

CONFRONTING **HARASSMENT** **IN THE WORKPLACE**



Produced by
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Harassment in the workplace is cruel, destructive behaviour that is not only damaging to the affected individuals, but which, in the case of co-worker harassment, can also eat away at the very foundation of our union.

Union solidarity is based on the principle that we are all brothers and sisters, that we are equal. Harassment erodes that principle because it assumes that some union members are inferior.

The struggle against harassment is such an important and pressing issue, that the leadership of the CAW, in the first major statement of the National Executive Board, passed a policy on harassment in the workplace in June, 1988.

One key point in this policy is made very clearly: harassment is anti-union behaviour, and it will not be tolerated within the CAW. CAW members have the right to work in an environment free of harassment.

The CAW policy covers harassment on a number of grounds including disability, sex, sexual orientation, race and religion.

The role of the local union leadership is crucial to make this policy work. However it is also up to the membership to challenge harassment when it occurs. Stopping harassment is the responsibility of all our members and leadership in every plant and office where the CAW represents workers.

By respecting our brothers and sisters and confronting harassment in the workplace, we can build a stronger and more effective union.

In solidarity,



Bob Nickerson

CAW National Secretary-Treasurer

“There’d be a picture, you know, these cartoons, a picture of the perfect woman and there’d be boobs and legs. I’m the only woman that works in that area and they put it right where I’d see it. So all the guys would be down the line looking at me. ‘Well, let’s see what reaction she’s going to have to that.’ So you just throw it away. You just go and do your job.”

Theresa

WHAT IS HARASSMENT?

Harassment is not a joke. It is cruel and destructive behaviour against others that can have devastating effects. Harassment by co-workers in particular is contrary to our basic union principles of solidarity and equality.

It is an expression of perceived power and superiority by the harasser(s) over another person, usually for reasons over which the victim has little or no control: sex, race, creed, colour, marital status, sexual orientation, disability, political or religious affiliation, or place of national origin.

Harassment on any of these grounds can be made the basis of a complaint to most provincial and federal human rights commissions.

Harassment can be defined as any *unwelcome* action by any person(s), in particular by management or a co-worker, whether verbal or physical, on a single or repeated basis, which humiliates, insults or degrades.

“Unwelcome” or “unwanted” in this context means any actions which the harasser knows or ought reasonably to know are not desired by the victim of the harassment.

“At first when I walked in the plant and they yelled things and whistled, I just went red. I didn’t know which way to look. I would go past to where I knew I’d be more safe and wouldn’t draw attention to myself for that reason. Oh I hated it. I hated it.”

Karen

“I was on probation, I didn’t have my 90 days, and you don’t do anything wrong before you get your 90 days. This one day, I went over to talk to my foreman, to ask him for something, and as I was standing there, this other foreman goes like this and grabbed me. Oh I was so embarrassed, so humiliated, I didn’t know what to do. I wouldn’t dare tell anybody.”

Debbie

Sexual harassment

is any unwanted attention of a sexual nature such as remarks about appearance or personal life, offensive written or visual actions like graffiti or degrading pictures, physical contact of any kind, or sexual demands.

Men as well as women can be victims of sexual harassment. However in the overwhelming number of instances, it is women who are sexually harassed by men.

Most often, the harasser is in a position of authority over the victim, such as a supervisor. While the harasser may wield some economic clout over the victim, with the backing of the union, this can be resolved.

The toughest harassment situation occurs when the harasser and the victim are co-workers. Even when both the harasser and the victim are CAW members, the union has an obligation to deal with the situation. Ignoring harassment penalizes the victim and undermines union solidarity.

Racial harassment

is any action, whether verbal or physical that expresses or promotes racial hatred in the workplace such as racial slurs, written or visually offensive actions, jokes or other unwanted comments or acts.

Workers did not create racism. The roots of racism go back deep in the history of our society. Racism has served employers well as a justification for exploiting certain groups of workers more than others, and generally dividing workers and their organizations.

“A foreman was staring at a guy, so the guy turned and asked him, : “Do you have a problem?” He said: “Yes. Your black face!”

Bashir

WHY IS HARASSMENT A UNION ISSUE?

By pitting certain groups of workers, such as women or ethnic minorities, against others, harassment creates a climate of intolerance and division among the membership. By eroding our unity and strength, it can weaken our effectiveness at the bargaining table or on a picket line.

It is the responsibility of management to ensure that the workplace is free of harassment. But just leaving the issue up to management is not good enough.

Our goal as a union must be to help create a workplace environment free of harassment. That means not only dealing with complaints when they arise, but also watching for instances of harassment and confronting the source.

“In one article in our newspaper, I said that human rights should not divide our union. They put a picture of you in the paper. They took the picture and they cut it out of the paper, and they screwed it into the wall in an area in the foundry. They put a bullet hole through the middle of the head, and they wrote K.K.K. on it.”

Leroy

HOW DOES THE CAW HARASSMENT POLICY WORK?

The role of the local union is crucial in combatting harassment in the workplace. The local leadership plays a key role in providing support for victims of harassment and assisting them in resolving incidents without delay.

The experience of harassment can be overwhelming for the victim. People often react with shock, humiliation and intense anger. Harassment victims may not feel comfortable going through the normal channels for resolving such a problem.

That is why under the CAW policy, harassment victims can report an incident and initiate a complaint with any one of a number of local union elected people.

“You know, you’re angry and you’re frustrated, and you just want it to stop and you want them to really feel what you’re feeling and the hurt and the anger that you feel.”

Louise

If a worker believes that he or she is being harassed at work and wants help, the steps are as follows:

- ▶ the harassment victim can approach any local union elected person or official, including members of the women's committee, human rights committee and affirmative action committee;
- ▶ the incident must be brought to the immediate attention of the unit chairperson and the local union president by the victim(s) or whoever they have chosen to assist them;
- ▶ the local union president and the unit chairperson must contact the CAW national representative, and if necessary, meet with a senior company representative(s) to investigate;
- ▶ within 10 working days of notifying the unit chairperson and the local union

president, the issue must be resolved, and the resolution of a harassment complaint must reflect the serious nature of such acts;

- ▶ confidentiality must be respected throughout the process;
- ▶ the national representative must notify the CAW national office about the complaint and its resolution.

This policy encourages all of us as union members to challenge harassment whenever it occurs. We must ensure that harassment does not threaten the dignity of our brothers and sisters.

WHAT ABOUT THE HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION?

Nothing in the CAW harassment policy prevents a member from filing a complaint with the Human Rights Commission. However the complaints process at the Commission is so lengthy and slow that it could take months to get a resolution. To be considered, a claim must be filed with most Human Rights Commissions within six months of the incident.

“We do not enjoy sexual harassment. If men see it happening to another woman, they should come to her aid because sometimes it takes another man to point out to these guys that they’re doing this.”

Yvonne

OTHER RESOURCES

- ▶ These pamphlets are available in quantities from the CAW national office.
- ▶ The CAW has produced a video on harassment entitled: “Call Me Sister, Call Me Brother”.
- ▶ Posters with the CAW Harassment Policy are available at the CAW national office.
- ▶ The CAW offers extensive training in human rights by specially-trained CAW instructors. Any local union can set up a course through the CAW education department. This program is designed for both local union membership and leadership.

“Racial harassment tears down—it breaks the union apart. It splits the union. The only way to stay united is to get along. And if you happen to be in the majority, to get along, we have to help the minority.”

Peter

“The thing that bothers me is that if you’re going to call me a brother, and if you’re going to call a woman a sister, mean it. Because you don’t go out and assault your brother, and you don’t go out and attack your sister. This a big family. As soon as we start treating each other like a family, then, when we say brother, we mean brother.”

Leroy

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our brothers and sisters
and confronting harassment
in the workplace, we can build
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*Call me sister,
call me brother.*