

PSAC launches new Social Justice Fund

“According to a survey by the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions, in 1999, around the world some 6,607 trade unionists were harassed or wounded, 2,942 were arrested, 140 were assassinated; 1,545 were beaten or tortured, and thousands more were sacked for normal trade union activities recognized in international law and codified by the ILO. In Colombia this year alone, over 85 trade union leaders have been murdered.”

– Canadian Labour Congress

A PSAC Social Justice Fund: *It's time*

The Public Service Alliance of Canada (PSAC) has joined a long list of Canadian unions that have negotiated employer contributions to a Social Justice Fund. In 2002, the PSAC negotiated its first ever collective agreement that included a Local Humanities Fund. The agreement covering 50 workers at the Gander Airport requires the employer to pay three cents into a fund administered by the Local. And this is just the beginning.

Helping to create an environment where trade unions can represent their members and work to ensure a better standard of living, health and safety laws and equity without reprisal is the single most significant reason that the PSAC has established a Social Justice Fund. With resources available to assist trade unionists and their organizations in the countries where they live and work, and the power of 151,000 members at home to educate the public and bring pressure to bear on Canada's political elite, the PSAC can play an important role and help save lives and advance the underlying principles of the Trade Union Movement worldwide.

A PSAC Social Justice Fund: *The plan*

The focus of the PSAC's Social Justice Fund will be on:

- *international development work;*
- *Canadian anti-poverty and development initiatives;*
- *emergency relief work in Canada and around the world;*
- *worker to worker exchanges; and,*
- *worker education in Canada and around the world.*

The PSAC has been a leader in human rights in Canada, and has enjoyed a significant number of victories. One recent victory – the PSAC's equal pay complaint against the Government of the Northwest Territories – resulted in the payment of significant legal costs to the PSAC as well as dues revenue on pay equity back pay. The PSAC will use this money to further human rights around the world.

With start-up funding of \$600,000, the PSAC Social Justice Fund will be in a position to support some programs both domestically and internationally, and develop the relationships that are essential to a fully operational permanent solidarity fund.

The key to success in the longer term is a fund financed through collective bargaining. Most union social justice funds in Canada operate on a contribution of one cent per hour per member, paid by the employer. CIDA provides matching funds.

Bargaining with many of our major employers has developed to the point where international solidarity and developmental assistance can be negotiated to the benefit of PSAC members and workers in less developed countries. One cent per hour per PSAC member would generate approximately \$2.6 million a year, plus an equivalent amount from CIDA.

A PSAC Social Justice Fund: *Everyone benefits*

The PSAC Social Justice Fund will benefit our international partners and the people they represent. It will also benefit the Canadian economy and the union.

Canadian unions, including the PSAC, have developed an enormous wealth of talent and expertise in a significant number of areas that can benefit workers and their organizations in other countries.

Governments act internationally when it comes to a range of labour rights, legislation and policy. Our ability to resist within Canada is strengthened when workers in other countries are equipped to prevent similar restrictions from being implemented in their own countries.

Through exchanges and popular education, our members and leaders will benefit from the experiences of workers and their organizations in other countries.

A PSAC Social Justice Fund: *Forging links around the globe*

Over the years, the PSAC has participated in international development and relief work in Canada and elsewhere in an ad hoc way. A separately-funded Social Justice Fund will focus the PSAC's ongoing work in areas as important as: domestic assistance during natural disasters such as the Manitoba floods and the 1998 ice storm in Quebec and Ontario; assistance to trade unionists and trade unions in repressive regimes; assisting trade unions and NGOs in the creation of effective structures; economic development initiatives, and the like.

As other unions in Canada, including the United Steelworkers (USWA), Canadian Auto Workers (CAW), Communications, Energy and Paperworkers (CEP), Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) and Canadian Union of Postal Workers (CUPW), can attest, Social Justice Funds are a real and tangible response to globalization and the increasing dominance of the corporate sector. By working together, sharing information and campaigns, developing common education and strengthening worker organizations, Social Justice Funds provide an important counter balance to the corporate sector in all countries. At the same time, Social Justice Funds have the ability to assist working people in the countries where they live and work, enhancing economic development, improving workplace health and safety and ensuring gender equality.

