

carnets 38

Autumn 2020



Fédération nationale
des enseignantes et
des enseignants
du Québec

FNEEQ special 50th anniversary



IN THIS ISSUE

The Cégeps and the FNEEQ: past to present •

The origins of interunion solidarity and coordinated combative bargaining •

Personal accounts of FNEEQ activists • Union activism at the private schools and colleges: 50 years of challenges... • News from the Regroupements • CISO international union solidarity delegation visits Mexico • Chilean people achieve historic victory



It was a privilege and an honour for me to be President of the FNEEQ during its 50th birthday on December 6, 2019. That celebration seems long ago now; in the meantime, the pandemic has thrown our profession, our union activism and our personal lives into disarray. Now, as we strive to withstand isolation and discouragement, the solidarity that binds us is more necessary than it has ever been. It gives purpose to our work and our demands.

In this special edition of Carnets, we celebrate the 50th anniversary of the FNEEQ's founding. I believe our Federation is an important and unique union organization in Québec, for a variety of reasons. First of all, its origins: the decision to join the CSN, a trade union federation, in the 1960s was unprecedented and laden with meaning. At the time, teachers took a risk by agreeing to become a minority within a broad union organization and committing to a form of unionism that went beyond the boundaries and interests of their profession. Their willingness to take risks and their concern for others have been passed down from one generation to the next. To this day, open-mindedness and sensitivity to differences are two of the core qualities that distinguish our Federation's activism.

This can be seen in the composition of our Federation, which embraces three very different groups: Cégeps, private schools and universities. Diversity is one of our strengths. Our members teach from preschool to university, in the public and private sectors, in academic and vocational programs. This gives our Federation a unique position, vantage point and voice in Québec's educational sector.

To underscore the FNEEQ's anniversary, the executive committee adopted the slogan "50 ans à faire école par nos luttes" (50 years of teaching / building a movement through our struggles). It embodies our members' energy and our progressive collective struggles:

- The fight for the status of women in the Federation
- The fight for unionization and recognition of university lecturers
- The fight for decent working conditions for teachers in private institutions
- The fight for the Cégep system's integrity and vitality
- The fight for the survival and promotion of educational institutions outside the major urban centres
- The fight for freedom of expression and professional independence
- At all times, the fight for humanistic and civic values
- And now, the fight for academic success during a global health crisis that will leave an indelible mark on students and teachers

We have been able to wage the struggles of the past and the present thanks to an incredible team of staffers whose expertise, commitment and skills deserve to be lauded. We often say there is something special about the FNEEQ, that there is a unique team spirit, a feeling of trust and solidarity among the members of the team. This unique quality is rooted in collegiality, a democratic principle that teachers hold dear in their work environment. The FNEEQ's cohesiveness has made it a distinctive, impactful and bold union in the past and present, and will keep it so in the future.

Caroline Thesnel

Summary

- 4 The Cégeps and the FNEEQ: past to present
- 5 The origins of interunion solidarity and coordinated combative bargaining
- 6 Personal accounts of FNEEQ activists
- 10 Union activism at the private schools and colleges: 50 years of challenges...
- 11 News from the Regroupements – Private institutions
- 14 CISO international union solidarity delegation visits Mexico
- 15 Chilean people achieve historic victory

CARNETS is published by the Fédération nationale des enseignantes et des enseignants du Québec. FNEEQ-CSN represents close to 34,000 members form CEGEPs, private institutions and universities. It is the most representative union organisation for highereducation in Québec.

FNEEQ-CSN

1601, avenue De Lorimier, Montréal, (QC) H2K4M5

Téléphone: 514 598-2241 - 1 877 312-2241

fneeq.reception@csn.qc.ca - www.fneeq.qc.ca



Editor-in-Chief: Richard Bousquet

Publication Coordinator: Sonia Beauchamp

Contributors: Sonia Beauchamp, Marie-Josée Bourget, Richard Bousquet, Yves de Repentigny, Camille Dubuc, Dany Héon, Bastien Laflamme, Léandre Lapointe, Ricardo Peñafiel and Caroline Quesnel

Translation: Analogos

Couverture: Bruce Toombs

Layout: Sylvie Patenaude and Isabelle Proulx

Printing: Imprimerie CSN

Tirage: 150 copies

Legal Deposit: Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec, Bibliothèque et Archives du Canada. ISBN978-2-923606-51-4.



1978 – FNEQ General Secretary Audette Landry and President Lucille Beauchemin at a meeting of the Federation's executive committees.
Photo: Pierre Gauvin-Évrard



2010 – Claire Tremblay, coordinator of the *Regroupement université*, at a common front demonstration on March 20.
Photo: Odette Lefrançois

The Cégeps and the FNEEQ: past to present

Although the first teachers' unions to join the CSN were at private colleges and government schools, the Cégep teachers' unions are nonetheless woven into the fabric of our federation's history. Indeed, shortly after their creation in the latter half of the 1960s, most of the Cégep unions joined the CSN (the others joined the CSQ), leading to the establishment of the CSN's Cégep sector in 1967. (The CSN didn't have federations at the time.) By 1968, the year of the first collective bargaining process for teaching staff in the public college system (which included, among other things, establishment of the 1/15 standard for teaching resources and an early definition of teaching workload), the decision had been made to create the federations. The *Fédération nationale des enseignants du Québec* (FNEQ) was founded in September 1969 in Lac-Beauport. It included the 20 bargaining units in the Cégep sector (there had been just nine at the start of the previous year), along with the *Syndicat des professionnels de l'enseignement* (SPE, private schools) and the *Syndicat des professeurs de l'État du Québec* (SPEQ, government schools), which would leave to go it alone in 1972. The FNEQ became the FNEEQ in 1982.



Yves de Repentigny
Vice-president, regroupement cégep

At the start, the three sectors (Cégeps, the SPE and SPEQ) were all quite independent, each with its own executive committee and its own convention, but in 1972, a reform of those structures led to a much more centralized way of doing things.

The reason for joining the CSN and then the FNEEQ was to “demand a more fair and humane society,” to be sure, but also to benefit from the strength of numbers and show that we could negotiate decent working conditions. The first collective agreement in 1969 was a bitter pill to swallow, but teachers racked up much more wins than losses, in terms of both wages and working conditions, in the heady agreements of the 1970s, of which the celebrated Common Front of 1972, whose leaders were imprisoned, is emblematic. The early 1980s signalled a major paradigm shift, however. The weak economy led to a deterioration in labour relations and fierce confrontations, including the one at the bargaining table in 1982, which led to the infamous decree of 1983 which imposed a 13% increase in workload, reduced indexing of pensions and a 20% wage rollback for three-months. That sparked a three-week strike which was ended by the odious Bill 111 (declared unconstitutional in 1999-2000 – because it hadn't been translated into English!), which was defied for three days. A glum mood pervaded the union movement for the remainder of the decade and the next cycle of collective agreement renewals in 1985-1986, which was made more difficult by the increasingly visible divisions within the FNEEQ. In 1988, 13 of the 42 Cégep teachers' unions, dissatisfied with, among

other things, the public sector bargaining process and the excessive influence of the *Fédération des affaires sociales* (FAS, now the *Fédération de la santé et des services sociaux* or FSSS-CSN) over decision-making, pulled out of the FNEEQ to form the *Fédération autonome du collégial* (FAC). During the same period, the FNEEQ decentralized and created the three groups that comprise it to this day: Cégeps, private schools and universities.

Neo-liberalism lost none of its influence since the early 1990s (one example is the frequent adoption of special legislation), but despite that, the FNEEQ has achieved regular successes at the bargaining table. Prime examples include the addition or more than 406.99 full time equivalents (FTE = one full-time annual teacher) in 1989, 122 FTEs in 2005 (although that agreement was signed under threat of a decree) and approximately 430 FTEs in 2010.

Some FAC unions returned to the fold in the mid-2000s and when that federation dissolved in 2009, nine others followed suit. Reform of decision-making structures in the CSN's public sector federations (which now operate on the basis of consensus, giving each federation equal weight) was a decisive factor in their return.

In 2020, unionism faces many challenges, including renewal in the midst of a changing labour market, fast-paced technological development and rampant individualism, but the *Regroupement Cégep* and its 45 unions are ready to meet them. ■

The origins of interunion solidarity and coordinated combative bargaining



Richard Bousquet
Vice-president, regroupement université

In 1985, the unions representing contractual university instructors set up an interunion coordinating committee for lecturers, which was the forerunner of the FNEEQ's *Regroupement université*. Its creation was timely in view of subsequent events. The strikes at UQAM and *Université du Québec à Rimouski* in the spring of 1987 and tough bargaining at UQAC, *Université de Montréal* and *Université Laval* prompted the unions to create shared information, discussion and action structures in order to increase their bargaining power.

« Mutual trust between the unions grew, based on communication and transparency,” recalls Marie Blais, an activist with the *Syndicat des chargées et chargés de cours de l’UQAM* (SCCUQ) at the time. She became coordinator of the *Regroupement université* in April 2001 and then Vice-President in December 2004. “The membership was determined to close the wage gap. There was a series of strikes at UQO, *Université Laval* and *UdeM*.”

The unions agreed on a coordination protocol (the Lanoraie protocol) in February 1989. The basic principles were solidarity, circulation of information, union independence and shared minimum demands. The group’s goals were to reduce the wage gap between the *Université du Québec* system and the chartered universities, promote professional development, support integration into the university and synchronize collective agreement expiry dates.

The Act respecting the conditions of employment in the public sector and the municipal sector, adopted in June 1993, ushered in budget cuts at the universities. It was a difficult period for lecturers. The university summit in October 1996, which followed up on the estates general on education and the employment summit, gave rise to new relationships between the *Fédération québécoise des professeures et professeurs d’université* (FQPPU), the student associations and the unions representing support staff.

The Employment Insurance reform of 1995 and the health insurance reform in 1996 led to closer ties with unions not affiliated with FNEEQ at Sherbrooke, Concordia and UQTR. In 1999, after a nasty strike, the SCCCUQTR asked the *Institut de recherche et d’information sur la rémunération* to investigate the pay gap between professors and sessional lecturers. They found there was a 71.5% difference in pay for doing the same work. As a result, the FNEEQ university unions decided that we had to agree on an action plan focused on mobilization by all the unions, although to different degrees. It was the first step in the development of an official coordinated bargaining strategy by the *Regroupement université* and the adoption of a more combative bargaining stance. “Think Big...stie,” said François Cyr, then Vice-President of the *Regroupement université*, echoing Pierre Falardeau’s Elvis Gratton character.

From that point on, “we made major gains while seeking consensus amongst ourselves, irrespective of the differences in size between the unions,” recalls Louise Bérubé, President of the SCCCUQAR almost without interruption since 1998.

“Our organizational model served as an inspiration for the *Regroupement privé* and for unions affiliated with other CSN federations,” says Marie Blais. Adds Louise Bérubé: “Our solidarity showed everyone the importance of looking after employees with precarious status.” ■

Personal accounts of FNEEQ activists

Three members who are actively involved in their unions agreed to talk to us about their activism. Here's what Bastien Laflamme, Camille Dubuc and Marie-Josée Bourget had to say. ¹



Bastien Laflamme

Bastien Laflamme has been teaching English for 31 years at *Collège de Lévis*, a private high school. He has been on the union executive since 1995 and president for the past 7 years. He is also a member of the FNEEQ-CSN insurance committee.



Marie-Josée Bourget

Marie-Josée Bourget is a lecturer in language studies at *Université du Québec en Outaouais*. She was president of the *Syndicat des chargées et chargés de cours de l'UQO* from 1999 to 2005. She decided to step down in 2005 but returned to the executive committee in 2013 and has basically been acting as president since then.

What made you get involved in the union ?

Bastien : Raymond Marier, the president at the time, asked me to. He wanted to groom the next generation. He was looking for a young instructor with no job security. I started as a union rep on the pedagogical commission. When I arrived at the College and attended my first union meeting, the majority of the teachers were there. There was a very vibrant union life. I realized it was something important. Labour relations were difficult. The union meeting was an outlet, a place where teachers could get together and show solidarity in a situation that was not easy. The school had financial problems; there was a possibility it could close. Union solidarity has been part of our history. Today, although there are many young teachers, there is still a high level of activism. They come to the meetings. Our members are concerned about their working conditions. We have been able to stay mobilized over the years. Whenever there's a new teacher at the college, I go and introduce myself. I have high hopes for the next generation. All the other members of the executive are younger than me. In fact, two of my former students have joined the team. There are always members of our union involved in the federation. We're a private school, we don't get much union leave, but we always have someone somewhere at the federation.

Camille : For me, it was never a question. When I'm working somewhere, I want to have a say in the working conditions. From day 1, I felt it was important to give people information. Helping people is a big motivator for me. And I must say that being part of the CSN was a major plus. The regional structure makes it possible for us to share our concerns and develop local solidarity. And then, at the federation level, we can work on more specific issues. I knew that the CSN, the federation and the union advisers would be a valuable resource for us.

Marie-Josée : First of all, it was because of the situation lecturers face, my work as a lecturer, what we were going through and what we're still going through. The union's first president was very proactive and he approached me as soon as I became a lecturer at UQO. He wanted me to get involved. At the time, there was a position called union council coordinator and I held it for about two years around 1996-97, before becoming president. That position no longer exists, but at the time it was used effectively to reach people.

¹ Answers edited for readability and length.



Camille Dubuc

Camille Dubuc has been teaching Special Care Counselling at *Cégep de Granby* since 2003. He became general secretary of his union in 2004 and president in 2015. He is a member of the FNEEQ health and safety committee.

Which campaign or struggle has affected you the most over the years ?

Bastien : The threat of closure of the school around 2000. The administration disagreed with the Board, which had laid out two options: cut salaries or close. The administration gave us carte blanche to investigate the possibility of merging with another school. We called a meeting with the director and the priests to tell the Board that we would take the keys and continue operating. They resigned en masse. It was a glowing example of solidarity among all job categories. The school could have closed. We were able to develop solidarity and it remains strong to this day.

Camille : In Granby, the *Un DEC c'est un DEC, partout au Québec* campaign resonated with all the departments. It was an important struggle. Usually, people are more concerned about their local problems. For once, people took an interest in a Québec-wide campaign. We looked beyond the local, beyond our daily concerns. We saw the issues in the education system in a new light and gained a better understanding of the importance of the Cégeps located outside the major urban centres.

Marie-Josée : In 2004, we went on strike for 4 weeks and we recovered all the money we had lost. The weather was wild during the strike. An article in the newspaper said we went through all four seasons during those four weeks. I remember doing a television interview in English. It was so cold! It must have been -30. The bargaining strategy was coordinated with the other unions. We were all

in it together and we made gains. We were kept abreast of the progress of the bargaining talks and the life of the union through in-person meetings of the Regroupement and conference calls. We shared the results of the negotiations to help others. It was very productive.

In your opinion, what is the FNEEQ 's strong point ?

Camille : The FNEEQ gives us an overview of the world of education. At the federation, we get insight into all levels of education, from kindergarten to university. And when a union is having difficulty, as some of the private sector unions have, the entire federation supports them. That's a great strength. There is also the School and Society Committee, which produces important discussion papers.

If the federation were to fight just one battle, what should it be ?

Marie-Josée : That's a great question! One thing I consider extremely important is preserving the Cégep system. Our education system wouldn't be the same without the Cégeps. I also work in Ottawa where there are no Cégeps, so at Regroupement Cégep meetings I sometimes explain the advantages of our system compared to Ontario's. Abolishing the Cégeps is an idea that resurfaces periodically. It's something that must not happen. This is a battle we can't afford to lose.

What would you like to tell FNEEQ members and activists ?

Bastien : There are some disparities between the Regroupements. We all have our own battles. I attended two Federal Council meetings about the Estates General on Higher Education, which gave me a better sense of where I fit into the education system. Everyone should take the time to go see what's happening in the other Regroupements. We would often find we have the same concerns. We have much in common with university lecturers and with small-town Cégeps. The problems with recruitment and job insecurity are the same. ■



1966 - Jean-Pierre Boutin of the SPEQ, in 1969 he would become the first president of the newly founded *Fédération nationale des enseignants québécois*.
Photo: Jean-Louis Frund



2012 – Red Hand Coalition die-in.
Photo: Unknown



1995 – May Day march during public sector negotiations.
Photo: Alain Chagnon



1981 - Francine Lalonde resigned at the Federal Council meeting in October.
Photo: FNEEQ archives



1979 – 24-hour walk-out during first bargaining session between the union common front and the government on June 12.
Photo: CSN archives



2012 – Teachers demonstrate in support of student protests on March 22.
Photo: Ariane Bilodeau



2004 – Demonstration during the Cégep coalition forum.
Photo: Clément Allard



1966 - Paul Doyon and Claude Sabourin talk strategy with an unidentified member.
Photo: Jean-Louis Frund



1972 – Common front rally at the Montréal Forum.
Photo: Archives CSN



1992 - Nacer Mazani, 2nd Vice-President, Lyne Boyer, 1st Vice-President, and Denis Choinière, President at the Federal Council meeting on April 9.
Photo: Archives CSN



2010 – Demonstration against tuition hikes on April 1.
Photo: Karine L'Écuyer



2007 – Striking employees on the picket line at Collège Villa Maria.
Photo: Michel Giroux



Union activism at the private schools and colleges: 50 years of challenges...

When we look at union activism in the federation over the past 50 years, it is readily apparent that teachers at the private institutions were central to the FNEEQ's creation and establishment. The federation's longest-standing bargaining certificate was granted by the Labour Relations Commission to the lay teachers employed by the Seminary of Québec on January 8, 1947. Now the *Syndicat des professeurs du Collège François-de-Laval*, the federation's oldest union is one of 42 in the *Regroupement de l'enseignement privé* today. The highly diverse group represents personnel in institutions at all five levels of education: preschool (3), primary (7), secondary (29), college (11) and university (1). Most are teachers, but a third of our unions also include support staff (secretaries, lab and computer science technicians, librarians, monitors, etc.).

Léandre Lapointe
Vice-president, regroupement privé

At first, the private colleges were run by religious congregations. Teachers had onerous working conditions, modelled on religious values of self-denial and the idea that their work was a "calling." They worked under the control of the members of the religious communities. Teachers had to mobilize to fight job insecurity, the complete lack of advancement opportunities and low pay. "Despite the rapid secularization of Québec society, priests and nuns continued to hold leadership positions at most colleges until the late 90s. Their degree of openness to unionism was uneven, to tell the truth. Bargaining talks were sometimes punctuated by critical comments unlike anything heard elsewhere in the federation, such as 'Your union values are incompatible with the college's mission,' 'The brothers see unionization of teachers as an insult,' 'You're upsetting the nuns of the Congregation,' 'It's your fault the priest died.' At the private colleges, there were often attempts to guilt union activists."

Decades later, union struggles in the private institutions are still in the news and still require creativity, perseverance and mobilization in order to uphold and improve members' working conditions. Underfunding and austerity measures across the education system are exerting increasing pressure on schools and therefore on collective bargaining. The *Regroupement de l'enseignement privé* has had to deal with the most lockouts and strikes of the entire education sector, involving both teachers and support staff. Many unions are in tough bargaining talks, employers are making demands regarding

workload, school administration deficits are growing and institutions are experiencing fluctuating enrollment.

Nevertheless, despite difficult conditions for union activism, we also see an abundance of courage, heart and energy in the Regroupement's union executives. Often working without union leave, the Regroupement's members energize the life of the union, demand rights for their members before the LRC, and inform and train members at general meetings. Attendance at the Regroupement's meetings and in the federation's training increases every year, an indication of the vibrancy of our many and diverse units. The Regroupement's teachers want to improve their working conditions and also want to give their students, particularly those with learning difficulties, the conditions for success. Union activism in the private schools constantly promotes the values of mutual assistance, solidarity and equality, in workplaces where individualism, performance and materialism tend to be the focus.

The current pandemic has added a new set of constraints to the mix, significantly complicating how we practise our profession, make connections and build relationships. At a time when our collective agreements are circumvented with ease, when overwork and simply preserving our physical and mental health are a real challenge, being unionized has never been more relevant to the private education system. ■

1 FNEEQ, *50 ans à faire école par nos luttes*, p. 152.

News From the Regroupements

Léandre Lapointe, vice-president, *regroupement privé*



Protecting health is a top priority and we must do all we can to keep everyone safe, particularly the most vulnerable in our society. However, the management of the pandemic by Public Health is placing enormous constraints on all school systems and constant pressure on all teachers that is increasingly difficult to cope with. As in the public system, none of our collective agreements contains provisions that are applicable to a pandemic. To manage the pandemic and address the shortcomings, the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEES) has issued regular updates to its guidelines since the spring. However, implementation of some of the guidelines remains an issue today.

Proclaiming their independence, a significant number of private colleges have applied only the guidelines they feel they should, mainly those to do with compensation. Every day, members are removed from the workplace at the behest of their administration or the regional health board and lose a portion of their salary or sick days. The situation is unacceptable. While the MEES has asked that salaries be maintained, many members in the private system are losing income or being forced to take sick days when they are in perfect health. Our goal is to standardize the application of the ministry's directives since all teachers, whether they work in the public or private sector, are dealing with the same situation.

Collective bargaining

Since our last issue was published, 12 unions in the Regroupement have signed collective agreements: the teachers at the *Académie de musique de Jonquière*, *Campus Notre-Dame-de-Foy*, the *Centre de musique et de danse de Val-d'Or*, *Collège Mont-Saint-Louis*, *Notre-Dame-de-Lourdes*, *Saint-Sacrement*, *École Pasteur*, *Jean de la Mennais* (after a three-day strike), *Vanguard School* and *Séminaire Saint-François*, and the support staff at *Villa Maria*. The teachers at *Kells Academy* finally signed their first collective agreement in April 2020, nearly two years after obtaining certification. Congratulations to all our members !

New Regroupement coordinator

We're pleased to announce the election of Caroline Leblond, a French teacher at *Collège de Lévis*, as the coordinator of the Regroupement de l'enseignement privé. With several years of union activism with the Regroupement under her belt, as a member of the *Comité fédéral des assurances et des régimes de retraite* (CFARR) and on the executive of the *Collège de Lévis* teachers' union, Caroline is well equipped to perform her role of supporting the FNEEQ team and the private school unions. Welcome aboard Caroline. On behalf of the FNEEQ and the *Regroupement de l'enseignement privé*, I want to express our gratitude to Alexandre Coudé. For the past 10 years, he has been a pillar of the Regroupement. Following a selection committee meeting, Alexandre has agreed to become a union advisor at the CSN, where he will continue to support, advise and apply his skills for benefit the unions. I would like to thank Alexandre personally for his support, his meaningful feedback and his friendship. Working with Alexandre has always been easy, productive and enjoyable. Thanks for everything, my friend ! ■



1983 – Mass demonstration by the common front in front of the National Assembly on January 29.
Photo: François Rivard

News From the Regroupements

Richard Bousquet, vice-president, *regroupement université*



Protests and support

Facing increasingly large class sizes and unrecognized extra workloads as they adapt their courses to online teaching, lecturers have started a petition to garner support. The FNEEQ unions that represent lecturers have also been protesting the discriminatory rules applied by the *Fonds de recherche du Québec* (FRQ) and, at the October meeting of the *Regroupement université*, they came out in support of lecturer and part-time instructor Verushka Lieutenant-Duval, who was unfairly suspended by the University of Ottawa.

At the time of writing, the petition, hosted on change.org, had collected over 1,000 signatures in less than a week. It calls on the government and universities to acknowledge that oversized classes are not a favourable learning environment; to limit the size of online classes or reduce them to a more human scale in order to avoid creating virtual auditoriums; to recognize teachers' increased workloads and give them the means to mitigate the negative impacts on students.

La The June 2017 review of the FRQ's Common General Rules resulted in rules that discriminate against adjunct professors (i.e. lecturers). Lecturers submitting grant applications are limited to a 2-page CV, compared with more than 10 pages for tenured

professors. The Regroupement protested against this arbitrary distinction in the FRQ's grant application forms. The unions also called for a dedicated fund to support participation by lecturers by compensating them for time spent on research.

In connection with its support for Verushka Lieutenant-Duval, the Regroupement made it clear that: it denounces all forms of racism and hate speech intended to demean, humiliate or dehumanize a person or social group; reminds universities and professors of their social responsibility in the fight against inequality, including racism; reiterates the importance of academic freedom; calls on university administrations to commit to respecting and defending the academic freedom of all members of their community; notes that the fight against racism and discrimination requires discussion of sensitive topics, such as the contextualized use of offensive terms that carry a heavy historical burden; condemns the posting of teachers' personal information on social media or other platforms, which can lead to a flood of hateful and harassing messages; and denounces the attitude of the University of Ottawa's administration, which has committed institutional violence against an instructor with precarious status. ■



THANK YOU!

Myriam Légaré
Teacher

EXCLUSIVE BENEFITS FOR EDUCATIONAL SERVICES EMPLOYEES AND RETIREES

for being there every day
for us and our families

Exclusive savings on each home, auto or leisure vehicle insurance because you are a member of FNEEQ

\$450 in average savings¹ for our clients from the public services who bundle their insurance

Ask for a quote today!
1 855 441-6016
lacapitale.com/fneeq-en



La Capitale General Insurance Inc., damage insurance agency. At all times, terms and conditions pertaining to coverage are governed solely by the insurance contract. Some conditions and exclusions apply. | 1. Source: June 2017 SOM survey of La Capitale clients who work for or are retired from public service and bundled at least two products among home, auto and leisure vehicle insurance. Average savings calculated using the declared amounts of 96 respondents who benefited from a savings.

News From the Regroupements

Yves de Repentigny, vice-president, *regroupement cégep*

Last March, at a time when the *Regroupement Cégep* already had many important issues on its plate, the COVID-19 crisis upset the apple cart and it has been the focus of attention ever since. The Regroupement had to quickly get up to speed with virtual meetings in order to adopt demands and an action plan, as the situation required. In late May and again in early September, in anticipation of the return to school, the Regroupement mandated its representatives to agree on a series of Québec-wide measures and resources to give teachers the working conditions they need in order to ensure continued success for all student populations despite the current situation.

These intensive efforts, along with the media releases, letter-writing campaigns, social media posts and representations to Cégep administrations called for by the action plan, have borne fruit. First, the Ministry of Higher Education (MES) provided the colleges with additional budgets to deal with the pandemic. However, the effects have rarely been felt in the classrooms and Minister Danielle McCann has asked the administrations for explanations. In addition, in October the FNEEQ got the Comité patronal de négociation des collèges (CPNC) to agree to set up an exploratory committee to examine steps that could be taken to reduce teachers' workloads.

Bargaining

Obviously, the public health crisis has had a significant impact on bargaining. At first, the government said it wanted to suspend bargaining talks so that it could focus on the pandemic, but it quickly changed tack, likely prompted by electoral considerations, and insisted on pushing through quick settlements by issuing ultimatums and making "final" offers. The FNEEQ and the CSN's other public sector federations felt differently, arguing that it would be better to suspend bargaining so that the pressing needs in the public sector not fall victim to botched negotiations. However, with an economic crisis looming, they decided in May to change their stance and returned to the bargaining table in the hope of quickly reaching an agreement. The Regroupement Cégep established its priority sectoral demands in late spring. In July, the minister responsible for the Treasury Board was replaced in a cabinet shuffle and the issue fell off the government's radar. To revive the process, the CSN tabled a counter-proposal at the central table in late August. At the FNEEQ sectoral table, discussions resumed in mid-September in an initially tense climate because the CPNC lacked a mandate, but

the mood improved once the CPNC showed openness to some of our demands. That said, the amounts on the table fall far short of what is needed to remedy the glaring problems undermining college education and no agreement appears possible for the moment.



Program reviews

In response to criticism from Quebec's auditor general, who felt the interval between reviews of any given program was too long, the Ministry of Higher Education (MES) decided to go full steam ahead and revamp a large number of technical programs, with no regard for transparency or consultation with those working on the front lines, i.e. the teachers. The first programs up for review include Accounting & Management Technology, Business Management and Office System Technology, which may be abolished and replaced by a single "multipurpose" diploma. The *Regroupement Cégep* has therefore adopted an action plan, which includes sending letters to the deputy minister in charge of the file, staging protests and a meeting of Office System Technology teachers from across Québec to discuss the program.

For their part, pre-university science and humanities programs are in the final stages of review. The failure to consult teachers early in the process led to some hitches, particularly with the Science program, for which the initial draft eviscerated the program's Québec-wide character, causing the MES to call on a committee of experts to get the process back on track. With profs currently focusing on their teaching duties and grappling with the restructuring necessitated by COVID-19, the *Regroupement Cégep* has asked the ministry to suspend work on these programs until times are closer to normal.

Centres for College Studies (CECs)

Although the CEC project in Vaudreuil-Dorion has been temporarily shelved because the government didn't want to approve a bilingual campus, the Regroupement Cégep continues to denounce the chaotic development of the college system, which seems to be driven by competition for "customers." It is calling for a moratorium on new approvals and the establishment of a tripartite committee including the MES, the Fédération des cégeps and the FNEEQ to agree on guidelines for opening new centres and analyzing projects for approval. It adopted a resolution proposing such guidelines in February. ■

CISO international union solidarity delegation visits Mexico

Labour reforms raise hopes amid unacceptable conditions



Dany Héon
Lecturer, *Université du Québec à Rimouski*
Vice-President, Public Sector, *Conseil central du Bas-Saint-Laurent*

From February 24 to March 4, 2020, an inter-union delegation from the Centre international de solidarité ouvrière (CISO) visited Mexico to observe the state of human rights and social mobilization. It included representatives of four major Québec union organizations – the CSN, the CSQ, the FIQ and the FTQ. I was there representing the FNEEQ as part of the CSN delegation.



Crédit photo : Benoît Taillefer
CCMM-CSN International Solidarity Committee

The visit took place against the backdrop of events that directly affect the labour movement in Mexico. The new Canada-United States-Mexico Agreement (CUSMA) was still being negotiated (Canada had not yet ratified it), and almost a year had elapsed since Mexico had overhauled its federal labour laws. That reform, ushered in by Mexico's new president, Andrés Manuel López Obrador, was the result of years of demands and struggles by the Mexican workers' and union movement. Its adoption was accelerated by international political pressure surrounding the CUSMA negotiations and the defeat of the PRI (Institutional Revolutionary Party) in the 2018 federal elections. The reform represents major progress in many ways and has raised high hopes, but doubts persist about the political will to implement it.

The CISO delegation met with various union organizations, political representatives, and organizations and associations of feminists, environmentalists, peasants, Indigenous people and human-rights activists. These groups told us about serious, unacceptable problems in Mexico, including targeted killings, forced disappearances, mass graves, femicide, corruption, collusion, disinformation (which our delegation experienced first-hand in meetings with municipal politicians and civil servants, and even with a corrupt union), modern-day slavery, land dispossession and destruction and, worst of all, the relative impunity enjoyed by those who perpetrate these crimes against activists, workers, women, students and

other members of the organizations with which we met. Now that I am home, what heartens me the most is the undaunted courage, pride and hope that these people show in the face of torture, killings of loved ones, unjustified imprisonment and other forms of repression.

This is the side of Mexico we heard about from the union and citizen organizations and marginalized people with whom we met. Much needs to be done, and there are many things that we as a union organization can and should do. I believe we must continue and strengthen our collaboration with CISO, which has proven its effectiveness in organizing and implementing positive actions through its support networks, alliances, campaigns and lobbying efforts to support our sisters and brothers, not only in Mexico but around the world.

In closing, I want to thank the Frente Auténtico del Trabajo (FAT), which was instrumental in organizing our visit, and especially our guide and interpreter Eladio Abundiz Guadian, who helped steer us through some politically complex situations. To me, he and his organization will always be exemplars of trade unionism.

In solidarity with our compañeros, ■

- 1 CISO (<https://www.ciso.qc.ca/>) is a key vehicle for co-ordinating international solidarity activities by Québec trade unions. The CSN played an important role in its creation in 1975.
- 2 <https://www.international.gc.ca/trade-commerce/trade-agreements-accords-commerciaux/agr-acc/cusma-aceum/index.aspx?lang=eng>
- 3 <https://reforma laboral.stps.gob.mx/>
- 4 On this subject, I urge everyone to read the delegation's complete report and the delegates' joint declaration, both of which will soon be available on CISO's website. I also encourage you to explore the site further for a fuller picture of our observations and the resulting demands and campaigns.

Chilean people achieve historic victory

In long struggle to restore democracy

On October 25, 2020, a year to the day after Chileans took to the streets in the largest demonstrations in the country's history to protest 30 years of post-dictatorship abuses, the people of Chile voted 78.27% in favour of adopting a new constitution and 79% in favour of holding a Constitutional Convention to draft it. But many battles remain to be fought in order to uproot the neoliberal authoritarianism so deeply embedded in Chile's political system.

Ricardo Peñafiel

Member of the School and Society Committee and representative of the FNEEQ, the CCMM and the CSN on the Québec solidarity and human rights monitoring delegation to Chile

In a movement that began on October 18, 2019, the people of Chile rose up in most of the country's major cities to protest 46 years of market authoritarianism and 30 years of abuse under a limited democracy. From that date on, hardly a day went by without thousands demonstrating all over the country. On some days, such as October 25, 2019 and March 9, 2020, the turnout was in the millions.

Despite bloody repression, massive protests continued every day until they were drastically limited by COVID-19 restrictions. The demonstrations exerted such pressure on Chile's government and political parties that in November 2019, they signed an Agreement for social peace and a new constitution. It originally called for a plebiscite to be held in April 2020, but because of the pandemic, it was postponed to October 25.

But this agreement was among the political parties, and it in no way staunched the national daily protest movement. The 79% vote in favour of a Constitutional

Convention (from which members of Chile's National Congress will be excluded) is another sign of the independence of the people's struggle to restore the democracy usurped by the political parties, whose approval ratings fell as low as 2% during the crisis.

The plebiscite was a historic victory that sounded the death knell for the odious Pinochet constitution of 1980 under which Chile is still governed today. After the vote, with an eye to the upcoming elections to the Constitutional Convention, all the political parties that had supported the Pinochet constitution for over 30 years tried to claim some of the credit for its defeat.

But the political parties – including those on the left – have been discredited, and there is no independent counter-hegemonic force strong enough to channel the will for change into a unified popular front in preparation for the elections to the Constitutional Convention. One of the first battles will therefore be to unify progressive candidacies to avoid splitting the vote. ■



1 See especially Report of the Quebec and Canadian Mission of Human Rights Observation in Chile (<https://ovcd.org/en/2020/08/16/rapport-final-mission-ddhh/>). The FNEEQ-CSN participated in this mission.



50 years of struggle

50 ans à faire école par nos luttes, the history of the *Fédération nationale des enseignantes et des enseignants du Québec* (FNEEQ-CSN), was released in December 2019. The book highlights the landmark struggles that have shaped the FNEEQ's identity and culture in its 50 years of existence.

The title aptly sums up the membership's energy and commitment to collective action for progressive causes. The list of struggles and victories is impressive: the fight for the status of women in the *Fédération*, for the recognition of lecturers, for the preservation of small-town institutions, for professional independence and freedom of expression. But perhaps the most striking thing is how little the basic issues have changed. A strong common thread runs through the debates about the teaching profession and the battles the FNEEQ has waged in the course of its history.

To buy a copy of the book for \$25, contact the *Fédération* at 514-598-2241 or fneeq.reception@csn.qc.ca (French version only).