



PROFS EN NÉGO

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EMPLOYER'S SUBMISSION STICKS TO MANAGERIAL

In this issue of Info-Négo, the FNEEQ-CSN Bargaining and Mobilization Committee gives a brief analysis of the employer's submission, which was received on December 16.

BACKWARD MOVEMENT ON FIVE FRONTS

We know it's a starting point in a negotiation but we do have to take the employer's submission seriously. It demands major concessions on departmental prerogatives, professional autonomy and freedom of union action, and shows no real willingness to improve working conditions in Continuing Education. Moreover, our negotiating partners do not appear to be concerned about job insecurity, which is basically absent from the issues covered by the document.

The employer's demands are organized into five themes, plus an "Other demands" section. Each theme starts with a brief introductory text. There follows a list of demands, which however is preceded by the word "including," suggesting that the employer is reserving the right to add more demands as the negotiations progress.

Some aspects of the preamble to the employer's demands are also worthy of note. First of all, the text is identical for teachers and other job categories: the Comité patronal de négociation des collèges (CPNC) saw fit to draft a single preamble, which talks about student success. Not a word about our working conditions. This creates some startling incongruities. For example, the

preamble notes the "exponential increase in students with disabilities" but proposes no measure whatsoever to deal with it or even recognize it.

CONTINUING EDUCATION

For years we have been criticizing the haphazard development of Continuing Education. It would appear, however, that the employer wants to further loosen the guidelines, on the grounds that flexibility and "agility" are needed in order to operate effectively. For example, they want to make "optimal use" of resources without having to come to an agreement with the union beforehand. And while the CPNC appears open to recognizing the work done by Continuing Education teachers outside the classroom, it wants to review the terms of engagement in the name of flexibility, which is not reassuring.

We do consider this new openness to recognizing work outside the classroom to be a promising shift. It was probably motivated by the many grievances filed by FNEEQ-CSN unions in recent years, which suggests we adopted the right strategy.

PROGRAMS OF STUDY

On another front, the employer has informed us that it wants to recognize the central role of program committees in the program management cycle. While this may seem innocuous, the language of the section leads us to believe that the purpose is to transfer the departments' prerogatives to the program committees, and to transfer the resources allocated to department coordinators to program committee coordinators.

The employer believes this change is needed to reflect institutional program management policies, which are based on the framework produced by the Commission d'évaluation de l'enseignement collégial (CEEC). FNEEQ unions have been boycotting the CEEC's quality assurance processes since 2014 because they constitute an all-out attack on departmental autonomy, an attempt by administrations to exercise control over decisions that rightfully belong to the departments. It need hardly be said that the departments played a vital role in the development of the CEGEPs. They are the cornerstone of the collegiality that underlies the practice of our profession. But now the decisions that affect us would be made by a body that is not always composed entirely of teachers and in which the employer can exert greater influence.

The employer wants to slash the departments' responsibilities and transfer some of them to the program committees, including approval of course outlines, pedagogical strategies, and analysis of human and physical resource needs. Naturally, transferring these responsibilities would involve siphoning resources from departmental coordinators to the coordinators of the newly empowered program committees. Basically, the employer wants to transform departments into social clubs.

SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

While the employer is unabashedly attacking our professional autonomy, some elements of its submission suggest that it wants to lay the foundations for a future professional order. It is proposing to enshrine in our collective agreement a professional development requirement, apparently without adding any resources. It seems the employer doesn't think we're prepared to shoulder our professional responsibility to keep our skills and knowledge up to date. Its demands go so far as removing the Professional Development Committee's decision-making power by giving itself a veto. In addition to betraying a certain contempt for our work, this plan, were it implemented, could well turn into a perilous bureaucratic odyssey. Who will do the monitoring? How? Where will the money come from? These are some of the questions that occur to us.

On another matter, it is unfortunate that the employer has not addressed our concerns about job insecurity in any way whatsoever. On the contrary, they want to make the status of untenured teachers even more precarious. The employer wants to make the granting of tenure contingent on an evaluation of the teacher's performance and skills. This is a clear lack of respect for the nearly 40% of CEGEP teachers who don't have tenure.

WORK ORGANIZATION

The section on work organization revolves around "efficiency" when it comes to human resources and the "flexibility" needed for "optimal" management. One of the management side's solutions is to increase the individual teaching load, even as we are asking for it to be reduced. The workload has increased significantly, due in large part to the growing number of students with disabilities, an issue that is not even touched on by our negotiating partners. This section also includes other

demands that could have a major impact on the job security of untenured teachers. For example, they want to make it easier for teachers to move from one CEGEP to another, claiming this is something the colleges are interested in. At present, teachers can transfer from one college to another under intercollege exchanges. If this system were relaxed, tenured teachers who haven't been placed on availability would be able to bump untenured teachers at another college.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE CEGEP SYSTEM

In our own submission, we expressed our desire to agree on guidelines for the development of distance education and the opening of "centres d'études collégiales" (CECs), and to write those guidelines into the collective agreement. The employer's response is shocking. With respect to distance education, the CPNC's only ask is that the obligation to consult the unions be removed from the collective agreement because taking the time to do so "impedes the implementation of development plans."

In recent years, the FNEEQ has made many representations to the employer about establishing guidelines for the opening of CECs, which is often done hastily, without in-depth analysis, and without taking into account the characteristics of the local student population. The employer has responded by explicitly arguing in its submission that since the CECs are "experimental," it shouldn't be required to create positions and some provisions of the collective agreement should be relaxed.

OTHER MATTERS

Finally, among the employer's other demands, there are two big backward steps. First, the employer wants to make management less transparent by limiting the information that must be provided to the unions. Secondly, when a student appeals a grade,

the teacher who gave the grade would be excluded from the review committee, on the grounds that the teacher's presence constitutes a "denial of natural justice" for the student. This demand is based on a skewed perception of the grade review committee, which seems to be viewed as a tribunal. The collective agreement provides that only the teacher or the grade review committee of which the teacher is a member can change a grade. Removing this prerogative would be a major setback in terms of our professional autonomy.

SAME OLD SAME OLD, EVEN WITH THE CURRENT BUDGET SURPLUS

The employer's submission is dismaying but unsurprising. Our bosses have taken their usual tack: their priority is to expand the scope of their managerial powers instead of addressing the welfare of teachers and the quality of education for students. The employer's submission does not provide for any additional resources. The employer seems to be aware, as we are, that the budgetary situation has changed, but is it prepared to recognize our real needs?

Fortunately, we will be able to present our vision to the employer in the coming months. Our goal is to secure the future of the CEGEP system. We have a well-considered plan rooted in a democratic consultation with the FNEEQ-CSN members in the Regroupement Cégep.

We hope you will participate in the activities we will be organizing in response to the employer's submission in the coming weeks. CEGEP teachers are a big group. It is time for us to turn out in force to show the employer how dissatisfied we are with its submission and the lack of response to our concerns.

Your Bargaining and Mobilization Committee