

November 8, 2023 - No. 59

First One-Day Strike in Quebec Public Sector Exposing a Government at Odds with Needs of a Modern Quebec



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First One-Day Strike in Quebec Public Sector Exposing a Government at Odds with Needs of a Modern Quebec

Quebec's 420,000 public sector workers, members of the Common Front, militantly joined a one-day strike on Monday, November 6, against the government refusal to uphold the right of Quebecers to public services which includes providing public sector workers with the working conditions and wages they are trying to negotiate against a government which is privatizing and dictating. From one end of Quebec to the other in large cities, towns and rural areas, picket lines went up and workers voiced their rejection of the government's intransigent position which harms the public sector. The President of the Quebec Treasury Board Sonia Lebel, who is also the Minister responsible for Government Administration, claimed that her government is delaying the resolution of the conflict with public sector workers out of social conscience.



Îles de la Madeleine, November 6, 2023 one-day strike

On October 29, Minister LeBel tabled what she called a "new offer," increasing the previous wage offer from 9 per cent to 10.3 per cent over five years. The unions rejected it as an insult and maintained their call to strike, because they said, among other reasons, the "new offer" keeps wage increases below the expected rate of inflation. This would mean that public sector workers would continue to be impoverished, while it was already established that there are several years of catching up to do on the wage front. The Common Front unions are asking for wage increases of around 20 per cent over three years.

Now Minister LeBel says that, since she has tabled a "new offer," it's up to the unions to table a counter-offer if they're not satisfied! She also says that it's not just a matter of wages and working conditions, "we must also improve the organization of work in our networks." This refers to getting the unions to agree to the imposition of "flexible" work schedules which makes the working conditions untenable and the personal lives of public sector workers in health care and education sectors also unsustainable.

By waging one-day strikes, the Common Front is giving the government a chance to return to the negotiating table and negotiate in good faith. Workers across Quebec, including what is called "the public," are categorically opposed to all attempts to increase ministerial powers so that governments can act with impunity while the workforce is considered disposable. There are at least 600,000 fully committed workers in these sectors who are very vocal about what is really going on, and these 600,000 people have hundreds of thousands of family members who know what is really going on and the entire society knows the state of health care services and of the schools, CEGEPs and social services. Every day news stories reveal the harm caused by the self-serving laws which serve narrow private interests. They show the harm caused to society when the dictum is that the pursuit of private profit is the driving force behind the development of social programs, not the well-being of the people.

The Legault government claims that in the public sector bargaining equation it is defending public



services and the well-being of the public, while public sector workers are only defending their own wages and working conditions. In response to the first one-day strike held by the Common Front, Education Minister Bernard Drainville posted on X "a thought for the parents and students whose schedules will be turned upside down. We all hope that an agreement can be reached quickly." This is typical of government attempts to turn the public against their co-workers in the fields of health care and education. Their hope that the inconveniences the entire society lives when the services are not available will win the day, not their sympathy for the workers and their demands. Typically, government ministers and spokespersons and media at their disposal just defame and malign the working people and refuse to discuss their working conditions, let alone elaborate the solutions they are proposing to improve the systems of health care and education and social services. The reason is of course obvious, which is that the government has no intention of having public services but, on the contrary, is using the public treasury to provide those who provide private services with guaranteed contracts and profits.

The workers when on strike and not on strike are the frontline defenders of the interests of the Quebec people. All out to uphold their just cause!



Workers Reject Wage Offer as Non-Starter



Montreal, November 6, 2023

Despite the overwhelming strike vote by all workers in education, health and social services -- both those in the Common Front and those not, the Quebec Minister responsible for Government Administration and President of the Treasury Board Sonia Lebel tabled what she called a new offer to the 600,000 workers in this sector on October 29 that would increase an earlier wage offer from 9 per cent to 10.3 per cent over five years. For more than a year, the Common Front has been calling for wage increases of around 20 per cent over three years.

"Once again, the government is demonstrating its inability to understand the difficulties faced by public services and the urgent need to save the sinking ship. What's more, it is proving that it is

completely out of touch with the anger of exhausted workers who are carrying on their shoulders public services that are more fragile than ever [...] We see nothing in this offer that would justify cancelling the strike. We have to face the facts. A strike is the only way to make the government understand. Since this is what it wants, we're going to strike loud and clear on November 6," the Common Front said in a press release responding to the announcement.

The vice-president of the Quebec Interprofessional Health Care Federation (FIQ), which will go on strike on November 8 and 9, said: "We are experiencing two feelings right now: disappointment and anger."

The Autonomous Education Federation (FAE), which tabled a slimmed-down version of its demands in September, said: "We have already demonstrated our willingness to settle quickly and have done everything we can to break the deadlock in our negotiations. We are still ready to talk, but our confidence is eroding more and more and it will be difficult for our members to remain calm in the face of the current offers, which look more like offers to leave. The gap between the government's new proposal and our members' needs is still very wide." The FAE has announced that November 23 will be the first day of an unlimited general strike.

Desperate to create the illusion that these negotiations are open and serious discussions on the future of public services, Minister Lebel said in presenting the government's offer: "Today, we have submitted significant proposals to the unions that could have a very positive impact on the ongoing discussions. We mustn't forget that these negotiations must lead to gains on both sides, since this is ultimately a work contract. Yes, we need to pay government employees better, but I also have a responsibility to ensure that every dollar from taxpayers' pockets is maximized and has a long-term impact on our networks, not a temporary effect. That's why it's imperative that we address issues related to work organization."

The mention of "issues related to the organization of work" is another desperate attempt by the Quebec government to make people believe that a viable organization of work is possible that is not based on the direct experience of workers in this sector and their demands.

The Common Front states, "Despite all the signals sent to these [sectoral] tables, including the recent trimming [of its demands], our employer counterparts are responding that they have no mandate to even talk about their own demands. We are left to question the government's willingness and ability to reach satisfactory agreements in the near future.

To read the Common Front press release, [click here](#).



Militant Participation in the First One-Day Strike



Quebec City

The 420,000 public sector workers united in the Common Front held their first one-day strike on Monday, November 6 from midnight to 10:30 am. More than 500 pickets took place across Quebec in front of health and education establishments. From northern Quebec to the Gaspésie, workers defended their demands on picket lines, met with the continuous honking of car horns saluting them. It was not uncommon for passersby, families or other public sector workers who were not part of the Common Front to join the picket lines.

Montreal





Maisonneuve hospital, Rosemont



University of Montreal hospital



Villa Medica Rehabilitation Hospital





Notre Dame hospital



Maisonneuve CEGEP



Montreal School Board offices



Saint-Anselme primary school



Pierre Dupuy secondary school



F.A.C.E. school

Laval



St. Eustache



Estrie



St. Hyacinthe



Lanaudiere



Abitibi



Chaudière-Appalaches



Jonquière



Rimouski



Gaspésie



(photos : PMLQ, CSN, CSQ, APTS)



Strike Days in the Coming Weeks

Three more strike days have been announced for November 21, 22 and 23 for workers belonging to the Common Front. The 80,000 members of the Interprofessional Federation of Quebec Health Care (FIQ) will go on strike on November 8 and 9, and then again on November 23 and 24, while the 66,500 teachers of the Autonomous Federation of Teachers (FAE) will begin a general strike on November 23.

In the health care sector, services will be provided in accordance with the law on essential services. As for the education sector, Quebec's school service centres have advised parents that classes and daycare services will resume as early as 11:00 am or in the afternoon.

The Interprofessional Health Care Federation of Quebec (FIQ) has notified the government and informed the public that it also has a mandate for an unlimited general strike following the November 7 and 8 walkouts it has already called.

Since October and November 2022 -- a year ago -- these workers' organizations have been putting their demands to the Legault government, offering their time and energy to achieve a new work contract that takes into account their responsibilities to the public. For the past year, they have been

exerting pressure through various tactics to make known to the government their determination to improve their working conditions, which are the conditions for the care and services they provide to everyone.

It's clear that public sector workers and the public are one and the same when it comes to who must be at the heart of decision-making in health, education and social services, so that the necessary quality and quantity of care is available. It's this unity that strikes at the arrogance of the Legault government, which declared on October 17, "The unions still think they have to go on strike to make sure they make the most gains. So we'll wait for the strike"

The Common Front responded: "Is the government telling us that it has refused to come to the table for a year, while it persists with its disconnected offers, with its attacks on our working conditions and with its arrogance, because it's waiting for a strike? If our message is not heard, a second option could be exercised, which would constitute the biggest strike action the public sector has seen in 50 years."

***Together in Defence of Public Services!
With One Voice Supporting Workers in Health, Education and Social Services!***

(Quotations translated from original French by Workers' Forum.)



Letter to the Editor

Recent media disclosures have drawn attention to who the real decision-makers are when it comes to the direction of Quebec's health care system. The letter which came to light at the end of October, signed by six former premiers of Quebec, argued that there are several groups of powerful private interests vying for control of health care delivery decisions. These large private interests are grouped together around several large charitable foundations that have a firm grip on the major university hospital centres. They feel their prerogatives are threatened by the health reform bill that seeks to remove decision-making from these centres.

This quickly disappeared from the media reports when it became clear that the Legault government's health reform is also designed to further concentrate decision-making power in such powerful private interests. There are those in the university hospitals represented by the six former premiers, but there are also those championed by the Legault government. It has to do with who decides the direction of health care, what the priorities are, what medical machinery to buy, what "health market" to aim for, what role drugs should play, and so on. In all this, the wages and working conditions the workers are demanding have no political representation other than that of the interests represented by striking workers and all those who support their just cause.

A Reader in Montreal



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