

## Policy on Racial Justice

November 2014

The trade union movement was built by working people determined to bring fairness to workplaces and to our society at large. Our greatest progress has come when we have understood the importance of combating discrimination and uniting all workers – immigrants, Canadian-born, and Aboriginal peoples; whites and workers of colour; women and men; workers who come from all religious denominations and speak all different languages.

Today, Unifor continues that tradition and is committed to using our bargaining power, people power, and political power to bring about racial justice.

What do we mean by racial justice?

Racial justice means much more than a simple notion of equality. Racial justice takes into account the history of unequal relations in Canada and seeks to challenge ongoing patterns of discrimination, inequality and systemic racism.

Canada is a settler society, built on Aboriginal land and resources. Some of the lands remain unceded territory. The current approach to resource extraction makes it clear that colonialism is not part of our past, it is, in fact, ongoing.

Canada is also a country of immigrants – our immigration policies have been based on the capitalist class' need for workers. Immigration policy has always been race and class-based – from who was granted farm land, to who was forced to work the land as indentured labourers, to who was brought in to build the railroad but denied full citizenship rights, to who was interned during the 1st and 2nd wars and had their homes and property stolen, to who is kept out of Canada even today. What we see in Canada these days with the rise of temporary migrant worker programs is not a departure from past practice, it is part of an historical pattern of economic racism and injustice.

What would racial justice look like?

Racial justice would mean that indigenous people and people of colour in Canada would have both equality of opportunity, as well as equality of outcome (in other words, wages and access to decent jobs would be proportionate to the rest of the population) . There would be no race-based 'job ghettos' and no racial harassment. The economic clout and position of all people would be equal. Unionization rates for workers of colour and indigenous workers would be equal to the national average. In terms of social equality, racial justice would mean access to decent, affordable housing, and it would mean

school curriculum that reflected not only the voices of first peoples, immigrants and people of colour, but a truer accounting of Canadian history. Racial justice would mean that there was no environmental dumping in poor, racialized neighbourhoods, no pollution of Aboriginal hunting and fishing territory, and clean drinking water and food security for all. Racial justice would tie economic progress to the principle of 'seven generations' and mean no harm to Mother Earth. Racial justice at the political level would go beyond the limits of the residential school inquiry and basic government apologies for racist internments, the head tax and racist immigration policies that excluded people from many regions of the world, most notably South Asia. Instead, racial justice would include self-government for First Nations, Inuit and Métis; it would include full equal participation at all levels of government by people of colour. Racial justice would include fair immigration, refugee, and settlement policies that don't discriminate against working-class people of colour and women. Racial justice would end poverty for our children and bring peace to our elders. Racial justice would mean that no group is advantaged at the expense of another. It would mean a sharing of power and a sharing of resources.

How do employers benefit from racial injustice?

- First and foremost employers benefit by creating and exploiting a whole class of contract, temporary precarious workers, the majority of whom are women, workers of colour, and new immigrants.
- Second, employers benefit by carrying on with the "Canadian tradition" of importing temporary migrant workers and then treating them as second-class citizens denying their basic labour and human rights, threatening them with deportation. These workers are almost always workers of colour.
- Third, employers benefit through keeping the minimum wage low.
- Fourth, employers benefit by lobbying against a rise in social assistance rates and by convincing governments to make it harder and harder for workers to access their unemployment insurance money – thus effectively ensuring that people are desperate enough to stay in, or take any job no matter the working conditions.

These measures affect all workers, but especially workers in low wage jobs – the majority of whom are workers of colour, indigenous people, immigrants and women.

What are the roles and responsibilities of unions in the struggle for racial justice?

Our union has successfully negotiated seniority provisions, pay structures, and protective language that prevents employers from discriminating against workers on the basis of race.

And yet, the Canadian job market continues to be racially segregated – and this will continue if our fight for equality doesn't include demands for employment equity, for fair and full immigration rights, for acknowledgement of foreign credentials, for an end to bogus "Canadian experience" requirements, for Aboriginal self-government, for better labour laws that actually make it possible for workers to join unions.

There is work to be done. Work to create a fairer immigration system. Work to demand an inquest into missing and murdered Aboriginal women. Work to increase minimum wage across the country. Work to enforce our anti-harassment policies. Work to get employment equity legislated and implemented. Work to negotiate language training and on-the-job training. Work to support our allies who are taking the lead on Aboriginal justice, on justice for migrant workers, on criminal justice reform. Work to support our co-workers who subsist on temporary contract work. Work to build our own union. To make sure that at every level workers of colour and Indigenous workers are part of the leadership of our union – locally, regionally and nationally. Workers of colour and indigenous workers in Unifor come together as United Workers of Diversity. Regional committees are leading the way on the struggle for racial justice.

Part of the work ahead of us requires recognizing that racism is a major problem in Canada, and a major issue for unions. If we do not deal with racism, it will continue to divide the working class. It is the major tool of capitalism and imperialism. Unions that do not deal with racism and don't deliberately address economic injustice based on race risk becoming irrelevant. Statistics Canada estimates racialized groups will make up a third of Canada's population — one in three Canadians — by 2031. At Unifor it is absolutely critical that we put an anti-racist lens and a diversity lens on every campaign and organizing drive we undertake, every round of negotiations we participate in, and every union election we run.

Challenging bigotry and discrimination takes leadership, courage, and learning. Our union is strong. We can be strengthened by our diversity – if we make the most of it. We can be a mighty force for racial justice.

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