

SERVING AND PROTECTING EVERYONE IN TORONTO"

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 6, 2002

In Toronto in 2002, we still have African Canadians, in particular young men who are routinely exposed to police harassment and subjected to racial profiling. This outrage was brought to community attention in a report released recently by the Toronto Star.

Based on the police's own arrest data, the Star has shown Toronto police stop and search a disproportionate number of African Canadians for no apparent reason. It appears either walking or jogging down your local street at any time of the day can be sufficient reason to be pulled over by the Toronto police. The Star further pointed out African Canadians continue to face major systemic challenges in dealing with other levels of the criminal justice system—for example, the levels of incarceration are much higher for African Canadians, especially for men.

When asked to comment on the Star's report, the Mayor claimed there isn't a problem. The Toronto Police Services Association responded by charging reverse discrimination—they argue this is the work of the Toronto Star to once again discredit the police in our community. And the Chief rushed to do 'damage control'.

These charges against the police and criminal justice are not new. Community activists have for many years organized around policing issues. Through hard work and determination, the community has battled to get issues of racial profiling and police harassment on the political agenda. Previous NDP and Liberal governments responded with major reports such as Stephen Lewis Report on Race Relations in Ontario and the Report of the Commission on Systemic Racism in the Ontario Justice Systems.

There is a consistent theme in all the government commissioned studies. In 1992 an audit of the Toronto police found significant evidence that after joining the force, many police officers developed strong beliefs about people based on race. The audit goes further cultural prejudice which exists in the police can not be underestimated. It permeates all sectors of the police force and leads to the type of behaviour that condones racial profiling and the unequal treatment of minorities, especially African Canadian men.

This trend was further substantiated by the 1995 Commission on Systemic Racism. As well the Attorney General of Ontario in a case filed at the Court of Appeals argued that racial profiling exists and is a subconscious factor when the police interact with members of certain communities.

Eight years ago, there was a belief we were turning an important corner in the relationship between community and the police. We all expected change. Many felt employment equity and the promotion of more minority police would effect the culture of the police force. Police would then begin to realize that they have a responsibility to serve and protect all communities.

This hasn't happened. In fact the relationship between police and the community has been slowly deteriorating since 1995 which coincides with the election of the Harris government

Where are we now? Chief Fantinos has called for public hearings headed up by Justice Dubin to deal with the findings of the Toronto Star report. There is considerable mistrust with the idea of yet another public hearing, to point that Dubin has withdrawn from involvement. We must ensure that all communities in particular the African Canadian community are engaged as full and equal partners in any process that is undertaken. There needs to be an open and frank exchange of ideas and development of solutions. The Chief and the Chair of the Police Services Board have to acknowledge that there is a problem with harassment and racial profiling, especially of African Canadians. Any attempts will fail if the Chief and senior police staff attempt to minimize recognition that there are problems in their ranks with racism.

This Labour Council has a real concern about policing in our community. Many of our members have been either been personally impacted by police racial profiling or their children have been effected. We must show solidarity with our community allies in this important struggle. The Canadian Labour Congress has written to Chief Fantino offering to provide the vast experience of the labour movement in combatting racism. We will continue to advocate for real, meaningful change.

It's now long overdue—the Toronto police must change. Therefore be it resolved that this Labour Council:

1. *show solidarity with our allies in their struggle for justice;*
2. *demand the reinstatement of the Civilian Revue Board to allow complaints to be dealt with impartially;*
3. *work with our affiliates to publicize the need for a community and labour response to the issue of police harassment and racial profiling.*