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NURSES DECIDE TO CONTINUE
THE STRIKE

At the Special Federal Council meeting, the 600 delegates of the *Fédération des infirmières et infirmiers du Québec* took a very important decision with a unanimous vote. They decided to continue the unlimited general strike, despite the penalties that could be announced by the Bouchard government.

After a report on negotiations, the penalties and the mobilisation, delegates concluded that nurses had nothing to lose; nothing could be worse for them than the current situation in health-care institutions. The President of the FIIQ, Madam Jennie Skene, repeated that nurses want to negotiate their work contract, but the

government and the employers simply refuse to negotiate and this was the case even before the strike began.

"The government's inflexible position on the question of salaries in fact means that salaries are no longer negotiable in Quebec. As for non-monetary matters, it took 14 months of negotiations, two days of strike action and the intervention of Minister Marois before we could approve two clauses of the collective agreement, which contains 45 clauses in all. To say that all non-monetary matters are settled, as the Minister does, amounts to disinformation.

We can see that the mobilization and solidarity of nurses are extraordinary. A pressure tactic such as the strike is necessary and it is the only way of having the negotiations progress. At the present time, the government refuses to negotiate, forces nurses to strike and brandishes legislation and fines. With the strength of the solidarity we all witnessed on the picket lines these past days, we know that our struggle is just and legitimate. We merit what we demand.

The support of the population for nurses' struggle shows to what extent the

population knows that nurses are also fighting for a better health system and for better quality of care. We have all witnessed various forms of public support."

In her closing address, the President gave delegates an important message: *"In the coming days nurses will have to strengthen their solidarity, resist the temptation of responding to provocation, regardless of where it comes from, and they will have to continue scrupulously ensuring essential services."*



UNFAILING

DETERMINATION AND SOLIDARITY

After having taken stock of the situation with regard to negotiations and exchanged on the state of mobilization, the 600 delegates unanimously reasserted their determination to obtain satisfaction in the struggle they are waging. With the strength of their convictions, nurses will continue their unlimited general strike, despite all decrees, legislation or other measures that could be applied. This decision should indicate to the government that nurses have had enough and that

they have nothing left to lose. They prefer to stand upright until the end, rather than accept the unacceptable. The health-care network is deteriorating from day to day, it is urgent that something be done to put a halt to this deterioration and, moreover, nurses do not want to continue to endorse situations where delivering health care and services has become dangerous both for themselves and the population.

LAST MINUTE

"Nurses are not looking for confrontation, they want a settlement" declared the President of the Federation, Jennie Skene, following Premier Bouchard's speech during which he gave nurses an ultimatum. The President therefore reasserted during a meeting with the media that nurses were determined to negotiate a collective agreement with the government and to devote all the required energy to this between now and Friday, while pursuing the strike.

STILL FAR AWAY FROM AN AGREEMENT

After more than one year of negotiations with the employer associations and the government, the negotiations steering committee presented on the main points that are still not settled and those on which there is an agreement.

Of the six priorities, two only were settled satisfactorily: the workload and job instability. The last issue of *FIIQ en Action* presented at greater length the different measures that were agreed upon, namely: the process of converting hours of replacement into positions and a quicker mechanism for the



settlement of disputes that arise at the Committee on Nursing.

Pay is also an important issue for nurses. The position of the government on salaries did not change since the presentation of wage offers last March, that is 1 % for 1999, 2 % for 2000 and 2 % for 2001. As for the salary catch-up raise for nurses and Baccalaureate nurses, the government is still not offering anything concrete and is instead proposing that the study of these questions be referred to a committee, and this without any guarantees, of course, that the money will be available once the results of the study are public.

The Federation's position on remuneration is the same as the one presented in the lat-

est issue of *FIIQ en Action*: a catch-up raise, paid retroactively to July 1, 1998, and a pay raise of 2,5 % for 1999 and 3,5 % for 2000. As for the third year raise, the FIIQ proposes that it be negotiated in fall 2000, in the light of the results obtained through a study on the relative position of nurses' and baccalaureate nurses' salary scales and on pay equity.

Concerning non-monetary clauses, there are subjects on which no steps forward have been made by employer associations. These are the clauses that concern access to positions, salary insurance, the annual vacation leave and union leaves. On the other hand, certain other non-monetary clauses have still not been dealt with: the job security plan, parental rights and the recognition of seniority.

SUBJECTS OF CONTENTION

ACCESS TO POSITIONS

For several years now, nurses have been demanding the improvement of the mechanisms for granting positions. This supposes a clearer definition of the requirements which employers can impose and a mechanism for the recognition of experience.

Too often, when an employer posts a position, it is easy to identify who will obtain it simply by looking at the requirements set by the employer. This situation is worse for the positions where a baccalaureate degree is required, since in addition to the requirements, the entire selection process can be biased by the interviews. Moreover, certain experience requirements are so high that a position can remain vacant because there are no candidates that meet the requirements.

This is why nurses want positions to be granted according to seniority.

Moreover, the academic

requirements set by employers for a growing number of positions only amplify a profound feeling of non-recognition of the work accomplished for many years. This means that thousands of nurses cannot have access to positions that have different responsibilities, such as an assistant-head nurse position, for example.

This is why nurses demand that it be possible to make up for academic training with years of pertinent experience.

Employer associations respond with a clear "no" to these two demands; they want to be able to continue choosing who will obtain the posted positions as they see fit.

SALARY INSURANCE

By an abusive interpretation of the notion of disability, several employers negate the right of nurses to salary insurance benefits. Not to mention the harassment which several employers practice as soon as a nurse claims benefits. It's almost as if the *raison d'être* of the health-care system was to care for sick people with the exception of nurses who are not allowed to be ill.

We therefore demand that the definition of disability be modified so that a nurse who is not capable of performing her normal duties may receive salary insurance benefits.

Another important element of nurses' demands with regard to salary insurance is the preponderance of the opinion of the attending physician. By an abusive use of control measures, useless convocations to the health office, employers want to give the impression that the only physicians capable of making a diagnosis are those employed to exercise control over disability cases.

This is why nurses demand that the opinion and recommendations of the attending physicians be preponderant.



ANNUAL VACATION LEAVE

In addition to a fifth week of annual vacation after 20 years of service, nurses demand that the period for taking annual vacation extend from June 15 to September 15. With the present vacation period, which extends from May 15 to October 15, many nurses can never have vacations with their children. In many institutions, it is not rare for a nurse to have to wait for 20 years before she can go on vacation in July or August.

This is why nurses demand that the period of annual vacation leave be shortened to extend from June 15 to September 15.

Employers were made aware of this situation. They were also informed of measures taken in various institutions and that made it possible to reduce the period for taking annual leave while having enough staff throughout the summer. In spite of this evidence, they persist in their refusal to modify the summer vacation period.

UNION LEAVES

For an active union life, it is important for a union to keep in touch with its members and to support them in the defence of their rights. Employer associations recognized this in the past and this is why the collective agreement makes it possible for employees to be granted leaves from work in order to carry out their union duties.

However, the cutbacks of the past years have led certain employers to exercise such control over union leaves that it has become virtually impossible for union repre-

sentatives to carry out the mandate for which they have been elected.

Moreover, a part-time employee who performs union duties can be severely penalized when the employer proceeds to calculate salary insurance, maternity leave or job security benefits to which she is entitled.

This is why nurses ask that union representatives be granted union leaves to carry out their mandate, without losing any of their rights.

SUBJECTS NOT YET DISCUSSED

Among the other subjects which employers have not yet negotiated, there is the whole question of the job security plan, parental rights and seniority. Although these subjects are not considered to be priorities, they are nevertheless of major importance for nurses.

JOB SECURITY PLAN

Nurses demand that the job

security plan be modified in order to better protect the income of part-time employees to avoid situations where nurses would receive zero benefits. Moreover, a relocated employee should not suffer any loss of income due to her relocation in a job title with a lower salary. It is important that there be a period of adaptation for employees that take on new duties.

PARENTAL RIGHTS

The employment insurance plan had devastating effects on maternity leave benefits. Nurses demand that the government guarantee the same amount of benefits, with the same eligibility criteria as before the reform, therefore that they be raised to the same level as before the reform of the federal Employment Insurance Act.

SENIORITY

Nurses demand that the rules for the recognition of seniority be revised in the case of employees who work in more than one certification unit for the same employer.

SUBJECTS ON WHICH THERE IS AGREEMENT

Besides the questions related to the work load and job instability, agreement was reached on certain other clauses. Here is a brief review of these.

VIOLENCE AT WORK

The introduction in the collective agreement of a statement to the effect that the union and the employer cooperate in order to eliminate violence at work.

ARBITRATION FEES

Employer associations withdrew their demand that the losing party bear arbitration expenses.

WEEK-END PREMIUM

Certain employers refuse to pay the 4% premium when employees do not work a full work shift. Employer associations agreed to straighten this out.

MARRIAGE LEAVE

An employee who does not hold a position will hence-

forth be entitled to this paid leave, according to the assignment she has at the time of the marriage.

PARTIAL LEAVE WITHOUT PAY BY A POSITION TRADE OFF

This leave, introduced in 1995, will be maintained in the next collective agreement. However, the employer maintains his refusal to reintroduce the partial leave without pay also included in the 1995 collective agreement.

LEAVE WITHOUT PAY FOR A NURSE TEMPORARILY STRUCK OFF THE OIIQ ROLL

An employee temporarily struck off the roll of the *Ordre des infirmières et infirmiers du Québec* will have the possibility of benefiting from a leave without pay for the length of time she is suspended.



INORDINATE FINES AND PENALTIES

At the Federal Council meeting, Chantal Boivin, co-responsible for negotiations reminded delegates of the penalties to which nurses and their organization are subject by virtue of Bill 160. Thus, the application of two measures are the responsibility of each employer .

- The double penalty : one day of strike- two days of loss of salary.
- The suspension of the automatic check-off of union dues : 12 weeks per day of strike.

Moreover, as the Minister of Health and Social Services declared in a press conference last Monday, the Attorney General of Quebec decided to deliver a statement of offence to 22 union organizations affiliated to the FIIQ. These unions are liable to a maximum fine of 125 000 \$ per day of strike.

On the other hand, at the time of going to press, the Council Ministers had not yet decided to apply the measure concerning seniority. - for each day or part of day of strike: loss of one year of seniority.

However, in the event that the double salary penalty is applied, delegates voted that it be shared by all the members of the FIIQ.

Bill 160 is an anti-labour and anti-democratic law and the Bouchard government, chose to brandish fines and penalties rather than negotiate. Public opinion, the managers of health institutions, physicians, patients, all agree to say that nurses' demands are just and legitimate. Delegates believed it was high time that the government stop hiding the supposed illegality of nurses' pressure tactics and that they return to the bargaining table to settle the problems that they have been facing for several years now.

**FOR INFORMATION
UPDATED REGULARLY**
A toll-free number :

1-877-282-9125

The FIIQ web site:
www.fiiq.qc.ca
In English,
the web site of
the Labour and Society International:
www.labourstart.org

Everywhere



Complexe hospitalier de la Sagamie - Pavillon St-Vallier



CHUQ - Pavillon CHUL

nurses are determined

In all corners of Quebec, from north to south, from east to west, in front of the vast majority of health-care institutions - CHSLD, CHs, CLSCs - nurses are shouting high and loud :

- Donnez-nous
 - Donnez-nous
 - Un salaire
 - Un salaire
 - Donnez-nous
 - Donnez-nous
 - Des conditions de travail respectables
 - Donnez-nous ce que nous méritons
- (on the tune of Valderi-Valdera)

Indeed, nurses on picket lines are highly mobilized and there are a variety of activities: music, barbecues, community lunches and diners, regional rallies, camping ...

Moreover, starting on the first day of the unlimited general strike, FIIQ Executive Committee members began a round of picket lines throughout Quebec. As you can see on these pictures, everywhere nurses are convinced that their cause is just and legitimate. We have the support of the nurses' unions of other provinces, labour organizations, professional associations and many individuals who send messages of support by e-mail.



CHA - Pavillon St-Sacrement



Domaine du Bon Temps



Hôpital du Sacré-Coeur de Montréal



CHUM - Campus Notre-Dame



CHUQ - Pavillon Hôtel-Dieu de Québec



Centre hospitalier régional de Rimouski



CLSC de l'Estuaire



Hôpital Ste-Croix



Hôpital Maisonneuve-Rosemont