



Manitoba Federation of Labour

Response to the

Canadian Experience Class Consultation

January 28, 2008

Introduction

The Manitoba Federation of Labour (MFL) is pleased to respond to your request for input on the Canadian Experience Class Consultation that has been undertaken by your office with the aim in mind of having the program in place later on this year.

The MFL is chartered by the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) to represent the interests of unions affiliated to the Congress with members resident in the province of Manitoba.

One of the Canadian labour movements long held concerns is the development of sensible strategies for our labour force development and our education and training needs, both at the federal and provincial levels. This strategy should be designed to meet the needs of our national and provincial economic development and of the people already resident in our country, either by birth or through immigration.

Proposed Canadian Experience Class Program

The proposed CEC program appears to focus on facilitating the permanent immigration to Canada of highly qualified individuals from outside of Canada or those who receive their education and training here as temporary residents. The inescapable conclusion is that these individuals will fill jobs that won't be filled by Canadian residents.

Your background paper states that the CEC *will facilitate the transition from temporary status to permanent residence for the following two groups: Canadian-educated international graduates who have attained some skilled work experience in Canada; and temporary foreign workers who have a track record of working in a skilled occupation in Canada.*

Further, it *will mark a departure from previous immigration policy in explicitly seeking permanent residents from the temporary population already in the country. It will encourage those most likely to succeed, by virtue of their work and study experience, to consider making Canada a part of their longer-term plans. Facilitating the transition to*

permanent status should make Canada a more appealing destination for skilled workers and international students.

The unspoken premise is that the federal government is not interested in developing the appropriate skill base among Canadians or those who are already permanent residents of Canada.

Our advice to you is to design and implement the appropriate skills training and education programs that will enable Canadian citizens and permanent Canadian residents to be *the best and brightest with the talents, skills and knowledge to meet rapidly evolving labour market demands. This is particularly important for those who are currently under represented in skilled jobs, such as women, aboriginal people and immigrants.*

This means the federal government will have to show leadership and financial commitment to education and skills training – the kind of commitment that has been absent for nearly two decades. A good starting point is to stop the endless rounds of tax cuts that has characterized Canadian public policy for the same period of time and start investing in Canada's future.

Who Benefits

Your background paper provides part of the answer to this question when it states *Employers should find in the CEC an added means of attracting international skilled labour. They should also see more newcomers in the labour market with the Canadian experience they recognize. The CEC will give even greater importance to Canadian post-secondary institutions as entry points to permanent immigration.*

You propose to give relief to employers who, in large part, are unwilling to devote resources to skills training, either in their workplaces or by being willing to invest in Canada's future by paying their fair share of taxes to support quality education and training.

Taxation is not a burden. It is an investment in Canada, an investment in the Canadian workforce and an investment in our young people. When one supports this kind of investment, Canada and our quality of life is supported. When one subscribes to the notion that all taxes are bad, one attacks the things we need such as a functioning infrastructure, high quality and accessible education and quality health care. These are the building blocks of a healthy country and society.

Of course, other beneficiaries are the individuals targeted by the proposed CEC program. These individuals are clearly seeking to share in the quality of life that Canada has built up, and who can blame them for that. But the fact remains, they are basically economic refugees. Interestingly, refugee claimants who are fleeing political repression, violence and even death in their home countries are specifically excluded from the CEC. We are forced to conclude that economic refugees who can support Canadian businesses are deserving of a leg up, but political refugees are not. This may make sense when economic game is the only consideration but it makes no sense from the standpoint of good and compassionate public policy.

Moral Obligation

Your background paper states *the new CEC will be limited to occupations at the NOC levels 0, A and B (management, professionals and skilled and technical occupations)* and promising foreign students.

These are the very individuals that the countries they hail from, in many cases developing nations, rely on to build healthy democracies and functioning economies. On the one hand, Canadian foreign policy includes an programs to foster these very things in developing nations. On the other hand, we adopt or propose to adopt policies like CEC that, intentionally or not, undermine those very objectives.

Conclusion

We, as Canadians, have a moral obligation to not undermine the ability of developing nations to establish a critical mass of expert workers and entrepreneurs to realize their economic and national goals. We, as Canadians have a moral obligation to devote the necessary resources to develop the education and training resources needed for people already resident in Canada (most especially women, aboriginal people and immigrants as well as other under represented groups), including post-secondary and apprenticeship and training capacity. We have the moral obligation to support the efforts of developing nations to do the same things.

What we can't do is dream up programs like CEC to overcome a shortage of resident skilled and knowledge workers by poaching them from other countries.