

The Essential Services is denying
the rights of the FIQ

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great support

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A SECOND WIND IN THE NEGOTIATIONS

The appointment of Michelle Courchesne as president of the *Conseil du trésor*, to replace Monique Gagnon-Tremblay, has surely given a second wind to the negotiations for the FIQ healthcare professionals. Furthermore, the representatives from the Federation have met in September and the minister maintained that her priority was to reach a negotiated settlement.

Madam Courchesne allowed the parties to undertake a real process of negotiations, where the pre-conditions have been removed. However, for his part, the Minister of Health is still denying the deterioration in the health network and the working conditions of the healthcare professionals. Faced with the numerous impassioned cries from the FIQ members and unions, he only sees one simple negotiating strategy. What an affront on the part of a minister, himself a physician, who trivializes the calls for help from his colleagues! The president of the Federation, did not hesitate to call him on it and invited him to visit the

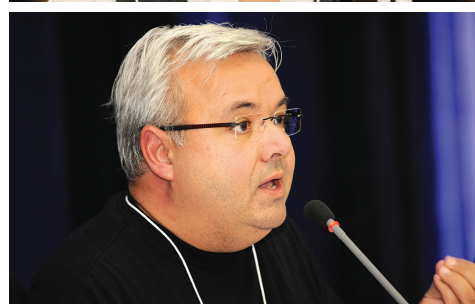
workplaces of those who go to great lengths to keep the public network alive. She also emphasized the courage of numerous healthcare professionals who speak up and attest to what they experience on a daily basis in their workplaces.

THE MOBILIZATION TAKES ON ITS FULL MEANING

The situation experienced by the healthcare professionals is regularly reported by the media and this media pressure is felt all the way to the negotiating table. The FIQ members must therefore continue the activities in the action plan: wear a black T-shirt

on Wednesdays, ignore the dress code, hide the ID badge, wear the negotiations bracelet and armband, wear a number patch to indicate all overtime work, etc.

The subjects that will soon be discussed at the negotiating table are at the heart of the Federation's priorities. Thus it is important that everyone be seen and heard, now more than ever: the pressure must be kept up! That is the best support that can be given to the negotiating team, now is the time that the actions of the FIQ members take on their full meaning. ■



STRIKE-BREAKERS (SCABS): THE FIQ WILL NOT COMPROMISE

The context and the climate of the negotiations over the past year have forced the Federation to evaluate all the possibilities that could lead to a negotiated settlement for its members. A strike remains a possibility among the means considered.

In fact, if the healthcare professionals feel pushed by the government to use a heavy pressure tactic such as a strike, the FIQ must insure that this show of strength is carried out legally. To do this, the unions have a legal framework that enables them to strike, particularly regarding the provisions prohibiting strike-breakers (scabs). These provisions stipulated in the Labour Code, prohibit the employers from hiring other people to perform the duties normally performed by the healthcare professionals when they are on strike. An inquiry mechanism that allows for verification that these provisions are respected by the employer is also provided. Any violation, if proven, can be the subject of a temporary or permanent order following an application to the Commission des relations du travail (CRT): an order to stop the use of scabs or a conviction of the employer and his conspirators to pay a fine.

The identification process of strike-breakers (scabs) is part of the actions lead by the FIQ to counter the use of personnel from the private healthcare placement agencies. At no time, will the Federation allow an employer to use this type of personnel to fulfill the duties of its

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WORD FROM THE PRESIDENT

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124 000 SIGNATURES: GREAT SUPPORT

THE ESSENTIAL SERVICES IS DENYING THE RIGHTS OF THE FIQ

Within the framework of the current negotiations, the FIQ remains optimistic about reaching a settlement with the government. However, the FIQ continues its preparations to offset an eventual halt to the negotiations with the management party. The Federation is ready for all possibilities.

Thus, in June 2010, all the affiliated unions sent the employers in the network and the Essential Services Council the agreements or the union lists for maintaining healthcare services for the public, according to the criteria stipulated in the Labour Code. This exercise covered the calculation of the percentage of employees that would work for each institution in the event of a strike.

Without a day in court, the Council rendered a series of unreasonable and unmotivated decisions, guided by the modifications demanded by the employers in the network. In some cases, it even stipulated a mandatory presence of a higher number of employees than that normally required for the care units. Thereby going against the provisions of the Labour Code and removing any chance of these employees being on strike.

The FIQ and its affiliated unions openly denounce the approach retained by the Council in treating these negotiated agreements and the union lists filed by the unions. The FIQ particularly disapproves of the orientation adopted for nullifying almost all the essential services that the unions intended to maintain to insure the public received the services to which they are entitled while maintaining a legal strike of its members.

The Federation has already undertaken actions to correct the situation. The FIQ intends to remind the decision-makers of the nature of the Essential Services Council's mission, that of insuring a balance between protection of the public in the context of a work conflict and the fundamental right of the employees in the public sector to fully exercise their legal right to strike!

During the month of September, the members of the FIQ Executive Committee did a grand tour of Quebec health institutions. This tour was definitely a good time to talk to the members about their concerns and about the negotiations. It was also very energizing for the political officers of the Federation who represent the members, who carry their demands and who enthusiastically defend their rights.

The petition operation led by the FIQ was also a great success, mainly thanks to efforts of the members. As a result, more than 124,000 citizens and nearly 630 agencies within the social, community, labour and health environments showed their support so that the government give the healthcare professionals acceptable working conditions that are likely to limit the shortage that is threatening the health network in the short term.

Last August, the Léger Marketing firm carried out a survey of the members of the Federation and the disturbing results were very revealing of the slow agony of the public health network. Thus, 63% of the professionals surveyed are afraid of professional burnout if the current negotiations do not settle the arrangement of work time issue, 59% said that this greatly harms their family life, 39% are considering working in the private sector and 27% are seriously considering leaving the profession. Ironically, Minister Bolduc is afraid that the solutions proposed by the FIQ will cause a breakdown in services. However, with such glaring statistics, the rupture is no longer to be feared: it is inevitable!

The FIQ has noticed that the chaotic situation in the health network is of grave concern to the Quebec people and the social communities and health networks are mobilizing to demand real solutions. Moreover, on October 5, the Federation organized a press conference at which eight agencies, including the Fédération des médecins spécialistes, le Collectif pour un Québec sans pauvreté, la Fédération des médecins omnipraticiens du Québec and the Fédération des femmes du Québec, added their voices to that of the FIQ. More than 120 messages of support for the healthcare professionals have also been received. The public is behind the healthcare professionals more than ever so that they can finally get the working conditions to which they are entitled.

Furthermore, for several weeks now, the Federation has been back at the negotiating table and the discussions lead us to believe in a real openness on the part of the government. However, the battle is still not won. Nurses, licensed practical nurses, respiratory therapists and perfusionists, members of the Federation must continue to stand up and to demand the implementation of concrete solutions that will attract the youth to the network and to retain those who want to leave it, while facilitating the reconciliation of work, personal and family life. Practising in a safe environment and providing quality care is not optional, it is vital to the survival of the public health network! ■



By deciding to modify the agreements and the lists based solely on the employers' observations, the Council ignored the expertise of the local parties exceeded its powers of intervention and denied the unions any form of fairness in the procedure.