

Book Reviews/Comptes rendus

MARTIN LONEY, *The Pursuit of Division. Race, Gender, and Preferential Hiring in Canada*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1998, pp. xvi, 400, \$65 (cloth), \$22.95 (paper).

The main thesis of this book is that "preferential hiring" (the author's term for employment equity) has led to a "pursuit of division" in Canada. Loney places "preferential hiring" in the context of a political supremacy of group over individual rights in Canada, which has also led, according to him, to ill-conceived multicultural policies and identity politics. All of the above have necessitated the abandonment of the merit principle and of the equality-of-opportunity objective. The beneficiaries of such policies are the government for which it is much easier to manage an ethnically-divided population, women, and other 'disadvantaged' groups, at the expense of young, able-bodied, white males who have no one to lobby on their behalf. The purpose of the book is to expose the "fraudulent claims" and "shoddy research" that have propelled the "politics of grievance." In the long run a new politics of inclusion is necessary, according to the author. The author has a clearly conservative political agenda, and the book, divided into twelve chapters, is a provocative though repetitive critique of government policies on race, gender, and equity. Although I had problems with some of the author's interpretations and sometimes with his logic, the book deserves to be taken seriously because it is well researched, well argued, and has some very valid, though not new, criticisms of employment equity.

Loney attempts to expose three main "fraudulent claims that there is systemic discrimination against visible minorities in the labour market, and against women, and that there is discrimination in education. In terms of the first claim, he admits that there are concentrations of ethnic groups in certain segments of the labour market, resulting in income differences, but argues such differences are not based on group visibility, since (a) there are wide variations among visible minority groups, and (b) some of the non-visible minorities fare much worse than the visible ones in terms of group disadvantage. Such differences, according to Loney, are more due to language ability, recency of arrival, and other factors unrelated to systemic discrimination. If there is no statistical evidence for systemic discrimination in employment, no remedial measures are needed. Even if, however, discrimination existed, employment equity would not be a fair or effective way to redress it, according to Loney.

Employment equity addresses group needs rather than individual ones. It is meant to equalize group opportunity, especially when there has been an

entrenched historic privilege of one group. Its implementation needs to be very careful and while it sometimes may create injustices on an individual level, in many instances it has done a lot of good. The fact that the visible-minority term is arbitrary and perhaps no longer relevant only provides an argument for revising the definition, consistent with a conception of "race" not as biological, but as socially constructed.

In his demonstration that there is no discrimination against women, Loney argues that statistical comparisons that presumably demonstrate it often eschew age standardization, qualifications, distinction between part-time and full-time workers, and continuity of labour force participation. If there are income disparities, marital status and the division of responsibility within the home are to blame. As Statistics Canada shows, women work less than men. Loney argues this is because women choose to prioritize family and child care differently than men. He does not probe why women may prioritize differently.

In reality, although a rapid closing of the gender gap for younger workers is taking place, there is still a significant gap between male and female earnings for full-time, full-year workers. There is still a disproportionate number of white males in senior positions, no matter whether this has resulted from the predominance of white males in the labour force in an earlier period, when, one might argue, real preferential hiring was taking place. Loney argues most of the new jobs (full-time as well) go to women. Reviewing statistical evidence, Loney claims qualified women in university positions are twice as likely as qualified men to be hired. Canadian data indicate there is no under-representation in recruitment relative to the number of women in the qualified pool (p. 300). The key issue is representative of what? The author introduces the notion of the qualified group. But if we took the qualified group as a comparator we would never make any progress on equity. In addition, why in an immigrant receiving country should the qualified group consist of Canadian university graduates only? The author finds the demands of female faculty for work time that is compatible with family demands, like picking children up from day-care, is outrageous, compared with the job expectations of many "low-paid Canadians." I wonder why this is the appropriate comparative group here and the only possible similarity I see is that of "low pay."

All in all, the author is right that the emphasis on race and gender (that employment equity is premised on) makes us forget social class at the expense of poverty, and especially child poverty, in Canada and it therefore works well for governments that want to create the appearance of a progressive agenda. Equalizing opportunity should be achieved for all social groups, including class-based ones. Because it currently is not, would the solution be to discard employment equity, a basically sound though limited tool? It would be like saying that if we cannot have democracy in all its dimensions (including the economic one) we do not want any.

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