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Sylvie's Choice

By: *Sylvie Perron, DTU President*

Dear faculty,

The purpose of this article is not to debate each of the major issues that have already been addressed over and over in the reflection process, but to share with you where I am getting to at this stage of the debate.

I confess that the present debate on affiliation has not awakened any passion in me, first of all because of the many responsibilities I have to fulfill as a member of the DTU executive and also probably because I was not here 20 years ago when FAC was created and, in this sense, I consider myself as a newcomer.

One year ago, after the departure of CEGEP Lionel-Groulx from the federation, the DTU Executive Council decided to start a reflection process on our affiliation. We then decided to ask for a number of changes to be made within the federation such as to have no limit of mandates for our CRT counsellors, more representative weight in the voting structure of the Conseil Intersyndical and the hiring of a lawyer to reduce the costs among others. As a consequence, we managed to have some of the voting rules at FAC changed, we obtained a change to the policy so that one of the CRT counsellor positions be with no limit of mandates and finally we signed the *Entente*. After these achievements at FAC, I thought it would be better to avoid a debate on disaffiliation, not wanting to bring our membership into a divisive process just before the negotiation period. Despite my intentions to spare our members from the sometimes painful debate we decided to continue with the reflection since there was still uncertainty regarding the future of FAC. Well, now that the period of reflection is almost at its conclusion, I will take a pause and share some of my thoughts with you.

The first question that we should ask ourselves is if there is a need to disaffiliate.

Since 2006, FAC is in fact facing many challenges that are undermining its stability: primary among these challenges were the disaffiliation of Valleyfield College and, last year, the disaffiliation of Lionel-Groulx, as a result of dissatisfaction towards the federation after the 2005 negotiation. Every time a college disaffiliates, the federation experiences a major financial and political crisis and has to focus its energy in getting out of crisis. This situation is still not over: while teachers here at Dawson have expressed their dissatisfaction and are considering the possibility to disaffiliate, two other colleges, André-Laurendeau and Baie-des-Chaleurs, are presently undergoing the same process, a situation which is certainly not the best to be in during a negotiation period. I believe that FAC could only be viable if those 3 colleges stay, especially Dawson and André-Laurendeau, the two largest colleges of those three. FNEEQ on the other hand is not experiencing such challenges and is a pretty stable federation. It appears to me that, in terms of security and stability, that FNEEQ would be the best choice.

Now, this being said, the question is whether or not we are ready to stay with FAC despite this instability or if we would rather go to FNEEQ. I cannot give you the perfect answer to this last question, it is up to each of you to decide what does make you willing to stay or leave the federation and if you are ready to live with the changes that an affiliation to a new federation would bring.

I identified and summarized, for myself and in order to facilitate my decision, what are the most important changes that an affiliation to FNEEQ would signify.

The major cons of FNEEQ:

- Less release time for chairs and coordinators (+ or – 1.3 FTE)
- A more complex structure and probably less proximity
- Harder to disaffiliate
- Higher union dues

The major pros of FNEEQ:

- Security and stability
- Experienced leadership (no limits of mandates)
- Belonging to the more powerful group of CEGEP teachers
- More and better organized training sessions for union executive councils
- Access to a strike fund
- Better conditions for Cont.Ed. teachers (450 hours = 1 year seniority)

Now a word about counselling services. First, I would like to clarify that no matter what the decision is, the work on the 8th floor will remain exactly the same; the union reps will still have to deal with all the problems that arise within a huge contingent of 847 faculty members. They will still have to do their best to defend our rights and find the best solutions to conflicts. The only difference in this task will be to have to seek help and advice from a different federation and this, I must admit, worries me a little since we are presently getting excellent CRT counselling services at FAC. I can't really say if FNEEQ services will be better, worse or equivalent, I only see that the FNEEQ unions look satisfied with them.

On the political aspect

I must say that I am really sad that the debate started focusing on the language issue and looked sometimes more like a fear campaign. I thought and I felt that the old Francophone - Anglophone antagonism had been overcome here at Dawson. In my opinion this is not an issue in this debate since both the CSN and the FNEEQ have clearly expressed their position and stated that they support the English institution and community.

Concerning unionism, I have always questioned the existence of three different federations to represent our profession. I do not believe in independent unionism, for me the real essence of unionism sits on the *rappart the force* that we can reach in order to better defend our rights.

Finally and as a conclusion, I will say that there is no way to vote and be 100% sure that it was the right option. I wish I could tell you what is the best thing to do but won't because I do not have the perfect answer to this question. I can only tell you where I am at this point and what my intentions are. Trying to be as rational as possible, considering that we are entering the negotiation period, because of the on-going instability of FAC and above all, according to my convictions, I think that I have no other option than to vote for FNEEQ. This decision has been a very difficult one to take, as I respect very much the people, at present and in the past, that have worked hard to build FAC.

Nostalgia and Reality

Janice Harvey, (History), Former DTU President

I have been involved with FAC from its foundation, including 6 years working at FAC itself and almost 20 years proofreading the publications which enabled me to follow every debate. It has been very difficult for me to come to the conclusion that Dawson should leave FAC but I honestly believe that the FAC I helped to create no longer exists.

At the beginning of FAC we were full of ideas. Every time a union was disgruntled or a new union was formed, we thought they would choose FAC. But, except for one, they never did! We believed FAC would eventually become THE federation for Cegep teachers. But this did not happen. Although some argue that “small is beautiful” and that size poses no problems, this is not self evident.

Democracy

Several people including FAC President, Jean-Claude Drapeau, have referred to the principles underlying FAC—democracy, pedagogy, information. Unfortunately these principles have become largely void of meaning. The President assures us, for example, that FAC respects its unions’ right to discuss and make decisions about affiliation. But in 2006 when Valleyfield teachers voted to leave FAC and join FNEEQ, FAC cut their insurance coverage at midnight the day of the vote, obviously before FNEEQ’s insurance company had time to open their files. (FNEEQ was able to have them covered retroactively as soon as this was discovered.) The same year a pro-FAC local executive threatened to sue a group of teachers who proposed disaffiliation at Lionel-Groulx. Two years later when the issue was again debated at Lionel-Groulx, FAC itself initiated a law suit against the local union executive.

In terms of Dawson, FAC decided that a duly-elected member of the DTU Executive was not allowed to attend FAC’s meeting in March because she had signed a pro-FNEEQ paper. Does this show respect for Dawson teachers and their elected representatives? None of these actions respect the right to discuss affiliation—they are basically corporatist.

Teachers for Teachers?

The principle behind the four year rule—that the people elected to FAC have taught recently—has also been raised as an advantage. But this is really a sham. When someone leaves FAC after four years they do not need to return to teaching, they just cannot be at FAC! They can go on leave to study, work, retrain, run their local union, or on a sick leave, etc. There has also been a tendency for people to return to FAC several times. At the moment 4 of the 7 people are there for their second, third or more times. Some have not taught for many years. Clearly this rule does not ensure that FAC officers are recent teachers. It does, however, ensure lack of continuity in representation. One of the reasons people return so often is the problem finding people to do these jobs from such a small pool of potential people due to FAC’s small size. I have personally witnessed people with no union experience at all being elected to the negotiation team or even the Executive. So FAC has a rule that, at best, results in disruption; at worst, results in a lack of expertise and competence.

Information and Pedagogy

Information and pedagogy are also seen as central principles at FAC. But in FAC’s new structure resulting from its reduced budget, both information and pedagogy have been cut to one person instead of the two positions that were in the old structure and FAC’s pedagogical magazine, *Factuel* has been suspended.

Strategic Errors

In the past several years, FAC has made several strategic errors that have cost members dearly, for example, the salary restructuring/173 hour dossier and the Decree/Entente. To some extent this is a result of FAC's small size as a small number of union Presidents try to analyze and decide on strategy, as well as a lack of leadership and a tendency to choose principle over pragmatism. Many Dawson teachers were concerned about this and its impact on FAC's credibility in terms of the next negotiations. It was largely these concerns that precipitated the reflection on affiliation. Similar issues were raised by the teachers of Valleyfield and Lionel-Groulx Cegeps who had lost faith in FAC and voted to leave. At Lionel-Groulx, the vote was 176 – 13.

Why FNEEQ?

Negotiations

So why is FNEEQ better? It is bigger and therefore discussions on strategy and policy involve representatives of 37 unions not 15. As the federation that represents the large majority of Cegep teachers, it has more credibility and bargaining power in terms of negotiating with the government. As a larger federation, it has more resources and can devote these to the negotiations. For example, FNEEQ has 5 full-time teachers on their negotiation team helped by the two teachers doing scholarship and staffing issues and a union counselor. (FAC has a smaller team who are responsible for running the CRT as well). FNEEQ is represented at the Central Table, FAC is not.

Services

FNEEQ provides quality services to its local unions with both experienced union counselors and specialized lawyers, a full-time person working very successfully to resolve scholarship problems (at this point he is trying to get the CA degree recognized), and a full-time person who can help locals with the staffing project. Pedagogy is also important for FNEEQ. Their five-member School and Society Committee analyzes pedagogical issues and sends articles to local unions each month. Publications are all translated into English. Within the structure of retraining set up by FNEEQ, teachers completing an MA can obtain release time towards this work.

Democracy

FNEEQ is a body that represents teachers. Its Cegep teacher unions have a monthly meeting where representatives of each union come to discuss issues. If Dawson teachers have something we want discussed we need only indicate this to the DTU and they can raise it with FNEEQ which has a bottom-up decision making process. The Executive attends the meetings and is also available by phone.

We need a strong and credible federation

FAC maybe made sense 20 years ago but it has not lived up to its promise. Nostalgia is nice but it is time to recognize reality. Negotiations are becoming more and more difficult. Even large independent federations like the FIIQ (nurses) have joined the SISP with other federations and the CSQ to decrease their isolation. We cannot take any chances of making mistakes due to inexperience or misplaced principles. Dawson teachers need to be represented by a federation strong enough, credible enough, and influential enough to fight for their interests. We owe ourselves this. We will find this in FNEEQ.

Truth is often inconvenient, as some have said

Here are some inconvenient truths about a recent Owl Hoots article

By Fred Jones (Economics)

True: Ronald Cameron President of FNEEQ went to Cuba on the Christmas break. However he paid his own way. It did not cost FNEEQ a penny. Just like many Dawson teachers who also went to Cuba. Perhaps “spending beach time in Havana” is a bad idea. The beaches are better at Varadero.

True: FNEEQ has taken a position criticizing the recent Israeli attack on Gaza and supporting the international boycott campaign against Israel. So has FAC. On March 14 of this year FAC voted unanimously, with some abstentions, to support the international boycott campaign of Israeli products, disinvestment in Israeli companies and a campaign of international sanctions against Israel. FAC agreed to participate in this boycott until an international political solution which conforms to international law and the principles of universal human rights is negotiated between the democratically elected Palestinian and Israeli governments. True, FNEEQ criticized the attack on Gaza first. However that seems to be the nature of the FNEEQ-FAC relationship. FNEEQ makes a decision and sometime later FAC catches on. Many other organizations are joining this campaign too. So FAC and FNEEQ will not be alone.

True: Ronald Cameron, the president of FNEEQ, spoke at a panel on “Palestinian Solidarity in the Academy” organized by the Concordia School of Public Affairs during Anti-apartheid week. The panel was sponsored by 20 groups including the Quebec Women’s Federation and several Jewish groups including the Jewish Alliance Against the Occupation and PAJU (Palestinians and Jews United). Hardly “thinly veiled anti-Semitic groups”.

True: A Dawson teacher earning \$60,000 would save at least \$395 per year by joining FNEEQ or \$3,950 over a 10 year period. Yes, the amount the DTU will send to FNEEQ is higher. However the insurance costs are significantly lower. The result is a big gain by switching to FNEEQ even if dues must be changed. However it may not be necessary to raise individual teachers dues. FNEEQ’s dues have not changed since before we disaffiliated. Nor have the DTU’s dues changed. If we did not change our dues, a teacher earning \$60,000 would save \$563 per year or \$5,630 over 10 years by joining FNEEQ. If you make more than \$60,000 you will save more.

True: If the average income at Dawson was \$60,000, the approximately 500 teachers would save \$197,500 per year if dues had to be increased. However as suggested above it may not be necessary to raise individual teachers dues. If we did not change our dues teachers would save \$281,500 per year by joining FNEEQ.

True: A teacher over 65 who retired with FNEEQ would pay significantly less health insurance costs than a FAC teacher. Over the 15 years from 65 to 80 a single teacher would save \$4,020. A married teacher would save more. This occurs because FAC rates are both higher and increase with age. FNEEQ’s rates are lower and constant. This is because FNEEQ is bigger and its insurance policies are collectively negotiated for all its retired members. FAC’s health insurance policies are individual policies. FAC is not involved in their negotiation.

True: CSN and FNEEQ have taken a public position in defence of English post secondary education. Ronald Cameron, the president of FNEEQ, said when he was at Dawson that if the existence of English cegeps was threatened, both FNEEQ and the CSN would stand by our sides to defend it. The only official position of the CSN is to defend English post secondary education. They take this position as they believe that the

Anglophone minority in Quebec has the right to its own institutions and because post secondary education is not compulsory and is used by both francophones and allophones to learn English so they can get better jobs and function in the more global climate of today. They recognize that the French primary and secondary schools do not adequately teach English. This position was defended by the CSN at the hearings into the French language charter.

True: FAC supporters were unhappy with the interview of Stephen Bryce of John Abbott. They did not like the idea that John Abbott is perfectly happy within FNEEQ. It quashes their argument about nationalist threats.

Not True: The DTU did not reject the entente three times. At Dawson we voted once and accepted the entente with a massive majority. Unfortunately FAC rejected the entente. The result is we got the decree. Hardly proof that "FAC is working well"

Tech, Says No To FNEEQ!

By: Georges-Emile Karam (Civil Engineering Technology/ Past Careers rep on Executive Council)

Some members of the DTU Executive Council are campaigning aggressively in the hallways creating the impression that a move of the DTU from FAC to FNEEQ is imminent, which is inaccurate. The attempt to move us to FNEEQ may be the agenda of only a handful of teachers at Dawson who believe in the left-wing concept of the big union. The truth is that the bulk of the teachers are not involved in this discussion and that the pro-FNEEQ campaigners are using this fact to sway the teachers towards FNEEQ. Please remember that FNEEQ is under the CSN which is SEPARATIST, and a signatory of the French Language Charter which calls for the closure of English CEGEPs. Furthermore the union dues at FNEEQ will be higher.

In any case please remember that it is of utmost importance for you to come to the April 14 General Assembly and to vote AGAINST having a college-wide referendum for disaffiliation, thus putting an end to all this.

Please bear in mind that even though some members of the DTU Executive Council are creating an impression that the DTU is in favor of moving to FNEEQ, this information is inaccurate. In fact, part of the DTU Executive Council is in favor of staying with FAC.

TECHS, SAY NO TO FNEEQ!

Marianopolis, FNEEQ couldn't unionize
Even though we thought them wise
They turned around and came to FAC
To steal our union off the rack

This time they screwed it up so royal
To free Quebec through us, the Loyal!
They're 'napping unions this past while
With such takeovers so hostile

Their Pres. wants English C.E.G.E.P.'s to close
And have us pay dues through the nose
For that they set up rendez-vous
So secret that they met in two's

We did not know what they were planning
"A done deal", they said, while the halls they were scanning
My dear friends, no deal is done
Through meetings secret from everyone!

The truth is out now, they're very few
And this we'll see when the vote is through
Dawson teachers will vote "NO!
FNEEQ and Dawson is a no-go!"

Now that the ADR process is over
Exhausting all the chalk of Dover,
For our pay, FAC, FEC, or FNEEQ
We are all dealt the same deck

FAC, accountable to the rank and file,
A boutique federation, service and style
FAC's small and beautiful, I contend
Don't let FNEEQ drive you 'round the bend!

I'm a tech, just hear me out
Vote for FAC; keep Dawson's clout!

Sitting on the Fence - A Time-Limited Position

By: Mary Hlywa, DTU 1st Vice-President

I have been firmly sitting on the fence in the debate on whether we stay with FAC or disaffiliate and join FNEEQ. From where I sit, there is green on both sides of my relatively safe perch – different shades of green, yes, but green none the less – making it a matter of taste as to which hue one chooses as the preferable place to live. Those who feel passionately about their choice argue strongly for the inherent worth of their colour. I do not mind that teachers have strong preferences, but accusations of the worthlessness or ugliness of the shade others choose tends to leave me chilled and... blue. Worst of all, there appears to be more and more people seeing red, and red only. Discerning the right shade of green in all that – much harder.

With less colour, I can say that I have been ambivalent about the choice we have given ourselves between FAC and FNEEQ throughout the evaluation process that began at least as early as last spring 2008. For certain, on the heels of the disaffiliation of Valleyfield, the threatened departure of Lionel-Groulx at that time caused the DTU Executive and the Executive Council to question whether the choice that union was considering would be a choice that would be in the best interests of our members as well. As we saw it, a full assessment of the advantages and disadvantages of remaining at FAC or switching to another federation was required. Since then much effort has been invested by many to create adequate information for teachers to make comparisons and declare their choice in the votes we will take next week. The advantages and disadvantages table that is available on the DTU website, as well as the more extensive comparison of federations that you will find there, form the basis of an analysis each teacher can make for themselves, in my opinion.

In this article I share with you the key strengths and some of the risks involved in the choice between FAC and FNEEQ from my individual perspective. At this point, I will be saddened by any choice we make. There are clearly strengths in FNEEQ-CSN that I find

exciting and reassuring. There are also strengths in FAC that are found in principles and practices that are inspiring and engaging. No matter what I choose, I would like to say that I respect teachers who adhere to either side of the debate – as each has value. No matter what happens in our near future, I would hope that the principle of mutual respect has leaders to champion it as a priority for any functional community.

What excites me the most about the FNEEQ option is its connections to a broader base, whether it is within education or on issues of concern with the general work force. Given its inclusion in the CSN, there are more resources available to support initiatives or actions that draw attention to the issues that matter in our communities. As our society faces significant economic challenges with the bust of the free market bubble, it would be exciting to be part of an organization with a strong voice to protect the interests of vulnerable workers, including teachers.

What reassures me about FNEEQ is that its size assures stability of the organization. Finding and securing talent for its executive may be easier when there is a larger pool of teachers from which to draw. The rules for the terms of office allow expertise to develop in certain individuals in the executive; one would hope this expertise would remain vital and would lead to effectiveness and good judgment. In contrast, FAC's rules with regard to executive positions, that one cannot hold a position for more than four years, makes the organization vulnerable with regard to the assurance of experienced and strategically knowledgeable leadership. This, I believe, is one of the most relevant concerns with regard to remaining with FAC.

The resources available to the federation are clearly a potential advantage of FNEEQ and the services it can provide the DTU, but this needs to be measured against the potential that the larger bureaucracy of FNEEQ-CSN might consume these resources, financial and human, less efficiently than a smaller federation.

What inspires me about FAC is that it is truly an organization that lives by its values: proximity, participation, horizontal management (i.e. not top-down decision-making) run by teachers for teachers, pedagogy and yes, autonomy. Integrity at all costs is a rare quality in an organization that protects interests. I do believe that FAC needs a more realistic strategy on this point, but I admire its adherence to resistance on principle. I also admire its ability to integrate its values into its everyday practices. In my time on the DTU executive, I have experienced feelings of inclusion from FAC executives and members of other FAC colleges, despite my difficulty expressing myself in French or my belonging to the DTU, which for the past 3 years has been making continuous, successful demands for change, but caused much conflict and anguish as well. I interpret the respectful and human qualities demonstrated to me as another sign of integrity and discipline.

What engages me about FAC is that as a small democracy; its structures allow for ample participation by its teacher members, permitting the evolution of FAC as a teacher community. In the past three years, with great debate, FAC has changed to accommodate demands made by unions to address some of the problems identified in its functioning, particularly improving the proportional weight of large colleges in decision-making. Also engaging is the proximity of its executives and resource people who are always available and respectful of our needs. As a wave of new teachers enters the college network over the next 5 to 10 years, they might enjoy the learning and networking that is possible through the participatory structures at FAC.

You have had many facts to consider so far in DTU documents and Special Edition Owl Hoots publications. In contrast, my contribution here has mostly remained on the right side of the brain, looking at holistic concerns within the limits of space available—just to round out the discussion and possibly guide our process somewhat. Yet in the end, even a fence-

sitter must climb down, and as may or may not be evident in my writing above, I had to make what I found to be a difficult decision.

I will be voting to maintain our affiliation to FAC. Many of its founding values and its continued practices are too close to my own personal views of how organizations should work to abandon FAC as an organization. FNEEQ certainly evolved once many college unions left its fold in 1988. As the past three years in the federation have demonstrated to me, FAC can also develop and mature as it moves past its first 20 years of existence. Particularly with a new generation of teachers coming into the college system, I would rather maintain for them the option of participating in the engaging teacher community that FAC creates. Some of them may be inspired by FAC's values as well. If we leave FAC, I highly doubt this option will remain viable for long.

Whatever happens over the next two weeks, I want to emphasize that we must respect the diversity of opinion among us. There are many strengths and risks that are appropriate and valid to consider in choosing to stay with FAC or choosing to join FNEEQ. Though passions do flare in processes such as these, leaving hurt feelings and resentments for those most involved, the values of respect and forgiveness have practical relevance. Once our collective decision is taken on the question of our affiliation, let us commit to making the Dawson Teachers Union a vital organization that builds our own engagement in the issues that affect our daily work life as teachers.