

WHO'S NOT AVAILABLE AT THE BARGAINING TABLES? THE GOVERNMENT, THAT'S WHO

Health minister Christian Dubé last week accused “the unions” of not coming to bargaining tables. This is a falsehood, and one that sends a very bad signal for future bargaining sessions. Unions have been ready and willing to negotiate from the very beginning of the process. The government is the party that’s refusing to make itself available.

I have an excellent collaboration with Sonia LeBel [...] We’re making joint efforts [...] Ms. LeBel and her team [...] are doing an extraordinary job, but they need to have people facing them [...] I’m asking employees to say to their unions, right now: Please go to the bargaining tables.
- Christian Dubé, February 15, 2023

Let’s make this clear: labour organizations are present, both at sectoral tables and at the central bargaining table. And discussions, in fact, started in January. But the reality is that our counterparts on the employer side are refusing to broaden their availability, and have rejected a number of the dates we suggested for meetings. At some tables, the government is offering four hours every two weeks to push negotiations forward. And scheduling meetings more than two weeks in advance is proving difficult. At this rate, bargaining will go on forever and we’ll still be at the tables in 2026.

The *Front commun* urges the government to stop focusing on public relations and to clear its agenda so that we can negotiate “seriously, actively, and rapidly,” as Sonia LeBel so aptly put it on January 11. In other words: please be consistent.

The *Front commun* is also asking the government to move quickly to bring concrete proposals to the tables so that progress can be made over the next weeks. For our part, we’re ready to suggest many solutions that will improve pay and working conditions and help us meet the challenges we’re facing collectively in schools, health and social services, and higher education.

Discussions are under way

Discussions at the central bargaining table started in January, and there have been four meetings so far. *Front commun* spokespersons have asked their government counterparts for clarifications regarding the offers they tabled in December, and have started to present some of our proposals. The government has also asked questions about our demands. This is a stage we need to go through before we can get to the heart of the matter. We hope the government will now be willing to negotiate rapidly and seriously.

Stay tuned – we’ll keep you posted on discussions as they evolve.

