

OPSEU Rainbow Caucus

LET THE WORD FIT THE CRIME

A message from the OPSEU Rainbow Caucus

As brothers and sisters in the trade union movement, we know how much power a single word can have. In our grievances, settlements, and collective agreements, we weigh what the nuances of language can give or take from us.

Words used in our everyday lives also have the power to give and take –conferring respect or dignity, casting dishonour or shame. Some words are imbued with significance for particular communities.

Sadly, a reminder of the significance of “bashing” was delivered to gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered Canadians on Sunday, November 18. Aaron Webster, a well-known figure in Vancouver’s gay community, was murdered by a gang of youths with baseball bats.

“Bashing” is a word which has become increasingly used to describe negative comments or attitudes toward powerful interests. For example, “management-bashing” and “America-bashing” are becoming prominent.

But when those of us in the gay community think of “bashing,” we think of those we have visited in hospitals and stood by while the police belittled and dismissed their statements. We know how reluctant our brothers and sisters are to report hate crimes to authorities, and we know this is so because little effort has been made to understand bashing, to document it, or to stop it.

Just this week, the Chretien government conceded, after years of denial, that gays and lesbians aren’t protected against hate crimes under federal law. Mike Harris has refused to join an NDP-sponsored effort to have the law changed, which Federal Justice Minister Anne McLellan has indicated she is willing to do – but only if the provinces agree.

What difference can a word make when dealing with this unrelenting tragedy?

The OPSEU Rainbow Caucus believes that by trivializing the word “bash,” the crime itself and its victims are trivialized. We urge our sisters and brothers to pause and reflect, and, when this word is used in our workplaces and communities, to remember Aaron Webster and the loved ones he was taken from. We stand with all our sisters and brothers in the union, but we must never stand in silence.

Please join Toronto’s gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered communities as we remember Aaron in a vigil.

Saturday, November 24, 2001 6:00 p.m.

Cawthra Square Park - behind 519 Church Street

URL: <http://www.opseu.org/committees/rainbowword.htm>

Direct OPSEU site: <http://www.opseu.org>