weaken the already precarious financial situation of poor families, which are often headed by single mothers. The underfunding of CPEs and of other subsidized daycares diminishes the strength of a public network in which everyone is treated equally, regardless of income, and fosters the implementation of private daycare centers that impose heavy costs on parents.

# HEALTH



## HEALTH CARE ON A DIET

The public portion of health care spending has not stopped declining in the last forty years. Decreasing from 80% in 1970 to 70% today, this trend continues. During the 1990s, the government imposed cuts of almost \$1.5B. Finally, the health tax was introduced in 2009. Reducing spending in this way erodes the capacity of the health care system to treat its population suitably, to prevent health problems effectively, and to adapt itself to demographic shifts such as the graying of the population.

## THE PRIVATE SECTOR IS NOT A SOLUTION



In order to make the health care system work, the government is increasingly calling on the private sector to dispense health care services. The Centre hospitalier de l'université de Montréal (CHUM) was financed through a public-private partnership (PPP). Yet this approach will cost taxpayers at least twice as much in 30 years as it would have if it had been funded solely publicly. While the privatization of the health care system is extolled as a way to generate savings, the opposite is in fact true. Even worse, these transformations occur at the cost of the health and well-being of the population and of professionals.

# THE ENVIRONMENT



## THE ENVIRONMENT DISREGARDED

Recent cuts in environmental protection, whether at the Bureau d'audiences publiques sur l'environnement (BAPE), within organizations tasked with overseeing parks and fauna, or to research in ecology or environmental studies, reduce the State's ability to develop expert knowledge of the repercussions of economic development and to protect the integrity of the natural environment.

## THE PLAN NORD FARCE



Not only does the government appear unconcerned about protecting the environment, it seems more interested in extracting natural resources than in protecting them. Indeed, the State is investing large sums of money in order to encourage mining companies to establish operations: this is the case, for example, with the public financing and building of a road leading to the Stornoway Diamond mine. In addition, the exploitation of the North has dramatic consequences for First Nations and other small communities, including the explosion of the cost of living, the weakening of families, pollution, and the implantation of organized crime.

# CULTURE



## A PRIORITY?

In recent years, governments have made enormous budget cuts to cultural programs. The museum network is an example: under the pretext that they are a burden because they do not generate money, fees are increased, collections are reduced, and some small regional museums are closed.

## THE BIG WINNER: PRIVATE ENTERPRISE



The recent decrease by 20% of the tax credits applied across the board to private companies threatens the survival of small businesses. Indeed, a large cultural business with high profits can absorb this loss of credit more easily than a small business, such as a neighbourhood bookstore or a publishing house, for which this credit plays an important part in financing its activities.

## A CULTURE OF PROFIT



We are now witnessing a reorientation of the mandate of the Conseil des arts et lettres du Québec (CALQ), whose mission is to support artists and cultural organizations in their development, toward that of the Société de développement des entreprises culturelles (SODEC), whose mandate is to fund cultural production in proportion to the project's profitability. In this way, we are witnessing, on the whole, the funding of commercial, profitable cultural products at the expense of authentic works of art.

# POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION



## AN ACCESSIBLE EDUCATION

In the wake of the Parent report in 1963, the government made many commitments to guarantee access to post-secondary education. In this way, tuition freezes, in the perspective that education should be free, the construction of a network of public universities and CÉGEPs, and adequate financing for teaching at the post-secondary level are measures that have had a positive effect on the accessibility of higher education. Education was understood as a means of emancipation and as a way to contribute to the intellectual and cultural wealth of Québec. These measures allowed many people, regardless of their income and social condition, to have access to higher education.

## THE DISENGAGEMENT OF THE STATE



In 1986, universities were asked to absorb budget cuts of \$227.8M and a reduction of the subsidy per student of 34% in only 8 years. This trend continues today: between 2011 and 2013, budget cuts in CÉGEPs amounted to \$110M. Moreover, between 1987 and 2009, the public funding of universities decreased from 87% to 65.8%. We are witnessing increases in tuition and ancillary fees, and an increase in private funding. By privileging private funding and the "user-pays" model, education becomes less and less accessible and universal.

## THE KNOWLEDGE ECONOMY AND THE DECLINE OF STUDENT SERVICES



Budget cuts in education inevitably have negative consequences on the services offered to the student population, such as library access and mental health services. Moreover, teaching institutions are transforming themselves in order to be more productive and competitive with each other. This is what we call the knowledge economy: funding is only allocated to teaching in disciplines with high job-market demand, and only research projects deemed profitable are subsidized.