

PSI World Congress 2002

BACKGROUND

Top-level union leaders from around the world will gather in Ottawa to launch global campaigns to defend our right to quality public services and promote action on pay equity.

PSI, which represents 20 million workers around the world, meets only every five years. More than 1,200 delegates will attend, with sessions interpreted in more than nine languages.

What are the main issues?

Public services – and public sector workers – are under attack around the world. In Colombia, in South Africa and in other countries, public sector workers have been killed in the past year as they have fought to defend public services. In Canada and many other countries, we've seen the impact of right wing economic policies on services, resulting in cutbacks and privatization. Trade agreements further tilt the balance of power in favour of multinational corporations anxious to take control of public services.

As well, PSI members are dealing with issues such as HIV-AIDS, racism and discrimination, attacks on workers' rights, pay equity and child labour.

Canadians are reminded daily of the importance of quality public services to their health and well-being, and the health of the economy and the environment. Tragedies such as Walkerton, the erosion of our public health care system and the closing of neighbourhood schools are all examples of the extent to which access to quality public services is at risk.

The September 11 horror provided a tragic reminder that at times of crisis and every day, public services play a vital role in our lives. And in the aftermath of the scandals that have rocked corporations, confidence in private sector solutions to the issues that confront us has diminished and Canadians are looking for assurances from their governments that the public interest is being protected.

At this time, the future of public services is one of the most important public policy questions to be addressed by governments. And public sector unions have a central role to play in that debate.

Who are the main speakers?

The Secretary-General of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions, the Director-General of the International Labour Organization and the President of the hemispheric labour central will be delivering major speeches as well as officials from PSI and Education International.

Among the Canadians who will give keynote speeches are Stephen Lewis, Ken Georgetti, Judy Darcy, Claudette Bradshaw (to be confirmed) and Françoise David.

What's happening when?

On the Monday morning, which is Labour Day, some of the world's heavy hitters in terms of the labour movement will be speaking. It's the best place to be for fresh news stories on the labour movement globally.

On Tuesday morning, Stephen Lewis will talk about the impact of HIV-AIDS in Africa and the Congress will debate a resolution setting out a plan of action for public sector unions around the world.

On Wednesday morning, the Director-General of the ILO will kick off a Global Campaign on Quality Public Services. As well, Canada Post is issuing a commemorative stamp that morning, with André Ouellette will use the occasion to address the UPS attack on the Canadian postal service.

On Thursday morning, PSI will be launching a Global Campaign on Pay Equity and women who have taken on the struggle for pay equity around the world will speak along with Françoise David, a former president of the Quebec Women's Federation and a leader of Rank and File, a Quebec-based organization defending the rights of non-unionized workers.

As well, there are a number of important resolutions on a wide range of topics including globalization and trade, water privatization, corruption and ethics, terrorism, racism, tolerance and human rights, and child labour throughout the week.

In addition, there are special sessions on harnessing the power of public sector pension funds in support of public services and on rights for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered workers.

What is the PSI?

PSI is a global union federation representing more than 20 million members of almost 600 public sector unions in 146 countries.

PSI works in concert with global union federations covering other sectors of the workforce and with the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU).

PSI is an officially recognized NGO representing the public sector within the International Labour Organization and has observer status with other UN bodies such as the UNCTAD, UNESCO and ECOSOC.

Who are the Canadian members of PSI?

PSI has four Canadian affiliates: the Public Service Alliance of Canada (PSAC), the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE), the National Union of Public and General Employees (NUPGE) and the Service Employees International Union (SEIU-Canada). Together they represent more than one million Canadian workers.

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