



Report to 2023 National Convention

CUPE ANTI-RACISM STRATEGY 2021-2027



CUPE

INTRODUCTION

Our union has a long and proud history of fighting against racism. In 1999, CUPE members at the national convention in Montreal adopted the *CUPE Policy Statement on Workplace Racism*¹ which set the bar for the Canadian labour movement.

At that gathering of CUPE activists from all over Canada, the call to action was clear: we need to take an activist approach to ending racism in our workplaces now.

CUPE activists have been standing shoulder to shoulder with communities who have been at the forefront of the fight against racism. CUPE helped establish employment equity legislation where it exists in Canada, and continues to fight for it where it is lacking. CUPE members have worked hard to make gains for representation on local and provincial executives. Nationally, Indigenous, Black and racialized members² are represented by two Diversity Vice-Presidents on the National Executive Board.

There is still more to be done. CUPE's 2016-2017 National Leadership Project showed that Black, Indigenous and racialized workers are under-represented in elected positions at the local level.³ They also face barriers to union participation.

A 2019 survey showed that 11% of our members identify as racialized and 5% as Indigenous. Of the 11%, almost one-in-five identify as Black (19%) and 17% as South Asian. The survey showed that Black and racialized workers continue to be overrepresented among those who have precarious employment. Black and racialized workers were also less likely to attend union events and activities.

At the 2019 National Convention, delegates voted unanimously to develop an anti-racism strategy for our union.

CUPE's *Anti-Racism Strategy 2021-2027* was adopted at the 30th National Convention in 2021 to recommit our union to the important work of dismantling white supremacy and fighting racism.⁴ The strategy is set to renew in 2027.



There are ten goals in the strategy:

- 1. Governance:** Ensure our Constitution and local bylaws acknowledge and address systemic racism
- 2. Representation:** Increase representation of Black, Indigenous and racialized members in the union
- 3. Anti-racism education:** Develop and engage in anti-racism education
- 4. Lived experience:** Learn from the experiences of Black, Indigenous and racialized members and celebrate their successes
- 5. Organizing:** Integrate an anti-racism focus into organizing strategies
- 6. Bargaining:** Bargain to eliminate systemic racism and workplace inequities
- 7. Enforcing collective agreements:** Administer and enforce the collective agreement with an anti-racist lens
- 8. Data collection:** Collect data on demographics, precarity and union involvement
- 9. Political action:** Take political action to challenge and eliminate systemic racism
- 10. Coalition work and global solidarity:** Work in coalition with community groups and in solidarity with anti-racist global justice activists

Implementing the strategy is a responsibility we must all take on as union members. When Indigenous, Black and racialized workers make gains, everyone is better off.

Priority goals

Based on consultations with members in 2020 and 2021, the following four goals have been the immediate focus for implementing the strategy since the 2021 National Convention:

Goal 2	Goal 3	Goal 6	Goal 8
Representation	Education	Bargaining	Data Collection

Progress

2	Representation
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National Diversity Vice-Presidents (DVPs)

The 2021-2023 National DVPs are Aubrey Gonsalves and Debra Merrier. Sister Debra represents Indigenous workers in our union and Brother Aubrey represents Black and racialized workers.

In April 2022, the National DVPs held a virtual gathering with nearly 100 Black, Indigenous and racialized workers. This first meeting of Indigenous, Black and racialized CUPE members since the adoption of the strategy set the stage for the kind of affinity spaces we need to foster in order to ensure our members can organize effectively for an anti-racist labour movement.

In September 2022, the DVPs hosted an in-person gathering at the National Sector Council Conference in Ottawa. In November 2022, they hosted an in-person gathering at the National All-Committees Meeting in Vancouver.

There was a second virtual gathering in November 2022 with the DVPs, followed by one in June and September 2023. The gatherings in November 2022 and September 2023 were open to allies, with a view to fostering anti-racist solidarity within union membership.



The activities of the National DVPs have been crucial to make progress towards achieving the goal of increased representation for Black, Indigenous and racialized workers in CUPE. The DVPs continue to engage with members across the country by hosting gatherings and by attending union events, including local meetings and division conventions.

Throughout these gatherings, the importance of representation has always been made clear: nothing about us without us.

Women in Leadership Development Program

After CUPE Ontario members adopted the Anti-Racism Organizational Action Plan to address the systemic underrepresentation and exclusion of Indigenous, Black and racialized members in the union, the division launched the Women in Leadership Development program for Black, Indigenous and racialized women with the support of the national union.

The program, which launched in the summer of 2022, is building capacity among Indigenous, Black and racialized women to be leaders of our movement.

Indigenous Workers


CUPE Atlantic Maritimes Indigenous Council (CAMIC)

In June 2022, CAMIC officially convened for the first time. This multi-provincial body provides a forum for Indigenous members in the Maritimes and Atlantic regions to meet, share resources, strategize, and hold space to build an anti-colonial union. The formation of CAMIC ensures that Indigenous workers in every division across Canada have representation through an Indigenous Council.

Water is life campaign

Many of our members work in the provision of water services to their communities. CUPE's *Water is life* campaign, launched in 2022 on National Indigenous Peoples Day, June 21, highlights the crisis that Indigenous communities across Canada are facing due to the lack of access to clean drinking water.⁵ Today, there are still dozens of First Nation communities living under some form of water advisory.

For example, June 19, 2022 marked 10,000 days since members of the Neskantaga First Nation have been under a long-term boil water advisory.⁶ Members of the Shoal Lake 40 First Nation were under a water advisory for 24 years until 2021 while water from their community was used – and continues to be used – to supply the City of Winnipeg.⁷



In 2023, four members of the National Indigenous Council shared their stories to highlight why protecting water is a fight that our union must undertake. The late Leo Cheverie (CUPE 1870) was of Inuk ancestry from Labrador and lived in PEI.⁸ Nathalie Claveau (CUPE 1500) is from the Innu community of Mashteuiatsh near Lac Saint-Jean, Quebec.⁹ Dawn Bellerose (CUPE 1880) is from Robinson-Huron Anishinaabe territory in Sault Ste. Marie.¹⁰ Lindsay Poll (CUPE 4070) is originally from Treaty 6, Lac Ste. Anne Métis Nation and Michel First Nation, and lives in Treaty 7 territory near Calgary.¹¹

Black and racialized workers

Every year, CUPE marks Black History Month, Asian Heritage Month and international commemorative days.

In 2023, the National Rainbow Committee held a special celebration to mark the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination on March 21 in conjunction with their meeting in Ottawa. The Committee also screened and then reflected on the documentary *Black Ice* (2022), which highlights anti-Black racism in the world of professional and semi-professional hockey in Canada. Since it is set in the world of the popular sport of hockey, the Committee recommended the documentary as an educational tool to introduce the issue of anti-Black racism to CUPE members.

In May 2023, CUPE issued a statement for Asian Heritage Month calling on the Government of Canada to renew its anti-racism strategy and to ensure that the glaring absence of a strategy to combat anti-Asian hate is addressed.¹²

Representation Toolkit

CUPE is developing a Representation Toolkit to provide locals with the tools they need to ensure better representation of Black, Indigenous and racialized workers in union leadership. The toolkit includes a guide on creating surveys, sample bylaw language to establish equity committees and diversity seats on local executives, and other tips to increase representation in locals.



3 Education

Anti-Racist CUPE Program

In order to build an anti-racist union, we need to ensure that we have the tools to educate membership, staff and leadership. CUPE's Union Education Branch is developing a new program called Anti-Racist CUPE, also known as the ARC program, for members.

ARC will be a blend of online and face-to-face learning opportunities to help CUPE members create an anti-racist union culture. ARC offers a learning path for members and locals to build anti-racist unionism to better serve the full diversity of CUPE's membership and to build solidarity in our communities.

The goal of this program is to deliver a curriculum that will continue to build an actively anti-racist workers' movement in our union. As trade unionists, we understand that economic justice isn't possible without racial justice.

Educational materials for commemorative days


CUPE has produced posters, stickers, buttons and other materials that locals can use to promote annual events that celebrate Black, Indigenous and racialized workers.

Black history

Each year, during Black History Month in February, CUPE honours a Black ancestor or someone who is making history today. In 2022, CUPE highlighted the story of Bromley Lloyd Armstrong – a Jamaican immigrant who became a Canadian civil rights leader. He was a dedicated trade unionist who was known for being passionate about radical social change in the fight against racial discrimination.

In 2023, CUPE celebrated the work of Dr. Jill Andrew, an Ontario-based Black feminist and co-founder of Body Confidence Canada, who serves as Canada's first openly queer and Black member of provincial parliament.

Every year on Emancipation Day – August 1 – CUPE issues a statement¹³ to recognize the history and legacy of slavery in Canada and to support the fight against anti-Black racism. These statements outline actions that members can take.



The UN International Decade for People of African Descent is from 2015 to 2024. CUPE reads a statement recognizing the Decade at national union events and is committed to continuing to recognize the decade at national union events beyond 2024. As we come to the end of the decade, the Anti-Racism Strategy guides us to continue fighting against anti-Black racism in our workplaces and communities.

Truth and reconciliation

In addition to the *Water is life* campaign which includes educational videos for members and the public to learn about Indigenous knowledge and the importance of protecting our most precious resource, CUPE remains committed to advancing truth and reconciliation through education.

Every year, CUPE promotes June 21, National Indigenous Peoples Day and September 30, the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation. In 2022, the national officers, Mark Hancock and Candace Rennick, released a video on the significance of the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation. CUPE also promotes Red Dress Day on May 5 and Sister in Spirit vigils on October 4 to honour and raise awareness about missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls and Two-Spirit people, and to demand action on the 231 calls for justice of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls.

CUPE's quarterly publication – *Counterpoint* – includes a regular column on reconciliation.¹⁴ Topics addressed have included articles on the *Water is life* campaign, the lack of funding to investigate unmarked graves at residential schools, and the importance of advancing truth and reconciliation at the bargaining table.

Anti-racism training for leaders

The 2021 National Convention adopted a resolution requiring the National Executive Board to receive mandatory anti-racism training. The NEB received this training in January 2023. Anti-racism training was also delivered to executive boards of several provincial divisions.

Union Education also prioritized the delivery of anti-racism and human rights training for members across the country at CUPE schools in 2022.



Indigenous cultural safety training in healthcare

Following a decision of Convention in 2021, CUPE is developing Indigenous cultural safety training for members working in the health care sector. This will ensure that our members, who deliver public services in institutions that have a colonial legacy, understand their role in decolonizing health care practices.

Promoting education on the Anti-Racism Strategy

Educating CUPE staff and member leaders on the Anti-Racism Strategy is key to its success. There was a presentation and panel discussion on the strategy at the National All-Committees' Meeting in November 2022, and delegates at the National Women's Conference participated in skills building workshops on the strategy and on Indigenous cultural safety.

CUPE staff are receiving training on the strategy across the country and regional directors are ensuring that the work of our staff is advancing the goals set out in the strategy.

6 Bargaining

At the bargaining table is where our movement can truly show our power to advance the cause of social and economic justice.

Truth and reconciliation bargaining guide

As workers that deliver the public services that our communities rely on, we must use our bargaining power to advance truth and reconciliation at the bargaining table.

In 2022, CUPE released *Truth and reconciliation: CUPE taking action through collective bargaining*, a guide for locals which includes sample contract language to better support Indigenous members and communities.¹⁵ The guide covers issues including the importance of knowing who your members are, how to bargain language recognizing the land on which the work is carried out, targeted hiring of Indigenous workers, and culturally flexible bereavement leave clauses.

Training for this guide has been developed for both CUPE staff as well as CUPE members and has already been rolled out at some union events.



Employment equity bargaining guide

Achieving equity in the workplace is an ongoing struggle for members who are women, Indigenous, persons with disabilities, Black or racialized and 2SLGBTQI+. Employment equity is not just about equal treatment, but also about taking intentional steps to correct inequity.

CUPE is developing an employment equity bargaining guide which includes sample bargaining language and other steps locals can take to ensure that their equity-deserving members can achieve their full potential in their workplaces.

8 Data Collection

We know from member surveys that equity-deserving members have long been structurally prevented from attending union events, including conventions, are underrepresented in union leadership positions, and are more likely to have precarious jobs.

We cannot create equity solutions without accurate information to guide the process. Collecting data about our membership is critical in order to ensure that the union can make informed decisions to better support equity-deserving members.

There is currently a review underway of CUPE's data collection practices to ensure an equity lens, identify gaps in data collection, and develop recommendations for a reporting system to support the goals of the *Anti-Racism Strategy* and monitor its success.



Other goals

As well as the priority goals outlined above, CUPE also acted on other goals of the strategy.

We took political action (Goal 9) on employment equity by calling on the federal government to improve the federal *Employment Equity Act* to ensure equitable employment for Black, Indigenous and racialized workers, as well as other equity-deserving workers. CUPE presented our demands to the federal government's Task Force on the Employment Equity Act Review and provided a written submission.

Highlights of our actions related to Goal 10 (coalition work and global solidarity) include organizing delegations of CUPE members to attend the National Black Canadians Summit and the convention of the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists. We also sent delegations to learn about the recent election and the violence endured by workers in Colombia, and to Cuba in support of our union partner, the National Union of Public Administration Workers, and the Cuban people in their ongoing struggle against a harsh United States economic blockade.

CONCLUSION

The *Anti-Racism Strategy* is an historic step forward in our union's commitment to challenge all forms of racial discrimination and create equitable workplaces and communities for Indigenous, Black and racialized workers.

Two years into the strategy, the impact of the work can already be seen – from creating bargaining guides and educational materials for locals to building an anti-racist consciousness among members and leaders.

There is still more to be done. You are part of that journey. Stay tuned for more events, educational material, bargaining language, and toolkits aimed at building an anti-racist union.

Let us know what you want to see happen next and what actions your local has taken by emailing CUPE at antiracism@cupe.ca.



Endnotes

¹CUPE, "[CUPE Policy Statement on Workplace Racism](#)," October 16, 1999.

²At the National Convention in 2021, there was a constitutional amendment passed to separate "Black" from "racialized" in order to ensure that our union recognizes the unique pervasiveness and viciousness of anti-Black racism.

³CUPE, "[Building Strong Locals National Leadership Survey Project](#)," September 30, 2017.

⁴CUPE, "[CUPE's Anti-Racism Strategy](#)," 2021.

⁵CUPE, "[Water is life](#)" campaign.

⁶CUPE, "[The fight for clean drinking water continues](#)," June 17, 2022.

⁷Shoal Lake #40 First Nation, "[Water](#)."

⁸CUPE, "[Water is life: we're in this fight together](#)," March 29, 2023.

⁹CUPE, "[Water is life: it could be gone tomorrow](#)," April 4, 2023.

¹⁰CUPE, "[Water is life: it's everything](#)," April 12, 2023.

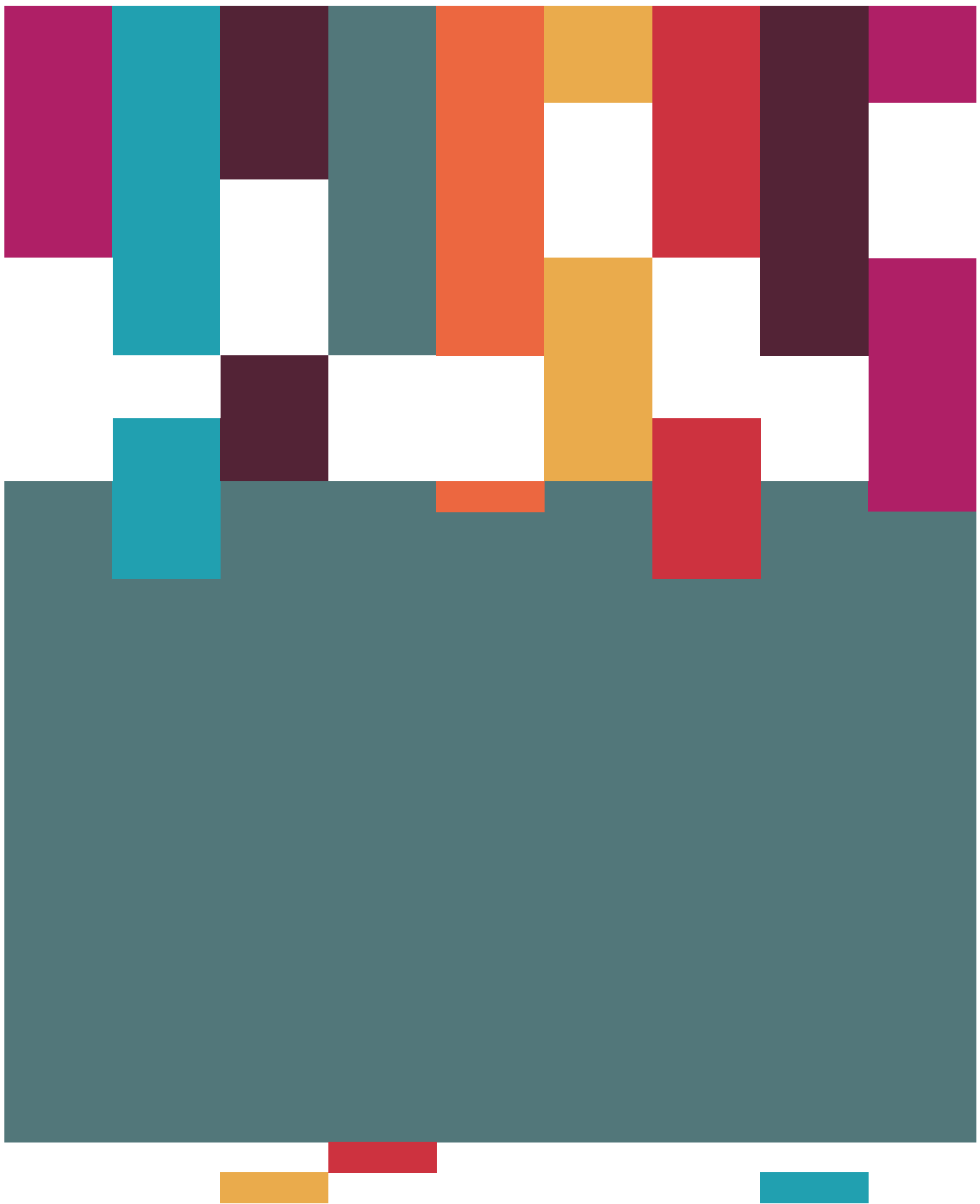
¹¹CUPE, "[Water is life: without it, there's nothing](#)," March 22, 2023.

¹²CUPE, "[Asian Heritage Month](#)," May 2023.

¹³CUPE, "[Emancipation Day](#)," August 1, 2022.

¹⁴CUPE, "[Counterpoint](#)." Counterpoint is CUPE's national quarterly magazine. It is designed to bring you news on issues important to CUPE members from a national perspective.

¹⁵CUPE, "[Truth and reconciliation: CUPE taking action through collective bargaining](#)," March 2022.



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