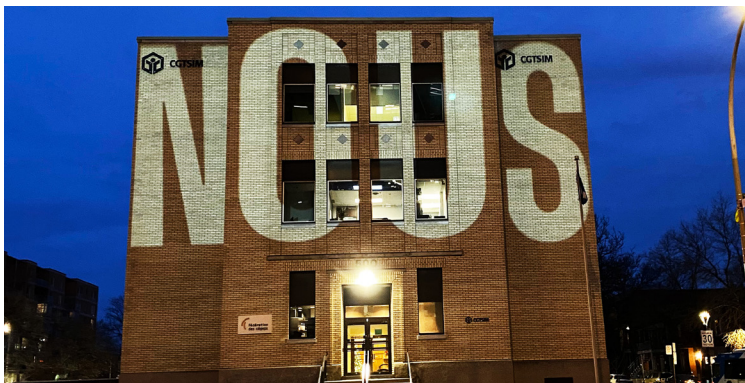


THE GOVERNMENT'S OFFERS TO THE FRONT COMMUN ARE AN INSULT TO 420,000 PUBLIC SECTOR WORKERS

Stretched beyond thin, public services are being buffeted by an unprecedented labour shortage, in addition to record inflation. And faced with this crisis, all the Legault government can think to do is make public sector workers poorer.

On Thursday, December 15, Treasury Board Secretariat president Sonia LeBel presented the government's so-called offers to the 420,000 public sector workers represented by the Front commun, a common front of unions consisting of the CSN (Confédération des syndicats nationaux), CSQ (Centrale des syndicats du Québec), FTQ (Fédération des travailleurs et travailleuses du Québec) and APTS (Alliance du personnel professionnel et technique de la santé et des services sociaux).

The Front commun is demanding real gains allowing for a wage catch-up, as well as permanent protection against inflation to ensure that there is no loss of purchasing power for the people who are struggling to keep public services afloat. Instead, the government is proposing to make them poorer.



Offers unworthy of the name

The government's tawdry proposed increases

- 9% increase over 5 years :
 - Year 1: 3% as of April 1, 2023
 - Year 2: 1.5% as of April 1, 2024
 - Year 3: 1.5% as of April 1, 2025
 - Year 4: 1.5% as of April 1, 2026
 - Year 5: 1.5% as of April 1, 2027.
- A \$1000 lump sum payment for the period from April 1, 2022 to March 31, 2023.

Despite skyrocketing inflation, the government's wage offer contains no measures to protect purchasing power. Not only is the government's wage offer lower than what is being agreed to in the private sector, but it will actually make workers poorer since the government's own forecast puts the inflation rate well above its proposed pay increases. It is projecting an inflation rate of 6.8% in 2022, which means that its offer of 3% in the first year will not shield workers from cost-of-living increases. This is grossly inadequate.

As for the proposed \$1000 lump sum payment, it's a real insult to women and men who are wearing themselves out to maintain public services, sometimes at the expense of their own health. We're talking about a one-time payment that won't even be factored into the calculation of retirement income or vacation time.

Let's not forget that, in terms of overall compensation, public service workers trail other Québec workers by 3.9%. And when we look at wages alone, that gap widens to 11.9%.

Retirement and pensions in the cross-hairs

The government is also taking aim at retirement with a plan to compel people who have worked for 35 years to wait until the age of 57 to retire. This is certainly not what we understand as a bid for retention - “detention” is more like it! But the Front commun does welcome the government’s response to union demands for keeping experienced employees in the public system on a voluntary basis.

Another target is the Government and Public Employees Retirement Plan (RREGOP), one of the few remaining employee benefits that is at least somewhat successful in retaining people who have worked in the public system for many years. The government is proposing to reduce the RREGOP pension, on the pretext that Québec Pension Plan (QPP) benefits have recently increased. In other words, what the government is giving with one hand, it’s taking away with the other. To add insult to injury, the government is claiming the QPP enhancement will induce people to retire earlier, and that’s why they need to reduce the RREGOP pension!

Not a word on regional disparities, group insurance, CEGEPs, and whistleblowers

The Front commun demands include a set of measures to help solve the crippling labour shortage problem in a number of regions. The government has chosen to completely ignore this issue: it’s not even mentioned in its so-called offers (nor is the issue of group insurance). Also worthy of note is the fact that Pascale Déry, the minister for higher education, was a no-show at the government’s press conference attended by her colleagues, the ministers for education and for health and social services. And CEGEPs are not mentioned anywhere in the government proposal. What does this mean? Lastly, the government has remained silent on measures regarding whistleblowers, despite the pressing need to give them better protection. The government proposal doesn’t even acknowledge the issue.





Management and inter-union forums

The government is back with the idea of setting up forums that would operate alongside bargaining tables, even though unions unanimously rejected this plan during the last round of contract talks.

The government needs to rethink its offers

The last two years of the pandemic have starkly demonstrated what's wrong with the public service sector. By putting such dismal offers on the table, the CAQ government is choosing to perpetuate this untenable state of affairs along with the labour shortage and all the problems that come with it. It's time to go back to the drawing board because the first draft isn't even close to getting a passing grade. The government must start over. Workers who provide public services shouldn't have to pay the price for economic recovery or the fight against inflation, especially when the government's revenues have risen dramatically and its strong budgetary outcomes exceed all expectations.

Front commun demands

The Front commun is demanding:

- For 2023: either a \$100-a-week increase for all employees or application of a permanent annual CPI-based indexing clause plus a 2% increase, depending on which formula is the most beneficial.
- For 2024: application of the permanent annual CPI-based indexing clause, plus a 3% increase.
- For 2025: application of the permanent annual CPI-based indexing clause, plus a 4% increase.

The Front commun is also presenting other demands in connection with such issues as retirement, parental rights, group insurance and regional disparities.

For more information about the unions' demands, see the "Comprendre" section on the Front commun website: www.frontcommun.org/comprendre.