



FASTFACTS



Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives-Mb • 309-323 Portage Ave. • Winnipeg, MB • Canada R3B 2C1
 ph: (204) 927-3200 • fax: (204) 927-3201 • ccpamb@policyalternatives.ca • www.policyalternatives.ca/mb

April 27, 2006

Aboriginal People, Jobs, and the Provincial Budget

A boriginal people are under-represented in Winnipeg's labour force. While their population is growing rapidly, Aboriginal people, and especially Aboriginal youth, experience higher rates of unemployment and lower rates of labour force participation than Winnipeg's population at large. There are structural, historical and policy explanations for this phenomenon. It is important to understand these if this inequity is to be resolved.

First, Aboriginal people - especially young Aboriginal men - face a great deal of racism when they try to secure jobs. In interviews done for my recently published book, *In Their Own Voices*, Aboriginal people repeatedly related detailed stories about blatant forms of discrimination when trying to find jobs. Some young Aboriginal people - perhaps many - give up looking for work, rather than face repeated instances of racism.

But it's more than that. Aboriginal people began to come to Winnipeg from rural and northern Manitoba in the 1960s, their numbers really starting to grow in the 1970s. Most moved into Winnipeg's inner city, where housing prices were low.

By the 1960s-1970s, Winnipeg's inner city was well on the road to being 'hollowed out'. The post-war process of suburbanization saw large numbers of those who could afford to do so leaving the inner city for the suburbs. Businesses, and jobs, followed. At the same time, the process of de-industrialization

started in earnest. The kinds of jobs that people with modest educations historically secured, and which lifted them out of poverty - union jobs in meatpacking plants and factories, for example - were largely gone. They moved to the suburbs, or more frequently to low-wage zones in the US sunbelt or in El Salvador or the Philippines. As a result, just when Aboriginal people were moving into the city, and especially the inner city, the jobs were leaving.

What is more, many of the Aboriginal people arriving in the city had been badly damaged - the result of colonization. Canadians that had come to what is now western Canada, forced Aboriginal people onto reserves, eliminated their economic and political systems, subjected them to the paternalistic and often harsh control of Indian Agents and the *Indian Act*, outlawed important aspects of their spirituality and their cultures, forcibly confined their children in residential schools where they were denied the right to speak their languages, were subjected to a qualitatively inferior education, and were taught to believe that Aboriginal people were inferior and that being Aboriginal was something of which to be ashamed. Many Aboriginal people internalized these false beliefs. The damage caused was great. The pain that many Aboriginal people carry today is intense, and damaging.

So Aboriginal people began to arrive in Winnipeg's inner city in the 1960s and 1970s, badly damaged by a century of colonization, just as the jobs were



Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives-MB

leaving the inner city. This, combined with the racism they faced and continue to face, is the broad outline of an explanation for their relative under-representation in the labour force.

A part of the good news in all of this is that community-based organizations (CBOs) run by and for Aboriginal people have emerged in the past 20-25 years, especially in Winnipeg's inner city, and through hard-earned practical experience and large doses of creativity, they have designed highly-effective strategies for getting Aboriginal people into good jobs. Some of these Aboriginal CBOs - Urban Circle Training Centre, for example, and the people at Ojijiita Pimatiswin Kinamatwin who work with young Aboriginal gang members, and the folks at the Aboriginal Centre, and many others - are extremely successful in getting Aboriginal people into good jobs. So we know this is possible.

The bad news is that these highly-effective organizations are constantly scrambling for funds. Successful though they are, they are sorely under-funded, and the dollars needed to expand and replicate their operations are not nearly sufficient. We know what works; but our governments refuse to make the investments needed to deal with the issue on the scale that is needed.

Witness the latest provincial budget. The NDP government cut taxes. Again. They boasted that tax cuts since they have taken office in 1999 now amount to \$618 million per year. Their simplistic assumption is that this is a good thing.

The truth is that these tax cuts are not at all a good thing. They are exceptionally costly to Manitoba. We can't afford them. The \$618 million per year lost to tax cuts is *not* available to be invested, among other things, in the community-based organizations that we know can get Aboriginal people into good jobs. By cutting taxes again the provincial government has chosen *not* to invest in our province's future productivity, and Manitobans' future economic well-being.

The failure to make such investments is a deep disappointment. It is a failure of imagination, and perhaps of courage. It is irresponsible. We need more Aboriginal people in the labour force: a labour shortage, in at least some sectors of Winnipeg's economy, is coming; the Aboriginal

community is the only part of Manitoba's population—along with immigrants and refugees - that is growing. We will increasingly need Aboriginal people to fill Manitoba's jobs, and to maintain and build our economic health. Aboriginal people themselves have developed creative and highly effective strategies for moving more Aboriginal people into the labour force. Yet our provincial government turns its back on this hard economic reality, choosing instead to pander to the simplistic and short-sighted special pleading of those who demand more dollars in their individual pockets, by way of ever-more tax cuts.

Aboriginal people pay for this short-sightedness today, as they have for so long; we all pay for this short-sightedness tomorrow - in reduced productivity, higher costs, and lowered levels of economic well-being. Personally, I prefer to invest today in my childrens' and grandchildrens' futures, and in the futures of Aboriginal people in Manitoba. In fact, here in Manitoba, the future well-being of my family, and of the Aboriginal community, are indivisible. Taxes, and the investments in our futures that they make possible, are the means by which to build our collective futures. Why can't our governments understand this?

- Jim Silver

Jim Silver teaches Politics at the University of Winnipeg and is a Board member of the CCPA-MB. He is the author of the recently - published In Their Own Voices: Urban Aboriginal Community Development (Halifax: Fernwood Publishing, 2006).

CCPA-MB FAST FACTS

The *Fast Facts* are produced and distributed free via e-mail. They can be reproduced as an OpEd or opinion piece without obtaining further permission, provided they are not edited, and full credit is given to both the author and the source, CCPA-MB. Please contact the CCPA-MB today to begin your free subscription.

Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives-MB

309-323 Portage Avenue

Winnipeg, MB

Canada R3B 2C1

ph: (204) 927-3200 fax: (204) 927-3201

ccpamb@policyalternatives.ca

www.policyalternatives.ca

CAW 567
OTTAWA