

# Chapter 11

## Treating the “Unequal Unequally”: Marginalization and Canadian Super Citizenship

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This chapter argues that the Canadian government’s introduction of the parents and grandparents super visa program reinforces inequality by designating the wealthier as worthier citizens. One of the requirements to qualify for this program is proof that the child or grandchild in Canada meets a low-income cut-off minimum. The program ordains privileged citizenship by creating an exclusive membership restricted only to those who can afford it while precluding other citizens from the same right. Such a policy negates the notion of citizenship as conducive to a political community of equals who are entitled to the same rights and privileges. The study points out that the infiltration of consumerism into the fabric of citizenship is the core of the problem: citizenship has become a commodity. Citizens who are denied similar opportunities based on financial factors are marginalized and relegated to second-class citizenship. In contrast, those who do qualify become what the economist J.K. Galbraith calls the “contented majority.”*

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## INTRODUCTION

We argue that Canadian government immigration policies introduced under the Conservative government of Stephen Harper create second-class citizenry and represent a retraction of basic human rights established following the second-world war. The chapter specifically addresses the Canadian “Super visa” program and Bill C-24, disingenuously named the “Strengthening Canadian Citizenship Act”. It will be argued here that the core of the problem relates to the infiltration of consumerism and the assertion of market logic into the very fabric of citizenship. Citizenship is becoming a commodity. In turn, citizens who are denied similar opportunities based on financial factors are being marginalized and relegated to second-class citizenship, whereas those who do qualify, or are without family abroad, become what the economist J.K. Galbraith calls the “contented majority.” These changes come about as Canadian capital is expanding overseas while the Canadian state takes on an increasingly aggressive military role and expands its repressive security apparatus. It does so in a global context of diminishing democratic control over national governments as legislation is increasingly bound by economic treaties negotiated without public oversight. This must be understood as a practical and symbolic end of post-war liberalism, founded on principles of human rights. However imperfect such a liberal international order was, it represented a historic achievement of a struggles for human dignity that were fought for over a century.

## Historical Context

Since 1950, following the interventions of T. H. Marshall, the notion of citizenship has adhered to principles of equality rather than ones labour market status. In fact, demolishing socio-economic inequalities was an overriding concern: “The inequality of the social class system may be acceptable provided the equality of citizenship is recognised” (Marshall, 1949, p. 70). These values came to be reflected in the 1977 Canadian citizenship act, which enshrines the “rights, powers and privileges” to all that hold citizenship. These rights were laid out in more expansive terms in *Lavoie v. Canada* (1995), that include certain economic rights such as privileges in employment above non-canadians. *Taylor vs Canada*, (2006)<sup>1</sup> further affirmed that Canadians “possessed all the rights and privileges that could be enjoyed by any person under its constitution and government”, which included “Practical benefits flow from this status, such as the right to vote, the right to enter or remain in Canada, and the right to travel abroad with a Canadian passport. Canadian citizens also enjoy privileged access to the Federal Public Service”. Yet, in spite of these affirmations, in the contemporary context of the Canadian state, <sup>2</sup>the inequalities of the social class system have been transposed onto the basis of citizenship. If citizenship is

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