February 1, 2021 |

Statements

BCFED statement on Black History Month

(Unceded Squamish, Tsleil-Waututh and Musqueam territories — Vancouver, BC) — Today marks the start of Black History Month. Every February, we celebrate the achievements and contributions of people of African descent. And as much as it's a time of celebration, it's also an occasion for accountability for historic racial injustices, especially those that continue to this day.

Our work in building a fairer future must be grounded in an honest and complete account of our history. Black History Month reminds us of what has too often been forgotten, and surfaces what has too often been hidden. But that only becomes truly meaningful when we embrace those truths, and allow them to inform and drive change.

Here in British Columbia, we benefit tremendously from the vision and dedication of many individuals and Black-led organizations. To name just a few:

- The Hogan's Alley Society, a strong voice for Black Vancouverites and an effective antidote to the erasure of their ongoing role in the history and life of Vancouver, BC and Canada.
- The BC Community Alliance, combating structural racism and working to include B.C.'s Black history in our curriculum.
- The Anti-Racism Coalition, whose recent campaign to have BC recognize Black Shirt Day has struck a chord with people throughout our province.

As Markiel Simpson of the BC Community Alliance says, talking about race "should be a welcome discussion, but since we've avoided that discussion for so long we've really become entrenched in our myths and what we've learned." And while he's referring to discussions in the broader community, that's every bit as relevant within labour. At the BCFED, we are grateful to have the ongoing work of the Workers of Colour Caucus spurring the challenging conversations we need to have for labour unions to become better allies.

The momentum behind those conversations — and the reckoning with our past and present that they support — has built quickly over the past year. The new wave of the Black Lives Matter movement mobilized a remarkable range of activists new and old. Events like the Anti Oppression Educators Collective's panel on confronting anti-Black racism in our school communities have helped us all deepen our understanding and knowledge. And the March On Pride, a now-annual event, centres Black and Indigenous leadership in PRIDE and honours the role of Black Trans women in creating the original PRIDE protests.

This coming month and beyond, we'll work with our allies and with the provincial government — including Rachna Singh, B.C.'s first-ever Parliamentary Secretary for Anti-Racism initiatives! — on both dialogue and action. And all of it will be grounded in the insight that we can only know where we're going when we know where we've been.

To our friends and allies throughout BC and beyond, have a great, informative and insightful Black History Month.