



HEU celebrates International Day Against Homophobia – May 17

Now in its 10th year, the International Day Against Homophobia – celebrated May 17 across the globe – is a date that HEU members have recognized since 2005 when the union's Pink Triangle Standing Committee made it one of their outreach initiatives.

This year's theme – *Sexual diversity in the workplace. It pays off!* – is particularly fitting since HEU's been a pioneer in the labour movement advocating for LGBT rights, same-sex spousal benefits, and employment equality. HEU was also one of the first unions in Canada to recognize same-sex partners for inclusion in dental and extended health care coverage before it was legally implemented, and secured anti-discrimination language in our collective agreements.

In 1994, HEU convention delegates established four equity caucuses, including the Lesbian and Gay Standing Committee (which became the Pink Triangle Standing Committee at 2008 convention) to recognize the diversity of our membership, advance and protect the rights of equity-seeking workers, and advocate to end discrimination based on gender, race, ethnic background, disability or sexual orientation.

And in 2008, delegates to the union's biennial convention passed a resolution making the Women's Committee a standing committee as well.

In further recognizing LGBT rights, 2010 convention delegates passed resolutions to include protection for transgendered health care workers in employer human rights policies and have gender-neutral washrooms available at union functions.

May 17 is a landmark date because the World Health Organization finally removed homosexuality as a mental illness from its list of diagnoses on that day.

Now, May 17 is an opportunity for us to draw attention to the disastrous effects of homophobia – especially teens being bullied in school – and to recognize our LGBT sisters and brothers in our workplaces.

HEU has once again sponsored a table at the International Day Against Homophobia Breakfast – hosted by Qmunity and Vancity – today at Vancouver's Fairmont Hotel. This year's theme is *Queering the Workplace: How LGTB Inclusion is Good for Business*. CBC's Kathryn Gretsinger is emceeding. Guest speakers include B.C. Federation of Labour president Jim Sinclair.

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