

Update from the *regroupements*

Regroupement cégep – Micheline Thibodeau, vice-president



The *Regroupement CEGEP* is navigating through troubled waters, as often seems to be the case. Several important issues with potentially huge consequences

for the future of the teaching profession and the college system have sparked numerous debates on strategic positioning and mobilization in recent months.

Among these issues, the conflict at Lévis-Lauzon CEGEP deserves a chapter all of its own. The college's challenge of a local arrangement involving the teaching committee and academic committee calls into question the very educational governance of the CEGEP, and could have major repercussions on the role of teachers in the system. What's more, in an attempt to quash teacher mobilization, the college decided to suspend union president Jean-Charles Desrochers for reasons that were anything but clear. Although Mr. Desrochers

was eventually reinstated in his functions at the college following numerous appeals and backing from the *Regroupement* unions and the CSN, vigilance is needed in the face of growing attacks against the role of teachers and of union representation in pedagogical matters.

Regroupement CEGEP union members were also front and centre in expressing outrage at the Quebec Treasury Board's downgrading of our job class in its salary relativity plan, a move perceived as a major assault on our professional identity, especially in light of the repeated assurances by the Ministry of Higher Education, Research, Science and Technology (MESRST) that we are part of the higher education system. A few short-term objectives were achieved after an impressive mobilization was mounted last fall and again early this year. For the moment, all further action is on pause while we wait for the talks to resume, but we will be keeping our signs nearby in case of any gridlock.

On the matter of access to the nursing profession, we were very satisfied with the recommendations of the interdepartmental working group, particularly the one calling for an analysis of prospective needs in the health care system for all jobs. This is one of the requests the Coalition for the maintenance of the DEC in nursing made to MESRST Minister Pierre Duchesne. This is yet another example of a successful mobilization effort by union members.

No report would be complete without mentioning the collective agreement negotiations that are in the process of gearing up. The negotiation and mobilization committee took up function on January 20th and has been working at Mach speed since then to put together a union tour, executive committee training session, sectoral situation analysis, etc.

Fneequeries

Happy retirement!

I would like to say a huge thanks to Daniel Mary, who retired from his position as *Regroupement CEGEP* coordinator in mid-January, for his devotion of time and spirit. It was a great pleasure for all of us to work with you. We salute your perfectionism, your determination to consider every angle of a situation, your constant quest for the best possible solution, and your tremendous respect for the unions and for the *Regroupement*. Happy retirement!

Welcome!

We also want to take this opportunity to welcome Nicole Lefebvre, who has taken up the torch as coordinator of the *Regroupement CEGEP*. Without a doubt, she will have some exciting challenges ahead.

Regroupement université Sylvain Marois, vice-president



First off, we would like to salute the "birth" of a new union: the McGill Course Lecturers and Instructors Union (MCLIU). Negotiating their first collective agreement as a separate union, McGill's lecturers, who have been without a contract for over two years, are still awaiting a settlement. Let's hope that 2014 is the year in which management actively cooperates to bring this long and gruelling negotiation to a conclusion.

But, of course, McGill isn't the only university where the labour climate is difficult. Two and a half years of negotiation at *Université Laval* have left a bitter aftertaste for many. And the *Syndicat des tuteurs et tutrices de la Téléq* has recently called for the appointment of a conciliation officer. On certain other fronts, however, the situation is looking more hopeful. At *Université de Montréal*, negotiations have been constructive to date, with the parties reaching agreement on the issue of evaluation and

Regroupement privé – Caroline Quesnel, vice-president



During fall 2013, the spotlights were trained on the secondary education sector for two major consultations. The first was a stock-taking exercise initiated by the *Conseil supérieur de l'éducation* (CSE) on the educational reform, 15 years after the Estates General on Education. The second, launched by the Ministry of Education, Recreation and Sports (MELS), had to do with the overhaul of the high school history curriculum. In both cases, the FNEEQ submitted briefs insisting on, among other things, the importance of a proper consultation with teaching staff and the professional autonomy of teachers at the secondary level.

On another note, we are extremely pleased to see the active participation of the private sector unions in various federation events. At the last *Regroupement* meeting, for example, no fewer than 20 unions were

preparing to broach the complex and delicate question of distance learning. At UQAT, talks are continuing as scheduled while at UQO, they are just getting under way. It goes without saying that course lecturers from UQAM and UQAR, who are getting ready to renew their collective agreement, are following all of these negotiations with the keenest of interest.

On December 2, 2013, after 15 months and more than 60 hours of debate in the National Assembly, the government announced the creation of the Ministry of Higher Education, Research, Science and Technology (MESRST). While not quite the answer to all of our prayers—and, for some, not the answer to any—this was a definite step in the right direction, a step that was necessary to follow through with the main project areas, or *chantiers*, that emerged from last year's Summit on Higher Education. With MESRST, we now have an

represented. The fall training sessions of “New Executive Committee Members” and “Financial Statements” were very well attended, and the large number of registrations received for the winter courses on “Negotiation” and “Chairing an Assembly” illustrates their relevance to the sector. Members were also actively involved in preparing the brief on the history curriculum reform: history teachers from 10 unions helped draft the document, despite the very tight deadline imposed by the MELS.

It should also be mentioned that two *Regroupement privé* members have been granted a teaching load reduction to work on federation projects. They are Katerine Deslauriers of *Collège Jean-de-Brébeuf*, who serves on the FNEEQ's comité précaireté et vie syndicale, and Nicole Marsolais of *Collège Esther-Blondin*, member of the federation's Women's Committee. As it is not always easy to release teachers at the high school level, the formula granted in the latter case—one day every two

interlocutor...which we didn't have before. And the minister seems to be listening, at least judging from the following quote in the news release his department issued for National Course Lecturers Day:

*“Course lecturers are essential members of the university teaching staff. Their expertise and diverse experience contribute to a quality university education. Through their passion for teaching, they transmit knowledge to students and thereby ensure the next generation of torchbearers in all spheres of activity.”*¹ This is the first time in 13 years that any minister has acknowledged our November 22nd event!

Few will deny that 2012 and 2013 were important years for higher education, with university a key topic of conversation both around the dinner table and in the news. Everything suggests that 2014 will be another watershed year. The *Forum*

weeks—could well pave the way for other union activists down the road.

A number of *Regroupement privé* unions are experiencing tough times: the demographic decline and financial instability of many colleges are threatening their very survival. This is the case at Dorval's Queen of Angels Academy, the all-girls private school that announced to its employees just his past January 23rd that it will be closing its doors at the end of the 2013-2014 academic year.

The FNEEQ deplores the fact that the school's teaching and support staff were presented with a done deal even though union representatives had been pressing for months for a meeting to discuss the situation, which they knew was becoming increasingly precarious. The federation has offered its full assurance that it will do everything it can to support the school's academic personnel, teachers and support staff through this difficult period.

*des enseignants universitaires contractuels*² (university contract teachers forum), which takes place November 20-22, will be the ideal opportunity to talk about university teaching and the contribution course lecturers make to this mission. While we obviously denounce the eroding job security of university teachers, we also feel it important to note that university contract teachers deliver the majority of undergraduate classes in Quebec, are increasingly active at the graduate levels and in research, and that their undeniable role in creating and transmitting knowledge deserves a discussion forum equal in scope to the part they play in Quebec university education.

Stay tuned!

1 <http://communiqués.gouv.qc.ca/gouvqc/communiqués/GPQF/Novembre2013/22/c4228.html> (our translation)

2 <http://chargesdecours.com/forum/>