

The Union of Northern Workers or the NWT Public Service Association as it was known then, began organizing employees of the new Territorial Government in 1969.

1. The GNWT workers were mostly former Federal Government workers who had been transferred to Yellowknife and found themselves in a dilemma. By transferring to the GNWT the workers were required to give up their union membership with the PSAC.

After a year of organizing, and collecting union dues by going door to door, from government office to government office, the Commissioner for the NWT, Stu Hodgson, agreed to recognize the NWT Public Service Association as the bargaining agent for 1,000 GNWT employees.

The first Collective Agreement was signed on June 8, 1970 by the Union's first President, Keith McInnis. NWT Commissioner Hodgson signed on behalf of the GNWT.

Over the years, other employee groups were organized and became part of the UNW. They include Hamlet and Housing Association workers, and a variety of other non GNWT employers. Most recently the diamond workers at the Ekati mine joined the UNW in 2006. The UNW has approximately 5,000 members.

Before Nunavut was created, the UNW represented 7,000 workers in both the eastern and western Arctic. The separation of the two territories reduced the UNW's membership to about 4500 members at that time.

In 1988, the GNWT passed the Union of Northern Workers Act which officially changed the name of the organization and recognized the UNW as the bargaining agent for its members working for the GNWT.

The UNW is a component (partner) of the Public Service Alliance of Canada. Every UNW member is also a member of the national Union - PSAC. The PSAC provides the UNW and its members with some specialized services. They do organizing drives, lobby governments at the federal level, provide legal advice, and representation in arbitrations.

The UNW provides direct service to its members, representing them in job appeals, grievances and everyday workplace problems. UNW also prepares bargaining demands for contract negotiations.

UNW Service Officers help ensure that the terms and conditions are enforced for each of the 25 Collective Agreements that apply to our UNW members.