

# EN ACTION

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FÉDÉRATION INTERPROFESSIONNELLE DE LA SANTÉ DU QUÉBEC

Special Preconvention issue



## A necessary renewal

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President

# A NECESSARY RENEWAL



From June 2 to 6, 2008, in Saint-Hyacinthe, the Federation will hold its 8<sup>th</sup> Convention, but the first to be held under the FIQ banner. On this occasion, the delegates representing care professionals from every region of Quebec will meet to define their organization's orientations for the next three years.



The political and economic environment in which the Federation operates is undoubtedly very unfavourable. For too long, the FIQ has been compelled to fight against the repeated attacks of neoliberal governments whose actions are contrary to union values. Thus, the health-care network has suffered many blows: budget cuts, measures resulting in a permanent shortage of care professionals, successive tax cuts limiting the possibilities of reinvestment in the field of health. The working and living conditions of the network's employees have deteriorated dramatically as a result.

The FIQ thus proposes to review its methods and operation to create better synergy among the different levels of the organization and favour active participation by everyone. Thanks to increased involvement and reappropriation of union action by the members, the FIQ is convinced that it will be able to avoid the pitfalls and gain ground on this battlefield.

The theme, "Renewing our action together", was thus imperative. Although the FIQ is very proud of its track record since 1987, a renewal of its action is nonetheless necessary. However, no change will be possible unless the members are fully involved and unless there is a return to the base. Thus, the visual of the 2008 Convention is a pyramid made of arrows, illustrating the concept of essential feedback from the members, inevitable consultations to find out their opinions, needs and concerns. Bright colours are used because the FIQ, despite a pressing need to review its methods, has the energy, dynamism and resources to achieve this goal.

During this Convention, the delegates will be able to amend the FIQ Constitution and Bylaws and the Union Defence Fund Bylaws. They will also be able to discuss orientations regarding solidarity and the new generation of union activists. In addition, a report on each of the organization's sectors and services will be presented so that they can evaluate the activities performed and measure

the work accomplished. Of course, the Convention will also be the time to elect the members of the statutory and standing committees, including the Executive Committee. Finally, the financial statements will be presented to the delegates.

During one week, the FIQ will be able to review the actions carried on since its founding, but especially over the past three years, evaluate its achievements and losses, and project the activities for the years ahead.

We have to do things differently: the FIQ and its affiliated unions must include the members in decision-making even more, well beyond the renewal of the collective agreements. It is necessary to "renew our action together." ■

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# RENEWING OUR ACTION TOGETHER

The backdrop of this 8<sup>th</sup> Convention of the FIQ will be the theme "Renewing our action together." Far from reflecting a cosmetic approach, this renewal on which the delegates will be invited to reflect is intended to be a major step in the organization's history. The FIQ believes that the current context, which is extremely unfavourable for the labour movement, calls for urgent action.

## THE CRISIS OF THE LABOUR MOVEMENT

In view of the situation experienced by the labour movement in different Western countries, it is possible to measure the extent of the latent threat. A sharp drop in the unionization rate is observed, attesting to the great difficulty experienced by labour organizations in hindering the development of the neoliberal project.

This passage to neoliberalism materialized with the adoption, in the vast majority of countries, of a series of measures aimed at transforming the role played by the State in the economy and in the social sphere. Henceforth, a nation's salvation depends on the strict application of predetermined policy prescriptions. The main ingredients for success are then summarized in five main principles: fiscal discipline, State withdrawal from the social sphere, tax reform, privatization and deregulation.

This world view glorifies making individuals responsible for their own welfare and sanctifies competition. It is thus in total contradiction with the union approach, which proposes a project featuring a concern for equity and solidarity. It is not surprising to find that neoliberal governments are using every possible means to weaken the influence and capacity for action of labour organizations.

In Quebec, for the past several years, the unionization rate has been maintained around 40%, thus ranking it among Western nations where the greatest union density is observed. Must we conclude that the Quebec labour movement is immunized against a generalized trend in all other industrialized countries? Several factors prove the contrary.

## AN ANALYSIS OF UNION PRACTICES

This crisis of a movement which nonetheless has achieved considerable gains for workers down through history has generated many debates in the scientific community. Thus, some experts have focused first on identifying the causes of this crisis and, secondly, on offering solutions to the unions so that they can renew themselves and face the music.

Rejecting the idea of a labour movement completely disarmed and doomed to a slow death, most authors believe that the movement has the necessary tools to overcome the obstacles raised against it. However, the severity of the crisis and the hostility of the external environment would oblige labour organizations to review their approach in depth.

The different forms of contemporary unionism have not provided satisfactory answers. Some labour organizations practice "business" unionism, which limits the field of union action to two elements: negotiating the collective agreement and monitoring its application. While this type of unionism was suitable during a certain period, it presents serious limits in this neoliberal era. The reluctance of these organizations to adopt positions on political or citizen questions prevent them from anticipating attacks and establishing strategies. By restricting their field of intervention, they only reinforce the unfavourable prejudice that they are corporatist and solely focused on defending their members, to the detriment of the common good.

Most labour organizations in Quebec and Canada practice "social" unionism. These organizations share the same concerns as business unionism.

However, they consider that their members are not only workers but also citizens whose concerns extend far beyond the context of work. They are convinced that defending the members as employees inevitably depends on the defence of political issues.

Despite the efforts of part of the labour movement to reconcile union struggles and citizen struggles, and despite a growing awareness of the importance of political action, social unionism has not been able to hinder implementation of neoliberal policies. It must therefore be deduced that social unionism has a major weakness that greatly limits the scope of its positions and sociopolitical actions. This deficiency is based on the relationships between the different constituents of the union structure. As in the case of business unionism, the debates and decision-making mechanisms are centralized at the top of the union hierarchy. Consequently, the resulting actions most often circulate top-down and very rarely bottom-up.

For these reasons, the political and citizen-oriented decisions made by organizations practicing social unionism do not seem to gain members' adherence. Since they rarely participate in the substantial debates and the action strategies proposed, they do not feel involved. →

**Don't forget that,  
from June 2 to 6,  
you can follow the  
progress of the  
FIQ Convention at  
<[www.fiqsante.qc.ca](http://www.fiqsante.qc.ca)>.**

(CONT'D)

### **THE SOCIAL UNIONISM PRACTICED BY THE FIQ**

For over a decade, the FIQ has practiced a form of social unionism which certainly has allowed breakthroughs in working conditions and given it the opportunity to stand out on certain sociopolitical issues. However, beyond sociopolitical issues, union activism and the commitment of members as citizens remain sources of concern: while the working conditions of care professionals are deteriorating constantly, few members choose the paths of union activism and involvement to improve things. Given the unfavourable context, it is imperative that the FIQ engage in introspection.

### **RENEWING OUR UNION PRACTICE**

While for some, the crisis in the labour movement depends on external factors, such as globalization, it is also due to internal factors on which the organizations can act to correct their aim. By intervening on the internal factors, the FIQ could increase its power to influence public opinion, as well as the employer lobby and governments, in order to change the external environment to its advantage.

The FIQ thus proposes to review its methods and its operation, at every level of the organization: this poses a challenge to the FIQ, its affiliated unions, its union reps, its staff and its members.

To ensure that this project will be successful, the recommendation the delegates are asked to think about and debate is to support the FIQ in the renewal of its action, based on a form of unionism that encourages increased member support and involvement. This type of unionism would have a broader sociopolitical impact than increasing the organization's bargaining power for the benefit of all members. ■

# **BROADENING OUR SOLIDARITY**

## **New practices**

At the 1991 Convention, the delegates adopted the main principles of solidarity that were to guide the Federation. From then on, the Federation learned from experience by participating in coalitions or social movements that allowed it to defend grassroots causes publicly. These first collaborations enabled the young Federation, as a labour organization, to come to the defence of causes beyond the defence of nurses' working conditions.

Through these experiences, the FIQ has developed close ties with several groups that share its union, feminist and grassroots values, and has made its voice heard in social debates at the local and international levels. Given the difficult current context, the time has come for the FIQ to broaden its action, diversify its approach and multiply the opportunities for mutual aid and solidarity, while maintaining the collaborations already established and without relegating financial support to the back burner.

The Executive Committee thus recommends that the delegates adopt the means to promote debates and take a position on the major national and international issues. The FIQ also wishes to increase the presence of labour or other stakeholders from foreign countries at the FIQ's decision-making bodies to contribute to these discussions. Finally, to further anchor the acts of solidarity called for by the current context, certain recommendations seek to initiate international cooperation projects with the assistance of experienced partners, facilitate the participation of nursing and cardiorespiratory care graduates in cooperation internships, and encourage the participation of young FIQ members in international cooperation missions.

To implement these projects, the Executive Committee recommends that one dollar per dues-paying member per year be added to the Solidarity Reserve Fund and that this amount, taken from the organization's regular budget, be dedicated exclusively to the activities related to these projects. ■

## **AN IMPRESSIVE RECORD OF ACHIEVEMENT**

In preparation for the Convention, the FIQ has sent the delegates the activity report of its various sectors and services so that they can evaluate all of the work accomplished over the past three years. As this report attests, over 200 employees in 13 sectors and services have contributed their efforts, energy and work to enable the FIQ to achieve its objectives. During the same period, the government, with its laws and interventions, has upset the union agenda repeatedly, particularly by imposing the negotiation of 158 local agreements, to which the FIQ had to dedicate most of its resources to ensure their success.

Constant efforts and innovations, struggles and demands, alliances and solidarity, pitfalls and victories – all of this has been routine for the Federation, which has been present not only with health professionals but in the major social debates and in the struggles to stop the rise of neoliberalism.

While the labour movement today is at the crossroads, the Convention is certainly an ideal time to reflect on the orientations that will guide the FIQ and allow us to RENEW OUR ACTION TOGETHER.

## **PROPOSED AMENDMENTS**

At the next Convention, the delegates will debate the proposed amendments tabled at the last Federal Council with a view to amending the FIQ Constitution and Bylaws and the Union Defence Fund Bylaws. Some proposed amendments to the Constitution and Bylaws, particularly those related to the creation of FIQ – *Association immobilière*, an entity established for the construction of the FIQ's new headquarters, are simply concordances.

New amendments to the Union Defence Fund Bylaws will also be submitted by the Executive Committee for debate. At the last Special Convention, it was proposed that the UDF offer financial support for mobilization within the context of the negotiation of a first collective agreement. Given that a growing number of employers are acting unilaterally and showing less and less respect for workers' rights, the Executive Committee will propose that the UDF also serve to support members in implementing an action plan, including pressure tactics to counter the shortage of care professionals or fight back against these employers. In this way, a union could receive an amount equivalent to \$5 per member, depending on the group concerned, to carry out its action plan. Similarly, a benefit of \$15 per hour not worked could be allocated to the members if the pressure tactics consist of a spontaneous work stoppage. In fact, the aim is to offer alternatives to improve the unions' bargaining power against employers who want to slash the working conditions of care professionals.

## YOUTH COMMITTEE Means of action

The Youth Committee, created in 2001, is composed of five care professionals under age 30. The recommendations adopted at the 7<sup>th</sup> Convention of the Federation in 2005 were of particular interest for the Committee. The theme, "Building the future together", highlighted the challenges to be met in the future, particularly to need to develop a new generation of activists. The Federation therefore set objectives and adopted several recommendations aimed at the Youth Committee.

Thus, the Committee members plan to mobilize young people at the local level, increase the number of youth committees and develop a more social and political approach in order to become more involved as union representatives. Worried about the absence of a succession and the rise of anti-unionism, they want to provide themselves with the means to act. The 2008 Convention is the ideal time to adapt the Youth Committee's mandate to its evolution and the FIQ's future needs. The Executive Committee, concluding that the Youth Committee from now on should be part of the Sociopolitical Sector, thus recommends that the delegates broaden the Committee's mandate and create a space that meets the objectives of recruiting, mobilizing and politicizing members under 30, in order to attract them, establish ties and deepen their knowledge of the organization's issues, and the union and political challenges. It is also proposed that a Youth Network be set up to create a broad forum that can attract and bring together a greater number of young people.

## NOTICE OF ELECTION

**8<sup>th</sup>  
Convention**

June 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6, 2008

To all members of unions affiliated to the FIQ

### STATUTORY COMMITTEES

In accordance with the FIQ Constitution and Bylaws, we hereby notify you that there will be elections at the Convention to be held on June 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6, 2008, in St-Hyacinthe, for the following positions:

#### **Executive Committee** (9 members)

- President
- 1<sup>st</sup> Vice-President
- 2<sup>nd</sup> Vice-President (Nurse)
- 3<sup>rd</sup> Vice-President
- 4<sup>th</sup> Vice-President
- 5<sup>th</sup> Vice-President (Nursing Assistant)
- 6<sup>th</sup> Vice-President (Respiratory Therapist)
- Secretary
- Treasurer

<b>Election</b>	3 members (1 president and 2 assistants)
<b>Union Defence Fund</b>	2 members
<b>Internal Audit</b>	3 members

### STANDING COMMITTEES

<b>Status of Women</b>	6 members and 2 substitutes
<b>Youth</b>	5 members (30 years or less) and 2 substitutes
<b>Occupational Health and Safety</b>	6 members and 2 substitutes
<b>Education-Animation</b>	6 members and 2 substitutes

### FOR THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE, THE STATUTORY COMMITTEES AND THE STANDING COMMITTEES

- Candidacies are admissible until twenty-four (24) hours after the official opening of the Convention;
- The candidates must be members in good standing of a union affiliated to the FIQ, complete a candidacy form provided for this purpose and return it, along with the "member in good standing certification", to the head office of the FIQ, to the attention of :  
President of the Election Committee  
2050, rue de Bleury, 4e étage  
Montréal (Québec) H3A 2J5
- Candidacies must arrive no later than 5 p.m. on May 23, 2008, or can be handed to the President of the Election Committee at the Convention;
- Candidates can obtain a copy of the candidacy form at the local union office, or by calling Dominique Trudeau (tel.: 514-987-1141 or the toll-free number 1-800-363-6541), or by asking the Election Committee at the Convention;
- Candidates must hand in a short introductory text along with their candidacy forms;
- Campaigning material must have the prior approval of the Election Committee.

## BEING A COMMITTEE MEMBER An active participation

For the FIQ, the committees have always been an essential place for participation, enabling the members to engage in the militant action of their labour organization. At each Convention, the delegates elect the members of the FIQ standing committees - the Youth Committee, the Status of Women Committee, the Occupational Health and Safety Committee and the Education-Animation Committee. Their mandate includes integration of the reality of care professionals into different spheres of the FIQ's activity and influencing the debates at different levels of the organization. The committee members all consider that their involvement has allowed them to develop a greater sense of belonging, acquire new knowledge, develop skills and create solidarity with other activists from the FIQ and elsewhere.

At the last Convention, with the aim of involving the committee members further in the FIQ's issues and actions, the delegates agreed that all members of the FIQ standing committees would henceforth be fraternal delegates to the regular Federal Councils and Conventions, and that the cost of their leave would be assumed by the FIQ.

At the Convention, the delegates will also have to elect the members of the FIQ statutory committees - the Election Committee, the Internal Audit Committee, the Union Defence Fund Committee and the Executive Committee.

About forty positions are open. Regardless of your age or your region, don't hesitate to submit your candidacy. Visit your local union office. Your delegates have all the necessary forms in hand. ■



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