

Making the Case for Social Inclusion

It's being billed as a case of home grown terrorism – the unthinkable in Canada. Twelve men and five youths are arrested in Toronto, accused of knowingly participating in a terrorist group, and being involved in terrorist training. Police say they were planning to make bombs and attack targets in Ontario. Their targets: the CBC, C-SIS buildings in Toronto, the Toronto Stock Exchange. Most of the accused were born and raised in Canada. But, their religion – they're all Muslim – has become the defining feature of the story. What if we take a moment and look at another common factor among them? Their age. All but two are in their teens or early twenties.

Little attention is paid to how disenfranchised youth can be attracted to radical organizations. And we have learned that the older member of the group deliberately looked for young men who were isolated from the Canadian mainstream. Jordan Bernt, from the University of Toronto, calls these young men: “particularly status hungry”. Belonging to a political movement – especially one that's on a mission – is one way of saying who you are in comparison to everyone else. Feeling excluded from the mainstream either socially, economically or both can send youth looking for other ways to feel included.

And what do we know about those who are excluded from the good life? Our study on ***Making Work Pay: Findings and Recommendations from CPRN's Vulnerable Workers Series***, by Ron Saunders, found that one in six full-time workers is condemned to poverty level wages.

Disproportionately there are more youth, with almost half (45 percent) earning poverty-

level wages. And more than a quarter of recent immigrants are in the same boat. For young people without higher education the situation is also grim with one out of four earning low wages. When you stack the characteristics – young, non-completion of high school or post-secondary education and recent immigrant – we can see a pattern of exclusion from the good life that Canada promises for others.

In our CPRN Youth Summit last November, 144 young people aged 18-25 told us what they want for Canada. We learned that they feel isolated as a whole from their government and do not know how to make their views known or heard. Civic literacy is at an all time low. The Youth Action Plan ***Towards an Action Plan for Canada “Our Vision, Values and Actions”*** called upon the education system to strengthen civic education. Young people want greater citizen participation and transparency in government. They also want the diversity of our country reflected in our institutions and government. Citizenship, they assert, is about more than freedom and rights; it is also about responsibilities. And young people expressed a strong value for shared responsibility between themselves, families, government, and corporations for the Canada we want. Canada should remain an exemplar – globally demonstrating honesty and ethics in all spheres. Understanding how Canada governs itself and how an individual can participate is central to a sense of power and inclusion. Without the basic tools to understand how to participate, we risk creating greater pockets of social exclusion.



The Canada we want is fair. It is a country where no one is left behind and the vulnerable are made safe and secure. Aboriginals, immigrants, young people, and people with disabilities all experience higher rates of unemployment and lower rates of pay than other citizens. That's not fair. And we need to fix it. How do we fix something that is not fair? Employers, workers, governments, and family all need to be a part of the solutions and build a Canada that includes and does not exclude. Our paper on adult workers entitled ***Too Many Left Behind: Canada's Adult Education and Training System***, by Karen Myers and Patrice de Broucker documents what happens to young people who do not finish high school. Permanently left behind in low paying and low skilled jobs, these workers need a second chance. And many of these workers are the parents whose children feel a sense of exclusion from the good life that Canada promised. There are many ways that we can give our adult workers a lift, so that they and their families have a better life, and as workers they are more productive. It will take determination to create a right to learn, services to make that right meaningful.

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