

Mr. Camille Awada, President
Canadian Association of Professional Employees
350 Albert Street, Suite 1800
Ottawa, Ontario K1R 1A4

October 25, 2023

Dear Mr. Awada:

On October 16, 2023, I had the opportunity to attend the special general meeting of the Canadian Association of Professional Employees (CAPE), which had been called for by a petition from a number of members and which dealt with "CAPE's plan to confront homophobia and transphobia, and implement the 2023 Canadian Labour Congress resolution calling for anti-hate flying squads". You were also present at this meeting, which you chaired and which some twenty members attended in person. Our union has over 24,000 members, all of them in the federal public service.

The petitioners had called us to the general meeting because of "the well-documented rise in organized homophobia and transphobia". According to them, CAPE members "have been subject to a sharp increase in hate events, threats, and intimidation, over the past two years". Unfortunately, they did not provide us with any data or other specifics in their petition.

Prior to the general meeting, I had inquired to CAPE management in order to learn more about the "well-documented rise" of which the petitioners were complaining. I had requested the following information:

- 1) the data collected by CAPE over the past five years demonstrating the increase in hateful behaviour, threats and intimidation occurring in the workplace against CAPE members who are part of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community, including the method used to collect this data;
- 2) the number of investigations and other steps taken by CAPE over the past five years to determine whether one or more CAPE members belonging to the 2SLGBTQIA+ community have in fact been subjected to hateful behaviour, threats and intimidation at work because of their membership in this community;
- 3) a description of the hateful behaviour, threats and intimidation, if any, that CAPE members have experienced at work because of their membership in the 2SLGBTQIA+ community, over the past five years;
- 4) the mandate that the petitioners wish to entrust to the "flying squads", i.e. their operations to defend CAPE members who belong to the 2SLGBTQIA+ community and who are attacked at work because of their membership in this community.

CAPE's General Manager, Mr. Jean Ouellette, replied to me as follows on October 4, 2023:

Your e-mail of September 28 was forwarded to me for a reply.

With regard to your first three questions, CAPE does not collect data based on the behaviours or actions you have identified.

As for your fourth question, I respectfully submit that you should ask it to the petitioners.

Yours sincerely,

Jean Ouellette, General Manager
Canadian Association of Professional Employees

Knowing that CAPE had no data on the "hate events, threats and intimidation" that CAPE members had allegedly experienced in their workplace because of their membership in the 2SLGBTQIA+ community, I listened carefully to the interventions of several people present at the general meeting, in order to understand better the situation. However, no data was provided. Towards the end of the general meeting, I went to the microphone to ask for more information and to give my point of view cordially.

I pointed out to the activists that, as far as I am concerned, I would never tolerate discrimination against co-workers on the grounds of their sexual orientation or gender identity. Obviously, I would tolerate even less if colleagues were subjected to hateful behaviour, threats or intimidation. Having been a shop steward for several years, I know that all the people I interact with on a daily basis at work share my point of view on this matter. I also know that neither they nor I have observed the behaviours denounced by the petitioners in our workplace, and CAPE tells me it has no data on this subject.

Given the resources allocated by CAPE to the issue, i.e. the organization of a special general meeting, as well as the numerous e-mails CAPE has sent over the past few years to mobilize members in defence of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community, I would have liked to know the real extent of the problem raised by the petitioners. It is important for me to see reliable data because, as a CAPE member, I am required to pay dues that must be used to defend members in their jobs as federal public servants.

CAPE members are free to advocate, associate and coordinate their actions, but CAPE resources are not intended to be used, for example, to organize counter-demonstrations in front of elementary schools where no CAPE member works. Our members are keen to keep their dues as low as possible, allowing those who wish to do so to spend more money to fund causes that are close to their hearts and that may be very important, but have very little to do with defending the interests of CAPE members in the workplace.

Activists in the 2SLGBTQIA+ community would no doubt be quite unhappy to see their dues increase if other members wanted to dip into CAPE's coffers to fund initiatives that run counter to what the 2SLGBTQIA+ community stands for. It follows that they too must not attempt to divert CAPE's resources to non-union activities.

At the general meeting, we heard a speech by Larry Rousseau, Executive Vice-President of the Canadian Labour Congress. The speech, along with questions and comments directed to Mr. Rousseau by those present, formed the core of the general meeting. Mr. Rousseau spoke at

length about "hate marches" and the need to oppose them by holding counter-demonstrations. As I understand it, the role of the squads referred to by the petitioners is precisely to take part in counter-demonstrations.

According to Mr. Rousseau, Canadians who oppose some form of 2SLGBTQIA+ proselytizing in primary and secondary schools are hateful people, but I am far from convinced that it is the case. In fact, you pointed out to Mr. Rousseau and the general meeting participants that your own family includes activists from both camps, and that none of them are hateful people, far from it.

According to Mr. Rousseau, a union like CAPE should fund counter-demonstrations, and ensure that those taking place in the National Capital Region are led by an organization called Community Solidarity Ottawa (CSO). However, it seems fairly obvious to me that these counter-demonstrations are in fact provocations. They do not fit my definition of democracy. Mr. Rousseau himself pointed out that the police had difficulty keeping the two groups of demonstrators apart. He complained that the police were not doing an adequate job. Every counter-demonstration carries the risk of confrontation and violence.

So why must there be counter-demonstrations? Is it really a democratic right to make a racket to prevent people from speaking, to call them Nazis or fascists, to inveigh against them and arouse their anger when they try to express their point of view in a demonstration? Would it not be better simply to organize demonstrations on another day or in another place to express the opposite point of view? Would this not be a good way to prevent violence and facilitate the work of the police, who certainly cost taxpayers more when they have to deploy large numbers of officers?

Mr. Rousseau's approach, and that of certain activists, seems to me more likely to inflame social tensions than to encourage a public debate. They should not be dragging our union into this, and even less asking it for a financial contribution to organize provocations that are very remote from the democratic spirit that should govern our country.

If our members are abused at work, they can call on our union to defend them. In fact, they should do so, and our union should be keeping a record of this to raise awareness if behaviours that can truly be described as hateful, threatening or intimidating are ever on the rise in our workplaces.

However, it must be understood that expressing disagreement and giving one's point of view is not in itself hateful. No one is obliged to adhere to the ideas of activists in the 2SLGBTQIA+ community. What is not tolerable is for people to be punished, threatened, discriminated against or pilloried for their ideas, no matter what community they belong to.

All workers must be treated equally and given the same consideration. They must receive fair remuneration and be able to develop in their work environment, with equal opportunities to fulfill their ambitions. It is up to our union to ensure this is the case, together with the employer. That is why we pay dues. I would hope that CAPE's leadership will keep this in mind and not succumb to pressure designed to distance our union from its true mission. With this in mind, I

would like you to pass this letter on to the other members of CAPE's National Executive Committee.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Bernard Desgagné". The signature is written in a cursive style with a small flourish at the end.

Bernard Desgagné
Member of the Canadian Association of Professional Employees