Parce que
Radio-Canada,
c'est nous

STTRC
Syndicat des travailleuses et travailleurs de Radio-Canada CSN

Our salary demands and inflation
The bargaining committee and the Union Bureau weigh in

At the Special General Meeting on May 28, members will debate a notice of motion tabled by a member at the General Meeting on April 30 calling for a review of the list of demands we adopted unanimously at the General Meeting on October 2, 2021, specifically of our salary demands.

In accordance with our rules of order, the debate will be conducted as follows:

The meeting will have to decide whether or not to reopen this debate. If it decides not to, the question will be closed. If it decides to do so, it will have to adopt a new salary demand.

The bargaining committee and the Union Bureau are unanimously of the opinion that the list of demands should not be reopened.

Like everyone else, we've noticed that the cost of living has risen significantly over the past few months compared with last year. However, we believe that upping our salary demands would be a mistake for several reasons, which we outline below.

Inflation and our demands

To be sure, inflation has surged since we formulated our demands and some members are concerned that we could end up with increases that are less than inflation. Here are the numbers:

- In 2021, the consumer price index (CPI) rose 3.8% in Québec (3.4% in Canada), compared with 0.8% in 2020 (0.7% in Canada);

- We will have to wait until the end of the year to know the inflation rate for 2022, but it is expected to be higher still. The forecasts range from 4.7% (Desjardins) to 5.3% (National Bank);

- The latest figures from Statistics Canada compare the CPI for April 2021 and April 2022. Between those two dates, the CPI increased by 6.8% in Québec.

First, let's review the monetary demands in the list of demands we brought to the bargaining table:

- We are demanding the following salary increases (percentage increase applicable to all salary rates and scales): :
  - April 1, 2021: 3.8%
  - April 1, 2022: 3.5%
  - April 1, 2023: 2.5%
  - April 1, 2024: 2.5%

- We are also demanding the addition of another echelon at the top of the pay scale for each job title and the elimination of the lowest echelon. We haven't yet specified the percentage increase for this new echelon, but its creation would have the effect of increasing the maximum salary on each scale for the remainder of the employee's career, once they reach it.

- A number of our demands have direct monetary impacts, including those relating to premiums, better pay for temporary upgrades, dental insurance, double overtime after a certain threshold and other benefits.

- Finally, we are asking for retroactive salary adjustments based on the job evaluation process.

Taken together, these demands could add up to a 20% increase over three years.

At the bargaining table

Are there rules about bringing demands to the table?

The rules for bargaining derive from the Canada Labour Code, the case law established by the courts, tribunals and arbitrators over the years, and a body of practices that have emerged in collective bargaining and labour relations in Canada, Québec and CBC / Radio-Canada over the decades.

These rules are based in part on the premise that in order to move forward, the parties at the table must have a minimum level of trust. One important element in their relationship is an unwritten rule that they don't go back on a point once it's been agreed on and they don't increase their demands once filed.

That's one of the reasons why we wanted CBC / Radio-Canada to table its own demands at the start of the talks: so that their maximum position would be defined and new demands wouldn't crop up during the bargaining process.

This unwritten rule has been repeatedly upheld by the courts: a union or an employer that changes its demands in the course of bargaining can be deemed to be bargaining in bad faith.

We believe that changing our demands would simply hand CBC / Radio-Canada an excuse for not addressing our issues. It could ask for nothing better.

The CBC / Radio-Canada context

Some people suggest that we demand a large wage hike in order to achieve our real target, which is a more modest increase. For example, demand 10% to get 5%.

However, CBC / Radio-Canada generally bargains within an overall budget envelope, with some flexibility in the distribution of the amounts. The employer says it has an X% margin, within which there is room for discussion. To go beyond that margin, we would have to fight tooth and nail.

The agreements at the other bargaining units are instructive. The Association des professionnels et superviseurs has just settled for increases of 1.5% per year, plus 0.8% for premiums and other monetary adjustments.

The Guild's collective agreement expires in March 2024 and provides for annual increases of 1.5%. For producers, the increases are 1.5% per year until December 2023, with a provision for reopening the agreement if another bargaining unit obtains a larger increase in the meantime.

Given this context, we believe that our salary demands (April 1, 2021: 3.8%; April 1, 2022: 3.5%; April 1, 2023: 2.5%; April 1, 2024: 2.5%), combined with the other monetary demands described above, are an appropriate target.

Finally, there are two important points to bear in mind:

- So far, there has been no discussion of salaries or any other monetary item at the bargaining table;

- The bulk of the monetary items (salaries, group insurance and other benefits) are usually dealt with at the very end of the bargaining process; in the vast majority of cases, salary increases are the last point to be dealt with.

We believe it is unappropriate to enter into a debate on changing our wage demands when we are so far from addressing this issue at the bargaining table. In the meantime, inflation may go up and down.

For now, our main goal is to force CBC / Radio-Canada to negotiate on the basis of the problems raised and solutions put forward by the employees we represent.

We believe all our energies should be directed to this end.