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# The Review

CANADIAN UNION  
OF PUBLIC EMPLOYEES

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## 2013-2014 Calendar

### General Council

Sheraton Laval Hotel  
December 11–12, 2013

### PPP Conference

Sheraton Laval Hotel  
February 3, 2014

### Convention study session

Sheraton Laval Hotel  
February 4–5, 2014

### General Council

Sheraton Laval Hotel  
February 6–7, 2014

### General Council

Sheraton Laval Hotel  
April 9–10, 2014

### Convention

June 3–5, 2014,  
followed by the General Council  
on June 6, 2014  
or November 4–6, 2014  
followed by the General Council  
on November 7, 2014 (TBA);

### Convention preparation conference

Hôtel Rimouski  
September 30 and October 1–2, 2014

### General Council

Hôtel Rimouski  
October 3, 2014

### General Council

Loews Hôtel Le Concorde, Quebec City:  
December 10–11, 2014



## Specialized workers: underpaid experts

OF ALL THE SPECIALIZED WORKERS IN QUÉBEC, THOSE WHO WORK FOR THE QUÉBEC GOVERNMENT EARN THE LEAST. WHAT GIVES?

Yet most people think that unionized workers enjoy better job conditions than their non-unionized counterparts. That may be true for some, but it's not the case for the specialized workers represented by some unions, including CUPE.

According to the Institut de la statistique du Québec, salaries for the Québec government's 7,000 specialized workers hover 30% below wages in the private sector. Hardly surprising then that the government is having trouble keeping its workers!

Simply put, refrigeration mechanics, electricians, plumbers, pipefitters, mechanics, etc., make more money when they leave to work for the private sector.

Faced with this labour shortage, the government subcontracts a large share of its property maintenance work at a higher price than the cost of having the work done internally.

The government pledged to correct this inequity by creating a joint sector committee to examine the issue in 2010. A recently submitted report clearly identifies possible solutions. But it appears that the Conseil du Trésor is reluctant to invest the necessary funding. According to many sources, the government is trying to postpone the issue until negotiations are held in 2015.

In the meantime, many government workers are losing money.

In recent months, demonstrations have been held in various locations across Québec to condemn government inertia on this issue, forcing the government back to the bargaining table.

### Lessons from the Charbonneau Commission

The Commission still hasn't wrapped up its work, but we can already see how important it is for the public sector to have its own experts. This internal expertise would provide managers with a benchmark for determining the real cost of allocating contracts to the private sector.

A specialized worker paid at the same rate as in the private sector would keep these skills in house and thus help reduce overbilling, an all-too common practice foisted on us by the private sector.

The only solution to the problem is pay equity for specialized workers and recognition of the value of internal expertise. To achieve this, we'd need to have a provincial government with a global vision of how to improve public services while cutting costs.

## A word from the President

by Marco Lutfy



### Reviving Activism

A union's mission is to serve its members. However, union officials are more than just information providers. They are also challenged to listen

attentively, settle differences, demand better working conditions and ensure dialogues remain harmonious. Expectations run high on all sides; employers always want openness and flexibility, and members expect concrete, and sometimes immediate, results.

Union life definitely requires a lot of self-sacrifice. Union officials must be meticulous and try to surpass themselves when dealing with problems, whether real or perceived. If they don't decompress from time to time, they have to cope with stress and be on the alert year in and year out. They end up feeling like punching bags and can come up with fewer and fewer solutions.

Yet union involvement is more than just dealing with a mountain of problems! It's also a huge educational experience, an opportunity to meet amazing people, share some laughs and feel vital and useful. It's a great feeling when we can manage confrontation and resolution. The challenges then become opportunities for achievement. The sense of accomplishment brings inner growth.

In short, union officials are also human beings who work at balancing work and personal life with their own obligations, dreams and ambitions. And sometimes they have to walk a fine line between the two.

# A Word from the Secretary General

by Michel Jolin

## Time to bail out?

Some of us may be inclined to disassociate ourselves from the FTQ, but before making such a drastic move, we should give some careful thought to what the FTQ actually is.

The FTQ, or Fédération des travailleurs et travailleuses du Québec, is the largest association of public and private unions in Québec. It has more than 600,000 members, who come from

42 unions, 15,840 workplaces and 5,160 local unions.

The FTQ is a major political force that gives us strong leverage in our negotiations with the government. In addition, the FTQ manages the all-important Fonds de solidarité FTQ, a solidarity fund with over \$9 billion in assets, which allows the organization to create or save thousands of jobs each year.

That being said, are there real or suspected

problems with some FTQ affiliates? With FTQ-Construction, for instance? Let's just say that it's hard to deny appearances. Is the solidarity fund under the control of organized crime? I highly doubt it. However, I do think that some people in finance would love to get their hands on a fund of that size.

It's my hope that we can distinguish between the FTQ and its 42 affiliated unions and the affiliate that is experiencing problems. While we should continue to be vigilant, we should also realize that we have a good partnership with an organization that, although in need of fine tuning, should certainly not be discarded.

## GENERAL COUNCIL OF OCTOBER 2-3, 2013

by Michel Jolin

### WE HEARD FROM A NUMBER OF CPAS COMMITTEES AT THE RECENT GENERAL COUNCIL.

Benoit Piché, a member of the Class 1 Committee and President of Local 4723 at the Institut universitaire de gériatrie de Montréal, provided an update on imminent job eliminations in his certification unit. Beginning in November, the employer's optimization plan provides for one nurse for every 50 users during day shifts, one for every 75 users during evening shifts, and one for every 225 users during night shifts. With ratios like these, how will it be possible to ensure quality of care and user safety?

The Insurance Committee provided an update on insurance contract renewal negotiations, including information on La Capitale's new prescription drug insurance rates, which take effect on January 1, 2014. Note that our basic plan will feature a new, cheaper option. Watch for our mailings, as you will be required to make a selection between October 28 and November 15, 2013. The Organizing Committee Opposing Public-Private

Partnerships (OCOPPP) held a workshop on the theme of Article 29 of the collective agreement ("Contracting Out").

The Action Committee continues to live up to its name. It has been busy these past few months demonstrating for specialized workers at the Centre jeunesse de Montréal, the Institut Philippe-Pinel de Montréal, the Institut universitaire de gériatrie de Montréal and the Centre de la petite enfance Picasso.

Alain Tessier, sector coordinator and new member of the CARRA retirement committee (RREGOP fund administrator), explained that we have recouped our losses from the financial crisis. We now have a healthy pension fund, which is excellent news.

On the issue of Letter of Agreement No. 1 Regarding Employees Working with Beneficiaries in Residential and Long-term Care Centres, another "AGIR" training program will be offered to beneficiary attendants.

Lastly, the following elections were held: Carmen Lamarque from Local 311 joined the Status of Women Committee, and Marie-Ève Adam from Local 313 was elected to the Information Committee.

## WANT TO BE FRIENDS ON FACEBOOK?

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**Like**



# Are you being taken for a ride?

A UNION IS ESSENTIALLY A GROUP OF WORKERS WHO BAND TOGETHER AND ORGANIZE THEMSELVES TO DEFEND THEIR RIGHTS, PROMOTE THEIR OWN INTERESTS AND ESTABLISH A BALANCE OF POWER WITH THEIR EMPLOYER TO PREVENT HIM FROM DOING WHATEVER HE LIKES. AND THAT CAN CAUSE PROBLEMS, WHICH IN TURN EXPLAINS MOST THE MEDIA'S UNRELENTING ATTACKS AGAINST UNIONS FOR THE PAST 30 YEARS OR MORE.



What's more, unions now seem at times to be targets of a witch hunt, and that's exactly what's going on. By accusing unions of being corrupt, criminal, racketeering organizations that should be tossed onto the scrap heap, media sources (and their owners) are hoping we'll take the next obvious step. Are they taking us for a ride? Do they really think we're that gullible?

Here are some tips and tools to help us recognize when media sources are trying to pull a fast one on us. These tips can help us form sounder, more substantial opinions based on facts rather than impressions.

## Innocent until proven guilty

This fundamental tenet of our justice system, which derives from British common law, guarantees a fair and equitable trial. In court, we present reasoned arguments and follow established procedures. We stick to the facts and the evidence, and each party (the prosecution and the defense) has the right to speak. We shouldn't confuse the justice system with the media. If you see a newspaper headline claiming "Michael A. charged with gangsterism," remember that people are innocent until they have been proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt. If a similar headline pops up in the media, try substituting your own name for the name of the accused. That should give you some food for thought.

FURTHER TO AN OPINION WRITTEN BY THE QUÉBEC PRESS COUNCIL IN 2003, THE INSTITUT DE RECHERCHE SUR LE QUÉBEC NOTED THAT NEWSROOMS AND EDITORS WERE LOSING THEIR INDEPENDENCE IN THE FACE OF FORMAL AND INFORMAL INSTRUCTIONS FROM OWNERS PUSHING THEIR OWN FINANCIAL AND IDEOLOGICAL AGENDAS.

## Who's sending the message? And why?

The importance we place on a message depends on who's saying it. That's a basic principle. For example, we might give little credence to what our brother-in-law says if he's always shooting off his mouth. We might be wary of car salesmen because we know they're pushing for the sale (since they have their own interests and profit at heart), and we keep that in mind as we listen to their sales pitch.

"Who's sending the message? And why?" We should always ask ourselves these two questions about the media. Some of us may still be unaware that the media are owned and controlled by those who have a high stake in sabotaging unions. If they could achieve this end, they could do whatever they please and increase their profits (especially by privatizing the public healthcare system so they can "sell" health care more effectively).

## Always check out a variety of sources

The rule of thumb is to check out more than one source. Information content and news are treated differently from one media source to another, depending on the owner. If the Journal de Montréal is the only paper you read and TVA the only channel you watch, then you're getting all your information from Quebecor. Try to see how other media sources report the same news. Do they use the same words, take the same angle? Do they have the same sources?

## What or who are their sources?

There's a lot to be said for looking up sources. Thanks to the Internet, it's easy to get information on sources used in the media. In no time at all, you can find out that such and such a study was carried out by the Montreal Economic Institute, for instance. Note whether the source is mentioned and if there's more than one. You're entirely justified in feeling suspicious if the information is said to be based on "reliable sources" or "observers."

## Spot the fuzzy logic

Fuzzy or questionable logic and misleading information are common media tactics. Either the premise is false and/or the conclusion is invalid.

Here's an example: "If you're a doctor, you have a stethoscope. If you have a stethoscope, then you're a doctor." That seems to make sense, but the following example shows that this type of reasoning doesn't always hold: "If it rains, the sidewalk gets wet. The sidewalk is wet, therefore it's raining." There can be lots of other reasons why the sidewalk is wet. Obviously, the conclusion isn't always justified by the premise.

## Avoid jumping to conclusions

Media commentators are prone to generalizing too quickly and drawing conclusions about broad issues based on a small number of facts. They think, "There's something rotten in the organization,

therefore the entire organization is rotten." In other words, they quickly throw out the baby with the bath water just because they see a fly in the water.

Some people would like you to think along the lines we've just discussed simply because unions are undermining their frantic pursuit of profits by demanding higher wages, better working conditions and the ability to work without risk of injury so that workers can one day enjoy a well-deserved retirement and a decent income. Yes, there are those who think we're gullible and are trying to take us for a ride. Let's prove them wrong!

## Happy Retirement



Carmen Cossette, s.l. 5436



Annette Morin, s.l. 4825



Céline Giroux, s.l. 4825

# Salary increases are an investment in the economy

by Sylvain Lemieux

DURING THE LAST THREE DECADES, MANY WORKERS FELT THAT THEIR SALARY INCREASES WERE DISAPPOINTING. WHILE THAT MAY BE TRUE, IT'S ALL A MATTER OF PERSPECTIVE. HERE ARE SOME HELPFUL FACTS FOR UNDERSTANDING THE SITUATION.

## Salary increases versus the CPI

Between 2002 and 2012, our salaries increased by 13.25%. During the same period, the cost of living (according to the CPI) rose by 20.8%,<sup>1</sup> with the result that our purchasing power decreased by 7.55%. Simply put, the net effect has been a reduction in salaries.

What's even more frustrating is that in 2006, when the economy was booming, the Charest government imposed a decree freezing our wages for two years.

## Next in line for attack: our pension program

It appears that the government would like to change our defined pension plan (guaranteed salary at retirement) to a defined contribution plan (fixed premiums, but no benefit guarantees at retirement).

The government, and the municipalities in particular, want us to swallow the notion that our pension plan is too costly. But it's important to understand that we pay 50% of the amount in these funds. That's why we should have a say in the matter.

Frequently, the employer (the government, the municipality, etc.) fails to deposit money in the pension fund at the same time we do, and makes its contribution only when the employee retires. That means that the money the employer should be depositing in the fund is not earning interest over the years. This undermines the health of the fund. Worse still, employers try to blame

1. <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/tables-tableaux/sum-som/I01/cst01/econ09f-eng.htm>

us and convince us that our plan is too expensive. The bottom line is that they're acting in bad faith because they're the ones mismanaging our nest egg.

## Are we entitled to ask for a wage increase?

For my part, the answer is a resounding YES, for several reasons. The public sector has a lot of catching up to do as far as salaries go. The pay gap can be higher than 30% for some job titles (skilled workers, for instance).

What's more, the money invested in our salaries is seldom a loss for the government. In fact, 70% of the money we earn is reinvested in the economy.<sup>2</sup> Can the same be said of subsidies granted to large corporations?

In my opinion, the government should be a model employer and establish better working conditions. This in turn would give the private sector an incentive to provide similar conditions and spread the wealth. At the end of the day, the gap between rich and poor would shrink.

In conclusion, in answer to the question about how we can have more effective negotiations in 2015, I would say that we need to be informed and ensure everyone else is too. The government has the power and means to influence public opinion. We lack these tools so we need to act with conviction, particularly in view of the fact that 70% of the wages we earn is reinvested in the economy.

2. <http://www.lapresse.ca/le-soleil/actualites/politique/2012/11/23/01-4597195-augmentation-de-salaire-pour-500-000-fonctionnaires-parce-que-leconomie-va-bien.php>

## The Review

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