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FIRST FIQ YOUTH NETWORK

An important milestone in the history of the FIQ occurred on October 22 and 23 when, in a pleasant setting, the first Youth Network of the young members of the Federation was held. More than 80 care professionals aged 30 and younger from the four corners of Quebec got together at this meeting. This first Network meeting was meant to be a determining moment for the pursuit of the work of the FIQ Youth Committee and the numerous local and regional youth committees.

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As announced at the Federal Council, the Youth Committee wanted to use this Network meeting to achieve a two-fold objective:

- Stimulate the fire of the participants' activism by repositioning the main issues of the union fight, that is, to work towards obtaining and maintaining better working conditions and argue for a more just society.
- Discuss the specific pleasant concerns of young care professionals and their vision of union action in their image. This objective is aimed at better defining the profile of the next generation, the Generation FIQ, and thus as faithfully as possible carry their hopes and dreams.

It is in this perspective that the Youth Committee worked flat out in order to develop an activity programme responding to these objectives. Against adversity, like the early and unexpected arrival of snow and the toxic fumes from a bus that is reactionary and hostile to the younger generation (!), the Youth Committee is

proud of the success of this first Network meeting. Several participants felt they had been hit with the activist virus, while others specifically appreciated the fact of having their own platform, where they can express themselves without having to be afraid of being wrong or of being judged.

One thing is sure: Generation FIQ is distinguished from its predecessors on certain subjects, in particular as regards communication methods. Nevertheless, it remains that those age 30 and under who attended these two days are very articulate and possess values that can only lead to union activism. It only remains to find the means to transform this potential activism into concrete actions, which also was the subject of very interesting discussions at the Network meeting.

In short, the FIQ and the Youth Committee have the firm conviction that this Network meeting was only the first step in a process that carries hope aimed at assuring the presence of strong and dynamic union replacements. ■

The next generation...

CONFERENCE OF JEAN-NOËL GRENIER



An outstanding speaker often solicited for various FIQ meetings, Mr. Jean-Noël Grenier suggested a conference on a notion that is both ordinary and complex: the “necessary necessity” of union action. How has union action brought about gains, that everyone benefits from today, often at the cost of many sacrifices? What role can and must the union play in the daily lives of the Quebec population? What are the union paths of action the most likely to insure success in their battles? There are some of the questions to which the professor in industrial relations at the Université Laval responded with panache.

First, Mr. Grenier worked at drawing a portrait of the difficult context in which the population of Quebec is evolving. Thus, the challenges are numerous in what Mr. Grenier calls the post-modern times, characterized by the ever-present neoliberal culture in the workplaces, government policies and the social sphere. In these circumstances, mobilization is all the harder, because employers deploy lots of energy to cause a greater split between workers by stimulating competition among them, by bypassing the parity power locales and by exploiting professional, generational and situational differences between employees.

Faced with these many tensions, Mr. Grenier estimates that the success of union action can only rest on the defence of the values at the core of unionism, that is, equality, justice and solidarity, and this, as much in the workplace as in the socio-political sphere. So, the professor from the Université Laval insisted on the complementarity of these two places of action. For him, the more labour organizations achieve success on the sociopolitical scene, the easier it will be to make gains in the workplaces, which is all the more relevant in the public

sector, because the employer is also the legislator.

Lastly, Mr. Grenier stressed the many gains obtained through union struggles that the whole population of Quebec benefits from, something which is often forgotten.

In conclusion, the speaker recalled that it is essential that everyone mobilize in order to improve the working and living conditions for all. To do this, it is in the interest of labour organizations to review the way they do things and to find ways to stimulate the younger members to participate, among others.

Mr. Grenier’s presentation obviously stimulated discussion in the room. Several questions concerning the inherent difficulties in mobilization and political involvement were raised. Moreover, the speaker certainly piqued the curiosity of the participants concerning the Lean method, the famous *toyotism* lauded by Dr. Bolduc, Minister of Health and Social Services. Mr. Grenier emphasized the dangers linked to this method of organization of work, which applies undue pressure on employees to the detriment of the quality of work and satisfaction at work. ■

Campfire

The FIQ Youth Committee made the most of this first Network meeting to suggest a very special activity. A campfire was organized in a sugar-bush located on the same site where the meeting was being held. Music, songs, laughter and discussions were on the agenda: a winning combination for a successful evening. The Network members want to especially thank Vincent Veilleux, FIQ Union Consultant and the designated cabaret artist for the evening.





Melanie and the round tables

The next generation...

THE “NETWORK EFFECT” - GENERATION FIQ

After a day of reflections on the values associated with unionism as well as on the pertinence of union action as the vehicle for better working and living conditions, the Network’s work resumed early the next day. Thus, it fell to Ms. Mélanie Laroche, Professor of Industrial Relations at the Université de Montréal, to create a bridge between the reflections of the day before and the aspirations of the Generation FIQ.

In a presentation that was as rigorous as it was interesting, Ms Laroche first examined the main elements that could explain a certain withdrawal from union actions, in particular for the younger generation. For example, the professor emphasized the fact that young people do not necessarily have different values than previous generations. However, the younger generation break away as regards their perception of the benefit of union action as a means to improve daily life. In the same manner, it appears that young people see themselves less in a union action for which the identity is based on social class and whose means of action favour confrontation and opposition. Thus, young people under age 30 would be more sensitive to individual forms of mobilization in the workplaces. Lastly, today there is a great variety of places where young people can express themselves and advocate their point of view, which brings into question the centrality of the union as the main platform for the interests of young people.

Far from putting a stop to a greater participation in union action of the under 30 age group, Ms Laroche suggests that these factors be nevertheless taken into consideration when efficient means of approach and involvement of young people need to be identified. Eventually, an undeniable fact remains: a greater participation of young people cannot be contemplated, if the issues defined and the battles waged by the union do not take into consideration their opinion. In this respect, the professor emphasized the importance and usefulness of having a Youth Committee. This enables young people to be heard and to feel involved while, thanks to them, the union leaders will take the pulse of these new members

and can adequately adapt the speeches and actions.

In conclusion, Ms Laroche stressed the importance of them taking their place as young people and to use all possible platforms to be heard.

Ms Laroche’s conference clearly set the tone for the discussions that followed. Thus, the young participants were invited to discuss, in round table discussion, the different issues aimed at better defining their vision of FIQ union action, as well as proposing action paths likely to improve the participation of those under 30 in the local and regional unions and the FIQ.

Certain findings came out of these discussions. For example, the need to define the welcoming structures for new care professionals who are hired, was practically a consensus as a means to favour in order to make them aware and facilitate their involvement in union action. Also, the essentiality of the increased visibility of union representatives was stressed. The proposed solutions to meet this even larger challenge since the passing of Bill 30 have been numerous. It has been suggested, in particular, to set up a structure of department delegates, as well as to use the new technologies of networking more. Lastly, throughout the Network meeting, the young participants emphasized the difference between their relationship at work and that of previous generations. ■

One of the distinctive traits of the participants at this first Network meeting is that they have started in the job market in the wake of Bill 30. Thus, most of them have taken their first union steps and have crept along within a FIQ reinforced by the pooling of the common interests of different classes of professionals. The Youth Committee, through this first meeting, was seeking to more clearly define the identity of this generation born at the crossroads of these new solidarities, Generation FIQ.

Generation

WHEN THE PAST MEETS THE PRESENT



During the Youth Network meeting, the participants watched a film that did not use the latest technology nor techno-music. Indeed, watching a black and white film with its poor sound and jumping images that highlights a person who shaped the history of Quebec surprised more than one person. It is an anthology piece dating from the 1960's entitled, "Le vrai syndicalisme, pourquoi", in which Mr. René Lévesque demonstrated

his popular talents in explaining to his captive audience why unionism is needed and relevant. The young participants seemed to appreciate this film which, in spite of its dealing with another time, is still valid today. What better way to bridge the gap between generations and demonstrate that yesterday's unionism pursued the exact same objectives as those of today and tomorrow. The film is available free on the web by googling its title. ■

THE YOUNG GENERATION... IN IT FOR THE MONEY?



Just arrived at the site where the Network meeting would be held, the young participants were initiated thanks to small intimate discussions which allowed them to get better acquainted. Thus, each participant received a puzzle piece the colour of which indicated the table where they would be seated. Once the puzzle was completed, the young participants had a list of 15 values or concerns. The participants then held a discussion in order to identify the three values or concerns that, for them, were the most important. The consensus seemed to be that, among the most prominent values, were solidarity, equality, respect, family as well as health. It must be said that money did not come up at any of the discussion tables. Contrary to the label they have been given, Generation FIQ seems to be more concerned with their future than with their wallets! ■

Common Front Rally

The FIQ Youth Network took place in the middle of the SISP-CSN-FTQ Common Front provincial tour. To break the routine a little, an outside rally was organized to help them better understand this crucial moment in Quebec union history. The participants were therefore asked to look at the site where they were meeting and to find the questions about the Common Front hidden on the footpaths. To liven up the game, the rally was held under a snow shower: a great diversionary tactic which made the next generation aware of the next round of negotiations.

Some sample questions

1. What does the acronym SISP stand for?
2. How many public service workers are represented by the SISP-CSN-FTQ Common Front?
3. In what year in Quebec's history was the first common front created?
4. What percentage of FIQ members are women?



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