

# carnets 47

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**ACADEMIC FREEDOM AND CUTBACKS :  
PASCALE DÉRY MUST GO!**

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PHOTO: YVES LAPOINTE

*Benoît Lacoursière*

Benoît Lacoursière, PRESIDENT

**W**hen they're running for office, politicians like to say that education is their "top priority." But when it comes time to make financial and policy choices, education seems to slide down their priorities list. Even worse, when staff, students or parents voice criticism, the government brings the full weight of the apparatus of state to bear to impose its vision and silence dissent.

Even though Québec has a law on academic freedom in universities and she herself signed an appendix on academic freedom to the collective agreement, Pascale Déry is unabashedly interfering in the content of CEGEP courses. Dissatisfied with the colleges' responses to her enquiries, she has launched an investigation designed primarily to deter teachers from discussing the Palestinian issue in the classroom. Other politicians openly say they want the government to probe the content of courses or cut funding to schools that criticize Israel. Clearly, this flies in the face of the principle of academic freedom, which is supposed to protect higher education from external interference. These are decisions that should be made by the academic community, particularly teachers.

In the primary schools and high schools, Minister Drainville is ignoring existing agreements and using Bill 47 to impose a duty of loyalty and censure staff who are too critical of the administration or the ministry. His predecessor did the same to the parents who sit on the boards of school service centres.

Academic freedom is also under siege in the United States with Trump's return to power. The American academic community is courageously fighting back.

The government holds the purse strings, another way to control educational institutions. In the schools, colleges and universities, austerity is the order of the day. The latest provincial budget provides for net cuts of 0.7% in university funding. The CEGEPs will have to slash more than \$150 million from their budgets in 2025-2026. These are shocking cuts at a time when the needs are immense and enrolment is rising. Contrary to what the minister says, the quality of education and the development of educational institutions will definitely be affected. We will need to mobilize to force this faltering government to back down.

The cuts to higher education are the last straw, coming on top of the minister's interference and bullying of Vanier and Dawson. Minister Déry is unable to defend higher education in cabinet and, worse still, she demonstrates every day that she doesn't know or care much about it. This is why the CSN and its higher education federations, including the FNEEQ, recently called for her resignation.



In addition to opposing the attacks on academic freedom, FNEEQ members are mobilizing to denounce the CAQ's cuts and austerity measures.

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## Academic freedom when it suits Minister Déry



By Martin Robert

**The FNEEQ and its unions were taken aback when, on December 3, 2024, Pascale Déry, the Minister of Higher Education, announced that the “tense climate” at Dawson and Vanier “forced” her to launch an administrative investigation into matters related to the Palestinian question.**

**A**ntonia Fikkert, Secretary-Treasurer of the Dawson Teachers’ Union, remembers the sense of bewilderment at the college on that fateful Tuesday all too well. “It is very, very rare and extraordinary to receive this kind of attention from the minister and to see her probing into our affairs,

questioning the specific competencies taught in the classroom and interrogating teachers about their actions. It’s direct interference in our practices, when things are going well at Dawson.” In fact, the minister admitted that she was intervening in order to challenge the content of a French course called “Appartenances palestiniennes” and another that discussed the Nakba.

This is particularly ironic given that, after her government passed the Academic Freedom Act, the same minister argued in a January 2023 op-ed in *Le Devoir* that “under no circumstances should we tolerate censorship in universities. Censorship inhibits thinking. Reflection in the shadow of fear hinders the pursuit of excellence that is central to a university’s mission. We cannot sacrifice academic freedom to a cause, lest we

lose both in the end. Academic freedom is the very foundation on which higher education was built and must remain so.”

Two years later, it would appear that these noble principles have disappeared into smoke, or that there is a double standard in applying them. In its brief to the parliamentary committee studying the Academic Freedom Act, the FNEEQ rightly argued that the Act should be extended to the CEGEPs, a key link in the higher education system which, unfortunately, is not immune to external pressure from the government.

Some quick research revealed that before entering provincial politics, Minister Déry sat on the board of directors of the Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs (CIJA). This pro-Israel

organization boasted that it had influenced the minister's decision to investigate Dawson and Vanier. The FNEEQ believes this is a troubling connection, under the circumstances, one that suggests a conflict of interest or the appearance of one on the part of the minister.

Dawson's Antonia Fikkert does not deny that there are complaints and disagreements within the walls of the institution: "It's part of our job to manage these disagreements, it's normal! There are issues about which students feel passionately. We have the expertise to present the facts and help students engage in a respectful debate. And there are institutional mechanisms to deal with any complaints."

### **Intimidation in the guise of investigation**

The minister's investigators have been given very broad powers and,

most importantly, their mandate and motives are unclear. While we do not have the full list of the people they have interviewed, the FNEEQ has spoken to some of those questioned. They all said it seemed like a fishing expedition. The investigators wanted to know about vague and vast issues, such as the union's priorities, the union's code of conduct and activism with Teachers for Palestine. Faculty members who were summoned were also denied the right to have a union rep present at the meeting. While the investigation claims to be "shedding light" on the situation, it has cast a pall of darkness over its own operations and information-gathering processes.

### **Risk of self-censorship**

This exceptional process has had a predictable effect on the College and is undermining academic freedom. "The investigation is making us censor ourselves, which didn't happen before

December 2024. For political science teachers like me, it now takes more courage to assign sensitive texts on subjects like Palestinian culture. We know we could be called before the investigators and made to defend our teaching choices. It's very intimidating. So it's much easier to choose something bland and avoid controversy."

CEGEP teachers educate adults on the basis of facts. This doesn't mean there can't be discussions and disagreements, as long as they are expressed respectfully in a calm academic setting. "That's what growing up at CEGEP is all about. If debates in a pedagogical environment are avoided at CEGEP, the discussion moves elsewhere, and not always with guiderails."



*Antonia Fikkert, Secretary-Treasurer of the Dawson Teachers' Union*

### **Academic freedom as defined by UNESCO**

(Article 27 · Recommendation concerning the Status of Higher-Education Teaching Personnel)

Higher-education teaching personnel are entitled to the maintaining of academic freedom, that is to say, the right, without constriction by prescribed doctrine, to freedom of teaching and discussion, freedom in carrying out research and disseminating and publishing the results thereof, freedom to express freely their opinion about the institution or system in which they work, freedom from institutional censorship and freedom to participate in professional or representative academic bodies. All higher-education teaching personnel should have the right to fulfil their functions without discrimination of any kind and without fear of repression by the state or any other source.



Nicolas Harvey, Vice-President, Communications, SCCC-UQO, and a member of UQO's Academic Freedom Committee  
Romain Vanhooren, Chair, UQO Academic Freedom Committee

## Academic freedom at the university: If you want it done right, you have to do it yourself!

Interview by  
MARTIN ROBERT

When the National Assembly passed the Academic Freedom Act in June 2022, the *Syndicat des chargées et chargés de cours de l'Université du Québec en Outaouais (SCCC-UQO)*, the union representing lecturers at the *Université du Québec en Outaouais (UQO)*, immediately set to work drafting a policy.

UQO quickly set up an academic freedom committee, as required by the Act. Last year, lecturer Romain Vanhooren submitted his candidacy to chair the committee and won the secret ballot vote. "I told myself that if we wanted things to move forward, we'd better get involved. It's better to take the initiative than wait to be called," he recalls. When the time came to draw up a formal policy on academic freedom—another legal requirement—SCCC-UQO took the same approach. The union went ahead, prepared a text with the help of a union advisor from the FNEEQ, and submitted it without further ado, thereby speeding up the policy drafting and decision-making process. "The members of the committee changed a few details, but 90% of the policy was based on what we had written," says Nicolas Harvey, a lecturer and committee member.

The Academic Freedom Committee, made up of administration, students,

profs and lecturers, meets periodically to continue its work. But chairman Romain Vanhooren wants to pick up the pace. The academic freedom advisory office isn't up and running yet. The committee has approved a note on the academic freedom policy to be added to course outlines but this hasn't been implemented yet.

"There's a maze of bureaucracy," says Vanhooren. "We're going to have to keep pushing to get the note added by September." The point is to raise awareness and explain that academic freedom benefits the entire university community. The range of subjects covered in class, and ultimately the quality of teaching, depends on it. The committee is planning to produce videos and posters to explain academic freedom.

### Complaints process is untested

It's also taking longer than expected to make an online form available to

teaching staff who believe their academic freedom has been infringed and want to submit a complaint to the committee. While people know they should consult the union and file a grievance if their rights have been violated, they don't necessarily think to complain to the academic freedom committee as well. "We have a lot of promotional work to do in the coming months," says Harvey. "It must also be said that when there are complaints, the academic freedom committee can only make recommendations to the administration."

The committee has yet to receive a complaint. Harvey believes that "when we get our first case, at that point we might be able to ascertain whether the members of the committee are ready to work together, whether there are disagreements, and whether some people will try to downplay the situation." The effectiveness of the committee remains to be seen.



PHOTO: MARTIN ROBERT

## Primary and secondary school teachers: Watch your backs!

Selma Skalli  
UNION ADVISOR

**The Act to reinforce the protection of students, including with regard to acts of sexual violence was passed on April 9, 2024. Under its virtuous facade, this law creates a system of control and surveillance in primary and secondary schools that goes well beyond its stated purpose of preventing and combating sexual violence.**

**T**he Act's overreach threatens freedom of expression and the professional autonomy of elementary and high school teachers.

The Act establishes two main obligations. The first is a compulsory pre-hiring check for "behaviours that could reasonably pose a threat for the physical or psychological safety of the students" that occurred in any public or private elementary school or high school during the previous 10 to 35 years. Unlike the mandatory criminal background check, the behaviour check covers non-criminal acts that do not have to be proven in a court of law. A guide published by the Ministère de l'Éducation in March 2025 states that such behaviour may be intentional or unintentional, consist of an act or omission, be directed against someone or not. In short, mistakes made in good faith, clumsiness, taking an educational risk that offends or displeases someone could all fall into the category

of behaviours that need to be checked before someone is hired.

We already have a disturbing example. The investigation into Dawson and Vanier ordered in December 2024 by the Minister of Higher Education is based on a section of the General and Vocational Colleges Act that uses the same language: "behaviour that could reasonably pose a threat for the students' physical or psychological safety." Under the "presumption of consistent usage," when the same wording is used in different statutes, it carries the same meaning. So if a teacher includes material about Palestine in a course and the government or the administration decides this is behaviour that threatens students' safety, it becomes something any other primary or secondary school would be required to check into before hiring the teacher.

Secondly, the law requires schools to adopt a code of ethics whose content is

dictated by the ministry. The ministry's guide includes a number of points that encroach on teachers' autonomy and freedom of expression. For example, teachers must be courteous at all times and refrain from shouting. However, there are situations in which shouting is an appropriate and necessary pedagogical intervention. Teachers are also supposed to refrain from publicly criticizing their employer or engaging in activities that could damage their employer's image or reputation, directly or indirectly. Teachers must be careful about what they say on social media, even in their private lives. In other words, if in doubt, keep quiet.

Faced with this explicit threat to the freedom of expression and autonomy of primary and secondary school teachers, we need to mobilize and stand in solidarity.

# Union activists in Colombia risk their lives

Nancy Gagné

SPANISH TEACHER AT THE CÉGEP DE LÉVIS



*CISO delegation outside the offices of the Colombian Federation of Education Workers (FECODE)*

In November 2024, I spent 12 days in Colombia and took part in a labour solidarity mission coordinated by the Centre international de solidarité ouvrière (CISO) with 11 other participants from Québec labour federations. We learned about the union rights and human rights situation for workers in Colombia, and we had the opportunity to talk to Colombian activists about their issues and struggles and to develop ties of solidarity between organizations in Québec and Colombia. For me, the trip was also a chance to pursue my personal interests through an experiential journey across the land, meeting people and making contact with the history, culture and geography of the Colombian Andes, which I had known only in the abstract as a Spanish teacher.

In a country where battles for democracy, social well-being and national sovereignty have been hard-fought, organizing is a challenge. Although tensions have eased since the 2016 peace agreement, being a union member is still dangerous in Colombia. Activists face reprisals, threats, kidnappings and threats to their lives. Between 1973 and 2019, 3,300 trade unionists were murdered. There are many obstacles to unionization in Colombia: the State, violence against unionists, the lack of legislation governing working conditions, neoliberal policies and an anti-union culture among the workers themselves. These factors promote a labour market without unions or standards.

In our meetings, we also learned about the challenges faced by the union federations when they try to make their voices heard in the corridors of power. The current progressive government of Gustavo Petro is open to discussion with the

unions, but the political violence of the past 60 years makes it difficult to engage in dialogue with players that have a tradition of armed conflict. Even within the union federations, managing differences of opinion and reluctance to accept democratic decisions are major challenges.

## Resilience and commitment

Our visit showed us the resilience of this people. We talked to people working on various fronts to create a better country, free from violence and conflict: creative teachers running a dialogue and peace education program while defending public schools, human rights lawyers acting as peace managers, women fighting together to advance the status of women, social workers working with former guerrillas to facilitate restorative meetings, and the list goes on. They are all striving to promote peace and build a more just and equitable country.

International solidarity experiences such as this remind us that we are privileged as activists in Québec and also serve to deepen our convictions. We must use our position to make a difference by supporting these organizations, sharing our respective practices, drawing inspiration from their experiences, speaking out when necessary and raising awareness—as I am trying to do with this article.

<sup>1</sup> BBC News Mundo (November 25, 2020). Por qué en Colombia no hay sindicatos (y qué tiene que ver eso con los asesinatos de líderes sociales) consulted on February 18, 2025 <https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-america-latina-55060513>

# An AI guide for unions

Interview by  
MARTIN ROBERT



Michèle Le Risbé has shared dozens of copies of the AI guide.

**T**he FNEEQ was disappointed by the announcement in April that the release of the report of the AI committee set up by the Ministère de l'Enseignement supérieur was being postponed until the start of the school year in August 2025, but at the same time the Federation and its Regroupements came out with their own practical guide to AI-related issues.

"This is very welcome," says Michèle Le Risbé, a teacher in the literature and communications department at Cégep de Sherbrooke and the officer responsible for pedagogical affairs at the Syndicat du personnel enseignant du Cégep de Sherbrooke (SPECS-CSN). "When it comes to AI, we've been walking a tightrope. The FNEEQ guide gives us something to hold onto, because we're having trouble finding our footing. It's useful because it's based on principles we all believe in." Le Risbé ordered extra copies of the guide to share at her union's general assembly. Copies were also distributed at departmental meetings.

The document sets out eight fundamental principles to guide teaching staff at all levels who must now live with the conversational robots that are proliferating on the web. It is a proactive tool for FNEEQ unions and their members at a time when more and more educational institutions are considering rules for the use of AI.

Responsible, ethical, sustainable and safe use of AI in schools, colleges and universities must be based on a critical, precautionary approach. Clear guidelines must be established that uphold core values: humanism, collegiality, academic freedom, diversity, equity and inclusion.

## Climate of suspicion

More and more teachers are complaining about the climate of suspicion that is taking hold in the classroom. Who's using ChatGPT to do some or all of their work? Who's using it for inspiration? Who is plagiarizing? How can you tell, and how can you prove it?

"We're going to see these students again in another course, so we want to have a trusting student-teacher relationship," says Le Risbé. "What's happening to that relationship? It's breaking down. We start to have doubts, which undermines our relationship with our students."

Currently, some institutions are taking action on AI and others are not. The situation varies widely. "Can the institution set rules for me on the pretext that it will make my job easier?" asks Le Risbé. "Some of our members also find the technology attractive. And what happens to my professional autonomy?"

The FNEEQ guide takes a lucid and critical look at the hazards of AI, which must never be imposed without ethical rules and without consulting and involving the union.

At the Cégep de Sherbrooke, it has taken time for the academic council and some departments to start looking into AI. However, they are making a little more headway each month. "Actually, the government could take its cue from the FNEEQ guide," says Michèle Le Risbé, only half-joking.

## Eight basic principles for unions to defend

- 1) Proceed with caution
- 2) Act with transparency
- 3) Safeguard personal information and privacy
- 4) Maintain intellectual and academic integrity
- 5) Respect professional autonomy
- 6) Uphold the primacy of human relations in teaching
- 7) Protect the quality of jobs and well-being at work
- 8) Support social and environmental justice



## Lecturers plagued by psychological distress

**Christine Gauthier**

VICE-PRESIDENT FOR THE REGROUPEMENT UNIVERSITÉ

**How's the psychological health of sessional lecturers pursuing an academic career despite their unstable status and uncertain future with the university? Not good.**

**T**hat is the finding of a poll of 431 lecturers for whom university teaching contracts represent their main job and primary source of income. We conducted the survey jointly with the CSN's Health, Safety and Environment Department.

### **What's the problem?**

The survey painted a grim picture: 56% of respondents reported high levels of psychological distress. A number of psychological and social risks were identified.

Half the respondents feel there is an imbalance between the effort they put into their work and the recognition they receive. Many say they have a heavy workload (64%) and the work has become more demanding in recent years (70%). They also reported a lack of support to help them cope: 50% of respondents don't feel sufficiently supported by peers or superiors when they're under pressure. Excluded from

departmental meetings and some decision-making bodies, some also feel isolated, especially since many don't have access to an office on campus.

74% also reported that their work takes an emotional toll. They do their best to handle the growing influx of demands from students (for accommodations, grades, responses to emails) in institutions driven by student consumerism and steeped in academic capitalism. Sitting on an ejection seat, they have to avoid student complaints at all costs, as these could jeopardize future contracts and employment at the university.

Finally, respondents mentioned the significant negative impact of job insecurity and income uncertainty on their personal lives. For example, 67% found it difficult to make long-term plans, such as having children or buying a house; 43% said that the uncertainty about being rehired makes it impossible to make major financial commitments.

### **What is the solution?**

As a result of the amendments to occupational health and safety legislation, institutions in Québec are now required to develop prevention mechanisms that take psychosocial risks into account when analysing the work environment. While these changes are not perfect, they are good news for teachers, who face amply demonstrated risks of psychological harm. The unique working conditions of sessional lecturers—including permanent insecurity and lack of real recognition of their academic work—will have to be taken into account. The trend must be reversed in the future. And universities will have to recognize the special risks faced by lecturers and commit to changing these harmful conditions of employment.

# SOMMET

## SST 2025

## Occupational Health and Safety Summit 2025 and OHS Review and Outlook

Joseph-Fernand Ouellette  
MEMBER OF THE FNEEQ HEALTH AND SAFETY COMMITTEE

The conclusion that emerged from the event is that employers themselves are unaware of the reforms. We should initiate the creation of OHS structures.

**M**ore than a thousand people attended the Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) Summit 2025 in Québec City on April 15-16. The event was organized by several central labour bodies, including the CSN, and civil society groups that defend the rights of workers. Various aspects of health and safety in the workplace were covered, including prevention and compensation for work-related injuries. The cooperation among the labour centrals demonstrated the importance of unity for union members. We shared our views on OHS changes and challenges, and discussed strategies for worker empowerment over OHS in the workplace.

Then, on April 17, the CSN held its OHS Review and Outlook meeting. This year's edition was the culmination of five years of mobilization following the reform of the OHS regime. It was an opportunity to discuss the CSN's specific political outlook, which will inform our future actions.

What conclusions emerged from this event? Employers themselves are not aware of the reforms. We need to mobilize to ensure that when collective agreements come up for renewal, our members demand not only clauses containing improved OHS protections but also union involvement in the OHS committee and in the selection of the institution's OHS representative.

Members of FNEEQ and CSN committees attended various workshops, including:

**1) Workshop on prevention of psychosocial risks:** Strategies for identifying and managing psychosocial risks in the workplace, such as stress, harassment and violence.

**2) Workshop on managing workplace accidents:** Participants learned about the procedures to follow in the event of an accident, including documentation, communication with the relevant authorities and support for injured workers.

**3) Workshop on ergonomics in the workplace:** This workshop focused on the importance of ergonomics in preventing musculoskeletal disorders. Participants explored techniques for improving workstation design and reducing the risk of injury.

**4) Workshop on OHS legislation:** Participants examined the new acts and regulations on occupational health and safety, particularly those affecting the education sector.

**5) Training and awareness workshop:** This workshop highlighted the importance of ongoing training and raising workers' awareness of OHS issues.

The workshops were also an opportunity to exchange ideas with colleagues from other fields, learn about specific problems and explore possible solutions that could be applied in education.

More info: <https://www.csn.qc.ca/sommet-sante-et-securite-du-travail-2025/>

## AUSTERITY: THE CAQ DOUBLES DOWN

**Yves de Repentigny**

VICE-PRESIDENT FOR THE REGROUPEMENT CÉGEP



**A**s discussed in our previous issue, the Québec government is back to austerity mode. In November, it announced a hiring freeze and a cap on paid hours (in other words, a limit on the number of people an institution can employ), on top of the cuts already reported in these pages.

This last measure is proving particularly pernicious, especially at a time of strong growth in the student population. Theoretically, it isn't supposed to affect the level of teaching resources, but in practice college administrations are arguing that, if they hire more teaching staff, they will have to lay off support employees or professionals. What's more, people on externally funded leave still count towards hours worked. The Ministère de l'Enseignement supérieur (MES) has told some colleges that it is prepared to raise the cap on teaching hours—in exchange for extending the teaching day in the regular sector!

At its meeting on March 27-28, the Regroupement Cégep condemned this attempt at blackmail by the MES. It also updated its action plan against the CEGEP cuts and added the fight against Bill 89 (An Act to give greater consideration to the needs of the population in the event of a strike or a lock-out), focusing on activities for May 1, International Workers' Day.

On May 12, there was a thunderbolt: the MES announced additional cuts of \$151 million to the CEGEPs. The CSN responded on the same day by calling for the resignation of Minister of Higher Education Pascale Déry.

### Artificial Intelligence (AI)

The ad hoc committee on AI set up by the Regroupement in October 2024 is working to equip the unions to address this issue. At the meeting of January 30-31, a motion was passed encouraging the unions to set up working structures to deal with AI issues. At the meeting on March 27-28, the document

*Guidelines and measures for ethical use of AI* was presented. It is a guide to applying the eight fundamental principles set out in a brochure distributed a few weeks earlier by our federation to support the work of local unions.

In addition, the CSN, in collaboration with the FNEEQ, the Fédération des employées et employés de services publics (FEESP-CSN) and the Fédération des professionnelles (FP-CSN), conducted two surveys on the use of artificial intelligence in education, one for union officers and the other for members.

### Investigation of Dawson and Vanier

On December 3, 2024, against the backdrop of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the Minister of Higher Education, Pascale Déry, launched an administrative investigation of student safety at Dawson and Vanier, although their administrations had received no complaints. She had contacted the colleges at the beginning of the school year to express her concerns that Palestinian literature was being studied in some courses. At its January 2025 meeting, the Regroupement Cégep condemned the political weaponization of the investigative process; reaffirmed the importance of respecting freedom of expression, academic freedom and professional autonomy; and expressed its full solidarity with the teachers of both institutions and their unions.

### Other matters

Over the past few months, the Regroupement Cégep has also adopted recommendations for the post mortem on the central table negotiations, denounced Bill 74 on regulations governing foreign students and condemned the Legault government's decision to suspend the graduate stream of the Québec Experience Program.

## THE ACADEMIC FREEDOM ACT THREE YEARS LATER

Christine Gauthier

VICE-PRESIDENT FOR THE REGROUPEMENT UNIVERSITÉ



**T**he *Academic Freedom Act* was passed in June 2022.

Universities were required to draft policies on academic freedom and set up committees whose main tasks are to examine complaints about infringements of academic freedom and raise awareness of the issue. The law

also requires institutions to report to the Québec government every year.

We filed an access to information request to find out what the committees had done during the 2023-2024 school year and learned two things of note.

First, the committees are pretty much dormant when it comes to handling complaints. In fact, there weren't any, except at UQAM. There, three complaints were received and all were deemed inadmissible, either because they concerned a grading dispute or because they fell within the purview of the harassment office. Those complaints took between 22 and 85 days to analyze.

Secondly, the universities have approached their mandate to raise awareness and develop teaching tools to promote and ensure respect for academic freedom in very different ways. At least five reported that they hadn't taken any steps to raise awareness yet, for lack of time. Others had begun to give their community more information about academic freedom through channels such as their websites. Finally, two have been more ambitious, for example by developing compulsory training for all staff.

It will take more time to assess the work of these committees, particularly the awareness-raising campaigns. We also shouldn't jump to conclusions: the absence of complaints doesn't necessarily mean there haven't been any violations of academic freedom. The most likely explanation is that people prefer to turn to their union for support and representation when there's a problem.

### Next round of coordinated bargaining: We're off!

The university unions have just approved a new coordinated bargaining platform and signed a solidarity protocol committing them to working together to improve the working conditions of sessional lecturers and tutors in Québec. A number of major issues have been identified, including:

- Fighting the casualization of teaching and protecting all aspects of the teacher's job, particularly when it comes to the use of artificial intelligence and technology in teaching;
- Strengthening collegiality and protections for academic freedom and professional autonomy;
- Supporting teachers as their job undergoes major changes;
- Better protecting psychological health.

The unions are determined to defend the quality of university education in Québec. The future of university teaching lies in enriching the human relationships that support the learning process, not in robots and artificial intelligence. To achieve this, we need experienced teachers who feel recognized at their true worth.

## COORDINATED BARGAINING: TWO MORE AGREEMENTS

Léandre Lapointe

VICE-PRESIDENT FOR THE REGROUPEMENT PRIVÉ



PHOTO : YVES LAPOINTE

### Vanguard School: Victory after a strike

At Vanguard School, a special needs school, the union had a tough bargaining round with a rigid administration that was demanding a number of unacceptable rollbacks. Although the union's demands were amply justified in view of the conditions on the ground, the deadlock continued for months. Faced with the employer's intransigence, more than 99% of members voted for a mandate for five strike days, at the time deemed appropriate. In the event, two strike days were enough to get the administration to move and be more responsive to the union's demands, particularly on professional autonomy, guidelines for technological change and distance learning. In mid-May, 93% of union members voted for the tentative agreement. Hats off to all the members of the union for their courage and determination!



PHOTO : DOMINIQUE BOISBLANC

On April 28, 2025, 200 members walked out at Vanguard School in the first strike in the school's history.

### Collège Jean de la Mennais: Bargaining goes smoothly

At Collège Jean de la Mennais, this round of bargaining unfolded in a constructive atmosphere, in contrast with the previous round, which saw five days of strikes. The union reached an agreement that included all the points in the coordinated bargaining platform. Noteworthy gains included hours for complementary tasks for teachers of French and English as a first language to reflect the amount of time they have to spend on grading, an official mentoring system to support new teachers, and significant improvements to work organization at the primary level. The general assembly unanimously ratified the agreement. Congratulations!

### Historic agreement at ITAQ

At the Institut de technologie agroalimentaire du Québec (ITAQ), 92% of teachers voted for a historic new collective agreement, their first as a FNEEQ-affiliated union. The contract provides for pay increases of 17% to 27%, a 25% increase in group insurance, and faster progression through echelons 1 to 6 to encourage young teachers to stay. In addition, the annualization and regularization of 50 positions is a major gain for teaching staff. Members will soon receive retroactive pay ranging from \$16,000 to \$36,000, depending on their echelon.

This agreement grants ITAQ teachers fair recognition, comparable to CEGEP teachers, and establishes ITAQ as a full-fledged institution of higher education at last. It will lay the foundations for future mobilizations in the technical education sector.

## THE CAUCUS CARVES OUT ITS PLACE

Saleha Hedaraly

VICE-PRESIDENT FOR THE STUDENT WORKER CAUCUS



**T**he Student Worker Caucus's first year has been a time of growth, engagement and change. First of all, there was a change of coordinator: in addition to the arrival of a new vice-president, the Caucus elected Kiersten van Vliet as its coordinator in February 2024.

From the outset, the Caucus considered its role within the FNEEQ. It highlighted its concerns about the dehumanization of international students by presenting concrete testimonials that helped the FNEEQ and the CSN strengthen their arguments on Bill 74 (the new regulations governing international students).

The Caucus has also looked at the issues surrounding artificial intelligence, its members being one of the first to be affected by its use. And we cannot leave unmentioned the beefed-up security on our campuses and the pressures exerted on student workers by rules of conduct adopted without consultation. These rules make them afraid to assemble and express their political views, rights that are constitutionally guaranteed in this country.

However, this has not stopped the unions in the Caucus from forcefully demand better working conditions. After the first strike in the union's history, the Concordia Research and Education Workers Union/Syndicat des travailleuses et travailleurs en recherche et enseignement à Concordia (CREW-CSN) won a 20% pay increase over three years. The Association of Graduate Students Employed at McGill/Association des étudiants diplômé-es employé-es de McGill (AGSEM/AEEDM) will soon begin negotiations for exam invigilators (Unit 2), while negotiations for all the other job classes created by McGill (Unit 3) are already under way. Teaching assistants who belong to FNEEQ-affiliated unions (AGSEM/AEEDM (Unit 1) and CREW-CSN) are the best paid in Québec. The Syndicat des résidents et internes de médecine vétérinaire-CSN (SRRI) is still negotiating its first collective agreement.

### Fighting for justice for all

The unions in the Caucus don't just fight for better working conditions. AGSEM/AEEDM and CREW have a culture of social activism and are doing their part for a fairer and more egalitarian society by taking to the streets (e.g. for the demos against Bill 89) or taking a stand on current issues (such as the Amazon boycott). On March 17, AGSEM/AEEDM organized a major rally to protest austerity at McGill, a priority for them since their non-permanent, part-time jobs are among the first to be affected by university budget cuts.

Meanwhile, the integration of the Caucus into the FNEEQ is progressing apace. The Caucus took part in the work of the BF2 Committee and formed a working committee to continue raising the profile of the Caucus as an important political space for student workers.



AGSEM rally against austerity on April 17, 2025.

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