

Fighting Racism and Building Solidarity with Migrant Communities

Increasingly, right-wing governments are coming into power around the world. Populist-sounding promises of working 'for the people' result in austerity, cuts to public services and social programs, climate inaction, and attacks on organized labour and workers' rights. As we have seen in recent provincial elections in Ontario, Quebec and Alberta, Canada is not immune to this trend.

These new political leaders know that the current economic system is failing workers and families. Many workers cannot find stable jobs, wages are stagnant, the cost of living is rising, and a dignified retirement is further out of reach. One of the primary strategies used by right-wing conservatives to gain support has been through deceiving and dividing working-class communities.

Rather than targeting those with wealth and power (including multinational corporations), politicians misdirect blame for social and economic problems onto immigrants and refugees. This is leading to increased racism and attacks on migrants and people of colour. In Canada, there are almost 300 white supremacist, anti-immigrant, and anti-Muslim groups organizing, and hate crimes increased by 47% in 2017.

As the 2019 Federal election approaches, many right-wing politicians will use lies to make working people turn against our co-workers and members of our community. We need to learn the facts and challenge these myths so that we can prevent this attack on our communities. If we are united, we will win and build an economy and society that works for us all.



LIE:

Immigrants take jobs from Canadians and drive down wages



TRUTH:

The rich are getting richer by exploiting workers and lowering all our wages

Despite decades of high worker productivity and low unemployment rates, average hourly wages for Canadian workers have remained nearly stagnant for 40 years. Yet, Canada's top CEOs are doing better than ever. With an average compensation of \$10.4 million, the richest CEOs now make an average of 200 times an average workers' salary.

Businesses - not immigrants - pressure governments to erode employment standards, freeze minimum wage rates, attack unions and collective bargaining rights, and make workers more precarious and vulnerable.

We have also seen highly profitable companies close operations across Canada, outsource and automate jobs out of existence, or layoff hundreds of workers simply to ensure they maintain profits for bosses and their shareholders. In other cases, they have ran their own businesses into the ground. Immigrants did not cause companies such as Target, Sears, Payless Shoes, or Bombardier to shed thousands of Canadian jobs or force bankruptcy.



LIE:

Canada is generous enough to migrants. We cannot afford to help everyone and we should take care of Canadians first



TRUTH:

Canadian immigration policies and access to social programs and services are restricted for many migrants

In reality, Canada lets in only a very small number of immigrants. In 2017, migrants to Canada (both permanent and temporary) represented just 2.6% of the entire population.

Most migrants to Canada are coming under temporary permits (such as work or study permits) rather than as permanent residents. In 2017, 70% of immigrants came to Canada under various temporary streams. Due to their temporary status, migrants are often denied basic rights and benefits like job protections, healthcare, education, and access to social programs. Many of their work permits are tied to a single employer, which increases vulnerability and limits their ability to speak out about bad work conditions. Most of them are also denied the right to a union. Migrant workers have been organizing against this injustice, demanding permanent resident status on arrival.

When it comes to accepting refugees, Canada does not even rank in the top 50 of refugee accepting countries. Half of the world's 25.4 million refugees are going to poorer countries in the South. In 2017, only 26,980 refugees resettled to Canada. In comparison, Lebanon, which is just a fraction of the size of Canada, hosted nearly 1 million refugees. In Canada, 3 out of 4 refugee claims are denied, resulting in many being deported to places where their lives are in serious danger.

Finally, this story of scarcity is often told to make us believe we don't have enough resources for everyone - even though we know wealth is increasingly concentrated into fewer and fewer hands. The fact is that corporations and the rich are not paying their fair share. In 2015-16 for example, Canadians paid \$145 billion in income tax, while corporations only paid \$41 billion. The CRA has also found that the wealthy Canadians have more than \$240 billion hidden in offshore accounts, resulting in \$3 billion dollars of lost tax revenues per year.





LIE:

Asylum seekers are jumping the immigration queue and coming across the border through “unofficial” means



TRUTH:

There is no fair immigration queue

Fear mongering by right-wing media and anti-immigrant politicians have made people believe in a non-existent “border crisis”. In 2018, there were 20,587 refugees who walked across the US-Canada border – an increase of 0.03% compared to 2017. In comparison, 24.4 million tourists entered Canada through the U.S. in the same year.

Regardless of whether asylum seekers arrive by foot, plane, or car, once they have entered Canada they follow the process like any other refugee claimant. No queues are jumped. The only reason people are travelling on foot is that otherwise they will not be able to have their case heard.

Yet, in response to this fabricated panic, the Federal government committed more than \$1 billion in the 2019 budget towards more policing at the border – resources that could have been spent towards childcare, health services, building affordable housing, or settlement services for refugees.

Unions must join the struggle for migrant and racial justice!

Workers must not be divided by those in power. We must unite against racism to stop the rise of right-wing governments who will attack our jobs and services. Remaining silent while migrants and people of colour are under attack, or not resisting in solidarity when their rights are stripped away, only serves to weaken our common struggles. An injury to one is an injury to all.

Migrants and refugees have been organizing, fighting for rights, services, good jobs and permanent resident status for themselves and all workers. Unifor is committed to anti-racism and ensuring rights and social and economic justice for migrants regardless of immigration status. Through the newly formed **Migrant Rights Network (MRN)**, we are working with our allies across Canada to highlight these issues and make sure political leaders respond to facts not fiction, and protect migrant communities. To learn more about the MRN, including accessing tools and resources that can be used in your Local, and participate in upcoming National Days of Action near you, please visit the Migrant Rights Network: www.migrantrights.ca

**MIGRANT
RIGHTS
NETWORK**

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Things You Can Do to Support Migrant and Racial Justice in Your Community!



1. Educate

Make sure union members know the facts about racism and immigration.

Distribute educational materials, put up posters in the workplace, and invite guest speakers to talk to members about the issues.



2. Commit

Pass a formal resolution at the Local level to support migrant and racial justice.

Commit to providing members with anti-racism training, support your Local's Aboriginal and Workers of Colour (AWOC) and Human Rights Committees, and support member attendance to AWOC and Human Rights conferences.



3. Organize

Hold migrant justice and anti-racism themed workshops, rallies, and community events. Organize delegations to talk to city councillors, MPPs, and MPs on the need for fair immigration policies and access to permanent status for all.



4. Mobilize

Sign up for Migrant Rights Network e-updates and support upcoming Network National Days of Action (June 16th and September 2nd). Attend and organize rallies in support of migrant justice and organize counter-protests wherever you see right-wing groups organizing in your community.



5. Support:

Build relationships with and provide political, financial, and in-kind support to migrant-led campaigns coordinated through the Migrant Rights Network and local migrant rights organization.

