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Opening address

After having addressed a warm welcome to the presidents of Canadian nurses' unions, the President of the Federation, Jennie Skene, delivered the opening address on behalf of the Executive Committee. Following are large excerpts of this address.



" Meetings are always important events for the FIIQ. Today, like in the past, you will have important decisions to make that will involve the 47 500 nurses we represent. It is a heavy responsibility because the motions passed during these two days will have tangible, immediate and practical consequences. [...]

" How do we want our organization to develop? Why? On which basis? With whom? With what purpose? How much human and financial resources do we want to invest? These are questions that merit clear answers. Unfortunately, although we are always guided by the same principles, the solutions are not static and unchanging. [...]

" The importance of the issues presented for discussion calls above all for serene debates. Our goal is to arrive at decisions that will satisfy the largest number of delegates possible. All delegates have the right and even the duty to express their viewpoints. All proposals presented according to the rules of procedure that we have established must be listened to and considered at face value.

" This democratic exercise is not easy. Certain points of view may be contrary to our values, shatter our convictions, spread concern or break a consensus that was taken for granted. In a context where the outcome is crucial, it is sometimes difficult to remain serene. Comments quickly become inflamed, because we all take to heart the defence of members' interests. We must therefore make an effort to be rigorous so that our comments always be marked by respect and tolerance. This is the first challenge that we will face together, with the help of the Chair of course."

A DEMOCRATIC GAIN

" One of the points on the agenda of the Convention is the modifications to the Constitution and Bylaws. Our decisions will bring the final touch to a process that was undertaken many years ago.

" The first step was taken in 1998, with the adoption of the principle of weighted votes at Federal Council meetings. However, in discussions surrounding this decision, a large part of the delegates had expressed their dissatisfaction concerning its restrictive nature. [...]

" The decisions (...), thus reflect the attention which the delegation, as well as the Executive Committee, has paid to the issue of the representativeness of delegates at Federal Council and Convention meetings. If we are coherent with the decisions of the bodies that preceded this convention, we will modify the articles that concern the composition of our decision-making bodies. These changes ensure that a decision made by a two-thirds majority vote will be even more representative of the will of members that the delegates represent. Thus, we will grant even more value to our democratic process. But, do not forget that along with this comes a rise of our respective responsibilities.

" You probably know that some members have publicly questioned the manner in which decisions are made at the FIIQ. Reflecting ignorance of our decisional process, and sometimes even in bad faith, the accusations were aimed more specifically at the Executive Committee of the FIIQ and even, personally, at its President.

" Yet, decisions were made, and continue to be made, by majority vote in decision-making meetings. Although decision-making bodies, including the Executive Committee are not above errors or erroneous evaluations,

although decisions made by a majority of votes do not always meet with the approval of members, each decision is nevertheless the outcome of a debate and a majority vote. When, afterwards, the opposition is such that all members reject a decision, it is our responsibility to revise it. In counterpart, it is also the responsibility of each delegate to reassure members on the democratic nature of our decision-making process. It is essential that nurses understand clearly that the motions presented are the result of debate and majority decisions at the Federal Council and the Convention.[...]

" Of course, members can question the value of a decision at local general assemblies or even reject it by referendum but, in this event, the decision is no less democratic. As a matter of fact, I will go even one step farther and say that the more controversial a decision is within our ranks, the more the delegates present at the meeting where it was adopted have the responsibility to explain and defend it.[...]

MUTUAL SUPPORT

" Another important question which we will be discussing during this convention is the special assessment. Democracy has a price. So does solidarity. It is in this perspective that we invite you to see the motions designed to set the amount of the special assessment. The Executive Committee examined this question from three main angles: firstly, support for union mobilization; secondly, the sharing of the effort; and thirdly, the respect of one's promises. [...]

" Union mobilization constitutes the spearhead of an organization like ours. History has shown that such mobilization is rarely spontaneous and that it is does not kindle itself. Left on its own, chances are that it will die away. We must therefore support mobilization by providing an organisational basis that will enable it to grow.[...]

" Consequently, right at the Founding Convention, nurses decided to set up a union defence fund. The existence of this fund represents much more than an insurance policy against hard blows. It symbolizes, over and above all, a fundamental principle of the union movement: solidarity in form of mutual aid. [...]

" We will never be able to reimburse the sum of energy devoted by executive committees and strike officers but we can share, within the limits of our capacities, the expenses made to support the mobilisation of members.[...]

" In the difficult context engendered by government repression, we contracted external loans to enable the organization to continue to operate.

The reimbursement of these loans will also be discussed at this meeting. It is the least we can do out of respect for the nurses' unions who, in response to our call, granted us loans of close to 2 million dollars, without questions or conditions. We must show them that we will take the measures necessary to be able to begin reimbursing them by the end of the year 2000.

" We will never repeat too often how important these loans were in providing our organization with the oxygen needed to go through this trying situation. The gesture of our Canadian colleagues represents far more than mere financial assistance, even though this aspect is currently crucial for us. Such loans, not to mention donations, without any security, based on our word, are exceptional. In a world where the smallest action has a price, in a society where the principle of "every man for himself" seems to win over "all for one and one for all", this gesture is a symbol of hope. [...]

" However, as you already know, the objective of the special assessment is far more than the reimbursement of our internal and external loans. Indeed, beyond our financial commitments, there is a question of solidarity, and we will give it the form of mutual support.

" The question of the sharing of the penalties should not raise a lot of debate, since it is in line with the decisions taken last June. [...] Today, we will apply the principle of the sharing of penalties, accepted by the delegation last June.

" But this is not all. The Executive Committee invites you to take another step in a spirit of solidarity, to go one step further in mutual support. We propose that the salary losses engendered by the strike be shared. The first time we discussed this possibility together, we hesitated: could we afford to do so without threatening the personal budget of nurses? Was it really necessary? Today, having examined the situation, we can respond positively to the two questions. Yes, we can afford to share among ourselves the salary losses. Yes, we must do so.

" [...] This decision will result in the compensation of individual salary losses for 5 days, 10 days, 15 days and even 23 days of strike.



Consequently, all nurses, who were members of the FIIQ in July 1999, will be treated as if they had been on strike for less than two days. All nurses will have lost more or less two days of salary and will not have lost more than two days of salary. The investment will be the same for all. [...]

" [...]But, above all, by sharing we are heartening those who were actively involved in the battle. [...]

THE YEAR 2000 AND AFTER

"We are all eager to turn the page on this bargaining round. Courage, the time will come sooner or later. It will then be time to take stock, to identify our good and bad shots, to evaluate our losses and our gains in the short, but also in the long term. Together, with the passing of time, we will be able to examine our performance against the results of the other union organizations. [...] Already, today, by our actions and our decisions, we will begin to pave the way for the unionism of the future, a forceful, progressive unionism, serving members and attentive to the needs of society.

" In what kind of a society do we want to live? What kind of a social heritage do we want to leave our children? And what about health? Are we going to let the differences in life expectancy and life in good health continue to grow between people who are privileged and those who are not? Between those who are at the top and those who are at the bottom of the social ladder? Will we allow a two-tier medical system to develop, without saying a word? Will we silently accept that half of the planet live in affluence while the other half experiences war, hunger and violence? [...]

" In short, the Executive Committee urges you to consolidate our organization and to help nurses regain trust in union democracy and in the solidarity experienced through sharing and mutual support. We must continue working together for the development of equity and social justice."

A warm welcome



In the usual order :

Cathy Ferguson, Pres., British Columbia ;
Debbie Forward Pres., Newfoundland ;
Heather Smith Pres., Alberta ;
Michèle Boisclair 3rd V.P., FIIQ ;
Debra McPherson Internal Pres., Canadian Federation of Nurses' Unions ;
Enid Mitchell V.P., Ontario ;
Maureen Hancharyk, Pres., Manitoba ;
Linda Silas Pres., New Brunswick ;
missing on the picture:
Pauline Worsfold V.P., Alberta.

Delegates greeted the representatives of Canadian nurses' unions who had come to pay tribute to the struggle of Quebec nurses with a thunder of applause and a standing ovation.

Whether from Alberta, Manitoba, British Columbia, Ontario, New Brunswick, Newfoundland, Nova Scotia or Prince Edward Island, all the guest speakers commended Quebec nurses for the difficult struggle they waged to win recognition for the profession.

At the opening of the Convention, they addressed delegates with the following words: "We are wholeheartedly with you, and you stand as a model, for all Canadian nurses, of staunch determination and unity, of women with a fighting spirit who face up fearlessly to the repressive laws passed by an inflexible government when the cause is just and legitimate."

Remember that the Canadian nurses' unions loaned 2 million dollars to the Federation to cover the shortage of cash flow resulting from the suspension of the automatic check-off of union dues.

This gesture, along with the fund-raising campaign they are conducting, reflects how nurses in the other provinces identified with the FIIQ nurses' strike. For the second time in 10 years - the first time was during the 1989 strike - Canadian nurses' unions send a message of solidarity to the Federation, in the form of tangible assistance.

Let us send them "46 500 mercis" !

THE SPECIAL ASSESSMENT: A GESTURE OF SOLIDARITY



In the last special issue of *FIIQ en Action* (Vol. 12, No. 10, November 1999), we spoke at length of the special assessment. With this information, the Convention delegates decided by a strong majority that the special assessment would be used as follows:

- to share the double penalty
- to share the salary loss
- to replenish the Negotiation reserve fund
- to reimburse loans totalling 2 million dollars.

Moreover, since data was still missing and new data had been received and since SIIÉQ nurses left the ranks of the Federation, new calculations were made.

Indemnity for the double penalty (13\$/hr)	6 566 678 \$
Indemnity for the salary loss (13\$/hr)	6 734 824 \$
Negotiation reserve deficit	3 000 000 \$
Reimbursement of loans	2 000 000 \$
Compensation to unions	55 000 \$
TOTAL	18 356 502 \$

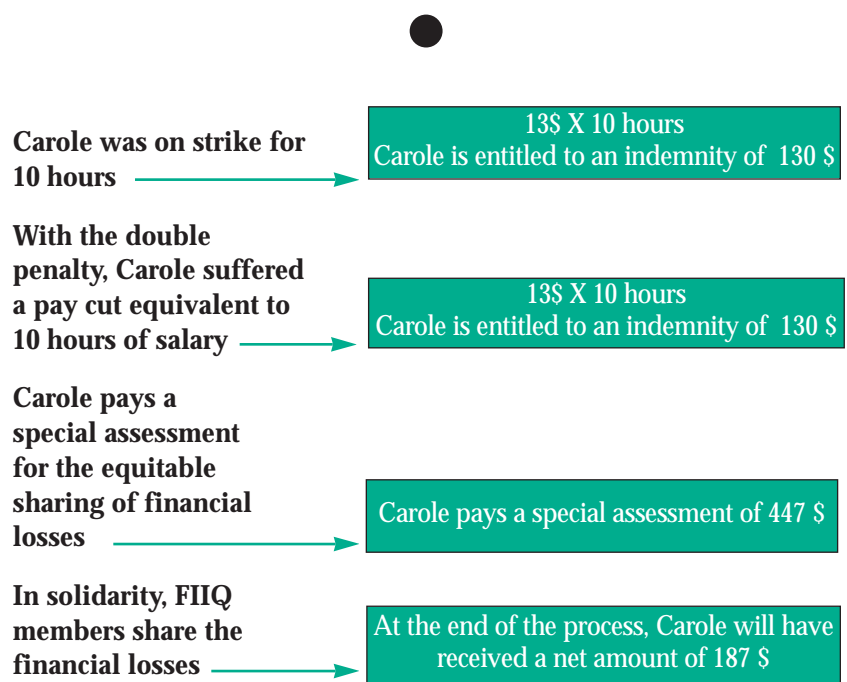
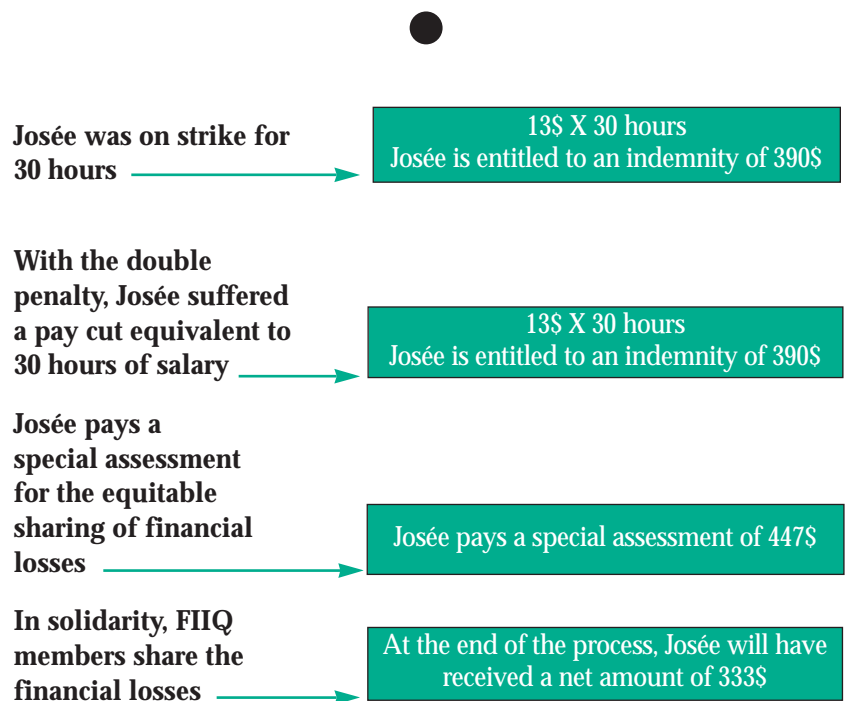
The total amount is equivalent to a special assessment per dues-paying member of 447,00 \$.

Moreover, although it is up to each union to decide how it will go about collecting the sum, delegates determined certain conditions for the payment of the special assessment to the Federation. It shall be paid in eight equal payments between March 1 and October 1, 2000 inclusively. It was also decided that as money came in, reimbursements would be made in the following order:

- payment of the Indemnity for the double penalty and salary loss;
- reimbursement of the Union Defence Fund by the Negotiation reserve. This will enable the Federation to pay 5\$ per day of strike to unions, as stipulated in the Constitution and Bylaws;
- reimbursement of the loan for a total of 2 million dollars.

Therefore, as explained in the last *FIIQ en Action*, over 80 % of the special assessment will be returned to nurses who suffered financial losses and to their unions which supported them in their action. Thus, nurses who went on strike will receive 13\$ for each hour of strike and, in addition, they will receive the same amount for each hour of penalty imposed.

Here are a few examples of the amount which a nurse who was on strike and who suffered the double penalty will receive in relation with the special assessment which she will pay:



Thus, whether nurses were on the picket lines working on essential services or at work, all FIIQ nurses will contribute financially in the same way to the struggle waged for the defence of their rights.

As the President of the Federation stated at the opening of the Convention: *“the sharing of the double penalty and of the salary loss is far more than a strictly financial matter. It is part of the extraordinary movement of solidarity sparked by our actions in the Quebec population and in the other union organizations, especially Canadian nurses’ unions.*

“The sharing of the salary loss will be symbolic in two ways. It will be a show of solidarity in adversity. It will also be the symbol of nurses’ resistance. This solidarity and steadfastness will enable us to come to terms with a government that wanted to squelch nursing unionism once and for all.”

As always, with solidarity, nurses will be able to regain full control of their collective power.

Constitution and By-laws : IMPORTANT CHANGES

At the Special Convention, held on November 30 and December 1, delegates completed the final step with regard to the issue of representativeness. Indeed, delegates voted that the principle of weighted votes be entrenched in the Constitution and Bylaws of the Federation not only for the Federal Council, but also for the Convention. Henceforth, even with less delegates in total, members can be assured that their vote will have the same weight., regardless of the number of delegates representing them since delegates' votes are weighted to reflect the number of members they represent.

These modifications to the Constitution and Bylaws of the Federation is undoubtedly a democratic gain for members and for the organization.



NEWS FROM EASTERN QUEBEC

At the end of her opening address, the president of the Federation, Jennie Skene, also spoke to the delegation of the disaffiliation of one of its unions, the SIIEQ. On the day before the opening of the Convention. November 29, 66% of the nurses of the lower St-Lawrence region, the Gaspé peninsula and the Îles-de-la-Madeleine voted in favour of leaving the ranks of the Federation.

The President mentioned that over 30% of nurses in eastern Quebec would have liked to remain with the nurses of the FIIQ. For these nurses, leaving the Federation at a time when nurses must show solidarity betrays a lack of elegance and a highly self-centred spirit. To all those nurses who would have liked to stay with us, the President of the Federation said high and loud: *“Patience, we will be there to help you join our ranks very soon, since the period of change of union allegiance is planned for fall 2000. This is a date. Don't miss it; we'll be there!”*

SOL-HILARITÉ A success !

On the first evening of the Convention, delegates attended an evening of “Sol-Hilarité”. Employees of the *Hôpital Saint-François d’Assise* in Quebec City united their energy, talent and voices for an evening of music and songs. Here is a short excerpt of the presentation of the evening.



“ [...] This show would not be complete if we did not explain the events that led to its creation because, paradoxically, it is in a situation of conflict that this musical adventure was first considered seriously by nurses. After all our mishaps, we were bitter and even taken over by collective discouragement, at the idea of putting on our old clothes, having been so certain that we would receive brand new ones, more fitting for our image and our true worth.

“ But as you all know, the outcome was not the one we expected. However, even in a context that was not very uplifting, deep down in our inner selves there was a dormant force, that was less exuberant in some and always prepared to express itself courageously in others. When we talked together, we found that we were unanimous on the fact that we had woven, in the circumstances, solid bonds of brotherhood and solidarity. We had moved closer to colleagues that we had passed in the corridors for 10, 20 or even 30 years. We had come out of our shell to appreciate the wealth of our work colleagues.

“ Once we had said this, what could we do? While we were all exploring our thoughts, one of us aid that we must

not return to the former isolation after this disappointing experience. Otherwise, what was the use of all the bonds we had developed and all the talents we had discovered? We had to do something, refuse silent resignation, seek out those who had supported us with such conviction in our struggle and who, we now know, were not only capable of solidarity with us, but also of promoting hidden talents for the advancement of a just cause.

“ Thus, employees of various sectors are here tonight, to sing their determination, their solidarity and their will to act and to say loud and clear that, despite all the refusals we may face in the future, nothing will ever stop them from moving forward against all odds. “

We would like to thank the following sponsors for their generosity which helped to make this event possible: B.M.B. Consultants ; Efficom (publisher of the planner) ; Melançon, Marceau, Grenier et Sciortino, lawyers ; La Sécurité, assurances générales ; Grondin, Poudrier, Bernier, lawyers ; Assurance-vie Desjardins-Laurentienne.



At this Federal Council, the delegates adopted the Federation's plan of action for the year 2000. This plan was drawn up in a context where nurses must strive, in spite of governmental stubbornness and repression, to preserve their collective organization in order to pursue their battle for the right to better working conditions and to collective bargaining.

In this context, the only possible response and the only means of reaching our objectives remain solidarity and cohesion. This is why the Federation set consolidation as the main objective for the year 2000. Consolidation will mean increased presence and actions among members. Thus, the actions described in the plan of action are designed to support local union life and the negotiation of our collective agreement, to maintain cohesion within the Federation and to stabilize our financial situation.

The plan of action adopted is therefore in line with the plan of action 1999 and it maintains the actions which will help us to reach the objective of the consolidation of the organization.

Plan of action 2000 Fighting back against repression

Greater presence among members

The plan of action proposed by the Executive Committee was composed of two parts: the first part "Plan of action for the sectors and services" and the second part, "Resolutions on the theme of the 5th Biennial Convention".

Concerning the plan of action of the sectors and services, the Health-Care, Task and Organization of Work, Status of Women, Social Security, Occupational Health and Safety, Negotiation and Labour Relations sectors, and the Union Organizing, Education-Animation and Communication-Information services, will focus their work on the actions deemed to be a priority for the objectives related to the consolidation of the organization, while respecting their respective missions. In each of the sectors and services, these objectives will take the form of actions that respond to the needs of members and support for local union life.

Without looking at the plan of action of each sector and service in detail, here are as examples some of the work that will be done in the year 2000. Thus, the Occupational Health and Safety Sector will develop material to help local teams to play their role fully when dealing with members that are faced with hazardous situations; after the signature of the collective agreement, the Negotiation Sector, will co-operate with the Education-Animation Service to set up training sessions for union representatives on the new collective agreement; the

Social Security sector will prepare and hold information evenings on the pension plan in institutions or regions; the Communication- Information Service will evaluate the information material and the publications addressed to members in view of producing more and better information for members; the Union Organizing Service will encourage the presence of the FIIQ among members in order to rebuild solidarity in our ranks despite the difficult context; finally, the Status of Women Sector Condition will offer support to local teams and to labour relations consultants in situations where members are subject to violence.

As for the Health-Care Sector, besides closely monitoring government decisions, it will continue to work to ensure that nurses' concerns are reflected in the positions put forward, such as on the privatization of services, the development of mega-clinics and the implantation of an ambulatory centre. The Task and

Organization of Work Sector will offer support to local teams and to labour relations consultants in their work on the organization of work at the local level, in particular with regard to the needs engendered by the application of Bill 72.

Moreover, the Labour Relations Sector, supported by the other sectors et services de la FIIQ, will continue to ensure counselling, negotiation and support services to union representatives, in all aspects of union life at the local level, as well as representation services.

By adopting this plan of action, delegates decided to take action to fight repression by focusing on actions and activities related to negotiations and services to members. This plan of action will strengthen our organization and preserve our collective force: our unions, our Federation.

Brand-new training sessions

During the Federal Council, the Education-Animation Service presented two new programmes to delegates that will be offered at the beginning of the coming year, namely sessions on specific subjects and customized sessions. The main objective of this new orientation is to support local teams by responding better and more quickly to their occasional and urgent training needs. The training sessions on specific subjects will be three-hour long sessions, and they will be divided into three categories which summarize in a nutshell the daily work of union representatives: labour relations, the organization of work, mobilization.

Customized training sessions are sessions designed to present the content of the specific training sessions in other formats than the three-hour sessions.

Financial forecast 2000



In the absence of the Treasurer, France Bisailon, who is on sick leave, the Associate Treasurer of the FIIQ, Lise Martel, presented the financial forecast for the year 2000 announcing a small surplus. She also presented the Executive Committee's proposals to cut certain expenses in order to preserve a surplus in the FIIQ budget.

Delegates discussed their concerns with regard to the financial situation at length. Different avenues were suggested to improve the situation and a certain number of proposals were debated and presented for discussion at a later date. Delegates mandated the Executive Committee to keep a close watch over expenses and to report back in six months. Discussions will continue at Federal Council meetings in the year 2000.

Delegates therefore adopted the financial forecast as presented. The Associate Treasurer also presented the financial statement as of June 30, 1999. The audited 1999 financial statement will be presented to the June Federal Council.

Moreover, Lise Martel report on the payment of union dues, which is going well, despite the withdrawal of union check-off by employers as a result of the application of Bill 160. She stressed that this had entailed a tremendous amount of work on the part of unions and local teams.

Negotiations on the agenda

On Wednesday, December 2, at the Federal Council, delegates received the report on the main developments that have occurred since the month of August; the mediation report and the report on remuneration, as well as essential services, were discussed. However, the matters related to non-salary clauses, parental rights and retirement were not discussed because we ran short of time. We are nevertheless presenting a brief report on these questions in this issue.



An unsatisfactory interim report

Delegates rejected, with an overwhelming majority, the government's offer to introduce new salary scales with an average salary increase of 2,5%, retroactive to July 15, 1999.

This was the offer presented by the *Conseil du trésor* in the context of the work of the *Joint Committee on the remuneration of Baccalaureate nurses*. The interim report of the committee's work as of November 30, 1999, was presented to delegates. Despite the rejection of this offer, the committee continues to meet since the evaluation of the nurse and baccalaureate nurse job categories is the main mandate of this committee. This evaluation should be completed by September 30, 2000.

Delegates deemed this offer insufficient for several reasons:

- Firstly, accepting that the offer be retroactive to July 15, 1999 would have implied that nurses give up all claims to retroactive payment for the period from July 1, 1998 (termination of the collective agreement) to July 15, 1999;
- Other job categories of slightly lesser value than that attributed by the *Conseil du trésor* to the nurse job category earn up to 5% more. Take, as an example, computer technicians, main class, the pipe-fitting inspectors, class I, or electricity inspectors, main class. These are all predominantly male job categories.
- Among job categories that require a baccalaureate degree, the baccalaureate nurse job category is the only job category in the civil service, education, and the health and social services to have a salary scale that is lower than that of the professionals of the health and social services sector (dietitians, social workers, occupational therapists).

The *Conseil du trésor* presented this offer as being a breakthrough, while waiting for the work of the joint committee to be completed. Delegates were not fooled by this. Indeed, by accepting this offer, nurses would have accepted that a considerable disparity be maintained between employment of comparable value at the detriment of equity and the principle of equal salary for work of equivalent value.

NON-SALARY CLAUSES IN ABEYANCE

In a recent issue of the *Info-Nego* newsletter (No 5), we spoke of the mediation report. The report was distributed to the delegates present at the Federal Council who were able to see with their own eyes its laconic tone and the omission of the most important fact: employers refused to participate in an exploratory process in view of settling the non-salary issues in abeyance.

These issues are the recognition of training, access to positions, human resources development, the organization of work, the period of annual leave, part-time leave without pay, pay for statutory holidays, the evening premium, status of employees on union leave and the working conditions at Île-d'Entrée.

To date, employer associations still refuse to pursue negotiations on non-salary clauses. According to them. The disagreement between nurses and the *Conseil du trésor* on the issue of pay is the main obstacle to a negotiated settlement and, as long as this obstacle remains, it will not be possible to complete the negotiation and to reach an agreement. They added that this summer's tentative agreement was quite adequate. Employers are thus throwing the ball in the court of the *Conseil du trésor*.

Finding negotiated solutions to nurses' demands remains an imperative of this bargaining round. May the government be warned: we're negotiating! There will not be any agreement between nurses, employers and the government if the content of the collective agreement rejected this summer by members is not considerably improved.

THE PENSION PLAN

On March 26, 1999, the FIIQ presented nurses' demands with regard to the pension plan. Since the plan is a universal one and the negotiation of the RREGOP plan concerns all union organizations, it was agreed in June to postpone this matter to the fall.



During a negotiation meeting held on November 22, the *Conseil du trésor* reiterated its position, which can be summarized in the two following points :

- Reduction of the contribution rate from 7,95 % to 4,69 % ;
- No improvement to the plan.

A successful economy, the low rate of inflation, the absence of a significant salary raise, here are a few elements which explain the actuarial surplus in the "employees' column" in the RREGOP. These surpluses can be used to lower the rate of the contribution or to improve the plan, or both.

The 4,69% rate, suggested by the *Conseil du trésor*, is the same as the one chosen by the CARRA actuaries during their actuarial evaluation of the plan, produced in October 1998. Of course, a contribution rate of 4,69 % would not allow for any improvement of the plan.

The *Conseil du trésor* explains this refusal to improve the plan by the fact that this will increase costs. Since the government never put in its part of the funds, doing so only in the books, it does not have access

today to surpluses to improve the plan. Thus, all improvements would represent a new expense for the government. In the zero-deficit context, the *Conseil du trésor* categorically refuses any improvement of the plan.

According to the claims of the *Conseil du trésor*, a drop in the contribution rate does not represent any savings for the government. This situation, which is different from the one in the private sector, is in large part due to the fact that the government did not put in the funds and the accounting methods used. However, a reduction of dues from 7,95% to 4,69% could represent additional annual income of approximately 70 million dollars for the Quebec government if employees do not pay into a RRSP the amount of money that is no longer deducted by their employer. In fact, since contributions to the RREGOP will be lower, income tax deductions will also be lower, unless nurses pay into a RRSP an amount equivalent to the drop in contribution.

For the FIIQ, the importance of ensuring an adequate level of pension income to nurses who retire is an important objective

of this bargaining round. On November 26, the FIIQ presented a counter-proposal which included the following elements:

- **Increasing the value of pension credits** according to the formula $1,1\% + 230\$$ per year of prior service in the RREGOP. This is essentially the same measure as the one implemented temporarily in the context of the voluntary departure programme in 1997.
- **Credited service for the purpose of eligibility.** With this demand, the FIIQ asks that the years of service for the purposes of eligibility be the years of employment (full-time or part-time) and not only the time worked.
- **Eligibility criteria** for the purpose of pension benefits without actuarial reduction. Introduce the factor 80 (age and years of service = 80) with a minimum of 58 years of age.
- **Indexation of pensions** according to the CPI minus 1 % for the service acquired in 1999, 2000 and 2001.
- **Redemption of years of service:** Nurses' demand to repeal the deadline for redeeming years in the form

of a pension credit for years of service prior to membership in the RREGOP plan was accepted by the *Conseil du trésor*.

- **Progressive retirement** The objective of this demand was to modify the progressive retirement plan provided for in the collective agreement. Thus, a nurse registered in such a plan could reduce her work time while receiving a pension.
- **Contribution rate:** must be determined on the basis of an evaluation of the current and future needs of the plan.

The Federation hopes that the government will understand that all nurses must receive decent income during retirement. The low level of income produced by pension credits along with the effect of part-time work on the accumulation of service must be corrected.

THE MATERNITY LEAVE

Nurses' main demand in the field of parental rights flows from the reform of employment insurance and its impact on eligibility for benefits. With this reform, the Federal government deprives a considerable number of workers of maternity leave benefits. Previously, a worker who had accumulated 20 weeks of service, during which she had worked at least 15 hours or received more than 150\$ in salary, was entitled to such benefits. Now, a worker must have accumulated 700 hours of work.

The length of the period during which the employer pays maternity leave benefits being contingent on eligibility to employment insurance benefits, the modification introduced by the Federal government had repercussions among nurses. Thus, nurses who, before this reform, could have received benefits equal to 93% of their salary for the 20 weeks of the maternity leave, are now only entitled to benefits equal to 93% of their salary during 10 weeks.

The FIIQ demands that the eligibility criteria, in effect before the employment insurance reform, for the purpose of determining if the employee is entitled to benefits for a period of 20 or 10 weeks, be maintained.

For its part, the *Conseil du trésor* wishes to introduce the same criteria as those provided for employment insurance. However, it proposes that the number of weeks of benefits for all workers not eligible for employment insurance benefits be increased to 12 weeks. Negotiations on this subject will continue in the coming weeks.



"Hold on tight ...we're negotiating!", this will be the theme for the last stretch of the bargaining round.

To employer associations who have until now refused to discuss working conditions, we say : *"Hold on tight...we're negotiating!"*

To the Conseil du trésor who wants to maintain the nurses' salary scale lower than that of male job categories and that of Baccalaureate nurses lower than those of the professionals in the health and social services network, we say : *"Hold on tight... we're negotiating!"*

To the government who refuses to improve the pension plan and who refuses to budge from his offer of 1% for 1999, 2% for 2000 and 2% for 2001, we say : *"Hold on tight... we're negotiating!"*

Finally, to union members and union representatives we say: *"Hold on tight... we're negotiating!"*

A QUEBEC FIRST: THE COMPLAINTS OF THE FIIQ ARE HEARD BY THE ESSENTIAL SERVICES COUNCIL

Employers concerned by the complaint lodged by the FIIQ, in particular with regard to the non-replacement of absences, will have no choice but to undergo mediation, under the aegis of the Essential Services Council, to try to reach an agreement and settle the problem adequately.

As you may remember, delegates at the August 30 and 31 Federal Council had adopted the following motion:

"Co-ordinate and make public the declarations of non-respect of essential services by employers. These declarations completed locally will also be sent to the Essential Services Council and the Comité provincial des malades, and to the OIIQ."

Around fifteen institutions had sent similar complaints to the FIIQ. As planned, these complaints were filed before the Essential Services Council, which convened the FIIQ, the unions and employers concerned, the regional boards and the *Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux* to a public hearing on November 25.

The FIIQ argued that, by omitting to replace nurses and to give appropriate assignments, these employers contravene the Labour Code by *"modifying the applicable standards for access to services and the delivery of these services, which is clearly prohibited by the Labour Code, even in the context of a labour conflict"*.

During the November 25 hearing, employers raised an objection on the fact that the Essential Services

Council could hear these complaints, arguing that it did not have the jurisdiction to do so in the absence of a lock-out or apprehended strike in their institution.

The Council received this objection with reserve; it will rule only after hearing the proof. Indeed, *"the Council considered that it needs to hear all the comments of the parties in order to be able to respond adequately to all the questions raised. It is in the interest of justice, of all the parties and the population, which is at the heart of the Council's mission."*

Remember that, in June 1998, the Essential Services Council had introduced in nurses' collective agreement, a quicker process for the settlement of disputes submitted to the Committee on Nursing. He had then used a power that it had never before used.

Once again, the Council is innovating. It imposes compulsory mediation between the parties, which must take place under the supervision of a mediator appointed by the Council. The Council also ordered that, afterwards, there be five days of hearings, to hear the Federation's complaints with regard to all institutions that

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HAPPY
NEW YEAR!



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Courriel : info@fiiq.qc.ca

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