

# Why Class Matters in the Fight for Racial Justice

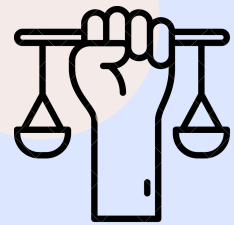
The Fight for Racial and Economic Justice



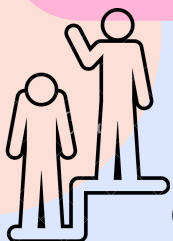
Racial justice emphasizes the “systematic fair treatment of people of all races,” which results “in equitable opportunities and outcomes for all”<sup>1</sup>

- Similarly, economic justice is about creating an economy that is fairer for all to thrive & succeed, including supports to assist folks (including universal basic income, income equality, etc)<sup>2</sup>

## How are the two concepts connected?



In the same way that racism was built into the foundation of Canada (as Canada was built upon the idea that white folks were superior, which in turn shaped fundamental economic, social, and political institutions), classism was also built into the foundation of Canada (in a way that continues to disadvantage those who are racialized and low-waged)



As a result of racist worldviews (i.e. the belief that white folks were superior), economic domination (through the exploitation of racialized folks) became common practice

1. Human and Civil Rights, n.d.
2. Hayes, 2022



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# Class Exploitation Throughout History and the Present Day

“Throughout the colonial world, various forms of slavery,...forced migrant labor, indentured servitude, and contract labor were common,” with folks not only being exploited in their lands but also moved “to other areas of the colonial world where they [and their exploitation] were needed”<sup>3</sup>



“The rise of Western Europe” as a global and economic power and their ability to finance and expand settler colonies (including Canada) was a large result of natural resources and labour forcibly taken from the “[G]lobal South during the colonial period”<sup>4</sup>



While many of these exploitative colonial practices ‘formally’ ended (because they were unsustainable and it became impossible for colonial powers to manage and continue exploiting folks, especially as they organized against exploitation), they continue today through the capitalist system (that has largely been influenced by colonial history)

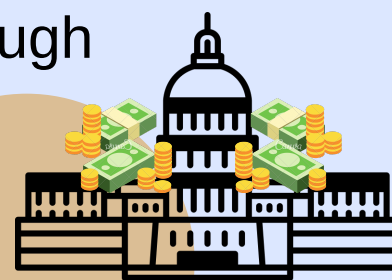
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3. Encyclopedia of Sociology, n.d.
4. Hickel, Dorninger, Wieland, and Suwandi, 2022



# Capitalism and Racism

The capitalist system maintains and requires racism because oppressing racialized populations is profitable

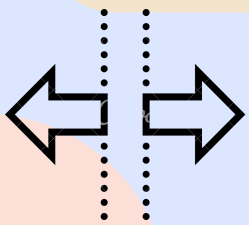
- “Racial oppression is” and always has been “a mechanism for obtaining [and demanding] cheap labor”<sup>5</sup>

- As such, it’s no surprise that “[o]ne’s race can be a major determinant of one’s social or economic class”<sup>6</sup>

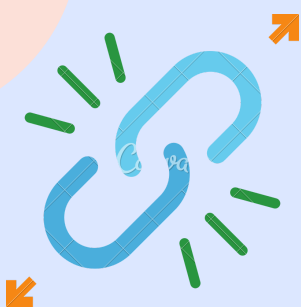


- Also, race and class play a large role in one’s education (and thereby occupation) - showing a vicious cycle of how race and class intersect to create complex systems of disadvantage (also touched on in our [‘Examining Oppression and Intersectionality’](#) resource)

$$race = mX + b$$



In fact, we say that racial and economic justice are linked because “[w]e know that those at the top use racism to divide poor and working people while they maintain power and profit”<sup>7</sup>



5. Encyclopedia of Sociology, n.d.

6. Human and Civil Rights, n.d.

7. Showing Up For Racial Justice, n.d.

# Canada's Working Class

**Working Class:** “typically refers to someone who works in a non-management and non-professional [position] that generally does not require post-secondary education”<sup>8</sup>



The typical working class worker in Canada is “likely to be a female, recently immigrated worker in the services-producing sector”<sup>9</sup>

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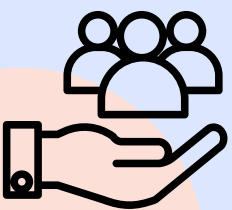


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This is in contrast to the idea that working class folks are blue-collar workers in “goods-producing sectors” - instead, working class folks are commonly those “serving and caring for people” including “retail clerks, food-counter attendants, and personal support workers”<sup>10</sup>



**\*\* In 2021 alone, working class Canadians represented 34% of “those currently employed in the national economy”<sup>11</sup>**

8. Speer, Bezu, and Nauta, 2022  
9-11. Ibid.

# An Average Working Class Canadian

- **Age:** young or close to retirement age
- **Income:** folks in working class positions earn an average of about 51% less income than non-working class workers<sup>12</sup>
  - Based on the 2016 Canadian Census, it was estimated that women employed in working class occupations earned an average of \$24,748 per year<sup>13</sup>
- **Race:** visible minorities are overrepresented in working-class occupations, with almost half of visible-minority workers employed in working class occupations in 2016<sup>14</sup>
- **Education:** many in working class positions experience a mis-match between their education and job
  - 2016 Census data showed that 53% of folks in working class positions held “post-secondary certificates, diplomas, or degrees beyond what [wa]s required for their jobs” of which 14% had university degrees<sup>15</sup>

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16. Ibid.  
17. The  
Investopedia  
Team, 2016

# Issues Facing The Working Class

Issues facing the working class were largely visibilized during the COVID-19 pandemic



- Those in the working class were highlighted as “essential workers” and society came to realize that their work greatly impacted our daily lives
- While some COVID initiatives came into place to better support these essential workers, many were short term (not providing sustainable support for working class folks)

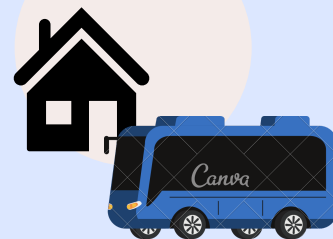


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**Some needs of the poor and working class include increased access to affordable:**<sup>16</sup>



- Child care
- Education
- Healthcare and benefits
- Housing
- Public transit



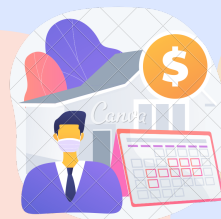
**\*\*Many of our community members also require linguistic accessibility when it comes to accessing affordable services as well!**

**And better policies related to:**

- Immigration
- Labour standards and regulations



**\*\*Including mandating paid sick leave, income assistance programs, and comprehensive benefit plans that can cover everyone (including those in the ‘gig economy’)**



- Gig economy: the "labor market that relies heavily on temporary and part-time positions filled by independent contractors and freelancers rather than full-time permanent employees" (ex. rideshare and food delivery drivers)<sup>17</sup>



**\*\* Paid sick leave is not guaranteed in many sectors in Canada!!**

# Instead, what do the poor and working class get?<sup>18</sup>

- **Indifference and neglect** (i.e. public authorities do not pay attention to or aim to address their needs)
- **Precarity** (a lack of social supports that they can rely on in case of hardship)
  - As such, many folks work multiple jobs and continue to struggle to make ends meet
  - Economic hardship leads to precarity in other aspects of life (including housing, food security, etc)
  - In our work with community members and organizations, we have found that folks experiencing economic hardship are vulnerable to exploitation in the workplace and housing (as they don't know or can't assert their rights and are often underpaid or forced to overpay for basic needs, such as housing (including paying 6 months to a year of rent up front))
- **Dehumanization** as many folks don't see or treat the poor and working class as humans/people

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18. Mompelat, Khan, and Shaheen, 2019

# Immigration x Class + Race: Seeking Justice

From our last resource, '[Immigration and Racial Justice](#)', it became clear that immigration is a racial justice issue



- The various temporary foreign worker programs that Canada relies on to bring in temporary workers deprives workers (often racialized and low-waged) of many rights
- As a “typical feature of racist social systems” relegating folks to “noncitizen” status makes it easier to dehumanize and “super-exploit” racialized and low-waged workers <sup>19</sup>

- Even though migrant workers pay provincial and federal taxes, “their access to social programs” and health benefits are “severely restricted” <sup>20</sup>
- Instead of protecting these folks, these programs create “documented cases of abuse and rights infringements” which include “inadequate housing, poor access to health care,...family separation, illegal recruitment fees, and cases of violence and sexual abuse” <sup>21</sup>



**HUMAN RIGHTS**



Exploitation in Canada goes beyond just ‘importing’ folks for cheap labour, but continues globally through unfair trade agreements and policies that allow countries in the Global North to exploit folks, industries, and loopholes carved for their benefit in the economic system

- This exploitation is easy to spot (just look at the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank - two institutions “designed with colonial principles in mind” that continue to benefit the Global North at the expense of the Global South) <sup>22</sup>



19. Encyclopedia of Sociology, n.d.  
20-21. Molnar, 2018  
22. Hickel, 2020

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# The Rich Just Get Richer

As the cost of living (groceries, gas, rent, etc) continues rising, the rich just keep getting richer (see Loblaw Cos. Ltd.'s profits throughout the pandemic)

However, as community organizations point to food security becoming a larger problem, with community organizations in the Greater Toronto Area seeing larger numbers of people coming to food banks, we **need** change

- We need to rebuild and widen social safety nets that can “respond to the new forms of precarity” and “expan[d] the services and benefits that are necessary to provide an adequate safety net for the 21st century”<sup>23</sup>

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- For many, the existing responses to economic precarity also need to be re-imagined, as many are still culturally irrelevant (i.e. groceries that don't cater to folks' cultural needs) and/or linguistically inaccessible (i.e. folks can't access services since there are inadequate language interpretation options)
  - This includes re-investing in and keeping costs low of public services (we're talking to you @TTC)

**Changes must “recognize [poor and] working-class voices and agency”<sup>24</sup>**

- Policies and proposed services should be co-produced with the poor and working class, “so that people are not involved just as recipients of public services but as shapers of how those services are better delivered”<sup>25</sup>

**This requires support at local, provincial, and federal levels**

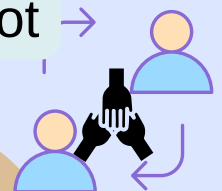
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23-25. Mompelat,  
Khan, and  
Shaheen, 2019



# What can I do in the fight for class and racial justice?

1. Talk to your friends and family about our inequitable economic systems (in Canada and globally)
  - a. Question how practices (such as sending recycling in Canada to other parts of the world for processing) are inequitable and disproportionately impact racialized and lower income folks
2. Reach out to, volunteer at, and join local organizations supporting low-income and working-class folks
3. Check out Workers Action Centre (<https://workersactioncentre.org/>) to educate yourself about issues facing workers in low-wage and precarious employment and see how you can get involved in local and global activism (including rallies and petition signing)

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## Stay in touch with CCNCTO

CCNCTO serves Chinese Canadian community members, including low-income and working class folks in precarious employment. By staying connected, you can help spread awareness about class rights and economic and racial justice and join our advocacy work to create equitable change

Scan the QR code to add us on WeChat (**Ccnctoronto**) or follow us on Instagram **@CCNCTO**

Fill in [this form](#) to join our volunteer team and support our various organizing, anti-racism, and equity work

Check out our most recent [2021 anti-Asian racism report](#) and our [Frontline Workers Pandemic report](#)

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