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## The government's new smokescreen

**Over the last few days, the employer party tabled its “priorities” at bargaining tables involving health and social service unions that belong to the Front commun. The government claims this is intended to help talks move forward, but in fact, it’s abundantly clear that what we’re seeing is a new PR exercise.**

### Employer of choice? We’re still waiting

The government had announced its intention to reduce its demands to five priorities for sectoral contract talks. (To recap, sectoral talks cover working conditions in the health and social service system, while the central bargaining table deals with topics that are shared by all public-sector workers, such as pay and pension benefits).

At a time when our health and social service system is going through one of the worst crises it has ever faced, the government has brought forth a mouse. Our system is having problems attracting or retaining employees. Work overload has become chronic. In response, the government is offering us temporary measures, measures affecting only a few job titles, and measures providing employers with greater flexibility to the detriment of staff. That is not what we need to put our system back on its feet. They’re talking about being an employer of choice – and we’re still waiting.

### The status quo is not an option – we need better working conditions

Ever since the beginning of contract talks, there’s only one thing the government has wanted to discuss: its own priorities. That’s not what bargaining is about! The government needs to listen to solutions put forward by workers as well. Time is running out, and there’s nothing substantial in the government’s proposals that could lead to an agreement.

In a display of sleight of hand, the government has brought different priority demands to the different bargaining tables. When to these we add its demands at the team care forum and the team mental health forum, we see that it’s completely missing the target. But in any case, the problem in these bargaining talks is not the number of demands put forward by either of the parties: it’s the fact that the employer does not have a mandate to get talks moving.

The bargaining committees of the health and social service unions are currently analyzing the documents tabled by the government and will provide detailed responses at the bargaining tables. One thing is clear: to move negotiations forward, the government will have to agree to talk about the solutions proposed by workers.

### Government blackmail around premiums

The government continues its blackmail operation around premiums, affecting thousands of health and social service workers. It recently announced that the premiums would be extended to October 15, but that the unions, in response, would have to establish priorities among their demands.

This week, the government added a new condition: unions must commit to discussing local matters. Coming up with this kind of condition at such a late stage in the bargaining process raises many issues, and is utterly incompatible with a rapid settlement.

We can’t negotiate under duress. The government must stop using blackmail and maintain the premiums until a new agreement is reached.

### Employer refuses the unions’ outstretched hand at the team care forum

At the team care forum priority table, the government wants to discuss overtime, independent labour, and how work schedules are organized, but only for some of the personnel in Class 1. We suggested that these issues be discussed for all four classes in order to facilitate exchanges.

Our hope was to accelerate discussions on these topics, but this week, the government rejected our outstretched hand. It has been complaining that public-sector contract talks are too complex, and yet it bears responsibility for making current talks more cumbersome.

### Mobilization is key to breaking the deadlock

Whether we’re talking about sectoral issues or those discussed at the central bargaining table, it’s becoming more and more obvious that worker mobilization will be the key factor that will make the government hear our proposals at last. And mobilization is exactly what the Front commun will be proposing over the coming weeks. More than ever, your participation in union activities will be needed to ensure that we get better conditions.