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Unless a significant shift occurs in the Couillard government’s vision, the conclusion of their first year in power is worrisome. “L’austérité à demeure” (Permanent austerity), the title of Michel David’s editorial following the provincial budget, clearly illustrates the government’s plan, which aims to undermine the essential duties of the State, that is, education and health. In fact, its prime champion, Treasury Board President, Martin Coiteux, has been given carte blanche to proceed with this most significant reengineering of the Québec State. As a result, we are witnessing the destruction of our public services and our social programs.

Though our repeated requests for social dialogue continue to fall upon deaf ears, we cannot be distracted by a right that is intensely determined to lead and repeat an anti-union and anti-social discourse in the public eye. A discourse that depicts public sector workers as the privileged few, that sets union against non-union workers, public against private...

For this government, society or community are concepts that no longer exist: it governs individuals, “tax payers”, and to hear them talk, State employees are not considered as such. Within this ideology of the right, why worry about the fate of the weak? Of the middle class? The realities of women? Of families? The future of our children? The problem is not with individuals, but with the State itself. That’s the logic of the liberal government. The liberals are liberating themselves from the State!

WHAT DO WE DO? HOW DO WE FIGHT BACK?

When faced with a government that strongly believes that the State is not the solution to problems, we must rise and protest. Solidarity, demonstrations and alliances are the best medicine for the ills created by these neoliberal politicians.

The Collectif refusons l’austérité, which our organization helped initiate, is highly relevant, continuing to fight against multiple cuts and rate increases in public services.

Furthermore, the national Common Front negotiations of our collective agreements, which expired on March 31, 2015, constitute another important opportunity to act and promote our Avec nous, c’est possible! project for quality public services and working conditions worthy of our jobs and professions.

Finally, our Congress, to be held in June under the theme Agissons ! Ripostons !, will be the perfect opportunity to engage in union renewal, strengthening our legitimacy and capacity for action. As well, we will put forward union strategies applicable to a context of austerity to reaffirm the critical role unions play in a democracy to ensure a level playing field and a more just society.

Louise Chabot
President
Austerity

Budget 2015–2016

PUBLIC SERVICES, FAR FROM BEING A PRIORITY

ERIK BOUCHARD-BOULIANNE  CSQ Economist

During the election campaign, the Québec Liberal Party (PLQ) promised a balanced budget arrived at with revenues from greater economic growth. Yet, the budget presented in March revealed a whole other strategy: severe budget cuts in 2015-2016, affecting the education, health and social services networks, as well as other ministries and organizations. CSQ News presents an overview of a budget that will have serious consequences on public services.

UNKEPT PROMISES

“Economic growth will allow us to better finance our public services, achieve and maintain a balanced budget, reduce the weight of our fiscal debt for future generations, and ease the heavy tax burden carried by the middle class.” Philippe Couillard made this statement during the last election campaign.

At the time, the PLQ’s financial framework projected annual budget increases of 4% in health, 3.5% in education and a freeze on other ministries and organizations, in order to safeguard, according to the PLQ, the fundamental responsibilities of the State: health and education. If the Couillard government had kept its promise, an additional $561 and $835 million would be granted to education and health, respectively. These amounts would prevent the significant cuts that will soon affect our networks.

PUBLIC SERVICES AFFECTED

Committed to balancing the budget at all costs, the government has made the decision, for a second year, to significantly cut in public services. These cuts will be felt throughout the education and health networks, as well as in other ministries and organizations. The impact will be even more significant as the cuts come after several lean years. It has become virtually impossible to cut in the unessential, making public services the most vulnerable.

EDUCATION AND HIGHER EDUCATION: THE BLOODLETTING CONTINUES

In the education sector, school board budgets have increased 0.2% overall, which is nowhere near enough to cover natural cost increases (inflation, changing clientele, etc.). According to the Fédération des commissions scolaires du Québec, an extra $350 million in cuts are being imposed on them. These additional cuts mean that school boards have suffered over $1 billion in cutbacks since 2010.

In higher education, operating budgets in CÉGEPs and universities have been reduced by 1.2% and 3.8%, respectively. As with the school boards, this is in addition to cutbacks from previous years.

Expected budget growth and the PLQ’s election promises

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ministries</th>
<th>Budget 2015-2016</th>
<th>Election promises</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Education, Higher Education and Scientific Research</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
<td>3.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health and Social Services</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
<td>4 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other ministries</td>
<td>-1.1%</td>
<td>0 %</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


A balanced budget was supposed to be achieved through economic growth generated by the liberal party’s return to power. The party also promised the creation of 250,000 jobs over five years. However, the most recent budget shows that the government now expects job growth of only slightly more than 35,000 per year for the next two years. This is in spite of unforeseen, yet favourable economic conditions, such as the drop in oil prices and the Canadian dollar.

TOWARDS INCREASED PRIVATIZATION IN HEALTH CARE

The health care network will also undergo serious cutbacks. Whereas the health and social services budget increased an average of 5.6% from 2003 to 2004, and from 2013 to 2014, the Couillard government is now limiting increases to 1.4%, that is, $460 million.

This increase is clearly inadequate considering the growing needs of the population and the fact that approximately two thirds of the budget will go to physicians’ salaries (an additional $300 million). In this context, there is reason to worry about increased privatization, reduced quality of care, and deinsurance of services that are currently a collective responsibility.

EARLY CHILDCARE IS NOT IMMUNE

In the early childcare sector, the network of early childcare centres (CPE) and coordinating offices are no exception and will have to deal with cuts of over $50 million.

OTHER SIGNIFICANT CUTS

In other ministries and organizations, cuts might be even more painful as they have already been subjected to budget cuts for years for the sake of preserving health and education.

In 2015-2016, the budget of the ministère du Développement durable, de l’Environnement et de la Lutte contre les changements climatiques will be subjected to a decrease of 3%, bringing their total budget cutback to 30% since 2004, considering inflation.

Finally, Télé-Québec is yet another example of an organization affected by the government’s austerity measures. The organization will have to deal with a new cut of $3 million this year, the equivalent of 5% of its budget.

ALL THIS FOR THAT...

It is clear that the sum of these cuts will affect public services offered to the Québec population. But why is the government imposing all of these budget cuts? Is it to finally pass a balanced budget (the famous zero deficit)? Of course, but it also wants to decrease taxes on individuals and businesses, and accelerate repayment of the debt.

The budget illustrates the government’s game plan for decreasing taxes. As of 2017, it intends on reducing tax contributions by individuals and businesses by over $1 billion per year.

The government also intends on accelerating repayment of the debt by increasing payments to the Generations Fund from $1.25 billion in 2014-2015 to $3.5 billion in 2019-2020, at the expense of other programs and services.

The intention of the government’s choices is not only to achieve and maintain a balanced budget. The second Leitão budget confirms that in addition to a balanced budget, tax decreases and debt repayment are now a priority over adequately financing public services. The people of Québec and State employees will feel the magnitude of these cuts over the coming months.
Austerity measures: inefficient and dangerous

LISE GOULET CSQ Health and Social Services Advisor

Privatized care, reduced access to services, and the deteriorating health of those most affected by austerity measures: this is the result of the many structural reforms and measures aimed at decreasing public expenses in most countries in the European Union. Yet, the positive effects of investing in health and education on a country’s economic growth are largely recognized.

Despite this consensus, and in the name of achieving financial goals and an ideology that aims to reduce the social role of the State, several European countries made massive cuts in their health care budgets by decreasing expenses, which ran from 4% to 5% in past years, to 0.1% and 0.5% in 2010-2011. Worse still, from 2009 to 2012, some countries significantly decreased their public health expenses, notably Greece (-9.6%), Ireland (-6%), Portugal (-3.5%), and Spain (-2.6%).

EXPENSES THAT BENEFIT ECONOMIC GROWTH

For Antoine Math, researcher at the Institut de Recherches Économiques et Sociales (IRES) in France, there is no question: austerity policies in the health care sector are economically inefficient and disastrous from a social and health perspective.

According to Mr. Math, the financial objective of decreasing public deficits should not target expenses in health care, especially not its public component. In fact, in difficult times, it becomes increasingly necessary to invest more. His conclusion is based on a review he conducted of various studies addressing this question.¹

One of these studies is particularly insightful. Conducted with 25 European Union countries between 1995 and 2007,² it shows that social welfare measures and sums invested in health and education are public expenses that have the greatest positive impact on economic growth.

In fact, every euro invested in social welfare can result in an increase of 2.8 euros in gross domestic product (GDP), whereas in health and education, these increases can reach 4.3 and 8.4 euros, respectively. The opposite might also be true. Cutting in these expenses would have a significant negative effect.

Actually, in addition to improving worker productivity, these social investments would result in less capital lost to outside economies (activity relocation, distribution of dividends, tax havens, etc.).

AUSTERTY, A CHOICE WITH DISASTROUS CONSEQUENCES

Furthermore, the deterioration in several health indicators in countries the hardest hit by austerity measures is worrisome. David Stuckler and Sanjay Basu, social science researchers and experts in health policies, compared the health consequences of different fiscal policies adopted during the financial crisis.³ Their conclusion is unequivocal: “Crises and recessions are not at fault for resultant declines in health and health care systems, but rather it is the decisions made in reaction to these crises that are to blame.”

Several analyses also attest to the negative consequences of austerity measures on health care services:

• Deterioration in the quality of care;
• Prolonged wait times (surgeries or treatment for illnesses);
• Massive phenomena of refusal of care due to inaccessibility to services, delays or related costs;
• Reduced or dissolved social safety nets for minorities and the most vulnerable members of the population;
• Diminished prevention efforts.

The issue is therefore not trivial. According to researchers Stuckler and Basu, economic policies determine “who will be exposed to the greatest health risks”.

GREECE: A SADLY EVOCATIVE EXAMPLE

In May 2010, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) offered Greece a rescue package with the usual conditions: privatize public organizations and infrastructures, and slash social programs. Finally, the health and social services budget was cut by 50%. And all without a public referendum, as the population had demanded.

The result? A significant increase in the cost of health and social services:

- Access to a physician becomes very difficult;
- Malaria makes a resurgence, the first since 1970;
- An epidemic of human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) breaks out in Athens: new cases increase 10x in illegal drug users and affect mostly young people already experiencing 40% unemployment;
- Calls for help to psychological support organizations double;
- The wait time to see a psychotherapist triples;
- The suicide rate increases dangerously;
- Underground clinics operated by volunteer physicians appear.

Worse still, the public debt continues to grow, reaching 165% of the GDP in 2011. That year, right in the middle of the financial and political crisis, Prime Minister Papandreou resigns.

ICELAND: A MORE INSPIRING EXAMPLE

In response to a referendum in 2010, 93% of the Icelandic population rejected the propositions of the IMF, recommending the implementation of an austerity policy, notably, a 30% decrease in financing the public health care system.

Rather than bail out bankers, Icelanders choose to invest in their economy and increase expenses on social welfare. In 2012, the economy grew 3%, the unemployment rate fell below 5%, and the country accelerated its debt repayment.

A SIGNIFICANT DETERIORATION IN EMPLOYMENT

In order to limit and reduce expenses on public health during the economic crisis, member countries of the European Union chose revenue and job cuts.

Save a few exceptions, the same pressures (for example: salary freezes) were imposed on all countries. Retired workers were not replaced, temporary contracts were not renewed, along with greater recourse to temporary workers, resulting in increased workloads, and in some cases, hours worked without equivalent compensation.

Today, poor working conditions make it difficult to recruit, retain and hire quality workers - complications recognized by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development.

Not surprisingly, women are the most affected by the loss of public sector jobs, where they make up the majority of the workforce. Several have lost an environment that recognized their qualifications, offered good work-family balance and proper compensation.

The economic crisis in Europe has been an opportunity, or excuse, to highlight and introduce “structural” reforms that have increased market logic in matters of health, but, most importantly, have reduced the social role of the states.
“It’s not because so many are wrong that they are right!”
– COLUCHE

JULIE-CATHERINE PÉLISSIER  CSQ Director of national negotiations and social security, and coordinator of SISP negotiations

At every level of negotiations, management representatives proclaim the urgent need to achieve and maintain a balanced budget, advocating cutbacks and reducing budgets for public services. The State asks us to negotiate against a backdrop of deteriorating working and retirement conditions. Though many may see this as the solution to what ails them, we disagree.

From January to mid-April, the Treasury Board and the Common Front met a half dozen times. The talks allowed parties to explain their demands, clarify some elements and identify possible angles for negotiations. The following offers a brief overview of these discussions:

RETIREMENT PLAN

The Common Front presented wage demands that aim to catch up on the gap with the private sector (2% per year), to protect their purchasing power (2% per year), and to participate in the collective enrichment of all Quebecers (0.5% per year). For its part, management justified its miserly offers (two-year freeze and 1% per year for the next three years) by invoking its inability to pay.

SKILLED WORKERS

The Common Front wants to resume the work on pay relativities begun during the last round of negotiations (evaluation, ranking and corrective measures for mixed employment classifications). However, management first wants to settle the pay equity exercises of 2010 and 2015. But, as these are not part of negotiation talks, the Common Front has reminded them that this work should be completed in parallel and in the appropriate forums.

PREMIUMS AND REGIONAL DISPARITIES

The Common Front explained the nature of its demands regarding premiums and regional disparities. We are still waiting for a response from the Treasury Board. A dozen negotiation meetings are expected from now until July; a meeting or so a week. We’ve got the beat, now we need to add the lyrics!

DON’T MISS ANY NEWS ABOUT THE NEGOTIATIONS

DO YOU WANT TO KNOW EVERYTHING ABOUT THE EVOLUTION OF THE PUBLIC SECTOR NEGOTIATIONS? SUBSCRIBE TO THE CSQ NEWSLETTER BY VISITING THE WEBSITE NEG02015.ORG.
Contrary to the claims of minister Coiteux, the Government and Public Employees Retirement Plan (RREGOP) is not deteriorating, it is improving. This statement is based on the latest numbers made public by the Commission administrative des régimes de retraite et d’assurance (CARRA) in April.

In fact, the results of the RREGOP’s last actuarial valuation on December 31, 2014, paint a rather positive picture. Here are a few highlights:

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Market value</td>
<td>$41.24B</td>
<td>$49.87B</td>
<td>$55.04B</td>
<td>(+33%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actuarial value</td>
<td>$40.9B</td>
<td>$46.53B</td>
<td>$50.6B</td>
<td>(+24%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liabilities</td>
<td>$43.55B</td>
<td>$48.57B</td>
<td>$51.41B</td>
<td>(+18%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deficit</td>
<td>$2.65B</td>
<td>$2.04B</td>
<td>$0.81B</td>
<td>($-1.84G)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capitalization rate</td>
<td>93.9%</td>
<td>95.8%</td>
<td>98.4%</td>
<td>(+4.5)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The deficit is the difference between the liabilities and the actuarial value ($51.41B - $50.60B = $0.81B). As for the capitalization rate, it is the ratio of the actuarial value to liabilities ($50.60B / $51.41B = 98.4%). This means that the fund has 98.4% of the funds necessary to finance all of the RREGOP’s commitments (liabilities) for the next 70 years.

Please note that the CARRA used the latest 2014 mortality tables for this update. Despite this, the RREGOP’s situation has improved, contrary to other retirement plans on which the latest charts have had a significant negative impact.

WHAT WE NEED TO KEEP IN MIND FROM THESE RESULTS

1. The excellent return of 12.1% for the RREGOP members’ fund obtained in 2014, and the average return of 9.7% over the last four years, are reflected in this latest update;
2. The deficit decreased by $1.84 billion;
3. Not only was the RREGOP’s situation already relatively good with a capitalization rate of 93.9% as of December 31, 2011, but it continued to improve in 2014 with a rate of 98.4%;
4. Though it is common to use the actuarial value of the fund to determine the surplus or deficit, it should be noted that as of December 31, 2014, the RREGOP’s market value presented a surplus of $3.63 billion and a capitalization rate of 107.1%.

CLARIFYING A FEW CONCEPTS

The market value of members’ RREGOP fund represents the total value of all assets had they been sold on December 31, 2014, (shares, bonds, etc.). As for the actuarial value, it represents the fund’s value if its annual losses and gains were spread over five years.

The liabilities of a pension plan represent the totality of its commitments to all of its members, active and retired (annuities or benefits acquired). In other words, it is the total sum required to pay annuities to active participants when they retire and to retirees until their death.

Sectoral negotiations

MANAGEMENT’S VAGUENESS STRATEGY

DENIS CUROTTE CSQ Assistant coordinator for national negotiations

Sectoral negotiations are moving at a snail’s pace at most bargaining tables. Limiting themselves strictly to the content of their demands, management representatives are unable to clarify the demands tabled last December. In fact, they are mostly seeking to obtain support from the unions regarding issues they’ve identified. This translates into an invitation to the unions to propose solutions to reduce the cost of collective agreements and increase management rights.

The pullbacks proposed on several working conditions make it difficult to find joint “solutions” when they aim to limit the rights and benefits outlined in employment contracts, as management seems to want. How else can it be? The school networks, higher education, and health and social services federations that are affiliated with the CSQ cannot accept proposals that would set the work and practice conditions of their members back several decades.

Since January, fifteen or so meetings have been held at the different sectoral bargaining tables. Though most, if not all, union teams have presented their demands, this cannot be said for management representatives. In fact, they have presented less than 30% of their demands, avoiding the specific issues they want to negotiate.

Management therefore prefers a strategy that hinders the speed of progress at most bargaining tables. It will be interesting to see what it will do over the coming weeks...

To follow the progress of negotiations, sign up for the CSQ’s Nego 2015 newsletter at nego2015.org.

1 This article was written on April 20, 2015.
Together for 10 years already!

The year 2015 marks the 10th anniversary of the SISP. Throughout our history, we've coordinated a number of campaigns to defend and promote public services. The SISP also has two rounds of public-sector negotiations under its belt, to renew our members’ collective agreements. Today we’re in the throes of a third round of contract talks, facing off against a government that’s set on overhauling the role of the State. The ties that unite the CSQ, the SFPQ and the APTS in solidarity are more important than ever.

In working together, the SISP’s member unions have proven year after year that collaborative efforts are beneficial for union action. They give us leverage with the government in periods of collective bargaining and enable us to share resources and information. In pooling our resources, we can put forward structural projects and produce high-calibre studies and briefs to flesh out the ideas we’re proposing for solutions to improve our members’ working conditions and standard of living. Concerted action also helps create synergy at the regional and local levels. Progressive organizations are confronted with many challenges. Here and in other parts of the world, people are feeling the brunt of policies of austerity and other attacks on public services and the labour movement.

Strengthening the ties that bind our organizations together is not only beneficial, it is essential to meet the challenges that lie ahead.

Our assessment is a positive one as we turn the page on our first decade. The SISP represents the dynamic forces of the public sector. Our efforts to improve our working conditions and promote and defend public services will hopefully continue for a long time to come.
Knowing where we come from

Founded with the objective of uniting the vital forces that drive Québec public services, the SISP celebrates its 10-year anniversary this year. We would like to take this opportunity to review this first decade and focus on the reasons for this alliance, which is as relevant and necessary today as it was ten years ago.

The solidarity agreement underpinning the SISP was signed when public-sector collective agreements were negotiated in 2004-2005. At that point, the SISP comprised the CSQ, the SFPQ and the SPGQ. The APTS and the FIQ joined two years later.

The activities of the SISP were by no means limited to negotiating collective agreements, however. In December 2007, the SISP handed in a petition with 25,000 signatures to denounce the adoption of Bill 142 under closure and to demand that workers’ labour rights be fully restored. The SISP also worked hard to promote our demands for better financing of public services and improvement of our rights as public-sector employees.

At the 2010 round of public-sector bargaining, the SISP represented more than 300,000 workers - the largest labour organization in Québec’s public sector. Mobilization activities were organized in a Common Front under the theme of “Together for public services”, and culminated in a demonstration in Montréal on March 20, 2010, where 75,000 workers took to the streets to put the government on notice that the solution to problems in public services had to come through negotiated agreements. The agreement was ratified a few months later.

Once this collective bargaining campaign was over, the SISP continued its work on the socio-political action front. To fight privatization, we worked with the coalition for hospitals without public-private partnerships, CHUs sans PPP. The SISP was also an integral part of the collective to put an end to tax havens, Échec aux paradis fiscaux, and waged campaigns on this issue in concert with other member organizations. A number of studies were conducted and briefs were submitted to parliamentary committees, to assert the standpoint of workers when legislation on public services was under consideration. The SISP brief on the D’amours Report comes to mind, along with the study on the value of public services and the one on the financing plan for public services, proposing measures that could potentially bring in a total of $3.2 billion in government revenue without penalizing families, vulnerable segments of our society, or the middle class.

In 2012, the FIQ left the SISP, followed by the SPGQ not long afterwards. Our work is proceeding regardless. Our members’ desire to have an alliance that is dedicated to defending and promoting public services throughout Québec is as strong as ever. The SISP continues to carry out this mission, fight the rise of right-wing forces and speak out against privatization, tax evasion and a host of other issues. As well as being active in all regions, we are regular participants in meetings held by Public Services International, to exchange views and work with labour organizations from every corner of the planet.

AND FOR THE FUTURE?

After our first ten action-packed years, some reflection is in order about what comes next for the SISP. With the rise of right-wing forces in the world, the tendency is to strengthen our ties of solidarity. This difficult context for social movements and the numerous attacks against them force us to think about ways of renewing our union practices.

Alliances are increasingly being forged to boost our leverage with the government and challenge its austerity measures. The anti-austerity collective Refusons l’austérité comes to mind, which brings together the key labour organizations in Québec along with a number of representatives of civil society groups. The clout that comes from our strength in numbers is always the best asset that union organizations have in defending their members. This has made the SISP a force to be contended with for ten years now, as well as a presence in every region and every sector of public services. Should we bolster this alliance to face tomorrow’s challenges? Could we increase the effectiveness of our actions? How could we ‘up’ our bargaining power? What approach can we take to bring our union organizations closer to our members? These are the kinds of questions that call for a renewal of the labour movement, and we’re now starting to put our heads together to ponder these issues in the SISP.
Tax havens: austerity versus public services

Not a week goes by without the issue of tax havens making the headlines. Since the beginning of the year, we’ve been hearing a lot of talk about it. This unexpected publicity is cause for celebration. More and more individuals, groups, journalists and experts are asking themselves questions about the harmful effects of this often complex and abstract issue. Public discontent fuelled by an acute sense of injustice is increasingly making itself felt. We are realizing the extent to which tax havens are having a tangible impact on our daily lives. Economic inequalities have been deepening for the past 30 years, with a handful of wealthy people getting even richer while the vast majority of us are trying to keep our heads above water. In stripping governments of major tax revenue, these tax havens are undermining the quality and accessibility of public services and social programs.

It’s up to governments to introduce legislative solutions to put a stop to the injustice of tax havens. Unfortunately, governments are taking their good old time about getting there. Whether it’s due to a lack of political will or sheer laxness, our elected officials have been choosing the easy way out – austerity measures. Isn’t it paradoxical that just as governments are pushing to dismantle the welfare state and slashing public services under the pretext that the public coffers are empty, tax havens are prospering like never before? The figures are dizzying: in 2014, 32,000 billion dollars, i.e., 15% of the world’s financial assets, have been channeled through tax havens. Every year, phenomenal sums of money slip by the treasury department because multinationals and wealthy individuals get around our tax laws with impunity. For Québec, the loss of tax revenue comes to hundreds of millions of dollars annually.

Special committee on tax havens

A major step forward in the fight against tax havens could nonetheless be possible in 2015. Thanks to public pressure, the work of an investigative journalist and the efforts of Nicolas Marceau, the MNA from the riding of Rousseau, the Québec government announced in February that a special committee on tax shelters. At the time this article was written, few details had been disclosed about the scope of the committee’s mandate and its objectives. We don’t know whether groups like the SISP and the Échec aux Paradis fiscaux collective (of which we are a member) will be invited to present their solutions. We welcome this announcement and hope that the committee will be a forum for genuine public debate on this crucial issue. We also hope that this committee will trigger a real intensification of the fight against tax avoidance and tax evasion in the coming years.

Federal elections in 2015

Along with our partners in the Échec aux Paradis fiscaux collective, the SISP will be very active in the upcoming federal elections, which will normally take place in October. As you may recall, we called out Finance Minister Joe Oliver in an open letter last November. We urged the federal government to take firmer measures to put an end to tax havens. We also urged the government to follow up on the seven recommendations presented in our expert report on taxation entitled Des solutions à notre portée (solutions within our reach). We’ll take advantage of this electoral period to remind the federal government of its responsibilities on this matter and to promote our solutions. We know this battle will be a difficult one. Last year the Harper government cut 220 jobs held by auditors at the Canada Revenue Agency, whose mandate was precisely to curb tax evasion via tax havens. Right when a number of European countries and international organizations such as the OECD and the G20 are raising more and more questions, taking steps and drawing up action plans to fight international tax evasion, Canada is content to turn a deaf ear. Given the disastrous consequences that tax havens have on our public services and societal model, such spinelessness is completely unacceptable. Our outrage is definitely merited.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

Open letters:
Oui à une commission spéciale sur les paradis fiscaux
February 26, 2015 - www.goo.gl/8YqUdP
Paradis fiscaux: qu’attend le Canada pour agir?
November 13, 2014 - www.goo.gl/19fSha

Brief and expert report:
Les paradis fiscaux : un enjeu incontournable
October 2014 - www.goo.gl/8wqXQf
Des solutions à notre portée
May 2014 - www.goo.gl/G482vB
Did you know that... there are other solutions to finance public services?

**Cost-saving measures**

- **850 million dollars**
  - saved by ending the practice of contracting-out IT contracts

- **144 million dollars**
  - saved by lengthening the duration of prescriptions for prescription drugs

- **1 billion dollars**
  - saved by creating a completely public pharmacare plan and by centralizing purchases

**Revenue-generating measures**

- **200 million dollars**
  - generated by adding a tax bracket in which income of $250,000 or more would be taxed at a rate of 28%

- **200 million dollars**
  - generated by revising tax benefits linked to capital gains and dividends

- **500 million dollars**
  - generated by tightening up corporate tax credits and subsidies

- **300 million dollars**
  - generated by stopping tax evasion and tax havens

- **650 million dollars**
  - generated by creating a tax on luxury vehicles and CO₂ emissions.

**Total**

- **= $1,994 billion**

- **= $1,85 billion**

Alternatives to austerity are possible. sisp.qc.net/financespubliques
A CONGRESS DEVOTED TO ACTION AND FIGHTING BACK

CATHERINE GAUTHIER CSQ Chief Editor

Over the past three years, more than 2000 members from across Québec, as well as university researchers, have fueled reflection on union renewal, which is the main theme for the 41st CSQ Congress. The fruits of their labours and resulting recommendations will be presented to delegates in June. Their decisions will lead to a plan of action to execute this critical shift, ultimately increasing representation and efficiency of our Centrale’s collective action so that it can legitimately pursue its work of social transformation.

Delegates will also address the question of union strategies appropriate to the current context of austerity. And rightfully so: the measures and policies high-handedly proposed by those in power, both in Ottawa and Québec, aim not only to review the role of the State, but also to weaken the union movement, which is not without consequence to members and the greater population. Within this context, careful thought is required to improve the efficacy of our union action.

Societies in which public services and unions have a strong presence are also those where social inequalities are the lowest. Through their battles and actions, union organizations not only defend and promote the working conditions of their members, they also defend and improve the living conditions of the entire population.

Activism, let’s talk about it!

Some 1000 individuals representing every CSQ union, as well as national and international guests, will be attending the Congress. In addition to debates and the passing of several resolutions, major conferences are on the menu. Here is a brief look at some of the questions that will be addressed:

• Does the austerity advocated by the government and the issues surrounding the organization of work, such as precarity and work overload, undermine professional cooperation and union solidarity between workers? Guest speaker: Mélanie Laroche, professor and researcher at the École des relations industrielles at the Université de Montréal and member of the CRIMT (Interuniversity Research Centre on Globalization and Work).

• How can union action, determined by the working conditions and lives of members, be practical, achievable and efficient? Guest speaker: Christian Nadeau, professor and researcher in the department of philosophy at the Université de Montréal, and author of Liberté, égalité, solidarité, refonder la démocratie et la justice sociale (Boréal, 2013). (See the Winter 2014 and Spring 2014 issues of CSQ News for the two articles on his interview with the magazine).

• Considering the needs expressed by members and different groups, how can proximity, communication and dialogue revitalize union life? Guest speaker: Robert Roy, associate professor and researcher in political philosophy at the Université de Sherbrooke and sponsor of the special commission on union renewal for the CSQ’s union renewal initiative.

A SIGNIFICANT EVENT

The 41st CSQ Congress will take place at the Centre des congrès de Québec, from June 26 to 29, 2015. Remember that it is this democratic body – the most important of our organization – that elects the five members of the CSQ’s Executive Council. To learn more, visit congress2015.lacsq.org. You will find a host of information, including videos explaining the union renewal initiative. Furthermore, the next issue of our magazine will present the highlights of the Congress. Don’t miss it!
Integrating academic orientation in learning

The ministerial project seems doomed to fail

MARIE-EVE QUIRION FPPE-CSQ Advisor for Professional Action

Goodbye to career education courses: this was the decision made by the Ministry of Education 10 years ago as part of the curriculum reform. Wanting to increase support for students, it adopted a guidance-oriented approach, which was supposed to allow for exploration of personal interests, discover new related careers and gain a better understanding of the link with subject matters studied. Today, seeing the many problems with this approach, the ministry is setting its sights on a new project... What is it exactly?

First of all, this is not a course, but rather five to ten hours of mandatory academic orientation integrated into students’ coursework from the 3rd primary cycle until the end of secondary school. In addition, the ministry developed a continuum presenting learning strategies and results expected from students.

According to the Fédération des professionnelles et professionnels de l'éducation du Québec (FPPE-CSQ), the project cannot rest solely on the shoulders of teaching staff. Guidance counselors must be involved in the whole process. But, for the moment, the ministry is not committing to anything in this regard...

NOT A PROMISING START

The government’s initiative is far from promising, with limited results from pilot projects in 17 schools. In several cases, the project consists only of documenting what is currently being done. Few pilot schools seem to have implemented new initiatives in connection with the government project. And in some cases, the guidance counsellors were not even aware of the pilot project in their own schools.

Furthermore, the ministry had to postpone implementation of the project, which was scheduled for September 2015, for the entire school network. From the beginning, the target date was unrealistic due to the desperate shortage of guidance counsellors in schools and austerity measures that aggravate the situation.

MEETING THE NEEDS OF STUDENTS

School guidance counsellors must increasingly perform varied administrative tasks that move them away from direct intervention with students. Yet, from the first cycle of secondary school, the students have important choices to make and need help to make them.

According to the FPPE-CSQ, changes are urgently needed to remedy the low professional regard experienced by guidance counsellors. Experiments conducted in some school boards have helped improve the situation. This is the case at the Commission scolaire de la Capitale where Line Houde works as a guidance counsellor.

“In our school board, we’ve developed a centralized approach which allows us to create a personalized and evolving portrait of each student. At the end of secondary school, we review with each student how far they have come in terms of self-knowledge and professional interests.”

According to Line, the quality of the intervention takes precedence: “A targeted 20-minute meeting is often more effective than two hours of poorly integrated content!”

However, this type of approach requires a sufficient number of guidance counsellors in schools, which is far from being the case at this time.

Basically, there is still a lot to be done to improve access to information and orientation services for students. We must recognize the specific expertise of guidance counsellors, ensure their full participation when interacting with students, and increase available resources in schools. /

On se donne les moyens, the Fédération des professionnelles et professionnels de l'éducation du Québec (FPPE-CSQ)’s web campaign, has now been viewed 600,000 times! Don’t miss the third viral video launched earlier this spring. Visit onsedonnelesmoyens.com.
School secretary

A WHIRLWIND WORK DAY

FRANÇOIS BEAUREGARD Collaboration

Taking attendance, answering the phone, filling out purchase orders, writing cheques, paying invoices, distributing mail, communicating with parents, finding lost objects, announcing schedule changes to students, nursing little boo-boos, and comforting children who are sad. Phew! And these are just some of the tasks Karine Montpetit efficiently handles in the course of a workday at École St-Thomas in Hudson.

The work of a secretary has radically changed since the era immortalized in the movie Populaire by Régis Roinsard, when job candidates were selected based on their typing speed. The computer has replaced old and noisy typewriters, and the duties of a school secretary have become increasingly diversified.

“Whatever I like most in my work is accomplishing many different tasks. Every day is different and the school is a vibrant environment with lots of action,” says Karine Montpetit, who has worked at the Commission scolaire des Trois-Lacs for five years.

However, this also means that a secretary is constantly interrupted during her workday. “Sometimes, I’m unable to finish a task I started in the morning because of constant interruptions for more urgent matters,” says Karine Montpetit.

HIGH DEMANDS

To perform well in this job requires versatility and adaptability in the face of unforeseen events. Plus, not just anyone can become a school secretary. Candidates must have a DVS in Secretarial Studies, and a grade of 80% in French and office automation tests, as well as successfully completing school board exams testing competencies required. And, in addition to professional skills, one must demonstrate several personal qualities, such as independence, resourcefulness, interpersonal skills and diplomacy.

“At times, we have to give bad news to parents, such as when classes are at full capacity. Understandably, this creates frustration and we need to be sympathetic to families who become upset in these situations,” she says.

AN ESSENTIAL CONTRIBUTION TO THE SCHOOL’S OPERATIONS

Often, it is when someone is absent that we realize how indispensable they are to us. When asked what one week without a secretary would look like in her school, she answers that there would be no one to answer the phone, greet parents, make sure the photocopier runs well, figure out how a child who normally walks home ended up on the bus, etc.

“I think that if no one was available to replace me for one full week, the situation would quickly become chaotic and the school staff would soon be calling me for help,” she says laughingly.

Karine Montpetit

1 Populaire (2012). populaire-lefilm.com
Student financial aid

PROLONGED TURNAROUND TIMES, A TERRIBLE IDEA!

Gabriel Danis CSQ Advisor for Higher Education

Financial aid applications for students from rural or suburban communities will now take longer to process. This past winter, to the great surprise of many, the government announced important changes in the operations of financial aid offices in most CEGEPS and universities.

In fact, Québec plans on removing access to “profile 3” from student financial aid offices, which provides them with the ability to respond quickly to student aid applications. Only five universities will maintain access: Université de Montréal, Université Laval, Université du Québec à Montréal, Université de Sherbrooke and McGill University. Once again, rural and suburban communities will pay the price for the Couillard government’s decisions.

For ten years or so, with the help of qualified personnel and a common software, “profile 3” has enabled financial aid offices in teaching institutions to process even the most complex applications. Once processed, admissibility is automatically determined within a very short turnaround time (24-48 hours).

ACCESS TO EDUCATION IS COMPROMISED

Unfortunately, removing “profile 3” will increase the time required to obtain a calculation of financial assistance from four to eight weeks, followed by a wait of nearly two weeks before receiving a first payment. What makes the situation even more deplorable is that it is the most vulnerable students who benefit from these services, particularly in the area of continuing education and permanent education (new immigrants, single-parent students, individuals going back to school, etc.).

“We worry that increased wait times will have a negative impact on access to higher education, student retention and success. This is another example of the impact of budget cuts. There is no doubt that this service directly affects students,” says Monique Lussier, academic advisor at Cégep Marie-Victorin and member of the Fédération du personnel professionnel des collèges (FPPC-CSQ).

ATTACKING PROFESSIONAL AUTONOMY

In addition, this decision reduces flexibility for workers in financial aid offices. “Whereas we were able to quickly reassure students and make a difference in their lives, we will now have no choice but to tell them to wait several weeks before getting an answer. This delay makes no sense and might discourage some from going back to school,” says Yvonne Dudley, responsible for financial aid at Dawson College and member of the Fédération du personnel de soutien de l’enseignement supérieur (FPSES-CSQ).

EXTREMELY HYPOTHETICAL SAVINGS

According to the government, the decision is above all motivated by a concern for saving money. It believes that it is more efficient to centralize the processing of applications at the Ministère de l’Éducation, de l’Enseignement supérieur et de la Recherche, rather than providing technical support to workers at educational institutions.
Yet, the government refuses to make estimated savings public, in addition to the fact that most of the investments to implement the software and train personnel have already been made.

“We highly doubt that centralization will lead to savings. Expected savings are minimal compared to the direct impact on students,” says Pierre Chassé, academic and vocational counsellor at Cégep Édouard-Montpetit and member of the FPPC-CSQ.

EXPOSING THIS GROUNDLESS DECISION

The CSQ, together with the Fédération étudiante collégiale du Québec (FECQ) and the Fédération étudiante universitaire du Québec (FEUQ), has written to the Ministère de l’Éducation to express its profound disagreement with this debatable decision. Solutions exist to improve the effectiveness of the current system; solutions that don’t require significant investment.

After having postponed the date to remove access to “profile 3” from institutions three times, a new deadline of May 3, 2015, has been put forward. At the time of writing, a joint press conference with the FECQ, FEUQ, and the Association pour une solidarité syndicale étudiante (ASSÉ) is being prepared to expose this infuriating decision, and ultimately, drive the government back.

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THE BARRETTE REFORM

LET’S BE VIGILANT AND TAKE ACTION!

LISE GOULET CSQ Health and Social Services Advisor

Since April 1, 2015, the health and social services networks have been feeling the effects of the first wave of the Barrette reform. Numerous budget and job cuts are creating insecurity, confusion and anger in personnel, who find themselves trapped in a big commotion in which they don’t know who is doing what, where and how. Workers will need to wait several more weeks, perhaps even months, before learning the new employment structure of every institution and point of service.

However, it’s not because the government imposes its laws that workers need to give in... It’s still possible to fight against the disastrous effects of the Barrette reform.

POTENTIAL COURSES OF ACTION

- Do you have concerns about the quality and security of services? Have you observed problematic situations in your work environment? Are you or is someone close to you experiencing issues with accessibility? Help us identify where things are going wrong and the problems created by the new reform. Contact your union.
- Do you want to fight against privatization in the public network? Participate in upcoming mobilization activities.

To learn more about the Barrette reform, visit austerite.lacsq.org.

Privatization, the government hidden agenda?

Austerity measures and current reforms are jeopardizing public health and social services systems. Though minister Barrette continues to affirm that services to the population will not be affected, he is making no concrete financial commitment to improve them. Quite the contrary, in fact. He is also generating tremendous uncertainty by stating that all points of service will remain, but without ever saying what services will be offered, in what proportion and under what conditions.

By refusing to commit to reinvesting savings to improve services, the government is weakening, destabilizing and demotivating workers and care teams. Still, it asserts making choices to preserve the public health system, when in fact it is promoting privatization.

THE FACTS

On one hand, the government professes to want to improve accessibility, quality and safeguarding of services. On the other hand, it imposes budget cuts, destabilizes care teams and adds accountability processes. Can we really improve the effectiveness of a health care system while depriving it of the resources it needs to operate efficiently?

And what if the billions in cuts were a smokescreen to hide a desire to deinsure complete health and social services programs? And what if this reform was part of a plan that was set in motion several years ago? Let’s recall a few important moments:

2004 Bill 25 is passed under closure, merging health care and social services institutions (CSSS). The goal? Improve access to services, decrease bureaucracy and save money. Yet, a report from the Ministry of Health and Social Services, published in 2010, shows no significant improvement in access to medical services.

2007 Physicians obtain the right to incorporate. Seven years later, 45% of 22,500 physicians have done so, depriving the government of $150 million in tax revenues annually.

2008 Eighteen months after Bill 33 is passed under closure, authorizing three types of surgery in private clinics and coverage by private insurers, the government approves 50 or so interventions in private specialized medical clinics.

2015 The proliferation of all kinds of fees charged during medical consultations constitutes another form of privatization, compromising universal care. In this regard, the section Utilisation des sommes liées à la désassurance d’un service assuré in Bill 28, which was passed under closure last April with the goal of rebalancing the budget, does not bode well.

We must fight back against this shift, which is contributing to the progressive dismantling of the public health and social services network. It’s time for action!
SURVIVING CHANGE

PIERRE LEFEBVRE, CSQ Advisor for Workplace Health and Safety

It’s started! Bill 10, adopted under closure last February, has started to impact health and social services workers. More changes are coming in the school network and other organizations targeted by mergers. Faced with these numerous changes, we anticipate an increase in psychological distress among affected workers. How does one survive such a context?

Last April the CSQ’s workplace health and safety network met to address the question. Thanks to the collaboration of Estelle M. Morin, psychologist and professor at the HEC Montréal, and Lucie Legault, advisor at the Association paritaire pour la santé et la sécurité du secteur affaires sociales (ASSTSAS), those present were able to take stock of the challenges ahead and of the role the unions might be called upon to play.

The research conducted by Estelle M. Morin has led her to conclude that the key is in the meaning we give to our work and the meaning we find in our work. According to the model she proposes, the meaning we find at work comes from the quality of our relationships, whereas the meaning of the work stems from the characteristics of the work itself.

IMPORTANT DISTINCTIONS
Therefore, work that has meaning is characterized by its social value, the autonomy it allows in performing it, and the opportunities for learning and development it provides.

Relationships that have meaning are characterized by the moral rectitude associated to work that respects the values of justice and equality, by the quality of relationships that provide opportunities for mutual assistance and support from colleagues and superiors, as well as by recognition for the work accomplished.

CONDITIONS FAVOURABLE TO CHANGE
Individuals share some of the responsibility in preserving and promoting the quality of life at work, looking at change optimistically as an opportunity for professional development, while demonstrating authenticity, social know-how, influence, etc.

However, the largest share belongs to managers and individuals responsible for human resources who must create and support conditions favourable to harmonious change: support and recognition practices, worker participation practices, team building, job enrichment, encouraging mutual assistance and cooperation, succession management, developing positive relationships between employees, instruction and training, better alignment of professional and personal obligations, etc.

By their protective nature, these combined actions can help prevent psychological distress – and by their constructive nature, contribute to psychological wellbeing.

PRECIOUS TOOLS
Within the particular context of major changes to the health and social services network, the ASSTSAS offers institutions a host of activities to analyze situations, identify and prevent problems, and recommend possible solutions.

Institutions interested in obtaining support can make a joint application to the Association for advice and technical assistance, local training or conferences on the subject. Also, several tools are available to institutions and unions on the Association’s website (asstsas.qc.ca/dossiers-thematiques/sante-psychologique.html).

To learn more about the work of Estelle M. Morin: irsst.qc.ca/media/documents/PubIRSST/R-624.pdf
The FIPEQ-CSQ Congress

A HIGHLY ANTICIPATED EVENT!

KATHY GIBSON FIPEQ-CSQ Communications Advisor

The theme of the very first congress of the Fédération des intervenantes en petite enfance du Québec (FIPEQ-CSQ), taking place June 8 to 10, will be Nous préparons l’avenir! This democratic body, the most important in the organization, will mark a pivotal turning point as it will determine the structure and direction of the federation for the next two years.

After many months of reflection, discussion and analyses, the event aims to be a generator of ideas and productive exchanges. During these three decisive days, participants will debate the proposals of the federal council and vote on them. Among the topics of discussion will be the principal directions of the federation, its statutes and regulations, the organizational model, and the election of the Executive Council.

AN ELOQUENT THEME

The theme Nous préparons l’avenir! reflects the reality of members and the activities of the federation. In fact, it refers to young children, who are at the heart of the work of members, as well as the FIPEQ-CSQ, that ensures a better future for its members and all workers in the early childcare sector.

There is no doubt: the 200 early childcare workers, members and delegates attending the Congress will be making FIPEQ-CSQ history!

Unionization in CPEs

The FIPEQ-CSQ is active across Québec

SIMON LAVIGNE CSQ Advisor

The FIPEQ-CSQ is pursuing its efforts to unionize CPE workers and is earning the trust of a growing number of early childcare educators across Québec. The Syndicat des intervenantes en petite enfance de Québec (SIPEQ) recently welcomed two new childcare centres (CPE) among its ranks. Workers at the CPE La Tourniquette in Thetford Mines and L’Amhirondelle in Saint-Henri-de-Lévis became accredited and are preparing their respective lists of demands for their first collective negotiations.

What’s more, the FIPEQ-CSQ broke through in the Outaouais region with the creation of the new Syndicat des intervenantes en petite enfance de l’Outaouais (SIPEO). Last March, workers at the CPE La Ribambelle d’Aylmer, with the support of their colleagues at the Alliance des intervenantes en milieu familial – Outaouais, became pioneers by obtaining their first accreditation.

Plus, it would seem that news spread fast because, on April 20, a request was made by the CPE La Cigale et la Fourmi (which has two centres, one in Perkins and one in Saint-Pierre-de-Wakefield) to the Commission des relations du travail. The FIPEQ-CSQ has made the creation of new unions in the early childcare sector a priority, and the results are extremely positive!

A BRAND NEW WEBSITE

The FIPEQ-CSQ’s website has a new look! Be sure to check it out: fipeq.org.

A new section was recently added to the lateteapapineau.org website, which explains the impact of austerity measures on the early childcare sector. See it, try it and share it!

C’est bien plus qu’une garderie!

lateteapapineau.org
CSQ, PROUD PARTNER OF THE FONDS DE SOLIDARITÉ FTQ.

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.
Your CSQ group insurance plan offers travel insurance coverage, including travel assistance and trip cancellation insurance, to all health insurance plan members.

To make the most of your coverage,* make sure you are in good and stable health before you leave.

Questions?
Call CanAssistance before leaving at 1-800-465-2928.

* For information on the applicable conditions and limitations, please refer to your group insurance booklet.