

February 7, 2014

## Black History Month

February is Black History Month, and we encourage all members to take this opportunity to reflect on the contributions people of African heritage have made to our country, our society and our union.

This year, we want to take time to remember one of the great leaders of our generation, Nelson Mandela.

We all remember Mandela as the African National Congress leader who dedicated his life to ending apartheid in Africa, who was imprisoned for more than 27 years for leading that fight, who overcame so many barriers to become the first Black president of South Africa.

It is truly inspiring that after nearly three decades in prison, Mandela was not vindictive upon his election. Instead, he taught us an important lesson in building a fairer and more inclusive society.

Labour unions played an important role in the anti-apartheid movement. Mandela spoke often of the importance of international solidarity in advancing the cause of freedom. And he recognized the important role unions play in a democratic society.

"The kind of democracy that we all seek to build demands that we deepen and broaden the rights of all citizens. This includes a culture of workers' rights," he said.

Nelson Mandela is a leader who has forever changed our movement and our world, much as did [Martin Luther King, Jr.](#)

The labor movement was the principal force that transformed misery and despair into hope and progress. Out of its bold struggles, economic and social reform gave birth to unemployment insurance, old-age pensions, government relief for the destitute and, above all, new wage levels that meant not mere survival but a tolerable life. The captains of industry did not lead this transformation; they resisted it until they were overcome. When in the thirties the wave of union organization crested over the nation, it carried to secure shores not only itself but the whole society.

– Martin Luther King, Jr.

These are two well-known leaders, but Black History Month is also about recognizing the thousands of less well-known leaders in Canada and the labour movement. You can learn more about them by visiting the [Black History Society](#) website.


We must use the lessons and inspiration of these leaders to continue our work to build a fairer and more inclusive society. For example, racialized workers in Canada still earn 29% less compared to non-racialized workers and continue to be over-represented in minimum-wage and low-wage jobs, often having to work two or three jobs to make ends meet. We must continue our employment equity campaign and our negotiation for fair wages and working conditions.

One excellent way to help build our movement is to ensure that members in your local are able to participate in the [Racial Justice and Human Rights Conferences](#) this month.

In Solidarity,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Fred Hahn".

Fred Hahn  
President

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Candace Rennick".

Candace Rennick  
Secretary Treasurer

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**Fred Hahn**  
President

**ONE STRONG VOICE**

**Candace Rennick**  
Secretary-Treasurer

