

## **POLICY STATEMENT ON HUMAN RIGHTS - WORKERS RIGHTS**

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### ***The Same Struggle***

*Unions emerged to not only collectively protect workers from the arbitrary use of power by employers and governments, but also to create a culture of equality and dignity for all members in their ranks. Achieving higher wages and better working conditions for workers is no more important in the final analysis than achieving solidarity amongst all workers. Human rights work within the unions is not an "addition" to trade union work; it is essential to the very reason for our existence.*

### **WHO ARE THE VICTIMS?**

Seldom do the wealthy have human rights problems. Rather, the victims of intolerance and discrimination - both overt and systemic - are, almost without exception, working people. Moreover, human rights abuse does not hurt all workers equally.

Working women, Workers of Colour, Aboriginal Peoples, Workers with Disabilities, and Gay and Lesbian workers - these five groups from within our larger family of labour predictably suffer the most discrimination in Canadian society.

### **WHO BENEFITS?**

Employers and those who do their bidding clearly benefit from human rights abuse in at least two fundamental ways: firstly, great profits are realized through "job ghettos" and differential wage levels, secondly, divisions within our CAW membership over human rights issues threaten the solidarity of the organization as a whole and weaken our ability to make progress.

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*Because these forms of institutionalized injustice ultimately serve the profit motive and the status quo, racism, sexism and homophobia will not be eliminated from the workplace until they are eliminated from the union.*

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### **HUMAN RIGHTS ARE "COLLECTIVE RIGHTS"**

Unlike the legal system which emphasizes "individual rights", the labour movement argues that "collective rights" can best protect our interests. Just as a collective agreement recognizes rights for all individual members of the bargaining unit, we believe that human rights are more powerful when they advance the interests of workers as a class.

Similarly, while we agree with the moral claim that human rights should be "guaranteed", we also know that human rights can be (and often have been) taken away by repressive legislation. Human rights exist only to the extent that they are struggled for, won and then maintained.

### **CAW HUMAN RIGHTS WORK**

Human Rights struggles have historically been part of the union since the early days of organizing. Our Human Rights program took another major step forward within months of the CAW becoming a Canadian union. A **Human Rights Conference** was convened in 1986 and has now become an annual tradition. The National Executive Board adopted a **CAW Anti-Harassment Policy** in 1988, and in that same year the Education Department developed a **40-hour Human Rights Program** that continues to be updated regularly.

In an important breakthrough, the CAW has negotiated with employers the right of members to refuse to continue to work and be paid when they are being harassed. Negotiated agreements have increasingly included **Joint Human Rights Training** paid for by the employers and made available to entire workforces.

The 1991 CAW Constitutional Convention adopted a comprehensive **Affirmative Action Policy** which, among other important initiatives, called for special leadership and activist training for women and workers of colour. Both courses have begun to break down existing barriers to the full participation of both groups in the overall life of the unions.

A National Union Anti-Racism Coordinator was appointed in 1992 to complement the Women's Department already in place.

## **ZERO TOLERANCE**

The political thrust and objective of our human rights work is that there shall be "zero tolerance" for any form of discrimination or harassment on the basis of prohibited grounds covered by Human Rights legislation. The CAW Constitution (Article 3, Section 10) states our obligations to each other clearly:

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**"Every member of the CAW-Canada will receive equal treatment under this Constitution, regardless of race, sex, creed, colour, marital status, sexual preference, disability, political or religious affiliation or place of national origin."**

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The membership **at all levels** of the CAW has a responsibility to embrace and implement this policy of "zero tolerance" in all aspects of our daily working lives. Our policies are only as effective as our willingness to live them and not just when it is comfortable to do so.

## **THE ROLE OF LEADERSHIP**

Our ability to challenge the corporate agenda and its ideology depends to a large extent on the willingness of CAW leadership to provide the political space for **all members** to join in common cause. Human rights training for Local Union and workplace leadership is essential to that goal.

Divisions within can only lead to defeat; solidarity and unity within our CAW family is the only basis for victory and progress for the working class.

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