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PRESIDENTS' MESSAGE

THE RIGHT WING, A THREAT TO PUBLIC SERVICES

Over the last few months, labour organizations have increased the number of opportunities to denounce the Right Wing policies which question solidarity, justice and social equity. These values have been forged in Quebec since the Quiet Revolution and have become its trademark. Therefore, it is without embarrassment that we must fight those that want to weaken the foundations of our society under the pretext that we no longer have the means. We respond to our detractors that it is a question of CHOICE.

To deliver this message, 55,000 people from labour, community, feminist, ecological and student organizations marched in the streets this spring denouncing the poor budgetary choices of the Charest government. They particularly denounced the health tax, the increase in tuition fees, the budget cuts and the hasty return to a balanced budget, measures deemed profoundly unfair. Despite this, the government has maintained its unjust choices.

Furthermore, one cannot turn a deaf ear ad vitam aeternam. The government will soon release its

best attire for the electorate a few months from the next electoral campaign in Quebec. We will not be fooled. Mr. Charest will count on the supposedly short memory of the electorate, but we will make sure to remind him of his unjust budget. We will demand policies and commitments that are more socially acceptable.

Federal election

After an analysis of the results of the last federal election, if there is one conclusion that can be drawn, it is that Quebecers remain very attached to the values of solidarity defended by the Left Wing.

While for several months, many have tried to convince us of a rise in the Right Wing in Quebec, the surprise wave of support shown for the New Democratic Party (NDP) indicates quite the opposite. By choosing the NDP, the Quebec people opted for values of fairness and justice defended by this party. It is clear once again that Quebec society has shown its difference from the rest of Canada, and this, even though less than 40% of Canadian voters voted for the Conservatives.

The attempts to muzzle all talk other than that of the "Right" must fail because they are against a real democracy. To those who question our legitimacy and our right to speak out in our society, even in the name of our members who have democratically elected us, the best answer is to tell them that solidarity remains a very current value in Quebec. The labour organizations are among their biggest supporters and more than ever, must act as bastions to defend the values which constitute an essential bond for our society.



Photo: Marie-Chantal Le Breton

• From left to right: Gilles Dussault (SPGQ), Régine Laurent (FIQ), Dominique Verrault (APTS), Lucie Martineau (SFPO), Réjean Parent (CSQ)



• Photos from the demonstration in Montreal on March 12, 2011. Representatives from Alliance sociale and Coalition opposée à la tarification et à la privatisation des services publics object to the government's budget choices.



Photo: Günther Gampfer

The Battle of Wisconsin

LESSONS FOR QUEBEC WORKERS

The public service employees of Wisconsin (U.S.) are currently engaged in a titanic struggle against their State's Republican administration. Using the public finance crisis as a pretext, the ultra-conservative governor of their State, Scott Walker, recently submitted and obtained the controversial adoption of a bill that abolishes the right to collective bargaining. Since then, the two camps have been engaged in trench warfare, both on the legislative front and in terms of mobilization. In April, the bill was suspended temporarily by an intermediate court to examine the dubious circumstances of its adoption. *Public Force* interviewed Stephanie Bloomingdale, Secretary-Treasurer of the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO) in Wisconsin.

What are the main highlights of this freedom-killing legislation?

This law contains at least 10 measures that directly contravene the right to freedom of association. In particular, we can mention the ban on deducting union dues at source and the obligation for the unions to hold an annual vote of their members to determine whether they still want to be unionized.

What were the circumstances of the bill's adoption?

As soon as Governor Walker tabled the bill, we showed our dissatisfaction with this unprecedented attack on the middle class and on workers in general. We quickly received the support of 14 State Senators from the Democratic Party, who decided to leave the State in protest.¹ During their absence, Scott Walker had his bill adopted in the middle of the night, without warning. He even double-locked the doors of the Legislature! Since then, we have filed court actions to have the law invalidated.

What is the Republican Party's ultimate goal? Do they have long-term strategic aims?

The Republicans' goal is to destroy the labour movement in the United States and eliminate any form of opposition to their policies tailor-made for the CEOs of the big corporations that brought them to power. By suppressing opposition, they will be able to privatize public services as they see fit. This is a concerted strategy of hardline Right-wingers throughout the United States. Apart from Wisconsin, other States, including Michigan, Ohio, Indiana, New Jersey, Florida and Tennessee, are considering adopting similar legislation. Last year, 600 bills aimed at reducing union rights were introduced in the United States.

What lessons can Quebec and Canadian unions learn from your struggle?

Labour organizations must redouble their vigilance to counter anti-union attacks. They must also get involved politically by supporting parties that really care about protecting union rights.



● Stephanie Bloomingdale, Secretary-Treasurer of the AFL-CIO in Wisconsin. The American Federation of Labour and the Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO) represents 12.2 million members including many public sector employees.

Photo: Syndicat AFL-CIO

Our struggle is contributing to the revitalization of the labour movement in the United States and in North America in general. Many people hope that this conflict will result in a rebalancing of the economy in favour of the workers. We know that we are winning the battle. Public opinion is behind us and understands that we are fighting to protect the most fundamental human rights.

What can Quebec workers do to help you?

If I had just one message for Quebec workers, it would be the following: fight harder than ever against the Right-wing wave sweeping across the continent and vigorously challenge every threat to your union rights and democratic rights.

We have to send out information about what is happening here

and make it understood that the struggle we are waging is a struggle for all workers, not only for those of Wisconsin. We also invite our sympathizers to visit our Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/wisaflicio?sk=wall> and visit our website at <http://standwisconsin.org/> to make a donation or obtain promotional material.

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Secrétariat intersyndical des services publics
9405 Sherbrooke East, Suite 120
Montréal (Québec) H1L 6P3
Téléphone : 514 353-8886
Fax: 514 353-8887
Email: info@sisp-n.ca
Website: www.sisp.qc.net

Editor-in-chief:
Nathalie Labonté, Éric Lévesque

Editorial staff:

Éric Lévesque, Nathalie Labonté,
Francis Boucher, Marjolaine
Perreault, Gabriel Danis, Martin
Alarie, Nicole DeSève

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Caron, Paré ass.

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1. The Democratic Senators thus sought to deprive the Legislative Assembly of the quorum necessary to adopt the Budget Repair Bill (BRB). If they had stayed within the borders of the State of Wisconsin, the police could have forced them to show up to vote.

New on the Website

A SECTION DEDICATED TO THE PPP



In the wake of the announcement to replace the *Agence des partenariats public-privé du Québec* with *Infrastructure Québec*, the SISP labour partners set up a working group in January, 2010 responsible for, among others, insuring a watch over this body and the projects under its direction. It is under the theme, "PPP, non merci! Un autre choix s'impose" (PPP, no thank you! Another choice to be made) that this group developed a Web content intended to inform the members of the SISP and the public of the issues with the public-private partnerships (PPP) and with the *Agence (Infrastructure Québec)*, set up by the government to give it advice on this subject.

By scouring this new section of the Website, internet surfers will better understand what a project carried out as a PPP consists of and the dangers which await Québec with this form of privatization of public infrastructures, and also for public services (*Qu'est-ce qu'un PPP?*) (What is a PPP?). They will also find the reasons why the SISP is against this type of development (*Pourquoi le SISP dénonce-t-il les PPP?*) (Why does the SISP denounce the PPPs ?) which has the main objective of opening new markets for private agencies (*Évolution historique d'un mode de réalisation traditionnel à Infrastructure Québec*) (Historical evolution of a traditional embodiment to *Infrastructure Québec*). Furthermore, internet surfers can consult an interactive map of the projects managed by *Infrastructure Québec*, where a detailed record of each one of the projects appears.

Readers can better understand the role that *Infrastructure Québec* plays in the promotion of PPP projects and other modes of completing projects which favour the dismantling of the State, and this, despite ever increasing sharp criticisms (*Qu'est-ce qu'Infrastructure Québec?*) (What is *Infrastructure Québec*?). Finally, readers can complete their research for information by consulting the frequently asked questions tab or by accessing the notices, briefs or research notes produced by the member labour organizations of the SISP.

Consult this new section and get to know it: <http://www.sisp.qc.net/vigie-infrastructure-quebec/quest-ce-quun-ppp/index.html>.



LAUNCH OF THE CAMPAIGN TO END TAX HAVENS

On April 28, a coalition of labour, student and civil society organizations launched a campaign to raise Québec public awareness about tax evasion. This campaign is mainly directed at the Québec government. The *Échec aux paradis fiscaux* group invites Québécois to send a postcard or virtual card to the Minister of Finance, Raymond Bachand, so that he takes concrete action to end this injustice.

This year again, Québec taxpayers will pay an average of \$3,395 in provincial tax, while corporations and wealthy individuals will manage to hide their share from the tax authorities through tax havens.

The HSBC Switzerland affair

The *Échec aux paradis fiscaux* group intends to challenge Minister Bachand more specifically on the HSBC Switzerland affairs. According to the CBC and the *Globe and Mail*, a computer technician from HSBC Bank of Geneva, Switzerland left his job and crossed the border with two computers containing the records of 80,000 of the bank's clients. In 2009, he turned over these files to a prosecutor in France, who offered the records of 1,785 Canadian citizens, most of them of Québec origin, to the Canada Revenue Agency. The

Québec records were then shared with Revenu Québec.

When the story broke in September 2010, Revenue Canada said that these records would be analyzed one by one and aggressive measures would be taken to recover the money owed to Canadians. On October 8, 2010, Minister Raymond Bachand also confirmed that Revenu Québec was investigating the Québécois whose names appeared in these records. Where is the investigation today?

It's time to act

Governments lose billions of dollars due to tax evasion, aggressive tax planning and tax havens. According to Statistics Canada, the Canadian assets invested in these tax havens, which are also called offshore

financial centres, were multiplied by eight between 1990 and 2003. In 2000, according to the Auditor General of Canada, the tax agreement with Barbados alone allowed \$1.5 billion to escape the tax authorities¹. How much more money is escaping taxes through other tax havens, such as Cayman Islands, Panama, Bahamas and Switzerland? We don't know. The Québec and Canadian governments have generally made the political decision not to recover these billions of dollars in taxes, when this money could fund their social programs. They prefer to attack petty crime, such as working under the table, instead of major crime, such as tax evasion by the wealthiest.

The existence of tax havens is particularly shocking and unfair in the view of middle-class taxpayers. Our governments, greatly influenced by the banking and financial community, allow the most affluent to shelter part of their wealth from tax and thus become even richer. In the meantime, the majority of the population pays more than its share to offset this, in addition to suffering the consequences of underfunding of public services.

Part of the solution to the lack of government financial resources is to abolish tax havens and all the related forms of cheating. This is why Québec citizens must end tax havens. It's time for action.

1. <http://www.radio-canada.ca/actualite/enjeux/reportages/2004/040420/barbares.shtml>

To send your postcard to the Minister, go to www.echecparadisfiscaux.ca. To support the global campaign aimed at G20 leaders, End Tax Haven Secrecy, go to <http://www.endtaxhavensecrecy.org/fr>.



Free trade agreement with the European Union

THE FUTURE OF OUR PUBLIC SERVICES WEAKENED?



Canada, the Canadian provinces and the territories are currently negotiating the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) with the European Union. These negotiations, started in May, 2009 should finish at the end of 2011. The issue: the de-regulation of all the sectors covered by the agreement and the opening of our public markets to European investors and international competition. In the crosshairs of the details of this agreement are found public markets, public services in particular, but also the environment, water, culture and workforce mobility. There would be major consequences to such an agreement. Here are three examples.

If this agreement contains the provision "protection of investments", foreign corporations could sue the States and the provinces which have a regulation hindering their commercial dealings and depriving them of anticipated profits. One can think about the environmental regulations and the limits imposed on the exploration and exploitation of our natural resources.

End of the "Buy Quebec" policy

By virtue of a no discrimination principle which would be included in the agreement, European corporations could bid to provide services or goods to the federal government, the provinces and to municipalities. The public markets of the health and social services network and of education would be subject to it. Concretely, the school boards, colleges and universities, as well as the health-care institutions and the regional agencies would be covered by it. Opening these public markets to European competition would have the effect of putting an

end to the policies of preferred purchasing by the governments with local or regional companies. An end to the "Buy Quebec" policy. This agreement would prevent the government from using the public markets as an economic tool by contributing to regional development and by promoting the creation of local jobs, fair trade products or sustainable development.

Europe is confronted with what has become a major political crisis. Faced with the precariousness of their financial health and the euro crisis, many European countries have committed to setting up thinning out plans for the purpose of substantially reducing public services and, consequently, public employment, and this, despite the agreements signed with the unions. Unions

presently have no guarantee that the agreement negotiated with the European Union will contain all the necessary provisions to respect the international instruments and national legislation regarding union rights and labour relations. Some orientations of the courts in European communities make us fear the worse, because on some occasions this court contends that a restriction on commercial freedoms by social norms is only acceptable if the latter does not interfere with the free market.

These three examples illustrate the fact that the negotiation of the CETA makes the socioeconomic and cultural development of Canada and Quebec dependent on the free market rules and constitutes a denial of democracy. At the present time there

is no mechanism which would force the federal government to submit the terms of the agreement to a public consultation. And yet, it is the future of our public services that is at stake. It is unacceptable that these negotiations, to which business men are invited, take place behind closed doors. It is unacceptable that organizations in civil society, including the union movement, are kept at a distance from these negotiations.

Only one avenue is possible. The Government of Quebec, directly involved in these negotiations, must quickly and openly make the National Assembly aware of the evolution of the negotiations, make the terms of the agreement public and obtain the approval of Quebecers before ratifying this agreement.

1. This provision would be in conformity with the model developed during the negotiations surrounding the Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI) and integrated into Chapter 11 of the North American Free-Trade Agreement (NAFTA).

Mr. Minister,

Again this year, Quebec taxpayers have paid you an average of \$3,395 in taxes and I have also paid my share. I fully understand that I must contribute to the funding of public services. What I do not understand is that you allow so many wealthy corporations and people to hide their money in tax havens so that they avoid paying their fair share. What do you intend to do in 2011 to end this injustice? Are you going to pursue, among others, these corporations and people in Quebec who have benefitted from tax havens offered by the HBSC of Switzerland?

The public is waiting for news from you.

Sincerely,

X _____

Raymond Bachand,
 Minister of Finance
 12 St. Louis St.,
 1st Floor,
 Quebec City, Quebec
 G1R 5L3

www.ehecparadisfiscaux.ca