



THE HARPER RECORD

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Conservative Colours

The Harper Conservatives and the colour-coding of Canada

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WHILE MAINSTREAM POLITICAL parties are unlikely to be consciously and overtly racist in the vein of white supremacist organizations, subtle and nuanced forms of racism do persist within Canadian institutions, including political parties. Some of the most insidious types of racism are the ones that are unconscious, unintended, or systemic in nature. This form of racism is often the result of individuals and/or organizations using their power and privilege in unconscious or unintended ways, but with negative impacts on racialized individuals and communities. The intention is not the issue, but the impact is. Indeed, the resurgence of colonialist discourse and public policy revives a debate about the true colour of the “new” Conservative government.

In the late 1980s, the Reform party was seen as being extremist and associated with white supremacists and the far-right after numerous Reform Members of Parliament and election candidates repeatedly made remarks that were considered xenophobic, homophobic, and sexist.¹ In addition, well-known racists such as Wolfgang Droege, Al Overfield, and others were found to play significant roles in the party as it attempted to gain ground in Ontario.²

When the *Toronto Sun* ran an article in late February 1992 reporting that the Reform party had been infiltrated by the Heritage Front, Reform party executive members scrambled to distance their party and leader

Preston Manning from these extremists.³ Nonetheless, the image of intolerance continued to plague the party's fortunes, and was considered a major factor in its subsequent rebirth as the Canadian Alliance.

The contemporary Conservative party has made significant strides to shed its connections to the Reform party and some of its more unsavory right-wing characters, but the question of whether some of the less overt manifestations of racism still exist must be addressed.

The Lebanon evacuation

In summer 2006, the Middle East erupted into another violent conflict involving Israel and Lebanon. As many as 50,000 Canadian citizens, many with Lebanese ancestry or familial ties, were stranded in the midst of the battle. Others, including UN Observers (a.k.a. Canadian Peacekeepers) Major Hess-von Kruedener and Lieutenant Tom Farkash, were killed. Montrealer Hassan El Akhras lost 12 family members during an Israeli air strike in the south Lebanese village of Aitaroun.⁴

The Conservative government faced embarrassment and stinging criticism for its delay in mounting an evacuation of what eventually amounted to over 13,000 Canadians.⁵

The criticism softened somewhat when Harper, returning from a G-8 meeting in Paris, redirected his flight to land in Cyprus so that he could pick up about 100 Canadians evacuated from Lebanon. Even though thousands were struggling to get home at the time, Harper's stop-and-scoop action for just 100 stranded citizens garnered him front page news coverage.⁶

Still, the conflict generated a national debate about the responsibility of the Canadian government for those with dual citizenship residing (temporarily or permanently) or vacationing abroad.

Immigration critics decried the costs of the evacuation, which by December 2006 was estimated to have cost \$94 million.⁷ Others raised questions about the "loyalty" to Canada of these "passport holders" (as the C.D. Howe Institute referred to them).⁸ Monte Solberg, the Minister of Immigration, narrowed the issue to a particular group and stereotyped them when he singled out those who live abroad for many years and re-

turn to use health care and social benefits.⁹ In November 2006, speaking to a House Committee on Immigration, Solberg said the Lebanon event raised questions about the rights of citizens who hold dual citizenship and don't live in the country. He went so far as to describe the situation this way, "Somebody's absent, isn't paying taxes, but is going to be using our social programs down the road; I think Canadians would feel that that is unfair."¹⁰ It apparently mattered little to Solberg that dual citizens of Canada are *de facto* also Canadians.

The picture Solberg carelessly painted used a "them" and "us" dynamic, "them" being certain people who have little attachment to Canada, but all too eager to cash in on the benefits of the Canadian passport. But virtually no mention was made by Conservatives or other critics of our citizenship policy about Canadians like Wayne Gretzky, Celine Dion, Keifer Sutherland, or others who similarly live abroad for extended periods while maintaining their Canadian citizenship status. No criticism is aimed at celebrities like these who are living abroad, yet there is criticism aimed at "foreign born" Canadians. This is where unintentional but hurtful racism can be found.

One of Canada's 41 MPs born in other countries, Jim Karygiannis, responded to the blunt picture that Solberg was painting:

This is a Conservative government trying to pit one Canadian against another Canadian in order to fulfill their Reform legacy of saying to the rednecks of this country that first and foremost we don't like the immigrants.¹¹

It is noteworthy that, in other moments of crisis, the issue of rights and obligations of citizens, or questions about the costs borne by the Canadian government to repatriate citizens, generated no similar debate. For example, 500 Canadians were evacuated from Southeast Asia in the aftermath of the 2004 tsunami; 200 Canadians were evacuated from Cote d'Ivoire when a crisis erupted in West Africa in 2005; hundreds of Canadians were evacuated from the Cayman Islands and Haiti in 2004; and thousands of Canadians were flown out of China after the Tiananmen Square massacre in 1989. In none of those situations was there any hand-wringing or concern expressed about who is a truly loyal or deserving Canadian citizen and what obligations the government has

for those living/touring abroad, much less a debate fuelled and framed by a governing political party in the way the Conservatives framed the Lebanon evacuation of Canadian citizens.¹²

Admittedly, this was the largest evacuation of Canadians abroad, but the colour-coded tenor and impact of the debate fomented by the Conservatives must be considered. The Conservative party point of departure for the post-Lebanon evacuation policy review was set against a discourse of who is a loyal or true Canadian and if Canada should maintain dual citizenship status. This focus was short-sighted and close to being misanthropic.

For a government so openly focused on the “bottom line,” it is significant that neither Stephen Harper nor his ministers ever considered the economic, social, and cultural benefits of having a citizen-based unofficial ambassadorial pool residing in other countries.

On immigrants and photo-ops

During the election hustle of 2006, Stephen Harper took centre stage at a photo-op in Mississauga, Ontario, strategically flanked by a multicultural array of Conservative party candidates. Most striking about the picture was how colourful the candidates appeared. Given the high density of people of colour living in this major urban centre, such a photo should not have been a surprise. But it was striking simply because such photos are rarely seen, unfortunately, except when political parties are preparing fund-raising flyers or seeking to win seats in densely multicultural ridings.¹³

Harper specifically used the occasion and the backdrop to make an announcement significant to Canada’s immigrant communities. “Immigrants and their families should be allowed to keep more of their own money in their pockets to start a new life in Canada,” Harper said.¹⁴ If elected, he promised his government would halve the \$975 landing fee charged to new immigrants, and over time would work to reduce the fee “as the fiscal situation allows.”¹⁵

But before this carefully staged and colourfully flanked photo was taken in Mississauga, Harper’s views on immigration were a matter of public record.

Harper, it must be remembered, was a key architect of the Reform party's immigration policies that had the result of attracting members of the white rights Heritage Front to the Reform party.¹⁶ Harper's record on immigration and race issues was summarized in a 2004 article published in *Now Magazine*:

- A Conservatives' interim policy document from 2004 refers to the need to attract immigrants who can best integrate into the "Canadian fabric"... read mostly white, mostly Europeans.
- Harper refused to revoke the nomination of Markham Unionville Conservative candidate Joe Li for referring to immigrants as "garbage."
- In Harper's own words: "West of Winnipeg, the ridings the Liberals hold are dominated by people who are either recent Asian immigrants or recent migrants from eastern Canada: people who live in ghettos, and who are not integrated into Western Canadian society."¹⁷

Earlier still, *Report News magazine* published the full transcript of a Q & A interview with Harper. Here are two excerpts exposing Harper's views on immigration, refugees, and Canadian culture.

Q: "Is there such a thing as Canadian culture?"

A: "Yes, in a very loose sense. But I think that Canadian culture is complex. It consists of regional cultures within Canada, regional cultures that cross borders with the U.S. We're part of a worldwide *Anglo-American culture and a worldwide Francophone culture* in the case of Québec. *We're part of a broader Western culture, Christian or post-Christian*, and there is a continental culture. There is a Canadian culture that is in some ways unique to Canada, but I don't think Canadian culture coincides neatly with borders."

Q: "What's your view on immigration?"

A: "I'm pro-immigration in principle. I think the biggest concern in the immigration system right now is the refugee determination process which has become such a boondoggle. It not only threatens the

integrity of the immigration system, *it threatens national security*. I've been saying for years that the most important thing is that this country makes its own immigration selection and that this policy be consistent with Canadians' views. A refugee determination system that has effectively created a back door immigration stream that bypasses legal channels is unacceptable. And we need to tighten that system. But I want to make it very clear: I don't want it to be said that I'm anti-immigration. I'm very supportive of [a] significant [level of] immigration and always have been." [Emphasis added.]¹⁸

Harper's use of language and reference to refugees and national security warrants further examination. Consider that a significant proportion of those admitted to Canada under our refugee determination processes had been, among francophones, Algerians, Moroccans and Haitians; and, among the larger anglo- or allophone group, Central Americans, Palestinians, South Asians (especially Sri Lankan Tamils), and Africans (among them a substantial number of Somalis).¹⁹

Harper's comments, in a post-9/11 context, suggest that these refugees are the people who could threaten "national security." Given that these source countries are largely non-white and non-Christian, it implies a profile of who, by virtue of colour and/or religion, is a security risk. Those Canadians with whose views Harper thinks refugee policy should be made consistent are presumably people of European origin, and Judeo/Christian faiths. The fact that growing numbers of Canadians don't fit this profile is perhaps the greater concern.

Changing demographics in Canada

Statistics Canada census reports have for at least two decades revealed dramatic changes in Canada's links to an Anglo-Franco/Christian history. In 1986, the census revealed that nearly 16 million Canadians had roots other than British or French. Not a surprise, really, given that since the 1970s our immigration policy focused on largely racialized immigrants from the global South. Back then, 70% of new Canadians hailed from Asia, Latin America, and the West Indies.²⁰

From 1997 to 2006, Citizenship and Immigration Canada's (CIC) annual overview of immigration numbers, plus the 2001 and 2006 census data, showed clearly that increasingly Canada's citizens are of an ethnic origin *other* than British, French, or native-born Canadian. The 2006 Census showed that 83.9% of the immigrants who arrived between 2001–06 were born in regions other than Europe.

In March 2007, Statistics Canada reported that not only is immigration currently fuelling two-thirds of our population growth, but also that projections show immigrants are likely to be the primary source of population gains by 2030.²¹ CIC's annual reports to Parliament also regularly point out that new Canadians increasingly originate from other than Anglo-Euro or Christian countries. The 2007 CIC report cited that 80% of immigrants today come from the *Middle East, Asia, and the Pacific regions*.

In short, the vast majority of immigrants who for the last two decades have been populating the country and defining its culture, are neither Anglo-Euro nor likely Christian in their traditional context. Yet Harper's public comments, cited above, demonstrate a profound failure — or perhaps a steadfast refusal — to grasp the cultural, religious, and immigration-related policy impacts of such a significant demographic shift — a change that has been in full swing since the 1970s.

Conservatives and their electoral base

For the last two decades, roughly half of the immigrant population has gravitated to three major urban centres: Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver. Today, nearly 80% of newcomers opt to settle in one of these cities.²² Only recently is there evidence of Harper and the Conservatives beginning to understand the changing voting patterns of this portion of the immigrant electorate. Indeed, Conservatives won 123 seats in the 2006 federal election, but failed to win any in major urban centres such as Toronto, Vancouver, and Montreal.

In mid-October 2007, the *Globe and Mail* reported that the Conservative party had devised a strategy to secure votes from select ethnic and religious communities in multicultural ridings in the next federal election. The strategy was called *Building Bridges with Ethnic*

Communities, and pictured the Conservatives, rather than the Liberals, as the party of electoral choice in specific ridings. The document showed the Conservatives had ruled out gaining the favour of all ethnic groups, acknowledging that at least a fifth were not “accessible” to the party, but claimed that nearly 80% of “visible minorities” were “accessible to the Conservatives.”

The strategy to turn some colour-coded ridings from red to blue involved “targeted mailings, one-to-one meetings at a major ethnic event involving key members of the Conservatives outreach team, and the creation of large databases of immigrants and newcomers.”²³

Identifying the voting patterns of ethno-cultural and racialized communities is only one part of the Conservatives’ strategy. Party insiders concede they must also establish credibility with this crucial voting block if they are to garner the votes they need. A top Conservative insider spelled out why Conservatives are now targeting urban ethnic ridings in this election:

Look at the traditional voting patterns. They [ethnic minorities] have been voting for the Liberals for years. So I don’t know if they’re going to change their vote right away. The problem with most of these minorities has been for the longest time that they all say that they like what the Conservatives are saying, they agree with what Conservatives are saying, but then, guess what, at election time, they still vote Liberal.²⁴

Aside from the off-putting use of identifiers like “they” and citing minorities as “problematic,” the party insider concedes that getting this community to actually vote for the Conservatives will take some serious work — work the Conservatives have been undertaking with diligence. They initiated the Air India Inquiry²⁵ and addressed the long-standing demand for redress of the infamous Chinese Head Tax.²⁶

Canada’s immigrant communities remain skeptical, however, because of the Conservative record. For example, the Conservative party’s *Building Bridges* training materials used at the March 2008 “political training conference” took credit for spending over \$50 million on *Canada’s Action Plan Against Racism*, but ignored the fact that it was the Liberals who established the *Action Plan* and budget allocation in March 2005²⁷ as a direct outcome of the advocacy of anti-racist activ-

ists who were part of the *UN World Conference Against Racism, Racial discrimination, Xenophobia, and Related Intolerances* held in Durban in 2001.²⁸

Furthermore, when Jason Kenny announced that Canada would withdraw from the upcoming UN Durban Review Conference, he undermined the Conservatives' credibility in many quarters. The Review Conference plans to assess the progress of member countries in fighting racism. Kenny made the announcement without public consultation. The withdrawal from the UN conference and credit-taking for the *Action Plan Against Racism* have seriously undermined the Conservative *Building Bridges* initiatives.

International education and credentials

On May 12, 2006, Harper announced his government would implement a number of initiatives to address concerns of immigrants in Canada. One of these announcements was a promise of more than \$300 million of additional federal funding, to be allocated over two years to aid in the settlement of newcomers. In addition, the government's budget included allocations to improve the assessment and recognition of foreign credentials in order to help newcomers achieve their full potential in Canada.

Harper said at that time: "The goal for all of us will be to get those who are trained and ready to work in their fields of expertise into the workforce more quickly."

The Canadian Labour Congress wrote to Immigration Minister Monte Solberg on September 12, 2006, asking what the government's time-line was to meet the promises Harper had made.²⁹ These answers are still not forthcoming.

Instead, a number of other changes have contradicted the goal of getting immigrants into the workforce more quickly. Diane Finley, Minister for Human Resources and Social Development Canada (HRSDC), made a significant public announcement in March 2006 at the Public Policy Forum Conference addressing the theme of integrating immigrants into the workforce. Finley reminded the audience of the Conservative electoral platform's "commitment to create a *Canadian Agency for*

Assessment and Recognition of Credentials, to provide pre-assessment of international credentials and experience.”³⁰ Finley went on to say:

I am committed to working with my provincial and territorial colleagues and all of you to ensure foreign-trained professionals [*read as racialized individuals*] get properly trained and meet Canadian standards so they can start working here quickly.³¹

Finley gave voice to a dominant-culture assumption that internationally-trained individuals don't meet Canadian standards and that assurances must be in place for “proper training” — subtle racism on two fronts. First, the Minister's persistent use of the term “foreign-trained” rather than “internationally-trained” perpetuates notions of being alien, or “other,” and certainly racialized. Secondly, like Harper, Finley failed to understand that, increasingly, newcomers to Canada bring with them a level of education that matches and often exceeds that of the general population.

Statistics Canada data show that, according to 2006 Census numbers, nearly one-third of immigrants are university graduates, compared with 23% of the general working-age population. Furthermore, there has been a huge jump in the qualifications of the newest arrivals; more than half of those who came between 2001 and 2006 hold university degrees. Immigrants now account for close to half of all those in Canada who hold a PhD, and 40% of those have Masters degrees.³² And keep in mind that 80% of immigrants are coming from colourful countries.

Finley prefaced her comments by saying that the issue is complex and that the federal government's role was limited, given that the vast majority of professional regulated occupations fall under provincial/territorial jurisdictions. Her remarks suggested the Conservatives were stepping away from their earlier electoral commitments to create an agency that would facilitate the assessment and recognition of immigrants' credentials.

When the Conservatives did finally create an agency, its name — the Foreign Credentials Referral Office (FCRO) — reinforced the Conservatives' withdrawal from the issue. Although they had promised an \$18 million investment in an agency that would assess and *recognize* international credentials,³³ Harper's 2007 budget offered only an

annual contribution of \$6.4 million to create the FCRO. Take note of the reduced dollar amount and the change in language of the agency. Highly credentialed newcomers are knocking on what they thought was an \$18 million dollar rapid-entry door to the workforce, when in fact the FCRO simply refers them to one or more of the existing 400 professional regulatory doors that assess their credentials.

Canada's labour force is already hugely dependent on immigration, and this is expected to become the primary source of both net labour force and population growth in the very near future. The Harper government's failure to ensure that highly-credentialed newcomers are working at good jobs commensurate with their abilities is nothing short of colour-coded economic folly for the nation.

Two decades of data show that immigrants persistently earn less and are congregated in occupations that do not utilize their credentials and international work experience.³⁴ More recently, Statistics Canada has found that most immigrants aged 25–54 had unemployment rates higher than the 4.9% rate of their Canadian-born counterparts.³⁵ Another Statistics Canada study of economic gains over the 25-year period (1980 to 2005) showed that immigrants are twice as likely to earn significantly less than their Canadian-born age peers, despite being more credentialed. A recent male immigrant with a university degree earns 48% of what his Canadian-born counterpart gets.³⁶ Furthermore, it takes at least 10 years for this cohort to reach wage parity with their Canadian-born counterparts.³⁷

As we near the point where immigrants will account for nearly all of Canada's population growth, their income levels are an important determinant for all Canadians. Apparently even the chief economist at the TD Financial Group recognizes the implications of this reality: "If we let immigrants fall behind, all of Canada will join them."

Despite this clarion call to change fundamentally Canada's immigration settlement and workforce integration patterns, Budget 2007 directed more than \$84 million into Canada's infamous Temporary Foreign Worker Program (TFWP) — an amount that was 12 times the meagre \$6.4 million he budgeted for a flaccid FCRO.³⁸

Solving a labour shortage or creating a disposable workforce?

Canada's TFWP, historically, was a small program enabling employers (principally in the agricultural/horticultural sector) to import workers for seasonal employment in Canada. However, under Harper, this program has undergone massive changes, resulting in a huge increase in the numbers of guest workers. In 2003, the total number of guest workers in the country was just over 110,000, and by 2007 the number jumped to over 200,000.

After Harper's electoral win in 2006, then Immigration Minister Monte Solberg signalled the government's immigration priority by revealing that, while he had no "immediate plans to make significant changes to the overall annual target for immigration," he was committed to using "tools" like "work permits, to help meet some of the skill shortages that this country has in different sectors." Further:

If we need workers for the oil rigs in Alberta or the East Coast, for example, then we need to put our energies into making sure we get them.

The same goes for every part of the country, from Gander to Nunavut to Whitehorse, Whistler, Edmonton, and Québec City.³⁹

In short order, Canada's TFWP underwent a series of "administrative changes,"⁴⁰ all benefiting employers and enabling them to fast-track access to import labour "for any legally recognized occupation from any country."⁴¹ In equally short order, economic hot-house provinces like Alberta were soon importing more guest workers than newcomers destined to become permanent residents.⁴² None of the administrative changes were directed at ensuring these workers would be entering the Canadian workforce with strong compliance, monitoring, or enforcement mechanisms to ensure their safety or protection from exploitation.

TABLE 1 *Stock of temporary foreign workers as of December 1*

	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
Total	110,476	126,031	141,743	162,046	201,057

SOURCE CIC Immigration Overview

Many observers and advocates, including academics, the Alberta Federation of Labour, the B.C. Building and Construction Trades Council, the B.C. Government Employees Union, the Canadian Labour Congress, the United Food and Commercial Workers, faith groups, the Québec Human Rights Tribunal, and numerous advocacy groups supporting migrant workers have documented many cases of fraud, workplace abuse, labour brokers' and/or employers' exploitation. Serious injuries and fatalities on the job are also grim realities for these workers.⁴³

Although racial status data are not collected for guest workers, clearly these workers are mostly people of colour. Employers claim they can't fill the jobs guest workers undertake by using the domestic labour force. Of the top 10 source countries for guest workers, half of them host racialized populations, and in 2006 nearly 35% of the 160,000-plus guest workers came from countries where the population is racialized.

The TFWP has been likened to a re-enactment of Canada's early racist history. Instead of importing Chinese labourers to build the national railway under horrific working and social conditions and inflicting on them the notorious head tax, the TFWP now imports workers largely from the global South to build urban transport infrastructure, pick our food, labour in the service or construction industries, or tend to the elderly and young. Guest workers now fill alleged gaps in all parts of the economy, including serving Canadians coffee.

Permanent residency for a few

In the face of growing criticism of the government's expanded and employer-friendly TFWP, and perhaps aware that strategically wooing parts of the colourful ethno-racial electoral block can help shift the Conservatives from a minority to a majority hold of Parliament, Harper has made other changes in immigration policy.

Acknowledging the country's need for some guest workers to remain in Canada as permanent residents, Harper's government introduced a special path to permanent residency called the Canadian Experience Class.⁴⁴ The CEC initiative, however, only gives highly-skilled guest workers and some international students the right to apply for perma-

ment resident status. The initiative is further limited by the requirement that the applicants must demonstrate strong labour market integration. This means their employer has a key role to play in affirming or negating a guest worker's application for Canadian citizenship.

Critics of the initiative point out that not only is it unbalanced to have employers play such a prominent role in determining citizenship, it is also reminiscent of the excessive power employers held in determining the mobility rights and civil rights of workers of colour during the apartheid years in South Africa.⁴⁵

The CEC initiative is consistent with what Harper described as his preference for an "immigration selection policy that is consistent with Canadian views,"⁴⁶ or at least his view of who should be eligible to remain in Canada.⁴⁷ By this program's definition, the vast majority of guest workers entering Canada under the Conservative regime are not highly skilled...but they are racialized.

A closer examination of the program's structure and funding reveals that, in addition to the skewed balance of power granted employers and the limited scope of coverage, the initiative is so inadequately funded that fewer than 10,000 applicants were expected to be processed within the first year, and no more than 25,000 by 2013. Meanwhile, nearly a million hopeful newcomers to Canada — most of them, not surprisingly, racialized — remain waiting in the queue, in the increasingly vain hope they and their family members will be able to become Canadian citizens.

Buried amendments to the *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act*

Federal Budget 2006 also levied a \$20 million cut to a long-overdue review of the *Citizenship Act*. As the then Ministers of the Treasury Board and Finance put it, these cuts were about "trimming the fat and refocusing spending on the priorities of Canadians."⁴⁸ Which Canadians the Conservatives are prioritizing is increasingly a question equity advocates and the progressive movement at large must be prepared to define clearly.

The government quietly altered another critical Act of considerable concern to specific cultural, racialized and newcomer communities:

the *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act (IRPA)*. In Budget 2008, Harper's government introduced a series of amendments to the IRPA, but buried these changes in Bill C-50, part 6 of a 136-page "Budget implementation bill."

Rather than enable meaningful public and parliamentary debate on this Act, which plays a pivotal role in populating the country, growing the labour force and, not incidentally, building the citizenry, Harper opted to change things by legislative stealth. Without consultation or warning, the Conservatives introduced their bundled bill in mid-March. This legislation gives the Immigration Minister the power to decide who gets into Canada and who doesn't, regardless of Canada's admission criteria laid out in other legislation.

Against the very real backdrop of nearly a million people waiting for years in a growing backlog of applications for Canadian citizenship, Harper proposed to tackle the problem by changing the rules of selection and granting the Immigration Minister unprecedented powers to fast-track some classes of immigrants and discard others.

Visa officers would no longer use standardized rules to assess applicants. Instead, the Minister would determine who gets in and who does not.

"This sets a dangerous precedent for a healthy democratic system," said Naeem Noorani, publisher of *The Canadian Immigrant*.⁴⁹ Numerous immigrant settlement and refugee groups, labour and ethno-racial newcomer communities voiced strong criticism of the bill and the underhanded political process that used to muscle it through Parliament.⁵⁰ Their criticism included:

- concerns about embedding the reforms in a budget bill;
- failing to conduct meaningful and inclusive consultations prior to the development of the bill;
- granting arbitrary powers to the Immigration Minister that fail any reasonable test of transparency and accountability;
- disingenuously suggesting the changes will deal with the near million applicant backlog;

- giving priority to a process that will unfairly compete with other paths to permanent residency; and
- retaining the view of immigrants as economic units; and
- continuing to permit employers to play an unbalanced role in determining immigrants' citizenship.⁵¹

In the face of growing criticism of the bill, Harper's government allocated more than \$3 million for an advertising campaign to sell the reforms, especially in ethnic newspapers. The print versions of the ads said they were public notices, the label given to advertising supposedly aimed at providing utilitarian information about a policy change. However, critics noted the ads contained little or no detail about the policy changes, and instead simply touted the bill's anticipated but unproven benefits.⁵²

The parliamentary committee that hastily undertook to hold only a few hearings on Bill C-50 was chaired by Conservative MP Norman Doyle. The committee "concluded that part 6 of Bill C-50, the entire part on immigration, should be removed from the bill."⁵³ The government agreed to hold limited consultations on the bill, but the committee's recommendations had no substantive impact.⁵⁴ Consultations with stakeholders and interested citizens were limited to less than 30 days, and only a select number of national organizations with an interest in the issue were granted a mere two-hour consultation window scheduled for mid-August. The consultation agenda was predetermined and focused on "addressing specific labour market needs."

During the debate about the IRPA changes, immigrant and newcomer community members voiced their concern that changes could reduce the number of family class immigrants and further slow down the process for family reunifications. One critic put this way:

It is clear that, if you are fast-tracking one group, you are slow-tracking another group, which is the family class. Essentially, you are putting more emphasis on newcomers as commodities, as workers rather than as people.⁵⁵

The agenda for the summer consultations makes it clear that employers' interest in accessing short- and medium-term workers are the Conservatives' singular priority.⁵⁶ Minister Finley coyly responded to critics that the Conservative government does consider family reunifications to be a priority, with this telling quote: "And if, at a future point in time, we decide that is *the priority*, they could be fast-tracked just like any of the worker categories" [emphasis added].⁵⁷

Ethno-racial communities have good reason to be skeptical about the Conservative party's pattern of stated priorities and real world outcomes.

Security and transportation workers

Harper's record on security measures that utilize racial and religious profiling practices goes beyond security certificates and rendition programs. For example, his Transportation Minister, Lawrence Cannon, has aggressively pursued the implementation of a security clearance program for marine industry workers. The Marine Transportation Security Clearance Program (MTSC) allows for an extreme invasion into an individual's privacy. Not only is the life of the individual seeking a security clearance in order to work on Canada docks exposed to the investigations of the RCMP and members of CSIS, but so also are the lives of their spouse, their parents, their spouse's parents, ex-spouses, and other family members.

The MTSC requires workers to consent to the release of their personal information to the governments of countries that the workers may have lived in or travelled to. If consent to disclose is not given, the MTSC will not be granted and the employee will not be able to work in designated areas.

The information on the MTSC form will also be disclosed to the RCMP, to law enforcement agencies generally, to CSIS, to other governments generally, and to virtually anyone or any other institution that Transport Canada may wish to contact to investigate the employees. Further, the MTSC form states that Transport Canada may disclose personal information collected to former employers, schools, and landlords of employees to verify such information.

In addition, the MTSC process creates a mechanism whereby, with “reasonable grounds to suspect” that one of the employees poses a threat to port security, they could be removed from their job by the Minister responsible for the legislation.

In short, the level of clearance required for a person driving a forklift on a dock is just short of the top security level required by those conducting the investigations into the workers’ lives. Ironically, the Maxine Bernier-Julie Couillard controversy suggests that lesser security checks were done on Bernier’s former significant other, who apparently had access to confidential foreign affairs documents, than the rigorous checks dock workers face on Canadian ports.

This example is relevant to racialized and newcomer communities because approximately 40% of B.C. unionized marine workers have dual citizenship.⁵⁸ Tom Dufresne, President of the International Longshore Warehouse Union, bluntly points out how the profiles are developed:

[Marine workers] would have to give their hair colour, eye colour and complexion’ information — that’s code for “race.” They would have to give permission for background searches into immigration, criminal, and Royal Canadian Mounted Police records. Simply put, they’re trying to make a database to racially profile our members. They also want to politically and financially profile our members.⁵⁹

Despite the ILWU efforts to resist the implementation of the MTSC program, using the grievance procedure and legal challenges arguing violations to the Canada Labour Code, the *Federal Privacy Act*, and Canadian Charter of Rights, Harper’s government has been able to advance the program — which has been described as a “model for the marine world.”⁶⁰

Given the country’s changing face, colour and ancestry, measures which increasingly rely on profiling individuals with information such as place of birth or travel history will likely result in differential and discriminatory colour-coded treatment, all under the rubric of security.

Conclusion

Racialized, religious, immigrant/newcomer and Aboriginal communities and allies of all stripes and colour will need to consider closely the Harper record, in terms of the equity impacts for them and for all Canadians. Our collective security rests on it.