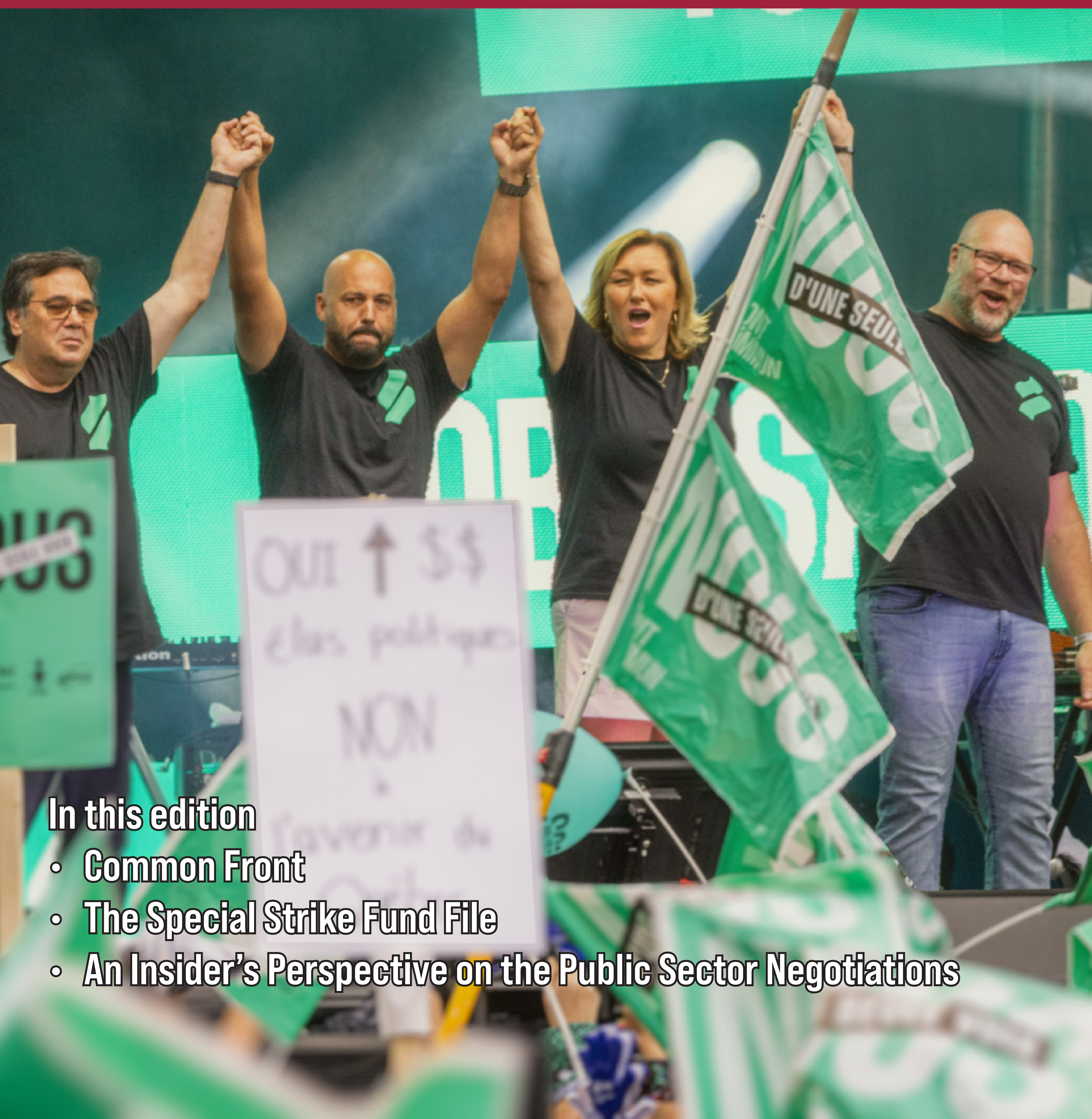
THE Review

MARCH 2024



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THE Review

Journal of the Conseil provincial des affaires sociales
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In this edition

AGENDA 2024

April 10 and 11

Extraordinary Congress and General Council

June 13th and 14th

General council

December 12th and 13th

General council

Bulletin published by the Conseil provincial des affaires sociales (CPAS)

CPAS is the union coalition of the healthcare and social services sector within the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE).

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MESSAGE FROM THE PRE-SIDENT

Dear members

I am very happy to write to you for the first as time president of the Provincial Council of Social Affairs.

As president, I pledge with integrity and transparance. I understand the importance of representing the interests of all members. I am fully committed to defending the values and principles of our provincial body as it has always been.

Together, we are faced with significant challenges in light of a government prioritizing another major overhaul centralizing our healthcare network. The passing of Bill 15 under closure on December 9th will have a negative impact not only on healthcare and social services workers but also on the general population.

Our Provincial Council of Social Affairs is built on the foundation of solidarity, and by remaining UNITED, we can achieve great things. I am committed to implementing an action plan that promotes communication among local sections. I am also confident in adopting a leadership style that harnesses the strengths of each activist within our ranks.

Though my tenure as president has just begun, my dedication to representing you remains unwavering. As the history of the CPAS (Conseil Provincial des Affaires sociales) demonstrates, we will successfully overcome and emerge even stronger from the challenges ahead!

Thank you once again for this incredible opportunity. Let us move forward together with courage, determination, and solidarity.

Looking forward to meeting you soon.

In solidarity,

Fanny Demontigny
President, CPAS

THE COMMON FRONT

LAURAINE ROBINSON
VICE-PRESIDENT CPAS INFOMOB

Organized in 1972, the first Common Front in the public sector had widespread recognition. Consisting of more than 210,000 Québec government employees who were members of various unions, the Common Front had a list of demands that members vigorously fought for and won. They included a minimum weekly wage of $100, tying wages to the cost of living, an enhanced pension plan, and significant pay raises for all concerned.

The Common Front's bargaining efforts were punctuated by strike actions on an unprecedented scale in the history of Canada's labour movement. Three presidents of union federations and a great many activists were put in prison, triggering a wave of social unrest. Blockades went up, and roads, cities, and airports were impacted. The situation was so dire that the government was compelled to beg the union presidents to appeal for release from prison so that negotiations could resume. A few months later, in October, the labour side emerged victorious regarding its main demands (source: Canadian Museum of History).

MAKING HISTORY AGAIN 50 YEARS LATER

The 2023 Common Front strike was one of the largest protest actions ever held in Québec's public sector. Bringing together more than 420,000 workers in health care, education, and social services, the unions composing the Common Front—the FTQ, CSN, CSQ, and APTS—demanded better working conditions and salary increases. Faced with the Legault government's intractable attitude, and especially its arrogance, the Common Front triggered several strike days in November and December 2023, before threatening to stage an unlimited general strike in January 2024. The 2023 Common Front strike left its mark on Québec's social and political history by demonstrating the power and solidarity of public sector workers and the extent of the public's support. Note that the FAE, which was not part of the Common Front, went directly to an unlimited general strike on November 23. As for the FIQ, it was still pursuing negotiations at the time of writing.

THE COMMON FRONT'S CENTRAL TABLE

On December 28, 2023, after more than forty-two (42) bargaining sessions and nearly six (6) weeks of intensive negotiations at the central table, the Common Front recorded the following central table agreement proposal.

The term of the new collective agreement is to be five (5) years.

- Initial offer, received December 15, 2022: 9%
- Second offer, received October 29, 2023: 10.3%
- Third offer, received December 6, 2023: 12.7%
- Agreement in principle: 17.4%

Up to an ADDITIONAL 3.0% in CPI protection over the last three (3) years of the agreement (1% per year).

On January 3, 2024, the delegates at the CPAS Special General Council in Trois-Rivières agreed to present this offer to their local unions, with most of the delegates recommending its acceptance.

Despite the fact that this historic agreement features a 17.4% increase over five years, the agreement has not received unanimous approval. When mobilization actions were held, the vast majority of the members in our sector gave their all to the cause and had very high expectations. In the end, the employees of the public sector made their choice.

VOTING RESULTS

Voting results for the Common Front as a whole:

78.8% voted yes.

For the health sector:

SCFP: 64.6% voted yes.

FTQ: 75% voted yes.

A few words from the CPAS Secretary General

HISTORIC NEGOTIATION?

MICHEL JOLIN

I have been your representative on the CPAS Bargaining Committee for over 20 years, and we have had all kinds of offers from governments during the rounds of negotiations. In fact, even salary cuts, and the government recuperated the value of three days of salaries.

We had years with 0% increase, others with 0.25%, 0.50% and 0.75%. Ridiculous offers, we can admit that. A good salary increase was 2%, but we must not forget that we are missionaries and did not take these jobs for the money!

Historic negotiation? Well, in terms of salary, 17.4% over 5 years, it is still historic, 6% for a single year, it has been a long time since we have seen that, I have not.

A government that negotiates using the public platform is not really historic, an employer/legislator has the upper hand, and it is not acceptable.

What is also historic is that the CAQ government despises unions, something we have never seen before!

Another historical fact, your mobilization, the strike sequences, your desire to obtain the means to offer the best services to the population.

THE SPECIAL STRIKE FUND FILE

PATRICK HALLÉ

STRIKE AS ULTIMATE WEAPON

Strike and lockout are the last resort used during the negotiations of a collective agreement. The objective of a strike is to deprive the employer of income and profits generated by the work of the employees; the lockout deprives the workers of their jobs and their wages. Fortunately, these pressure tactics are only used in approximately 4% of all collective agreement negotiations in Quebec[1]. Thus, we can conclude that work stoppages remain the exception rather than the rule; parties prefer reaching a consensus.

However, sometimes certain situations will force employees to resort to these drastic measures. For example, when an employer persists in proposing wage increases that are barely 50% of the anticipated rate of inflation, workers may feel pressured to exercise their right to strike. This is precisely what led the members of the common front to stop working for 11 days in the fall of 2023.

THE STRIKE FUND AS FINANCIAL SUPPORT

It is recommended that each individual or family set up a contingency fund to cover their needs as well as those of their family for a minimum period of 2 to 3 months. Unfortunately, many cannot build or maintain this financial cushion. A collective alternative consists of opting for the creation of a strike fund, thus offering a solution to this problem.

The strike fund, established collaboratively, provides a way to circumvent the challenges of individual accumulation of financial resources. The resulting strike pay represents a guaranteed minimum income. This provision ensures that the possibility of engaging in the fight to improve working conditions is not hindered when this becomes necessary. By choosing this collective approach, individuals give themselves the means to preserve their ability to claim their rights without fearing immediate financial consequences.

EXCELLENT BARGAINING LEVERAGE

During our recent united front strike, questions relating to strike funds aroused keen interest in the media. Questions have emerged as to why some unions do not have such funds[2], and why others establish particularly strict access criteria[3]. These concerns have not been raised within the Canadian Union of Public Employees.

With a strike fund exceeding $130 million and mechanisms allowing rapid recharging, if necessary, the strike fund of the Canadian Union of Public Employees is undoubtedly positioned among the most effective and enviable in Canada and North America.

During collective agreement negotiations, the strike fund initially assumes a dissuasive role vis-à-vis the employer. The simple assurance that workers will not be completely deprived of income during a strike or lockout is often enough to persuade an employer to improve its offers. This negotiating asset also allows to counter the employer threat of depriving workers of their source of income.

The fund reaches its full potential during a strike or lockout, financially supporting workers deprived of their wages during the labor dispute. Currently, the maximum compensation per week of strike is $300, rising to $400 after 12 weeks. In addition, the fund can cover group insurance and even the employer's share in the event of interruption of payment on their part[4].

HOW DOES THE CUPE NATIONAL STRIKE FUND WORK

Our strike fund has been anchored in our statutes and regulations since 2001, thus becoming an essential component of our union identity. Over the years it has evolved, leading to the adoption of several modifications aimed at improving its efficiency and viability. These changes were integrated thanks to amendments adopted during our meetings within the Canadian Union of Public Employees (see Outline for details).

One of the major changes was to grant the right to strike pay from the first day of work stoppage. In fact, before 2017, compensation was only paid after three days. This development reflects our ongoing commitment to adjusting and optimizing our strike fund to better meet the needs of workers, thereby strengthening our ability to support our members from the start of a labor dispute.

Since 2001, the individual contribution to our strike fund corresponds to a percentage, currently set at 5%, of the capitation fees paid to CUPE, which represent 0.85% of salary[5]. To illustrate this data, if your salary is $1,000/week, the per capita paid to CUPE would be $8.50. Of this amount, 42.5 cents (5%) would then be allocated to the national strike fund.

Our statutes have incorporated an additional mechanism: in the event of a decrease in the fund below $50 million, CUPE is required to increase the contribution to 6% of the capitations, until the fund reaches $80 million[6]. During this period, CUPE can also transfer 4% of the capitation fees intended for the national defense fund to the national strike fund.

If these measures are not enough, a second regulation also authorizes CUPE to increase the capitation by 0.04% (from 0.85% to 0.89%) if the strike fund falls below $15 million and this, until it reached $25 million[7]. These adjustments demonstrate our commitment to maintaining a robust and functional strike fund to support our members in crucial times.

PROCEED TO CHECKOUT

These examples pragmatically demonstrate how the strike fund works financially, generating significant benefits for the workers involved. Let us take the cases of John and Mary during the last common front strike, as well as the conclusion of the agreement in principle on December 28, 2023.

[1] Statistics from the Quebec Ministry of Labor, work stoppages in Quebec. Results for the year 2020 and statistical portrait of collective agreements analyzed in Quebec 2022.

[2] TVA News, Where is the strike fund? Worried, a FAE teacher talks to the media. November 26, 2023. https://www.tvanouvelles.ca/2023/11/26/ou-est-le-fonds-de-greve-inquiete-une-enseignante-de-la-fae-se-confie

[3] Radio-Canada Info. Buzzword of flexibility by the CSN for access to the strike fund. December 11, 2023. https://ici.radio-canada.ca/nouvelle/2033928/csn-greve-fond-souplesse-acces

[4] CUPE's Strike Fund Regulations. https://scfp.ca/statuts-du-scfp

[5] Paragraph 13.3, pages 47-48, of the CUPE 2023 Statutes

[6] idem

[7] Paragraph 13.2, page 47, CUPE 2023 Statutes

[8] idem

John — Beneficiary attendant in a Montreal CHSLD:

- Base salary: 25.63 $/hour.
- Contribution to the strike fund: $0.018/hour.
- Total contribution for 10 years: $206.74
- Strike indemnity received for 9 days: $135.00
- Shortfall compared to the initial investment: $71.74

However, by participating in the strike, John helped salary increases to augment from 10.3% on October 29, 2023 to 17.4% on December 28, 2023. Considering the result for the year 2023 alone (from 4, 3% to 6%), his net gain represents $820, or almost 12 times his initial investment, equivalent to a return of 1200%. Over a five-year period, the additional gain in wages from the strike is $3,819 per year starting April 1, 2027, or 53 times the initial investment of $71.74.

Mary — Administrative technician for 15 years:

- Current salary: $32.32/hour.
- Contribution to the strike fund: $375.00
- Strike indemnity received for 9 days: $540.00
- Gain compared to the initial investment : $165.00 (44 %).

The nine days of strike with the common front allowed Mary to increase her salary by $4,651 per year in 2027 compared to the offers of October 29, 2023.

These examples highlight the effectiveness of the strike fund as a strategic financial instrument, providing significant returns to workers engaged in defending their rights.

WHAT DOES THE FUTURE HOLD?

It is undeniable that the use of the strike as a pressure tactic by the common front has proven fruitful for the workers. The CUPE strike fund played a crucial role in facilitating strike votes and financially supporting the most vulnerable members during the dispute.

Now that the advantages of this national strike fund have been demonstrated, it has become essential to monitor its evolution and continually seek to improve its effectiveness. This can be done by highlighting the gains obtained during conflicts, by adjusting allowances according to the cost of living, or by increasing investment income…

The success of the CUPE strike fund provides a valuable lesson for the future, highlighting the importance of maintaining and constantly improving financial support mechanisms for workers engaged in struggles to improve their working conditions. Vigilance and adaptability will be key elements to ensure the sustainability and effectiveness of this initiative.

Outline :

The history of the National Strike Fund of the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) reflects a significant evolution from its creation in 1967 to its current situation in 2023. Here is a summary of the key stages:

– 1967: Creation of the National Defense Fund with an initial investment of $250,000.

– 1968: Introduction of a contribution of 10 cents per member per month to the fund.

– 1971: The fund is used up, and strike benefits are interrupted.

– 1972-1979: The contribution to the national defense fund increases, going from 10 cents to 80 cents per member per month.

– 1981: Change of contributions from a fixed amount to a percentage.

– 1982: The fund is used up again, and it is decided at the special convention in June to revitalize it again with a special contribution of $5 per member and $1 per member per month until it reaches $10 million.

– 1983: Adoption of a contribution of 20% of capitations into the defense fund.

– 1985: Introduction of a mechanism to increase contributions by 0.04% if the fund falls below $5 million. Strike pay increases to $75 per week.

– 1987: Strike pay is increased to $100 per week.

– 1997: Strike pay is increased to $200 per week.

– 1999: The national defense fund is emptied for the third time, leading to the creation of a working committee to propose solutions.

– 2001: Split of the National Defense Fund into two separate funds, the National Strike Fund is created, used specifically for campaigns to avoid strikes, strike allowances, legal costs linked to the strike and the replacement of group insurance necessary during the strike.

– 2006: The strike fund can now obtain income from guaranteed investments.

– 2006-2023: Progressive increase in strike benefits, reaching $300 per week at the start of the strike, $350 from the 8th week and $400 after 12 weeks of work stoppage. The waiting period for obtaining strike pay is also reduced, from 15 days to the first day of the conflict.

– 2023: The national strike fund reaches an amount of $131 million, benefiting from a solid rate of return which makes it possible to finance a large part of the struggles when necessary.

This timeline illustrates CUPE's ongoing commitment to strengthening its financial capacity to effectively support its members during struggles to improve working conditions.

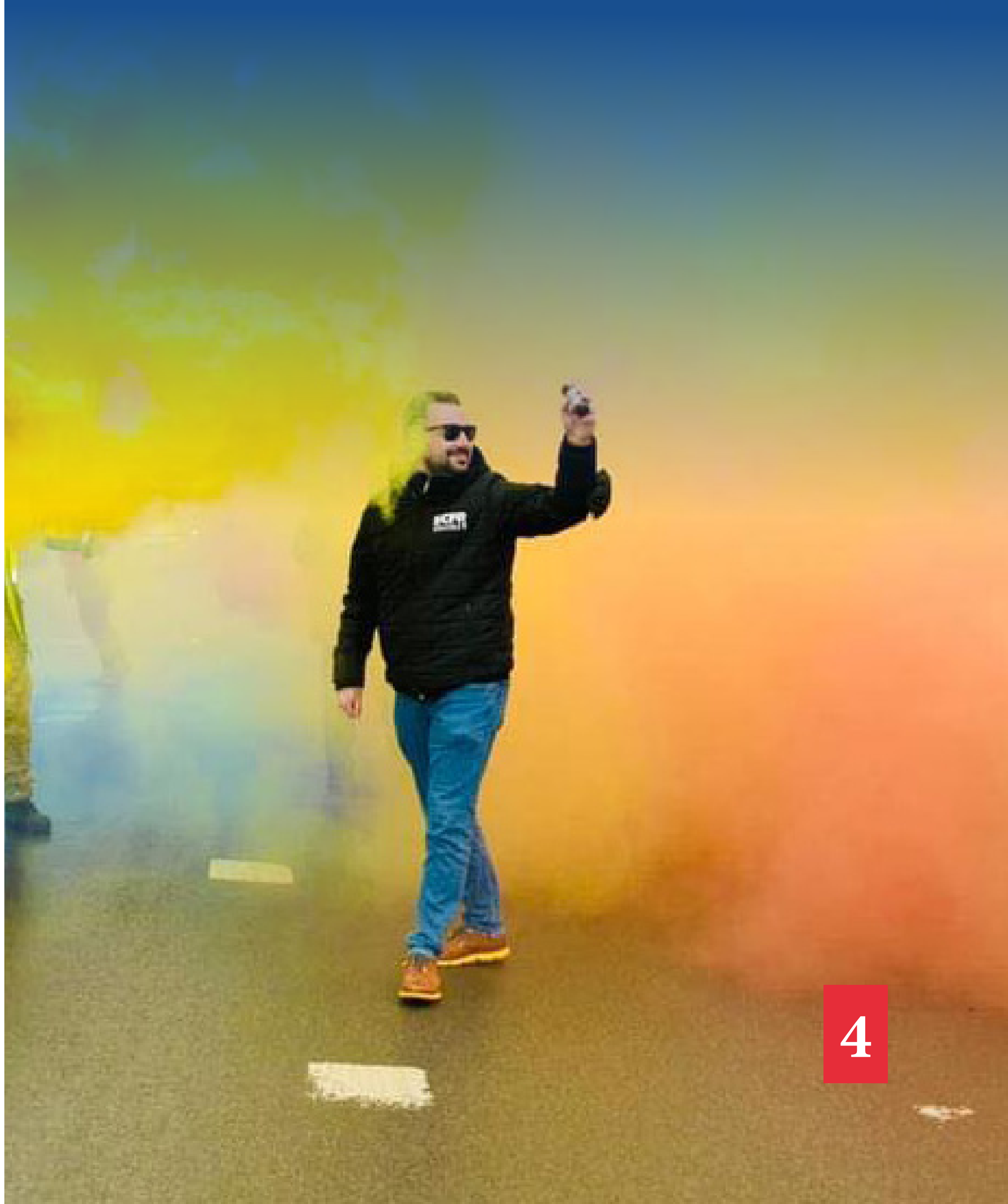
Thank you to Mr. Claude Généreux (National Secretary-Treasurer of CUPE from 2002 to 2012) for his collaboration.

LETTER OF DEPARTURE FROM PRESIDENT MAXIME STE-MARIE

Hello dear delegates,

It is with mixed feelings that I write these few lines. I left the CPAS Presidency on February 9 in order to take on a new challenge within the CUPE organization.

I want you to know that I feel very privileged to have had the opportunity to represent you over the past few years, and grateful for the trust you have bestowed on me. Over the years I have had the chance to speak on your behalf and, every time, I have done so with empathy and conviction.



Although we felt frustrated at times during the last negotiation, I am very proud of our effort and involvement. Your enthusiasm was contagious, and it was the greatest mobilization of our public service sector in the last 50 years.

We could have held out longer and obtained better gains if some partners had not rushed to settle, but this is what happens also when you are in a common front.

Although the texts of the collective agreement are not finalized, we must already think about the next big challenge, namely the union allegiance vote provided for in Bill 15 adopted under gag order at the end of 2023.

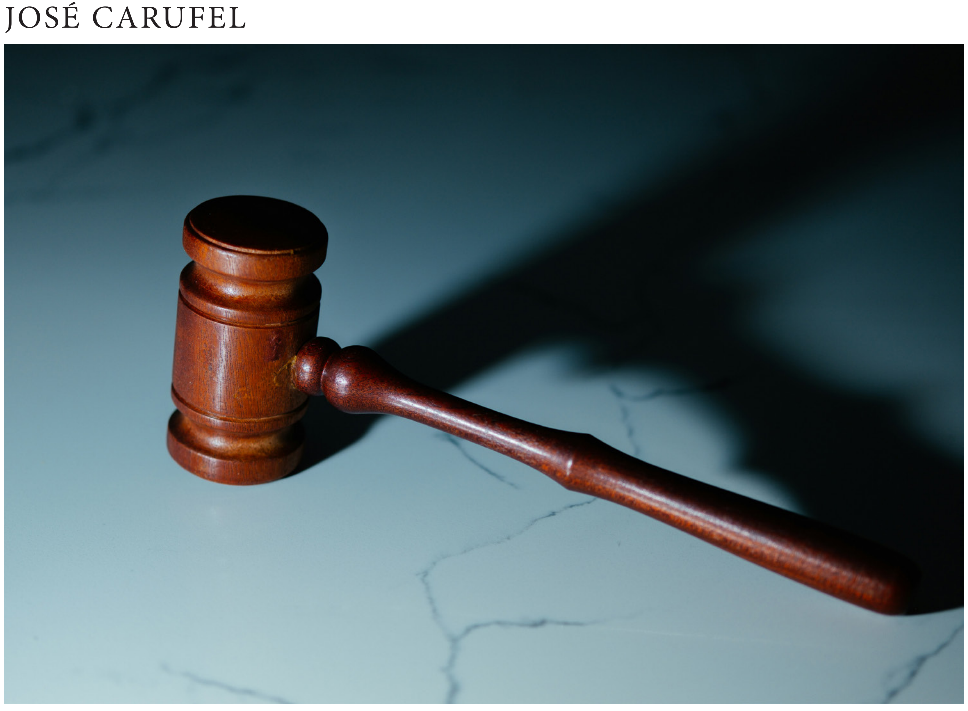
Since we are fortunate to be part of the finest and largest union organization in the country, I am certain that, true to our rich history, we will emerge even stronger and greater from this period of turbulence.

Thanking you, I remain,

Maxime Ste-Marie

OBSTRUCTION BY MINISTER CHRISTIAN DUBÉ

JOSÉ CARUFEL



In the January 2022 edition, I penned an article highlighting recent labour law decisions. On March 17, 2021, the administrative labor court ruled in favor of the Union, stating that the Employer Negotiating Committee for the Health and Social Services Sector (CPNSSS) had obstructed union activities. At the time, I wondered if this decision would dissuade the Legault government from imposing rather than negotiating. Subsequent events revealed that the government persisted in obstructing union activities.

On December 14, 2023, a new decision was rendered, confirming that the government, specifically CPNSSS, continued to undermine union activities. Other unions representing employees in the health and social services network had filed grievances to this effect. The ministry had once again unilaterally modified the working conditions of employees. CUPE also alleged that MSSS had failed in its obligation to negotiate in good faith, because unilateral modifications to collective agreements occurred during negotiations.

Among the contested directives were the double-rate remuneration during the summer period of 2022 and the maintenance of certain measures provided for in Law 28, intended at putting an end to the state of health emergency while providing for the maintenance of transitional measures for an indefinite period. Imposing these measures, without negotiation, hinders union activities and infringes the right of association. Unions are not opposed to improving the conditions of employees but wish to negotiate fair conditions for its members. In doing so, the government reserves the right to decide to whom and how these conditions apply, and especially when they can end.

The administrative labor court describes the argument by the union organizations as follows:

[32] Although this measure may be favorable to some of their members, union organizations condemn the absence of prior discussions despite their repeated requests. They believe that they are once again faced with unilateral changes to the working conditions of their members while mechanisms provided for in collective agreements make it possible to act in consultation with them in order to choose the best solutions to deal with the lack of personnel.

The court awards punitive damages to denounce such a substantial violation of the right of association and also to dissuade the defendants from repeating the alleged conduct. It further specifies that as a major employer, this damage can only be symbolic and must send a clear message that is consistent with the seriousness of this intentional attack on the right of association. Finally, the Government of Quebec is ordered (Ministry of Health and Social Services), via Mr. Christian Dubé, in his capacity as Minister of Health and Social Services, and to the Employer Negotiating Committee for the Health and Social Services Sector (CPNSSS) to pay the sum of $45,000 in punitive damages to each of the union organizations.

The future will tell us if the employer and the Legault government will finally change their behavior. For the moment, the government has initiated an appeal procedure with the administrative labor court.

https://www.canlii.org/fr/qc/qctat/doc/2023/2023qctat5205/2023qctat5205.html

2023 QCTAT 5205

IS THIS REALLY A PAYROLL ERROR?

JOSÉ CARUFEL

The various local provisions of our collective agreement usually provide for a reimbursement procedure when an error occurs in your pay. It is common, but wrong, to consider that any extra payroll deduction is the result of an error.

For example, case law indicates that there would be an error if the employer had applied an incorrect hourly rate, paid simple time instead of time and a half, omitted to pay a premium or had forgotten to include hours worked on payroll.

In a recent arbitration award, an administrative agent had been receiving the psychiatric premium for almost twenty years. When Notre-Dame Hospital was integrated into the CIUSSS du Centre-Sud-de-l'Île-de-Montréal, an administrative review was carried out and the premium was stopped. The employer took the law into its own hands by recovering the premium paid to the worker, over several paychecks. However, a claim by the Employer which originates from the application or interpretation of the collective agreement cannot be qualified as an error nor be subject to compensation.

This is especially true if the claim is contested by grievance since the sums thus claimed do not constitute a liquid and payable d

The employer argued that an agreement had been reached with the worker, but the arbitrator considered that the grievance raised called into question the nature of the debt. From then on, the employer could no longer consider the sums he intended to claim from the complainant as a liquid and payable debt, nor continue with the ongoing deductions, nor keep the amounts he had already deducted, since these sums could not be his until an arbitrator officially decided the matter. The arbitrator concluded that the employer illegitimately made deductions from the worker's pay to recover the amounts paid as a psychiatric premium and ordered the employer to reimburse the employee.

This decision is based not on the collective agreement, but rather on articles 1672 and 1673 of the Quebec Civil Code and Article 49 of the Act respecting labor standards.

https://canlii.ca/t/jz8t6

AN INSIDER'S PERSPECTIVE ON THE PUBLIC SECTOR NEGOTIATIONS

MÉLANIE GOUGEON

The public sector negotiations enjoyed widespread media coverage throughout the bargaining process. Our dear premier and the minister of the Secrétariat du Conseil du trésor (SCT) had a no-holds-barred approach in the public arena. The leaders representing each of the Common Front organizations gave press conferences as well. At these events, they reported on the negotiations and repeatedly had to debunk the government's lies.

But what was happening behind closed doors? People have asked me to try to explain the nuts and bolts of the bargaining process–in other words, what actually happens behind the scenes at the Conseil du trésor.

I was there as FTQ coordinator and spokesperson. Interesting fact: although women account for more than 78% of the employees in the public sector, I was the only woman at the Common Front bargaining table. In fact, I was the very first woman spokesperson for the FTQ in public sector negotiations.

THE COMMON FRONT

As you know, the negotiations were held with the Common Front, consisting of the FTQ, CSN, CSQ ,and APTS. At the central table, the bargaining team consisted of eight people from the FTQ, CSN, and CSQ, including one spokesperson from each of the three union federations. This alliance made it possible to bring together more than 420,000 workers in education, health care, and social services. It also led to the biggest national march and strike in decades.

However, the alliance brought its own set of challenges: it was one thing to combine these three major organizations together, but it was another thing to come up with a common platform that reflected their constituents' demands. What's more, we added the APTS, an independent union, to the mix for the first time. Each of the organizations had its own ideas, vision, operating methods, and bargaining style, and in addition, there were three union spokespersons at the same table. In short, it was no easy task! In order to succeed, we had to have an ultimate common goal: to make the Legault government yield, and to obtain better conditions for our members.

THE NEGOTIATIONS

The negotiations with the Québec government ended up taking over a year. In all, we held 42 bargaining sessions, including interminable employer caucuses and back and forth trips to Quebec City to attend meetings that provided barely one or two hours with the employer in a single day. And let's not forget the counter-offers that the Secrétariat du Conseil du trésor took hours to send us because twenty people were drafting them. All the while, the government's spokesperson knew full well that these proposals would be rejected.

And what about the government's famous new bargaining centre? Simply put, it's an unhealthy place--crummy little rooms, too hot for even the most cold-sensitive people. After holding two or three meetings there, we returned to the H complex to negotiate. It was very difficult to get access to the caucus rooms, and it was as hot as ever, but at least the rooms weren't unhealthy. When the sessions went longer, we had trouble getting access to the bathrooms after 5 p.m., so we had to get the security guard. Maybe the government thought these poor conditions would make us cave in!

Did the bargaining start in earnest right from the very beginning? The employer's representatives would certainly tell you they did. But the truth is, the REAL negotiations didn't start until the last six weeks of the talks. We wasted a prodigious amount of time discussing the forums and venues for negotiating the various issues. For months on end, we dealt with spokespersons who had no mandate and who tried to sell us on the government's ridiculous wage offers and the merits of its attacks on the pension plan. They even had the gall to offer us a verbatim document to get our members to accept their offers. They kept pushing us toward an overall settlement and refused to record points of agreement between the parties. Worse still, our counterparts kept presenting measures that, thanks to other sources, we already knew were no longer within the government's spheres.

The arrival of mediators at the central table in mid-November infused new life into the negotiations. This was, in fact, an unprecedented event. In other words, the union party's request for mediation had shaken things up! Given its constant presence in the public eye, the government was in no position to refuse the mediation request. From November 21 onwards, we were engaged in negotiations six days a week. There were still lengthy employer caucuses, but at least the mediators confronted the other party, forcing it to come to the table with answers. The real negotiations were finally beginning. We were thus able to make progress on a few matters, but as of December 17, there were still major issues to settle.

It was at this point that the Secrétariat du Conseil du trésor decided to call in one of its chief negotiators, the man who actually held the purse strings. They then tried to convince us that the SCT had thrown in everything it could. They said our members would get more than the expected amount for inflation, and that if we were given more still, they would have to cut back at the sector tables. A sob story, in short. Afterward, they turned on the rhetoric: we understand you, we hear you, and we're going to make you a new offer. And what was the offer? A measly extra 0.3%, which meant we went from being offered 12.4% to a proposed 12.7% over five years. Big deal!

On December 23, after a day of negotiating into the early hours of the morning, we were still at 12.7% over five years, with the faint possibility of a CPI clause that included a raft of conditions that would kick in at the end of the five years. We were still a long way off the mark. There was no prospect of a settlement before the holidays, and each party decided to report back to its principals. The mediators saw no openings either, and proposed an adjournment until after the holidays.

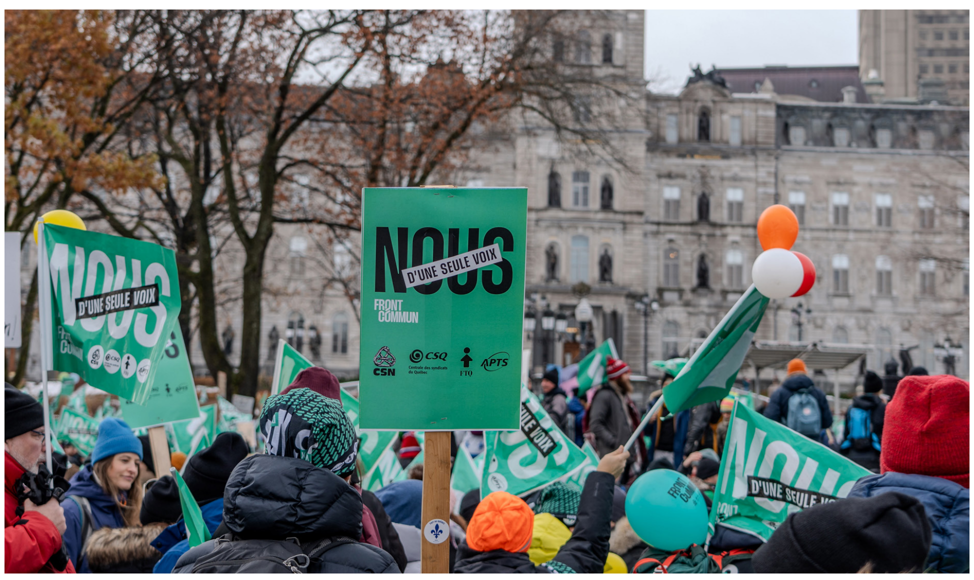
That evening, everything came to a head. We were called back to the bargaining table at 8:30 p.m. to work through the night. By the morning of December 24, all the issues had been settled, apart from wages. In the afternoon, exchanges took place between the leaders and Minister Lebel. We were finally able to leave Quebec City at 5 p.m. on Christmas Eve, but without a settlement in our pockets. Minister Girard probably had decided it was time to eat his turkey...

The return to the bargaining table was then scheduled for December 26. Talks continued, and we finally received the government's final offer on December 27. After another day of intense discussions, we were able to reach an agreement in principle on the morning of December 28.

THE STRIKE

In the previous negotiations, the pandemic had prevented us from using every means to achieve our goals. In this new round, our members were ready to do battle. In fact, they voted in favour of pressure tactics up to and including an unlimited general strike. This was a first in 40 years!

Three strike actions over a total of eleven strike days were necessary to counter the attacks on the RREGOP and parental rights, and to obtain a decent pay raise. On the first day of the strike, I toured several strike sites, and the scale of mobilization was spectacular. The second action took place as we were in a bargaining session at the Secrétariat du Conseil du trésor. That was THE place where we needed to be. However, on the third day, we interrupted our session to join our members who were demonstrating by the thousands in front of the National Assembly. That moment generated a huge outpouring of support for the bargaining team, enabling us to confidently return to the front.



The third action was seven consecutive days of strikes, which hadn't happened since 1972! On the morning of December 8, the first day of this action, my colleague Pierre-Guy Sylvestre and I came across demonstrators in front of the National Assembly– members of the Common Front, our members! It sent shivers down my spine! Clearly, putting 65,000 FTQ members and a total of 420,000 people on strike had been a consequential decision. In making it, we knew what we were asking of our people.

The strike days, the massive mobilization and, not least, the public's obvious support, enabled us not only to fend off the Legault government's attacks, but also to obtain a higher wage increase and a CPI clause.

MY PERSONNAL ASSESSMENT

It was undoubtedly a historic negotiation in many respects:

- Largest Common Front - 420,000 workers
- Largest national march - 100,000 demonstrators
- Members mobilized like never before
- Strike mandate up to and including an unlimited general strike
- Eleven days on strike
- Phenomenal public support
- Largest-ever public sector wage increases

Introduction of a CPI clause applicable to the last three years Notwithstanding the above, I think that some questions should be asked regarding these negotiations:

- They took far too long, since the real bargaining only began in the fall of 2023, whereas demands were filed in the fall of 2022. When will we have a government that is at the ready and assigns mandates at the outset?
- Why the sudden rush to settle on December 23-24? I disagree that it had to do with momentum, because as far as I'm concerned, we were the ones in a position to establish a momentum, at a time we felt was right, based on our mobilization efforts and the public support we had.
- We were face to face with a disrespectful government that didn't want to negotiate with us from the very beginning and then suddenly forced us into quick negotiations from the evening of December 23 until January 2, 2024, for certain sectoral tables. In any other environment, we would never have accepted such disrespect from an employer. Why should unions negotiating in the public sector accept such treatment when unions receive respect in other sectors? Is it because of the government? Is it for fear of losing public or media support?

Of course, these negotiations were marked by historic moments, but despite the wage increases, the CPI clause, and the withdrawal of attacks on the pension plan, it left me with a bad taste in my mouth. I'm proud of the work we accomplished TOGETHER, but on the other hand, I'm disappointed with the way the negotiations ended. Would we have achieved more if we hadn't agreed to the pace the government imposed at the very end? No one will ever know. However, one thing is certain: we would not have accepted less, given the large-scale mobilization supporting us, and we would at least have been shown some respect.

In conclusion, if there's one thing in life that I have quickly learned and that I'm instilling in my daughters, it's that you must make yourself respected.

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