

LA PASSERELLE NÉGO

NEGOTIATION AND PANDEMIC



We are in a period that will mark the collective imagination for a long time. Unfortunately, we are only at the beginning of the COVID crisis. There are several signs that the current situation could continue for several months, easily into the middle of the summer.

On March 31st, our collective agreements (French, English, Cree and Kativik) expired. At the beginning of the crisis, the President of the Treasury Board, Christian Dubé proposed a truce to the unions. We accepted that. Shortly thereafter, Première Legault, indicated that he wanted to reach an agreement with all public sector employees and to quickly come to the conclusion of collective agreements.

It is crucial to note that this negotiation is like nothing we have ever experienced. We have spoken to some union leaders who have a long history in union matters and they have never known anything that would be similar to the current situation.

The FPPE Executive, in the interest of representing members, agreed to partake in an accelerated negotiation process as recommended by the première. For us, one of the obvious advantages was to secure wage increases for the next few years.

We therefore convened our union executives to set priorities in the interest of a speedy resolution. Representatives from each of the unions participated in the *Conseil fédéral de négociation*, meeting via video conferencing. We did what was necessary; however there was no reciprocity of the part of the employer group.

The FPPE is always looking for a favourable collective agreement for its members, we will adopt our strategy accordingly. Of course, if the negotiation were to continue over a long period of time, we would come back with all of our demands, all of which are legitimate to us.

Today, that is the scenario that seems to be emerging. We have passed the governments' deadline of March 31st. The various premiums (for example that of the psychologists) were extended for 6 months.

The government no longer seems in a hurry to settle ... even though they were the ones who created the urgency. The negotiation teams are currently in limbo.

Let's hope that it is not a strategy that hides another.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Jacques Landry'.

Jacques Landry,
President ,FPPE(CSQ)

ANGLOPHONE TABLE P2

Following the meeting of the Conseil fédéral de négociation, the *FPPE* negotiation team met with the employer negotiators on March 29th to relate the specifics of our targeted demands in an attempt to reach an agreement in principle in a very short period of time. We explained that in addition to this *short list* of demands, many preoccupations could not be quickly resolved and remained important issues for professionals. At the same meeting, the employer team also shared their priorities, making it clear that it could not grant any of our requests that have a monetary impact. The employer side also explained that, because of the current health crisis, it no longer considers the 'Attraction and Retention' of Professionals to be a problem. Indeed, according to them, school boards are now "employers of choice" because of the maintenance of remuneration in times of crisis.

The negotiation team met again with the employer on March 30th, only to find that the information provided did not allow an agreement to be reached at this stage.

Given the current slowdown in the pace of negotiations, we will return to the table with the original list of our demands.

FRANCOPHONE TABLE P1

The same approach was made with the employer at the Francophone negotiation table on March 29th. After analysing the situation of priorities on both sides, we indicated to the employer that we would be willing to meet with them again if they had a mandate to negotiate. The spokesperson for the employer side contacted us at the end of the day on April 1st to set up a new meeting to discuss the priorities identified.

We have indicated to the employer representative that we are returning to the table at the original negotiation pace.

NEWS FROM THE NORTHERN NEGOTIATION TABLES P3 & P4

Negotiations at the northern tables followed much the same path as for the P1 and P2 tables.

We were invited on Wednesday, March 25th, to resume negotiations at an accelerated pace, despite the common agreement that we would suspend the negotiations until early April. The objective of the exercise in which we were asked to participate by the employer side was to conclude a collective agreement in the coming days. We wanted to know more about the context of the upcoming discussions, and, above all, what conditions would be imposed on us if we accepted this blitz. To do this, we met with the two northern tables (Cree and Kativik) the following day on Thursday, March 26th.

At that time, we indicated to the employer that we had to validate with our federation as to whether we had the mandate to agree to negotiate sectoral matters quick-

ly. We wanted to have as much information as possible. The employer side informed us that all union demands could be discussed, both monetary and those at zero-cost. Also, we did not have a limit on the number of demands," that could be identified as priorities, but since the mandate was to negotiate quickly, we had to be selective. With respect to the deadline, no date was mentioned, but it was a question of days, not weeks. The employer side ensured that it had all the mandates to negotiate quickly.

We then did the exercise of preparing a "short list" of demands with the Conseil fédéral de négociation. The identified demands were balanced and realistic in our view, and which could be agreed upon quickly. We presented this list on Sunday, March 29th at both tables. We also received a priority list of demands from the employer. We were very disappointed to find that the vast majority of employer

demands were still on the table, including requests representing significant setbacks for our members. We expressed our displeasure at both tables. In addition, we were also dissatisfied with the lack of mandates on the part of employers to negotiate our demands. We found that the attitude of the employer was not one of a genuine accelerated negotiation process. We indicated that we expected a quick return, which was scheduled for the next day, March 30th. At the time of writing this, we still have not heard back from the representatives of the Cree and Kativik tables.

Our future actions will therefore have to be part of a comprehensive and coordinated strategy. Rest assured that we will keep you informed of what will happen next.