

Parks Canada workers raise importance of their role to world heritage

Quebec City — Workers at Parks Canada and their supporters are calling on the delegates to UNESCO's 32nd Session of the World Heritage Committee to consider respect for heritage workers as an important part of preserving and protecting the world's natural and cultural heritage.

“Workers built, operate and maintain historic buildings, monuments, canals and locks,” says the president of the National Component of the Public Service Alliance of Canada, Daniel Kinsella. “Workers protect and preserve our national parks and natural heritage areas. They interpret the significance of our heritage to generations of people. Doesn't it make sense then that respect for heritage includes respect for workers?”

Bearing the slogan, “Respect for workers is respect for heritage,” Parks Canada workers and their supporters have gathered in Quebec City to pass out information materials and host a reception for UNESCO delegates. They hope to raise awareness about the important role of heritage workers and the need to ensure that governments committed to world heritage maintain the proper working conditions for workers to do their critical jobs.

“The workers at Parks Canada are committed to and take great pride in carrying out their mandate,” says PSAC regional vice-president for the Atlantic Jeannie Baldwin. “However, Parks Canada workers are finding it harder and harder to do their important work when they are faced with job insecurity and unfair working conditions.”

The year-long contract negotiations between Parks Canada workers and their employer stalled in May when negotiators for the employer refused to address the union's key issues and walked away from the table. These issues include no contracting out, the privatization of parks services, the downsizing of the bargaining unit and issues surrounding the arming of park wardens.

“We've noticed that the employer's position and tactics at the bargaining table are even older than Canada's heritage sites,” says the president of PSAC's Union of Canadian Transportation Employees Component, Mike Wing. “That's one heritage we hope they wouldn't preserve.”

The more than 4,000 PSAC members at Parks Canada have been without a contract since August 2007.