

# OUR UNION VOICE



Public Service Alliance of Canada  
Alliance de la Fonction publique du Canada

## ROADMAP TO VICTORY



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- Our achievements
- Building more diverse, inclusive workplaces

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**Our Union Voice** is a publication of the Public Service Alliance of Canada. Representing 215,000 members, PSAC is one of Canada's largest unions and is affiliated with the Canadian Labour Congress and internationally to Public Services International.

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## EDITORIAL

### Our union grows stronger to face the challenges ahead

Workers in Canada haven't had it easy over the past few years. First, the pandemic upended our working lives and pushed many people to the breaking point. Now, it is fuelling alarmingly high grocery bills and rising prices at the gas pumps which has families wondering how they'll make ends meet.

Staring down the challenges that lie ahead, it can be hard to know where to turn for support, especially for marginalized and precarious workers who have been hit the hardest.

But without a doubt, we have seen how strong, organized unions are the most effective way to keep workers safe and to fight for decent wages that keep up with soaring inflation.

Because of our strength at the bargaining table, unionized workers earn higher wages, better benefits and enjoy safer workplaces. That's why more and more workers are turning to PSAC as uncertainty about the future and Canada's economy grows. Since our last national convention in 2018, PSAC's ranks have grown by more than 30,000, to 230,000 members from workplaces all across the country.

That's been a trend right across the board, as Canada's unionization rate has jumped during the pandemic after years of slow decline. Union coverage increased to 30.9 per cent in 2021, mostly in front-line industries like healthcare and retail that have suffered the most during the pandemic.

Many of PSAC's newest members are also from Canada's most vulnerable sectors — universities, the gaming industry and not-for-profit organizations — where job



Photo: MIV Photography

security is fleeting, and workers often move from contract to contract.

These sectors are also where we've celebrated some of our biggest victories recently — including better wages, equal tuition, more stable employment and better access to maternity and parental leave.

In the months ahead, our power to mobilize and negotiate strong collective agreements will be put to the test. As inflation continues to climb, we'll need a strong and united membership to push back against job cuts and austerity and secure fair wages and working conditions that don't leave workers behind.

As one of Canada's largest unions, we have the bargaining power to achieve these gains and so much more, but we are only as strong as our members who fight alongside us. That's why I urge each and every one of you to get engaged in negotiations, support your bargaining teams, and take action to demand change.

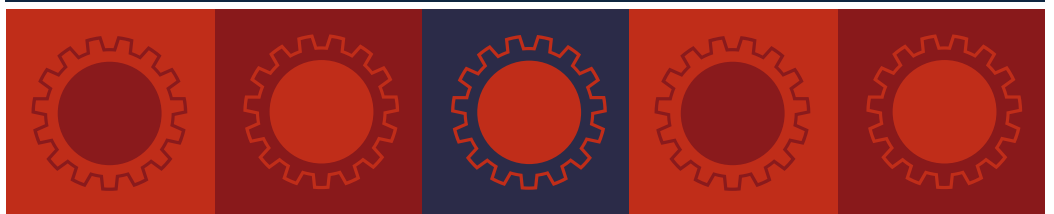
*In solidarity,*

*Chris Aylward, National President*

## 2022 PSAC National Convention: Organizing for Change

PSAC's 19<sup>th</sup> National Triennial Convention will take place virtually May 26 – 27 and May 30 – June 3. Members from across the country will come together to set the course for our union over the next two years. Delegates will adopt PSAC's 2022-2024 budget, discuss challenges facing our membership, and debate resolutions that will guide our efforts to build a stronger union.

Follow all the latest convention news and updates at [psacunion.ca/2022-convention](https://psacunion.ca/2022-convention), and by following us on social.



# The victories that make us stronger

Much has been gained for workers in the last few years. With most of our members currently bargaining for better working conditions and pay, we want to highlight the power of mobilization and political action in securing major wins for PSAC's membership.

## Mobilizing pays off

Employers' poor decisions can be challenged. Just ask the FB Group's border services members, who broke their bargaining stalemate after just 36 hours of work to rule. They mobilized and were able to reach an agreement that benefited nearly 9,000 members.

With respect to the Phoenix pay system fiasco, we drove a hard bargain to secure \$2,500 in general damages, far beyond anything achieved by other bargaining agents, and made sure there would be no more gross payback for overpayments.

Mobilization also helped bring 130 Canada Revenue Agency jobs back into the public sector. These jobs had been sneakily contracted out, but PSAC led a successful campaign against their privatization.

## Toward greater equity

To change our workplace culture, PSAC is committed to dismantling the obstacles facing marginalized groups. We set up a national working group on gender equity, lobbied successfully for a federal pay equity act, achieved a big win in securing 699 leave for our members, and successfully campaigned for universal child care services.

We also achieved significant improvements in our collective agreements. Many units adopted measures to fight sexual violence and harassment, such as paid domestic violence leave and protection plans with guaranteed anonymity. Many units also adopted leave for traditional Indigenous practices. Last but not least, many groups updated their collective agreements to ensure inclusive language.



FB members attend an information picket in Cornwall, Ontario.

## Growing post-secondary

The post-secondary DCL sector is growing, with new members from École de technologie supérieure, Saint Paul University, University of Saskatchewan and University of Ontario. The results are clear: better pay, better working conditions and recognition of employee status for the more than 30,000 members who chose PSAC.

Moreover, in a historic win, PSAC brought an end to sky-high tuition fees for its international PhD members at Queen's University.

## A stronger North

PSAC continues to secure strong collective agreements for our members in the North, including for more than 4,000 public service workers with the Nunavut Employees Union, who will now enjoy higher pay and a better northern allowance — a significant achievement considering their 46% higher cost of living.

Contributor: Rosane Doré Lefebvre

## THE GROWING STRENGTH BEHIND OUR UNION

Our union can trace its roots back to 1966, when the Civil Service Association of Canada and the Civil Service Federation of Canada merged to increase our bargaining power.

Today, our strength comes from not only those same federal public service workers, but tens of thousands of members from different sectors and workplaces across Canada.

PSAC continues to grow, and our 230,000 members live and work in almost every city, town, and village in Canada — some even work overseas, as part of Canada's foreign service — all working together to make our collective agreements, our workplaces, and our communities better.

The diversity within our membership is what makes us strong. PSAC represents workers in over 300 different bargaining units, all helping to keep the country running smoothly.

### • Federal government workers

PSAC members who work directly for Treasury Board and agencies make up the largest percentage of workers in the federal public service and deliver a wide range of programs and services people in Canada rely on every day.

### • Broader federal public service workers

PSAC members work at Crown corporations and organizations funded by the government like the Mint, the Office of the Auditor General, Canada Post, Parliament Hill, and more.

### • Transportation workers

PSAC members help manage Canada's airways and work at airports, ports, and pilotage authorities in every province and territory. We help keep the country moving.

### • Northern workers

PSAC members work in all three territorial governments, at municipalities, and in the private and broader public sector in the Yukon, Northwest Territories, and Nunavut. PSAC is the largest union in northern Canada.

### • Post-secondary and scientific workers

PSAC members teach, research, and work in administration at universities and scientific facilities, across the country. This is one of the fastest growing sectors in our union.

### • Indigenous workers

PSAC members work with First Nations and Indigenous communities across Canada and help deliver a wide variety of services such as healthcare, housing, education and policing initiatives.

### • Para-public and private sector workers

PSAC members work at non-profits, social service and healthcare providers, government contractors, in the security and gaming sector, at museums and many other workplaces.

We are proud to bring together workers from Esquimalt to Saskatoon, Gjoa Haven, Sherbrooke and Charlottetown — and everywhere in between — to form one of Canada's largest and most powerful labour unions. Our work reinforces almost every sector of the economy, and supports our communities with strong public services. Together, we're making a difference.

Contributor: Patrick Bragg

# Bargaining 101: On route to your next contract

## BARGAINING STARTS WITH YOU

We hold bargaining surveys to ask members how we can improve their work life, from work-life balance to decent wages and protections against harassment and discrimination.

PSAC turns these into bargaining demands, and members elect their bargaining team and prioritize their demands.

**Treasury Board and agencies:** Instead, members meet at a national bargaining conference to prioritize their demands and elect their bargaining teams.

## RAMPING UP TO STRIKE

During a strike vote, PSAC offers strike training and plans a strike strategy. Members continue to apply pressure to reach a deal without taking strike action.



**Treasury Board and agencies:** During impasse, either side can apply for a Public Interest Commission (PIC), which makes non-binding recommendations to help the parties reach an agreement. If an agreement still can't be reached, the union can call a strike vote.

## TAKING JOB ACTION



Members can strike by working to rule – where workers do no more than the minimum required by the rules of their contract – stopping work in certain locations, picketing only on certain days or by calling an all-out strike. Members receive strike pay and other benefits while on strike.

➤ Bargaining teams continue to negotiate until they reach a settlement.



“The strength and mobilization of our membership drove our bargaining team at the table. The support for equity demands such as anti-racism training, sexual violence prevention training, and gender affirmation leave meant that despite Bill 124 and Ontario’s regressive wage cap legislation, we were able to make important strides in our collective agreement.”

*Astrid Hobill, president, PSAC Local 901 at Queen's University*

## AT THE TABLE



PSAC's bargaining teams exchange proposals with the employer. Through this process, some demands are accepted, some are rejected, and some are modified.

**Treasury Board and agencies:** The only difference for Treasury Board bargaining is an extra Common Issues table that negotiates improvements for all Treasury Board members.

## SUPPORTING BARGAINING

## REACHING IMPASSE



When PSAC and the employer can't reach an agreement, the two sides reach impasse, and a conciliation officer or a mediator can be brought in to help reach a deal. If that fails, the union can call a strike vote.

Bargaining teams can't negotiate without your support. While your team is negotiating, you can help put pressure on your employer online and in person at rallies, days of action, by lobbying, and by wearing union swag at work to join the fight for a fair contract.

## REACHING A TENTATIVE AGREEMENT

Once PSAC and the employer reach a tentative agreement, members vote on their new contract. If a majority of members vote in favour, a new collective agreement will be signed.

➤ If it is rejected, the strike will continue until a settlement is reached.

Contributor: Louise Laporte



Any bargaining demand can be won with an open and approachable bargaining team. Our representatives really listened in the last round. As a result, we were able to secure a major salary bonus for our members. Now that we're at the table, I try to be as approachable as they were because I know it makes all the difference."

*Jimmy Mailhot, TC bargaining team member, Secretary and Treasurer of local 10117 UCTE and President of the PSAC-Quebec Mauricie Area Council.*



# FEDERAL BARGAINING IS BROKEN

## IT'S TIME TO FIX IT

PSAC members who work for the federal government often ask us why it takes so long to negotiate each collective agreement. In other jurisdictions, it takes months, not years, to reach a deal. They ask why they can't strike when bargaining breaks down but must wait months to apply that pressure. When grievances go to adjudication, why does it take so long to be heard and to get decisions?

**These are good questions — and members are right to ask.**

The answers to these questions — but not the solutions — lie in the *Federal Public Service Labour Relations Act* (the Act) and other laws like the *Public Service Employment Act* (PSEA) and the *Parliamentary Employment and Staff Relations Act* (PESRA).

These laws govern the rules around collective bargaining, the ways that public sector and parliamentary workers are hired, and how grievances are handled. They also complicate the process and make it harder for workers to seek justice. Workers elsewhere have fairer, quicker, and more effective options.

**That's why PSAC is committed to changing these outdated laws with more worker-friendly legislation.**

### How does it impact bargaining?

Put simply, these laws prevent unions from settling bargaining quickly and effectively.

When bargaining breaks down, unions must make their case to a Public Interest Commission (PIC) before members can pressure the employer with potential strike action. The PIC process can take months, and since the PIC's recommendations are non-binding, they rarely bring the two sides closer to reaching a deal.

The employer also uses these laws to undermine important discussions at the table — issues like recall rights and Work Force Adjustment, staffing levels, or classification that can have negative impacts.

Negotiations still need to continue after the PIC process — or unions need to continue escalating their job actions — before a settlement is ever reached.

### What about grievances?

Under the Harper government, several federal tribunals, including the Federal Public Service Labour Relations Board, were combined, without extra resources. This has slowed down their work to a crawl. The current Liberal government has not fixed this, leaving workers in the lurch.

Even worse, there are, by law, only 12 adjudicators in the entire federal system — only 12 people to handle all grievances filed by hundreds of thousands of employees. This system needs change. PSAC will fight to overhaul the way grievances are handled.

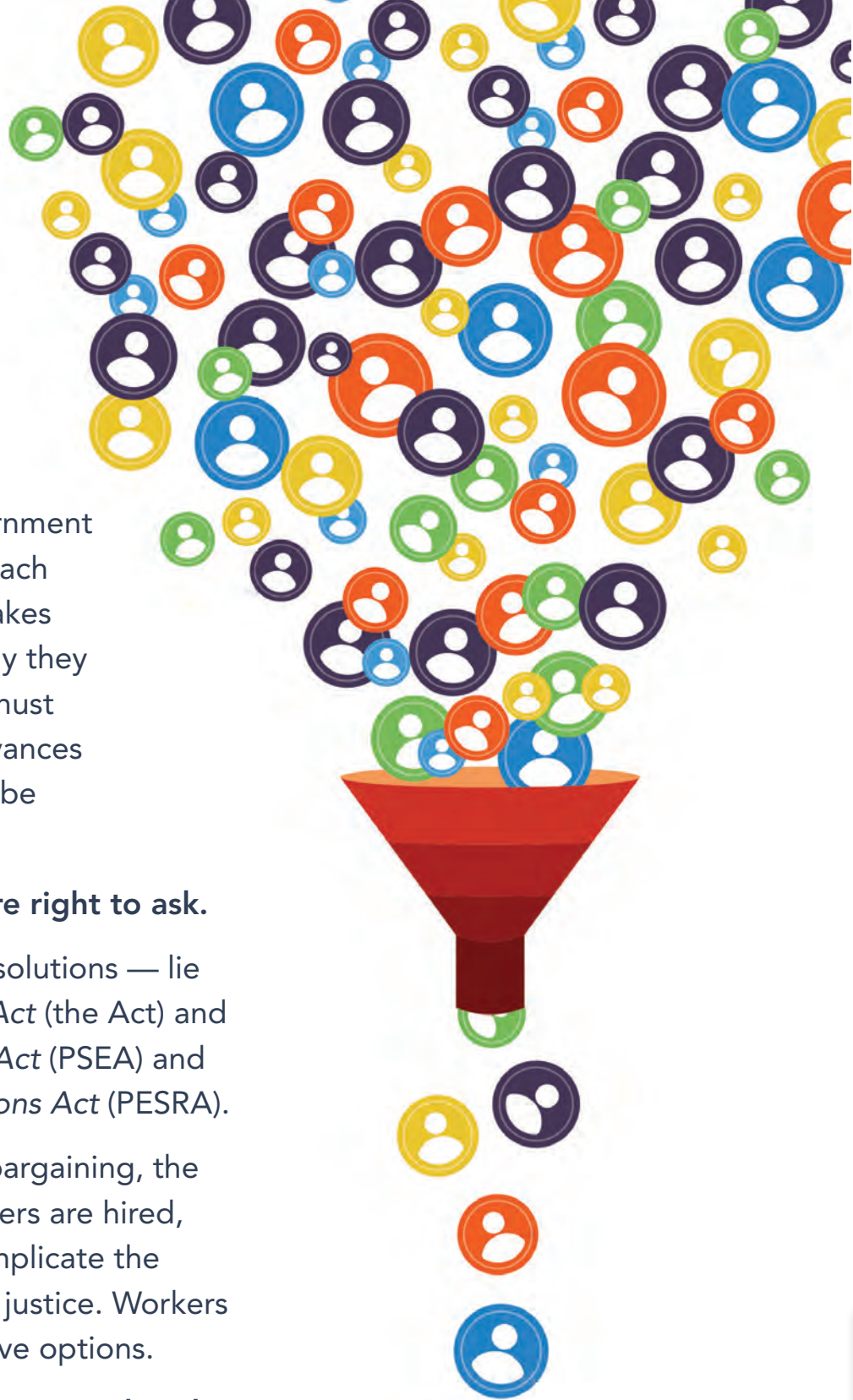
In other jurisdictions for example, the union and the employer can agree on a choice of arbitrator or ask the labour board to appoint one from a list of independent arbitrators. This helps speed up the process and gives more options to resolve grievances.

Workers with human right complaints can turn to the Canadian Human Rights Commission, but only once their grievance is finished — sometimes more than five years later. This is unacceptable, and disproportionately impacts workers who are already marginalized and oppressed.

### The path ahead

Working towards legislative change won't be easy. We will need your support in the months and years ahead to influence decision-makers and put pressure on the government to build a fairer process that puts workers first.

*Contributors: Louise Laporte and Michele Girash*



# ON THE ROAD TO VICTORY TOGETHER



Office of the Auditor General strike

When thousands of PSAC members take to the streets as part of a rally against the Phoenix pay system or cuts to public services, people take notice. Having a mobilized and engaged membership is critical to getting the best possible deal at the bargaining table – for all our members. The biggest victories happen when members’ needs are reflected by their bargaining teams, and they in turn support their team and work together to mobilize.

But coming out in numbers is just one way to mobilize. There are many other ways to get involved with your union — from taking the leap and joining one of your regional committees to something as small as sharing a post on social media.

Here are a few of the ways you can get engaged and help support your union. Pick one that feels right for you and get started today.

## Don't know how to get started? Get engaged!

Getting involved doesn't have to be intimidating. Start small. Read your collective agreement and connect with your shop steward or a member of your local executive. Start talking with your co-workers about the bargaining issues that matter most to you and learn what's happening at the bargaining table. Sign up for PSAC's newsletter and follow our social media channels. When you're ready, take part in an online action to learn more about bargaining and show your support.

## Feeling more comfortable? Get involved!

Attend a union event, meeting, or rally. Wear buttons, pins, or union swag to publicly show support for your bargaining team and send a strong message to your employer. You can also help spread the word about important bargaining issues by handing out leaflets to other members. Keep the conversation going by posting or sharing bargaining information on social media.

## Ready to take the next step? Get active!

Talk to your local about attending a bargaining conference to give you a say in bargaining priorities. If you are a member of an equity group, you can also consider registering for a regional equity committee or conference — bringing forward the experiences and needs of our diverse members is key to building a stronger union. Make even more of an impact by joining your bargaining team or your local executive. You can also help to mobilize other members by joining the national mobilization team and participating in a call or texting campaign. Finally, turn up the pressure by lobbying your elected officials.

Our union is built from the ground up, and the strength of our membership gives us the leverage we need at the bargaining table. When we organize together for fair wages, job security, better working conditions, and inclusive workplaces, there's no limit to what we can achieve.

*If you have a mobilization idea that you think would be effective in your workplace or community, please email it to PSAC's national mobilization team at [mobilization-mobilisation@psac-afpc.com](mailto:mobilization-mobilisation@psac-afpc.com).*

Contributor: Jeffrey Vallis

Please be sure to keep your contact information up to date at [psacunion.ca/user](https://psacunion.ca/user) to receive all the latest bargaining updates, and join our mailing list to receive our weekly e-newsletter.

## Building more diverse, inclusive workplaces

We know from the experience of many members, including those involved in the Black and Indigenous class action lawsuits, that workers from equity groups consistently get left behind. Collective bargaining is one of our best tools to create fair work environments for all employees. That's why we need to make sure our demands explicitly focus on equity, especially given the broader context of systemic discrimination based on race, gender, disability, sexual orientation and other identities.

In this round of negotiations for federal public service workers, PSAC is working to do just that, including:

- Introducing more gender-neutral and gender-inclusive language.
- Stronger protections against violence, harassment and discrimination in our workplaces
- Mandatory training on anti-racism, anti-oppression and Indigenous history for all federal workers
- Bilingual allowances for Indigenous languages

- Leave for Indigenous cultural practices
- A seat at the table at the Centre for Diversity and Inclusion to help improve representation from equity-seeking groups in the federal public service.

More broadly, as part of PSAC's Anti-Racism Action Plan, PSAC is reaching out to members across the country to hear about their experiences and how we as an organization can better represent our diverse membership. Our Gender Equity Taskforce is also using an intersectional approach to explore barriers to women's participation in union life, including bargaining processes, and to improve gender equity within PSAC.

Contributor: Laila Malik

# SCORING VICTORIES FOR ALL WORKERS

PSAC has a long history of raising the bar for our members. And over the years, many of PSAC members' hard-fought victories have made workplaces safer and more inclusive for tens of thousands of workers in Canada.

1976

## PSAC ENDS "RUG-RANKING"

PSAC succeeds in getting "rug-ranking" abolished - the practice of tying a secretary's pay (then a woman-dominated occupation) to that of her boss.

1987

## WON LANDMARK SEXUAL HARASSMENT RULING

PSAC member Bonnie Robichaud wins landmark Supreme Court ruling that employers must provide harassment-free workplaces.



1991

## FOUGHT FOR THE RIGHT TO BE POLITICALLY ACTIVE

After a seven-year legal battle ending at the Supreme Court, PSAC and four members win the right for federal public service workers to be politically active, amending the Public Service Employment Act.

1994

## PUSHED BACK ON DISCRIMINATION AND HARASSMENT

Ojibway PSAC member Mary Pitawanakwat is awarded a \$200,000 settlement and reinstated in her former position at the Secretary of State in Regina after taking her racial discrimination and sexual harassment case to federal court.



Photo from Canadian Dimension Nov 1995 Issue

## LAUNCHED LARGEST NATIONAL GENERAL STRIKE

PSAC members hold the largest national strike by a single union in Canada, gaining major improvements in job security.



1991 National General Strike support demo Ottawa

1998

## GAINED EQUITABLE TREATMENT FOR LGBTQ+ COUPLES

PSAC is first to negotiate benefits for same-sex couples recognized in collective agreements, 10 years before same-sex marriage is recognized in Canada.



PSAC activist Anne Whitehurst, 1996

1999

## WON HISTORIC PAY EQUITY VICTORY

PSAC wins a landmark pay equity victory for more than 230,000 current and former members in women-dominated positions who received retroactive salary adjustments and interest totaling over \$3.6 billion.



Pay equity demonstration mobilization on Parliament Hill, 1998

2022

## PANDEMIC VICTORY FOR FEDERAL WORKERS

In a major win for federal public service workers hardest hit by the pandemic, an arbitration board ruled that Treasury Board cannot force workers to exhaust all their other leave before accessing 699 leave.

2020

## SECURED PHOENIX DAMAGES SETTLEMENT

After rejecting the government's meagre settlement of five days of leave, PSAC secures a better deal of \$2,500 in Phoenix damages and a claims process for out-of-pocket expenses and severe losses for more than 165,000 federal public service workers impacted by the Phoenix fiasco.

2017

## SUCCESSFULLY RE-OPENED VETERANS AFFAIRS OFFICES

PSAC campaign against the Conservative government closure of nine Veterans Affairs offices succeeds in getting Liberal government to re-open all of them.

2001

## SET THE STANDARD ON PARENTAL LEAVE

PSAC is one of the first unions in Canada to negotiate a combined full-year maternity/parental leave allowance in a public sector agreement.

