

PUBLIC SECTOR BARGAINING: A SLAP IN THE FACE FOR 420,000 FRONT COMMUN WORKERS

Insulting – offensive – contemptuous. It’s hard to find the right words to describe the offer tabled by the government on Sunday.

An extra 1.3% for the first year, for a total of 10.3% over 5 years – pathetic. Another slap in the face for 420,000 Front commun workers. Too little, too late. It’s an insult. Front commun workers are done with turning the other cheek.

Even though 100,000 people turned out in the streets to support the Front commun on September 23, even though a mandate for an unlimited general strike was adopted with 95% in favour, even though a first day of strike action has been announced, once again the mountain has given birth to a mouse. The government still wants to decide everything on its own and impose its will, a habit it’s developed since it was first elected in 2018.

This offer shows us, again, that the government simply doesn’t understand the problems experienced in public services or the urgency of saving a ship that is about to sink. It is also utterly disconnected from workers’ anger as they continue, despite their exhaustion, to carry the weight of fragile public services on their shoulders.

Strike action as planned on November 6

From the Front commun’s point of view, there is nothing in this offer that would justify cancelling the strike. Strike action, in fact, is clearly the only thing the government will understand, and when 420,000 workers walk out on November 6, the message will be loud and clear.

And then what? Stay tuned – a second strike action is a possibility. Clearly, announcing a first day of strike action has not opened the government’s eyes. The Front commun will keep you informed.

Pay offer

The government is now offering a 10.3% increase over 5 years, distributed as follows:

	Offer tabled on December 15, 2022	Offer tabled on October 29, 2023	Most recent inflation forecasts (Desjardins, October 2023)
2022			6.7%
2023	3%	4.3%	4.5%
2024	1.5%	1.5%	2.6%
2025	1.5%	1.5%	1.9%
2026	1.5%	1.5%	2.0%
2027	1.5%	1.5%	
TOTAL	9%	10.3%	17.7%

The government is proposing that workers should get poorer, and the new offer doesn’t change that – which is simply unacceptable. After all, the government chose to give MNAs 30% as a catchup pay increase (providing them with real gains) along with other yearly increases, and SQ police officers were offered 21%. The agreement to be reached with the Front commun will have to take that into account.

In any case, the tiny pay increase provided in this offer will probably go up in smoke on March 7 when finance minister Éric Girard presents his economic update, because there is a very strong likelihood that government inflation forecasts will be higher than current projections.

Premiums and temporary measures

After numerous threats on this issue, the government is now saying it will maintain the following temporary measures and premiums until the day before the new collective agreement comes into force:

1. Retention premium for the psychologist job title
2. Premium related to certain skilled workers' job titles
3. Premium for medical secretaries
4. Attraction and retention premium for Class 1 personnel who hold a full-time position on an evening, night or rotating shift
5. Premium for employees in the personnel class of health and social services technicians and professionals who work in certain sectors / Premium for employees working in certain sectors
6. Lump-sum payment for employees working with clients in residential and long-term care centres (CHSLDs)
7. Lump-sum payment for employees working with clients who have serious behaviour disorders
8. Interim annual recruitment and continued employment allowance for employees working for an institution in the Far North

At the same time, given the current crisis in public institutions, the government is setting off a powder keg by choosing not to maintain some of the measures taken during the public health crisis. In health and social services, the following measures will not be extended beyond November 4:

1. Letter of Agreement (outside the collective agreement) on the 3.5% premium for Class 1 personnel
2. Double rate (200%), subject to certain conditions and restrictions, when an employee does an overtime work shift of at least four (4) hours
3. Lump sums of \$200 or \$400 for working additional shifts
4. Lump sum of \$2,000 for exchanging a day shift for a less desirable shift (evening or night shift) during four (4) consecutive weeks
5. Lump sum of \$4,000 for a person seconded to a remote health and social services region
6. \$500 referral bonus.





Pension issues

The government has finally withdrawn its demand that employees with 35 years of service be forced to work until age 57 before they can retire without being penalized.

However, it still wants to reduce pension benefits because the Québec Pension Plan (QPP) has recently been enhanced. Overall, the government is still trying to take away with one hand what it gave with the other. And it still wants to fund part of its pay offer at the expense of our pension benefits.

There is agreement on one aspect of the pension plan: the government says it is willing to raise the maximum age for participating in the RREGOP from 69 to 71.

Parental rights

The government has sent positive signals regarding two Front commun demands for parental rights. It is willing to allow an employee to take leave without pay or part-time leave without pay before a paternity or adoption leave (Front commun demand 4.1).

It would also add an extra day to the bank of leave with pay for an employee experiencing a high-risk pregnancy, as certified by a health care professional.

Achieving a settlement for public-sector workers will certainly require an agreement at the central table, but there will also have to be agreements at sectoral tables. And in fact, several aspects of the government offer are related to sectoral table issues.

The Front commun is available as ever to negotiate and achieve rapid progress, to its members' satisfaction, at the bargaining tables.

