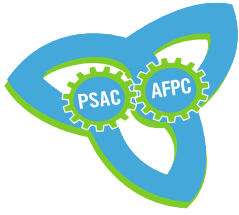


REFLECTIONS OF 2019 NEWSLETTER



PSAC
Ontario

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POWER OF MANY CAMPAIGN

In the face of so many regressive, anti-worker policies and cuts to public services by the Ontario Conservative government, the Ontario Federation of Labour (OFL) launched the Power of Many Campaign. The campaign trains activists in key areas on how to get politically engaged and to take action.

Over a dozen sessions have been held across the province, setting up community hubs in Hamilton, Toronto, Durham, Sudbury, Waterloo, Sault Ste Marie, Kingston and many others. The goal is to have trained activists across the province respond quickly to any anti-worker announcement in their communities.



STRIKE ACTION



BARGAINING IS POLITICAL

In the summer and fall of 2019, there were three strikes in our region; all located in eastern Ontario. This was an exceptional amount of strike action for our union, as in the previous seven years we experienced one strike and one lockout in Ontario.

I am proud of our members who stood strong and decided to fight their employers for better working conditions. This level of activism and militancy are the cornerstone of the labour movement and form the bedrock of many of the exceptional collective agreements we enjoy today.

Yet, why is all this labour unrest taking place now? What's so different about our working landscape today? Well, the short answer is politics.



We have an Ontario Conservative government, led by Premier Ford, that has made it clear that they stand on the side of employers over workers. From rolling back labour laws, paid sick leave, cutting social assistance and canceling the increase to minimum wage – the message is clear. This government will not allow any disruption to profits, as the Premier has stated “Ontario is open for business.”

Corporations have heard this message loud and clear, especially when it comes to strike action. The government was quick to pass back to work legislation to end the York University strike and prevented the Power Workers' Union from taking strike action before it even commenced.



Moreover, even without the threat of back to work legislation, this government has shown little interest in getting involved in ending labour disputes. In PSAC Ontario's case, this meant little political recourse in getting employers back to the table.

There are many of our members who believe that bargaining is separate from politics. These recent examples from our Locals prove otherwise. In addition, our national bargaining units and agencies are facing the same issues currently with the federal Liberal government. Bargaining is political, so we need to ensure we are mobilized, politically active and strike ready!



ORGANIZING POWER



As overall union membership declines across the country, these victories are critical to keeping the labour movement strong.

Unionization not only helps workers in representation and improvements to their workplaces, but also helps workers get the training they need to stand up for their rights. As we make gains, we raise the bar for everyone else, which helps to improve the quality of life for everyone.

PSAC is one of the largest unions in Canada and our numbers continue to grow. This is a result of our commitment to organizing new workplaces, which helps build our bargaining power. The more our membership grows, so does our capacity to negotiate, undertake campaigns and take effective political action.

I am proud to say that our Ontario region is one of the fastest growing in the country, with a very successful organizing program. In 2019, we added over 1,500 new members, specifically in the academic and gaming sectors. This increase will help our existing Locals in those sectors and increases our ability to negotiate strong collective agreements.



LEADERSHIP TOUR



PSAC's National President, Chris Aylward and National Executive Vice-President, Magali Picard, spent months traveling across the country speaking to our members about Phoenix, bargaining and issues in the workplace. In Ontario, I joined them on this leadership tour through southwestern Ontario from May 7-11, 2019. We traveled to Windsor, Sarnia, Walpole Island, Chatham, London, St. Catharines, Niagara Falls and Hamilton.

We visited the Customs and Immigration Union (CIU) Branch 16, 17, 18, and 19, the Canada Employment and Immigration Union (CEIU) Locals 576, 647, 581, and 624; Agriculture Local 17, the Union of National Employees Local 258, and the Union of Veterans' Affairs Employees Local 18. In addition, we held a rally in Windsor on May 7th, at the Canada Revenue Agency building support for a fair contract for our Union of Taxation Employees.



This was a great initiative, which helped connect our rank and file members to our union's leadership. We were able to discuss strategies in resolving workplace issues and the need to continue to pressure this government over bargaining and Phoenix.





It is now four years since the implementation of the Phoenix Pay System, and tens of thousands of our members are still receiving incorrect pay, if they are paid at all. PSAC and our members continue to fight this government to do the right thing; compensate our members fairly and take greater steps to finally fix our pay system.

PSAC is the only remaining union in the federal public service that has not reached a deal for Phoenix damages and compensation. The government's five days of leave offer is offensive, given the magnitude of the devastation Phoenix has and continues to cause. This is why PSAC has connected our current round of bargaining to achieving Phoenix compensation and we are preparing our members to take strike action. Our members are tired of empty promises by this Liberal government. It is time the Prime Minister live up to his commitments of treating our members with respect by bargaining fairly.



At the beginning of 2020, PSAC was able to force the government to expand the Phoenix claims process. This new process will help members who cashed in investments like RRSPs, lost interest on savings, or saw delays in receiving their severance, pension or pay, and weren't able to earn interest on those funds. This is another step to addressing the many hardships our members have faced. Yet, it is shameful that we had to force the government to implement this initiative, which they should have done long ago.



Cuts to the Ontario Student Assistance Program (OSAP)

OSAP was established in 1966 to help students to pay for tuition, books, and other costs associated with attending postsecondary schooling. The last provincial Liberal government improved OSAP, essentially providing free tuition to students whose household income was \$50,000 or less, beginning in September 2017. This redesign of the OSAP program was meant to assist lower income families and reduce the amount of debt for students demonstrating financial need.

However, in 2019, Premier Ford and his Progressive Conservative government, eliminated these changes and converted many of the grants available to repayable loans. This was in addition to eliminating the six-month interest free grace period for loan repayments after graduation.

On January 25, 2019, PSAC's DCL 610 and 901 academic Locals joined over a thousand students and workers demanding that Premier Ford reverse cuts to OSAP at Queen's Park. Rallies were held in other areas by students across the province to protest cuts to OSAP grants, student debt relief, and student union democracy and autonomy.

Student debt in this province continues to grow, with tuition rates soaring each year, leaving a new generation of workers straddled with debt as they begin their careers. Moreover, many families will simply not be able to afford postsecondary education, furthering inequality in our province.

