

Empowering Our Community: Politicizing Our Struggles



African Heritage
&
Black History Month

Empowering our Community: Politicizing our Struggles



February 27th, 2017

6:00 pm - 8:30 pm

United Steelworkers Hall

25 Cecil Street, Toronto, ON M5T 1N1

Film Screenings: Sisters in the Struggle - The Road Taken - Journey to Justice

To Register visit www.BHM2017.eventbrite.ca or

contact Paulette Hazel - 416.483.7667 - phazel@ofl.ca



Information

Date: February 27th, 2017

Time: 6:00 pm – 8:30 pm

Location: United Steelworkers Hall 25 Cecil Street, Toronto, ON M5T 1N1

Film Screenings: Sisters in the Struggle – The Road Taken – Journey to Justice

Contacts: www.BHM2017.eventbrite.ca Paulette Hazel – 416.433.7667–
phazel@ofl.ca

Introduction

Over fifty Labour and community activists came together for African Heritage Month to engage in a community based discussion to help shape the political action work of the coalition of Black Trade Unionists, Ontario Federation of Labour and Canadian Labour Congress.

The event provided a forum to learn about the history of the Black Sleeping Car Porters, the double legacy of racism and sexism facing Black women in politics and the story of Viola Desmond and other brave anti-racist activists who refused to accept inequality. Three films were screened recounting these struggles followed by a discussion on the current struggles facing our community with the objective of developing strategies to make our voices heard through political action. The films were shown at the same time so participants could choose the film that spoke to them. By working in solidarity with Black and racialized workers across Canada we will continue the legacy of our ancestors to challenge anti-black racism in our times.

Agenda

6:00 p.m. to 6:45 p.m.

Dinner



6:30 p.m. to 7:00 p.m.

Welcome:

Ahmad Gaied, OFL Executive Vice President

Coalition Black Trade Unionist CBTU:

Yolanda McClean, President CBTU

Introduction of Videos:

Megan Whitfield, OFL Vice President Workers of Colour
Pablo Godoy, OFL Vice President Workers of Colour



Ahmad Gaied



Yolanda McClean

7:10 p.m. to 8:15 p.m.

Screening

The Road Taken, Sisters in the Struggle,
Journey to Justice



Megan Whitfield &
Pablo Godoy

8:15 p.m. to 8:45 p.m.

Empowering Our Community - Politicizing Our Struggles Discussion

Chris Wilson, Coalition Black Trade Unionist,
Mojdeh Cox, CLC National Representative, Political Action & Campaigns



Marie Clarke Walker

8:55 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.

Wrap Up

Marie Clarke Walker, CLC Executive Vice President

Movie Screenings

All three films are available online from the National Film Board and speak to the historical struggles in our ongoing journey to justice.

The Road Taken

This 1996 documentary takes a nostalgic ride through history to present the experiences of Black sleeping-car porters who worked on Canada's railways from the early 1900s through the 1960s. There was a strong sense of pride among these men and they were well-respected by their community. Yet, harsh working conditions prevented them from being promoted to other railway jobs until finally, in 1955, porter Lee Williams took his fight to the union.

Claiming discrimination under the Canada Fair Employment Act, the Blacks won their right to work in other areas. Interviews, archival footage and the music of noted jazz musician Joe Sealy (whose father was a porter) combine to portray a fascinating history that might otherwise have been forgotten.



Link: https://www.nfb.ca/film/road_taken/

Sisters in the Struggle

This documentary features Black women active in politics as well as community, labour and feminist organizing. They share their insights and personal testimonies on the double legacy of racism and sexism, linking their personal struggles with the ongoing battle to end systemic discrimination and violence against women and people of colour.

Link: https://www.nfb.ca/film/sisters_in_the_struggle/



June Veacock, Past
President of CBTU



Akua Benjamin



Rosemary Brown,
First Black MPP

Journey to Justice


This documentary pays tribute to a group of Canadians who took racism to court. They are Canada's unsung heroes in the fight for Black civil rights. Focusing on the 1930s to the 1950s, this film documents the struggle of 6 people who refused to accept inequality. Featured here, among others, are Viola Desmond, a woman who insisted on keeping her seat at a Halifax movie theatre in 1946 rather than moving to the section normally reserved for the city's Black population, and Fred Christie, who took his case to the Supreme Court after being denied service at a Montreal tavern in 1936. These brave pioneers helped secure justice for all Canadians. Their stories deserve to be told.





Link: https://www.nfb.ca/film/journey_to_justice/

Descriptive Agenda - Facilitated Discussion

Following the film screenings, a community based discussion was facilitated by Mojdeh Cox (CLC) and Christopher Wilson (CBTU) to make links between our historical struggles and current times with the objective of identifying strategic actions going forward.

<p>8:15pm – 8:17pm</p>	<p>Parallel Realities <i>Based on the films, participants were asked: what are the parallels between the struggles of yesterday and the realities of today?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Facilitators posted responses on flip chart under the heading "Parallel Realities: Yesterday & Today"
<p>8:17pm – 8:20pm</p>	<p>Naming Our Struggles <i>What are our struggles today?</i></p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Facilitators took turns taking up responses and posting them on flip chart under the heading "Our Struggles Today"
<p>8:20pm – 8:30pm</p>	<p>Identifying Urgency – Dotmocracy</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Facilitators handed out <u>4 dots</u> per participant. Participants are instructed to identify the top 4 urgent struggles. Facilitators encouraged participants to use all their dots, choosing to either place all their dots on one issue, or spreading them out.

<p>8:30pm – 8:40pm</p>	<p>Taking Action - Small Group Discussions <i>What action can you take on this issue?</i> <i>Consider all levels of government, immediate, short-term and long-term actions.</i></p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Facilitators identified top 3 struggles and divide participants up in small groups (grouping individuals sitting close to one another). ▪ Participants used the hand out (see next page) to guide their discussion, taking notes by designating a group member as a recorder.
<p>8:40pm – 8:45pm</p>	<p>Looking Ahead of Our Struggles - Harvesting the Discussions <i>What can we do in this room to take action on our struggles?</i></p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Facilitators asked each group to report back on one action that we can collectively mobilize around to move our anti-racist movement forward. ▪ Facilitators closed the session by reminding participants that yesterday's struggles inform today's actions. <p><i>Suggested wording: "Sankofa" is a Twi word (one of the many dialects spoken), and it means 'go back and get it.' It means you must reach back to reclaim what is lost in order to move forward. It is always meaningful to look back at history to inform our actions today."</i></p>
<p>8:45pm – 9:00pm</p>	<p>Closing Remarks</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitators thanked everyone for their participation and encouraged participants to stay involved.

Minutes

Our Struggles Today

- Precarious work
- Economic Justice
- Anti-Black Racism
- White Privilege/White Supremacy
- Criminal Justice/Racial Profiling
- Representation in Leadership
- Segregation
- Gentrification
- Representation: Leadership, Politics, Union Leadership
- Discrimination in employment
- Government coercion as employment
- Anti-racist 'safe spaces'. LGBTQ



- Lack of parent support: School boards
- Knowledge of Black History in Canada
- Youth and Stigma
- Racial profiling
- Carding
- Islamophobia
- Anti-Black Racism
- Media Depictions
- Economic Justice – Good Jobs
- Economic Apartheid
- Precarious Work
- Environmental Racism
- Marginalization of Black Women
- Criminal Justice System
- Mass Incarceration
- Systemic Racism

Today's Actions

- Black Votes Matter Campaign
- Mobilizing Anti-Racism & Islamophobia
- Make It Fair Campaign
- Building Connections Between Movements
- \$15 & Fairness Campaign
- Black Lives Matter Movement
- CBTU
- NCCM
- Anti-Black Racism City of Toronto
- OCASI Campaign

Strategies for Action

Issue: Three struggles were identified as central by participants:

- **Criminal Justice**
- **Anti-Black Racism**
- **Representation: Leadership, Politics and Union Leadership**

1. What can we do to act on this issue? Identify:

a) Immediate actions:

Criminal Justice

- Knowing your rights
- Knowing what to do at the time you are confronted
- Stopping in a safe place, on a spot check

Anti-Black Racism

- Acknowledge it, identifying immediate actions
- Mandatory training
- Honest open discussion
- Expressing our emotions
- Some diminish our feelings
- Micro-aggression

Representation: Leadership, Politics and Union Leadership

- Identify individuals who have potential. (In schools, etc.) - who may have power to influence others. Use their potential for good.
- Start young. Positive reinforcement

Which institutions/ levels of government need to be engaged?

Criminal Justice

- All of them, incremental steps
- All levels of government

Anti-Black Racism

- Federal, provincial community

Representation: Leadership, Politics and Union Leadership

- All levels. Anti-Racism Directorate needs to ensure that all ministries are held accountable.

b) Short-term actions (up to 1 year):

Criminal Justice

- N/A

Anti-Black Racism

- Transparency, contact MPP, more grant
- more lobbying
- more support from labour unions
- demanding actions

Representation: Leadership, Politics and Union Leadership

- Be willing to challenge municipally, federally, provincial
- Need for politicians to speak and make a difference “no hot air”

Which institutions/ levels of government need to be engaged?

Criminal Justice

- All need to be engaged
- Unions, judges, lawyers and police

Anti-Black Racism

- N/A

Representation: Leadership, Politics and Union Leadership

- Educationally → more forums for discussion at various age levels. Young, teen, young adults etc. Informal settings can work.

c) Long-term:

Criminal Justice

- Organization

Anti-Black Racism

- N/A

Representation: Leadership, Politics and Union Leadership

- Build relationships within communities in order to reach a larger group.
- Go into the schools to talk about the importance of getting involved. This is to find out what the community needs.

Which institutions/ levels of government need to be engaged?

Criminal Justice

- Police
- Employer
- Judicial
- Law

Anti-Black Racism

- N/A

Representation: Leadership, Politics and Union Leadership

- Using technology to reach members of the community who may not be able to come out.

2. How can labour support workers of colour to empower our communities politicize our issues? Who can we work with?

Criminal Justice

- Be informed and willing to support through political advocacy.

Anti-Black Racism

- Unions already prepared to support oppressed rights, they need to have more communication with community groups that need their support and power.

Representation: Leadership, Politics and Union Leadership

- It starts with US. Each one of us.

Photos



