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Political rights decision: A step in the times

July 15, 1988 was a historical day for federal public service employees.

It was the day the Federal Court of Appeal found that Section 32 of the Public Service Employment Act which deals with political activity, violated the freedom of expression and freedom of association sections of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

This unanimous decision gave a tremendous boost to the Alliance's contention that political rights should not be denied to our members.

However, the decision may not mean an end to the battle for political rights.

The decision ruled that Section 32 (1) (a) of the Public Service Employment Act is void because it's "open to

discretionary application" and has no force and effect on public service employees with the exception of deputy heads. However, the Court has not ruled that there can't be any restrictions on our members' political rights. It does permit "reasonable limits" on rights and freedoms.

The Alliance anticipates that the federal government could seek leave to appeal the decision to the Supreme Court and/or introduce new legislation placing some restrictions on political activity. However, the government has not given any indication of its course of action.

Meanwhile, Bill C-273 -- a private member's bill calling for political activity for public service employees -- is on the House of Commons order paper for August 11.

If C-273, as amended by committee, becomes law, PSAC members will still be able to be politically active. Restrictions will only apply to employees providing policy advice directly to senior levels of government.

It all started when four PSAC members **Randy Barnhart, Linda Camponi, Ken Clavette and Heather Stevens** wanted to take part in the 1984 federal election campaign. They applied to the Federal Court of Canada Trial Division on the grounds that the PSEA interfered with their rights under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Language teachers and TB go back to the table

Mediation talks on behalf of the federal government language teachers commenced Aug. 2 with mediator Ian Deans, Chairman of the Public Service Staff Relations Board.

Alliance Vice-President Albert Burke said the Alliance has accepted Treasury Board's word that they are returning to the table with no pre-conditions.

"These mediation talks were made possible because of the determined fight by the language teachers to obtain a collective agreement without concessions. And we expect that a settlement can be reached which meets the needs of the teachers to maintain the quality of their working conditions and the quality of the service they provide.

Support the Bell workers

The Canadian Labour Congress is calling on all members to support the 19,000 Bell Canada telephone operators and technicians located in Ontario, Quebec and the eastern Northwest Territories, members of the Communications and Electrical Workers of Canada. They have been in a labour dispute with Canada's richest corporate empire.

Here are the key issues: improved job security by limiting part-time and temporary work and contracting out; improvements in the wage offer and indexation of wages and pension benefits and reduction

of working hours and improved vacations.

Members can help support the strikers in the following ways: do not cross CWC picket lines and join them as often as you can; continue to use the phone and place demands on all of Bell Canada's services; complain loudly and often about the deterioration of service and, finally, be aware that anyone repairing or installing a telephone is a scab and should be treated accordingly.

Help send a strong message to Bell Canada. These workers need your help.