

SUMMER | 2021

LABOUR ACTION

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TORONTO & YORK REGION

LABOUR COUNCIL

15

YEARS

TOGETHER WE DID | TOGETHER WE CAN | TOGETHER WE WILL

Building the Power of People to Win Justice

“We are all in this together”. That was the slogan repeated as the COVID-19 pandemic turned our lives upside down. But a year later, as we endured the third COVID-19 wave, it seems clear that not everyone is included in that slogan. Every day the news highlights the growing extremes of inequality. The tragic situation in private long-term care is the logical outcome of a business model predicated on insecure work and poverty wages. And across the globe, the ruthless attempts of the gig economy giants to keep their workers in indentured servitude threatens to take us back to a much different time in history.

One hundred and fifty years ago most Canadians had few rights. Public services as we know them did not exist. But on April 12th, 1871 a small group of Toronto trade unionists came together to give life to an idea – the creation of a collective voice for working people. From the very beginning, our unions have been working together for social justice under the principle that “What we desire for ourselves, we wish for all”.

Our story began on the land of Indigenous communities and has been forged with those who have come from around the world as immigrants or refugees to build Canada’s largest urban centre. Each new wave of immigrants discovered that, in order to have a fair share of the prosperity that they helped to create, they needed collective power—a united voice to fight for dignity and a living wage.

That still rings true today, as workers struggle for basic human rights in the middle of a global pandemic. The Toronto Board of Health indicates that half of the city’s COVID-19 cases have been people on low-incomes; 79 per cent are racialized people; and more than 60 per cent of workplace outbreaks have been in frontline settings, such as food processing and warehouses.

If we want to “build back better” for all of us, not just the wealthiest, we need to look at the lessons of past struggles. In its early days, the Labour Council lobbied for public health measures, unemployment relief and education for all. We’ve fought for health and safety, for greater equality in the workplace, and against bigotry and racism in society. Unions worked with community allies to expand union benefits, like health plans or pensions, and win universal social programs for everyone. Sometimes our actions weren’t popular – but everyone enjoys the benefits of paid maternity leave that postal workers won on the picket line, and the equality rights won through bitter struggles on the streets and in the courts.

And this struggle continues. As more people get vaccinated and when, hopefully, the third wave soon subsides, our focus must be on ensuring that workers are never this vulnerable again. We’ll fight for a just recovery and an equal one. Everyone deserves a decent job, with dignity, fair wages and paid sick time. Together, we can find collective voice and fight for a better world. Together, we will build the power of the people to win social, economic, climate and racial justice for generations to come.



**“What we
desire for
ourselves, we
wish for all”**

President Andria Babbington



On June 3rd 2021 Andria Babbington was sworn in as the President of the Toronto & York Region Labour Council. Andria joined the labour movement when she began working in the hotel sector in downtown Toronto, where she became chief steward in her hotel at the age of 19, one of the youngest in her union's history. Working as a union organizer for many years, Andria played a pivotal role in campaigns such as Hotel Workers Rising, which raised the living standard across North America for thousands of hospitality workers. Andria has been on the Labour Council Executive Board since 2004, serving for eight years as Vice President. This is her first interview as President.

Andria, looking out at the labour movement today after the impacts of this past year, what do you see as the current state of labour?

The past few years have been hard on workers, and they've become unsure about the future. Workers are unsure about what a post COVID-19 recovery is going to look like, both in their workplaces and within their communities. The question is whether or not there is real solidarity within the labour movement – will we come together and fight, not just to survive, but thrive after the pandemic. To make the kind of gains we need, the labour movement has to show workers and their communities that it's ready to fight for them.

We'll need to get workers engaged in the political process and turn out to the coming election so that we can hold the politicians who enabled this crisis accountable. We also need workers to engage with the labour movement and organize more workplaces than ever. The COVID-19 pandemic created a health and safety crisis that decimated working people, and bosses put their safety on the backburner in pursuit of profits. Now, we're hearing about lay-offs and budget cuts for workers who put their lives on the line. To ensure workers come out

on top after this past year, we need to fight like we never have before.

As a young woman immigrating to Canada right as you entered working age, what were your experiences with your first foray into the working world?

Coming to Canada was difficult because I wasn't just settling into my new home, I was also looking for my first job. When I started my job search, we had family and friends already living in Canada who gave me the heads up that I shouldn't get too excited. As a young Black woman, they told me I would have to do 200% more to make it in this country. I went into my first job with my eyes wide open after those warnings, but I definitely wasn't ready for what I saw. Joining the hotel sector in the "back of the house," I was joining an older workforce, and in my department, it was mostly women, people of colour, and newcomers to Canada. If you were new in the country, this is where you were sent. These people were doctors, nurses, engineers, but we all ended up in the back of the house anyway. It was hard for us to move up too, and the hardest part was the disrespect and harassment in the workplace, but the managers told us we should be grateful to have a job at all.



How did you confront these challenges in the workplace? What role did organized labour play?

When I first started working, I had no idea what being in a union meant. We were unionized, but for me, all that meant was stopping off at Human Resources to pick up your copy of the collective agreement. Back then, the only time the union became involved in our struggles was when our rep came to the job site – but those visits were sometimes months apart. I was lucky though. Some of the women I worked with – some old enough to be my mother – took me under their wing. They knew the way this work could be, and they protected me and taught me how to protect myself. They taught me how to speak up to the boss. As I learned to stand up for myself, I noticed many of my coworkers were afraid to fight back against the bosses. After seeing that, it didn't take me too long to step up, because I knew I couldn't keep my head down just because I was being protected.

My father taught us that even if you only have a little bit, you need to take care of others who have nothing. So, I started reaching out to others, encouraging them to be brave and to stand up for themselves, and that if they felt afraid, that we would all be there for them. At first, my coworkers were surprised to see that we could fight for ourselves without the rep, but soon they knew they could count on me. Then my coworkers encouraged me to do more, and a year after I started working, I became a shop steward. Now when there were problems, we knew we didn't have to wait for the rep, and that I would speak up for them- and they could all speak for one another.

Why did you decide to make the move to the Labour Council from there?

After many years of organizing, UNITE HERE approached me: they recognized what we built in our workplace. The solidarity, and strength in our shop was a testament to how strong labour is when it's mobilized, and they asked me to take the energy I had put toward improving the lives of my 750 coworkers and do it for several thousand more by joining the Labour Council. I'll be honest I was scared – I was comfortable where I was. It was intimidating to meet and work with people who I felt I knew nothing about; I thought I didn't know their struggles. But eventually, I decided to take heart and join the Labour Council. When I sat in on my first meeting, I was relieved and excited. The people who I thought would be distant from my coworkers and I, our problems, and our union were facing the same things in their workplaces.

Now that I was there, we weren't just hearing their stories, but they were hearing ours as well, and the support and solidarity we had for one another was amazing. We were sitting amongst equals, all sharing our stories and experiences to strengthen one another. We all know that some people treat their unions like CAA, they pay their dues and forget the number until everything has broken down. They treat solidarity like an On/Off switch, something you flick on only when you have a contract to negotiate at your workplace. But at the Labour Council, we know that solidarity and the labour movement is a daily project and a lifelong struggle. For workers to achieve the future they deserve, they need to engage with their unions and with the labour movement. That's why the Labour Council is so important.

You're the first Labour Council president who is a woman of colour. How has your experience shaped the way you will lead?

As a woman of colour, I didn't go through life with a silver spoon in my mouth. I, like many others, had struggles in this country, working multiple jobs to make ends meet. I've had coworkers and families leave one job just to clock into another 8-hour shift to put food on the table. I know from talking to workers through the Labour Council that the rise of precarious work is impacting marginalized communities the most, and that conditions for unorganized workers are worse. As these problems grow and inequality deepens, it affects all workers, whether they are Black, or White, or from any background.

To make changes that will positively impact all communities, we need to grow our political power and

political consciousness across all workers. To mobilize for better working and living conditions, we need to reach workers who are beaten down, and show them that organizing their workplace and voting can change their lives. To positively affect change, we need the trifecta: union power, political power, and community power. The Labour Council will continue to agitate against repressive and dangerous laws like it has done before in the fight against carding. We will show workers and communities we are ready to fight for them even outside of the workplace. We will also continue to get good jobs to marginalized communities as we do with our apprenticeship programs for Black youths.

The best program for marginalized communities is one that delivers good, union jobs, with fair pay. Lastly, the Labour Movement needs to look in its backyard as we agitate for racial equality. We must ensure jobs within our unions, particularly in leadership positions, are open and accessible to all. As a black woman, I know there is racism in our

unions, and I won't be the one to say that we are perfect. It's our job to ensure we change that. Labour leaders are waking up to this fact, and I am encouraged by their willingness to address anti-racism, specifically anti-Black, anti-Indigenous and anti-Asian racism, in our unions.

If you were to describe in one word how we achieve our goals, what would it be?

Solidarity! When we look at the challenges ahead of us, it's going to take everyone. We need to engage workers, we need to engage communities, and we need individuals to be ready to fight for someone else. Solidarity can't just be something we sign off with on emails. It can't just be counting how many flags we have in the air on Labour Day. How many members can you get to come to a picket? How many of your neighbours will come to support your march? We need people across this whole region to know that every fight for workers is their fight. It's definitely solidarity in my book.



A Roof Over Our Head

Who can afford a house these days? House prices have exploded out of reach of anyone with a modest income. We were already in a housing crisis when COVID exposed and increased the vulnerability of those without access to affordable housing, the dangers of under-housing, and the cruelty of homelessness. Our rental housing crisis is neither random nor typical of the situation in other developed countries. Instead, it is due to deliberate policy choices – and neglect – by different levels of Canadian governments, egged on by large private sector landlords and investors. The way out of this mess is to hold governments accountable and insist that they act on behalf of Canadians, not big business.

WHO IS AFFECTED

There are over 100,000 households lingering on the waiting list for social housing in Toronto. Countless other families who are not on any list live underhoused or overextended financially, paying rents they can't afford. There are nearly 10,000 homeless people in Toronto, and over 1,000 people in York Region documented as homeless.

The average rent for a two-bedroom apartment in the GTA is \$1,591, and much higher in downtown Toronto. More than one in five renters spends over half their income on rent. However, the above rates don't tell the full story since they reflect the rents currently being paid. If someone needs to find a home now, the entry rent for housing is much higher.

The supply of affordable housing is key. Developers have been powerful players in municipal and provincial politics for decades. They responded to rent controls by shifting most new building to condominiums, shrinking the rental market. Massive profits have come from urban sprawl and subdivisions that gobble up prime farmland.

As the downtown core becomes redeveloped with luxury condos, the rapid entry of short-term rentals through AirBNB has taken thousands of units out of the housing stock.

HOUSING THAT STAYS AFFORDABLE

The solution is to build housing that is not subject to the speculative market. From the 1970's on, all levels of government supported an impressive building program of non-profits, co-ops and publicly owned housing that funded more

than 600,000 good quality, affordable homes across the country. The Labour Council Development Foundation became one of the key builders of co-ops in Toronto. Visionary planning, such as that along Toronto's Esplanade, introduced a new approach to housing in Toronto. The St. Lawrence neighbourhood became the model for sustainable, mixed-use, mixed-income community.

Today hardly any public housing units are being built. Housing expert David Hulchanski says: "Canada has the most private-sector-dominated, market-based housing system of any Western nation ... and the smallest social housing sector of any Western nation (except the United States)."

Greater Toronto real estate is a source of massive profit. With land and buildings being subject to the speculative local - and now global - market, every time the property is sold, the landlord charges more rent to recoup their return in investment. Since the 2008 financial crisis Real Estate Investment Trusts (REITs)



have been buying up huge swaths of apartment buildings, promising big dividends for investors. One REIT bought 44 high rise apartment buildings (6,271 rental units) in the GTA in late 2019 for \$1.7 billion. This trend towards concentration of ownership is accelerating and putting huge pressure on affordability.

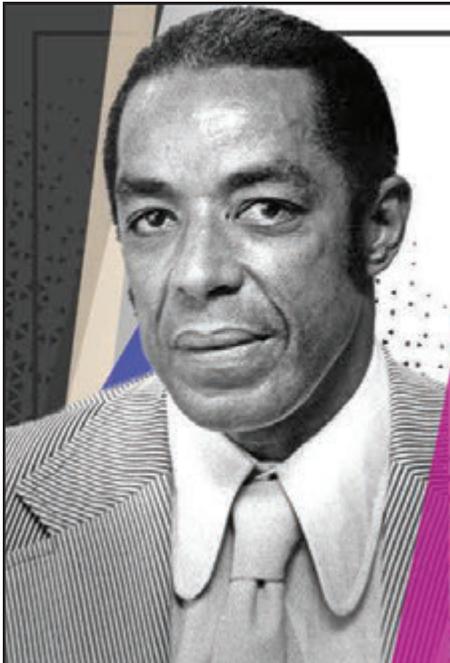
To solve homelessness, we know poverty is one cause, and intersectionality makes it worse. But people who are poor can live well if housing is affordable. The Government of Canada, through CMHC, has launched the Rapid Housing Initiative. It is a \$1 billion program to help address urgent housing needs of vulnerable Canadians, especially in the context of COVID-19, through the rapid construction of affordable housing. This is a good start, but a late one, and must be sustained and broadened.

“Canada has the most private-sector-dominated, market-based housing system of any Western nation ... and the smallest social housing sector of any Western nation (except the United States).”

ENDING THE HOUSING CRISIS

At its core, to solve the housing crisis, we need to move away from market-based housing, and towards provision of much more social housing through co-ops, government-owned public housing, and non-profit organizations. In the meantime, we need strong rules to protect tenants and require affordable housing to be included in new developments. Labour Council housing program demands:

1. The right to shelter and a fully-funded national housing program
2. Municipal, provincial and federal governments immediately implement a comprehensive plan to fund and build permanent affordable social housing, including co-ops, government and non-profit organizations.
3. Ontario repeal Bill 184, reinstate and extend the ban on evictions and foreclosures, place all units under rent, ban “renovictions”, and implement a rent relief program
4. Reverse provincial policy on vacancy decontrol, which incentivizes landlords to kick out tenants and hike up rent prices.
5. Retain and expand affordable housing by implementing mandatory inclusionary zoning, regulating AirBNB, imposing a tax on vacant units, and enhancing RentSafe enforcement to ensure healthy homes
6. Expand and humanize existing system of shelters and invest in Streets to Homes programs across greater Toronto
7. Ask our affiliates to support community partners, allies and union members who are working on tenant, housing and homelessness issues.



16th Annual BROMLEY L. ARMSTRONG

IN THE SPIRIT OF BROMLEY POISED FOR ACTION

Gala

“

I see before me a new generation of thinkers and a community of activists. If you become an agent of change, the rewards will be beyond measure.

- Dr. Bromley Lloyd Armstrong

”

On May 26, 2021, Labour Community Services and the Equity Committee of Toronto & York Region Labour Council, hosted the 16th annual Bromley Lloyd Armstrong Gala and Awards, virtually.

The Bromley Lloyd Armstrong Award was established in 2005 to commemorate the courage, dedication and outstanding service of Bromley Lloyd Armstrong to the Labour, and Human Rights, Movements in Canada.

This year, the award was presented to Chris Campbell, Liyu Guo, Ivan Dawns and the late Megan Whitfield. SEIU Healthcare became the first union to receive the award. All were recognized for their tireless work in the areas of Equity, Inclusion, and Human Rights.

2021 BROMLEY LLOYD ARMSTRONG AWARD

PRESENTED TO



CHRIS CAMPBELL
Carpenters and Allied
Workers Local 27



LIYU GUO
OPSEU Local 594



IVAN DAWNS
IUPAT DC 46



MEGAN WHITFIELD
CUPW Toronto Local



Taking Action on Equity and Human Rights SEIU Healthcare

As recipients of the first Bromley Armstrong Award to be presented to a union, SEIU Healthcare was recognized for the strides they made in promoting and demonstrating an organizational commitment to Equity, Human Rights, and Inclusion. SEIU Healthcare's Social Justice Capacity Building program supports, and is actively engaged, in community initiatives, focused on moving the equity agenda. They have partnered with the all levels of the labour movement to build capacity within the union.

The scope of the position and program:

- Supports organizational change within SEIU Healthcare programs and departments to effectively implement and promote practices, systems, and behaviours with the organization that are consistent with the principles of the social justice movement.
- Supports and tracks innovation on social justice strategies, particularly around racial and economic justice, which include strategies to close the wealth gap experienced by equity seeking groups.
- Stays abreast of key developments in the social justice movements and incorporates innovations into the organizational approach.

The union has brought in professional advice to create a program that allows it to benchmark, measure, and drive an inclusive and psychologically safe culture. They develop solutions that are relevant, practical, and applicable to both short-term and long-term goals. The Racial Advocate program will aim to recruit and train Black, Indigenous, people of colour, and other workers from equity seeking groups, whose role will be to assist and support workers who face any form of racial discrimination, violence, and marginalization with peer-led support, and will direct racial justice initiatives and promote access to community cultural appropriate services.

ADDITIONAL ACTIONS

- Signed the Toronto and York Region Labour Council's Charter of Inclusive Workplaces and Communities, standing up for the rights and dignity of everyone with the goal to promote inclusive, just, and respectful workplaces and communities.
- Conducted member surveys regarding equity issues occurring at SEIU Healthcare workplaces

- Supports and is actively involved with community groups such as Coalition of Black Trade Unionist and Urban Alliance on Race Relations.
- Created an Organization Equity and Inclusion Commission that leads and directs the Internal Equity and Inclusion Commission
- Launched SEIU Healthcare's in-unit social justice educational program at Sunnybrook Hospital specifically geared to addressing discrimination and related disparities within SEIU Healthcare's workplaces
- In 2019, SEIU Healthcare held its first-ever Human Rights Conference



SEIU Healthcare, represents more than 60,000 healthcare workers in Ontario, and has championed improvements in healthcare for nearly 75 years to improve the lives of healthcare professionals, by protecting their rights and advocating for safer working conditions.

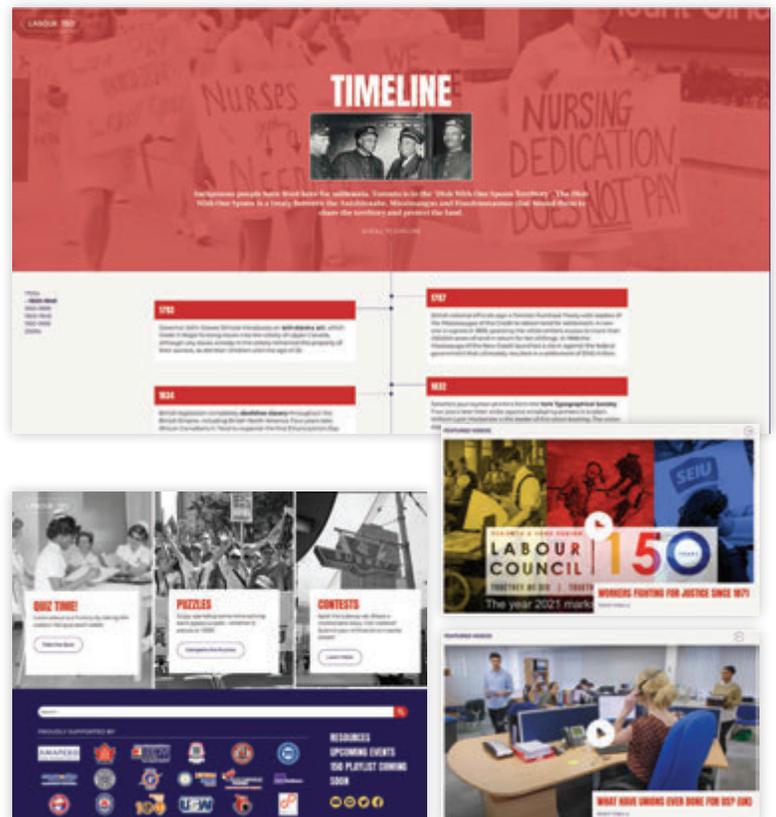


Explore and Learn at Labour150.ca

How do we win against impossible odds? How do we come together, speaking many languages, and build new forms of solidarity? Would you like to know more about how working people shaped our world over the last 150 years? The learnings from this journey are more than just history. They provide a guide for those working for a more just society today and tomorrow.

Watch the story of what we have achieved through struggle and determination. See the newest comedy version of the famous skit “What have the unions ever done for us?”. Check out the timeline, try the weekly quiz, complete a puzzle, download the anniversary edition of “The Workers’ City” or find your union’s story.

From personal accounts to video documentaries; from songs to photo exhibits; from virtual maps to podcasts... we explore labour’s rich and diverse history on the new website Labour150.ca.



The Journey

150 Years of Working Together for Justice

The year 2021 marks the 150th anniversary of the Toronto & York Region Labour Council. For a century and a half working people have organized collectively around a vision of economic and social justice. It's been a remarkable journey, and the lessons from our past provide a guide for anyone working for a more just society today and tomorrow.

We are in the “Dish with One Spoon Territory,” a treaty between the Anishinaabe, Mississaugas and Haudenosaunee. Our story began on the land of Indigenous communities, and it has been forged with those who have come from around the world as immigrants or refugees to build Canada's largest urban centre.

One hundred and fifty years ago a small group of trade unionists came together to give life to an idea – the creation of a collective voice for working people in Toronto. On April 12th, 1871 the Toronto Trades Assembly was founded by representatives of the emerging economy – barrel-makers, shoemakers, printers, bakers, cigar-makers and metalworkers. They were soon joined by other occupations. It was a time of rising for workers across the world, from the nine-hour day movement to the Paris Commune.

Within a year the fledging labour movement in Toronto would be tested. Printers at the Globe newspaper who went on strike for a nine-hour day were jailed for criminal conspiracy. Ten thousand people took to the streets demanding the printers' freedom and labour rights. The call for justice echoed throughout the country and the federal government passed the first Trade Unions Act.

Each new wave of immigrants discovered that in order to have a fair share of Canada's prosperity they helped to create, needed collective power - a union voice to fight for dignity and living wages. From the very beginning our unions adopted the principle that “What we wish for ourselves, we wish for all”.

From the early foundation of skilled trades the labour movement grew with the garment industry, metal and





packinghouse workers, brewers and transit workers. In the 1940's mass industrial organizing spread to Toronto's electrical, rubber, appliance, chemical and paper plants as well as hotels and restaurants. In the 1960's public sector workers gained the right to bargain and strike, followed by teachers and other professionals.

In the early decades the Labour Council built campaigns for employment standards, sanitary conditions, limitation of working hours; and prohibiting child labour. It also called for equal pay for women, one of the first advocates for equality in Canada. There was a sweeping program for municipal ownership of the street railway system, telephone services, power, gas and the fire brigade. It lobbied for public health measures, unemployment relief and a quality education system including technical training. Workers Compensation and a Fair Wage policy were early victories of our movement. Labour led the fight for the right of working people to vote and run for

office. In the early 1900's there were passionate debates about socialism, war and peace, and a massive upsurge of militancy in the post-WWI period. Labour started to elect candidates to school boards and city council, including Jimmy Simpson who eventually became the first labour Mayor of Toronto. The creation of the Toronto Hydro Electric System was championed by William Hubbard, the first African-Canadian City Councillor. Labour led a plebiscite to create the publicly owned Toronto Transit Commission. These crucial achievements reflected the determination of labour to engage in "political bargaining" to win social gains. But women's rights were denied, while in every aspect of society systemic racism and bigotry were deeply ingrained.

Women were part of the labour movement from the earliest years and in dramatic moments in Toronto labour history such as the 1907 Bell telephone strike and the 1912 Eaton workers strike. The number of women in the workplace changed significantly

during the World Wars when women surged into the workforce in Toronto munitions' factories.

The Great Depression took a heavy toll on jobs and incomes. Organizing among the unemployed took on a new urgency, as the demand for "Work or Wages" spread across the country. The Second World War spurred the economy and created a new upsurge of organizing. Canada finally brought in unemployment insurance and new labour laws, as tens of thousands joined unions and struggled for collective agreements in Toronto.

At the war's end there was again a massive strike wave to secure union rights as well as better wages and working conditions. The lessons of the fight against fascism were deeply felt, and in 1947 the Toronto Joint Labour Committee for Human Rights was formed. It led a relentless campaign against racist practices by employers, landlords and businesses. This legacy is honoured through the Bromley Armstrong Award.

The long post-war economic boom led to an unprecedented level of prosperity for working families, the spread of the suburbs and expansion of unionization. But it also saw the cold war impact on the labour movement in a fierce struggle over politics. With the creation of the New Democratic Party, labour formally adopted a social democratic



orientation. Across the country, it continued “political bargaining” to expand workplace gains like health plans and pensions into universal social programs. The Labour Council was a founding partner of the United Way, and unions widely supported charitable work.

But the booming economy also had a darker side. Unsafe work conditions plagued the factories and construction sites. New immigrants suffered exploitation and discrimination. In 1960 the Hogg’s Hollow tragedy sparked an uprising by the Italian community demanding a new deal in their adopted homeland. New safety and labour laws were won, and mass organizing swept across construction sites and every industry. Discrimination was challenged in schools and institutions, including immigration policies. Little by little, a “new deal” was shaped for immigrants, and the demographics of Toronto changed. But discrimination continued to shape the reality of many Torontonians.

The turbulent 60’s and 70’s saw the rise of anti-racism struggles, health and safety activism, and a women’s movement that was deeply grounded in labour. The Labour Council Development Foundation was formed to create co-operative housing projects, and the partnership with United Way led to the creation



of Labour Community Services. The Labour Education Centre started to offer extensive training on union issues as well as workplace adjustment. Teachers won bargaining rights, public sector workers won the right to strike, all while those in power tried to limit union militancy. The federal government legislated wage controls, resulting in mass walkouts during the 1976 country-wide Day of Protest.

By the 1980’s the labour movement in greater Toronto was changing as industry shed jobs and public sector unionization increased. Women were moving into leadership of unions, workers of colour were organizing to challenge barriers, and the emerging gay rights movement found growing support.

Global solidarity was fused into the culture of Toronto labour. But business was transforming as well, and the signing of the Canada-U.S. Free Trade Agreement marked a decisive change. A third of all industrial jobs in greater Toronto were lost through plant closures, and employers went



on the offensive demanding cuts and concessions.

The anger of working people set the stage for the historic election of the Ontario New Democratic Party in 1990. Its five-year term was marked by important achievements and heart-breaking disappointments including the Social Contract legislation. It broke ground with new labour law, Employment Equity and environmental policies, although those were repealed by the Harris Conservatives. The Harris “common sense revolution” attacked workers rights and ushered in tax cuts and privatization. The labour movement mobilized, building alliances and a powerful resistance movement that featured a full general strike in October 1996.

By the end of the decade the Conservatives forced a merger of six municipalities into a Toronto mega-city; merged the school boards; and downloaded massive costs. In York Region, the first major privatized transit service was established, setting the stage for future transit schemes across Ontario. In response unions committed themselves to a higher level of political action, defeating the Conservatives in every Toronto seat in 2003 as well as electing David Miller as Mayor.

The 21st century has posed many challenges to the labour movement. Governments have embraced austerity, employers have imposed two-tier wages, and tough strikes or lock-outs are more frequent. Precarious work seems to be the norm for the next generation. Labour Council has worked with community allies on many issues – from stopping privatization of water and hydro, to raising the minimum wage, to demanding policies that support good jobs for all.

To address the climate emergency, labour is calling for a just transition to a low-carbon future. There are creative approaches to organizing, and a focus on bringing a labour message to newcomer communities. Union structures are more reflective of the diversity of the changing workforce. Climate justice is being incorporated into labour's analysis, along with an equity lens. And despite the hostility of employers, people seek out and form unions in every sector of the economy.

Labour has been deeply involved in the struggles for community safety, for racial equality, for public services and for an education system that gives every student what they need to succeed. We recognize the vital need to challenge systemic racism in every aspect of society.

We have laid out a vision for an economy that is both sustainable and offers good jobs for all. And we are training a new generation of activists who will continue to lead these efforts in the decades to come.

Today the Labour Council represents over 220,000 union members in every sector of the economy. Working people in Toronto and York Region have come a long way since 1871. The gains we have won – through collective bargaining and political campaigns – could hardly have been dreamed of by those who started 150 years ago. Together we did transform society and lift up the quality of life of all Canadians.

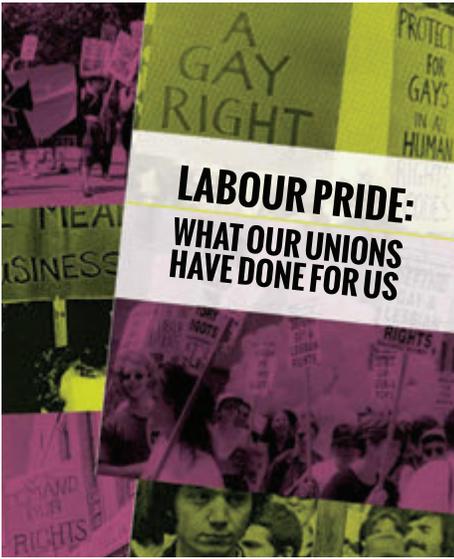
But what about the world of work today? Will there be decent jobs, with dignity and fair wages? Will children be able to breathe clean air and live in harmony with their neighbours?

If we look to the legacy of those who came before us, their wisdom and their courage – we find the answers.

Together we can find collective voice and fight for a better world. And as we continue this journey, together we will - build the power of people to win social, economic, climate and racial justice for generations to come.



Labour Pride



The story of working class gays and lesbians in the trade union movement is as old as the early days of union organizing, when workers began to collectively demand improvements in their working conditions and fight for better pay, hours and benefits. In 2014, when World Pride came to Toronto, Labour Council published Labour Pride, a brief account of the role of workers and their unions in supporting gay and lesbian rights from the 1970's.

We wanted to honour the thousands of LGBTIQ workers who began the push to create visibility—all those who came out, organized for inclusiveness and diversity, and fought for equal rights on shop floors and in offices. As workers, activists, and staff of unions, they worked hard and pushed their unions, but did not always succeed. Although unrecorded in history, their defeats were no doubt a passage to later victories, and we honour their visibility, voice and courage.

Labour Pride documents the more positive changes and victories of LGBTIQ workers and the unions that supported them. These victories have been absolutely critical to the success of the struggle for equal rights for LGBTIQ peoples in Canada. Without

the engagement and investment of unions in the struggle for equality of gays, lesbians, and trans people it is doubtful we would be where we are today, even where gains remain to be made.

Many unions in Canada have contributed their strength, influence, voice and resources in support of LGBTIQ workers. But the engagement of unions in LGBTIQ history is uneven. Most certainly, work remains to be done and all unions can and should get involved in supporting the rights of not only LGBTIQ workers, but the rights of all workers who face discrimination in any form.

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 Excerpted from the Introduction of the book
 Labour Pride by Prabha Khosla. Find Labour
 Pride on Labour150.ca



How we approach the task of dismantling systemic racism



The late and great civil rights leaders former United States Congress Representative John Lewis said it best, "Do not get lost in a sea of despair. Be hopeful, be optimistic. Our struggle is not the struggle of a day, a week, a month, or a year, it is the struggle of a lifetime. Never, ever be afraid to make some noise and get in good trouble, necessary trouble." Lewis, who died last year at the age of 80, tirelessly dedicated his entire life to advocate for human rights and fight against racial inequality, all while knowing that he may never see his vision become a reality before the end of his life.

The stories of taking up the fight every day is a familiar one for many. We know the work is essential. When we look at Canadian civil rights leaders such as Bromley Armstrong, Dudley Laws or Buffy Sainte-Marie, we see personal sacrifices that sometimes comes with getting in "good trouble". It is vital that we commit to acting as individuals; however, working alone is not enough. Our impact will be the greatest when we work together. Our solidarity, sustained efforts, and collective actions will make the most significant and lasting difference.

March 21 is the International Day for Elimination of Racial Discrimination (IDERD), marking the 1960 tragic massacre in Sharpeville, South Africa. There is no small irony in the fact that when South Africa's Apartheid regime was designing their system of racial segregation, they studied the Canadian model of status cards and reservations created under the Indian Act.

On this 21st of March, we are calling all activists and advocates for human rights, labour unions, and community organizations to double their efforts to dismantle racist and white supremacist structures.

We are in the year after the merciless deaths of George Floyd, Ejaz Choudry, Joyce Echaquan and too many others. These deaths at the hands

of institutions that are supposed to protect us and make us feel safe, have sparked action here at home and across the world. We saw protests, open calls for change on social media, and even traditional corporations weighed in on the conversation, releasing official statements.

Racism is a significant issue in our society, from education to healthcare to our workplaces. Our organizations have been focused on challenging discrimination for many decades. This work must be relentless if we are to succeed. Canada is in denial of how widespread racism continues to be in every part of our society. The nooses found on construction sites across Toronto are just the most outrageous example of that reality.

When we come together and take intentional action, we create change. Our collective voices shape the narrative of our society. We must celebrate these successes and reflect on the greatness of strength when combined. Yet, creating the process is not the solution, just the pathway towards a solution. The magnitude of the impact of racism is extensive, and we have much work ahead of us; we cannot stop now.

Labour and community groups need to come together at a scale never before seen to build a powerful

movement. Silos don't work; racial justice need to be a central part of social, economic, and environmental organizing.

We have enormous hurdles to climb with so much dismantling of racial discrimination needed, and so much learning and unlearning to do. As individuals personally involved in this work and working with organizations immersed in this work, we know first-hand that racial equality cannot be achieved by individuals or a few organizations alone. And just as importantly, racism cannot be addressed with performative action. We need to take intentional and concrete steps, remain focused on the end goal, and invest our resources.

While we could not achieve racial equality during John Lewis's lifetime, we hope to realize that reality in our lifetime. There is much work to do, and the International Day for Elimination of Racial Discrimination (IDERD) must serve as a day every one of us commits to sustained action to address this crucial challenge.

Neethan Shan is Executive Director of the Urban Alliance on Race Relations

Faduma Mohamed is Executive Director of Labour Community Services

John Cartwright is President of the Toronto & York Region Labour Council

Toronto Joint Labour Committee for Human Rights

The end of the Second World War saw a massive mobilization by workers across the globe to secure dignity, decent wages and labour rights. The lessons of the fight against fascism were deeply felt, and many unions took on the fight against racism and anti-Semitism. In 1947 the Toronto Joint Labour Committee to Combat Racial Intolerance was formed. Kalman Kaplansky spearheaded the initiative with strong support from the Steelworkers, Autoworkers, and Packinghouse Workers. Bromley Armstrong of UAW Local 439 and Stanley Grizzle of the Sleeping Car Porters were Black leaders in the Committee as it led a relentless campaign against racist practices by employers, landlords and businesses.

The re-named Toronto Joint Labour Committee for Human Rights (TJLCHR) developed anti-racism material and presentations for union events and the annual Labour Day parade. It carried out a series of test cases, visiting hotels, restaurants and clubs to challenge discriminatory practices. Its work with community activists helped win the Ontario Fair Employment Practices Act in 1951 – some of the earliest human rights legislation in North America.

In 1954 a delegation of leaders from Toronto's Black community, including Armstrong and Grizzle, travelled to Ottawa to demand reform of Canada's racist immigration laws. Donna Hill, secretary of the Committee (mother of author Lawrence Hill and singer Dan Hill) prepared the brief for the delegation.

That same year, TJLCHR lent its support to Black residents of Dresden Ontario. Discrimination was rampant in the

town, with restaurants and hair salons refusing to serve Black customers. Numerous complaints were filed, and Bromley Armstrong and Roth Lor went to Dresden Ontario to run a test case under the new Fair Accommodations Act. The McKay's Cafe case garnered widespread media attention and ended up in the courts. McKay was fined, and eventually obeyed the law. These stories are captured in the Labour Council videos "Welcome to Dresden" and "Welcome to Canada" which can be seen at youtube.com/labourcouncil.

The TJLCHR campaigned against discrimination for many years. This legacy is honoured through the Labour Council's annual Bromley Armstrong Award, given to union activists who have been leaders in equity, inclusion and human rights work.



Human Rights demand at 1952 Labour Day Parade

Celebrating Builders of **The Future**

On May 16th the Toronto Community Benefits Network held its first Building Diversity Awards Ceremony. The awards are a way of recognizing those contractors, unions and individuals in Ontario that are leading the way by working together to increase the participation of Black, Indigenous and racialized workers in the construction industry.

THIS YEAR'S WINNERS WERE:

Community Benefits Champion - **Chris Campbell** – Carpenters Local 27

Leading on Diversity, Union - **LiUNA Local 506**

NexGen Builders Champion, Mentor - **Kimoy Francique** – IBEW Local 353

Leading on Diversity, Contractor - **Crosslinx Transit Solutions**

Leading on Diversity, Owner Client - **METROLINX**



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COVID Lessons from the Day of Mourning

Each April 28th we mark the annual Day of Mourning, honouring workers who have been killed or injured at work or suffered from occupational disease. This day was initiated by the Canadian Labour Congress in 1985, as unions struggled against employers and politicians who refused, despite the cost in human lives, to change business practices. As society continues to grapple with the COVID pandemic, what was learned over decades of safety activism has been ignored too long.

There is nothing neutral about the Day of Mourning – it represents the legacy of decades of intense worker mobilization around workplace health and safety in the face of employer resistance. The Hoggs Hollow tunnel disaster of 1960 sparked a massive uprising by the Italian immigrant community; Toronto labour leader Gerry Gallagher led a series of walkouts to protest unsafe conditions in construction; Steelworkers went on strike to force a full inquiry into uranium mining at Elliot Lake; aircraft workers in Toronto and Malton walked off the job over the use of toxic chemicals, and office workers warned of exposure to early video display terminals and repetitive strain injuries.

The truth about asbestos came out, but it still took years before the Canadian government would ban the deadly substance. Union safety activists partnered with medical professionals to uncover the terrible impact of carcinogens, while year after year, employers resisted changing the materials used for their products. Finally, in 1976 Ontario workers won the right to refuse unsafe work, and in 1987 the right to know about hazardous material was put into law. But the mobilization for safe work continued.

In 1990, on April 28th, downtown construction sites were shut down for a rally at the Chinese Railway Workers Monument to demand the passage of

stronger safety laws. After the 1992 Westray mine disaster, it took a dozen years to win federal legislation holding employers responsible for workplace deaths. The 2009 Metron Swingstage tragedy, which killed four immigrant workers in Toronto, resulted in the first jail sentence of a company director in Canadian history.

In the year 2021, the Day of Mourning focused on the impact of COVID – the lives lost, the failure of the Conservative government to implement effective policies, and their refusal to legislate paid sick days. We also acknowledged the impact of systemic racism on peoples' safety and health, whether through poor working conditions, precarious jobs or hate crimes such as the nooses found on construction sites.

Health and safety have been a priority for Toronto's labour movement throughout our 150 year history. Workers' rights to challenge unhealthy conditions - or to have safety laws enforced - were only won through tough struggles and patient organizing. They were never granted through the benevolence of those with economic or political power. We have to apply those same lessons to protecting everyone during COVID. Labour's motto draws from the resolve we have learned over many generations. We pledge to Mourn for the Dead, and to fight like hell for the living!



Ford's 32-Hour Consultation on School Reopening



You have to ask - Is it arrogance, ignorance or wilful mischief? After months of obfuscation, on May 27th, Premier Ford wrote to education unions about reopening schools and demanded an answer within 32 hours. CUPE School Board unions blasted the government for its negligence during the crisis, and provided a detailed list of measures they have been advocating for school safety. The four main teacher unions issued a joint response:

“Since the beginning of the pandemic, Ontario’s teachers and education workers have supported the safe, regional reopening of schools and have repeatedly called on your government to engage with education and public health experts in meaningful dialogue on how to keep schools safe and open to in-person learning across the province. Educators know that in-person learning provides the individual attention and holistic social, emotional, and academic supports necessary to best realize student success and well-being.

While this government has finally recognized the role of schools in COVID-19 transmission and reached out to engage education stakeholders, meaningful dialogue requires more than a 32 hours’ notice to respond to questions better suited to those in the medical and public health communities.

Teachers and education workers have repeatedly called on this government to work collaboratively to implement the health and safety measures called for by public health and education experts, including smaller class sizes to allow for proper physical distancing, improved ventilation and air filtration systems in schools, and robust tracing and testing protocols to stop potential outbreaks before they begin. Educators

have also pushed this government to ensure that teachers and education workers are prioritized to receive vaccinations.

These measures are necessary to ensure that schools and workplaces are safe for students and staff, and allow for a sustainable return to in-person learning. However, the situation is not the same everywhere in the province and the government must defer to the advice of local medical officers of health regarding what is best for their communities.

Educators once again urge you to convene an advisory table of all education stakeholders to address the health and safety needs of schools and the learning challenges faced by students because of the pandemic.”

Celebrate The Victories

Three years ago the Doug Ford government unleashed a tsunami of changes – from wiping out the gains we had won to labour law and employment standards, rolling back the \$15 Minimum Wage, cutting Toronto City Council in half, and threatening to cut a billion dollars from Toronto Public Health. Together with our community allies, labour fought back on every issue.

The spirited fight by Ontario’s teachers and support workers to defend the quality of education changed the political dynamics. Parents across the GTA starting going after their own MPP’s in Conservative ridings. The mysterious “Vaughan Working Families” full-page newspaper-attack-ad sponsor was exposed as a major land developer. Meanwhile, public health officials in small towns joined with the City of Toronto and health activists everywhere to defeat the cuts in health spending.

Then COVID intervened... and changed everything. Suddenly it seemed like a different Doug Ford was on our TV screens. And for a while, his political fortunes went up. But in the back rooms, the crony deals kept getting made and democracy curtailed. Developer donors were getting new zoning approvals that made no sense. Private long-term care companies were shielded from lawsuits instead of being held to account for their terrible record of harm. Ford’s Cabinet made terrible decisions about COVID, reopening business, and ushering in the third wave. And no matter how much people shouted, it seemed like Doug Ford was never going to back down.

But he couldn’t ignore the pressure over paid sick days. As the campaign grew stronger, we were joined by Mayors, Boards of Health, doctors and other experts to say that sick time is a public health issue. Despite being dead set against it, the Conservatives had to do something – announcing a temporary three-day policy for paid sick days, but one where the taxpayer reimburses employers for the cost. Nobody is fooled, but we should celebrate this win as we continue to build more pressure for permanent, employer-paid sick days as a right for every worker.

Then there was the outrageous Ford plan to grant university status

to Charles McVety’s Canadian Christian College. McVety is a conservative political kingpin with a nasty streak of intolerance and bigotry. In recent years, the CCC has been the site of events featuring extremist speakers fomenting hatred against other Canadians, with white supremacist groups acting as “security”. Ford went so far as to introduce legislation to pave the way for CCC to get accredited. Fortunately the objection of many organizations including Labour Council helped derail the plan, and in late May the ruling came down to deny it university status.

Sometimes it seems the odds are stacked against us – but fighting back and mobilizing does make a difference. Ford’s caucus gets divided, and the public starts to see how badly this government actually governs. Even though we don’t always win everything we want, we deserve to celebrate our victories!



A Thank You Letter To Our Movement

“My parents, like most of our families, came to Canada looking for a better life”.

Those are the words I use to begin the story of my own life’s journey, and it is the reality of most of us in greater Toronto. Our history begins on Indigenous lands and has been forged with those who have come from around the world as immigrants or refugees. I have been honoured to be part of a labour movement that, at its best, defines itself around goals of social, economic, racial and climate justice.

I have been inspired by the rich history of those who came before us, and the decisions they made that shaped who we are today. Perhaps I was lucky – before I ever was part of a union, I got involved in the campaign to support the California farmworkers. The dignity of those migrant workers, and the humility of leaders like Cesar Chavez, made a powerful impression about the values our movement should uphold.

We did try to organize a union in the woodworking shop I worked in, but people were afraid. So I went into construction and joined Carpenters Local 27 forty-five years ago. I immediately became part of a progressive network of activists in the Building Trades, many of whom were veterans of left-wing political struggle. We all had strong opinions, as well as



a deep abiding loyalty to the working class. There was an inherent belief in international solidarity, fueled by anger at the injustices imposed on people across the globe – from Vietnam to Africa and Latin America.

From an early age I came to abhor every aspect of racism, and to see how the poison of discrimination impacts on those around me. I have learned from people with far more courage than I could imagine. In this “gathering place” half of us are born outside of Canada, half are people of colour – and we keep trying to figure out how to make a better world together.

As a construction worker, safety has always been important – at each Day of Mourning the images of too many tragic deaths run through my mind. The lymphoma that coursed through my blood seven years ago is directly related to the toxic material I used daily at work, while the superb care I received at Sunnybrook Hospital serves as a reminder of why we fight so hard for public healthcare.

I have held a number of elected positions, starting as a Representative in my own union, then leading the Building Trades Council for a decade. In 2001, I was elected President of the Labour Council with the slogan “Vision + Organizing = Power. Labour’s power has allowed us to succeed, sometimes against overwhelming odds. Few of our victories have been written down, but they are all seared in my memory.

If asked what I am most proud of over these years, it will be hard to make a choice. The equity agenda of Labour Council is at the core of what we do, and drives us to help dismantle systemic racism. The role of labour in city-building; the tough struggles for public education; breaking ground on green jobs; the \$10 Minimum Wage victory; the fight for Good Jobs for All; the Stewards Assemblies; Workers’ Rights organizing; the election of Hassan Yussuff to CLC presidency; building the Community Benefits movement; the many rallies and campaigns... The list goes on and on.

But the roots of Labour Day are here, and nothing can match the exhilaration of seeing thousands of union members and their families taking to the streets to show their pride in who we are and the contributions we make to society. I am sure Andria will sense that same pride as she leads Labour Day parades in the future.

In truth, there was seldom a morning I did not wake up excited about what the day would bring. Our Labour Council has played a role in local struggles and on the national stage, and my own experience in working globally on climate issues has been incredibly gratifying. We have seen people from all walks of life step up and join in common cause - winning justice for those on strike, those without jobs, or communities being left behind. We share those lessons through our Leadership Institute, where key activists develop their skills to lead future struggles, as well as lasting friendships. As the old saying goes, we may retire from the job - but not from the struggle. I will be devoting more time to the role of Chairperson of the Council of Canadians, and to the crucial challenge of climate justice.

I have learned so much from the amazing people who have served on our staff and our Executive Board, and want to thank them for their friendship and their wisdom. Every day we as leaders make judgement calls. Over the years I have made more than my share of mistakes, and have sometimes been too demanding. To anyone I have offended over the years, I apologize. But I know each of us grows and learns by being challenged. I want to honour every person who gives their time and energy to try to make a difference in this big, complicated world. It has been a privilege to know and work with all of you. Together, we make the path by walking, and together we help make this a better world.

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