

PUBLIC FORCE

The public services, the best of ourselves!

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Mobilization is more crucial than ever!

You are holding the first issue of *Public Force*, the official newsletter of the *Secrétariat intersyndical des services publics* (SISP), addressed to the 300,000 public sector workers represented by our five labour organizations.

Like the SISP, this newsletter was born from our will to strengthen solidarity among the public sector employees who are members of the CSQ, FIQ, SFPQ, SPGQ and APTS. We must confess that such an intention would have been unthinkable not so long ago. But what may seem impossible in normal times often becomes possible in times of crisis, and that's what is happening.

A major crisis that threatens public services

As Presidents representing the greatest number of public sector workers, we are convinced that Quebec is in the midst of a major crisis. A crisis of values that jeopardizes both the survival of our public services and the societal model we have adopted in Quebec, based on the principles of justice, equality and solidarity.

We have to hear the increasingly numerous voices raised with ever-increasing boldness on the public scene in the past few years, to discredit the quality of our public services, devalue them and demean the people who work for them, while at the same time calling for an increased private sector role in delivering these services. The supporters of this line are especially successful due to their largely disproportionate coverage in the Quebec print and electronic media compared to the number of real people they represent.

Very real issues for employees and the general public

This observation regarding the climate prevailing in Quebec has made us aware of the scope of the challenges facing all public sector workers and the labour organizations that represent them. The employees' jobs are certainly at the heart of the matter, but there is more. There is also a broader issue that concerns all of our fellow citizens, the type of society we want in Quebec.

On one side is the social democratic model, which has made it possible to build a modern Quebec and allowed all Quebecers, regardless of income, to have access to a package of free, quality public services, which was not previously the case. On the other side is the neoliberal model, which seeks a return to greater privatization, with varying access to services and varying entitlement to quality services depending on the users' ability to pay.

Over the past few years, economic power has considerably increased neoliberalism's grip on our world. Public services are the last sector of activity where it has

unacceptable that private corporations will take our jobs and use them solely to make a profit. Finally, we care about preserving the moral and social interests of our members. From where we stand, defending public services is a question of reason, and of heart.

Together we can make a difference

We have chosen to join forces in the SISP with the aim of emphasizing the need for greater solidarity among public sector workers to defend our public services.

We face a major challenge, a challenge we will overcome thanks to the commitment of our 300,000 members.



From left to right : Gilles Dussault, Lina Bonamie, Dominique Verreault, Michel Sawyer and Réjean Parent

Photo : Michel Monette

been unable to impose its rules. It is obvious that its will to expand, in the name of an insatiable quest for profits and enrichment, is pushing neoliberalism irremediably in this direction. We must therefore succeed in protecting public services from the devastating logic of the marketplace.

A question of reason... and of heart

We are convinced that labour organizations, especially in the public sector, are the last bulwark that can halt the process that has been set in motion to privatize public services and dismantle the Quebec State.

However, we must recognize that this is an enormous challenge. Despite the major attacks the labour movement has suffered in the past few years, including the harsh Bill 142, which became Bill 43, it is our responsibility to defend public services. There are three very simple reasons for this. First, we know that access to universal public services is an essential step in social progress. Second, we love our work of serving our fellow citizens and it's

Réjean Parent

CSQ President

Lina Bonamie

FIQ President

Michel Sawyer

SFPQ General President

Gilles Dussault

SPGQ President

Dominique Verreault

APTS President

The SISP: a fundamental mission

The SISP's mission is to defend and promote public services offered to the Quebec population, and value the workers who provide these services. By their concerted actions, the CSQ, FIQ, SFPQ, SPGQ and APTS want to promote access to quality public services throughout Quebec.

October 10 and 11, 2007

A page of labour history is written in Duchesnay

A first in the history of the labour movement occurred on October 10 and 11, 2007 in Duchesnay, a Quebec City suburb, when the executives of the five member labour organizations of the *Secrétariat intersyndical des services publics* (SISP) met to share their analysis of the socio-political and economic context in Quebec. At this meeting, they developed a joint action plan to defend and value public services and the people who work for them.

For two days, CSQ President Réjean Parent, FIQ President Lina Bonamie, SFPQ President Michel Sawyer, SPGQ President Gilles Dussault and APTS President Dominique Verreault, as well as the members of their executives, discussed the threatening wind from the right blowing across Quebec, howling for privatization of public



Photos : Daniëlle Lavallée



The SISP's five member labour organizations are living with the same reality due to the Government's intention to withdraw from public services. In this context, the union executives conclude that it is necessary and urgent to take various actions to strengthen union power, both internally through greater mobilization of our members, and externally through public opinion.

An action plan in preparation

Following this two-day meeting, the union leaders discussed an action plan, which essentially will focus on three lines. The first line, which transcends the action plan, reiterates the memorandum's objective of defending and promoting public services, and valuing the people who work for them.

The second line of the action plan turns inward to the members of the SISP's five labour organizations. It will seek to define and implement means of raising members' awareness of the real stakes of privatization and its impacts on public services.

The third line of the action plan turns outward, with the aim of informing the general public about the dangers of privatization, particularly in the health-care sector.

Organizations that can and want to work together

This historic union meeting in Duchesnay once again showed the ability of the SISP's member labour organizations to work together and their will to join forces to defend their common interests.

services and downsizing of government. They also focused on the means necessary to counter this in the name of the common good.

A privatization process in full swing

Essentially, the leaders of the five labour organizations share a common reading of Quebec reality. Public services in Quebec and the thousands of employees who work for them have been confronted for years with the most virulent attacks ever launched against them by the adherents of neoliberalism.

Taking advantage of this favourable wind for its ideas, the Charest government accelerated the process of dismantling the Quebec State:

- five government bodies are already threatened with privatization;
- 19 other organizations are currently under review;
- the privatization of the health and social and social services network is under way and will probably pick up speed with the report of the Castonguay "private" working group;
- the infiltration of higher education by the private sector is now a fait accompli;
- the funding of postsecondary education is less and less public.

The SISP: A new and powerful union force

With its 300,000 members, including 240,000 from the public, parapublic and peripublic sectors, the *Secrétariat intersyndical des services publics* (SISP) is a powerful union force. In fact, no other Quebec labour organization can claim to represent so many public sector workers. The SISP today is the



Photo : Gabriel Danis

strongest voice that can be raised on behalf of those who deliver public services to the population on a daily basis.

The SISP draws its strength from an alliance of the following five labour organizations:

Centrale des syndicats du Québec (CSQ)

President: Réjean Parent

155,000 members, including over 100,000 in the public sector
Sectors represented: education, health, social services, recreation, culture, communications, community and municipalities.

Fédération interprofessionnelle de la santé du Québec (FIQ)

President: Lina Bonamie

57,000 members, all in the public sector
Sector represented: health

Syndicat de la fonction publique du Québec (SFPQ)

General President: Michel Sawyer

44,000 members, all in the public sector
Sector represented: public service

Syndicat de professionnelles et professionnels du gouvernement du Québec (SPGQ)

President: Gilles Dussault

19,000 members, including 17,000 in the public service and 2,000 in the parapublic sector
Sectors represented: public service, government corporations, education and health

Alliance du personnel professionnel et technique de la santé et des services sociaux (APTS)

President: Dominique Verreault

26,000 members, all in the public sector
Sectors represented: health and social services

The SISP — 300,000 employees, like you, working for the good of 7,651,033 Quebecers.

28th Public Services International World Congress

Privatization is wreaking havoc around the world

Four of the SISP's five member organizations sent representatives this September to the *Public Services International (PSI) World Congress*. Held in Vienna, Austria, this Congress brought together more than 2,000 union activists, representing over 20 million public sector workers in over 140 countries around the world.

This was the 28th World Congress of the PSI, which celebrates its hundredth anniversary this year.

The SISP leaders' participation at this event was very rewarding and an opportunity for our represented union organizations to strengthen their solidarity and their ties with this major world organization and its member unions. This is a necessary approach at a time of economic globalization, which has stirred up a wind of privatization of public services, blowing through Quebec and through all nations around the world.

A voracious appetite

Whether in North America, South America, Europe, Africa or elsewhere on the planet, the same phenomenon can be seen everywhere – the emergence of powerful right-wing lobbies, all singing the same refrain: the need to privatize certain public services in the name of efficiency,



Several countries were represented at the World Congress in Vienna

market competition and profitability. The language and culture may change, but the sales pitch always remains the same.



The Charest government denounced in Vienna

The SISP representatives didn't just listen in Vienna. The SISP presented a workshop on the efforts pursued in Quebec to defend and value public services to counter the Charest government's attempts at privatization. They also used this international podium to denounce the Charest govern-

While health services and health care are currently the main targets of the private sector in Quebec, the accounts heard at this World Congress show that it won't stop there. The examples of what is happening in the rest of the world show that corporations have a more voracious appetite and have already set their sights on social services, the education system, pension and old age security plans, water management, gas and electricity, police and security, culture, and of course... waste management.

ment once again for its stubborn refusal to review Bill 43, even though its adoption under closure has been clearly condemned by the *International Labour Office (ILO)*, a United Nations agency.

The SISP leaders reminded the Convention that the Quebec government has still shown no remorse for its violation of international agreements on union freedom and the protection of union rights, the right to organize and free collective bargaining, as highlighted by the ILO decision.

Three good reasons to oppose privatization of public services



Photo : Photos.com

1
They would cost more because they would be subject to the logic of profit.

2
They would force families back into debt because free, accessible and universal services would be abolished.

3
They would vary in quantity and quality from one region to another, controlled by companies primarily seeking profitability.

What's your reason?

The SISP sounds the alarm on health care

This autumn is a time full of danger for public health services and social services. The struggle against privatization is the SISP's top priority.

We have never seen such aggressive privatization initiatives. The contractual agreement between Hôpital Sacré-Cœur de Montréal and the private surgical centre RocklandMD, the launch of the Groupe Chaoulli brokerage agency to facilitate access to private care, and the closed-door meeting of privatization planners from all over the planet in Saint-Sauveur are missiles aimed at the destruction of the public health-care system. To top it all off, the report of the committee mandated by Finance Minister Monique Jérôme-Forget and chaired by Claude Castonguay, whose preconceived ideas are already known, will be deposited in December. This report will contain conclusions and recommendations which can only increase privatization of health care.



Photo : APTS

It's time to show our indignation!

The SISP will use every podium to denounce these virulent attacks on the public health and social services system. But we have to count on the strength of numbers and the obvious indignation of our members to send a clear message regarding two-tier health care: NO THANK YOU! So the SISP is calling on its members to rise up and make themselves heard.

Your gesture can make a difference

In November, thousands of awareness pamphlets, along with a postcard to be addressed to the Charest government denouncing privatization of health care, will circulate in your work environments. We are counting on everyone to sign this postcard proudly, affirming your convictions in favour of the public health-care system.

A demonstration in Saint-Sauveur

The SISP has also mobilized to show its commitment to the public system by participating actively in a demonstration organized by the Coalition Solidarité Santé against the "Secret Davos on health care" in Saint-Sauveur on November 5, 2007.

For the future of the public health-care system, the time for action is now!

Memorandum signed May 22, 2007

The five SISP leaders make a commitment to closer ties

The Presidents of the five member labour organizations of the *Secrétariat intersyndical des services publics* (SISP), Réjean Parent (CSQ), Lina Bonamie (FIQ), Michel Sawyer (SFPQ), Gilles Dussault (SPGQ) and Dominique Verreault (APTS), confirmed their commitment to cooperation and rapprochement by signing a memorandum last May 22 in Montreal. The memorandum defines the undertakings that our labour organizations are making to each other.

The memorandum begins by presenting a series of common interests for our five labour organizations, which justify this commitment by our leaders to join forces on various actions. In fact, our labour organizations agree on the same commitment to defend and promote the economic, professional and social interests of our members. They also want to fight for the existence of quality public services and, especially, their universality and accessibility.

Unanimity that closer ties are a necessity

The Presidents are unanimous in recognizing that closer ties of solidarity and cooperation among our organizations can only serve our members' interests and the cause of public services.

This cooperation confirms the viability and strengthens the cohesion of the SISP within the labour movement. The SISP will also have an annual plan of action, a budget and internal operating rules, to be established by the General Assembly composed of the five Executive Committees of the five labour organizations. They each will designate a liaison officer to ensure implementation of the SISP's plan of action, which will be coordinated by a Secretary General appointed for two years.

Common issues

The five labour organizations also specified the issues on which they intend to collaborate. One field in which SISP member organizations intend to push their

cooperation is sociopolitical action, particularly by focusing on the struggle against privatization of public services, the review of public bodies, international action, the emergence of an alternative discourse, culture, language and sustainable development.

For action on demands, the issues chosen are Quebec-wide negotiation of intersectoral elements and the struggle against Bill 142 and the revision of the process of negotiation. Regarding professional action, they will mainly deal with attraction and retention of quality staff in public services.



Photo : Michel Monette

The memorandum also provides that the members of the five labour organizations will be informed regularly of the exchanges and collaborations organized through the SISP. This memorandum, signed by the five union leaders, was ratified by the decision-making bodies of each labour organization.



Photos : Maxime Maguire

Petition against Bill 142

Remind the Charest government: we remember December 2005

Last spring the *International Labour Office* (ILO) condemned Bill 142 (which has become Bill 43), adopted under closure by the Charest government. In the wake of the ILO decision, the SISP has launched a petition, which is now circulating, calling for the restoration of the rights of Quebec public service workers.

The goal is to obtain 50,000 signatures by December 10. Watch for this petition so that you can add your signature, or ask your union representatives. We invite you to visit the SISP website at www.sisp.qc.net to obtain the petition. Please sign it as a group and return it to your union rep.

We hope that public sector workers will sign this petition massively to remind the Charest government, a few days before Christmas, that we will never forget the legislative power grab it imposed on public service workers in December 2005 by imposing Bill 142 to decree our conditions of employment.



The SISP shows its colours at the 11th Journées de la culture

The SISP showed its colours at the 11th *Journées de la culture*, held September 28, 29 and 30.

A working group had been created to prepare an exhibition presenting the finest works by staff members of each SISP member organization and some of their close collaborators. The group was composed of Daniel B. Lafrenière (CSQ), Johanne Gagnon (SFPQ), Éloïse Paquette (SPGQ) and Marc Thibault-Bellerose (FIQ).

Held at the SFPQ offices in Quebec City, this exhibition brought together over a hundred members, artists and visitors from the region to admire the talent of our artists, who showed about fifty works.



Influence across Canada

Because the event was open to the general public and benefited from publicity across Canada, the SISP obtained coverage in some major national media, in collaboration with *Culture pour tous*, the former Secretariat of *Journées de la culture*. The working group is already planning to participate in the 12th *Journées de la culture*, with the aim of associating members of each SISP member organization and a possible regional component.