



## ZERO TOLERANCE FOR RACISM AT WORK

Toronto was shocked by a racist hate crime at a construction site at Michael Garron Hospital on June 10<sup>th</sup>. Two nooses were hung at the workplace, as a sick reminder of the lynching of thousands of Black men in the United States. Local unions and the general contractor EllisDon immediately called for a criminal investigation by police, and the community rallied by covering the project hoarding with signs challenging hate and affirming that Black Lives Matter. Other workers rallied in support of their Black co-workers.

But in a sickening development, two more nooses were found at Toronto construction sites - one at Dundas and Sumach on June 26, and the other at 81 Bay St. on June 25.

This dramatic evidence of physical hate crime in our society must be immediately addressed. It is not clear if this is a network of individuals who are engaged in a white supremacist campaign of intimidation and hatred. Toronto has experienced this before – with neo-Nazi groups in the 1930's; the Western Guard formed in the 1960's, physical attacks on south Asian immigrants in the 1970's, the attempt of the Ku Klux Klan to set up a Toronto operation in the early 1980s, and current extremist groups targeting the Muslim community.

We are all called upon to condemn these actions and the deeply ingrained systemic racism that gives rise to them. Every person who holds power or authority in society – in government, in business, in workplaces, in the media and in unions – is called upon to use their position to implement immediate and lasting change to ensure that human rights and anti-racist practice are embedded in the culture of every workplace and every community.

Construction unions have come out forcefully with open letters to their members. This includes:

***IBEW Local 353*** – *Local 353 is committed to working with all levels of authority to expose and expel from our midst those who would commit such vile acts of hatred. For us to flourish well into the future we must demand a change in society. We also must be ready to admit that anti-Black racism does exist and most importantly act upon and confront its very existence.*

***UA Local 46*** - *Hateful actions based on race and skin colour impact everyone and racism is dehumanizing to everyone it touches. Local 46 strives to provide a culture and environment that allows people to work free of discrimination and intolerance. We are committed to eliminating any racist actions within our Association. We believe in the elimination of racist and oppressive systems in society.*

**Carpenters** - *These deplorable acts of racism need to stop. We will take action to address anti-Black racism and to deepen solidarity and address inequality in our industry. Keep having those difficult conversations with family, friends, and colleagues. If you experience or witness racist behaviour, racial harassment or hate crime, contact your union immediately for support and representation. Racism is not acceptable – not now, not ever!*

**LiUNA** – *LiUNA has zero tolerance for any and all forms of racism, hate or bigotry, and there will be consequences for any member who partakes in any act on the job-site that aims to threaten or discriminate against one based on race – consequences that will include the risk of expulsion. Such ignorant acts of hate do not represent the integrity of our industry or the men and women who are dedicated to building stronger, inclusive communities across Ontario.*

Ultimately, it is employers who have the power on any construction site. It will require firm action from contractors to ensure that racism is addressed, as well as seriously committing to equitable hiring so racialized workers are not isolated. The public statement by EllisDon should be adopted by every contractor and subcontractor in the industry.

*‘EllisDon is giving our full support to the police investigation to ensure we can hold the perpetrators accountable, and to ensure they are prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law. It is our hope that we can ensure these perpetrators can be caught, and never have the opportunity to work in our industry again.’*

There is no simple answer to this deeply disturbing situation. The construction industry has been powered by skilled workers from Indigenous communities and generations of immigrants and refugees who have used their grit and determination to build Canada’s largest urban centre. Their unions have organized relentlessly to protect workers and make this the most highly unionized industry in North America.

Yet, in the face of systemic racism, much more remains to be done. Having a workforce that is representative of our communities requires dismantling historic barriers and supporting equitable hiring programs. We urge every leader, member and activist to help create a future where there is zero tolerance for racism in our society.

The Executive recommends that the Labour Council:

1. Condemn the hate crimes perpetrated on jobsites and demand full criminal prosecution of those responsible
2. Work with construction affiliates to help to challenge systemic racism, including anti-Black racism, and take measures to ensure that all workplaces are free of any form of

harassment or discrimination. Urge every union member to step up, speak out and report any instances of racist behaviour

3. Demand that every construction contractor undertake measures needed to ensure that extensive human rights and equity training is mandatory for all employees and supervisors, and that anti-racist practices become embedded in the working culture of every contractor
4. Strengthen support for the work of the Toronto Community Benefits Network and extend Community Benefits Agreements to require increased hiring of racialized workers on all publicly funded construction projects
5. Work with construction affiliates to outreach to diverse communities to recruit members from racialized and equity seeking communities
6. Continue to urge all affiliates to endorse the Charter of Inclusive Workplaces and Communities and undertake the crucial work of membership engagement outlined in the Yes It Matters campaign material