

Canada: 33 million and Climbing

By MARK WEGIERSKI

The census in Canada is statutorily held every five years. By the time the results of the 2006 Census come in, it is likely that Canada will have reached a population of 33 million people.

Eventoday,Canadaisconventionallyconsidered a vast, empty country that can easily accommodate many millions more immigrants, without any worry of environmental degradation or decline of quality of life. Indeed, the conventional wisdom is that current-day Canada's high-immigration policies (of about 250,000 immigrants a year—a rate which is per capita about twice that of the United States) are an unmitigated blessing—bringing not only salutary multicultural enrichment, but also constituting the “engine” of Canada's current economic success and growth.

There are many problems with the officially approved views of Canada's demographic, immigration, environmental, and economic situation. Canada is territorially the world's second largest country, and although only a very small portion of that vast territory is comfortably habitable (and already somewhat overcrowded), Canada has *enormous* physical resources (including the world's largest supply of fresh water; vast forests; extremely extensive grain and other food production; and huge oil, natural gas, and mineral ore deposits). Most of Canada, however, is virtually uninhabitable because of extreme cold in the winter, bogs, and thin soils—which can usually support only scraggly coniferous trees. So the prospects of a “commodious” existence for many millions more people on Canadian territory are rather dubious.

One very important consideration is that virtually all of the immigration today ends up in Canada's biggest cities—Toronto, Montreal, and

Vancouver. This means that the environmental and social problems of living in these ever-larger urban agglomerations are ever-increasing.

Unlike in earlier years, smog has become a major problem in Toronto, and other large urban centers, especially during the summer months. The time required for commuting to work has been continually increasing, and gridlock has become ever more frequent on the overburdened road and highway system.

The increasing population in the cities overburdens the vaunted health-care system (for example, because of the sheer number of new patients), as well as the public education system (for example, because of the very high proportion of students requiring ESL instruction). As some of the wealthier inhabitants of the city seek to find a calmer living in the countryside, the more attractive parts of the hinterland are opened to more and more residential development.

Environmental Impact

To accommodate the burgeoning population in the more southerly parts of Canada, good agricultural land is paved over by roads, housing tracts, and shopping malls.

As Canada requires ever more natural resources to maintain its economy, oil and mineral exploration as well as logging in ever increasing parts of the hinterland, including those which were once thought to be set aside mostly for the less intrusive forms of tourism, becomes economically necessary. Canada has already seen at least one colossal ecological disaster—the near-disappearance of the cod fishery in the Maritimes.

As a northern country, Canada is particularly prone to the more negative effects of global warming on its environment. For example, life in Toronto in the summer months is becoming increasingly uncomfortable.

It could be argued that there exists in Canada today, something which could be called the commodity-consumption/welfare-state. Despite the

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attempts of some of the welfare-state's supporters to distinguish between the "bad" materialism of corporate consumerism, and the presumably "good" materialism of redistributive welfare policies, the differences between what could both be seen as materialistic outlooks are minimal. A genuine sacrifice in the consumption-lifestyle, on behalf of something like the ecological future of the planet, is comparatively rare.

Many of the ostensibly pro-ecological policies are also calculated in such a fashion as to shift the maximum of costs onto the taxpaying public, and exponentially increase the permissible level of government intrusion. One of the most obvious inducements to conservation of such resources as electricity is to charge market prices for them, yet this is usually considered anathema.

Nation, Family, and Community

Also, since the current-day system typically absolves people of responsibility for their individual actions, it thereby lessens the appeal it can make on behalf of individual conservation efforts. For example, why should I limit my water-consumption, if I'm receiving it for free, and I know that even if I limit myself, irresponsible others will use as much as they wish. Of course, with mass immigration into Canada, reinforced by massive population growth outside Canada, the argument for individual ecological conservation becomes markedly more difficult to make.

Indeed, the rather abstract allegiances of many ecologists to "the planet" do not seem to make the most effective behavioral inducement. People often tend to care most for their own nation, local community, and family. So the ecological appeal could be better framed in terms of preserving the ecology of *this* country and *this* countryside. The idea is to link patriotism, civic-mindedness, and ecology. It could be argued that the commodity-consumption/welfare-state rapidly consumes the long-accumulated, once-carefully shepherded wealth of a given state/society/nation like a ravenous, raging fire, in the end leaving only a burnt-out husk.

The GNP is expected to rise at a rate of at least 3 percent a year, and it seems that it is never

enough. The maintenance of what are (by any world-historical measure) the comparatively very high living standards of the Canadian welfare-state can only occur with the intensifying despoliation of the natural environment; or with net negative population growth. It could be argued that the current-day Canada, which should be called a consumptionist welfare-state, has consumed with comparatively little long-term benefit, and with obvious detriment to social values and cohesion, vast resources which could have sustained earlier societies in relative comfort and stability for centuries or even millennia.

Ironically, the hypertrophy of immense wealth also actually results in the tendency towards the atrophy of authentic social standards and much of authentic social existence. Even as ever-greater wealth is generated, society loses many of its earlier good habits that would allow it to utilize the wealth towards ensuring a "commodious" existence, or to carefully conserve it for future generations.

It could be argued, furthermore, that the relatively high general living standards of the Canadian welfare-society can only be maintained at fever-pitch height for little more than a generation. It now increasingly appears that the Baby Boomers here are indeed the first and last hyper-affluent generation. Though these trends are only beginning, increasing economic and budget stringency appears to be the trend of the future.

It is clear that the Canadian welfare-society is the very opposite of premodern "stable-state" (or "steady-state") societies. The current-day, socially liberal, multiculturalist, consumptionist welfare-state might well be only a very brief episode in human history, before some kind of massive dissolution into chaos, or, possibly some sort of new re-integration, emerges.

The central idea is to link some aspects of traditional nation, family, and religion, with a deeply conservationist and ecological program. There would be the hope for societies to emerge that would be comparatively socially and ecologically stable, and technologically advanced at the same time. ■