



## Public Services International Washington Office Report

*North America Meetings, 28-31 January, 2014*

*Prepared by [Mark Langevin](#)*

PSI-North America was very busy last week with a series of meetings to more effectively coordinate the work among affiliates and PSI.

On Jan. 28<sup>th</sup>, PSI General Secretary Rosa Pavanelli met with U.S. affiliate leaders, including Ken Zinn and President Karen Higgins from National Nurses United, President Lee Saunders from AFSCME, President James Hoffa from the Teamsters, and President Mary Kay Henry from the SEIU. Rosa also met with economists from the [Center of Economic and Policy Research](#) (CEPR), including Deborah James.

### The USA Subregion Meeting

The USA subregion held its affiliate meeting on Jan. 29<sup>th</sup> at the American Federation of Teachers. The USA titular, Candice Owley, chaired the meeting and affiliates evaluated the PSI 2013 work plan, priorities for 2014, and how best to prepare for the Inter-American Executive Board meeting to be held in Guatemala City from March 26-28, 2014. Candice reported on her participation in the PSI delegation to Guatemala in August of 2014 as well as the most recent PSI global steering committee meeting. Everyone agreed that PSI was making progress toward its priority objectives, but that additional focus and detailed work plans were needed.

Bill Fletcher, Jr. from AFGE reported on his proposal to lead the way on an anti-racism, anti-xenophobia project for the PSI Inter-American region. Sandra Vermuyten, PSI Trade Union Rights Specialist, reported on our progress establishing an Educational Support Workers Affiliate Network, including a recent grant from [Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung](#) (FES) to finance a global meeting in 2014.

### The AFGE Hosted Reception

Following the USA meeting, the American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE) hosted a reception for all North American affiliates and friends at the Washington Court Hotel. The reception was well attended by Canadian and USA affiliate leaders and staff, as well as special guests. AFGE's Secretary-Treasurer, [Eugene Hudson, Jr.](#), welcomed everyone.

### The PSI-North America Labor Rights Seminar

On January 30<sup>th</sup>, the North American affiliates gathered at the AFL-CIO to attend the PSI-North America Labor Rights Seminar. [Cathy Feingold](#), Director of the AFL-CIO's International Department, and PSI General Secretary Rosa Pavanelli, welcomed the attendees and presenters. Canada Titular Danielle Legault (SQEES/SEIU) and USA Titular Candice Owley (AFT) chaired the seminar proceedings. The seminar featured presentations (all attached to this email) by Dr. Gordon Lafer from the [Economic Policy Institute](#) (EPI) and the University of Oregon [Labor Education and Research Center](#) (LERC), Lori Wallach from the Global Trade Watch at [Public Citizen](#), and Blaine Rummel from AFSCME and [In The Public Interest](#). The seminar also included a panel discussion focusing on the experiences with attacks on labor rights and strategies to overcome these attacks. The panel was composed of Paul Moist, President of CUPE, Régine Laurent, President of FIQ and Paul Booth, Special Assistant to the President of AFSCME.

Canada's Ambassador to the U.S., [Gary Doer](#), made remarks during lunch.

Following lunch, attendees participated in a rich discussion of how best to confront the rising numbers of political attacks upon public sector unions in North America. Attendees discussed the origins of these attacks as well as political, legislative, public relations, and membership responses that are now underway. Many attendees agreed that PSI should increase focus on information exchanges, solidarity campaigns, common and effective messaging to citizens and lawmakers as well as explore the possibility of coordinating more joint actions.

Sandra Vermuyten of PSI offered to assist with coordinating a ["Route of Shame"](#) bicycle ride campaign in Washington, D.C. to protest labor rights abuses by a select number of national governments around the world. Milt Issacs from ACFO suggested getting "out in front" with a common PSI message that defends labor rights by confronting corruption. Richard Langlois and President Louise Chabot from CSQ suggested campaigns that link PSI to global, national, and local struggles to confront the ever-increasing income inequality that undermines public services and economic development. Ken Zinn from NNU recommended more visible global campaigns, such as the [Robin Hood Tax](#), to strengthen public finance and fair taxation. PSI General Secretary Rosa Pavenelli reported that affiliate unity was critical in developing and implementing global campaigns against the attacks on labor rights and the increasing income inequality in North America and around the world. The discussion reviewed the earlier presentations and attendees clearly linked the attacks on labor rights with free trade negotiations underway in North America and around the world as well as the prevalence of outsourcing.

Michael Filler of the Teamsters suggested that an effort be made to draft and ratify a collective statement on PSI North American international labor cooperation to confront the attacks on labor rights. The participants seconded this proposal and Mark Langevin, Sub-regional Secretary for North America, was tasked with developing a tentative draft for discussion.

### **The Canada Subregion Meeting**

On January 31<sup>st</sup> the Canadian subregion held its affiliates meeting with ample participation from Canada and Quebec. The affiliates reported on the increasing attacks on labor rights at both the federal and provincial levels. Most of the affiliates reported on their "conversation" campaigns as well as the Canadian Labor Congress' most recent public relations campaign, ["Fairness Works!"](#)

Richard Beaulé of FIQ reported on his recent secondment to the Washington office and explained his work on the PSI North America Public Health vs. Trans-Pacific Partnership briefing circulated among affiliates. Mark Langevin of PSI recognized the high value of this secondment and thanked FIQ and its President, Régine Laurent.

Affiliates agreed that PSI North America requires more intensive information exchanges and communication from PSI Headquarters and the Washington office.

### **Immediate Follow-Up**

- Discussion draft of North America affiliate statement of international cooperation and solidarity;
- Distribution of materials and updates for the Inter-American Executive Board Meeting in Guatemala City, March 26-28, 2014;
- Establishment of a blog or Facebook for PSI North America to announce and exchange basic information;
- Exploration of the possibility of holding a special PSI North America Trade Negotiations Meeting to discuss experiences and strategies for confronting the extreme "investor-rights" provisions and the negative list approach to trade in public services.

For more information see:

- Presentation: [Legislative attacks on public employees, public services and labor standards](#) - Dr. Gordon Lafer
- Presentation: [Free trade agreements and the public sector](#) - Lori Wallach
- Presentation: [A new approach to outsourcing](#) - Blaine Rummel
- PSI strategic briefing - [Public health care vs. the Trans-Pacific Partnership agreement](#)
- Meeting agenda: [PSI Sub-regional Advisory Committees for USA and Canada \(SUBRACs\) and Labor Rights Seminar](#)