



# **CAW NATIONAL EXECUTIVE BOARD STATEMENT ON YOUNG WORKERS**

**June 2009**

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Young workers are actively building the union today. Tomorrow they will have greater responsibilities. Young workers who develop as activists and leaders are critical to the future of the labour movement. And that future is now.

The CAW is committed to generational change. The CAW will work with our younger members to provide the skills and tools to actively participate in union life.

The CAW is also committed to being a vehicle through which young people can articulate their unique concerns, communicate their struggles and build the capacity to mobilize on a wide range of issues and across geographic boundaries.

Organizations without an active youth wing risk stagnation. The history of our union has been in part the successful transfer of our values and lessons learned while at the same time making space for the new challenges to the way things are. That spirit of learning and challenging, teaching and responding is the hallmark of generational solidarity.

From our youngest member to our oldest retiree, the channels of communication, the education between generations, is in the spirit of mutual cooperation and respect.

## **Closing the Generational Gap**

In the face of tremendous economic, social and environmental hardship that threatens future generations young people continue to fight back for a fairer and more just society. The CAW will stand with young people who put the principles of workers rights, human rights, equity, peace, social justice and environmental sustainability first and foremost in the work they do.

We will actively work to build on the strengths and experiences of all members toward the goal of building activists, expanding our capacity to organize and ensuring the work of our union is relevant for all workers and all members of society.

## **Organizing Young Workers is a Priority**

Young workers are among the most vulnerable groups of workers in society. Employers often take advantage of their inexperience in the labour market, leaving them open to harassment, exploitation and unsafe working conditions while on the job. Young workers are also the most open to joining unions.

Through union-lead communication, education and mobilization efforts our collective goal must be to encourage youth to identify themselves as workers and to view the union as a means to effectively tackle workplace issues.

## **Communicating, Educating, Mobilizing**

The 5<sup>th</sup> CAW Constitutional Convention started the CAW down a new path. At that time, our union formally acknowledged the importance of considering youth issues within a larger plan for generational change.

Through that discussion, the CAW Youth Project was officially established and the first CAW National Youth Conference was held in 2000. The CAW Youth Project has focused on creating space for young people within the union to develop confidence, skills, and the knowledge to participate actively in union life and play a role in building our union. This inspired many young members in several local unions across Canada to get actively involved and create youth committees.

The CAW Youth Network was later created out of the need to reach out beyond the borders of our local unions. The CAW Youth Network provides a space for youth and youth allies from across Canada to share information and experiences, to identify the issues that affect their day-to-day lives across a diverse range of workplaces, and to create common solutions that benefit everyone, respecting the established structures and processes of the union.

Thinking through new ways in which we continue strengthening our union goes a long way towards also making it more relevant and attractive to young workers: a union that is open and accessible, which reflects the needs of its membership in the workplace and the community and is ready to take on corporate power and insensitive governments.

***A good union fighting for young workers is more likely to be a good union for all people.***