

CAPE Education Committee

Terms of Reference

This document identifies the objectives, mandate, educational strategy, structure, core principles and general activities of the Education Committee of the Canadian Association of Professional Employees (CAPE), established on January 26, 2024 by decision of the National Executive Committee (NEC).

OBJECTIVES

To protect our rights in the workplace and win gains at the bargaining table, CAPE members require both practical, workplace knowledge and a broader understanding of the labour movement and its role in society. The CAPE Education Committee will focus primarily on **political education** to build the knowledge and capacity of members to intervene as effective trade unionists within both CAPE and the broader labour movement, particularly within the federal public sector. The Committee will also coordinate with CAPE National, which will focus on **skills-based training on workplace issues and organization**.

The Committee will seek to:

- Build the capacity of members to engage in campaigns being led by CAPE National or at the rank-and-file level on issues related to the workplace, such as telework.

- Strengthen support for equity, diversity and inclusion among the membership, both within the federal public service and in society more generally.
- Develop a general understanding among members of the labour movement, its history, victories, defeats, and transformative role in society, as well as a common understanding of the public service labour movement and the environment in which we operate.
- Provide a space for CAPE members to learn about the struggles of various social movements, and forge links of solidarity with other groups, including those fighting for justice internationally.
- Support the training of members on how to organize the workplace and defend their interests in solidarity with our co-workers, both unionized and non-unionized (such efforts would be led by CAPE National, as well as the Mobilization Committee).

THE CONTEXT

In the last few years, the labour movement has experienced a significant resurgence as a new generation of union organizers is connecting to the traditions of the past, organizing new workplaces and winning new contract deals. In Canada, we have seen public servants mobilize at both the federal and provincial level to fight for better collective agreements, including teachers in Ontario led by the

Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) in 2022, federal public servants in the Public Service Alliance of Canada (PSAC) in the spring of 2023, and the Common Front job action of over 420,000 workers in Quebec.

Despite these important developments, the rising cost of living and the prospect of a return to austerity politics means that unions must continue to grow their collective power if they are to prevent a further deterioration in living standards. While many public servants enjoy decent salaries and benefits, a strong labour movement is required to defend the long-term interests of all public servants, and to advocate for fair working conditions for all people in Canada. Many public servants often face long hours, pressures not to claim overtime, deskilling, harassment in the workplace, and arbitrary decision-making and tasking by senior management.

The resurgence of labour struggles in many places provides us with important lessons on how to revitalize CAPE and the broader public service labour movement to defend our collective interests against the employer. Although the experiences of successful labour fight-backs are diverse, many are rooted in the traditions of union democracy and the collective values of solidarity and grassroots participation. Forging connections with other community groups and social struggles, they

are rediscovering the forms of collective action that built the labour movement in the first place.

Yet, strengthening the labour movement in the federal public service faces multiple challenges, including the fact that our employer has the legislative and executive power of the state to determine the legal environment in which we operate. The workforce itself is fragmented into 17 different unions, with many workers – such as casuals, students, and temporary workers – not unionized at all. Occupation and “professional” status further divide employees. Moreover, many employees experience harassment and other forms of discrimination based on gender, age, sexuality, racialization, language, ability, and religion. Learning from the labour struggles of the past and present therefore requires us to consider how we can address the particular circumstances of our own labour-relations environment.

MANDATE OF THE COMMITTEE

Through a focus on political education, the Education Committee will seek to build the knowledge and capacity of members to intervene as effective trade unionists within both CAPE and the broader labour movement, particularly in the federal public sector. While the Committee will serve as a space for debate and exchange, it will be animated by the principles of democratic unionism—that solidarity and

unity make us stronger, that workplace organizing makes unions more effective, and that a strong labour movement requires mass participation. The Committee will explore these values and the barriers to their realization in the public service labour movement. It will focus in particular on the lessons of the labour struggles of the past and present and how they can be adapted to our own unique set of circumstances in the federal public service.

Recognizing that cyclical attacks against public servants are typically part of a broader offensive against the standard of living of working people, the Committee will explore ways to support larger community and social struggles that challenge poverty and injustice, as well as the oppression of women, Indigenous peoples, racialized groups, queer people, and international struggles for justice. The Committee will also be guided by the awareness that we have a responsibility to provide services to the public, and that our unions should defend policies that support working Canadians and marginalized peoples.

CORE PRINCIPLES OF DEMOCRATIC UNIONISM

Solidarity and Unity Make Us Stronger

Solidarity is based on the recognition that wage and salary earners share a collective interest that is best served when we are united. The

Committee will seek to understand the dynamics behind the fragmentation of the public service labour movement and potential ways to overcome it, as well as ways to build solidarity with our sibling unions, community groups and struggles.

Workplace Organizing Makes Unions More Effective

Labour unions are critical for defending the rights of working people. However, many unions often behave as bureaucratic and legalistic organizations with little connection to their members. The history of the labour movement shows that rank-and-file organization in the workplace is necessary to build leaders and activists capable of defending our rights. The Committee will explore ways to create democratic spaces that bring together all workers to enhance our collective power.

A Strong Labour Movement Requires Mass Participation

When workers are collectively engaged in mass struggles, they have a much greater chance of making their demands heard. The Committee will examine how mass action in the public service in the past has led to important historic gains, and how workers in different places are organizing and using mass actions to defend themselves.

STRATEGY

To achieve its objectives of building the knowledge and capacity of members to intervene as effective trade unionists within both CAPE and the broader labour movement, the Education Committee will organize activities that appeal to both a **broad segment of the membership** and ones that are more tailored to **members who are interested in taking on an organizing role**. This will include:

1. Broad-based educational activities such as talks, panels, and debates.
2. Smaller-based educational activities such as reading groups to explore particular topics in greater depth.
3. A quarterly bulletin with updates on CAPE campaigns, developments in labour, and one long-form article.

The Committee will also coordinate with CAPE National to support technical training on workplace issues—such as telework, performance reviews, workforce adjustment, harassment, and increased workloads—as well as organizing the workplace’ training and training for involvement in specific campaigns.

The Committee also recognizes that CAPE, given its relative size, has a modest role to play in strengthening the labour movement. Wherever possible, activities will be organized with PSAC and other unions.

STRUCTURE AND MEMBERSHIP

The Education Committee will include a chairperson elected by the Committee on an annual basis and membership is open to all CAPE members. The Committee shall have a maximum of 15 members. Where necessary, Committee members will vote on activities and campaigns by simple majority. While learning activities will often be informal, formal meetings will generally adhere to Bourinot's Rules of Order.

The Committee will set the general direction and high-level content of educational activities, with CAPE National Staff leading on the organization of events and development of educational products.