

The Future of Canada's Unions:

Journalists Weigh-In on the Road Ahead

It's quite common to read, see or hear media reports that are critical of unions and union activists. The labour movement has historically been a target of criticism, sometimes credible and balanced, but more often biased and extremist. It is less common to come across items in the popular press that favour unions and argue for their ongoing relevance. Less common until just lately, that is. Recent months have seen a number of articles that champion organized labour, including recent pieces in *The Toronto Star* and *The Globe and Mail*.

Toronto Star columnist and award-winning journalist Linda McQuaig (formerly a reporter with *The Globe and Mail* and a producer on CBC Radio's "As It Happens") recently reminded us that, although unions face frequent criticism, they remain "as the old saying notes, "the people who brought you the weekend." In her column in the February 12, 2013, issue of the *Star*, McQuaig expressed concern that at least some of the gains the labour movement worked to achieve are currently at risk:

In the 19th century, workers typically toiled 10 to 16 hours a day, six or seven days a week. Unions fought to change that. In the decades that followed the Great Depression, unions won higher wages and better working conditions for their members, setting a standard with ripple effects that led to a better deal for all workers. But in recent decades, many of the precious, hard-fought union gains — job security, workplace pensions, as well as broader social goals like public pensions and unemployment insurance — have been under fierce attack by the corporate world.



McQuaig goes on to suggest that corporate interests may ultimately countermand collective bargaining:

Instead of being widely shared, almost all the benefits of economic growth in recent decades have been siphoned off by a small corporate elite. It's that same corporate elite, and its political and media supporters, who now assure us that unions are no longer relevant. This is curious, since corporations still see the wisdom in collective action for themselves; they band together to form business lobby groups. But, when it comes to working people, collective action is apparently out of date.

Activist and journalist Richard Littlemore shares McQuaig's concern. In an article that appeared in *The Globe and Mail's* Report on Business magazine on

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Labour Unions in Today's World

Kathi Page, President, APSSP

The current newsletter for Spring 2013 is focussed on the role of the labour union in today's world, what it means, and whether it is still as relevant in 2013 as it was when unions were first formed as a result of exploitation and necessity. Over the years, I have had the opportunity to travel and have marvelled at the variety of opinions I have encountered about unions and the people who rely on their support for fair wages and safe work conditions. I have heard from those who understand the importance and those who see no value in protecting everyday people who work and provide for their families.

Some years ago, I visited the demonstration coal mines in North Sydney, Nova Scotia, built and guided by retired and laid off miners, who shared the stories of their childhoods and lives determined by their employers. Children beginning dangerous work at age nine in the mines, sleeping with their coats on in drafty houses in the winter but still proud of their work and contributions. Fisherman, loggers, miners, factory workers, transportation ... and the list goes on. The

same situation played itself over and over in the emerging industrial society, of employers taking maximum advantage of their employees to build significant businesses and fortunes.

As our society changed and the rights of women and workers and others became more recognized and part of our culture, the union movement has grown and legislation was passed to put standards and expectations into

“Now times are changing again; economics are weaker, and the move is afoot to reduce the power of the union to provide for its members.”

law. We have relied on these laws to provide fair and equitable treatment for thousands, if not millions, of workers, who labour hard for their employers and contribute to their communities as they attempt to live a reasonable life and provide for their families. It was unions and the accompanying legislation that levelled the playing field for the everyday worker. Non-union employees also benefited from the examples set by new collective agreements.

Now times are changing again; economics are weaker, and the move is afoot to reduce the power of the union to provide for its members. This will reduce the positive standards that were set for non-union employers as well, pulling us all down to the lowest common denominator, reducing the benefits for those who do the work in order to boost the bottom line or cut the budget. If unions lose the ability to improve and protect work conditions, then others will also lose out as well. We will all have limited voices in the workplace and reduced compensation opportunities.

For those of us who depend on our jobs in order to live our lives as well as take pride in the important work we do in so many ways to support our complex society, the threats to the survival of the union movement are serious. But at the same time, it is critical that we of the union represent ourselves with responsibility and self-discipline, to prove to others the important reasons for our existence for the benefit of the workers and to highlight our value and worth to society overall.

From the Editor:

As professionals who work with children and their families, we sometimes encounter real-life examples of why collective bargaining remains important in today's world – families in which parents work for low wages in jobs without security or benefits; children who come to school ill because parents will lose their jobs if they miss work. We find more examples both nationally, in the number of contract, part-time and temporary positions that more and more people must take just to be able to work, and internationally, in the grim working conditions and

impoverished wages of workers throughout the developing world.

I hope you enjoy this special edition of the APSSP newsletter, devoted to the relevance of the labour union in 2013. I would like to extend my thanks to the APSSP members who contributed, and an invitation to you, as APSSP members reading this newsletter, to share your opinions and ideas with me via email at vppublicrelations@apssp.org.

Marieke Favrod

The Road Ahead for Canada's Unions

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March 27, 2013, Littlemore observes that “the pendulum has been swinging away from union rights and toward restoring a freer hand to employers”. He notes that in the United States, “right-to-work” legislation, which disallows any labour contract that requires all employees to pay a fee, or dues, to unions, is law in at least 23 states – and, not coincidentally, that “those jurisdictions have been attracting almost a third of all new manufacturing jobs”. No unions, cheaper labour, more jobs, bigger profits? Littlemore adds a broader perspective by citing a recent study out of Harvard University, which indicates “that the decline of organized labour in the U.S. accounts for between a fifth and a third of the yawning increase in income inequality that is one of the country’s most crippling problems”.

Concern for the survival of the labour movement, and the necessity of that survival, has even made its way into Canadian comedy. Witness the following segment, from an episode of the Rick Mercer Report: a space-age schoolboy returns home from the “learning pod” and is asked what he learned that day. He proceeds to tell his father all about “these groups they had in the olden days called labour unions” which existed “so workers had a fair method of negotiating”. His father zealously

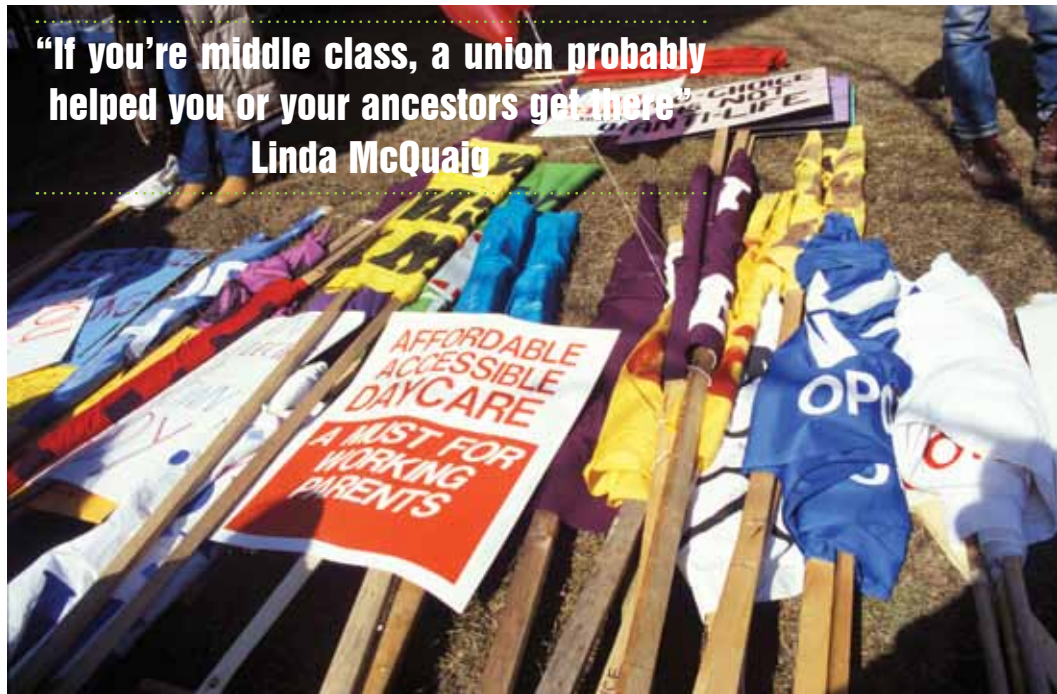
assures him that “unions were banned because we couldn’t afford them, and society is better off for it”. The segment turns out to be an ad for the Conservative Party of Canada, with the tag line “In space, no one can hear you strike”. The studio audience erupts with laughter, but journalists like McQuaig and Littlemore might ask us: are we laughing because it’s funny, or are we laughing because it’s true?

To read Linda McQuaig’s full article, follow this link: <http://www.thestar.com/opinion/>

editorialopinion/2013/02/12/unions_in_canada_under_siege_from_government_business_and_media_mcquaig.html

To read Richard Littlemore’s full article, follow this link: <http://m.theglobeandmail.com/report-on-business/rob-magazine/do-unions-have-a-future/article10310754/?service=mobile>

To view Rick Mercer’s hilarious contribution to the dialogue, follow this link: <http://youtube.com/CITS7DELzXE>



“If you’re middle class, a union probably helped you or your ancestors get there”

Linda McQuaig



Annual General Meeting

The APSSP AGM is on Thursday, May 16, 2013 at the Mississauga Grand Banquet Center. Registration and cocktail reception from 5:00, followed by dinner at 6:00 and our meeting at 7:00. Elections will be held for the Provincial Executive positions of President, VP External Affairs, VP Negotiations, Treasurer and Secretary.

We hope to see everyone there!

Opposing “Right to Work” Legislation: Who’s Right?

Joe O’Connor, Vice-President External Affairs, APSSP Provincial

As we reflect on this past round of provincial bargaining, many unanswered questions could become the future solutions for upcoming Collective Agreements. It is imperative that we understand what Ontario unions, including APSSP, have been capable of achieving and maintaining over the years. In the Collective Bargaining process, we have been able to negotiate fair wages, enhanced benefits, dispute-resolution processes and good management-union relations.

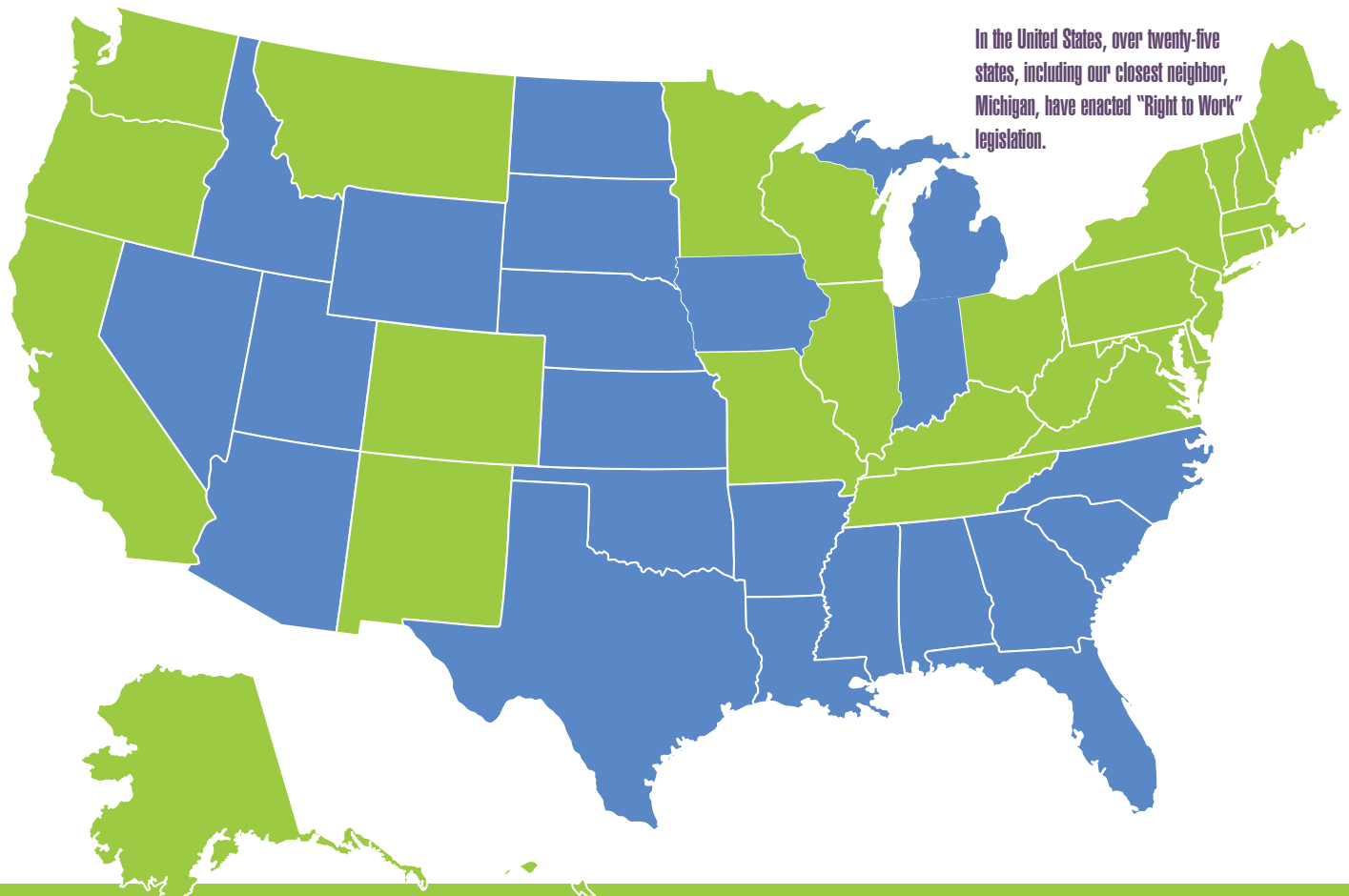
These working conditions were not achieved over a few days, but are the fruit of labour struggles by workers across this country over the past one hundred years. We have a great responsibility to be the stewards of this legacy, which has been entrusted to us by generations past. Each of us must take this responsibility seriously, knowing that if

we fail to do so, labour rights that have been achieved over decades could be undermined by our employers or our Provincial and Federal governments.

We must be aware that the corporate culture across North America does not at times recognize the value of union membership, and the rights of workers to a just wage, benefits, and fair working conditions. There is tremendous pressure from corporate Canada to extract worker’s rights, wages, pensions and benefits in order to increase opportunities for shareholder profits. At this time in Canada, corporations hold \$540 billion dollars in available capital, which they are failing to invest in our economy until they see the opportunity to exact greater profit.

We need only look south of the border to the

United States, where over twenty-five states, including our closest neighbor, Michigan, have enacted “Right to Work” legislation. We know that this title is a misnomer, and that truthfully, this re-writing of labour legislation undermines the rights of collective bargaining and union membership. We are aware that there is a conservative movement, both provincially and federally, to enact legislation that would replicate these imposed legal sanctions against the democratic bargaining process. If we are vigilant, and allow our collective voices to continue to challenge this trend, the outcome may be positive for the union movement in the province. It is up to all of us in APSSP to be this voice, to be vigilant, to understand the issues, to question the process, and to advocate for our collective bargaining rights and agreements.



What Has APSSP Done for Me Lately?

Dan Milne, Vice-President Negotiations, APSSP Provincial

With the recent decline in union membership in North America, and with increasing calls for union transparency and accountability, it is important to take some time to reflect on how this impacts our own union, APSSP.

APSSP is approaching almost 40 years of age. It has grown and changed over the years since it was formed by a small group of school-based professionals in Toronto. At that point in time, unions - especially those in the public sector - were experiencing rapid growth and consolidation. This early collective of insightful and thoughtful professionals recognized the potential power of a union in forwarding their goal of increasing school-based professional services for students and ensuring that, as non-teaching professionals, they would be treated with respect and fairness. However, of significant concern was that the interests of school-based professionals would not be fairly articulated or represented should they become part of a larger, homogeneous union (e.g., CUPE). And so they developed goals and a constitution and moved forward in forming an independent, non-affiliated union ... APSSP.

By focusing on growing as a membership specific to the providers of professional student support services, APSSP has been able to function as both an advocate for the membership, and for the students who rely on the services of the membership to increase their opportunity to succeed in school. It is the collective work of the APSSP membership, in collaboration with teachers, which makes a difference for students.

As a certified union, APSSP functions under the auspices of the Ontario Labour Relations Act. Along with providing legal protections for



Association of Professional Student Services Personnel

40 Years of Service, Action, and Commitment

the membership, the most important outcome has been the ability of the union to bargain collectively, achieving collective agreements that reflect the professionalism of the membership and that ensure fair and equitable treatment within the education sector. With every piece of legislation that impacts the workplace, APSSP has been strategic and focussed in taking advantage of opportunities that can positively impact the membership. Achievements include:

1. Pay grids that, at max, are some of the highest in a number of APSSP disciplines across the Education Sector.
2. Pay Grids that reflect not only job functions but educational qualifications.
3. Additional allowances (PHD/Psych Associate/Additional Degrees) that reflect changes in professional colleges and education enhancements that are of value to our employers.
4. Improved and enhanced Benefit Packages.

5. APSSP involvement in local school board committees to ensure that the voice of professional student service staff is recognized (i.e., SEAC; Joint Management/Union).
6. A voice for professional student service staff at the Ministry of Education. In recent years, this has meant that APSSP is fully engaged in provincial negotiations, and that ministry initiatives related to community agency collaborations and safe schools are influenced by the APSSP voice.

Unions exist to defend and protect the collective rights of their membership. They have made significant contributions to improving the lot of the entire community in areas such as minimum wages, benefits, health and safety, working conditions, work week hours, pensions, etc. Over the past 40 years, APSSP has made its own contributions to this effort, by improving and defending the role and work of school based professional staff.

visit www.apssp.org

For more on how APSSP is working for you.

APSSP Chapter News

News from Local Chapters Across the Province

Two Toronto APSSP Members Help to Build Homes in Guatemala:

Carmela Diano, Vice-President Grievance, APSSP Provincial

Melissa Hanlon and Steph Wilson, Social Workers from the Toronto Chapter of APSSP, recently participated in the Global Village Project through Habitat for Humanity. They spent part of the summer in 2012 in Guatemala, helping to build homes for local villagers. This was a great opportunity to visit a new country and get to learn about the culture and local community. The families themselves also help with the builds and then re-invest their time by helping other families in the community to build homes as well. Melissa and Steph will be heading to Costa Rica this summer to participate in another build. Anyone who is interested is welcome to look at the trip details at www.habitatglobalvillage.ca.



APSSP Niagara: Paying it Forward

Leanne Hasenack & Tracy Hofland, Niagara Chapter

The Niagara Chapter of APSSP decided to “pay it forward” this past holiday season. We were happy to give \$500 to the Education Foundation of Niagara (EFN) which supports so many students and families with a variety of needs within our Board. We also raised food and cash donations for Community Care, our local food bank. We proudly call ourselves “A little Union with a Big Heart”, and hope to plan future ways to continue “paying it forward.”.



Written with Purpose:

Fiction Inspired by the Labour Movement

A select bibliography of fiction inspired by the labour movement:

Dreamland, by Kevin Baker

An epic novel set in turn-of-the-century New York City; multiple subplots feature gangsters, Coney Island carnies, Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung, and include the story of seamstress and union organizer Esther Abramowitz.

The Island Walkers, by John Bemrose

A national bestseller in Canada and shortlisted for the Giller Prize, *The Island Walkers* is set in a small town in southwestern Ontario in the 1960s, and follows a period in the life of the Walker family in which father Alf, a millworker, faces hard choices during a labour dispute.

Wabash, Robert Olen Butler

Set in Illinois in the 1930s, *Wabash* looks at the very different ways that husband and wife Jeremy and Deborah Cole cope following the death of their child, Jeremy through his activism at the steel mill where he works.

A Place Called Freedom, by Ken Follett

Set in the later 1700s and moving from Scotland to London and finally Virginia, *A Place Called Freedom* tells the story of a young coalminer's attempt to escape indentured servitude.

Mary Barton and North and South, by Elizabeth Gaskell

Elizabeth Gaskell, a contemporary and close friend of Charlotte Brontë's, depicts the early labour movement in England in two of her novels, both of which feature young female protagonists. *Mary Barton* is the daughter of a factory worker who is courted by a young man from her own community and also by the son of a mill owner; in *North and*

South, Margaret Hale is the daughter of a minister who becomes personally involved in the dispute between a cotton mill manufacturer and those who labour for him.

Thunder on the Mountain, by David Poyer

Set in western Pennsylvania in 1936, survivors of an industrial accident that killed five workers work to organize a union. *Kirkus Reviews* called this novel "a rousing good read".

Union Dues, by John Sayles

Nominated for a National Book Award, *Union Dues* follows teenage runaway Hobie McNutt and his father, Hunter, who leaves his job at a West Virginia coal mine to search for his son. Better known as the director of films including *Passion Fish*, *The Secret of Roan Inish* and *Lone Star*, Sayles developed a segment of this novel into his film, *Matewan*, about the 1920 coal miners' strike in Matewan, West Virginia.

The Jungle, by Upton Sinclair

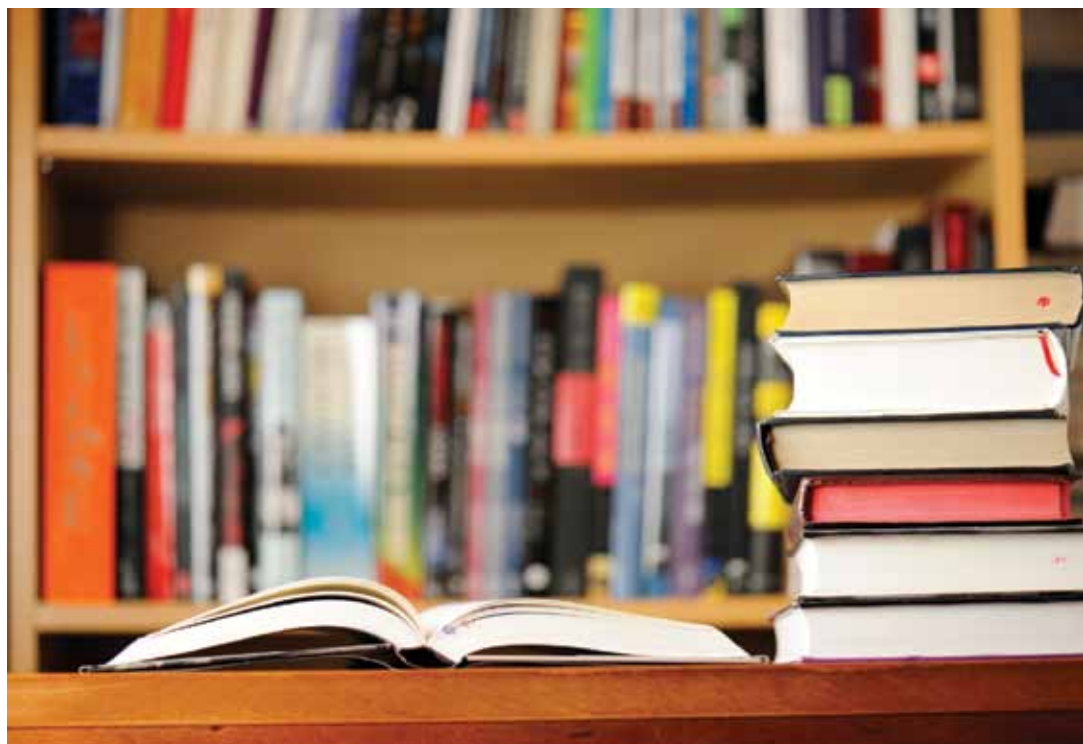
A young man and his family move from Lithuania to America hoping for a better life, but find few opportunities in 1930s Chicago.

In Dubious Battle and The Grapes of Wrath, by John Steinbeck

One of Steinbeck's earlier novels (and President Barack Obama's favourite Steinbeck novel, according to Wikipedia) *In Dubious Battle* features young idealist Jim Nolan, who helps to organize a fruit pickers' strike in 1930s California. Steinbeck went on to win the Pulitzer prize for *The Grapes of Wrath*, in which a family of tenant farmers make their way from Oklahoma to California during the Great Depression in the hope of finding work.

Germinal, by Émile Zola

Chosen by André Gide as one of the ten best novels in the French language, *Germinal* tells the story of a coalminers' strike in northern France in the 1860s.



APPSP Provincial Chapter Members

- ▶ Bruce-Grey Catholic District
- ▶ Dufferin-Peel Catholic District
- ▶ Durham Catholic District
- ▶ Halton Catholic District
- ▶ Hastings Prince Edward District
- ▶ London District Catholic
- ▶ Niagara District
- ▶ St. Clair Catholic District
- ▶ Toronto Catholic District
- ▶ Waterloo Catholic District

Have Your Say!

You can contribute to the APSSP newsletter.

We all know that APSSP members, whether individually or collectively through their chapters, are doing great work for students, their co-workers, the education sector, and the community at large. Contributing to the APSSP newsletter is one way you can share with your colleagues some of the excellent things that are going in your school, chapter, or local community.

APSSP welcomes editorial and photo contributions from all members, so go ahead and have your say. Story ideas and other submissions can be sent to vppublicrelations@apssp.org.

Upcoming Meetings:

Governing Council Meetings

- ▶ Sunday, October 20, 2013
Best Western Cairncroft, Niagara Falls

Provincial Executive Meetings

- ▶ Tuesday, May 7, 2013
- ▶ Tuesday, June 4, 2013

Annual General Meeting

Thursday, May 16, 2013, 5:00pm
Mississauga Grand Banquet Centre
35 Brunel Road, Mississauga

Elections will take place for
the following positions:

- ▶ President
- ▶ Vice-President, Negotiations
- ▶ Vice-President, External Affairs
- ▶ Treasurer
- ▶ Secretary

Education Planning Weekend

October 19 & 20, 2013
Best Western Cairncroft
Niagara Falls

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