Workers' Forum

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Mass Common Front Demonstration in Montreal

Public Sector Workers Declare: With One Voice, We Defend Public Services!

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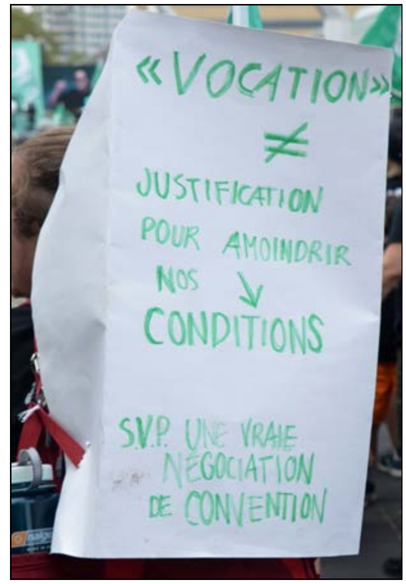
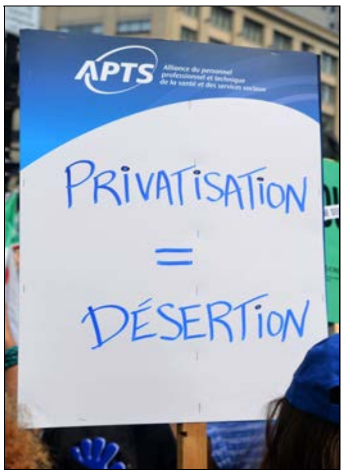
On Saturday, September 23, more than 100,000 public sector workers and their many allies from childcare centres, parents, students and so many others marched through the streets of Montreal to demand their rights. They came from all corners of Quebec, by bus, by car, from Trois-Rivières, Quebec City, Victoriaville, Drummondville, Val d'Or, Gaspésie, Gatineau and the Magdalen Islands to show the Legault government that they do not accept its dictate and the working and living conditions it imposes on them. A tide of banners, flags, caps and scarves bore the slogan: *Nous d'une seule voix!* (We with One Voice!) marking the unity of all public sector workers in their determination to obtain working conditions worthy of their social responsibilities.

The demonstration ended at the Place des Festivals, where all the speakers affirmed that it is the hundreds of thousands of public service workers who, because they are on the front line of care for the population, are the ones who defend and protect the health and education of the whole population. They were quick to point out that this is also the opinion of the vast majority of Quebeckers, and that the government must be held to account if it continues to refuse to negotiate based on the demands of the workers.


POPULATION
EN =
SANTE =
SOINS DE
QUALITÉS


NOUS
D'UNE SEULE VOIX
NOS ÉLÈVES
SONT PLUS QUE
LEURS NOTES


«VOCATION»
≠
JUSTIFICATION
POUR AMOINDRIR
NOS ↘
CONDITIONS
S.V.P. UNE VRAIE
NÉGOCIATION
DE CONVENTION


APTS
PRIVATISATION
=
DÉSERTION


9% sur 5ans
Quand vous vous votez
30%?!
Bas-St-Laurent,
Pas contents!


Pour m'encourager,
on diminue mon
fond de pension...
-15 000$/année
Merci, mais non merci.


LES PROFS
QUITTENT :
CONDITIONS EXÉCRABLES
RETRAITE
ÉPUISEMENT
MANQUE DE RECONNAISSANCE
$


L'AVENIR DES
ENFANTS PASSE
PAR DES CONDITIONS
DE TRAVAIL
RAISONNABLES


DUBÉ et CARMANT
ça fait trop longtemps
que vos employés
de soutien travaillent
pour des
CAQahuètes
C'est assez!
Agent adm.
Secrétaire
tech adm.
À quand notre tour!

Demonstration Targets Real Disruptors of Social Life

– Pierre Soublière –

Nearly a quarter of the 420,000 public sector workers, from all regions of Quebec, converged on Montreal on Saturday, September 23. Common Front unions estimate that more than 100,000 people responded to its call to make themselves heard as one voice to demand humane working conditions as an integral part of turning the tide and creating a public network that defends the rights and dignity of everyone.

A striking aspect of the demonstration was the number of young people, the next generation, expressing their enthusiasm for viable public networks of health care and education. For many, this was the first time they participated in an action of its kind. The fact of being together like this with all the energy that emanates from it was a great encouragement for the battles that are on the horizon, at a time strike votes have already begun and will continue in the weeks to come. Union spokespersons report that in the Îles-de-la-Madeleine, for example, the vote in favour of a strike is close to 100 per cent!

The day's host, comedian Rosalie Vaillancourt, welcomed people as they arrived at the Quartier des spectacles and reflected the atmosphere and the issues very well. She expressed her personal appreciation for the work of health and education workers, while affirming that all public sector workers are the pillars of society and that the current struggle is for the future of the public sector and society itself. She said what was needed were services that meet the needs of people as they exist today.

Treasury Board President Sonia Lebel has shown herself and her government to be totally insensitive to the fact that the driving forces of society had come together, sometimes traveling long distances, to say loud and clear that improvements are necessary both in terms of salaries and their working conditions for the good of public services. The Common Front unions argue that Lebel and her government have a "disconnected and contemptuous" manner, insensitive to the untenable conditions of workers and the deterioration of public systems. Lebel raised once again that she expected "flexibility," the possibility of organizing work in schools and hospitals "in a more efficient manner," adding that no one wants services to be "disrupted."

On this subject, the unions raise the examples of more "flexibility" and "efficiency" in the service of private interests on the part of the CAQ government. A few days prior to the demonstration, a request for action was filed at the Montreal courthouse regarding the COVID-19 outbreaks which occurred in Quebec's residential and long-term care centres (CHSLDs) in the spring of 2020. The action initially raised only the case of residents of the CHSLD Sainte-Dorothée, but has since been expanded and now concerns all patients in public CHSLDs in Quebec who experienced outbreaks during the pandemic, involving 25 establishments.

The lawsuit is based on the right of CHSLD residents to receive adequate health care and social services at levels determined on a scientific basis, with continuity and in a personalized and safe manner, that upholds their right to life; the safety, integrity and freedom of their person; and their dignity.

In their class action request, the plaintiffs argue that during the period from March 2020 to March 2021, CHSLD residents were treated in a wrongful, negligent and unsafe manner by the defendants as part of their response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Among the evidence in this regard, the plaintiffs raise the failure of the defendants to adopt or update a regional plan to combat an influenza pandemic between 2006 and 2020, the defendants' omission of measures to prepare CHSLDs under their responsibility for the pandemic in January and February 2020, and the failure to put in place in a timely manner the necessary measures to protect CHSLD residents when they were identified in January 2020 as part of the most vulnerable population.

The request for collective action also targets the Minister of Health and the National Director of Public Health.

Auto Industry

Wage Demands of U.S. Auto Workers

Rally by autoworkers in Kokomo, Indiana, week of September 17-23, as they prepare for rotating strike actions.

U.S. autoworkers are not flinching in their demands for a 40 per cent wage increase to match the increase in salaries the owners of the big three automakers have given themselves in the last few years while the wages of autoworkers have systematically declined.

Autoworkers in the U.S. point out that since 2003, they have seen their average hourly wage decline by 30 per cent. Meanwhile, over the past decade, the Big Three automakers have raked in more than $250 billion in profits and rewarded shareholders with tens of billions of dollars in stock buybacks and dividend payouts.

General Motors CEO Mary Barra earned $29 million in 2022, which is 362 times what her company's median employee makes. At Stellantis (formerly known as Fiat Chrysler), CEO Carlos Tavares made $24.8 million or 365 times the salary of the average employee. Ford CEO Jim Farley took in $21 million, which is at least 281 times more than the median worker.[1]

Ford and General Motors have proposed wage increases of 20 per cent and Stellantis 21 per cent over the course of a four-year contract. This is well below the demand of the United Auto Workers

(UAW) for a 36 per cent wage increase to make up for years of falling autoworker pay amid rising corporate profits and surging executive compensation.

The Economic Policy Institute reports that in 2021 CEOs in the U.S. raked in 399 times as much as their employees, up from a ratio of 59-to-1 in 1989. CNN repeats the argument of the CEOs who point out that most of their pay is tied to company performance, which makes calculating the amount they take home "complicated." That's all the more motivation for "keeping costs – including workers' pay – low," CNN notes.

When Stellantis announced its offer of a 21 per cent pay increase, its spokesperson said: "Our goal is to secure a sustainable future that provides all our UAW-represented employees with an opportunity to thrive in a company that will be competitive during the automotive industry's historic transformation." United Auto Workers President Shawn Fain rejected the 21 per cent pay increase from Stellantis. "This is about working class people standing up to get their share of economic justice and social justice after being left behind for decades," he told MSNBC's *The Sunday Show*. Some 13,000 Stellantis autoworkers continue picketing outside three plants in Michigan, Missouri, and Ohio, as of September 22. "If we don't get better offers, and we don't get down to taking care of the members' needs, then we're going to amp this thing up even more," Fain told CBS.

The transfer of wealth from hundreds of millions of people worldwide to a tiny minority of individuals is humongous. In 1970, an average CEO had income 20 times that of a middle level worker's median income. Now it has become 300 times. Income tax on rich individuals was 70 per cent in 1970 and now its 37 per cent. The U.S. federal government collected 12 per cent of its taxes from corporations in 1970, now it collects six per cent. Real wages of workers have become flat.

Since 1978, the CEO compensation among the 300 biggest companies in the U.S. has gone up 1,460 per cent, while the typical worker's pay grew by just 18 per cent (both adjusted for inflation). In the same period, those CEOs' compensation grew 37 per cent faster than stock market growth.

Autoworkers at Chrysler plant in Center Line, Michigan picket, September 22, 2023.

Note

1. CEOs of other corporations make even more. Michael Rapino, the CEO of LiveNation, makes 5,414 times what his median employees make. Put differently: a median earning LiveNation employee needs to work 5,414 years, to make what their CEO makes in one year. And he is not the top paid CEO in the U.S. The top 10 paid CEOs in the U.S. as of 2022 were:

Stephen Schwarzman, Blackstone, $253M.
Sundar Pichai, Alphabet, $226M.
Stephen Scherr, Hertz, $182M.
Barry McCarthy, Peloton, $168M.
Michael Rapino, Live Nation, $139M.
Safra Catz, Oracle, $138M.
Douglas Ingram, Sarepta Therapeutic, $125M.
Bill Ready, Pinterest, $123M.
Kiwi Camara, CS Disco, $110 M.
Tim Cook, Apple, $99 M.

In Europe CEOs are reported to make less than in the U.S. but this is increasing. CEOs in Germany earn the highest salaries in Europe. The Netherlands is a close second, where CEO to worker salary (not income) is 7.3. The European average ratio is 5.6 although that ratio can go up to 300 for companies listed on the stock market.

UAW leadership argues that just as there were wage givebacks and layoffs during recessions or other periods of economic stringency, the people who produce the products that produce the massive profits should share in the prosperity.
