

CSQ

MAGAZINE

ACTIVISM



GETTING INVOLVED

IT'S YOUR TIME TO SHINE!

Voting... but so
much more

.....

The glory and the
misery of activism

.....



Centrale des syndicats
du Québec

Special Edition 2022



PARITY
SOLIDARITY
RIGHTS



GET INVOLVED, THEY SAID!

For organizations like ours, electoral campaigns are key milestones that should not be wasted.

And yet, how we engage with the political process and the extent of the CSQ's involvement come up regularly during meetings of our decision-making bodies. The issue was also raised during the 2015 and 2018 Congress debates.

I think that it's a matter of how we approach things. Political action can take a number of different shapes and forms that go far beyond supporting a given party. It's about so much more! And one thing is quite clear: our working conditions are driven by the government's decisions and policies. And, in this regard, collective bargaining can't address everything. There is much more to be done.

Political action is another important tool we can use to influence government decisions, to bring our vision, our values and our issues forward. To promote our societal project, in other words.

TWO AND A HALF YEARS IS A LONG TIME!

Though things aren't quite back to normal yet, our day-to-day lives are steadily inching closer to a new post-pandemic reality. We all want to put the pandemic behind us and look to the future, wouldn't you agree? And that is exactly what the government is doing!

The pandemic provided them with a perfect excuse to rule like no other government had done before ... or just about. No wonder comparisons with Duplessis follow them around!

They ruled by decrees for two and a half years, all thanks to the state of emergency and its tools. Two and a half years is a long time! Long enough to build a culture and see it take root within the government. In fact, even though the state of emergency has been technically lifted in Québec, the government has provided for some flexibility and powers which allow for its ruling by decree for a little while yet.

In other words, this government managed the state and our public networks the same way it managed the health crisis, i.e. in a hurry. No time to listen, no time for genuine consultation. Just enough to paper over the cracks and patch a few things up.

The government held consultations only when the house started going up in flames. Always in a rush, time and time again. Despite all our efforts and our appeals. And we found solutions, on several occasions.

Social dialogue isn't a fad or empty words. It can truly work when all parties put their minds to it. The reason I bring it up once more is that social dialogue is in itself a form of political action. A powerful instrument with which to influence government decisions, play our part as a social actor and provide leadership as a central organization.

THEY ARE READY...

It won't come as a surprise if I say that this government will most probably be re-elected. That is not the issue or the strategy of our political involvement campaign.

They are already making decisions based on their next mandate and to lay the required groundwork. Such as the recent announcement of the new responsibilities that Chair of the Conseil du Trésor Sonia Lebel will take on, namely the health and education network negotiations.

That brings us back to the importance of our own position and our focus on the issues we're concerned about and that affect us. Political action means putting the many challenges we deal with, both at work and in our daily lives, front and centre. And that is exactly what we are going to do!

SO ARE WE!

You may remember that the CSQ held a two-phase consultation with its members, as outlined in the 2021-2024 action plan adopted during the June 2021 Congress. Members clearly indicated their support for greater political involvement of the CSQ during election periods.

Media releases, lobbying, participation in parliamentary committees, working committees and consultative bodies: the CSQ is already fully engaged in politics on a day-to-day basis. But in the coming months, we will do even more. And, most importantly, we will also encourage our members, as citizens, to do more.


Éric Gingras CSQ PRESIDENT



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VOTING... BUT SO MUCH MORE



In a democratic society, citizens have rights and responsibilities. Going to the polls every four years is among them, though some do not exercise this right. How can we encourage political involvement?

Audrey Parenteau
CHIEF EDITOR



A government of the people by the people: that is what democracy is all about. This political system provides all citizens with the opportunity to be actively involved, in some way, in decisions that impact their lives.

Voting in an election is undoubtedly the most meaningful gesture when taking part in a democratic society. And yet, the percentage of people who exercise that right is in decline throughout the western world. In Québec for instance, voter turnout at the provincial level has gone from 74.60% in September 2012 to 66.45% in October 2018. And in June of this year, voter participation in the most recent Ontario election was only 43.03%. That amounts to 6.1 million Ontarians who did not cast their vote.

The reasons given by those who do not vote revolve around the fact that “they just aren’t interested in politics, they do not understand what politics is all about, and they are not familiar with or do not recognize the candidates, the parties and the differences between their respective positions,” shows a Institut du Nouveau Monde (INM) study.

IS STAYING INFORMED OUR DUTY?

If voting is a right, is staying properly informed a responsibility, particularly before an election? To make an informed decision, getting to know the candidates, the parties and their election promises is crucial. And yet, in Québec, the information and political actions of groups such as labour unions or civil society organizations are governed by the Election Act during an election campaign.

“Although election campaigns ought to be milestones of our democracy, they are in fact periods that hinder the ability of groups to freely communicate their points of view. It makes no sense whatsoever,” states CSQ Vice President Mario Beauchemin.

Allowing groups to be politically involved, he believes, would foster discussions and debates on a number of social issues that impact the entire population and, in so doing, help inform voters.

DOING OUR RESEARCH

Citizens should look for reliable information which will help them examine and consider various issues. That way, they will have all the facts when comes the time to cast their ballot. How? Here are a few ideas:

- **Looking at the list of candidates.** It’s always a good idea to know who is up for election in our riding.
- **Visiting the web pages and websites of the candidates and political parties.** Generally, that is where we can find more information on their ideas and their commitments.
- **Comparing your ideas with theirs.** This will help pinpoint the most like-minded candidates.
- **Asking questions.** Whether in person, by email or through social media, asking questions can help

better understand a candidate’s point of view as well as challenge their ideas on issues you consider important.

- **Attending public debates.** They can sometimes help us make up our minds.
- **Following the news and current affairs.** It’s a great idea to stay informed, whether through traditional media or on social media. That being said, it is important to make sure that the content sources are reliable.
- **Talking things out with our loved ones.** Having a discussion about your values as well as the ideas conveyed by candidates and the various political parties can sometimes help see issues from a different angle and give the matter further consideration.

ELECTORAL REFORM

LONG OVERDUE

In September 2019, the Québec government introduced Bill 39 which would amend the electoral system. Though the idea has resurfaced periodically for some 50 years, the reform itself has yet to come to fruition.

Audrey Parenteau | CHIEF EDITOR

Bill 39 has been described as historic because our current system, commonly known as the British electoral system or first-past-the-post, has not been updated since 1862. Clearly, it no longer meets the expectations of the Québec population.

THE SYSTEM'S LIMITATIONS

The current electoral system falls short in a number of respects, particularly in causing significant discrepancies between the will of the voters and the actual composition of the National Assembly.

Currently, a person receiving the greater number of votes is elected in a given riding even if the winning candidate did not get a clear majority. And the party who wins the most ridings will form the government regardless of the total votes it received.

The Mouvement démocratie nouvelle (MDN), which heads the *Chaque voix compte* (Each vote counts) campaign, states that “none of Québec’s 41 elections have led to a National Assembly which truly reflects how people voted.” This electoral system has even led to the election of a party which had won fewer votes than the party forming the official opposition no fewer than five times.

FOR A PROPORTIONAL SYSTEM

A proportional system would provide fair representation of the will of the people and foster better representation for women,



political diversity and our regions. Over 100 countries around the globe have opted for this system.

It is “based on the principle that the number of seats held by a party reflects the proportion of votes cast in favour of this same party,” states the MDN website.

People across Québec have been calling for this reform for some time. Throughout our history, most political parties have come out in favour of this change. Coalition avenir Québec (CAQ) had made the commitment in a formal agreement to introduce a bill to change the electoral system. That, it has done. And yet, the reform has not been adopted.

YOUNG PEOPLE AND POLITICS

RESHAPING ACTIVISM



Photo iStock

We often hear that young people are turning away from politics. Some also criticize their lack of enthusiasm for voting. Are 18-to-34-year-olds really apolitical?

Sylvie Lemieux
COLLABORATION

"It's not that they aren't interested in politics but rather that they feel that political parties aren't interested in them," points out Sébastien Dallaire, General Manager at Ipsos Québec. In fact, a new Ipsos survey published in March 2022 revealed that only 14% of adults aged 18 to 30 feel that political parties pay special attention to issues that really matter to them such as mental health, the environment and social inequalities. Which means that many believe these topics should be given greater consideration in the electoral platforms of most political parties.

Obviously, this impacts the youth vote. In the 2018 provincial election, just over half (53.4%) of adults aged 35 or younger exercised their right to vote compared to 69.6% for voters aged 35 and older according to Élections Québec statistics. More young people voted in the 2012 election, with 62.7% of voters aged 18 to

24 heading to the polls—a phenomenon linked to the student movement against tuition hikes.

ABSTENTION DOES NOT EQUAL DISENGAGEMENT

"It is true that fewer young adults vote today than earlier generations. That being said, that doesn't mean that they are less committed politically. They simply get involved differently by attending demonstrations for instance, or volunteering for organizations that support a cause they believe in or signing petitions. They are by no means apathetic," states Valérie-Anne Mahéo, Assistant Professor in the Department of Political Science at Université Laval and member of the Center for the Study of Democratic Citizenship (Centre pour l'étude de la citoyenneté démocratique).

They are also less likely to subscribe to a party's ideas and to vote for the same

party from one election to the next, the way their older counterparts might do. Valérie-Anne Mahéo adds that “their involvement is somewhat ‘à la carte,’ more flexible and less ideological in terms of the parties’ election platforms.”

A QUESTION OF TRUST

And it is partly because they are in fact younger that they don’t vote as much. “There is a period of great transition between the ages of 18 and 34: we leave the family home, complete our studies and enter the job market, explains Valérie-Anne Mahéo. And this steep learning curve takes centre stage.”

“Studies have shown that, among other factors associated with low youth voter turnout on election day, young people feel a sense of helplessness and doubt about their ability to really understand the issues at stake. Another reason for their lack of interest is that they do not know or are unfamiliar with how our democratic institutions operate,” emphasizes Malorie Flon, Director General at the Institut du Nouveau Monde (INM).

The Ipsos survey also revealed that one in four young adults does not vote because they do not trust the political system. “They criticize politicians for not keeping their promises, explains Sébastien Dallaire. And one in five respondents believes that their vote doesn’t matter.”

FIGHTING VOTER APATHY

INM teams visit schools regularly to lead citizen involvement workshops. “Young people are hungry for meaning, notes Malorie Flon. They care about public affairs and community spirit. We just need to find how to channel this interest to encourage their involvement in the election process.”

And whose responsibility is that? “It’s a shared responsibility. Families, schools, unions and even businesses have a role to play in encouraging them to vote, without trying to sway anyone’s opinion of course,” says Malorie Flon.

Élections Québec has decided to tackle this challenge through various citizenship education programs across primary schools and high schools as well as francization schools and organizations.

Of course, political parties also have an important role to play in generating more interest from younger people. “Sadly, parties are more interested in wooing older voters than younger voters, which doesn’t encourage them to become politically involved,” states Valérie-Anne Mahéo. And yet, data from the Institut de la statistique du Québec shows that 18-to-35-year-olds have considerable political weight: they made up more than a quarter (27.7%) of all Québec voters in 2018, on par with the baby boomer generation.

“So their voice does matters, provided they choose to vote, she adds. And to achieve that goal, political parties need to reach them where they are, namely on social media.” Some politicians are more skilled in that endeavour than others. Jagmeet Singh, leader of the New Democratic Party, has used videos posted on Instagram and TikTok to connect with younger voters.

Let’s just hope that others follow suit.

Photo Sarah Fortin



Sarah Smith

Photo Étienne Boisvert



Maxime Boutin

Photo Mathieu Girard



Mélanie Déziel-Proulx

WHAT DO YOUNG PEOPLE THINK?

We asked a few thirtysomethings to share their thoughts on political involvement.

SARAH SMITH, 34

Sarah, a math teacher for first-year students in a Montréal suburb high school, is interested in politics despite a busy work and family schedule.

“I vote on election day but I don’t necessarily listen to the entire leaders’ debate, she says, laughing. But I do read up on each party’s electoral platform. I think it’s important to make an informed decision. I want to know who I’m voting for, not just put a check mark on a ballot.”

She is critical of the way some politicians do things, politically speaking. She dislikes candidates who tend to

criticize their opponents in order to raise their own profile. She still remembers how Françoise David, former Québec solidaire co-spokesperson, detailed her party’s platform during the leaders’ debate without ever tearing her opponents to shreds. “I found that truly inspiring, she adds. I’d much rather support those who can present their ideas in a positive manner.”

She takes advantage of election campaigns to help her students practise their statistics literacy by analyzing election results. “It helps them see how significant one vote can truly be.”

MAXIME BOUTIN, 32

Maxime grew up in a family where politics were frequently discussed. “My parents were civil servants: it’s easy to become interested in politics when you work for the government,” explains the secondary four Social Sciences teacher at Saint-Léonard-d’Aston’s École secondaire La Découverte, in the Centre-du-Québec region.

He exercises his right to vote at all three levels of government “because it’s important.” But he does find that

elected officials too often make decisions which are designed to get them re-elected rather than to really improve things.

“Things will change within the next decade once today’s younger people become the more significant demographic group. Political parties are going to have to take their opinions on universal issues like the environment into account.”

MÉLANIE DÉZIEL-PROULX, 35

This “committed feminist” is an active citizen, in many ways. She votes, but is also involved with organizations that advocate for causes she holds dear like the environment, women and members of the LGTBQ+ community.

“It helps me to better understand and appreciate different realities,” explains the Syndicat du soutien scolaire de l’Outaouais Vice President. It also gives her an opportunity to do her part and help change things.

She hopes to see a renewal, a shift in our political landscape. “Young people have lost faith in political parties who don’t always do what they say they will,” she argues. She hopes that parties will listen a little more carefully, be more active on social media—the main source of information for young people—and commit to a political vision that goes beyond the next election.

THE GLORY AND THE MISERY OF SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT

To understand activist burnout, we need to examine the neoliberal thinking that requires us to move very fast, always faster and faster. The lack of time forces to collectively choose the easy option by always relying on the same voices, those of the rare activists who dare to take the floor in the public arena.

Marilyse Hamelin | COLLABORATION



Marilyse Hamelin studied journalism at UQAM before working in Québec media. she is an author, a freelance writer and an independent editor.

I stood up, overflowing with anger, enraged by the pervasive sexism, visible everywhere. It was long before #MeToo and, closer to home, before #AgressionNonDénoncée and Décider entre hommes. It was at the outset of the 2010s, and the new feminist revolution had yet to be started.

I titled my blog *La semaine rose*, a tribute to the pioneers of the defunct magazine *La vie en rose*. I wanted to spark a social conversation that might make things happen. Then, everything came together: media interviews, speaking tours (women's groups, CEGEPs, universities, unions, etc.). I wrote one book, and then another one. Without realizing it, I now had two feet firmly planted in activism. I had become a leading figure, one of those people who exist only for a cause.

Over the years, I became a "standby feminist," almost a mascot or a caricature. I sensed that things were not going well, but I had to carry on, for the cause. And then one day, everything froze: I couldn't go on any more. Just thinking about it made me nauseated, gave me a stomach ache. I was exhausted. I gave up all together. I ended a high-profile column in a renowned magazine. I stopped giving lectures, and I declined all radio interview invitations.

SURVIVING ACTIVIST BURNOUT

Happily, a renaissance ensued, along with the joy of rediscovering myself as a multi-dimensional human being, obviously a feminist, but also interested in myriad cultural issues and topics. My activist burnout, coinciding with the pandemic, forced me to redefine myself. I am now an editor and a writer. I take pleasure in circulating ideas. I stay away from microphones and projectors, except to promote books.

I don't know if I'm still an activist, but the quest for social justice underpins all my thinking: gender equality, equality between women, all women, equality for trans and non-binary people, equality for people with disabilities, anti-racism and equality for Indigenous peoples, environmental protection and ecofeminism.

OUR COLLECTIVE RESPONSIBILITY

We need to further our thinking and discussion so that individuals are not forced to bear the brunt of burnout. It is important to refrain from the reflex of turning toward activists as though they held all the answers, to stop labelling them, and to stop denying their right to be human beings and thus their right to experience contradictions. In a world where everything happens in the fast lane, simplistic thinking is often a tantalizing commodity...

As organizations and more broadly as a society and in the media, we must avoid resorting to preconceived ideas. Instead, we can ask activists to bring their perspectives to the forum we wish to provide them. For example, instead of saying “here is the topic of our feminist congress; you are feminists, so come and talk to us about such and such an angle on feminism,” why not check whether or not they have an angle to propose? The outcome might exceed our expectations.

It is important to understand that activists give of their time to enter into a dialogue with society and that they are not there to provide a mere “service” to organizations. We frequently encounter clientelist relationships, even in the union sphere of influence. As a result, we are collectively sticking straws into the activist, who is often working freelance and in precarious conditions, in order to extract all the juice.

NOT THE ONLY ONE

Martine Delvaux, writer, university professor and feminist activist, is among the committed people who “make the effort to speak in public.” It is important for her to address the vast spectrum of exhaustion, because between *burnout* and a certain fatigue, if not inevitable fatigue, there are several rungs on the ladder...

“I don’t know if I was exhausted, but I regularly felt the need to step aside when things started to become invasive,” she recalls. “I turned away somewhat from the media to concentrate on writing.” She says “I needed to protect myself from cynicism, the feeling that my work had no purpose.”

This sense of loss of value of one’s involvement counts as one of the symptoms of a fatigue that can lead to activist burnout. That is why it is important to be attentive to the signs, despite the importance of the cause being championed. In an economic system that destroys not only the environment but also people, it is important to listen to one’s survival instinct.



STRENGTH IN NUMBERS

Making a difference. Doing one's part. Advancing workers' rights and championing social causes. There are thousands of reasons why people decide to get involved. *CSQ Magazine* met with three longstanding union activists.

Anne-Marie Tremblay | COLLABORATION



Diane Bélanger

FOR THE KIDS

"Speaking up for our children." That, in a nutshell, is what drives Diane Bélanger's unionism. And always has. A psychoeducator for some 35 years, she decided to step up as deputy delegate the day funds allocated to her and her colleagues in a Causap-scal school in the lower St. Lawrence region—where she had been working for 15 years—were cut. "I couldn't believe they were cutting back on services. I was barely meeting the kids' needs, despite working full time."

Her union involvement now spans some 20 years, including 10 years as President of the Syndicat des professionnelles et professionnels de l'éducation du Bas-St-Laurent. "I soon realized the hardships experienced by some of my colleagues, due in part to school board mergers and what we saw as increasingly dehumanized management practices." This role was tailor-made for one who describes herself as "not afraid to speak her mind when dealing with employer representatives."

Her involvement also helped break the isolation some education professionals experience, each in their own schools. "By getting involved in CSQ decision-making bodies, I realized that the Centrale could impact political decisions like school board mergers. Because the more of us there are, the more we can move things forward. I also discovered people from various walks of life with many common interests who aspired to change

the world." A wonderfully rich networking opportunity.

Getting involved is, quite simply, crucial for Diane Bélanger. It helps make sure that children have access to the services they truly need. "We were successful, through negotiation and by intervening with political officials, in promoting professional services in public education. Today, you can find more than one professional per school instead of one resource person for several school institutions. That certainly was not the case when I first got involved."

Despite these small victories, there is still much to do: instead of hiring more professionals, we see parents being encouraged to turn to the private sector when waiting lists get longer. And there lies the importance of staying involved to keep up the pressure on our governments.

KNOW AND ASSERT YOUR RIGHTS

The “Aha moment” happened for Alain Sauvageau when an Occupational Health and Safety position opened up at his Cegep’s local union. While he admits that he initially resisted anything union-related, he still read the entire collective agreement when he was first hired. “My mother always told me to read all my contracts. I followed her advice and, for a whole month, it was my bedtime reading,” explains the Cegep de Granby Chemistry Laboratory Work Technician.

Alain Sauvageau had such a good handle on the subject that the union actively courted him in the hope he would get involved, though he turned then down several times. “I finally agreed to become the Occupational Health and Safety Advisor because I believed I could really help my colleagues avoid occupational diseases or serious injuries. I knew that I would be useful.” Through his union role, he could hold employers to account and insist they prevent potential dangers.

This first incursion convinced him that unions weren’t a “pain in the neck,” but decision-making bodies that changed workers’ lives for the better. Twenty years on, he is still actively involved as advisor and Secretary for the Syndicat du personnel de soutien du Cégep de Granby – Haute-Yamaska. “It really sparked something deep inside me: I’ve been Mobilization Director, Vice President and President. I even served one term at the Fédération du personnel de soutien de l’enseignement supérieur.”

Alain Sauvageau really enjoyed being involved with the collective agreement negotiations. It helped him make sense of the arguments on all sides and to better understand the various clauses. “I remember this one time, a colleague came to see me to tell me she was pregnant. We went to the boss’s office, where I said that she couldn’t work in the laboratory anymore and that we had to find something else for her to do.”

It’s actually members’ gratitude that encourages this advisor to remain involved in his local union. “It’s our members’ appreciation that energizes me. When they ask for advice, or thank me for my help, for answering their questions, for helping them. That’s what pushes us to keep on fighting, so that everyone can have decent and fair working conditions.”

Alain Sauvageau believes that there is still much to do to see the support staff properly recognized. “People often say that public service workers have it really good. And yet, our salary remains below the average wage of Québec earners and below Canadian salaries.”

Being involved in his union remains, quite simply, as crucial in 2022 as when he first stepped up in 2003. “Once you call it quits, there isn’t anyone left to protect what we’ve achieved in the past fifty years, like pay equity.”



Alain Sauvageau



Claudia Lupien

FULLY INVOLVED, NATURALLY

Being involved in a union body is a great opportunity to take a very broad look at our society, believes early childhood educator Claudia Lupien who first got involved in her union in the early 2000s. Currently Executive Committee Secretary-Treasurer at the Syndicat des intervenantes en petite enfance de Montréal, she has held most of the organization's positions and participated in various committees.

Unionism goes far beyond working conditions, regardless of their importance. "We can also impact society as a whole by fostering certain values or even supporting causes which have bearing not only on unionized employees, like raising the minimum wage. I believe that advocating for social justice is a good thing." She adds that it is also an opportunity to connect with people who share the same values. All the more so given that it is the sum of everyone's talents that truly makes a difference. "A labour union is the sum of all its parts, of all its members. Every single raised fist matters."

She goes on to say that "any progress we experience in life is directly related to activism. I believe that everybody should embrace and advocate for at least one cause. Personally, I

support several issues. I participate in marches or share information on different topics related to feminism, human rights or LGBTQ+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and others) issues, all causes I believe in."

Getting involved in her union was only natural for Claudia Lupien. "Either we feel compelled and our involvement is natural or our inner critic demands that we change the way things are. In my case, it was a bit of both. I also wanted to add my own two cents, to share my ideas, my strengths. And it's extremely rewarding to participate, to see how things work from the inside even though there is a great deal of transparency, to be a part of this extraordinary machine."

She also feels that, with her unionism, she is doing her part for her community. "These decision-making bodies are essential to better working conditions, but they're also very rewarding. I am very proud of the work we do and appreciate the opportunity to take on personal challenges. For instance, you can learn new things, like how to speak in public. Even if, one day, I decided to step away from unionism, this sense of belonging will always stay within me," she summarizes.

WHEN POLITICS HAS NO AGE

They were not 35 years old when they were elected head of their city. Yet they are certainly not lacking in wisdom, vision or leadership. A portrait of three mayors in the prime of life who decided to get involved to make a difference.

Amélie Cournoyer | COLLABORATION

A youthful tide swept over Québec during the 2021 municipal elections. The *Ose le municipal* campaign launched by the Union des municipalités du Québec to encourage young people to get involved in municipal politics may well have had something to do with the groundswell of change: throughout the province, 1 089 young people from 18 to 34 years old ran

as candidates for the office of municipal councillor and 62 for the office of mayor. More than half were elected to office (665 municipal councillors and 33 mayors).

CSQ Le Magazine met with 3 young people who have held the office of mayor since November 7, 2021 to discuss political involvement and commitment.



SÉBASTIEN MARCIL

Mayor of Saint-Roch-de-L'Achigan



“Municipal government is an incredible platform for taking action. We are able to change things very quickly, unlike the provincial government, at times.”

– Sébastien Marcil

In 2017, Sébastien Marcil left Québec City and his job as communications advisor with the office of the leader of the official opposition at the National Assembly to seek a quieter life for his young family. After visiting several cities and towns north of Montréal, on stopping over at Saint-Roch-de-L'Achigan, it was love at first sight.

TAKING ACTION

Two years after his arrival, he became the spokesperson of a group of citizens opposing the construction of an airfield in their village of 5500 residents. “It thrust me to the forefront of citizen activism,” he recalls. Thanks to his leadership and his experience in the field of communications, the new *Achiganois* contributed to stopping the project. Without realizing it, he had just taken his first steps in municipal politics.

In 2021, many citizens of the small municipality in Lanaudière approached him to run for the office of mayor. That was all it took for the young man working as a press officer at the CSQ to be convinced to declare his candidacy. “In the era of climate change, there are many questions about what shape land use planning should take. We represent the younger generations, and if something challenges us, we have to take action,” asserts the mayor who says he remains true to the values he inherited from the CSQ, such as the environment, equality between women and men, social development, education and educational success, among others.

On November 7, 2021, Sébastien Marcil was elected with over 82% of the vote, becoming, at age 34, the youngest mayor in the history of the village. “We had to introduce IT into the mayor’s office by buying a computer,” he says, a smile in his voice. The young man holds an undergraduate degree in applied political studies as well as a graduate diploma (DESS) in public management.

MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Being a young elected official and “not a native-born resident” brings its share of challenges, he acknowledges. “Sometimes I have the feeling that I have to work twice as hard to demonstrate my abilities, but at the same time, I have solid support from the village population.”

He believes that his experience in provincial politics has given him a leg up in his new duties as mayor. “Municipal government is an incredible platform for taking action,” he says. “We are able to change things very quickly, unlike the provincial government, at times.”

The motivation for getting involved in municipal politics stems from a profound desire to commit to action. “I have always needed to work in jobs that resonate with my values and that give me the sense of changing the world a little,” he says. “If we add up each gesture, we sometimes have the impression of having made a difference.”

CATHERINE FOURNIER

Mayor of Longueuil

It was during her CEGEP studies, at age 19, that Catherine Fournier started to take an interest in politics and to campaign for the Parti Québécois and the Bloc québécois. "I saw politics as a way not only to get involved in my community but also to participate in championing great ideas for society, as a means of changing things in a very tangible way," says the young woman who holds a bachelor's degree in economics with a minor in political science.

THINK GLOBALLY, ACT LOCALLY

In 2016, the 24-year-old was elected MNA in the district of Marie-Victorin, becoming the youngest woman MNA in the history of Québec's National Assembly.

Five years later, she declared her candidacy for the office of the mayor of Longueuil. "I said to myself: if we succeed in making progress in Longueuil with the major national issues that have always interested me, from confidence in our democratic actions, the fight against climate change, to housing issues, I think it will have an impact across Québec. I am trying to apply the famous dictum "think globally, but act locally," asserts the author of *L'audace d'agir*, a book published in 2017 that calls on her generation, the millennials, to commit to action.

A MATTER OF TIME

Catherine Fournier has learned "on the job" that the organization of an election campaign in a large city like Longueuil requires a great deal of time and money. "I started from nothing," she says, stressing the scope of the task. A challenge that the politician met hands down by getting herself elected at age 29, clinching the title of "youngest woman mayor in the history of Longueuil." Although her age was not an obstacle during the campaign, she believes that it is probably because she had already been involved in politics for six years. "People have known me for a number of years. They see that I am able to deliver the goods, that I move the issues forward," she explains.

In her view, time is her main obstacle. Heading the fifth largest municipality in Québec comes with an infinite list of tasks and atypical hours that could well intrude on all her personal time. The mayor acknowledges that work-life balance is a daily challenge. "I try to set limits, even if it's sort of in my nature to agree to everything that comes along. That's what's difficult when you are doing a job that is also your passion," she concludes.



“ I saw politics as a way not only to get involved in my community but also to take part in championing great ideas for society.”

– Catherine Fournier

MICHAËL PILOTE

Mayor of Baie-Saint-Paul



Since adolescence, Michaël Pilote has continually committed to project after project. His volunteer commitment was recognized in 2013 when he was awarded the Lieutenant-Governor's Youth Medal. Declaring his candidacy for municipal councillor in his home town in 2017 went without saying, although he was only 24 years old at the time. "I have always stepped up to the plate. For me, going into politics was a natural move along a continuum."

FROM ONE GENERATION TO THE NEXT

When the former mayor of Baie-Saint-Paul, Jean Fortin, announced his retirement in 2021 after 9 terms, the young municipal councillor and nurse clinician by profession started thinking about the possibility of replacing him. In the end, the race for the office of mayor was between Michaël Pilote and the municipal councillor Luc A. Goudreau, a retiree. In the early weeks of the election campaign, everyone was talking about the issue of age in the municipality of just over 7000 residents. "People were saying that I was too young and that I should prove myself before occupying that office," he remembers.

But the holder of a bachelor's degree in nursing and a master's degree in public administration quickly won the confidence of the public. "As the campaign carried on, I heard less talk about my age. It was a burden at the beginning, but it became a huge positive at the end," he continues. Result: the 28-year-old *Baie-Saint-Paulois* won the election with over 86% of the vote.

"Young people are full of surprises. We aren't perfect. We'll hit home runs and foul balls, but all in all, we are capable of quite the batting average!"

– Michaël Pilote

TRUST YOUNG PEOPLE

Today, people no longer mention Michaël Pilote's age. "People have come to trust me," he says. After several months in office, the mayor feels that he has ownership of the issues, and he has put responsible development of the city at the top of the list. "Currently, there are so many projects in Baie-Saint-Paul," he explains. People come knocking at our door and they are asking for quick answers. But I want to take the time to reflect, to do things the right way."

What Michaël Pilote has learned from his experience in municipal politics to date, is that people must trust the upcoming generations. "Young people are full of surprises," he asserts, pursuing a baseball metaphor. "We aren't perfect. We'll hit both home runs and foul balls, but all in all, we are capable of quite the batting average!"

BEYOND OUR BORDERS

Solidarity is among the key values of the labour movement. And it shines through not only here at home but around the world.

Luc Allaire | CSQ ADVISOR

It is through a shared struggle for better working conditions that solidarity has grown within the labour movement. Workers realized that it is only by being united that they could move forward. That is how they first achieved equal pay for equal work, and then equal pay for work of equal value.

Solidarity, while key at the local level, is of equal importance internationally given that many issues, namely poverty, inequality or the fight for quality public services, transcend borders.

SHARING AND LEARNING FROM ONE ANOTHER

Active on the international stage, the CSQ expresses its solidarity through its affiliation with organizations such as Education International (EI), Public Services International (PSI) as well as the Trade Union Advisory Committee to the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (TUAC-OECD).

Through its involvement in these organizations, the CSQ takes part in discussion and information-sharing forums on various topics such as digital technology development, tackling tax evasion, academic freedom as well as the privatization of public services which especially impacts health and education networks.

Thanks to these affiliations, the CSQ is apprised of any success achieved by its colleagues in other countries. It is also informed of any proposals put forward in international forums attended by our governments. With this information, the CSQ can keep a



vigilant eye on setbacks experienced elsewhere which may threaten workers here in Québec.

Through the *Comité syndical francophone de l'éducation et de la formation* (CSFEF), an organization accredited by the *Organisation internationale de la Francophonie* (OIF), the CSQ demonstrates its solidarity with French-speaking colleagues in other countries.

COOPERATION PROJECTS

And that's not all. The CSQ is also involved in cooperation projects with African, Haitian and Latin American unions, providing support through capacity building activities.

The CSQ has helped unions in Chad, Niger, Columbia and the Democratic Republic of Congo set up study circles in educational institutions, supporting teachers in addressing issues they deal with on a daily basis. This grassroots unionism allowed Colombian colleagues to develop schools as territories of peace, and Congolese colleagues to fight for free education in order for girls to have access to basic education.

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