

Richardson out of touch with constituents

1



- 29 Sep 2008
- Calgary Herald
- By MANSOOR LADHA

When I lived in Tanzania, the favourite topic of African politicians was to blame the country's Asian immigrant minority for crime, problems in the economy or in the political system. African politicians would stand up at a political rally and blame the Asians for everything that went wrong in the country and the masses would readily support them. But I couldn't believe it when an politician from Canada, a respected developed democratic country was quoted as saying that immigrants don't have much respect for the law. Considering that the incumbent for Calgary Centre, Lee Richardson, who represented a riding with 25 per cent immigrants, his comments are bizarre to start with. Look who's committing the crimes, he said. They're not the kid who grew up next door.

As usual, the politicians either say their comments were misconstrued or they were misquoted. Whatever his explanation may be, he is simply not fit enough to be an MP representing a riding with such a large immigrant population. How can any MP think of blurting such statements even if one doesn't have immigrants in one's riding? The incident shows that Richardson, who has been an MP in the riding since 2004, is ill-informed and out of touch with his constituents.

Simply put, the role of an MP is to protect the interests of his constituents and Richardson's statements are anything but protective of immigrants' rights and obligations. The damage is done and it's irreparable.

Instead of making such negative comments on immigrants, we would have expected Richardson to come up with new ideas about how to settle them when they come to Canada and come up with innovative ideas so that they could get suitable jobs instead of channelling funds for more employment counsellors who make their living out of the federal budget, telling immigrants how to downgrade their credentials, making a bunch of photocopies for them and giving them lectures on how to write the perfect resume the tools with which they could eventually end up getting jobs at any cleaning company or at a McDonald's restaurant anyway.

As an incumbent MP, Richardson will be well advised to read reports, publications and books, which clearly indicate that immigrants come to Canada with higher education levels, but then seek ways to narrow the gap between their income levels and those of other Canadians. It is unfortunate that systematic racism remains as a constant reminder in this country as is indicated in this story of the Edmonton Journal May 2, 2008 headed Skilled immigrants do not find doors open in Canada, which cites the experience of Sufian Yanes, an electrical engineer, who graduated from the University of Damascus, with a work experience of 10 years in Syria, Germany and Switzerland.

When he immigrated to this country, Canadian immigration officials told him that his degree would be recognized here. Guess what happened since his arrival? He has found work only at gas stations, the food industry and for the past three years as taxi driver. Welcome to Canada! In one of the recent books published on immigrants, *Unlikely Utopia: The Surprising Triumph of Canadian Pluralism*, Penguin Group, 2007, author Michael Adams points out that for Canadian Muslims the promise of economic success in Canada has yet to be truly fulfilled when bearing in mind their educational background and employment outcomes. Muslims in Canada are better educated than the population at large: 45 per cent hold a university degree as compared with 23 per cent of all Canadians. And yet in terms of income, Muslim Canadians lag behind the national average. Richardson should have known that people living in glass houses should not throw stones at others!

***Mansoor Ladha is a freelance journalist living in Calgary. He is author of a book entitled, "A Portrait in Pluralism: Aga Khan's Shia ismaili Muslims," published by Detselig.**