

*On November 10, 2011, over 1000 demonstrators gathered outside the James Administration building following an earlier protest against tuition hikes outside Quebec Premier Jean Charest's office on Sherbrooke St. At 3:45 pm, fourteen students entered the James Administration building. Soon thereafter, riot police entered McGill campus, forcing demonstrators to leave campus. Police used pepper spray, tear gas, and physical force against demonstrators.*

<https://www.mcgilldaily.com/2011/11/mcgill-students-violently-forced-off-campus/>

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/montreal/mcgill-investigates-disturbing-protester-police-clashes-1.1066063>

The following was published in the *McGill Tribune* on November 28, 2011.

### **Thirteen theses on seven days**

**By Darin Barney**

1. The purpose of the modern university is to cultivate the practice of dissent against arbitrary authority.
2. There is no equivalence between a few staff members being frightened, jostled, or momentarily prevented from leaving a safe building, and dozens of people being beaten by armed police for refusing to abandon a peaceful protest on a university campus.
3. The allegation that some of the protestors entering the James building on November 10 were masked and wearing hooded garments does not justify their having been physically assaulted by McGill Security officers, and it does not justify the violence of riot police against peaceful supporters and protestors assembled outside the building. Reports indicate that by the time police arrived at McGill on November 10 it was known that what was happening inside the building was a peaceful student protest.
4. The arrival and brutality of the riot police on campus was not a response to the occupation of the James building; it was a response to what was known to be a peaceful student protest outside the James building.
5. The fact that protestors inside the building communicated to supporters outside the building does not justify the brutality of the police (it has been very interesting to listen as those who are otherwise enthusiastic about the "revolutionary" pedagogies enabled by emerging media technologies incite moral panic over the use of these same media in protest situations).
6. The insinuation that those who "caused" the trouble were not members of the "McGill community" is manipulative and pernicious. In the first place, it is clear that many McGill students and faculty members were involved in the events of November 10th, up to and including the brief occupation of the James building and the demonstration outside it.

Secondly, even if the McGill campus is private property, university campuses are intrinsically public spaces that belong to all who seek knowledge and try to speak the truth. The universality of its community is what distinguishes the university from a private club.

7. The events of November 10 are directly related to measures taken on campus by the Administration, and the climate that has resulted, since the beginning of the MUNACA strike in September. These include: injunctions that threaten police violence against McGill workers who express themselves too noisily or too visibly; surveillance of professors, staff and students taking part in peaceful demonstrations; threats against professors acting in solidarity with their striking co-workers; condescending and manipulative propaganda from the Administration; unsustainable and unhealthy working conditions for non-striking employees; spurious and intimidating disciplinary proceedings against activist students; increased security presence on campus; widespread alienation of faculty and students from the institutions of collegial governance. For these conditions, the McGill Administration is solely responsible.

8. The ethos of “personal responsibility” has been vigorously promoted and enforced by several people in positions of authority at this university. Recent requests by students for academic amnesty for those who object to crossing a union picket line have been rejected on the grounds that students wishing to stand up for such principles must take personal responsibility for their choice to do so, and must suffer the consequences. It is therefore curious that the investigation into the events of November 10 commissioned by the Principal has been designed specifically to relieve those involved of personal responsibility for their actions or inaction. According to the Principal, the investigation “should not make findings about or assign blame to specific individuals.” Dean Jutra has confirmed that the investigation “will not include any nominative assessment of individual conduct or responsibility.” It would appear that many of those who otherwise invoke the ethic of personal responsibility suddenly lose the stomach for enforcing this principle when it is they, themselves, who might be held to account for their actions and called to bear the consequences of their choices.

9. If measures eventually recommended to “reduce the likelihood of a similar incident occurring in the future” do not recognize and address the disciplinary climate established by the Administration over the past several months and instead take the opportunity to increase securitization and restrictions on organized dissent and assembly on campus, the conditions enumerated above as contributing to the events of November 10 will be compounded rather than relieved, and the likelihood of similar events recurring on campus will be increased rather than decreased.

10. The executive character of the Principal’s response to these events has aggravated, rather than alleviated, the perception of an Administration uninterested in democratic governance and accountability. Private consultation with a handful of valued but unnamed confidantes prior to a unilateral decision and announcement of an investigation whose mandate and personnel are non-negotiable demonstrates exactly the type of executive governance that has

alienated much of the campus community. The mode of governing that has given rise to the problem is unlikely to be an effective means of addressing it.

11. Defenders of the proposed investigation into the events of November 10 have framed the issue as a matter of trust and confidence, rather than a matter of legitimacy. Appeals to the autonomy of the university, trust in its collegial traditions, the integrity of peer adjudication and confidence in the distinction of our fellows miss the point entirely. The issue is not whether the Principal has confidence in the Dean of Law: the issue is whether an investigation conducted solely by a member of the senior administrative team could ever be seen as legitimate in the eyes of the McGill community as a whole, particularly those who were victims of violence on November 10. Trust in the integrity, intentions and judgment of the Administration is precisely what has been strained over the past several months, and was shattered violently on November 10. That trust must be earned back. It cannot be invoked to legitimize exactly the sort of executive behavior that compromised it so decisively in the first place.

12. The apparent radicalism of the act of occupying the James building (“apparent” because student occupation of university administration buildings is such a frequent, predictable and benign act that it is hard to believe anyone actually considers it “radical” anymore) should not be used as a pretext to discount the validity of the students’ reasons for taking this action.

13. Conservative political actors on and off-campus are fond of portraying themselves as a minority that is persecuted by the politically-correct “liberals” and “tenured radicals” who dominate the university. Recent events at McGill demonstrate that precisely the opposite is true: it is campus progressives who are systematically marginalized, intimidated and ignored in the offices, decisions and processes by which the university is governed. When was the last time a conservative activist was beaten by police on a university campus simply for expressing her ideas?