



THE COMMON GOOD IS THREATENED

The main objective of the supporters of a capitalist society is to accumulate riches despite the harmful effects that it generates for populations and the environment. Governments, as a captive audience for this logic, adhere to this way of thinking and ask that citizens support the failures and “tighten their belts”. Privatizations, destruction of the common good. How can people, particularly women living in poverty, live in such a system?

It was through a reflection on the common good and the privatization of public services that the members of the Status of Women Committee invited the network participants to discuss this subject. At the outset, Michèle Boisclair launched a call for citizen mobilization around these themes. “What we believed we had acquired in principle and in fact through hard struggles in the 1960’s in Québec is on the verge of disappearing. Our public services have now been penetrated by business logic: increase in productivity, profit and fee structures. Even inside our health network, still public in appearance and collectively funded by taxes, a view based on competition and individualism

has been introduced. This will bring about the destruction of public services and those people who need it the most will have less and less access to healthcare services. What is presently happening is directly linked with the phenomenon of impoverishment of a certain social class, in which women are the first ones touched as workers, parents or still, users of the healthcare system. This network is an opportunity to give ourselves the ammunition so that as women we can take the floor in order to reverse the tendency and build a stronger society.” ■



PLAYING AS IF IN REAL LIFE

The participants, many of whom were experiencing their first network, took up the challenge of looking into the common good by playing a board game suggested by Louise Lafortune and Christine Bernier from the *Carrefour de participation, ressourcement et formation*. This game simulates life’s journey and experiences according to whether we become rich or poor through the fate of the roll of the dice. In addition to warming up the mood, this exercise will make the participants live emotions that they never would have thought they would experience and share them with all the activists. A feeling of exclusion, loss of respect and a feeling of shame for the impoverishment of some; power and freedom for the richest; demobilization and fatalism for those in the middle class faced with financial burdens. As in real life, human and social relationships become difficult and individual fates sometimes unacceptable.

THE NETWORK IN A NUTSHELL

On April 21 and 22, the Women’s Network met in Longueuil with a theme linked to the demands of the World March of Women, “For the economic independence of women and against privatization: still battles to wage”. This network attracted more than 90 participants despite the context of negotiations which is constantly mobilizing the delegates from the Federation in their institutions.

The opening activity of a board game on the common good was fun for the participants. During the different activities throughout the day, they had to come up with arguments in order to deconstruct the myths which shape minds daily. The conferences by Nicole Jetté of the *Front commun des personnes assistées sociales* (FCPAS) and Marie-Claude Goulet of the *groupe des Médecins québécois pour le régime public* (MQRP) solicited keen interest and lots of emotion. Indeed, both the subjects of poverty of women and privatization of the health system reminded the participants that collective solidarity is well-founded and that society’s choices at the time the Québec public healthcare system was created in the 1960’s were pertinent. ■

News from the Status of Women Sector

CAREGIVERS IN CANADA

A new class of workers has appeared in Canada over the last few years. Made up of a majority of women of immigrant origins, in a dependent situation with their employer, with an obligation to live-in and to be available to work at any time, it is difficult for caregivers to defend themselves in cases of mistreatment, violence or exploitation.

The *Association des Aides familiales du Québec* (AAFQ) is publishing an awareness-raising leaflet on this subject and will attend the 2010 Convention of the International Labour Organization (ILO) on domestic workers in order to force the States to respect their rights. ■

MEETING WITH HAÏTIAN UNIONISTS

The Status of Women Sector attended a meeting in Santo-Domingo with unionists from Haïti in order to understand the situation since the January 12, 2010 earthquake. Haitian women who lived through the earthquake gave an account of their experiences. Often in mourning and without a home, separated from their families or they are in charge of the elderly and children who escaped death and they are exposed to sexual violence and financial insecurity. As unionists, they can no longer adequately assume their tasks in the workplaces that are no longer functional. The FIQ reinforced its ties with women's groups and mutual aid at the meeting and will continue its work of solidarity with the people on the ground.



ABOLISHMENT OF THE PAY EQUITY COMMISSION

Among the contested measures in the “Bachand budget”, is the abolishment of the Pay Equity Commission and the transfer of its activities to the *Commission des droits de la personne et des droits de la jeunesse* (CDPDJ). An economy of scale and reduction in staff are the reasons invoked by the government.

The setting up of this Commission was linked to the 1996 adoption of the Pay Equity Act, assumes training mandates, an advisory role and has decision-making and monitoring powers regarding the application of the law. Even if the pay equity work is over for the workers in the public sector, what will happen for some businesses in the private sector that the Commission followed in its work? What will happen regarding the follow-up on maintenance? While Québécois gave themselves a collective tool that is the envy of many governments, we are now faced with returning 13 years in the past when the only recourse for advocating

the right to pay equity was by an individual complaint to the CDPDJ.

Faced with this unacceptable decision, the *Conseil d'intervention pour l'accès des femmes au travail* (CIAFT) convened a meeting on May 11 for discussion which the Status of Women and Negotiation Sectors of the FIQ attended in order to develop a battle strategy with the groups and organizations concerned by this file. ■

THE RIGHT TO ABORTION, STILL IN DANGER HERE AND ELSEWHERE

Nebraska has just adopted a law aimed at prohibiting abortions as of the 20th week by invoking the pain felt by the foetus.

In Canada, the Conservative MP and the president of the “Pro-Life Caucus”, Rod Bruinooge, tabled a bill (C-510) in order to criminalize coercing a woman into having an abortion.

In June 2010, at the G8 Summit, the Harper government played the role of advocate for the improvement of maternal and child health for the poorest areas of the world, omitting however, to include abortion in the global health of women. Yet, not having access to safe, legal abortion services causes more than 13% of the 500,000 maternal deaths each year throughout the world. ■

From left to right
Michèle Boisclair, Luce Dessureault, Claire Alarie,
Martine Éloy, Sylvie Charbonneau, Sylvie Lachance, Florence Thomas, Nathalie Wallman and Annie Pinard

Action and mobilization

To support the different actions presented at the Women's Network, go to the FIQ web site, under the Status of Women tab. www.fiqsante.qc.ca

Calendar of activities for the World March of Women (WMW) 2010

From March 8 to October 17, 2010:
Marches in all countries in the world

From October 12 to 17, 2010:
WMW in Québec

- **October 12:** Local marches (in towns or villages)
- **October 13 and 14:** Regional marches and rallies
- **October 14 and 15:** Interregional marches (ex: groups from different regions could meet up in a contingent which will head towards Rimouski)
- **October 17:** Major rally in Rimouski (activities organized from 11:00 to 3:00)

Actions in every region will be coordinated through consensus tables of women's groups and the list of these tables will be available on the FIQ web site under the Status of Women tab. ■

Economic independence of women and privatization STILL BATTLES TO WAGE

Ms Nicole Jetté, an experienced worker for many years with underprivileged or people in difficulty, described the evolution of government policies and their impact on the poverty of women in Québec. A riveting conference which in addition to painting an historical picture, also raised questions on the role of the State in matters of social policies.

Right from the beginning, Nicole Jetté opened the conference by invoking Article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in which it states "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights". Questioning the participants on the negation of the fundamental rights of people condemned to poverty in Québec and elsewhere, she challenged the idea of a welfare state, she, herself preferring that of a State responsible and committed to respecting the rights and needs of all its citizens.

Ms Jetté emphasized that prior to the 1960's, the perception of poverty was based on morals. Therefore, social assistance found its justification through charity such as help for needy mothers and allowances for blind or disabled people, without referring to justice and equality. Two principles emerged in 1963: the "right for every person to social recognition, whatever the reason for the need" and "the State's responsibility in matters of financial assistance for citizens in need".

But these principles will quickly disappear in the name of economic order. Thus, as of the 1970's, the rules for social assistance cover two objectives, that of satisfying the essential needs of the citizens while

urging them to work. With the advent of all for the economy, this double standard will lean towards the side of the obligation to work and restrictions. Between the 1980's and today, a ceiling set at 50% of the minimum wage was introduced, along with criteria for employability, various categories of assistance and numerous restrictions. These reforms of social assistance will become deeply rooted through the disengagement of the State in matters of health and the shifting of services to the community and will primarily affect women living in poverty.

If the resistance of people to these measures that are more and more restrictive has had any effect, particularly by the group for the defence of the rights of persons on social assistance in 1974 and the massive mobilization with the *Le Collectif pour une loi sur l'élimination de la pauvreté au Québec* in 1997¹, Ms Jetté emphasized that the social assistance philosophy promoted by the Government of Québec has not stopped dominating, misrepresenting the law against poverty, reinforcing prejudices, adversely affecting the dignity of the disadvantaged and implementing social controls over people in a situation of poverty. Unfortunately, always to the detriment of women. ■

¹ In December 2002, the National Assembly unanimously adopted *Bill 112, An Act to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion*.

"Thanks to your conference, Ms Jetté, I now understand what I have experienced. My mother found herself without a job and with two young children after my father left. She taught me resourcefulness, and especially the importance of having a field that will give me financial independence."

Message from a participant at the Network
On the left: Ms Nicole Jetté



THE NETWORK'S FAVORITE



Claire Alarie, member of the Status of Women Committee, shared her favourite with the Network participants, a book by a collective led by Michèle Charpentier and Anne Quéniart, *Veilles et après*.

“This book talks of older women and it affected me on several levels. Subjects introduced are social and citizen commitment, family responsibilities, poverty, accommodation, health care, self-esteem, sexual discrimination, an array of features not normally considered or cited when talking about older women.”

The introduction in this work, which has a surprising title for some, is signed by Lise Payette. The book gives an account of the multiple realities and characteristics of aging women so that the reader can get beyond the prejudices. It stops those who would like to confine them to clichés. One must dare to tackle this theme in today's era where appearance and beauty are skin-deep.

Veilles et après, Femmes, vieillissement et société, under the direction of Michèle Charpentier and Anne Quéniart, published by remue-ménage, 2009. ■

FOR A PUBLIC SYSTEM IN BETTER HEALTH

It is no longer an open secret, the Government of Québec is relentlessly privatizing the health system. Marie-Claude Goulet, an emergency doctor at CHUM St-Luc and president of the *Médecins québécois pour le régime public* (MQRP), gave an eloquent demonstration to the Women's Network of this phenomenon, using numbers and examples, and of the validity of maintaining and developing a public healthcare system.

For Marie-Claude Goulet, the foundations for public health insurance, the right to health and access without discrimination, preceded the organization of health services. By recalling the principle of universality and a history of the creation of a Québec health and social services system in the 1960's, she emphasized that, for women in particular, the setting up of this network ended financial indebtedness of families due to illness and brought about quality paid and unionized jobs.

Nevertheless, privatization has been entrenched and following its course in Québec for several years. Thus, the share of care being offered by the private sector is increasing while the State's responsibility for this care is decreasing. Marie-Claude Goulet did a surgical analysis. It is a question of creating a market, according to Dr. Goulet. At the same time there is passive chronic under-funding, budget cuts, restriction of medical acts, exclusion of diagnostic tests from public health insurance or the billing of incidental expenses. Actively, through several laws and reforms that are progressively implemented by the government, there is delegation of a large number of services to the private sector. All the actions converge in favour of a transfer of public funds to private industry. The recent introduction in the last budget of a health tax of \$200 and

of a \$25 payment for each visit to the doctor only accentuates a tendency to penalize a large number of citizens.

What are the consequences of a private health market? Less control over health-care costs, an increase in costs, splitting up of health services, deterioration in the present system in terms of quality and resources, and consequently, access that is not equitable for all Québécois.

Who are the ones most affected by privatization of the health-care system? Women, who as citizens use healthcare services more frequently for themselves and their loved ones, but also as workers in the network. More numerous in jobs with no security, more affected by conjugal and sexual violence, assuming parental tasks, the latter see their working conditions slowly whittle away and their health deteriorate under the pressure.

In spite of this context, Marie-Claude Goulet, inviting the participants to join the actions of the MQRP, believes in the improvement of access to public care and suggests public solutions because “we cannot let the financial interests of a minority penetrate the health field and our health is not for sale”.¹ ■

¹ To access the MQRP web site and read about all the demands and the solutions proposed by the physicians in this group: <http://www.mqrp.qc.ca/index.php>

