

# Union UPDATE



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## Resisting attacks against equality and human rights *First national conference brings racially visible members together*

**D**elegates to the PSAC's first National Racially Visible Conference in early March left the event with more determination to be at the forefront in the struggle for equality, human rights and quality public services.

PSAC National President John Gordon, in his opening speech to the delegates, stressed that the union must build resistance to growing government attacks on equality and human rights.

"Canadians deserve quality public services and need them in order to deliver human rights and equality," he added. "Quality public services are the great equalizer and we cannot allow them to be further dismantled and sold off by the federal government."

The keynote speaker, Canadian Labour Congress Secretary-Treasurer Hassan Yussuff, pointed out that government cuts have a disproportionate impact on equity-seeking groups. He also said workers of colour must be at the forefront in the political struggle for change and human rights.

### Backlash smokescreen

Another speaker, Yasmina Chouakri of the Quebec Women's Federation, illustrated how gender equality was used as a smokescreen for racist attacks in the recent backlash against reasonable

accommodation in Quebec. In order to resist this new right wing tactic, she believes that feminist analysis must go beyond just gender equality and must take all forms of inequality into consideration.

Guest speaker Fo Niemi of the Centre for Research Action on Race Relations commented on how the right wing ideology has given rise to new code words. "National security," "public security," and "cultural security" are being used as

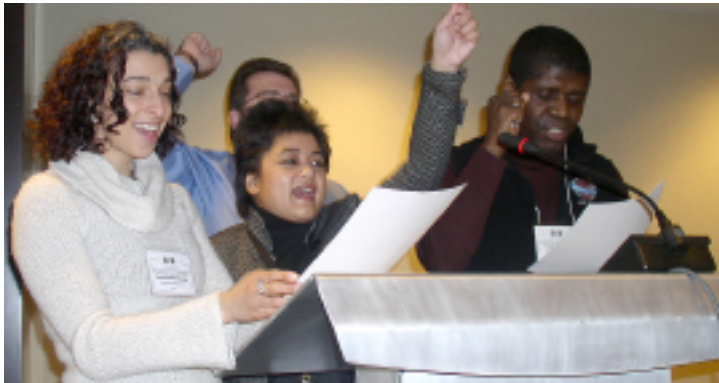
justifications to attack minority groups, he said. He challenged PSAC members to rise above personal biases and to challenge the meaning and intent behind these words.

The conference also held workshops that provided delegates with the opportunity to share experiences and

knowledge, to network and to develop skills to take on leadership roles in their union.

Delegates elected Danielle Dubuc and Carl Laguerre, as well as two alternates, to sit as the racially visible representatives on the PSAC Equal Opportunities Committee.

On the last day of the conference, delegates debated and adopted resolutions. The Alliance Executive Committee will address some of the resolutions while others are being referred to the next PSAC Triennial Convention in 2009.



*Delegates volunteered to lead the singing of "Solidarity Forever" at the start of the first PSAC National Racially Visible Conference.*

# Mourning and Fighting for Change

*On April 28, PSAC honours workers killed or injured on the job*

**H**undreds of Canadians die every year in the one place they should be protected: their workplaces. And on April 28, the Public Service Alliance of Canada both mourned and pressed for change, in commemoration of the National Day of Mourning for Workers Killed or Injured on the Job.

It's been 24 years since the Canadian labour movement began marking the Day of Mourning and still workers in Canada continue to be killed and injured at an ever increasing rate.

According to data collected by the Association of Workers' Compensation Boards of Canada, in 2006 – the last full statistical reporting period – there were 976 workplace fatalities in Canada, up from the 798 workplace deaths recorded in 1998. And the real figure is probably much higher as fatalities due to worker exposure to toxins, carcinogens and other hazardous materials or situations are not reliably recorded by provincial compensation systems.

Despite these horrific statistics, governments in Canada continue to systematically weaken health and safety laws through deregulation and inadequate enforcement of existing health and safety laws.

On April 28, 2008, PSAC members joined with our sisters and brothers across the country to observe the National Day of Mourning and remember our co-workers who have been killed or injured in the workplace. We also used this as an opportunity to reaffirm our commitment to occupational health and safety and improved working conditions in all Canadian workplaces.

PSAC members observed a minute of silence at 11:00 a.m. on April 28, to remember these brothers and sisters. Local Labour Councils, Federations of Labour and individual Locals and Branches also sponsored commemorative activities in communities across Canada.

*Visit [www.psa-acfp.com](http://www.psa-acfp.com), for more information about the National Day of Mourning for Workers Killed or Injured on the Job.*

## Taking to the Courts

*PSAC to appeal Federal Court pay equity decision*

**PSAC** is not giving up on a quarter century-old, \$300 million pay equity complaint against Canada Post. The Union announced last month that it will take the case all the way to the Federal Court of Appeal.

The complaint, originally filed with the Canadian Human Rights Commission in 1984, involves about 6,000 current and former clerical workers at Canada Post. In February, the Federal Court (Trial Division) overturned an award made by a Canadian Human Rights Tribunal in October 2005.

"We believe the Federal Court's decision is flawed and there are strong grounds for an appeal," said PSAC National President John Gordon. "Some aspects of the decision are contradictory while others ignore the roles and authority of both the Tribunal and the Canadian Human Rights Commission."

The fact that this complaint is approaching the 25-year mark was also not lost on the Federal Court justice who commented in his decision that the length of the Tribunal hearing alone was wrong, unreasonable and offended the public conscience.

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# International Women's Day 2008

## *Where is the federal plan for women's equality?*

**O**n March 8, PSAC activists across Canada united to demand that the Harper government take women's equality seriously and reverse bad policies which have led to the cancellation of essential programs and the closure of women's organizations.

Thirteen years after the Canadian government pledged to enact a "Federal Plan for Women's Equality," women are still experiencing widespread economic injustice:

- Women still make less money than men. Women only make 71 cents for every dollar earned by a man. For racialized women that figure is 64 cents and for Aboriginal women, 46 cents.
- Women still do most of the unpaid work in the home, taking care of children and family members and cuts to public services mean that this workload will increase.
- Maternity and parental benefits outside of Quebec are woefully inadequate, and many women have to return to work before the end of their leave because they simply can't afford not to.
- Childcare is either too expensive or not available for many working mothers.
- The minimum wage is so low that women working for that wage are considered to be the "working poor."

During the January 2006 election campaign, Stephen Harper signed a pledge promising to "take concrete and immediate measures, as recommended by the United Nations to ensure that Canada fully upholds its commitments to women in Canada."

The Conservative government has done nothing to advance women's equality – in fact Harper and his government have taken us backwards by:

- Cancelling the federal-provincial child care agreements;
- Refusing to adopt federal pay equity legislation;
- Abolishing funding for the Court Challenges Program;
- Drastically cutting funding for literacy, youth employment programs and workplace skills programs; and,
- Changing Status of Women Canada Women's Program funding criteria, eliminating funding for research and advocacy, and closing down 12 out of 16 SWC regional offices.

The federal government must be held accountable for its attempts to undermine women's equality. PSAC fully supports the Canadian Labour Congress' *Equality Once and for All!* campaign, which demands:

The appointment of a senior Minister responsible for women's equality, and a federal Status of Women department with the leadership, the resources and mandate to advocate for women's equality within government; and, Federal support for a strong network of women's groups who advocate for women's equality.

**Visit [www.canadianlabour.ca](http://www.canadianlabour.ca) for more information on what you can do to pressure the Canadian government to promote women's equality – for once and for all.**



*Members of the PSAC women's committee in Moncton celebrated International Women's Day with sisters from other organizations, at the launch for the Equality Once and For All! campaign.*

# In brief

## First agreement for Health Canada Commissionaires

Commissionaires who work at Health Canada as security guards have ended their strike by voting to accept a tentative agreement. This will be the first collective agreement for this unit, the first group of Commissionaires in Ottawa to join PSAC. Significant gains include a no contracting out clause that protects bargaining unit work and language to protect members from sexual and personal harassment in the workplace. Members now have seniority rights for job postings, lay-off and protection from being transferred out of the bargaining unit, as well as a new pay grid that better recognizes seniority and experience.

## Campaign launched against bill that will cost Thunder Bay 100 jobs

Local Canadian Grain Commission workers and their supporters are launching a campaign to stop legislation that will gut the Canadian Grain Commission and cost the Thunder Bay area 100 jobs.

Bill C-39 proposes to eliminate inspection and weighing services, as well as regulatory oversight of grain shipments. This would contribute to a significant economic hit in Thunder Bay, threatening grain producers, consumers and the grain sector as a whole.

“The Union is asking the people of Thunder Bay to join us in demanding that [Local MP] Joe Comuzzi stand up to his own government’s attempt to gut the Canadian Grain Commission,”

said Don Beese, President of the Agriculture Union’s Local 30, PSAC.

A campaign website launched this month at [grainaction.ca](http://grainaction.ca) will direct messages from the public to Comuzzi and the Conservative Government. Visit [grainaction.ca](http://grainaction.ca) today to show your support for Canadian grain workers.

## PSAC defends postdocs at Western

PSAC is writing a new page in Canada’s labour history by defending the rights of Postdoctoral Fellows and Postdoctoral Associates to form a union at the University of Western Ontario in London.

The Union filed a certification application with the Ontario Labour Relations Board on February 29, requesting a vote by the 250 Postdoctoral Fellows and Postdoctoral Associates employed by the university.

Western contends that the Fellows and Associates are independent contractors who don’t meet the legal definition of employees under the *Ontario Labour Relations Act* and so are not entitled to join a union.

Gerry Halabecki, PSAC Executive Regional Vice-President for Ontario, feels the university should adopt a more enlightened attitude toward the rights of its employees to form a union.

“PSAC is already a dynamic force at the University of Western Ontario through the Graduate Teaching Assistants Union (PSAC Local 610),” says Halabecki. “The Postdoctoral Fellows and Postdoctoral Associates have the same rights to be represented by a union and to bargain collectively.”

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## Taking to the Courts

The 2005 Tribunal decision awarded approximately \$150 million in adjustments and interest, half of what the Union calculates was actually owed. Canada Post appealed the Tribunal’s decision within minutes of its being released in 2005. PSAC then filed a cross-appeal against the Tribunal’s decision to discount the award by 50 per cent.

Gordon assured PSAC members that the Union will continue fighting for pay equity.

“We will continue our battles in court, whenever we need to. But we’re also committed to working to have proactive pay equity laws enacted so that future generations of women will not have to wait decades for economic justice.”

**For more information on PSAC’s fight for pay equity, visit [www.psc-afpc.com](http://www.psc-afpc.com).**