Quebec's "Nurses on the Move" Facebook page bans WSWS reporters for criticizing unions

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Two *World Socialist Web Site* reporters, banned from the *Infirmières en mouvement* (Nurses on the Move) Facebook page, have sent an open letter to its administrators protesting the anti-democratic action and insisting that "workers entering into struggle need access to a wide range of ideas."

The recently-established *Infirmières en mouvement* Facebook page attracted more than 35,000 members after Quebec nurses, in some cases outside official union channels, mounted sit-ins and other protests. It quickly became a forum for nurses and other health care workers to expose, and discuss how they can best fight against, the onerous working conditions and deteriorating patient care that has resulted from years of savage budget cuts imposed by all levels of government.

Several nurses have used this forum to directly criticize the union that represents the vast majority of Quebec nurses, FIQ (or in English, the Interprofessional Federation of Health of Quebec). Like the other unions, both public and private sector, FIQ has suppressed opposition to the austerity policies of successive Liberal and Parti Québécois (PQ) governments.

A video showing FIQ President Nancy Bédard talking about a "positive" emergency meeting with Quebec Health Minister Gaétan Barrette provoked many hostile comments on *Infirmières en mouvement*.

Ridiculing Bédard's and Barrette's empty promises to institutionalize patient-nurse ratios, a young nurse from Laval writes: "Ha ha ha! That's great! She might get us a free subscription to the review of the oiiq [the order responsible for regulating the nurses' profession in Quebec]!" He added: "I'm sure she would call that a major gain !!!"

A nurse with many years of experience wrote: "In every negotiation, nurses want to improve their working conditions, not just their salary. And our representatives always serve us up the same tepid soup." She went on: "If you read between the lines, the members are just as angry with the union as with the government!"

Another added, "If patients were really looked after, we would not be in this situation," while a fourth wrote: "A law against forced overtime! A job ... it's not a prison !!!"

Several noted that the union has abandoned this central demand for nurses: the end of compulsory overtime, which allows employers to force nurses to work 16 hours straight and workweeks of well over 50 hours, while causing worker burnout and putting patients health, even their lives, at risk.

The decision to block the *World Socialist Web Site* reporters was taken shortly after Louis Girard had republished on the Facebook page an article he had written for the WSWS. The article welcomed the growing militancy among nurses and warned them against the treacherous role played by the union bureaucracy, especially during the 2015 Quebec public sector workers' struggle.

Girard was blocked when he tried to publish a message that pointed to the wave of teachers' strikes in the United States, many of which were launched or continued in open defiance of the rightwing, pro-Democratic Party trade unions. In his censored post, Girard also quoted comments nurses had posted on the *Infirmières en mouvement* page bitterly criticizing the agreement reached in 1999 between the PQ government and FIQ as a "pact with the devil."

An appeal was made to the other administrators of the page to uphold the democratic right of WSWS reporters to participate in the debate, but to no avail. The other WSWS reporter, who had actively participated in discussions on *Infirmières en mouvement* by raising a

number of critical political issues, was blocked soon after.

The open letter from the WSWS reporters answered the spurious arguments advanced by moderator Simon Chandonnet to justify the ban. Whether Chandonnet, who appears to have been the principal advocate of the censorship of the WSWS, is part of the FIQ apparatus is not clear; but he has acted exactly like an agent of the union bureaucracy. He has since been promoted to be the page's administrator, which gives him the power to decide who can moderate messages.

His policy is to push political issues "into the background," unless they uphold the "status quo." As the open letter explains: "Under the guise of avoiding politics lies a very well-defined type of politics: support for the union bureaucracy, which isolates workers and subordinates them to the Parti Québécois, a party of big business which imposed massive cuts in 1997 and forced thousands of nurses and teachers into retirement without replacing them."

Chandonnet's call for nurses to "unite" on a strictly professional basis amounts to isolating the nurses from other workers, beginning with their public sector workmates. This the union bureaucracy has done time and time again.

He opposes any objective criticism of the trade unions, which he denounces as a witch hunt. The open letter responds as follows: "Our arguments are accurate and true. They are based on an objective analysis of the historical evolution of the unions. The latter, because of their nationalist and pro-capitalist perspective, are now collaborating with the employers to impose vast rollbacks on the workers they ostensibly represent."

Finally, Chandonnet opposes the activity of socialists, the real reason for his censorship. He dishonestly characterizes their activity as "recruiting" for "hard-line socialism." The WSWS reporters had posted on *Infirmières en mouvement* an article and numerous messages elaborating a detailed, historical critique of unions and of the reactionary Quebec nationalist perspective advanced by the PQ and the pseudo-left Québec Solidaire. They emphasized the international character of the growing working class opposition to austerity and the dismantling of public services. They also insisted on the need to form rank-and-file action committees, independent of and in opposition to the corporatist unions, to mobilize workers across Canada against capitalist austerity.

In the article for the WSWS republished on the Facebook page, Girard wrote: "The nurses are confronting a capitalist system in crisis ... But they have powerful allies: other public sector employees and workers all over the world who are also under attack."

The need to unify the struggles of the working class was also at the heart of many messages posted by the other WSWS reporter: "Not only nurses, but all health workers should unite across the country. Quebec nationalism has divided us too much from our class brothers and sisters elsewhere in Canada ... Perhaps we should invite these workers on this Facebook page or create a new one that would aim to build links beyond the province?"

The two WSWS reporters criticized the role of Québec Solidaire. This supposedly left party refuses to address the real causes of the current health crisis—the ruling-class drive to make the working class pay for the crisis and failure of capitalism. Instead, QS puts the blame on Health Minister Barrette's mismanagement and doctors' salaries, while ignoring the years of massive cuts imposed by provincial PQ and Liberal governments, to say nothing of the cuts successive federal governments have made to health-care funding.

At a recent demonstration in Montreal, the unions also sought to scapegoat doctors for the crisis undermining Canada's public health system.

In the struggle to defend their class interests, workers inevitably come into conflict with the privileged union bureaucracy, which connives with the ruling class in eliminating jobs, cutting wages, destroying pensions and dismantling public services.

Nurses in Canada need access to the WSWS, the only media voice that advances a clear and objective critique of the trade unions and encourages the formation of rank-and-file committees to organize a united struggle of workers against capitalist austerity. We encourage nurses, healthcare workers, and other to circulate this article, including on the *Infirmières en mouvement* Facebook page.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact