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Congress in Ottawa

Canadian affiliates hosted PSI's 27th World Congress in Ottawa, Canada earlier this month. Congress is PSI's supreme body that meets every 5 years. 1250 participants speaking 10 interpreted languages enthusiastically took part in the debates, the elections, the side meetings and the entertainment at the Ottawa Congress Centre. Keynote speakers included Juan Somavia, the ILO Director General speaking by video, Dr Stephen Lewis, UN special advisor on AIDS in Africa, Françoise David, former President Quebec Women's Federation, Guy Ryder, General Secretary International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU), Fred van Leeuwen, General Secretary Education International, Ken Georgetti, President Canadian Labour Congress (CLC), Linda Chavez Thompson, President ORIT, Ethel Birkett-LaValley, First Nations representative and Vice-President CLC, and Odile Sallard, Director, Public Management Service OECD. Details are available on the PSI website.

Gender- equal constitution a world first

As a result of a Congress decision, PSI is the first international trade union organization to operate with a gender equal constitution. This guarantees that all positions in PSI structures, from the sub-regional level to Congress, are required to have a 50-50 gender balance. The only minor exception to this is at Congress itself where this is not feasible due to very significant over-representation of one gender within the affiliate's membership. A new Executive Board operating under the new constitution was elected by Congress in Ottawa.

Quality public services campaign

Congress has launched a 5-year global campaign for quality public services (QPS). The campaign aims to build on the growing awareness that quality public services, not de-regulation, are essential to well-functioning societies. It also links with the activities of many PSI affiliates that have given high priority to quality services in their list of strategic objectives. PSI will establish criteria that can be used to measure the quality of public services early in the campaign. The criteria will have regard to national and regional differences.

POA new sharp focus

Congress adopted a vision statement on its 2002-2007 Programme of Action (POA). A key feature is that the new POA is focused on fewer priorities. There are now four priorities, down from 18 in the previous POA. These are on public sector workers and their work, workers' rights, equity and diversity, and on union development and international solidarity. The vision statement commits PSI to increase its effectiveness by making international work more relevant at the workplace level, more inclusive, and built on principles of social justice and development. PSI will act in close consultation with affiliates and build alliances with other organisations that share common interests. PSI will adopt strategies and material that increase involvement through a more campaigning approach in reaching its objectives.

POA 1: Public sector workers and their work

This programme is aimed at developing public services to deliver universal high quality services. In so doing, this should improve social cohesion. It recognises that problems of public services are different, especially between the developed and developing world. The programme involves activities at all levels - from influencing international organisations to involving rank and file members in influencing local communities. It is closely linked with the PSI global campaign for quality public services. Specific objectives will be set along 3 themes: building public support, helping affiliates improve public services, and convincing public authorities to involve unions in decisions on public services.

POA 2: Winning workers rights

This emphasises the need to re-direct globalisation so that it embraces the rights of workers. Whilst it includes broader work on the ILO core labour standards, it centres on the rights of those who deliver public services. These workers include migrants, those delivering services that have been privatised, those living with HIV, and those in the informal sector. The International Financial Institutions (IFIs) and the World Trade Organisation are key targets at the global level, but activities are also linked to more local and sector-specific campaigns. Many governments still deny public service workers the right to organise, in contradiction to the ILO Conventions they have signed. PSI wants to see the ILO have more power to enforce Conventions agreed by governments. Affiliates can be more involved through PSI and the ICFTU in developing ways to pressure these governments to bring about real change.

POA 3: Equality, equity and diversity

This programme promotes equity and equality for all groups that are disadvantaged within PSI's sphere of influence. It especially focuses on equity for women, but also includes equity for those discriminated on racial, disability, sexuality and other grounds. It lists five key objectives. They

include gender mainstreaming for the whole organisation, as well as campaigns in defence of women's rights. The strategies link research, policy development, education, capacity building, networking and campaigning at all levels. PSI's commitment to diversity recognises the benefits from encouraging ideas and contributions from all groups in society. This is based on mutual respect, tolerance and a genuine celebration of the variety of people involved in trade union work.

POA 4: Union development and international solidarity

This is PSI's approach to capacity building with affiliates that have significant needs. It is also about the development of international solidarity links between unions in the North and the South. PSI seeks to improve affiliates' self-sufficiency. This means that affiliates should be able to chart their own directions and priorities. These programmes aim at strengthening democratic and equitable unions that can represent workers' interests. Union development activities will be closely linked to other elements of the POA to ensure relevance and that real outcomes are achieved. The more union development engages with real and immediate issues faced by affiliates, the more effective it will be in ensuring real gains in both capacity and achievement.

Finance changes

Congress approved a new approach to subscriptions for the next 5 years. There will now be a minimum fee for all affiliates. The previously separate general and development accounts will be unified, and Executive Board is authorised to make annual fee adjustments if necessary within close limits.

Ylva Thörn new President

Ylva Thörn was elected world President of PSI for the next 5 years. Ylva, who is President of Kommunal in Sweden, was elected to loud applause (and singing led by the South African delegation) by Congress delegates. Ylva replaces Bill Lucy who has been President since 1994. Bill will stay on as Vice President during the current term.

Hans Engelberts re-elected

Hans Engelberts was also re-elected unopposed as General Secretary after 20 years in the job. In accepting his re-election Hans said this will be his last term and, typically, looked forward to what is still to be achieved.

New staff

PSI has appointed Wendy Caird, former National Secretary of the CPSU in Australia and Chair of the PSI Asia-Pacific Region to an officer position in headquarters, Ferney-Voltaire. The position is for one year and will be involved in co-ordinating the Quality Public Services campaign.

Special edition Focus magazine

The PSI Focus magazine for the end of the year will be a double issue featuring articles and images from the 2002 Congress. All the main changes and decisions made by the supreme body will be included. Electronic copies of Focus will be available on the PSI website early November, and print copies should be delivered by the end of the month.

Comments

Please email comments on PSI World News to psi@world-psi.org.

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