

Quebec Public Sector Workers Rank-and-File Coordinating Committee meeting discusses strategy to counter unions' attempt to impose sell-out contracts

Our reporters
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The Quebec Public Sector Workers Rank-and-File Coordinating Committee held its latest meeting Sunday, January 7, to map out a strategy to defeat the unions' attempts to short-circuit the militant struggle that 600,000 education, healthcare, and other provincial government workers have been waging for months against the right-wing Coalition Avenir Quebec government.

Dozens of public sector workers participated in the online event, which called for a working class industrial and political offensive against austerity and war, and the building of rank-and-file committees in every workplace to organize and lead it.

Attendees overwhelmingly adopted a resolution opposing the efforts of the Common Front union alliance and the Federation autonome de l'enseignement (FAE, Autonomous Teachers Federation) to sabotage their struggle by shutting down the strike movement and ramming through concessions-filled contracts. It declared:

“This meeting of the Quebec Public Sector Workers Rank-and-File Coordinating Committee condemns the sellout agreements concluded behind workers' backs between the public sector unions and the Legault CAQ government.

“If union leaders have provided only scant details, it is because these agreements betray workers' key demands for improved wages and working conditions.

“They are the result of the unions' policy of dividing and demobilizing rank-and-file workers in order to impose the attacks demanded by the government and big

business.

“The leaked figures for wage increases, for example (17.4 percent over five years), are a major retreat from the unions' own initial demand (21 percent over three years), which was itself already insufficient.

“This meeting demands immediate and full disclosure of the agreements to give rank-and-file members enough time to analyze and discuss them and ask questions prior to any ratification vote.

“Above all, this meeting pledges to do everything in its power to mobilize the massive popular support enjoyed by public sector workers over the heads of the union bureaucrats, who are colluding with the government.

“The threat of a back-to-work law underlines the need to wage our struggle on a radically different basis, as a working-class political struggle.

“It must be broadened and extended to the rest of the working class—not just in Quebec, but across Canada—to make it an explicit challenge to the ruling class' program of austerity and war.

“To achieve this, we need to step up the work of the Coordinating Committee to build a network of rank-and-file committees, independent of the union apparatuses. Their task will be to prepare a worker-led counter-offensive in defense of working conditions and public services for all.”

The meeting was addressed by Laurent Lafrance, a special education technician with over 12 years' experience. Lafrance has also written extensively on the struggles of education and other public sector workers on the *World Socialist Web Site*.

In his remarks, Lafrance urged rejection of the sellout agreements brought back by the union bureaucracies.

Aware of the determination among workers to continue the struggle until their demands are met, the Common Front unions have announced plans to drag out the voting process for over a month, while keeping essential details of the proposed five-year agreements under wraps—all with the aim of demobilizing the rank-and-file and manipulating the ratification process.

Lafrance stressed that workers confront a political struggle against the agenda of austerity and war pursued by Premier Francois Legault's CAQ government on behalf of the Canadian ruling class. The unions' close collaboration with the government, he continued, is inseparable from their decades-long integration into the state and big business as "partners" of the government and corporate executives. To oppose this, workers must take matters into their own hands by rejecting the corporatism and Quebec nationalism promoted by the unions and turning instead to mobilizing the working class in Quebec and across Canada in an industrial-political counter-offensive.

The report was followed by questions and contributions from the several dozen public sector workers in attendance. Samuel, who has been working together with his wife in the healthcare sector for over 15 years, said, "These negotiations take place every four years, a year late on top of that. We can really see that the government is laughing at us every four years." Mathieu, another healthcare worker, commented, "The union leaders tell us every time, we'll get our act together next time." He spoke about the concessions, including real-wage cuts imposed by the unions on workers in previous bargaining rounds, adding that workers should not forget these when union officials try to regale with claims of "historic gains."

Sterling, an education worker from Ontario who participated in the November 2022 strike by 55,000 school support staff, sent a message of solidarity to the meeting. "Quebec workers need to learn the lessons of other workers' struggles across Canada and internationally," he wrote. "This includes the Ontario education workers' strike of November 2022 against the ultra-right government of Doug Ford. Ford tried to trample over workers' democratic rights by using the anti-democratic 'notwithstanding' clause in the constitution to pre-emptively ban our strike and impose a savage pro-government contract. Workers courageously resisted this assault by walking out in defiance of Ford's strike ban. But we were ultimately betrayed by the Ontario Federation of Labour and Canadian Union of Public

Employees bureaucrats. They shut down a growing movement for a province-wide general strike and ordered us to go back to work without any of our demands being satisfied, then foisted a concessions-laden contract on us."

Sterling concluded his message by emphasizing that the experience in Ontario underscored why the building of rank-and-file committees was necessary for workers to secure victory.

Further contributions to the discussion were made by Frédéric, a Université de Montréal student, and Richard Dufour, a WSWS writer. Frédéric addressed the link between the ruling elite's "disastrous" profits-before-lives response to the COVID-19 pandemic and the public sector workers' struggle. The ruling elite's policy of mass infection and death has had a devastating impact on "our infrastructure, public services, and front-line workers," he said.

Dufour spoke to the necessity of workers adopting an international perspective under conditions in which workers around the world are engaged in major class battles over similar issues faced by Quebec workers. He stressed that unifying the struggles of workers in Quebec with workers across Canada, the United States, and around the world is "an historic task that is posed by the whole objective situation, not just here in Quebec and Canada, but on an international scale." This situation is characterized on the one hand by an eruption of barbarism, expressed in the imperialist-backed Israeli genocide against the Palestinians, and on the other by a global upsurge of the class struggle that must assume an anti-capitalist and socialist character.

The meeting concluded with an appeal for all of those present to get involved in the Coordinating Committee's work by distributing the resolution, building rank-and-file committees at their workplaces, and joining the Committee at cbsectpub@gmail.com. You can also fill out the form below.



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