
CONFERENCE INSIGHTS: MOVING THE EQUITY AGENDA FORWARD

Jane Stinson

Education Officer,
Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE),
Ottawa, Ontario, Canada *and*

Geoff Bickerton

Research Director,
Canadian Union of Postal Workers (CUPW),
Ottawa, Ontario, Canada

- Realize that “The New Economy” includes long-standing struggles against racism, sexism, homophobia, ableism, and ageism;
- Recognize the complexity and variation of equity issues and make them a priority in unions;
- Find new ways of organizing low wage and contingent workers;
- Learn from new ways of organizing Aboriginal workers;
- Negotiate hiring practices to bring more members of equity-seeking groups into the workplace;
- Encourage unions need to share information and experiences to find common ground, new strategies, and key issues to achieve greater equity in the New Economy;
- Establish union structures for equity-seeking groups;
- Balance formal equity structures (such as committees and executive representation enshrined in union constitutions) with informal caucuses and autonomous activities by equity-seeking groups;
- Equity caucuses should select their own representatives;
- Seek union provision for assisting equity-seeking groups to connect within their union and across unions to learn from and support each other;
- Representation of equity groups in union structures is important but not enough – we need a program to achieve material gains for equity-seeking groups.
- Address equity issues through collective bargaining, negotiate equity protections into collective agreements and grievance violations;

- Apply an equity lens to collective agreements and union activities – conduct “equity audits” to periodically evaluate our performance at all levels of the union;
- Seek training and retraining for union leaders on equity issues to understand barriers for equity-seeking groups and to explain why addressing equity issues benefits all workers;
- Organize with allies inside unions and with coalition partners outside unions; and
- Keep pressure on after conventions: Be tenacious, never give up!