**Introduction to Ramirez**

In the same period (1974-1976) that a new round of repression was being launched against the immigrant community in the United States, north of the border the Canadian government was also revising its immigration laws in the direction of greater restrictiveness. In the following article by Bruno Ramirez we discover that the sources of that revision were similar to those that led to repression in the United States: a growing inability of the Canadian government to integrate its immigrant population according to the requirements of capital.

Ramirez traces the changes in Canadian immigration law in the post-World War II period, relating them to the interaction between business demands for particular kinds of labor and the behavior of immigrants as would-be labor supply. He shows the immigrants have been able, again and again, to convert mechanisms of domination into mechanisms of their own struggles.

One example is the immigrant family whose regrouping was favored by the state through the “sponsorship system” of immigration. According to the plans of the state, the family was to take on many of the costs of reproducing the labor power of the immigrants. It was to do this in an isolated fashion, scattered across Canada according to the needs of the labor market. Instead, by refusing to disperse, by clustering around certain poles of industrial development, by creating ethnic militant groups, the families linked up to provide their own job networks, information and mutual assistance associations, etc. – in short a powerful base on which to articulate their own needs and demands.

This in turn led to attempts by capital to reinforce the hierarchy within the immigrant communities and to instrumentalize them. One aspect was support for the development of an ethnic bourgeoisie thorough which the communities could be controlled. Another aspect of the reinforcement of hierarchy was the 1966 policy shift away from unskilled towards semi-skilled immigration. But this, as Ramirez shows, led to the importation of workers who already had experience with urban and industrial struggle in their countries of origin. One dramatic example is given by the arrival of young Italian immigrants trained not only in Italian factories but in the intense student and workers politics of the 1960s in Rome, Milan, Bologna and elsewhere. Ramirez traces this international circulation of struggle between Europe and North America as well as others, such as those between Greece, Chile or the West Indies and Canada. This international circulation of struggle acted as a catalyst for wider struggles within the immigrant communities and within Quebec and Canada as a whole. The series of relationships traced here are clearly parallel to those suggested by Flores on the interconnections between struggles in Mexico and in the Chicano community in the United States – linked through the movement of multinational immigrant workers.

The 1976 Canadian Immigration Act, which went into effect in April 1978, sought to respond to these aspects of immigrant autonomy in a number of ways. At the point of entry it gave immigration officials greater personal discretion in selecting among applicants – making it easier to exclude politically questionable applicants. One criterion of admission was directly addressed to the threats posed by immigrant geographic concentration. Applicants could increase their chances of admission if they promised to work and live in a government designated community for at least 6 months – upon pain of deportation for violation. This kind of requirement, together with a de-emphasis on previous skill differentiation, led Ramirez to conclude that “the major new criterion regulating the inflow of immigrants is not so much their skill characteristics but rather their availability to work and live under conditions and in locations set forth by the authorities.” To what degree those new regulations will succeed in decomposing immigrant working class forms of organization remains to be seen.

Ramirez’s article grew out of a conference organized by Italian immigrants in Montreal to discuss the new thrust of State immigration policy. That conference was one of several which have taken place in many immigrant communities in Canada. The article draws on this process of discussion that has often been the only vehicle providing access to the experiences of particular immigrant groups. As the public debate on the immigration question has proceeded there has been a sharp gap between the highly technocratic discourse carried on in the established media and the ad hoc, practical or down to earth way in which many immigrants speak about it in their communities. At the same time in many immigrant circles the responses have been far from unified as established ethnic leaders tend more often to reflect the views of the government and of party caucuses than those of their constituents. People have been slow to see the proposed changes as a political attack against the immigrant working class. (And against the Canadian working class which at the time of the new law was engaged in one of the most important waves of wage struggles of the postwar era). It has been this atmosphere of manipulation, confrontation and class self-activity that produced this political analysis of the class strategy used against immigrant workers and that has sharpened the analytical tools utilized in the elaboration of this piece.