

report

Post-secondary Education Representatives Videoconference

January 18-19, 2021

The National Union of Public and General Employees (NUPGE) is a family of 11 Component and 3 affiliate unions. Taken together, we are one of the largest unions in Canada. Most of our 390,000 members work to deliver public services of every kind to the citizens of their home provinces. We also have a large and growing number of members who work for private businesses.

The office of the National Union of Public and General Employees is situated on the traditional unceded territory of the Algonquin Anishinaabeg people and is now home to many diverse First Nations, Inuit, and Métis communities.

We recognize and acknowledge the crimes that have been committed and the harm done.

And, we dedicate ourselves, as a union, to moving forward in partnership with Indigenous Peoples in a spirit of reconciliation and striving for justice.

Larry Brown, President

Bert Blundon, Secretary-Treasurer

Post-secondary Education Representatives Videoconference January 18–19, 2021

PARTICIPANTS

BCGEU Cindy Battersby

Seth Downs

SGEU Marney Robinson

Kathy Mahussier

Debbie Zawada-Wiebe

MGEU Kimberly Lynn

OPSEU Anastasios Zafiriadis

Bernard King
Nick Mustari
Heather Petrie
Janice Hagan
Denis Martinez
Kella Loschiavo
Pearline Lung

NBU Paula Trites

Leslie Hebb

NSGEU Rick Wiseman

Tammy Zinck Darryl Warren

PEI UPSE Hans Connor

NAPE Debbie Hawes

NUPGE Larry Brown, President

Bert Blundon, Secretary-Treasurer

Len Bush, Managing Director (Office of the President)

Diane Fowles, Administrative Representative

Nadia Ibrahim, National Representative

1. Land Acknowledgment

The Chair, Nadia Ibrahim, acknowledged that the land from which she was joining the meeting, and where the NUPGE office is located, is on the traditional unceded territory of the Algonquin Anishinaabeg people.

2. Anti-harassment Statement

Ibrahim read NUPGE's Anti-harassment Statement, a copy of which was provided to participants ahead of time.

3. Welcome and Introductions

Participants were asked to introduce themselves, their Component union, and their role. Participants then had an opportunity to review the agenda.

4. Opening Remarks: National Report—Larry Brown, NUPGE President

President Brown commented on the political situation across the country and on the worsening Covid-19 situation in many provinces.

Brown spoke about HSAA's Member-to-Member Campaign currently underway in response to Bill 32 in Alberta. The campaign is having a great impact and receiving a positive response from members.

Brown commented on the move to working from home in the PSE sector. It became clear in the early days of the pandemic that many collective agreements do not have language on working from home. In many cases, there are unanswered questions about employee rights, employer obligations, and occupational health and safety coverage.

Brown noted the numerous NUPGE meetings in the coming months. He emphasized that these meetings are an opportunity both for Components and members to learn from one another and for the National Union to hear from members.

Bert Blundon, Secretary-Treasurer, provided additional opening comments. In light of recent events in the United States, Blundon encouraged us to reflect on how fragile democracy is and the role of unions in a democracy. He also underlined the importance of joint trusteeship of pension plans.

He noted the looming threat of austerity and the risk that provincial governments will target education. Lastly, he referred to the impact of distanced learning and isolation on this generation of students. He welcomed participants' comments on this point.

5. Report of the October 15, 2020, Videoconference

The Chair directed participants' attention to the <u>report of the previous Post-secondary</u> <u>Education Representatives Videoconference on October 15, 2020</u>, which was circulated

prior to the meeting. There was an opportunity for participants to ask questions or identify any errors or omissions.

6. COVID-19 Pandemic

a. Update on public health orders and guidelines, institutions' health and safety protocols, etc.

The situation varies across provinces and individual institutions, but many institutions remain in a blended learning model. In these cases, most courses are online while programs with hands-on components, such as trades and sciences, are conducted in person. In some cases, such as in parts of Nova Scotia and regional colleges in Saskatchewan, in-person classes resumed in September.

Online learning means that many staff continue to work from home. But many workers are on campuses, including maintenance workers, custodians, food service workers, library staff, lab technicians, and instructors of in-person courses.

Where in-person labs and courses are happening across the country, there are protocols and restrictions, such as lowered capacity limits and heightened sanitation. The same is true where libraries and other on-campus services are open.

Much of the same health and safety protocols reported in the fall remain in place on campuses, such as physical distancing, daily screening, sanitation, and masking requirements. It is common practice for institutions to require that staff report (or seek approval for) when they are coming to campus. Some Components reported few issues with these protocols and restrictions, but others noted that the frequent changes to health and safety protocols have created challenges and frustration for members. In BC, occupational health and safety committees were initially excluded from the pandemic risk-assessment plans.

Also, the extent to which PSE institutions report Covid-19 cases on campus varies. MGEU and OPSEU, for example, have pushed for more transparent processes.

b. Update on enrolment, student issues, etc.

Students' experiences with distanced learning vary based on a number of factors, including their home and family situation, access to equipment, and individual learning needs and preferences. Students are also missing the social aspects of campus life.

The move to online learning has exposed inequities in access to technology and equipment. Students with low incomes, and those living in rural and remote areas, face barriers to obtaining the necessary tools, such as a laptop or reliable internet.

Like staff, students are experiencing burnout and other negative mental health impacts.

There are unique challenges facing international students, such as possible language and cultural barriers, and insufficient supports. At one college in New Brunswick, there have been allegations of racism against international students, and the college is conducting a study into systemic racism, which may be expanded upon.

There was a discussion of how the different provinces and institutions have arranged for international students to quarantine upon arrival, and who is responsible for cost and any monitoring. This will be an issue to watch.

Participants observed how institutions are increasingly focused on quantity—of students, graduates, and revenues—over quality of education. Management seems to view PSE as a business. The trend of colleges and universities increasingly relying on international students, and the higher tuition they pay, is part of this pattern. Related to this is the decrease in government funding for PSE.

The state of enrolment varies between provinces and institutions. Components reported that while enrolment figures are down overall, enrolment has not suffered as much as expected. One BCGEU representative reported that there has been a noticeable decline in enrolment among Indigenous students, which is concerning.

c. Update and discussion on working conditions

Participants touched on the numerous pros and cons of working from home (WFH). For example, some workers are enjoying the increased flexibility, work-life balance, and sense of control over their work lives. Components have also seen instances of wider engagement through virtual meetings and events. On the other hand, some workers are overworked, unsupported, and without the appropriate tools or setup at home.

Heavy workload continues to be a major issue across Components.

Some Components reported that employers are consulting with unions on these issues. For example, PEI UPSE engaged in a consultation with the college on the additional stress and work that has come with blended learning. The NSGEU has representation on a Dalhousie University committee looking at WFH.

In other cases, as reported at the last meeting, there are still issues with management's lack of understanding and trust. Management underestimates the additional time required to develop and teach online courses and to support students remotely. In at least one example, in BC, the employer violated collective agreement language regarding appropriate preparation time.

Some Components also reported management's lack of trust when it comes to WFH. As a result, members are not only struggling, but they feel it is unseen or unrecognized. Relatedly, members have been telling their unions about overtime hours, but they are not necessarily reporting to the employer. In an extremely interesting example, the

NSGEU requested from Dalhousie University figures on sick leave and overtime. They showed that, compared to 2018 and 2019, sick leave usage dropped by 50% in 2020 and overtime usage dropped by 40% in 2020.

Participants discussed the reasons why members might not be taking overtime, including guilt for having a job amidst widespread job loss, need to "prove" oneself, pressure from the employer, and blurry line between work life and home life.

As a result of these various issues, and compounded by the pandemic, several Components pointed to the increased instances of mental health issues.

Layoffs have been uneven across provinces and the sector, with precarious workers most affected. For example, in BC, it is non-regular support staff and teaching assistants who have experienced layoffs. OPSEU indicated that 60% of part-time support staff have been laid off. It was emphasized that this situation is having a severe impact on these workers' mental health, as well as on their career prospects. SGEU shared a concerning trend where members have experienced layoffs amid a hiring boom at the managerial level.

On the other hand, the NSGEU has actually seen hiring of custodians because of heightened sanitation protocols. Several Components have negotiated, or are working on, LOU's and MOA's regarding layoffs and recall language.

Participants provided updates on the use of the federal workshare program. One NSGEU local has had a fairly positive experience with the program, while one OPSEU local has seen many issues. It was reported that the insights shared by NSGEU representatives during the last videoconference proved useful to OPSEU representatives in working to address the issues through grievances.

d. Discussion of long-term impacts on post-secondary education

Given the benefits and challenges that come with WFH and distanced learning, participants discussed the need to consider how to protect the positives (e.g., maintaining flexibility where it is desired and appropriate) while guarding against the negatives (e.g., addressing workload issues, inequitable access, privacy, and ergonomics). Components are already thinking about the role of collective bargaining and looking at collective agreement language to ensure workers are protected.

Several participants raised worries about the possibility of employers wanting to adopt more online or distanced learning in the long term without evaluating how it is going. For example, the Ontario government is already investing large sums of money in eCampusOntario, which is looking to build a shared library of courses as part of a Virtual Learning Strategy. There is a similar initiative in BC, known as the Open Online Courses Project. In addition to the issue of intellectual property, which has been discussed at previous meetings, this shift may threaten job security and undermine the role of educators.

There may also be new processes, or best practices, that emerge from the pandemic context. For example, an MGEU representative reported that, this year, instructors will be given much more notice of what they will be teaching, compared to previous years, which could be something to push for in the long term.

7. Update: NUPGE Research on Working from Home

In June 2020, NUPGE released a report, <u>Working from Home: Considerations for Unions</u>, which identified emerging issues and questions. In September 2020, NUPGE released a report entitled <u>Workers' Health and Safety Protections and Working from Home</u>, which identifies existing gaps and potential legal issues regarding health and safety and WFH.

NUPGE will be releasing an online member survey on working from home. It will provide members with an opportunity to share their opinions on working from home during the pandemic, any issues or benefits they have experienced, and their work preferences going forward.

8. Discussion: Privatization in Post-secondary Education

Components in several provinces noted concerns around contracting out. Information technology (IT) services seem to be an area that employers are targeting. There are also concerns about how the move to cloud-based services will impact job security. Interestingly, however, it was noted that there were some job increases in Saskatchewan after the move to a cloud-based system.

It was reported that the BC government is undertaking a pilot project on Contact North via Coast Mountain College. The BCGEU has concerns about accountability and the impacts on job security for current college staff who work in student support and IT. OPSEU representatives shared their experiences with Contact North in Ontario.

Guest Presentation: Education for All Campaign—Pam Foster and Christina Muehlberger, Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT)

The Education for All campaign is a joint initiative that brings together PSE student and worker organizations around a shared vision for the sector. After receiving an invitation to join the campaign coalition, NUPGE was favourable to joining, but wished to first seek feedback and guidance from members in this sector. Representatives from CAUT were invited to present to this videoconference.

The speakers provided an overview of the campaign vision and action plan to date, while emphasizing that it is a living campaign. The presentation slides will be provided to participants.

The presentation generated positive discussion. Participants also raised some important questions and considerations to strengthen the campaign, such as a greater emphasis on skilled trades, institutional governance issues, and more unifying language to connect all workers in the PSE sector.

There was support for NUPGE joining the campaign. Since the meeting, NUPGE has formally joined the coalition and looks forward to bringing members' voices to the table.

10. Discussion: Campaigns and Advocacy

Participants shared the campaigns and advocacy initiatives of Components and locals. There are numerous exciting initiatives underway, with just a few PSE-focused examples below:

- the BCGEU is working on a campaign on public PSE and spotlighting student stories.
- OPSEU is engaged in anti-racism work, a grievance history project, educating members on health and safety rights, and pushing back against performance-based funding.
- The NSGEU shared how unions came together across the sector to work together during the pandemic, including letter-writing campaigns, information sharing, and media work.

11. Component Reports

Participants reported on any updates or information that had not yet been covered by the discussion, including grievances and arbitration decisions. Details can be found in the attached Component reports.

Many Components are currently in, or nearing the start of, collective bargaining. The impacts of the pandemic on bargaining remain a common concern across Components. In most provinces, the sector fears austerity measures are coming. Wage-freeze legislation continues to be a challenge, as well.

One OPSEU member shared an inspiring story showcasing the solidarity and knowledge sharing that comes from these meetings. This member recalled a meeting years ago where a fellow participant from the BCGEU shared their perspective and advice on organizing part-time college staff. OPSEU has since successfully organized part-time staff in Ontario, who are currently negotiating their second agreement.

Appendix 1: Component Reports

Component Report

Component: BCGEU

1. Updates on campaigns, materials, or initiatives related to post-secondary education

- Member profiles and shout outs on social media recognizing the work members are doing. Profiled members in the quarterly BCGEU Provincial magazine.
- Restarting campaign for Public Libraries with emphasis on technological services for marginalized members in our communities falling to Public Libraries to provide, and staff working conditions around safety and COVID 19.

2. Legislation and policies in your province—recent changes, announcements, or new policies

BC government is seeking legal advice on limiting non-essential travel to the province during the pandemic.

PHO orders extended to February 5th.

Vaccine roll out started with health care workers and seniors in care.

No new initiatives for PSE student aid programs

3. Observations on government or political climate pertinent to postsecondary education

No change – PSE in BC is severely underfunded. Institutions rely on tuition revenue from International students to fill budget gaps and are experiencing shortfalls because of this. Support staff are being laid off at institutions, due to low enrollments and funding shortfalls.

Enrollment is done approximately 10% and attrition rate has increased.

4. Updates on COVID-19 protocols

- Winter term continues with online hybrid delivery, in class only for programs with a portion that requires hands on instruction/learning. The programs that are running In Class instruction have reduced class sizes, in order to adhere to PHO.
- Planning for Spring/Summer term still not finalized, likely to continue with current delivery model
- No updated provincial guideline for PSE
- Health and safety protocols are continuously evolving. Members struggle with keep abreast of changes. IE: What is required when at the worksite. OHS worksite committees not being included in review of COVID Risk Assessment plans. Members working from home are finding additional costs such as

- upgrades to internet, technology upgrades to their own equipment and heating costs.
- Members are experiencing ongoing issues with workload through the transition to online/distributed learning. Employers have been unwilling to adhere to the language in the agreements regarding the provision of appropriate course prep time. This has resulted in at least one grievance so far.
- Members are struggling with isolation, feeling disassociation with the workplace and colleagues. Constantly changing technology to offer stable and secure work environments is challenging for members to work through with minimal training.

5. Collective bargaining updates

- Completed bargaining for final group in PSE under the provincial mandate
- Note: To bring forward workload issues in next round of bargaining

6. Other items

Respectfully submitted by: Cindy Battersby – BCGEU Component 7, Vice President

Component Report

Component: MGEU

- 1. Updates on campaigns, materials, or initiatives related to post-secondary education (component led or participated)
 - MGEU is running a mental health campaign right now; it is very timely as we have instructors and supports feeling stressed these days
- 2. Legislation and policies in your province—recent changes, announcements, or new policies
 - Pallister has named a new minister in charge of post-secondary education...Wayne Ewasko, minister of the new Department of Advanced Education, Skills and Immigration. This is what Pallister has to say about the new department and Wayne...

"Our pandemic recovery plan is focused on getting people back to work and ensuring new job opportunities for young Manitobans and new immigrants we welcome into our province," said Pallister. "This new department will focus on aligning advanced education institutions with the needs of the labour markets of today and tomorrow by giving young Manitobans the skills they need to succeed and new immigrants the job opportunities our province can offer. Minister Ewasko's 17 years of experience as a teacher and guidance counsellor makes him particularly well-suited to carry out this important task."

- I guess we will have to wait and see what he has in store for us.
- Bill 28- The Public Service Sustainability Act was declared unconstitutional by Justice McKelvey of the Court of Queen's Bench. The government has appealed the decision and the Manitoba Court of Appeals will hear arguments in November 2021. In the interim, Justice McKelvey will determine a remedy for members negatively affected by the Bill 28.

3. Observations on government or political climate pertinent to post-secondary education

 At the beginning of the pandemic the Manitoba government ordered postsecondary institutions to submit revised budget scenarios for cuts on 10%, 20% and 30%. The exercise has demoralized the entire post-secondary sector in Manitoba knowing that the government sees the sector as a budget line item expense rather than a crucial partner in rebuilding the post COVID economy.

4. Updates on COVID-19 protocols

- Provincial guidelines or reopening plans for institutions
 - i. Manitoba has been in Code Red since November 12th, it is getting very tiresome. They say we only have two more weeks, but we will wait and see, we suspect we will remain "red" for some time to come.

- Health and safety protocols (e.g. PPE, screening, working from home)
 - i. Nothing much has changed here, it is up to the institutions as to how this is handled. Some are still fully working from home, while others have a mix of on campus and home/online delivery.
 - ii. All institutions require masks and sanitation upon entering the building and most have a very robust cleaning protocol.
- Working conditions (workload, training, staff levels)
 - i. Instructors are feeling the weight of the increased demand of students with online learning or even blended learning.
 - ii. Our Centre for Learning Innovation has been crazy busy helping instructors to move everything to Moodle and get up to speed on how to handle the platform to the best of their needs.
 - iii. Most institutions have had some lay-offs; so far my college, ACC has had no lay-offs to date. But some support staff are feeling the pressure of keeping their department running, as some work from home while others come in and deal with the students face-to-face.

5. Collective bargaining updates

- any major grievances or arbitration decisions—not at this time
- Most of MGEU's post-secondary institutions are either in bargaining or are getting ready to get started. We tend to follow Manitoba Hydro, what they get offered, generally we get offered—right now Pallister has offered them four years of zeroes! My membership is very unhappy, this will not be an easy round of bargaining. We are just coming off a crappy contract with Bill 28 only giving us 0%, 0%, .75% and 1% over the last four years.

6. Other items

not at this time

Respectfully Submitted:

Marc Payette
MGEU Staff Representative and
Kimberley Lynn
MGEU Post-Secondary Component Director

Component Report

Component: OPSEU

7. Updates on campaigns, materials, or initiatives related to post-secondary education

- All OPSEU PSE sectors
- Participation in the Ontario Colleges and Universities Coalition
- Universities:
- Participation in the Technical Table Meeting on Special Constables regarding the regulatory work required to bring the Community Safety and Policing Act into force. Topics of discussion included:

Who may employ special constables;

The functions and powers of special constables;

Code of conduct for special constables; and

Process to deal with the breach of the public duties of a special constable

- College Faculty:
- Research and preparation of an update to the 2014 Report on Education in the Colleges.
- Research and preparation of a vision of higher education that centres
 academic decision-making, academic freedom, adequate investment in the
 colleges, free or reduced tuition for students and the provision of quality
 education that is both a social and economic good for the student and the
 larger community.
- College Support
- Plans for a stepped-up social media campaign to support bargaining.
- Conducted the Living@Work Survey of its members. Nearly 3,000 members from 16 colleges completed the survey, examining members' experiences, perceptions and feelings about working from home. Some of the results included: Over 70% noticed improved interactions with their supervisor, coworkers and clients since working from home and about half noticed an improvement to productivity. Over 60% said they would like a hybrid situation of some days being at home and some days being at work if they were allowed to make the choice after the pandemic ends.
- Establishing Anti-Racism Action Committees in every Local, to look at department procedures, to encourage local committee to identify and remediate racism as it's effecting students and workers in Ontario's public colleges. The proportion of Black, male, under-graduate students has decreased since 2006 among new immigrants and those born in Canada.

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8. Legislation and policies in your province—recent changes, announcements, or new policies

Ontario budget, Fall 2020:

- 2% increase in operating grants, year-over-year
- Announcement of \$59.5 million over 3 years for a micro-credential strategy;
- \$50 million for a Virtual Learning Strategy, funding will go to approved projects proposed by colleges and universities in four 4 funding categories digital content, digital capacity, digital fluency and digital delivery;
- \$180+ million over 3 years for Skilled Trades Strategy (although colleges deliver 80+% of in-class apprenticeship training, it's unclear how much of this funding will be invested in the colleges);
- \$100 million for Employment Ontario (22 of 24 colleges run EO offices);
- Announcement that they will revise the Second Career re-training program (one-third of all Second Career clients attend college);
- \$1.5 million for a Special Implementation Team on Intellectual Property (encouraging the commercialization research); and
- \$19.25 million for mental health supports for postsecondary students (a 2016 survey of university and college students in Ontario found that 46% of students reported feeling so depressed it was difficult to function; 65% reported experiencing overwhelming anxiety and 14% had considered suicide in the previous year.)

Other Announcements:

 Performance-based funding agreements signed with all colleges and universities, takes effect this year in terms of data collection, evaluation and publication of the institutions' performance against the metrics, two-year delay until the institutions' funding is tied to performance.

Observations on government or political climate pertinent to post-secondary education

The implementation of performance-based funding is one of the most significant policies shaping PSE in Ontario today. It will make colleges compete against each other, it will force institutions to find "efficiencies", a code word for further cuts, it could lead to the elimination of college programs that are vital to the health and well-being of society, and it will force institutions down the road of micro-credentials.

The other significant policy shift which is deeply concerning, is the move towards the delivery of micro-credentials, defined by Colleges Ontario, as a "portion of a credential". This move to "unbundle" credentials is a very worrisome development. It will move colleges away from giving students an education, encompassing a broad understanding of an industry, a whole body of knowledge from which to build a career, to short-term training, setting students up for a life struggling from one gig economy job to the next.

9. Updates on COVID-19 protocols

- Colleges and Universities:
- Some in-person classes, and some essential workers working in the workplace. Most workers are working remotely.
- There is PPE and institutions are following the new Stay-At-Home orders.
- There are no re-opening plans at this time. No predictions about the fall term.
- Universities:
- Because of COVID, work has disappeared for some precarious workers including food services, event staff, and other staff throughout various academic or administrative departments.
- Workload: staff are overwhelmed, really struggling with work-life balance, especially parents with child care and elder care issues, people are forced to work different hours, management are accommodating parents/caregivers, some members going on sick leave, other members are taking leaves under the Emergency Infectious Disease Leave but the workload is overwhelming. Staff are Zoomed out.
- College Faculty:
- Workload:
- Online: there are no class-size caps so there can be large online classes.
- In-person: there is an increase in workload because of the restriction limiting
 the number of students to 10 per learning space. In the larger colleges this
 has resulted in more sections of a course being put on and the additional
 hiring of contract faculty. Prior to COVID, there might have been one section
 of 30 students. Now there will be three sections of 10 students. The 10person limit will last for the whole term.

College Support Part-time:

This vulnerable and precarious group of workers have borne the brunt of layoffs among support staff. Their numbers have been cut in half due to the pandemic. These members have also experienced reduced hours of work. They do not have paid sick days. The pandemic is having a huge impact on the mental health and well-being of part-time support staff. The union has called for all laid off support staff to be rehired at the colleges.

10. Collective bargaining updates

- Universities:
- Food service workers at Ryerson University filed 80 grievances, because the workshare program did not work.
- Some units in the sector are in bargaining, Bill 124 is in effect. (Bill 124 requires bargaining units in the public sector to serve a three-year "moderation" period with compensation increases of no more than 1% per year.)

- College Faculty:
- Collective agreement expires Sept. 30, 2021, the bargaining unit is in the demand set phase of the bargaining cycle.
- College Support Part-time:
- collective agreement expires January 30, 2021. Currently in the final part of the demand-set phase of the bargaining cycle.
- College Support Full-time: collective agreement expires in 2022, will go into pre-bargaining in the fall of 2022.

11. Other items

Component Report

Component: NAPE

12. Updates on campaigns, materials, or initiatives related to post-secondary education

None

- 13. Legislation and policies in your province—recent changes, announcements, or new policies
 - Economic Recovery Committee
- 14. Observations on government or political climate pertinent to postsecondary education

Nothing new

15. Updates on COVID-19 protocols

CNA

- Our Trades Programs are being offered on campus
- Reminding programs are being offered online
- Programs with Labs (medical or science) are being offered on campus
- Covid-19 protocols in place for the programs and campuses.

MUN

Still online

16. Collective bargaining updates

None

17. Other items

Provincial Election called for February 13

























NATIONAL UNION OF PUBLIC AND GENERAL EMPLOYEES

- B. C. Government and Service Employees' Union (BCGEU)
- Health Sciences Association of British Columbia (HSABC)
- Health Sciences Association of Alberta (HSAA)
- Saskatchewan Government and General Employees' Union (SGEU)
- Manitoba Government and General Employees' Union (MGEU)
- Ontario Public Service Employees Union (OPSEU)
- Canadian Union of Brewery and General Workers (CUBGW)
- New Brunswick Union of Public and Private Employees (NBU)
- Nova Scotia Government and General Employees Union (NSGEU)
- PEI Union of Public Sector Employees (PEI UPSE)
- Newfoundland & Labrador Association of Public and Private Employees (NAPE)

The National Union of Public and General Employees is an affiliate of the Canadian Labour Congress and a member of Public Services International.











