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A Call for SOLIDARITY



The 600 delegates of the Fédération des infirmières et infirmiers du Québec met in a special federal council to review the state of negotiations and the strategies required to move forward and achieve nurses' primary objectives.

Jennie Skene, Federation president, reminded delegates that the nurses have shown solidarity, cohesiveness and extraordinary mobilization during the tough battle waged since the pressure tactics began.

"Nurses have been highly mobilized and we, as delegates, have a responsibility not only to maintain that spirit, but to direct and channel it towards our adversaries: the government and the

employer associations. We don't have the right to play the employers' game and become divided. The federal council is the place where we nurses as a group can fine tune our approach, ask questions and make decisions. Our objective is to sign a collective agreement that reflects nurses' priorities.

Today, we can say that there is not one person in Quebec who doesn't know what nurses want, and the people are still on our side. It is the

government that refuses to recognize nurses' reasonable demands.

Faced with this stubborn government, it is important that we don't endanger this collective organization that nurses have developed. Even though consensus has not come easily during this federal council, it is important that we remain united and maintain our solidarity, because those are the real tools we have to fight the battle."



HARD CHOICES

After looking back on the circumstances of the rejection of the agreement in principle, delegates took stock of the negotiations and discussed the strategy needed to get the Bouchard government to sign an agreement that would solve nurses' problems. After some hours of discussion, the delegates decided to take a break from the heavy pressure tactics. Most delegates felt this decision was necessary to permit a reworking of the strategy.

The decision wasn't easy, however, since the delegates were still highly committed to the strike, even after 22 days on the picket lines. But it had to be done: with a government unwilling to listen or talk as long as nurses were using illegal pressure tactics, and with the overwhelming rejection of the agreement in principle by the nurses, it became necessary to come up with a new strategy. The delegates knew that nurses had fought hard, and if the methods used didn't allow them to knock down the wall in front of them, they would have to go around it and come up with a new strategy to get the Bouchard government to move.

As well, to leave all possible doors open, the council directed the bargaining team to take any steps necessary to put the Federation in a legal strike position by requesting the intervention of a mediator. Delegates also decided that it would be a good idea to bring in outside resources who might give the bargaining team a new sounding board for reworking strategy.

So during the two days of the federal council meeting, delegates took stock, discussed, and above all made decisions that would make it possible for nurses to get a collective agreement that would meet their needs and acknowl-

edge the value of their work. Thus, while there may no longer be picket lines in front of health-care institutions, guerrilla tactics will begin on the inside. At the local level, if it hasn't already happened, nurses will be asked to vote on tactics to pressure the institution's administration. During this council, even while deciding to call off the strike, the delegates chose to continue with action to get a collective agreement.



A BRIEF REMINDER

Since the last issue of FIIQ en Action (distributed after the federal council on June 29), the federal council met on July 4, 9, 15, 16 and 17 and on July 23 and 24. Here is a brief review of the decisions and actions taken:

July 4

Federal Council meeting in Dorval: Delegates passed a resolution about continuing the strike, a position that had to be presented to the local general assemblies. They also discussed strategies for getting back to the bargaining table.

July 6

Nurses voted 93% in favour of continuing the strike.

July 9

Federal Council in Laval: Delegates decided on a 48-hour truce, after consultation with the membership, so that negotiations could be go forward.

July 12

Nurses voted 93% in favour of the 48-hour truce from 8:00 a.m. Tuesday, July 13 to 8:00 a.m. Thursday, July 15.



July 15, 16, 17

Federal Council in Laval: Delegates analyzed the draft proposal resulting from the bargaining session during the truce and voted 62% in favour of adopting it.

July 21

Announcement that the agreement in principle was rejected by nurses, with 75% of them voting against it.

A Massive Rejection A CLEAR MESSAGE

In a general ballot on July 21, 1999, FIIQ nurses voted on the draft agreement in principle recommended to the local general assemblies by the federal council. Seventy-five percent of the nurses who voted turned down the proposal. The participation rate was 63%. The draft agreement was thus rejected by two-thirds of the institutions where FIIQ is present.

With this rejection — so massive and by such a large number — nurses sent a very clear message to the employer associations and the government: *“Your latest offer is not good enough and we no longer trust your promises.”*

The government’s refusal to provide an immediate and concrete response to nurses’ demands, combined with all the missed meetings and unfulfilled promises, have completely destroyed the government’s credibility with nurses. Similarly, the petty attitude toward application of collective agreements by local employers and their bad faith, which has been demonstrated many times, have seriously undermined the bond of trust that should exist between nurses and their employers.

This vote also expresses nurses’ determination to see some fast and genuine improvements in their working conditions, professional requirements, and salaries.

This determination is only equalled by the government’s stubborn refusal to improve its wage offers. The nurses’

strong mobilization, the massive public support, a significant drop in the government’s approval rating: nothing has helped, and the government has held to its strategy based on legality and the refusal to review wages until a wage-relativity study has been done.

Nurses rejected the draft agreement because it lacked content on standards, because nurses don’t trust their employers and the government, and because of the unspecified wage component that depends on a wage study and future negotiations — in the fall of 1999 — on general pay increases.

The employer associations and the government must understand that by rejecting this draft agreement, nurses have shown that they expect their demands to be heard. It is now up to the employer associations and the government to sweeten the deal that is currently on the table, because it isn’t good enough for nurses to accept.



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