

## The Common Front adopts a strike mandate

### Takeaway

Faced with the employer's priorities, only our determination can move the negotiations forward!

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The consultations on the strike have been completed and the member unions of the organizations in the Front commun have given it an historic mandate: all the CEGEP teachers' unions voted in favour of a strike, up to and including an all-out indefinite strike. The message to the government is clear: the current offers are inadequate and unsatisfactory, not to say insulting, and members are ready and willing to continue their mobilization using the ultimate pressure tactic if necessary.

### The employer is feeling the pressure!

Already, following the Front commun's big provincial demonstration on September 23, which brought more than 100,000 people into the streets of Montréal to support our public services, Sonia LeBel announced with considerable fanfare that she was directing the employers' bargaining committees at the sectoral tables to pare down their priorities to five or six. And she told them to do it fast, by October 11. We think this was a clear indication that the government is feeling the pressure in the negotiations and, instead of putting up the money needed to reach an agreement at the bargaining table, it has once again chosen to rely instead on media relations to salvage its image.

### Employer's bargaining committee picks odd top 5

On Sonia LeBel's instructions, the Comité patronal de négociation des collèges (CPNC), the employer's bargaining committee at the sectoral table for CEGEPs, drew up its list of sectoral priorities. We were not surprised to see distance education at the top of the list, as it is one of the government's stated priorities for the CEGEPs. On the other hand, we wonder why the CPNC included two items on this short list that do not apply to all the CEGEPs, while withdrawing its proposals on research, which had been identified as a priority for the college sector in the central table offers in April. At the same time, the CPNC announced that the monetary offers it withdrew in its last sectoral submission could still be discussed if they were priorities for the unions. It appears the purpose of this exercise was not so much to move the talks forward as to get the union alliance, the ASPPC, to shift its focus towards the employer's priorities.

To prevent progress already made at the sectoral table from disappearing without a trace, the union committee agreed with the CPNC, before the announcement of the employer's priorities, on a list of points on which the discussions had been fruitful and which could be included in the tentative agreement that will be submitted to the membership at the end of the negotiations. However, these points are few and relatively peripheral. On the major issues, there remains an abyss between our positions and the CPNC's.

### Political orders are a recipe for failure

Beyond the content of the employer's priorities, there is the process: the pruning of the employer's priorities and the bargaining show that the government wants to put on are indicative of the undue control that the Treasury Board is exercising over the sectoral talks. The whole approach is consistent with the centralized decision-making to which the CAQ has accustomed us on other issues.

So instead of initiating a genuine process of prioritization, the political orders from the upper echelons of government have only further inflamed the situation. The CPNC has actually withdrawn some of the resources it had included in its original offer. The courageous move would be to invest in the public system, but the government seems intent on escalating the conflict instead.



### Towards an all-out strike

Teachers United are refusing to narrow the negotiations to the employer's priorities and refusing to allow the CAQ to monopolize the public arena on this issue. We know that gains for the union at the bargaining table will also be critical gains for the public, which wants quality public services, the vital importance of which was highlighted by the pandemic. In the coming weeks, we will redouble our efforts to bring our bargaining talks to a successful conclusion. Local and regional actions will be stepped up, and we stand ready and willing to take strike action commensurate with the determination shown in our ranks.