

OUR COLLECTIVE TRUTHS LIGHT THE WAY FORWARD:

A Report on the 2023 BCFED Anti-Racism Engagements

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IN GRATITUDE

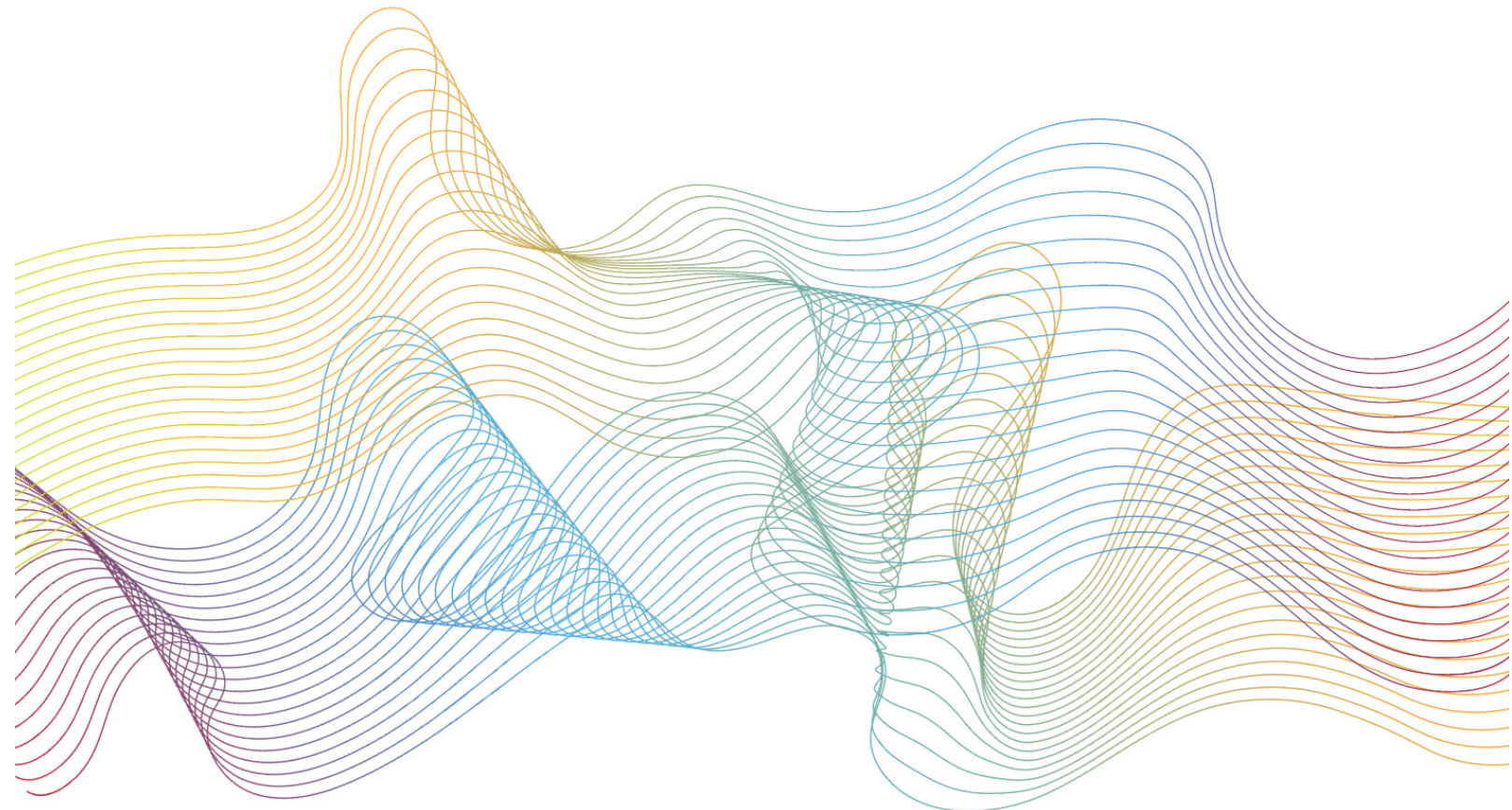
To the participants who gifted their wisdom to this process, we thank you. Your stories of hardship, grief, trauma and of joy and connection fuelled these sessions and helped light the path forward for the labour movement and for our provincial government simultaneously.

Without your participation and the faith you placed in this process, the sessions we held would not have been successful, or would our recommendations have carried as much weight. Thank you for bringing your truth. Our collective truths light the way forward.

In love, power, and solidarity,



*Hermender Singh Kailley
Secretary-Treasurer of the BC Federation of Labour*





OUR COLLECTIVE TRUTHS LIGHT THE WAY FORWARD: A REPORT ON THE 2023 BCFED ANTI-RACISM ENGAGEMENTS

By **Kassandra Cordero**, Director: Equity and Human Rights

Background:

In the summer of this year, the BC Government offered funding to organizations that work with Indigenous, Black and Racialized communities to run engagement sessions to help inform the BC Anti Racism Act. The Act is expected in the spring of 2024, and is the next phase of BC's Anti-Racism initiatives roll out.

The BCFED applied for funding on the basis that the labour movement is made up of a large population of Indigenous, Black and Racialized workers through its affiliated unions. The engagements could also inform the BCFED's anti-racism campaign, and would provide valuable insight into what workers envision as we pave the path forward together to eradicate racism from our own movement, as well as from workplaces, community spaces, and government institutions.

The BCFED was granted funding in August, along with over 60 other groups. Over the months of August and September, the BCFED worked with Culture Ally, the consulting agency enlisted by the province to assist organizations that had received funding to plan and promote the engagement sessions.

The BCFED held its four sessions toward the end of September because we wanted to give people some space from the summer, and back to school activities to increase our level of engagement. It was important to us to have space that was as safe as possible for Indigenous, Black, and Racialized union members to really engage in honest and unfiltered conversation about the engagement questions, so we ensured to hire culturally appropriate counselors to be ready to assist participants if they were impacted by the sharing that was happening, and we supported the cultural safety of the sessions by ensuring only racialized staff and leadership were in the room and facilitating.

We did have some concerns for safety of the group as alt-right groups have been organizing against Indigenous rights and reconciliation, against racially and religiously marginalized communities and against SOGIE rights, and educational resources in the public school system but also in society in general. We applied safety measures to our sessions accordingly.

We had an executive assistant running technical support and handling traffic in our main Zoom room, and we held the engagement portion of our sessions in a breakout room. Before we went into the breakout we asked people who did not identify as Indigenous, Black, or as Racialized to sign off, and

they did. Inside the breakout session we had our Secretary Treasurer, Hermender Singh Kailley, welcome everyone to the session and thank them for their time.

Our Racial Equity and Justice Representative, Cora Mojica welcomed the groups and reminded them that they are welcome to continue these conversations with us in our Racial Equity and Justice Caucus. Our primary contact, facilitator and coordinator of the engagements was Kassandra Cordero, the director of Equity and Human Rights at the BCFED. Our supporting facilitator was Rohini Arora, who is the BCFED director of Organizing and Campaigns.

Our Counsellor for the first two sessions was Kristin Kowalko who is Indigenous and is Registered Clinical Counsellor at 'Noke Counselling. Our Counsellor for the third and fourth sessions was Raman Cheema who identifies as South Asian and is a registered Clinical Counsellor from Collective Healing.

At the in person sessions, one was held on unceded xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), and sə́lilwətaʔt (Tsleil-Waututh) territory in Vancouver and one was held on unceded Latzie, Kwantlen and Semiahmoo territory in Surrey. Food was provided as well as a variety of hot and cold beverages at both events.

The hybrid nature of the third and fourth sessions was provided through the use of an OWL meeting camera device.

Although we had over 200 people sign up for the sessions, we had only 109 active participants within the sessions.

Consultation topics and Questions:

The consultation questions were split up into four themes, with one to two questions per theme. Participants were informed that their comments would be shared in aggregate and with specific quotes not attributed to them. Participants were invited to be honest and transparent about their feelings, and assured that comments they made would not have any identifying markers tied to them, including specific work sites, names, or specific cases. Those present in the sessions were also informed that the BCFED would use their feedback in part to inform its upcoming Anti-Racism campaign, and that they would have access to the report provided to affiliates.

Section #1: Systemic Racism

1. How can the Government of BC better support Indigenous and racialized peoples through the Anti-Racism Legislation?

The four groups presented a series of testimonies and suggestions by participants, focusing on several key aspects:

There were concerns about exploitation and treatment of migrants, particularly those working in sectors that are education, healthcare, or service oriented.

There is a call for legislated accountability for people or institutions causing harm, including putting teeth into pieces of legislation meant to protect workers to determine that systemic, institutional, or interpersonal racism has taken place and to have the mechanisms in place to compensate workers harmed by it. Educational interventions are recommended as a way to promote understanding of issues faced by racial, religious and cultural minority groups.

There is a critique of the lack of knowledge and understanding about the UN Decade for People of African Descent among political leaders and unions, and about the lack of promotion around it in the labour movement.

Various participants asked for clarification regarding the term "legislation" and the scope of the new anti-racism act being proposed by the BC government. Although the parameters of the consultation as put forward by the province was to take a look at government provided services, and government as an employer, participants were encouraged to also speak about their experiences as they saw fit.

A need for increased access to legal aid for marginalized communities, particularly for immigration, housing and criminal justice issues, was expressed.

Some participants suggested that corporations need guidelines to hire more Indigenous people and individuals from Black and racialized communities.

There was a robust discussion on highlighting the necessity to value life experiences and not just educational certificates, or colonial and capitalist education structures that have high financial and access barriers.

Suggestions included multiple recommendations aimed at addressing systemic racism against Indigenous, Black, and racialized people:

Expanding Scope of Legislation: Participants in the discussion argued that the anti-racism legislation should touch every aspect of life, as racism is not confined to one specific area.

"If the BC government has racism within the government workers, and they can't fix that, if someone within the ministry is not allowing this information to get to them? The government's Labour Relations and Human Resources departments are acting in bad faith, refusing to investigate matters that involve complaints against supervisors or management, unreasonable timelines, intimidations."

"BC Government could mail out forms to employees directly, asking to rate their workplace, supervisors, managers, and what changes would benefit the workplace, don't hand it to the management and let them cherry pick, who will get one of these forms rating the workplace, these forms are confidential why are they handed to the employer?"

"Systemic racism is based on a colonial structure predicated on the supremacy of whiteness. Governments are reluctant and resistant to acknowledge this."

"The incidents of systemic racism may be verbal bullying, social bullying and prejudicial bullying. The mental injury is not visible so that WorkSafeBC can not give one support."

"We must acknowledge that racism actually exists, get involved with organizations that are fighting it, and elect leaders and policy makers who won't reinforce or support structurally racist policies."

Accountability of Unions: Speakers discussed the pervasive problem of racism within unions and underscored the need for self-reflection and reform within these institutions.

Increased Education: Education was suggested as a key tool for combating racism. A recommendation offered was to provide anti-racism education both within institutions such as unions and as larger public awareness programs.

Creation of Anti-Racism Ministry: Participants advocated for more financial resources devoted to support anti-racism work, including the appropriate funding for a ministry dedicated to this issue, instead of a parliamentary secretary office within a ministry.

The group discussed a need to ensure that systemic racism is included in the Workers Compensation Act, and other provincial bodies that are tasked with making life at work safer for marginalized community members.

Improved Hiring Practices: Participants suggested that the provincial government could provide businesses and corporations with guidelines to hire more individuals from Indigenous, Black and racialized communities, and value life experiences as part of their qualifications.

Public Accessibility and Engagement: The discussion brought forth a number of recommendations on making anti-racist resources more accessible to the general public. This includes access to subsidized counseling, legal aid, and other forms of support against racist incidents.

Public School Curriculum: There was a proposal to develop the public school curriculum to include more on racial issues, the rights of individuals, and the history and culture of Indigenous, Black, and racialized groups. While it was recognized that many Indigenous, Black and Racialized teachers are doing a phenomenal job of teaching these concepts to students, it was also brought forth that not all teachers seem to teach these materials in ways that affirm the humanity of Indigenous, Black, and racialized communities.

WCB: A full scale review of WCB was suggested to examine whether or not there is a sufficient standard of care being afforded to workers as support but another idea emerged about creating something like a Healing Centre that does community outreach.

Adding racism and the various forms of it as a part of the definition of psychological injury.

"I don't think Anti-Bullying Investigations work well for BIPOC and queer because investigators are usually white and privileged (requires finances and position to fund law degrees) and they are paid by the employers. this means, if they want to continue getting work from them, it is favourable for them to produce results that favor the corporation/institution that is funding the investigation"

"To me, all creatures of earth should get along and support each other including all animals, plants, and nature. There are many similarities between Japanese culture and Indigenous beliefs and worldviews. If Indigenous people starts to hold their cultural practice in much more mainstream place and daily life, perhaps it will be a game changer to all so called minority group to hold a validity in this country."

"I feel we are liked and welcome as long as we are doing bottom feeder works or self employed work, not rocking ruling class and management level work. There are so many limitations for someone like myself applying for a profession, management, leadership positions. Certification from outside of this country is not permitted and English as a second language speakers are classified as a second class citizen in the career market. Consequently, I do a lot of leadership level contribution to the society for free. It seems to be as long as I give my expertise and knowledge as a volunteer position in the community, the system is fine by but when I apply for a paid director position, I am outside of the selection list. In result, we stay in low income class, not threat to the upper class."

Section #2: Healing

1. What kind of programs can the Government of B.C. create to help heal communities, victims, and survivors of racist violence?
2. What kinds of programs can the Government of B.C. create to prevent further community harm?

Across our sessions participants suggested that there's a need for government initiatives aimed at healing from the impact of systemic racism and colonialism.

The conversation also addressed the importance of adequate training and accessible, relatable teaching materials in the workplace to educate about racism and harassment. As the conversation evolved, participants communicated that such programs shouldn't just be reserved for university students, or leadership or staff within organizations, but be accessible broadly.

There was a widely endorsed perspective that addressing racism should be part and parcel of the government's policy and within every institution - a sentiment viewed as a necessary condition to help community members heal from racial violence.

An important perspective from Indigenous participants, that was supported by the whole group, was the need to decolonize systemically provided wellness supports. There was discussion about the services a worker is pointed toward after having experienced psychological injury at work due to racial micro and macro aggressions, and the lack of a mechanism for it to be covered under the Workers Compensation Act.

The high barrier of achieving presumption for workplace psychological injury came up in each session. Another connecting piece to this is the lack of ability to have Indigenous or holistic healing methods covered by WorkSafe, or even by insurance companies under workers' benefits packages.

During this section, a few more critical recommendations were made to support healing:

Education: Participants discussed the importance of education, and acknowledgement of the violence that has happened and is continuing to happen as a critical component to healing. Healing from racial trauma can only begin when a recognition of the violence has happened.

"That constant gas lighting that is often the first response when somebody gets called in about having been racist. It ends up getting internalized and then part of our racial trauma is that we do second guess ourselves..."

"I just feel like in order for healing to happen... there needs to be acknowledgement that that the racist acts have happened, even microaggressions. And we have people that we work with who don't even recognize the microaggressions and the unconscious biases that they have."

"I hope we would be pushing for the parliamentary secretary role (of Anti-Racism Initiatives) to be a ministry."

"What I would really like to see is I'd like to see funding that is provided to the experts who are the people that are Black, Indigenous, people of color, to create these programs. I don't want to see the government create anything."

"For me, Healing comes from knowing that the other party has gained understanding and It makes it conscious effort to change and and regrets their their actions."

Workplace training: Comparable to the education avenue, participants proposed implementing training in workplaces, and wellness models that could be used by Indigenous, Black, or Racialized workers to make use of after experiencing the violence of covert or overt racism.

Broadly accessible programs: In a capitalist and colonial context, it costs money to heal, and healing becomes a financial burden that Indigenous, Black and Racialized communities disproportionately carry. This dynamic coupled with the fact that Indigenous, Black and Racialized community members also face disproportionate barriers to obtaining education to go into fields like medicine, and therapeutic practices means that even the people who have the money to obtain supports aren't always getting supports that are culturally safe.

For workers who do not have the benefit of union representation, leave under the employment standards act was suggested, similar to language we've seen regarding leave for workers experiencing the effects of sexual or domestic violence. We have seen some organizations do this proactively in their internal policies such as Amnesty International.

Compulsory modules: It was recommended that preventative measures be taken, like completing certain training modules about racism for those starting new jobs, those seeking business licenses or who wish to operate or continue to operate as a non-profit under the Societies Act. By preventing some racism through measures like these, it was suggested that we might be able to lessen the burden of healing in Indigenous, Black and Racialized communities.

The participants again emphasized the role of education as a preventative measure, proposing that courses should be introduced at the K-12, Post Secondary, university, and adult basic education level to raise awareness about racism, harassment, unconscious bias, and culturally acceptable behavior.

Another key suggestion arising in this section was quotas for hiring Indigenous, Black and Racialized people into executive and director levels positions, and hiring cohorts.

The group discussed the importance of funding organizations doing preventative work such as the BCFED, the BCFED Occupational Health and Safety Centre, the BC Centre for Women in the Trades, and community based Indigenous, Black and Racialized led organizations doing policy and training work.

"Speaking as somebody in the education system, These systems are based on upper middle class values of the dominant culture. So, training has to be culturally appropriate and if we're in small towns, I've come from a small town as well, there's nothing, there is nothing, forget about culturally appropriate, there's nothing, nothing, not even just something to give lip service."

"Indigenous elders have stepped up to support the correctional system. To assist individuals that are incarcerated and on parole. It is not only for individuals of Indigenous roots, but for others with traumatic effects of society. The trauma is real for many and we all deal with our own issues."

"How about some free counseling and trauma, training and supports in our communities. The wait list is ridiculous to go get any kind of services or support and people can't afford it."

Section #3: Accountability

1. How can the Government of B.C. be held accountable for the progress and outcomes of this legislation?
2. What is the best way for the Government of B.C. to keep the public updated on the progress of this legislation?

"We can always use what is being done in other jurisdictions on other issues and not be afraid to use a tool that is good and that it and that works or a system that is good and that works and is inclusive."

One of the first suggestions to come up in our discussions was the establishment of an accountability body consisting of representatives from the affected communities who would provide regular feedback and help with the policy's fine-tuning.

The notion of an anti-racism registry was brought up, where there would be clear criteria for reporting any form of racism. The registry would benchmark what qualifies as systemic, interpersonal, structural, or organizational racism.

Participants in multiple sessions from the private sector raised the idea of adopting Key Performance Indicators (KPI's) as measurable targets to assess the effectiveness of anti-racism efforts.

Participants discussed the importance of applying restorative justice in handling racialized violence and other workplace issues, provided the victim is comfortable with this approach.

A further step in this approach would involve healing centers and mediation options for those willing to participate.

"I think there is a lot of benefit in government engaging with the community leaders. The government might not be able to reach Syrian refugees, but then they can reach out to a community leader that the refugees are comfortable to express their mind to."

In terms of policies, the conversation also touched on the need for clear, tangible consequences that deter misconduct. The accountability mechanisms should not just exist on paper but in practice, providing actual solutions to issues and offering justice to victims instead of retraumatizing them through harmful investigative procedures.

Another suggestion from the group was having an ombudsperson role or an advocate for anti-racism. The office would serve as a place where people could take their complaints of racism and there would be an investigation and follow up.

When asked about how the province could keep the public updated on the progress of the legislation, participants suggested the creation of a real-time visual tool, like a graph on a webpage, that would continuously show the work the government is doing to eliminate racism juxtaposed with an inverse tally of the number of reported racist incidents. This tracker could provide transparent insights into the progress and impact of the legislation.

Section #4: Multiculturalism vs. Anti-Racism

1. Are multiculturalism and anti-racism different? Why or why not?
2. How does *multiculturalism* affect your life? How does *Anti-Racism* affect your daily life?

The participants in our engagements discussed multiculturalism and anti-racism as two distinct concepts.

Multiculturalism was generally viewed as a celebration of different cultures, often superficially, like showcasing traditional clothes or food.

Some participants consider multi-culturalism as a divide, or a mechanism to further perpetuate covert racism, and that it sometimes acts as a shield to hide systemic racism.

Anti-racism was described as an active way of living, focusing on compassion, empathy, and allyship. It was considered by the vast majority of participants to be the active fight against systemic, racial prejudice, and according to the conversations held, it's a necessary condition for multiculturalism to work properly.

In one session, participants discussed that multiculturalism and anti-racism are like the canvas and the individual colors in a painting, marking a clear separation between the two. They indicated that while multiculturalism provides the diverse backdrop, anti-racist action aims to address discrimination and racial inequality present within.

There was a commonly shared belief that anti-racist policies are important for a truly respectful and engaged multicultural society, otherwise, multiculturalism could risk being a token or superficial representation of diverse cultures.

The participants expressed a variety of ways in which multiculturalism affects their lives. For some, multiculturalism represented superficial celebrations of their culture, such as wearing traditional clothing or sharing customary food, often not extending beyond those token displays.

Some participants indicated that their experience with multiculturalism often resulted in the whitewashing of their cultures, diluting their traditions and customs to make them more palatable or "acceptable" in a diverse society.

"That's what it reminds me of. Everybody dress up as your cultural attire come to school multicultural day and here's your food like let's share."

"Canada's 'Multicultural Act' re-instills the power of anglo-whites and franco-whites. So I have never found the 'multicultural act' to actually really be 'multicultural' (bicultural - English and French [white]), but definitely not 'multi-'"

"Everyone should be included. I think we're supposed to just be together as humans. The divide is driving me crazy. I'm Black. I'm a Jamaican woman and this is my Filipino friend and this is my Indian husband. I love races. I, if I hear something and I don't understand it, I go up to a person from that race or that religion and I ask the question and I think that is such an opening for us to be honest and forward with each other."

This might lead to the actual meaning and significance of their practices being overlooked or neglected, or even appropriated. Several participants also argued that multiculturalism divides rather than unifies, as it can be used as a way to "other" and stereotype cultures, and to mask the systemic racism embedded in society.

Participants communicated that they felt that without an active and effective anti-racism approach, multiculturalism fails to provide a truly inclusive and respectful environment. It's important to note that the participants also expressed a desire for multiculturalism to be more genuinely engaging with their cultures which means integrating actively in cultural events and practices, rather than just limited token displays. They suggested a collective longing for meaningful multicultural interactions where their culture is truly understood and appreciated, not just admired superficially.

Further Reflection:

After the engagements, we reflected as a staff and leadership team about how future engagements could be even more effective and serve a greater purpose for participants. Some of the reflections include having a longer window in which to engage Indigenous, Black and racialized workers, scheduled in the spring rather than through the summer when many people are away or are tasked with greater responsibilities for childcare. We talked about the importance of the stories and lived experience of the communities we are seeking to engage, and the need for more funding to be provided to organizations to engage their communities in a holistic way, with support for funding sessions that are longer and have space and resources built in to support sharing, healing, and power building beyond simply focusing on recommendations. By supporting engagements in these ways, we can better support a group to make recommendations that are well rounded and consider flows of power, responsibility, and agency. We look forward to continuing this conversation with the committees, caucuses and working groups who have agency over Anti-Racism within the BCFED.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Key Recommendations for Government:

1. Immediately expand the scope of the Anti-Racism legislation anticipated this spring by including protections for workers who are not directly employed by the government and are seeking relief from current racist incidents and structures in their workplaces and are in need of mechanisms to support them beyond current infrastructure. Measures need to include adding systemic racism as a prohibited ground to the BC Human Rights Code, Adding systemic racism to the

Workers Compensation Act, and Violence Regulation, and adding systemic racism to the Employment Standards Act.

2. Establish an advisory board on Anti-Racism that would function as a body to ensure accountability of government entities to the public on progress on Anti-Racism.
3. The province should consider the creation of a body tasked specifically with investigating claims of racism, coordinating with the advisory board mentioned above, as well as an ombudsperson that could serve as a resource to the public when accessing public services and encountering racism.
 - a. This body should consider funding a healing centre for people experiencing racism which would provide holistic and culturally appropriate healing modalities for community members.
 - b. This body should also fund groups providing culturally appropriate and Indigenous healing practices.
4. Establish a confidential reporting and investigation process for workers who do not feel comfortable/safe bringing their complaints of racism directly to their employers. Reports should be investigated by a party with the necessary experience and lens.
5. Ensure that the anti-racism act includes an enforcement mechanism and requires both random and targeted audits of government services and agencies. Establish a government agency that is responsible for monitoring and enforcing compliance with the Anti-Racism Act.
6. With the Worksafe BC and Skilled Trades BC continue to fund groups like the BCFED, its Occupational Health and Safety Centre, and the BC Centre for Women in The Trades (BCCWITT) to do training for workers, employers and the general public on Anti-Racism.
7. Provide funding for Indigenous, Black, and Racialized community-led organizations that are doing training on Anti-Racism.
8. In the K-12 system, all school districts have multi cultural liaison workers and include anti-racism training, resources and support for school staff as part of their job duties..
9. . Strengthen existing workplace legislation to improve accountability and provide remedy for workers who experience racism by:
 - a. Specifically adding a definition of systemic racism to the BC human rights code, establishing ending systemic discrimination as a purpose of the Act, and adding it as a prohibited activity;
 - b. Naming racism, including systemic racism as a workplace hazard that must be prevented by employers in Part 2 of the Workers Compensation Act and Regulations,

and ensuring that the proposed language defining racism as an act of violence in the draft violence prevention regulations is implemented.

- c. Adding a new paid leave provision for workers experiencing the effects of racism to the leave provisions in the BC Employment Standards Act. Workers should be able to access paid leave to:
 - i. deal with the immediate and ongoing physical and psychological impacts of racism including but not limited to seeking medical, counselling and victim services support;
 - ii. obtain advice and support from a lawyer or law enforcement;
 - iii. and take any other action required to keep them and their family safe.

Accessing this leave should not limit the workers' ability to access other supports or remedies available including through Worksafe BC or the Human Rights Tribunal.

10. Require compulsory education for business owners, public institutions, and organizations operating under the Societies Act of British Columbia.

11. Expand the current K-12 Anti-Racism education plan.

12. The province should work with insurance providers to make coverage for culturally appropriate healing practices available under employee benefit plans.

Key Recommendations for the Labour movement:

1. That the BCFED and affiliates consider how the labour movement still carries the legacies of white supremacy and structural racism, and do deep work to rectify this reality.
2. That Anti-Racism training be made available to all union members through the CLC, BCFED and its affiliated unions.
3. That the BCFED and its affiliates consider creating a labour centre focused on healing, and resource this centre with funding to support Indigenous, Black and Racialized workers with options for restorative justice and culturally safe healing modalities.
4. That the BCFED lobby on the need to ensure accountability is legislated for institutions causing racial harm to workers. (See above recommendations for government).

