

# REAL-WORLD HERO: BROMLEY ARMSTRONG

1926–2018

*“This is our Canada with people of every complexion... enjoying each other’s company.”*

Bromley Armstrong arrived in Canada from Jamaica in 1947. He planned to remain only long enough to complete his studies. Instead, he chose to stay in Canada, making Toronto his home. Armstrong has spent his life fighting intolerance and discrimination and speaking up for disadvantaged people in their search for equal rights and justice in Canada.

Armstrong played an important role in changing Canadian immigration laws. Today, Canada has a reputation for being open and welcoming to immigration from every corner of the globe, but this was not always the case. When Armstrong arrived in 1947, discrimination was practiced in many different ways. At the factory where he worked, less than one half of one percent of the workforce was black.

Armstrong soon became involved in the Union movement at his factory – the first step in his involvement in human rights issues. In 1954, he and more than two dozen others led a “March on Ottawa,” demanding that Canada’s racist immigration laws be revised. He was also known as a champion for the rights of “displaced persons” – immigrants from Eastern Europe who were not welcome in their countries of origin following World War II, and who experienced severe discrimination in Canada.

Armstrong was an outspoken champion of fairness. Through his efforts, the laws of Ontario, which had permitted restaurants and other places of business to refuse to serve customers because of the colour of their skin, were challenged in court and eventually thrown out.

In honour of his work, the Government of Jamaica recognized Bromley Armstrong in 1988 with the Order of Distinction, Officer. The Government of Ontario gave him the Order of Ontario in 1992 for his work in human rights.

Armstrong received the Order of Canada in 1994 for his contribution to human rights and labour. In 1998, he received the annual Baha’i National Race Unity Award for his pioneering fight against racism.

Until late in life, Bromley Armstrong remained active as a human rights champion, and an example to all Canadians that commitment and perseverance can lead to positive change.

