

INFO-NEGO #9

May 6, 2020

Exploratory Discussions at the Bargaining Tables

Since March 13, 2020, the COVID-19 crisis has brought about its share of upheaval. It led the CSN and public sector federations to analyze the new reality and review their approach for the round of bargaining that had begun. Note that on March 23, while the premier was pressing pause on all of Quebec, the CSN asked the government to suspend public sector bargaining and to implement, as of then, a series of measures, including wage adjustments, premiums, and protective measures, so that we would be able to fully devote ourselves to the crisis and so that workers in the network could get through this difficult period.

The discussions that followed allowed for, in particular, obtaining a premium for those working on the front lines to combat COVID-19. While we still feel that the premium is insufficient and inequitable, CSN representations allowed for broadening the reach of the premium to a greater number of workers. We are continuing to drive forward our claims that the premium should be a fixed amount of \$3 or \$4 per hour and that it should apply to all workers, including emergency day care workers, who as of now are not entitled to the premium.

Since late March, the CSN has had numerous discussions with Conseil du trésor representatives. While we have continued the push for the suspension and focused our discussions on measures to deploy

immediately to get through the crisis and while this has allowed for changing the initial positions of the employer, the government still wishes to bargain at an accelerated pace to settle all public sector collective agreements. The number of times that the premier has mentioned this topic in his daily press conferences has reflected this; he has often spoken of his desire to quickly come to a global agreement with central labour organizations.

With a reality that has changed significantly (due to, among other things, an unprecedented health crisis and a drastic change in the state of public finances) and a government that is clearly indicating that it wishes to settle working conditions and wage conditions for 550,000 government employees within a short period of time, CSN public sector federations feel that it is in their best interests to sit down with the Conseil du trésor and the various employer bargaining committees to begin discussions on an exploratory basis, with the objective of advancing the work to renew collective agreements, both at the central table and at the sectoral tables. We will begin to carry out these discussions with the Conseil du trésor tomorrow and will base our exchanges on the general orientation adopted by the four CSN public sector federations. In accordance with this orientation, exploratory discussions will cover both improving working and practice conditions, by focusing on the issues of work overload and job insecurity, and improving wage conditions, by demanding increases that are higher than inflation for all workers, with a particular focus on low-income workers.

In the coming days, we will be able to see whether the government's desire to agree on acceptable working conditions, while taking the pandemic context into account, will translate into concrete action to improve the lives of workers in the networks. More than ever before, we are seeing that public services are the pillars of our society; the government must acknowledge this fact without delay.

We will keep you informed of new developments.

