

## REPORT OF THE PSAC-QUEBEC WOMEN'S DIRECTORS March 2017 – May 2021

So much has happened on the status of women since the last PSAC-Quebec Convention. And it's not just within our union, but also in society at large.

Huguette Breton was officially elected as PSAC-Quebec Director for Women at the convention. Her term ended upon her retirement in June 2017. She was succeeded by her alternate, Dominique St-Jean. Below, she describes her activities through December 2019, then outlines her mandate as Director for Women during the pandemic.

The PSAC-Quebec Women's Committee Facebook page continues to be active thanks to the contributions of many regional coordinators and regional Women's Committees. A mobile library of feminist publications was created for coordinators and members of regional Women's Committees but has been inactive for obvious reasons during the pandemic. Other social media platforms may be added in the future.

2017 was a pivotal year for the status of women. The Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women has been ongoing since 2016, but is encountering hurdles. On October 4, the PSAC-Quebec Women's Committee supported their calls for justice and share the loss of their sisters. It has been shown that over 1,500 women faced this sad fate. We also marked a sombre occasion: the first anniversary of the Phoenix fiasco. Women and young workers quickly felt its harsh effects: their employment status is more often precarious because of the 90-day window for contract implementation, contract jobs, part-time employment and maternity leaves. A number of collective agreements were also ratified during this period. Delays in retroactive pay and salary adjustments created problems for women in our region.

In March, the Collectif 8 mars, a group of feminist organizations and committees in Quebec, chose "Equality knows no bounds" as its theme. I had that theme in mind when I attended the PSAC National Equity Conferences in Toronto and co-facilitated a workshop. Pride (LGBTQ2+), members with a disability, racially visible members, Indigenous peoples and women shared the floor at the conference. Multiple discrimination and intersectionality were discussed, and it became clear that women make up the only group represented within each of the equity-seeking groups. PSAC needs a national women's conference and a separate conference for the other equity groups so that more women have a voice nationally in two contexts. Increasingly, women's committee meetings include an environmental component because mothers want to leave a healthy society on a healthy planet for their children's children.

In July, I attended my component's triennial convention. The component's decision-making structure is clearly lacking in equity, and even more in parity, but this is apparently an issue in many components. Currently, however, the membership of the Quebec Council, whose meetings I always attend, is majority women and I find it very accepting and inclusive. With Magali Picard as REVP and Monique Déry as her alternate, women are well represented in our region.

Women represent 52% of the Quebec population but have much less political, economic and media clout than men. The FTQ's bi-annual convention on the status of women was held on September 12 and 13 and took as its theme, "Be the change you want to see." Françoise David and an inspirational panel of women led discussions on attitudes, rape culture, contempt, abuse, violence, harassment, austerity and the rejection of otherness and difference. Participants were urged to reject social inequalities, the pink tax and all forms of violence and discrimination that affect women disproportionately. We were encouraged to demand more astute political options and the elimination of systemic barriers in schools, hospitals, social services and, of course, the judicial and penal systems.

In October, the Harvey Weinstein scandal broke and, here in Quebec, accusations against Éric Salvail and Gilbert Rozon. I took part in a training session on human rights and another on media relations. The #MeToo, #MoiAussi and, in France, #balancetonporc (call the leech out) movements took off, denouncing rampant sexual violence everywhere. As more accusations came to light, we pondered a labour movement response to potential workplace #MeToo allegations.

2018 saw the rise of women and the law. The Collectif 8 mars chose "Feminist for as long as it takes" as its theme. The struggle to prevent harassment, sexism and sexual abuse gained worldwide prominence. #MeToo-type accusations continued and proliferated. January 21 marked the start of the anti-Trump marches and the Women's Marches protesting sexist decisions and actions by politicians and the wealthy, and the conservatism of newly elected male politicians around the world. Claire Kirkland-Casgrain was the first woman to be granted a state funeral in Quebec. Abortion came under further siege and the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls was in full swing. The \$10 bill featuring a portrait of Viola Desmond came into circulation. I attended the national leadership course, which set our priorities: reject bargaining concessions, increase member engagement and member representation, organize politically, step up lobbying, intensify legal action to assert workers' rights (Phoenix) and retain better public services, for the greater good. I also took part in the FTQ's political action school and PSAC's triennial convention, at which Magali was elected National Vice-President. Our region needed a new REVP, and Yvon Barrière was elected in a very tight vote that pointed to as yet unresolved regional differences.

To mark the 12 Days of Action to End Violence Against Women, most regions organized self-defence classes for our members, which were a great success. We launched the emergency go bags campaign, to which an impressive number of our members donated. Sonia Gagné and I helped to develop and plan the PSAC-Quebec Women's Conference, which took place in April 2019 and adopted the theme, "Me too, for as long as it takes!" I attended the meetings of the National Women's Working Group and Human Rights Committee. A Gender Equity Task Force was struck and our Women's Committee Director is a part of it. The workshop on domestic violence in the workplace that was introduced would benefit women in every region.

In 2019, the Collectif 8 mars chose “Show some respect” as its theme, urging everyone, particularly men, to respect women and act as women’s allies but also to speak out against any lack of fundamental respect between the sexes instead of clinging to the idea of a gender war. On March 8, I had an incredible opportunity to march with women in Guatemala City as part of the PSAC Social Justice Fund’s Education in Action Project. PSAC-Quebec’s triennial Women’s Conference had its largest attendance ever and participants’ feedback was glowing. Michèle Audet, Diane Andicha Picard, Rose Dufour, among others, really electrified the women of PSAC-Quebec. Every component, the university sector, the directly chartered locals and every region answered the call. One significant issue remains: there has been a shortage of women on the committee in the Estrie/Bois-Francs region for more than four years. Karina Palmorino and Elham Khosmanzar have taken turns filling the Coordinator position but have been unable to add to the regional women’s committee. The regional women’s committees distributed more than 180 emergency go bags to organizations in Quebec City and several regions.

At the FTQ, I attended an education seminar, a training session on internet addiction and the CNESST women’s school. Five women took part in the succession planning and leadership sessions. The Legault government and its Bill 21 generated a great deal of discussion. Next came the FTQ convention and my participation in organizing and holding an event for women. My formal decision not to seek another term as Women’s Director was announced, although I will continue to serve on the General Council, to which I was elected as PSAC representative. December 6 marked the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Montreal Massacre and several women from the regional women’s committees attended the commemoration.

The Exceptional Women Award, now known as the Magali Picard Award, was presented on March 8, International Women’s Day, each year.

Throughout my term, I attended the meetings of the PSAC National Human Rights Committee, the National Women’s Committee, the National Officers and the FTQ Status of Women Committee and General Council. I served on the Quebec Council, the convention finance and organization committees, PSAC-Quebec’s lifetime membership and education committees and the steering committees for the conference on the status of women and the national convention. I met and worked with the Women’s Coordinators and visited each region at least once. My priority was always to promote the interests of members identifying as women in the Quebec region.

Femicide, violence, wage disparity, discrimination, the “glass ceiling” and feminist issues were left out in the election campaign. I was an active presence on behalf of most issues, participating in lobbying, blocking building entrances, rallying against Phoenix, supporting our bargaining team, blocking Andrew Scheer, taking part in the March for the Planet and marching against social inequalities (including the Fight for \$15 campaign, the Women’s March in Montreal and the Sisters in Spirit vigil on October 4 to honour the lives of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls).

Barriers preventing women from holding decision-making positions persist within PSAC and our society. Women who belong to the equity groups continue to be those most affected and most marginalized. A Gender Equity Task Force has just released its report. I was involved in formulating its conclusions: reduce barriers to women's presence in order to encourage and promote their involvement, and work to prevent the systemic barriers and rules that could decrease or hamper their involvement. There has recently been a shift in mentality that questions the presence of women involved in status of women activities at convention and in our leadership bodies. We are underfunded compared to other larger committees if we are to have the same technical requirements. I urge the area councils to do their utmost to support the regional women's committees because strong women's representation is crucial for PSAC-Quebec which will benefit from women's presence at every level. Over a three-year cycle, the Education Committee has failed to reach consensus on training by and for women at PSAC-Quebec, even though such training used to be the case. Education and prevention are key to addressing the systemic barriers that still exist.

As they represent the full diversity of our union, women have an intersectional presence. The Director of Equity Groups consistently stepped up for women, as did other members of the Quebec Council who gave women significant support. I encourage their continued collaboration to keep committees vigorous and active and to boost the Young Workers Committee, which is essential to succession planning in our region.

Our battles, so very necessary, have made us "Feminists with all our Might." We must contribute our diversity to the change process and take our rightful place. In Canada and among our membership, women hold up to 92% of the lowest-paying jobs. Social and workplace problems have a greater impact on women, so we must continue to unite on their behalf. Women with a disability, Indigenous, LGBTQ2+ and racialized women are even more adversely affected: that is why we need to stay united. I will, of course, continue to work to improve the status of women, not just for myself but for all of us.

Thank you to PSAC-Quebec employees Nathalie, Lyne and "Cathy-now-Zita," superb allies in the various projects. Thank you to Sonia Gagné, my partner in crime, to Isabelle Renaud and to the coordinators for their involvement in all of the regions (Sonia, Fedoua, Maryline, Lisa, Judith, "Diane-now-Sonia", "Karina-now-Elham" and "Céline-who-became-Lise-and-is-now-Isabelle"). I was immensely proud of each woman's strengths and knew I could count on the support of these passionate, engaged and inspiring women.

I offer my full support to Sister Maryline Nadeau and congratulate her on taking up the torch of this union role with its unique opportunities for engagement. I wish her every success in the many battles that lie ahead. In feminist solidarity,

Sister Maryline Nadeau held the director position for a few months, but electoral, health and personal issues led her to officially step down in March 2019. Sister Fedoua Hritel officially took over the position in summer 2019. She worked in collaboration with Dominique St-Jean until the election of an alternate. Sophie Martin took on the position

of Women's Coordinator for Montréal. While there was some movement within the committee, we believe that fluidity in leadership roles gives an invaluable personal and human experience to the women who choose to sit on women's committees.

The April 2020 PSAC-Quebec convention was rescheduled to June 2021 due to the pandemic. COVID highlighted the challenges faced by women. As the front line in healthcare, education and social services, they have played a major role in the pandemic. However, our members were also called upon to demonstrate unprecedented adaptability to maintain services to the population through this national crisis. Meanwhile, they need to balance several personal roles with their professional ones. Isolation and the lockdown have had an impact on Quebecers' mental health and have underscored inequalities. Emergency shelters are overflowing and the demand for food bank and community services is unparalleled. In the first quarter of 2021, there were ten cases of femicide in as many weeks, and increased violence against women is worrying both here and around the world. On April 2, members of your women's committees marched to protest that violence and chant, "Not one more."

Fedoua continues to serve members in her role. She remains responsible for PSAC-Quebec's regional women's committees and promoting their creation. She attends the meetings of the Quebec Council and is the spokesperson of PSAC-Quebec's regional women's committees. At each meeting of the Quebec Council, she submits a written report to explain and describe her activities and those of PSAC-Quebec women's committees. She must also submit this report to Convention; ensure and promote representation in the various union bodies and community groups that defend women's interests; attend meetings of the area councils of the other regions with voice; and serve on the FTQ General Council. In addition, Fedoua was elected as alternate for the three VP positions representing women on the FTQ General Council. We should all be proud of our new director, who, in addition to her professional and union roles, recently took on an even important one as a new mother. This highlights the urgency to create a more egalitarian, safe and healthy world for our daughters and all of our children. The members of PSAC's women's committees are all working passionately and in solidarity toward that objective. We call on to all present who are ready to help mobilize the women of the Eastern Townships and Mauricie regions in particular or become involved in a RWC to communicate their intent.