

President's Report

Bas-Saint-Laurent/Gaspésie/Îles-de-la-Madeleine/Côte-Nord

Region 8

April 2014 to February 2017

The past three years have kept me busy, with mobilization and political action in particular. The highlights are as follows:

- Political action, **19th of every month** mobilization campaign;
- **Defeat** of the Conservatives;
- **Election** of a majority **Liberal** government;
- **Problems** with the new **Phoenix** pay system;
- **Tentative agreements** towards a new collective agreement.

2014

19th OF EVERY MONTH CAMPAIGN

At the beginning of the year PSAC adopted a political action plan designed to get rid of the Conservatives. Every Area Council was to put concrete actions in place to achieve such goals as membership engagement and mobilization, public awareness and communication with the media. The action plan really took off in Quebec with the **19th of every month** initiative. The campaign got off to a bit of a slow start but picked up over the course of the year when PIPSC, the FTQ and other unions came on board. In addition to taking part in our monthly outings to Institut Maurice-Lamontagne (IML), I took advantage of my time in Sherbrooke in November to denounce the working conditions of Statistics Canada's SSO (Statistical Survey Operations) staff.

CONSERVATIVE CUTS

Although most of the cuts announced by the Conservatives took place between 2011 and 2013, the impacts continued to be felt in 2014 in the form of program reviews and cancellations and the redeployment of staff to other regions.

I had to deal with the media on two issues in particular: the replacement of a research ship and the closing of the IML library.

After MP Jean-François Fortin spoke in the House, I had to comment on Radio-Canada and LCN about the decision by the Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) to send the ship intended for IML to Newfoundland. That incident proved to be a thorn in the government's side and it gave me an opportunity to criticize the Conservatives' policies.

In mid-October, DFO announced that the IML library would be closing permanently, more than two years after the initial announcement. A number of political, union and community stakeholders intervened to keep it open. We received national coverage, and the issue even made the headlines in *Le Monde* in France.

Although our political action did not always yield the desired results, it gave us a chance to talk about our issues and to denounce the negative policies of the Conservatives.

We continued to have good media coverage for the region, for Service Canada in Sept-Îles, Parks Canada in the Gaspé and Fisheries and Oceans in Mont-Joli. From the time the cuts were first announced, we kept our focus on the economic implications associated with the loss of good jobs in the region and the decrease in public services.

I closed out the year by participating in the huge demonstration in Quebec City on November 29. A number of CR-08 members also joined us. The high turnout made for an impressive demonstration and it gave us a chance to explain to those marching why PSAC was there as well.

2015

19th OF EVERY MONTH

The 19th of every month campaign continued in 2015, culminating a few days before the election. PSAC-Quebec even targeted a few “winnable” ridings in the Montreal and Québec City areas for sustained political action.

Through this campaign we were able to reach out to our members and make them aware of the consequences of the Conservatives’ policies, their anti-union legislation (C377, C525) and the dangers of doing nothing. PSAC adopted a variety of tools for this purpose, including the signing of solidarity cards, 19th of every month flyers, telephone town halls and fact sheets such as *10 things the union has done for you* and *10 reasons to defend collective bargaining rights*.

A number of CR-08 locals, both large and small, came up with different ways of getting their members involved in the campaign. I would like to thank the Local Executives and the members who fought so hard on this long but ultimately successful campaign.

In September we received good newspaper coverage on the job losses in the Gaspé as a result of the Harper government’s cuts. Patrick Leblanc provided the available figures, but the journalists went directly to the Treasury Board. This opened some people’s eyes: it is difficult to deny information when it comes directly from the government.

TRAINING

Through PSAC I was able to take a series of training sessions on mobilization, including Leadership I and II and sessions on saving the Rand Formula and C4 (fighting for our lives). A workshop on media led by Martine B. Côté helped us respond to the Conservatives through letters to the editor. A number of articles written by union representatives appeared in newspapers. I also took the training on PSAC’s internal review committee so that I would be able to conduct investigations with members, as set out in PSAC’s Constitution.

ELECTION OF LIBERAL GOVERNMENT

It would not be immodest to say that our political action campaigns such as the 19th of every month initiative and other union and community organization campaigns helped bring a majority Liberal government to power. The day after the election I could already see tremendous relief and an improvement in employee morale.

Throughout the campaign Justin Trudeau promised to negotiate with the unions in good faith and improve relationships with public servants. The Liberals also announced a number of investment initiatives, some of them related to science. This was quite a change of attitude from the Harper years.

REGIONAL TOUR

In November I visited the Port-Cartier and Sept-Îles locals with Magali Picard and Patrick Leblanc to talk about the election results, the ongoing negotiations and economic issues on the Côte-Nord. The president of the FTQ Area Council for Côte-Nord also explained to us that, after an economic boom, Côte-Nord was experiencing hard times with the downturn caused by falling natural resource prices.

JLP FACILITATOR

I was asked to become a facilitator for the Joint Learning Program (JLP). Following a five-day training course I committed to facilitate five workshops over the next two years.

2016

NEGOTIATIONS WITH TREASURY BOARD (TB)

Despite the election of the Liberals, negotiations have proven more difficult than anticipated. In PSAC's opinion, we went back to the bargaining tables too quickly. The same players – all of them appointed by the Conservatives – were there, including chief negotiator Carl Trottier. Since the mandate of the TB teams had not changed, taking away our sick leave was the order of the day. Our political action with MPs in the regions revealed that the Liberals were not aware of our issues and did not understand the matter of sick leave.

Members were asked to come out again to defend their sick leave. A number of them said they were prepared to let go of this issue after the Conservatives' disinformation campaign and we had to provide detailed explanations of the consequences of losing this leave.

It was not until December that TB finally gave up on sick leave for this round of negotiations. The PA table had a tentative agreement, which we hope will make bargaining with the other tables easier. The most significant gain relates to sick leave: no changes will be made.

PSAC came to an agreement with TB to establish a working group whose mandate is spelled out in the tentative agreement as follows: "to improve employee wellness and reintegration into the workplace of employees who have been on sick leave."

PHOENIX

This new, “ultra-modern” automated pay processing system for federal public servants was supposed to replace a system described as obsolete. Phoenix began exhibiting serious failures from the beginning of its implementation, leaving thousands of employees with serious pay problems. Some received thousands of dollars in overpayments, while others went without being paid for periods of up to several weeks, not to mention the employees who did not receive their pensions after they retired.

Although the government took measures to resolve the most urgent cases, new cases continued to come to light throughout the year.

JLP WORKSHOPS

Since my training in November 2015, I have given a dozen workshops on mental health in the workplace and harassment-free workplaces. These workshops help us promote awareness among management and employees of the issues encountered in the workplace. Mental health needs have exploded over the past three years and these workshops are in great demand.

2017

QUEBEC COUNCIL

I attended the majority of Quebec Council meetings over the past three years. It is truly gratifying to work with a group of activists of all ages. I would also like to take the opportunity to recall that Quebec took the lead on the 19th of every month initiative under the direction of Magali and her team.

I also continued my involvement with the occupational health and safety (OHS) committee for PSAC-Quebec through my contribution to the Info-Flash newsletter and the organization of regional OHS conferences.

CHALLENGES

The future of our work remains a serious challenge. With a number of long-standing activists retiring, we need to find a way to engage young workers and older people in the union movement. The defeat of the Conservatives and the forthcoming signing of new agreements with TB notwithstanding, we need to maintain a profile with our members. The 19th day of every month campaign provided an opportunity to reconnect and to be more visible with our base. Our union as we knew it came very close to disappearing under the Conservatives. We need to learn the lessons from this experience.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In closing, I would like to thank my colleagues on the Area Council Executive for their support throughout the year: Marc Robidoux (1st VP), Christine Henry (Treasurer), Isabelle Charest (Secretary), Jenny Pelletier (VP Education) and Sonia Gagné (VP OHS). I would also like to acknowledge our members’ participation at our regional meetings. We still need to find people willing to serve as representatives for women, equity groups and young workers. I would also like to thank our representatives of the past three years: Jennifer Braga, Jean-Julien Mercier, Normand Pelletier, Nathalie Rainville, Jean-Sébastien Schetagne, Maude Séguin-Tremblay.

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