

Immigration and National Identity in Canada

Weak Canadian identity = high immigration?

by Mark Wegierski

In the search for the reasons behind the high rate of dissimilar immigration to countries like Canada today, it may be argued that insufficient attention is paid to “the crisis of national identity” in those countries. Canada's official immigration figures are five times per capita those of the United States — and possibly the highest per capita in the world. A country with an atrophied sense of identity finds nothing worthwhile to preserve, and therefore is completely open to immigration and to continuous social and political reconstruction. Even a media-barrage of “horror-stories” about abuses of immigration provisions and refugee-claims would be unlikely to change things very much if Canada's own identity is vaporous — fundamentally lacking in a galvanizing, mobilizing feeling for something worthwhile to defend.

Canada's identity is crisscrossed with lines of fracture. It must first be acknowledged that Canada really consists of “two nations” — English Canada and French Canada (Quebec). An unbelievable amount of political energy is diverted into “keeping Quebec in Canada.” English Canada is itself a heterogeneous identity with at least three distinct regional cultures — the Maritimes (Atlantic Canada), Ontario, and Western Canada. English-Canadian national identity was never especially robust, and it has increasingly attenuated and atrophied since the 1960s. As Ray Conlogue has argued in his *Impossible Nation: The Longing for Homeland in Canada and Quebec* (Stratford, Ontario: The Mercury Press, 1996), English Canada was especially deficient in building up the “cultural-psychological” or imaginative aspects of its identity. With the worldwide fading of Britishness as a

possible identity after 1945, English Canadians have been left with very little. Even the Canadian core tradition at its height appeared rather arid, consisting mostly of Lowland-Scots-Presbyterianism, Calvinist in religion, and Whig in politics, which seemed to perpetually war against any sense of Romantic nationalism or possible Celtic *phantasie*. Canadians of that era were, typically, especially stolid, unimaginative, and dull. Some historians have argued that the founding tradition of Canada was, in fact, nineteenth-century “reformism” or “radical liberalism” — rather than the high-Toryism originating with the United Empire Loyalists. The former, as opposed to the latter, would seem an especially inhospitable ground for building up a deeply-rooted, national, collective sense of purpose and meaning. The allure and temptation of American culture, which only increased as one went further into the Twentieth Century, was irresistible. Indeed, American pop-culture has overwhelmed English Canada to an almost unbelievable degree. In the post-1960s it would often be the case that Canadians would take U.S.-inspired trends (such as “rights-absolutism” or political correctness/ multiculturalism) and push them so far “forward” that the U.S. would appear to be lagging by comparison. And it would often be the very extremity of this “progressive” drive that would constitute Canada's “distinctiveness” from the U.S.

Canada is one of the few Western countries where certain Left and left-liberal sectors identify themselves with what they consider to be a (Canadian) nationalism. (In a classic line in his *Patriot Game* book on Canada, Peter Brimelow described it as “one of the toadstools of history.”) By this he meant that it was an artificial bureaucratic growth predicated on the annihilation of true national sentiment. However, the suggested solution of the absorption of English Canada into what in the 1980s appeared to Brimelow to be a distinctly more robust U.S., is highly questionable,

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as well. *True* English-Canadian nationalism must also be ferociously anti-American, as George Parkin Grant, Canada's leading traditionalist thinker, stresses again and again in his writings. It may even be argued that Canadian Left-nationalism is at times not entirely devoid of more positive possibilities.

The Canadian federal election of June 2, 1997, pointed to the very regionalized nature of Canada today. Out of a total of 301 seats, the Liberals won 155 seats, including 101 of 103 seats in Ontario. The right-leaning Reform Party won 60 seats, all of

coalition on geographic lines would appear advantageous to both parties (i.e. Reform in Western Canada, PCs elsewhere) Jean Charest, the leader of the PCs, has been particularly vehement in his denunciations of Reform Party leader Preston Manning. Perhaps Reform's chances of forming the federal government will only come about in a new situation of crisis, if Quebec finally decides to separate through a referendum vote. (In the October 1995 referendum in the province of Quebec, a process leading to separation came within a half-a-percentage point of endorsement.)

Canada, lacking a coherent sense of its own identity and purpose, lies open to virtually any minority- or victim-based claims of the current-day world. One issue which may be seen as symbolic of the troubles of Canada is that of relations with the aboriginal peoples — Canadian Indians, Métis, and Inuit (Eskimo). In late November 1996, the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Issues, which had been launched five years earlier, reached its conclusions. The cost of the inquiry process alone was \$58 million dollars (it was calculated that the report cost about \$13,000 per page). What the report recommended was that the federal government simply give two billion more dollars per year to the aboriginal peoples over a period of twenty years (i.e. \$40 billion dollars). Otherwise, "violence was inevitable." The fact is that aboriginal peoples currently receive about \$11,000 per capita in benefits, and are exempt from income tax. The report also recommended virtually total sovereignty for about 100 aboriginal "nations." In a blistering condemnation the *Toronto Sun*, a major Toronto newspaper (November 24, 1996), said that a rejection of this entire report would be a good point at which to start to question the entire victimological mentality which has increasingly taken hold in Canada.

Although the *Toronto Sun* did not say this, it may be argued that Canada's identity as a society is compromised and delegitimized by the double-barrelled assault of the aboriginal peoples (who wish to lay exclusive claim to all the traditional benefits of a native-born population, immemorially tied and rooted to the soil) and of multiculturalism (all the visible minorities who claim "absolute cultural self-determination," as well as extensive entitlements on the basis of past and present

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them from Western Canada. The Bloc Québécois won 44 seats in Quebec. The social democrats (New Democratic Party) (21 seats), and the traditional center-right party (the Progressive Conservatives) (20 seats) received most of their support from Atlantic Canada. (There was also one liberal independent elected.)

The difficulties of a "small-c conservative English-Canadian" electoral victory ever emerging in the Canadian polity were highlighted by Reform's failure to break through in Ontario. The harsh mathematics is that, with Quebec's representation amounting to a quarter of the seats in the federal Parliament, a party based solely in English Canada (or what is sometimes ironically called TROC — the rest of Canada) would have to win two-thirds of the seats in English Canada to form a majority government — an almost impossible feat. To this has to be added the almost automatic exclusion of a "small c-conservatism" from heavily-immigrant, large-metropolitan areas, notably Toronto, with its over 30 seats.

In addition, the smaller Progressive Conservative Party is adamantly against forming any kind of association with the Reform Party. Although a Reform-Progressive Conservative

victimization of all persons of color, by all white, European peoples). It may be noticed that English-Canadians, and increasingly even the French-Canadians/Québécois, are not left with any meaningful social and cultural claims to stand on. As for “white ethnics” such as Ukrainian-, Italian-, Portuguese- and Polish-Canadians, their role has apparently been that of supporters of multiculturalism in a brief, earlier incarnation, when it was supposed to benefit mainly them — and then, with the ever-increasing arrival of visible minorities, their re-classification as part of “the oppressive majority.” It may indeed be argued that far from offering a real plurality of distinct, worthwhile *cultures* (such as the colorful folk-cultures of Eastern European ethnic groups), Canada today represents *one* hyper-liberal culture (having most of its aspects defined by the lowest-common-denominator on Earth of American pop-culture) — with the most multiracial population on Earth!

It might well be argued that the Canada of today is as far removed from a traditional conception of European nationalism as has ever been possible in human history. Persons somewhat influenced by or aware of such traditions cannot help but experience high degrees of “cognitive dissonance” and *anomie*, living in such a society. In those earlier societies, one had been taught to cherish one's national and/or religious heritage as a priceless patrimony, which had to be the touchstone of one's existence, constantly fought and striven for, and never spoken of except in the most reverential terms. Any nation on the crowded European continent that had adopted internationalism as an outlook would have simply ended up as carrion for its neighbors. While nationalism doubtless had its dark side (from the universally-known phenomenon of Nazi Germany, to the virtually unknown phenomenon of Ukrainian fascism) it could far more often be a focus for the most exalted, high-minded expressions of the human spirit. The cherishing of, high respect, and high regard for one's own national group is what is virtually forbidden today — to almost all European

peoples. With every year, the weight of political-correctness/multiculturalism becomes heavier on the backs of European and European-descended societies. As the self-induced guilt of Europeans is continually ratcheted up, they become ashamed of merely existing. What all this will lead to appears to be that these groups will in fact become the new pariahs, while constantly accused of being cruel and harsh oppressors — the latter simply being a rationalization and cover-up for their actual dispossession. In the end, it seems that the only thing that can assuage white liberal guilt is the complete effacement of European civilization. What also has particularly tragic dimensions is that this appears to be an ever-tightening process, from which there can be no conceptual escape possible for those societies.

It is now becoming increasingly apparent that — at the very minimum — the U.S., and especially Canada, will constitute a new kind of thoroughgoing, albeit nonviolent totalitarianism, imposed through the virtual univocality of the mass media and education systems (including higher education). What was obvious about old-fashioned Communism (particularly in Eastern Europe) was the extent to which many persons in those societies hated the system. Resisters could feel themselves cheered on by their societies, which made their sufferings in the Gulag (or in the later authoritarian phase of the regimes, of material deprivation and the blocking of their career paths) meaningful. Characterizations of opponents of Communism as “Nazi collaborators,” “fascists,” “reactionaries,” “religious fanatics and obscurantists,” or merely as “unscientific” and “superstitious,” though they were certainly employed, were not generally accepted by a significant proportion of people in the society. The fact is that Communism was in most cases crudely imposed “from above.” The current regimes, however, are constructed on the basis of a thoroughgoing permeation of ideology, apparently “from below.” One may suspect that at some point, if current trends and directions continue uninterrupted and unopposed, every nook and

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cranny of such a society will be thoroughly filled with the ideology. The mere existence of resisters might then be seen as so provocative as to warrant “active measures.” But at that time, far from feeling the tacit, warm support of much of their society, such resisters will find themselves utterly reviled, as “hatemongers,” “racists,” “bootstomping Nazis,” etc., by a thoroughly brainwashed populace — often even by their own families and friends. They will find themselves — and the future — utterly without hope.

One of the most obvious strategies for creating the illusion of “bottom-up change” is the siphoning of enormous state resources to politically-minded bureaucracies, and special-interest groups, under the pretext of the welfare-state. It may be said here that, looking at the comparatively harsh nature of capitalism half-a-century, or a century ago, such welfare innovations as old-age pensions, health-care insurance, subsidies to higher education, etc., seemed to have been eminently justifiable. However, the extension of a nation's citizenship to (putatively) everyone on the planet; and the siphoning of state resources to politically-minded bureaucracies, and special-interest groups, have severely strained the initial premises of the welfare-state. The effective death of the notion of citizenship means the eventual death of the welfare-state, and the devolution to “Brazilification.”

In discussing the disbursements of the welfare-state, it is important to distinguish between administrative, mostly politically-neutral entitlements such as old-age pensions, and the establishment of clearly politically-minded bureaucracies, as well as the conferring of huge grants to special-interest groups. Because of the two latter phenomena, there is hardly a “social activist” that does not live well at public expense, one way or another. Not only are these kinds of persons seemingly driving society to oblivion, many of them are doing it — figuratively speaking — in gold-plated, chauffeur-driven limousines. (Just how many hundreds of thousands of lucrative, well-paying positions, whose main work-requirements are the minutiae of the day-to-day advancement of the left-liberal agenda, will ever be enough for these people?) There is also the whole issue of the corporate foundations and philanthropies, much of whose money apparently also goes to these types of groups. (The extent of the Ford Foundation's funding of the pro-

immigration lobby has often been pointed out in the pages of THE SOCIAL CONTRACT.) Some studies in Canada have indicated that the corporate sector has carried out “employment equity” (affirmative-action) policies more thoroughly than even the federal civil service!

The harsh criticisms often expressed by neoconservatives of the welfare-state — as typified in David Frum's writing — appear to ignore many of the above aspects of the situation, which have truly made the welfare-state untenable. Frum appears to rage against “middle-class entitlements,” calling for slash-and-burn approaches to old-age pensions, healthcare, etc., yet at the same time finds little to complain about in the abuse of welfare and

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healthcare by illegal immigrants. What he seems to be saying is that decent, hardworking middle-class persons do not deserve the benefits of the welfare-state, whereas the undifferentiated mass of “poor” — including illegal immigrants — should have these benefits maximized. It might be noted that apart from the manifest injustice of such a stance, the adoption of such a configuration of “welfare-reform” by the Republican Party would be politically suicidal.

What should particularly be noticed about grants to special-interest groups is that, even if they constitute a relatively insignificant part of the government budget, this is money which is spent explicitly on *political* activities. For example, the annual budget of the Canadian National Action Committee on the Status of Women, the main feminist lobby group, is comparable to that of the Reform Party of Canada. Yet, virtually all of NAC's funding consists of taxpayers' money, handed over by the government with virtually no debate, whereas the Reform Party has to raise its funds on the basis of constant, ongoing, honest popular appeal. The dense networks and layers of “social activist” groups would probably quickly wither to very little, if they were not constantly infused with taxpayers'

money. In fact, deprived of their subsidies, they might even be left with less influence than the few small existing right-leaning groups, such as the Voice of Canadians Committees, and the Immigration Association of Canada, which not do not receive any government money, and have to break through the hostile media and educational climate.

Although it is relatively easy for some to see and point out what would need to be done today, the summoning up of the resources to save whatever remains of traditional Canada appears to be a Sisyphean labor. It appears that Canada will be among the first of the European-descended societies to be transmogrified into something decidedly different. The tendency of Canadian history, for at least the last thirty years, has been that, whenever there was even a glimmer of hope that the surge towards the socially-liberal, multicultural, engorged welfare-state "utopia" could be arrested, those hopes were quickly dashed.

It still remains an issue of debate whether the United States has any greater hope for the future than Canada. The United States, is, among other things, the very center of global political-correctness, as well of the highly corrosive, hyper-materialist, pop-culture which might well find itself able to digest even such countervailing tendencies as Iranian theocracy - leading to the "universal, homogenous, world-state." Nevertheless, the flow and shape of immigration from the Southern countries, into North America, will be critical in determining what kinds of lives we will be living in the future. To put it bluntly, the less such immigration there is, the better virtually all people's lives in North America will be (including those of the most recent immigrants!). It is only a comforting illusion to think that countries such as Canada, Australia, the United States, or for that matter, even France, Germany, or Poland, will continue to exist "forever" as their demographic make-up radically shifts. This is not what history teaches us. As *Village Voice* writer Lawrence Chua stated in his review of Peter Brimelow's *Alien Nation*: "His fear is justified. We will bury him." (c.f., THE SOCIAL CONTRACT, Fall 1996, Vol. VII, no. 1, p. 62.)

Who decided there should be such an intake policy in the first place — certainly not the majority of the people of Canada — as opposed to a fragment of the elites. Yet it is precisely these elites

that benefit most from newcomers as new client-groups and voters for the welfare state. At the same time, these elite-groups are best able to insulate themselves from the negative consequences of this massive, dissimilar immigration.

Can such an immigration policy be seen as in any way *normal* or *natural*, in relation to the life of any nation? Is such mass immigration into the West now to be accepted with a resigned sense of inevitability, or can any Western state ever reassert control over its borders?

More specifically, is not the "refugee" immigration category in Canada an underhanded method for doubling the immigration total?

Why *should* the West invariably multiculturalize itself, while all non-Western countries remain emphatically themselves? Finally, is not the multiculturalization of the West over the long term tantamount to the effacement of European ideas, ideals, beliefs, and in the end, populations? It might indeed be called — to all intents and purposes — a form of "slow genocide" or of "death on the installment plan."

Deep and profound concern about the troubled future and possible grim destiny of one's own people, nation, and civilization cannot be easily dismissed.

It may be argued that the "emergency-situation" of late modernity into which — as Heidegger put it — we are all thrown, imposes on serious social and political thought the necessity of the embrace of a defined polarization, which might have looked or seemed superfluous or unnecessary, overly self-consciously axiological, or even somewhat overwrought, in earlier times. Heidegger had also pointed out that, however chaotic the situation already appears, late modernity may well be just beginning.

Canada — despite its current embrace of many disintegrative trends — has up until now remained a safer, cleaner, less crime- and corruption-prone and more civil society than the U.S. However, insofar as some of the rambunctiousness of U.S. conservatism or populism can be directed into taming the immigration flood, then, ultimately, it is the United States (or certain regions thereof) that might emerge as better places to live, in the 21st century and beyond.

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