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Special communication

Bargaining talks enter the home stretch

With two weeks of bargaining to go, with the assistance of a conciliator, and just over a month to go before we have the right to strike and the employer has the right to lock us out, the union bureau and the union council have accepted a recommendation from the bargaining committee. To get the best shot at reaching a tentative agreement, the union's elected officials have decided to take a new tack. But that doesn't mean we're backing down!

First the facts: the current bargaining round with the conciliator ends on August 5. The bargaining committee doesn't intend to extend the talks unless there's a breakthrough. But its members will remain available to negotiate after that date any time, day or night. We don't want a labour dispute and the goal is still to reach a negotiated settlement. We will obtain the right to strike on August 27 at 00:01 a.m., and CBC / Radio-Canada will obtain the right to lock us out at the same time. From that point on, under the law, all it will take to go on strike with 72 hours notice is a mandate from a general meeting to the union leadership.

The fact is that after 10 months of meetings, we've only just started to really negotiate. The bargaining committee tabled demands this week that would restore true meaning to the concept of seniority, beyond just more annual vacation time. Also on our agenda are significant changes for temporary and contract employees. Most importantly, the creation of regular positions will have to be addressed.

The analysis by our committee shows that it would be possible to convert several hundred temporary positions into regular positions and to end contract status in a number of job titles where it is the norm.

We are still waiting for the employer's financial position, despite our repeated requests. We have many monetary demands and we will have to make a strong case at the bargaining table. To increase its effectiveness, the bargaining committee has asked for the assistance of Marie Andrée Charron from the union bureau and the CSN has agreed to provide an outside expert to support the committee.

The union's members will also need to step up much more vigorously.

A management document outlining the Corporation's strategy, of which the bargaining committee obtained a copy, notes that turnout has been low at important union meetings. According to CBC/ Radio-Canada, "the union's demands were adopted by fewer than 140 members at a general meeting and only a small contingent of 300 members is interested in the progress of the bargaining talks." Is this true? Will we confirm management's sceptical view of our commitment or raise our voices in unison?

Management's document also mentions some points in the employer's bargaining framework that are light years away from our demands. Based on this information, our bargaining committee has told the employer that it refuses to participate in sham negotiations.

After a thorough analysis, the bargaining committee recommended to the union bureau and then to the union council that we refocus our bargaining strategy and the union's actions. Our goals remain the same. We will still have the same window of opportunity during the election campaign to exert pressure, up to and including strike action.

Our bargaining team has increased the pressure on their management counterparts and will continue to do so. We will make the flow of information between the bargaining committee, the union bureau and the union council more fluid. But **the key remains the membership's support for our demands, and especially, greater participation.** The bargaining committee and the union's elected officers believe as firmly as ever that negotiating a contract is a collective effort. It's not like hiring a contractor and saying "Call me when the job's done."

The bargaining committee feels the hot winds of mobilization blowing at the local stations. Now those winds must blow in Montréal too.

Where will we stand on August 5? We'll know in two weeks. Where will we stand on August 27? The bargaining committee is planning to discuss the situation a few days beforehand with all the elected officers. In the meantime, it's conducting a blitz. We've stepped up the pressure and increased the pace of work. More than ever, the bargaining committee needs your support and your presence. The employer also needs to feel the winds of mobilization from our 3,000 members, not just union officers and a handful of active members.

We continue to believe that, together, we can get there.

Your Union office and
Negotiation committee