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Human Rights and Equity News for OPSEU Staff and Members | Spring 2014 | equity@opseu.org

TOWARD A MORE INCLUSIVE UNION

RESPECT:

Equality Begins at Home.

How do we transform “the people united” from a slogan in the streets to a daily reality in our Union? We begin each gathering with the statement: *“Whenever OPSEU members gather, we welcome all peoples of the world. We will not accept any unwelcoming words, actions or behaviours against our union members.”* Is this enough?

The Equity Unit seeks to breathe justice into the daily life of our Union by developing and implementing OPSEU’s Harassment and Discrimination Prevention and Personal Harassment Policies. Allegations of discrimination and harassment among the membership are taken serious. The Equity Unit responds to complaints filed under the Policies with advisors, mediation, investigations, and implementation of recommendations that seek to heal the union of any damage cause by breaches of the Policies. We deserve and expect within the union the same equitable and fair treatment that we demand in the workplace. Information about the Policies and Procedures, in addition to forms to file a complaint, can be found at www.opseu.org/committees/equity/harassment-and-discrimination.htm.

In addition to these two policies, the Equity Unit provides strategic expertise and support to staff and individual members in relation to campaigns, grievances, mediations, harassment and discrimination complaints, policy initiatives and training related to human rights. *An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.*

INCLUSION:

Leave No Member Behind.

Ever have a boss who requires you to do a job but fails to provide the necessary training or tools to do it? We scream “unfair” and rightly so. We should demand nothing less within our union. The OPSEU Accommodation Policy seeks to remove barriers to full union participation based on disability, gender, family status, creed or any ground identified in the Ontario Human Rights Code. The strength of our union demands the full participation of its diverse membership. To this end, the Equity Unit evaluates and approves human rights accommodation requests so members can truly gather as equals at convention, educational gatherings, bargaining sessions, and other events that build the bonds of solidarity.

SOLIDARITY:

Stand Up and Be Counted.

Living in a society where discrimination and oppression remain a daily reality, we cannot sit back and wait for the universe to bend toward justice. Establishing equity within the union requires an intentional commitment and proactive struggle. To this end, the Equity Committees and Caucuses provide the ties that bind us together, making visible

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and celebrating the diversity that is our strength. They advise OPSEU on issues related to women, people with disabilities, workers of colour, Aboriginal workers, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender/transsexual, intersexed, queer, questioning and two spirited (LGBTTIQQ2S) workers, francophones and young workers. The Social Mapping Project is a long-term project that seeks to transform our union into a model of equity and solidarity. <http://www.opseu.org/countmein/index.htm>

ACCOMMODATION AND THE ONTARIO HUMAN RIGHTS CODE

“Accommodation” is a term used to describe the duties of an employer, service provider or landlord to provide equal access to people protected under the Ontario Human Rights Code (Code). The following are prohibited grounds of discrimination:

- ▶ Race
- ▶ Ancestry
- ▶ Place of origin
- ▶ Colour
- ▶ Ethnic origin
- ▶ Citizenship
- ▶ Creed (religion)
- ▶ Sex (including pregnancy)
- ▶ Sexual orientation
- ▶ Disability
- ▶ Age (18 and over, 16 and over in occupancy of accommodation)
- ▶ Marital status (including same sex partners)
- ▶ Family status

- ▶ Receipt of public assistance (in accommodation only)
- ▶ Record of offences (in employment only)
- ▶ Gender identity
- ▶ Gender expression

The duty to accommodate recognizes that people have different needs and require different solutions to gain equal access to services, housing and employment. To accommodate means providing an environment free of barriers and allowing people meaningful access to jobs, housing, and the use of goods, services and facilities (e.g. public transit or schools).

OPSEU ACCOMMODATION POLICY

The purpose of the OPSEU Accommodation Policy is to ensure that OPSEU provides accommodation to members in accordance with the Ontario Human Rights Code. The goal of an accommodation is to allow OPSEU members to participate fully in union-related activities and functions.

Members who require accommodation may direct their requests to the Equity Unit or an event planner by completing an Accommodation Request Form (see below).

Members will be required to identify accommodation-related needs and to provide information about capabilities,

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limitations and restrictions in order to substantiate requests for accommodation.

The Equity Unit will assess all accommodation requests on an individualized basis and will explore accommodation options. All accommodation-related information will be kept confidential except where disclosure is necessary to make arrangements or to process expense claims.

For example, a member attends a regional event hosted by their union. This person has mobility issues and is unable to walk long distances. The hotel where the event is taking place does not provide parking onsite.

Instead, space is rented out at a nearby lot, fifteen minutes away and involves crossing a major and very busy intersection. The member submits an accommodation request to have valet parking expenses covered. An accommodation may be granted after examining the member's restrictions and/or limitations in relation to the request (for valet parking). For instance, what is the maximum distance that this person is able to walk? Does the member require any items to assist with walking? Are these restrictions/limitations permanent or temporary? Under the Accommodation Policy, other alternatives would be explored to determine the most suitable form of accommodation for this member. In this instance, valet parking may be granted given the individual's mobility restrictions as they relate to disability. Furthermore, additional accommodation arrangements could also be made to ensure that this individual has a hotel room that is situated closer to the event's conference area.

OPSEU ACCOMMODATION FUND

The Accommodation Fund is a central fund administered by the Equity Unit. Approved member expenses required

for accommodation (e.g. materials in alternate formats, sign language interpretation, single room hotel accommodation, extra caregiving costs) will be reimbursed through the OPSEU Accommodation Fund for Locals, regional events, Provincial Committees and Caucuses. Approved accommodation expenses for central events are covered by event budgets. Access to any reimbursement of expenses for accommodation is obtained through the Accommodation Request Form process.

For more information: <http://www.opseu.org/committees/equity/accommodation-policy.htm>

En français: <http://www.sefpo.org/comites/equity/politique-accommodement.htm>

EQUAL PAY FOR EQUAL WORK

The significance of this year's Equal Pay Day on April 16th is not so much the attention of a single day, but the need for consistent advocacy and awareness of the political, social, and economic issues that contribute to the growing gender pay gap in the province of Ontario, and Canada in general.

Equal Pay Day has gained international recognition worldwide, with Ontario being the first Province in Canada to formally recognize the

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increasing gender pay gap that sees male employees earning more than women employees for identical work. The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA) in its Report entitled 'A Growing Concern: Ontario's Gender Pay Gap' and authored by Human Rights and Labor Law Expert Mary Cornish; has highlighted ground breaking findings. These findings include among others, the facts as below:-

- ▶ Women's wages continue to lag behind those of men. In 2010, Ontario gender pay gap was 28%, meaning that on average, women earned 0.72 cents for every \$1.00 earned by men. Surprisingly, this gender pay gap worsened in 2011 with a widening of 31.5%. This means that in 2011, women earned 68.5 cents for every \$1.00 earned by men.
- ▶ Women of color and racialized women, new and recent immigrant women, Aboriginal women, women with disabilities, Youth female workers, and women with a gender variant other than heterosexual are further disadvantaged by the gender pay gap. As an example; statistics indicate that racialized women earn 19% less than white heterosexual women and 24% less than racialized men. Detailed statistics on pay gender gap based on various women's classifications and gender variances are available through Statistics Canada, Canadian Community Health Survey, 2009.
- ▶ In monetary terms, women's average earnings decreased from \$35,000 in 2010 to \$33,600 in 2011; which translates to a wage loss of \$1,400 per year. Conversely, men's earnings INCREASED in the same year; from much higher comparative earnings of \$48,800 in 2010 to \$49,000 in 2011.

The increasing equal pay gender gap is therefore appalling. We live in the 21st Century and Canada is among one of the most developed Nations of the World.

This increasing equal pay gender gap is a symptom of a much more complex and larger problem that we need to pay attention to. Let us take a moment to grasp the following fundamentals:-

- ▶ Ontario, and by extension Canada, has not made a concerted effort to implement the 2009 ILO Global Jobs Pact in which Governments committed to implementing programs and systems in place aimed at closing the gender pay gap; . The CCPA report recommends that Ontario implement the 2013 World Bank Gender at Work report that proposes mainstreaming of gender equality measures into labor markets.
- ▶ When the Federal Government undertakes Fiscal Policies to stimulate the Canadian economy, and particularly during periods of economic decline similar to the 2009 recession, the industries that greatly benefited from financial stimuli were mainly those that are male dominated; and particularly in the Construction Industry.
- ▶ According to the Workers Action Centre's relentless campaign, the economic sectors and industries that are female dominated continue to be over-represented by women who are in precarious employment. These are women

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whose terms of employment are often temporary, casual, contract, or seasonal. Added to this, such precarious employment is characterized by low wages near the bottom end of the pay scale, and women who work in professions such as bank tellers, child care workers, personal home support workers, teaching assistants, flight attendants, and servers/waitresses are most negatively impacted by low wages that do not keep up with inflation and the rising cost of living.

- ▶ Following the global financial markets melt down which subsequently led to the global recession of 2009 and the collapse of financial institutions and private sector corporations, many workers lost jobs as a result of poor financial and economic policies not of their own making. In Canada, we continue to pride ourselves as having escaped the severe impact of this recession better off than other developed countries such as the United States and the European Union. What is not so obvious to us is the creeping poverty and homelessness that continues to hurt most Canadians, and which we can only compare to malignant cancer not yet fully blown.
- ▶ Women bear the greatest toll of this loss of dignity and livelihood as a result of poverty. According to the Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women (CRIAOW), women who are more likely to be poor are those raising families by themselves, women with disabilities, Aboriginal women, Women of Color, Immigrant Women, Lesbians, Migrant women, and Low wage earners. Poverty is defined using Statistics Canada's low income cut-offs (LICOs). Simply put and often debatable, poverty is defined as the level at which people spend so much of their income on basic necessities that they live in very difficult circumstances.
- ▶ Sadly, Canada has the largest wage gap between

women and men full-time workers out of the world's 29 most developed countries, according to statistics from the Organization for Economic Co-operation and development (OECD in Figures, Paris, 2004).

Given the above dire circumstances, what tools and options do we have to further close the equal pay gender gap? To begin with, the Pay Equity Commission provides programs and services to support and enforce compliance with Ontario's Pay Equity Act. It is strategically placed to acknowledge and be at the fore front in implementing programs aimed at reducing the equal pay gender gap countrywide; and as a matter of priority.

Secondly, current Government Policies that perpetuate equal pay gender gap and subsequent poverty of women in general need to be challenged. There is no specific Government Strategy in Canada that deals with women's poverty. Instead, the Government as early as 1990 embarked on brutal cuts to social assistance programs when it slashed federal support under the Canada Assistance Plan to Ontario. Eligibility for welfare became further eroded through the Mike Harris era at the start of 1995 with a slash of welfare benefits for all recipients (except the aged and the disabled) by 21.6%.

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Mike Harris further eliminated nutritional supplement for poor pregnant mothers. This erosion of social support programs continues today. Recent changes to the Canada Pension Plan (CPP) continue to disadvantage retirees who opt to take early retirement. Considering that women earn less than men, the CPP entitlement for women in retirement is therefore significantly lower than that of men. Consequently, the same rationale of lower pension payouts for women who qualify for Defined Benefit Pension Plans, Defined Contribution Pension Plans, and group RRSP plans apply.

Needless to say, the 'Employment Insurance' program discriminates against women. The Standing Committee on the Status of Women studied how the Employment Insurance Program discriminates against women. The findings of this study are documented in the report entitled 'Gender-Based Analysis: Building Blocks of Success'. The Report's recommendations were submitted to the House of Commons on May 19, 2006. However, considering that the equal pay gender gap continues to rise, there is need to reflect why little has changed to reduce this gap, and especially because these recommendations were tabled to the House of Commons as far back as in year 2006. These include:-

1. That the Government of Canada initiates legislation that ensures Gender - Based Analysis (GBA) is included in all federal policy and program activities.
2. The inter departmental committee on Gender Based Analysis be expanded to have representation from all Government departments and that the Status of Women Canada coordinates and ensures that this Committee is accountable for the distribution of information on the GBA Accountability measures.
3. The Status of Women in Canada liaises with

organizations that are actively engaged in gender equality on a priority basis.

4. That priority areas on gender inequality be identified for action plan in the period between 2005-2010; and that the GBA Analysis and implementation goals be included in this action plan.

In conclusion, it is crucial that women's inequality as a result of equal pay gender gap be addressed, and prioritized. By closing the gender pay gap we ensure that women's skills are valued. Women will better plan and save for retirement therefore ensuring that fewer women live in poverty in old age. OPSEU continues to be at the forefront in advocating and creating awareness that labor rights are Human Rights. Given the dynamic role of OPSEU's Provincial Women's Committee, and with relentless and equal advocacy by other Equity Committees and Caucuses within OPSEU, we remain proud to be the Union of choice for members who trust us to highlight, advocate and fight for their dignity and decent livelihood for all; and more so for women and their families. Women have a right to equitable pay that eliminates or decreases the growing gender pay gap. Only then can Society pride itself on providing equality to both women and men.

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2014 Equity Calendar

May 1 – 31	Asian Heritage Month
May – August	Pride Events throughout Ontario
July 9 – August 4	Toronto Caribbean Carnival
August 11-12	Pride events throughout Ontario
November 7 -9	Human Rights Conference

UPCOMING EVENTS

ASIAN HERITAGE MONTH ►

Asian Heritage Month is held in May every year. It is a month long celebration that puts into focus the long and rich history of Asian Canadians, and celebrates their various contributions to the Canadian Society economically, socially, culturally, and politically. Significantly, Asian countries comprise one of the largest sources of immigration to Canada.

Asian Heritage Month has been celebrated in the United States since 1979. In December 2001, the Senate adopted a motion proposed by Senator Vivienne Poy to officially designate May as the Asian Heritage Month in Canada. The official declaration was signed May 2002 in recognition of Asian Canadians with the Heritage from East Asia, Southern Asia, Western, and Southeast Asia.

OPSEU joins in celebrating the Asian Heritage Month with our brothers and sisters of Asian Heritage. We celebrate the many achievements and contributions of Asian Heritage as we all enrich the cultural diversity and fabric of Canada. For additional information, please follow this link:

http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/multiculturalism/asian/index.asp?utm_source=direct&utm_medium=poster&utm_campaign=AsianHeritageMonth

2014 PRIDE EVENTS ►

In the coming months, members of the Rainbow Alliance will be involved with Pride festivities to be held throughout the province. Activities will involve reaching out to local communities and hosting forums to educate people about issues affecting the LGBTTIQQ2S (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, transsexual, intersex, queer, questioning and two spirited) community. Pride is an opportunity to showcase, embrace and celebrate each other's differences.

It is also an opportunity for increased education, to eliminate the stereotypes and barriers that have plagued the community for quite some time. Everyone has a right to be treated equally and dignity.

Toronto is home to one of the largest Pride events and this year will play host to World Pride from June 20-29. This also marks the first time that a North American city has been selected to stage the event. Scheduled activities will definitely showcase Toronto's identity as a city that respects tolerance and promotes diversity. It is expected that World Pride 2014 will attract more than five million visitors from all over the world. Members interested in participating and/or volunteering should contact the Rainbow Alliance at pride@opseu.org. World

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Pride will feature world class arts, community activities, the World Pride Human Rights Conference (June 25-27th), the Trans March (June 27th), the Dyke March (June 28th) and the 34th annual Pride Parade (June 29th).

OPSEU'S WORKERS OF COLOUR AT TORONTO CARIBBEAN CARNIVAL: JULY 9 TO AUGUST 11, 2014 ▶

The Toronto Caribbean Carnival (formerly known as Caribana) has run annually since 1967, and was originally performed as a gift from Canada's West Indian community, as a tribute to Canada's centennial.

Toronto's Caribbean Carnival, like other Caribbean festivals around the world, is more than just a party. It is a breaking down of the artificial barriers of society - like class, race and wealth. It is a celebration of Caribbean culture, food, creativity, art, music and history. It is a celebration of the ethnic and social make-up of the islands: people of African descent (both slaves and free): French plantation owners; East Indian and Chinese indentured labourers; British, Spanish and Creole settlers and the indigenous Indians. It is a celebration of literal and spiritual emancipation.

Toronto's Caribbean Carnival is generally perceived to be mirrored on Trinidad and Tobago's Carnival. Before 1834, and before slavery was abolished, Trinidad's Carnival celebrations had two aspects: the torches, drumming and other African-derived ceremonies of the slaves, and the other being the fancy-dress silks and satins of the European plantation owners. Often, the French monsieur and madams would dress as fantastical versions of their own slaves, while the slaves would parody the plantation owners.

After the emancipation, former slaves, under the concealment of disguise, brought their dances, their songs and their festival traditions to the streets,

recreating in symbolic ways the freedom from the "cane fields"... slavery. Toronto's Caribbean Carnival falls on the anniversary of the emancipation from slavery in Trinidad, August 1, 1834, and also on the date of a European festival celebrating the first loaf of the New Year's wheat and the opening of the fields for common pasturage.

Over the years, these Carnival celebrations and now Toronto Caribbean Carnival have eventually evolved to today's masquerade bands competing for top honors called "Band of the Year"; and reflecting the diverse expressive traditions of the Caribbean. The bands must pass a judging point which will rate each band section for its costume design, energy of masqueraders, creativity of presentation; just to name but a few.

Notably, Toronto Caribbean Carnival has steadily grown from hundreds of celebrants on Toronto's Yonge St. in the late 60's, to thousands on Toronto's University Ave in the 80's and 90's. Today, it is currently one of Canada's major tourist attractions with over a million celebrants and visitors at Toronto's Lakeshore, the Carnival's present location. While Toronto Caribbean Festival runs for 2 weeks, its climax is the Parade of the bands on the final weekend of the festival. We invite you to join in this explosion of fun and celebration.

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INTERNATIONAL YOUTH DAY ▶

“Leadership: Accelerate Your Activism” is the 7th Annual International Youth Day (IYD) event hosted by the Provincial Young Workers Committee (PYC). Following the success of 2013, this year’s event is a two day affair and will be held from August 11-12, 2014 at the OPSEU Membership Centre in downtown Toronto. The goal is to educate young workers on how they can establish their “voice” in OPSEU, their workplaces and within their communities. Planned activities such as skill sessions will be interactive and will equip participants with the necessary tools and knowledge to build on the leadership potential of OPSEU. The call for applications and a tentative conference schedule can be accessed at:

<http://www.opseu.org/committees/youth/international-youth-day-2014.htm>

HUMAN RIGHTS CONFERENCE ▶

Plans for the 3rd biennial Human Rights Conference are already underway. It is scheduled to take place from November 7-9, 2014 at the Eaton Chelsea in downtown Toronto. This year’s theme is Human Rights, Competing Rights, Emerging Rights. It will aim to look at current trends in human rights law and the effects of competing and emerging rights.

Some of the topics explored may include impacts on aboriginal communities, children’s rights, migrant workers, people with disabilities, etc.

The event will bring together around a hundred and fifty OPSEU members from across Ontario. More information about the conference will be provided as it becomes available.

<http://www.opseu.org/committees/equity/events-and-projects.htm>

RECENT EVENTS

WOMEN’S CONFERENCE 2013 ▶

On November 8-10, 150 members gathered for the 15th biennial OPSEU Women’s Conference in Toronto, themed “A Woman’s Journey: The Art of the Possible.” OPSEU activists were inspired by the journeys and activism of the many guest speakers, shared stories with each other about their own journeys, and committed to working on issues important to them in their locals and regions. For more information: <http://www.opseu.org/committees/pwc/2013-womens-conference-review.htm>

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Statement of Respect

Harassment or discrimination of any kind will not be tolerated at OPSEU functions.

Whenever OPSEU members gather, we welcome all peoples of the world. We will not accept any unwelcoming words, actions or behaviours against our union members.

We accord respect to all persons, regardless of age, political affiliation, including people of colour, women, men, First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples, members of ethno-racial groups, people with disabilities, gays, lesbians, bisexual, transgender/transsexual people, and gender diverse persons, francophones and all persons whose first language is not English.

In our diversity we will build solidarity as union members.

**Approved for distribution by
Warren (Smokey) Thomas, OPSEU President**

