

Information for AEU members about joining the Communications, Energy and Paperworkers Union of Canada

What does signing a card with CEP mean?

Contrary to what some members are hearing that signing a card means nothing, signing a membership card with CEP is not just a straw poll to see if members would like to join a union that is affiliated with the Canadian Labour Congress.

Signing a card is actually applying for membership in CEP. These cards will eventually be submitted by CEP to the Ontario Labour Relations Board as proof that you want to join CEP. At the same time, CEP will tell the Board what it considers to be the bargaining unit. If the Board finds that 40% of the bargaining unit has signed cards, then it will order a vote.

What happens if a vote is taken and a majority of members vote in favour of CEP?

If that happens, CEP becomes the new bargaining agent and the members would form a Local of CEP.

What would be different from what we have now?

Your collective agreement:

Remaining in AEU means that the collective agreement remains in force and you continue to be protected and receive the benefits until a new collective agreement is negotiated or the members are in a legal strike/lock-out position.

According to the terms of the Ontario Labour Relations Act, "If the trade union that applies for certification under subsection 7 (4), (5), or (6) is certified as bargaining agent for any of the employees in the bargaining unit defined in the collective agreement, the trade union that was or is a party to the agreement, as the case may be, forthwith ceases to represent the employees in the bargaining unit determined in the certificate and the agreement ceases to operate in so far as it affects such employees".

In other words, joining CEP means that once CEP is certified, there is no longer a collective agreement in effect until a new agreement is negotiated. It also means negotiating a complete new agreement.

Your local:

In AEU, the union is responsible for negotiating agreements and handling grievances up to and including arbitration. Representatives are on hand in the NCR where most grievances are heard. Representation is also available for our members across the country. AEU also retains legal counsel to represent at arbitration, whenever necessary.

The CEP Constitution states that it is the responsibility of the Local Union “to process grievances in accordance with their responsibility” and “to represent the workers in their respective jurisdiction relating to Local matters”. In other words, our members will still be responsible for handling grievances up to and including arbitration – and the associated costs. While the CEP national office is located in Ottawa, servicing is provided through their regional offices, e.g. Toronto, Montreal. CEP currently has 740 Locals, according to information on their web site.

Your dues

AEU dues are currently 1.035% of salary. The major portion of our dues are used to pay for representation of grievances, including arbitration costs, negotiations, legal opinions and the strike fund.

CEP dues are set by both their convention and by the individual Locals. We understand that members have been told that CEP dues would be 1.6% of salary.

According to the CEP Constitution, the dues set at the convention which are paid to the national union are .0078% of basic pay. That amount can be increased to .0096% if the strike fund falls below \$15 million.

In addition to these dues, individual Locals must also budget for costs related to grievances and arbitrations, legal opinions, affiliation fees to federations of labour and district labour councils, meetings, translation and interpretation, and the costs to send members to education schools, conferences and conventions. (Unlike PSAC, most unions do not pay for Local attendance at education seminars, conferences, etc.). Essentially, as a CEP local, members would need to fund many of the same things they do now, in addition to paying the CEP national union.

If a new CEP Local is formed, AEU dues collected up to the time that the new union is certified, would remain the property of AEU.

Your strike fund

AEU has a strike fund of half a million dollars for 320 members. Strike pay is paid from day one. The amount is set by the members of AEU. While the current AEU Regulation 1 – Strike Fund, provides for \$175 per week, higher amounts have been paid when strikes have actually occurred. The Regulation was changed several years ago to also provide equivalent strike pay to members who are not on strike but respect AEU sanctioned picket lines. AEU members can change the terms of the strike fund regulation at a membership meeting.

CEP has a much larger strike fund but also has over 150,000 members. According to the CEP Constitution, “Members on strike receive \$200.00 on the fifteenth (15th) day of the strike or lock-out and \$250.00 each seven (7) days thereafter”. This means that the first 14 days of a strike are without strike pay. Strike pay is also not provided to members who are not on strike but respect picket lines. Because the amount of strike pay is included in the CEP Constitution, it can only be changed at their national convention, held every two years.

If a new CEP Local is formed, monies in the strike fund accumulated up to the time that the new union is certified would remain the property of AEU.

What if I change my mind about signing?

If you have signed a card with CEP and have changed your mind, you can revoke your request for membership.

You can sign a short statement saying:

To whom it may concern:

I, the undersigned, working for the Public Service Alliance of Canada, located at 233 Gilmour Street, Ottawa, Ontario (or the address of a regional office, if appropriate), freely revoke my application for membership in the Communications, Energy and Paperworkers Union of Canada.

Print your name and include your signature and the date.

Give your signed statement to the person who gave you the CEP membership card and send a copy in an envelope marked Confidential to AEU Secretary Louise Laporte.

And, should the Labour Relations Board call for a vote, you will be able to express your preference at that time.

Membership meeting

We know that members may have other questions and will want to discuss this important issue. A meeting will be scheduled in the near future – we will provide you with more details as soon as a meeting room has been secured. Members may participate by phone and simultaneous interpretation will be provided. In the meantime, if you have questions or concerns, please send them to me. During the week of February 22 I will be out of town on work-related business, so please send your questions to Louise Laporte.

In solidarity,

Lucette Charron
AEU President
on behalf of the AEU executive