

Upcoming negotiations A turning point for the system

Meeting in Drummondville from February 25 to February 27, FSSSS-CSN unions in health care and social services adopted a strategic framework that lays the foundation for upcoming negotiations in the public sector.

One employer, one bargaining committee

Unions in the four classes of personnel in the health and social services system decided to speak with one strong voice! Delegates agreed to create a single bargaining committee that will be vigilant in defending the interests of all classes of personnel, at all the tables. In negotiations in health care and social services, the Ministry of Health and Social Services and the Conseil du trésor will be up against a single united block of activist members elected by FSSSS unions from all across Québec representing almost half of all the workers in the system, in all job titles and all kinds of facilities.

Improving daily life

The next round of bargaining has to contribute to recognizing and enhancing the value of our jobs on the eve of the most substantial turnover of the workforce ever in the system. It is crucial to make jobs in the public sector more attractive for young workers, because if this isn't done labour shortages in the institutions will just get worse. All Québécois will pay the price, because institutions will farm out even more of their work to the private sector, at great expense, and the population will suffer a decline in the quality and quantity of services.

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Photos : Michel Giroux

As the most representative union organization in the sector, it is our responsibility to make sure that solutions are found. What's at stake is obviously the quality of life for our 110,000 members in the public sector, but also the survival of a universal system of quality services accessible to all – something that the overwhelming majority of citizens still want to keep. It's a major challenge, and the resources and strategies deployed by the FSSS and the CSN will be on a scale that measures up to challenge.

Pay: a crucial priority

FSSS-CSN unions began months ago thinking about the need to pay the priority in upcoming negotiations. This objective is reiterated in the strategic framework. It is shared on the whole by the other three federations in the CSN's public sector and is part of inter-union discussions about creating a common front.

The most recent figures from the Institut de la statistique du Québec (ISQ, Québec's statistics institute) show that for the same work, overall remuneration is lower in the public sector than in any other sector of work – by 8.3% last year, factoring in all benefits. In 2009, the gap was 3.7%. It's a problem that needs urgent action, because it makes public services relatively unattractive for new, younger workers. This is a major challenge for our public services.



Making pay the priority doesn't mean that we won't have other demands. Our strategic framework identifies four main non-monetary orientations:

• Curbing the trend towards privatization

Privatization is the biggest threat to our public services. It can take various forms – contracting-out, the use of personnel agencies, private-public agreements or ending public coverage of various services, for example. Poor management practices like these increase costs for the system, and in a context of budget cuts mean reductions in services for the population. For several years now, we have been campaigning to value, promote and preserve public services (our VPP campaign). We will have to continue this struggle in the upcoming negotiations. We want to give ourselves additional means for defending public services while improving our collective agreements to better oppose all forms of privatization.

• Quality of life at work

Low pay is one obstacle to renewing the labour force, and the deterioration of the quality of life at work is certainly another. Our goal is to take action on working conditions in order to ensure that everyone can contribute to the best of their knowledge and skills, thereby increasing their satisfaction at work. Professional



autonomy and family-work-study balance are examples of the levers at our disposal to improve the quality of life at work. This must lead to a reduction in work overloads.

• **Revising the List of job titles**

In many cases, job descriptions don't correspond to reality. We made some progress on this in the last round of bargaining and the work that followed, but more needs to be done to complete the process. A better List of job titles will give workers better access to positions by reducing the scope for arbitrary management decisions. This will have a positive impact on maintaining and developing workers' expertise in the health and social services system. We also want to revise the procedures in the collective agreements for revising the List of job titles to make them clearer and more effective in the future.

• **Freedom of union action**

Finally, in the next round of bargaining we want to strengthen our freedom of union action, which has been the target of numerous attacks and was weakened by the decree adopted by the Charest government in 2005. For instance, we should have a way to respond quickly to cases of meddling in union affairs. As well, we want to make sure that union rights are respected at all times, notably in the areas of occupational health and safety and the replacement of workers on leave for union work, and we would like to improve the process involved in the provisions on psychological harassment.



Towards a coordination of the public and private sectors

The FSSS-CSN has a number of affiliated unions that represent workers who are not covered by the laws governing negotiations in the public sector. For many of them, though, any settlement they obtain on pay is directly tied to the results of negotiations in the public sector. This is the case for paramedics, intermediate and family-type resources (RI-RTFs), employees in childcare centres (CPEs) and home childcare providers (RSGs). The FSSS as a whole wants to give these employees a say on the issue of pay, since the outcome of negotiations will apply to them too.

At the last Federal Council meeting, public-sector unions approved a process for co-ordinating the private and public sectors of the FSSS-CSN. This now has to be discussed by the unions in the private sectors. Depending on what they decide, the next decision-making meeting on bargaining in the FSSS-CSN might very well see unions in the public sector meeting together with unions in the private sector – a first!

Next steps

On the basis of this strategic framework, the Federation and affiliated unions will continue to discuss bargaining proposals that will then be submitted for debate to the general meetings of all unions in the coming months. Keep in mind that we have to file our sectoral demands with the Comité patronal de négociation du secteur de la santé et des services sociaux (the management bargai-

ning committee for the health and social services sector) by October 31, 2014 at the latest. Demands at the central table – e.g., pay – must be filed in December 2014, within 30 days of the publication of the next ISQ report on pay trends in the public sector. The collective agreements for the 500,000 employees in the public sector expire on March 31, 2015.

Have you thanked someone today?



The CSN is currently conducting a vast campaign aimed at recognizing the value of the work done daily by the 500,000 or so employees in Québec's public sector. You can participate by thanking someone whose work you really appreciate through social media, using the hashtag #merciavous. It can be someone who works in another department, even another public system – in education, for example, or the public service.

If you don't have a social media account, you can say thanks through the merciavous.org web site. Look for lots of surprises, in particular various video clips. To make sure that you don't miss anything, follow the #merciavous campaign :

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