

Did the Church of Scientology pay what it owed its employees?



Church, CNESST have reached out-of-court settlement in case of underpaid workers



Gaétan Pouliot · CBC News · Posted: May 06, 2019 4:00 AM EDT | Last Updated: May 6, 2019



In Quebec, the Church of Scientology has offices in Quebec City and Montreal. (Maxime Corneau/Radio-Canada)

We will never know if the Church of Scientology paid its employees the hundreds of thousands of dollars that Quebec's labour standards board ruled they are owed. The parties have reached a confidential, out-of-court settlement.

The board, known by its French acronym CNESST, had sought more than \$750,000 on behalf of 62 people who worked at the Church of Scientology in Quebec City. Following an investigation, it concluded those employees had been underpaid and were owed pay for statutory holidays or vacation time.

The CNESST asked Quebec Superior Court to order the organization to pay the wages owed, plus interest and indemnities, for a total of more than \$900,000.

The CNESST opened its investigation last June, after a report by Radio-Canada's investigative program *Enquête* found that church workers were earning far less than Quebec's minimum wage.

Radio-Canada reviewed pay stubs that showed members of the Church of Scientology had been paid below minimum wage. For example, one member was paid \$70 for nearly 40 hours of work in a week — less than \$2 an hour.

According to other pay slips, some workers received less than \$40 for a week of work.



Église de Scientology
665, rue St-Joseph, Québec,
QC, G1K 3C1

D/FBO MORE Div: 7R

Date : 14 December 2017,

W E : **21 December 2017**

Staff **FDN**

Dépôt jeudi le : 14 December 2017

Heures Total : **38.75**
Unités poste : 150
Unités total 198
Allocation : 69.57
+ Book Comm : 0
+ Bonus : 0

Unité Ancienneté : 38
Unités formation : 5
Valeur de l'unité : \$0.35
+ REMISES : 0
+ Ajustement, 0
Montant paye brute : **69.57**

In this pay stub, obtained by Radio-Canada, a staff member of the Church of Scientology of Quebec appears to have been paid just under \$70 for nearly 40 hours of work. (Radio-Canada)

Out-of-court settlement

With the out-of-court settlement reached between the parties, the case is now closed.

A spokesperson for the CNESST, Geneviève Trudel, said **the terms of the settlement are confidential** and would not comment further.

"It is plausible that the employer paid the full amount, or just part of the sum. It is impossible to know," said Dalia Gesualdi-Fecteau, a professor in the legal sciences department at the Université du Québec à Montréal.

She said it would be "very rare" for such an agreement not to include some kind of payment.

The Church of Scientology did not respond to questions from Radio-Canada.

Religious workers

It's not known if the Church of Scientology is now conforming to Quebec's labour laws. Out-of-court settlements with the CNESST generally do not include such commitments, said Gesualdi-Fecteau.

This is not the first time the Church of Scientology has been investigated by Quebec's labour standards board. Radio-Canada has identified **two other cases, one in Quebec City and one in Montreal, which have also been settled out of court.**

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A spokesperson for the Church of Scientology maintained last year that its personnel were **not** "employees" but rather "religious workers."

"They voluntarily contribute to the activities of the church and its humanitarian goals. They don't work for monetary gain, but to help others," said Michelle Lacombe, the group's director of public affairs for Quebec.

However, **the concept of "religious workers" does not exist in Quebec's labour law.**

"I have the impression that it's a structural way of having cheap labour," said Gesualdi-Fecteau.



Documents reviewed by Radio-Canada suggest the Church of Scientology is still recruiting workers in Quebec. (Maxime Corneau/Radio-Canada)

In recruitment mode

Since the labour board's investigation into the working conditions of Church of Scientology employees, the organization continues to recruit personnel, according to new internal documents obtained by Radio-Canada.

Last fall, "bonuses" between \$50 and \$200 were offered for recruiting "full-time" workers.

"Staff are awarded a bonus for each personnel member signed OR re-signed for two-and-a-half years or five years," reads a Church of Scientology document addressed to employees that suggests contracts have been signed with new workers.

"Play the game and RECRUIT!" concludes the message.

The Church of Scientology has offices in Quebec City and Montreal, and is present elsewhere in Canada and around the world.

If you have information about the Church of Scientology, contact the reporter at gaetan.pouliot@radio-canada.ca.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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