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In Quebec, as elsewhere, ENOUGH IS ENOUGH !

At the opening of the Special Federal Council on negotiations, the President of the Federation, Jennie Skene, reminded delegates of the events since the last Federal Council and stressed the importance of solidarity.

"Since our last meeting in March, nurses in local general assemblies adopted a plan of action and voted, with a strong majority, in favour of strike action. We

can be proud of the work accomplished, the results of the vote demonstrate that nurses are resolved to settle the problems they face. With a 41% participation rate, 63% of nurses voted for the general strike". The Executive Committee and the Negotiating Committee believe that these results are more than satisfactory. "Last time, in November 1996, 61% of nurses voted for a 24-hour strike to be called with other unions. Now, on their own, they decided to say high and loud 'Enough



is enough ! It's time to act ! " ". The President also reminded delegates that, since March, many local actions were conducted in different regions of Quebec:

demonstrations, overtime ban, and nurses in Northern Quebec, for their part, delivered only emergency services.

These spontaneous actions are also a concrete proof of the fact that nurses have had enough, and this is not specific to Quebec. *"Everywhere in Canada, nurses are engaged in or about to begin bargaining. As a matter of fact, the President added, our demands are the same: creation of positions, train-*

ing, compensation and pay equity. Everywhere unionised nurses are fighting privatisation and want to solve the problem of the shortage of nursing personnel."

"After the nurses of British Columbia, Newfoundland and Saskatchewan, those of Alberta, Ontario and Manitoba will, like nurses in Quebec, wage a struggle in a context where it is urgent that the governments correct the errors and improve the lot of nurses."

A HEAVY SCHEDULE!

There were four weeks between this Federal Council and the preceding one. Yet, several elements of the internal and external context have changed. The Executive officer in charge of negotiations, Lina Bonamie, therefore presented a progress report on the current negotiations.

She began by reminding delegates of the will expressed by the Minister of Health and Social Services, Pauline Marois, to find short-term and middle-term solutions to the problem of nursing workforce planning. The FIIQ responded by presenting concrete and permanent solutions, in a Quebec-wide framework, to solve the problem of the shortage of personnel during the summer period. The Federation thus clearly demonstrated its will to negotiate.

Yet, the management party has acknowledged neither the problem of precarious employment, nor the importance of stabilising positions. Only the credo of decentralisation is repeated over and over again. It seems that the Minister's invitation was not accepted on that side of the table.

Meanwhile, in other union organisations, mobilisation has also begun. The majority of these organisations chose to prepare for a legal strike in the fall and, as a matter of fact, some have already filed a request for mediation.

Moreover, in the rest of Canada, as the President stated in her opening address, many nursing unions are engaged in the collective bargaining of their working conditions. It is surprising to see the extent to which not only the situation and problems faced by nurses, but also the intransigence of employers and governments, are similar. It is interesting to note that everywhere nurses, as a group, have had enough and that they are determined to fight for their rights and demands.

Until now, at the bargaining table, the parties clarified their offers on

the various articles and demands. However, there is no sign of a true will to negotiate; their strategy consists in delaying negotiations.

The Vice President, Lina Bonamie, concluded her presentation with the following words : "If Minister Marois is serious when she says that we must find solutions quickly to solve nursing problems, she must ensure that employers understand this clearly. For the time being, what we observe — and we are the ones to sit at the table with employers — is that her message was not understood. "

The success of these negotiations is crucial. The results of the referendum on pressure tactics reflect nurses' determination. Moreover, many testimonies illustrate the fact that public opinion is on our side. For example, on the evening of our press conference to announce

the referendum results, TVA television network held an opinion poll on the nurses' strike and asked people if they felt that a nurses' strike was legitimate. The result of this opinion poll speak for themselves: 70% of respondents supported our action!

We are therefore pursuing our work in view of the objective of improving our working conditions by solving the problems which nurses face. To this end, solidarity is a winning card!





For nurses working in remote and isolated regions **AN AGREEMENT IN PRINCIPLE**

The Vice President of the Federation, Lina Bonamie, presented the terms of the agreement in principle that the *Fédération des infirmières et infirmiers du Québec* concluded with the *Comité patronal de négociation du secteur de la Santé et des Services sociaux* concerning the recruitment and retention of nurses for the regions covered by the isolation premiums and benefits. Since this agreement contains clauses that modify the current collective agreement, it must be ratified by local general assemblies.

This agreement was reached after the nurses of James Bay, Hudson Bay and Ungava Bay begun pressure tactics to denounce the shortage of nursing staff and the possible reduction of health services in the Far North. The terms of the agreement are :

Settlement and retention premium: each nurse working in one of the institutions covered by Section XII of clause 34.05 of the collective agreement will receive an annual premium. The amount of this premium will vary between 14 000\$ and 16 000\$ per year, depending on the geographic location of the institution.

Salary supplement: nurses who work in outposts or northern clinics will receive a salary supplement of 135\$ per week integrated in the salary

scale. Talks between the parties will continue on the introduction of one or more new job titles regarding work in isolated and remote regions and concerning delegated acts.

Leave of absence without pay to work in a facility in the Far North : this leave of absence without pay can henceforth be extended for a total of five years.

With this agreement, the government finally acknowledges, on the one hand, that monetary incentives are essential if we want nurses to pursue their career in the Far North and, on the other, that nurses' work in outposts and northern clinics in Quebec is highly complex. For more information on this agreement, attend your local general assembly.

ELOQUENT RESULTS

On April 8, in all health-care institutions affiliated to the Federation, nurses voted on the management offers and on a plan of action.

With a 41% participation rate, nurses rejected management offers with a 93% majority. Moreover, 63% voted for a general strike to be called at a time deemed appropriate by the Negotiating Committee. Finally, 77% of nurses voted in favour of hours or days of recuperation. These can be called one hour or one day at a time, and this at a time deemed appropriate by the Negotiating Committee.

Given these results, delegates decided to recommend to local general assemblies to hold a vote to rally to the pressure tactics adopted by a majority of nurses, including the general strike. Watch the notice boards for the date of the rallying vote.



As soon as the BELL telephone operators and technicians strike is over, a toll-free telephone line will be installed to inform members of the latest developments with regard to negotiations.

Coming actions



May 1st

On May Day, international workers' day, you are invited to wear your tee-shirt and jeans.

May 12

To celebrate International Nurses' Day on May 12, there will be two actions:

- on May 9 and 12, wearing of jeans and negotiation tee-shirts
- from May 8 to 12 inclusively, there will be a public campaign which consists of having post-cards signed in support of nurses' demands

Other means of action could be announced. So, keep an eye out for news!



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