



THE POWER OF SOLIDARITY

MUNACA Strike Demonstrates the Power of the Collective

In August of 2011, the members of the McGill University Non-Academic Certified Association (MUNACA) voted overwhelmingly in favour of giving their union the right to call a strike in the face of continued resistance on the part of the university to negotiate fair and equitable working conditions.

MUNACA had been a stand-alone association which had recently affiliated with PSAC.

The workers were seeking the same working conditions their colleagues enjoyed in other Québec universities, like Université de Montréal (UdeM) and Université du Québec à Montréal (UQAM), including protection for their pensions and benefits, and scheduling rights.

In addition, McGill non-academic employees did not have a proper wage scale. Under their employer's proposal they would have had to wait over 35 years to reach the regular salary for their position.

When the strike began on September 1, the union's main demands focused on a base salary increase for all members consistent with cost of living increases, a wage scale dictating annual salary increases for members on par with wages scales at other Québec universities, and greater protection for pensions and benefits.

They were looking for an agreement that was fair, reasonable and sustainable.

The strike was punctuated by a number of incidents, including two separate injunctions brought against the union.

The first injunction, secured September 23, was extended to January 21, 2012, by the Québec Superior Court in mid-October was against picketing a construction site on campus where the construction workers refused to cross the picket line. McGill also succeeded in obtaining an injunction restricting the numbers of strikers around entry ways. McGill secured

another injunction which restricted picketing within a certain proximity of senior administrators' homes.

Due to the lack of progress at the bargaining table, the union to expand their picketing activities off campus. At one such picket of a McGill Homecoming event at the Hilton Montréal Bonaventure Hotel, a MUNACA strike organizer was arrested by Montréal police.

The union accused McGill of using illegal scab labour after which an inspection by Québec Ministry of Labour official Thomas Hayden found 15 cases of illegal replacement work in late September.

The strike was colourful and tried the solidarity of the workers, but they fiercely stuck together.

After almost 11 months of negotiations and a full semester on strike, MUNACA members voted to ratify a five-year contract with McGill, of which the main highlight was introduction of salary scales and increases significantly more than McGill had been offering.

The return to work protocol was a sticking point between the two sides. It took two days to negotiate after the announcement that a tentative agreement had been reached.

The protocol resolved that "The parties agree to cooperate in the establishment of a healthy climate of work which is respectful of the people and the institution and work in a professional manner" and that "no disciplinary or administrative measures will be taken against an employee for any event or action that occurred during the strike."

One of the strike's "dividends" was far greater solidarity amongst students, professors and unions in following years. As well, the following round of bargaining was completed in only three months, just past the expiry date of collective agreement.

All in all, this was a very successful strike for MUNACA members and PSAC.

Museum Case Study (video)

<https://www.dropbox.com/s/69l35kz09zvp0sy/PSAC%20Final%20-%20Split.mp4?dl=0>

The Clerical and Regulatory (CR) strike of 1980

After 10 long months of futile bargaining with Treasury Board, tens of thousands of members in the CR group walked off the job on September 8, 1980, for the first time in their bargaining history. Long considered a “docile” bargaining unit, these members demonstrated true solidarity by standing strong during their two-week strike. Worksite after worksite was shut down as a result of their strength on the picket line. Their determination won them a 24.7 percent wage increase over two years, but that wasn’t all.

Solidarity amongst the strikers and support from other trade unionists kept morale high and built the involvement of this predominantly female group of PSAC members. For the first time, large numbers of women members were exerting control over the direction of the bargaining process by exercising their right to strike.

The strike increased the profile of PSAC women as strong, involved trade unionists with a solid commitment to obtaining equality and respect in the workplace. It played a major role in raising issues of concern for women, such as leave for care and nurturing of pre-school-age children, adoption leave and maternity/parental leave. It was also in 1980 that the first pay equity settlement was reached for the Library Sciences (LS) group.

There is no question that this strike prompted an increase in the number of women members actively involved in their union and focused more attention on their issues. The strike also encouraged women to develop their leadership skills and seek elected office at all levels of the union, including the position of National President. The first National Women’s Conference was held in 1985. By the 1988 PSAC Triennial Convention, Regional Women’s Committees were recognized in the union’s constitution and funded. Local organizing was strengthened. The solidarity demonstrated in the 1980 CR strike made it evident that women’s strength and resolve are an integral part of the labour movement.

The 1991 PSAC General Strike

"Some will refer to it as the 'Strike of'91"; others as the "The Great Public Service Strike." But regardless of the name, one thing is certain — this strike will be known as the first real collective stand federal public service workers ever took against their employer." (Excerpt from Alliance magazine, Winter 1991/92)

On September 6, 1991, 10,000 PSAC members were the first to walk off the job in what led to the union's biggest, national general strike and one of the largest strikes in Canada's history. The determination and conviction of the members garnered public and media support like never before and debunked the misconception that public service workers were 'overpaid and underworked'. Even right-wing, anti-labour newspapers were able to see justice in the cause. It educated the media and raised the profile of the important work PSAC members do.

According to Daryl Bean, PSAC's National President at the time of the strike:

'The federal public service will never be the same again and neither will the Public Service Alliance of Canada. Sept. 9, 1991, to Oct. 3, 1991, will long be remembered by Alliance members and indeed all Canadians as a time when the workers in the federal public service stood up for themselves, their co-workers and their families.'

While the members were legislated back to work in October, the solidarity and union strength prevailed. They had mobilized and carried out an effective national strike, building a stronger union. They achieved tougher job security provisions that were to provide critical protection in the face of the massive job cuts of the mid-1990s. They put their issues on the public agenda and gained the respect of the labour movement and other sectors of society.

'The rules of the game have been changed. For good.

The federal public service will never be the same. Ever.

And that is arguably the largest victory of all.'

(Excerpt from Alliance magazine, Winter 1991/92)