

FACT SHEET

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AND STILL WE RISE !

UNION SISTERS
ORGANIZE !

"But some of us are brave..."

Women of colour have worked in Canada for centuries. As slaves and domestics, as nurses and clerks, as teachers and factory workers, women of colour have faced discrimination and obstacles on the grounds of race, sex and class. Immigrant women of colour may face additional barriers on the basis of their language or their ethnic origins or religious beliefs.

WHAT'S THE CURRENT SITUATION?

- ♀ People of colour make up 11% of the workforce in Canada; women of colour make up almost 5%.
- ♀ The unemployment rate of 11.2% for women of colour is higher than the 10.9% for all other workers.
- ♀ Women of colour are the least likely to be employed all year and have the fewest weeks of employment per year.
- ♀ Women of colour are over-represented in lower paid occupations: sales, clerical and service (around 7%) and under-represented in higher paid jobs.
- ♀ On average, women of colour earn 11.9% less than all other women.
- ♀ Average annual earnings are less than \$15,000 (note: many women of colour work as domestics, nannies, cleaners, piece workers at home – very badly paid jobs which are not included in these statistics, meaning the average income is even lower).
- ♀ Women of colour are less likely to have a pension plan – 35% compared to 39% of all other women.

- ♀ An EKOS survey in 2001 indicated that one out of four workers of colour experienced racial discrimination or harassment at work.
- ♀ Thirty-seven percent of women of colour are poor, compared to 18% of all other women and compared to 35% men of colour; almost half (45%) of children of people of colour live in poverty in Canada, compared to one in four (26%) of all children.
- ♀ People of colour in Canada have higher educational qualifications than the overall population; a while approximately 11% of the total population over age 15 are people of colour, 15.8% have a BA, 15.3% a Masters, and 18.7% a Ph.D.

“This evidence of major economic gaps based on race demands that we stop denying the reality of racism and take concrete actions to counter exclusion and marginalization. Unions have a major role to play in this regard.”

“Is Work Working for People of Colour?”
2002 CLC Research Paper

Andrew Jackson

UNIONS CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE FOR WOMEN OF COLOUR

- ♀ Women of colour who belong to a union make 34.3% more than those without a union (\$27,908 vs. \$20,772).
- ♀ Seventy-nine percent of unionized women have a pension plan, but only 31% of non-unionized women do.
- ♀ Seventy-eight percent have extended medical coverage vs. 40% for non-union women.
- ♀ Unionized workers have access to a grievance procedure to fight discrimination and harassment.

But! only 22% of women workers of colour are organized, compared to almost 32% of all women. We've got a problem. Workers of colour (49%) and all women (30%) are more likely to want to join a union... so, it's very likely that large numbers of women of colour (not all people of colour are men, not all women are white, but some of us are brave...) are likely to want a union. Why are few women of colour unionized: what's the problem?

Unionization rates for women are higher in the public sector, with more stable and relatively higher paid jobs. Women of colour are under-represented here. Women of colour predominate in lower paid sales and service jobs in the private sector – where the overall unionization rate for women is only 14.5%. Women of colour work in precarious jobs and non-standard jobs which are largely unorganized.

WHAT CAN BE DONE?

- ♀ Organize, organize, organize. Our unions need to organize in the service, sales and clerical sectors of the economy, where women and women of colour predominate. Hire women of colour organizers and union staff.
- ♀ Unions need to develop ways of organizing workers in non-standard jobs.
- ♀ Support employment equity programs and laws where they exist – where they do not, negotiate them.
- ♀ Fight for proactive pay equity legislation to combat systemic sex and race-based wage discrimination.
- ♀ Support the right to organize for domestic workers.
- ♀ Bargain for ESL and FSL language training at work.
- ♀ Support women's organizations which fight for the rights of women of colour, such as the Congress of Black Women of Canada and the National Organization of Immigrant and Visible Minority Women of Canada.

- ♀ Support women of colour into and in leadership positions.
- ♀ Encourage the participation of women of colour activists.
- ♀ Examine our own union policies and structures and rid them of systemic barriers and discriminatory practices.
- ♀ Strengthen anti-discrimination and anti-harassment language in our agreements.
- ♀ Educate ourselves and others about racism in Canada and join the fight to combat it – mobilize and use the collective power we do have.

Challenging racism and sexism, fighting for workers rights is a huge task. But, in the words of Mary Ann Shadd – Black activist, educator, newspaper founder, writer, publisher, anti-slavery fighter, underground railway organizer, lawyer and freedom fighter... “I’d rather wear out than rust out!” Wouldn’t you?