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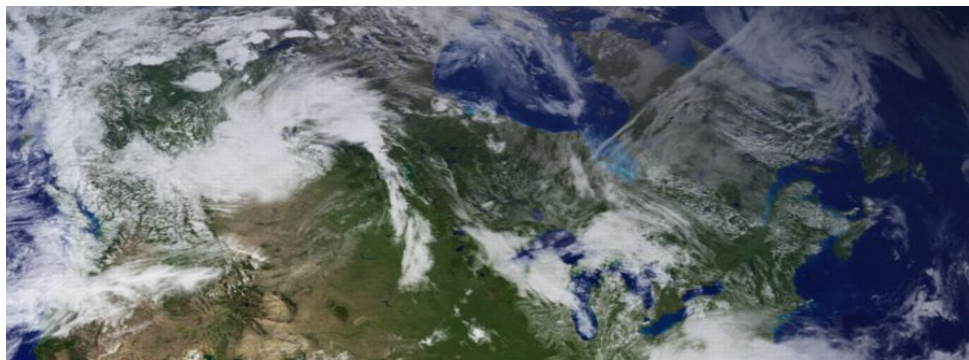
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[More on the strange economics of temporary foreign workers](#)

Posted by Marc Lee under [Alberta](#), [labour market](#), [temporary workers](#).
July 19th, 2007
[Comments: none](#)

The Alberta Federation of Labour [reports](#) that more people now coming into province as temporary workers than traditional immigrants. From their press release:

Alberta has become the first province in Canadian history to bring more people into its jurisdiction under the temporary foreign worker program than through Canada's mainline immigration system.

According to new figures from the federal department of Citizenship and Immigration, as of December 1, 2006, there were 22,392 temporary foreign workers in Alberta. That's more than double the 11,067 temporary workers who were in the province in 2003 and more than three times the 7,286 who were in the province in 1997.

Significantly, the 2006 figure for temporary foreign workers in Alberta is greater than the 20,717 immigrants granted permanent resident status in the province that year. This marks the first time that temporary workers have overtaken traditional immigrants.

Over the past five years, other provinces – most notably B.C. and Ontario – have also experienced dramatic jumps in the use of temporary foreign workers. But in those provinces, traditional immigrants still out number temporary workers.

“Once again, Alberta seems to be leading other provinces in the race to the bottom,” says Gil McGowan, president of the Alberta Federation of Labour. “If these temporary workers were on a track to becoming full citizens, it would be less of a concern – but they're not. The vast majority will be treated like Post-It Notes – to be used, discarded and sent back to the countries of origin.”

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As a result of the “exponential growth” of the temporary foreign workers program, McGowan says that “we’re in the process of creating an underclass of workers who are much more vulnerable and open to exploitation than Canadian workers and who have little hope of ever becoming full citizens.”

In response the dramatic jump in numbers, in early May the AFL established its own “Office of the Temporary Foreign Worker Advocate” to help temporary workers who are being ill-treated by employers or employment brokers.

In the seven weeks since opening the office, the AFL's Advocate has provided assistance to dozens of workers from India, Romania, Mexico, the Philippines and other countries. Complaints have ranged from exorbitant fees charged by brokers; to substandard housing; to employers refusing to pay overtime or renegeing on promises related to wages and training.

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