PSAC · Quebec

Public Service Alliance of Canada

REPORT OF THE REGIONAL EXECUTIVE VICE-PRESIDENT

10TH TRIENNIAL CONVENTION

MOVING FORWARD TOGETHER!

June 17-20, 2021

VIRTUAL EDITION

Dear Sisters and Brothers:

This report describes my activities since my election in June 2018 to the position of Regional Executive Vice-President of PSAC-Quebec.

The activities are set out under three headings:

- ✓ Regionalization
- ✓ Political and social action
- ✓ Other activities

As you know, my term of office has been dominated by a crisis without precedent in the trade union movement. In the spring of 2020, COVID-19 arrived, disrupting our activities both here and elsewhere. At the time, public service strike vote mobilization was in full swing and we had generated sensational momentum among the Quebec membership.

But the pandemic has also demonstrated our commitment to assisting and supporting our members in both public service sectors and directly chartered locals as we negotiate this extraordinary situation. Our response to the questions that flooded in during the first few months of the crisis was prompt and efficient. We also helped to develop COVID-19 FAQs for our university sector locals, which encountered several unique situations, including those related to residences and international students.

My report also includes numerous non-pandemic-related structural, political and mobilization activities, as you can see below.

Regionalization

Quebec Council
Since my election, PSAC-Quebec's Council (QC) has met three or four times a year. I have chaired every meeting. The Council dealt mainly with regional issues, but it also coordinated national actions like the "We Are All Affected" campaign in support of the public service, and the universal childcare campaign.

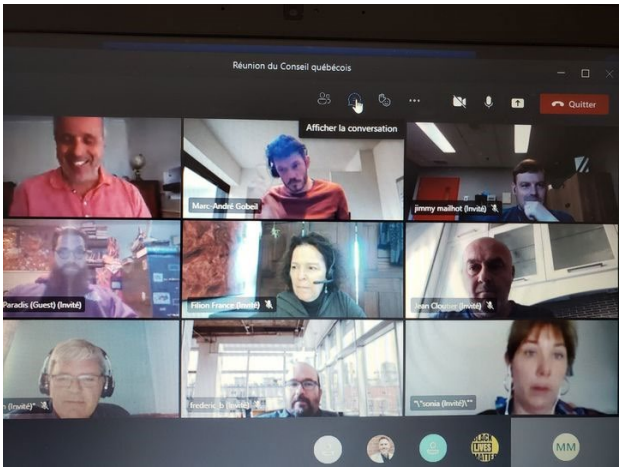
In addition, the QC provides follow-up on union education, occupational health and safety, regional political action and financial matters. New members joined the Council after elections in some area councils. Council members continue to focus on increasing mobilization through education and political action.

Very early in my term of office, I created a temporary mobilization committee to take on the many challenges that were cropping up: public sector negotiations, the federal election and Phoenix. The committee's tasks included refreshing the PSAC-Quebec logo. The committee received training in teamwork and the members resolved to maximize group collaboration.

I am proud of helping to transfer our accounting to the QuickBooks program. It was a lengthy process that included training sessions for the Finance Committee and for me. To ensure a successful transition, we also hired an accounting firm.

It was another priority for me to revitalize the Young Workers Committee and increase its representation in the Quebec regions. Younger members have been challenging to engage in recent years, but some young elected officers are eager to work with me to reverse this trend. We are creating a more dependable and cohesive network within our regional organization.

We have also re-established our three-day meetings, although we all had to get used to the virtual format, as you can see from the thumbnails below!



National Officers' meetings
Since October 2018, the DCLs have been taking part in the twice-yearly National Officers' meetings. The meetings are unique opportunities to share information, discuss experiences and enjoy one another's company. They are also intended as a networking springboard for our components and DCLs. The November 2019 meeting was attended by some 70 participants and showcased our excellent spirit of regional cooperation.

These initiatives need to continue.

PSAC-Quebec's first Recognition Awards gala took place at the meeting, to thank the membership as a whole and honour those who made a significant contribution to their area of the union.

After several weeks, I set up a webinar format to streamline interaction and diversify content. These sessions attract on average more than 40 participants.

Cooperation between PSAC-Quebec and the various components and DCLs has been excellent because of our shared desire to follow up promptly with members.

The fall of 2020 was mainly devoted to our information webinars for the ratification votes. I took part in all of the more than 20 webinars. Another topic that generated much discussion was a large-scale project to develop a new strategic plan for the Quebec Council, one that considers a number of new realities for local unionism.

Annual general meetings (AGM)
Since the start of my term of office, I have been invited by the presidents of the area councils to address the membership at their AGMs. I also attended the AGMs and information meetings of many locals.

These meetings increased my understanding of regional characteristics and the way they shape members' concerns. They are an opportunity to talk to members about our political positions and report on our progress in areas like Phoenix and collective bargaining.

Phoenix
February 2020 marked the fourth anniversary of Phoenix, which is still a major issue for us. Taking every available opportunity to underscore the failures of the payroll system, I took part directly or indirectly in Phoenix-related activities such as our surprise welcoming committees for politicians like Justin Trudeau and former minister Bill Morneau; our membership BBQs with a cause; our occupation of Liberal buildings; our pledge-signing campaign lobbying elected representatives; our regional activities to speak out against Phoenix and reiterate our claims for fairer compensation; and our meetings with MPs of all parties, especially Liberals.

I would also like to mention the closure of a dozen government buildings and a meeting with the Bloc caucus, where we got the Bloc to express public support for our claims.

Refreshment of PSAC-Quebec logo
The new PSAC-Quebec logo was launched in the spring of 2021, several weeks before our revamped website went live. We take special pride in the addition of the three waves representing the majestic St. Lawrence River.

Representation of Women and Equity Groups
Since my election, I have witnessed the involvement of our members who represent these groups on the various PSAC-Quebec and FTQ bodies. I took part in the opening of PSAC-Quebec's Racially Visible Conference in Orford and the PSAC National Women's Conference in April 2020.

Political action
The Political Action Committee focused its activities on the various provincial and federal elections which saw the Coalition Avenir Québec (CAQ) come to power on October 1, 2018 and the re-election of the Liberal party to a minority government on October 21, 2019. Public sector negotiations, Phoenix, the Québec experience program (PEQ) and Quebec's Bill 59 also prompted a number of political actions.

These activities are summarized under **Political and social action**.

Union education
The Education Committee met regularly over the past three-year cycle to ensure that course offerings met members' needs. We kept to the course calendar during the period covered by this report.

The pandemic made us completely rethink our approach to education. We acted quickly to stay connected to the membership through a host of webinars and seminars featuring specialists who could explain the situations we were facing: the pandemic and work, of course, but also other relevant topics such as anti-racism. Our virtual platform was so popular that most of our training sessions and webinars saw record participation.

In addition to the new challenges presented by the pandemic, we explored leading edge options like reaching out to members with a smartphone app and producing podcasts on union life and its challenges.

Finance
The Finance Committee met regularly during the past three-year cycle and submitted its reports to the Quebec Council. As I noted earlier, we replaced the Simply Accounting system with QuickBooks in January 2020 in accordance with a resolution adopted by the QC.

PSAC-Quebec is financially sound despite an operating budget below the increases in actual activity costs.

I am proud to say that the Finance Committee will present a clear, detailed report at Convention 2021.

Health and safety
The Health and Safety Committee held meetings despite the changes to its membership during the period covered by this report.

One activity coordinated by the Committee was the "Stop Workplace Violence" campaign.

Quebec has recently introduced Bill 59 to reform occupational health and safety, a controversial piece of legislation because it undermines our members' rights. I'll get back to this topic in the **Political and social action** section.

Communications
This term of office has included a variety of communications activities, primarily related to mobilizations and the political situation, especially the provincial and federal elections.

The following tactics were used to reach out to members at each of these important gatherings:

- ✓ We produced a video urging members to get involved in PSAC-Quebec's fall election. The video went out in a newsletter to all members and was posted on the Facebook page.

- ✓ We carried out public relations activities (interviews and news releases) and posted information on the main social media platforms, including Facebook.
- ✓ We set up focus groups in the target regions of Saguenay and Quebec City to determine how members would prefer to receive union information and survey their thoughts and expectations on the federal election campaign.
- ✓ We organized training sessions on writing opinion letters.

As the spokesperson for PSAC-Quebec, I had the privilege of conducting dozens of interviews in every region of Quebec.

With close to 6,000 subscribers, our Facebook page is a hit, as shown, for instance, by the spontaneous impetus for mobilization for our Plains of Abraham members to whom the employer would not award Phoenix-related compensation.

We notice a change in tone, too. Comments are more respectful, more restrained and show rising solidarity. The more than 100 photos of locals across the region that we posted for the Strike Alert activities on January 22 and February 27, 2020 were a big hit.

In addition, more and more members are private messaging us on Facebook. That helps us to refer them to the right sources or directly address their concerns where we can. Our members are grateful for our prompt responses.

I would encourage all members to use these platforms and to post comments that are constructive for our union.

Bargaining and labour disputes

We carry out collective bargaining on behalf of approximately 45 units, most of them directly chartered locals (DCLs). These units alone represent just over half of PSAC-Quebec's 20,000 members. Bargaining in the DCLs generally resulted in an agreement without a labour dispute, though with keen mobilization.

Since my term of office began, we have worked together to resolve disputes in units such as Montreal Airport and the National Battlefields Commission (NBC).

The mobilization staged by NBC members during their labour dispute could serve as a role model for many other units. A video following the members' experiences has been highly successful. Here are some shots of the many mobilization actions staged by the determined members at the Plains of Abraham.

Another situation concerns the staff of the Non-Public Funds (NPF) on the military bases. Our members there were working jobs similar to those in other units but earning 40% less pay. In the fall of 2020, the Valcartier CFB and Saint-Jean Garrison employees obtained significant increases and wage adjustments of 3-16%, depending on the job classification.

We recently launched a major mobilization campaign to support the members of the Fraternité des constables du contrôle routier du Québec (Quebec brotherhood of traffic control officers), whose key demand is salary relativity. Our activities included a large-scale emailing campaign targeting the SAAQ leadership and the relevant MNAs.

Organizing

We worked with MUNACA to launch an organizing drive for McGill University's non-academic employees in the summer and fall of 2018. A petition for certification was filed on October 1 in order to unionize 600 new employees and bring them into the MUNACA bargaining unit. In so doing, PSAC-Quebec and MUNACA resolved a question of interpretation concerning restrictions on certification that dated back to 1994.

We made inroads into the Quebec public service with our welcoming of the Fraternité des constables du contrôle routier du Québec (FCCRQ) (Quebec brotherhood of traffic control officers) in June 2019. At a general meeting, the members voted in favour of a service agreement with PSAC-Quebec. The FCCRQ represents some 300 peace officers who

enforce the statutes and regulations governing the transportation of goods and passengers by road within Quebec.

PSAC-Quebec continues to serve as a benchmark for employees in the academic and research sectors. We filed a petition for certification in June 2019 to represent the research employees and postdoctoral fellows at the École de technologie supérieure, a group of approximately 100 employees.

We kicked off a union drive among the members of the technicians and office employees bargaining unit at the Syndicat de la fonction publique et parapublique du Québec (SFPQ). SFPQ is an independent union that has no affiliation with any central labour organization. Some SFPQ members pursued PSAC-Quebec, saying they wanted to join a real union. SFPQ has a reputation as an employer-biased union. So far, its members have been very receptive to the range of services PSAC-Quebec can offer. One open period has just ended and another will take place in 2021.

In the spring of 2021, PSAC-Quebec also welcomed a new group, obtaining certification for the Community Housing Transformation Centre.

Legal matters

MUNACA and the Section 39 (*Labour Code*) Cases

In 2018, we continued with the hearings into the host of cases brought under s. 39 of the *Labour Code* concerning exclusions from MUNACA certification, and expending significant resources on these cases. Revised certification for the MUNACA unit was obtained in August 2019, resolving many of the cases brought under s. 39 of the *Labour Code* concerning the exclusion of M positions, and repatriating 572 professional positions into the unit.

Université de Montréal and the “Gilligan affair”

The “Gilligan affair” received a lot of media attention in 2018, when the Université de Montréal (UdM) pursued joint and several civil liability against SESUM and its executive officers in the amount of $50,000 and an injunction. UdM claimed that discriminatory lobbying practices damaged its reputation through the distribution of leaflets likening UdM administrators to characters from the TV show *Gilligan’s Island* while a new collective agreement was being negotiated. We had to file a motion for abuse of process and the case came before the Chief Justice. After mediation, we settled the matter with a simple letter of apology and an undertaking to use the Labour Tribunal’s mediation services to improve working conditions (trade union freedom of expression).

The case points to the very difficult and litigious relationship with UdM in 2018-2019. Complaints of retaliation for union activity (dismissal and disciplinary action) were also resolved with significant gains for the members.

Pay Equity

In the winter of 2019, we worked with Robert Lamoureux on submissions to CNESST disputing Université Laval’s position that postdoctoral fellows were excluded under the

Pay Equity Act. We are still awaiting the decision, but are currently looking at challenging the exclusions in section 8 which exclude a good number of our members from protection under the Act. On January 14, 2020, we filed a petition in Quebec Superior Court challenging the new provisions in the Act (the petition includes FTQ affiliates, CSN and CSQ).

TRAC

We are working with RavenLaw to challenge section 8 of the *Professional Syndicates Act*.

Postdoctoral Fellows – Université Laval

In January 2020, after two years of hearings, we obtained a Labour Tribunal decision confirming that the certification of SPPRUL – Université Laval never covered the University's postdoctoral fellows, so we had a clear field when we certified them in 2013. The Tribunal found that SPPRUL has no monopoly over Université Laval's research operations, and decided to update SPPRUL's certification, which had become outdated since the 1990s, to reflect the new terminology in the University's current statutes.

Political and social action

Provincial and federal elections
In 2018, a union coalition organized the "Same Old, Same Old" pre-campaign to show the similarities in approach and politics of the CAQ and QLP parties. We carried out activities in some 15 electoral divisions.

According to the survey conducted after the campaign, 51% of respondents had seen or heard about our campaign and more than 70% of those in the target ridings had heard about it. Just over 60% of respondents agreed that unions have the right to get involved in politics.

For the federal elections in October 2019, the Political Action Committee organized information and political education activities for our members, to make them aware of the need to block the Conservatives, whose previous term of office had been catastrophic for the public service sector. PSAC-Quebec succeeded in its overall goal: only two of the seven target ridings elected Conservative candidates (Montmagny and Chicoutimi).

Of the seven ridings that were initially targeted, we felt that we could still make a difference in Beauport-Limoilou, Québec and Trois-Rivières. The results were positive in these three ridings. A new and major challenge we encountered during the 2019 election was ensuring compliance with the limits on national election expenses set out in the *Election Act*. Here is a summary of the election-related actions we carried out.

- ✓ 27 posts to our Facebook page
- ✓ A rally in Trois-Rivières where we disrupted the Conservative candidate's campaign kick-off speech
- ✓ 22 opinion letters written by members published in daily newspapers
- ✓ A townhall with analyses provided by a political scientist (over 1,650 participants)
- ✓ An election debate in Trois-Rivières
- ✓ A rally in Drummondville
- ✓ Door-knocking in the Beauport-Limoilou and Québec electoral divisions

Although the Liberals were re-elected, political action must remain central to our mandate.

Meetings with MPs and politicians
During our many mobilizations in my term of office, I met with countless MPs and MNAs of all parties. Let me highlight some of those meetings.

As part of the Phoenix rallies, I met with Justin Trudeau to make him aware of our members' ordeals and discuss the importance of offering compensation.

I also had an unusual opportunity to meet with the entire Bloc québécois caucus in February 2020. At the meeting, I outlined the damage wreaked by the Phoenix fiasco on our members.

I also took the lead on the issue of official languages in the public service, noting that our members reported numerous shortcomings.

For instance, many members in Quebec are experiencing increasing difficulty working in French and obtaining work documents in their own language, a problem that has been exacerbated by the pandemic.

I gave several media interviews on the subject, a fact that did not go unnoticed. In February 2021, I was invited to appear before the House of Commons' Standing Committee on Official Languages, where I presented the problem to the full committee, supported by actual examples.

Another important and relevant issue is the reform of the Québec experience program (PEQ), which has a significantly adverse effect on our members in universities. The changes to PEQ as presented by the Legault government make it harder for foreign students to obtain a long-term job after their studies in Quebec. I invited Nadine Girault, the minister responsible, to meet with our members and listen to their concerns in an informal webinar, but she turned down our invitation. We did, however, endorse a number of letters criticizing the PEQ reform that were sent to politicians by lobby groups.

In the fall of 2020, the Fonds de recherche du Québec (FRQ) began consultations on "reimagining university together." PSAC-Quebec took the opportunity to submit its own brief setting out the demands and proposals of our university sector members. We worked

with the Conseil québécois des syndicats universitaires (CQSU) to produce an extensive 19-page brief which gained the attention of scientists involved in the study, who asked the FRQ for our permission to consult it. The brief covers the following topics.

- ✓ the health and safety of the university population
- ✓ the importance of data
- ✓ the democratization and accessibility of knowledge
- ✓ university funding: competition and mentoring
- ✓ the commodification of education
- ✓ heeding knowledge mobilization.

And now another piece of legislation is fomenting upheaval in Quebec: Bill 59, *An Act to modernize the occupational health and safety regime*. These reforms had been eagerly awaited because the current legislation is 40 years old. Unfortunately, however, the Bill turns back the clock on workers' health and safety, for example, from the perspective of prevention. We therefore participated in inter-union mobilization, speaking out against the gutting of existing protections and demanding that the government get it right. A number of members paid their MNA's office an impromptu visit, as did I!

I also lent my support to the battles being waged by affiliated unions, such as the lockout of members of the United Steelworkers, an FTQ affiliate. We supported the ABI workers in their lockout from January 2018 to July 2019.

Other activities

PSAC
As a member of AEC and NBoD, I took part in meetings and defended the interests of all members of the Quebec region.

Conferences
I took part in the Occupational Health and Safety Conference and the openings of a number of events including the Women's Conference, the Equity Conference and the DCL and university sector roundtables.

FTQ Board, General Council, Convention and Solidarity Fund
Approximately 30 PSAC-Quebec members attended the most recent FTQ Convention, which took place in Quebec City from November 25-28, 2019. Representatives to the FTQ General Council were elected at the PSAC-Quebec caucus. We hold eight seats on the General Council. I also attended the monthly meetings of the FTQ Board and the Solidarity Fund. I am delighted to report that Fedoua Hritel, one of our members, has been elected to the FTQ Board as alternate vice-president for the status of women. A number of other PSAC-Quebec members are also serving on various FTQ committees.

Moving forward together!
Respectfully submitted,

Yvon Barrière