

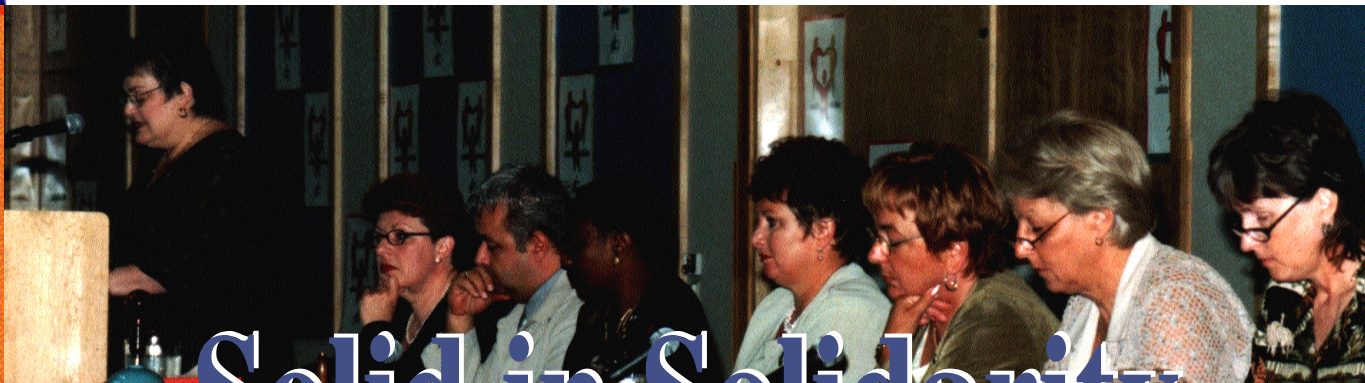


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# Action

Convention  
on June 12, 13 and 14

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## Solid in Solidarity

**Here is a very brief excerpt from the report on the organization that FIIQ President Jennie Skene delivered on the Executive Committee's behalf to open the Convention.**

« It is with pride and emotion that I open the FIIQ's 6<sup>th</sup> Convention today. Pride in being your President, pride in representing you but, above all, pride in being surrounded by union members and representatives as militant and determined as you. At the last Convention in June 1998, we had begun a process of reflection on the power of our collective values in the face of neoliberal globalization that gives precedence to competitiveness, flexibility, profitability, individualism... and so on. Our reflection led us to confront many effects of neoliberalism on our daily lives and to take on the collective challenge of finding solutions adapted to these new everyday realities.

Today, it is up to us to take stock of these past three years. Under the theme *Solid in solidarity*, we will look at the past with a critical eye and examine perspectives for the future. *Solid in solidarity* - need we say that this accurately describes us in issues like collective bargaining, representativeness in decision-making meetings and the workload... We were on such important issues as the struggle against poverty and violence, and the campaigns to promote respect for human and social rights... And we were *solid in solidarity* in the debates on training, the place and role of nurses, and the privatization of health care and services...

*Solid in solidarity* - isn't that what we were when we hold through the 23-day strike that was one of the

greatest exploits in the recent history of labour relations in the public and parapublic sectors? *Solid in solidarity* - isn't that what we were when we stood up to the Bouchard government, which tried in vain to gag us with an arsenal of repressive laws? *Solid in solidarity* - isn't that what we were when we expressed our legitimate demands, loud and clear, with the public's support. *Solid in solidarity* - isn't that what we were in countering and getting around the effects of iniquitous anti-union legislation that had no other purpose but to bring the FIIQ and its members to heel?

For us, this theme, *Solid in solidarity*, conveys a feeling that motivates us in our daily struggles... struggles to obtain better working conditions... struggles to obtain recognition for the value of our work... struggles to provide care under safe conditions... struggles to preserve and protect our union rights... struggles for accessible quality public healthcare services.

These struggles, waged over the past three years, have been major challenges, sometimes demanding a lot of time and energy. In this sense, it may be normal that sometimes we are a little, even very much, out of breath. But the FIIQ remains a dynamic organization, present in the debates of the day. If we succeed in holding firm, it is because these battles are instilled with collective values that combine the quest for better living conditions for nurses with the improvement of public services.

Since 1998, a process of reflection has been under way within our ranks on the effects of neoliberalism, on society in general, but especially on our everyday lives as women, nurses and workers. We no longer have any doubt that the neoliberal ideology is well in place and imposing its vision of government, which it claims should no longer be responsible for the redistribution of wealth and social equity. We no longer have any doubt

that the problems prevailing in the healthcare network, especially the threat of privatization, service cuts particularly in the outlying regions, the creation of pharmaceutical monopolies with their effects on group insurance premiums, and interinstitutional competition are directly related to this new school of thought. We no longer have any doubt that all the changes in work environments, regulations and labour laws are directly dictated by the adherents of neoliberalism. The politicians and especially their leaders all sing the same song... that we have to get in tune with neoliberal globalization, supposedly to be competitive and stay in the race. [...]

The internal and external context led the organization to make choices that sometimes turned out to be difficult, but adjustments were necessary and they were made. Think of the health care network consolidation period when the FIIQ and its allies had no other choice than to get actively involved, on more than one occasion, in the regional boards. Think of the energy deployed to alleviate the effects of the nursing shortage, or the political and financial impacts of the illegal strike of the summer of 1999.

In the past three years, the FIIQ has made every effort to maintain a balanced budget and avoid accumulating deficit after deficit. Once again, heartrending choices were made: the activities of all of the standing committees were reduced, as was the number of FIIQ employees. An exercise in prioritizing Federal Council mandates was also carried out at the Federal Council during the adoption of the action plan. This explains why the emphasis was put on negotiations and being present with local teams and why certain other issues were temporarily put on the back burner. For example, this was the case for the resolution concerning unionization of nurses in the private sector; the resolution on the possible development of new places for the delivery of nursing care in the community, and

the resolution to increase members' awareness of the question of cultural, religious and social diversity in society. Yet these mandates, like many others, pose major challenges for the members. We will have to take action on them sooner or later. [...]

Nurses have engaged in tough battles and have carried a significant number of difficult issues over the past three years. The task was difficult and the energy invested at every level of the organization has been remarkable and worthy of mention. But we must now focus on the future. Even though neoliberal globalization poses a threat to our quality of life and our collective values as women, citizens, workers and nurses, we and the labour movement as a whole are far from powerless in this regard. For this purpose, we must be willing to review our policies, revise our strategies and rethink our alliances. [...]

We note the scope of the debates to come, the depth of the challenges we have to meet, and the importance of the decisions that must be made. For all union organizations, they raise questions about the amount of energy they will have to deploy to win. This is why unions, ourselves among them, must assess the expediency, in the best interests of their members, of expanding their solidarity through the creation of ad hoc and permanent alliances.

In conclusion, I wish to point out that nurses are women, *Solid in solidarity*, who love their profession. They are patient and determined, which probably is a partial explanation of the way they fight their battles. It is thanks to them if the FIIQ is a «solid» organization, capable of dealing with change despite a difficult climate and «in solidarity» within its ranks and with other groups. And while this theme, «Solid in solidarity», reflects both our past and present struggles, it also calls for us to consider the context of our future struggles.

# Nursing work and unionism in the context of GLOBALIZATION

To obtain a good understanding of the challenges confronting nurses today and tomorrow and understand what is currently at stake, the delegates studied the document on the Convention theme Nursing work and unionism in the context of globalization. From the winning of the right to association and the role of nursing as a vocation in the 19<sup>th</sup> century to the triumphant neoliberalism at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it presents the evolution of the practice of nursing in Quebec, the consequences of the phenomenon of globalization on healthcare and the importance of action to counter the dangers that threatened the public's right to healthcare and the nurses' right to care.

After a very thorough presentation by the appointed Executive members, Lina Bonamie and Daniel Gilbert, the discussions continued on the second day at a round table. The exchanges among the participants at this round table were followed by questions and comments by the Convention delegates. The panelists were Michelle Choquette, President of the CFNU,

Louise Cournoyer, delegate from Maisonneuve-Rosemont Hospital, Remi Pearson, delegate from Santa Cabrini Hospital and Murielle Dufour and Lucie Girard, FIIQ consultants who acted as resource people.

To discuss the Convention theme in greater depth, four themes were discussed during this activity:

- the impacts of the political and economic choices of the past few years on the right to healthcare and the right to care;
- the revision of the professional regulations;
- nurses in Quebec and elsewhere;
- means of making changes.

When the Convention continues in September, the delegates will primarily discuss the current challenges and adopt policies and actions that will guide the FIIQ for the next three years.

## Executive Committee elections

The delegates adopted an amendment to the constitution and by-laws concerning the composition of the Executive Committee. From now on, it will have 8 members instead of 9. The positions of Assistant Secretary and Assistant Treasurer have been replaced with a position of Assistant Secretary-Treasurer.

The elections were held on the last day of the Convention and six Executive Committee members were elected by acclamation. They are:

Jennie Skene, President  
Sylvie Boulanger, 1<sup>st</sup> Vice President  
Daniel Gilbert, 2<sup>nd</sup> Vice President  
Lina Bonamie, 4<sup>th</sup> Vice President  
Chantal Boivin, Secretary  
Lise Martel, Treasurer

Michèle Boisclair was reelected to the position of 3<sup>rd</sup> Vice President and Sylvie Savard was elected to the new position of Assistant Secretary-Treasurer.

The new Executive will take office at the end of the Convention, September 28, and will be introduced officially, along with the members elected to the various committees, in the issue of *FIIQ en Action* to be published after the Convention.

## FOLLOW-UP ON the exploratory approach on affiliation

At the Federal Council last March, the delegates asked the Executive to meet with representatives of the organizations with which the FIIQ had begun an exploratory approach on structural rapprochement. The President of the Canadian Federation of Nurses Unions, Kathleen Connors, the President of the FTQ, Henri Massé, and the 1<sup>st</sup> Vice President of the CSN, Claudette Carbonneau, were therefore able to address the delegation and answer a few questions.

The three representatives saluted the FIIQ's maturity, militancy and determination. While stating why they eventually hope to welcome the FIIQ as an autonomous entity, if this is what the FIIQ's member nurses choose, the representatives briefly presented their organizations.

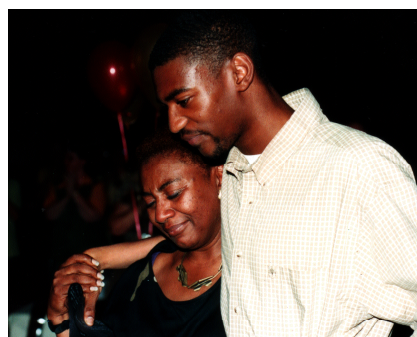
On the first day of the Convention, the FIIQ's task force on the exploratory approach presented a second progress report to the delegates, this time on the status of the exchanges with the CSN and the CFNU. With this second report, the delegates have in hand all of the results of the FIIQ's exchanges and discussions with the three organizations. Debate on this issue will continue at the conclusion of the Convention in September. Stay tuned...

For September  
26, 27, 28

Essential debates still have to be held and major decisions made during the last three days of the Convention scheduled for the end of September. For example, there is the policy to reduce violence in the workplace, the exploratory approach on union affiliation, and the Convention theme on the labour movement and nursing. Even though two of these three topics – the approach and the theme – were discussed in June, the decisions will be made in September.

Due to a lack of time, some issues could not be discussed fully during the first three days of the Convention. These include the FIIQ's constitution and by-laws, the financial statements, reports of activities, multiple bargaining units, and the follow-up required on the workforce plan. The schedule will have to be rearranged so that the delegates can debate these issues and decide what orientations to adopt.

Delegates shouldn't forget to bring all the documents distributed in June for the last three days of the Convention. If you're a delegate, we'll see you at the Convention. All other members will hear from us after the Convention with the next issue of *FIIQ en Action*.



The Convention Organizing Committee took the opportunity of a community meal attended by the delegates to mark the departure of Régine Laurent, Secretary of the Executive Committee for the past 10 years. Among the surprise guests were her mother and her son Thierry.

## A strike fund, a way to carry on the struggle

At the Federal Council last March, the Executive Committee presented a study to the delegates on the necessity of providing the FIIQ with a strike fund. We should remember that many nurses called for this collective means of carrying on the struggle throughout the summer 1999 strike. After debating the issue, the delegates chose to recommend that the Convention create a strike fund and accept its conditions.

At this Convention, the delegates therefore realized that nurses deserved this tool to support their battles and voted to create a strike fund. This fund, by collecting \$1 per week per member, would provide nurses who are already FIIQ members or who join it in the future with permanent and substantial financial resources to carry on a struggle, if necessary. The delegates also decided to hold a referendum of the entire membership on this question.

Until the referendum is held, which cannot take place before the end of the Convention, a document explaining the importance of adopting a strike fund and the conditions for collecting contributions will be distributed to all members.



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