

CAW Statement on Affirmative Action

Our Changing Society: Our Democratic Union

The CAW has a long-standing reputation for democracy; both in fighting for democratic changes in our society and in maintaining democratic structures internally. We fight for social and economic justice, and we stand behind our principles internally through our democratic CAW Constitution, our local union bylaws, our CAW and Quebec Council structure, our National Executive Board and our Public Review Board.

However as society changes, so too our membership and therefore our union is changing. Because of the dramatic influx of women into the paid workforce over the last decades, the number of women in our union has risen significantly - now to about 20 per cent of our membership. This number will continue to rise.

Our major urban centres are now a diverse mix of racial and ethnic backgrounds. Changing immigration patterns mean that increasingly immigrants to Canada will be non-Europeans. This trend also will likely increase in coming years.

In CAW workplaces, our union membership is, or should be, reflecting the diversity of our changing society. As well newly organized units and recent mergers are bringing new groups of workers, with large numbers of women and visible minorities, into the CAW.

The CAW Leading Progressive Change

The CAW has been in the forefront, leading progressive change in response to the demands of our changing membership.

Our constitution has required mandatory human rights committees and women's committees since the '60s. We have annual women's conferences and human rights conferences. Our national Women's Department under the office of the national president ensures that equality issues are a priority in the CAW. In 1988 we implemented our anti-harassment policy to confront all forms of co-worker harassment with an effective procedure for swift resolution of complaints. We established an affirmative action seat for women at both our CAW Council and our Quebec Council where we have women's committees and human rights committees.

Our annual Family Education Program encourages the entire family to get involved in union education. Each year hundreds of CAW families take advantage of the facilities at our CAW Family Education Centre for the two-week residential course.

We have built a model child care facility at our education centre, thereby encouraging the full participation of members with small children.

We believe in social change and have built links in the community on issues ranging from child care to substance abuse recovery to co-op housing. We are outspoken on most issues at the national level and in our local communities.

The CAW has also led the way in collective bargaining. We were the first private sector union to negotiate child care funds in 1984. In 1987, we were the first union in the private sector to negotiate funds to build a child care centre, thereby creating new spaces during extended hours for the needs of our members.

We have long had no-discrimination clauses in our collective agreements. We have now taken pro-active measures such as negotiating human rights training for our members, conducted by the union, but with negotiated time off paid for by the companies.

We broke ground with negotiated employment equity provisions in our Big Three auto agreements. With paid time off, our local employment equity committees build links with the community and challenge the corporations to make their workforces reflective of the communities in which they operate. Our ground-breaking work with General Motors won the CAW an employment equity award from the Ontario Government. However, stronger measures are needed to change hiring patterns in the Big 3.

A number of CAW workplaces are already covered by some form of employment equity legislation. We will soon face a new mandatory employment equity law in the province of Ontario. This law will require us to bargain with employers to remove barriers to the fair participation of all workers and develop positive measure for workers in the four designated groups (women, visible minorities, aboriginal people, and people with disabilities) to qualify for jobs to which they otherwise might not have access.

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Building on Our Diversity

Increasingly, we insist that employers' hiring reflect the diverse nature of the communities they operate in, and so too must our CAW structures reflect that diversity.

As the face of our union membership changes, so too the union must continue to change. All CAW members, women, men, all races, all levels of ability, must feel that their union responds to and reflects their concerns and their needs. All workers need to see themselves reflected in the structures of the union and to know that if they want to get active in the union, they can also aspire to elected positions and staff positions within the union. All members need to know that they have physical access to union offices and that they have the language skills or the translation to participate in meetings and understand other communications from the union.

However there is concern among many women and visible minority members of our union, that no matter how active they become in the union, no matter how they try to participate, because they come from a 'minority' group, they may never get the support they need to get to elected positions.

There are exceptions. About one third of CAW locals have at least one woman on the local executive. This is often because enlightened local leadership made a special effort to include them as part of the leadership team. We need to help make this happen in all our local unions.

Union structures that include more diverse representation benefit enormously from additional skills, different abilities, access to new networks and communities, new ideas and different perspectives. They make the union more accessible and more appealing for organizing workers from those groups.

Recognizing the importance of including all groups within the union structures builds a stronger union and ultimately gets back to the basics of what the union is all about: solidarity.

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Why Not Just Guidelines?

Why can't we just rely on goodwill to achieve affirmative action? Why do we need an affirmative action plan with mandatory measures?

In the CAW, we have a lot of experience with voluntary employment equity measures. The federal employment equity law includes only voluntary goals and is notoriously ineffective. We know that voluntary measures are just that - voluntary - they do not guarantee rights. We would never negotiate voluntary measures for wages or benefits, because we know they are not worth the paper they are written on.

Some say yes to an affirmative action plan, but not now. Certainly there needs to be more education and debate in our union about affirmative action. But education and debate should not be an excuse for postponing action. There is never a good time to implement far-reaching change, but certainly justice delayed is justice denied.

Some argue that mandatory affirmative action measures create token positions and undermine the individuals, who may be very talented, who take on those mandatory positions.

This ignores the many talented people who now are blocked from entry into positions in the union, women who have been going to skills workshops at women's conferences for years who can only get elected to the women's committee, or visible minority members who for years have been stewards or committeepersons but can't gain entry into the top leadership team and therefore remain invisible.

There are also many more women and visible minority members who could become qualified with the right kind of training and support for them to get active. Some members still need to develop public speaking skills or other leadership skills that they could acquire through training programs. Some just need the support of having childcare provided or paid for.

Some members might need additional English/French language training to boost their confidence; some need to get access to the CAW education programs that develop our local leadership. Some just need physical access to union facilities.

Clearly there are still barriers to the full participation of all groups in our union. That's why we need an action plan.

Commitment

The CAW is committed to a policy of fair representation and inclusion of all members in its structures and activities. To achieve fairness, we recognize the need to identify and change structural barriers that limit participation, especially for women, visible minorities, native peoples and those with disabilities. As well, we recognize the need to take affirmative action measures, without which these groups may not achieve full and fair access to the CAW.

Education

The following measures comprise a plan of affirmative action for the CAW:

- Reaffirm the CAW anti-harassment policy at all union functions.
- Clarify at each CAW education course or conference the nature of sexist/racist behaviour and sexual/racial harassment.
- Incorporate into all education programs materials which discourage sexism and racism, break down traditional stereotypes and encourage shared family responsibilities.
- Increase the focus on feminist and anti-racist issues in staff and leadership training such as PEL.
- Develop an advanced leadership course for women and minorities to help them play a greater role in the local union.
- Hold regional educational workshops for women with special outreach to women of colour to encourage their greater participation in the union and to develop the skills for them to do so.
- Hold educational workshops for CAW members of visible minorities to encourage their greater participation in the union and to develop the necessary skills to do so.
- Continue our very successful CAW Family Education Programs during the summer months.
- Continue to encourage family involvement in union education and recreation activities.
- Reaffirm and broaden the commitment to the provision of child care or reimbursement for child care expenses during all local and national union events and education activities.
- Develop CAW literature and videos to encourage women and visible minorities to become involved in the union.
- Continue to hold annual women's and human rights conferences, and encourage leadership to attend these activities.
- Increase the training of women and members of visible minorities as local union discussion leaders to achieve representative numbers.
- Build forums for women and visible minorities into the agenda of CAW conferences, conventions, and residential schools.

Collective Bargaining Goals

- Develop a CAW training course for negotiating employment equity.
- Make employers responsible for fair hiring and promotion practices by negotiating employment equity programs with the goal of achieving workplaces that reflect the diverse nature of the community.
- Reaffirm our commitment to negotiate pay equity whether or not it is required by law. Once we have negotiated pay equity agreements, maintaining this equity should be the goal.
- Negotiate anti-harassment provisions into our collective agreements clearly stating the employers' duty to maintain a harassment-free workplace.
- Expand negotiations for child care funds.
- Continue to negotiate improved maternity leave pay equivalent to sickness and accident provisions.
- Negotiate English/French in the workplace programs.

Representative - National

- Maintain the representation of women at the CAW National Executive Board by creating a second mandatory position. One woman now sits on the NEB by virtue of an affirmative action position at the CAW Council Executive. If the second position for a woman isn't

- achieved through CAW Council, the second woman would be elected as an additional trustee of the NEB at the CAW Constitutional Convention.
- Maintain the current mandatory position for a woman on the executive of the Quebec Council.
 - Maintain the representation of a visible minority person at the CAW National Executive Board by creating a mandatory position on the executive of the CAW Council, who will then by virtue of that office, be a member of the CAW National Executive Board.
 - Strive for gender and racial representation on national committees, boards, and delegations.

Representative - Local

- Following the lead of the national union, make local union leadership structures such as executives, boards and committees, including bargaining committees, more representative of the make-up of the membership. Locals can apply to the National Executive Board to add additional places to their Local Executive Board to achieve better representation of women, visible minorities, native peoples and people with disabilities.
- Ensure the participation of CAW members from the designated groups in education programs and conferences to develop their skills and confidence.
- Provide child care or subsidize child care costs for all local union meetings, educationals and events as required.
- Send a strong positive signal to minority groups within the local union by ensuring swift enforcement of the CAW Anti-Harassment Policy.

Hiring

- Continue efforts to make appointments of staff representatives reflective of the gender and racial make-up of the membership. While the representation of women on staff has improved greatly, other designated groups are currently under-represented.
- Improve efforts to make the support staff more diverse especially with native peoples and other visible minorities as well as people with disabilities.
- Seek out contractors of services and supplies to the CAW that are not only unionized but also follow affirmative action guidelines.

Other Special Measures

- Review facilities in the union, both at the national and local union level to ensure access for the disabled.
- Increase efforts to provide literacy and English/French-as-a-second-language training in the workplace.
- Where there are major language groupings among the local membership, designate members to assist as translators if needed at local union meetings.

Solidarity In Diversity

Recognizing the diversity of our union and working to ensure fairness in all our structures and activities, means building a stronger union. It means creating a union:

where all members can become active knowing that their rights will be respected;

where all workers see themselves reflected in their leadership and in the activities of the union;

where all members committed to the union can aspire to leadership;

*and where, when we call each other sister and brother,
and when we claim solidarity, we know that this is truly so.*