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A series of equally important debates



After welcoming the delegates to the first Federal Council of 2001, the President of the Federation, Jennie Skene, spoke of the agenda.

“This Federal Council will be an opportunity to review several issues, some of which affect our immediate everyday lives as nurses, such as job evaluation, workforce planning and the insurance plan. Others challenge us regarding the FIIQ’s future and the means it intends to adopt to take on the many challenges we face today and tomorrow. The creation of a FIIQ strike fund or the exploratory process with the FTQ are two issues that will be debated, among others. Still others, particularly the functioning of FIIQ decision-making bodies, will concern you more specifically as delegates.

“This issue will begin the discussion. How can we, as delegates, improve the functioning of the decision-making bodies both through rules of procedure and through more disciplined operations, not only to promote better debates, but to preserve a certain quality of life?

“In addition,” the President continued, “the presentation of a report on job evaluation will give us a better understanding of where we are at and help us to better identify the steps required to prevail on this issue, which I believe, along with the shortage, is of the most concern to nurses.”



Short, medium and long-term solutions to attempt to deal with this shortage emerge from the report of the Nursing Workforce Planning Forum distributed to each delegate. “Nothing is automatic, however,” the President added, “and no doubt we will still have to fight in our respective work environments so that the relevant recommendations are applied to attract new nurses and retain an increasingly unmotivated workforce. I simply remind you that, once again, the nursing shortage has prevented ten delegates from attending this Council due to the vaccination campaign against meningitis. This will be the case at the June convention as well.”

The President also told the delegates that the FIIQ has the responsibility as a leader not only to improve the daily lives of the member nurses, but also to plan the future of the organization that the nurses have established to achieve their objectives.

“Two years ago, at the same period, we decided to seek a general strike mandate to unblock our negotiations. We obtained this strike mandate and exercised it for more or less twenty-three days. With this strike, we improved several clauses of the collective agreement and are still suffering the aftereffects of special legislation ... The questions we will ask at this Federal Council, without having to answer them immediately, are as

follows: do we want to give the nurses we represent the means to support their struggles when they make such a decision? Do we want to leave young nurses – and nurses of any age – a strike fund commensurate with their future needs?” the President asked the delegates.

Because the FIIQ is pondering its future and its ability to better respond to nurses’ needs, it has also been involved in an exploratory process, for more than four months, in view of affiliating to the FTQ. “Would our structures and our identity be preserved in such an affiliation?” the President asked. “Answers to these questions will be given but, first of all, we will share a vision of the society in which we operate and the threats weighing over our capacity as a society to make political choices.”

When we talk about political choices, this brings us to another point on the agenda, the People’s Summit, the parallel summit to the Summit of the Americas. “The Summit of the Americas, which is being held here in Quebec, in our back yard, confronts us with a vision of the world that we do not share. In the name of freer markets, must we renounce more justice and equity and a better redistribution of wealth? Must we renounce quality public services that meet the people’s needs? Will our governments become incapable of action, like the citizens who elected them, out of fear of reprisals? We will have the chance to hear from two people who are very involved in the whole issue of globalization and the FTAA negotiations.” This is why it is important to participate in the People’s Summit and the activities of the Table de convergence Québec 2001, bringing together union organizations, progressive groups and everyone who rejects this model of society. The delegates therefore began the three-day Federal Council session with considerable a lot of work in store.



FOLLOW-UP ON QUESTIONS OF INSURANCE

At the November Federal Council, during the discussion on the renewal of the group insurance contract, delegates had mandated the Social Security Sector to analyze the impact of certain proposals aimed at cutting costs for the group insurance plan, like the withdrawal of the travel insurance benefit, co-insurance, the obligation to use generic drugs, the withdrawal of the CAPSS service and the introduction of the couple rate. After having heard the analysis of the impact of these proposed modifications on the premium rate and on their application, delegates decided not to make any modifications to the benefits provided for in the nurses' group insurance plan.

NURSING WORK FORCE PLANNING

The *Forum national sur la planification de la main-d'oeuvre infirmière*, a task force in which the FIIQ was actively involved since its very beginning in 1999, presented a report to the Minister of Health and Social Services last February. This report, which received the support of the Minister, decries the present situation, makes recommendations and proposes a plan of action. The FIIQ prepared, especially for nurses, a summary entitled *For action to bear fruit*. If you have not yet seen it, go to the local union office to pick up a copy.

COMMITTEE ON THE TASK AND ORGANIZATION OF WORK

In accordance with Article 42 of nurses' collective agreement, a provincial parity committee on the task and organization of nurses' work, composed of 9 members, 4 from the union party and 5 from the management party, was formed and its mandate is:

- to study the task and organization of nurses' work;
- to study the impact of the introduction of technological changes;
- to recommend, if necessary, the creation of new job titles related to nurses' work
- to recognize the existence of and study new clinical sectors and review the use of those that already exist;
- to evaluate the possibility and the necessity that nurses practice in new clinical sectors of activity;
- to study any other question agreed upon by the parties;
- to make recommendations to the various parties

The delegates thus elected three nurses to represent the FIIQ on this committee. The elected representatives are:

- Antoinette Houde, CLSC du Fjord, Saguenay;
- Yves Parenteau, CHUS, Sherbrooke;
- Guylaine Allie, CLSC Ahuntsic, Montreal

The 4th representative is a consultant for the Task and Organization of Work Sector.

JOB EVALUATION



STILL A HOT ISSUE

The progress report presented on the job evaluation process focused on two aspects of the issue that have held the attention of the Negotiation Sector over the past few weeks.

Job Evaluation Committee

The Vice President responsible for the issue, Lina Bonamie, presented a summary of the work directly related to the job evaluation process currently under way with the *Conseil du trésor*. Within the context of this work, nurses from institutions (CHP, CLSC and CHSLD) tested different types of questionnaires. The purpose of this exercise was to help FIIQ representatives in establishing the type of questionnaire to be favoured. The work involved in formulating a questionnaire is still in progress.

To allow accelerated discussions and better coordination of the work conducted by the main union organizations with the *Conseil du trésor*, the FIIQ agreed to participate in an inter-union table, along with representatives of the CSN, FTQ, CSQ and SFPQ. The questions related to the evaluation plan and the method for estimating gaps will be discussed at this table. The *Conseil du trésor* has to table a proposal on these two aspects at the beginning of April.

Legal proceedings

The Negotiation Coordinator, Richard Beaulé, informed delegates that the FIIQ recently filed a petition for judicial review to nullify the decisions of the *Pay Equity Commission* (CES). The effect of this *Pay Equity Commission* decision is to deprive all public and parapublic sector employees holding jobs in a predominantly female job category of a real pay equity program. This is unacceptable discrimination, especially since its source is a law, the *Pay Equity Act*, that is specifically intended to put an end to gender-based wage discrimination.

In addition to this first cause of action, the FIIQ also argues that the Commission acted unfairly because it did not offer the union organizations the same opportunities to be heard as the *Conseil du trésor*. The unjustified *Pay Equity Commission* decision should be nullified because the Commission manifestly did not consider the numerous arguments presented by the FIIQ and the other union organizations on the many sexist biases in the government tools.

Both before the courts and during the work with the *Conseil du trésor*, the FIIQ will not abandon as long as it has not obtained the establishment of a true pay equity program. It is to be hoped that the *Conseil du trésor* understands that, without such a program, FIIQ nurses will continue to demand that their work be recognized at its fair value.

Why an exploratory process in view of affiliation?



On the second day of the Federal Council meeting, delegates were informed of the results of the talks begun in the context of the exploratory process in view of affiliation to the FTQ. Before the members of the team presented their complete report, the President of the Federation, Jennie Skene, reminded delegates of the reasons for this process, the reasons for this debate.

“Last June, pointed out the President, when the Executive Committee presented the proposal to engage in an exploratory process with the FTQ, many delegates were surprised, astounded, even angry. Some delegates asked: Are we in danger? Is this a liquidation sale? Are we in difficulty? Others, however, saw in this process the recognition of the FIIQ as a valuable organization in the field of health and on women’s issues: a recognition of nurses militancy and determination ... But, remember, delegates rejected this idea and reasserted their strong feeling of belonging to the FIIQ.”

In November 2000, following the offer made by the CSN, the Executive Committee again raised this question for debate. Delegates, while reasserting their attachment to the Federation and expressing concerns and, in certain cases, even anger, mandated the Executive Committee to begin an exploratory process in view of affiliation to the FTQ.

The words of the President were unequivocal: *“No, this is not a liquidation sale, we are not in difficulty; but these offers, that of the FTQ as well as that of the CSN, force us to raise questions that we would probably have raised shortly. After*

a little more than 13 years of existence, is it not normal to examine our past actions and think of what our future will be? We have the responsibility as union leaders to reflect and constantly ask ourselves how to better serve nurses’ interests? How will reach the objectives we have set? How can we avoid stagnating, or even moving backwards? How can we make our union action more efficient? How...? How...? These are all questions that the members of the Executive Committee have raised before proposing that delegates begin an exploratory process in view of affiliation to a central labour body.”

“Today, continued Jennie Skene, what we all want is a federation, the FIIQ, that is strong, militant, that still represents almost all nurses, and that is constantly in motion.” The members of the Executive Committee, delegates, staffers, all see this discussion around a possible affiliation as an opportunity to reassert our pride in belonging to the FIIQ. This reflection is also proof of the organization’s maturity and of its commitment to serve members forever better.

Many union representatives wondered, and may still be wondering, why the FTQ and the CSN made such an offer to FIIQ nurses? *“The FTQ and the CSN, the President stated, are simply after what we represent: a fighting spirit, determination, representativeness, expertise. In fact, what these two central labour bodies are after is what characterizes the FIIQ: heart, voice, strength!”*

“It is the responsibility of each one of us and our responsibility collectively to face this challenge together. Regardless of the outcome of this debate, we will necessarily come out of it as winners, because the FIIQ is — and will always be — an organization built on the strength of its members, its past struggles and those to come. Being open to discuss a possible affiliation is an extra asset for us!”

Here as elsewhere The labour movement in a period of questioning...

The rate of unionization of workers in a given sector or a given country is a good indicator of the quality of the working conditions that prevail in this sector or country. However, sometimes statistics can be misleading.



For example, at the international level, when data reflect that there is a rising number of unionized employees in the world, reality shows that this increase is mainly due to the development of democracy in certain countries, to the fact that the union movement has moved out of illegality (for example, in South Africa, Chile or the Philippines) or to the proliferation of atypical jobs. The same is true when the

new jobs created are mainly part-time and casual ones. In all these cases, there may be a greater number of unionized employees, but we must admit that the quality of working conditions leave much to be desired.

In Quebec, the most recent data indicate that, after a drop in the rate of unionization of almost 10% in hardly eight years (39,5% in 1999 in comparison to 48,5% in 1991), the proportion of unionized employees increased to 39,9% in the year 2000. But, nevertheless, in comparison with the decade of the 1990s, the level of unionization and, consequently, the working conditions of men and women workers considerably deteriorated. Besides being unacceptable in terms of social justice, this phenomenon may engender a downward pressure on the working conditions of unionized workers.

Thus, here as elsewhere, organizations recognize the scope of the threats hanging over the heads of workers, unionized or not, and the

fact that these threats are exacerbated by the current process of globalization. At the international level, large labour federations like *International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU)* and the *World Confederation of Labour (WCL)* are trying to coordinate resistance by drawing up new strategies based on inter-union and international concerted action. Similarly, in Canada and Quebec the union movement is in a period of questioning, in an attempt to reposition itself on the Quebec and Canadian labour scene.

In the context of globalization, it is more and more evident that unions are both increasingly necessary and increasingly threatened. They have a crucial role to play and to do so, according to Juan Somavia, Director General of the *World Trade Organization (WTO)*, they *“must be sufficiently strong to have an influence on the results at the international and national levels. They must therefore reinforce their capacity to organize differently.”*

When economic interests over-rule social concerns

The progress report presented to Federal Council delegates was divided into three main parts: the first part dealt with the long-term general context, the second drew a quick picture of the issues which the union movement is facing in Quebec as elsewhere, and the third part presented and briefly analyzed the FTQ, its role, its structures, its services and its zones of influence.

In the opinion of the Executive Committee and of the team responsible for this question, it is important that the exploratory process be rooted in a broader context by dealing with the new issues facing the movement. Related to the current globalization process, the issues that are facing the union movement as a whole and their solutions have, and will have, considerable effects on the health-care system in Quebec and in all parts of the world.

Indeed, we can draw two main trends from the strategies of global neo-liberalism, free-trade American style, national deregulation and the formulation of limitative international rules and standards, transnational speculation and continental competitiveness. On the one hand, decision-making centres are gradually being displaced and, on the other, the influence of private interests is growing inconsiderately.

Decisions made in Alberta (introduction of private clinics for patients requiring accommodation), in Washington (1,600 billion-dollar income tax reduction), in Geneva (agreement designed to limit and ban the production of generic drugs), in Tokyo (speculation on the Canadian dollar) or in Ontario (crisis and layoffs at Nortel) have direct effects on the price of drugs, the value of pension funds, the price of fruits and vegetables imported from the South, the privatization of health services, etc.

Thus, new players enter the ballgame (such as the *World Trade Organization*) while pressure from private enterprise and multi-national companies on the Quebec and Canadian governments is growing. Obeying their orders, Quebec refused to respond positively to the demands of the *World March of Women* and granted only a scandalous 10¢ increase of the minimum wage and allocated only 300 million dollars, over three years, to the struggle against poverty and exclusion, while, at the same time, reducing the income tax of individuals and companies by several billion dollars.

It is urgent that we question this two-faceted phenomenon: the displacement of the power centres and the emergence of new, more influential private-interest players. The question that arises is how can we have a say in decisions when we don't know the decision-makers, the issues under discussion, the solutions proposed, the interests involved, or the time and place where these decisions will be made?

THE FIIQ AND ITS FTQ COUNTERPARTS

The Executive Committee of the FIIQ mandated Sylvie Boulanger, 1st Vice President, to be responsible for the exploratory process with the FTQ and Paul Chaput to ensure the coordination of the work. The consultants assigned to this issue are: Marie-Andrée Comtois, from the Health-Care Sector, Pierre Desnoyers from the Union Organizing Sector and Richard Laforest from the Labour Relations Sector. Finally, the President, Jennie Skene, is ex-officio member of this work group and takes part in the meetings with the representatives of the FTQ.

For the FTQ, the team is composed of René Roy, Secretary General of the FTQ, Nicole Bluteau, nurse and Vice President, Émile Vallée and André Tremblay, consultants for the Executive Board and Dominique Savoie, coordinator for the Research Department. The President of the FTQ, Henri Massé, joined this team for the first meeting.

To date, the two teams met on six occasions and plan to meet to complete their inquiry, especially with regard to the coordination of the negotiations and the setting up of a new service at the FTQ that would be devoted to questions pertaining to the public sector. (negotiations, funding of the network, privatization, etc.).

The FIIQ team organized two meetings with its employees to share thoughts and information on the process in progress. The Federation also met the presidents of affiliated unions last February to share the information they had obtained and exchange with union leaders on the future of the Federation in the context of the upheavals in health-care institutions, in the network and in society as a whole.

THE FIIQ WILL ALWAYS BE



The talks begun with the FTQ, as those that will take place with other labour organizations, are guided by two rigid conditions: one is the respect of the political structures and services of the FIIQ, and the other involves the respect of its specific identity and autonomy.

Thus, any possibility of affiliation or any structural rapprochement with another organization will only be considered and explored if the FIIQ is assured of being able to keep its political structure (convention, Federal Council, Executive Committee, Negotiating Committee, statutory committees, etc.) as well as its service structure. Besides, and this is an essential condition, no formal affiliation will be explored if the FIIQ does not have the guarantee of being able to preserve its identity, including the respect of the principles that served as the groundwork for the creation of the FIIQ in 1987 and the policies adopted by the Convention over the years and, more specifically, those that appear in the Statement of Principle adopted at the 1991 Convention.

For the members of the Executive Committee and for delegates, it is clear that the FIIQ, as we know it, is and must continue to be, the organization of Quebec unionized nurses. It is also very clear that the FIIQ is, and must remain, an unavoidable spokesperson on the issues that concern nurses' working and living conditions, and on the questions that concern women, health, the organization and the funding of the health and social services network. Finally, any possible rapprochement must help the FIIQ to better play its role as agent of social change.

The structures of the FIIQ and its identity are therefore inherent to the union organization of nurses today and will continue to be so tomorrow.

New challenges for the union movement

As part of pre-convention activities, the delegates had the opportunity to hear **Mona-Josée Gagnon, Professor at Université de Montréal, speak on the future of the labour movement in the context of globalization.**

Madam Gagnon approached this question from three angles. She first offered a status report on the labour movement, focusing on the constants and the change factors. She then talked about globalization and the consequences of its manifestations for the union movement, especially for public sector unionism. In conclusion, she asked questions about the strategies available to the labour movement in this context, since it is still possible to make choices.

After briefly presenting the role of a union, Ms. Gagnon considered that there have been two contradictory trends in labour history. *“First of all, there has been a trend away from localism (an action centered on the immediate workplace and group) to broader-based action, linked to the recognition of common interests. [...] A second trend concerns the social composition of Quebec unions. The Quebec labour movement historically was built on a fairly homogeneous social base. [...] Then things changed. People with no similarities at all found themselves in the same unions, [...] resulting in a movement to professional unions. This coincided with unionization of public sector employees, which changed the configuration of the labour movement. Independent unions multiplied.”*

She discussed unions and professional identity, concluding that professional unions, in the future, will have to find a way to reconcile the aspiration for professional identity with the need for pooled efforts. She explained this

by two factors that are impelling the unions to change their professional approach: on the one hand, because of the transformations in the organization of work and in employee profiles, unions no longer have any choice but to respect professional identities and take them into account in building solidarity. On the other hand, the unions are increasingly placed in a situation compounded by downsizing and globalization, where they no longer carry weight, because their management opposite numbers have «grown», relying on networks and objective alliances. This is obvious in the case of employees of multinational firms and is increasingly clear in the case of the public sector.

Madam Gagnon then discussed unionism in the public sector and especially in nursing. *“In the FIIQ, you represent this need for professional recognition, while at the*

same time you intervene on sector-related issues and issues affecting society. You are more socially oriented than independent unions generally are. [...] The debates around the transformation of our health-care system give reason to believe that a recognition of the professional identity of nurses is making progress, with the notion of nurse practitioner, for example. But recognition of professional identity is not enough. Is professional practice compatible with privatization of some services, or part of them, and the imposition of a profit-oriented or, more simply, a bookkeeping logic, or with the casualization of working conditions? I don't think so. This leads us to put the debates now under way in Quebec in perspective with what is happening elsewhere, and particularly with the phenomenon of globalization.”

Madam Gagnon dwelled on some of the concrete repercussions of globalization. She spoke about the loss of the sense of public service, due to the neoliberal ideology which seeks to treat public services and human services, according to the criteria of private enterprise, profitability or reduction of spending by every means. The performance of national health-care systems are evaluated on the basis of statistics and, in this context, there is never any question of working conditions of employees or life expectancy in good health. She added that this discourse is not new but that its dissemination has advanced enormously.

Globalization therefore compels the labour movement to take its international alliances more seriously. Madam Gagnon concluded her lecture on the following note.

“We must not ignore the fact that the labour movement is an immense work in progress. I say ‘work in progress’ because only recently has there been an awareness that we can no longer work in isolation. Our destinies are linked and are being played out in the same meetings (FTAA, WTO, OECD,...) [...] The international labour movement is in the process of taking on a dynamic form that it had never before developed. Moreover, the unions have also intensified their ties with many community groups, thus contributing to the creation of vast common fronts to influence the course of the FTAA negotiations. From this point of view, despite the importance of the challenges facing the unions, it is encouraging to think that the labour movement is committing itself to new methods, new alliances, and that it is refining its analyses because of the need to discuss them with other groups.”



Another world is possible



to the FTAA!
The world is not a
commodity

Delegates unanimously resolved to support the Manifesto of *Convergence Q•2001*, a coalition, of which the FIIQ is a member, for peaceful opposition to the April 2001 *Summit of the Americas*. Two spokespersons for *Convergence Q•2001*, Lorraine Guay, of the *Fédération des femmes du Québec*, and Philippe Duhamel, of *SalAMI*, presented the ins and outs of the *Summit of the Americas* and the negotiations for creation of the *Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA)*. They described the harmful consequences of the FTAA, the trade agreement that is destined to have the most far-reaching historical repercussions, that will have the greatest impact on the environment and on every aspect of people's lives in the three Americas. This Agreement will grant transnational companies a right, with no equivalent, to compete with and challenge all public services: health, education, social security, culture and protection of the environment.



Convergence Q•2001 is not against globalization but opposes the FTAA which only seeks to protect investors. In opposition to the FTAA's entrenched warlike competitiveness, *Convergence Q•2001* advocates other contracts based on the values of solidarity, equality and cooperation among countries, among peoples, between women and men.

By supporting the *Convergence Q•2001* Manifesto, delegates also said no to the treatment of health services and women's bodies as commodities. The FIIQ will carry out a vast campaign to inform its members by distributing a tabloid newspaper published by *Convergence Q•2001*, available from at the local union office.

Nurses are also invited to participate in the peaceful and democratic citizens' activities of the *People's Summit*, which will be held in Quebec City from April 17 to 21, 2001 at the same time as the *Summit of the Americas*. More specifically, you are invited:

- On April 20 to a festive and educational teach-in on the issues of the FTAA
- On April 21 to the March of the Peoples of the Americas.

The details of all the activities around the *People's Summit* are available in the special tabloid newspaper sent to local teams at the beginning of April.



The FTQ and its political structures

Like any democratic union organization, the FTQ has political structures that allow its members to be involved in decision-making. On first sight, these structures are similar to those with which we are familiar. There is a Convention, like the FIIQ's, to set the general orientations of the FTQ, a General Council, the equivalent of the FIIQ's Federal Council, as intermediary body, and the Board which is the equivalent of the Executive Committee. Of course, these bodies deal with issues that have an impact on all the workers of the FTQ. The FIIQ would thus maintain its specificity and its autonomy on all issues that concern it as a Federation or that concern nurses specifically (shortage, workload, work force plan, etc.).

In the event of the affiliation of the FIIQ to the FTQ, it would be the FIIQ, as a provincial organization, that would be affiliated. In this context, the FIIQ would keep its political structures unchanged. Thus, a nurses' union could not affiliate directly to the FTQ without being a member of the FIIQ. The cost of the affiliation to the FTQ is a set amount of \$1,10 per member per month, regardless of the salary.

● The Convention

The Convention is the supreme body and is held every three years. The number of delegates that the FIIQ would have would be proportional to the number of members it represents like for all the other organizations affiliated to the FTQ. The FIIQ would represent about 9% of the delegation at the Convention with its 201 delegates on a possibility of around 2,295 delegates. The Convention sets the FTQ's major orientations. As an example, the theme of the next FTQ Convention will concern the issue of globalization.

● The General Council of the FTQ

The General Council is the decision-making body between convention meetings. The FIIQ would thus have around 5% of the delegates, with 9 delegates to the General Council out of a potential delegation of about 187. This body votes on recommendations submitted by the Executive Board, the FTQ's budgets and financial reports, and the positions that the FTQ will adopt on major issues. The Committee of trustees is also elected by this body. The role of this committee resembles that of the FIIQ's Internal Audit Committee; it examines the FTQ's books, and can make suggestions in view of developing better control over the FTQ's financial situation.

● The Board

The Board is the equivalent of the FIIQ Executive Committee. It has executive powers and expedites current business between meetings of the General Council. The Board is composed of the President, the Secretary General and 13 Vice Presidents chosen by each affiliated union or provincial organization that has 8,000 members or more. The FIIQ would be entitled to one vice-presidency on the Board. In addition, one vice-presidency is reserved for the regional workers' councils and three vice-presidencies are reserved for women.

● The regional workers' councils

Created by the Board of the FTQ, the general councils represent the FTQ in all regions and they have the responsibility to foster regional union life, besides promoting the interests of the members of the region they represent. Membership in the regional councils is on a voluntary basis and it is up to each union to decide whether or not it wishes to join the regional council. The cost of membership varies from 0,15¢ to 0,30¢ per member per month, depending on the region.

IN QUEBEC

FOUR CENTRAL LABOUR BODIES AND SEVERAL LARGE INDEPENDENT ORGANIZATIONS

As a result of the history of the labour movement in Quebec, there are now four central labour bodies of unequal importance and several independent organizations among which only the FIIQ represents nurses.

Regarding the number of members they represent, the FTQ is at the top of the list with around 480 000 members, followed by the CSN with around 215 000 members, then the CSQ which counts 94 000 members and finally the CSD which, though it is considered to be a central labour body because of the diversity of the unions it represents, has only 32 000 members. With the exception of the CSQ, these central labour bodies are mainly present in the private sector.

In the Quebec public and parapublic sector, the CSN represents almost 100 000 members, of which 80,000 belong to the FSSS, and are therefore in the health-care sector, while the FTQ represents 55,000 employees of which 40,000 are in the health-care sector.

When we look more specifically at the union representation of nurses, we see that the FTQ represents at most 1,000 nurses, the CSN represents approximately 5,000, and the CSQ around 3,500, while the FIIQ, with its 45,000 nurse-members, undoubtedly constitutes the only union organization that can speak in the name of Quebec nurses.

With this portrait, it appears that, with its offer to affiliate, the objective of the CSN is to establish its predominance in the health-care sector while, with the same offer, the FTQ is trying to increase its presence in this sector. Finally, it is important to stress that, by adopting a classical raiding strategy, the CSQ can only divide nursing union forces.

EXPLORATORY PROCESS IN VIEW OF AFFILIATION

WITH THE FTQ, BUT ALSO WITH THE CSN AND THE FCSII

A vast majority of the 600 Federal Council delegates decided to pursue the process in view of a possible affiliation with these two central labour bodies since delegates rejected all talks with the CSQ. They decided to pursue the process undertaken with the FTQ four months ago and to begin another such exploratory process with, on the one hand, the CSN and, on the other, the Canadian Federation of Nurses Unions (CFNU). Since delegates felt strongly about the importance of such a debate and of having in hand all the pertinent information to make an informed decision, they adopted the following motions:

“to extend the exploratory process to the CSN, which has clearly indicated that it was prepared to accept the FIIQ as an autonomous organization and that a report be presented at the June meeting.”

“to explore the possibilities of affiliation with the Canadian Federation of Nurses Unions (CFNU) and present a report at the next meeting.”

Delegates also asked that the presidents of the labour organizations, with whom the FIIQ has talks in view of a possible affiliation, be invited to a meeting of the Federation. The work on this question will therefore continue into the fall.

The FTQ and its services

The FTQ offers a wide range of varied and interesting services. Some of these are similar to those offered by the FIIQ, some are new, and others still are complementary. In the event of affiliation, the FIIQ will always continue to be responsible for direct services to nurses and affiliated unions. Indeed, the FTQ does not offer direct services like, for example, consulting services for the interpretation and application of the collective agreement, the arbitration of grievances, occupational health and safety (compensation). All direct services to members would remain the responsibility of the FIIQ, thus preserving its structure and identity.

Like the FIIQ, the FTQ has an information service and status of women department which, as a matter of fact, are quite similar to those of the Federation. The FTQ also has other services such as Research, Occupational Health and Safety, and Education. These services would of course complement those offered by the FIIQ. For example, by using certain training sessions drawn up by the FTQ, the FIIQ could draw up new ones addressed more specifically to meet nurses' needs. On the other hand, in the field of health, the FIIQ would contribute more specialized expertise while the FTQ would mainly contribute a viewpoint based on the needs of health-care users.

However, some of the services offered by this labour organization are quite different, like the francization department, which upholds the rights of workers to work in French, and the social support network. This network is a sort of union employee assistance programme. It offers help with regard to family problems, drug addiction, alcoholism, indebtedness, etc. On the other hand, the international solidarity department has in-depth and durable expertise in international relations. Far from being in competition, the international solidarity activities of the FIIQ would be reinforced by the activities of this labour organization in certain cases and, in others, they would offer a complement.

● A service to be created

In the event of the affiliation of the FIIQ to the FTQ, the public sector of the FTQ would increase and be greatly reinforced. Indeed, the FTQ would then have close to 100,000 employees involved in the Quebec public and parapublic sectors, that is 20% of the members of this labour organization. This is why the FTQ proposes to set up a new service to offer support to its affiliated unions. It could be composed of a full-time economist, the coordinator for the FTQ-central bargaining table and, during negotiations, a communications consultant would join the team.

This is an interesting proposal, but the Federation believes that it needs to be rediscussed in future meetings to expand its scope and clarify how it would operate.

● A special issue: negotiations

There is no formal negotiation service at the FTQ. Surprising! Not at all, rather reassuring in fact! The negotiation of the collective agreement is taken care of by affiliated unions. In the private sector, the FTQ intervenes only upon request, for example when political lobbying is required. However, for the public and parapublic sector negotiations, the FTQ plays a coordinating and support role for its affiliated unions involved in the bargaining talks with the government.

This means that the FIIQ would negotiate by itself, at its own table, the general and specific working conditions of nurses. As for retirement, parental rights and the general pay raise, this would be negotiated at the central FTQ bargaining table, which would be composed of the FIIQ and of the two other FTQ unions present in the health-care sector, the SQEES and CUPE. According to the current proposal made by the FTQ, the coordination of this bargaining table would be granted in turn to each union.

For the FIIQ, keeping its own sectorial bargaining table is highly important in order to preserve its autonomy, its negotiation structure and its identity.

LOOKING AHEAD

MAY 2001

Following a Federal Council decision: there will be information meetings in all FIIQ-affiliated institutions. Keep an eye on the bulletin board for the date, time and place of this general assembly.

JUNE 2001

At the Convention, on June 12, 13 and 14, a progress report on the exploratory process will be presented to delegates.

SEPTEMBER 2001

At the time of the continuation of the convention in September, during the week of September 24, delegates should have in hand a complete analysis in order to make a decision on a possible affiliation. In the event of a positive recommendation to the Convention, and as the FIIQ Constitution and Bylaws stipulate, there must then be a referendum among all nurses of the Federation.

Is a strike fund really necessary?



During the last day of the Federal Council, the Associate Treasurer, Lise Martel, presented a study to delegates on the need for the Federation to have a strike fund. After having debated the question, delegates chose to recommend the creation of a strike fund to the June Convention and that, if adopted, the conditions be set by delegates.

The Associate-Treasurer began by reminding delegates that nurses showed great solidarity on three occasions by sharing the financial losses the suffered as a result of a pressure tactic among themselves. She also drew a few observations from these past experiences:

- With just a few exceptions, nurses have always favoured sharing the financial losses resulting from the struggles waged to improve their working conditions;
- The period between exercising the right to strike and the payment of benefits was too long for the nurses;
- The collection of the special or additional assessment turned out to be an arduous and difficult operation in some cases, in the absence of automatic checkoff of union dues (Bill 160) and the absence of union leaves (Bill 72).
- To support these hard struggles, nurses gave about \$800 in special assessments over the past 13 years.
- The special assessment collection operation to support the “withdrawal of availability” pressure tactics was the one of the three which assured the nurses of financial support at the time of the action, which was carried out most easily, and which, because of application of the Rand formula, called for the least energy on the part of the delegates, with the result that most of the members do not necessarily remember it.

Indeed, delegates felt that it was important for them to take the means...

...for ongoing struggles

Delegates consider that it is up to union representatives at the local, regional and FIIQ level to prepare for the future, analyze how an organization like ours can continue to wage struggles to improve nurses' living and working conditions, defend and obtain recognition for the value of nursing, protect the quality of health-care and services, stop the rise of privatization, and reduce poverty, violence and the rollback of social rights. Nurses' future battles will be fought in a context where the rules of neoliberal globalization (deregulation, privatization, etc.) will be increasingly present and endorsed by the State as employer.

Even though the last struggle was very difficult, we cannot settle for doing nothing and refrain from giving ourselves sustainable means to act and respond. For all of the nurses the FIIQ represents today and for all those it will represent tomorrow, delegates are convinced that it is desirable to have a strike fund, the better to meet the many challenges confronting nurses in the decade ahead. Some delegates expressed this point of view in the last round of negotiations.

...for all nurses

Every day, nurses are faced with situations or problems that challenge them as women, workers and health professionals. When nurses engage in a struggle or go on strike, they do so with their own concerns:

- as women: who are single-parent; trying, for better or for worse to reconcile work and family; who have difficulty making ends meet at the end of the month; who often work on call or part-time, and who take on the role of natural caregiver in many cases;
- as workers: who are faced with the enforcement of repressive and anti-union laws, laws that jeopardize freedom of union action, that attack seniority, that muzzle nurses and their organization;
- as health professionals: who have to ensure maintenance of essential services in sufficient quality and quantity, while others walk the picket line.

These situations are not necessarily easy to live with, but nurses nonetheless have chosen on two occasions to meet this challenge. Next time couldn't we make things easier by reducing financial worries through the creation of a strike fund to be used when the action is happening?

...for positive spinoffs

By giving themselves a strike fund, FIIQ nurses would send a clear message to the government and employers: far from surrendering to repression, the nurses will always be there to fight just and legitimate battles. From now on, with a reserve fund tailored to their needs, it will be much more difficult for the government to silence or curb nurses or try to smash their organization. If an organization has substantial financial reserves, doesn't this give it a better foundation to conduct a strike and assert its bargaining power? For the Executive Committee and for delegates, it is increasingly clear that the creation of a strike fund is necessary and can only have beneficial effects for members, for the unions and for the FIIQ.

Thus, a strike fund could serve to cover: compensation for loss of salary, compensation for penalties, support to the unions for mobilization, payment of fines imposed on unions, the replenishment of the negotiation reserve, loans to Canadian nurses' unions outside Quebec and finally the payment of administrative expenses.

All things considered, the big winners would undeniably be nurses. Wouldn't it be more reassuring for them to know that, even if they have to resort to a work stoppage to win their point, they will be paid strike benefits at the time the action is happening? Wouldn't it be more advantageous for them to contribute a known, fixed and regular amount to a strike fund? Wouldn't it be easier for them to make it through the post-strike period: waiting for the agreement to be signed, for retroactive pay, etc.? In short, providing the FIIQ with a strike fund means giving all nurses the means to come out of a struggle even stronger and more unified, with greater solidarity!

Special Convention

THE CSQ'S OFFER: DELEGATES SAY NO THANKS!

When the President, Jennie Skene, and the executive officer in charge of the Union Organizing Service, Michèle Boisclair, spoke of a letter which the CSQ sent to all local representatives, most delegates had already read it and had not appreciated this gesture at all. Delegates felt that sending a letter full of errors and half-truths to all local representatives, without notifying affiliated unions and the leaders of the federation was a clear expression of the CSQ's intention to raid nurses and of its will to destroy the force that the FIIQ represents.

Thus, delegates unanimously rejected this pseudo-offer by the CSQ. As opposed to the two other central labour bodies (FTQ and CSN) who proposed affiliation respecting the structure and identity of the FIIQ, the CSQ proposes that nursing unions join in a piecemeal fashion the already existing federation (UQII) which represents hardly 6% of unionized nurses in Quebec, and which neither established its credibility nor its capacities with regard to the defence of Quebec nurses' interests.

It is for these reasons that delegates unanimously rejected this unacceptable offer, designed only to divide the force of nurses. They remain convinced that all nurses must remain united within the FIIQ and that it is united that we will best be able to defend nurses' interests.

In the afternoon of the second day of the Federal Council, almost one hundred more delegates joined Federal Council delegates for the opening of the Special Convention. Indeed, a Special Convention had been convened because, during a meeting of affiliated unions, the presidents of several unions had expressed their concern about the fact that the Convention was held in June. Given the nursing shortage, employers refused to grant union leaves, which meant that a good number of delegates would not be able to attend the June Convention

This is why, the Executive Committee decided to convene a Special Convention in order to evaluate the possibility of postponing the Convention to the fall. According to the Constitution and Bylaws of the FIIQ, it is the responsibility of the Convention to postpone a meeting of the Convention. After a heated discussion, taking into consideration various factors and the importance of the debates, delegates decided to split the Convention meeting into two parts rather than postponing the entire five days of meeting to the fall.

FIRSTLY, IN JUNE, on June 12, 13 and 14, delegates will take care of current business, that is receive the activities report for the past three years, amendments to the FIIQ Constitution and Bylaws and to the bylaws of the Union Defence Fund, financial questions, the strike fund, elections to the various committees, including the Executive Committee. Delegates also decided that the progress report on the exploratory process in view of affiliation to the FTQ, CSN and CFNU would be presented in June to begin the reflection on the theme of the Convention: nursing work and nursing unionism.

THEN, IN SEPTEMBER, during the week of the 24, delegates will continue their debates and take a position on a policy to counter violence, on the theme and on the exploratory process in view of affiliation. This will be an extremely important convention for the future of the Federation!

Notice of election

In accordance with the FIIQ Constitution and Bylaws, we hereby notify you that elections will be held at the Convention to be held in Ste-Hyacinthe, on June 12, 13 and 14, 2001, for positions :

On the FIIQ Executive Committee:

- President
- 1st Vice-President
- 2nd Vice-President
- 3rd Vice-President
- 4th Vice-President
- Secretary
- Associate-Secretary
- Treasurer
- Associate-Treasurer

On the statutory committees:

- Election Committee: 3 members
- Internal Audit Committee: 3 members

On the standing committees:

- Status of Women Committee: 6 members
- Education-Animation Committee: 6 members
- Journal Committee : 4 members
- Occupational Health and Safety Committee: 6 members
- Social Security Committee: 3 members

Whether for the Executive Committee, the statutory committees or the standing committees:

- The deadline for submitting candidacies is 24 hours after the official opening of the Convention;
- To submit your candidacy, you must be a member in good standing of a union affiliated to the FIIQ, complete the application blank provided and return it to the President of the Election Committee at the head office of the FIIQ:
2050 rue De Bleury, 4e étage
Montreal (Quebec) H3A 2J5
- It must arrive no later than June 8, 2001, at 5 p.m., or you can hand it to the President of the Election Committee in person at the Convention;
- You can obtain a copy of the candidacy application blank from your local union office, by contacting Dominique Trudeau (tel: (514) 987-1141 or 1-800-363-6541), or from the Election Committee during the Convention;
- Candidates must provide a short introductory text along with their application blank.

Please note that notice of two amendments was given at the Federal Council and they will be debated at the Convention. If they are adopted by the Convention, they will modify the FIIQ Constitution and Bylaws by bringing, in one case, the number of members on the Executive Committee down from 9 to 8, as follows : abolition of the positions of Associate-Secretary and Associate-Treasurer and creation of an Associate Secretary-Treasurer position, and in the other, the number of members on the Internal Audit Committee down from 3 to 2.



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