

Report from the Status of Women Committee

We are motivated to continue moving forward!

Until women obtain true equality, we will be feminists!
Until we have overcome violence against women, we will be feminists!
Until we achieve a society free of gender discrimination, we will be feminists!
Until we eradicate poverty among women and their families, we will be feminists!

Those are all reasons why from one term of office to the next, the FSSS Status of Women Committee advocates for women's specific demands, by means of the labour movement.

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The Status of Women Committee

In 1983, a position of vice-president for the status of women was created on the Executive Committee. In 2007, as part of the reform of the Federation's structures, the Executive Committee distributed responsibilities for areas of work, ensuring that a woman was in charge of work on the status of women. For the past two years, it has been the vice-president responsible for office personnel and administrative technicians and professionals who was responsible for this work.

The elections for committees at the Federal Council meeting following the convention, in November 2007, resulted in a renewal of nearly the entire Status of Women Committee. Only one member of the out-going committee remained on the new committee. As well, the union staff representative providing support for the committee changed, and then changed again in mid-term as a result of reassignments to collective bargaining. So the team that carried out the mandates from 2007 convention was entirely new.

May 2007 to November 2007

Josée Marcotte, vice-president responsible for office personnel and administrative technicians and professionals

Maryse LeBlanc, union staff representative

Gisèle Charrette

Ghyslaine Fiset

Suzanne Ledoux

Diane Lessard

One vacancy

November 2007

Josée Marcotte, vice-president responsible for office personnel and administrative technicians and professionals

Marie Bergeron, union staff representative (until November 2008)

Anna Pilote, union staff representative

France Dutilly

Gisèle Charrette

Carole Duperré

Hélène Mathieu

Suzanne Audette

30 years of struggle are worth celebrating!

It was in 1980 that women voiced the need for the Federation to create a Status of Women Committee. **In 2010**, the Status of Women Committee will celebrate its 30th anniversary. It will be sure to mark the event.

The place of women

Ensure women's presence in the arenas of power

That the FSSS organize a forum on the place of women in the arenas of power in both the labour movement and the broader public sphere, and on the measures to be taken to ensure genuinely equal opportunities for women in political representation.

Resolution from the 40th Convention of the FSSS



Why aren't women more present in the spheres of power? What can we do to encourage their active participation in these spheres? Are family responsibilities really an obstacle to women's involvement? Do the spheres of power allow for family-work-study balance? Does this kind of power interest women? If not, why not? Is the power to influence of more interest to women than decision-making power?

These are just some of the questions that guided the Status of Women Committee in its thinking and discussions around the organization of the forum on *Women and Power*, held May 12-13, 2009 in Montréal.

We invited four women who have exercised or now exercise power in different settings: Françoise David, Sylvie Desnoyers, Louise Harel and Lise Payette. To round out the discussion, we asked a political scientist, Manon Tremblay, to join us. These five outstanding women shared their thoughts and experiences in a round-table discussion moderated by Ariane Émond.

Taking one's place in the spheres of power doesn't simply mean being elected as a member of a political party. Women are involved in different spheres of power: the labour, environmental, community and feminist movements, as well as various boards of directors of public or private institutions, etc. How do we create coherent links among these various seats of power and foster a new generation of feminists representative of our values?

Though it is important for more women to take the plunge and become involved, they also have to be prepared to navigate the various spheres of power. This is why, in collaboration with the Centre de développement femmes et gouvernance (Centre for women's development and governance), we offered participants two training sessions on "Negotiating your power" and "Communicating to convince." This training can help women take their place in the various spheres of power.

The quest for balance

It is important for the various places of power to reflect the population as a whole and for women's representation to be an integral part.

In the December 8, 2008 provincial election, 37 women were elected, out of a total of 125 MNAs – 29.6%, and 5 more than in 2007 but one less than in 2003. Since 2007, we have at least achieved parity in Cabinet in Québec, whereas in Ottawa only 28.9% of cabinet ministers are women. At the municipal level, women today account for fewer than a quarter of elected officials.

So in 2009, we can see that politics is still a male bastion, with the gap being most visible in municipal politics. In the 2005 municipal elections, 13.1% of mayors and 26.6 of municipal councillors elected were women. There will be another round of municipal elections on November 1, 2009: shouldn't they be an occasion for electing more women?

A first woman becomes official leader

Following the general election in December 2008, Pauline Marois became the first woman to hold the position of leader of the official opposition in Québec's National Assembly. Previously, two women had held this position on an acting basis: Monique Gagnon-Tremblay for the Liberals, from May to October 1998, and Louise Harel for the PQ, from June 2005 to August 2006.

Building the necessary momentum

Claudette Carbonneau was elected president of the CSN in 2002, becoming the first woman to hold this position. The CSN's Executive Committee is now composed of three women and three men.

In the FSSS, Catherine Loumède was president from 1987 to 1990. With the exception of a brief interim in 1982, this was the first time in the history of the Federation that it elected a woman as president – and three quarters of its members are women. Twenty-five years later, Francine Lévesque was elected president in 2007.

The place of women in the FSSS

FSSS members: 78% of members are women

Executive Committee: 5 women and 2 men

Co-ordinators: 2 women

Federal Bureau: 13 women and 9 men

Provincial staff positions: 1 woman and 6 men

Spokesperson for collective bargaining or in charge of provincial areas of work:

- . public sectors: 2 women and 2 men
- . private sectors: 1 woman and 3 men

Standing committees:

- . Financial Oversight Committee: 1 woman and 2 men
- . Health and Safety Committee: 1 woman and 4 men
- . Status of Women Committee: 5 women.

Sectoral bargaining committees:

Public sectors (8 women and 4 men):

- . nursing and cardio-respiratory care personnel: 2 women and 1 man
- . paratechnical personnel and auxiliary services and trades personnel: 1 woman and 2 men

- . office personnel and administrative technicians and professionals: 3 women
 - . health and social services technicians and professionals: 2 women and 1 man
- Private sectors (3 women and 6 men):
- . childcare: 2 women and 1 man
 - . pre-hospital: 3 men
 - . private institutions and community agencies: 1 woman and 2 men

Percentage of those attending decision-making meetings who are women

(from May 2007 to March 31, 2009)

2007 convention	54 %
Federal Councils	56 %
Federal Bureau	57 %
FSSS Executive Committee	67 %
Regional assemblies:	
1A Gaspésie-Iles-de-la-Madeleine	50 %
1B Bas St-Laurent	55 %
02 Saguenay-Lac-St-Jean	55 %
03 Québec-Chaudière-Appalaches	58 %
04 Cœur-du-Québec	67 %
05 Estrie	50 %
6A Montréal-Laval-Grand-Nord	43 %
6B Laurentides-Lanaudière	58 %
6c Montérégie	52 %
07 Outaouais	60 %
08 Abitibi-Témiscamingue-Nord-du-Québec	80 %
09 Côte-Nord-Basse-Côte-Nord	61 %
Sectoral meetings:	
. nursing and cardio-respiratory care personnel	78 %
. paratechnical personnel and auxiliary services and trades personnel	43 %
. office personnel and administrative technicians and professionals	67 %
. health and social services technicians and professionals	54 %
. childcare	84 %
. pre-hospital sector	97 %
. private institutions and community agencies	85 %
. shelters for battered women	
. private residential care centres	
. community organizations	

The Status of Women Committee observes that women are present in the spheres of power at the CSN, the FSSS and in unions. But these gains are still fragile and constant vigilance is required to preserve this balance. **We have to constantly monitor access to equality for elected officers** in order to bring out the different realities of the men and women we represent more clearly.

Although some progress has been made, there are still shortcomings in women's representation in both the Federation and our unions, and we have to continue working to overcome them.

Following the imposition of Bill 30, our unions had to overhaul their structures. The Federation suggested new by-laws that provided, for example, for a person in charge of the status of women on the executive committee, with the possibility of creating a status of women committee to provide support for that person. The objective was to have this responsibility taken on by a woman on the executive committee.

What is the situation now? Have unions put people in charge of the status of women on their executive committees? The Status of Women Committee thinks that it is time to take stock of the situation and ask unions, if they have not already done so, to designate a woman on the executive committee to be responsible for work on the status of women. This is why we are proposing the following.

That unions designate a member of the executive committee to be responsible for work on the status of women and that they ensure that this responsibility is always taken on by a woman.

Taking the leap

Involvement, commitment, is above all a matter of personal conviction. It reflects a desire to get involved and improve the lot of the women and men that we want to represent.

To take action in our communities, we have to DARE to make the leap and apply for a position or stand for election; we have to DARE to get involved at various levels.

For women who are tempted to get into politics: there is now support and information available to encourage women to stand for election and to support them when they do so. In this regard, we salute the Centre de développement femmes et gouvernance (Centre for women's development and governance), which makes various tools available, including training sessions at a "women and democracy" school (École femmes et démocratie), to initiate them in exercising power while giving them the confidence they need to effect a change of course.

Women are gradually assimilating the machinery of politics – developed by and for men – and shaping it in their own image. At times, they weigh and assess issues and actions differently. Women are traditionally associated with the community sector and tend to come to terms with diverging interests, characteristics likely to influence decisions and ways of getting involved in politics.

The labour movement is also a concrete, accessible environment in which women can make progress, and an important centre for political and social action.

Though some women are reluctant to go ahead, it is important to encourage them and convince them to make the leap – first by clearly describing and explaining the nature of what they will be expected to do and then by seeking to provide them with support.

Closer to home

The Status of Women committee wondered whether in the FSSS, the women or the status of women committees take on and come to grips with the issues that concern them and whether they receive support from the person responsible for status of women work and the executive committee. Do status of women officers, committees and our members have the tools they need to do this work, and how can the Federation do a better job of helping them?

We think that we have to improve this aspect and thus do a better job of helping women who get involved and become active in our unions. We therefore aim to provide more support for status of women officers. Such support could be an incentive for women who hesitate to make the leap.

We thought about the form this support could take and came up the idea of tools for helping to organize meetings, mini-training sessions, issues papers, etc.

We also want to develop a network that will allow for discussions among activists and with the Federation's Status of Women Committee. This is what we want to achieve with our second resolution.

That the FSSS make tools available to unions on topics specifically relevant to women, that it provide opportunities for meetings and training and that it develop a network, especially for status of women officers.

The elimination of violence

National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women

The Status of Women Committee has a mandate to recognize the National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women during the fall session of the Federal Council.

Violence in the workplace

In 2007, the presentation of the play *Il y a des coups* by Théâtre Parminou demonstrated how violence in the workplace can take many forms. This play drew audience attention to violent behaviours, which are not always easy to detect and which we sometimes engage in unawares.

This viewing provided a valuable reminder that we, as union activists, have a role to play in preserving workplaces that protect the physical and psychological health of workers.

Violence against Aboriginal women

In 2008, the Status of Women Committee gave the floor to Aboriginal women. Many of us knew little about the difficulties faced by Aboriginal peoples, and this lack of awareness was nourished by a biased perception that Aboriginal people enjoy privileges. With this presentation, the Committee hoped to raise union representatives' awareness of the hardships experienced by the women we rub shoulders with in our unions, whether as workers or as clients.

Many Aboriginal women have to wrestle with substantial problems of discrimination and violence. Our two guests, France Robertson from Québec Native Women and Viviane Michel from the Maison communautaire Missinak (Missinak Community House), discussed their domestic violence strategy and its application in the Aboriginal community. Their moving presentation made us more aware of the difficult circumstances that Aboriginal people have had to deal with and adapt to over the course of their history. This event provided an opportunity to express solidarity with First Nations people, which we hope will be strengthened.

Awareness and visibility campaign aimed at eliminating the various forms of violence

That the Status of Women Committee develop a proposal for the FSSS for an awareness and visibility campaign in our workplaces aimed at eliminating the various forms of violence.

Resolution from the 40th FSSS Convention

During the current term, the Status of Women Committee developed a proposal for an awareness and visibility campaign aimed at eliminating the various forms of violence in our workplaces. Violence is unacceptable, and we must work tirelessly to oppose it.

As part of the commemorations surrounding the 20th anniversary of the École Polytechnique Massacre, the Status of Women Committee will launch its awareness and visibility campaign against violence and will also participate in an international and multidisciplinary conference that will be held on December 4, 5, and 6, 2009. The conference aims to assess the significance that this tragedy has acquired in Québec and around the world, to collectively reflect on the massacre, and to discuss the issue of violence against women and feminists.

In 2009, the movie *Polytechnique* reopened the debate on violence against women. The fight against violence must continue in today's world, and this fight should be of concern to everyone.

Psychological harassment in the workplace

To build on its analysis of the problem of violence in the workplace, the Status of Women Committee appointed an activist as delegate to the 6th *International Conference on Workplace Bullying* held June 4 to 6, 2008 at UQÀM.

At the thought-provoking workshops and presentations made at the conference, the central conclusion remained the importance of introducing the human aspect back into the workplace. Marie-France Hirigoyen, international expert on psychological harassment in the workplace, identified its main causes: a narcissistic society, vulnerable individuals, an expectation of continuous performance at work, situations that are beyond employees' control, deteriorating relations in the workplace, decreased acknowledgement of employees, the challenge of adapting to an increasingly harsh working world, a fend-for-yourself mentality, and the disintegration of solidarity among workers.

Meetings with unions

Unions representing English-speaking members in Montréal meet one day a month to discuss various issues related to their working conditions. A member of the Status of Women Committee attended one of these meetings to present a guide entitled *Les rapprochements sexuels entre un professionnel de la santé et un ou une cliente, un interdit, une agression sexuelle, un crime* (published by the Association québécoise plaidoyer-victimes), which points out that sexual contact between health-care professionals and clients is forbidden, a form of sexual assault and a crime.

It would seem that this meeting marks the starts of collaboration between the Status of Women Committee and FSSS unions. Such meetings allow the Committee to make specific status of women issues better known, and committee members hope to be able to continue this kind of work with unions in the next three years. They will therefore be available for other meetings.

The struggle to maintain a public health-care system

We have no hesitation saying that winning a public health-care system in the 1960s and 1970s contributed greatly to better living conditions for women and the population as a whole, especially the most vulnerable of them.

Unfortunately, for some years now our governments have been making increasingly disturbing attacks on our public system. We are even more concerned that women will be hit hardest by the privatization of health care, because they are the people who mainly work in and use these services.

Women account for more than 70% of the work force in health care and social services. It is important for government to invest in the public health-care system, both to ensure free, universal access to services and because it is a sector in which the majority of jobs are filled by women. They are major users of the public system because they are often responsible for the health of their families and relatives. Private health care is a setback for women's equality.

Investment in health care and social services stimulates the economy as much or even more than investment in roads and bridges, and at the same time helps improve the economic situation of women.

The Committee wants to contribute actively to the struggle to preserve the public system, and we need the support of women in the federation, among others.

We think that status of women committees must put their own stamp on this work and share it with all members of their unions. In support of this work and these discussions, we want to prepare a set of arguments and talking points on the harmful effects that privatization and contracting-out have on women's living and working conditions. These could be used at general membership and other meetings, in union newsletters, etc.

That the Status of Women Committee prepare arguments and talking points on the harmful effects that privatization and contracting-out have on women's living and working conditions.

Family-work-study balance

According to a *Segma-La Presse* survey published on March 8, 2009 for International Women's Day, a strong majority of women in Québec consider that they still have important struggles to wage. Pay equity is still the most important, according to 39% of respondents, followed by family-work-study balance, at 31%.

On the eve of the process to renew collective agreements in the public sector, this means that it is time to improve working and living conditions for thousands of women who work in health care and social services. The Status of Women Committee will follow the progress of negotiations with interest. Committee members will be particularly attuned to progress made on specific demands on family-work-study balance.

Already, a few unions have made progress and are involved in interesting experiences in family-work-study balance. We would like to see these worthwhile experiences shared by all our unions.

3.1 That taking into account the various levels of collective bargaining, unions undertake to define family-work balance objectives and draw up demands for their employer, after assessing their members' needs. That unions have the objective of implementing at least one new measure in the next three years.

3.2 That the CSN and its federation deploy their resources to develop bargaining policies on family-work balance and to support union action on these issues, and that they ensure follow-up on progress made and the dissemination of worthwhile experiences.

Resolutions from the 62nd Convention of the CSN

The 62nd Convention of the CSN passed resolutions that have been implemented in part with the production of a guide on family-work-study balance.

The Status of Women Committee wants to get involved in this process and provide support and follow-up for unions. Later, we want to review and assess the work.

That the Status of Women Committee do follow-up with unions on the union process on family-work-study balance suggested by the CSN, that it do an assessment of the process and ensure follow-up on progress made as well as dissemination of worthwhile experiences.

Pay equity and maintaining pay equity

Pay equity: there's still work to be done!

Since the adoption of the *Pay Equity Act* in 1996, discrimination in what women are paid has been part of the social discourse. Our demand now enjoys broad public support. For this reason, the *Pay Equity Act* was a major social gain for Québec, the result of lengthy mobilization by women.

Media coverage of the pay equity settlement in the public and parapublic sectors and then the settlement in childcare centres might leave the impression that the issue of pay equity has been settled for good. But the report released by the Ministry of Labour on November 21, 2006, entitled *La Loi sur l'équité salariale: un acquis à maintenir* (The Pay Equity Act: gains that need to be maintained), provides a reality check by reporting that close to 50% of private companies had not completed their pay equity work, and in many cases had not even started. The report also showed that belonging to a union was a very significant advantage for women, since unionization has a positive impact on their rates of pay and the gap in pay between men and women is narrower for unionized women.

Obtaining pay equity, applicable as of November 21, 2001,¹ is still a challenge for many women, and we will continue the battle side-by-side with them until we obtain justice!

A flagrant injustice for women who work in exclusively female workplaces

The Pay Equity Commission knew from November 21, 1996 on that it had to develop regulations on procedures for making comparisons for this kind of workplace. Thus, since the Act stipulated that salary adjustments would be payable two years after such a regulation was adopted, the Commission had three years to develop the regulation and give the same deadline for an end to discrimination for all women, namely November 21, 2001. Yet it took until May 5, 2005 for the Commission to adopt regulations covering these workplaces, which meant that salary adjustments were postponed to May 5, 2007.

Excerpt from *Quand notre responsabilité collective est de mieux faire* (When we have a collective responsibility to do better), a brief presented by the CSN to the National Assembly's Committee on Labour and the Economy in hearings on Bill 25, *An Act to amend the Pay Equity Act*, March 2009.

Pay equity, a gain to be maintained!

On March 25, 2009, the Minister of Labour and the members of the Committee on Labour and the Economy invited the CSN to comment on amendments to the *Pay Equity Act* proposed in Bill 25. The bill is the government's response to the report on the implementation of the Act. The FSSS made an active contribution to the analysis of this bill.

The core of this bill is without a doubt the set of provisions on maintaining pay equity. The Federation is pleased to see that the legislator recognizes that the objective of pay equity has not been fully achieved.

Though the bill as presented includes measures that will unquestionably allow for a better application of the principle of "equal pay for work of equal value," it also has major shortcomings that mean that inequalities will persist unless the necessary changes are made. The FSSS and its Status of Women Committee will pay close attention to the amendments made to the legislation and will not let the legislator-employer shirk its obligations to maintain pay equity or use loopholes to avoid handling our complaints.

The Having a child – and protecting your rights... handbooks



The Status of Women Committee completely revised the handbook on parental rights for workers in the health and social services system to take into account the new National Provisions decreed on December 15, 2005 and the Québec Parental Insurance Plan (QPIP) that came into force on January 1, 2006.

The handbook was eagerly awaited by our unions and was clearly greatly appreciated by members since the Committee has had to reprint it twice since the revised version first came out .

The Committee also published another handbook on parental rights intended for all workers in the private and community sectors, both unionized and non-unionized. This new tool makes the Federation's influence felt throughout the women's movement.

The handbooks are practical tools aimed at making it easier for workers to exercise their parental rights and help them plan the various stages involved when a child is born or arrives in the family.

The handbooks and related standard letters can now be downloaded free of charge from the FSSS Status of Women Committee's web site. You can also obtain copies of the handbook from the CSN's bookstore.

The Status of Women Committee's web site

Develop the Committee's web site

That the development of the Status of Women Committee's web site be continued with the goal of creating a network to foster and sustain the interest of local unions for issues specific to women in our unions and to promote the specific role of local status of women officers in FSSS unions. That follow-up on this web site be the responsibility of the union staff representative assigned to this committee.

Resolution from the 40th FSSS Convention

During the current term, we carried out an important revision of the Status of Women Committee's web site, and the Committee worked to update its content and to add documents and new links, including links to the web sites of Waves of Resistance and the March 8 Collective. The Committee will continue to update and expand its web site.

International Women's Day

Women's economic autonomy: a collective strength

On March 8, 2009, the women's movement joined forces to put forward four demands connected to economic autonomy:

1. Minimum wage: an increase in minimum wage to \$10.43 per hour
2. Work stability: in particular, amendments to the *Québec Labour Standards Act* to prohibit disparity in treatment based on employment status; full respect of basic rights, namely the right to unionize, the right to negotiate, the right to strike, and the right to freely choose one's union; amendments to the *Employment Insurance Act* that would expand access to benefits and raise the income replacement rate

3. Recognition of immigrant women's diplomas and skills
4. Creation of a policy that would foster work-family-study balance

United, mobilized and moving forward!

On March 8, 2009, the March 8 Collective, composed of various women's groups and Québec trade-union organizations, challenged the Québec government to make concrete commitments on the promotion of women's economic status. In the context of the economic crisis, the representatives of the Collective were concerned: the already slow advancement of women toward equality could slow further or, worse, take a step backward. Six major demands were directed at the government:

1. Use of gender-based analysis, a tool that helps to prevent discrimination by identifying the different effects of government policies, programs, and measures on women and men
2. Creation and preservation of decent, high-quality, and well-paid jobs for women
3. Preservation of a public health care system: ensuring the permanent place of the health care system within the public sector
4. Education, the key to women's progress: reasserting the value of public education and fighting to reduce school drop-out rates
5. Maintenance of high-quality public services, particularly services offered to people in difficulty, victims of violence, and women who wish to have an abortion
6. Creation of a policy that would reconcile family, work, and study

As part of the same event, several of our unions organized activities and discussions to encourage reflection on the continued struggle to improve the status of women. The vice-president responsible for matters regarding the status of women also participated as a speaker in some of these activities.

The CSN's national women's co-ordinating committee

The FSSS-CSN Status of Women Committee participated regularly in the CSN's national women's co-ordinating committee, which brings together women from the CSN National Committee on the Status of Women in addition to representatives from status of women committees in central councils and federations.

On November 13 and 14, 2007, twenty or so women from the FSSS took part in the CSN forum *Femmes de métier : vision d'avenir* (Women in Trades: A Vision for the Future), a forum concerned with the integration and participation of women working in male-dominated fields.

This category includes women working as paramedics, dispatchers, stationary engineers, housekeeping attendants (heavy work), electricians, and stretcher bearers.

World March of Women

Global action in 2010

Delegates from the 48 national co-ordinating committees, including Québec's, agreed to organize a global action for 2010.

This action will revolve around the four broad areas of action drawn from the strategic action plan of the World March of Women (WMW):

- . employment
- . the common good – food sovereignty – access to resources
- . violence
- . peace and demilitarization

The global action will take place between March 8 and October 17, 2010. Each country will organize a multi-day march, taking local climate conditions into consideration.

In Québec, we will march over a period of five days, between October 12 and 16, 2010. On October 12, 13 and 14, we will begin marching in our towns; relay marches will then be held in more remote areas. On October 14 and 15, interregional contingents will form up and make their way to the chosen gathering place in Rimouski. The march will finish there with a gathering on October 17, 2010, where we will take stock of the government response to our demands and hold an event to demonstrate our solidarity with women living in countries that are militarized or engaged in armed conflict.

To wrap up the 2010 international actions, WMW delegates from five continents will head to the Democratic Republic of the Congo on October 17. Simultaneous actions will be held around the world to demonstrate solidarity with women living in countries in conflict.

We believe that we must remain actively involved in this action and encourage our unions and the Federation to take part.

So, fellow women, it's time to pull out your hiking boots, lace up your shoes, and get training, because in 2010, WE'RE MARCHING!

That the FSSS and its affiliated unions support the participation of the women representing them, through status of women officers or the Status of Women Committee, at the 2010 World March.

Our close links with the women's movement

The Fédération des femmes du Québec (FFQ, or Québec Federation of Women)

The FSSS is a member of the FFQ and participates in its proceedings. Throughout the term, calls for solidarity are relayed to the FSSS and vice versa, thus maintaining the vitality of the Québec feminist network.

The FFQ is an important voice for all Québec women. It enjoys significant influence and its contribution is very important for the promotion and defence of women's rights and interests. In its campaigns, it opposes all forms of violence, discrimination, marginalization, and exclusion with regard to women. It strives to achieve equality between women and men in all sectors of society and works to implement conditions that would help to achieve this goal through a pluralistic approach, i.e., by promoting the integration of women in all their diversity of experience, background and origins.

Pan-Canadian Young Feminist Gathering

The officer responsible for status of women work participated as a volunteer in the First Pan-Canadian Young Feminist Gathering, attended by 511 young Québec feminists from Québec and all across Canada.

Held in Montréal, this event aimed to motivate, mobilize, and firmly establish the young feminist movement in Canada, as well as to bring the movement online. We were impressed by the initiative and dynamism shown by these young women. We were proud to observe that feminism is very much alive among younger generations.

Solidarity activity with the women from the Maison communautaire Missinak de Québec

In May 2007, the Maison communautaire Missinak de Québec organized a benefit concert to help fund the first shelter for Aboriginal women in an urban area.

In collaboration with the Status of Women Committee from the Conseil central du Montréal métropolitain (Metropolitan Montréal Central Council) and Québec Native Women, we organized a group trip from Montréal to Québec City to attend the show. On the way there, activists were able to hear a talk on the difficulties faced by Aboriginal women.

The benefit show, which featured the singer Chloé Ste-Marie as well as many Québec Aboriginal performers, was a resounding success and allowed the Maison Missinak to raise the money it had lacked for the shelter, which should be inaugurated in the fall of 2009.

Support for the Coalition nationale contre les publicités sexistes (National Coalition Against Sexist Advertising)

The Status of Women Committee joined the Coalition nationale contre les publicités sexistes, a non-profit organization set up with the aim of eliminating sexist advertisements by denouncing them and demanding that they be withdrawn. The organization is made up of groups that mobilize in support of an egalitarian world.

Other memorable events

Bill C-484: a threat to abortion rights

The FSSS and the Status of Women Committee opposed Bill C-484, the “Unborn Victims of Crime Act,” because it represented a real threat to abortion rights. This amendment to the Criminal Code in no way constituted a response to violence against women, as its proponents would have had us believe.

We demonstrated in the streets of Montréal and elsewhere to protest against the possible undermining of reproductive rights and to demand firm commitments from political party leaders that they would not support bills that curb women’s freedom of choice. Although Bill C-484 remains a dead letter in the wake of the elections, we must remain on the alert.

The Bouchard-Taylor Commission

Controversy over reasonable accommodation stirred up passions and provoked considerable unease and misunderstanding. Some media seized on the issue and placed it in the spotlight, thus helping to fuel confusion and prejudice. A number of politicians, particularly those in the ADQ, blew certain situations out of all proportion by portraying them as threats to Québec identity. These were shameful moments for Québec.

The Bouchard-Taylor Commission, or the *Consultation Commission on Accommodation Practices Related to Cultural Differences*, provided an opportunity for Québec residents to voice their opinions, particularly on the place that religion should occupy in public spaces and institutions as well as on the formula for living together harmoniously. In a statement presented to the Bouchard-Taylor Commission, the CSN recommended the adoption of a charter of secularism.

In the CSN's view, this secularism should be expressed through the neutrality of the government and its institutions. We are in favour of an open secularism that would ensure individuals the right to express their opinions and beliefs in daily life and in public spaces.

As for Bill 63 amending the Québec Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms, we feel that it was merely a device used by the government, which shirked its true responsibilities by refusing to define limits to the place of religion in public spaces through a charter of secularism.

Andy Srougi loses his lawsuit against *À bâbord!* and Barbara Legault

On September 12, 2008, masculinist activist Andy Srougi lost the libel petition he had filed against the magazine *À bâbord!* and feminist activist Barbara Legault, who, as you may recall, had contributed to the Status of Women Committee's presentation of their report at the last FSSS convention by defining and describing masculinism.

In 2006, Srougi accused Legault of having "uttered hateful comments" directed at him in the article "*Des hommes contre le féminisme*" (Men against feminism), written by Legault and published in the magazine *À bâbord!* Srougi claimed that "libellous, false, and hateful comments [had] damaged [his] reputation and caused him emotional distress." In his decision, Judge Henri Richard of the Court of Québec rejected Srougi's allegations.

Srougi, a former coordinator of Fathers-4-Justice Québec who presented himself as a "men's rights activist," demanded a large sum in damages for harm to his reputation as well as exemplary damages. In the article in question, Legault had, fittingly enough, been reporting that the masculinist movement was using legal proceedings against feminist groups and activists with increasing frequency.

This ruling constituted an important victory in the face of an attack against feminism and against the right of the women's movement to express its views and positions. It also affirmed freedom of the press at a time when similar threats were hanging over the publishing house Éditions du Remue-ménage after its publication of the book *Le mouvement masculiniste au Québec* (The Masculinist Movement in Québec).

Bills 7 and 8

The Status of Women Committee is eager to underscore the important victory won by those women who obtained the right to unionize and to negotiate for improved work conditions.

Exclusion considered discriminatory

The Commission des droits de la personne et des droits de la jeunesse (Human Rights and Youth Rights Commission) judged that it is discriminatory to exclude thousands of domestic workers and caregivers from the *Act Respecting Industrial Accidents and Occupational Diseases* (LATMP is acronym for the name of this Act in French). In a notice made public in December 2008, the Commission affirmed that many domestic workers and caregivers, the majority of whom are women, are victims of discrimination based on sex, social circumstances, ethnic origin, or race.

It recommended that the Québec government modify the LATMP so that domestic workers and caregivers can profit from the same benefits as all other workers.

Smear campaign against Françoise David

The Status of Women Committee joined several other women's groups in publicly denouncing radio host Sylvain Bouchard's smear campaign on the Québec City radio station 93.3 FM. We refuse to tolerate contemptuous comments directed at people who have worked tirelessly to promote equality between men and women.

The loss of a great feminist

It was with great sadness that we learned of the death of Hélène Pedneault in late 2008. A committed feminist, she wrote for the famous magazine *La vie en rose*. Her talents extended to many areas: in addition to being a journalist and writer, she was also an environmentalist. She co-founded Eau Secours, the S.O.S Water! Coalition in which she was a "porteuse d'eau" – a "water-bearer," or an individual dedicated to protecting water resources – from the beginning.

Pedneault also had a close relationship with trade unionists. She would often remind union members of their duty to fight against the discrimination still faced by women. Her views will not be easily forgotten; nor will her exuberant spirit. Her energy will live on in our future battles against all forms of discrimination against women.

Conclusion

We believe that many challenges remain to be met for equality between women and men to be achieved. True equality is not possible without financial autonomy and a fight against poverty. It requires the adoption of concrete measures for work-family-study balance. It also requires that the *Act Respecting Occupational Health and Safety* be applied in its entirety to all industries and not just to those that are predominantly male. In the fight to end discrimination against women, many things still need to be accomplished.

For all of these reasons,

We are motivated to continue moving forward!

