

# Newsletter

Summer 2025



CUPE Ontario  
Pink Triangle  
Committee

Comité du  
triangle rose  
du SCFP Ontario

## Chair's corner

**A message from Vee Gandhi (they/she), Chair, CUPE Ontario Pink Triangle Committee**

The Pink Triangle Committee (PTC) remains deeply committed to advocating for equity, inclusion and solidarity for 2SLGBTQIA+ members and allies across CUPE Ontario. Over the past year, the committee's work has continued to reflect both the urgent realities faced by queer and trans communities and the power of collective care and organizing.

Throughout 2024, the committee's efforts were shaped by a troubling rise in anti-2SLGBTQIA+ protests and political attacks across Canada. This has impacted not only members' physical and emotional safety in public spaces, but also their experiences at work and in their communities. These challenges are not abstract; they've shown up in concrete ways – including a noticeable decline in participation during recent counter-protests in Toronto, where members have expressed growing concerns around safety, burnout and isolation in the face of increasing hate.



In response, the committee has been working to strengthen how we mobilize as a union when hate shows up in our streets and workplaces. A major part of this work is focused on community conversations during Pride events. In 2024, members of the PTC attended twelve Pride celebrations across Ontario – including Pride Toronto's Trans March, Dyke March, and Two-Spirit Pride – as well as smaller and rural Pride events like Peterborough Pride, Lakefield Pride, and Cornwall Pride.



These moments of connection on the ground have helped the committee build relationships, learn from members' experiences in different regions and reaffirm the importance of showing up for each other in public spaces.

The committee has also spent time looking inward.

In both our fall and spring meetings, members focused on building internal capacity through team-based discussions and planning. We worked on developing new campaign ideas, reviewed our current action plans and resolutions and shaped proposals for CUPE Ontario's 2025 convention. We also took time to honour the departure of a long-time committee member and reflect on the values that guide our work as a team.

Recognizing that representation matters, the committee is currently working to fill a vacant seat, with a focus on 2SLGBTQIA+ members who are Black, Indigenous, racialized, and/or are from Northern Ontario. The goal is to ensure that the voices of those most impacted by structural barriers are included in our conversations and decisions.

Looking ahead, the committee is excited to move forward with:

- A webinar featuring 2SLGBTQIA+ artist(s), focusing on how communities resist hate and create space for joy and connection.
- A video for CUPE locals aimed at helping strengthen inclusion, with attention to the unique challenges faced by racialized trans members.
- Continued planning for Pride season 2025, including outreach at Toronto Pride and work toward ensuring CUPE Ontario is present at at least one Northern Pride event.

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## Chair's corner - continued

As the elected representative and chair of the Pink Triangle Committee, I want to reaffirm that I am here to support our members, to listen and to advocate for union solidarity in every space I enter. Our work is rooted in collective care, and I remain committed to building stronger, safer and more inclusive workplaces and communities for all.

The committee extends sincere thanks to CUPE members and allies who continue to show up for equity and justice, even when the work is hard and the climate is tough. Your solidarity makes a real difference and we are proud to stand alongside you.

## In memory of Nancy



It was with great sadness that we said goodbye this year to Nancy Hanschmann, a long-time CUPE Ontario Pink Triangle Committee member. We are proud to have had the opportunity to stand with Nancy over the last several years and to be inspired by her strength and her voice for equality, diversity and inclusion.

Nancy was a longtime CUPE member, leader, and activist in our union and she played a vital role on CUPE Ontario's Pink Triangle Committee.

Nancy was a member of CUPE 109 and she worked for the City of Kingston for more than 35 years. She was the first woman ever to be hired to the position of assistant supervisor position in Public Works and it was an achievement that she was rightly proud of.

She served on CUPE Ontario's Women's committee from 2008 to 2014 and was a member of CUPE Ontario's Pink Triangle Committee from 2009 until her passing. She also served on the CUPE National Pink Triangle Committee, spending four+ years as its co-chair. She also made her

mark for justice and the rights of 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals when she served on the Ontario Federation of Labour's Solidarity and Pride Committee for more than six years.

In honour of Nancy's contributions and achievements in promoting the engagement of 2SLGBTQIA+ communities, CUPE Ontario has recognized Nancy with this year's Pink Triangle Advocacy award.

As members of the Pink Triangle Committee, we stood side by side with Nancy during countless campaigns and Pride celebrations. We joined our voices to hers in a call for us to do better and be better.

Nancy, thank you for your fierce leadership and activism, pushing for safer spaces in your local, your community and communities across Ontario. Finally, thank you for your friendship and mentorship. Your voice and fire will continue for years to come, as we strive to bring an end to hate and thrive in a world of acceptance, love and tolerance.

Along with Nancy's family, friends and everyone she touched here in CUPE Ontario, we are grateful to have worked alongside her for so many years. This year, members of PTC plan to attend [Kingston Pride](#), June 8 to 15, in honour and in memory of Nancy.

-- Cupe Ontario Pink Triangle Committee

## Politicizing 2SLGBTQIA+ issues

By Ali Fraser (they/them), PTC member

**Were LGBTQ issues talked about in the last elections. If not, why not? How do we keep our politics alive? How do we power our community?**

This year, the Progressive Conservatives formed government again in Ontario and the Liberals were returned to power in Ottawa with a minority federal government.

But what does that mean for us? Do you feel engaged as a 2SLGBTQIA+ voter? Do politicians lobby for queer rights?

In looking at the 2025 Ontario political party electoral platforms, not one political party took a clear, pro-queer rights stance. That is not surprising for the PCs, but a frustrating silence from the Ontario NDP, Liberals, and Green party. At least their messaging for the 2022 provincial election included us to some degree.

But now, our name – *our names* – have all but disappeared.

Does that mean we're good? Does it mean we must now have equal access and full ability to participate in Canadian society, the economy, education, healthcare, housing, etc.?

Is there nothing left to fight for?

The previous federal Liberal government, elected in 2021, actually did take action when they launched the [2SLGBTQIA+ Action Plan](#). As of 2024, the action plans purports to have completed a survey of queer people and provided financial support to queer community groups. And according to *Xtra* magazine, in that election all major political parties, including the Conservatives named queer issues as important.

In the 2025 federal election, the NDP and Green party said they would continue to promote queer rights, but could not (or did not) name what those rights are.

In Alberta on April 9, federal Liberal leader (now Prime Minister) Mark Carney was asked about supporting access to gender affirming care and protecting trans rights. His response was, "[A]ccess to healthcare in Canada is... a fundamental right. And we will defend it." Without naming us, Carney said he would defend our right to health care. This is good. But it's only one assurance and queer people are not named in the official party electoral platforms.

Again, does that imply there is nothing specific left to fight for?

Do you feel like *you* have full and meaningful participation in society without any barriers?

We all know homophobia, transphobia, racism, sexism, and all manner of hate readily exists. The problem is insidious.

We are no longer named by politicians who can, in turn, no longer name our issues. They don't understand our struggles, or that we *even still* have struggles.

Fighting for same-sex marriage was a uniting force because it could be named. We could rally behind a knowable cause. But what is the cause now?

Our problems are so tied to other problems of limited access and barriers. It's never just one thing. Access to gender affirming healthcare is not just about doctors. It's about access to financial support or income, having somewhere to live, reliable transportation, and social supports – issues nameable by those who live them, but hard to communicate to those who do not.

Now we have to settle for being invisible. We struggle to vote for queer, progressive political platforms where few exist.

Our reality in the federal election was working to ensure the Conservatives did not form government. As we know, they are on record as saying they will remove trans rights. (I wonder how this sentence will age.)

What do we do? Probably what we do best: fight for us. Our people. Our loved ones. Our rights.

Fight for love.



## Susan goes to Cape Town

**By Susan Gapka(she/her)**

**Susan, a member of CUPE 2998 and former PTC chair, shares stories from the International Lesbian and Gay Association (ILGA) World Conference.**

Rising hate and violence towards 2SLGBTQIA+ communities across the globe and particularly in the United States since November 5, 2024, gave me an extra sense of urgency as I boarded Air Canada at Pearson a few days later for the ILGA World Conference in South Africa. I had been nominated by the Ontario Federation of Labour for the World Board as Trans Chair earlier; however, I was struggling to locate a supportive member to send me as a delegate for the conference. Thank goodness CUPE Ontario Pink Triangle came to the rescue.

According to the ILGA's website, "The 31st ILGA World Conference has been the largest in the history of the organisation, with over 1,450 delegates from over 100 countries in attendance. The conference also marked the first time in 25 years that the event returned to African soil. The member organisations of ILGA World also elected their new representatives to the Executive Board, with Kimberly Frost and Yuri Guaiana elected Co-Secretaries General, and votes for the next World Conference to be held in Buenos Aires, Argentina."



Upon arrival in Cape Town, a few of us met to finalize the Trans pre-conference which was scheduled for the next morning. On the second day, the Trade Union pre-conference took place; it had been planned online over the previous months. CUPE National participated in a panel, with CUPE represented by Gina McKay and Kimalee Phillip, who spoke about Canadian labour. I accepted a late invitation to speak about trans inclusion during the Women's pre-conference.

The North American and Caribbean (NAC) Annual General Meeting also happened prior to the official conference after the pre conferences. We adopted our first full strategic plan, elected co chairs for Canada (Rob Boulet and Kim Vance-Mubanga); United States (Mohamed Amin and Liaam Winslet), and Caribbean (Kenita Placide). Lucien Goovard, the other Caribbean co chair, was appointed later due to a vacancy caused by a resignation. Rob and Kenita now serve as NAC representatives on the ILGA World Board representing our region. We also adopted a motion to

hold our regional meeting prior to the next World Conference.

Once the conference officially opened, I was exposed to two interesting learnings. India legalised consensual sex/relationships instead of sexual and gender rights to include sex work; and Disability Rights is part of body autonomy liberation. However, most of my time was in governance workshops as a voting member on behalf of CUPE Ontario. The most contentious proposal was to disband the equity Bisexual, Intersex, Trans, Women, Youth (BITWY) committees which met fierce resistance from those of us who have benefited from that route of ILGA engagement. If the proposal had been adopted, the committees would be closed. This constitutional amendment would have required a super majority of two-thirds to pass and was soundly defeated. Imagine CUPE attempting to eliminate our equity committees that so many of us benefit from accessing!

## Susan goes to Cape Town - continued

During the plenary, member organisations also elected the chairs of ILGA World's Steering Committees: Hamlet Nkwain (Bisexual Committee), Obioma Chukwuike (Intersex Committee), Alejandra Collette Spinetti Nuñez (Trans Committee), Angelica Polmonari (Women's Committee), and Gabriel Benjamin Barahona Escobar (Youth Committee).

Luckily, I was able to make it to a second ballot campaigning for trans chair. But I ultimately came a distant second, due to a strong campaign by Collette Spinetti and the strong Latin America delegation, who mounted a successful campaign to host the ILGA World Conference.

In early January I was appointed for a third term as ILGA NAC trans representative. Using my networks gained at the conference I have recorded two videos for IGLA World, for [International Women's Day](#) and [Trans Day of Visibility](#). This would not have been possible had I not been present in person, so thank you, CUPE Ontario.

Unfortunately, since January 20, USAID funding to ILGA has been cut significantly, negatively impacting ILGA World and NAC and its member organisations. Trans and racialized people have been re-criminalised, with draconian anti-trans legislation and with ICE "disappearing people" without due process. Most Executive Orders have been stayed or overturned through the courts; however as trans representative embedded in trade union organising, I feel it is critical to remain engaged globally, to bring a working-class analysis to ILGA and world affairs; and to remain vigilant, determined and active in creating a more inclusive, more responsive, and a more progressive future.

## Show your Pride in 2025

Every year, PTC works with the Ontario Federation of Labour Solidarity and Pride Committee to compile a list of Pride events across the province. The list will be available soon on ofl.ca.

CUPE Ontario and the Pink Triangle Committee always make up an impressive contingent in Toronto Pride events. If you're in town at the end of June, we'd love to see you over the weekend of June 27 to 29 for the Trans March on Friday, the Dyke March on Saturday, and Pride Parade on Sunday.

PTC members will also join CUPE's National Pink Triangle group for Capital Pride in Ottawa and the Pride Parade on August 24.

Help carry a banner, decorate CUPE Ontario's parade float, or just be part of the excitement!



**Capital Parade, Ottawa, 2024**



## Why small-town Pride matters

By Rhonda Grigsby (she/her), PTC member

For many 2SLGBTQIA+ people living in small or rural communities, being out and visible can still be a challenge. These regions often lack 2SLGBTQIA+ resources, support networks, and inclusive spaces. As a result, Pride in a small town isn't just a celebration – it's an act of courage, resistance, and hope.

In communities where being different can make you feel isolated, Pride events create a space to connect. They offer a sense of belonging not only to 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals but also to allies, family members, and neighbours who want to show their support. When even a handful of people gather to wave rainbow flags in a local park or march down Main Street, the message is loud and clear: *you are not alone*.

### Building community, one event at a time

Many small-town Pride events focus heavily on community engagement. Rather than just parades and parties, these events often emphasize dialogue, awareness, and inclusion. They might partner with local schools, libraries, churches, or civic groups to create inclusive programming, or host safe-space workshops to build local allyship and understanding.

### The power of visibility



Visibility is a double-edged sword in smaller communities. While being visible can open 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals up to scrutiny or criticism, it also serves as a lifeline to those who are still finding their voice. Seeing a Pride flag flying over city hall or a rainbow sticker in a café window can offer immense validation to someone who might otherwise feel unseen.

For youth especially, small-town Pride events can be life-changing. They send a powerful message: *You matter here. You have a future here. You are loved*. That kind of affirmation can't be overstated in a world that often feels unsafe for 2SLGBTQIA+ youth.

### Pride is personal

In small communities, Pride becomes less about scale and more about sincerity. Every handshake, every shared story, every hug exchanged is a piece of progress. While big-city events offer celebration on a massive scale, small-town Pride offers intimacy and authenticity – and that can be just as meaningful, if not more.

At its core, Pride is about visibility, acceptance, and love. And whether it's a parade with tens of thousands or a picnic with ten, it's all part of the same movement toward a more inclusive and compassionate world.

During the past Pride Season, members of the Pink Triangle Committee not only attended Toronto Pride events, but also various community Pride Events. Joseph Di Flaviano attended Hamilton Pride and Capital Pride in Ottawa; Ali Fraser attended Pride events in Durham, Peterborough and Lakefield. Coline Babin marched in Montreal Pride and Mallory Imrie was at Hamilton Pride. Gabby Millsap volunteered at Capital Pride; Vee Gandhi attended Capital Pride and Two-Spirit Pride; and I attended Peel Pride and Cornwall Pride.

Pride in small communities may fly under the national radar, but it is no less impactful. It embodies the spirit of Pride in its rawest form – a celebration not just of who we are, but of where we are, and who we choose to stand beside. These events remind us that change doesn't just happen in big cities – it starts in backyards, church basements, and small-town sidewalks. And that's something worth marching for.

