



Report to 2025 National Convention

CUPE ANTI-RACISM STRATEGY 2021-2027



CUPE

INTRODUCTION


The Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) has a history of being a leader in the fight against racism. In 1999, at our national convention in Montréal, delegates adopted the *CUPE Policy Statement on Workplace Racism*,¹ which started the conversation on eradicating racism within CUPE, the Canadian labour movement, and beyond.

At the convention, CUPE activists from across Canada came together to make a powerful commitment: we must confront racism in our workplaces, locals, and communities. As a union, we must take an active role in fighting for fairness and equity to ensure a barrier-free world for future generations.

The fight against systemic barriers requires collective action and solidarity — not isolated efforts. CUPE activists have taken this struggle to their regions, advocating for anti-racism measures and pushing for the implementation of employment equity. They have worked to increase representation within the union and have championed an intersectional approach to tackling systemic racism, recognizing that meaningful change must address the interconnected nature of oppression.

In the past, CUPE members made historic gains in representation within the national leadership by voting to add two Diversity Vice-Presidents (DVPs) for Indigenous, Black, and racialized members² on the National Executive Board. Many provinces followed suit, and several divisions' executive boards now have seats for Diversity Vice-Presidents. Like a ripple effect, the goal to increase the representation of equity members within CUPE's leadership is catching momentum, but while we have made significant progress, the work of confronting and eradicating racism is far from over.

CUPE's 2016-2017 National Leadership Survey showed that Indigenous, Black, and racialized workers were underrepresented in elected positions at the local level and faced systemic barriers to full participation in our union.³ A 2019 survey showed that 11% of our members identified as racialized and 5% as Indigenous. Of the 11%, almost one in five (19%) identified as Black and 17% as South Asian. The survey showed that Black and racialized workers were overrepresented among those in precarious employment and were also less likely to attend union events and activities.



These numbers highlighted the urgent need for a comprehensive plan to address racism at all levels of our union. Central to this plan was the identification and removal of barriers that prevent members from accessing leadership roles, having their voices meaningfully heard, and building genuine solidarity with organizations dedicated to combating racism in our communities. Addressing these challenges is essential to creating a more inclusive, equitable, and representative union for all. So, at CUPE's 2019 National Convention, delegates voted unanimously to develop an anti-racism strategy for our union.

CUPE's Anti-Racism Strategy 2021-2027 was adopted at the 30th National Convention in 2021 to recommit our union to the important work of dismantling white supremacy and fighting racism.⁴

There are ten goals in the strategy:

- 1. Governance:** Ensure our Constitution and local bylaws acknowledge and address systemic racism
- 2. Representation:** Increase representation of Black, Indigenous and racialized members in the union
- 3. Anti-racism education:** Develop and engage in anti-racism education
- 4. Lived experience:** Learn from the experiences of Black, Indigenous and racialized members and celebrate their successes
- 5. Organizing:** Integrate an anti-racism focus into organizing strategies
- 6. Bargaining:** Bargain to eliminate systemic racism and workplace inequities
- 7. Enforcing collective agreements:** Administer and enforce the collective agreement with an anti-racist lens
- 8. Data collection:** Collect data on demographics, precarity and union involvement
- 9. Political action:** Take political action to challenge and eliminate systemic racism
- 10. Coalition work and global solidarity:** Work in coalition with community groups and in solidarity with anti-racist global justice activists

Union solidarity cannot exist in an environment where racism exists. That is why we all must commit to implementing the Anti-Racism Strategy.

Priority goals

Based on consultations with members in 2020 and 2021, the following four goals were determined to be the priorities in 2022-2023:

Goal 2	Goal 3	Goal 6	Goal 8
Representation	Education	Bargaining	Data Collection

A full report detailing progress on these goals was presented in the 2023 Convention Report on the *Anti-Racism Strategy*. Any new updates under these four goals are included in this report.

The following goals were prioritized in 2024-2025:

Goal 4	Goal 1	Goal 5
Lived Experience	Governance	Organizing

Progress

4	Lived Experience
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CUPE is committed to putting the experiences of Indigenous, Black, and racialized members in our union at the heart of our anti-racism work. Whether that's telling more stories through CUPE's print and digital publications, using lived experiences to inform our ongoing Anti-Racism Strategy, or highlighting those experiences at CUPE events, it's more important than ever for us to amplify the voices of those most impacted by racism and discrimination.



Member Profiles

Since the 2023 National Convention, we have published stories highlighting the leadership and lived experiences of CUPE members on the National Racial Justice Committee (NRJC) and the National Indigenous Council (NIC). Members of these national committees bring years of activism fighting against racism in their workplaces, in their regions, and in their locals. Their struggles and successes are what make CUPE a better union for all our members.

CUPE conducted interviews with the NRJC and NIC members. Those who wanted to share their experiences were photographed and worked with staff to shape how their stories were told. The stories were distributed digitally to roughly 10,000 members through the digital publication, CUPE Today.

The response we received from members about the publications was overwhelmingly positive. Members felt heard and represented through the telling of these stories. Staff who worked with the profiled members learned about them and their experiences in a profound way.

Black History Month

Each year, during Black History Month in February, CUPE honours a Black ancestor or someone who is making history today.

In 2024, CUPE honoured the struggles of Nell Toussaint, a fierce defender of human rights. She fought to ensure that everyone—regardless of their immigration status—can access health care in Canada. Nell, originally from Grenada, came to Canada, where she became seriously ill but was denied health care simply because she lacked the “right” kind of immigration status. Despite her serious illness, she took her cause from Canadian courts to the United Nations, remaining steadfast to the very end. In a landmark decision, the United Nations Human Rights Committee ruled that every person, regardless of their immigration status, has the right to essential health care. Sadly, Nell died from her illness, and it was because she was denied health care in Canada. CUPE honoured Nell’s inspiring struggles and successes during Black History Month in 2024, sharing her story with thousands of CUPE members across the country.

In 2025, CUPE honoured Marjorie Villefranche, who is the Executive Director of Maison d’Haïti. A key figure in Montréal’s Haitian community, she has made her mark as a feminist and anti-racist activist fighting discrimination and all forms of exclusion. Members learned about Marjorie’s remarkable journey as a young immigrant arriving in Canada from Haiti, and how she helped members of vulnerable groups fully participate in their community.



1 Governance

Fighting systemic racism must be reflected in all levels of the union. For effective change to take place, those in decision-making positions must be representative of their members.

Representation Tool Kit

To assist members, a representation toolkit has been developed. The purpose of the kit is to help locals find strategies to increase the representation of Indigenous, Black, and racialized members in union democracy. This valuable resource is designed and created for grassroots members, local executives, workplaces, staff, and the community to access and help shape and create anti-racist spaces across Canada.

This toolkit includes various tip sheets on how to support Indigenous, Black, and racialized CUPE members, how to build a stronger union through inclusion and diversity, how to establish designated equity positions on local executives, the importance of self-identification questions, and more. The topics are the culmination of feedback received from Indigenous, Black, and racialized CUPE members over several years. The National Racial Justice Committee and the National Indigenous Council have reviewed each tip sheet and have also provided important advice on priorities for the toolkit.

Equality Statement

CUPE's Equality Statement is being revised to "explicitly oppose racism, colonization and other forms of systemic oppression," as outlined on page 3 of the strategy. This ongoing work has been shaped by valuable input from the national equity committees, including feedback gathered at the joint equity committees meeting in April 2025. Updating the Equality Statement is part of a broader effort to ensure alignment across key governing documents, such as the Code of Conduct. To maintain that consistency and reflect the depth of consultation, CUPE is continuing this important work with care and intention, with changes to be brought forward at a future convention.



Statement on the International Decade for People of African Descent

In addition to the Equality Statement, the statement on the United Nations International Decade for People of African Descent was amended to include the second decade (2024-2034), which the United Nations adopted in December 2024. The revised statement discusses the recommitment to the theme of the first decade, which was “recognition, justice, and development.” This second decade is an opportunity to make more progress in confronting the legacies of enslavement and colonialism, delivering reparatory justice, and securing the full human rights and freedoms of people of African descent worldwide. By reading this statement at meetings that govern the decisions made by our union leaders, be they local, regional, or national, we are reinforcing our commitment to fighting against anti-Black racism.

Diversity Vice-President (DVP) Gatherings

DVP gatherings are an opportunity for the Diversity Vice-Presidents to meet with members and to report on the union’s work on issues faced by Indigenous, Black, and racialized members. It is also an opportunity for members to ask questions and provide feedback. There was one DVP gathering in 2023, one in 2024, and two more gatherings in 2025. Participation at these gatherings continues to increase at a steady pace. The gatherings provide members with resources, a chance to listen to panellists with lived experience as Indigenous, Black, and racialized leaders, and an opportunity to discuss challenges and successes in their local.

5 Organizing

Indigenous, Black, and racialized workers are overrepresented in precarious, low-wage, and non-unionized jobs. Many do not have access to the union advantage – fair wages, protection from discrimination through a grievance process, and the power of collective bargaining. That’s why CUPE must strengthen its outreach and organizing efforts to extend these protections and benefits to all. To grow our membership and our strength as a union, our organizing efforts must be attuned to the needs of Indigenous, Black, and racialized workers across all sectors.

Employment Equity Guide

An Employment Equity Bargaining Guide for locals has been developed to increase support for the hiring and retention of Indigenous, Black, and racialized members in our members' workplaces, along with the other designated equity-deserving groups, such as women, workers with disabilities, and 2SLGBTQI+ workers. The guide provides members with a range of information, from the importance of employment equity to what locals and employers can do to promote it.

The guide is a comprehensive approach to equipping locals in supporting employment equity in our members' workplaces. It provides clear guidance on how members can navigate the legal requirements for employment equity by looking at various jurisdictions. It also provides members with sample language for developing collective bargaining proposals and checklists for identifying barriers to employment equity.

Outreach Initiative in Northern Saskatchewan

CUPE has been integrating an anti-racism focus into organizing plans. This includes a pilot outreach project in northern Saskatchewan. The goal of this project, which initially started off as an organizing strategy, is to build a relationship with Indigenous rural communities in northern Saskatchewan who are seeking better working and living conditions.

There is tremendous potential to engage, build relationships, and conduct outreach with Saskatchewan's northern and Indigenous communities. This work can support communities who are unsure or mistrusting of the role labour unions can play in improving access to safer working conditions. This work also aligns with CUPE's strategic directions: "Reclaiming Worker Power: Strategic Directions 2023-2025".

The following goals were prioritized in 2025-2026:

Goal 7	Goal 9	Goal 10
Enforcing the Collective Agreement	Political Action	Coalition Work

Progress

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Enforcing the Collective Agreement

CUPE's Anti-Racism Strategy calls on locals to administer and enforce our collective agreements using an anti-racist approach. Far too often, Indigenous, Black, and racialized workers are told that they are overreacting or misinterpreting racist behaviour and practices at work, which may leave them to fear that their union may not support them if they were to come forward with concerns. Taking a strong stance against racism in the workplace means affirming the member's experience and asking what they need for support. We must use our negotiated agreements as tools for fighting back against racism, not as barriers to support for those impacted by racial discrimination or violence.

Migrant Workers' Resources

The federal government made sweeping changes to immigration policies in November 2024 that have had significant impacts on CUPE members under the Temporary Foreign Worker Program and the International Student Program. Before and since these changes, we have developed a fleet of resources for members and locals to support migrant workers, and particularly those who are now impacted by the changes:

- Part 1 of the *Temporary Foreign Workers in our Union: A Solidarity and Action Guide* was completed in April 2024 and has become an important resource to members, local leaders, and CUPE staff.
- Bargaining language, protecting the rights of workers with temporary work permits, is being finalized.
- A fact sheet on the International Student Program is also in development.
- A new flyer outlining the rights of migrant workers and the need for status for all was published earlier this year.

CUPE has been working with local executives to advocate for the rights of members with expiring work permits who are facing deportation.

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Political Action

CUPE's Anti-Racism Strategy calls on us to fight for racial justice not just in our workplaces, but in the political arena. It urges us to use political action to make services safe, accessible, and culturally sensitive for Indigenous, Black, and racialized communities. It pushes back against privatization, poor service quality, and precarious work that disproportionately impact these communities. The strategy also calls on CUPE to support more Black, Indigenous, and racialized people in running for elected office.

Task Force Report on the Federal Employment Equity Act Review

Following the report of the Federal Employment Equity Act Review Taskforce's report, CUPE participated in Employment and Social Development Canada's (ESDC) roundtable consultations on possible amendments to the Employment Equity Act. We also engaged in the Canadian Labour Congress' Employment Equity Working Group to develop common positions among affiliates on the Task Force's recommendations. As part of the consultations, we provided a written submission with CUPE's recommendations to ESDC in August 2024.

Nearly all of CUPE's recommendations were accepted including the following:

- Including 2SLGBTQI+ workers and updating the language from Aboriginal to Indigenous workers and visible minorities to Black and racialized workers.
- The Employment Equity Act and the Accessible Canada Act should work together to ensure the strongest possible provisions for removing barriers to employment for persons with disabilities.
- The Act should include the concept of intersectionality to address multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination.
- The federal government and the Canadian Human Rights Commission should promote and support ongoing research and education on the employment barriers faced by people who identify with more than one designated group.



CUPE's Election Strategy

At a Diversity Vice President gathering in November 2024, the federal election strategy was presented to members. The virtual gathering had roughly 100 members present, double the number of members from previous gatherings. The presentation focused on the consequences of electing a right-wing federal government for Indigenous, Black, and racialized people and their communities. Discussions took place on how we can develop key messaging to mobilize our members in the regions to vote for worker-friendly governments in the upcoming elections.

Human Rights Conferences

The Prairie Human Rights Conference took place from January 21-23, 2025. The Anti-Racism Strategy was presented by the Diversity Vice Presidents during the plenary session. The session provided several updates on the political situation in each of the Prairie provinces. Having the Anti-Racism Strategy presented at this conference provided members with an opportunity to connect its goals with the challenges they're facing in implementing the strategy because of racist rhetoric coming from Conservative politicians. The conference also addressed the attacks against 2SLGBTQI+ communities, especially trans communities, and how we can strengthen our solidarity with them.

CUPE Quebec held its human rights conference from December 3-5, 2024, in Trois-Rivières. The event was an opportunity for members to dialogue around increased inflation and economic disparity, and the rise of right-wing politics. There were connections made with this reality and the issues affecting the human rights of members, such as artificial intelligence technology, the genocide in Gaza, and the discrimination faced by Indigenous women, among other issues. The event also commemorated the December 6, 1989, massacre of women at École Polytechnique.

The Hospital Employees' Union (HEU) Equity Conference took place from March 10–13, 2025, in Vancouver, BC. Approximately 300 members from equity-deserving groups attended to share successes and challenges related to human rights, build connections with fellow members, and explore emerging issues in social justice and equity.

10 Coalition Work/Global Solidarity

Working with Community Partners

CUPE continues to collaborate with Migrante and the Migrant Workers Alliance for Change. This collaboration has included co-creating workshops and panels to educate CUPE members on the impacts of the federal government's immigration changes.


Members of CUPE's National Pink Triangle Committee, along with some staff, attended the 2024 World Conference of the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, and Intersex Association in South Africa. We joined the delegation of representatives from six other Canadian unions and connected with 2SLGBTQI+ trade unionists representing 120 unions from around the world who met at the labour pre-conference to resist the growing global anti-LGBTQI+ backlash and to strengthen support for 2SLGBTQI+ workers and communities.

Following the tragic death of Nell Toussaint — CUPE's 2024 Black History Month honouree — in January 2023, CUPE partnered with the Canadian Health Coalition and her legal team to promote a campaign to pressure the Canadian government to comply with the United Nations ruling that calls for essential health care for all, regardless of immigration status.

In November 2024, the co-chairs of the National Indigenous Council attended the Indigenous Disability and Wellness Gathering and met with organizations advocating for the rights and justice of Indigenous peoples with disabilities. In February of 2025, the co-chairs of the National Indigenous Council also attended an Assembly of First Nations (AFN) forum on the challenges of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and how that is implemented with Canadian laws. This forum was an opportunity to network with the AFN and various community leaders who are doing good work on this front.

CUPE's coalition work extends beyond Canada. In 2024, we sent a delegation to the Philippines to learn from their experience on supporting workers and community members in defending human rights.

The genocide in Gaza has been at the forefront of our political consciousness for two years. CUPE joined five other unions to call on the then-Prime Minister Justin Trudeau to reinstate funding to the main aid agency for Palestinian refugees in Gaza and throughout the region.



In 2025, we collaborated with Maison d’Haïti on honouring the director of the organization, Marjorie Villefranche, for Black History Month. Our online post included a link for members to learn about the work of Maison d’Haïti and the ability to donate online.

CUPE attended the Canadian Council of Refugees (CCR) symposium. The event included caucuses where resolutions were drafted for the CCR to lobby the federal government to uphold the rights of refugees and migrant workers.

Members of the National Racial Justice Committee and staff attended the Black Canadians Summit in Montréal and collaborated with other Black activists and leaders and racial justice advocates from across Canada.

Other goals

While we prioritize annual goals of the Anti-Racism Strategy, we continue to work on the other goals.

3


Education

Anti-Racist CUPE Program

To build a truly anti-racist union, members, staff, and CUPE’s leadership must be equipped with the knowledge and tools necessary for meaningful change. CUPE has responded to this need by developing a new initiative called Anti-Racist CUPE (ARC). This program is designed to deliver workshops and courses that support the ongoing work of building an anti-racist workers’ movement within our union. As trade unionists, we recognize that the fight for racial justice has deep roots in education, and it’s important that this is reflected in the Anti-Racism Strategy.

Two workshops were piloted at the April 2024 Dave Saunders Weeklong School in Ontario: one workshop on acknowledging and combating anti-Black racism, and one workshop on bargaining truth and reconciliation.

CUPE is developing a workshop on solidarity with Palestine to bring awareness about the ongoing Palestinian struggle against apartheid and settler-colonialism. An additional workshop is also being created on understanding anti-Palestinian racism at work and in our communities.



In addition, CUPE is developing a workshop on antisemitism, which speaks to the Jewish community's lived experience of discrimination. The workshop will help members recognize and challenge antisemitism in their workplaces and communities.

Additional piloting has taken place in various regions to ensure the Anti-Racist CUPE program's objectives are met. CUPE continues to develop a variety of workshops from special topics to leadership training.

Educational materials for commemorative days


CUPE has produced posters, stickers, buttons, and other materials that locals can use to promote annual events that celebrate Indigenous, Black, and racialized workers.

Every year on Emancipation Day on August 1, CUPE issues a statement to recognize the history and legacy of slavery in Canada and to support the fight against anti-Black racism. These statements outline actions that members can take.

CUPE continues to commemorate national days of remembrance to raise awareness about racism in our country. Whether it's Holocaust Remembrance Day or commemorating the attack on the Quebec Mosque, which was motivated by Islamophobia, we raise awareness about the atrocities against communities that are motivated by racism and hate.

Each year, CUPE acknowledges Asian Heritage Month to honour the contributions and history of Canada's Asian community. We acknowledge and honour the activism of people of Asian descent in their fight for human rights and social justice. Their ongoing struggles against multiple forms of oppression have been instrumental in strengthening our labour movement and our communities.

In May, CUPE recognizes Jewish Heritage Month to honour the lived experiences of our Jewish members and communities. Members are encouraged to register for the workshop on antisemitism, which speaks to the historic and ongoing reality of discrimination faced by Jewish people.



As part of our commitment to truth and reconciliation, we have used the Water is Life campaign to feature educational videos designed to help members and the public learn about Indigenous cultures and the importance of protecting water as a human right. Currently, the National Indigenous Council is working with staff on updating and creating the next phase of the campaign.

Every year, CUPE observes and promotes key days of recognition:

- June 21 *National Indigenous Peoples Day*
- September 30 *National Day for Truth and Reconciliation*
- May 5 *Red Dress Day*
- October 4 *Sisters in Spirit Vigils*

These dates honour the history, culture, and resilience of Indigenous peoples across Turtle Island. They also draw attention to the ongoing crisis of missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls, and Two-Spirit people, while calling for implementation of the 231 Calls for Justice from the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls.

CUPE's quarterly publication, *Counterpoint*, features a regular reconciliation column. Past topics have included the Water is Life campaign, the underfunding of efforts to locate and investigate unmarked graves at residential school sites, and ways to centre truth and reconciliation in collective bargaining.

Promoting Education on the Anti-Racism Strategy

CUPE staff and elected leaders play a crucial role in the success of the Anti-Racism Strategy. Over the last two years, the DVPs have taken several opportunities to educate members about the strategy. The DVPs have also made presentations about the strategy at the National Sector Council Conference in Winnipeg (2024), the Indigenous Peoples' Conference in Saskatchewan (2024), and the Prairie Human Rights Conference in Saskatchewan (2025).

CUPE has been offering presentations and workshops to locals and staff. CUPE staff are receiving training on the strategy across the country.

6 Bargaining

The bargaining table is where our movement can truly show its power to advance social and economic justice.

Truth and Reconciliation Bargaining Guide

As workers who deliver the public services that our communities rely on, we must use our bargaining power to advance truth and reconciliation at the bargaining table.

Since the release of the guide, locals have used the information in a variety of ways. Some locals have bargained in land acknowledgements to collective agreements. Some have pushed for leave language to include cultural days and Indigenous holidays, such as the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation. Other locals have fought for representative workforces and targeted hiring. One local even took a creative approach to bargaining with an Indigenous Employer and completed bargaining in a circle format with an Elder present.

Employment Equity Bargaining Guide

Members of equity-deserving groups continue to struggle for opportunities to succeed in their workplaces. We cannot achieve truly inclusive and thriving workplaces until fairness and equal opportunity are fully realized. Only then will our workplaces genuinely reflect the diversity of our country and provide an environment where all workers can succeed. Employment equity goes beyond equal treatment; it requires deliberate action to address long-standing systemic inequities and to transform the everyday workplace culture in which we live and work.

CUPE has developed an employment equity bargaining guide, which includes sample bargaining language and other steps locals can take to ensure that their equity-deserving members can achieve their full potential in their workplaces.



8 Data Collection

Indigenous, Black, and racialized members continue to encounter barriers to accessing key decision-making spaces within the union, including conferences and conventions. To effectively address the challenges these members face, it is essential that we collect accurate and comprehensive information to better understand their experiences and needs.

There is currently a review underway of CUPE's data collection practices to ensure an equity lens, identify gaps in data collection, and develop recommendations for a reporting system to support the goals of the Anti-Racism Strategy and monitor its success. CUPE is developing a strategy on how to collect data regarding the enforcement of the anti-discrimination language in CUPE's collective agreements.

A fact sheet on the importance of self-identification surveys has been developed for CUPE locals to support the advancement of human rights within the union. This resource is designed to help members and locals understand the value of collecting socio-demographic data as a tool for promoting equity. It addresses common questions and concerns, offers sample survey questions, provides practical tips, and includes a sample privacy statement that can be used in local questionnaires.

CONCLUSION

The Anti-Racism Strategy represents a landmark commitment by our union to confront all forms of racial discrimination and to advance equity in our workplaces and communities, especially for Indigenous, Black, and racialized workers.

Now, four years into its implementation, the strategy is already making a meaningful impact. From the development of bargaining guides and educational resources for locals to the growing awareness and engagement of members and leaders, the foundation for a more anti-racist union is being built. This work is more critical than ever, as we continue to stand united in our values and solidarity in the face of rising hate and white supremacy.

While progress has been made, much work remains. Every member has a role to play in this ongoing effort. Watch for upcoming events, educational materials, bargaining resources, and toolkits, all designed to support the continued work of building an anti-racist union.

Tell us what equity actions your local has taken, what you want to see happen next, and what kind of support you need to advance the Anti-Racism Strategy by emailing CUPE at antiracism@cupe.ca.



Endnotes

¹CUPE, “CUPE Policy Statement on Workplace Racism,” October 16, 1999.
<https://cupe.ca/challenging-racism-workplace>

²At the National Convention in 2021, there was a constitutional amendment passed to separate “Black” from “racialized” in order to ensure that our union recognizes the unique pervasiveness and viciousness of anti-Black racism.

³CUPE, “Building Strong Locals National Leadership Survey Project,” September 30, 2017.
<https://cupe.ca/building-strong-locals-national-leadership-survey-project>

⁴CUPE, “CUPE’s Anti-Racism Strategy,” 2021. <https://cupe.ca/cupes-anti-racism-strategy>



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