



POLICY STATEMENT

HARASSMENT

The B.C. Federation of Labour believes every worker has a right to be treated with dignity and respect, and to be free from discrimination and harassment at work, in their union and in the community.

Harassment is a power play by people who want to control and torment others. It is fuelled by sexism or racism, or a fear and dislike of what is different. It includes remarks and actions intended to hurt, to embarrass, to confuse and to destroy an individual's self-confidence and self-esteem.

Harassment violates many union contracts. It certainly violates the spirit of the labour movement where we are supposed to be working to achieve justice and equality for working people.

Victims of harassment are humiliated and stressed. They can become physically ill. They often lose work time because of the abuse, and may quit because they see no way to stop the harasser. When harassment occurs within the union, victims are likely to drop out of union activities and avoid their colleagues. Many people who experience harassment are afraid to speak up because they fear ridicule or fear the harassment will get worse.

Harassment is certainly against the law.

Over the past few years, Human Rights Commissions across the country have expanded definitions of harassment and have spread out the responsibility for preventing it. They have made it clear that sexual harassment includes unwanted physical touching, patting, leering, and verbal abuse, as well as demands for sex accompanied by threats. They have eliminated ignorance as a defence. Harassment is now regarded as any comment or action "that should reasonably be known to be unwelcome". Commissions have ruled that graffiti, jokes, pin-ups and slurs, even when they are not directed at a particular individual, can poison a work environment, making it hostile and intimidating.

Recent rulings indicate that while employers are responsible for establishing a workplace free of harassment, unions will be held liable, along with the employer, if the union leadership is aware that harassment is occurring and does nothing to stop it. Many affiliates have adopted anti-harassment policies and negotiated grievance procedures to help resolve sexual harassment complaints quickly. But union activists must take steps to make sure that harassment complaints by women, visible minorities,

and gays and lesbians are supported. It takes work to make sure union policies against harassment have meaning.

While policies and grievance procedures are effective, what is really needed is a change in attitudes. No matter how good the wording is, no policy, contract provision or complaint procedure has meaning unless the leadership of the union, at all levels, clearly and unequivocally opposes sexual harassment and harassment based on race, religion, national origin, disability or sexual orientation.

If the leadership does not stand by workers when they challenge harassment in the workplace and in the union, nothing will change.

To end sexual harassment and other forms of harassment, we all have to take responsibility. We have to take responsibility to examine our own actions and to speak up when we see or hear colleagues being abused, harassed and intimidated.

Change will not occur without action by men, as well as by women. But with cooperation and respect, we can change our workplaces, our unions and our society so that women, visible minority workers, Aboriginals and gay and lesbian workers can achieve equality.

The following are a few of the things that affiliates to the B.C. Federation of Labour can do to help end harassment.

In the Union:

1. State clearly in your union constitution that every member has the right to be treated with dignity and respect, regardless of sex, race, sexual orientation, disability, religion or national origin;
2. Adopt policies condemning sexual harassment and other forms of harassment based on gender, sexual orientation, race, religion, disability or national origin;
3. Make sure members know about the policy and the union's opposition to harassment. Post the policy in the workplace, have it on hand at union events and write special articles in the union newsletter;
4. Develop a simple complaints process for union events, so if members believe they are being harassed they can get assistance. Encourage members to voice complaints and resolve differences;
5. Develop educational materials on ending harassment, offer workshops on the issue, include materials on harassment in steward training courses and union counselling programs;

6. Sponsor women's conferences and conferences on racism, human rights and gay and lesbian rights, where the issue of harassment can be discussed by those who are most often the targets; and
7. Support groups in the community opposed to materials and advertising that contribute to harassment by stereotyping women, visible minorities, Aboriginals, ethnic groups, lesbians and gays.

In the Workplace:

1. Negotiate language in the collective agreement to protect workers from all forms of harassment and discrimination;
2. Set up a process to resolve complaints quickly. This could include an internal process to try and resolve complaints between co-workers without involving management;
3. Negotiate employer-paid counselling (chosen by the individual) and available to those who have been harassed, and for those who are harassers;
4. Negotiate provisions that allow women being sexually harassed to refuse work with full pay until the employer stops the harassment;
5. Encourage the employer to develop policies and advertise them to all workers, indicating the company will not tolerate harassment; and
6. Negotiate paid education in the workplace on stopping sexual and other forms of harassment.

It will take work and adjustment to stop harassment in our society.

If we condone it through our silence, we are obstacles to the achievement of equality.

**Adopted in Convention '92
B.C. Federation of Labour**

cope 15