

# **Human Rights: Equality and Solidarity - Confronting Racism**

---

---

*“Until all of us have made it,  
none of us have made it.”*

*In the words of the late Rosemary Brown, the first Afro-Canadian woman elected to a provincial legislature in Canada and to run for the New Democratic Party leadership. She was also a CAW Social Justice Fund Board member.*

---

Our Constitutional Convention is a time for measuring our progress and celebrating our achievements. It is also, importantly, a time for expanding our vision and preparing to successfully meet the challenges that we know lie before us. As always, our union is struggling to create a larger, more inclusive vision and to define the bold and strategic actions that will help us to build a stronger, more diverse membership and leadership.

Some of the challenges that face our union are external. We pursue these challenges at the bargaining table, at the ballot box and in our social unionism work.

At the same time, there are other changes that are required and they must come from within. Each of us can start by challenging our own beliefs and attitudes, and the ideologies and structures they uphold and support. We can work diligently with our co-workers and neighbours to learn and discuss ways in which we can gradually, but continuously, rebuild the unjust society in which we live.

Together, as a union, we must put strategies in place that will build safe and respectful workplaces, a progressive and united workers' movement, strong communities, a cohesive society and a better, more equitable world. Achieving this requires a vision, and an understanding of the goals and desires of equity-seeking groups.

Retracing our steps as a union, going back to basics as it were, gives us the opportunity to learn from our history and to see how we might cement our gains while building an ever more vigorous movement.

## The CAW-Canada Leads by Example

---

For over half a century, we have been in the forefront of the struggle for fairness and justice in our society, including the introduction of ground-breaking laws and policies.

As far back as 1948, when the struggle for human and civil rights was still in its infancy, UAW Local 439 formed a *Joint Labour Committee to Combat Racial Intolerance* under the leadership of Brother Dennis McDermott. The committee bravely and successfully campaigned for human rights legislation in Ontario, the first of its kind in Canada.

A review of our bargaining achievements over the decades will confirm how hard we have worked on this agenda. For so many years, it was a real struggle to win “no discrimination” clauses in our collective agreements. Today those clauses are everywhere.

Within a year of the formation of CAW-Canada in 1985, we held our first human rights conference. And by 1988, we were the first union in Canada to adopt strong co-worker harassment policies and procedures. We have understood how important it is to look within, as well as outside the union.

### At the forefront of meeting the needs of a diverse membership

There have been some significant milestones in the pursuit of equality and justice for all of our members. They include:

- ✓ CAW 1<sup>st</sup> National Human Rights Conference (1986)
- ✓ CAW Constitutional Convention (1988): Harassment Policy Statement
- ✓ CAW Constitutional Convention (1991): Statement on Affirmative Action
- ✓ CAW National Executive Board Statement On Canada’s Immigration and Refugees Policy (1992)

The theme of that 1991 convention, **Solidarity in Diversity**, holds for today, as a source of strength, perhaps even more than what it did twelve years ago. In 1991, we laid out a vision of what our unions and workplaces could and should be. It would involve a variety of progressive steps and it would require our collective effort.

---

*“Our strength can only be maintained by acknowledging our differences, by embracing what is unique about all segments of our union as well as our shared values.”*

*Robert White, CAW President,  
Constitutional Convention, 1991*

---

Our vision then, and now, is to “build for the future, a union whose leadership at all levels reflects the membership. To that end, the affirmative action policy commits the CAW to recognizing and removing barriers to participation from women and visible minorities... To call each other sister and brother and truly mean it we must build solidarity through diversity.”

The 1991 constitutional convention policy, *Solidarity in Diversity*, set in motion the changes that would advance equality within the CAW. It did so by recognizing the barriers to participation for equity-seeking groups and the need for programs that would systematically remove those barriers.

Twelve years later, we have come a long way in opening up the kind of space that encourages equity-seeking members to participate in the life of the CAW. We have:

- ✓ Developed leadership courses for aboriginal/workers of colour and women to support them in playing a greater role in our union and the larger community;
- ✓ Created and sustained caucuses for aboriginal/workers of colour;
- ✓ Held national and regional aboriginal/workers of colour conferences on a regular basis;
- ✓ Encouraged the active participation of members who are aboriginal workers, workers of colour in facilitating our education and workplace training programs;
- ✓ Negotiated non-discrimination clauses and anti-harassment training in our collective agreements;
- ✓ Trained local union leadership to confront discrimination and harassment, and empowered them to lead by example;
- ✓ Encouraged local unions to amend their bylaws to include affirmative action seats on their executive boards for aboriginal /worker of colour member-at-large positions;
- ✓ Established affirmative action positions for women and workers of colour/ aboriginal workers at both our CAW Council and Quebec Council.

As a result, today, aboriginals and workers of colour members hold leadership positions at various levels in the union - national staff, coordinators, and local union leadership.

Furthermore, through the human rights component of our education programs, our membership understands how much stronger we can be as a *collective*. This makes for a more united voice, at the bargaining table as well as in our communities.

## Racism

---

Racism still exists in our society. We continue to hear of the struggles and the backlash throughout our country. There are many different forms of discrimination facing people of colour and aboriginal peoples. Indeed, there is new evidence of long-standing “racial profiling” or “racial targeting”. In our society, one can still be stopped while driving, or be denied housing, or be stopped at airport security, for no good and valid reason - simply because of race. Racial targeting is in fact a systemic problem in our society, illustrating the systemic racism that still exists in our institutions.

Racism and discrimination are also evident in working conditions and wages paid to workers. Last year, the Canadian Labour Congress released a study, which documented that workers of colour in Canada in 1999 were paid, on average, 16.3 % less than all other workers. The CLC study also found that the wage gap for new immigrants to Canada is greater than for previous generations of immigrants, and the difference cannot be attributed to education. This suggests that discrimination is a greater factor in determining the distribution of income in Canada than in the past.

*“The earnings of recent immigrants compared to those of the Canadian-born have deteriorated sharply. In 2000, male immigrants who had been in the country one full year made 63 cents for every dollar made by those born in Canada. Immigrants who had been in the country 10 years made 80 cents for each dollar earned by Canadian born workers” ...*

*“Census 2001 shows that the gap in labour market conditions between recent immigrants and Canadian-born persisted, despite the strong economic growth of the late 1990s. ... The unemployment rate of recent immigrants age 25 to 44 was still twice that of the Canadian-born population, 12.1% compared with 6.4%... Female immigrants of 1990s faced tougher labour market than men. ... only 55.6% of female recent immigrants in 2001 were employed, 21.8 percentage points lower than the employment rate of 77.4% for Canadian-born women in 2001. Unlike male recent immigrants, this was similar to the gap in 1996, and double the gap in 1991”.*

*From Statistics Canada, Census 2001, Analysis Series*

---

Part of the problem lays with our minimum wage laws. Nowhere in the country do they truly reflect the real current costs of living. In the case of Ontario, the minimum wage of \$6.85 has been frozen since 1995. There are an estimated 300,000 workers in Ontario working at a minimum wage which is kept below the poverty line as part of a deliberate government policy. This has a direct impact on people of colour and aboriginal Canadians who are more likely to work in minimum wage jobs.

---

Other labour standards also have a direct impact on the lives on workers of colour and aboriginal workers. Hours of work, vacations, paid holidays are all regulated by provincial standards. Governments, when they diminish these standards, inflict a huge toll on these workers, many of whom have no union to protect them.

The CAW-Canada is supporting a Living wage policy, which seeks to substantially improve minimum wages, with automatic annual increases, and to have them more realistically reflect the costs of living for workers and their families, a minimum wage that would actually provide food, clothing and adequate shelter.

A living wage is a social policy which we can well afford as one of the world's richest nations. It would remove cheap labour as a factor in competition between employers and assist hundreds of thousands of workers and their families, including those who already face discrimination and marginalization in our society.

Their struggle is our struggle. Our union is determined to work with all members and locals to eliminate racism in our workplaces, union, and in our communities.

## **Immigration and Refugee Issues**

---

Canadian immigration and refugee policies have a significant impact on our society. The CAW has constantly strived for greater fairness in these policies, working in concert with the other non-governmental organizations that share our goals. Our 1992 NEB Statement on Canada's Immigration and Refugee Policies is a testament to that commitment.

The head tax, for example, adversely affected people of colour wanting to immigrate to this country. Families were required to pay a large sum of money on behalf of each adult family member, placing an unfair burden on those coming from developing countries and those least able to afford it.

The CAW-Canada has been in the forefront of unions supporting higher levels of immigration. We have argued that immigration creates jobs and more generally improves our society. We have also called for comprehensive settlement services for immigrants, currently undermined by the government's cutbacks to the community agencies that provide these services.

In Ottawa, the current government has responded to public pressure by increasing the annual number of new Canadians to 300,000 per year. However, the government has been silent on the inadequacy of settlement services, including services like English as Second Language (ESL) training, recognition of foreign credentials, and housing and medical care assistance for new Canadians. These services are critically important for new Canadians if they are to realize their potential rather than be relegated to low wage and marginalized employment. Recognizing foreign credentials could also assist with our current medicare crisis.

## **Immigration - the Provincial Role**

The sands are shifting with respect to immigration policy. Although Ottawa retains responsibility for refugees, the selection of immigrants is quietly being devolved to provincial responsibility. This new reality should give us considerable pause. All provinces except Ontario now have an agreement with Ottawa. What schemes will be undertaken by provinces thrust into competition with each other for what their current governments view to be “the best and brightest the world has to offer”. What happens when reactionary governments play to our post 9/11 emotions with a call to keep out people who pose a “security risk”, barely disguising their own racist views of much of the world’s peoples? And what happens to family reunification? What happens to the poorer men and women around the world who have no access to skills training? Perhaps the Ontario Tory government in a pre-election bid for its own immigration agreement said it all when it advocated a “first priority to fully-trained medical professionals, business investors and skilled workers”. Our country would be a very different place today if this narrow market-based measuring stick had been used in the past. We would have more doctors and more idle rich, but not the hard-working men and women who came from unskilled jobs and farms to help us build this prosperous country. A battle looms on this front.

## **Terrorism Laws and Immigrants and Refugees**

There are most certainly new considerations in a post-September 11, 2001 world. However, we cannot let our judgment become clouded. We particularly cannot abandon our place as a humanitarian country with relatively progressive immigration and refugee policies.

In the aftermath of September 11, there are those who would seek to characterize Canada's immigration and refugee system as riddled with holes for would-be criminals or terrorists. When these voices become louder and go unchallenged, immigrants and refugees, particularly those with Middle Eastern and south Asian backgrounds, end up in jail or deported under terrorism laws without due process.

This is contrary to our justice system which is based on the accused having a right to fair trial. It puts lives of legitimate refugees at risk.

## **Solidarity and Diversity**

---

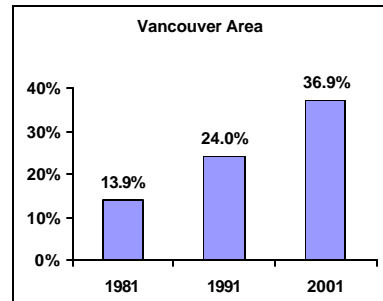
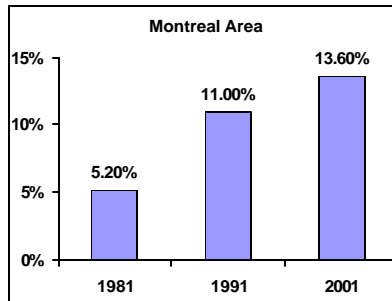
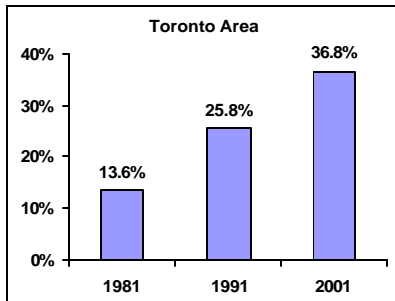
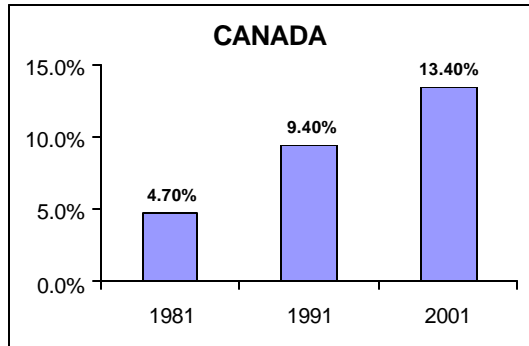
As workplaces increasingly reflect the changing face of our society, so too will the CAW.

The 2001 Census takes a snapshot of those changes. The census is an important source of information and can be invaluable in support of our locals and community organizing efforts.

---

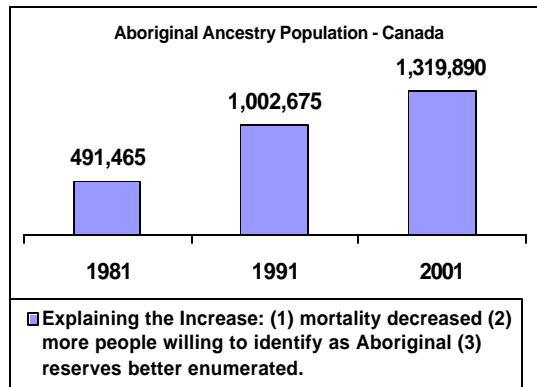
**Visible Minority % of Population 1981 – 2001**

The census survey found that there are 4 million Canadians who identify as workers of colour, comprising 13.4 % of the population of this country. This compares with 1.1 million workers of colour and only 4.7 % of Canadians in 1981. The census also found that there are 1.3 million Canadians who are aboriginal, an increase of 22 % since 1981.



These trends are evident in the CAW-Canada's organizing drives. Newly organized units are bringing large numbers of workers of colour to the union, many of them recent immigrants to Canada. The 2001 Census found that 5.4 million Canadians (comprising 18.4 % of the population) were foreign-born. Half of all immigrants to Canada speak neither English nor French.

Ninety-four percent (94%) of all immigrants to Canada settle in our largest cities – Toronto, Vancouver, and Montreal. Recognizing and embracing this diversity will make our union stronger. Our policies and structure must continue their evolution so as to reflect the changing face of our membership and our society.



**Challenges Ahead of Us**

Now, as the membership of our union evolves further, a sign of a healthy movement, we must renew our commitment to the changes that will allow us to continue to reflect that changing membership.

Aboriginal women and women of colour in particular struggle to play a meaningful role as members of our union and as leadership. Although many of our newly organized or merged units have brought large numbers of women of colour into our ranks, they remain largely under-represented in the leadership.

Aboriginal women and women of colour are at a point in history where their struggles must be authenticated. They, as with other equity-seeking groups, know and can articulate their needs best. As a union, we must work enthusiastically to include and support aboriginal women and women of colour and to encourage their active participation in the life of our union and the labour movement at large.

We have fought for equality so that all of our members can claim their rightful place in society. We want to continue to work to overcome the barriers to full participation in our workplaces and in our communities. And when governments systematically strip our rights by revoking equity laws and dismantling human rights commissions - attacks that affect workers of colour and aboriginal workers significantly more than others - we are reminded of the importance of joining with other equity-seeking organizations in that fight for equality and justice.

## Organizing

As the 2001 statistics indicate, the proportion of workers of colour is expected to grow rapidly within the Canadian workforce in the coming years. To continue to be a strong and vibrant movement, our union must focus our energies in organizing these unorganized workers. The CAW must demonstrate our commitment to equality and develop strategies to address their needs.

Recognizing the importance of including all groups within our union structures builds a stronger union and ultimately takes us back to the basics of what the union is all about, solidarity. We need to continuously review our structures and practices to encourage the meaningful participation of workers of colour and aboriginal workers in all of the union's activities and decision-making structures.

---

*"The CAW has taken many steps over the years to eliminate racism from our workplaces, our union, our communities, and around the globe. Our union, our leadership and our members have made progress towards greater justice and equality for all. But much remains to be done.*

*Each of us has an important role to play in this struggle. It's critical as trade unionists we lead by example and take a proactive approach to building a brighter and more equitable society for all. The keys to eliminating racism are education, courage and action. I encourage you to think about this pressing problem and to become part of the solution we should all be seeking."*

*Buzz Hargrove, CAW President  
International Day for the Elimination of  
Racial Discrimination, March 21, 2003*

---



# Recommendations

## Education

- The CAW-Canada work towards deepening its anti-racism analysis in all educational courses.
- Continue a commitment to human rights training which includes a cost-sharing arrangement with locals whose leadership participates in the union's forty-hour human rights training program.
- Encourage local union leadership to make every effort to participate in human rights training within six months of being elected.
- In recognition of the benefits that diversity offers, the union will encourage increased participation of aboriginal/workers of colour in educational programs and commit to increasing the number and utilization of aboriginal/workers of colour facilitators.

## Research, Data and Policy Development

- All research and policy development will work towards deepening its anti-racism analysis.
- Monitor the demographic shifts that are re-shaping our workplaces and communities in the 21st century. This information will be critical for us in understanding our growing diversity and strengthen us as a union.

## Local Unions

- Since our 1991 Convention, some locals have made special efforts to ensure that there is at least one woman/worker of colour/aboriginal person on the local executive.
- Encourage locals to ensure that their executive is reflective of the membership, if necessary by adding additional seat(s) on their executive board.
- Locals to encourage aboriginal/workers of colour members to run as convention/council delegates.

## Aboriginal Women and Women of Colour

- The CAW-Canada develop strategies to encourage more women of colour and aboriginal women to play an active role in our union.
- Increased activism will assist in breaking down the additional barriers that are faced by women of colour and aboriginal women. Local union support for the increased representation of women of colour and aboriginal women in our educational programs and conferences is critical, as are other measures that help raise the general comfort level of aboriginal women and women of colour.

## Organizing

- The CAW-Canada to develop a strategy to re-double the union's efforts to organize among new Canadians working in the country's large urban centres. This focus is crucial given the already evident increase in immigration and the studies that point to its expansion in the coming years. As part of this strategy, we must continue to use organizers who reflect the workers we are trying to bring into our union. After all is said and done, these new workers are a key to the future of our union.

## Council Committees

- Council committees will continue to seek to have aboriginals/workers of colour representation.
- Encourage locals to submit the names of aboriginals/workers of colour to serve on different committees.

## National Union

- The CAW-Canada support a living wage campaign that would significantly increase the minimum wage across Canada and require annual adjustments in this important employment standard. The campaign would focus on the large urban areas where approximately 80% of all Canadians now live, including the majority of workers of colour.
- The CAW-Canada endeavour to extend the Big Three auto sector contract commitments to literacy and basic skills programs (e.g. B.E.S.T) into more regions of the country and other sectors of the economy. There remains a critical need for such programs, especially among members whose formal education was short-changed for one reason or another.
- The CAW-Canada campaign to outlaw employment and temp agencies which are provoking a rampant increase in "legal" job ghettoes of poorly-paid, precarious work with minimal benefits and few employment rights. The overwhelming number of workers in these jobs are workers of colour.
- The CAW-Canada continue to reflect affirmative action seen on the National Executive Board represented by aboriginals/workers of colour.
- Continue efforts to have national staff and national coordinators reflective of aboriginal/workers of colour membership.
- The CAW-Canada publish a new 2003 policy statement that reviews the achievements, commitments, policies and programs that have made the union a long-time leader in the struggle for workers' human rights.

## Conclusion

Union structures that include 'diverse representation' benefit from additional skills, different abilities, and access to new networks and communities, new ideas and different perspectives. It makes the union 'a more vital organization, more accessible' to its current membership and more appealing to the 70% of workers in Canada who are not currently organized - many of them women, aboriginal people, and people of colour.

Building the union is an ongoing process. To sustain our union's earlier vision, including the policies coming out of the 1991 convention, we must continue and renew our commitments. They will become the catalysts for further change – and a source of pride for our union.

rd:dn:opeiu343