

CUPW runneth over: Taxpayers soaked for union's pet projects and conferences

By [Brian Lilley](#), Parliamentary Bureau – December 06, 2012

Should taxpayer dollars be used to pay for conferences that support terrorism?

“Of course not” is what most rational people would say, but not the bosses at the Canadian Union of Postal Workers. Last week it was reported that CUPW bosses were headed to Brazil for a conference that celebrated jailed terrorist Ahmad Sa'adat.

Sa'adat is the secretary-general of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine and is currently behind bars for the assassination of Israeli Tourism Minister, Rehavam Ze'evi, in October 2001 .

The union wanted to have taxpayers pay for the trip from what is called the International Solidarity Fund, an annual \$200,000 outlay paid for not from union dues but from Canada Post general revenues. Given that taxpayers own Canada Post, that means our money is going to this political slush fund for CUPW.

Here's the scary part: CUPW's solidarity fund is not unique. Right now the Public Service Alliance of Canada, the biggest union for federal government employees, is at the negotiating table with eight different branches of the federal government and they want the feds to pay into their own slush fund. “The Social Justice Fund remains a priority bargaining demand in all of our sets of negotiations,” PSAC's website reads. “The Employer shall contribute once cent per hour worked to the PSAC Social Justice Fund.”

While paying just one cent per hour per employee may not sound like much, PSAC would get \$3 million per year for their fund if it was included in every contract. What would the money be used for? Among other things, fighting the very policies public servants are supposed to spend their day implementing.

PSAC boasts of using the fund to defend “quality public services” and fighting government cuts. They also say they are on the front lines of fighting free-trade agreements and changes to the Canadian International Development Agency. So far, PSAC has convinced 85 different employers, including two federal government agencies, to pay into the fund and they want more. When news of the CUPW union bosses going to the terror-loving conference broke, Canada Post was ordered by the government to ensure taxpayers didn't subsidize it.

“As soon as we were made aware of the union's intentions, we informed them it was not an appropriate use of the funds,” spokesman Jon Hamilton said.

The union defended the conference and has promised to file a grievance over Canada Post's refusal to fund the trip. “The union is there to represent the members but I think the union is (also) there to develop social and political views about what's happening globally,” CUPW president Denis Lemelin said.

If the union wants to do that and members want to fund it, so be it. But taxpayers shouldn't be funding it. Yet that could happen if PSAC is successful at the bargaining table.

NDP Leader Tom Mulcair refused to condemn or even comment on tax dollars being used for this fund. That shouldn't be surprising considering that Nycole Turmel, a key part of Mulcair's team, initiated the fund.

Treasury Board president Tony Clement's office said it doesn't like to comment on contract negotiations but was blunt about the idea of paying for a political slush fund.

"If the NDP and their union bosses expect the federal government to divert hard-earned taxpayers' dollars to fund their political projects, they are dreaming in Technicolor," spokesman Andrea Mandel-Campbell wrote in an e-mail.

That's a good start. Now it's time to take this slush fund out of the existing contracts. Let unions pay for their own campaigning.