



## NATIONAL CITIZENS INQUIRY

Quebec, QC

May 12, 2023

Day 2

### EVIDENCE

(Translated from the French)

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**Witness 8: Stéphane Hamel**

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[00:00:00]

**Chantale Collard**

So good morning. For those just joining us, my name is Chantale Collard. I'm a lawyer and I'm acting as prosecutor for the National Citizens Inquiry here in Quebec City.

So Monsieur Hamel.

**Stéphane Hamel**

Hello.

**Chantale Collard**

Hello. First of all, thank you very much for agreeing to testify here at the Inquiry.

**Stéphane Hamel**

Thank you for participating in this exercise: it is overdue.

**Chantale Collard**

First, we'll proceed with your identification. So simply state your full name.

**Stéphane Hamel**

My name is Stéphane Hamel.

**Chantale Collard**

And I'll swear you in. So do you solemnly declare to tell the truth, only the truth? Say: "I do" or "I swear."

**Stéphane Hamel**

Yes, I swear.

**Chantale Collard**

Perfect. So Monsieur Stéphane Hamel, I'll let you introduce yourself. But first, I should mention that you've had major political involvement, including being a founding member of the CAQ [Coalition Avenir Québec].

**Stéphane Hamel**

Yes.

**Chantale Collard**

So you've had a close relationship with Monsieur Legault and you can tell us all about that. And so the question today is, first of all, your motivation for coming here to testify before the Commission, your primary motivation. And to begin, I'll let you talk briefly about your occupation because you're not just in politics. You also have another career path: you're in business, you've also studied computer science, and so on. So you can tell us about your professional career.

**Stéphane Hamel**

Yes, but not anymore because it's extremely difficult for me to find work. Usually, I work in very large companies. And since I had my episode with the CAQ—which became very public—I no longer have any possibility of getting contracts because I'm a contract worker and large companies and the government seem to have flagged me. So it's been very, very difficult for me over the last three years.

As for my career path, at heart, I'm mostly a computer scientist. I got my first computer when I was twelve and I was making my own games at the time. I enjoyed making them, not playing with them. So I also trained in computer science and accounting at UQAM [Université du Québec à Montréal].

At the start of my career, I was Operations Manager for a small company in Montreal, and that's where I practised my accounting. I also had my first attempt in business management and all the processes they can have for companies.

Then I designed a computer system for the major oil companies in Canada. So with my father, I started a company called Les logiciels Infosys. And I was the architect and coder, more or less, of this system which is used for the global management of major companies such as Ultramar, Petro Canada, Shell, and many others with whom I worked in the United States, Canada, and many other countries.

I had a few partners when I bought the company and I was defrauded by my co-shareholders. So I spent about seven years fighting with the justice system and I know the justice system from that experience; in my opinion, it is a disaster for ordinary citizens.

**Chantale Collard**

Monsieur Hamel, thank you for giving us a brief overview of your background; we will yet see a link. Maybe we can't see the link between IT, politics, the pandemic—what we call a

pandemic. So one of the first questions is, of course, your political involvement. So we're talking within the party, so as not to confuse the two: the government and the party are two different entities.

[00:05:00]

**Stéphane Hamel**

Yes. I was an activist with the CAQ from the very beginning; there weren't many of us.

**Chantale Collard**

What year?

**Stéphane Hamel**

It was the end of 2011–2012.

**Chantale Collard**

More than 10 years.

**Stéphane Hamel**

So really at the very beginning of the CAQ. I'm a founding member of the CAQ. I took part in the first campaign in Terrebonne with Monsieur Gaétan Barrette, who was my MNA [Member of the (Quebec) National Assembly] at the time, my candidate in the riding of Terrebonne. It was a campaign full of developments. Monsieur Barrette is very talkative.

From then on, I took part in all the CAQ conventions. I've really cut my teeth in politics; and I'm particularly interested in the philosophy of politics, sociology, and all that.

So I did my homework; and my goal was to enter parliament in Quebec one day because in computer systems or government ways of doing things, they spend billions and billions of dollars on systems and nothing ever works. And even today, there's nothing that works, especially in the healthcare system. And we saw the disasters with the Société de l'assurance automobile du Québec [Quebec Automobile Insurance Company]. They don't seem to be able to come up with a system that works, whereas in all my years in the private sector, I've never seen such disasters. Of course, we're no angels: sometimes there may be things that don't work, but I've never seen projects cancelled and restarted *ad vitam æternam* [to life everlasting].

**Chantale Collard**

All right. So Monsieur Hamel, we're going to start in 2020. There's a link between the pandemic and politics. I'd like you to tell us about that link and how it affected you.

**Stéphane Hamel**

Starting in 2018, I participated in two campaigns: in Vimont and in Laval-des-Rapides. And at that time, I became president of the Laval-des-Rapides riding [association] for the CAQ. When the pandemic started, we had a lot of Zoom meetings. And what kept bugging me was

that no one was talking about the elephant in the room. In all the meetings, I tried to bring the subject to the table, and it was as if I had eyes looking at me with—!

**Chantale Collard**

How did you bring up the subject?

**Stéphane Hamel**

I brought up the subject as: What's the point of all this? What did the CAQ, as a party, do to try and smooth things over? Because what I was seeing at the time was that the government was doing everything it could to stir up fear. I expect politics to bring people together, not try to scare them in ways that I've never seen. So that's what it was all about at the beginning because at the beginning we hadn't even had any discussions yet.

**Chantale Collard**

Of what point in time are we speaking?

**Stéphane Hamel**

Really early in the pandemic.

**Chantale Collard**

So April 2020, around then?

**Stéphane Hamel**

Late March, early April 2020 when everyone was like deer on the highway facing the high beams. Everyone was wondering what was going on. My first observation was that nobody was talking about it.

**Chantale Collard**

Very true. By the way, when you broached the subject, what was their reaction? How did they respond? Were the words clear? Or was it something hinted at when you talked to the party?

[00:10:00]

**Stéphane Hamel**

People on the party executive, in particular, were saying, "We mustn't ask questions because it's absolutely essential that the whole population be on the same wavelength—because it could be dangerous to have people leading others elsewhere." And I could understand at some level saying, "We've got a pandemic, an extremely dangerous virus, so don't disseminate information that could lead people to disregard health measures."

**Chantale Collard**

Which, at the time, had just been imposed.

**Stéphane Hamel**

Which had just been imposed. We remember, at the very beginning it was, “Stay at home.” Then there was a crescendo in the measures. That was at the beginning. As time went on—over the next few months—it became increasingly clear that it was people who were already at the end of their lives who were succumbing to COVID. So I asked these questions at meetings. And we were just speaking among ourselves; we were not in the public eye.

**Chantale Collard**

Yes, that’s right.

**Stéphane Hamel**

We were speaking among ourselves, the executives and all that. “Aren’t you being a little too alarmist?” And it wasn’t—

**Chantale Collard**

That was the wrong question.

**Stéphane Hamel**

These were not questions to ask, even between us. We were not to talk about such things, absolutely not. It was an *omertà* [a code of silence], already at the start.

**Chantale Collard**

Already at the start? Within the party itself?

**Stéphane Hamel**

Within the party itself. So for me—someone interested in politics for a long time—I said: “But that’s not democracy. We should debate this.” On the other hand, I can understand that in the beginning, we wanted to be reassuring. But we weren’t reassuring people, we were leading them into fear—increasingly so!

**Chantale Collard**

At the time, you were wondering about the narrative that the people were led to believe. So it was very well orchestrated. That’s what I understand.

**Stéphane Hamel**

It was made clear that we were not to discuss government decisions.

**Chantale Collard**

So it was very clear.

**Stéphane Hamel**

That’s right. At the time, I was president of Laval-des-Rapides, and Monsieur Legault came up with an initiative which he called: “Je contribue” [“I contribute”].

**Chantale Collard**

So “Je contribue” was an initiative to get people to donate their time in CHSLDs, RPAs and so on [long-term care and seniors’ residences].

**Stéphane Hamel**

Yes. And I wanted to give a bit of my professional background at the outset—precisely to put into context the fact that I’m someone who asks a lot of questions due to my work. It’s part of my job to ask questions in order to find solutions and computerize processes. So you need to ask a lot of questions to understand.

At the time, I was also very naive, as Amélie [Paul] would say: I was naive too. I decided to go and work in a CHSLD to lend a hand.

**Chantale Collard**

What was your main occupation in the CHSLDs?

**Stéphane Hamel**

I was a service assistant, so a bit of a jack-of-all-trades. We fed the residents, helped them get dressed, emptied the garbage cans: it was really a little bit of everything.

**Chantale Collard**

But you were in direct contact with the residents?

**Stéphane Hamel**

I was in direct contact with the residents, yes.

**Chantale Collard**

So you were able to observe things?

**Stéphane Hamel**

Yes.

**Chantale Collard**

Can you tell us about it?

**Stéphane Hamel**

Yes, absolutely.

[00:15:00]

At the very start, I was greeted with suspicion by the establishment’s management because I was president of the CAQ, the party in power. But that had nothing to do with it. I could see what was going on; we heard, “the lack of staff.” I was naive enough to say, “I’ll go and help.”

**Chantale Collard**

You wanted to do a good deed?

**Stéphane Hamel**

Well, not just a good deed.

**Chantale Collard**

But for the community?

**Stéphane Hamel**

It was really: "I can't stand seeing people left to fend for themselves like that!"

**Chantale Collard**

Absolutely.

**Stéphane Hamel**

I think there are a lot of people who were there, like me, who worked for "Je contribue" for the same reason. They can't stand to see people die like that.

**Chantale Collard**

Absolutely.

**Stéphane Hamel**

All alone in their excrement, not being fed. And I was hired at CHSLD St. Jude in Laval.

**Chantale Collard**

What exactly did you observe at this CHSLD?

**Stéphane Hamel**

I have a few anecdotes. There's a big corridor on the first floor. There was a lady who was constantly going out because the lady smoked. So the door was right next to her room. Then there was a gentleman in a room just across from her, and the door was right next to him. He wanted to go outside. The gentleman was no longer capable but he was a gentleman with all his faculties. He was a very fine gentleman. I even had conversations with him. He said, "Can you help me? Let's go for a stroll." On top of this, it was a beautiful spring day in May; the first really beautiful, sunny day of 23-24 degrees. The gentleman said to me, "I can't take it anymore, I want to go outside."

**Chantale Collard**

Ah yes.



**Stéphane Hamel**

So I went out of my way. I went to see the management. I said, “The gentleman wants to go out, so I’ll go with him.” This was just as I’d done with the lady going out for a smoke. “I can take them both out at the same time. It’s outside: there’s no danger. I’ll keep them away from each other.” I got an answer like, “Yes, maybe” from a nurse. Then he passed it on to management and suddenly they said, “No, we can’t do that.” I said, “But the lady can already go out!”

**Chantale Collard**

So you were denied.

**Stéphane Hamel**

And it stayed that way. When I arrived at the CHSLD the next morning, they’d put bars on the gentleman’s door!

**Chantale Collard**

No.

**Stéphane Hamel**

To make sure he didn’t go outside. His bedroom door! And I found that absolutely terrible.

Another anecdote which took place a few weeks later: there was a gentleman I had become very attached to. He was Monsieur Labbé. We’d had several conversations and he was in his right mind. Then at a certain point, I heard some confusion: a problem had come up, but I was so busy taking care of a number of residents that I didn’t see it. It happened around 7:30 in the morning.

Then I let it go. At half past one or one in the afternoon, I went to see the gentleman. I didn’t know what had happened. Since the very beginning of the day, the gentleman had needed his diaper changed. And supposedly he had been aggressive in his request, but I know the gentleman and he’s not an aggressive man. And at one o’clock, he exploded. And they’d been putting off changing him since early in the morning because they said he was aggressive.

So I talked about it with some of my colleagues who were there as helpers like me. Because I didn’t have the skills or the strength to do that job—to change a diaper—one of the others took it upon himself to do it.

[00:20:00]

So all the employees were supposedly forbidden to do so. At that point, I escalated the situation up to management and told them that the gentleman wanted to lodge a complaint. I was immediately, forcibly thrown out.

**Chantale Collard**

Okay. So basically, you were there as a helper. You wanted to help this person.



**Stéphane Hamel**

Yes.

**Chantale Collard**

The complaint process is something to which we are entitled.

**Stéphane Hamel**

Yes.

**Chantale Collard**

Was there a link—and you'll get to this—between your ouster from the CAQ and what happened?

**Stéphane Hamel**

That was my first strike. I've had three strikes with the CAQ.

**Chantale Collard**

Okay.

**Stéphane Hamel**

When it happened, I asked for the phone number or e-mail address of the director of the CISSS [Integrated health and social services centres] in Laval and I wrote a complaint for Monsieur Labbé. I sent the complaint directly to him. And then the director of the CISSS called a minister—I don't remember which—and complained that I had made a complaint for the gentleman.

**Chantale Collard**

So he complained that you had made a complaint.

**Stéphane Hamel**

So the minister called the CAQ leadership and I then received calls telling me that I had no right to file a complaint on behalf of this gentleman.

**Chantale Collard**

Did they elaborate on the reasons? Did they send you a letter? What happened next?

**Stéphane Hamel**

No. Once again, there was no debate.

**Chantale Collard**

Okay.

**Stéphane Hamel**

And I was told that I was going too far and that I wasn't in solidarity with the CAQ and the CAQ executive. And I was told very, very clearly that I had to keep quiet.

**Chantale Collard**

It was clear.

**Stéphane Hamel**

It was clear.

**Chantale Collard**

But it wasn't in writing, if I understand correctly?

**Stéphane Hamel**

No, it was all verbal. I got a lot of phone calls, and the word went around: "What are you doing?" Well, I was naive. I complained, which is the man's right. The gentleman didn't have the capacity to do that. So there you have it.

**Chantale Collard**

You say this was your first strike. There have been two. Now we'll come to the second strike.

**Stéphane Hamel**

The second strike was the CAQ blitz in every riding to call its citizens because everyone was still in shock. So they said, "We'll call citizens to see how they're doing," which seemed fine until the directive was to call them, but also to offer them a free membership card for a year. So I said, "No, I won't do that." But it looks like everyone cooperated and did it. And there were even lists of who performed the best and sold the most membership cards.

**Chantale Collard**

Sold, given.

**Stéphane Hamel**

So if it would have been a matter of calling citizens to encourage them, "Are you doing well?" and all that. But to be judged by the number of membership cards we sell! Because that's automatically renewable.

**Chantale Collard**

Absolutely.

**Stéphane Hamel**

I thought it was utterly unscrupulous. And I said so.

**Chantale Collard**

You've made it known.

**Stéphane Hamel**

That was my second strike. They made it clear that they weren't happy with me.

**Chantale Collard**

Still verbally?

**Stéphane Hamel**

Verbally, yes.

**Chantale Collard**

And your third strike?

**Stéphane Hamel**

The third strike was, I think, at the beginning of July 2021. A lot of water had passed under the bridge by then.

[00:25:00]

So I stayed pretty quiet and observed. I still attended all the meetings and they never ever had any discussions about the pandemic.

**Chantale Collard**

A taboo subject.

**Stéphane Hamel**

An absolutely taboo subject until the government began to set its sights on a health passport.

**Chantale Collard**

We are now in 2021?

**Stéphane Hamel**

I think these discussions started in April 2021 and intensified until it became almost official in July 2021.

**Chantale Collard**

Yes, just before the passport.

**Stéphane Hamel**

And then I made a post on my Facebook, which is private. On which I have, of course, friends who are in the CAQ—I have MNAs; people on the executive committee; all sorts of people—but above all, it's private.

**Chantale Collard**

It's not accessible to the general public.

**Stéphane Hamel**

It's not accessible to the general public. So I wrote a note. I can't remember the wording. I think I gave it to you yesterday.

**Chantale Collard**

You had the letter. I have the letter.

**Stéphane Hamel**

No, the Facebook post?

**Chantale Collard**

No, I don't have it. Tell us about it.

**Stéphane Hamel**

I'll try to paraphrase. I said, "I don't agree with a health passport, and if the government decides to go ahead with it, I'm going to oppose it." It was as simple as that. So it wasn't public; I didn't make a public statement.

**Chantale Collard**

But you did say it was clear that you were going to oppose it?

**Stéphane Hamel**

Yes.

**Chantale Collard**

It was always private, but it became known.

**Stéphane Hamel**

Yes, because I had a lot of CAQ people on my Facebook, so they all saw it. So that was the third strike and that was the final one. And then I received a letter from the party executive telling me that I didn't support the constitution of the CAQ party and that I wasn't in solidarity with the party. And that for that reason—I'm paraphrasing because I don't have the letter with me—

**Chantale Collard**

Yes, I have it right in front of me.

**Stéphane Hamel**

They immediately removed me from my position as president. And the executive voted for that unanimously.

**Chantale Collard**

By the way, I can [read] this part for everyone's benefit: "However, we have become aware of the publications and comments you have shared on numerous platforms or social networks—" You mentioned Facebook.

**Stéphane Hamel**

Only on one.

**Chantale Collard**

"—and we are of the unanimous opinion that you are openly opposed to the principle of the constitution and are in breach of the requirements described above." So as a result, your mandate came to an end, et cetera, et cetera.

**Stéphane Hamel**

Well, there's a problem with this letter, which is: I opposed the government—I opposed a government decision—

**Chantale Collard**

Not a party decision.

**Stéphane Hamel**

—which is not the party. The party and the government are two separate entities. So I wasn't opposing the constitution of the party. I was opposing a directive or decree from the government, which was then formed mainly by CAQ MNAs. But as soon as the government is formed, the notion of party no longer exists: the MNAs are there to represent the public. So they're no longer members of political parties. In all the training we've had as party members, we've always been told to be extremely careful to distinguish between government functions and partisan party functions.

[00:30:00]

And they ignored that, simply because I was criticizing a government directive.

**Chantale Collard**

Monsieur Hamel, we're running out of time, but first I'd like to know if you'd like us to submit this letter signed by Céline Tessier?

**Stéphane Hamel**

Yes. It is already very public.

**Chantale Collard**

Okay, but to the Inquiry?

**Stéphane Hamel**

Yes, absolutely [no exhibit number available].

**Chantale Collard**

So listen, I know we could have talked about—you mentioned it briefly—computers and all that, but time's running out.

What I'd really like to ask you is this: Basically, what conclusions can we draw from this, and what could have been done differently in relation to your own situation?

**Stéphane Hamel**

Well, what could have been done differently is to have what is supposed to happen in any democracy: debate. But obviously, there was no debate; and debate was shunned like the plague. So the obvious conclusion to draw is that we are no longer in a democracy. There is no more democracy. The basis of democracy is freedom of expression and the exchange of ideas. As a group we will find solutions.

What I saw was that it had now become a single party. Even the opposition was no longer opposed. So what else could we do? Calling people conspiracy theorists— If there are people who don't see a conspiracy, I think they're asleep. At first, I thought, "Okay, they want us all to speak with one voice so that people will respect the health measures." But as we eventually realized that it wasn't such a dangerous virus, that the vaccine didn't work— Because even Dr. Fauci in the United States said—just before I opposed it, and this is one of the reasons why I opposed the health passport—that the viral load of an unvaccinated person and a vaccinated person is the same, which makes a health passport obsolete.

So what could we have done differently? I say: nothing, because it was a conspiracy, a plan. But the word conspiracy has been distorted. It's clear now that there was an agenda. What was the agenda? Speculating, well that's where you may become a conspiracy theorist. But those who don't see a conspiracy or an agenda, well—

**Chantale Collard**

Based on verifiable data.

**Stéphane Hamel**

Wow! I also see that there's no media here.

**Chantale Collard**

Mainstream media, you might say.

**Stéphane Hamel**

Mainstream. And I haven't heard any media coverage of this Inquiry. And we're in Quebec City, where Radio X is supposedly trash radio. Even they didn't talk about it, even in Quebec City!

**Chantale Collard**

That's right.

**Stéphane Hamel**

They didn't mention the Inquiry. So what's going on? Why is everyone so quiet? You asked Amélie [Paul] earlier, "Is it going to stop?" No. It's still going on, as you can see. There's no openness on the part of the media or the government to have a debate. We've had three years of extraordinary drama and all of a sudden, nobody's talking about it anymore. The drama is over, the pandemic is over.

**Chantale Collard**

As if it was nothing; as if nothing had happened.

**Stéphane Hamel**

And what they want: "Don't talk about it anymore; move on."

**Chantale Collard**

No. We're going to keep talking about it.

**Stéphane Hamel**

That's it. What else can we do? In fact, it is what you are doing.

[00:35:00]

Then perhaps, continue to hammer home the message that, "Hang on, we've got things to say!"

**Chantale Collard**

To pass on the message. Thank you. I'll leave you with the commissioners, who probably have a few questions.

**Commissioner Massie**

Thank you, Monsieur Hamel, for your testimony. So if I may summarize the core of your testimony, it's that: In your experience with the CAQ, at the beginning you were relatively motivated to participate, to debate, to propose new ways of doing things so that we could improve. You were mainly motivated to improve, for example, the government's IT processes, which is no small task. But to make any kind of change or reform, there has to be discussion. And here, I think you were disappointed—that's what I understood from your message—that there wasn't that kind of openness.



What is surprising, however, is that a party takes power and then falls into a certain unanimity that is perhaps partly dictated by our British parliamentary system where— Well, it's very tight around the Premier and ministers, and even the MNAs don't seem to have much say, if anything. What's surprising though, is that during the pandemic, there wasn't much of an outcry from the opposition, who seemed to be in the same unanimous frame of mind.

What do you think is at the root of this state of affairs among the political and ruling classes? During this pandemic, I'd say there's been a kind of crystallization of a position that we can't seem to get out of. We're still caught up in it. And so from your political experience, how do you try to understand what's going on right now in the political institutions we have in Quebec?

### **Stéphane Hamel**

It's certainly the same thing that happened among MNAs in caucus that I experienced with the executive. I think the watchword was, "We all have to get the same message across." And I think they did the same thing within the other parties. So the government had to be unified and that's what we saw. They were a single party. There no longer was any difference between the parties. They were all saying the same thing. And the Parti Québécois, the Québec solidaire party, and especially the Liberal Party: their opposition consisted of asking for more than the government was doing. So they weren't criticizing the government's decisions but were notably asking for even more restrictions.

So the MNAs and all the party executives saw what happened to me when I opposed. So I was the naive one of the bunch and I served as an example. Just as they did with Amélie [Paul], it was the same thing. So when the artists saw Amélie being treated like that: zip, they shut up. And the same goes for the political class: when they saw my treatment: zip. So they don't need to make many examples. Just a few, and everyone shuts up.

### **Commissioner Massie**

No, but my question, to try and open up a few other avenues: Do you think there's any possibility of a renewal in this mentality that is closed to debate, at least at the level of the political class?

### **Stéphane Hamel**

What's astonishing today—now that the pandemic is over—is that there's no such openness to debate. So yes, we're going to have to make a complete change in the political culture because it has been like this now for quite a few years.

[00:40:00]

And how can we do that when we don't have a voice in the media because the media censors us? Every time we try to talk about those three years, the media won't let us. So how do we get our message across? Because people are also getting a single message from the media: "Everything's fine now; let's stop talking about it and move on."

So that's a good question. I think we need to have a collective debate on the following: Our democracy no longer exists, how can we reinvigorate it? And that's what Amélie Paul and I have been doing for the past eight months. The aim of the podcast we've started—we stream it every week—is to launch this debate. And all the invitations we've sent out to

people have been turned down outright. Nobody wants to come and talk to us—apart from people who are already well known, and who have already spoken out publicly against all this, and tried to find solutions. But we're still under that *omertà* [culture of silence]. So I'd like us to find some solutions but it seems that the agenda isn't finished yet.

**Commissioner Massie**

Thank you, sir.

**Chantale Collard**

Stéphane Hamel, thank you so much for your honesty and authenticity. We often don't know what goes on behind the scenes. As the Premier himself said, "It's not health, it's politics," and I think your testimony bears this out.

So thank you very much, and I hope that all this will be widely disseminated.

**Stéphane Hamel**

Thank you.

**Chantale Collard**

Thank you.

[00:42:11]

***Final Review and Approval:*** Erin Thiessen, November 8, 2023.

*The evidence offered in this transcript is a true and faithful record of witness testimony given during the National Citizens Inquiry (NCI) hearings. The transcript was prepared by members of a team of volunteers using an "intelligent verbatim" transcription method, and further translated from the original French.*

*For further information on the transcription process, method, and team, see the NCI website: <https://nationalcitizensinquiry.ca/about-these-translations/>*