



Spotlight on the Social Justice Fund

Fighting poverty. Standing up for quality public services. Supporting workers' rights all over the world. These are just a few of the ways that the PSAC Social Justice Fund makes a difference in workplaces and communities in Canada and internationally.

Launched five years ago, the Fund supports humanitarian relief in Canada and other countries. It also sponsors worker education and worker-to-worker exchanges. But more importantly, the Fund is one of the most significant ways that PSAC defends quality public services – by promoting a strong public sector as a great equalizer to deliver peace, human rights and democracy – both in Canada and around the world

This issue of Union Update highlights the work of the Social Justice Fund – proving that PSAC members' solidarity has no borders.



source of income, the project will address the problems of hunger and malnutrition in the family – without handing the reins of food production to multinational corporations.

The Social Justice Fund is also helping the same union stand up for workers' rights to organize in Andhra Pradesh. Our contribution is helping to strengthen the collective bargaining capacities of local unions. One of the union's goals is to pressure the state government to allow migrant workers to access to amenities and social programs, such as the National Rural Employment Act. This could benefit up to 60 per

Helping people, not corporations

When disaster strikes, corporations profit. As Naomi Klein has documented in her bestselling book, *The Shock Doctrine*, some of the first people on the scene of any catastrophe are representatives of the private corporations vying for reconstruction contracts and pushing for the privatization of public services.

PSAC's Social Justice Fund is working with partners around the world to ensure that the money we devote to emergency humanitarian aid is being channelled through international agencies that have a proven capacity to deliver disaster relief on a non-profit basis – preventing corporations from profiting from crises.

In, India, the Fund is supporting the **Union of Fish Harvesters and Agricultural Workers of Andhra Pradesh**,

where workers are leading a post-Tsunami reconstruction project. The program builds on the reconstruction work that has been carried out over three years in the Nellore district of Andhra Pradesh. The project plans to reduce the poverty among fish harvesters and workers with a particular emphasis on the empowerment of women. By improving the fisher women's access to markets as a



Photo: Save the Children

cent of the migrant workers in the district and help put an end to child labour.

PSAC's Social Justice Fund is funding other rehabilitation projects that are working to reconstruct essential services, using a **"public-public partnership"** model. This brings together government, public sector workers and affected communities to rebuild infrastructure, using a fully public process.

In the days following the earthquake in Sur Chico, Peru in September 2007, the Fund supported public sector unions that led reconstruction efforts in affected areas based on a public-public partnership. We also funded a public forum in the community that aimed to strengthen the role of public service workers in the reconstruction of vital services in the affected region. Participants developed a citizen's platform demanding that workers and citizens be able to participate in and monitor the continuity of public services. Of vital importance is their demand to keep water in public hands.

Making poverty history in Canada

The PSAC Social Justice Fund supports **anti-poverty initiatives** in Canada that promote quality public services as a necessary step to overcoming poverty. These projects encourage community participation, giving low-income people more control over their own lives. They also facilitate and encourage cooperation, exchanges and networking among groups sharing similar objectives. The Fund encourages advocacy for progressive public policy and



The Social Justice Fund supports literacy and re-training programs in Canada's inner cities and Northern Territories.



social change and is particularly committed to empowering First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities.

In the last three years, the Fund has supported more than 70 anti-poverty initiatives across Canada. These include projects aimed at:

- promoting justice and rights for immigrant workers;
- developing services and training to empower women;
- advocating for First Nations, Métis and Inuit rights;
- providing literacy training and support for inner city schools; and
- training injured and unemployed workers.

Some of these are ongoing projects under the auspices of the **Make Poverty History Campaign**,

while others are new initiatives with new partners. Many projects involve the participation of PSAC members.

The **Bus Riders' Union: Ride with Dignity** project, for example, organizes workshops and public meetings in various transit-dependent communities of Vancouver. The project focuses on fighting the privatization of public services, with an emphasis on improving the routes, schedules and conditions for those who are dependent on public transit, particularly the urban poor, workers on night shift or those who work in precarious jobs. The BRU also fights for accessible buses and routes for people with disabilities.

The project organizes and involves the most transit dependent bus riders, especially women and people of colour, Aboriginal people and immigrants.

A new project supported by the Fund is the Speak Out Against Poverty project. The Thunder Bay Economic Justice Committee, in collaboration with the Thunder Bay and District Injured Workers Group, are running a speaker's school in 2008 to train low-income workers and workers with disabilities to become advocates for the rights of people with disabilities. The program focuses on building public speaking and leadership skills among a group of about 15 people who will be trained in an atmosphere of peer support and mutual aid. The participants will become more confident in advocating for the rights of people with disabilities and in making the links between disability and poverty.



In Bolivia, the Social Justice Fund supports programs that empower women through training in basic language and math skills, as well as natural medicine.

Building unions all over the world

In addition to our work in fighting poverty and promoting public services, PSAC's Social Justice Fund advances the rights of workers and their unions in the developing world. We support labour development programs that address privatization; globalization and its impacts; human and labour rights; gender and equity; health, safety and the environment; and HIV/AIDS.

Projects in this area include a joint contribution with the Canadian Union of Postal Workers (CUPW) to the **Colombian Union of Postal Workers** for a national forum to educate workers on privatization, ways of defending jobs and labour rights and ways to promote new forms of organizing. Another project provides for the **Union of Workers of the People's Defender's Office in Colombia** to organize training sessions and skills-building workshops.

These two projects have made a significant contribution to the internal capacity of our counterpart unions in Colombia.

A new and exciting initiative that the Fund has recently taken on is the five-year **Labour International Development Program**, jointly funded by the Canadian International Development Agency, the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC), PSAC and six other Canadian labour unions. The program aims to strengthen trade unions and their labour allies in Africa, the Americas, Asia and the Middle East. The program tackles issues including the effects of globalization on workers, weak labour protections and poverty among working people and their families.

As part of this initiative, the PSAC Social Justice Fund and CUPW are supporting training and capacity building for public sector unions in Nicaragua and South Africa. The joint program will train workers to defend quality public



services and create alliances with communities, municipalities and national governments. The program is closely linked to PSAC's **Think Public!** campaign and the CUPW's defence of universal postal services campaign.

Bringing workers together

Another way that the Social Justice Fund promotes workers' rights both at home and abroad is by sponsoring **worker-to-worker exchanges**. These exchanges are a powerful educational tool that develop solidarity between workers in the North and South. The exchanges help consolidate a stronger base of union activists to fight against privatization and defend quality public services.

The **Defending Public Services: Canadian and Colombian Workers on the Front Lines Tour** is a joint initiative sponsored by three public-sector unions – PSAC, CUPW and the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE), in conjunction with the CLC.

The Front Lines Tour, established in 2004, brought together a delegation of six public sector trade unionists and activists from Colombia to visit Canada. The tour provided opportunities for Colombian trade unionists and activists to engage in discussions with PSAC, CUPW and CUPE members about their struggles to stop the privatization of public services and the impact of privatization on workers, services and communities in Colombia. In 2006, it enabled five PSAC members to travel to Colombia and build concrete links between what is happening to the public sector workers in Colombia and the privatization of public services here in Canada.



Canadian and Colombian union leaders are working together to defend quality public services.

This year, Canadian union leaders, including PSAC National President John Gordon, will visit Colombia to deepen the Canadian labour movement's relationship with the country's workers. The leaders will also meet with other civil society and human rights organizations, adding another set of voices to the campaign against the free trade agreement that Canada recently signed with Colombia.

Education for a change

The work that the Social Justice Fund does around the world is also reflected in the union education that PSAC delivers to our members. Working with PSAC's education program, we aim to:

- link workplace and community issues in an international context;
- mobilize members to take action around current and emerging issues;
- increase the commitment of union members to undertake collective action in the workplace; and
- build solidarity with sister organizations in the Global South.

The Social Justice Fund developed a two-day **Globalization and Social Justice course** and a short education module intended for the broader PSAC membership, which we have been delivering since the fall of 2005.

The success of our Social Justice Fund depends on the commitment, engagement and participation of the PSAC members from coast-to-coast-to-coast.

Stand Up and Speak Out!

Make Poverty History by Defending Quality Public Services

The Social Justice Fund is working closely with PSAC's **Think Public!** campaign, to support this year's Stand Up and Speak Out! Challenge, spearheaded by the Make Poverty History Campaign, for October 17, 2008.

Ending poverty requires a strong public service, government action and public involvement and commitment. Both the Social Justice Fund and PSAC's **Think Public!** campaign work to foster links between the union and our communities, partnering with other progressive organizations to push for social and economic justice.