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- Manitoba Government and General Employees' Union
- Ontario Public Service Employees Union
- Canadian Union of Brewery and General Workers
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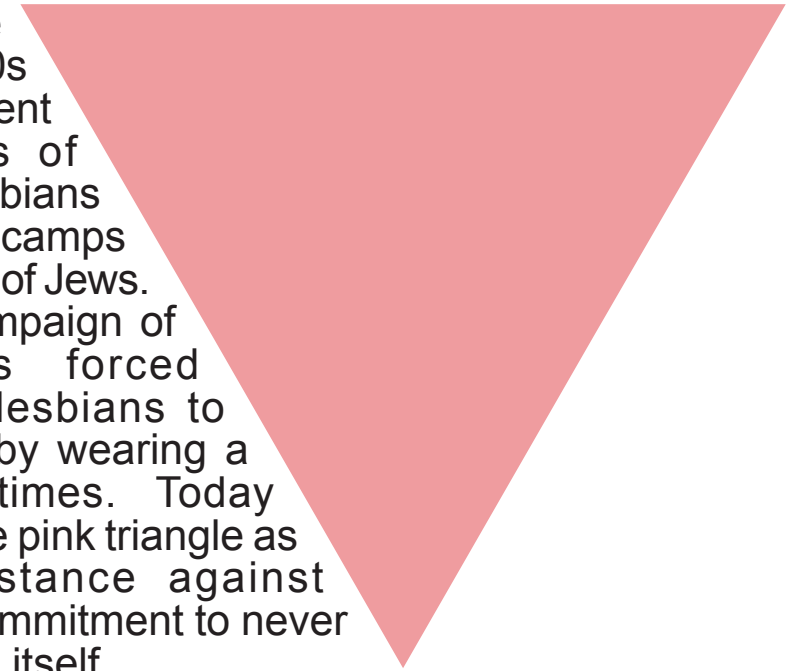
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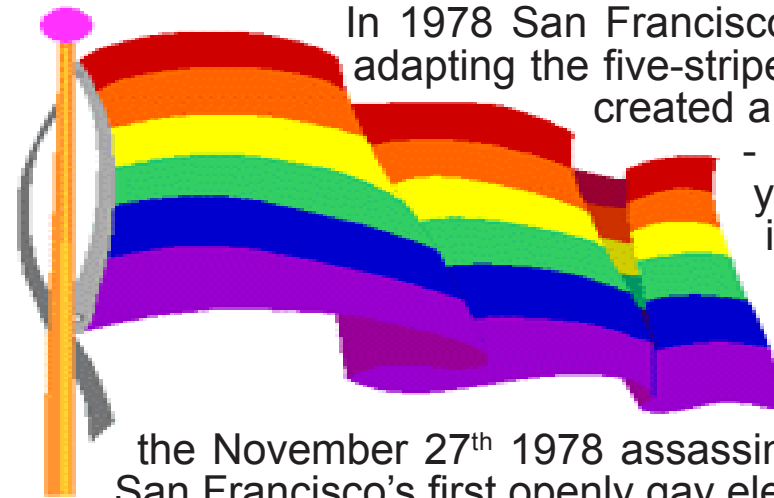
# Solidarity and Pride

## The Pink Triangle

Few people are aware that in the 1930s and 40s the Nazis sent tens of thousands of homosexuals and lesbians to the concentration camps alongside the millions of Jews. As a part of this campaign of terror the Nazis forced homosexuals and lesbians to identify themselves by wearing a pink triangle at all times. Today millions recognize the pink triangle as a symbol of resistance against persecution and a commitment to never let this history repeat itself.



## The Rainbow Flag



In 1978 San Francisco artist Gilbert Baker, adapting the five-striped "Flag of the Race", created a flag with eight stripes - pink, red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, and violet - representing sexuality, life, healing, sun, nature, art, harmony, and spirit. Following

the November 27<sup>th</sup> 1978 assassination of Harvey Milk, San Francisco's first openly gay elected official, the city's Pride Parade Committee used a modified version of Baker's flag to demonstrate the Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual (LGB) community's strength and solidarity in the aftermath. Today the Rainbow Flag - red, orange, yellow, green, blue and purple - provides an important positive symbol of the diversity of the LGB community.





## **The National Union Waves a Rainbow Flag with Pride**

The National Union believes that all workers should have equality of opportunity and treatment. But we all know that sometimes to achieve equality you have to recognize the differences. Especially when these differences are the very cause of unequal treatment.

To make Canada a society that is free from discrimination it is first necessary to acknowledge the problems and then take the steps to address them. This is the National Union's approach – look plainly at the facts and then do what is right!



## **Discrimination Exists**

Imagine you are visiting a strange town. In this town everyone speaks a language you don't understand and wears clothes you are unable to put on. At first you feel a little self-conscious. As time passes you would become uncomfortable with the attention you receive for being "different". Others stop and stare at you on the street. You can't get service in a restaurant because you don't meet the dress code. People around you are making jokes about you that you can't really understand. You try to blend in and hide your differences but it is always there. Every so often the people around you make hostile and threatening gestures.

For most gays and lesbians life every day is a little bit like that imaginary experience. Everywhere they go men and women are holding hands, cuddling or kissing. Almost all images on television are of people who are straight. Then, whenever they show affection in public or try to be themselves they are called hurtful names. Attempts to have a public life as a gay or lesbian draw condemnation. People say that "if only they wouldn't throw it in our face" or "we don't make a big issue about being straight" implying that things would be alright if gays and lesbians simply hid who they are. Jokes are told in the office about gays and lesbians. Assumptions are made about paedophilia or other "deviant behaviours". Sometimes the comments make light of violence and death.



## **Homophobia and Heterosexism**

Homophobia is the term used to describe the negative personal attitudes many people have about lesbians and gays. These attitudes may be attributed to the pervasive heterosexism in our society. Heterosexism is the belief that heterosexuality is more normal or superior to homosexuality. But, as in every aspect of human life, sexuality is far more complex than a simple either/or proposition. Heterosexuality is a sexual orientation in the same way that homosexuality is.

Despite some remarkable gains made by lesbians and gays over the past decades we still live in a country where gay men and lesbians are treated unequally. Many are denied jobs and housing, are harassed in the community and at work, assaulted, and even killed, because of who they are. Homophobia is so prevalent in our society that the media regularly contains expressions of hostility. Some religious and "community leaders" condemn lesbians and gay men as "immoral" and will hide behind undefined "family values" as a way to rationalize their hatred of difference.

While Human Rights Commissions and the federal courts have stated that same-sex spouses are entitled to the same benefits as heterosexual couples, provincial and federal governments are still dragging their heels on making the necessary changes. When two people can pay the same dues and premiums but be denied the same services simply on the basis of their sexual orientation, it becomes an important issue for your union. Polls indicate that the Canadian people are strongly in favour of these steps – it's time governments entered the new millennium.



## **The National Union is going to be part of the solution - not the problem**

Trade unions arose out of the struggle of women and men for dignity, equality and freedom from discrimination. The experiences of injustice and harassment in the workplace based on sexual orientation are taken as seriously by the National Union as all others are. We must, as working people and trade unionists, take the principled stand to support the struggle of our lesbian and gay sisters and brothers in their goal of attaining full equality.

Along with our sisters and brothers in the Canadian Labour Congress and the Public Services International we are busy educating our members and lobbying government to see justice done. We are calling on all our members to join us!

### ***Every member can help!***

- Distribute this pamphlet in your workplace.
- Ask your local executive to invite a Lesbian or Gay solidarity organization to speak at your next meeting
- Support your union's efforts to hold workshops on the issue.
- Speak out when governments or corporations start trying to turn back the clock on lesbian/gay rights.
- Establish a Pride committee in your local.
- Support and participate in local Pride Parades.
- Bring forward lesbian/gay issues to the bargaining table.

### ***At the table***

As trade union members we know that a good collective agreement can go a long way towards addressing problems in the workplace. The following are suggestions that your local can consider when bargaining equity for lesbians and gays:

- Do an equity audit of the workplace – how representative is the job site?
- Implement education programs for employees to dispel myths and misconceptions about lesbians and gays.
- Bargain strong language preventing discrimination or harassment based on sexual orientation.
- Ensure recruitment and hiring practices are equitable.