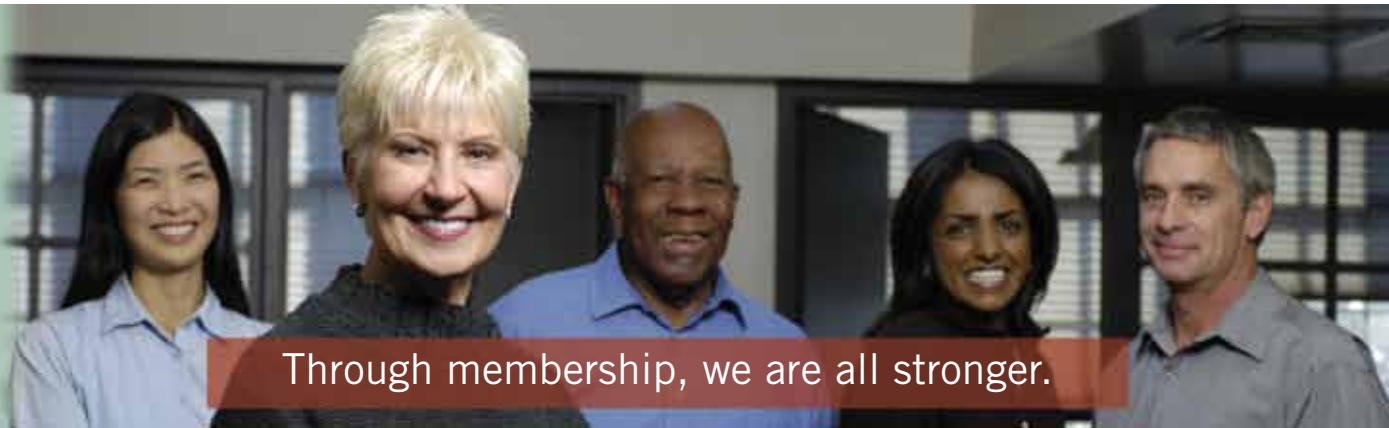




Public Service Alliance of Canada  
Alliance de la Fonction publique du Canada

Vol. 5, N° 3 | Autumn 2011



Through membership, we are all stronger.

# Our Union Voice



Photo: Owen Egan

Workers at McGill University on the picket line in September.

## In this issue

- 2 **A message from John Gordon**  
*Building a people's opposition*
  - 4 **Ottawa/Gatineau "democracy school" energizes activists**
  - 5 **Union members fight to save search and rescue centres**  
*Canada Post lockout has implications for all workers*
  - 6 **Young workers gather at Edmonton conference**
  - 7 **Justice for Aboriginal Peoples – it's time!**  
*Union campaign raises awareness of injustices*
  - Survey interviewers fight for better working conditions**
  - 8 **Regional convention delegates elect veteran activists and fresh faces**
- News briefs



## Sign up for the news

Sign up at [www.pfac-afpc.com](http://www.pfac-afpc.com) to receive the latest e-mail news about collective bargaining & much more.



Photo: Miv Photography

## PSAC launches campaign to protect public services

Treasury Board President Tony Clement announced that he plans to cut federal public sector jobs to eliminate the deficit. The 2011 federal budget made his intentions clear – the Conservatives want to slash \$11 billion in spending between now and 2014. Finance Minister Jim Flahery was quoted in the media saying that “there’s no question” programs will be cut.

Government spending reviews have already been taking place for the last several years. In 2010, the government placed a two-year freeze on departmental budgets. A report from the Parliamentary Budget Officer says that this freeze, combined with previously announced cuts, will save the government a total of \$1.8 billion annually.

The Conservatives have targeted \$720 million of program and operating cuts over the next year in a range of sensitive areas that include the federal nuclear safety watchdog, the public health agency, the agency that tracks hazardous materials and an as yet unexplained 20 per cent reduction in the budget for Environment Canada.

### Ideological cuts

The government is attempting to justify the cuts by saying that there will be no impact on services. This claim is not supported by the facts.

What the government would consider to be “non-core” departments and agencies – things that the government thinks that

the private or voluntary sector should be doing – are likely to be hit hardest. They are chipping away at services they consider to have no value: arts, culture, heritage, language, environment and even the Coast Guard.

These cuts are less about saving money and more about ideology – a move to privatize the delivery of public services. There is no evidence that this will be cheaper; on the contrary, privatization of public services actually costs taxpayers more.

### Temp contracts costly

We are seeing the privatization trend increasing with the federal government relying more and more on contractors and, in particular, on temporary staffing agency contracts that cost over a billion dollars per year.

Private contractors must build in profit margins – which mean higher costs for taxpayers combined with lower salaries and fewer benefits for the people they employ. It’s a lose-lose situation.

PSAC members are taking action in our workplaces and communities to demonstrate the importance of public services and highlight the valuable work that we do to protect Canadians’ safety and build healthy communities.

*(Continued on page 3)*



## A message from the PSAC National President

# Building a people's opposition

It didn't take long for the newly elected Harper Conservative majority to show its true colours when it comes to workers' rights. The federal government's actions against striking and locked out members of the Canadian Auto Workers and the Canadian Union of Postal Workers were unjust and downright draconian. But as CUPW National President Denis Lemelin said, "the government cannot legislate away our solidarity and determination."

The Harper government is planning to cut billions from federal public services. To put it plainly, the Conservatives want to gut federal spending by \$4 billion and then give \$4 billion in tax cuts to corporations. While I hesitate to refer to Canadians as "taxpayers" rather than "citizens" – the reality is that we all pay taxes. As workers and as community members, how would you prefer to see your money spent? Do you want to line the pockets of the richest CEOs or maintain crucial social services that help all Canadians?

Given this political climate, we cannot afford to be divided. PSAC members must play a key role in the movement to protect public services. We aren't just struggling to protect our jobs – we are fighting to protect our communities.

We see what's happening in the United States, where state government workers are having their collective bargaining rights removed and their pension plans emptied in the name of deficit reduction. Similar attacks on workers are taking place in the United Kingdom, where over half a million public sector workers are due to lose their jobs. Countries such as Greece, Portugal and Spain are making huge cuts to public services in the name of post-recession deficit reduction.

But what about the human cost of jobs, pensions and services lost? We must never let our government forget that real people are hurt when they lose their jobs. Widespread layoffs and cuts to pensions destroy communities. This creates a human deficit that is far more destructive than any fiscal deficit.

We must work together and create a popular opposition to Stephen Harper and his cuts – a movement that brings

together the progressive forces in civil society, including the labour movement, to push for social and political change. Every single PSAC member needs to be active in defending our public services, because democracy doesn't just happen at the ballot box. Political action must be a daily act, incorporated into all of our work.

We can build a people's opposition to the Conservatives by being active union members in our workplaces and communities. It's time to speak with our friends, families, neighbours and allies about the importance of public services and the workers who provide them. We must challenge any attempt to contract-out, privatize or sell off our public services.

Meet with your Member of Parliament, along with your provincial, territorial and municipal representatives – tell them to protect public services and halt the massive cuts to Canadians' social security.

We can't allow the Conservatives to define our Canada. We are all citizens and we all have families. We all depend on public services – whether they are national, provincial, territorial or municipal. We all expect our governments to work in the best interests of citizens, not corporations. So we must take our message out to communities, building our network of allies along the way. The Conservatives may have a majority in the House of Commons, but we cannot allow them to have a majority in popular opinion.

Do you want a Canada that looks after its citizens with quality public services or a government that puts the profits of corporations first? Do you want strong communities or user fees to pay for privatized services? Do you want a decent pension plan that allows you to retire with dignity or do you want to rely on the market to define your retirement savings? These are real choices – ones that you can help decide.

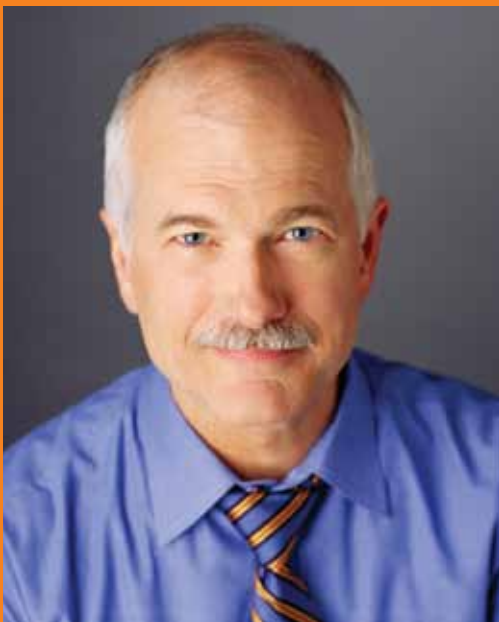
With our solidarity and the collective power of workers standing together, we can win.

*In Solidarity,*

*John Gordon, National President*

## Correction

In the summer 2011 issue of *Our Union Voice*, we reported that Canada Post had closed its customer contact centres in Ottawa, Winnipeg, Edmonton and Fredericton and the National Philatelic Centre in Antigonish. In fact, the centres are currently open and are slated for closure in the near future.



## PSAC mourns the loss of Jack Layton

The Public Service Alliance of Canada mourns the loss of NDP leader Jack Layton and sends our heartfelt condolences to his family and loved ones. He was a fearless and passionate advocate for social justice on behalf of all Canadians. Over the years, Layton's advocacy for worker's rights, equal marriage, universal health care, public transportation and affordable housing distinguished him as a principled politician and a great Canadian.

Our union joins with Canadians from coast-to-coast-to-coast to thank Jack Layton for everything he did to make Canada a more democratic, just and fair society. We promise to pick up the torch from where he left off.

Rest in Peace Jack.

## Our Union Voice

is a quarterly publication of the Public Service Alliance of Canada. Representing 172,000 members, PSAC is one of Canada's largest unions and is affiliated with the Canadian Labour Congress and internationally to Public Services International and UNI Global Union.

**Editor:** Ariel Troster

**Editorial Board:** Bonnie Bates, Catherine Gilbert, Nicholas Galletti, Steve Jelly, Louise Laporte

**Contributors:** Aalya Ahmed, Joselito Calugay, Michael Desautels, Pierre Lebel, Denis Lemelin, Lesley Thompson, Jeffrey Vallis, Christopher Wilson

**Design, layout and production:** Janet Jorgensen

**Translation:** PSAC Language Services

**URL:** [www.pzac-afpc.com](http://www.pzac-afpc.com) **ISSN:** 1718-8652

**Public Service Alliance of Canada, 233 Gilmour Street, Ottawa ON K2P 0P1 613-560-4200**

*Ce journal est aussi disponible en français sous le titre **Le Rassembleur**.*

# PSAC launches campaign to protect public services

(Continued from page 1)

## Workforce Adjustment Appendix protects laid off workers

The Workforce Adjustment Appendix (WFAA) is the most important job protection document that PSAC has ever negotiated with the federal government. It outlines the obligations that federal public sector employers, the Public Service Commission, PSAC and you have if the employer decides that your services will no longer be required beyond a specified date.

If you are an indeterminate Treasury Board employee or work for the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, Parks Canada or the Canada Revenue Agency, the federal government must guarantee you another reasonable job offer. If your employer cannot find you an equivalent or appropriate job offer, you may be placed in surplus status or given assistance to transition into another career.

If you believe that job cuts are coming to your workplace, contact your union representative. They can help you interpret the WFAA as it pertains to your situation and explain your options to you. If you are a member of another bargaining unit, please check your collective agreement for job security language or contact your local executive or shop steward.

**More information on workforce adjustment is available on our website at [psac-afpc.com](http://psac-afpc.com).**

## What you can do

Are you a proud public sector worker? Do you talk about the work you do? Do your family members, neighbours and friends know about the public service you provide?

It's time to get the word out and let people know that cutting public services has real and serious consequences.

- Start by signing PSAC's petition to Treasury Board President Tony Clement urging the government to stop the cuts, protect public services and find other ways to balance the budget.
- Contact your nearest PSAC regional office to get copies of the petition and start collecting signatures. We collected over 100,000 signatures on our Hands Off Our Pensions petition last year. We need even more this time.
- Speak up when someone attacks public services.
- Make a comment online or send a letter to the editor when the media publishes false or misleading information about the work of public service providers.
- Phone, email, or visit your Member of Parliament to explain the service you provide and why it's good for your community.
- Sign up for email information from your union about more activities coming this fall to promote public services. Visit [psac-afpc.com](http://psac-afpc.com) to stay in the loop.

## Cuts are on the way

### Department of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness

Spending is being reduced by 5.9 per cent.

### National Research Council

Spending is being cut by 7.8 per cent.

### Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission

Spending is set to drop by 10 per cent.

### Hazardous Materials Information Review Commission

The Commission is targeted for a 20 per cent reduction in its spending.

### Public Health Agency of Canada

Spending is to be cut by 8.2 per cent.

### Public Works and Government Services Canada

In June, the government announced it would be cutting hundreds of jobs at Public Works, directly affecting 78 PSAC members now and many more over the next three years. This includes the elimination of the Government Exhibitions Program and of 23 marine inspector positions. More significant cuts are expected in the future as a result of the 2012 budget.

### Fisheries and Oceans Canada

According to latest estimates, 275 positions are expected to be eliminated. This includes the closure of the Coast Guard's search-and-rescue centres in Newfoundland and Quebec.

### Environment Canada

In August, it was announced that 776 indeterminate employees will lose their jobs, including 470 PSAC members. A range of jobs will be eliminated including people who protect water quality, safeguard ecosystems, prevent toxic waste from poisoning communities and communicate important information about climate change.

### Department of National Defence

Contracting out is increasing and current plans are for the elimination of 2,100 civilian jobs over the next three years. Contracts are going to another (non-unionized) government agency, Defence Construction Canada.

### Heritage Canada

There have been cuts right across the board affecting 60 people over the last year. Areas such as Official Languages are trying to carry out their mandate with fewer staff.

### Parks Canada

Some of the funding cuts are being made in areas that the agency believes could be handled by volunteers rather than experienced staff. Cuts are also being made to professional staff behind the scenes including scientists, geologists, and naturalists.

### National Gallery

Five curators were laid off in the spring. These cuts follow the elimination of all public and educational programming, affecting 27 educational staff members and eight guides.



Photo: Miv Photography



– Photos: Ken Clavette

**PSAC activists in Ottawa/Gatineau discussed politics beyond the ballot box.**

## Ottawa/Gatineau “democracy school” energizes activists

**W**hen it comes time to vote in an election, do you want to be familiar with the issues and make the best decision at the ballot box? Well, we have just the thing for you. It’s called Democracy School. Last April, 50 PSAC members in the National Capital Region found out what it was all about.

Smack dab in the middle of a federal election campaign, Democracy School participants had an opportunity to explain their definition of democracy, discuss governance and give their take on the state of our democratic processes. They also took a look at the platforms of the major federal parties from a union standpoint. The objective of Democracy School is to clarify the role the union can and must play in democratic debates and provide members with the necessary tools to talk politics.

To reach this goal, participants held discussions with other trade unionists and observers of the political scene in Canada, including journalist Linda McQuaig and Éric Hébert-Daly, former national campaign manager for the New Democratic Party.

On the last day, participants heard from some candidates that the PSAC NCR Regional Political Action Committees had chosen to support. Among them, former PSAC president Nycole Turmel and Paul Dewar, two NDP candidates who have since been elected in Hull-Aylmer and Ottawa-Centre respectively. Turmel is also currently the interim leader of the NDP.

Participants then reviewed regional action plans in preparation for the last two weeks of the campaign. When it was all over, the members went back to their workplaces and their communities reenergized and ready to take political action and apply their new knowledge.

There will be a second edition of Democracy School in 2012. This time, the objective will be to discover what type of political action unions and citizens can engage in to promote social justice and equality.

## Union members fight to save search and rescue centres

**O**n June 25th, 300 delegates to PSAC’s Atlantic convention put down their resolution books and walked out the door. Flags flying high, the crowd marched to St. John’s harbour to join over 2,000 demonstrators protesting against the closure of the Maritime Rescue Sub-Centre.

This office of the Canadian Coast Guard, located in St. John’s, Newfoundland, is the nerve centre of marine search and rescue coordination for the province. The centre is responsible for 900,000 square kilometres of cold ocean waters and 29,000 kilometres of dangerous coastline in Newfoundland and Labrador. It deals with the most distress incidents of any Coast Guard operation in the country.

### Dangerous cuts

On June 7, the Canadian Coast Guard announced it will close two Maritime Rescue Sub-Centres, one located in Quebec City, with six jobs declared surplus, the other in St. John’s, with twelve surplus jobs. The Halifax Joint Rescue Coordination Centre will lose six positions as the services of the sub-centres are centralized at coordination centres in Victoria, Trenton and Halifax.

Even though we are mid-way through 2011, these cuts came as a result of the 2010 budget. A strategic review mandated that the Department of Fisheries and Oceans slash \$56.8 million in spending. This had a direct impact on the Canadian Coast Guard, reducing search and rescue services across the country to only 27 people. These workers are represented by the Union of Canadian Transportation Employees, a component of PSAC.

“The Harper Conservatives’ decision to close the Maritime Rescue Sub-Centre in



– Photo: Lesley Thompson

St. John’s is nothing short of reckless,” says Jeannie Baldwin, PSAC Regional Executive Vice-President for the Atlantic. “The consequences will be fatal.”

For years there have been concerns in Newfoundland and Labrador about the Coast Guard’s response times to distress calls. Moving this service to the mainland adds new fuel to the fire. When the 12 workers leave the St. John’s centre, they will take with them a wealth of specialized knowledge of mercurial waters, fatal shores and tens of thousands of harbours, islands and coves, some whose names and locations don’t exist on any map.

### Public support

In a province that has for centuries eked out a livelihood from the volatile North Atlantic, everyone knows someone who has been affected by a tragedy at sea. The 1982 Ocean Ranger disaster and the 2009 Cougar Helicopter crash hang heavy in Newfoundlanders’ hearts, so it is no wonder

that local citizens are so concerned about the closure.

The unanimous support was visible at the June 25th rally. Fishers and their families, mariners, pleasure boaters and politicians of all stripes were out in force. Students and seniors joined with business people and union members to implore the Harper government to reverse this decision.

“This is what a coalition looks like,” said Earle McCurdy, President of the Fish, Food and Allied Workers, to the explosive crowd.

### Fighting back

Despite the opposition, the Harper Conservatives continue to ignore public will and public safety. According to the federal government, the Canadian Coast Guard is committed to relocating employees who are declared surplus. But PSAC is determined to fight back.

“Prime Minister Harper needs to understand that the North Atlantic is not the Rideau Canal,” says Jeannie Baldwin. “From Signal Hill to Parliament Hill, we will continue to resist this decision and defend this quality public service.”

### Join the campaign!

Jason Hamilton, a Maritime Search and Rescue Support Officer in Halifax, was placed on administrative leave after posting a Youtube video criticizing the cuts to search and rescue centres across Canada. Hamilton is slated to lose his job in the spring of 2012. He is committed to raising awareness about the vital role that search and rescue centres play in keeping people on the water safe. For updates on the campaign, follow @SaveSAR on Twitter and visit the website at [www.savesar.com](http://www.savesar.com).

# Canada Post lockout has implications for all workers



– Photo: Jeffrey Vallis

**PSAC members joined CUPW picket lines all over Canada this summer.**

*Over the summer, 48,000 postal workers went on rotating strikes and were subsequently locked out by Canada Post and then legislated back to work by the federal Conservative government. In this article, Canadian Union of Postal Workers' National President Denis Lemelin explains the issues behind the dispute and what it means for unionized public sector workers everywhere.*

The Canadian Union of Postal Workers faced a number of crucial issues in the lead-up to this summer's lockout. This included an employer-driven transformation of the postal system that is drastically affecting the health and safety of our members. At the table, CUPW raised many proposals to address these and other issues, but instead of discussing solutions, the Canada Post Corporation's approach to bargaining was arrogant and intransigent.

Postal services across the world are dealing with declining letter volumes by expanding into successful revenue-generating services such as banking. But Canada Post instead demands cuts to staffing, benefits, wages and job security. With inflation at 3.3 per cent, CPC wants to slash the starting wages and pensions of future employees, creating a two-tier system which penalizes new postal workers.

## Sick leave under threat

Canada Post is also determined to eliminate CUPW members' sick leave and impose an inferior short-term disability plan. Management refused to discuss any other approach to address absenteeism even though workplace injuries, not sick leave, are on the rise. Members of PSAC's Union of Postal Communication Employees went

on strike in 2008 over a similar short-term disability scheme.

Our union's negotiators bargained hard with the employer for seven months before we called a strike vote on May 30, 2011. CUPW members voted 94.5 per cent in favour of striking – the biggest turnout in the union's history. Across the country, CUPW members kept up a barrage of workplace actions designed to show strength and unity.

Despite these pressures, CPC management refused to budge from its demands for rollbacks from workers – hiding record profits and the bloated salaries of its upper management behind a sheer wall of spin. The mainstream media obligingly filled its pages with the usual attacks on public sector workers for being “out of touch” and “overpaid” even though postal workers make no more than the average industrial wage.

## Public on side

When CUPW began a series of rotating strikes, we successfully drew the public's attention away from these ideological attacks and toward the issues of postal transformation, staffing, work methods and health and safety. That didn't suit management at all.

It became clear that Canada Post was counting on its friends in the newly elected majority Conservative government to tip the scales in its favour with back-to-work legislation. To this end, management did everything possible to goad CUPW into a full-blown walkout, including cutting off its members' medical benefits and cancelling vacation leave. When we stayed strong and united in the face of these provocations, CPC did something unprecedented: it abruptly shut down Canada's postal system, locking out postal workers nationwide.

## Heavy handed

Within days of the lockout, the Conservatives introduced Bill C-6, a punitive and heavy-handed piece of legislation that we saw as unjust, unnecessary and unproductive. Bill C-6 imposed wages on postal workers that were lower than management's last offer. The legislation was rammed through Parliament by the Harper majority government, despite a heroic filibuster staged by the NDP in an effort to delay its passage.

The Conservatives were only too happy to imply that postal workers (and by implication all public sector workers) were not “real Canadians.” We can expect to see this type of division again and again as workers are turned against each other and told to settle for less.

The federal government's intervention in our negotiations with Canada Post sent a signal to *all* unionized workers in this country that our right to free collective bargaining is no longer guaranteed. Legislation is a weapon that a neo-conservative government can wield against us, forcing unionized workers to accept austerity measures to pay for a financial crisis that we did not create. Only our united strength can overcome such a weapon. Luckily, as union members, we have the formidable weapon of solidarity to resist these attacks.

During the entire strike/lockout period, CUPW members received unprecedented support from other unions, community organizations and the public. This support buoyed our spirits and we wish to thank the many PSAC members who showed their solidarity. This broad-based community support is essential if we are to build a popular opposition to the Conservative government and their corporate cronies.

## Take action

Be prepared to fight the same fight in your workplaces. The Harper government will try to do the same thing to you. We will be there to support you!

Contact your MP and tell them that you oppose back-to-work legislation for postal workers and other public sector employees. Workers should not be forced to shoulder the burden of a financial crisis that they had no part in causing.

# Young workers gather at Edmonton conference



– Photo: Jeffrey Vallis

**Participants in the Prairie Region's young workers' conference shared ideas and deepened their union activism.**

Young workers are the future of our union. As tens of thousands of employees from the baby boomer generation retire from the public service – their jobs likely lost to attrition under the Conservative government's reign – the responsibility will fall on young workers to foster enthusiasm and propel our union forward.

"It will be a fight to keep our jobs, as some of us may never have job security in our positions," says Amanda-Rose Bourget, a Service Canada employee in Manitoba. "It should be of high priority to mobilize, make our voices strong, and fight for our rights as young workers."

Bourget was one of 35 participants to attend the Prairie Region's first-ever young workers conference held this past May in Edmonton. As a shop steward for her local, Bourget was still relatively new to the labour movement, having only participated in a few union courses through her regional office.

She has since been elected as the representative for young workers on the Prairie Region Council and will be responsible for youth outreach and support during her three-year term.

"Although my experience was limited, my interest and passion grew stronger the more I learned and participated," she explains. "Not only was I able to meet and connect with other young workers in the public service, but I was also able to meet and talk with PSAC activists and leaders."

## Common ground

The three-day conference packed a busy schedule with workshops that focused on building our union and fostering social change. Participants shared their personal experiences in building the union and the challenges they face in the workplace. They soon discovered many similarities.

"The biggest challenge is fear and intimidation, as most of the young workers are also term workers," says Jerad Cooper, a taxpayer services agent for Canada Revenue Agency in Edmonton. "I've met many youth who want to be involved in their union, but they are afraid that it will cause them to lose their job or have their contracts not be renewed."

This is an unfortunate reality that PSAC is trying to combat, with a concerted effort to recruit, educate, and empower young workers. This includes opportunities like the Prairies young workers conference and last year's Young Workers in Action course.

## Big impact

"I've had the opportunity to meet and work with many of the young workers in our region, and I'm constantly impressed by their passion and determination," says Robyn Benson, Regional Executive Vice-President for the Prairie Region. "They come with fresh ideas and we're assisting them in accessing the tools they need to make an impact."

This sentiment is being echoed across the country. PSAC's British Columbia region held a young workers' course earlier this year and continued the momentum with a special International Youth Day event. The National Capital Region also held a young workers conference this past May, and has seen positive results with a first-time ever youth caucus at the National Capital Regional Convention and the reactivation of the regional youth committee.

"Young workers experience particular issues both within our union and in their workplaces," says Adrian Dumitru, NCR regional organizer. "Addressing their issues, allowing for opportunities to connect and seeking their input is essential to recruiting and keeping young workers involved in our union."

## PSAC's Ontario region encourages young workers to get out and vote

Activists in PSAC's Ontario region have been focusing their efforts on encouraging young workers to vote in the October provincial election. They used International Youth Day on August 12 as an opportunity to launch their campaign against public sector cuts and in support of public services.

Ontario students face the highest tuition fees in Canada. This directly impacts the 4,000 teaching assistants, fellows, research assistants and postdoctoral associates that are part of PSAC Ontario's growing university membership.

High tuition costs are forcing a lot of students to graduate with high debt loads. As work opportunities become more part-time and precarious, it's difficult for students to obtain employment and pay off those debts following graduation.

High education costs also impact upon our members and their children who are attending college and university. To reinforce the value of public services, PSAC Ontario has joined the Ontario University Coalition and jointly commissioned a research project into post-secondary education through the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives.

Young workers are significantly affected by provincial and federal politics, even though youth are less likely to vote. Nicole Beaulieu, a student campaign organizer in the Sudbury regional office, was interviewed by Northern Life newspaper at a recent union event:

"There is a vicious cycle. We don't vote because we think that our issues aren't important to the government, but because we're not voting, the issues aren't being brought to the government. If we don't make our issues heard, they'll never be addressed," she said.

Christo Aivalis, the young worker representative to the Ontario Regional Council agrees.

"I think it's important for young workers to become involved in politics because it's a venue where people can express their concerns and exercise their power," says Aivalis. "If more young workers become involved in politics, we can shape the discourse on key issues like job security, pensions, free collective bargaining, human rights and on a more just and equal society."

Justice for Aboriginal Peoples – it's time!

## Union campaign raises awareness of injustices

*“Why don't you people just get over it?”*

This is the first line of a video produced by PSAC's National Aboriginal Peoples' Circle as part of their latest campaign. The Circle hopes to raise awareness with PSAC members and the general public about the historical and current injustices faced by First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples in Canada.

“We can't simply ‘just get over it’, because the injustices we have faced are too great to ignore – and they have gone on for far too long,” says Ontario Circle member Barbara Goodfellow. “Our ancestors and our current leaders have tried everything from peaceful negotiation to court challenges and, in doing so, have demonstrated remarkable patience, but the federal government consistently refuses to do the right thing.”

Patty Ducharme, PSAC National Executive Vice-President and co-chair of the Circle agrees.

“I believe that successive federal governments have been able to ignore their responsibilities and treaty obligations because they know they can get away with it,” says Ducharme. “Canadians haven't had the opportunity to learn the whole story, so they believe the myths and misconceptions that surround Aboriginal Peoples. This campaign hopes to change that.”

### Pride and remembrance

Making the video was the first time that many of the Circle members have been in front of the camera

“I don't mind saying that I was a little nervous,” says Prairie representative Alisha Bigelow. “But the finished product is something that I think we all can be proud of.”

For Atlantic representative Robert Saunders, participating in creating the video was a highlight in his years as a union activist.

“Where I live in Labrador, most people are unaware of the fact that children were taken from their families to attend residential schools. I remember my father talking about his experiences as a young boy in Davis Inlet, how he was subjected to all kinds of abuse,” says Saunders. “This video has already had an effect on the families of residential school survivors who were removed from their homes simply because they were Aboriginal.”

### Positive experience

“I liked it, the whole experience of making it, the anticipation of viewing the final presentation then finally seeing it,” says Prairie representative Alex George

about making the video. “I was really impressed by the detail and thought that went into it.”

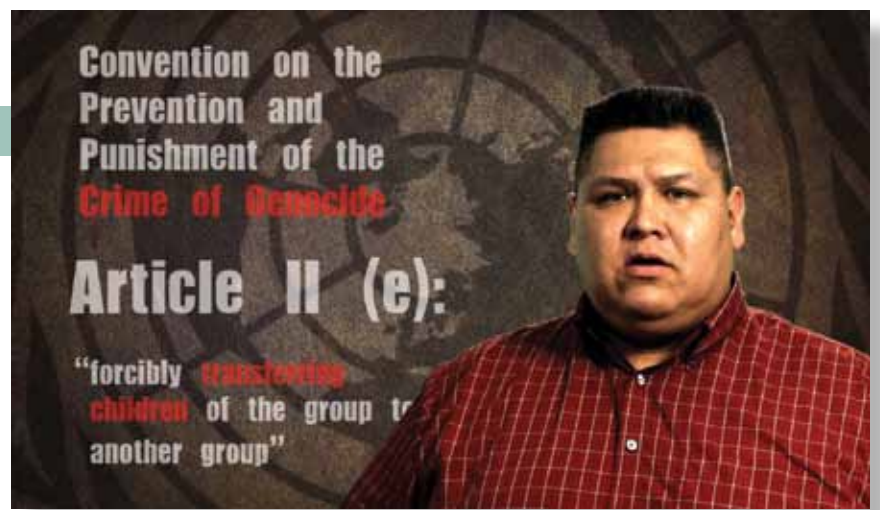
Karen Wright-Fraser, the Circle representative from the North, treasured the opportunity to raise awareness about First Nations history.

“As Aboriginal peoples in Canada who went through the residential school system, we were taught to be ashamed of who we were and not to stand up for ourselves,” she says. “Our own stories have been kept out of the history books for far too long. A lot of our own people don't know this history or what is going on today.”

Echoing the sentiments of all the Circle members, Wright-Fraser sees the video as a call to action.

“I believe it is time for the Aboriginal Peoples to stand up and be proud of who we are and to reach out to other Canadians and help them to understand our past so we can all walk forward together,” she says.

**The video is only one element of the campaign. Fact sheets, background information on the issues and sample letters to government are all available on the PSAC website at [psac-afpc.com/napn](http://psac-afpc.com/napn). Check it out and help spread the word.**



— Photo: Alroy Fonseca

## Survey interviewers fight for better working conditions

Réjean Amyotte has worked for Statistical Survey Operations as a regional office interviewer for nine years, but he still doesn't have guaranteed hours of work.

He also knows of other workers who have worked for SSO for 13 years and have no guaranteed hours and who see new hires get continuous hours for five days with weekends off.

“Those are the preferred schedules,” Amyotte says. “In the meantime, those with seniority will have their hours cut without warning. We're basically at the mercy of management who will arbitrarily change shifts.”

SSO regional office interviewers and field interviewers collect data for national surveys conducted by Statistics Canada. Without them, there would be no national statistics on a wide variety of issues, such as literacy, unemployment and consumer spending. The product of their work is very important despite the Harper government's disdain for valid statistics, including its decision to abolish the mandatory long-form census.

Amyotte, who is a member of the bargaining team for the SSO regional office interviewers unit, was once bumped down from senior interviewer to interviewer due to lack of working hours.

“The working conditions create a lot of stress because there's no financial stability,” he says. “You go from having steady income to suddenly having less and less money. It makes it hard to plan your life.”

Field interviewers at SSO face the same issues.

“Everyone [is supposed to get] an average work week, but that's just a projection not a guarantee,” says Mary Anne Walker, a field interviewer and a member of the bargaining team for the field-interviewers unit. “When a survey project nears the end of its cycle, the work hours grow shorter. If a new project comes up, rather than give existing employees more work, they hire new people. And they tend to give new hires a lot more work than senior interviewers.”

One thing that causes a great deal of frustration among field interviewers is the management's practice of tying assignment of hours and pay to the interviewer's performance, particularly their rate of respondents. Workers who have a better response rate are given more assignments, even over workers who have worked at SSO for 10 or 15 years.

But Walker points out that interviewers have very little control over response rates. “It depends on geography,” she says. “Those in the middle-income strata tend to be more willing to respond to

surveys than those who live in low-income neighbourhoods. So if your area is in the low-income neighbourhoods, you'll get a lower response rate.”

The fact that their pay and their number of work hours hinges on response rates has created an occupational health and safety issue for field interviewers, who are predominantly women.

“Many are forced to put themselves at risk,” says Walker. “They're forced to work in the dark at night in rough neighbourhoods. If they have a bad feeling about a certain respondent, they're still compelled to enter their homes because we get paid according to our response rate.”

The demand for recognition of seniority rights will be among the major issues at the bargaining table, says Amyotte.

“Recognition of seniority will allow us to have some stability and job security,” he says.

Wages will also be a major issue for SSO members.

“Compared to Service Canada, Veterans Affairs and the Canada Revenue Agency, who do the same work, we lag far behind,” says Amyotte.

Both the regional office and field interviewer units are on the arbitration route in this round of bargaining. This means that, should negotiations reach an impasse, one of the two parties can ask for binding arbitration to resolve the issues.



From left: Jeannie Baldwin, Jérôme Turcq, Robyn Benson, Sharon DeSousa, John Gordon, Julie Docherty, Patty Ducharme, Bob Jackson and Larry Rousseau.

## News briefs



### Severance cash-out win for new federal employees

Treasury Board has granted PSAC's policy grievance with respect to the eligibility of indeterminate employees with less than one year of continuous employment to receive the severance cash-out.

Treasury Board had taken the position that employees with less than one year of continuous employment were not eligible to receive the payments in lieu of severance.

PSAC filed a policy grievance in May and we received word in July that Treasury Board will follow our interpretation. As a result, all recently-hired indeterminate employees that are part of the PA, SV and EB groups will receive a severance cash-out payment that corresponds to the time they worked up to the second day of the new collective agreement.

### Academic workers at University of Winnipeg join PSAC

Nearly 400 academic workers employed at the University of Winnipeg have joined the Public Service Alliance of Canada and will now benefit from improved working conditions and free collective bargaining.

Teaching assistants, tutors, lab demonstrators and markers voted 89 per cent in favour of joining PSAC. Workers, many of them students, welcomed the opportunity to regulate their often precarious working conditions.

### Welcome to Queen's University postdocs

PSAC is thrilled to welcome 180 Postdoctoral Fellows at Queen's University who voted in favour of joining our union. PSAC is becoming the union of choice for academic workers, including teaching assistants, researchers, contract instructors, administrative staff and postdoctoral fellows. Over 90 per cent of postdocs at Queen's will be covered by a new collective agreement that will improve their salaries, benefits and working conditions.

## Regional convention delegates elect veteran activists and fresh faces

Delegates to PSAC regional conventions across Canada elected a new slate of Regional Executive Vice-Presidents over the summer. Working with PSAC National President John Gordon and National Executive Vice-President Patty Ducharme as well as a network of union activists, the REVPs will be leading the struggle to protect public service and fight job cuts.

### Jeannie Baldwin – Atlantic

Jeannie Baldwin was re-elected Regional Executive Vice-President by delegates of the 5th Triennial Atlantic Regional Convention this June in St. John's. This marks the beginning of her third term at the helm of a region that represents almost 20,000 PSAC members in the four Atlantic Provinces. Jeannie brings to her office over 30 years of union activism, and has been in leadership roles since the PSAC national strike of 1991.

### Jérôme Turcq – Quebec

Jérôme Turcq was first elected Regional Executive Vice-President for the Quebec region in 2000. Re-elected this spring at the 2011 Quebec Regional Convention, Jérôme is now taking on his fifth mandate. Before being elected REVP, Jérôme held the position of Executive Vice-President of the Union of National Defence Employees.

### Bob Jackson – British Columbia

Bob Jackson was elected REVP for British Columbia at PSAC's BC Regional Convention in May 2011. Prior to his election as REVP, Bob was a founding member of the BC Regional Council, where he served as the National Officers' Coordinator for two terms. Bob worked at the Canadian Food Inspection Agency for over 30 years, was the Agriculture Component Regional Vice President for 18 years, and held many positions in his local.

### Robyn Benson – Prairies

Robyn Benson was re-elected as REVP at the 2011 Prairie Region Convention, having held this position since 2000. Prior

to serving as REVP, Robyn worked for 20 years with the Winnipeg Taxation Centre of the Canada Revenue Agency. Her union involvement dates back to 1980 when she was a term employee. She has held a variety of union positions including Regional Vice-President in the Union of Taxation Employees.

### Sharon DeSousa – Ontario

Delegates at PSAC's Ontario convention in May elected Sharon DeSousa as Regional Executive Vice-President for Ontario. Sharon is the first racially visible member elected to the Alliance Executive Committee in PSAC's history. Sharon was the alternate to the Regional Executive Vice-President from 2008 to 2011 as well as a representative for racially visible members on PSAC's Ontario Council. DeSousa was a member of the Program and Administrative Services group bargaining team during the last two rounds of negotiations with Treasury Board.

### Larry Rousseau – National Capital Region

Delegates at the PSAC-National Capital Region convention in June elected Larry Rousseau as the Regional Executive Vice President – the second racially visible member elected to the Alliance Executive Committee. Larry was a Regional Vice President with the National Component and an employee of Statistics Canada. His first experience in the labour movement was when he started as a filing and stockroom clerk in the mailroom of the Canadian Labour Congress at the age of 18.

### Julie Docherty – North

Julie Docherty was elected as the REVP for PSAC North in June 2011. She joined the Public Service in 1991 as an Adjudicator at the Workers Compensation Board and was seconded to the Yukon Employees Union in 1996 as a union advisor for a 4 year term. She returned to the Department of Justice as a worker's advocate in 2000 and continued in that position until being elected as REVP North.