



**Special Anti-
racism Committee
Videoconference**

August 24, 2020

The National Union of Public and General Employees (NUPGE) is a family of 11 Component and 3 affiliate unions. Taken together, we are one of the largest unions in Canada. Most of our 390,000 members work to deliver public services of every kind to the citizens of their home provinces. We also have a large and growing number of members who work for private businesses.

Larry Brown, President

Bert Blundon, Secretary-Treasurer

Special Anti-racism Committee Videoconference
NUPGE Office
15 Auriga Drive, Ottawa, ON
August 24, 2020
12:00 pm EDT

Participants

BCGEU/NUPGE	Kusam Doal
HSABC/NUPGE	Nat Lowe
SGEU/NUPGE	Muna De Ciman
MGEU/NUPGE	Deb Jamerson
OPSEU/NUPGE	Michael Hamilton Marjorie Nelson
NSGEU/NUPGE	Jason MacLean Melissa Marsman
NAPE/NUPGE	Joanne Miles
NUPGE	Bert Blundon, Secretary-Treasurer Len Bush, Managing Director Jeryn Daly, National Representative Diane Fowles, Administrative Representative

1. Introductions—Jason MacLean

Participants from 7 Components and 4 NUPGE staff joined the videoconference.

Jason MacLean began the meeting by welcoming everyone and thanking them for joining the videoconference. He stated that the first meeting was very informative, but that it was only a starting place to recognize that NUPGE needs to do more and needs to push the Components to do more. He also conveyed regrets from Larry Brown, who was absent for 2 reasons: he wanted to make sure the committee had a safe space to discuss ideas without feeling hindered by the President being there; and he had another conference call that would have overlapped partially with this videoconference.

MacLean then had everyone introduce themselves for the benefit of the new participants on the videoconference.

2. Review of Agenda—Jeryn Daly

Jeryn Daly read a land acknowledgement, recognizing that, although the meeting took place virtually, the National Union building is on the traditional and unceded territory of the Algonquin Anishinaabeg, and is now home to many First Nations, Inuit, and Métis.

Daly then introduced the agenda and the main topic for discussion: the brainstorming document authored by Brown, MacLean, and Daly.

3. Officer's Greetings—Bert Blundon

Bert Blundon thanked the participants for joining the videoconference. He stated how he had hoped that at this point in history we would be past many of these issues. He is outraged by what he sees happening in America, at watching a clearly racist president enact racist policies, refusing to denounce racism in the country. He shared that he'd previously spent 8 weeks at Harvard, in Boston, and that you could cut the tension there with a knife, which is something people can feel immune to if they don't live it every day.

Nationally, NUPGE is trying to position all Components to be involved in the debate and to push for a more just and fair society for everyone. Blundon shared what he'd heard from his daughter who lives in Calgary. She works with a woman from Iraq, who experienced numerous incidents of harassment for her involvement in planning demonstrations for Black Lives Matter. She received threats that required 2 police officers to accompany her, unbeknownst to the police force boss because they're afraid he won't provide security for her. Canadian society overall doesn't realize that many members of our society live this harassment every day.

Blundon closed by saying that, as a white person, he needs to listen to the committee members because he has a lot to learn. NUPGE needs to be part of this conversation

and make it part of our day-to-day work to stomp out racism in all its forms, not just at work, but in the community as well. He then thanked the participants for joining the committee and helping NUPGE with this important work.

MacLean echoed Blundon's sentiments and said he'd be remiss if he didn't mention the man (Jacob Blake) shot in the back 7 times in the US and how much it angered him. He said everyone on the committee knows why Black Lives Matter. He also said he believes it is quite divisive only because Black Lives do Matter and that we need to fight against those who think otherwise.

MacLean shared that he personally quit Facebook again because the racism on the platform is so bad. He had challenged people equating the murder of a young white person (a victim of gun violence) with the murder of George Floyd (a victim of anti-Black racism and police brutality)—some of whom were members of the NSGEU—and had to step back for a mental health break.

MacLean then invited Nat Lowe to speak about HSABC's *Racism in the Workplace* report, which was launched a few weeks ago.

HSABC—*Racism in the Workplace* report—Nat Lowe

Nat Lowe shared that the report launched a couple of weeks ago and thanked MacLean for speaking at the launch on behalf of NUPGE. He shared that HSABC had a panel of members who reviewed and contributed to the report and shared their own experiences on work-based racism.

There are a number of recommendations in the report, and HSABC wants to use the report as a way to start conversations around racism. They've had many years of discussion about diversity but haven't fully confronted racism head-on before.

The report itself is very comprehensive and goes in-depth with each different aspect of racism, whether anti-Asian, anti-Black, anti-Indigenous, or anti-immigrant racism, and covers a bit of the historical context as well. Members are starting a BIPOC caucus to work on issues about working with white members in the union to address issues head-on.

Lowe closed by saying he's excited about it. They have a lot of work to do, and it may be uncomfortable at times, but he's optimistic that HSABC will be able to advance racial justice.

4. Component Roundtable

MacLean invited the participants joining the committee for the first time this week to talk about what their Component had been working on to be actively anti-racist.

BCGEU—Kusam Doal

Kusam Doal shared that the BCGEU has had a human rights committee for some time, but has faced some criticism with how often the BCGEU holds human rights conferences. The conference usually takes place around Convention, and as a result the conference can feel like a bit of an afterthought, and not given enough of a meaningful role.

Resolutions passed at the last Convention included a roundtable discussion for workers of colour and roundtables for different groups of equity-seeking individuals (people with disabilities, Indigenous people, etc.), but some of these roundtables haven't happened yet. The roundtable for workers of colour took place in fall 2019. There were a lot of discussions regarding representation within the union executive, as the higher you go, the less representation there is for workers of colour. The same is true within the BCGEU staff.

Senior staff undergo leadership training annually. Last year, some of the teachings focused on diversity and inclusion. They brought in good speakers and had some good discussions and exercises, though they were quite uncomfortable in many respects. People often don't realize their own hidden biases, and it can be uncomfortable when they're acknowledged (even when they aren't intentional).

The BCGEU's process is similar to the NSGEU's: when BCGEU members have a grievance that involves racism, they have to go to the human rights commission, and the union provides no support. This can be frustrating for members who would appreciate assistance from the union.

Doal would be in favour of NUPGE doing an anti-racism campaign, but cautions that we need to look at anything we do through the lens of how it affects every marginalized or minority group. The work can't stop just because the campaign ends. It's something that must be worked on, on a daily basis. There are also differences across the provinces in terms of which groups are affected more heavily. Doal is in favour of the Components sharing information and using the parts that work best for their own province.

Doal hopes the committee can come up with ideas and solutions that impact change in the labour movement, as there is still a lot of work to be done.

NSGEU—Jason MacLean

MacLean clarified the point Doal raised about British Columbia and Nova Scotia being similar in terms of the protocol for human rights violations. Previously, in Nova Scotia, if you filed a complaint involving human rights and a grievance, the union would wait until the human rights complaint goes through and would then proceed with the grievance. Nova Scotia has since stopped doing that because people have made it clear that they want their union to be able to assist them through the human rights process. The NSGEU itself has no standing to do that (i.e., the main reason is because they have no

standing with the commission). But people are allowed to have support people with them, and it sometimes works out that the support person could be a co-worker or fellow union member. But the union itself has no standing there unless named as a respondent.

MacLean also gave an update on the leadership summit the NSGEU was considering, the one that he mentioned in the previous meeting. The summit idea has now morphed into a leadership summit incorporating employers. The idea is that the union will go out and meet with employers, tell them about privilege and unconscious bias, and encourage them to participate and sponsor some people to attend the summit. This will give them an idea of what to look out for in workplaces. The NSGEU has obtained some sponsors for the event, who are also working on getting more employers to participate in the summit.

SGEU—Muna De Ciman

Muna De Ciman thanked NUPGE for organizing the meeting. De Ciman is the Chair of SGEU's Human Rights Equity committee and is heavily involved in BLM in Regina. She shared that SGEU still has a long way to go in their anti-racism efforts and in ensuring that SGEU accurately reflects its membership.

SGEU's Human Rights Equity Committee passed a resolution for Black History Month to be recognized by SGEU. The Component has an Indigenous Vice-President seat (new in 2019), but no other VPs for equity-seeking groups.

De Ciman is looking at how SGEU will move forward to ensure it reflects its 20,000 members. De Ciman shared that she worked hard to be an ally for Indigenous people through the Human Rights Equity committee to build solidarity.

MacLean reassured De Ciman that the committee was to provide assistance and help Components move forward and not necessarily recreate the wheel all the time. A significant goal of the committee is to share resources and learn from each other.

5. Brainstorming Document—Jeryn Daly

Daly reviewed the brainstorming document with the participants. She then asked the committee which idea they thought NUPGE should focus on first.

De Ciman responded that she's concerned about how to make sure Components are held accountable to act on the work being put forward by NUPGE. She shared a story of a member who called a Black member the n-word. De Ciman asked him if he was okay with her representing him as a steward, since she herself is Black. The member said he didn't have a problem with it, but it hurt her to represent a member she felt had not had a change of heart. She is also concerned that, even after training and reading the code of conduct, he might reoffend again.

MacLean responded by saying that all Components are members of NUPGE, but that NUPGE can't dictate how they should operate because they all have their own constitutions and political systems. He also said that he, Blundon, and Brown would be taking what the committee said and sharing it with the National Executive Board (NEB) at their meeting.

Michael Hamilton (OPSEU) shared that he's a chief steward for a local of the LCBO, and he just went full-time. He said he heard skepticism in some members' voices when they learned he was their new representative, like they were questioning his ability to be their rep. Hamilton said it hurts, but he knows his collective agreement very well and is learning more now that he's full-time.

Hamilton also stated his belief that people who aren't directly affected by COVID-19 or racism brush those issues off as "not my fight." He feels this is where society as a whole (not just in unions) is missing the mark. Things die down for a bit, but then flare up over an incident, where we should be seeing more consistent balance in how we deal with these issues. If people are serious, there needs to be a stronger movement put behind it. When people were stuck at home, they had the time to think about these issues. But Hamilton is seeing that now that people are returning to work, people are returning to the way they were before and ignoring the issues (out of sight, out of mind).

MacLean echoed Hamilton's thoughts, and said, it's not necessarily that we need a bigger movement, but a bigger commitment. He said he's 1 guy at a table, and he and Bert are 2 guys at a table. But at the NEB, he will be pushing for a bigger commitment from the Components on these issues. It will take a couple meetings to get there, but it is on the agenda, and Larry is advancing the cause by forming this committee.

MacLean also spoke to the point on the brainstorming document about NUPGE doing its own survey on racism in the workplace. He believes it would make more sense for NUPGE to use the backbone already developed by HSABC and share it with Components. Daly agreed with MacLean and said that's something NUPGE could work on with HSABC.

MacLean also suggested that he, Blundon, and Brown, need to start networking more, and that everyone else at the table needs to talk to their Component reps at the NEB table. The committee should leave no stone unturned to advance the issue.

Joanne Miles (NAPE) pointed out the need for a correction in the brainstorming document: NAPE doesn't currently have an anti-racism committee. It was on the agenda, but their board meeting was canceled due to COVID-19. It will be on a future agenda, and they will put out a BLM statement on their website, so Miles hopes they can move forward on forming a committee shortly. NAPE is also considering doing an anti-racism campaign as well. Miles agreed with MacLean that sharing resources between provinces—particularly educational resources—would be a great asset. Each Component could tailor the material to best suit their needs (as opposed to a campaign, which Components would have to wholly adopt or pass on).

Marjorie Nelson (OPSEU) agreed with everything that had been said so far and wanted to address what De Ciman had said earlier, because representing members that don't look or sound like you can be a problem. Even with all the work OPSEU has done through social mapping and town halls, Nelson still doesn't believe OPSEU has completely gotten ahead of the problem. They are currently working on recommendations from the town hall meeting. But they know that education around white privilege is a hot topic, because there's still a lot of misunderstanding with the term. There's a misconception held by many white people that, if you tell them they have white privilege, you're pointing your finger and trying to take something away from them. OPSEU is very progressive, but when the top people don't look like the membership, it poses a problem

Nelson said it's key for Components to understand the issue of representation, because people feel more comfortable when the person representing them looks like them. It gives people confidence that their rep will understand how they're feeling. Nelson gave the example of eye rolling—just because a Black woman rolls her eyes, it doesn't mean she's an angry Black woman. It's a natural way to express yourself when you're upset or get passionate about a subject.

Daly agreed with Nelson's points and has witnessed phony viral posts on Facebook about rights being taken away due to privilege. One of the goals of NUPGE's educational work could be to explain the idea of privilege, because once people hear the word, they immediately react to it instead of thinking concretely.

Daly also spoke to the suggestion in the brainstorming document about finding out what language around racism already exists in the Collective Agreements. She asked whether that was something the Collective Bargaining committee could bring to their next meeting. Len Bush (NUPGE) said he would raise that with the NUPGE staff person who chairs that committee and have them put it on the agenda.

Lowe shared that while the survey was useful as a conversation starter for HSABC, it may not be as useful for Components who are further ahead on the issue. The survey was intended to obtain data, but also to be used as a tool for organizing and engaging members, as well as a way to have the BIPOC caucus created. Lowe said he'd be happy to talk to anyone about the methodology of the survey.

MacLean cautioned against Lowe selling the survey short as a conversation starter, because it's really more of an "I told you so." Once people have concrete evidence that racism exists in their workplaces, they can't ignore it. It also shows commitment from HSABC to make things better for its members, and that's what we need from all the Components.

MacLean finished by saying that the committee may not meet again in this form, but something else could potentially come once things get established with the NEB. The committee was formed to get the conversation going, and to get some information to

report to the NEB on where the Components need to go. MacLean promised to tell the committee members what was discussed at the upcoming NEB meeting.

Daly echoed MacLean's sentiments, and stated she was happy that NUPGE had set a clear course on these issues.

Blundon thanked the participants for letting him sit in and listen on the videoconference. He reiterated that this work is too important for NUPGE to wait and see how another organization does before taking action. It needs to become enshrined in the daily lives of everyone and amplified by people like himself who are in a position to help make the committee's work happen.



NATIONAL UNION OF PUBLIC AND GENERAL EMPLOYEES

- B. C. Government and Service Employees' Union (BCGEU)
- Health Sciences Association of British Columbia (HSABC)
- Health Sciences Association of Alberta (HSAA)
- Saskatchewan Government and General Employees' Union (SGEU)
- Manitoba Government and General Employees' Union (MGEU)
- Ontario Public Service Employees Union (OPSEU)
- Canadian Union of Brewery and General Workers (CUBGW)
- New Brunswick Union of Public and Private Employees (NBU)
- Nova Scotia Government and General Employees Union (NSGEU)
- PEI Union of Public Sector Employees (PEI UPSE)
- Newfoundland & Labrador Association of Public and Private Employees (NAPE)

The National Union of Public and General Employees is an affiliate of the Canadian Labour Congress and a member of Public Services International.

■ 15 AURIGA DRIVE
NEPEAN, ONTARIO
CANADA / K2E 1B7

■ [613] 228-9800
FAX [613] 228-9801

■ www.nupge.ca

■ national@nupge.ca

