

UNFINISHED BUSINESS:

Community Safety and Racism in Policing

INTRODUCTION

Canadians and citizens around the world have taken to the streets to demand anti-Black racism be addressed after the brutal murder of George Floyd, and the deaths of far too many others. Society is putting “the fierce urgency of now” clearly on the agenda of governments at every level. We need real action to address systemic racism, particularly anti-Black racism.

The *Toronto & York Region Labour Council* represents 220,000 women and men who work in every sector of the economy. The recommendations provided build on decades of ongoing work that encompasses the lived experience of our members and their families, the knowledge of frontline workers, the lessons from dealing with political decision-makers and working with community allies, and the learning from both gains and setbacks.

HISTORY

Systemic racism and anti-Black racism are deeply rooted in our society. We have many shameful instances of discrimination in Canada's history: the treatment of First Nations, the Chinese Exclusion Act, the turning away of South Asian and Jewish migrants, anti-Black and anti-Asian policies and even Ku Klux Klan activity, right up to the present day deaths of racialized and Indigenous people at the hands of police. These acts have been made possible by casting groups of people as the "other" -- somehow not part of our shared humanity.

The people and institutions in Toronto have never been immune to the corrosive influences of racism, discrimination and exploitation. In response, in 1947, the *Toronto Joint Labour Committee to Combat Racial Intolerance* was founded to undertake campaigns for legislation and action against discrimination. Their efforts helped secure some of the first anti-discrimination legislation in North America. The Joint Committee also joined with Black community leaders to demand the federal government end Canada's deeply racist immigration policies.

In 1975, *Labour Council* helped found the *Urban Alliance on Race Relations* after a series of violent attacks on South Asian immigrants. Toronto unions have joined with community activists to push for human rights policies at work and in broader society, and have campaigned for Employment Equity, public services for every community, refugee rights and police accountability. In recent years the crucial work of fighting Islamophobia has also been a priority, along with challenging anti-refugee xenophobia.

Throughout the decades, *Labour Council* and its affiliates have been engaging with City Council, federal and provincial politicians, the Police Services, School Boards and community allies to identify and fight for policies and practices that address systemic racism. But too often the statements of key political leaders have not translated into effective outcomes. We therefore must honour determination of Black and Indigenous community organizations who are calling for the current model of policing to be defunded – it is a result of decades of frustration and anger over the refusal of those with power in the system to allow meaningful reform.

POLICING & COMMUNITY SAFETY

THE ISSUE

The *City of Toronto* must commit to re-design the policing model, re-direct financial resources, demilitarize police culture, and ensure the law is equally applied for the protection of everyone – based on human rights of every person being fully respected and protected.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Ensure that a major portion of public funds will be re-assigned from the current flawed model of policing into a comprehensive, inclusive, equitable approach to community safety for all.
- Continue to investigate and remove systemic racism in all practices and culture of policing.
- Explore new methods of community safety - from the use of non-lethal technology and “mobile crisis teams,” to alternative support teams for people facing mental-health issues and non-life threatening safety needs.
- Review training, guidelines, and protocols for the use of force and for responding to incidents involving mental illness, disabilities, and those who are exhibiting mental distress.
- Recruit, support and promote officers who are representative of the diversity of Toronto’s communities and who can interact fully with all residents.
- Require police officers to co-operate fully with SIU investigations (and to have an independent SIU that reports to a civilian authority) and submit all relevant evidence to a civilian body.
- End racial profiling and other practices that often disproportionately single out young people of colour and marginalized members of our communities, which can become the entry point into the discriminatory criminal justice system.

PUBLIC GOVERNANCE

THE ISSUE

Time and time again, past Anti-Racism directorates, task forces and secretariats do not withstand the test of time or lack the financial teeth necessary to enact change. New governments and new priorities sweep in and erase equity policies and programs, effectively resetting the process and eroding trust with the public. Provincial statutes have prevented democratic control over policing and the unsustainable growth of police budgets.

Accessibility and accountability of public services is a key element of equity and justice. The provincial government, the *City of Toronto* and *Toronto Police Services* must undertake significant change to current governance and funding decisions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Amend the *Police Services Act* to ensure that governance of Police Services is clearly placed with Police Services Boards.
- Reform police governing structures so they are legally accountable to civilian oversight, including the City Auditor, and ensure they are accessible to the community.
- Eliminate the power of the *Ontario Civilian Police Commission* to overturn *Toronto City Council* decisions pertaining to police budget matters.

- Ensure any new anti-racism bodies are adequately funded and legally protected so they can participate in monitoring redesigned policing.
- Work with other agencies to protect and preserve public services in all areas so those subject to systemic racism have access to discrimination-free resources.
- Strengthen democratic and inclusion practices in all public bodies and agencies, boards and commissions; municipal committees and other decision-making venues so those who oversee institutions like the police are more representative of the communities served by those institutions.

NEXT STEPS

Every single day Toronto residents and families are harmed as prejudice is perpetuated through structural and institutional racism – the criminal justice system, the education system, governments, social media and through many other facets of society. People are fed up with reports and studies – they want decisions that are actionable and intentional. **The work will not be easy.** Every Canadian is called upon to combat discrimination – and those with power in all levels of government have a special duty to make decisions that are bold, lasting and truly transformative.