

Creating and Nurturing a New Path for the Progressive Filipino-Canadian Community

Introduction

A new path of genuine settlement and integration is emerging in the progressive Filipino-Canadian community. This is the path leading to full participation and entitlement in a multi-ethnic and multicultural society within a world that is facing the crisis of neo-liberal globalization and the crisis of environmental degradation and climate change.

Filipinos started coming in the 1960s after Canada removed the discriminatory provisions from its immigration program based on racial origin. Coming either directly from the Philippines or indirectly from other parts of the world, they are part of the transnational Filipino community that seeks permanent settlement in the receiving country like Canada yet maintain attachment to the Philippines. Today, Filipinos have become Canada's third largest source of immigrants contributing their share to the building of Canadian society and polity.

Canadian society and state

Canada was created as a "white settler colony or nation-state" by European colonial powers who occupied this land at the expense of the indigenous peoples. Like other white settler nation-states, its main concern was the establishment of clear racial, ethnic and capitalist-based economic goals. Even after the confederation in 1867, Canada continued its preferential treatment for immigrants who would not change the basic "white" character of its Canadian population while pursuing the continuous expansion and consolidation of capitalism in Canada.

However beginning in 1962, Canada abandoned its "all white" racist immigration policy and introduced the points system of eligibility to facilitate the entry of economic classes like skilled and professional people, investors and entrepreneurs. Growing global economic competition, a relatively small population, shortage of skilled labour, and the need for investment capital, confronted Canada's drive for further economic growth and capital accumulation. These factors would combine to push Canada to open its immigration doors to include people of colour of different cultural and ethnic backgrounds from the South, such as the Philippines. In recognition of this diversity, the Canadian government declared Canada a multicultural and bilingual society in 1971. Since then, Canada has officially become a cultural mosaic but with the white piece of this mosaic continuing to loom large and dominant over the rest of the other pieces. Thus, the struggle against systemic racism and discrimination remains a major form of protest and participation in a multicultural and multi-ethnic Canada.

Today, Canada's immigration policy continues to be guided by the dynamics of its capital accumulation within the context of a neo-liberal global economic system amidst a growing crisis in natural and human environments. This policy reduces or increases immigration in accordance with the ebb and flow of Canada's internal political economy fueled by intense competition in the global market of capitalism where workers from the South like the Philippines, continue to provide cheap labour power for countries of the North like Canada.

Canadian immigration policy needs settlement and integration programs to properly manage and allocate immigrant labour and other resources for the purpose of sustaining capitalism in Canada and its important role

and position among the G8 within the larger sphere of neo-liberal global capitalism. Through such programs, the Canadian state performs its inherent legitimation and accumulation functions in the service of domestic and international capital while unjustly dividing the Canadian working class along racial lines and between immigrants and Canadian-born workers. Like the rest of other Canadians, Filipino-Canadians are streamed along this path of settlement and integration which leads to economic marginalization and social exclusion for Filipino workers, women and youth. This further serves domestic and global capital accumulation at a time when environmental degradation and rapid climate change require urgent answers and solutions.

A progressive Filipino Canadian community

It is within this frame of Canadian history and political economy that a progressive movement of Filipino Canadians was born in early 1970s. Starting mainly as a solidarity network to support the struggle for the restoration of democracy and civil liberties in the Philippines during the martial law period, this progressive movement has evolved to address various issues facing Filipinos in Canada foremost of which is the issue of genuine settlement and integration in Canadian society.

In the course of addressing these issues, this progressive movement of Filipino Canadians has succeeded in building local organizations and national networks for Filipino women, workers, youth, arts and culture and solidarity work. In Vancouver, there is the Philippine Women Centre of B.C. (PWC-BC), the Filipino Canadian Youth Alliance (FCYA-BC), Filipino Workers Organization (SIKLAB-BC), BC Committee on Human Rights in the Philippines (BCCHRP), Filipino Nurses Support Group (FNSG) and Sinagbayan-BC. In Toronto, there is the Philippine Women Centre of Ontario (PWC-ON), Filipino Canadian Youth Alliance (FCYA-ON), Filipino Workers Organization (SIKLAB-ON) and Sinagbayan-Ontario. In Montreal, there is the Philippine Women Centre of Quebec (PWC-Q), Kabataang Montreal (KM/UKPC), Filipino Workers Organization (SIKLAB-Q) and Sinagbayan-Que. There is as well, the Philippine Women Centre of Manitoba (PWC-M). These local groups are housed at the Kalayaan Centre in Vancouver, Kapit Bisig Centre in Montreal and Magkaisa Centre in Toronto. They network and coordinate activities through their respective national alliances such as the National Alliance of Philippine Women in Canada (NAPWC), Filipino Canadian Youth Alliance – National (FCYA-N), SIKLAB-National, Sinagbayan-National and the Philippines-Canada Task Force on Human Rights (PCTFHR).

These organizations and networks provide to Filipino communities nationwide, a critical approach to Canada's immigration, economic and multicultural policies. They expose the cracks and weaknesses in its settlement and integration programs. As well, they identify the struggle for and attainment of genuine settlement and integration as a central key in guaranteeing the community's full participation and entitlement in Canada.

These organizations also challenge the idea of who a Canadian truly is in the midst of intensifying social contradictions and the changing face of Canadian society. They critique a notion of Canadian multiculturalism that segregates rather than integrates. Their members insist on taking and sharing equal rights and entitlements in the country that they were born in or migrated to - a country that they and most of their future generations will settle and live in for the rest of their lives.

Even as these organizations and their members principally address Canadian issues they are at the same time, fully engaged in anti-imperialist international solidarity against neo-liberalism and its dire impact on peoples of the world, particularly the workers, peasants and women. Lately, they have begun to address the crisis of the natural and human environments and climate change. Beyond the Filipino Canadian community and all of Canada, they consider themselves and their organizations as part of the dynamic Filipino transnational community that continues to define its particular issues and role in North America, especially, within the

broader context of the current crisis of neo-liberal globalization and the particular chronic crisis of neo-colonialism in the Philippines.

Hence, in taking on the above positions and activities, progressive Filipino Canadians and their organizations have embraced their role as part of the process of helping build the socialist movement in Canada and the international anti-imperialist movement.

Creating and nurturing a new path

This weekend conference is an opportunity for us to create and take on the new path of genuine settlement and integration. As progressive Filipino-Canadians, we will continue to be critical of Canada's official settlement and integration programs. We question and reject the old path of settlement and integration that leads to our economic marginalization and social exclusion. We reject the old path that consigns us as mere cheap labour appendages in the accumulation process of domestic and global capital.

Instead, we will strive to create a new path of genuine settlement and integration that struggles against our economic marginalization and social exclusion; a new path that struggles against systemic racism; a new path that struggles to achieve women's equality and development as well as the youth, thereby ensuring their future. It is a new path that would lead to our full participation and entitlement in all aspects of Canadian society. It is a new path that makes us part of the broader process of helping build the socialist movement in Canada, anti-imperialist solidarity and global environmental change and sustainability.

This is the new path that we will create and nurture as progressive Filipino-Canadians.

After years of democratic consultations and decision-making processes at meetings and conferences, we, the members of the progressive movement of Filipino Canadians and our organizations, have forged this new path of genuine settlement and integration in Canada. We have come together this weekend, to announce the historic formation of the Congress of Progressive Filipino Canadians (CPFC). The CPFC will be the national centre of these organizations and their members that would lead in educating, mobilizing and organizing progressive Filipino Canadians and our communities to struggle for genuine settlement and integration along the process of helping build the socialist movement in Canada and the global anti-imperialist support and solidarity movement. We shall strive to bring together the cooperation and participation of other Filipino Canadian progressive groups and individuals along this new path of settlement and integration. We will also seek to unite and coordinate with other progressive groups and individuals outside the Filipino community including those who are part of the Filipino transnational community in North America and other parts of the world.

As CPFC commits itself to genuine settlement and integration along the process of helping build the socialist movement in Canada, it stands and fights for the following concerns:

- Democracy, social liberation and anti-imperialist support and solidarity against neo-liberalism, imperialism and all reaction.
- Human rights in civil, political, economic, social and cultural fields against class exploitation and national and state oppression.
- Enhancing women's equality, development and human rights.
- Making the youth count in Canada's future especially the right to education and employment.
- Support the rights and welfare of temporary and migrant workers.
- Overcoming the community's economic marginalization.
- Combating systemic racism in all its forms and manifestations.
- Right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment.

- Rights of LGBT, seniors and the aged, children and other sectors of society against intolerance and discrimination, sexual abuse and other forms of discrimination to a life of dignity and secured existence.
- Support of families in the process of reunification and/or settlement.
- Development of capacity and skills in community organizing and alliance building.
- Development of people & community-based arts and culture.
- Trade union and other democratic rights of the working class in the pursuit of its historic mission of fighting for social liberation.
- Rights and concerns of the Filipino transnational community in North America for genuine settlement and participation in their receiving country.