

Change through activism: Unifor Statement in support of Black History Month

January 30, 2018

In recognition of the 21st anniversary of Black History Month in Canada, Unifor proudly celebrates *Generative Activism: the creation of power, influence and a better society through one's involvement to bring about that change*. Considering the leadership role that Unifor plays in Canada's labour movement and the role that black Canadians played in the establishment of unions across the country, a celebration of the strength, activism and solidarity of black labour could not be any more relevant than it is today.

Over seventy years ago, the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters played a significant role in improving the working conditions of black men employed as railway porters on the Canadian Pacific Railway. These workers faced racist attitudes, ongoing harassment, poor job conditions and low wages. To improve their working conditions, and because white unions would not allow them as members, the Porters envisioned their own union. One where fairness and collective strength would mean improved wages, better opportunities and an increased standard of living for their families. Their vision became reality in 1945, with the signing of the Porters first collective agreement.

As we celebrate Black History Month, Unifor is proud to acknowledge the role that black trade unionists, activists and an engaged black labour movement has played in shaping Canada and our union. From the resolve and courage of the black porters, to the vision of Viola Desmond, the perseverance of the Honourable Jean Augustine, to the current activism of the Black Live Matters movement; we are all better. Our movements are stronger and more inclusive because of the work that black activists did in the past and continue to do every day in the workplace, our union and in communities. Let us celebrate the generations of activism and continue to learn from these visions as we work to build inclusion.

As February unfolds, Unifor encourages members and locals to participate in and promote Black History Month events in their communities or consider hosting a Black History Month celebration in their halls.

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