

MAKING GOOD TROUBLE: DISMANTLING SYSTEMIC RACISM

MAY 6, 2021



March 21, 2021 was the 61st anniversary of the Sharpeville massacre, when police opened fire on unarmed Black South Africans demonstrating against racist “pass” laws, killing and injuring hundreds of people. March 21st is now commemorated as the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. This year the Labour Council, Urban Alliance on Race Relations and Labour Community Services brought together individuals and organizations to identify strategies to dismantle systemic racism in workplaces, healthcare, schools and society. The title Making Good Trouble was taken from the slogan of famed civil rights leader John Lewis who passed away earlier in the year.

Our movement has been focused on challenging discrimination for many decades – in 1947 the Toronto Joint Labour Committee on Human Rights was formed. It led a relentless campaign against racist practices by employers, landlords and businesses, and its legacy is recognized through the annual Bromley Armstrong Awards. This work must be relentless if we are to succeed. The nooses found on construction sites in Toronto and attacks on Asian-Canadians are just the most recent outrageous examples of the reality of racism.

To tackle this, the IDERD assembly was capped by four breakout groups examining tangible strategies to dismantle racial discrimination in the workplace, in healthcare, in education and in society. These critical discussions led to the following series of recommendations:

Society

- Online hate legislation and policies need to include full accountability and oversight
- The legal process relating to hate crimes needs to be transformed
- Policing must be overhauled, from shifting resources towards policing alternatives to requiring timely charges for race/hate crimes

Workplaces

- Unions should fully commit to the Yes It Matters campaign and use the Charter of Inclusive Workplaces and Communities as a key organizing tool
- Demand Employment Equity policies and develop Community Benefits programs
- Negotiate with employers the development of comprehensive anti-racism strategies for every workplace

Healthcare

- Get profit out of long-term care
- Implement paid sick days for all
- Guarantee decent wages, benefits safe working conditions and full time jobs for all health care workers

Education

- Call for deeper public investment in all levels of education – to give every student what they need to succeed, particularly those from Black, Indigenous, people of colour and newcomer communities
- Ensure there is anti-racism education embedded in all curriculum so there is space to reflect and unpack the ways systemic racism impacts our society
- Provide resources across all levels of education to reflect Black, Indigenous and people of colour experiences, history and excellence
- Call for educational and community supports to end the disproportionate impact of streaming and drop-out rates for Black, Indigenous and students of colour.

The tangible solutions proposed by participants demonstrate that these steps are within our grasp. We came together because we have a vision. Yes, the work to eliminate racial discrimination is challenging, but we as union and community members will continue to do that work TOGETHER, with tangible and strategic solutions at the forefront of this work to achieve real change. Knowing that the Canada we want is achievable only strengthens our resolve as we work to achieve the elimination of all forms of racism and discrimination.

On May 6, 2021, the Labour Council resolved to:

- Work with affiliates and community allies to integrate these recommendations into their strategic work
- Use every opportunity to engage with public institutions and all levels of government around an agenda of racial justice
- Continue to urge affiliates to do the internal work outlined in the Yes It Matters campaign and utilize the Leaders Guide to Equity to make real change within their structures