

CONFEDERAL OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY COMMITTEE

2020-2023 REPORT



POUVOIR



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Occupational health and safety (OHS) has always been a focus of the work of the CSN, its affiliated organizations, and its unions. It is a key issue, because not only are health and safety problems constantly expanding, but they have also become increasingly complex and involve multiple factors.

ONE EXAMPLE IS MENTAL HEALTH IN THE WORKPLACE.

The psychological dimension, so long neglected, is now being afforded greater importance than ever in occupational health management.

THE CONFEDERAL OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY

(OHS) Committee embarked on its three-year term in a context of legislative and regulatory changes. We should point out that Bill 59, which became the Act to Modernize the Occupational Health and Safety Regime (AMOHSR) (SQ 2021, c. 27), was central to the Committee's work. As we know, this Act reconfigures OHS in terms of both prevention and compensation, and is far from satisfactory. We must also mention that COVID-19 slowed down and disrupted the Committee's work schedule.

THE AMOHSR CONTAINS SETBACKS, which is why the OHS Committee made it a priority to equip the unions to fight back on the ground. We needed to mobilize union members to make the government realize that reforms to occupational health and safety must never be at the expense of workers. The purpose of the reform must be to protect the rights of victims of industrial accidents and create a healthier work environment by establishing mechanisms to eliminate hazards at their source. Prevention and compensation must complement each other so that Québec workers finally have a legislative framework suitable for the twenty-first century.

THEMES ADDRESSED BY THE CONFEDERAL COMMITTEE

The Committee's work plan was disrupted by COVID-19 and the AMOHSR, which became the subject of the bulk of the Committee's discussions.

During this three-year term, three members had to be replaced. The Committee held eleven meetings between March 2020 and January 2023.

COVID-19

The Committee's three-year term began during the public health crisis. It compiled an account of inconsistencies as to how the CNESST's instructions were applied to unions, and then asked the CSN to demand that the CNESST play its role of maintaining a critical stance and preserve its independence from the INSPQ.

"REAL PROTECTION FOR EVERYONE" CAMPAIGN

The topic that absorbed virtually all of the Committee's attention was the AMOHSR. This legislation was introduced in the fall of 2020 and received assent on October 6, 2021. Dissatisfaction with the new law was unanimous: while there were some small advances in prevention for non-priority groups, there were also setbacks in compensation for these groups as well as for priority groups.

Following the introduction of the Bill, a mobilization campaign was launched under the theme "Real Protection for Everyone." The campaign, slated to run for five years, spearheaded opposition to Bill 59 and, subsequently, to the Act. As a result, the government backed down on some points. The campaign also put occupational health and safety back at the centre of the CSN's actions and demands. For too long, OHS had been taken for granted. Bill 59 was a wake-up call — a reminder to us all that we will always have to fight for healthy workplaces. Health and safety must always remain central to our actions and the CSN must continue to be at the forefront in OHS-related matters.

BILL 59

At each of its meetings, the Committee monitored the progress of the debates in the National Assembly.

The key mobilization event related to our work on Bill 59 was the vigil held in front of the National Assembly. This vigil led to a measure of progress for workers and also to a change in spokesperson on the part of one of the opposition parties. Our efforts succeeded as well as they did because every link in the CSN chain mobilized to support them.

Visits to the unions were organized to promote buy-in to our demands. These visits were an opportunity to take stock of the work that needs to be done on the ground to restore OHS to its rightful place.

AMOHSR

It was decided to follow up on the adoption of the law by holding demonstrations as sections of it came into force. Accordingly, one demonstration was held in front of the CNESST offices on April 6, 2022, to mark the coming into force of the interim regime; another, on October 6, for the coming into force of new provisions concerning compensation; and a third, on December 13, when participation mechanisms in the construction sector came into force.

The members of the Committee considered it very important to encourage our unions to participate in the demonstrations to show that workers are united against the setbacks resulting from this law.

FOLLOW-UP ON AMOHSR-RELATED WORK AT THE CNESST

Now that Bill 59 has become the AMOHSR, work is continuing at the CNESST. Before the Act can come fully into force, multiple regulations need to be adopted. These regulations, which relate to both compensation and prevention, could result in further setbacks. Consequently, mobilization remains essential if we are to negotiate the best possible regulations.

The work of these committees was reviewed at every meeting of the OHS Committee.

PROVINCIAL OHS COORDINATION MEETINGS

These meetings have played a very important role during the last three years. Coordination has been restored to its rightful place. The meetings have provided an opportunity to consult the various organizations within the union on issues related to COVID-19 and the changes in the law. There have been seven regular coordination meetings; Committee members would like to have two meetings per year, in the future, to continue strengthening the links between the various actors within the CSN. The coordinating meetings are attended by all the federations and central councils, as well as UCCO-SAC. We need to get out of our silos to ensure that the CSN's demands reflect the concerns of all our members.

In addition, at the height of the work on Bill 59, short coordinating meetings were held every three weeks to promote buy-in as to the demands related to Bill 59. Given the importance of what was at stake, the objective was to provide our officers an overview of the OHS regime, its strengths and weaknesses, and how it compares to regimes in other countries.

We can therefore say that the coordination meetings contributed to cohesion and solidarity within the CSN on the OHS front.

EVENTS

April 28: International Commemoration Day for Dead and Injured Workers



This day of commemoration is a solemn occasion on which we remember that too many workers continue to be injured or lose their lives in the workplace.

More than ever, we owe them our thoughts on this day. Several sectors of the CSN were hit hard by COVID-19. While the government was urging Québécois to stay home, many CSN members were out risking their lives on the front lines. It is important that

CSN members in all workplaces take this occasion to pay tribute to these workers.

CSN members and staff were asked to wear a black ribbon and observe a minute of silence in honour of workers who lost their lives on the job. The commemoration was moved out of the CSN's offices and into the workplace. This practice should continue. April 28 must be commemorated directly in the workplace, together with our members.

National Occupational Health and Safety Week



In line with the Real Protection for Everyone campaign, the themes for this year's National OHS Week were linked to the mobilization against the AMOHSR. The objective was to heighten awareness, among our unions, of the setbacks in the Act and the importance of mobilizing. During National Occupational Health and Safety Week, the CSN highlights various resources, video testimonials from its members, and its health and safety services. It is an opportunity to bring OHS players together and to organize activities in the unions in connection with our mobilization. A special effort was made to involve the unions' central councils and federations in developing these activities. National OHS Week must be used to make workplaces safer and raise awareness of the importance of prevention for avoiding occupational injuries.

Review and outlook



The CSN's *Bilan et perspectives* meeting is a key OHS event. In line with the health and safety campaign, the theme chosen was "Real Protection for Everyone." More than 350 members working in occupational health and safety, including union officers and advisors, met in November 2022. It emerged clearly that every sector is affected by the legislative changes brought about by the AMOHSR.

Inspirational testimonials informed workers of the recent changes and the importance of mobilizing to avoid setbacks, and showed that our unions are determined not to be passive victims. All in all, it was a vibrant conference with active participation and inspiring discussions.

The right to work in a safe environment was won through great struggles. We intend to defend this right, and will fight to develop it further to adapt to new workplace realities.

The Committee will continue to inform the movement about health and safety issues.

Its members should have a greater presence at meetings of the CSN's bodies and events in order to disseminate the Committee's reflections to all the members of our unions.

The Committee will continue pressing the issues discussed in this report and start working on other issues. Communicating information to our unions will remain a priority, because the CSN has done crucial work on occupational health and safety, and it is important that the unions know about it.

