

With negotiations, EVERYBODY WINS !



The Government's response to our demands:

We're still far apart



The government presented its proposals on Monday, November 30. The offers from the Conseil du trésor don't meet employees' needs. Here's why:

Pay

We are asking for raises of 11.25% over 3 years, including a catch-up increase. The government's offer would limit the overall increase in "labour costs" to 7% for 5 years – a huge difference. Pay is only one part of labour costs. For example, the Conseil du trésor's proposal would include costs for maintaining pay equity, salary relativity, pensions and "remedial measures, if any, for sectoral issues." Anything left over would be put towards raises in pay for a five-year contract. As of now, we don't have any idea of how much, if any, there would be for any increases in pay rates.

Organization of work

In its response, the government also introduced the issue of the organization of work. At their press conference, government spokespeople explained that savings resulting from a reorganization

of work could be used to solve sectoral problems. Here again, there are a number of points that need to be clarified.

Family-work balance

The government showed no willingness to consider framework legislation on family-work balance. It argued that it has already adopted a number of laws as part of its family policy.

Parental rights

On parental rights, the government has agreed to work with us to bring our collective agreements into line with various pieces of legislation, but seems to exclude the Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms from the process.



Skilled workers

The government will give us its position on skilled workers later.

Pensions

Finally, on pensions, the Common Front negotiators met with representatives of the Conseil du trésor on November 18. They gave us some preliminary responses to our demands. We'll come back to this in a future newsletter.



The November 30 meeting was very short, and didn't give the union negotiators an opportunity to clarify various aspects that remain unclear. This is why we use the conditional tense in our report here: our assessment is a preliminary opinion based on the texts filed and will have to be tested. We should know more after additional bargaining sessions that are scheduled between now and the end of 2009.

Giving up is out of the question!

Our demands are legitimate and realistic. For the future of our public services, real government action is necessary!

Our Common Front is already having a real impact. Contrary to its intransigent stance in 2003-2005, the government seems to be open to genuine negotiations this time. It responded to our demands just one month after we filed them, as we had invited it to do. This suggests that it is in fact interested in reaching a negotiated agreement before March 31, 2010.

It's up to us to prove our steadfast determination in the coming months!

The Common Front regional tour : a resounding success !



From Val D'Or to Rimouski to Gaspé, the Common Front held meetings in all 13 regions of Québec. Everywhere, union meetings were packed and the level of participation was very encouraging. Many workers belonging to the CSN, SISP and FTQ turned out to welcome this historic Common Front and kick off the 2009-2010 round of collective bargaining. To wind up the tour, union mobilization resulted in thousands of enthusiastic members participating in a big Common Front rally on October 29 in Montreal

Towards a collective agreement that measures up to our expectations !

Friday, October 30 marked the official start of negotiations in the public and parapublic sectors. The 475,000 workers joined in a Common Front to file their central table demands with the Conseil du trésor.

The central table demands were presented jointly by the organizations that make up the Common Front. The CSN, the FTQ and the SISP are speaking with a single voice as they put forward the four main demands in this round of bargaining.



1- Towards a fair catch-up raise

Since the last round of negotiations ended abruptly when the Charest government imposed a decree and froze our pay, it's time to recover our fundamental right to free collective bargaining and see to it that workers in the public and parapublic sectors don't get any poorer.

The goal of the Common Front is a negotiated settlement by March 31, 2010, on a new collective agreement that will cover the period from April 1, 2010 to December 31, 2012 inclusively.

Workers are asking for raises of 2% a year as protection against inflation, plus a catch-up raise equal to 1.75% per year to close some of the gap between them and other workers, who according to Québec's statistics institute (the ISQ, or Institut de la statistique du Québec), earn 8.7% more than government workers. These two demands add up to an increase of 3.75% per year. If Québec's economy grows by more than 3.75%, there would be a mechanism for improving pay rates.

2- A good, guaranteed pension plan

The Common Front wants a change in the way the Government and Public Employees Retirement Plan (the RREGOP) is funded to make workers' contributions rates more stable, while guaranteeing the security of their pension benefits.

3- Support our skilled workers !

Skilled workers are in much demand in our public institutions, and it is becoming harder and harder for the public sector to attract and retain skilled labour. Very uncompetitive pay rates mean that fewer and fewer young workers are coming into the public sector. Skilled positions aren't filled and the work winds up being contracted out. This round of bargaining has to make progress towards finding solutions to meet the challenge of renewing the work force and retaining employees in the public sector.

4- Family-work balance: Walk the talk !

The Common Front is demanding that the government make a commitment to go ahead with framework legislation covering all workers that would promote and support family-work balance. The Common Front's position is that such legislation should encourage joint work in each workplace to develop practical solutions facilitating family-work balance.



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Co-ordinated bargaining at all levels !

The public- and parapublic-sector federations are responsible for sectoral bargaining. And they have chosen to co-ordinate their bargaining strategies on four major issues.

Arbitration costs

Regarding the division of arbitration costs, CSN federations want to return to the pre-2005 provisions, which enabled workers to have a fairer defence in the event of a dispute.

Increase in the employer's share of the cost of group insurance

The cost of group insurance varies a lot from sector to sector. The position we are defending is therefore that employers should pay a fairer share of the cost of the insurance plans in which they participate. Right now, the employer's share is expressed as a flat amount. In 1991, the amount was equal to roughly 20% of the total premium; today, it corresponds to less than 5%. We want to restore some balance by increasing the employer's contribution.

Regional disparities and premiums

We want to find support measures for workers faced with unusual living conditions in remote areas. And the premiums are intended to reflect various specific conditions inherent in a kind or shift of work or a workplace.

Salary relativity

There will be a supplementary filing on salary relativity. Work on this with the government will be done on an inter-union basis. The work is aimed at reviewing the government's salary structure to remedy inequities for both predominantly male and gender-neutral jobs.

The mobilization is just beginning !

Be ready by mid-December! The CSN central councils will be organizing regional mobilization actions around significant targets. The actions will be organized by the regional mobilization committees. More information will follow soon.

