



Special ADR Edition

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STILL UNDECIDED

by: Pat Romano (Humanities)

I worked at FAC as the representative for non-permanent teachers from 1993-1995, and, while there, came to respect much about the organization. At the present, I am undecided about leaving FAC, but do hope that our debate moves beyond a focus on the possible insurance benefits or the issue of access to the central table in negotiations.

While these issues are not unimportant, they have to a degree been relevant throughout the 20 years we have been members of FAC. When Dawson disaffiliated from FNEEQ, surely we were aware that this would leave us with a smaller voice in negotiations and that the smaller membership would quite possibly involve higher costs for insurance. Moreover, looking back over the last 20 years, we cannot convincingly argue that our absence at the central table has negatively impacted on our wages, pensions, or parental rights. Essentially our collective agreement is the same as the one applicable at FNEEQ colleges. Any differences, such as the GOS and *our* larger amount of release time for chairs and program coordinators, represent specific choices by FAC members. Furthermore, on occasion, FAC introduced new ideas into the negotiating process, such as the clause allowing teachers with a CI over 60 to use continuing education courses to make up a full load – a significant improvement which was then promptly extended to FNEEQ. Finally, while our insurance costs are higher, the specific differences in coverage also largely represent choices made by us.

While at FAC in the 1990s, I became part of an organization which was trying to create a distinct voice for itself in the union movement, one that specifically focused on college education (arguably significant given the numerous times over the last 30 years, where we have felt we have had to justify our existence – a problem no other level of education faces). There was also a real commitment to building a truly democratic federation, where the powerful couldn't dominate over the small, where the membership was kept well-informed, where the leadership shared the same interests as the membership, and where disaffiliating would be simplified. Over the years, FAC has continued to strive to respect these founding principles, although hindsight has now shown that some of them have caused other problems.

From its beginning, FAC has stressed the value of the college system and pedagogy and the representative for pedagogical affairs at FAC is heavily involved in federation decision-making. Tenures for the FAC executive are limited to four years, with the aim of ensuring that those holding the key positions in the federation are college teachers first and never lose touch with the classroom.

However, this has led to questions currently being raised about whether potential candidates for the FAC executive have the necessary experience, particularly when heading into a negotiating round. This is definitely a concern, although the risks are perhaps attenuated somewhat by the fact that during negotiations the various union federations often work together and that individual unions and the membership play an essential role in the negotiating process. That being said, possibly we are looking at going into the next period of negotiations with a relatively inexperienced team. Certainly, encouraging people to take on very demanding union positions at a time when the federation is in crisis becomes increasingly difficult. On the other hand, our interest in ensuring that those who hold the top positions in our union remain in touch with our reality in the classroom remains a priority and is an issue we hope is addressed during our debate.

The decision-making structures at FAC also sought to ensure that smaller, primarily regional, colleges were not consistently outvoted by the larger colleges and the resistance encountered by Dawson to its efforts to increase the larger colleges' voting power indicates the extent to which this is a fundamental value at FAC. The commitment to democracy also was emphasized by FAC's policy of providing substantial information to its members and its translation of all documents into English.

Unfortunately, budgetary problems have led to significant cutbacks in the documents sent to us from FAC. On the other hand, I am not entirely satisfied with FNEEQ's commitment to English translations given that the *Carnet Collegial* is still not being translated (apparently they have made a pledge to do so in the near future, but, given their larger resources, this does seem a little late in coming).

Moreover, FAC's commitment to ensuring that small colleges have a strong voice has led to a concern that the interests of larger colleges are not being heard. Arguably there is no perfect voting structure, but this is perhaps becoming a larger problem given that many regional colleges are facing a dire situation due to their declining enrolment. While FAC has recently modified its voting statutes to give the larger colleges a greater say at the *Assemblée Fédérative* and the *Conseil de Négotiation*, this may not be sufficient.

To conclude, I continue to respect the principles upon which FAC was built, but the federation is certainly at a crossroads. Ultimately, the question for me is whether FAC is still viable. I think in general it has served us well over the last 20 years and say this while recognizing that there have been some serious mistakes made in recent years. FAC, however, has faced serious budgetary crises in recent years and the loss of two of its members, with perhaps more to come, as well as the growing concern over whether FAC can effectively respond to the interests of urban colleges. On the other hand, I continue to have questions about FNEEQ. Are the interests of college education at times compromised for larger interests? How close is the union leadership to the classroom reality? How democratic is a federation which makes disaffiliation so difficult? Given its inadequate translation policy, how committed is FNEEQ to anglophone colleges? It is these issues I hope which are addressed both in our debate here at Dawson and in the visits by representatives of FNEEQ and FAC later this month.

FNEEQ - the Central Table - and FAC

by: Fred Jones (Economics)

1. **FNEEQ takes part in the central table negotiations on wages, pensions, insurance and parental rights.** FNEEQ forms a coalition with the three other CSN public sector federations to negotiate with the government at the central table. This coalition chooses a spokesperson and defines negotiating positions and strategy. FNEEQ participates in these discussions to choose a spokesperson and retains a veto over this choice. FNEEQ also participates in all caucus meetings where positions are debated and instructions are given to the spokesperson. As decisions are by consensus, FNEEQ retains a veto over these positions.

The CSN executive does not choose the spokesperson. The CSN executive does not define the negotiating positions. The CSN executive does not tell the federations what to accept. However, it is true that frequently at the end of a negotiation the final compromises are made in *comité restreint* where only the Quebec Prime Minister and the three central presidents, from the CSN, QFL and CSQ, take part. FNEEQ would not have a seat at that table. However, FNEEQ would participate in creating the positions and compromises which the CSN president would defend.

FAC is not at the central table. It is not involved in the caucuses. It has no veto over negotiating positions or spokesperson. FAC has no link to the *comité restreint*.

2. **It was suggested that FAC did not need to be at the central table because it has “direct relations” with the Treasury Board.** A very strange suggestion! Does FAC expect the Treasury Board will give it more than the agreement at the central table? Remember the Treasury Board is the dominant financial institution in the government and generally favours lower not higher wages. It was also suggested that the employer’s side of the negotiations could bring FAC’s demands to the central table. That is an equally strange idea. Usually we find that the employer’s side tries to reduce our gains rather than increase them. Are they likely to propose FAC’s demands to the other unions? True FAC teachers get the same pay as FNEEQ teachers. However, FNEEQ’s negotiator determines the wages for teachers in FAC unions.
3. **The first priority for FAC in the coming negotiation is salaries. However salaries are negotiated at the central table and FAC is not at the central table.** How will FAC negotiate these demands?
4. **FAC appears to have decided to negotiate alone.** Guy Desmarais, FAC VP said at the DTU November 24, 2008 General Assembly “At this moment, FAC would like to negotiate on its own.” Economic times are difficult and getting worse and we want to negotiate on our own – all 3500 of us.

Will we join FNEEQ at the central table or sit on the side and watch?

What is the most effective strategy – negotiating alone or with others?