



2008-2010
public-sector negotiations

The CCSPP-CSN looks ahead

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Introduction

Win back the right to free collective bargaining!

Although this is not the time or place for agreeing on the strategic framework for the next round of collective bargaining, we do need to take a serious look at various aspects of the environment at the present time, a few months away from initiating the process for replacing the decree imposed in 2005. The first objective we have to attain is to win back the right to negotiate our working conditions and pay! This is the underlying thrust of all that follows: finding the path that will lead us to this necessary victory. Of course the picture is not always rosy, but we have to take the steps to ensure that what we want is reflected in our actions and is echoed by our members. With this paper, we are laying the foundation stone of the structure we have to rebuild together!

As we saw in the evaluation of the last round of bargaining, we are faced with a government that will no doubt continue to develop the neo-liberal vision of the State and its relations with its employees that it has pushed ever since it took power in April 2003, and despite the fact that it only got a minority when it was re-elected in March 2007. It will continue to aim for less government and as little government intervention as possible, preferring to develop the private rather than the public sector. As well, the Conservatives in Ottawa are setting the example, depriving government of its ability to act by literally cutting off supplies. The result: a government that is shrinking away, at “best” limited to its current role and at “worst” steadily downsized, without any ability to affect markets and at the mercy of the slightest changes in the economy.

One of the challenges facing us is to renew our collective agreements and replace the current decree in a context in which the government will try to further reduce its spending and privatize various chunks of services. There is also a “favourable” context of more staff shortages in some sectors at a time when many of our members will be just a few years away from retirement. Furthermore, in addition to the need to increase the overall income of all our members, we will have to maintain pay equity and negotiate salary relativity.

All this gives us good reason to want a rapid start to work on the next round of collective bargaining. The work of establishing a position of bargaining strength that will allow us to achieve our goals will be crucial and complex. Questions of alliances, information and mobilization of our members, as well as the place we can take in the media, will lie at the heart of the strategy to be developed.

But first things first: we think that the current stage should help give us a better grasp of the current situation and conditions and identify our expectations and collective will for action so as to take back the right to free collective bargaining and above all the right to improve working conditions in the public sector. It is along these lines that we have prepared these thoughts about the prospects that lie ahead for us.

1. The bargaining system

The March 2007 ruling of the International Labour Organization (ILO) on Bill 43 strengthened our resolve regarding our right to free collective bargaining. The ILO asked the government to repeal the repressive measures in the decree and review pay and the bargaining system so as to come up with alternatives to this unfair special legislation for reaching a settlement. After the abrupt end to the last round of negotiations and the government's abhorrent behaviour, we have to give thought to the legal framework that governs our negotiations. And this is not the first time that we have taken time to consider the process of collective bargaining in the public sector as set out in Bill 37.¹

It's worth briefly reviewing our past thinking on this so as to weigh whether it can be a useful contribution to our work today.

Before going any further, we think it important to point out that we are not so naïve as to think that revising the legislation governing collective bargaining would be enough to guarantee us a more balanced bargaining position in the future, especially when our main criticism of the government-as-employer is precisely that it makes and unmakes the laws as it pleases.

The legislative framework does, however, constitute an important aspect of the bargaining process that we cannot ignore if we want to think more fully about this, or at the very least position ourselves strategically by turning a public spotlight on the unfairness of the current system. Thus the ILO decision, inviting the parties to review the bargaining system, and the Supreme Court ruling recognizing freedom of association and the right to free collective bargaining come at a very appropriate time, and we should not miss the opportunity to participate in such an exercise if the government has the intelligence to want to redress certain aberrations in the current system.

Work already done in the past

In 1991, the government agreed to an initiative from labour organizations proposing a tripartite process of reflecting on the bargaining system itself.

¹ An Act respecting the process of negotiation of the collective agreements in the public and parapublic sectors.

Although the union organizations – the CSN, CEQ, FTQ, FIIQ, SFPQ and SPGQ – made a positive contribution, the government and employers dodged the debate.

These were the basic conclusions reached by the inter-union group:

At the outset, the document set out a general appreciation of the system in these terms: *The current collective bargaining system leads systematically to an impasse in terms of solving problems; it is no exaggeration to say that it fosters illegality on the one hand and, on the other, an out-and-out denial of collective bargaining and a brutal imposition of working conditions. The bargaining issues negotiated and the solution to problems disappear along the way: the form eclipses the substance.* (our translation)

The desired changes touched on a number of themes. Some of them were:

- The creation of a labour relations board so as to encourage free collective bargaining and disputes settlement.
- Expanding the scope of what is negotiable to include all matters, in reference to the law, which still stipulates that regarding pay, only one out of three years is negotiable, whereas it is the reverse that has occurred in practice.
- A genuine mediation process that is not merely a step towards obtaining the right to strike. Mediators would be authorized to make recommendations and make them public.
- Recognition of a real right to strike in relation to essential services.
- Bargaining levels and the resolution of stalemates in local bargaining through strike action or mediation-arbitration.

In the 20 years that Bill 37 has existed, this was the only formal and co-ordinated attempt by union organizations to affect its thrust. Various elements contained in this document are now obsolete, but there are others on which we can draw to resume this work of critical thinking.

We know that the provisions of Bill 37 associated with the Labour Code's provisions on the public sector are changeable, i.e., eminently adaptable. They are applied at some times and not at others. At times they are invoked, and at other times forgotten or deliberately ignored. At times they are inapplicable, and at others they are reinforced by other legislation such as Bill 30,² which imposed local bargaining throughout the health and social services system.

² A judgment by the Superior Court of Québec in November 2007 invalidated Bill 30. The government has appealed the decision.

However, one ingredient that is crucial to reaching a conclusion to a bargaining process that respects both parties is lacking in the current system, namely a credible way of settling disputes that entails at the least a political price for the party at fault if it is not respected.

The ILO decision discusses at length the need for the public sector in Québec to have a real method for settling differences that is accepted by both sides. On this aspect, the inter-union work in 1992 suggested the possibility of choosing between strike action and mediation-arbitration. Other forms of mediation could also be envisaged, such as mediation with recommendations rendered public at the end of the process and leaving it up to the parties to decide whether to follow them or not.

Another element in favour of considering certain aspects of the current system is the issue of local bargaining in health care and social services. It is difficult today to weigh the impact of this new reality on the dynamic between local parties that now negotiate many matters that were previously handled at the national level. And especially at the level of local bargaining, there is no mechanism for settling differences, no right to strike, no mediator-arbitrator who can render a decision without the parties' consent, no expiry date for local clauses! This unilateral decentralization was done for the benefit of local management, not to promote a sound bargaining process.

Finally, note that in March 2006, the government created a group within the Conseil du trésor to review the framework of labour relations. Although the group's mandate is fairly vague, it would seem that its main role is to do some in-depth thinking about issues in collective bargaining in the public sector, in Québec and elsewhere. The Conseil du trésor has still not made the group's findings public. If the government really wants to undertake an in-depth reform of the bargaining system with us, as it has publicly claimed recently it wants to do, it should begin by presenting the thinking of this group and concrete proposals that respond to our concerns. As well, given the importance of quickly activating a process for replacing the decrees, any work that does begin should be slated to wrap up very quickly by the end of December 2008.

2. Valuing the public sector

As we said in the part on the evaluation of the last round of negotiations, the government's unchanging financial framework was a stumbling block throughout negotiations, for all the unions. As happened in 1982-83, the government based its entire bargaining strategy and public credibility on the ideological issue of what the government could afford, instead of using any serious economic analysis. Yet

what the government can afford is directly related to the taxes it decides to collect to meet its obligations. So it is much more an ideological stance than an economic one. The government was actually using this financial framework to signal its political choice in favour of reducing its investments in public services, at the expense of employees and services. And indeed, this whole issue of our members' working conditions will have to be a key part of our public message.

In the preparations for the start of the last round of bargaining, and notably in the analysis of current conditions, linking our public discourse on improving our working conditions to the quality and development of public services was often identified as a major strategic element.

It must be acknowledged, though, that this goal was not really achieved, because of the very dynamics of collective bargaining.

First of all, we should realize that this political dimension, which must be present at all times in the public sector, needs to be reconciled with the primary role of our union organizations, which is to negotiate collective agreements and rights and benefits for the employees we represent. Public-sector employees can therefore, like employees in all other sectors of society, legitimately lay claim to better conditions without being obliged to demonstrate explicitly and concretely the links between each of their demands and a positive impact on the quality of services.

Next, it is hard to intervene and point out the positive impact of improving our working conditions if this is done solely at a time when we are already in the process of deciding on our demands. Furthermore, it is all too easy for the government to argue that the financial impact of accepting union demands, once their cost is known, would be so great that it would jeopardize the government's very capacity to provide the services. The sacrosanct financial framework in the last round of bargaining is the best illustration of this.

Current conditions give us a few months before the formal resumption of work to renew our collective agreements. In the meanwhile, there is little likelihood of any abrupt change in government policies in favour, say, of major investments in public services; the contrary is far more plausible.

The CSN has often organized campaigns or operations aimed at valuing, defending and developing public services, although the results are hard to verify.

We should take advantage of the period that lies ahead to work with our members in taking the lead to explain to the general public, outside of any bargaining context, workers' daily occupational and economic realities and the dangers of any divestment from the public sector. This could take the form of a campaign to value both public services and the people who work to deliver them.

It could be carried out in 2009, the year of changes in union allegiance and preparations for negotiations. It could then lead into and be followed by a public campaign in support of negotiations.

Filing demands rapidly

The length of public-sector negotiations and the fact that they begin months after collective agreements expire are a disservice to the interests of the members we represent. We have repeatedly seen that the periods of time between the end of the collective agreements and their renewal constitute *de facto* extensions.

Given the imposed duration of these collective agreements, it is true more than ever that we should begin negotiations as soon as possible. When should we aim to file our demands, given the March 31, 2010 expiry date, the period of changes in union allegiance in July 2009, and the official (but historically ignored) time limit set out in the Labour Code for filing our demands, which would take us to October 2009 at the latest, with the employer supposedly obliged to respond 60 days later?

Filing our demands rapidly was not identified as a strategic element in the last round of bargaining. But if this time we want to get the government to engage without delay, put the credibility of the bargaining process in the fore and use the shameful nature of the decree as an argument in favour of a rapid and satisfactory conclusion to the next round of bargaining, we should envisage filing our demands at the central table as close as possible to the legal time limit, namely in the fall of 2009, so as to demand that our management counterparts begin bargaining quickly in 2010.

Acting ahead of time to pre-empt the government's message

We have already said it: any government can legislate to impose its point of view. But there is a political price to pay for doing so, and the cost is related to how convinced the general public and our members are of the validity of the government's point of view. If we want to make it more politically costly for the government, we have to act pre-emptively before the government starts presenting its arguments.

For example, we have already pointed out all the government spending since January 2006 and the revenue that the government has foregone through tax cuts, and compared this with Ms. Jérôme-Forget's alarmist predictions in the fall of 2005 to justify her immutable financial framework. This should position us well for showing that it's really ultimately about political choices, and thus demonstrate the intransigent logic that the government managed to impose on the last round of bargaining. We could seek to demonstrate the urgency of investing in personnel and public services by making this premise a collective political choice in opposition to the bean-counting vision of the role of government. Obviously, this would imply a long-term communications plan and

very sustained work in the field before negotiations even begin, with follow-up during negotiations.

In conclusion, our work plan could look like this: in the fall of 2008, establish our work teams, with work on a pay policy beginning in the winter of 2009. We could then begin a public campaign to value the public sector by the spring of 2009.

We will come back to this in the calendar of work.

3. Remuneration

The issues of salary relativity, the maintenance of pay equity and the pay policy will be central in our work on remuneration. Although they differ in nature, they are all related, because they affect each other in the framework of preparations for negotiating our members' remuneration.

Maintaining pay equity is a permanent process provided for in the Pay Equity Act, one that we will have to incorporate in the way we follow up on collective bargaining so as to make the adjustments that become necessary as a result of the changes that are constantly occurring in the jobs we evaluated and those that are created or abolished subsequently. As well, we must always keep in mind that our evaluations are based on what the networks were like in 2001, and that adjustments are already necessary.

As for salary relativity, normally it would have followed shortly after the implementation of the pay equity plan, but the government's refusal to proceed made this impossible. Expectations about potential adjustments resulting from such an exercise have therefore been heightened by this refusal, and will be further heightened in two years. Issues of staff shortages and the attraction and retention of personnel will also affect perceptions of the value of certain jobs and what they should be paid. We will therefore have to explain all this thoroughly and prepare our pay demands, taking into account our members' overall needs in terms of both purchasing power and the maintenance of pay equity and salary relativity. Members' support for our demands will be directly proportional to the degree to which they understand these issues, and this will take union information and education work throughout the period of preparations and negotiations.

Consequently, the CCSPP will have to begin work examining hypotheses for pay demands that relate specific demands to general demands. The work of the current advisory committee on maintaining pay equity could be expanded to cover remuneration in general and be used as food for thought in CCSPP discussions by the winter of 2009.

4. Additional strategic elements

The mobilization strategy

We have raised the issue of the credibility of the bargaining process in our members' minds, but the credibility of strike action in the public sector is just as important. In addition to the issue of "giving up pay," which always has an impact on members' decision about whether to go on strike, there is the fact that the last round of bargaining added to the complexity of our members' perception of this pressure tactic. The primary impact of a strike in the public sector consists, of course, in bringing political pressure to bear on the government. And it is this aspect that we will have to focus on with our members.

Remember, we had agreed to exercise our right to strike legally, for a limited length of time, which meant that the impact on members' pay differed, depending on their sector of work. Thus, because of essential services in health care and social services, the average length of strike action by members of our unions in that sector was 42 minutes a day. The merger of the different kinds of institutions (CLSCs, hospitals, CHSLDs) carried out under Bill 25 made it impossible to apply with precision the percentages of essential services stipulated by the Labour Code in each institution. To ensure that the strike was legal, we therefore used the highest percentage applicable in each institution. Furthermore, since our union code of ethics provides for maintaining services in the event of a strike in this sector, even in an illegal strike situation the impact would never be identical for workers in health and social services and workers in education, for example. And even within education, the impact is not the same across the board. CEGEP teachers had to make up time lost during the strike and give the courses that had been cancelled without any financial compensation,³ whereas FEESP members were able to go on strike "normally"...

So the impact of a walkout is never the same for our members in different sectors, regardless of the legal or illegal nature of the strike. But the last round of bargaining gave the impression that walkouts in a legal framework were a dead-end, because despite the fact that we scrupulously respected essential services, the government had no qualms about legislating to impose its point of view and objectives.

We will therefore have to debate all means of action in support of bargaining with our members, including the use of strike action, despite the obstacle created by the imposition of a decree when we were exercising our fundamental right to strike while abiding by the rules that made strike action legal. Furthermore, we will also have to face more intolerance from the general public for the interruption or reduction of public or parapublic services. There is growing

³ A court decision in February 2008 provides grounds for hoping that this practice will no longer be possible in CEGEPS in the future.

confusion about what the word “essential” means in essential services: as we have seen in other disputes – in public transit or at the Notre-Dame-des-Neiges cemetery –popular discontent over public inconvenience during legal disputes or even lockouts is on the rise, with calls for legislative action to force employees back to work. And in all this, there is no attempt to reach a solution that guarantees workers’ rights.

There are other debates that need to be explored: the issue of joint action versus sectoral action; the issue of a “social” strike in support of broad-based demands on, for example, the future of public services; the issue of mechanisms for settling at the local or sectoral levels; etc.

Consequently, we should plan to debate this throughout all our organizations in the winter of 2009, leading in to debates in general membership meetings on the use of legal or illegal strike action and its public and political impact, as well as milder tactics that could be used in the next round of collective bargaining.

The question of alliances

It is hard to predict right now what will be required to build the broadest possible alliances in the next round of collective bargaining. But the need for such alliances seems to go without saying.

For example, we will have to consider the development of alliances in the context of the SISP (the Secrétariat intersyndical du secteur public). We can also be proactive on this within the ranks of the CSN, with the FTQ and with components of the SISP (see page 16) if they don’t choose to keep to themselves.

But over and above what we will be able to accomplish in terms of alliances, we will have to take into account the synchronization of negotiations in accordance with the different calendars in the various sectors and the new realities created by Bill 30 in referring matters to the local level in health care and social services. The fallout from the court decision invalidating Bill 30 may also influence the dynamics of bargaining. Nor is there any guarantee that management won’t try to approach certain groups to de-synchronize sectors. In short, prevailing conditions in this regard will be rather unstable...

The timing of the filing of demands at the central table and sectoral filings is a key question for encouraging better synchronization among the various sectors, and in particular among the CSN’s federations. A confirmed intention to get negotiations rolling without delay in the winter of 2009 would make it easier to plan the mobilization of members subsequently in a concerted way.

But to return to the question of alliances, it’s worth beginning with a review of past, current and foreseeable players.

The traditional players ...

In the various rounds of negotiations in the public sector, the alliances have taken different forms. Generally speaking, when we mention past alliances, we are usually referring to the CSN, CSQ and FTQ joined together in a Common Front. Over time, the term virtually became a brand name.

This reality is explained by the fact that, starting with the first Common Front in 1972, these three central organizations were the only ones that were really representative of the public sector. It must be said, though, that while many rounds of bargaining began with a Common Front, very few ended in the same format as they began. All too often, agreement on the same strategic framework at the outset of negotiations hit a snag over objectives or the hidden timelines of this or that organization that became irreconcilable with the initial strategic framework. The last round of bargaining, marked by the departure of the CSQ, is very telling in this regard.

Over the years and in parallel to the Common Front, other independent union organizations emerged in the public sector. Most potential combinations and alliances have been tried at one time or another, often with three participants, sometimes with two, sometimes with six or five, depending on the issues. We even went it alone in 1985, for example. It should be noted, however, that we have never envisaged six-party alliances on all the central-table items.

The centre of gravity in our striving for unity has always been a recognition of the role of inter-sectoral or co federal groupings. With this in mind, we have always identified two other components that had this kind of profile and that also represented a decisive number of employees. Thus our traditional concept of central-table alliances revolved for the most part around the FTQ – CEQ/CSQ – CSN Common Front, which had the added benefit of the reputation, or notoriety, of the alliances in the 1970s and '80s. But we think that with the emergence of the SISF, we are now at a turning point in this regard, at least for the next round of bargaining.

Our relative independence in our strategic choices – which has never prevented us from engaging in serious alliance-building – stems from our majority or strong representative position in all sectors – health and social services, teachers and support staff in the CEGEP network and school board support staff – and all socio-professional categories in the parapublic sector. Even our presence in the private sector becomes a factor enhancing our credibility with the general public and government.

Because of this, we were able several times to trace the general parameters of settlements in the systems at both the sectoral level and the central table, since

the employer recognized that we had a critical mass sufficient to bring about a comprehensive settlement in negotiations.

What we have to do now is to properly assess the relatively new and very different configuration of players in the public and parapublic sectors and the ensuing new dynamic so as to evaluate to what extent our role as a key player in recent decades has been affected.

The players in health care and social services

Negotiations in health care and social services in 2003 began in a labour environment that had, of course, evolved, but that involved a limited number of decisive players. With 100,000 members, the CSN alone represented half of all the personnel in the health and social services system, and had a significant presence in a majority of job titles, with the possible exception of nurses and certain professionals and technicians. Nurses, most of whom belonged to the FIIQ (42,000 members), had never really sought to join a broader alliance in previous rounds of bargaining, except perhaps during the voluntary retirement programme in 1997. They paid dearly for this attitude in 1999, when they took on the government alone. The other labour organizations present in the sector in 2003 were the FTQ, representing about 40,000 members, and the CSQ, with slightly more than 5,000 members.

The other employees in health care and social services were basically scattered among a whole array of independent organizations whose development had been encouraged by the repeated fragmenting of bargaining units on the basis of job titles. This was true for the APTMQ (5,000 members), the CPS (10,000 members), respiratory therapists, dietitians, etc.

By dividing employees in the system into four occupational classes, Bill 30 changed the situation fundamentally, giving a boost to the more corporatist organizations. Thus the FIIQ, which already represented the majority of nurses, expanded its membership to 57,000, thanks in particular to the addition of nursing assistants and respiratory therapists to this class of personnel. The ranks of the APTS, created by a merger between the CSP and the APTMQ (+ dietitians), grew from 15,000 to 25,000 members, giving it a place it had never had previously among professionals in health care and social services.

We all know how central the health care sector is in the context of negotiations in which there are, on one side, major expectations of improvements in general working conditions, and on the other, equally important expectations regarding the specific demands of various groups of employees.

The players in education

Although the education sector did not experience major upheavals in the last round of bargaining like those that affected health care, here too we have to take

into account the changes that have occurred or that are desired, especially in the organizations representing teachers.

At about the same time as the SISP was founded, the FEC-CSQ and the FAC linked up in a bargaining cartel for CEGEP teachers that covered about one third of personnel in the system. There were, of course, discussions with the FNEEQ on expanding the cartel, but here again the idea ran up against a difference in strategic visions, the same one that led the CSQ to leave the Common Front. This kind of coalition was not a new reality in the sector, where the members' desire to see all the organizations concerned working together has been a historic constant. For the time being, the FAC has decided to remain autonomous, though two of its unions recently returned to the FNEEQ; it has even stayed aloof from developments around the SISP.

The most striking recent event in education in terms of the configuration of organizations has, of course, been the creation of another independent organization, the FAE, stemming from the disaffiliation of nine elementary and high-school teachers' unions from the FSE-CSQ in June 2006. The disaffiliation involved 27,000 of the 80,000 members that the federation had at the time.

There seem to have been a number of reasons for the departures, but the way the FSE conducted the last round of bargaining and the results obtained were in all likelihood what sparked the movement. In this sense, it would seem that the hasty retreat on central-table demands, along with the CSQ's withdrawal from the alliance with the FTQ and the CSN, were additional reasons motivating the CSQ's departure.

This breakdown in the CSQ's monopoly in this class of personnel is a historic event, since the monopoly dates back more than 40 years to when elementary and high-school teachers joined together in the Corporation des enseignants du Québec, the ancestor of the CSQ.

We have our own debates to conduct, and we have no intention of meddling in the CSQ's. But at its last convention, the massive departures of teachers from the FSE brought into question the CSQ's structures for representation and negotiations, just as the debates around the merger of the FAC and the FEC fuelled discussions at a special convention in June 2007.

We want to dwell on certain aspects of the work that has been announced and its impact on our own course of action, and more specifically the fate of the SISP (Secrétariat intersyndical des services publics), within which the CSQ plays a decisive role.

The Secrétariat intersyndical des services publics

Set up in February 2005, the SISP was then composed of the CSQ, the SFPQ and the SPGQ. Officially, the idea was to create a structure that would defend public services broadly, given that the founding organizations were all members of the same international labour organization – Public Services International.

Quite soon, another more concrete role was added to this general mandate, namely the co-ordination of negotiations. Thus, scarcely two months after it was created, the member organizations shared the same strategic framework (a settlement before the summer) and were making a counter-proposal on pay that halved the Common Front's original demand, which until then was accepted by almost all the organizations. This gesture by organizations representing about 170,000 government employees influenced our own decision to file a counter-proposal in the fall of 2005. The strategies used by the SISP were no more successful than ours, but the disruptive impact of this new player had an important influence on how we were able to proceed.

Be it at the end of the last round of bargaining or even more so today, it must be said that the SISP is still present. The FIIQ decided to join in June 2006, and the APTS did the same in June 2007. As well, the CSQ, the SFPQ, the FIIQ and the SPGQ conducted a joint round of meetings in the regions of Québec in the context of the spring 2007 election campaign, on the theme of *Public services, the best of what we are*. Today, the orientation adopted by each of these organizations is leading them to negotiate together in the next round of bargaining.

This project is consistent with the CSQ's historic ambitions, notably the creation of a vast central organization in public services. No doubted intensified by the departure of 27,000 teachers, these ambitions were confirmed at the CSQ's June 2006 convention, which passed a resolution aimed at recognizing "... the pertinence for the central to work at reinforcing itself in public services and establishing closer ties with the independent union organizations that have a significant presence in public services. Between now and the next convention, this convention asks the central to explore the creation of a new union force in public services with the independent union organizations."

The SISP is thus a coalition whose members are part of a more or less official structure through an operating protocol that notably includes an agreement not to raid other member organizations.

We have seen that a critical mass is an important concept when it comes time for us and the employer to decide who has the best chance of bringing discussions to a close with a settlement in the public sector.

And the SISP as it now stands represents 245,000 members in the public, parapublic and peripublic sectors in the three big sectors, i.e., the public service, education and health and social services; and in the latter, it represents employees who have a central strategic role in care. Furthermore, the organizations in the public service, which have never really had a say in settlements on major issues at the central table, no doubt see an unexpected opportunity to play a real role here.

With this as a starting point, you just have to imagine, for example, the impact that filing a single pay policy for all these groups could have as well, obviously, as that of a final settlement on the main financial parameters in bargaining, to realize what we may be confronted with in terms of perspectives for alliances.

Already, in discussions around an attempt to make an inter-union gesture to mark the 1st anniversary of the decree imposing our working conditions in December 2006, the presence of the SISP could soon be detected in our discussions with the CSQ. And more recently, in April 2007, as we worked on how to follow up on the ILO's decision, despite repeated calls to the CSQ to develop a common strategy with the FTQ, the SISP's strategy had already been decided when discussions finally took place to develop joint actions.

This suggests what can be expected in the future dynamics of our relations on certain attempts at co-ordinated actions. The objective that the SISP seems to be pursuing is to position itself as the government's counterpart of choice on the major issues on the public sector.

This means that our first reflex, which would be to begin by building a CSN-CSQ-FTQ Common Front, has to be rethought. Although the CSQ's dream of a central union organization for public services may not become a reality, the SISP now occupies a special place in the public sector for the government, and it will seek to play a more important role in the next round of bargaining. We can't ignore its presence on the union scene in the next round of negotiations.

Consequently, we think that we should have an open attitude to the SISP and its component organizations, with a view to establishing conditions for alliances in which we, alongside the FTQ, can play a vital role in initiating debates at the central table and on methods and tactics to set in motion for the upcoming negotiations.

5. Calendar of preparatory work for the next round of collective bargaining

Following this evaluation and this brief overview of the prospects in store for us in the future, we have to try to have the clearest possible idea of how to organize the work of preparing for the next round of collective bargaining.

This is what is “foreseeable” at the present time.

1) Review the system of collective bargaining and continue the struggle against Bill 43

In the spring of 2008, we began inter-union work on this issue, starting from what was done in 1992, the Supreme Court judgment on the B.C. case and the ILO decision. This work should be aimed at defending a common position with the government so as to have a maximum impact on political parties in the current context of a minority government and the probability of an election in the coming year.

In addition to the legal and union struggle, we took advantage of the second anniversary of the adoption of Bill 43 to remind members of the main consequences of this unjust law and report on what is happening with the court challenges to it. We also pointed out all the spending the government has done since it adopted a decree that it justified to a large extent by the so-called constraints of very tight public finances. We could follow up on this with a concrete gesture by our members, the form and timing of which could be determined later. We have to use all possible forums and platforms to voice our dissent and underscore the unjust nature of the law. As well, a campaign to value public services would be a form of struggle against the decrees adopted in 2005.

2) Remuneration: make information for members the priority

We will have to get members thinking about pay issues as soon as possible before 2010, given the ILO’s decision and our members’ loss of purchasing power, the legal obligation to maintain pay equity, and the necessity of salary relativity and its consequences for general demands on pay.

3) Begin preparing the next round of bargaining now

The question of the very future of public services will no doubt be part of the showdown with the government when it comes time to renew the collective agreements. We will therefore have to turn up public pressure on this aspect. We could commission a survey of our members and the general public on a series of topics starting in the fall of 2008. After that we could think about an internal and public campaign to recognize the real value of public services and the people who make them work. Such a campaign could start in the winter or spring of 2009 and last for several months, continuing on into the period of changes in union allegiance and right through until we file our demands. The public campaign could be accompanied by internal “political” training with our unions around collective bargaining and tactics. We should

“unify” our internal and external messages, as well as those used for the campaign on changes in allegiance, so as to build a consistent set of messages that have a coherent cumulative effect. Our public information campaign for the next round of collective bargaining should be a logical extension of the work done before then.

August 25, 2008

Acronyms

APTMQ	Association professionnelle des technologistes médicaux du Québec (professional association of medical technologists)
APTS	Alliance du personnel professionnel et technique de la santé et des services sociaux (alliance of professional and technical personnel in health and social services)
CCSPP	Comité de coordination des secteurs public et parapublic (CSN) (co-ordinating committee for the public and parapublic sectors)
CDPDJ	Commission des droits de la personne et de la jeunesse (human and youth rights commission)
CPS	Centrale des professionnelles et professionnels de la santé (health professionals central)
CSN	Confédération des syndicats nationaux
CSQ	Centrale des syndicats du Québec (formerly the CEQ)
FAC	Fédération autonome du collégial (autonomous CEGEP federation)
FEC-CSQ	Fédération des enseignantes et enseignants de cégep (federation of CEGEP teachers)
FIQ	Fédération interprofessionnelle de la santé du Québec (inter-professional health care federation)
FIIQ	Fédération des infirmières et des infirmiers (federation of nurses)
FEESP	Fédération des employées et employés de services publics (CSN) (federation of public service employees)
FNEEQ	Fédération nationale des enseignantes et des enseignants du Québec (CSN) (teachers)
FP	Fédération des professionnèles (CSN) (professionals)
FTQ	Fédération des travailleurs du Québec
FSE	Fédération des syndicats de l'enseignement (CSQ) (teachers)
FSSS	Fédération de la santé et des services sociaux (CSN)
ILO	International Labour Organization / International Labour Office
SFPQ	Syndicat de la fonction publique du Québec (Québec public service union)
SISP	Secrétariat intersyndical des services publics (inter-union secretariat in public services)
SPGQ	Syndicat des professionnels du gouvernement du Québec (Québec government professionals)