



The National Newsletter of the Commissionaires Union

Talking the talk, walking the walk



Photo by PSAC Communications

Commissionaires from Northern Ontario Region and a PSAC negotiator were in Ottawa Jan. 29 to 31 for a round of bargaining. Left to right: Reg Couldridge, David Doyle and Krystyna Theriault.



Photo by Chris Wilson

Toronto Airport Commissionaires/COREII employees elect Marvin Akal to represent their new Local as a delegate to the PSAC Triennial National Convention in Montreal, Quebec, on April 28 to May 2, 2003.

Prince George Airport Certified

By Al Johnson

The Canadian Industrial Relations Board (CIRB) granted certification to Prince George Airport Commissionaires in December 2002, after seven months of hard struggle.

One would think we are talking about a war — and, indeed, we are. However, we are fighting this war not with weapons but with nerves.

see *AIRPORT* on page 4

2002: Good year for organizing

By Les W. Buss
Regional Organizer

The year 2002 was gratifying for Commissionaires who obtained bargaining rights, but it had its disappointing moments as well.

Across Canada, PSAC, in partnership with Commissionaires, were able to certify 24 new sites in B.C. and the Toronto Airport and made three applications for certification in St. John's, Nfld., P.E.I., and Gagetown, N.B. During this time we also mounted several other campaigns — most notably in Alberta — and hope to make further certification applications soon.

Campaign Summaries

The Atlantic applications were all rejected by their respective labour boards. The P.E.I. application was a couple of cards short for majority support. The application made for Gagetown Commissionaires was withdrawn by the union because of functional integration with Fredericton Commissionaires, and the application for St. John's, Nfld., was rejected because their labour laws do not provide recognition for a national union.

see *ORGANIZING* on page 4

Corps has lost direction, union must act as compass

by *Ernie Hunter*

The Christmas and New Years festivities are over. Time to get back to aggressively pursuing our objective of uniting all the Commissionaires in Ottawa.

We ended 2002 with a mail-out, including a copy of our first national newsletter. It met with a great response.

While 2002 saw Corps Headquarters being kind enough to give us back our five sick-days (cumulative), a modest raise in pay, promises of three days' bereavement leave and six-per-cent vacation pay to those who qualify due in 2003 — for which we have not gotten any confirmation — we say, "Thank you, but we're still unionizing!"

Commissionaires are asking about changes to the Charter. We have no quarrel with the Corps hiring outside of the Charter. We all know that it would have been impossible for the Royal Canadian

Legion to survive and carry on their proud tradition if they depended solely on veterans who are rapidly becoming fewer and fewer. The Legion had to resort to accepting associate members to survive just as the Corps now needs to expand its base to meet contract obligations.

However, new aggressive hiring practices seems to have resulted in a loss of direction for the Corps. Many Commissionaires feel that we've become numbers filling a contract. Our personal aspirations mean little to those who control the day-to-day operations. Sometimes we'll see experienced Commissionaires helping train new personnel who are placed in day posts or supervisory positions that were not made available to the trainers themselves. This is not fair.

We deserve more. Just being a Commissionaire and carrying on the proud tradition of the Corps carries a great meaning for most of us. The Corps, however, has adopt-

ed an attitude that they are merely providing jobs to those who apply. They are destroying the very tradition used to market the Corps and acquire new contracts.

Consider the following issues:

Pay: We had five days sick pay and six-per-cent vacation pay. But, as easily as it was given to us, it was taken away, with no notification or explanation. We got it back, including three days bereavement leave. Arguably, our efforts to unionize had this effect. We can accomplish much more than this with a Collective Agreement.

Bilingual Policy: Who wants it, the client or the Corps? And is it administered fairly? It is reported that in many cases Corps HQ is promoting bilingualism to acquire more government contracts. At times, however, certain bilingual personnel are placed where they are not really required.

see BIGGER on page 3

Ontario Local elects executives

By *Reg Coulridge*
President Local 05-00801

A PSAC local in the Northern Ontario Region elected its executive members on January 6, 2003, with over 66-per-cent voter turn-out.

The vote was conducted with PSAC Regional Representative Dave Doyle during three separate meetings, with advance poll provisions available for those unable to attend on voting day due work schedule commitments or distance from the voting site.

The new executives are:

- ◆ President: Reg Coulridge
- ◆ Vice-President: Mike

Thomson

- ◆ Secretary: Krystyna Theriault
- ◆ Treasurer: Jeff Landriault
- ◆ Chief Steward: Blair Chalk

A notification of these results will be sent to all members in the next Local 05-00801 mail-outs.

We thank all candidates who allowed themselves to be nominated for the various positions. Unfortunately, in the democratic process of elections there is only one winner. However, by supporting the successful candidates as they assume their elected positions, we all win.

Why I became a union organizer

By *Bill Parker*

I served as a proud member of the Canadian Corps of Commissionaires, Great Lakes Division, at several posts including courts and federal buildings. I took pride in my work, but over time, I began to witness first-hand how the Corps has lost sight of its focus and original mandate. The Corps was created to give veterans meaningful employment on a non-profit basis. However, the Corps is becoming more and more like any for-profit, second-rate security company.

I joined the PSAC as a volunteer member organizer in an effort to regain pride, fairness and justice among Commissionaires and COREII employees, and I will continue to work hard until these are fully restored.

Matron faces daily risks on the job

Like many employed for the Corps of Commissionaires, Patricia Johnson, a matron working in the RCMP detachment at Williams Lake, B.C., had never been a union member, nor did she come to the Corps with a military or enforcement background. She got her current position by responding to a posting in her local newspaper. The work she does as a matron is far different from jobs she had held. Each day, Johnson faces murderers, rapists and people with drug-related issues.

"On a daily basis, I face the risk of contracting any number of communicable diseases," says Johnson. "We are in constant contact with clients in poorly ventilated and often overcrowded detention cells."

The risks are greater when detainees are intoxicated and vomit or do worse. On more than one occasion, Johnson and her colleagues have had food or excrement thrown at them.

The responsibilities of guards and matrons include guarding the cells, giving inmates their medication, cleaning up the cells after the release of detainees and providing special suicide watches on clients who appear at risk.

"And when we're not looking after clients we are often called upon to assist with some of the administrative tasks," Johnson added.

There are tremendous expectations and significant responsibilities

placed upon guards and matrons, but Johnson was given only four hours of on-the-job training, with no further training afterward.

Johnson says she joined the union drive because "Williams Lake is the lowest paid detachment in the province. We receive no specialist pay or additional benefits for the work we are called on to perform, and we are paid the standard wage for a Commissionaire work-

Without the union, this employer holds all the cards – and from what I've seen, it's a stacked deck.

ing at a federal site."

Wages are, therefore, the number one issue driving Johnson's passion to unionize. According to her, those working in the Smithers division are paid a full \$1.90 an hour more, and unionized municipal counterparts are better paid as well.

"Beyond the money issue, for me, is the need to re-establish a proper working environment, to restore respect," stated Johnson. "I have never experienced such disrespect and contempt as I have as an employee of the Corps. We need the union to help us bargain for just

compensation and to address our health and safety concerns. The employer's attitude is, 'If you don't like it, quit,' which is not an option for most."

Johnson, now a member of the union negotiating team, was active with PSAC Negotiator Moe Ritchie, conducting strike votes of bargaining unit members last fall after negotiations reached a stalemate. Her involvement gave her the opportunity to meet other guards and matrons in the region. She was buoyed by the positive response and warm welcome she received.

"In each location, we received overwhelming support," she enthused. "The total, after all ballots were counted, was 96 per cent in favour of strike action. We joined the union in order to have someone in our corner when dealing with the employer. Without the union, this employer holds all the cards — and from what I've seen, it's a stacked deck."

Bigger: Let's find solutions together

continued from page 2

There are other problems, including unjust job placements, promotions and replacements.

We believe the Commandant has an agenda to become the biggest security company in Ottawa. The Charter was amended to accommodate personnel without military or police experience so that more contracts could be acquired. There is nothing wrong with this, sometimes being bigger is better. But consideration must be given to those best qualified to do the job, including those who have a long and positive history in the organization.

Let's use our right to unionize to bring a voice to the workplace and to collectively play a role in shaping a better future for us. There are solutions. Let's find them together.

We are looking for volunteers, Commissionaires who want to receive training in organizing/representation, and others who wish to share their leadership skills for the benefit of all Commissionaires. We are currently forming National Committees to address our shared concerns and to address future campaigns in a coordinated, orderly fashion. Please contact Les Buss at 604-240-1382; Chris Wilson, Ontario regional Organizer at 416-

485-3558; Allan Johnson at 604-430-5631; Jim Macmillan-Murphy at 250-953-1053; Mark Power, St. John's, Nfld. at 709-726-6453; and Angèle Cadieux, Ottawa, at 613-560-4261 for further information on how you can help.

We will be publishing a list of all officers, stewards, and volunteers nationwide as soon as possible. Thank you and we look forward to meeting many more Commissionaires in the future.

Corps attempts to strike back

By Sean Blatt

From coast to coast, the Corps of Commissionaires is acting according to a coordinated, national strategy of legal opposition to the PSAC's efforts to certify Commissionaires.

While the legal arguments available to the Corps vary depending on the circumstances of each application for certification and on the jurisdiction under which an application has been filed, it is clear that the Corps is offering aggressive legal opposition to the PSAC at every turn.

We cannot even begin to estimate the amount of money the Corps has poured into this campaign, but we know that it is a sub-

stantial — indeed very substantial — sum of money, money that would have been better spent on providing appropriate pay, benefits and working conditions for the Commissionaires that the Corps is “supposed” to be serving.

The good news is that the union is well aware of the employer's strategy, and the PSAC has been prepared to meet every legal attack launched by the Corps with steadfast resolve and an unwavering determination to achieve victory for Commissionaires. We are confident that with the resources of the PSAC — and most importantly, with the courage, solidarity, energy and enthusiasm of the Commissionaires who support the PSAC — we will carry the day.

Organizing: opening new fronts

Continued from page 1

PSAC and Commissionaires are going to begin a new organizing drive in P.E.I. very soon. Commissionaires are re-organizing in St. John's under a local entity, and we are hard at work in N.B. at this time. We are also very close to making a large application for certification in Alberta and hope to give more information soon on this campaign.

Commissionaires from Vancouver Island and the Yukon met with their employer Jan. 16, 2003, to begin negotiations on their wage re-opener. We are determined to get a decent raise. We gave the Corps the benefit of the doubt last year, but we now expect them to reciprocate. We are also poised to make three immediate applications in B.C. for more units of Commissionaires. PSAC has recently hired a new Regional Organizer for the Ottawa region, Angèle Cadieux, and she has already started work with the Commissionaires there to obtain bargaining rights.

Remember that anything worth fighting for is worth having. Let's keep up the struggle, support each other and get the message out that Commissionaires are organizing.

Airport: Commissionaires undaunted

Continued from page 1

Our enemy is powerful, spiteful and determined to win at all costs. Our fellow Commissionaires are the ones facing this enemy — the ones who no longer tolerate abuse from their bosses. With the certification, we have won a victory, but the struggle continues.

The employer continues to

harass those it suspects to be our members. The employer has denied them work and has removed them from their jobs. The union defends them and has filed complaints with the CIRB.

Though it is an uphill struggle, our brothers and sisters are not giving up. We are resolved: The employer won't get away with dirty tricks.

Contributors to this issue:

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*Proud of Our Past,
Protecting Our Future
National Newsletter*

of the Commissionaires Union
will be published four times a year
by the Public Service

Alliance of Canada
233 Gilmour St., Ottawa, ON, K2P 0P1
(613) 560-4200.

Visit our Web sites at:

www.psac-cmre.com or www.psac-afpc.com

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