

## **PSI North America Statement of Principles and Objectives**

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The countries in North America entered the COVID-19 crisis already suffering from levels of crises:

- the crisis of years of misguided government austerity abetted by tax cuts for the wealthy and the corporate sector,
- the crisis of income and wealth inequality that resulted, and
- the crisis of systemic, ingrained racism, against Black people, Indigenous Peoples, and People of Colour, and
- the crisis we all face of a planet that is reacting to too many years of increasing pollution and greenhouse gas emissions, and
- the crisis of climate disasters becoming the norm.

We need to now respond effectively to, and then recover from, the COVID crisis, but we must do so in a way that does not just return us to the unsustainable “old normal.”

We must demand not just short-term relief, but a major pivot to a new economic model built on economic and social justice for all.

Unrestrained capitalism has proven to be the enemy of working people, the enemy of good government, and the enemy of the environment. We need to demand a people-centred recovery, and a people-centred economy.

Our countries are in the midst of the worst unemployment crisis since the Great Depression of the 1930s. Millions of jobs have disappeared, and millions of workers have exited the job market altogether.

The economic recovery must be focused on getting millions of jobless workers back to work and fully employed in decently paid, productive jobs.

The economic recovery must be led by public investment in infrastructure and in renewed and expanded public services. Only a strong public investment can lead the recovery.

The economic recovery must be gendered, inclusive, and focused on reducing inequality. It must address the precarity, poor working conditions, and wage discrimination in women-dominated sectors.

By far the greatest economic risk we face today is a weak and halting recovery, with prolonged high unemployment, weak investment and consumer demand, and the risk of a *double-dip recession*, even a depression.

**Therefore, we assert:**

**1) We need to build and rebuild our public services, reflecting our common values.**

We have never achieved an adequate, encompassing, and compassionate set of government services, reflective of our common desire to care for, and share with, each other.

Instead, under the perverse logic of tax cuts and austerity, we saw those protections and services we had built be weakened and destroyed.

In some of the world's wealthiest economies, we somehow can afford to have millionaires and billionaires with more money than many nation states. But we can't afford guaranteed health care for all in the United States, or to maintain our public system in Canada? Not even dental care for children? We can't afford sufficient mental health care? A public prescription drug plan? We can't afford a public system of child care and early childhood education?

Every study ever done has shown that poverty leads to illness and unnecessary deaths among young and old, fuels drug and alcohol abuse, creates the conditions under which crime is more rampant, and perpetuates the conditions under which poverty begets poverty.

But our system does not spend money on preventing poverty, instead it spends money putting bandages on the wounds created by poverty.

Is it because that's where others can make money, by selling us the bandages? Let us seize the moment created by the disaster of COVID to finally deal with the long-term disaster of inadequate and impoverished public services so that we can build a society that serves all the people in it.

The solution must denounce privatization for the failure that it always is, and must instead be based on using our common wealth for the common good.

**2) We can't afford austerity.**

Federal, States and Provincial governments must play their part in stimulating the economy. That requires an active economic role, including providing direct employment. To add to the unemployment rolls, or to cut government spending at

this point, would be completely contrary to what is needed, which is action to help a completely flattened economy to recover.

To ignore this basic fact is to ignore all the lessons of history. Austerity and restraint now will simply make a bad situation worse, period. There can be no responsible debate about that. A healthy economy will generate tax revenue; a weak economy will drag us all further into the hole.

Austerity is an old, tired, and failed model.

We must ensure fully funded and expanded quality public sector services in all areas.

We must ensure the provision of affordable housing for all as a basic human right.

And we must ban the privatization of public services and the sale of the commons.

### **3) We need fair taxation.**

Fair taxation is the sine qua non of any economic recovery.

Too many governments have engaged in a perverse race to the bottom, vying to see who can cut corporate and wealthy income taxes the deepest. In doing so, they have starved their revenue of badly needed resources. That is such an obvious result that many people have speculated that it was intentional, a way of justifying cuts to the public sector that could not otherwise be justified.

We have heard over and over that “we are all in this together.” If that is true, then we all need to do our share in the recovery, according to our ability. Profitable corporations and the wealthy must pay their fair share of taxes. Corporate tax cuts must be reversed. Wealth taxes must be introduced. Tax dodges and havens must be eliminated. Any tax breaks should be specifically tied to job creation—no jobs, no tax break, period.

We all know how to get enough revenue into government coffers. All we need to do is implement the tools that are available to us.

### **4) We reject the poison of racism.**

We insist that our societies not only condemn racism through words but fight racism, bigotry, and hatred through actions that will finally make a real difference in the lives of those oppressed by racism and intolerance.

We must ensure that institutional racism, sexism, and homophobia do not leave marginalized peoples out in the cold when it comes to a just recovery.

## **5) We must demand equal justice.**

In our police systems, and our prison systems, we have to root out the systemic racism that exists.

We incarcerate too many black, Latino, and Indigenous people.

Too many black and Indigenous people are killed by police. One unjust and unacceptable killing by a police officer is too many, but we are unfortunately way beyond that level. This has to stop, and the system and the people in it have to be held accountable.

We cannot achieve this by nibbling around the edges—we need to tackle the problem at its roots.

A primary point is that we need a complete halt to any further privatization of our justice or corrections systems, and a complete reversal of existing privatizations. This is no place for profit-making at the expense of justice, or decent, humane, and accountable correctional facilities.

Public safety is not just, or even mostly, about policing. It has to include every opportunity for all our kids to get a good education and to stay in school. It has to include safe, affordable housing, and intervention programs that divert people from criminal activity. It means accessible mental health services and treatment for addiction, plus programs and policies that tackle inequality.

We need to rethink our approach to public safety, transitioning away from a punitive system and investing in evidence-based approaches that address the underlying drivers of violence and crime—tackling them at their roots, before they ever have a chance to grow.

## **6) We need laws that protect employees.**

We must demand that governments make collective bargaining in the workplace a basic human right for all workers, including those in the gig economy, and expand worker health and safety protections.

Our media is awash with messages thanking front-line workers for their courage and commitment in these trying times. And they deserve every bit of those thanks.

But they also deserve more. They deserve better treatment.

More low-wage earners lost their jobs and their income from COVID measures than did other workers. Many of the low-income workers who didn't lose their jobs were among those labeled as front-line heroes. Worthy to be called heroes, not worthy of earning decent wages?

Employees who have union protection have fared better during the pandemic. They had more rights to sick leave and job protection. They had more enforceable rights to safety at work. They had better wages to start with. The laws should be reworked to not just allow unionization, but make unionization a social objective. The law should encourage unionization, make unionization easier for employees to attain, and provide public service help for workers to unionize.

We have a huge and growing precarious workforce. These workers, without full-time jobs, with no assured wages, with no chance of being paid if they miss even a day of work, with no employment rights, were the first to suffer economically when the pandemic shutdowns occurred. And they were the most vulnerable to the pressure to continue working through unsafe conditions. We need to reverse the trend towards ever-growing occupational precarity.

We need the problems of precarity to be addressed through legislation. Labour laws should be written to limit the ability of employers to use and abuse a part-time, casualized workforce, and to give those that are working in part-time or casual employment the full benefit of statutory rights including the absolute right to unionize.

## **7) We need to rebuild our health care systems.**

We must reassert that quality health care for all is a basic human right, and universal health care must be provided for all. There is no room for profit taking in health care.

For the United States that means improving its current Medicare system and extending it to all.

We entered the pandemic with health care systems that were weakened by too many years of the low-tax, austerity agenda. Our hospitals were run down and not fully staffed; we already had waiting lists for too many services, and the proper equipment was not available.

The failures of our systems were not shared equally; racialized communities were more likely to be infected by, and to die from, COVID.

During this pandemic we heard State and Provincial governments—the ones that responded with integrity—say that they based their decisions on the advice of health care professionals. Now it is time to rebuild our health care system on the same principle, based on the advice of the professionals in it: the public health care experts, all of the many professionals delivering health care, all of the front-line workers who have been so important during this crisis.

Responsible political leaders repeatedly said that they were not the ones best equipped to make the decisions about public health. Let's remember that going forward.

### **8) We need to rescue our long-term care systems.**

Residential care facilities were among the hardest-hit locations for COVID-19. Too many workers in those facilities risked their own health, and that of their families, to care for others.

Governments have allowed for-profit private ownership to take root—despite decades of evidence showing that for-profit residential care facilities have seriously underperformed that of the publicly owned and operated ones.

Now with the pandemic, the evidence has never been clearer that for-profit homes are a risk to the lives of the residents. Research has shown conclusively that for-profit long-term care homes had significantly higher death rates than non-profit and publicly owned homes.

Long-term care must be publicly administered, universally accessible, comprehensive, and not for profit.

### **9) We need to tackle inequality head on.**

The levels of income and wealth inequality in our countries are far too high and have been growing for far too long. That basic fact has been established over and over. It's time to do something about it.

Those with the lowest incomes were hit hardest by COVID, economically, and even in terms of the rates of serious illness and death arising from the virus.

We know how to fix the problem. Stronger workers' rights. Fair taxation, allowing for stronger social programs. Homes for the homeless, social programs for those that need help. Government involvement in the economy, not just as a champion for corporations, but as the representative of the people.

One important step is to put absolute limits on CEO and executive suite pay.

Income inequality kills. It causes suffering. It is curable.

### **10) We need to tackle gender inequality head on.**

Women paid a higher price during the pandemic. Women have been harder hit with COVID-related unemployment than have men. The retail and hospitality industries were hard hit, and those are areas where very many women work.

The gender pay gap compounds this inequality—not only were women losing jobs at higher rates, but they were making less money to begin with.

And this is worse for racialized women, who, again, were earning less before the crisis hit.

Single parents have been hit harder, too. The majority of single parents are women. With schools and child care and early learning centres shut down, it was very difficult for them to continue working.

A true recovery must be a recovery that addresses these fundamental inequities and—finally—resolves them.

### **11) We need to rebuild our economy on a sustainable basis.**

It is no longer rational to argue that we should continue with economic development that is damaging to our environment. No fully rational person could look at the evidence and say we need to rebuild without any regard to the environment.

If we continue to destroy our planet, the death and disruption caused by COVID will seem inconsequential in comparison.

Surely, we all know that. If we still need to marshal the arguments, it is not because we are facing a lack of facts, it must instead be that we are facing willful blindness.

We know how to build an economy that does not depend on ruining our planet. We know we need to do so. A sustainable economy would have better, safer jobs. There really are no jobs that will survive a climate catastrophe.

We are in a climate emergency. Let's act accordingly.

**Finally, let us reassert** our long-standing and immovable demand that we retain and strengthen our democracies, with governments that govern for the people and not simply for corporations, where people make the decisions, not just those with wealth, and where elections are won or lost on the basis of ideas and policies, not the amount of money spent on the campaigns.