

PUBLIC FORCE

PUBLIC SERVICES, THE BEST OF OURSELVES

PENSION PLANS:
Should we believe
everything we read?



Funding for public services can be improved without having to ask the middle class and the poor to dig even deeper into their pockets!



From left to right :
Richard Perron (SPGQ),
Lucie Martineau (SFPO),
Louise Chabot (CSQ) and
Carolle Dubé (APTS).

ON NOVEMBER 11, THE SISP SENT A PLAN TO THE MINISTER OF FINANCE OUTLINING 15 PROGRESSIVE TAX MEASURES THAT WOULD ALLOW THE PUBLIC PURSE TO RECOVER \$3.2 BILLION.

By submitting this plan, the SISP hopes to remind elected officials that although the current context is challenging, public services should not have to pay the price. We are well aware of the fact that a minority government is currently in power. This is why we are urging opposition members of the National Assembly not to sacrifice education, healthcare, safety and environmental protection on the altar of partisanship. These fundamental missions should be supported through progressive tax measures.

TO THE RIGHT WINGERS WHO ADVOCATE AUSTERITY HERE, THERE AND EVERYWHERE, AND WHO DEMAND THAT THE STATE UNDERMINE ITS PROGRAMS TO FILL ITS COFFERS, WE WOULD LIKE TO RESPOND BY SAYING THAT WE STRONGLY BELIEVE THAT THERE IS A BETTER WAY TO FUND PUBLIC SERVICES, WITHOUT HAVING TO FURTHER CHOKER THE MIDDLE CLASS, WHILE PROMOTING ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND GROWTH WITHIN THE PROVINCE OF QUEBEC.

To the right wingers who advocate austerity here, there and everywhere, and who demand that the State undermine its programs to fill its coffers, we would like to respond by saying that we strongly believe that there is a better way to fund public services, without having to further choke the middle class, while promoting economic development and growth within the province of Quebec.

By conducting an analysis, the socio-economic resources within our organizations developed a plan that would help the government fill the State's coffers with more than \$3.2 billion annually. The 15 measures contained in the plan are divided into three major themes: putting an end to outsourcing (\$567 million); adopting progressive tax measures (\$1.35 billion); gaining better control over drug costs (\$1.29 billion).

This additional revenue would not only allow the new government to abolish the regressive health tax as it had originally planned, but would also allow it to fund healthcare, education, infrastructure and environmental programs.

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THE PPP, NO THANK YOU! CONTEST

WHICH RAN IN THE LAST ISSUE OF
PUBLIC FORCE (VOL. 4, NUMBER 1),
was a great success.

Thank you for your participation!

THE WINNERS, WHO **LISE LAFLAMME**,
WILL BE RECEIVING FROM SAINT-EUSTACHE;
A BASKET OF EQUITA **THERÈSE FONTAINE**,
PRODUCTS, ARE: FROM SAINT-AUGUSTIN-DE-WOUBURN.

PRESIDENTS'
MESSAGE
{continued}

COLLUSION, CORRUPTION AND SUBCONTRACTING: A COMBINATION THAT IS COSTING OUR PUBLIC SERVICES DEARLY

The SISP deplores the fact that over the years, the government disregarded the various warnings it issued over outsourcing, and how the practice was associated with collusion and corruption. Although testimony heard at the Charbonneau Commission in recent weeks focused on issues under municipal jurisdiction, our fears have nonetheless been confirmed. Since it was announced that a public inquiry would be held, the cost of doing business in Montréal has gone down by 20 to 33%. At the provincial level, the total value of contracts outsourced by the previous government was \$28.8 billion in 2011, which is almost the same amount spent by the State on healthcare! Will it be revealed that billions slipped through the fingers of the State when the Charbonneau Commission turns its attention to issues under provincial jurisdiction? In the meantime, our long-term care nursing homes (CHSLD), our schools, our childcare centres (CPE) and our key departments and agencies are sorely lacking resources!

AT THE PROVINCIAL LEVEL, THE TOTAL VALUE OF CONTRACTS OUTSOURCED BY THE PREVIOUS GOVERNMENT WAS \$28.8 BILLION IN 2011, WHICH IS ALMOST THE SAME AMOUNT SPENT BY THE STATE ON HEALTHCARE!

The SISP would like to encourage elected officials to promptly adopt the measures outlined in its plan. Our public services are in dire need of these resources. Crippled by major cuts and the previous government's reengineering of the State, our public services should not be at the receiving end, yet again, of bad government policies or put in jeopardy because of ideological wrangling and partisan conflict.

A PDF version of the document *Un plan pour récupérer 3,2 milliards pour mieux financer nos services publics [A plan to recover \$3.2 billion to better fund our public services]*, can be downloaded from the SISP website at: www.sisp.qc.net



DID YOU KNOW?

The Syndicat des fonctionnaires provinciaux du Québec, which would later become the Syndicat de la fonction publique et parapublique du Québec, was created on September 26, 1962. Two years later, with the adoption of a new labour code, public service workers, with the exception of police and firefighters, finally gained the right to strike.



A webclip on tax havens by the SISP

Gaining a better understanding in just four minutes

WE PROMISE! FOUR MINUTES IS ALL YOU WILL NEED TO GAIN A BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF THE NEBULOUS ISSUE OF USING TAX HAVENS TO AVOID PAYING TAXES.

On September 26, the SISP launched the French version of a webclip entitled *Paradis fiscaux : la grande arnaque* [Tax Havens: The great scam] Its goal? To raise awareness among its members and the general population about the fight against tax havens, a scourge that not only deprives the Quebec Treasury of hundreds of millions of dollars each year, but that also has a major impact on our public services.



How do multinationals go about lowering their overall tax bill with impunity? At first glance, unless you are a tax specialist or an economist, the issue may seem quite complicated. Rest assured however, that you will have a much better understanding after having watched *Tax Havens: The great scam*, which explains

transfer pricing, one of the strategies used by certain multinationals to avoid their civic duty. This practice, although legal, operates on the fringes of the law, and can be very profitable for companies that have subsidiaries in tax havens.

A TREMENDOUS SUCCESS IN QUEBEC AND ABROAD

The SISP webclip, released just a month ago, has already been viewed by 22,000 people! The English and Spanish versions were recently launched, and have generated a great deal of attention in Europe after being posted, most notably, on the Education International (EI) and Public Services International (PSI) websites. The webclip was produced and directed by François Jacob (*La Queue du Train, Panama, Le Soleil*), who is also the artistic co-director of the Kino movement and filmmaker mentor at Wapikoni Mobile. The script was developed by François Jacob, in collaboration with the SISP and Érik Bouchard-Boulianne, an economist for the CSQ and member of the *Échec aux paradis fiscaux* committee.

TO WATCH THE WEBCLIP, YOU CAN EITHER GO TO:

- Our website at: sisp.qc.net/
- Our Facebook page: [Secrétariat intersyndical des services publics](#)
- YouTube: [sispvideo](#)

The right-wing, the media
and
pension plans
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The right-wing, the media and pension plans: just because something is in print does not mean it is accurate.

IN THE WAKE OF AN ARTICLE ENTITLED “RREGOP: MYTHS AND REALITY”, PUBLISHED IN THE LAST ISSUE OF PUBLIC FORCE (SPRING 2012)¹, ALLOW ME TO ADD SOME GRIST TO THE MILL. IT IS NOT SURPRISING THAT IN THE LAST FEW MONTHS, ADDITIONAL EXAMPLES OF BIASED OR PARTIAL INFORMATION REGARDING PENSION PLANS HAVE COME TO LIGHT.

Let me start with the most recent and, in our opinion, the most dramatic example to date. The front page of the September 26, 2012 edition of La Presse read: “Caisses de retraite du secteur public: un trou de 250 milliards” [Public sector pension plans: a \$250 billion deficit]. Then, the main headline on the front page of its Business section read: “Régimes de retraite du secteur public: un monstre de 250 milliards” [Public sector pension plans: a \$250 billion monster]. That’s right, a monster! And, to elicit even more fear, an enormous rhinoceros head was used as an illustration!

So what exactly was this article about, you ask? It presented an overview of a study published by the Fraser Institute. The report claimed that “Ottawa and the provinces are faced with \$254 billion in unfunded pension liabilities for current and future retirees”. It goes on to say that “in Quebec, the numbers are just as astounding, with an unfunded liability of \$75 billion...”

In reality however, Quebec’s unfunded pension plan liability (also known as net liability) is \$28.7 billion². Oops! That’s a small \$46.3 billion error! That very morning, the Association québécoise des retraité(e)s des secteurs public et parapublic (AQRP) issued a press release asking

the Fraser Institute to retract its statement. Within a few hours, the Fraser Institute had withdrawn the study from its website. The next morning, La Presse made mention of the error and printed an apology from the Fraser Institute...all in a small quarter page article (Business section, page 4).

BIASED SOURCES

Why are we referring to this example, and what can we draw from it? We should start by mentioning that in Canada, the Fraser Institute is, in a sense, the proverbial older brother of the Montreal Economic Institute (MEI). Both openly promote right-wing ideas and values, and claim that they want to play an objective and non-partisan role when it comes to public debates on economic issues and the role of the State. They refuse however, to disclose the names of their generous donors, some of whom do not even have a head office in Canada.

Let’s go back for a moment to the report that contained the \$46.3 billion error. We want to specify that it was not a typo, but rather a fundamental mistake. Not only does this error make the rest of the argument null and void, but it also casts suspicion on the rest of the data in the report. And yet, after having created so much drama around the report, La Presse settled for nothing more than a short, neutral retraction. They did not even attempt to challenge or call into question the credibility of the Fraser Institute. You can bet that La Presse will continue to publicize future studies from this “learned institution”.

¹ Read the entire article at <http://www.csq.qc.net/dossiers/retraite.html>.

² It is important to remember that of this amount, only about \$18 billion remains to be financed by the RREGOP (see 2nd myth <http://www.csq.qc.net/dossiers/retraite.html>).

THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING VIGILANT

Was this an isolated occurrence? Unfortunately not. In the last year or two, it seems as though a few right-wing organizations (Fraser Institute, MEI, C.D. Howe Institute, Canadian Federation of Independent Businesses, etc.) have conspired to take turns publishing “studies” that do little more than rehash the same figures (which are occasionally founded, oftentimes biased, and sometimes completely wrong) and repeat the same unsupported assertions, which are based on prejudice rather than objective reality.

IN THE LAST YEAR OR TWO, IT SEEMS AS THOUGH A FEW RIGHT-WING ORGANIZATIONS (FRASER INSTITUTE, MEI, C.D. HOWE INSTITUTE, CANADIAN FEDERATION OF INDEPENDENT BUSINESSES, ETC.) HAVE CONSPIRED TO TAKE TURNS PUBLISHING “STUDIES” THAT DO LITTLE MORE THAN REHASH THE SAME FIGURES (WHICH ARE OCCASIONALLY FOUNDED, OFTENTIMES BIASED, AND SOMETIMES COMPLETELY WRONG) AND REPEAT THE SAME UNSUPPORTED ASSERTIONS, WHICH ARE BASED ON PREJUDICE RATHER THAN OBJECTIVE REALITY.

What is even more serious or more worrisome, is the excessive media coverage given to these pseudo-studies which are often rooted in propaganda. This does not even take into account the large proportion of columnists and commentators who not only repeat the comments made by these organizations, but often add to them.

This is why it is important to remain vigilant and to reference official data rather than findings from ideological groups. We are not, as a labour organization, claiming to be completely objective. However, all the information in our “RREGOP: Myths and Reality” article, is from verifiable and official sources (CARRA, RRQ, ministère des Finances, Conseil du trésor, etc.), and not from our own findings and conclusions, since this could be viewed by our critics as subjective.

In addition to providing our members and the population at large with information that is both transparent and thorough, our goal is to avoid spreading propaganda. We ask the same of the abovementioned “institutions” and of the media in particular. It may be a utopian request for the former, considering their interests, but for the latter, it should be self-evident. Unfortunately, we must remember that just because something is in print does not mean it is accurate...



FACT OR FICTION?

Two examples of recently published articles on public sector pension plans that failed to put the facts into perspective...

DEUX CLASSES DE CITOYENS À LA RETRAITE (TWO CLASSES OF RETIREES) Jean-François Cloutier, *Journal de Montréal*, November 7, 2012

He states as follows: *At a time when Quebecers are living longer, the financial crisis drastically eroded the value of pension funds held by some workers compared to others, leading to the creation of two classes of citizens. A situation considered by some experts as unjust and untenable.*

The journalist describes the RREGOP as the “Cadillac of pensions” and compares the private and public sectors. He fails to mention however, that pension benefits are part of the public service worker’s overall compensation. According to the Institut de la statistique du Québec (ISQ), for comparable jobs, salaries in 2011 were 8.3% lower in the public and parapublic sectors than in the private sector. The only source cited by the journalist is Pierre Girardin, actuary and advisor to the MEI.

LA « PATATE CHAUDE » DES RETRAITES (RETIREMENT PENSIONS - A HOT POTATO) Annick Poitras, *L’actualité*, November 1, 2012

She states as follows: *The pension funds of provincial civil servants are also in the red! Another \$29 billion is needed to meet the pension promises made to employees; that is 17% of Quebec’s debt.*

This is an actuarial deficiency. It is not a debt but a liability. It is the amount representing the government’s commitments to all its salaried and retired employees. As for the RREGOP, its actuarial deficiency amounts to \$18 billion. The journalist failed to mention however, that as of December 31, 2011, the funds of participating contributors was capitalized at around 100% and those of the government at about 56%, for a global capitalization of 80%, a threshold considered perfectly acceptable. Long-term financial health is more than adequately secure.



Harper's war against the public service

FEDERAL PUBLIC SERVICE EMPLOYEES ARE STRESSED AND ANXIOUS ABOUT THEIR FUTURE. FOR THE LAST SEVERAL MONTHS, THEY HAVE BEEN RECEIVING NOTICES SAYING THAT THEIR POSITIONS MAY BE ELIMINATED. THOUSANDS HAVE ALREADY LOST THEIR JOBS OR WILL BE LOSING THEM IN THE NEAR FUTURE. STEPHEN HARPER'S CONSERVATIVE PARTY, WHICH WAS RE-ELECTED TO A MAJORITY GOVERNMENT IN 2011, IS INTENT ON MOVING FORWARD WITH ITS AUSTERITY PLAN WITHIN THE NEXT FEW YEARS, WHATEVER THE COST. PUBLIC FORCE HAS PREPARED AN OVERVIEW OF THE CURRENT SITUATION, ALONG WITH ITS SOCIAL, ECONOMIC AND HUMAN IMPLICATIONS.

Last March, claiming to act in the interest of improving "operational efficiency" and productivity, the Conservative party of Canada tabled an austerity budget that will reduce spending by \$5.2 billion annually, starting in 2016-2017. These massive cuts will result in the disappearance of 19,200 federal public service jobs, of which 13% are in Quebec (2,500 positions). Program spending will also be reduced by 6.9% over the next three years. The Conservative government is calling for a 5 to 10% workforce reduction within three years, in sixty or so federal departments, organizations and agencies.

EXTREME AUSTERITY

Budget cuts and the elimination of jobs serve no economic purpose and cannot be blamed on the financial crisis of 2008. Simply put, these are political choices made by none other than Stephen Harper. Since coming to power in 2006, the Conservatives have made countless questionable decisions on taxation: cutting the GST, reducing capital tax, cutting corporate tax rates and reducing taxes for more affluent Canadians. These choices, which have been harshly criticized by economists and editorial writers because they deprive the State of billions of dollars, have contributed to weakening the country's public finances, helping justify the need for a far-reaching austerity plan. Since their majority win in 2011, the Conservatives have enjoyed complete freedom of action, and can now focus their attention on expenditures which include those incurred by federal civil servant salaries, social programs and public services, which are now considered costly and ineffective.

GOING AGAINST THE WILL OF THE PEOPLE

It goes without saying that these drastic cutbacks are not what the population is looking for. According to a recent study published by the Broadbent Institute, 9 out of 10 Canadians believe that reducing growing income inequality should be a government priority. Furthermore, three quarters of Canadians want corporations to pay higher taxes, and two thirds are willing to pay higher taxes themselves to protect our social programs. Rather than govern in a manner that reflects the wishes of the Canadian majority, the Harper government is focussed on abstract growth and productivity objectives. And yet, according to a new study by the University of Waterloo, although the GDP has grown substantially (28.9%) over the last 15 years, improvements in quality of life grew by a much smaller 5.7% for that same period. Furthermore, the recent economic downturn, which caused the GDP to drop by 8.3% between 2008 and 2010, led to a stunning 24% decline in the quality of life of Canadians. In short, "when the economy improves, Canadians reap comparatively little benefit", and when the economy slows, the wellbeing of Canadians declines dramatically. Now, there's another good reason to maintain quality public services.



The victims of the cutbacks

IN ADDITION TO THE 19,200 GOVERNMENT WORKERS WHO ARE SET TO LOSE THEIR JOBS, COUNTLESS OTHERS WILL BE AFFECTED BY WORK REORGANIZATIONS. IN A MOVE THAT WAS SEEN BY MANY AS LACKING DIPLOMACY, THE GOVERNMENT BEGAN BY SENDING OUT WRITTEN NOTICES TO EMPLOYEES, INFORMING THEM THAT THEY WERE AT RISK OF LOSING THEIR JOBS. THIS HAS CREATED RIVALRY AMONGST CO-WORKERS WHO ARE NOW BEING PITTED AGAINST ONE ANOTHER TO COMPETE FOR THE JOBS THAT WILL BE SPARED. SO FAR, 24,000 NOTICES HAVE BEEN SENT OUT. ACCORDING TO SEVERAL REPORTS, THERE IS AN UNHEALTHY ATMOSPHERE IN THE WORKPLACE. IN ADDITION TO FEELING THREATENED, EMPLOYEES FEEL AS THOUGH THEIR PERFORMANCE IS CONSTANTLY UNDER REVIEW. THIS TOXIC ENVIRONMENT HAS HAD A NEGATIVE EFFECT ON PRODUCTIVITY AND "OPERATIONAL EFFICIENCY", WHICH HAS LED TO A HIGH RATE OF ABSENTEEISM.

According to some, the work climate in the federal public service is rapidly deteriorating. We are seeing an increase in the number of civil servants being treated for psychological distress, which is without a doubt the most striking indicator. At Health Canada, where employee assistance services are available, the incidence of distress calls deemed serious, due to the risk of suicide, has increased considerably over the last three years. The number of calls is just under 200 so far this year, compared to 88 in 2009. Health Canada has also logged some 40,000 distress calls, 20,000 of which have resulted in more in-depth clinical consultations.

The PSAC has also noted that employee stress has reached a level that has never been seen. In 2011, close to half (48%) of all disability insurance claims were directly related to mental health issues, such as depression and burnout. That's twice as much as in 1991 (23.5%). The union strongly believes that these problems are the result of the draconian cutbacks and the effect they are having on the work climate. The stress of PSAC members is further magnified by the total lack of transparency with regards to how positions are being eliminated, and by the vagueness surrounding work reorganization. It is important to note also, that although the 2012 budget was tabled six months ago, Parliamentary Budget Officer Kevin Page is still trying to obtain details from the federal departments and agencies concerned. This information will allow him to understand the consequences of cutbacks on services to the population and employees. At the time of writing, only one third of the departments and agencies affected by the cuts had made this information public.

THE IMPACT ON SERVICES AND THE REGIONS

Can the federal government eliminate thousands of public service jobs without affecting services to the public? Of course not! Contrary to a promise made by the Minister of Finance Jim Flaherty, it is the regions that will bear the brunt (65%) of these cuts. It is plain to see that direct services to the population will be affected first and foremost. The recent announcement that the Canada Revenue Agency will be closing 29 regional service counters, which were set up to provide companies and individuals alike with in-person tax services, is a perfect example.

The elimination of thousands of quality jobs will also have an impact on regional economies already hard-hit by the 2008 financial crisis. The Public Service Alliance of Canada (PSAC) estimates that the social and economic impact of job losses announced in the 2012 budget will total more than \$109 million in Quebec alone. It goes without saying that we are miles away from a strategic plan for regional employment and economic recovery.

THE COSTS OF OUTSOURCING

Do job cuts generate real savings for Canadians? Nothing could be further from the truth. When faced with less in-house expertise, we are forced to outsource, which comes at a tremendous expense. Economist David Macdonald took a look at outsourcing costs within the federal public service. What he brings to light speaks for itself: in 2011 alone, the cost of temporary help and outsourcing totalled \$1.2 billion, an increase of 79% over the value of such contracts before the Conservatives took power in 2006. Based on the data we have today, this upward trend appears to be continuing. We should therefore question the true purpose of the cuts initiated by the Conservative government. According to David Macdonald, not only are we witnessing spiraling government spending, but we are also seeing the creation of a "shadow" public service where employees are awarded contracts without having to go through the usual rigorous and objective hiring process. In most cases, subcontractors are hired to do the exact same work public servants were doing before losing their jobs. Although subcontractors are doing the work of the civil servants, they do not have to meet the same requirements or the same standards of integrity, impartiality and bilingualism.

THE BEST OF OURSELVES



My name is Ginette Jacob. I am an administrative technician, team leader in the Technical Aids Department (RAMQ) at the Raymond-Dewar Institute in Montreal. My work involves participating in the Hearing Aid Program. I analyze client files to determine eligibility, interpret the regulation, submit requests to address the needs of our clients, supply technical aids, invoice services and conduct client follow-ups. To provide our clients with the best service, this position requires one to be available, tactful and to have a strong sense of responsibility. It is difficult however, to deliver quality services with limited resources and to meet shorter waiting time goals. What drives me is having autonomy when it comes to my work organization, being able to share the expertise I have developed over the years, collaborating with various health professionals and the challenge of satisfying an elderly and underprivileged client base. My job may seem like routine work, but behind each file there is a person who needs help.

My name is Catherine Maltais. I am a lab technician at the Laboratoire de sciences judiciaires et de médecine légale (LSJML), in Montreal. My work consists of identifying all DNA profiles found at a crime scene. At the LSJML, we process requests submitted from all police services across Quebec and from the coroners. Giving my best at work involves processing each and every file in a manner that is impartial and that respects the principles of justice and fairness for all. The most difficult aspect of my job is the high degree of responsibility involved: making a mistake could have tremendous consequences. For example, a criminal could be exonerated or charges could be laid against an innocent person. What drives me is knowing that my expertise, combined with the use of highly sophisticated, state-of-the-art equipment, makes an invaluable contribution to our judicial system.



My name is Sylvie Boulet. I am a spiritual care counsellor at the Institut universitaire en santé mentale de Québec, but my employer is the brand new CHU, which serves as the trustee for the Centre spiritualitésanté de la Capitale-Nationale. The centre consists of 42 spiritual care counsellors who are spread out in facilities across the area. As an active member of the multidisciplinary team, I address the spiritual and religious needs of those who are hospitalized, on a daily basis. I am involved in the round-the-clock on-call service (day and night) that patients and families have access to when going through tough or trying times. The best of me at work is being a good listener and being there for my clients. The mission of pastoral care workers has evolved with the development of a non-confessional approach that is also open to confessional practice. The profession is somewhat unknown but luckily, research demonstrates the value of our support.

My name is Rachel Roy. I am a career counsellor at the office of the ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale in Gaspé. My work involves helping individuals get to know themselves better, and guiding them as they look and opt for a job that satisfies their career aspirations and nature. I work with adults who, for the most part, have lost their jobs and, as a result, are going through a difficult time. The most rewarding part of my job is when a client is ready to leave and says: "I've made a decision. I know what to expect." Working in the outlying regions requires versatility. It is definitely demanding and there is no time to get bored! One of the most difficult aspects of my job is that my co-workers are spread out over a very large area. Consequently, support and discussions amongst counsellors are rare. What drives me is that my work allows me to help others, and knowing that I play a role in helping people find their place. It's a job where the terms "public" and "service" take on their full meaning.

