

# CSQ News

May-June 2002

## Full Steam Ahead on Pay Equity

**Monique Richard**

President

At the outcome of the general assemblies held in the course of recent weeks, the majority of all CSQ-affiliated federations decided to support the extension of collective agreements in accordance with the terms of the agreement in principle that was reached between the government and union organizations. Of course it is important for us to review the reasons for this choice, even more so in light of the outlooks that are now open to us.

As I have said on several occasions, both within the CSQ and in the public sphere, a sole consideration guided the CSQ executive when it decided to recommend such an extension: the interest of the members it represents. People can consider the following, and judge for themselves.

First, the wage increase that was gained not only covers the rise in the cost of living, it also represents a measure of improvement. That is what we experienced in the last year of the collective agreement and that is what we wished to maintain as part of an extension.

Second, the negotiation process, comprising the tabling of union demands followed by that of the employer offers, usually extends over several months before it terminates in an agreement. Therefore, it was to our advantage to secure a wage increase immediately. But let's be clear. An extension of our working conditions does not in any way prevent us from seeking solutions when problems arise. That is what we do on a regular basis, negotiations or not, whenever the circumstances require.

Lastly, and this is the fundamental consideration: it was in our interest to distinguish between the negotiation of our collective agreements and the battle we are fighting to attain pay equity. In this way, we are in a better position to counter the employer's tendency to tie a pay equity settlement to the calling into question of our working conditions. What's more, our message to the government will be much clearer and stronger: 2002 will have to be the year of attaining pay equity.

Our struggle at the CSQ goes back several years. It affects all groups affiliated with the CSQ, and primarily, the 66% of our members who are women. Nothing will sidetrack us, nothing will allow the government to evade the issue. By choosing to extend our collective agreements, we have made a political, union and activist choice. The choice to rally together, more determined and mobilized than ever, in the battle to achieve pay equity.



CANADIAN PRESS

### Testimony of Palestinian Children

This is a message that I received during these dark days of the Israeli occupation of Palestine. In sending you the testimony of children, I think I might be moving a rock of the mountain that we need to move. In a moment of hope, I have the feeling that I may not be completely powerless.

**Danielle Jasmin**

École alternative L'Envol

**My name is Lema Zayed and I'm 11 years old. I want to go to school and finish my studies this year. I want to be free this summer, so I can go swimming and have fun. I want the Israeli soldiers to leave our country, stop the occupation and stop using these big tanks. We don't have anything to fight them. I don't want them to occupy or bomb our houses.**

**My name is Ahmed Tuqan and I'm 7 years old. Since the Intifada started, we began moving from house to house. Every week, we live in a different house. The Israelis walk into people's houses and frighten people. When they entered Jerusalem, we moved to Ramallah, and when they entered Ramallah, we moved to Jerusalem.**

**My name is Yanal Zayed, I am 4 years old. I want to swim. I want to be at home, to have a house and a window to look outside.**

**My name is Sara Atrash, I am 5 years old. Mummy, I love you.**

**Heba Burka, 12 years of age. We really want peace and security. We want love and affection. Give us our childhood and our freedom.**

**Ahmed Atrash, 8 years old. It's a hard situation. I am sad. My parents don't let me play in the yard. They don't let me watch TV, because they are watching the news. I'm sad for the *shuhada* (the dead) and I was sadder when I heard there were more. But I play with my friends in the neighbourhood. My only wish is that the Israeli soldiers leave my country, and it's the best wish I could make.**

These texts were written on March 31, 2002, and translated into French by Danièle Ouanès, in Montréal.



STOCK J.-F. LEBLANC

# Women deprived of maternity leave

Claire Harvey  
Independent Journalist

Julie Martel happily planned to stay at home with her baby for one year because of the federal government's new maternity and parental leave programs. She hadn't counted on the unpleasant surprise that awaited her in the form of a restrictive provision of the *Employment Insurance Act*.

In fact, the Act penalizes many Québec women who are eligible for the preventive leave program during their pregnancy<sup>1</sup>. "In October 2000, I had to stop working because I taught students with behavioral problems who could sometimes be violent," Julie Martel explains. "I wanted to protect my health and that of my unborn child. I did not really have a choice. There were signs that my pregnancy would be difficult and I had already had one miscarriage two years earlier." Her employer therefore put her on preventive leave, and she was compensated by the Commission de la santé et de la sécurité du travail (CSST).

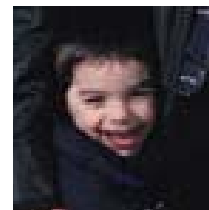
Unfortunately, she received bad news in the final trimester of her pregnancy. In January 2001, when she called Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC), Julie Martel learned that she would not be eligible for the federal government's parental leave program. The problem was that given her temporary status, Julie Martel had received employment insurance benefits during the summer and since then had not accumulated the 600 work hours needed to qualify her for her parental leave. What's more, since in her case, the CSST benefits represented less than 125% of her employment insurance benefits, the teacher would have been entitled, under the Act, to a weekly

employment insurance benefit of \$3. Even though the teacher had not claimed this pittance, the fact that she was eligible for it meant that her benefit period could not be extended. Therefore, she was denied parental leave.

Julie Martel is not alone. "Workers with temporary employment status and young workers, whether in education, health or seasonal industries are especially vulnerable to this situation because they are often subjected to more or less long layoff periods, interspersed with callbacks. They receive employment insurance benefits between jobs, only to have their maternity leaves docked for that period of time,"

explains CSQ Vice-President, Jocelyne Wheelhouse. The result? These women are forced to choose between returning to work within a few weeks after the birth of their children or take a leave at their own expense to stay at home with their newborns. "If that's what the access to maternity leave promoted in government advertising means, we may well call it misleading advertising," Jocelyne Wheelhouse adds.

In the Eastern Townships alone, some fifteen mothers-to-be experienced the same problem. In 2001, at the initiative of Sylvie Carignan, these women set up a committee of mothers deprived of their maternity and parental leaves. Working in collaboration with a an



STOCK N. BLOUIN

## A flaw in the *Employment Insurance Act* deprives many women of their right to maternity and parental leave

advocacy group that defends the rights of the unemployed in the Eastern Townships (Mouvement des chômeuses et chômeurs de l'Estrie [MCCE]), the committee gathered testimony from across the province, undertook procedures with the Ligue des droits et libertés de la section de l'Estrie (section 15 of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* prohibits any form of discrimination) and garnered the support of the CSQ and the Fédération des travailleurs et travailleuses du Québec (FTQ).

### A minority?

The committee's goals? Unite mothers affected by this problem, inform the public and secure a legislative amendment in order to eliminate all forms of discrimination against pregnant women. "We have been fighting for over a year now, and the government has not yet made any tangible gesture," stresses committee member Julie Martel. Along with the committee, Ms. Martel even met with an assistant to the Human Resources Development Minister, Jane Stewart, responsible for the *Employment Insurance Act*. "After a lengthy discussion, she told us that we only represented a minority and that a study would have to be conducted to determine whether amending the legislation for us would be worth the trouble. Why wouldn't it be worth the trouble?" the young teacher wonders.

Denis Curotte, adviser with the Fédération des syndicats de l'enseignement (FSE), notes that this problem is not new. "However, it has become more urgent since the improvements to parental leave were introduced. And it probably affects a significant number of women. In addition to women workers with temporary employment status, full-time permanent employees may find themselves in this situation, notably as the result of two closely timed pregnancies.

That proved to be the case for Isabelle Lapointe, a preschool teacher at the Saint-François- d'Assise de Montréal

school. "Pregnant with my second child, I had to take a preventive leave because I had no immunity against fifth disease (also called Sticker's disease, a benign disease for children, but which can cause serious problems for a fetus, and for which no vaccine exists). For having wanted to protect her unborn child, the teacher was disqualified from parental leave. An \$8,000 deficit in the family budget! "It's disgusting," she exclaims. "What happens to women who are can't afford to do without this income? Do they choose to abort because of flaws in the *Employment Insurance Act*?"

A remedial teacher working on contract in schools near Rimouski, Sandra Dionne also had to opt for taking preventive leave. "I was having contractions all over the place. I had to stop working to get to the end of my pregnancy." As a result, her parental leave was docked two months. "What should I have done? Stay at work and risk giving birth at school?" she asks, indignant.

In other fields, notably in the health and social services sector, many women are experiencing or have experienced a similar situation. Annie Trudel, a nurse at the Cité de la santé de Laval, was perhaps "lucky" enough to be entitled to her parental leave, except that her employment insurance benefits were cut by \$30 per week. Why? "After I got the preventive leave, my employer assigned me to lower risk duties, but part-time. My employment benefits were therefore reduced by as much. In real terms: a loss of about \$1,000!

In order to help put pressure on HRDC, the CSQ is currently trying to determine the number of union members in Quebec who may have been deprived of their maternity leave in this way. A minor inquiry has already revealed that some twenty CSQ members have been adversely affected. If you find yourself in this situation, don't hesitate to contact your union or the "Comité des mères brimées de leurs congés de maternité et parental" at (819) 566-5811. You can also sign



STOCK N. BLOUIN

Isabelle Lapointe was not entitled to the federal government parental leave because she was granted preventive leave during her pregnancy!

the committee's petition on the following Web site: <http://www3.sympatico.ca/mccea>

<sup>1</sup> Québec is the only province to offer such a program.

## The Interactive Virtual Classroom

**Linda Viel**

Teacher and technology development adviser  
viell@collegia.qc.ca

A new formula involves new ways of doing things, but doesn't abandon the usual teaching practices... Basically, teaching in the virtual classroom is not so different from traditional classroom teaching. This new form of distance learning has to be defined. This is not automated self-instruction or an online course where a student can access a Web site to download course content. We are talking instead about interactive education, in which the environment resembles that of the traditional classroom.

The student connects to a site according to an established schedule, where he accesses the virtual classroom. He types in a user's code and a password, and he's there! An interface is displayed with different virtual functionalities. The student can visualize his classmates by looking at the name of participants. He can talk to his colleagues using a microphone, communicate with written messages using the keyboard and interact on a virtual blackboard. When the instructor is teaching, the learner can raise his hand to ask a question or formulate a comment. This interaction develops the feeling of belonging to the group and enables people to create a class atmosphere. "Chatting" allows peers to engage in mutual assistance and sparks interest.

For the instructor, this universe quickly becomes a stimulating environment in which the 'virtual', often perceived as impersonal and lacking in contact, is turned into a teaching environment full of possibilities for generating a motivating class atmosphere and the sustained interest of participants. Obviously, lectures are not used; all available teaching methods have to be used to

maintain interest and elicit active participation. The instructor can use slide displays to develop his course. He can use tools on the virtual blackboard to point out, frame, underline or complete a text zone, etc. The student can also use the same virtual tools to identify an element or complete information at the request of the instructor. An application such as Excel, Word, or a program open on the student's or instructor's work station can be shared by the entire class. The student can demonstrate his skills under the watchful eye of his peers, and the instructor can produce a demonstration without resorting to the traditional canon.

Many types of content deliver well in the interactive virtual classroom, but we shouldn't think that everything can be taught using this process. Every type of content must be analyzed in order to evaluate the resources to be put in place to allow the learner to develop the competence or skill being taught. To do so, we have to combine other types of instruction. By analogy, the traditional classroom is combined with practical labs, assignments and exercises, readings, just as the virtual classroom is associated with the delivery of media materials, access to online content or to the delivery of assignments through downloading or e-mail, as well as with intensive lab sessions.

The formula for interactive virtual classroom teaching has been tested since fall 2001 at Matane CEGEP, and it has surpassed expectations. The success of students is combined with the learners' satisfaction. Here are some comments from enthusiastic participants:

"First, we don't have to travel, find parking or deal with the weather," says Bertrand Lirette, networking student in Saint-Ulric. So, right from the beginning, we know that we'll be comfortable, in a peaceful environment, cappuccino in hand, armed with a



Linda Viel, interactive virtual classroom teacher of the Cisco networking certification program for Groupe Collégia, a consortium of continuing education uniting the Matane CEGEP and Gaspésie et des Îles CEGEP.

well-connected PC. And it's not true that technology dehumanizes the classroom feeling of belonging!"

"We can join in the group anytime and discuss directly with the instructor and the other participants," adds Daniel Ahier, of Gascons.

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9405, Sherbrooke East St.

Montréal (Québec) H1L 6P3

Phone: (514) 356-8888

Fax: (514) 356-9999

Director of communications: Lorraine Pagé

Chief editor: Luc Allaire  
allaire.luc@csq.qc.net

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