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THE THREE 'FRONTIER' NATIONS

A Canadian's View

By John Meyer

TORONTO, CANADA —

In Canada there is no integrated planning or environmental accounting. At the two Washington conferences in October, I had expected to find that other countries, which are currently out-performing us economically, would have elements of these critical considerations embedded in their policy-making. That was not the case.

Instead of finding that other countries have more comprehensive and advanced policy-making capability, it became obvious that they were making the same mistakes as Canada but in a smaller way. The three frontier nations (Australia, Canada and the U.S.A.) are still pursuing frontier population policies because the policy-making apparatus still has a frontier mentality. The Europeans are not actively pursuing immigration to boost their populations but they do seem not to have explicit population and environmental policies.

"The media represent both a force and a mindset which are opposed to a national debate on the effects of large-scale immigration."

The "Myths and Taboos" theme of the FAIR conference was appropriate since it highlighted a universal problem: the enforcement of dogma by a power elite. Today, the throne of power is no longer located in the pulpit or boardroom or private club but in the offices of the editor. It is very important for those promoting a change in national policy to clearly identify the forces and attitudes which are maintaining the status quo. The media, employers of cheap labor, land speculators, altruists, and some church bureaucracies are the "pull" behind current immigration policies. They are enforcing the taboo on any debate of the issues which will lead to change. The vision of the endless frontier is the myth that the debate will destroy.

If we can show any of the players to be violating their social contract, or to be in a position of conflict of interest, that may be enough to remove their opposition to the discussion of the real issues.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE MEDIA

The media represent both a force and a mindset which are opposed to a national debate on the effects of large scale immigration.

The "force" is their control of and influence on any debate. Without media coverage and participation we may as well move our soapbox to the nearest closet.

The "mindset" is the expertise levels of those who report and edit the news. These people have not spent the last twenty years pondering the effect of population change and migration on national and global well-being. Most of them are not aware of even the most basic linkages between demographic change, the environment, and the economy. Population and environment courses are common in high schools now, but it will be years before the graduates make their presence felt in the media.

Unlike manufacturing industries whose market is limited only by the quality, performance and cost-effectiveness of its products, most media enterprises are geographically limited. For instance, the *Toronto Star* cannot hope to expand significantly its market share in Montreal or New York. Its main vehicle for increased revenue is growth in the local market and growth in the number and expenditures of its advertisers. The *Toronto Star* took in \$200 million in the decade of the '80s from new home advertising for houses built predominantly on prime agricultural land.

The "corporate" end of the *Star* certainly knows on which side its bread is buttered. The editorial side is probably likewise aware of this but it also sees itself as the society's information system. "Good media," said one observer, "are like a nation talking to itself." We must make clear to the media that they have been falling down in their responsibility to air the best information, and that they have been guilty of neglect and intimidation in smothering the national debate on immigration.

The conferences brought out the similarities in the frustration of national debate in most of the western countries. It seems that the immigration debate will not be media-led but media-impeded.

"Poverty, environmental decline, and political and ethnic instability are the driving factors"

THE "PUSH" FACTORS OF MIGRATION

Whatever the approaches of Western governments to immigration, it is obvious that the "push" is the major problem. Poverty, environmental decline, and political and ethnic instability are the driving factors in emigration. In order to understand the full context of migration it is necessary to understand both the push and the pull factors. The conferences gave a good overview of both.

It was very interesting to hear during the presentations that the first concern of many younger Eastern Europeans is not how to fix and improve their economies and societies but how to get themselves to Germany, the US, or Canada. I am sure that these individuals have the same feeling for their countries that we all do — so one is left with the conclusion that the problems in the home countries are regarded as hopeless, that nothing they as individuals can do will produce a meaningful improvement.

We are beginning to see the same despairing mentality in Canada. We have a declining social and economic situation and the governments are perceived by many as both responsible for, and incapable of, solving the problems. People throw up their hands in disgust and talk about moving to the US, New Zealand, or Australia.

SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES

The most startling thing the conferences brought out, from my personal point of view, was the incredible set of similarities between the situations of Australia and Canada. Similarities is too weak a word. The statistics of the two countries make them almost identical twins except that one is frozen and the other is dusty. Compared to other OECD countries, Australia and Canada are tied for first in a race for the:

- highest per capita net external debt;
- highest rates of population growth;
- highest rates of labor force growth;
- highest rates of agricultural land losses;
- stagnation of real per capita incomes;
- lowest rates of productivity improvement.

The differences between the US and Canada are larger but the complete lack of planning in either country is leading to the same kinds of assumptions. In short, both countries, once viewed as bread baskets and limitless wells of raw materials, will run out of critical resources in the near future. Of course, each country is planning to turn to the other as a source of solutions for its problems.

Meeting people from Europe brought up, once again, the misconceptions about Canada under which many still labor: wide open spaces suitable for

settlement, virgin forests waiting to be cleared for the plow — are visions that still linger in the European mind. (They still linger in many Canadian minds as well, which is much of the problem of "myth and taboo" that hinders the making of new policy.)

Immigration policy in all of the OECD countries is a stand-alone policy, whose consequences are dealt with in separate policy "budgets" rather than being dealt with at the source.

FUTURE COOPERATIVE ACTION

The delegates from the various countries represented groups which, collectively, have the understanding to begin to implement integrated national policies that would tie population, the environment, and the economy together. If Canada is any indicator, there probably exists somewhere in each federal bureaucracy the embryo of a sophisticated and comprehensive input-output model that mathematically represents such an integration.

Such models are exactly what is needed for nations to adopt integrated policies. They are also exactly what advocates of those policies require to support their calls for change. These models should be sought out, supported, and cited as often as possible to bring home to our opponents — the believers in limitless growth — the fact that they are poorly informed and out of date.

With the homeless visible on virtually every block of the capital of the most powerful nation on earth, it is obviously time to update the vision of what constitutes a prosperous nation. Forty years ago more prosperity meant more of what we already had. We were industrial adolescents. Today we are industrial middle-agers who must look at prosperity in terms of individual well-being rather than in terms of simply "bigger is better." Otherwise, the promise of what our countries once offered will slip beyond the reach of many in the current generation and the vast majority of those in generations to come.

It was a pleasure to spend two days with such an aware, focused, and diverse group. The last time I found conversation so stimulating was in a short half-hour talk with Dr. Norman Borlaug who looked upon his accomplishments in the "green revolution" as merely buying time to solve the population problem. Dr. Borlaug knew what fundamentals had to be addressed to solve the problems that all nations are facing.

It was refreshing for me to find that same awareness among so many of the delegates at these conferences. ■

[Zero Population Growth of Canada, Inc. produces an excellent set of fliers showing the interrelationship of population, resources, the environment, and immigration. For a set, send \$5 in US funds to P.O. Box 113, Ajax, Ontario, Canada, L1S 3C5.]