




CUPE ANTI-RACISM STRATEGY FOR CONSULTATION

Draft



CUPE



At CUPE's 2019 National Convention, delegates unanimously voted to create an Anti-Racism Strategy for our union and to present it for adoption at our 2021 National Convention.

CUPE has developed a draft of this strategy for members' feedback. It is rooted in the knowledge and experience of our members. Black, Indigenous and racialized members across the country participated in online consultations to make their recommendations. Our National Indigenous Council and National Rainbow Committee held a joint meeting for the same purpose.

During these consultations, CUPE members shared their lived experiences of racism. They discussed the barriers they face in and outside the union. They described how these challenges have been heightened by the growth of white supremacist movements in Canada and across the world, and by the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on Black, Indigenous and racialized communities.

Members also highlighted opportunities for change. As Canada diversifies, our labour movement is diversifying too. In order to build union power, we must organize in a way that connects our histories and struggles. This document outlines specific actions for CUPE to take to dismantle systemic racism and build an equitable and inclusive labour movement that fights for the rights of all working people. These actions include making changes to our internal policies and structures, as well as taking political action and working in coalition with anti-racist movements in Canada and globally.

CUPE welcomes your input on this draft. Please email antiracism@cupe.ca with questions or comments.

CUPE ANTI-RACISM STRATEGY FOR CONSULTATION

CUPE has a strong history of challenging racism. Over two decades ago, delegates to CUPE's National Convention adopted our 1999 *CUPE Policy Statement on Workplace Racism: Challenging Racism in the Workplace*. Since that crucial milestone, our union has challenged racism through a wide range of initiatives. We have developed bargaining strategies to advance workplace equity; created anti-racism workshops and educational materials; lobbied governments to take action on racism and human rights; supported community-led actions and initiatives; worked with anti-racist global justice activists; developed equity committees and designated equity positions on Local executives; and created two Diversity Vice-President seats on our National Executive Board, representing racialized and Indigenous members.

We must build on this work and do more. The devastating effects of colonization are ongoing. Racism, xenophobia and hate are on the rise in Canada and across the world. Black, Indigenous and racialized members continue to experience discrimination in and outside the union and those who are women, persons with disabilities or LGBTQ2+ members are likely to face more discrimination.

CUPE's 2014 Membership Survey showed that racialized members are over-represented in precarious jobs and less likely to be involved in the union.¹ It indicated that racialized and Indigenous workers are under-represented among our membership compared to their representation in the Canadian population. *CUPE's 2016-2017 National Leadership Project* suggested that Black, Indigenous and racialized members are under-represented in Local elected positions and face challenges in becoming more involved in the union.²

As trade unionists, we know that we cannot achieve economic justice without achieving racial justice. In 2019, delegates to CUPE's National Convention voted unanimously to create a CUPE-wide Anti-Racism Strategy. The resolution called upon CUPE National to:

- 1.** Create and implement an anti-racism strategy, including anti-Black racism, for the workplace and union that builds on CUPE's 1999 policy statement on racism in the workplace; and

¹ <https://cupe.ca/cupe-membership-survey-results-equality>

² <https://cupe.ca/building-strong-locals-national-leadership-survey-project>

2. Present this strategy at our 2021 CUPE National Convention for delegates to adopt.

Our new Anti-Racism Strategy is made up of 10 priority goals. These goals build on CUPE's previous anti-racist work and were developed in consultation with Black, Indigenous and racialized members from across the country. The strategy provides multiple pathways for CUPE to challenge and dismantle systemic racism in our workplaces, union and communities.

Systemic racism includes patterns of behaviour, policies or practices that shape institutions and organizations, and which create or reinforce disadvantage for Black, Indigenous and racialized people. Racism can be intentional, or it can be unintentional due to unconscious bias. Whether intentional or not, racism has a devastating impact on those experiencing it. Human rights law does not consider intent when determining wrongdoing and the need for remedy.

1

Ensure our Constitution and Local bylaws acknowledge and address systemic racism.

CUPE's Constitution and Local bylaws lay out the rules and procedures that govern how our union works.

There are many ways we can use the Constitution and Local bylaws to centre equity and inclusion. For example, in 2019, our Constitution was amended to increase equity-seeking delegates at National Convention and to include Indigenous land acknowledgements as part of the standard agenda of Local membership meetings.

In order to tackle systemic racism, we must build on this work. We should amend the Equality Statement to explicitly oppose racism, colonization and other forms of systemic oppression. We should also update our *Guide to Local Union Bylaws* to encourage the creation of human rights and anti-racism committees and other measures to increase representation.



2

Increase the representation of Black, Indigenous and racialized members in the union.

Lack of representation in union leadership is a barrier to participation for many Black, Indigenous and racialized members. When people do not see themselves reflected in union leadership positions, it becomes difficult to see the union's relevance to their lives.

Lack of representation can lead to decisions that ignore the needs of Black, Indigenous and racialized members. It also deprives the union of their vital perspectives, leadership skills and activism. This absence weakens the union and undermines the fundamental union principle of solidarity.



Many Local initiatives to increase representation already exist. These initiatives include the creation of designated equity positions on Local executives, as well as practices to increase participation at Local union meetings. CUPE should highlight these initiatives and encourage other Locals to adopt similar approaches.

To address the barrier of representation, CUPE should also provide leadership training for Black, Indigenous and racialized members to develop their capacity to take on leadership positions. In addition, the union should create more organizing spaces specifically for Black, Indigenous and racialized members to discuss their needs and consider solutions in a safe space. Examples of such organizing spaces could include Local anti-racism committees, as well as online regional and national meetings.

By building a strong network of anti-racism activists across the country with effective communications systems, we can help Black, Indigenous and racialized members overcome isolation, build solidarity and strengthen our union. We should monitor progress in advancing representation through National surveys of union executives.

3

Develop and engage in anti-racism education.

Collective action against systemic racism requires an understanding of our shared history and the ongoing impacts of racism, colonization and white supremacy in our lives today. Anti-racism education uncovers why inequities exist and how oppression operates in our society.

A commitment to anti-racism starts with the leadership of our union. Regular anti-racism training at the highest level of CUPE will set the standard for the rest of the union.

CUPE already has a strong history of providing anti-racism workshops for rank-and-file members and Local executives. As we move forward, we must monitor how often these workshops are delivered and how many members take them. We must ensure that Black, Indigenous and racialized members are involved in the development and delivery of CUPE's anti-racism education.

Anti-racism education should also be included in other workshops not specifically focused on human rights and anti-racism. For example, anti-racism education should be included in Local executive training and in *CUPE's Internship Program*, which develops new servicing staff. When possible, we should also collaborate with employers to provide anti-racism education in our workplaces.

Anti-racism education is especially important given the services we provide as public sector workers to diverse communities. In its final report, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada called for Indigenous awareness training for public service workers, including those CUPE represents. CUPE should provide this training to members as part of our union's commitment to truth and reconciliation.

CUPE can also contribute to the education of children and youth on anti-racism principles and our colonial history. We should provide resources for members to talk about anti-racism at home and integrate anti-racist content into youth-focused union spaces, such as the Youth Council at National Convention.



4

Learn from the experiences of Black, Indigenous and racialized members and celebrate their successes.

CUPE advocates for change by communicating our members' challenges and successes. However, Black, Indigenous and racialized members' stories have been historically under-reported. We need to acknowledge and profile the lived experiences of Black, Indigenous and racialized members and celebrate their successes. Members' stories should be shared on CUPE's social media, at CUPE events and in CUPE publications like *Counterpoint*. Regularly highlighting Black, Indigenous and racialized members and their achievements is a way to empower members and ensure that their stories are centred and part of the union movement.



5

Integrate an anti-racism focus into organizing strategies.

Canada's workforce is becoming increasingly diverse. Expanding the diversity of our membership is critical if the union is to build organizing power.

CUPE's 2014 Membership Survey showed that Black, Indigenous and racialized workers are under-represented among our membership compared to their representation in the Canadian population. Organizing the unorganized is part of CUPE's mandate. Our new members should reflect the diversity of Canada.



Organizing efforts must be attuned to the needs of Black, Indigenous and racialized workers and involve strategies for direct outreach. As part of this work, CUPE should train Black, Indigenous and racialized members to serve as member organizers.

CUPE should also focus on including precariously employed workers in the scope clauses of our collective agreements. Precarious workers are disproportionately Black, Indigenous and racialized. Expanding scope clauses will provide job protection, better wages and benefits for all.

Finally, union-provided orientation training sessions for new Locals and members should be regularly held and bargained into collective agreements. These sessions should educate new members about their rights as workers and explain how the union operates, while emphasizing CUPE's commitment to human rights and anti-racism.


6

Bargain to eliminate systemic racism and workplace inequities.

Struggles at the bargaining table are inseparable from our work to dismantle systemic racism and other forms of discrimination faced by our members. Bargaining with an anti-racism/anti-discrimination focus will significantly strengthen the labour movement by ensuring that we fight for the rights of all workers.

Black, Indigenous and racialized members must be included in the bargaining process to ensure that their lived experiences inform bargaining priorities. Designated equity seats on bargaining committees should be created to ensure that all members' voices are heard. Bargaining surveys should also include questions about equity and discrimination.





As part of an anti-racist bargaining agenda, Locals should review collective agreements and negotiate language on a wide range of issues such as wage discrimination, health and safety and leaves for cultural and religious reasons. 'No discrimination' clauses and anti-harassment language should clearly prohibit discrimination and harassment on the basis of prohibited human rights grounds, including racial discrimination. The language should also outline a fair, timely and effective process for investigating and resolving incidents and complaints.

Bargaining must also prioritize the elimination of precarious work. Black, Indigenous and racialized workers are over-represented in precarious work in Canada. As such, precarity is an important way in which systemic racism manifests in our workplaces. Precarity weakens all workers and our union. We can fight precarity by bargaining access to benefits and pension entitlements for precarious workers, or by bargaining language that obligates the employer to convert part-time positions to full-time, permanent positions.

Precarity includes temporary, permanent part-time, casual, on-call or contract employment. Members who work precariously also lack decent pay, benefits, pensions or leave provisions, including sick leave. Precarious workers lack job security and, as a result, are often afraid to challenge discrimination or health and safety violations.

We must also prioritize employment equity in bargaining. Employment equity aims to build a workforce that is more representative of our communities through fair hiring and promotion processes. It also works to eliminate systemic discrimination in employer policies that pose barriers to good jobs for Black, Indigenous and racialized workers, as well as other equity-seeking workers. Examples of employment equity include collective bargaining language that establishes more equitable hiring and promotion clauses, targeted training to provide opportunities for promotions and transfers, provisions for designated positions and the establishment of joint employment equity committees.

Resources and tools such as checklists for bargaining and sample bargaining language will help Locals to advance an anti-racist bargaining agenda, as will workshops and training for Locals, servicing representatives and participants in CUPE's Internship Program. An effective system to track Local collective agreement language that advances equity will also be key for measuring our success.

7

Administer and enforce the collective agreement with an anti-racist lens.

Our existing collective agreements contain clauses we can use to fight racism. We must be vigilant about enforcing these rights.

When reporting racism, Black, Indigenous and racialized members are often told that they are overreacting or misinterpreting racist behaviour and discriminatory practices. Fear of backlash and lack of union support may prevent members from coming forward with their experiences. Local executives, shop stewards and staff should receive training to understand the prevalence and detrimental impact of workplace racism and to support any Black, Indigenous and racialized members who are experiencing it. Locals should promptly file grievances related to discrimination and racism and bring them through the grievance procedure in a timely way from start to finish. A central system for CUPE to track grievances related to discrimination and racism could help determine workplace trends, as well as solutions.



8

Collect data on demographics, precarity and union involvement.

Data collection is essential to understand the full picture of CUPE's membership, including the intersection between demographics, work precarity and union involvement.

Data on our membership should be collected at regular intervals and monitored to ensure that CUPE's information is accurate and up to date. When data is collected, it should



be done via accessible means, using appropriate technology, to ensure that the voices of the most marginalized members are captured. Membership data can reveal the issues and challenges that need to be tackled by the union regarding anti-racism. It can also be used to provide an anti-racist lens in policy creation and the union's decision-making processes.

9

Take political action to challenge and eliminate systemic racism.

CUPE has political power. We work hard to elect progressive governments and to lobby for change between elections. CUPE members deserve accountability from all levels of government, and governments that fail to address systemic racism in our workplaces and communities must be challenged.

In allyship with the NDP, CUPE should push for change by encouraging Black, Indigenous and racialized members, as well as anti-racist allies, to run for elected office. We must continue to advocate for legislation that eliminates precarious work, advances employment equity, challenges racist policing and justice systems and implements fully funded anti-racism strategies.

CUPE Locals are on the frontline in the fight for public services and against privatization and austerity. Our campaigns are strengthened when they are grounded in the community which we serve. As public sector workers, we must also lobby for change when the services we are expected to deliver are inadequate, culturally insensitive or unsafe for Black, Indigenous and racialized community members.



10

Work in coalition with community groups and in solidarity with anti-racist global justice activists.

As public sector workers and CUPE members, we are deeply connected to our communities. CUPE was founded through grassroots mobilization, and we continue to support ground-up, community-based organizing today.


Advancing social justice is a core mandate of our union. We have supported Black Lives Matter and activists fighting against Islamophobia, anti-Semitism, anti-immigrant sentiment and other forms of hate. As part of our commitment to truth and reconciliation, we have supported Indigenous struggles around land and water, justice for missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls, treaty rights and the implementation of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

We must continue to work in coalition alongside community groups in the fight for justice. Our strength as a union – our power to mobilize and organize – gives us this responsibility. Working in coalition, in turn, strengthens our position at the bargaining table and our anti-privatization and anti-austerity campaigns.

We also need to expand our fight for global justice. The global economic system relies on racism to exploit and ultimately divide workers. This undermines our power. Building and strengthening a globally organized labour movement is critical to challenge this system, and to exert our collective right to live in a just world.

CUPE has expressed solidarity and stood alongside Black, Indigenous and racialized communities in the Global South that are resisting land theft by local governments and international corporations, including Canadian mining companies. We have spoken out against police brutality and white supremacist violence. We have challenged Canada's racist immigration policies, which severely





restrict access to essential programs, services and permanent status for mostly racialized migrant workers. We have also opposed Canadian foreign policy that undermines democracy, reinforces colonial power and creates the economic and social conditions that force people to migrate in search of work and safety.

The continuation and expansion of this work is critical. We must approach it with a clear understanding of Canada's role in the world, and an awareness of the privilege that so many of us hold as Canadian union members working and living in a rich nation. Worker-to-worker solidarity exchanges, a cornerstone of our work, will allow us to share our perspectives, and our global partners can share theirs with us.

ACCOUNTABILITY AND REPORTING ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE ANTI-RACISM STRATEGY

As the Anti-Racism Strategy is implemented, ongoing accountability to Black, Indigenous and racialized members is crucial. This will include regular consultations with members in the regions. Reports will be provided to the National Executive Board on key milestones in the implementation of the strategy. Progress reports will also be provided to the 2023 and 2025 National Conventions. A final report and possible recommendations to renew the strategy will be presented at our 2027 National Convention.

