EDUCATION UNDER PRESSURE

Louise Chabot
“IT’S TIME TO ACTION UNIONISM”

Health and social services
A NETWORK UNDER ATTACK

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The theme of our Congress, _Agissons ! Ripostons !_ speaks volumes about our efforts over the past several months to boost jobs, ensure quality public services, and fight against the harshness of austerity measures that continue to impact the living conditions of our entire population.

Furthermore, we are working very hard at negotiating the working conditions of the thousands of members we represent in the public education, health and social services sectors. This is our priority! We will act to ensure that our fundamental rights to negotiate are respected in order to reach an agreement that satisfies the legitimate demands of our members.

One year ago, on October 31, 2014, we tabled our demands for better salaries and working conditions. Jobs, job security, excessive workloads, sub-contracting, professional autonomy, purchasing power, and reducing salary gaps: these are the main issues at the heart of our negotiations. The government needs to understand the importance of acting on these issues to ensure quality jobs that attract and retain personnel, and to guarantee the quality of public services.

Yet, we are far from being heard or understood. The government is utterly insensitive to the issues addressed by our demands. Worse still, it is proposing cuts to our current work conditions. Not surprising you may say, considering the speed at which it is sabotaging our education and health care services, decreasing the working conditions of workers, the learning conditions of our young people, and the services provided to the most vulnerable – in one fell swoop.

We refuse to “move forwards into the past”. We are determined to move ahead and obtain decent working conditions that acknowledge the fundamental value of our jobs. This is our focus for the coming days, weeks and months: a satisfactory negotiated settlement! Some predict a special bill. If it is so, we refuse to be fatalistic and back away from the possibility of reaching an acceptable negotiated settlement.

The fight will be a difficult one. The Common Front, which consists of 400,000 workers, including the CSQ, will do everything in its power to negotiate in good faith and reach a settlement that is favourable to all of its members.

We can do it!

Louise Chabot
President
ADOPTION OF BILL 28
A HARD PILL TO SWALLOW!

MÉLANIE MICHAUD  CSQ Social Security Advisor

When it adopted its mammoth Bill 28 last spring, the government stated it wanted to ensure better access to primary health care services. In fact, the changes it had just made to laws governing prescription drug insurance, public health insurance and pharmacies had a significant impact on private group insurance plans, such as the CSQ’s. CSQ News takes stock of the situation.

Since October 1, private insurance plans in Québec can follow the example of the prescription drug insurance plan and limit the amount reimbursed for brand name drugs (also called innovative drugs) to the price of the generic version.

Before adoption of the Bill, private insurance plans were legally required to reimburse 67.5% of the cost of brand name drugs. From now on, they can change their reimbursement policy for innovative drugs in order to reimburse them at the price of the less costly generic version.

Only individuals with medical restrictions that require taking brand name drugs are exempted. They will however require that a non-substitution form be completed by their physicians.

The CSQ General Council will look into the issue this October. A change to the group insurance plan will be proposed in order that reimbursement for brand name drugs be adjusted to the price of the less expensive generic version. A change to the insurance contract will have a significant impact on its renewal in 2016. However, the addition of paid services offered by pharmacists could change the situation slightly.

AN UNCLEAR SITUATION

The government has also expanded the role of pharmacists by adding new professional activities to their services. Since they are included in the benefits of the public plan, paid services related to drugs listed in the Régie de l’assurance maladie du Québec will be reimbursed by insurers according to the minimum amounts indicated.

But, this is all in theory for now. In practice, the issue remains unclear due to the absence of an agreement between the Association québécoise des pharmaciens propriétaires and the government regarding costs for these new services. For this reason, the CSQ’s group insurance plan cannot reimburse these costs at this time. Once an agreement is finalized, adjustments will be made and admissible claims will be transmitted directly in pharmacy.

Another snag is that the effects of the increase of health insurance premiums related to these new services remains unknown. What is certain is that since 60% of Quebeckers are covered by a private group insurance plan, the significant impact of this bill is undeniable. And once again, the government is stepping back and leaving us with the bill...

NEW SERVICES OFFERED IN PHARMACIES

• Renewal of prescriptions for a specified period
• Adjustment of prescriptions
• Prescription of medications when no diagnosis is required
• Prescription of medications for certain minor conditions (when the diagnosis and treatment are known)
• Therapeutic substitution in case of a drug’s supply shortage
• Administration of a medication to demonstrate proper usage
• Prescription of laboratory tests by pharmacists who work in a health or social services institution

Note:
- Pharmacists can charge fees for only the first 4 services.
- For certain new services, the pharmacist will be required to undergo formal training.
Review of pension annuities

A happy outcome for 2010 retirees

SÉBASTIEN LAVERGNE CSQ Social Security Advisor

Nearly 1300 retirees, mostly CSQ members, saw their pensions adjusted downwards in August 2013. An unacceptable situation that was brought on by the fact that CARRA was late in annualizing the salaries of these individuals at the time of their retirement.

In collaboration with the AREQ-CSQ, the CSQ was quick to act to remedy the situation. In April 2014, CARRA finally acknowledged that the deadline for correcting the situation was not met. It cancelled the downward review, but only for some. Still not satisfied, the CSQ continued to push ahead. In June 2015, CARRA finally cancelled all downward pension adjustments for retirees affected by this situation.

PRIVATE SECTOR SUPPLEMENTARY PENSION PLANS

PERPETUITY GUARANTEED

Defined benefits plans have a proven track record. Thanks to risk pooling, they provide unsurpassed protection at a lesser cost, particularly with regards to returns and longevity. However, private sector plans have been jeopardized over the past few years. Last June, the government of Québec tabled a bill aiming to change the rules for financing these plans.

The bill came from a consensus obtained by the labour and workforce advisory committee (Comité consultatif du travail et de la main-d’œuvre), consisting of employers and workers, including the CSQ. In fact, CSQ president, Louise Chabot, has underlined how interesting it is to see the positive outcome that results when the two sides work together to find solutions.

The structural changes proposed by the bill will provide more stable financing, as well as the creation of a stabilization fund, which would be financed through additional contributions. These measures would ensure better perpetuity of the fund, in the medium and long term.

Keep in mind that several members of the CSQ are impacted by the bill, such as the members of the Syndicat du personnel d’enquête de la Commission de la construction du Québec (SPECCQ), the Syndicat du personnel infirmier d’Héma-Québec (SPI-CSQ), and the Syndicat Loisir Québec.

University pension plans

A BILL IS EXPECTED THIS FALL

A bill impacting pension plans in the university sector is expected this fall. The CSQ, which represents workers in this sector, presented several major solutions during meetings in which rules for funding and perpetuity of the plans were discussed. As soon as the bill is introduced, the CSQ will review it and make sure that it properly reflects the guidelines set out in the meetings.

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1 An Act to amend the Supplemental Pension Plans Act
The CARRA and Québec Pension Plan Merger

THE CSQ IS WATCHING

MARIO LABBÉ CSQ Social Security Advisor

Retraite Québec should be seeing the light of day next January 1. The new entity was announced last March, much to the surprise of the CSQ and every other union organization whose members contribute to the RREGOP. At that time, the government had just announced the merger of the Commission administrative des régimes de retraite et d’assurances (CARRA) and the Québec Pension Plan (QPP).

We quickly made our displeasure known to the government for not having including us, or at least consulting us prior to this decision, and reminding them that the CARRA is the administrator of our retirement plan and that nearly 45% of its financing comes directly from our pension fund.

According to the government, this merger will produce economies of scale and shared expertise between the two organizations, which will be beneficial to their respective clients in the long term. The government also committed that when the merger is complete, CARRA’s and QQP’s respective clients will be minimally impacted.

Despite scepticism about these claims and being faced with a “fait accompli”, since when the announcement was made the merger was already in the works, the CSQ is keeping a close eye on the progress of the work and will do its best to influence it in the interest of members, active or retired.

In fact, the CSQ has a representative sitting on a follow up committee for the merger. Furthermore, we took advantage of the opportunity we were given last August 31, to convey our main concerns during the consultations for Bill 58 regarding the merger. We indicated our fear of the negative consequences the merger could have on client services and clearly indicated to the government how deeply we hold to the integrity of the mission and services currently provided by the CARRA, from a standpoint of continuous improvement.

Rest assured that the CSQ will continue to follow this situation very closely. /

WHO DOES WHAT RIGHT NOW?
The CARRA is the government organization in charge of managing the RREGOP.
The QQP manages the Régime des rentes du Québec, a universal public pension plan to which all workers and their employers contribute. It also supervises all private pension plans in Québec that offer similar plans to their personnel.
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Québec is one of the most successful societies on the continent when it comes to income equality, public health, and low crime rates. This is the result of a broad range of public services and social programs implemented since the 1960s. But, the government’s austerity measures will not be without consequence on their accessibility and quality. To turn things around, the state must increase revenues in a way that will allow it to adequately accomplish its missions.

This was the principle defended by the CSQ during the Québec Taxation Review Committee last September. Judging the reform proposed by the Godbout Commission unacceptable as a whole, notably because it does not allow the Treasury Board to obtain additional revenues and relies too heavily on taxes and tariffs, the CSQ suggested an alternative to increasing state revenues by approximately $800 million, all while improving the progressivity of the tax system.

Welcoming the recommendation of the Godbout report regarding a new tax table with several new tax brackets, the Centrale went further by formulating several proposals to find new sources of revenue, notably with the addition of a supplementary bracket for incomes of $150,000 and more. Always with the goal of generating new revenues, the CSQ endorsed the QST increase to 11%, but suggested ways to mitigate the regressive impact of the tax hike.

OTHER AVENUES TO INCREASE STATE REVENUES

Ecofiscal policy is an interesting avenue to counter climate change. The CSQ has recommended increasing the gas tax, subject to an additional tax credit on solidarity and the implementation of measures to promote the transition to a fleet of more fuel-efficient cars and the use of public transportation.

Furthermore, the Centrale has demanded a greater global tax contribution from businesses, as well as a review of tax incentives for businesses. Finally, the CSQ has strongly recommended the implementation of measures proposed by the Godbout Commission to increase taxes on capital gains and to fight more vigorously against tax avoidance and tax evasion.

ARE THE DICE STACKED?

On the first day of hearings, Finance Minister Carlos Leitão announced his intention to move ahead with the tax cuts and increase the QST. The statement gave a start to CSQ president, Louise Chabot: “This position once again shows how the Couillard government’s parliamentary commissions are nothing more than a facade and that the decisions have already been made behind closed doors, without any real debate on taxation. However, Québec must take the means necessary to adequately and fairly finance its public services and social programs. The same goes for safeguarding the social balance and maintaining principles of equality and fairness that distinguish Québec from the rest.”
THE CSQ AT THE TIME OF RESPONSE UNIONISM

CATHERINE GAUTHIER Chief editor

“It’s time to act, engage and resist. Our actions and our responses will equal the level of government attacks!”, said Louise Chabot in her address to the CSQ Congress last June. Reelected as president of the organization, she begins her second mandate at a time she believes is historic for Québec.

“Austerity measures are shaking the Québec model, its social balance, and its principles of equality and fairness. Under the pretext of an urgent need to achieve a zero deficit, elected officials are decreasing and destructuring the state by abolishing services and programs, and cutting budgets to prepare for privatization of our public services. Not to mention major anti-union attacks that aim to weaken the voice of workers. It’s quite something!”, she says.

UNIONISM MUST RENEW ITSELF

In this context, the theme of the 41st CSQ Congress, Agissons ! Ripostons !, was born naturally. “I’ve always preferred a proposal-oriented type of unionism, and it’s the path we’ve chosen at the CSQ. However, when our proposals and solutions are not heard by the government, we need to take to the streets and put pressure for our views to be heard.”

This response unionism is part of the cultural shift within the organization. “We have the duty to review our practices, transform the culture of our organization, and prioritize our actions. Though all of our causes are right, we must focus on the essential in order for our members to take ownership of the union project.”

THE ROAD TO UNION RENEWAL

Over the last three years, the CSQ and 2000 union members throughout Québec reflected on the question of union renewal. The goal was to better understand the vision shared by members of their organizations and of the union movement, as well as get to know their expectations of the CSQ.

“The Congress was the result of an approach that was very productive in reinforcing our capacity for action. Why? Because we did not go about it in an institutional manner. We launched an appeal to members and they responded in great numbers, offering food for thought and proposing solutions.”

The challenge now is to transform these into aspirations and directions. Louise Chabot is clear: it does not mean simply putting the propositions voted at the Congress on paper and determining how to go about implementing each one. “It is all of us, together with members, that we will achieve a great part of this work.”
TWO OTHER BIG PRIORITIES
Union strategies in a context of austerity were also debated at the Congress. “Currently, our governments, in both Ottawa and Québec, are developing anti-state policies, limiting any form of social dialogue and attempting, just like the right, to make us believe that unions hurt society and are motivated solely by self-interest. Yet, the fights we have led and gains we have made over the years have benefited society as a whole.”

Louise Chabot recalls that the union movement always has been and continues to be a defence against government decisions harmful to the population and the common good. She emphasizes that in the current context, unions must maintain and strengthen their alliances with other groups in civil society.

Negotiations for public sector collective agreements are another priority. For Louise Chabot, there is not doubt: contemptuous and unacceptable offers from employers, in addition to austerity measures, require a strong response from the unions. Mobilization and union action carried out this fall are therefore essential.

THE SPECIAL BILL, INEVITABLE?
The threat of a special bill is always looming when the conditions of work and practice of state personnel are negotiated, since the employer is also the legislator. But this should in no way break the resolve of workers to obtain a satisfactory negotiated settlement, believes Louise Chabot.

“Our objective remains a negotiated and satisfactory agreement. Negotiation is a fundamental right. The right to strike is also a legitimate right related to the right to organize. This allows for a balance of power. We have a duty to negotiate in good faith and to present alternative solutions. We must also determine what we feel is unacceptable and increase pressure all the way up to a strike, if necessary. But between the two extremes, there is a whole spectrum of pressure tactics.”

Louise Chabot reminds us that there is no direct link between striking and imposing a special bill. “Such a bill requires an emergency situation. But, the need for a balanced budget does not meet this requirement. If the government has already decided that it would legislate (which would mean that it was not negotiating in good faith), it would do so whether there was a strike or not. If this should occur, we would then reevaluate our strategy and make a decision according to our expectations and objectives. What is certain, is that the fight won’t be an easy one, making it essential to ensure a balance of power sufficient to make some headway. And, we need to remember that obtaining a satisfactory negotiated agreement is always possible.”

AN IMPORTANT FIGHT TO DELIVER
How are we going to stop this massive attempt to demolish the Québec model? Louise Chabot is convinced we can do it if we strongly believe that the fight is worthwhile, that we have solid union and social alliances to lead the fight, and that we have the capacity to inform and sensitize the population.

“I am convinced that we can win the fight and preserve the common good.”

“It’s what motivates me to continue. I am convinced that we can win the fight and preserve the common good. Growing austerity measures, which the population never agreed to, added to contemptible employer offers to state workers, arouse anger and instill in a large number of people the desire to fight back.”

TRUE DEMOCRACY
The president of the CSQ wraps up by reminding us that as union members and citizens, we don’t have the right to stand by and do nothing in the face of the destruction of the common good by a government that, once elected, gave itself a mandate other than the one it had promised during the election campaign.

“Democracy is more than exercising our right to vote every four years and then letting the government do what it wants. That’s a parody of democracy. True democracy means continuing to work, even after voting, in the public arena, in every forum, and if necessary, in the streets, to remind the government that we do not live in a dictatorship and that it has to consider the opinion and desire of the citizens who constitute the 400,000 unionized members of the Common Front,” says Louise Chabot.
The words are those of Jean-Noël Grenier, professor in the Department of Industrial Relations at Laval University and researcher with the Interuniversity Research Centre on Globalization and Work (CRIMT).

At the 41st Congress of the CSQ, he was awarded the Prix Mérite CSQ 2015. He was deeply moved on accepting this aware. “It validates my choice. It is important, because it is awarded by the only union organization that is entirely dedicated to the defence and the promotion of public services. These services form the societal connections that make a society work.”

FROM DROPOUT TO ACTIVIST UNIVERSITY PROFESSOR

Jean-Noël Grenier came from a modest family, his mother a seamstress and his father a fisherman and forestry worker in Gaspésie who left school after grade 6. A dropout who resumed his studies through adult education, he is proud to present himself as the pure product of a public education. “It was the teachers, the professionals and the support staff who gave me the desire to carry on, who encouraged me to go back to school. I have a doctorate thanks to public education.”

Today, he insists, “you must not be afraid to take your demands into the public arena, because they are just, fair demands. Whether we’re talking about early childhood, education, health or social services, you are there! What you do must be valued. There is nothing wrong with demanding better working conditions to make the public services better. Without the people who provide public services, we are nothing, we are not a society.”

Acknowledging that the current era is fuelled by austerity and hyper neoliberalism, he ripped into the language of budgetary restraint and the purely financial reasoning of the establishment. “This government is promoting the deconstruction of the public services, individualism, competition between everyone and impoverishment.”
His message was clear: “The people who are in power come from the financial establishment, which is far removed from the reality of populations and their needs. They have eliminated bodies of consultation and dialogue in Québec to introduce purely administrative, technocratic bodies, so that they have distanced themselves from the population. They use divisive discourse to gain acceptance for their downsizing. They pit union members against the middle class, union members against users, and users against the middle class. Their discourse consists of asserting that unions are making the demands and using the methods of another era. But it is their discourse that dates from another era. You are essential!”

WITH MEMBERS, SEIZING THE WINDOW OF OPPORTUNITY

Jean-Noël Grenier is convinced that Québec society is experiencing the winds of change. Union renewal is underway and this is exciting. “You are engaging in a more dynamic union movement. Your efforts are bringing you and your members closer together. A union is meaningless without its members.”

In his view, the CSQ can rise to this challenge and modernize its practices, specifically to make them more relevant to the realities of the younger generations. “Engaging in a process of renewal involves uncertainty. There is no real roadmap or established route. I applaud the CSQ for committing to such a process, for it is a demanding one.”

He observed that new forms of mobilization in workplaces promote the work of members and change the public’s perspective. “Such actions are striking because they present your day-to-day reality and your work. It’s effective! In 2014, you had reason to feel discouraged by a public that was against you. In 2015, the public has turned against the government. This is a major shift; people no longer believe the government when it says it is not affecting the public services.”

That is why he called on the unions and members of the CSQ to be proud of their fight to achieve social progress, justice, fairness and solidarity. “You give us hope! Your fight is just! It is one of resistance and action. You are fighting this battle on behalf of all Quebecers. You should pat yourselves on the back.”

A NEW EXECUTIVE COUNCIL FOR THE CSQ

At the 41st Congress of the CSQ, the 1,000 delegates elected the five members of the Executive Council.

Louise Chabot was re-elected President, the office that she has held since 2012. She has also served as third Vice President (2000 to 2003) and first Vice President (2003 to 2012) of the CSQ. She was also the former President of the Union québécoise des infirmières et infirmiers (UQII-CSQ) from 1988 to 2000.

Sonia Éthier was elected first Vice President. A former President of the Syndicat de l’enseignement du Bas-Richelieu (FSE-CSQ), the special education teacher has been a union activist for close to 28 years.

Line Camerlain was re-elected second Vice President, the office that she has held since 2012. Coordinator at the Syndicat de Champlain (FSE-CSQ) from 2005 to 2012, the secondary school science teacher sat on the Executive Council of this union for six years.

Mario Beauchemin was elected third Vice President. Since 2005, he has served as the President of the Fédération des enseignantes et enseignants de cégep (FEC-CSQ). A history teacher at Cégep de Sainte-Foy, he was also active with the local Executive Council of his union for four years.

Daniel B. Lafrenière was re-elected Secretary-Treasurer, a position he has held since 2009. He also served as second Vice President from 2006 to 2009. An attendant for students with disabilities, he was the Vice President of the Fédération du personnel de soutien scolaire (FPSS-CSQ) from 1998 to 2006.

THEY STEPPED DOWN

Congress paid tribute to two outgoing Executive Council members, Marc Nantel, first Vice President since 2012, and Pierre Jobin, third Vice President since 2009, commending them for their activism, their contribution and their profound commitment to the CSQ. They have both chosen to take a well-deserved retirement.

Would you like to know more about the 41st CSQ Congress? Visit congres2015.lacsq.org.
As we were going to press on October 5, 2015, mobilization in the ranks of the CSQ had shown no signs of slowing down. The members had just voted 81.8% to approve a mandate of six days of rotating strikes, to be conducted as part of the Common Front, locally or throughout the province, bearing in mind the climate of negotiations. The vote not only sent the government a very clear signal, it also strengthened our bargaining power in securing a negotiated, satisfactory agreement.

“At this point in the bargaining process, we should have made much more progress, and had the employer party truly wanted to engage in a dialogue, we would be on the verge of concluding an agreement. Our members do not necessarily want to strike, but the message they have given us is that they are prepared to take to the streets in large numbers, if need be,” stated Louise Chabot, at a press conference.

The subsequent union assemblies had record attendance levels. What’s more, members engaged in unprecedented mobilization. The level of outrage about the government’s contemptuous attitude is very high among union ranks but also among the general public.

“Every day I meet people who express outrage over the government’s attitude. It is not only public-sector workers who are subjected to austerity measures. The current negotiations will have a direct impact on the public, and so it is impossible to stand idly by when the government stubbornly persists in destroying our network of public services,” Louise Chabot explained.

For months, mobilizing actions have continued to multiply all throughout Québec. Through these bold gestures, CSQ members have reminded the government that they refuse to be impoverished, that they reject the non-recognition of jobs in the education, health and social services networks and that they will never allow the employer party to undermine the gains that make a difference in public-sector jobs, such as the Government and Public Employees Retirement Plan (RREGOP). CSQ News presents an overview of some of the many mobilizing actions since late August 2015.
“WE ARE BEARING THE WEIGHT OF OUR SCHOOL SYSTEM!”

Members of the Fédération des syndicats de l’enseignement (FSE-CSQ), from the Fédération du personnel de soutien scolaire (FPSS-CSQ) and the Fédération des professionnelles et professionnels de l’éducation du Québec (FPPE-CSQ) demonstrated on August 25, in front of the Montréal offices of the Premier of Québec. The demonstrators reminded Philippe Couillard that they have been literally bearing the weight of the school system for many years. They also denounced the dismantling of Québec’s public education system.

CSQ MOBILIZED IN FRONT OF CONSEIL DU TRÉSOR OFFICES

The delegates of the General Negotiations Council demonstrated early in the morning on September 2 in front of the offices of the Conseil du trésor, in Québec City, to remind the Minister, Martin Coiteux, that state employees take their bargaining process very seriously. “We’re more mobilized than ever! We have no intention of allowing our working conditions to deteriorate any further!” said Louise Chabot, President of the CSQ.

A HOT FALL SEMESTER IN THE CEGEPS

The members of the Fédération du personnel de soutien de l’enseignement supérieur (FPSES-CSQ), the Fédération des enseignantes et enseignants de cégep (FEC-CSQ) and the Fédération des professionnelles et professionnels de collège (FPPC-CSQ) also mobilized to denounce the government’s unacceptable offers and the cutbacks to the postsecondary education network.
A FORMIDABLE PRESENCE!

Over 2,000 teachers and support staff members from the FSE-CSQ and the FPSS-CSQ gathered on September 20 at the Festival Western de Saint-Tite. They held a corn roast on the grounds of the village church. While enjoying the event, they vouched for the fact that they are bearing the weight of the school system and that sometimes, working in schools or centres is like a full-fledged rodeo. They also denounced education cuts.

A HISTORIC DEMONSTRATION

Over 150,000 people took to the streets of Montréal on October 3 to support the demands of the 400,000 public-service employees currently negotiating the renewal of their collective agreements. In solidarity with the workers of the Common Front, they sent a strong and clear message condemning difficult negotiations and the dismantling of the public services.

“WE WILL NOT BE PUSHED AROUND!”

The members of the Fédération de la Santé du Québec (FSQ-CSQ) rally against unacceptable employer demands for clawbacks. If they were applied they would set back the working conditions of healthcare workers by 60 years.

“ENOUGH IS ENOUGH!”

Members of the Syndicat des technicien(ne)s et professionnel(le)s de Lanaudière (CSQ) demonstrating at the Centre Hospitalier Régional de Lanaudière.
A NETWORK ATTACKED ON ALL FRONTS

LISE GOULET CSQ Health and Social Services Advisor

Where will the Barrette reform stop? After a major reorganization of the public health network resulting from the merger of several institutions last April, and unprecedented budget and job cuts, the minister has now announced his willingness to legalize fees billed by clinics and review the basket of insured services. It he wanted to privatize the health system, he wouldn’t go about it any other way...

“The Barrette reform is a direct attack on our public health system. Under the pretext of fiscal restraint and efficiency, the minister has abandoned our principles of universality and fairness in matters of health. We will not let the government destroy our healthcare model this way!” warned Claire Montour and Claude de Montigny, President of the Fédération de la Santé du Québec (FSQ-CSQ) and President of the Fédération des syndicats de la santé et des services sociaux (F4S-CSQ), respectively.

CLOSELY MONITORED SITUATIONS

REORGANIZATION OF THE HEALTH NETWORK

Since April 1, 2015, restructuring of the health network is in full swing. With institutional mergers, nominating new boards of directors, granting new management positions, and reviewing responsibilities and supervisory ratios, as provided by the bill, the new governance is being implemented very quickly. Why?

“Last winter, Minister Barrette stated that services would not be affected by the bill and that all service points would remain in place. Our minister is a smooth talker. We know that services to the public are being affected by the austerity measures implemented by his government, which was also confirmed by the Québec Ombudsperson. He shouldn’t take us for idiots,” warns Claire Montour.

And so, although management and accountability agreements signed by the CEOs of these new institutions include measures to “ensure optimal maintenance of services to the population during the restructuring period,” many impending changes are already creating serious concerns.

The ministry’s social services directorate, for example, is currently reviewing several service offerings, notably support of autonomy for the elderly, those with physical and intellectual disabilities, young people, as well as for those with mental health and addiction issues.

In addition, from August 2014, the government mandated the Institut national d’excellence en santé et services sociaux (INESSS) to review the relevance of certain services offered. The INESSS’s 14 themes must determine guidelines that will help institutions define the care and services relevant to physical health and identify those that no longer are. The results won’t be released before several months.

As part of its mandate to evaluate the performance of the health and social services system, the Health and Welfare Commissioner must conduct public consultations on the basket of insured services in order to identify the values and priorities that could guide future choices in matters of health.

Yet, despite the work underway and without providing any guidelines, the Ministry of Health and Social Services has asked institutions to review the relevance of physical healthcare and services in order to reduce program spending by $150 million as of this year. In fact, more than $450 million in budget cuts must be additionally made by April 1, 2016.

“Of course, this fiscal restraint will translate into reduced services and deterioration in the conditions of practice. Some managers admit that impending retirements and job vacancies will allow them to review their service offerings. How can we talk about equal access and healthy governance in this context? It’s unacceptable!” says Claire Montour.

“the minister has abandoned our principles of universality and fairness in matters of health”

DEVELOPING FAMILY MEDICINE GROUPS AND SUPER CLINICS

Introduced on November 28, 2014, Bill 20, which aims to promote access to family and specialized medicine, constitutes another major component of the Barrette reform. Although all network stakeholders agree on the need to improve access to primary care, notably by promoting interdisciplinary collaboration, the heated debates that made the headlines confirm the existence of numerous issues, points of view, and interests.

The signature of an agreement in principle on May 25, 2015, between the minister and the Fédération des médecins omnipraticiens du Québec (FMOQ), has prevented forced patient quotas and financial penalties provided by the bill. However, the physicians have committed to reaching certain targets (registration and follow-up of 85% of the population of Québec, attendance rates of 80% for family physicians with their registered clientele) from now to December 31, 2017, at the risk of seeing the bill imposed to them. The agreement includes the use of performance indicators, better coverage for the territory (services in proximity), and the creation of a favorable environment that will ease, apparently, interprofessional teamwork.

The main lines of the new management framework for family medicine groups, made public last May 26, are consistent with the above: resources that are proportional to the number of patients registered (the money will follow the patient), extended hours of operation, higher attendance rates, expanded range of services offered to encourage interprofessional teamwork. Therefore, “improving access to health services is more than a question of quotas and attendance for physicians. Physicians admit the need to revise certain terms that affect interprofessional teamwork, which is interesting. But, how far are they willing to go?” wonders the FSQ-CSQ president.

For the Collège des médecins du Québec, “collaboration, communication, sharing of information, and an understanding of the roles of different actors must, from now on, guide the practices of interprofessional teams.” But beyond these principles, what will happen to the actual deployment of collective prescriptions and the practice of delegated activities?

The implementation of new clinical and organizational projects, resulting from the restructuring of the health and social services network, should be an opportunity for a global overview of the roles and responsibilities of various professionals that make up the care teams.

“As such, we will continue to demand greater professional autonomy and working conditions that will enable our members to provide better access to quality services,” insist the two unionists.

LEGALIZATION OF INCIDENTAL FEES

The abusive – and often illegal – charging of incidental fees in clinics is unfortunately not a new or rare occurrence. Every year in Québec, $100 million in fees are charged to patients. As of June 30, 2015, 113 physicians, optometrists, and medical clinics were targeted by a class action lawsuit. The increase in these fees creates profound inequalities.

“The difficulties with access to a physician and certain medical services puts physicians in a position of power with regards to patients who are ready to pay, to deprive themselves, or take on debt for access to services that are otherwise difficult to obtain.” Tolerating this situation results in normalizing the act of paying for necessary medical care that is, in principle, covered by the Régie de l’assurance maladie du Québec (RAMQ).

Under the pretext of wanting to prevent this abuse, last June, Minister Barrette announced his intention to amend Bill 20 to monitor the direct invoicing of patients. By doing so, Gaétan Barrette legitimizes the practice. Worse, these changes would create a two-tier system that is prohibited under the Canada Health Act.

In fact, Health Canada is very clear on this issue: the law prohibits charging fees for insured medical services. By remaining on its course to privatizing care, Québec could lose millions of dollars in federal transfer payments, which is certainly not in the interest of the population.

Contrary to what the minister says, opposition to the normalization of fees charged to patients is unprecedented. In a press conference given last September 14, numerous citizen, community, union, and medical organizations clearly expressed to the minister that the proposed amendment was completely unacceptable.

2 Agreement in principle between the FMOQ and the MSS to increase and improve access to primary medical services.

3 Improvements to technical and administrative support, access to electronic medical files, improved access to specialized consultations and technical platforms, review of the concepts “himself” and “interprofessional work;” simplification of administrative requests, adaptation of agreements, etc.

A RESPONSE IS ALREADY IN THE WORKS

Because it takes place in a context of austerity, budget cuts, and especially, a decrease in the social role of the state, the CSQ and its two health and social services federations are convinced that the proposed reform will not improve access to, and the quality of, services offered to the population of Québec, even if it is the objective of the new bill. “We are watching the situation closely,” warns Claire Montour. “The minister’s pretences will be the subject of great scrutiny. At the beginning of the summer, FSQ-CSQ member-unions sent an access to information request to the management of newly integrated centres. The goal was to obtain an overview of the situation of access to health and social services as of May 31, 2015. An analysis of this information will allow us to determine the situation over time and to support our actions and demands in the right moment.”

As for the CSQ, it is trying to obtain the new management framework of family medicine groups (which was still not available at the time of writing), as well as the recent management and accountability agreements that the public institutions would have reached with the minister, and the action plans that should ensue from them.

Fighting back against the Barrette reform

Are you concerned with the quality and safety of services and care? Have you witnessed problematic situations in your work environment? Are you or your loved-ones experiencing problems with access? Help us uncover the deviations and problems created by the new reform. Contact your union.

A better understanding of upcoming changes is critical. Will the government be true to the transparency it boasts about—or will it continue to control the information? The facts won’t lie…and we will act accordingly.

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Dominique Gagné, Pascale Pruneau and François Thériault agreed to momentarily put their work on hold to participate in the production of an ad for the Holding it together (L’école à bout de bras) campaign, which has been running on TV and radio for several weeks. CSQ News met with them during filming to get their impressions.

Dominique Gagné is a guidance counsellor at the Commission scolaire des Grandes-Seigneuries and a union delegate. She loves her work. “When you choose a career like mine, it’s because you want to help. You want to make a difference in the lives of young people by helping them move forward in their education,” she says.

The metaphor of holding schools together is a strong one and a theme she completely relates to. “I think that my coworkers will see themselves in the message since the ad reflects their daily lives. I also hope it will reach the parents, because our education system needs their support to force the government to fix the situation and reinvest in public schools,” deplores Dominique Gagné.

“...Austerity translates into greater job insecurity for workers, fewer services for students, and higher fees for parents.”

Pascale Pruneau teaches grade 3 at the Jacques-Hétu music school in Trois-Rivières. According to her, the impact of budget cuts is huge. “Being a teacher is demanding. You have to see to everyone all the time. It’s hard enough meeting the needs of struggling students in a class of 20 to 22. Adding more students to a class, as the government is proposing, will make the task even more difficult,” she says.

To manage, she brings work home like thousands of other teachers across Québec. Her family often reproach her for it, but for her, when you work in the field of education, your work is never really done.

François Thériault has been a caretaker at École de la Pommeraie for five years. He has been directly impacted by austerity measures. He was replaced and his pay was cut by one day every two weeks. For him, austerity translates into greater job insecurity for workers, fewer services for students, and higher fees for parents.

He enthusiastically agreed to participate in the ad because he believes that defending public schools is a fundamental cause. “Our youth are the future of Québec. Every society that aspires for growth must invest in its young people,” he says.

“Education personnel are committed to their work. The government has always counted on that, knowing that we would continue to do a good job despite deteriorating conditions. But this time, we might have reached our limit. This is the main message of the ad,” he says.

For these three individuals deeply committed to their jobs, the new movement of human chains organized by parents is a source of comfort and hope. They hope that the Je protège mon école publique movement will boost their own mobilization efforts and add to the points argued in negotiations to make the government, which is obsessed with balancing the budget and reducing taxes, listen to reason. Let’s hope so, because who knows how much longer education personnel will be able to continue holding schools together as they have been for a long time now? /
At the start of the school year, the CSQ and its federations of higher education met with the new Minister of Education, Higher Education and Research, François Blais. Their objective was two-fold: to clarify the minister’s intentions and explain the consequences of cutbacks in Québec cégeps and universities.

Though the Minister of Education, a former dean of the Université Laval, understands the issues in higher education better than his predecessor, Yves Bolduc, the differences end there. François Blais clearly seems to be continuing in the direction of his predecessor.

AN OBSESSION WITH JOB TRAINING

Minister Blais and the entire Couillard government seem obsessed with job training. Therefore, political representatives of the CSQ, Fédération des enseignantes et enseignants de cégep (FEC-CSQ), the Fédération du personnel professionnel des collèges (FPPC-CSQ) and the Fédération du personnel de soutien de l’enseignement supérieur (FPSES-CSQ) were not surprised to learn that any future fiscal room in education will be channelled into the area of vocational and technical training. The minister also seems fixated on another idea, the dual training system.
However, despite a few pilot projects, the dual system is at the moment more of a trendy idea than a coherent and well-organized project. What role will professional and support workers play between businesses and colleges? Will teachers have to teach in businesses half the time? So many questions with no answers.

The minister has recognized from the outset that his project is not clearly defined. He promises to create a round table with the unions to explore the dual system and its application at the college level.

The “GERMAN MODEL” IMPORTED INTO QUÉBEC

Inspired by the German experience, the dual training model advocates for greater alternation between classroom teaching and time spent in the workplace. It also promotes strong dialogue between the unions, businesses and teaching institutions.

In an interview, François Blais said he was inspired by this model and wants approximately 50% of training to be done in businesses.

THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE DEMERS REPORT

Minister Blais seems sensitive to the situation of cégeps in outlying areas. He wants to improve student mobility. He is also seeking a formula to improve collaboration between urban cégeps and regional ones. This being said, there seems to be no real desire to move things along, and the Rouillé committee, which is in charge of implementing the recommendations of the Demers report, seems to be moving in slow motion.

The CSQ, FEC-CSQ, FPPC-CSQ, and FPSES-CSQ have shared their concerns about the future of general education and potential new college-level diplomas and certifications. The minister was reassuring, saying he had no intention of changing the general education program. As for new certifications, he simply said that his ministry was not working on anything at the moment.

STUDENT SERVICES AFFECTED: OH REALLY?

The CSQ and its federations of higher education concluded their meeting by demonstrating to the minister the many consequences of budget cuts, particularly on professional and support workers. Their message was clear: there is nowhere left to cut and student services have already been significantly reduced. A situation that is even more worrisome as the administration of several cégeps have announced more cuts in the future.

The minister was visibly annoyed and did not seem to understand the impact of cutbacks on cégeps. For him, the cuts mean nothing more than the layoff of a few temporary employees and a decrease in working hours for others. Clearly, the government’s contempt for the education sector seems boundless.
THOUSANDS OF DOLLARS FOR HUNDREDS OF HCPS

FÉLIX CAUCHY-CHAREST CSQ Communications Advisor

After more than seven and a half years of waiting, several hundred home childcare providers (HCP) indemnified by the CSST for preventive leave or an employment injury, between November 1, 2008 and November 30, 2010, have won retroactive increases in their indemnities. In some cases, lump sum payments may be as high as $6,000.

The FIPEQ-CSQ and the CSQ are particularly proud of the conclusion of this agreement. They initiated discussion in January 2013. At the time, a project was tabled with the Ministère de la Famille, and this was the project that served as the basis for the agreement.

However, cases that arose after December 1, 2010 have yet to be settled. That is why the two organizations are making every effort to find a fair, just solution for these members as well.

POLICY REVERSAL REQUIRED

The FIPEQ-CSQ is keeping up the pressure on the Minister of Families. In addition to recovering tax credits from the private sector and the federal contribution, it is calling for:

- an accelerated increase in the number of reduced contribution spaces in childcare centres and in regulated home childcare, based on an assessment of the real needs of parents in each of the regions;
- a freeze on the parental contribution;
- a moratorium on the granting of spaces in unsubsidized private childcare;
- a guarantee to make subsidized spaces more financially advantageous for all families;
- reinforcement of fiscal monitoring of the childcare tax credit.

We’re preparing for the future!

RENÉ COCKAERTS FIPEQ-CSQ Advisor

The Fédération des intervenantes en petite enfance du Québec (FIPEQ-CSQ) held its very first congress last June. Today, it is stronger and better equipped to carry on its battle to secure decent working conditions and quality, accessible and adequately funded educational childcare.

Having adopted its major orientations, revised its statutes and by-laws and defined its new organizational model, the Federation is now in a position to conduct its affairs in an enriched and representative way. The congress marked an important stage in building a collective identity shared by all members and in strengthening the solidarity needed for the battles that remain to be fought.

A RENEWED EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

From left to right: Lucie Lefebvre, Secretary, France Bachand, Treasurer, Kathleen Courville, President, Dominik Michaud, 2nd Vice President, Valérie Grenon, 1st Vice President.

Don’t miss three videos featuring childcare providers enthusiastically sharing their educational experience with children, as well as the measures they take to provide quality service. Visit lacsq.org/mediatheque
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For more information on the protocol CSQ-Fonds, contact the local representative (LR) in your workplace, your local union or Langis Beaulieu, coordinator – CSQ at 1 800 361-5017.
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