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## BC Forestry Workers' Strike Approaches Six Months Steelworkers Leadership Group Unanimously Rejects Proposal by Western Forest Products



Hundreds of workers from all sectors marched in Nanaimo, November 6, 2019, in support of striking coastal forestry workers. (USW 1-1937)

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### BC Forestry Workers' Strike Approaches Six Months

## Steelworkers Leadership Group Unanimously Rejects Proposal by Western Forest Products

Negotiators for United Steelworkers Local 1-1937 representing BC coastal forestry workers employed by Western Forest Products (WFP) and subcontractors met through a conference call with WFP and Contractor Chairpersons on November 18 to report on mediation sessions that were held on November 12, 16 and 17. The forestry workers have been on strike since July 1 on issues related to wages, benefits, unsafe working conditions and the abusive drug and alcohol policy.

The negotiating committee reported on what had taken place in mediation -- that there had been some progress but that ended with what they characterized as the company's "mediation delaying action," refusing to respond to the union's last offer at midday November 17. The bargaining committee reports, in *Bargaining Bulletin* #32 dated November 18, that "The Union's leadership group comprised of WFP and Contractor Chairpersons has passed a unanimous motion directing the Bargaining Committee to reject WFP's proposal in its entirety. The leadership group further stated that WFP should stop its delaying tactics and get back to the mediation table."



The committee reports that not only did the company fail to address the union's proposals regarding the workers' concerns, but the company's proposal actually eliminated "17 other tentative agreements the parties have reached in the mediation process, essentially wiping out much of the work already completed." Included in language that was already negotiated, but now eliminated by WFP, were agreements related to union security language improvements, health and safety language improvements, apprentice selection improvements, arbitrator and umpire appointments to speed up arbitration, member support during drug and alcohol investigations and testing, and other issues.

As has become their practice in attempting to undermine the union and the solidarity of the workers behind their just demands and their bargaining committee, the company issued a letter from CEO Don Demens directly to USW Local 1-1937 members on November 18 which falsely



claims that WFP had removed concessionary demands, that the company has agreed to extend Long Term Disability coverage past age 60, as well as other false claims.

The Bulletin concludes with "The USW Bargaining Committee remains available every day to continue mediation. We urge WFP's bargaining committee to contact the Mediators to schedule more dates. We are available starting tomorrow."

On November 25 the Bargaining Committee issued another update, reporting that there still has been no reply from WFP to the union's proposal of November 17, nor has the company contacted the mediators to re-start discussions. The mediators requested a conference call with the union spokesperson for November 26.

Labour Councils, union locals from both the private and the public sector, and communities affected by the strike, are standing firm in solidarity with the forestry workers' fight for wages and working conditions that are acceptable to them and take into consideration the dangers of their work and the needs of the workers, their families and communities.

(Photos: USW 1-1937)



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## Nanaimo Rally Supports "No Concessions" Stand of Forestry Workers

- Barbara Biley -



**Rally in Nanaimo, November 6, 2019, in support of striking coastal forestry workers.**

Several hundred people from throughout Vancouver Island gathered outside the offices of Western Forest Products (WFP) in Nanaimo on November 6 to demand that the company return to negotiations with the union. The workers, members of United Steelworkers' Local 1-1937, have repeatedly rejected WFP's attempts to impose major concessions which would eliminate wages and working conditions that have been achieved over a period of more than 40 years.

The crowd was full of banners and placards of many unions. Health care workers, ferry workers, teachers and CUPE education workers, longshore workers, several island MPs and many others were out in force to support the just stand of the forestry workers. These workers have been standing firm throughout the strike for a negotiated contract that respects their rights and dignity, both in terms of conditions previously agreed to and an end to unilateral anti-worker actions of the company, many of which were facilitated by a contract imposed through binding arbitration in 2004. Following the very loud and spirited rally outside the WFP offices there was a short march to Nob

Hill Park where lunch was served.



**USW Local 1-1937 president Brian Butler addresses rally, November 6, 2019.**

The rally was addressed by several Steelworkers' leaders including USW Local 1-1937 president Brian Butler, District 3 Director Steve Hunt, Fraser Valley Local 2009 president Al Bieksa, and BC Federation of Labour president Laird Cronk and others. The message from the speakers and the workers was clear, that WFP's refusal to negotiate and its repeated attempts to stall, bully and intimidate through charges at the Labour Board are recognized as attacks on the rights of all and condemned by workers from all sectors and the broad public.

So far there have been four mediation sessions. The last of these ended October 20 when, in spite of the union amending its demands, the company refused to move off of any of its concessionary demands. At least twice the company has written directly to the workers attempting to bypass and undermine the union's bargaining committee. The latest such action was a letter from WFP CEO Don Demens to individual workers on October 31 "offering" binding arbitration and a similar letter to the union from WFP bargaining committee spokesperson Roger MacDougall. The bargaining committee's immediate and firm response to that was a definite *NO!*

In the bargaining bulletin issued November 1 the bargaining committee explained "The last time the Local Union faced Binding Arbitration over its Collective Agreement was in 2004, when the BC Liberal Government imposed Binding Arbitration that forced the Union to accept a substandard Collective Agreement which was gutted of many rights the Union had gained over decades of collective bargaining [...]" Workers were "forced to accept the employers' unilateral right to implement alternate shifts, which previously had to be agreed upon between the Parties. This has created untold hardship for members forced to work on fatigue-inducing, unsafe work schedules" and "were also forced to accept whole logging operations being contracted out through what is now known as the Woodlands Letter of Understanding, which led to the introduction of many new contractors and subcontractors, many of which created all kinds of labour relations problems for our members and the Local Union. Their rampant use became a divide and conquer strategy for the Industry."



The bargaining committee stated, "Many other negative results came from the imposed 2004 contract that still plagues the membership to this day, as a consequence of Binding Arbitration. Repeating mistakes of the past is not the way we will reach a Collective Agreement [...] Binding

Arbitration is completely unacceptable. We can never give up control of our Collective Agreement rights to another third party as history does not lie. We have witnessed the damage and suffered the consequences of this dangerous process and could never agree to it."

The day after the rally the union was notified that WFP had agreed to return to mediation. The parties met on November 12, 16 and 17 until WFP decided that it would not respond to the union's last offer on November 17 and mediation ended.

WFP is one of a handful of forest monopolies that dominate the industry in BC and have benefitted from provincial government policies that have permitted them to make record profits from logging and manufacturing. WFP operates on the coast, mainly on Vancouver Island. While closing mills in BC and shipping raw logs overseas and shipping product to mills in the U.S., Western Forest Products has purchased two sawmills in Arlington and Vancouver, Washington since the beginning of 2018. WFP is the main player in the coastal section of the forest industry, with both logging operations and mills in Cowichan Bay, Chemainus, Ladysmith, Duke Point and Port Alberni. The company recently closed the planer mill at its Saltair Division in Ladysmith. Unfinished lumber is now taken to the two mills in Washington to be planed as a means of getting around tariffs.

Over the last five years the company has reported record profits from the added value created by forestry workers employed by Western and subcontractors, without regard for the well-being of the workers, including their safety on the job and going to and from the job. The current efforts to impose concessions in wages, benefits and working conditions and to increase subcontracting so as to weaken the organization of the workers to defend their rights, have earned them condemnation from not only the forestry workers but from workers and local communities throughout the region.



(Photos: M. Duhra, USW 1-1937)



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## **Vancouver Transit Workers Defend Their Rights and the Public Transit System**

### **Bus Drivers and Maintenance Workers Reach Tentative Agreement**

**- Anne Jamieson and Brian Sproule -**

The 5,000 transit workers who provide bus and ferry services in the Metro Vancouver area have been seeking wages and benefits acceptable to themselves and improved working conditions which are the conditions for the safe transport of the public.

The intransigence of CMBC regarding the concerns of transit workers in Metro Vancouver for proper wages and working conditions meant that workers announced on November 20 a three-day



system wide shutdown would take place on November 27, 28 and 29. Negotiations resumed on November 26 after breaking down two weeks ago. After 10 hours of negotiations, Unifor National President Jerry Dias announced a 30 minute extension of the strike deadline past midnight to permit negotiations to continue and a tentative agreement was announced at 12:30 am this morning, averting the shutdown.



**Posted to the Unifor Local 111 twitter feed, November 23, 2019: "With all due respect to PR Dept ... Transit Workers are better qualified to tell it like it really is. ... just ask and listen to ANY Transit Worker in this room."**

"This contract recognizes that Unifor members are the backbone of the Metro Vancouver transit system," said Gavin McGarrigle, Unifor Western Regional Director and lead negotiator. "We look forward to being an integral part of an expanding system that keeps this region moving." Job actions will end while ratification votes take place in the coming days, following which details of the agreement will be made public.

The contracts between Unifor Locals 111 and 2200 and the Coast Mountain Bus Company (CMBC) expired on March 31. With no progress made in months of negotiations, in early October, the workers voted 99 per cent for strike action and served 72 hours strike notice on October 29. They have been engaged in job action to back their contract demands since November 1.



The workers are organized in Locals 111, representing the 4,000 transit operators that drive buses in the Translink system; and Local 2200 representing nearly 1,000 tradespersons and technicians that maintain the buses and Seabus fleet. CMBC is wholly owned by TransLink, the body which oversees public transit operations in Metro Vancouver.

The *Transit Strike Bulletin* published by Unifor states "At its core, this labour dispute is about acknowledging the important role that transit workers play in a system that is both under stress

and expanding."

Three of the issues on the table were: parity of drivers' wages with those of bus drivers in other large cities like Toronto; adequate breaks during a shift for rest, food, and to use the washroom; and wage parity between CMBC maintenance staff, and SkyTrain maintenance staff.

The *Transit Strike Bulletin* states that despite the company's disrespectful and entrenched approach, both locals at first opted to take actions that were the least disruptive to the public, which included a uniform ban by operators and a ban on overtime by the mechanics.

The ban on overtime for maintenance workers resulted in daily cancellation of SeaBus sailings and reduced bus service on a number of major routes. The fact that this alone caused significant reductions in service only proved that the working conditions are unsustainable, as everyone knows that if the system is running on overtime it is running with a significant shortage of workers. Bus drivers are also experiencing serious problems because of understaffing, including not getting bathroom breaks and other rest breaks, putting their safety and well-being and that of the public at risk.

The entrenched position of TransLink (via CMBC), was undoubtedly due to the fact that TransLink had decided that it could not "afford" to meet the just demands of the transit workers while at the same time proceeding with its planned expansion.



McGarrigle told *Star Metro Vancouver* on October 11 that the issue of drivers working through their break times in order to keep buses running on schedule has gone unresolved for years. He said that workers are at a "breaking point." Burnout is common. "Bus drivers need time to recover [...] going to the bathroom, having something to eat, getting your head reset for the next route, and they are dealing with completely overcrowded buses, passing up passengers, having to assist the elderly. They are not machines, they are humans, and they need adequate time to decompress and recover."

TransLink has reported an 18 per cent increase in ridership between 2016 and 2018. According to McGarrigle this has resulted in a 36 per cent increase in overcrowded buses. The small community shuttle buses which service what are considered light volume routes have special mechanical lifts at the rear for people using wheel chairs or scooters as well as for people with shopping carts. These lifts take time to load and unload passengers as well as to raise and lower. Drivers also need time to adjust mirrors and the driver's seat and do various safety checks.

A driver of a bus on one of the busiest routes in Vancouver told *Workers' Forum*, "This job has finished me -- I can't keep doing it." When asked about the issue of breaks, he said that the route he is on supposedly has a 40-minute break built into the schedule, but a driver "has to phone ahead and ask for it." One time he phoned and asked for a break but it was denied and he was told that the "break is for the bus, not the driver"! Though well under 65, this worker has decided to take early retirement as soon as he can do so without penalty (i.e. so that he can have a liveable pension). He said he fully supports strike action, and has decided to keep going until after the strike is over for the sake of his fellow workers who have to stay and keep doing this stressful job.

CMBC had refused any reasonable compromise and dug into their position, thus forcing the union to escalate actions. As expected, CMBC had tried to put a wedge between the public and the union by painting transit workers as selfish and uncaring, and is quoted in the monopoly media as saying: "The union [will be] leaving hundreds of thousands of customers without transportation." In fact it is the employers who are selfish and uncaring both for the public, and for the transit workers who are providing a crucial service to the public.

Metro Vancouver transit riders were not taken in by the attempts to blame the workers. The *Transit Strike Bulletin* said, "Transit operators have been overwhelmed by the support and solidarity from our passengers."



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## **SkyTrain Workers Vote in Favour of Job Action**

Nine hundred SkyTrain workers are in the midst of negotiations with their employer, TransLink's BC Rapid Transit Company. They include train operators, attendants, technicians, mechanics and administrators on two of the three SkyTrain lines, the Millennium and Expo lines, whose contract expired on August 31. They are represented by CUPE Local 7000. On November 21, 96.8 per cent of members voted in favour of job action if a contract isn't reached. Eight days of mediation also began that day.

In a November 13 statement, union President Tony Rebelo explained that outstanding issues include wage increases, sick benefits, inadequate staffing levels and forced overtime.

The third SkyTrain line, the Canada Line, is privately owned and operated by ProTransBC, a consortium headed by SNC-Lavalin under a long-term agreement with TransLink.



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## **For Your Information Greater Vancouver Transit System**

TransLink is the transportation authority established by the province of British Columbia to provide regional bus service, SkyTrain rapid transit, SeaBus passenger ferries linking the North Shore to downtown Vancouver across Burrard Inlet, HandyDART service for people with mobility issues, and West Coast Express commuter rail, train service between Vancouver and Mission in the Fraser Valley.

TransLink contracts with several operators:

### **Coast Mountain Bus Company**

TransLink's largest operating company is Coast Mountain Bus Company Ltd. (CMBC) which operates over 96 per cent of the bus service in the region, as well as SeaBus. Coast Mountain Bus Company drivers and maintenance workers, members of Unifor, have been engaged in job actions since the beginning of November. Other Coast Mountain employees are members of CUPE and MoveUP and are not involved in the job actions. Cleaners are employed by another subcontractor, as are employees of the administration while customer service, including transit ticket sales and promotions, are handled directly by TransLink as are security services and policing.

### **Bombardier**

Bombardier operates the West Coast Express.

### **BC Rapid Transit Company**

British Columbia Rapid Transit Company Ltd. (BCRTC), on behalf of TransLink, maintains and operates two of the three SkyTrain (light rapid transit) lines in Metro Vancouver -- the Expo Line and the Millennium Line -- as well as the West Coast Express commuter rail service.



## ProTransBC

ProTrans BC is a subsidiary of SNC-Lavalin Inc. and is the private operator of SkyTrain's Canada Line, a 19-km automated rail-based rapid transit system connecting Downtown Vancouver with central Richmond and the Vancouver International Airport.

## West Vancouver Blue Bus

West Vancouver Blue Bus is owned and operated by the District Municipality of West Vancouver under a contract to TransLink.

## First Transit

HandyDART service is contracted to First Transit.

Workers in the different sections of the Greater Vancouver transit system belong to several unions, including Unifor, CUPE, MoveUP, Teamsters, and the Amalgamated Transit Union.



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## University of Northern BC Faculty Strike

# Appropriate Compensation and Working Conditions for Professors, Librarians, Lab and Contract Workers Demanded



UNBC Faculty Association picket line, November 11, 2019.

Faculty Association members at the University of Northern BC (UNBC) whose contract expired on June 30, served 72-hour strike notice on November 4 and initiated strike action on November 7. Negotiations for a new contract began on March 5, but were not progressing despite an 84 per cent

strike mandate and subsequent mediation efforts. The nearly 350 Faculty Association members include tenured and tenure-track faculty, term and sessional instructors, librarians, and lab instructors.

A central issue in the negotiations is bringing an end to the substantial discrepancy in salary structure and compensation received by UNBC faculty members in comparison to professors at other Canadian universities with UNBC currently ranking 98 out of 100, according to Faculty Association President Stephen Rader. Rader further points out that efforts to fix the salary structure have been ongoing for many years, including through a strike during the last round of negotiations in 2015. Failure to address this discrepancy is not only of concern to current UNBC faculty members, but is also an impediment to hiring good quality new faculty members as an increasing number of retirements take place over the next 5 to 10 years.

Professors' salaries are not the only issue. Of equal concern is compensation for librarians, lab instructors and those in precarious part-time and term contract positions -- a growing component of university academic staff across Canada which makes it increasingly difficult for workers to plan and meet the needs of themselves and their families.

UNBCFA members have also made it clear that they will never agree to concessions proposed by the administration that would change crucial collegial governance language "in exchange" for addressing the salary issues and/or the precarity concerns of part time and contracted members. As pointed out in the UNBCFA *Bargaining Bulletin #14*: "The Employer has tabled a number of proposals on matters such as tenure that are crucial to the way universities traditionally operate. These proposals are unacceptable to the Faculty Association because they would diminish collegial governance and would make UNBC an unattractive place for faculty to work -- even if our salaries were higher."

The bulletin continues: "On the issue of salaries, the parties may be converging, albeit slowly. The Faculty Association has been working on the salary issue for the better part of a decade, through three rounds of bargaining, two arbitrations, and a strike. All our resolve has been and is directed towards one goal: a settlement that will ensure serene labour relations at UNBC for the foreseeable future. The UNBCFA is eager to achieve a Collective Agreement that provides as much assurance as possible that students, faculty, and staff three years from now will not face the kind of uncertainty -- or job action -- that they do now."

Both sides returned to the bargaining table on November 12 and exchanges continued off and on all week. After negotiations broke down over the weekend of November 23-24 the Faculty Association requested that the Minister of Labour appoint a mediator, a request that was supported by the university. Late in the day on November 26 the government announced that a special mediator will be appointed.

Support for the UNBCFA is widespread and visible on the picket lines in Prince George and Terrace and at regional sites in Quesnel and Vancouver. Colleagues from CUPE locals representing support staff and teaching assistants and food services staff in UNITE HERE Local 40 have been walking the lines with Faculty Association members since day one of the strike. Union and community



members from Prince George and across the province have shown their support by joining pickets and rallies, writing letters to the UNBC administration and Board of Governors, making donations and spreading the word about the issues the Faculty Association is determined to have addressed.



**Rally held the day before the faculty strike began, November 6, 2019.**

Despite the challenges they face in terms of their studies, students have been visible in their support of Faculty Association members -- organizing marches, joining the picket lines and expressing their concerns to the UNBC administration. One example is a recent letter to the Board of Governors and UNBC President from the graduate and undergraduate students who serve as UNBC Research Ambassadors. In part they state: "We've witnessed first-hand how deeply faculty and staff at UNBC love and promote our university and community.... We are devastated to learn of the inequitable treatment of faculty, instructors and staff .... We are disappointed that the UNBC Administration is not upholding the values ... that originally attracted us to choosing this educational establishment and acting as student leaders through the Research Ambassadors program.... We will continue to abstain from all Research Ambassador activities to demonstrate our solidarity with the Faculty Association."

Support and solidarity from the Canadian Association of University Teachers and faculty unions across the country has also been significant including financial assistance, messages of solidarity, and letters to the UNBC administration. One such letter to the Chair of the UNBC Board of Governors, from the Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations states, in part: "As evidenced by a variety of rankings, UNBC faculty are amongst the most accomplished and dedicated in the country, yet their pay consistently ranks amongst the worst in the country. It is simply unacceptable that the administration would continue to attempt to leverage concessions from librarians and precarious contract faculty in exchange for the most modest of wage adjustments. It is also alarming that the administration is asking for concessions on collegial governance in exchange for their wage proposal."

Support from across the country was underlined with the arrival of "flying pickets" from 15 post-secondary institutions from as far away as Memorial University in Newfoundland and Labrador joining the picket lines and a noon hour rally at UNBC on Friday, November 15.





**Faculty are joined on the picket line by UNBC support staff.**



**Food services workers show their support for striking UNBC faculty.**

*(With files from UNBC Faculty Association and Prince George Citizen. Photos: UNBC Faculty Assn, )*



## **Letter to University of Northern British Columbia, Board Chair**

**- Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations -**

I am writing today, on behalf of 17,000 university faculty and academic librarians at our 30 member associations, to implore you to return to the table and negotiate a collective agreement in good faith with the UNBC Faculty Association. It is also time for the Board of Governors to exercise some leadership in moving beyond the toxic labour relations environment that has plagued UNBC in recent years.

Faculty at UNBC are consistently faced with an administration that is openly hostile to faculty and regularly misunderstands and insults the role of faculty at a research university. Two strikes in less than five years speaks to a deeply dysfunctional relationship that is undermining the reputation of UNBC. As evidenced by a variety of rankings, UNBC faculty are amongst the most accomplished and dedicated in the country yet their pay consistently ranks amongst the worst in the country. It is simply unacceptable that the administration would continue to attempt to leverage concessions from librarians and precarious contract faculty in exchange for the most modest of wage adjustments. It is also alarming that the administration is asking for concessions on collegial governance in exchange for their wage proposal. Indeed, the core problem at UNBC is a lack of meaningful collegial governance and any step backward on that front must be rejected.

Faculty across Ontario will stand in solidarity with our colleagues at UNBC until they achieve a fair settlement. It is time for the Board of Governors at UNBC to show some leadership and direct the administration bargaining team to return to the table and end this dispute.

Yours Sincerely,

*Rahul Sapra*  
*President, OCUFA*

*(November 10, 2019)*



## Quebec Public Sector Negotiations

# Workers Speak Out About Their Concerns and Needs

- Interview, Jeff Begley, President, Federation of Health and Social Services (FSSS-CSN) -



Public sector workers march in Quebec city, October 30, 2019, as they submit their contract demands to the Quebec government.

Quebec's 500,000 or so public sector workers are beginning negotiations for the renewal of their

collective agreements, which expire on March 31, 2020. The unions representing them have put forward their cross-sectoral demands (wages, pension plans, etc.) and their sectoral demands which pertain to the working conditions of specific categories of workers. Under the hoax of ensuring the health of public finances, the Quebec government has declared that it is preparing to continue to impose the anti-social austerity agenda that has proven to be so disastrous for the working conditions of public sector employees and consequently, for the delivery of public services. This is anathema to the workers who are preparing to step up their struggle for their rights.

*Workers' Forum* fully supports the fight of the public sector workers for wages and working conditions that they deem adequate to live a decent life, to be able to keep and attract public sector employees and to deliver services in a dignified and humane manner. This struggle is being waged directly in the field of public opinion and *Workers' Forum* is placing its pages at its disposal. In this issue, we are publishing an interview with Jeff Begley, President of the Federation of Health and Social Services (FSSS-CSN), which has approximately 110,000 members, 80 per cent of whom are women.

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***Workers' Forum:*** As public sector negotiations begin in Quebec, what are the main concerns of workers in the sector at this time?

***Jeff Begley:*** First, the last reform of former Liberal government Health and Social Services Minister Gaétan Barrette has taken its toll and will continue to do so for a long time to come.[1] The creation of mega-institutions has hurt services as well as the network, and the deterioration of services is having a major impact on the people delivering services, who are our members. The problem of health and safety, of issues of mental health, has skyrocketed since the beginning of the reform. It is causing serious problems within all the conditions existing in the system.

For example, since the beginning of the reform, salary-insurance claims for sick leave have increased by 25 per cent. That's huge! Over the past year the claims have not decreased. We don't have the numbers yet for the year, but the claims are continuing. This is very disturbing. It not only costs a fortune in terms of money, but also in terms of the huge human cost on the health of our workers. It's a revolving wheel. The more the conditions deteriorate, the more our members fall ill.

Things need to change significantly during the upcoming negotiation, and quickly, otherwise the situation will only further erode.

The labour shortage is an added factor because it exists in health as it does elsewhere, which is new in terms of the health care sector. Ten years ago, Human Resources managers had a file full of resumé's that they had not responded to and now they're not able to find people.

And, of course, ever since the last negotiation, our members are under the impression that the last time they won the negotiation was in 1999. That means that for 20 years now our conditions have been worsening.

These are the main factors causing the disarray amongst our members, in addition to the wage issue. It's crucial that with the next negotiation, our members are able to say they have achieved a substantial improvement in their living and working conditions.

***WF:*** What's the link between the Barrette reform and the problems you have just mentioned?

***JB:*** Here's an example. Previously, for instance, in a Residential and Long-Term Care Centre (CHSLD), when there was a problem at the level of attendants, when we needed more of them for



example, we had a Board of Directors responsible for 400-500 residents, and maybe for 100-120-130 employees, and in the case of very large CHSLDs, the number of employees could reach about 400. There was a Board of Directors, which met every month to address the problems of the CHSLD, which could foresee that certain problems may arise, whether related to food services, attendants, nurses, or management. There was pressure on the Board to deal with these problems before they became too big or too serious, to ensure the well-being of employees and patients.

Now the CHSLD, along with all the other CHSLDs in the region, the local health care community service centres (CLSCs) as well as the youth centres, the rehabilitation centres for the intellectually handicapped and the hospitals have all been somewhat merged into a mega-institution. Within such conditions, you're lucky if you have 10 minutes a year to talk about a problem in a CHSLD.

In addition, employers are completely lost. If we ask one of our members who their boss is, in many cases if you're not working at the establishment's head office, you never see him or her. We call a number and hope that the message was received. The problem is even bigger in the regions, where the distances between the establishment's components and head office are even larger. It's a serious problem, both for the employee and for the union. The union is faced with the distress of the person not receiving the services needed, not knowing how to address that need. This has a very negative impact on the public and on employees. This problem exists everywhere in Quebec, in the major centres and in the regions. We undertook a tour across Quebec and the situation exists everywhere, irrespective of the service. Accountability has been shifted so far away from where the service is provided that it has created a crisis of accountability within the system, a general disarray. Everyone is paying for it.

**WF:** What about the issue of wages?

**JB:** Wages have deteriorated significantly over the years. The cost of living has greatly exceeded our wages over the last 20 years. That's why we have tabled a demand for a fixed wage increase amount for the first year of the contract. Although the amount is significant for people who are better paid, it is even more significant for low earners. We are asking for a fixed increase of \$ 3 per hour in the first year, for all our members. Three dollars the first year on average represents a little more than a 9 per cent increase, but for low wage earners it represents something like 20 per cent.

**WF:** How do you envisage the upcoming period as negotiations begin?

**JB:** We undertook a tour of our members in order to work out our demands. Now that we have tabled them, we are embarking on another tour to have them take root and discuss what's required to push them forward.

Expectations are very high among our members. The government has announced that it will offer us only the equivalent of the cost of living, and a little more for patient attendants and the lowest paid teachers. We hope that this is just posturing at the beginning of negotiations, to position itself in relation to public opinion and that at the bargaining table the government will become serious. Otherwise, if the government really wants to limit us to inflation, we will tell our members that we need to mobilize ourselves more than we have done in recent years.

In our opinion, if the Coalition Avenir Québec won the Quebec election in October 2018, it's because people were disgusted with the Barrette reform in health care and with the situation prevailing in the schools. The Legault government needs to recognize that.

Of course if the government puts into practice what it has announced for health care attendants and teachers, it will not be up to the mark with what these employees need. As for the other categories of workers, they will definitely not accept being limited to inflation.

In addition, the government has not said a word about the conditions for the delivery of services, about working conditions.

As far as I know, all the unions involved in these negotiations have tabled their demands. We expect a response from the government before the holidays.

It is certain that a very significant move is going to be needed to improve conditions in the public services.

## **Note**

1. The main component of what has been called the Barrette reform, named after former Minister of Health and Social Services Gaetan Barrette, was the adoption in 2015 of Bill 10 by the Liberal government which restructured health services. The legislation created mega-institutions that sometimes cover entire regions, whose boards of directors are essentially appointed by the Minister of Health and Social Services and accountable to the Minister. The law eliminated the intermediate levels of decision-making that existed within the network, thereby further distancing the voices of workers, those who make the system work, which are often criminalized.

*(Photo: CSN)*



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