

Racism and Poverty-A Statement from We're Together Ending Poverty (June 2020)

We're Together Ending Poverty (WTEP) is a small diverse grassroots group of activists which came together in 2008 to educate and empower ourselves and others to take action on root causes of poverty.

Two of our founding beliefs are relevant to the activism seen on Calgary streets and around the globe:

- To understand the root causes of poverty we need to examine our society from many different perspectives including but not limited to gender, race, class, ability, age and sexual orientation.
- The concentration of wealth in a few hands, locally and globally, and the continued existence of patriarchal and classist attitudes and practices are fundamental causes of poverty.

As this is written, tens of thousands of Calgarians and other Canadians mobilize on the streets in solidarity with anti-racism protests in the US denouncing the killing

of George Floyd, the latest black man to be murdered by the police. However, they are also speaking out against the racism experienced on a daily basis by Indigenous and racialized peoples in Calgary and Canada.

Regardless of what now happens in the US, a key issue before us in Calgary and Canada is what happens next once the rallies and marches end? How will we build on the energies and passions that have been unleashed to uproot racist structures and systems in our society to move beyond the soft discussions around diversity and multiculturalism. We have to engage in uncomfortable dialogues around the interconnected and mutually reinforcing relationships among

- underlying white supremacist assumptions;
- the economic, social, political and other institutions in our society;
- and individual actions and behaviours;
- and the impact these have on Indigenous and racialized communities.

These dialogues are fundamental in enabling us to take the actions necessary to disrupt systemic racism. Systemic racism does not operate alone in our society, but is intertwined with other systems of oppression, all of which intersect to foster the exploitation of labour, lands and resources. The discussion around “the racialization of poverty” is illustrative of this point.

In 2015, at the Conference on Restorative Justice, in Halifax, Social Work educator, scholar and activist Robert Wright defined racialization as the “practice through which a group becomes increasingly populated by racialized persons.” Wright defined the “poor” as those living below the low-income cut-off (LICO). He then went on to cite the 2013 Poverty Profile produced by the National Council of Welfare to demonstrate that the poor in Canada are more racialized than white. According to the 2006 Census of Canada, the overall poverty rate was 11%; the rate among racialized persons was 22% and that among non-racialized persons 9%. Wright then states that growing economic disparity in Canada is “disproportionately impacting racialized people and that this was best explained by racism.”

This national picture of the racialization of poverty holds true for Calgary, according to a 2006 report, *Inequality in Calgary: The Racialization of Poverty*, as well as updated statistics by the Homeless Hub (an initiative of the Canada Poverty Institute). The Hub stated that in general Calgary’s population of low income individuals has shown a tendency of being increasingly composed of racialized individuals.

In “The Colour of Poverty: Understanding Racialized Poverty in Canada” (2014), Seema Allahdini argues that the growing racialization of poverty is rooted in “racial discrimination in the labour market, beginning with settler colonization” during which “race was used as an organizing principle in society to oppress, exploit and exclude people of colour” [and indigenous peoples]. It is the continuing impact of this organizing principle on structures and systems today that explains why we find people of colour concentrated in “contract, temporary, part-time and shift work” which in turn means “less job security, sub-standard working conditions... and low wages.”

It is obvious that anti-poverty activists also need to be anti-racism activists. This activism goes beyond rallies calling for systemic change. Power is not given up without struggle and often the trappings of change leave systemic oppression intact.

Today’s rallies are not the first time that the issue of systemic and institutional racism has been raised in Calgary by, for example, the Congress of Black Women, the Committee Against Racism, the Alliance Project of the Women of Colour collective, the Calgary Status of Women Action Committee, the Committee for Anti-racism Education, and the Anti-Racism Organizational Change Project at

CommunityWise Resource Centre (Calgary). For years Indigenous communities have called for systemic change in policing, education, health, child welfare, etc. The 94 Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada are all focussed on immediate systemic changes, including anti-racism education, that are long overdue.

So once the rallies are over, we need to build on the passions, energies and numbers that have come out onto the streets and build a mass anti-racism movement that uses an intersectional analysis (one that understands how individuals may be impacted by multiple forms of oppression) and that will disrupt systemic racism institution by institution.

“A Luta Continua – The Struggle Continues!”

In solidarity with BlackLivesMatter.

WTEP