

January 2012

TO ALL CUPE CHARTERED ORGANIZATIONS

Dear Sisters and Brothers:

FEBRUARY – BLACK HISTORY MONTH

The celebration of African and African-American history in the month of February was first conceived by African-American Carter G. Woodson in 1926. He chose a week in February that marks the birthdates of two key figures who helped end slavery in America: former United States President, Abraham Lincoln and Black abolitionist, Frederick Douglass. Over time the celebration has expanded to become Black History Month.

It's a time for communities around the world to celebrate, share and promote the history, cultural heritage and contributions of the entire African diaspora that have enriched our society. African-Canadians have roots in this country dating back to 1603. Knowledge of their contributions to our society will help create role models for African-Canadian youth and help them feel more affirmed.

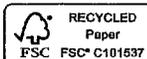
In Canada, Black History Month was first celebrated in Toronto by Black railroad porters in the 1950s. The city of Toronto officially acknowledged the commemorative period in 1979 following pressure from the Ontario Black History Society, founded the year before. It wasn't until 1995 that the federal government officially recognized February as Black History Month, following a motion from Jean Augustine, the first Black woman elected to Parliament.

In the 1940s, workers of colour were grossly underrepresented in the workforce despite a growing manufacturing sector in Canada. They were subject to a colour-coded system that exploited and excluded them from good jobs, accommodation and access to services afforded to white citizens. When they did find manufacturing jobs, they were concentrated in the dirtiest, most dangerous and gruelling industrial positions. The situation only changed with the work of Black labour activists like Bromley Armstrong, who fought for improved working conditions and equal rights for African-Canadians.

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PAUL MOIST – National President / Président national **CHARLES FLEURY** – National Secretary-Treasurer / Secrétaire-trésorier national

TOM GRAHAM – **FRED HAHN** – **DANIEL LÉGÈRE** – **LUCIE LEVASSEUR** – **BARRY O'NEILL** – General Vice-Presidents / Vice-présidents généraux



CUPE's anti-racism work is shaped by a class analysis of the root causes of racism, which has its root in colonialism, imperialism and the historical exploitation of people of colour throughout the world. We began promoting human rights in the workplace through our collective agreements long before these protections were achieved through legislation. A detailed employment equity plan gives us power to ensure that the employer abides by the negotiated targets or outcomes. In accordance with resolutions passed at our 2009 and 2011 national conventions, CUPE is working to eradicate systemic racism. We continue to improve access for workers of colour in our labour force through the promotion of employment equity, access to training, and the recognition of foreign credentials.

Recently, we launched a new course on employment equity; continue our active recruitment of racialized members for servicing representative training programs; implemented the *Code of Conduct* on harassment and discrimination and provided ombudspersons to address these issues at all national events; and included diversity training in steward training programs.

Our *Bargaining for Equality* binder is also being updated to include new language on bargained employment equity programs and other tools to combat racism.

CUPE locals can further the union's anti-racism work through a number of different means as well by, for example, creating dedicated diversity seats at local, district and regional council levels, or by pushing for union training for diversity members.

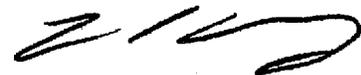
We invite you to let us know what you, your local or division is doing to celebrate this month and to fight racism in your workplace. Please share your actions and photographs, or tell us what Black History Month means to you by emailing equality@cupe.ca. For more information on Black History Month and links to other resources, visit cupe.ca/anti-racism.

Changing the colour of power is a slow process, but it is possible. Making such change requires solidarity, courage and tenacity.

In solidarity,



PAUL MOIST
National President



CHARLES FLEURY
National Secretary-Treasurer