

CONVENTION NOTES

April 28 2009



OUR CONVENTION FINALLY GETS UNDERWAY

While a broken water pipe forced the cancellation of the first day of the PSAC's 15th triennial convention, it didn't dampen the spirits of the participants who reconvened on Tuesday morning. Elder Phillipa Ryan brought greetings to the convention. She commented that our convention theme – Leading the way for quality public services – is very timely and observed that our country's wealth must be used for the benefit of all. The convention was officially opened by National President John Gordon.

WE ARE A POWERFUL FORCE

When PSAC convention delegates met in Toronto three years ago, the economy was growing but the Harper minority government had announced an expenditure review that lacked any investment in public service.

"While the economy is now in crisis, some things never change," said National President John Gordon in his opening address and report to the convention. "Since our last convention, Harper has sharpened his attacks and made it clear he is no friend of workers, women, equity-seeking groups, the poor, Aboriginal Peoples...pretty much anyone who isn't Stephen Harper."

"Looking back over our 43 year history, we have seen governments try to remove our hard-fought rights, freeze our wages and benefits and sell off our jobs to the private sector. Thanks to the commitment, energy and solidarity of our membership we have weathered these storms before and emerged a stronger, more diverse, politically active and empowered union."

Workers around the world who are losing their jobs and their homes are the innocent victims of the current economic crisis; a crisis precipitated by greed and incompetence in the financial sector but which is underpinned by the policies of privatization, liberalization and labour market deregulation in recent decades.

"The scale of the current economic crisis serves as testimony to the failure of the policies of privatization, deregulation and a corporate culture of greed," says Gordon. "The question for us is – what are we going to do about it?"

ity public services. As a union, we can champion the rights of people before profits, of workers before corporations, of quality public services for the people by the people."

Gordon took pride in the significant achievements of the past three years. "We are a powerful force when we work together. We have made some significant achievements, even in these tough times through our political action campaigns, through collective bargaining, in our organizing efforts, and in our work to advance human rights and equality"

Gordon noted that our union has been organizing new members in new sectors and expanding our solidarity to reach around the globe. The world and the membership are changing and PSAC is changing to meet new needs.

"We have done great things but we can do more. We are a powerful force but we can be stronger. We can move the union forward; we can build a better world. We can do all of this if we work together – Locals and Branches, Components and Regions, committees and councils. Our power is our solidarity and our commitment."

PSAC LAUNCHES LEGAL CHALLENGE

President Gordon announced that the PSAC has now filed a case with the Ontario Superior Court, challenging the constitutionality of the Harper government's *Expenditure Restraint Act* and *Equitable Compensation Act*.

"These Acts are a cynical attack on public services and the workers who deliver them by ripping up freely bargained collective agreements," says Gordon. They attack the union's right to advise and represent members on human rights issues and attack women's right to pay equity."



We must use the recession to make the case for quality public services – **Lead the way** for quality public services

– **Traçons la voie** pour des services publics de qualité



ARBOUR CALLS FOR A BROADER DEFINITION OF SECURITY THAT INCLUDES HUMAN RIGHTS

We are still in search of a common and universal vision of human rights, said internationally acclaimed human rights advocate Louise Arbour in her keynote speech.

The former United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights described a mainly western perception of human and state security that focuses almost exclusively on criminality, terrorism and war. She said this perception has been a consequence of a “quasi-obsession on a narrow concept of security” in the first decade of the 21st century that, in many ways, began on Sept. 11, 2001.

“On the other hand, for millions of men, women and children who live in extreme poverty (...) international terrorism, the crime of organized drug trafficking and armed conflict are not necessarily the main sources of their insecurity,” she said.

The two disparate views on the concept of security puts in conflict the principles of what President Roosevelt called “freedom from fear” and “freedom from want,” which were intended to be the indivisible foundations of the *UN Universal Declaration on Human Rights*.

“The fracture of the concept of indivisibility of rights, shortly after the enactment of the *Universal Declaration*, has taken political dimensions that render the advancement of all rights more difficult,” said Arbour.

She said Canada’s international human rights advocacy can be strengthened by showing a stronger commitment to social justice legislation and international agreements. She pointed to the need for the Canadian government to implement the rights of Aboriginal peoples, reverse its decision to oppose the *UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* and extend the scope of Canadian law to protect Canadian citizens abroad, with Omar Khadr as a particular example of this opportunity.

CREDENTIALS COMMITTEE REPORT

Accredited delegates: 469

Observers: 247

Guests: 23

Total: 739

“I believe that there is probably no more challenging political issue than to seriously enhance the protection of all human rights for all,” she said.

CONVENTION DEBATES

PSAC budget: Delegates adopted a three-year balanced budget for the period 2010 to 2012 that had been unanimously recommended by the convention Finance Committee. This budget does not contain any increase in PSAC dues. However, during the convention, delegates will debate a range of resolutions, some of which have cost implications over and above the budget.

Constitution resolutions

CS-86: adopted. Section 5(b) of the Constitution – Membership rights – is changed to include family status, social and economic class and gender identity in the definition of discrimination.

CS-97: adopted. Directly Chartered Locals will now have some flexibility in providing financial reports to the National President while maintaining accountability.

CS-98: adopted. Regional Councils will now be required to provide annual financial statements to the National President.

DELEGATES CARRY 160 COFFINS AT DAY OF MOURNING RALLY

Grant De Patie. Sarbjit Sidhu.

These are just two of thousands of workers who died in work-related incidents over the last five years.

Their surviving family members were among the hundreds of people who rallied in front of the Vancouver Art Gallery early yesterday, just before the opening of the PSAC Convention.

Hundreds of PSAC delegates volunteered to carry 160 black coffins, representing the number of workers who died in work-related accidents or illnesses in British Columbia in 2008.

“On average, 65 fatalities are reported in the federal jurisdiction every year, including 10 in the federal public service,” said Kay Sinclair, PSAC’s Regional Executive Vice-President for B.C., during the rally. “We need to continue the struggle to put workers’ health and safety on the political agenda in B.C. and in Canada.”