



Members for Change – Program to Respond to Anti-Trans Hate

Content warning: The materials below contain references to violence against 2SLGBTQI+ people. Please take care when engaging with these materials.

Global and National Context

2SLGBTQI+ rights are in the global political spotlight and under attack from organized, international far right forces. This hateful surge is driven by social conservative forces, and serves powerful interests in distracting populations everywhere from universal issues like declining standards of living, unprecedented inequality, and the climate crisis. The backlash particularly targets transgender people, a poorly understood minority who have attained unprecedented visibility and organization in recent decades. Still socially and politically marginalized, trans people are an easy target for campaigns of misinformation playing on anxiety, fear, and suspicion. This right-wing populism is readily adopted by politicians, as we have seen in the US, in New Brunswick and Saskatchewan, and at the 2023 Conservative Policy Convention.¹ Their policies have a direct impact on transgender populations, with well-documented impacts in increasing the risks of suicide and harm among trans people – especially the most vulnerable among them, such as minors, people of colour, people with disabilities, and/or working-class people.

Many communities woke up on September 20, 2023 to find overt hate demonstrations against transgender people happening across the country - but they also saw a growing solidarity movement pushing back against hate and confronting these bigots in the streets.

This is a challenge and an opportunity for the labour movement, and not just because solidarity is important. Fighting this wave of anti-trans hate is our business for three other important reasons:

- Unlike in the recent past, when many trans people were excluded from the labour market because of employer discrimination, today many trans people are rank-and-file union members or active trade unionists. Overrepresented in the working class and in progressive politics, they make a crucial contribution to the movement out of proportion to their numbers. Attacks on them, which are growing at an alarming rate, are a direct attack on our movement.
- What happens in society spreads quickly to the workplace. Just as we've seen hate crimes against the 2SLGBTQI+ community skyrocket in Canada (and elsewhere), we've seen a marked increase in workplace discrimination and harassment against transgender people in particular.
- Many of the far-right forces that are targeting trans people today are also aggressively hostile to organized labour, both in their political alignment with the institutional right and in their active anti-union organizing through projects like United We Roll and more recent targeting of union activists. If these forces gather momentum and experience, they will become more of a threat to future labour actions and to workers on picket lines everywhere.

¹ In Canada, the provinces of New Brunswick and Saskatchewan have moved to introduce anti-trans policy changes, similar to the first steps taken by many US states. At the 2023 Conservative Party Convention, two aggressively anti-trans policy proposals were approved by comfortable majorities of party delegates.



CAPE and the Public Service of Canada

It's only in recent history that trans people have been able to join the federal government workplace in greater numbers. Earlier generations were either excluded by discrimination (legally allowed until 2016) or able to exist in the workplace only after undergoing a medical transition process, blending in, and keeping their history a secret. Many still face rampant workplace harassment and discrimination, inadequate workplace facilities, inaccessible name and gender change processes, and inequitable healthcare access.

In the last few years, trans workers have made effective use of departmental pride networks and of the interdepartmental Public Service Pride Network to improve workplace conditions. However, workers' advocacy through these networks is dependent on on-the-clock volunteer hours, supervisor goodwill, and executive support. As with much Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) work in our workplaces, it is frequently undercut by Human Resources departments and their employer-centric mandates. Above all, this work ties the improvement of workplace conditions to high-level institutional priorities that can and will shift when governments do. **Employer networks are not enough; trans public servants need strong unions to defend them and to fight for better workplace conditions.** The bottom line is simple: the boss isn't going to change things until they're made to. And unlike employer networks, unions have a longstanding commitment to anti-discrimination and workers' rights, and a historic will to get out in the streets to fight back against hate and injustice.

CAPE has been all but silent on all of this, as it has on many other issues and struggles faced by workers in our time². The few communications that CAPE National has begun to put out, such as a message on the eve of the national anti-trans protests on September 20th, have been in direct response to initiatives of the CAPE Solidarity Caucus. This progressive rank-and-file caucus has been at the forefront of organizing rapid response teams to counter anti-trans protests, as called for in a 2023 Canadian Labour Congress anti-hate resolution. We need rank-and-file momentum, but **we also need principled, material support from CAPE's National Executive Committee to respond to calls from the labour movement for mass action, confront the employer, empower locals with best practices and education, and ensure that trans workers know that a union job is a safe job.**

² For a case in point of CAPE's failure to support its trans members, consider 2023's new Public Service Healthcare Plan, negotiated by the National Joint Council. The updated PSHCP was advertised principally via the announcement of a new provision for gender-affirming care, widely and loudly promoted as an example of CAPE's commitment to EDI. However:

- The new provision as written has very large gaps and ambiguities that could have a major impact on the ability of trans employees to actually make meaningful use of the benefit for surgeries that are not already covered provincially or territorially. These gray areas are immediately obvious to anybody who has navigated gender-affirming healthcare, and reflect a profound failure of consultation or involvement of transgender people at any stage of the process.
- In response to numerous emails of transgender members about specifics of the new and potentially life-saving healthcare, CAPE provided nothing more than a stock message about an upcoming FAQ. The FAQ in question said nothing more than "There has also been a new benefit introduced for gender affirmation coverage" – an insult to a community which to this day does not yet know whether it will be able to get coverage for procedures like facial feminization surgery.



Members for Change commitments

The Members for Change platform is built on three pillars of a strong union: democracy, solidarity, and equity. **We do not see equity as an afterthought or diversion from the main purpose of the union; empowering and defending all workers is the purpose of the union, and serves our shared interest.** A union that fails to support its more vulnerable members loses credibility and is weaker at the bargaining table. A union that stands for its vulnerable members energizes its rank and file and grows in its ability to fight and win. And organizing for change now means we are more prepared for future fights on any issue.

If elected, the Members for Change team will:

Advance equity by fighting proactively for the rights and interests of transgender members:

- Develop best practices and union-level expertise for effectively defending trans workers who are subject to harassment in the workplace, and equip locals and rank and file to defend their rights.
- In sharp contrast to current practice, ensure that future National Joint Council negotiation of the Public Service Healthcare Plan unambiguously expands gender-affirming healthcare, and gives trans employees access to all benefits that are available to other members with comparable medical needs (e.g. wigs, voice therapy, hair removal, etc).
- Create a focused caucus for transgender union members to ensure strength and precision at the bargaining table, and communicate priorities transparently.
- Restore the collection of Public Service Employee Survey results for trans, non-binary, and gender-diverse workers, to ensure disaggregated data on experiences of harassment and other workplace issues and struggles.
- Ensure LROs, stewards, and rank and file are aware of trans workers' rights and the employer's obligations under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and federal and provincial human rights legislation.
- Enforce the employer's responsibility to facilitate efficient gender and name change in all workplace systems, to reflect members' identity.
- Advocate for the employer to fulfil its obligation to give trans workers full access to appropriate washroom facilities, uniforms, and dress code.
- Communicate proactively to membership about transgender issues, to make members aware that the union is a safe and supportive ally and how union representatives can lend support in the difficult process of coming out and/or transition in the workplace.

Expand democracy by ensuring robust mechanisms for participation of transgender members in union goal-setting and leadership:

- Institute a 2SLGBTQI+ Committee with NEC standing to regularly advise the CAPE executive on equity challenges facing the membership, through an intersectional lens.
- Create a trans-centered, rank and file 2SLGBTQI+ caucus group to report on workplace issues, initiate CAPE-wide changes, and influence bargaining priorities.



- Facilitate more regular communications to union members on advances and challenges in equity in the workplace, including best practices from locals.

Practice solidarity by joining with other unions and with community organizations to defend trans rights in and out of the workplace:

- Push for the formation of an inter-union caucus for 2SLGBTQI+ workers to ensure that all trans workers can be supported and work strategically together on shared issues.
- Ensure that National Joint Council unions develop a shared bargaining approach on all issues of equity and intersectionality.
- Directly organize and support locals in organizing to act on the Canadian Labour Congress's call for union locals to form rapid response units to fight anti-trans protests in their communities.
- Build robust relationships with 2SLGBTQI+ community organizations and labour federations to advance the labour movement's active role in fighting anti-trans politics.