

Racial Inequality in Access to Work and Incomes

Big Changes

Canada's changing population, immigration, and labour force

Canada's population is dramatically changing as a result of increasing levels of immigration. Significantly, many of these newcomers to Canada are people of colour.

- Canada welcomed an annual average of close to 200,000 new immigrants and refugees over the 1990's;
- Immigration accounted for more than 50% of population growth between 1991 and 1996;
- Immigration accounted for 70% of the growth in the labour force, over the same period;
- Over 75% of new immigrants in the 1980's and 1990's came from what is called the 'Third World'; and
- The 2001 Canadian Census data, based on individuals self-identifying, found Visible Minorities make up 13.4% of the Canadian population while immigrants accounted for 18.4%. Those figures are projected to rise to 20% and 25%, respectively, by 2015.

Social Exclusion

We are seeing increased levels of 'social exclusion' of people from non-European backgrounds (people of colour or also known as 'racialized immigrants'). Social exclusion is defined as:

exclusion from participating in civil society through legal sanction and other

institutional mechanisms; the denial of access to social goods (health care, education, housing) and economic exclusion.

In the Labour Force

- The fastest growing forms of work are non-standard jobs such as contract, temporary, part-time, piece meal, shift work, or self-employment - there are fewer good jobs;
- There is an over representation of people of colour in low-income sectors and occupations;
- Proportion of income from government transfers fell from 19% in 1995 to 11% in 1998; and
- In 1998, racialized immigrants with university education experienced 10.4% unemployment rate compared to 6.6% for non-racialized immigrants and 4.2% for non-racialized Canadian born - the rate for racialized Canadian born was 6.3%.

The Racialization of Poverty

- Throughout the 1990's, racialized group members and new immigrants were twice as likely as other Canadians to live in poverty;
- The rate for racialized children under six years of age living in low income families was 45% - almost twice the overall figure of 26% for all children living in Canada (1995); and
- In 1998, the annual wages and salaries of recent immigrants were one-third less than those of other Canadians.

Racializing Crime

After the terrorist attack of September 11th, 2001, national security has led to racial profiling and targeting of groups in the workplace and in the community – most notably Muslims, Arabs, West Asians, and South Asians;

- There also has been an increase in deportations and attacks on people of Muslim, Arab, and Asian background;
- Racialized groups, especially those from low-income and marginal communities, bear the brunt of the law and order agenda; and
- Discrimination in the criminal justice system has led to higher levels of incarceration of racialized youth.

Segregated Neighbourhoods in Urban Canada

- There is a concentration of poverty or residential segregation intensifying along racial lines.

Social Exclusion and Health

- Discrimination in the health care system is often characterized by language barriers; lack of cultural sensitivity, absence of cultural competencies, barriers to access of health services, and inadequate funding for community health services.

Policy and Organizational Responses

The labour movement must increasingly commit itself to:

- Involvement in coalition building and community mobilization;
- A renewed commitment to organizing the unorganized, especially in those workplaces made up predominantly of racialized immigrants;
- A continued lobby for employment equity legislation in all Canadian jurisdictions;
- A lobby of governments in Canada to more readily recognize the work and education credentials of new immigrant workers;
- Better forms of democratic representation to ensure that racialized immigrants can participate in our political process;
- Campaigning for higher minimum wage levels; and
- Lobby for public universal child care.

The contents of this Fact Sheet are based on a presentation by Grace-Edward Galabuzi to the National Union's 2003 Equality Leadership School. Grace-Edward is a political scientist at York University and author of Canada's Creeping Economic Apartheid.

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