

**IAMREC Meeting – March 23-24, 2007**  
**Presentation by John Gordon, Canadian Titular**  
**Public Service Alliance of Canada**

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## **Introduction**

Greetings; on behalf of the Canadian affiliates, welcome to Canada and beautiful Québec City. Welcome to the new members of IAMREC.

My comments this morning will outline some of the challenges faced by Canadian and Québécois unions, and an overview of our recent participation in PSI.

## **Canadian Context**

The current Québec government of Liberal Premier Jean Charest has attacked public and social services with venom not normally seen in this province. Our Québec Sisters and Brothers have done a lot of work mobilizing members and the public around these cuts.

On Monday, March 26, there will be a provincial election in Québec, and we will see if Charest pays for his cuts of public services and social programs.

*(A footnote on this issue: The Québec provincial election results reflected the displeasure with Charest's government. Unfortunately, there was a surge in support for the right-wing Action démocratique du Québec (ADQ), resulting in a minority government for Jean Charest. The combination of Jean Charest and the ADQ, who are not that far apart politically, is not positive for workers and unions in Québec.)*

The Canadian Conservative government of Stephen Harper is very right-wing and aligning Canada closer and closer to the policies of George Bush and neo-liberal globalization. The impact of this realignment affects our sovereignty and our access to quality public services.

Further expansion of Free Trade and other policies of neo-liberal globalization have meant that unions and citizens have had to fight even harder to protect those services we have now. Making improvements has become that much more difficult.

The cuts made to social programs and public services by the Harper government are ideologically driven. They attempt to further marginalize disempowered members of society, and end informed research and debate. Some of these cuts include:

- Status of Women Canada: cuts to their budget and significantly changing the mandate to disallow domestic advocacy and research;
- Child care: no national child care program; cut of \$1 billion to child care and reneging on provincial agreements, cutting \$250 million per year;
- Court Challenges Program: ended program that assisted Canadians mounting legal challenges against the government;
- First Nations: significant cuts and ending programs to assist with the health, literacy and employment of our First Nations Sisters and Brothers;
- Cut completely or significantly reduced funding for important literacy, equity, and research programs that assisted Canadians across the country.

The Federal Budget announced this week opens the door to further deregulation and privatization of federal public services. It does nothing to improve equity programming, provide essential services (such as national child care), substantively address our environmental challenges or address poverty – in Canada and globally.

A federal election is in Canada's future. Stephen Harper will want a majority government, to accelerate his neo-liberal policies of privatization, deregulation and inequity. Anyone who wants a more inclusive, progressive Canada is going to need to mobilize to ensure that a Conservative majority government doesn't happen.

## **PSAC's DQPS Campaign**

Building upon PSI's Quality Public Services campaign, PSAC delegates to the 2006 National Convention overwhelmingly passed a policy on Defending Quality Public Services (DQPS), which calls on PSAC to take on concrete and comprehensive actions to ensure that quality public services are preserved and remain publicly delivered. The DQPS Policy passed at Convention exposes in general terms what privatization means and why it is important for PSAC to fight privatization and defend quality public services. It also outlines a number of areas in which PSAC must act in order to do just that.

The ultimate goal of this campaign is for PSAC to make an active contribution to building a just, inclusive, secure, prosperous and sustainable society for workers and their families. Quality public services are essential to addressing social and economic inequities, and improving social cohesion. Working with partner labour unions and other progressive organizations, we will defend quality public services against attacks due to privatization, de-regulation and cutbacks, and demand the expansion of public services which support these overall social goals. We are very excited about this campaign, and are integrating this work into all that we do.

## **Canadian Affiliates and PSI**

I assumed the position as Canadian titular in May, 2006. My first Executive Board was in November 2006, where most of the discussions concerned the upcoming PSI World Congress and Program of Action. I am certainly looking forward to our continued discussions this week on these subjects.

Significant effort has been made over the past year on coordinating activities of Canadian affiliates, and integrating our new Québec affiliates into the fold. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all of you who have worked hard to progress this coordination.

As you know, the Canadian titular positions at IAMREC, the Executive Board, and the Women's Committee are shared amongst the pan-Canadian affiliates on a rotational basis.

In welcoming our Québec Sisters and Brothers to PSI, the system we are proposing is:

- Reserve one of the titular seats at the IAMREC level for a Québec-based affiliate;
- Titular for the Executive Board and Women's Committee would come from the pan-Canadian affiliates;
- The Québec affiliates would put forth a representative from the opposite gender as that of the pan-Canadian representative, in order to achieve gender parity.

This proposal for our new governance structure has been approved by all Canadian affiliates. We hope it can be considered this week.

One challenge we have is furthering our coordination activities, especially given the bilingual nature of this country. While there is to be 10,000 Euros in the IAMREC budget for affiliate coordination, we are going to need to discuss how best to utilize this money, given our needs of translation and other issues of access.

Everything we do must be bilingual, and no one affiliate can carry the duties of coordination and information sharing. We need to think creatively on how best to share this work, to ensure that we are fully inclusive. This would also set a positive standard for any future recruitment to the Canadian affiliates group by PSI.

## **Recent Participation of Canadian Affiliates in PSI Activities**

*Regional PSI Conference on Racism (December, 2006), Miami Florida*

There was participation from the Canadian affiliates SEIU, NUPGE and PSAC.

This conference created an action plan to:

- Protect migrant worker rights through improved legal protection;
- Fight discrimination against migrant workers, especially women;

- Strengthen bilateral cooperation and networking by affiliates on this issue and the PSI migrant health care worker campaign;
- Democratize unions to be inclusive of workers of colour, ethnic minorities, migrant workers and indigenous peoples at all levels to strengthen union development.

I would like to mention the work by the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC), in terms of research and outreach to affiliates on migrant workers. While complementing PSI's migrant healthcare worker campaign, the CLC's work is focused on:

- This issue of migrant workers in Canada – worker permits, treatment by employers, isolation, abuse, etc;
- The problems and shortfalls of the Canadian government's temporary worker program;
- The need to improve Canada's immigration laws, including the recognition foreign credentials;
- The role of unions as advocates for change and protection of migrant worker's rights.

*United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (February – March 2007), New York*

PSAC participated in the joint PSI, Education International, and International Trade Union Confederation delegation at the recent meeting of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women.

The theme this year was the elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against the girl child. The objective of the union delegation was to push for recognition that quality public services are necessary condition for us to achieve equality, including that of women and the girl child. We felt that Canada's statement to the Commission fell short of where we should be as a country in regards to equality for women and girls; especially as to how we work collectively to eliminate the barriers of poverty, violence, and discrimination – in Canada and internationally.

*Public Sector Steering Group – Public Sector Forum (November, 2006), Geneva*

The Public Sector Steering Group is chaired by Brother Larry Brown from NUPGE. This year, there was participation from SFPQ, PSAC, CUPE, and NUPGE (BCGEU) at the Public Sector Forum. Participants from around the globe worked to outline the future of public services, and what PSI and affiliates can do to influence this future in a positive way.

Six themes emerged as the key issues that would be determinates of public services, public sector workers, and the broader community. They are:

- Corporate globalization;
- The environment;
- Union strength and influence;
- Uses of technology;
- Trends in public service delivery;
- Demographic change.

The report of this forum, with recommendations for PSI and affiliates, is expected in the coming months.

In closing, I welcome you to Québec, and extend my best wishes for a successful meeting.