

# OUR UNION VOICE



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



## SPEAK UP SPEAK OUT

### INSIDE

- Treasury Board bargaining
- Harassment at DND
- PSAC on campus

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Vol. 15, Issue N° 2 · 2021

### IN THIS ISSUE

Long road to political activism . . . . .	3
Vaccinations in the workplace . . . . .	3
TB bargaining . . . . .	4
TB common issues . . . . .	4 - 5
Unions after the pandemic . . . . .	5
Harassment at DND . . . . .	6
PSAC on campus. . . . .	7
Surveying the federal public service . . . . .	8

**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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**ISSN:** 1718-8652  
Public Service Alliance of Canada  
233 Gilmour Street, Ottawa ON K2P 0P1  
613-560-4200

Ce bulletin est aussi disponible en français sous le titre **Le Rassembleur**.



## EDITORIAL

### We will hold Trudeau's new government to their promises

In September, Canadians re-elected Justin Trudeau's Liberal minority government to lead the country through our pandemic recovery.

I want to thank you — our members — for supporting our election work, talking to your family and friends about the issues that matter most, and taking the time to vote.

Thousands of PSAC members signed PSAC's pledge and told us they planned to vote for candidates that put workers first.

I want you to know I take this pledge to heart, and that our work did not end on election day.

Our job as a union is to ensure that Trudeau's government follows through on their election promises to support workers and their families.

In bargaining, we will do everything in our power to improve your collective agreements and your working lives. There are so many important issues we need to address: fair wages, remote work, work-life balance, classification and gender pay gaps, contracting out, and systemic racism and harassment in the workplace.

We will mobilize, and we will show the government the collective strength of our union.

Together, we will push forward for a fair deal at the bargaining table that recognizes the value of your work and the changing nature of our post-pandemic workplaces.

We'll also continue to fight for the issues you told us mattered most this election — a just pandemic recovery, improving our healthcare system, universal child care, public services and the climate emergency.



Photo: MIV Photography

We know this work cannot be achieved without making real progress towards reconciliation with Indigenous people, addressing racism in our workplaces, and improving gender equity initiatives across Canada.

There is so much work to be done — and it will not be easy.

During the pandemic, we, and millions of other Canadians, saw the importance of strong and effective public services that can quickly respond to the crisis.

We will continue to fight any attempts to privatize or cut the public services that will be key to our recovery.

Prime Minister Trudeau was given another chance to build a better future for all Canadians. Our union — over 215,000 members strong — will hold his government to account at the bargaining table, in the workplace and in our communities.

*In solidarity,*

*Chris Aylward, National President*

## PSAC webinars on anti-racism now available!

Indigenous, Black, and racialized communities around the world are leading movements to address longstanding systemic racism in our workplaces, our schools, policing, healthcare, and our unions.

We all have a role to play in identifying and challenging racism when we encounter it in our daily lives. We encourage you to learn more about how you can take action with our anti-racism educational tools including webinars, podcasts and much more.

Visit our Anti-Racism Resources page at [psacunion.ca/anti-racism-resources](https://psacunion.ca/anti-racism-resources) to learn more



## LOOKING BACK

# The long road to political activism

In the summer of 1984, four PSAC members fought for the right to be politically active as federal public service workers, paving the way for the stronger, more engaged unions we have today.

It was the dog days of summer, and the Liberals had just called a federal election, hoping to capitalize on their lead in the polls. But when four PSAC members wanted to help their local candidate's election campaign in Ottawa Centre, they quickly found out they were breaking the law — and launched a seven-year struggle to win political rights.

Under the *Public Service Employment Act*, government workers were barred from openly participating in partisan politics. This included canvassing on behalf of a political party or candidate, putting up a lawn sign or wearing a campaign button. The rules even restricted government workers from asking questions at election debates and town halls.

But activists Heather Stevens, Ken Clavette, Linda Camponi and Randy Barnhart thought these rules were too restrictive and might violate their rights under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, introduced in 1982.

They filed for an injunction against the prohibitions to allow them to work on the campaign, but a federal court denied their request. Undeterred, they served the government with a charter challenge.

Two more public service workers — not PSAC members — filed a separate legal challenge at the same time.

They knew the legal battle wouldn't be easy.

Barnhart recalls that in the public service, “you write memos, they go up the line and then you hear back what happened. But this time we were stepping out of that way of dealing with issues and when I saw our names in the newspaper my jaw dropped.”

With the odds stacked against them, Clavette admits he had “little confidence” in winning. But joining the case was a matter of principle.



**For years, I was active in supporting struggles for democracy around the world, and when I learned that Canada itself barred some workers from fully participating in democracy, it seemed outrageously wrong.”**

— Ken Clavette

The media coverage the case received quickly caught the attention of PSAC National President Daryl Bean. Bean recalled that prohibitions in the *Act* effectively meant “you worked behind the scenes on campaigns and hoped you didn't get caught,” and he was eager to throw the full weight — and protection — of the union behind the members' challenge.



Randy Barnhart, Linda Camponi, Heather Stevens and Ken Clavette

Unfortunately, the federal court's decision in 1986 fell well short of the sweeping ruling members had hoped for. This led to several appeals over the following five years that eventually led to a hearing in front of the highest court.

In 1991 — just 30 years ago this year — the Supreme Court of Canada finally ruled in favour of PSAC members' right to political activism. The decision forced the government to amend the *Public Service Employment Act* and give full political rights to federal government workers with only limited restrictions aimed at ensuring neutrality within the public service.

While the victory firmly secured the right of PSAC members to get involved in election campaigns, the fight on this front is far from over. PSAC continues to push for protections in collective agreements to prevent intimidation and harassment against members involved in important political activism outside of elections and formal union activities — for example, in movements such as Black Lives Matter or in support of Indigenous struggles.

Looking back on their incredible accomplishment Camponi, who is now retired, shared a message for current PSAC members:

“You have political rights — exercise them!”

Contributor: Alroy Fonseca

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### Vaccinations in the workplace



The federal government's vaccination policy came into effect on October 29, mandating vaccinations for all employees in the core federal public service, including more than 160,000 PSAC members. As of November 15, those who don't comply will be put on leave without pay.

#### **I'm only partially vaccinated, how does the policy apply to me?**

In order to comply, partially vaccinated employees need to get their second dose within 10 weeks of October 29.

#### **I am currently on leave, how does this policy apply to me?**

You will have two weeks following your return to provide your vaccination attestation.

#### **How long can I be placed on leave without pay?**

A date for review of the policy is scheduled to take place in six months. This means that an employee could be placed on leave without pay for at least six months.

#### **What happens to my benefits if I am put on leave without pay?**

If a benefit plan member goes on authorized leave without pay, they may retain their employer-paid coverage for the first three months, meaning the employer continues to pay the employer share. In the event an employee remains on authorized leave without pay for more than three months, they are responsible for both the employee and employer share of contributions.

#### **Will PSAC represent me if I choose not to be vaccinated?**

If you choose not to get vaccinated, PSAC will look at your case and — if your human rights or collective agreement rights are being violated — PSAC will support you. However, there is a strong possibility that the government's policy will withstand legal challenges, so the best and safest thing to do is to get vaccinated.

Visit [psacunion.ca](https://psacunion.ca) for the latest updates on COVID-19 and our FAQ for members working in sectors outside the federal government.

# Treasury Board bargaining: An opportunity for change

**A**s bargaining heats up this winter for 120,000 federal public service workers, it can be easy to forget why we should pay attention to this round of negotiations. The pandemic and a snap federal election have taken a heavy toll on everyone, and many people are feeling burnt out.

But the past few months have also underscored the importance of a strong union and collective agreements that protect our working lives, improve our workplaces, and help build our labour movement.

This is our chance to build on the lessons we've learned during the pandemic. COVID-19 changed the way we work and brought social inequalities to the surface. So, we need to negotiate remote working conditions that make sense and fight for the right to disconnect after work. We have to protect the public services that helped get Canadians through the crisis and address systemic racism in our workplaces.

At the heart of that process are the PSAC bargaining teams fighting for change.

Samantha Basha, a first-time Programs and Administration (PA) bargaining team member

from St. John's, Newfoundland, knows how important it is to reach out to as many members as she can to hear their concerns. As an openly queer woman, she understands that members don't all share the same experiences.

"Sometimes I might not think about certain issues because they're not applicable to my work," Basha explained. "But when I see how important they are to other members, it makes them worth fighting for."

Kristina MacLean was drawn to join the Operational Services (SV) bargaining team because she wanted to address systemic racism in her workplace.

"Having experienced discrimination, I learned that the protections I often sought were provided for in my collective agreement

— it's our first line of defence," explained MacLean. "Ensuring that members from equity-seeking groups are engaged in every part of the bargaining process is key to negotiating a strong contract."

During this round, PSAC will also push the government to ramp up education for public service workers on Indigenous history and rights, and the responsibility of settlers to advance reconciliation, in line with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Call to Action #57.

Together, we can negotiate collective agreements that build a stronger, more inclusive public service that can adapt to the needs of our members and improve our workplaces.

But our union is only as strong as our membership. Over the next few months, we encourage you to learn about the issues at stake, talk about bargaining with your coworkers and support our bargaining teams — loud and proud — when they need us.

That's the only way we'll make a real difference in our workplaces.

*Contributors: Alroy Fonseca and Jeffrey Vallis*

## Common issues: what you need to know

This past June, we kicked off a new round of bargaining covering over 120,000 members in the Programs and Administrative Services (PA), Technical Services (TC), Operational Services (SV), and Education and Library Science (EB) bargaining groups. While each group negotiates specific improvements to their respective collective agreements, the common issues bargaining team negotiates improvements to issues that affect all four groups.

### Here are the key common issues bargaining priorities for this round of negotiations:

#### Remote work

Make sure that remote work is free from remote surveillance and unreasonable performance expectations. Ensure the employer covers work-from-home expenses and addresses concerns around accommodations, ergonomics and health and safety.



#### Technological changes

Guarantee that our union is consulted on new and emerging technological changes in the public service and address any negative impacts they could have on our members.



# The pandemic changed our workplaces — now unions are evolving too

Gone are the watercoolers and break rooms, in come the group chats and park hangouts

Everything changed almost overnight in March 2020, upending our lives as we knew them. Over a year has passed. And while toilet paper is back in stock, it's clear that the workplace has changed considerably. It might not go back to the way it was ever again. In fact, it's clear many workers would prefer that.

Labour unions also need to adjust how we organize and engage with you — union members — and workers who may be looking to join a union for better working conditions. The guiding principle for any good organizer has to be “meet people where they're at.” While PSAC worked hard to reach members online before the pandemic, it has far and away become the most effective way to reach members.

Here are a few of the ways we'll be adapting to reach you — whether that's in the workplace or your home office.

## Digital engagement

We've shifted to sending more emails to members and boosted our social media presence on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.

We are expanding to new platforms to get in touch with you and creating new and more dynamic content. We're also building our staff dedicated to member engagement so that we can serve you better and get back to you faster.

We'll continue to improve our digital communications so that it can be a truly two-way dialogue. We're creating more ways for you to connect with us so that you can play a bigger role in our union and the decisions we make. It means embracing new tools like texting and messaging to connect with you and improved digital-first video content. And of course, it means we're going to continue to improve and customize our websites to serve you better.

## How can we reach you?

There are some things that you can and should do, though, to help strengthen our collective voice. The easiest is to **make sure that PSAC can contact you**. Log into the PSAC members' portal ([psacunion.ca/user](https://psacunion.ca/user)) and make sure you have a personal email on file (that's an email address not managed by your employer). Update your phone number and home address if it changes. This can go a long way to making sure you hear from your union and are staying informed. You can also sign up for the weekly email newsletter directly on the [psacunion.ca](https://psacunion.ca) home page.

## Communicate safely with colleagues

Just as important: **reach out to each other**. Even better, do it in a space not controlled by your employer. If you are using Slack or Microsoft Teams at work, be aware of what messages managers can read (spoiler: all of them!) and set up a separate space for you and your coworkers to discuss workplace issues. It can be a different Slack or Teams channel, but WhatsApp, Signal or even a Facebook group can go a long way.

## Face-to-face solidarity

As the world reopens, many of us will be heading back to the office more. For those of us already going into the workplace during the pandemic, we'll be seeing and working with more people in-person. It's important that we continue to build strong face-to-face solidarity. Come out to local meetings, area councils and as always reach out to coworkers and discuss issues you're facing.

No matter where you are working — at home, at an office or the myriad of other workplaces that PSAC members can be found — your union is here for you.

Contributor: Dave Scrivener

## Fair wages



Maintain our hard-fought gains and secure wage increases that reflect the rising cost of living, as well as our members' hard work and dedication.

## Contracting out



Tackle the alarming increase in contracting out of government work, including temporary staffing agencies and privatization of public services.

## Classification and gender pay gaps

Renew the outdated classification system, close the gender pay gap, and move towards a gender-neutral classification system that accurately measures the work members do and fully complies with pay equity laws in Canada.



## Systemic racism in the workplace

Address the systemic racism experienced by Indigenous, Black, Asian, and other racialized communities and ensure all workplaces not only reject racism but actively work to dismantle the structures that sustain it.



## Work-life balance

Negotiate flexible work options that allow members to shape their work day around their personal and family responsibilities. That includes securing the right to disconnect outside of working hours and expanding leave provisions.



## Job security

Oppose all forms of precarious employment, ensure members have timely access to indeterminate employment and install a fairer Work Force Adjustment process.



Contributor: Jonathan Choquette

# A culture of harassment at National Defence

One member's fight to protect her fellow workers and organize survivors to action



**Warning** – descriptions of sexual and racial harassment may be triggering for some readers

For years, Kristina MacLean experienced sexual and racial harassment at work. She tried to brush it off, was told to accept it and move on.

As a racialized woman — MacLean is of mixed South Asian descent — working as a naval dock worker in B.C., she was constantly subjected to harassment by her colleagues and even the tugboat captain who was supervising her.

She endured the discrimination for years until she decided to break her silence in 2011. Kristina turned to her union for support and filed numerous grievances and complaints.



The military mindset is perfection. No one misses a step. Managers are afraid to acknowledge anything out of line because they fear not getting promoted. They make problems go away. They tried to make me go away.”

– Kristina MacLean

Eventually, MacLean received a settlement for her ordeal, but she faced further retribution and delegitimization at work.

Now, MacLean is firmly focused on the future — towards making National Defence a better and safer place to work for women and for Black, racialized and Indigenous workers. She has watched managers get promoted who knew about the harassment and did nothing to fix the culture, and she wants to see that change.

She wants to see a shift away from ignoring problems and toward solving them. “What if promotions go to people who roll up their sleeves, acknowledge things need to change, and set about to do the challenging work to change them?”

Kristina likens the change that she would like to see to a cup of tea. “The department needs to embrace Therapy, Education, and Accountability (T-E-A).”

Although all public service workers have benefit plans that include access to mental health care, when Kristina requested therapy, she faced procedural struggles, repeated stigmatization, and questioning.

Kristina also wants to see more mandatory anti-oppression and anti-harassment training that is led by survivors across the department.

June Winger, national president for the Union of National Defence Employees, says the toxic workplace culture at National Defence is rampant and needs to be torn down and rebuilt from the ground up.



It's a crisis of leadership — of accountability. Only the leaders can stop this.”

– June Winger, UNDE national president

Kristina's story is not the first. It has similarities to retired UNDE/GSU member Bonnie Robichaud's landmark Supreme Court victory in 1987. Robichaud fought back against sexual harassment in her DND

workplace, took her case to the highest court in the land and won, setting a national precedent that all employers are responsible for ensuring their workplaces are safe and free from harassment.



It's been a long time for consciousness to catch up with the struggle. I just kept showing up. They finally figured out that I wasn't going away and wasn't crumbling. They called me a problem. They might call Kristina a problem, but she's not. She's a solution.”

– Bonnie Robichaud

PSAC and UNDE will have a big role to play in the sweeping investigation into sexual misconduct and workplace harassment in Canada's military recently launched by the federal government. From Bonnie's successful fight in the eighties, to Kristina's work today for the members of the future, Winger said her union and their members will continue to be united against harassment of all forms in their workplace.

“Our 20,000 members proudly provide services to the Canadian Armed Forces, and we expect to be heard and respected in return,” she said. “We will take an active role in the review that is currently taking place and we will fight for the needs of our members.”

Going forward, MacLean hopes to mobilize survivors who have come forward to be part of the solution.



A group of survivors — an advisory panel, a 'Survivor-Ship' — will know where the holes are in the ship, why it is sinking, and will know what needs to be done so that it floats again.”

Contributor: Michele Girash

# 25 years of successful union organizing on university campuses



## For over two decades, PSAC has been the union of choice for university sector workers.

Universities have relied heavily on the work of teaching assistants, research assistants, postdoctoral fellows and many other short-term contract workers to support academic programs for years. This led to chronically low wages and few, if any, benefits for many workers in the sector. But successful organizing drives in the sector has started to dramatically improve the working conditions of post-secondary workers.

“Over 30,000 workers in Canada’s university sector have chosen to join PSAC, making our union one of the strongest in the academic sector,” said Alex Silas, national executive vice-president for the National Capital Region.

PSAC’s first successful organizing drive in the academic sector saw teaching assistants at Western University join the union in 1996. Since then, PSAC has organized workers from more than 25 universities across the country.

“I never thought of myself as a worker,” said Carolyn Whipp, a Wilfred Laurier University graduate who supported PSAC’s organizing drive while serving as a teaching assistant. “But I am now starting to see

how campaigns to unionize can bring people together around shared concerns to assert their rights and take back collective power.”

PSAC’s academic sector members have shown their collective power through major gains at the bargaining table. In addition to negotiating better wages, benefits and job security, major victories have included:

- Child care benefits of \$2,000/child annually at Queen’s University.
- Salary top-ups to 100 per cent for 26 weeks of parental leave at Dalhousie University.
- Commitments to advancing equity at Memorial University, UOIT, University of Saskatchewan, Carleton University, and Université Laval.

PSAC remains committed to organizing the university sector to improve working conditions for employees. At the 2018 Triennial National Convention, members voted overwhelmingly in favour of a campaign to fight the rise in precarious work and reaffirmed the union’s pledge to continue organizing in the academic sector.

“Stay tuned,” said Silas. “We look forward to welcoming many new academic sector workers into our union in the coming years.”

*Contributors: Loren Crawford and Adrian Dumitru*

## Lethbridge University graduate students join PSAC

In 2016, Alberta’s NDP government amended the *Post-Secondary Learning Act* to allow academic workers to unionize. It was an important year for union activists in the post-secondary education sector, and a moment that changed everything for the University of Lethbridge Graduate Students’ Association (ULGSA).

Following the change, teaching assistants and research assistants could officially be represented at the bargaining table by their students’ association. Jackson Ham, a PhD student in neuroscience and now chair of the ULGSA Labour Relations Committee remembers the organization’s first steps into the labour movement.

“It has been a big learning curve, but I am passionate about workers’ rights and glad I was involved early on,” said Ham.

### Overcoming challenges

With so much turnover in their membership, little experience in bargaining, and workers trying to juggle union representation and studies at the same time, the new union executive quickly had their plates full.

While post-secondary workers are critical for the social and economic health of our country, they often cope with precarious job contracts, difficult conditions and low wages.

“The best way to overcome these challenges was to join a strong national union to support us and make our movement as strong as possible,” said Ham.

The search began for a service agreement with a national union. PSAC stood out because of the significant presence of the union in the post-secondary sector.

With over 30,000 members working at 25 post-secondary institutions across Canada and strong stances on education issues, it was the perfect fit.

### Finding their voice with PSAC

Joining PSAC quickly propelled their growth.

The ULGSA is now bargaining their first collective agreement. PSAC is fighting alongside them for better health and safety rights, fair wages, and stronger job security.

“

Working with PSAC helps us do so much more. We feel supported. The infrastructure and support on important issues empowers our members, all while educating them on their rights. It changes everything.”

– Jackson Ham

With his union working with them every step of the way, Ham is hopeful for the future.

“We’re not just improving the collective agreement for us, but also for our future members,” said Ham. “With PSAC, we’ll achieve this so much faster than on our own.”

*Contributor: Rosane Doré Lefebvre*

2020-2021

## A survey of the federal public service

PSAC is fighting to make the public service a better place to work — through bargaining, consultation, grievances, legal action, and workplace campaigns. Lots of things have changed in the last two years that have impacted our members' jobs.

Here is what you had to say about some of the issues you are facing at work:



**46%**

working at their regular workplace felt like they were putting their health and safety at risk.<sup>1</sup>

**53,712**

said they were affected by Phoenix.<sup>1</sup>



**134,000**

federal public service employees said they are working remotely during the pandemic.<sup>1</sup>



**3 out of 10**

don't believe senior management take adequate steps to support mental health.<sup>1</sup>

**71%**

of respondents say the workload in their section has increased in the last three years.<sup>2</sup>



**1/3**

of the respondents said their career progress in the federal public service has been adversely affected by discrimination.<sup>2</sup>



<sup>1</sup> Public Service Employee Survey, 2020

<sup>2</sup> Public Service Alliance of Canada membership survey, 2021