

TOGETHER **AS ONE** PARTNER

PROPOSED CENTRAL TABLE DEMANDS

2023 public sector
bargaining
round

**FRONT
COMMUN**



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Written and produced by: **Front commun**

Logo (Front commun): **Molotov communications**

Graphic design and layout: **Pier-Luc St-Germain, Jean Grégoire**

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NOTICE

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2023 BARGAINING ROUND TOGETHER AS ONE

Bargaining for 2023 is well under way. The ink has barely had time to dry on our most recent collective agreements before we find ourselves back at the bargaining table, as those collective agreements expire on March 31, 2023.

The next step will be to formulate our demands, which will be submitted to Treasury Board by the end of October 2022. In these pages, you will find draft central table demands, which are being submitted to you by the Front commun for consultation. Beyond the negotiations at the bargaining table, it is up to each and every one of us to defend these demands through our mobilizing efforts and our determination.

Together as one

Fifty years after the formation of the first Front commun in 1972, the Confédération des syndicats nationaux (CSN), the Centrale des syndicats du Québec (CSQ) and the Fédération des travailleurs et travailleuses du Québec (FTQ) are joining forces to bargain as an alliance. This means that in this round of bargaining, over 355,000 members will speak with one voice.

Like its historic predecessor, today's Common Front constitutes a coherent strategy for addressing the urgent needs of the personnel in our public systems by bolstering our solidarity and establishing ourselves as the government's leading bargaining counterpart. A Common Front is also an effective response to the divide-and-conquer strategies of governments.

Unique circumstances due to COVID

The last two-and-a-half years have been defined by the Covid-19 pandemic. The public has endured grief, fear, lockdowns, public health restrictions, and an economic downturn. The pandemic has demonstrated the importance of our public systems, but also their extreme fragility.

For those of us who, throughout the crisis, have maintained public services against all odds, the pandemic has both highlighted and aggravated the problems that are the legacy of decades of austerity: outdated facilities, chaotic health and social service systems, red tape, understaffing and excessive workloads. Despite the uncertainties, the improvisation and the emergency decrees, we persevered.

Today, we are still dealing with high levels of burnout and distress, exacerbated by the successive waves the pandemic has inflicted upon us. Make no mistake: it is our remarkable ability to adapt and our commitment, despite the lack of resources and harsh working conditions, that have kept the public systems afloat.

The pandemic also revealed our government's capacity to act and invest when it considers it a priority. It wasted little time injecting massive sums into the public systems. However, this was too often done in an authoritarian manner, through decrees and ministerial orders that divided the workers in the public system, all of whom were on the front lines, too often without consultation or consideration for their actual needs.

NOTES

Strong recovery clouded by inflation

The economic recovery is strong and Québec's budget situation is extremely favourable. For 2022, real GDP growth is expected to exceed 3%, which should allow the government to reap considerable revenues and maintain its enviable budgetary position.

Unemployment, which had exploded to a record high of 17% during the first lockdown, has returned to the near-full-employment levels that prevailed before the crisis.

The major downside is record-breaking inflation. In fact, every one of us has seen the prices of everyday items skyrocket in the space of a few months. The highest level of inflation in nearly 30 years is impacting the cost of groceries, housing, gasoline and practically everything else. This turbulence is also reflected in the financial markets and complicates economic forecasts.

In such inflationary times, workers should not feel shy about demanding substantial wage increases in order to maintain their purchasing power.

Full employment is intensifying competition

The current strength of the labour market is a source of concern for employers. The labour shortage we experienced before the pandemic is now more serious than ever. While it affects all sectors, it is increasingly acute in public services.

Since the unemployment rate is currently at the lowest level ever recorded in Québec, workers are choosing to work where the salary, working conditions and conditions of practice are most attractive. In public services specifically, the departures, career changes or absences due to disability of a significant part of the workforce are also due to arduous working conditions and poor pay, which are complicating efforts to attract and retain personnel in the public system.

In normal times, this labour shortage would be a lever for negotiation, increasing our bargaining power and providing strong arguments in favour of our demands. However, it seems that our employers prefer easy solutions—overtime, outsourcing, cutting back on services and hiring unqualified personnel—rather than solving the long-standing problems. Once again, it is those who have remained at their posts who have to bear the brunt of understaffing.

The battle ahead

The next round of bargaining will present tall challenges. Our demands are born of a specific social and economic context. They are ambitious and will require us to mobilize collectively if we are to win.

After decades of austerity, cutbacks and wage restraint, after years of pandemic, during which we maintained services to the public under the most difficult conditions, there can be no doubt that the demands we are presenting are justified and that a catch-up is essential for the sustainability of public services.

The government will always find excuses to postpone the much-needed catch-up in our working conditions, conditions of practice and remuneration. However, the figures show that the government has the financial capacity to meet our demands. And as history teaches us, it isn't enough to be right. We need to make a show of force.

This consultation is therefore doubly important. We need to know whether you support the demands proposed in this document and that you are prepared to fight for them. Because first and foremost, the Front commun is you. And we will need to show solidarity, determination and creativity to achieve a satisfactory outcome in this round of bargaining.

HERE'S TO A PRODUCTIVE CONSULTATION!

CENTRAL TABLE PROPOSALS SUBMITTED FOR CONSULTATION

1. WAGES: GETTING RICHER, COLLECTIVELY

It doesn't matter whether we are in an economic growth phase or a slowdown, a time of budget surpluses or deficits; the government always finds a reason for asking us to tighten our belts. Since the special law of 2005 decreeing our working conditions—which had the effect of leaving us poorer—we have managed to improve our purchasing power, albeit slightly. The last bargaining round, completed in 2021, should have allowed us to continue this much-needed catch-up and made us a little better off. However, the sudden, unexpected rise in inflation to levels unseen in over 30 years has wiped out all improvements in our salary conditions, despite the sacrifices we have made to serve the public.

Rapidly rising costs for food, housing and gasoline, in particular, have had a detrimental effect on everyone's purchasing power. It should also be borne in mind that inflation hits low-income people the hardest for example, those receiving entry-level wages, as they have to spend a larger share of their income on commodities with rising prices having a greater impact on their lives.

Permanent wages indexing mechanism

In inflationary times, protecting our earnings against the rising cost of living is an absolute minimum. The Front commun considers it essential that we demand this minimum, to which we are adding further increases allowing for enrichment. No employee should become poorer over the course of their employment. This is why we are proposing, first of all, that the collective agreements include a permanent indexing mechanism based on the Consumer Price Index (CPI) that will guarantee that wages are adjusted annually based on the cost of living.

Then, to ensure that all employees enjoy improved living conditions, we are demanding other wages increases in addition to the adjustments for inflation. So, notwithstanding the permanent mechanism to protect us against inflation, we will need to create space for bargaining and we will have to maximize our bargaining power.

Year 1

Speaking together as one, we demand an immediate increase of \$100 per week for all wages.¹

This demand echoes the legacy of the Common Front of 1972, when workers in health care and social services, elementary and secondary education, and the CEGEP system represented by the CSN, the CSQ and of the FTQ united under the slogan "Nous, le monde ordinaire" (loosely translates as "We, the common people") and demanded a minimum wage of \$100 per week for all public sector employees.

This \$100 per week raise will mean the largest increase for the lowest-paid employees, including those with entry-level wages. It will protect the basic income of every employee in the public sector while taking into account the unequal impact of inflation. Since inflation is difficult to predict, and since we all want to have greater purchasing power, we are demanding, in addition to protection against the rising cost of living, that the first wages increase at least cover inflation plus 2%. So for every wage, our minimum demand for year 1 would be \$100 per week or inflation plus 2%, whichever is greater.

1. THIS EQUATES TO AN INCREASE OF \$2.86 PER HOUR FOR EVERYONE.
FOR JOBS WITH ANNUAL SALARIES, THIS INCREASE EQUATES TO \$5,223 PER YEAR.

2. WORKING CONDITIONS AND CONDITIONS OF PRACTICE

The pandemic has laid bare facts we have long known: our public systems are battered and short-staffed. Services are often interrupted. The workload is getting heavier and heavier, with dire impacts on the health and safety of employees. The staff shortage has spread to all of the personnel classes in the system. At a time when Québec has the lowest unemployment rate ever recorded and workers can choose to work where the salary conditions, working conditions and conditions of practice are most attractive, our employer must do something.

There are two priorities: improving working conditions / conditions of practice and increasing wages are both equally urgent. The Front commun is therefore recommending that we make a demand directly to the government for significant investments that will make it possible to negotiate structural measures at all sectoral tables in order to improve working conditions and conditions of practice.

PROPOSAL TO BE VOTED ON

2

That the Front commun demand that Treasury Board make significant funds available and give mandates to negotiate solutions at the sectoral tables in order to substantially improve the working conditions and conditions of practice of public sector workers.

3. PENSION PLAN

For more information on the pension plan, see the “Additional Information” section on pages 18 and 19.

Since the 2015 negotiations, the political and fiscal situation around pension plans has improved significantly.

First of all, in terms of financial health, the Régime de retraite des employés du gouvernement et des organismes publics (RREGOP) is doing well. With its most recent capitalization rate estimated at 109% and a surplus of \$6.7 billion, the plan is able to meet its commitments in full. This surplus ensures that we are well placed to weather any turbulence in the financial markets.

Next, the Front commun believes the impact of the enhancement of the Québec Pension Plan (QPP), which came into effect on January 1, 2019, must be borne in mind. It will eventually mean increased income for retirees. The QPP enhancement will raise the income replacement rate from 25% to 33.3% and increase maximum pensionable earnings. The increase in employee and employer contributions resulting from the enhancement is approximately 1% of salary. This reform of one of the public components of our pensions system is therefore an important step toward improving the quality of life in retirement of everyone we are committed to protect.

Finally, we consider it preferable to aim for improvements to the pension plan that will entail no additional cost for public sector workers. This approach stems from the strong upward trend in the RREGOP contribution rate since the mid-2000s, our desire to stabilize this contribution rate over the long term, and the recent enhancements to the QPP which have led to increased contributions to the plan.

Consequently, since the retirement picture has not changed significantly since the last round of bargaining, our current demands are in line with our objectives in that round and with the work in progress at the working committee set up by the parties.

Demands

Enhancements to retirement conditions that do not affect the contribution rate

The Front commun recommends a series of measures all of which will improve retirement conditions with no financial impact on the plan. Several of these measures

could also have a positive effect on the voluntary retention of experienced personnel (a description of each of these demands can be found in the appendix to this document):

- Improve phased retirement
- Increase the pension after age 65
- Increase the maximum age for contributing to the RREGOP to 71
- Adjust the interest rate assumption for the actuarial reduction offset
- Introduce an early benefit

Funding and maturity of the RREGOP

One of the Front commun's concerns is the steadily increasing maturity of the RREGOP, which could have an effect on the financing of the pension plan. In this regard, the ratio of active members to retirees was 7:5 in 1996; it stands at 1:9 in 2022 and will fall to 1:1 in 2040. In practical terms, this means that there are fewer and fewer active participants compared with the number of retirees, which could put upward pressure on the contribution rate for employees. To respond to this issue, the Front commun is conducting analyses through the working committee in an attempt to reach an agreement on structural measures that could stabilize the contribution rate as the RREGOP approaches maturity. A recommendation to the bargaining parties could emerge from this work.

Improve "social" and "environmental" criteria for the Caisse de dépôt et de placement du Québec's investment strategy

The demand we are proposing here has a more ethical and political dimension, as it relates to the investment strategies of the Caisse de dépôt et de placement du Québec (CDPQ).

The CDPQ, of which RREGOP is a major depositor, has made significant progress on responsible investment in recent years. Withdrawing from coal and oil exploitation by the end of 2022 is an important step in the right direction that other major investment fund managers would do well to emulate. However, the CDPQ needs to go further by establishing a plan to divest from fossil gas and setting more ambitious greenhouse gas reduction targets to bring it in line with the Paris Agreement and climate science. Employee contributions to RREGOP should not be put at risk to fund the climate crisis, but rather used to support the transition to a future of renewable energy and green jobs.

The other area in which the CDPQ needs to improve in terms of responsible investment is social criteria. In recent years, as an institutional investor, the Caisse has placed more emphasis on environmental and governance principles in its investment choices than on social principles. The CDPQ needs to incorporate more social principles into its investment criteria, particularly respect for human rights and labour rights. Employee contributions to the RREGOP fund must be invested in ways that are consistent with the values we defend as a labour movement.

PROPOSALS TO BE VOTED ON

3.1

That the Front commun demand the following enhancements to retirement terms and conditions, with no impact on the contribution rate:

- Improve phased retirement, in particular:
 - Increase from 5 to 7 years the maximum duration of phased retirement set out in the Act respecting the RREGOP;
 - Provide that workers who opt for phased retirement can extend it beyond the initially agreed-upon period, without exceeding the maximum period provided for in the program;
- Implement a process for adjusting pension amounts for retirement after age 65;
- Increase the maximum age of participation in the RREGOP to 71 years;
- Adjust the interest rate assumption for the actuarial reduction offset;
- Introduce an early benefit.

3.2

That the Front commun demand structural measures to stabilize RREGOP contribution rates in view of the plan's increasing maturity, based on an assessment of the union side's recommendations at the CSN-CSQ-FTQ working committee.

3.3

That the Front commun demand that the Caisse de dépôt et de placement du Québec (CDPQ) significantly improve its responsible investment policy by taking greater account of environmental and social criteria in the financial management of its contributors' deposits.

4. PARENTAL RIGHTS

The purpose of the parental rights plan set out in our collective agreements is to ensure the financial security of new parents during an absence related to the arrival of a child, and to prevent parenthood from negatively impacting their employment situation.

In the most recent bargaining round, held against the backdrop of the pandemic, the bargaining parties assigned parental rights issues to a working committee. This joint committee will submit recommendations, jointly or separately, to the bargaining parties in the fall, which may lead to the formulation of new demands. However, the Front commun has already identified some key demands.

Work-life balance and better parenting balance

Certain terms and conditions related to Québec Parental Insurance Plan (QPIP) benefits were amended effective January 1, 2021. Specifically, more benefits are now available to parents who are sharing a certain number of weeks of benefits.

Increase the number of weeks for paternity leave and adoption leave

In the interests of consistency, extending the length of the paternity and adoption leave provided for in the collective agreements would make it easier for parents to share the leave and spend more time with their child.

Improve terms and conditions for taking leave without pay or part-time leave without pay

To align access to leave without pay under the collective agreements with the terms and conditions of the QPIP, new parents must be afforded greater flexibility. Certain limits in the current parental rights plan may prevent parents from taking full advantage of the improvements made to the QPIP in 2021. Amendments to the collective agreements will be required to achieve this.

Broaden the grounds for special leave and increase the special leave bank

Our collective agreements currently permit special leave for pregnancy-related visits to a health care professional, with a supporting medical certificate or a written report signed by a midwife. To be entitled to this leave, the employee submitting the request must be pregnant.

This means that employees using assisted procreation services cannot take this special leave because they are not yet pregnant. We want to remedy this situation and make it possible to take special leave for assisted procreation.

An increase in the number of days of leave should also be considered. Currently, the special leave bank stands at 4 days, which can be split into half days, without loss of pay. This is insufficient. We are also proposing that the bank take into account situations that require extended travel.

Periods of cyclical layoffs and vacations

When a maternity leave begins or is already underway during cyclical layoffs or vacations that cannot be rescheduled, employees are deprived of weeks of compensatory benefits to which they would be otherwise entitled. We believe that this inequity should be remedied to give all employees the same rights and benefits.

In April 2022, an agreement in principle was reached between Treasury Board Secretariat and all unions representing teachers employed by school service centres. The agreement corrected an inequity for teachers whose maternity leave coincided with the summer vacation period. While this agreement is certainly a step in the right direction, it does not address the situation of employees in other job categories. The Front commun therefore recommends making further demands in this area.

NOTES

7. GROUP INSURANCE

Employer contributions

Health insurance premiums have been increasing steadily and employer contributions have not kept pace. It is worth noting that the increase in premium costs is partly related to the difficult working conditions in the public sector, which contribute to higher use of prescription drugs and health care. Medications for mental health problems account for more than half of the drug costs reimbursed under our insurance policies. The employer therefore has some responsibility for this situation

While the employer contribution provided for in the collective agreements was improved for several groups in the last round of bargaining, it remains insufficient considering the cost of the premiums. In some cases, including preschool, elementary, secondary, vocational, adult education and CEGEP teachers, the collective agreement provides for no employer contribution.

Full employer contribution for all

In the last bargaining round, we gained application of the full employer contribution, in some sectors and for some personnel classes, for employees who are not full-time and are required to participate in their employer's group insurance plan. Unfortunately, in other sectors and other personnel classes, employees who are not full time still have to pay a larger share of the health insurance premium because the employer is making a smaller contribution, even though the premium is the same regardless of number of hours worked. This is the case for professionals in the elementary school, secondary school and CEGEP systems, as well as for all personnel in the health care system. More work needs to be done to obtain the full employer contribution for these workers.

Universal public drug plan

From a broader perspective, one way to significantly reduce health insurance costs would be for the government to introduce a universal public drug plan. This would alleviate the pressure of rising drug prices on supplemental insurance plans such as ours. For years, the organizations in the Front commun have been calling on the government to bring in a public plan of this type.

If the government / employer refuses to do so, it would be all the more reasonable for it to shoulder its share of responsibility as an employer in the face of constantly rising drug prices.

PROPOSALS TO BE VOTED ON

7.1

That the Front commun demand that the collective agreements include substantial increases in employer contributions to health insurance plans, and provide for the full employer contribution to health insurance for all public service workers, regardless of job status or number of hours worked.

7.2

That the Front commun demand that the government commit to implementing a universal public drug insurance plan.

NOTES

8. WHISTLEBLOWERS AND MATTERS OF PUBLIC CONCERN

An employee working in public services who publicly discloses a situation that is likely to be detrimental to the public interest or who questions the soundness of the policies and program objectives of the government or a public agency has no protection under the collective agreement. The same applies to an employee who speaks out on matters of public concern or general interest.

In the public sector, the duty of loyalty is too often invoked to prevent employees from alerting the public to problems that could affect it. Shouldn't our loyalty be, first and foremost, to the Quebecers who receive the public services we provide on a daily basis?

In recent years, ministers have said they want to do away with the code of silence and that whistleblower protection should be enshrined in the collective agreements. These statements have never been followed by concrete action.

The Front commun believes it is time for the government to walk the talk. We therefore propose to demand clauses in the collective agreements guaranteeing employees' freedom to publicly disclose problems and their right to express themselves for the common good or the general interest on matters of public concern without suffering retaliation from the employer.

PROPOSAL TO BE VOTED ON

8

That the Front commun demand that the collective agreements include clauses guaranteeing all workers whistleblower protections and the right to make comments and express themselves in good faith on matters of public concern without fear of reprisal from their employer, in accordance with the rights enshrined in the *Charter of human rights and freedoms*.

9. INCREASE IN PREMIUMS AND OTHER AMOUNTS

This point relates to annual increases in responsibility premiums, other premiums, supplements, lump sums and fixed-amount indemnities or allowances.

Some of the premiums in our collective agreements are set as a percentage of the worker's salary. For example, skilled workers currently receive a 10% premium.

Other premiums and allowances are fixed amounts. There are dozens of these in the collective agreements, such as the annual isolation and remoteness premium and the lump sum provided for in the letter of agreement regarding employees working with clients presenting serious behavioural disorders.

We believe that these premiums and allowances should not be frozen in time and should all be increased by at least the same percentage as wages.

PROPOSAL TO BE VOTED ON

9

That the Front commun demand, subject to any other adjustment agreed to at the various tables, that the responsibility premiums, other premiums, supplements, lump sums, and fixed-amount indemnities or allowances in force on March 31, 2023, 2024 and 2025 be increased, respectively, effective April 1, 2023, 2024 and 2025, at the same rate as pay, with all necessary adjustments.

10. WORK IN PROGRESS

In the recently concluded 2020 bargaining round, we agreed to continue some work during the term of the collective agreement. This work will be carried on by working committees under the auspices of the Treasury Board Secretariat. Some of the committees include all three labour centrals, others just some of them. Work on issues including the pension plan and parental rights is ongoing or will begin shortly, and we are still hoping to find solutions before the collective agreement expires.

At all of these committees, the employer and union representatives will have to produce a report, jointly or separately, for submission to the bargaining parties. The union recommendations arising from these reports may lead to the formulation of additional demands related to the letters of agreement in question.

PROPOSAL TO BE VOTED ON

10

That, in preparing its demands, the Front commun assess the union recommendations made at the inter-round working committees set up after the 2020 bargaining round:

- Working Committee on the Government and Public Employees Retirement Plan (CSN-CSQ-FTQ);
- Working Committee on Parental Rights (CSN-CSQ-FTQ);
- Working Committee on Skilled Workers (CSN-CSQ-FTQ);
- Working Committee on College Continuing Education Instructors (CSN-CSQ);
- Working Committee on the Evaluation of Certain Job Titles (CSN-FTQ);
- Working Committee on the Evaluation of Psychology Professionals in Colleges (CSQ).

11. HARMONIZATION

These central table demands have been recommended by the labour organizations in the Front commun. They were submitted to and adopted by each organization's political bodies. They are now being submitted to the 355,000 public sector workers represented by the Front commun, who will vote on them by the end of September.

Following this consultation, a harmonization process may be necessary before we submit our demands to Treasury Board in the fall. We therefore recommend adoption of a harmonization mandate.

PROPOSAL TO BE VOTED ON

11

That each organization be mandated to carry out the process of harmonizing the central table demands with the other organizations in the Front commun.



ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

MAINTENANCE OF PREMIUMS, ALLOWANCES, INCREASES AND OTHER TEMPORARY AMOUNTS AND BUDGETS

A number of temporary premiums, allowances, increases, amounts and budgets expire on March 30 or September 30, 2022, i.e. during bargaining on renewal of the collective agreements, including:

- Lump sum for employees working with clients presenting serious behavioural disorders
- Lump sum for employees working with clients in a residential and long-term care centre (CHSLD)
- Retention premium for psychologists
- Premium for certain skilled worker job titles
- Interim annual recruitment and continued employment allowance for employees working in an institution concerned in the Far North.

The Front commun wants to make sure that no temporary measures are suspended during bargaining. We will therefore want all of them to be maintained until the next collective agreement comes into effect.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ON THE RREGOP

Improve phased retirement

Under the RREGOP, employees can continue their employment with reduced working time for a period of 1 to 5 years prior to full retirement by entering into a phased retirement agreement.

At the end of the agreed period, workers must retire, even if they have not yet reached the maximum period allowed under the phased retirement program (5 years).

The phased retirement program does not impact workers' pension benefits, since they continue contributing to the RREGOP as if their working time had not been reduced. There is therefore no effect on the years of service and salary recognized for the purpose of calculating the pension.

Considering the labour shortage and increasingly challenging conditions for workers in the various public systems, the Front commun recommends increasing the maximum duration of phased retirement agreements in the Act respecting the Government and Public Employees Retirement Plan to allow workers who wish to do so to continue working beyond the period agreed upon initially, without exceeding the maximum period, which we recommend setting at 7 years.

Increase the pension after age 65

In Québec, the vast majority of supplemental pension plans provide for a mechanism known as a postponed pension, which increases benefits for workers who continue working beyond their 65th birthday. The RREGOP does not do so.



LIST OF ALL PROPOSALS TO BE VOTED ON

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1. WAGES

1

That the Common Front demand:

- The introduction of a permanent mechanism whereby, annually on April 1, each rate of pay and pay scale will be adjusted¹ based on the consumer price index (CPI)¹ for the period of January 1 to December 31 of the previous year.

For the duration of the three-year collective agreement:

- In year 1, an increase for each rate of pay and pay scale of \$100 per week², **or** application of the permanent annual cost-of-living adjustment mechanism plus 2%, whichever is greater;
- In year 2, application of the permanent annual cost-of-living adjustment plus a 3% pay increase;
- In year 3, application of the permanent annual cost-of-living adjustment plus a 4% pay increase.

1. THE ADJUSTMENT CANNOT BE NEGATIVE

2. WHICH IS THE EQUIVALENT OF \$2.86 PER HOUR BASED ON A 35-HOUR WORK WEEK

NOTES

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