

# UNIONS AND DIVERSITY: HOW TOLERANCE, RESPECT, AND SOLIDARITY CAN BUILD A STRONGER MOVEMENT

**Diversity means difference.** Diversity incorporates the principle that **all workers** should have equal rights, but rather than ignoring the differences between people, their differences should be recognised and respected.

People are different in multiple ways. Some of the common dimensions of diversity are race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, culture, language, age, ability, religion, political and other beliefs.

We cannot ignore that Canada's population and workforce are growing more diverse.

For example:

- The Canadian population is comprised of individuals of more than 200 different ethnic origins. In the past, a majority of immigrants were from European countries, but most now come from countries in South and Southeast Asia, the Middle East, the Caribbean, South and Central America, and Africa. In 2005, members of visible minorities accounted for more than 13% of the total Canadian population, and they are growing faster than the total population.
- Sustained immigration is changing Canada's linguistic diversity. In 2003, 44% of immigrants knew neither English nor French, and between 1996 and 2001, the proportion of the population reporting a mother tongue other than English or French increased from 12.5% to 18%.
- More than one million Aboriginal peoples from diverse cultures and different linguistic groups live throughout Canada. As they have higher fertility rates than non-

- Aboriginals, their number is growing twice as fast the rest of the population.

## To value diversity is to:

- Acknowledge and embrace individual differences
- Promote equity
- Be inclusive
- Provide opportunities for everyone to reach their full potential

**These are the same values upon which the labour movement was built.**

## Benefits of valuing diversity:

- Helps to build and strengthen unions and the labour movement
- Brings fresh and different ideas and perspectives into our organizations
- Challenges stereotypes and thereby changes corresponding attitudes
- Helps to eliminate discrimination within our organizations (discrimination which has legal implications for any organization)

A common myth about diversity is that talking about and examining our differences **encourages divisions**. Divisions have always existed. Talking about them does not encourage divisiveness but instead brings them into the open and **encourages positive change to begin**.

Quotes:

**“You can only protect your liberties in this world by protecting the other person's freedom, you can only be free if I am free”**

-Clarence Darrow

**“Alone we are nothing, together we're everything – it's the whole philosophy of Labour.”**

-Leon Davis -1932

