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Fédération de la santé et des services sociaux (FSSS-CSN)

AGREEMENT IN PRINCIPLE IT'S ALL IN OUR HANDS

In late December, delegates from all FSSS-CSN unions in the public sector decided to recommend to their members that they reject the agreement in principle reached with the Couillard government and continue to negotiate to improve the daily lives of the workers we represent. This FSSS-CSN Federal Council's position was motivated mainly by the fact that this five-year agreement

won't protect our purchasing power: we estimate that under this agreement, 90% of FSSS-CSN members will not obtain raises in pay that keep up with inflation by 2020. For all the details of the monetary and salary conditions negotiated by the Common Front, see the no. 6 issue of «It's all in our hands» put out by the CSN, which deals solely with central table matters.

We are right to have the courage of our ambitions, to believe in them, and we should all be proud of belonging to a union organization that offers its members the possibility of refusing an agreement in principle that in no way satisfies our bargaining priority of countering members' impoverishment.

Thanks to mobilization, we convinced the employer party to withdraw its demands at the sectoral table

On December 9, as the Common Front deployed a one-day national strike across Québec, the FSSS-CSN conducted a final bargaining blitz with the MSSS and the CPNSSS at the sectoral bargaining table. The result was an agreement in principle on sectoral matters. This agreement was conditional on a satisfactory agreement in principle at the central table, in particular on pay, and the Common Front concluded a central table agreement in principle the following week. At our sectoral table, it took more than 60 bargaining sessions, some of them intensive, to reach an agreement.

We had presented our demands in November 2014, and the government made its first offer in January, in the midst of the debate on Bill 10. But it was only early in the fall of 2015 that bargaining talks really got under way. The FSSS-CSN first got management to withdraw all its demands, which attacked our rights in various ways. It was thanks to our determination and mobilization that we succeeded in making this government back down on all its demands at the sectoral table.

Thanks to mobilization, gains at the sectoral level

It was thanks to this same determination that we succeeded in making certain gains at the sectoral level in this round of bargaining.

For example:

Target 1 – Opposing privatization

The sectoral agreement in principle provides notably that any privatization project must be announced long enough in advance to allow unions to analyse it and propose alternatives to making use of the private sector in any form. Employers also committed to valuing, promoting and preserving public services. The FSSS-CSN was able to maintain and strengthen a number of attraction and retention measures in the public sector, notably by integrating the premium paid to psychologists into the collective agreement.

Target 2 – Quality of life at work

Improvements that will have an impact on the quality of our life at work include:

- a better defence of workers' job security;
- a tangible increase in the number of full-time positions, for everyone (Classes 1, 2, 3 and 4), with a proportion of 80% as the minimum target;
- recognition of the fundamental role of workers in reorganization of work projects;

- more preventive work on occupational health and safety;
- more resources for combatting excessive workloads;
- one to eight weeks of leave for family-work-study balance with averaged pay;
- renewal and updating of premiums for employees working with beneficiaries in CHSLDs, with clients presenting serious behavioural disorders and in the Far North.

Target 3 – Reviewing the List of job titles... and access to positions

The FSSS–CSN obtained agreement to do the necessary clean-up in job descriptions in institutions. Gains for employees include better access to positions for employees and standardization of requirements throughout the health and social services system, which has not been the case so far – contrary to the situation in education and the public service.

Target 4 – Union rights

Provisions in the agreement will help union representatives to do a better job of playing their role for members, because they'll have in hand all the information needed to defend employees' rights fully.

Bill 10

Finally, the adoption of Bill 10 meant that various provisions in the collective agreement had to

be revised to adapt them to the new reality of mega-institutions. One of these was the issue of job security in the event of a transfer. With the considerable expansion in the size of institutions, there have to be clear geographical limits to any transfer of personnel. Thus the 50-kilometre rule in various local agreements becomes the reference for Québec as a whole.

More than ever in your hands!

But to have a comprehensive agreement, another major piece was needed: a satisfactory agreement at the central table. Our collective agreement is an integral whole, and the agreements in principle can't be analysed independently of each other.

What will be most important in the coming weeks will be the democratic process in general membership meetings. Throughout Québec, tens of thousands of workers in the health and social services system will have to decide how they want to continue the struggle for a satisfactory agreement. So it is more than ever the time to speak up and debate the prospects that we see collectively for continuing negotiations and fighting for a better distribution of wealth. It is perfectly legitimate for us to call for putting a stop to poverty. We have every reason to not want to give up and to continue to advance. It's now your turn to say what you think, and it's up to you to decide in your general membership meeting whether or not you want to continue this struggle.

PAY EQUITY:

AN UNACCEPTABLE PRELIMINARY CONDITION

After reaching an agreement with another union organization, the government set a preliminary condition for any progress on salary parameters. It required that the FSSS-CSN withdraw the complaints it had filed in Class 1 following the pay equity audit done by the Conseil du trésor in 2010. Withdrawing our complaints on this amounts to recognizing that there has not been any discrimination since 2001, even though we know that major changes have occurred for a number of job titles in Class 1. It also obliges us to relinquish any retroactivity. Pay equity is a fundamental right, entrenched in law, and this right must not be negotiated. The government's preliminary condition is another reason why the FSSS Federal Council chose to recommend the rejection of the agreement in principle.

The government's preliminary condition should be seen in relation to the following changes at the sectoral level:

- Terms and conditions for updating and professional development for nursing and cardio-respiratory care personnel in relation to Bill 90 and recognition related to salary relativity;
- Critical care premium and enhanced critical care premium for beneficiary attendants as well as nursing and cardio-respiratory care personnel;
- Better recognition of overlapping periods between shifts for certain Class 1 employees in CHSLDs;
- Renewal of Letter of Agreement no. 30 on professional supervision of employees in Classes 1 and 4.