

67th CSN
Convention
Montréal – 2023

REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

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WELCOME

Brothers and Sisters,

Whether you are delegates, staff,
or guests of the CSN, I welcome you,
on behalf of the entire
Executive Committee—Nathalie,
Yvan, François, David, and Katia—
to this 67th CSN Convention.

I would like to extend a special
welcome to those of you who are
attending your first convention.

MAINTENANT

JUST IMAGINE: FOR THE CSN, THIS IS CONVENTION NUMBER 67! WE HAVE BEEN PART OF THE QUÉBEC LANDSCAPE FOR A LONG TIME: 102 YEARS IN SEPTEMBER OF THIS YEAR, TO BE PRECISE.

And we are not the only ones to have marked a milestone anniversary during the last three years:

- The Fédération de l'industrie manufacturière celebrated the 10th anniversary since its merger.
- The Fédération des employés et employés des services publics its 75th anniversary.
- The Conseil central de Lanaudière the same.

Special congratulations on these other CSN centennials:

- The Conseil central du Montréal métropolitain, which celebrated its 100th birthday just before the CSN's, and
- To the CSN–Construction, which will celebrate its centennial next year.

BRAVO!

But what really sets our movement apart is not our longevity but our fighting mettle and the autonomy of our unions and affiliated organizations. These qualities, and our spirit of solidarity, will be on display throughout this convention. We hope this will be a lively, productive, and galvanizing meeting, like our theme Power Now.

While circumstances often push us into confrontation, at the bargaining table or in the streets, our actions are rooted in our values of justice and freedom, and in the quest for ever greater dignity for the women and men who make up Québec's workforce. In the kind of unionism we practice, as a labour confederation representing so many job titles, we support one another—from the machinist in Saguenay to the beneficiary attendant in St-Hyacinthe.

PROGRESS AND RENEWAL

LET US GO BACK IN TIME A HUNDRED YEARS, FOR A MOMENT. WORKING CONDITIONS WERE APPALLING.

Under the pressure of industrialization and rapid economic growth, labourers worked in unbearable conditions, fourteen hours a day, six days a week, in order to keep up the pace of production demanded by the bosses. Women who worked in factories to help their families survive were exploited, as were children. Many died.

Exploitation still exists, but fortunately things have changed. The CSN has fought for the eight-hour day, for occupational health and safety measures, for better wages, and for the right to work in French. Later, it fought for social changes, which have played an important role in shaping the Québec of today:

medicare, laws on automobile insurance, occupational health and safety, pay equity, the creation of the educational daycare network, the Québec parental insurance plan, and much more. This is what we call the “second front.”

IT IS A WELL-DOCUMENTED FACT THAT UNIONIZED WORKERS HAVE BETTER WORKING CONDITIONS THAN NON-UNIONIZED WORKERS IN THE SAME JOBS.

They also enjoy more benefits and better protection. As former CSN president Gérard Picard once said: “[...] No one has ever done workers any favours.” Indeed, workers have fought long and hard for what they have. Last year, the CSN adopted a slogan that expresses our strength throughout the decades: “La CSN, solidaire depuis 1921.” That slogan has now been coupled with our logo.

Historically, our conventions have always dealt with a myriad of proposals. It's a challenge, because sometimes there isn't enough time, either in the plenary sessions or the workshops, to discuss every subject in the depth it deserves. This year, we are going back to the true function of a convention: setting a general course for our confederation together. That has been our guiding principle throughout the planning of this gathering: its purpose is to decide democratically on the broader objectives that will guide our actions for the next three years.

We are proud that the CSN Executive Committee that sits before you at the convention table has, for the first time, full gender parity. Although we have decades of union experience between us, we are a new executive, elected in 2021, and we bring with us a desire to make things happen and the determination to move from words to deeds. Change necessarily means a period of adjustment, but it also means renewal.

Some are calling us a “field” executive, because we've been out there every week: in the unions, on the picket lines, in demonstrations, at union anniversaries. Over the past two years, we have made more than 125 visits, alone or together with others, to hear what you have to say. We want to share our vision in a participatory atmosphere, where every problem has a solution. Where we build on the things that unite us and iron out those that might divide us.

We know that we are never as strong as when the union movement speaks with one voice, and within the CSN we feel a deep desire, on the part of union officers, staff, and members alike, to support the movement with all our might. I would like to take this opportunity, on behalf of my fellow Executive members, to applaud all the work that has been done to renew the collective agreement of the CSN's employees. The bargaining process has made us all better, and paves the way for great strides in staff engagement and skills development. I thank the employees and members responsible for the tremendous work accomplished during the last term, which will allow us to begin this new one on a strong footing.

MAJOR DISRUPTIONS DURING THE PANDEMIC

BEFORE LOOKING AHEAD, LET'S LOOK BACK AT THE TWO-YEARS-AND-A-BIT THAT HAVE PASSED SINCE THE LAST CONVENTION.

March 13 was the third anniversary of the declaration of the public health emergency by the Premier of Québec, which plunged all of Québec, including the labour movement, into uncertainty.

Even today, its effects still linger in many sectors, including educational childcare, health, and social services, the schools, and higher education. In healthcare, what compromised the system's ability to deal with the pandemic was not so much the lack of infrastructure or equipment as the dehumanizing management of employees: the lack of staff, the atrocious schedules, the poor salaries, the lack of recognition and appreciation. Throw in a pandemic and the house goes up in flames!

The same was true in the school system and higher education, where the use of distance learning in a totally ad hoc manner caused distress for both students and staff. In a system that was already severely under-resourced in all areas, incidents of violence, both against support staff and teachers, increased.

And then there were the retail workers in grocery stores and hardware stores, for example. These essential workers were also unprotected during the first outbreaks, as they went to their jobs to serve Québec while the rest of the population was under lockdown. They had to deal with unusually heavy workplace traffic and their infection rates were high. For workers in meatpacking plants, the situation was terrible. Working in cramped quarters, in the cold, and at an unsustainable pace, they experienced mass COVID outbreaks that even forced some plants to close.

IN BOTH THE PRIVATE AND PUBLIC SECTORS, WORKERS OFTEN WENT TO THE FRONT LINES IN FEAR. SOME LOST THEIR LIVES.

During this critical period, employees in sectors deemed essential worked all-out, day and night, to keep Québec afloat. All of us together—the CSN, unions, and workers—exerted ourselves to maintain services, to keep industries running, to transport goods, to house people, to construct buildings. Our work demonstrated the strength of workers and their importance.

Obviously, union life was strongly impacted. How could we come together, mobilize, and defend ourselves when we were in crisis mode—or in survival mode? When we were in lockdown? It isn't easy to practice solidarity when the shop where you work has shut down, or when you're working a double shift

because your coworkers have fallen in battle. As a union confederation, we had to reforge our links, find new ways to share our experiences, and set concrete objectives to guide our renewed struggles.

During the last term, every area of activity was disrupted by the pandemic and the economy was severely impacted. Let's take a look at what happened in a few sectors.

Québec's economic strength is based on a solid manufacturing sector, which is capable of innovating and providing decent jobs in all regions of Québec. To be sure, manufacturing jobs are being lost, but plants have continued to grow. In adversity, many have explored the potential of business conversion, modernizing processes and equipment, and sometimes even transitioning their production activities. The CSN believes in this energy and our governments need to believe in it too.

The pandemic highlighted all the potential risks of our dependence on imports in strategic sectors. Think of the problems with medical supplies and personal protective equipment, at the height of the crisis. If Québec is to regain its momentum, we need to bring back the production activities that have been relocated over the past thirty years.

WE MUST INNOVATE, INVEST, TRAIN AND, ABOVE ALL, PUT WORKERS AT THE CENTRE OF THE TRANSFORMATION PROCESS.

Another sector that was not spared is culture and communications. The job cuts in newsrooms have multiplied in recent months. Advertising revenues are falling: they are being siphoned off by Internet giants that publish content from Québec media outlets on their platforms with impunity and pay nothing for it. The CSN supported two federal bills that would require them to pay royalties and make room for Québec and Canadian content on their platforms. The current crisis in our media industry threatens hundreds of jobs. But most importantly, it jeopardizes the vitality of our democratic life, for the media play an important watchdog role.

Cultural industries were hard hit by the lockdown. A wave of revenue losses and pain swept through the arts and entertainment community. The good news, aside from the resumption of cultural activities, was that an important reform, the *Status of the Artist Act*, was passed almost a year ago.

THE GLOBAL PICTURE

WHAT HAPPENS HERE IS OFTEN INFLUENCED BY WHAT HAPPENS ELSEWHERE.

Globally, the last two years have been a time of dramatic events that have raised international tensions and had major social and economic consequences. There was the invasion of Ukraine, which has affected us economically and as human beings. Syria has been at war for eleven years and China is under the yoke of a dictator whose espionage apparatus reaches to our shores. Lebanon is in a dire economic crisis and Haiti is fighting famine and gangs.

And then there is Afghanistan, which has been named the worst country in the world for women and girls. Since the Taliban seized power in 2021, they have been virtually banned from schools, universities, workplaces, and public space. Meanwhile, on March 8, the UN estimated that at the current rate of progress, gender equality will not be achieved for another 300 years, a date that moves further away with every year. In a terrible example of this regression, 21 million women in the United States have lost their abortion rights, and a Republican bill in Florida may soon ban education about menstrual cycles in elementary school. The silence about violence and inequality is intolerable.

Right-wing and far-right populist movements are on the march worldwide. They have always been the enemies of the labour movement in general, and of workers' rights in particular. We will have to make the necessary efforts to fight the setbacks they are trying to impose on us.

THE CANADIAN CONTEXT

CLOSER TO HOME, WE WILL ALSO BE KEEPING A CLOSE EYE ON THE POLITICAL CLIMATE IN CANADA. THE ELECTION OF PIERRE POILIEVRE AS LEADER OF THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY HAS SET THE RED LIGHTS FLASHING ON OUR DASHBOARD.

His platform is the antithesis of progressivism, with his promises to abolish the carbon tax and shut down the CBC, together with his vague statements on abortion rights and the rights of the LGBT+ community.

At the same time, the Liberals are showing wear and tear after being in office since 2015, jeopardizing the many progressive policies adopted during that period. We are still waiting for a number of delayed bills, such as one that would allow the creation of a public drug insurance plan for Québec, and the long-awaited reform of the Employment Insurance system, a key demand of the CSN for years now.

On the plus side, the federal government recently introduced anti-scab legislation, and the CSN was involved in this process. While the bill has not yet

passed officially, it is already part of the government's 2023–24 budget. This is a very good thing for employees under federal jurisdiction, who still lack this protection some 45 years after it was first introduced in Québec.

Also during the last three years, the federal *Pay Equity Act* came into force, in 2021. The work has just begun, but this is notable progress and we will follow it closely.

LABOUR SHORTAGES EVERYWHERE

IN QUÉBEC AS ELSEWHERE, THERE HAS BEEN A GENERAL ECONOMIC SLOWDOWN. INFLATION IS RUNNING AT LEVELS NOT SEEN IN DECADES—6 OR EVEN 7 PERCENT.

It is no longer uncommon to hear people who work full-time talk about going to food banks. This is unacceptable.

The wealth gap is widening, even as corporate profits in many sectors are rising. For example, multinational food companies have taken advantage of inflation to increase their profit margins shamelessly. At the same time, home ownership has become an unattainable goal for first-time buyers. And finding affordable housing, whether in big cities or small towns, is something of a miracle. The labour movement must act as a bulwark against poverty and must always care about the distribution of wealth.

And about the distribution of work. Some may think that labour scarcity puts workers in the driver's seat and has only advantages. However, too many workers are suffering from collateral effects: more overtime, work intensification, burnout, less rewarding work, less time to support new hires, a decline in the quality of services offered, lower hiring standards.

The Québec job market is in an unusual situation. The causes of the labour scarcity are primarily demographic: over the years, more workers have been leaving the workforce than joining it. The pandemic also reshuffled the deck in the job market, as did the subsequent economic recovery. At the time of writing, Québec had more job openings than unemployed people. The aging of the population will continue into the next decade, creating even more openings.

THIS IS WHY THE CSN HAS LAUNCHED A MAJOR CAMPAIGN, TITLED *WORK, BUT BETTER*.

This campaign is based on the concerns of unions that are working to implement solutions—your solutions—on the ground. Five objective challenges have been identified: well-being, health, and safety in the workplace; decent, well-paid jobs; lifelong learning; a more inclusive labour market; and worker involvement in all these changes.

The impacts of the labour shortage are also being felt in terms of labour market policies (or the lack thereof). For example, take child labour: according to

the CNESST, the number of injuries to children fifteen and under has more than doubled in the last three years, and increased fivefold over the last ten. This is unprecedented. This is not to mention the psychological stress and the risk of dropping out of school, both of which increase along with the number of hours worked per week. Until recently, Québec was the only province with no minimum working age.

At the CSN, we believe that a business model based on the labour of 12- and 13-year-olds is not a good model. Children belong in school. Fortunately, the *Bill respecting the regulation of work by children* was recently introduced. The bill was drafted on the advice of the government's advisory committee on labour and manpower, which includes the CSN and other major labour and business organizations. We are proud to have contributed to this step forward for Québec.

The labour scarcity has also led to a massive influx of immigrants into Québec's labour market—not just in Montreal but also in smaller centres. Our desperate need for workers partly explains this situation, and a shameful picture is taking shape: immigration levels are being decreased while the number of newcomers with precarious status is increasing.

People are arriving under the Temporary Foreign Worker Program, which means they have closed permits tied to a single employer, and can be sent home if they try to work for anyone else.

The real solution is to grant permanent resident status to both temporary foreign workers and undocumented migrants.

In the midst of a labour shortage, instead of welcoming migrants and their families so that they can contribute fully to Québec society, we are bringing in cheap labour. If these people are worthy of coming here to work, then they are also worthy of coming here to live: they are entitled to live in Québec with dignity, if they so wish.

POPULIST GOVERNMENT: A THREAT TO OUR GAINS

OUR LAST TERM WAS MARKED, OF COURSE, BY THE CAQ GOVERNMENT'S AGENDA AND ITS POPULIST STRATEGIES. THESE ARE NEITHER PROGRESSIVE NOR PRO-WORKER, AND INDEED SOMETIMES PANDER TO THE SUPPORTERS OF THE NOTORIOUSLY ANTI-UNION ÉRIC DUHAIME.

Composed largely of private sector managers, the CAQ's elected officials and, especially, its leader, is very top-down and often prefers to negotiate in the court of public opinion. They take their cue from the latest polls and make their announcements on social media. François Legault clings stubbornly to measures that make the rich richer and the poor poorer.

The fact that his cabinet has an equal number of men and women should not be taken to mean that he is advancing the cause of women. Far from acting as a model employer, this government has dragged its feet on pay equity for years, using every legal manoeuvre to delay settlements. There are complaints dating back more than ten years that have yet to be settled!

This should come as no surprise from a government that, despite expert advice and a mountain of evidence, refuses to admit that systemic racism exists in Québec society within certain areas and social structures.

The CAQ would be wise to shed its arrogance and soften its ideological approach to governance: its dominance in the National Assembly, consisting of 90 out of 125 MNAs, is inversely proportional to the number of people who voted for the party, a very modest 27 percent. Its about-face on electoral reform, to which it had committed itself, is just one example of its political opportunism.

Add to this the weakness of the opposition parties, which have not succeeded in renewing themselves and are struggling to get their message across, and we can only conclude that the major trade union organizations must do a better job of acting as a counterweight to the government. Against the demagoguery of the Legault government, the CSN must make its voice heard in the public arena, not only on labour issues but also on major social issues—our second front.

That is what we did when they tried to sell us a social vision based on a tax cut that was as untimely as it was inequitable. Giving someone earning \$40,000 a year enough to make a single trip to the grocery store, while putting four times that much back into the pockets of the wealthiest, defies the most elementary logic. The same logic was applied to handing out the “anti-inflation shield” cheques, which aided the rich as much as the less fortunate. This is outrageous.

The government has deprived itself of \$5 billion this year, an amount that would have been better spent on relieving the pressure on public services, reducing the tensions caused by the labour shortage, decarbonizing Québec, building social housing, investing in public transit, or ensuring better integration and francization for immigrants, among other priorities. To forego this money is incomprehensible and irresponsible.

THERE IS, HOWEVER, ONE ISSUE IN REGARD TO WHICH PUBLIC PRESSURE, INCLUDING FROM THE CSN, HAS HAD AN EFFECT: MINISTER GIRARD'S PROPOSED REFORM OF THE QUÉBEC PENSION PLAN.

Faced with across-the-board opposition from the groups consulted by the parliamentary committee, including the CSN, the Minister of the Economy was forced to back down, with ill grace, on his proposal to increase the minimum age for access to QPP benefits from 60 to 62. This measure would have been detrimental to anyone who isn't able to work two more years and cannot afford to live without a pension.









POUVOIR
MAINTENANT

FIGHTING TO DEFEND OUR SOCIAL FABRIC

IN RESPONSE TO THE PANDEMIC'S DEVASTATING IMPACT ON THE HEALTHCARE SYSTEM, THE CAQ AND ITS MINISTER OF HEALTH INTRODUCED ONE BILL AFTER ANOTHER.

First there was the 2022 Health Plan, which promised to make the public system “an employer of choice,” but was more like a grocery list than a real plan. Then there was the bill to abolish placement agencies: while the objective is valid, the means are questionable. Then came the massive Bill 15, better known as Santé Québec—a mammoth, 306-page text with 1,200 articles, which amends 37 laws.

The CAQ is shaking up the structure yet again, something that has never solved the problems of the healthcare system, or helped workers and patients. Bill 15 is a reform of the reforms, following the disaster of the Barrette reform a few years ago. They are marketing it as decentralization, but in fact all power will be centralized in one mega-structure. The Legault government wants to hand this system, which belongs to all of us, to the private sector on a silver platter. The Premier set the stage by selling the public on the idea that private enterprise is the only solution to the current problems. His government is ready to take an axe to our public services, which have been built through great struggle by those who came before us.

To counter the CAQ's mercantile vision of health, the CSN has launched its *Vraiment public* campaign. We are the people with the solutions, and we have compiled them in the CSN's new health platform. We will never accept politicians using the system's failures to sacrifice the public network instead of rolling up their sleeves to fix it. While the system has never been fully public, its creation was a major advance for all workers, who no longer had to worry about the size of their bank accounts whenever they needed care and services.

WE HAVE QUITE A BATTLE AHEAD OF US.

Given the scope of the bill (we had not completed our analysis at the time of writing), the goals of our campaign are more relevant than ever: deprivatize, decentralize, and democratize health and social services.

ANOTHER LONG-TERM STRUGGLE IS THE DEFENCE OF SCHOOLS AND HIGHER EDUCATION.

These sectors have been scandalously neglected by successive Québec governments, leaving a distressed system in which staff are unable to provide the services for which they were trained.

Unventilated classrooms, lead in the water, cuts to student services—and more cuts are on the agenda. This places enormous stress on the workers, who also need support. Fast-tracking training to meet staffing needs won't help provide adequate support for students, who have been experiencing increased behavioural challenges and mental health issues since the pandemic.

Add to this the challenges of digital technology, distance learning, and artificial intelligence—which brings chatbots within reach for any and all—and you have a perfect storm.

If education were truly a priority for Premier Legault, staff would be recognized and valued for the essential work they do at the elementary, secondary, and post-secondary levels. And we would not be witnessing the slow and dangerous commodification of education.

When it comes to educational childcare services, the government has had to admit the failure of its plans for kindergarten for 4-year-olds, a fate we predicted in our *4 ans c'pas grand* campaign. This failure was due in part to a lack of planning but mostly to the lack of workers. There is a shortage of early childhood educators—and of places, with tens of thousands of families on the waiting list. The situation is preventing many women from working.

PUBLIC SECTOR BARGAINING: TOGETHER AS ONE

IT IS WITH THIS SHORT-SIGHTED GOVERNMENT, WHICH SEEMS TO BELIEVE THAT EVERY QUÉBECER EARNS A MINISTER'S SALARY, THAT WE ARE NEGOTIATING IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR.

The last round of bargaining, during the pandemic, was unusual to say the least. Mobilizing was a challenge: there was no common front, but each federation still fared well. The ink had not yet dried on the collective agreements of our 170,000 members when the next round began, this time with the largest common front ever assembled. The cooperation between the FTQ, the CSQ, the APTS, and the CSN is strong enough to stand against a government that seeks to divide workers and negotiate in public.

Québec's largest employer made a ridiculous first offer, which would have actually left workers poorer. Adding insult to injury, the government tried to change the rules of the game midstream by introducing “forums” with no clear mandate—a fine way to duplicate negotiating structures while trying to make the good people believe they just wanted to save time. We publicly denounced these forums, and won: the minister backed down.

THE COLLECTIVE AGREEMENTS HAVE NOW EXPIRED AND WE HAVE TO THINK ABOUT STRATEGY. PUBLIC SECTOR BARGAINING IS ALWAYS A CHALLENGE, BUT WHEN THERE ARE 420,000 OF US IN A UNITED FRONT, ANYTHING IS POSSIBLE.

EXEMPLARY COMBATIVENESS AND SUPPORT

IT IS NOT ONLY IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR THAT WE ARE IN A STRONG BARGAINING POSITION. IN THE PRIVATE SECTOR, COMPANIES ARE PREPARED TO REOPEN COLLECTIVE AGREEMENTS BEFORE THEY EXPIRE, AND RAISE WAGES.

In other cases, unions have won record increases—we're talking about 20, 30, or even 40 percent over three or five years.

You have to strike while the iron is hot. Inflation and the labour shortages are creating a unique situation at the bargaining table. As you're spending spend a week, a month, or a year out in the cold or the rain, fighting to be heard, to be respected, you know you can count on the CSN's Professional Defence Fund, the only one of its kind in any Québec union confederation.

THE PROFESSIONAL DEFENCE FUND IS MUCH MORE THAN A STRIKE FUND.

It also funds our sectoral and regional campaigns, our second-front campaigns, and the entire public sector bargaining process. It covers some of our members' legal bills and, of course, enables us to financially support striking brothers and sisters across Québec. Over the 2020–23 period, we had an uncommon number of struggles and the Fund paid out a record of nearly \$26 million to strikers.

The Professional Defence Fund helped workers at Coop Novago stay strong for seventeen months and workers at Rolls-Royce hold out for over five months. It supported the school bus drivers who, after years of injustice, mobilized in an admirable way and won wage increases of up to 56 percent over six years!

The same was true during the historic battle at the CPEs, where the early childhood educators gave all of Québec a lesson in solidarity by refusing to sign an agreement until their coworkers in the kitchens, administration, and maintenance also got what they deserved. That's what a CSN-style settlement is all about: united mobilization of all workers, building effective bargaining power, public support, and positively impacting the struggles waged by the other union centrals.

And while the workers at the Davie shipyard renewed their collective agreement without a conflict, it is worth mentioning that after ten years of effort, Davie has become the third shipyard approved by the Canadian government for its National Shipbuilding Strategy, which will mean jobs for 1,500 workers for nearly twenty years. It's a great victory for these workers and for the region, and thus for the CSN too!

COORDINATION IN THE PRIVATE SECTOR

DURING THE LAST THREE-YEAR TERM, THE CSN'S PRIVATE SECTOR INTERSECTORAL COMMITTEE ALSO FOCUSED ITS CONCERNS AND ACTIONS ON COLLECTIVE BARGAINING.

The committee coordinated its efforts on three issues: no salaries below \$18 per hour in any of our collective agreements, diverting disputes from the legal route to alternative mechanisms to settle them more quickly, and negotiating occupational health and safety clauses.

The objective is to create real cohesion that will increase our bargaining power and improve our bargaining outcomes on issues targeted through these coordinated efforts. These are demands that have already been articulated at our conventions and by our federations. Coordinating our demands paid off: more than 70 percent of the unions whose agreements expired in 2022 completely eliminated hourly rates under \$18. News of this success has percolated throughout our ranks and beyond, thanks to extensive efforts. For this first year of coordinated bargaining, we can now say: mission accomplished!

The CSN's Comité de coordination générale des négociations (CCGN), which includes private and public sectors, has also taken up the minimum wage issue. It is demanding that Québec's minimum wage be raised to \$18 per hour as soon as possible, and is reviewing the target periodically; the next review will happen in the fall. We will continue fighting this battle together with the major union and community organizations so that everyone, unionized or not, can live in dignity.

OUR INTERNAL COORDINATION IS ALSO AIMING TO IMPROVE THE OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY CLAUSES IN OUR COLLECTIVE AGREEMENTS.

Each federation has drafted clauses adapted to the particular circumstances of its unions. Protecting workers is a core element of our mission, for the number of illnesses, accidents, and deaths is not decreasing. In all sectors, our members deserve to be safe, physically and psychologically.

AN UNREMITTING STRUGGLE FOR HEALTH AND SAFETY

THIS ISSUE HAS CLAIMED MUCH OF OUR ATTENTION DURING THE LAST TERM THANKS TO THE INTRODUCTION OF BILL 59, AIMED AT “MODERNIZING” THE OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY REGIME.

Just about everyone, unions and employers alike, agreed that the bill was, at best, very incomplete and, at worst, just a bad bill (notwithstanding the fact that it does recognize psychosocial risks and requires prevention measures in almost all workplaces). At least the bill had the merit of sparking a massive mobilization across Québec. The pandemic could not dampen our spirits!

The CAQ used its majority to pass Bill 59, whereupon it became the *Act to modernize the occupational health and safety regime* (Act 27)—but we would be remiss if we failed to mention the mobilization and perseverance of the CSN, which was at the forefront of this struggle. Our alliances with other labour and community organizations, and our numerous public statements, helped force the Minister of Labour to retreat on some issues. This solidarity kindled the flame of unionism in many places and situations, not to mention lending greater visibility to struggles for health and safety. In this sense, our actions have borne fruit. If any single success demands highlighting, it is surely the imposition of real health and safety measures in the construction industry. That said, Bill 27 did not solve the judicialization problem.

In this regard, we will continue to support our members. During the past three years, the CSN defended 7,500 injured members from 1,600 of our unions before tribunals, not to mention all those whose cases did not make it to court. The CSN will also continue to push for greater diversion of cases away from the courts.

Currently, Act 27 forces us to negotiate, at the CNESST, an agreement on prevention and worker participation mechanisms, if we want to ensure that our workplaces are healthy and that certain advances are not made at the expense of tried and tested mechanisms.

We will continue our advocacy efforts on the CNESST's Board, as well as our five-year “To Truly Protect Everyone” campaign.

MEANWHILE, IN CONJUNCTION WITH THE MAJOR LABOUR CENTRALS AND COMMUNITY GROUPS, WE WILL BE ORGANIZING A MAJOR HEALTH AND SAFETY SUMMIT IN 2025.

We will also continue working on our self-help networks, which will celebrate their 30th anniversary this fall. These will be further developed during the next term, as demand is growing—understandable in the current situation. So far, the results have been very positive.

TOWARD GREATER INCLUSION

THE CSN IS ALSO COMMITTED TO PROTECTING AND DEFENDING QUÉBECERS WHO FACE DISCRIMINATION IN THE WORKPLACE.

The rise of intolerant movements is exacerbating these problems and we are concerned about these issues. These form part of the daily challenges faced by our members and our unions. Yes, we stand up for labour rights, but we must also fight sexism, racism, discrimination against Indigenous people, homophobia, and transphobia.

On all these fronts, CSN committees are doing remarkable work and equipping unions with guides, training, web resources, and videos. They are partnering with other unions and community organizations, and going public to expose injustices and demand greater equity.

We will pursue inclusiveness in the workplace through our educational work with central councils, federations, and self-help networks. We will also continue responding to requests for support, intervention, and inclusion-related activities. We have a duty to embrace diversity and inclusion, be it in terms of gender, origin, disability, social class, or sexual orientation and gender identity.

QUÉBEC IN TRANSITION

ONE ISSUE THAT CONCERNS US ALL IS CLIMATE CHANGE, THE GREATEST ENVIRONMENTAL THREAT OF OUR TIME.

The time to sound the alarm has passed. The alarm rang out a long time ago and our governments turned a deaf ear. According to the latest Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report, the climate impacts will be more severe than previously thought. A good dose of political and individual courage is therefore needed, and the time to act is now.

During the last term, the CSN saw these impacts in the workplace. We worked in partnership with other union organizations and civil society. Examples include the Front commun pour une transition énergétique and Nature Québec, together with whom we are calling for improvements to the management of Québec's forests, to allow for their renewal and sustainable development, while respecting the communities and biodiversity that depend on them.

Our Environment and Sustainable Development Committee also worked on various issues surrounding climate change, the just transition, fossil fuel divestment by pension funds, mining claims, and transportation, among others.

Also during the last term, we participated in the COP 26, 27, and 15 summits, as well as to the development of the Réseau intersyndical sur le climat (RIC), together with the other trade union organizations. With the RIC, we organized activities to denounce the effects of climate change in our workplaces, effects that will increase steadily in the future.

If nothing is done, some workers will lose their jobs and tens of thousands of others will have to change jobs or take training to keep their jobs. The crisis isn't affecting only workers in the private sector: illnesses related to rising temperatures will have a significant impact on our public sector members, too.

The CSN has emphasized, at every forum, that the transition must be a just one: the economy must be greened in a way that is as equitable and inclusive as possible for everyone involved, by creating decent jobs and leaving no one behind. It is therefore vitally important that the affected workers and communities participate in the decisions that affect them.

WE MUST ALSO TALK ABOUT THE OTHER TRANSITION: THE DIGITAL TRANSITION. FOR YEARS, THE CSN HAS BEEN INTERESTED IN THE IMPACT OF THE DIGITAL ECONOMY, INDUSTRY 4.0, AND ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE IN THE WORKPLACE.

There have been significant technological changes in some areas over the past few decades and the number of such areas is likely to increase exponentially in the years ahead.

These changes bring with them many challenges: breaches of privacy, infringement on professional autonomy, potential job losses, and loss of bargaining power. With the help of the Commission des partenaires du marché du travail, we have set up a workforce training support team that will enable us to support the private sector unions and increase access to skills training for our members. The team will develop training plans for skills development and upgrading, job retention, and internal mobility.

In general, training is a priority issue on many fronts: skills development, workplace safety, employment equity, promoting member participation, and developing union leadership. It is also an essential support to offer in our workplaces in terms of francization, especially in the current context, in which the proportion of people working primarily in French has decreased considerably in recent decades. Indeed, the rate has fallen to levels similar to those prior to the adoption of Bill 101, the *Charter of the French Language*, in 1977. We have been fighting to protect our language since the beginning of the twentieth century, and it is still necessary.

We have been very active in supporting our affiliated organizations and unions, in many ways. We also spoke out on the adoption, a year ago, of the *Act respecting French, the official and common language of Québec*, which gave the Charter more teeth. This Act poses its own set of challenges for us, as the CSN is proud to represent English-speaking members. This does not, of course, prevent us from demanding that decisions made in Québec should never be detrimental to French, that newcomers have access to our language, and that workers always have the right to work in French.

SOLIDARITY IN ALL OUR THINKING AND ALLIANCES

ALTHOUGH QUÉBEC HAS THE HIGHEST UNIONIZATION RATE IN NORTH AMERICA—FOUR OUT OF EVERY TEN WORKERS—BUT MANY WORKERS REMAIN WHO STILL REQUIRE OUR HELP IN ORGANIZING, SO THAT EVEN MORE PEOPLE, IN THEIR OWN WAY, MAY BRING ABOUT BETTER CONDITIONS IN THEIR WORKPLACES.

If we wish to eliminate injustice, discrimination, and arbitrary decisions by employers, and if we want more workers to have better working conditions and to be better protected and defended, we must convince non-unionized workers of the benefits of joining our movement.

Sometimes it is helpful to take a step back to assess where we stand, which practices we should promote, and what vision we need to embrace, both in the medium and in the long term, in order to stay true to our core mission. We will not do this alone: we have a mandate from the Convention to hold an Estates General on trade unionism, and we will organize this event together with other union organizations. This will be a forward-looking process; in pursuing it, and in order to remain relevant, influential, and militant, we can spare no effort.

The future of trade unionism is also about young people. Each year, the CSN holds two training sessions for the next generation of union leaders, under the slogan “Give us a young person and we’ll give you an activist!” We also hold a large gathering every three years, during which our future leaders unpack the role of unions, develop their thinking about labour market issues and the balance of power, and connect with their union spirit.

AT THE CSN, WE BELIEVE IN THE POWER OF NUMBERS AND WE KNOW THE BENEFITS OF POWER NOW.

We will maintain our alliances with civil society and our inter-union alliances—which will be more important than ever in the years to come—as well as our alliances with international unions.

But all these alliances will be useless if we are not united as a movement. We own this solidarity and we must keep it alive.

United, we will continue our efforts to inform, organize, mobilize, and support. United, we can fully play our social role. United, we will reach more people and speak louder than the bosses. Together, we will never give up, because we practice the strongest form of unionism: a confederation in which each job title supports the next, where the gains of one pave the way for those of the other.

The CSN has a reputation for tenacity and toughness. With the large number of job titles it represents, our confederation is truly a microcosm of our society. It is this kind of union pluralism that enriches our organization and drives social transformation. Because we speak with one voice, our words are heard. Many sectors of activity—culture, technology, restaurants, retail, manufacturing, and more—need unions more than ever, to command the respect of the employer.

“Solidaire depuis 1921” isn’t just a slogan: it is a look into the past, at the present, and toward the future. We were the first major union confederation in Québec, built of unions that are also a hundred years old. The battles we fight, for which we get out of bed each morning, are many. And the union’s way forward will never be a quietly flowing river. We believe in equal opportunity and a better future for all workers. In Québec and beyond, our strength is the sum of our history, our traditions, and our people.

WE—330,000 STRONG—ARE THE CSN, AND I AM SURE WE WILL SPEND AN EXCELLENT WEEK TOGETHER.

HAVE A GREAT CONVENTION!
And long live the CSN—for another 100 years, and beyond!

Caroline Senneville, President
On behalf of the CSN Executive Committee
April 3, 2023









POUVOIR
MAINTENANT



We must innovate, invest,
train and, above all,
put workers at the centre
of the transformation process.

