

**SPEECH  
TO THE  
UNITY CONFERENCE  
BY  
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Good Morning!

It's an honour to be here today.

I'm going to try and be brief in my remarks, but before I start, I want to take this opportunity to thank the members of the Conference Organizing Committee for their ongoing commitment and hard work over the last year in putting together this Conference. I also want to thank the members of the Resolutions Committee for their thoughtful deliberations and recommendations which will assist delegates with the resolution debate later today.

I also want to acknowledge the two AEC Officers responsible for the Unity Conference, Brother Jean-François Des Lauriers and Brother John Gordon for their leadership. And of course, I want to thank all the PSAC staff who have worked so hard to ensure that this event was a success. And finally, I want to thank all of you. Union work takes time and is often at the expense of our families, but our Union is stronger because of your commitment and participation. I thank each and everyone of you for making the time to be here today.

This year marks the largest, longest and most intense Convention and Conference cycle in PSAC history. The year began with the Access Conference in January, followed by the National Women's Conference in February. The seven Regional Conventions took place throughout the spring, and we're now in the process of finishing up the last of the seventeen Component Conventions which began in early summer. And of course, this important Conference this weekend!

The 2005 Unity Conference is the final PSAC National Conference to be held in this conference cycle. And I must say that without question, this has been our most intense and successful round of conferences!

The discussion and debate at all of the conferences has been thoughtful, provocative and respectful. There has been a marked increase in the understanding and analysis of issues facing PSAC members as workers, as union members, as equity group members and as community members. Strategies have been developed to

more effectively address key issues – strategies that go beyond simply sending a resolution on to the PSAC Convention. Formal and informal networks have been built and strengthened.

The feedback we've received from conference delegates has been overwhelmingly positive. Delegates and observers are leaving the Conferences feeling invigorated, inspired and recommitted in the fight for justice and equality. I hope that all of you leave the Conference on Sunday feeling this way as well!

This morning, I want to make a few comments about some of the recent steps our Union has taken to support our human rights work internally and more broadly, and as well to note some of the challenges before us that require your attention and action.

The 2003 PSAC Convention was the most political Convention in our history—a turning point really, for our Union. Delegates to that Convention overwhelmingly adopted a budget that provided increased opportunities for member participation in the Union, including a number of key line items which specifically supported the Union's equity and human rights work.

\$20,000 per year was provided to Regional Human Rights Committees to assist their mobilizing and organizing activities.

Delegates also adopted changes to the PSAC Constitution which very clearly defined which Regional Committees can be constitutionally recognized and funded. Specifically, only Regional Unity, Pride, Access or Human Rights Committee made up of members of the Unity, Access and Pride equity groups can receive funding under the line item 'Regional Human Rights Committees' in the PSAC budget. Further, the Committee title must include the terminology specified in the Constitution, that being the terms Unity, Pride, Access or Human Rights' Committee.

Many of you were upset by this, but as the National President, it is my duty to respect the Constitution and provide a proper interpretation of it as required—even if it is unpopular! When I provided the interpretation to the National Board of Directors last year, I said, just as I said to many of you here in this room who came

to see me and express your disappointment in my interpretation, that I fully expected members to propose changes to the Constitution at the 2006 Convention to address this issue. I see that there are indeed resolutions on this issue which will be debated by delegates here, however, I caution you not to let your work end here. Constitutional changes which get recommended to Convention require the support of 2/3 of Convention delegates.

The last Convention also saw the Unity Conference budget increased from \$150,000 to \$300,000 resulting in more than 90 fully funded delegates here at this Conference this weekend. While I think most of us agree that the fully funded model is a much more equitable and representative approach to conference participation, it admittedly limits the number of delegates that can attend a conference. I don't have to tell you that this especially impacts our Racially Visible and Aboriginal members who still share a conference under the banner of "Unity". While this will be my last Unity Conference as PSAC National President, I sincerely hope that this is the last "Unity" Conference as we know it.

PSAC Aboriginal members and PSAC Racially Visible members should have their own separate conferences. It's as simple as that. Again, I'm pleased to see that there are resolutions calling for this and remember the work does not end here.

Delegates to the last PSAC Convention adopted a resolution calling for the creation of the National Aboriginal, Inuit and Métis Network (NAIM) along with significant resources to get the job done. This was a big step forward for our Union, to be sure. Along with Brother Jean-François Des Lauriers, I have had the pleasure of overseeing the first steps in the creation of this Network. In the fall of 2003, a one-time think tank of members came together to provide direction on what the Network should look like, and what it should focus on.

That led to the creation of the NAIM Circle—a core group of 14 regional representatives and the two elected EOC Aboriginal representatives. I believe that all of the Circle members are here today, either as a delegate or an observer. That's great! The Circle has done some great work, and has put together a substantial

workplan for the development of the Network over the next three years, along with some recommendations, which they have presented to the Aboriginal Caucus here at this Conference. I understand the discussion went well yesterday, and look forward to the conclusion of the conference today. This Conference is the first opportunity for Aboriginal delegates and observers to provide direction on their Network and its place in our Union.

In the 2003 budget, the contribution of the Equal Opportunity Committee was also recognized, and an additional \$15,000 per year was allocated to specifically support the work and outreach of the EOC Equity representatives, including the representatives you will elect during this Conference. Our Union needs strong leadership at all levels – on Human Rights’ Committees, on bargaining committees, as Local Stewards, as Component Officers, as EOC representatives, as National and Regional Officers. Leadership was a key issue for this Conference Organizing Committee, and Sisters Veacock and Jacobs provided a lot for us to think about in their presentations yesterday. Strong leaders alone don’t necessarily or automatically result in strong and effective leadership though. It’s the combination of strong individual leaders working as a team that makes a difference. It’s the team that can pull together diverse interests and bring a vision and an agenda into focus. I hope you will keep this in mind as you make your decisions this weekend.

While on the subject of the EOC representatives, I believe it is time that PSAC Convention Committees include an appointed equity representative. Representation continues to be an issue for our Union at all levels. Currently, each Component is provided one representative on each of the four Convention Committees. Appointing an equity representative to each Convention Committee would not only help ensure that an equity perspective is brought to the debate but also provide a valuable and unique learning experience for that PSAC member. I will be discussing a proposal for how to make this happen with the National Board of Directors in a few weeks.

And one final reference to the 2003 Convention before addressing some broader issues. The Convention marked a new era in international solidarity within the PSAC. The Social Justice Fund,

which was launched and a commitment made by the delegates to make it a bargaining priority for our Union. We have started this process, and I think that it has the potential to become a significant part of what our Union stands for and does. And, if I remember correctly, delegates at the 2002 Unity Conference overwhelmingly adopted a resolution calling for such a solidarity fund! Our Social Justice Fund also works in Canada and with our members who are involved in organizations promoting social justice at the international level.

I am also particularly proud of the work that our Social Justice Fund is doing to fight poverty. It's a disgrace that in 2005, poverty is still very much a fact of life here in Canada - one of the richest countries in the world.

You know all too well the devastating impacts of poverty throughout the communities where you live and work, and the disproportionate levels of poverty experienced by racialized and aboriginal people here in Canada. It's a fact that Aboriginal and Racially Visible people have higher rates of poverty and lower rates of employment. There is an over-representation of racialized particularly women workers in low paid, low-end occupations and low-income sectors and also temporary work. They are especially over-represented in low-end service sector jobs and precarious and unregulated temporary or contingent work.

As some of you may know, our Social Justice Fund has launched an exciting new project. Originally we set out to fund up to 15 anti-poverty initiatives that involve PSAC members and their communities. We wanted to start small, with each project eligible for funding up to \$2500 for activities aimed at education and anti-poverty work. The response is overwhelming, and there is still a lot of time to meet the September 30<sup>th</sup> deadline if you want to submit a project. The Social Justice Fund is doing this in the context of the international 2005 Make Poverty History Campaign—a world-wide campaign to end poverty around the world.

I know that here in the Atlantic, several of our activists have undertaken to distribute hundreds and hundreds of the white Make

Poverty History bands in workplaces and at union events. Please join us in the fight to Make Poverty History!

The PSAC has also make some steps at the bargaining table negotiating specific provisions for Aboriginal Peoples such as recognition of traditional adoption practices in First Nations communities, Aboriginal Day as a paid holiday, provisions for harvesting, hunting and fishing, special paid leave to attend the funeral of an elder, bonus for workers who use two of the four official languages as well as northern and settlement allowances.

And in 2005, the PSAC with its Component, the Union of Northern Workers, entered into an historic agreement with the Dene Nation in Yellowknife to jointly explore work-related and labour relations' issues facing Dene workers. A survey has been developed that will involve the Dene peoples of the NWT and will provide the Union and Dene leadership the information and direction to protect the rights of workers of our communities.

But we continue to face challenges.

Despite the federal task force five years ago which looked at the issue of under-representation of Racially Visible workers in the federal public service and their extensive report "Embracing Change", there continues to be under-representation of Racially Visible workers in the federal public service and Aboriginal people continue to be represented in lower paying occupations.

Stronger enforcement and accountability mechanisms are needed to ensure that federal employers are meeting the objectives of the Employment Equity Act. And the Canadian Human Rights Commission must be adequately resourced if they are to fulfill their roles both under the *Employment Equity Act* and *the Canadian Human Rights Act*.

We know that employment equity will be further weakened with the implementation of the PSMA part of which came into effect April 1<sup>st</sup> of this year. It will result in the delegation of staffing responsibilities to as low a level as possible within the management of the public service, despite the federal government's acknowledgement that one

of its central challenges to the employment equity initiatives and “Embracing Change” benchmarks was the lack of support from managers at lower levels. The PSAC is in the process of hiring a staff person to assist in the coordination of our work under this new legislation. Training modules have been developed to help ensure our members know their rights under the PSMA and are equipped to mobilize.

We also know that the federal government continues to seek savings of \$12 billion over four years through their expenditure review. As you know, the government plans to create a new shared services organization for information technology and corporate administrative services across departments and agencies, not to mention the Service Canada initiative that the government is selling as a “one-step shop” for questions on any federal service or program. There’s no doubt that the government’s plans will affect services to Canadians, and not in a positive way, not to mention the impact on you, the people behind the service. Coupled with the PSMA – we know we have our work cut out for us.

But our Union has a long and strong history of defending our members’ workplace rights. Together, we will face this government, and collectively we will make a difference. We will speak out to ensure that public services that Canadians expect and deserve are protected—like food safety, drug testing, search and rescue, pension and employment insurance benefits, border protection and so many more services that are the back bone of a vibrant and equitable society. We will also speak out on the rights and working conditions of the workers who provide these services.

We continue to work at enhancing our collective understanding of globalization and the racialization of poverty. We continue to fight racial profiling and security certificates. We continue to support the quest to find out what role Canadian officials played in the deportation and imprisonment of Maher Arar. We continue to support efforts to ensure that workers in Canada, primarily Racially Visible people from the Global South who are subjected to sub-standard labour conditions work as farm workers, live-in caregivers, construction workers, adult entertainers, textile workers and in the

manufacturing and service sectors are afforded the same rights as Canadian workers.

We also support the recent decision of the Ontario government to end the use of private systems of law, including the sharia. While we respect the right to religious freedom, we support one public legal system which respects the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. We support universal access and treatment under the law which ensures that discriminatory practices, especially against women and children, are not tolerated in Canada. Over the next few weeks, I intend to write to the Ontario Premier outlining our position - which has been debated at Regional Conventions, Component Conventions and the National Women's Conference.

I want to end where I began—by thanking each and every one of you. I'll say it again—being the National President of the PSAC is an honour and a privilege.

It's been a special honour to work with and learn from you – our Racially Visible and Aboriginal Brothers and Sisters. Our Union has become stronger because of your commitment, and because you've pushed the envelope and challenged us! All I can say is “keep it up”!

Thank you, and all the best for a great Conference!