



**national
union**

***NATIONAL UNION OF PUBLIC
AND GENERAL EMPLOYEES***

- B. C. Government and Service Employees' Union
- Health Sciences Association of British Columbia
- Health Sciences Association of Alberta
- Saskatchewan Government and General Employees' Union
- Manitoba Government and General Employees' Union
- Ontario Public Service Employees Union
- Canadian Union of Brewery and General Workers
- New Brunswick Union of Public and Private Employees
- Nova Scotia Government and General Employees Union
- PEI Union of Public Sector Employees
- Newfoundland & Labrador Association of Public and Private Employees

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The National Union of Public and General Employees is an affiliate of the Canadian Labour Congress and a member of the Public Services International



Strength in Diversity



Building the Union

Strength in Diversity



Imagine you are building a house. During the planning you must consider the types of material needed, and the size and shape of each, for all the different purposes. You know that it is in the diversity of materials used and how each is utilized that the strength and character of your home will be defined.

Now turn your thoughts to your union. Similar to the imaginary home you just built, its strength is found in the diversity of the membership. Every individual brings skills and abilities to the union that

can help to build a strong and fighting movement. Your unions' ability to defend the interests of you, your co-workers and the communities you live in, is only as good as the strength of the membership. The membership is only as strong as the union's success at uniting the diversity within it.

This is why the principle of equity is important for the union. We need the perspectives of all members to be heard in order to ensure that we can more fully represent you. We need the full participation of everyone to build a strong house of labour.



This is also why racism, sexism, homophobia and the exclusion of the disabled, weakens the union. These prejudices can prevent people from participating in the union - denying it the valuable resource of their skills and abilities. Discrimination and prejudice divide us from each other and distract us from what is truly important, those things we struggle for in common – the desire for meaningful work, good pay, and dignity on the job.

When you embrace the opinions and life experiences of people from all ethnic and racial backgrounds as well as those with different sexual orientations and physical abilities you



increase the knowledge that can be brought to bear on an issue. When you integrate the perspectives of these people into all your work you strengthen your ability to succeed.

But it is not as easy as it sounds. We all have attitudes, most learned when we were very young, about those people who are "different" from us. There are social barriers that prevent people of colour, aboriginals, gays and lesbians, the disabled and others, from fully participating in the workplace, the union or the community at large.

For many of those seeking equity their experiences with unions and other organizations have been negative. Many newcomers to Canada fear becoming involved because in their countries of origin belonging to a trade union is dangerous. The behaviour of co-workers, even unintentional comments and actions, at work or in a local meeting can keep people from feeling welcome. And, if the bargaining committee doesn't try to introduce equity issues during negotiations many will feel forgotten or ignored. This is why it is important to address these attitudes on the shop floor, within the union, at the bargaining table, and in the community.



It is impossible to overcome some of these attitudes and barriers in a short period of time. You cannot overlook the role that discrimination and intolerance, both historic and contemporary, play in keeping people apart. That is why your union takes extra measures to ensure that people from equity seeking groups are involved, engaged and full participants. By promoting equity we all benefit!

To find out more about how you can reach out to your sisters and brothers from equity seeking groups contact your union's education department or contact the National Union.