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Canada's Converging Crises

By Mark Wegierski

I. Immigration Policy

In the long chronicles of human vice, folly, and stupidity, contemporary Canada seems to occupy a particularly prominent place. Nevertheless, 1994 has not been a good year for Canadian immigration-boosters (consisting of almost everyone in the political classes, the media, the academy, and the corporate elites). Critics of immigration (the submerged Canadian majority) found a number of galvanizing incidents on which to focus their opposition, as well as a few brave media personalities and politicians to voice their concerns. Even the hyper-liberal monthly *Saturday Night Magazine*, the paragon of "official" Canadian culture (which publishes about one right-of-center article per decade), recently came out with Daniel Stoffman's ground-breaking piece, "Refugee Fraud/Open Door Travesty" (November 1994).

The two most prominent incidents were the murder of a young Greek-Canadian woman in a fashionable downtown café, during a robbery carried out by four young, guntoting Jamaican males, and the murder of a police officer by a young, gunwielding, Jamaican male. In both cases it was found that the accused perpetrators had extensive criminal records, had been deported at least once, and were either illegal immigrants with unserved deportation orders, or else had recently been allowed to stay in Canada under lax provisions.

In the ensuing brouhaha over the two most prominent incidents, it turned out that there were possibly up to 40,000 persons who had criminal records, or had committed crimes, while waiting for acceptance by Canada. The problem was that the files with this information had been dumped into a remote warehouse — out of sight, out of mind. Immigration Minister Sergio Marchi responded by creating a small RCMP (federal police) section to handle the deportation of some 600 persons he described as "hardcore criminals", i.e. those who had been convicted of three or more violent offenses in the last ten years. At the same time, he ordered the fast-tracking of about 6,000 other refugee claims.

Canada's Immigration and Refugee Board is described as an institution plagued with problems. The Immigration and Refugee Board would not exist at all had not the Supreme Court of Canada ruled that all persons physically reaching Canada are entitled to a full hearing as refugee-claimants. (The court also mandated that all refugee-claimants should receive welfare payments, a food allowance, free medical and dental care, etc. Indeed, until some months ago, refugee-claimants were in fact formally *prohibited* from working.) In the wake of the Liberals' victory in October 1993, Prime Minister Chretien dismissed virtually all of the former Tory IRB appointees, and put in their place mostly long-time immigration activists, such as Michael Schelew, former Vice-President of the Canadian branch of Amnesty International. Recently, a member of the IRB quit, and alleged that Schelew had imposed "quotas" of an 80% acceptance rate on all boardmembers, and had severely berated them and threatened them with firing if they fell below that number. There is in fact an inherent bias towards acceptance, as rejection requires extensive written explanation, while acceptance requires none. In any event, the acceptance rate at the IRB has shot up to 90%. Earlier in the year, Schelew had also apparently sent a long memo to all IRB staff urging the fast-tracking of applications from such persons as refugees from rightwing regimes, homosexuals, and persons who were homeless in their countries of origin.

There was another minor scandal when an IRB member and long-time Liberal party activist candidly admitted that he had entered Canada illegally in the late Sixties, and had married a Canadian woman to stay in Canada, while leaving behind his wife in India. Although legally not required to do so, he resigned from his lucrative posting.

Commenting on the IRB scandal, respected TV commentator Mike Duffy pointed out that the yearly cost of the refugee-claim system, including the refugee-courts, legal aid costs paid to lawyers, and the welfare-payments, medical care, etc. for refugee-claimants amounted to a billion dollars, which is more than the United Nations spends on all refugee concerns in a year. (It would not be difficult to rack up such sums, as the average yearly salary of an IRB judge is about $85,000.) In a subsequent broadcast, Duffy estimated that the number of legitimate refugee claimants (according to UN criteria) was probably around two to three thousand, whereas some 25,000 persons had been accepted in the last year. In December 1994, Schelew was finally forced to resign, receiving a $100,000 separation package, while the government investigation into his activities at the IRB, which was just getting underway, was immediately called off.

The upshot of this accumulation of scandals was that Immigration Minister Sergio Marchi reduced total immigration targets for the next year by about 50,000 (to approximately 200,000) and promised a refocusing of

immigration on "economic immigrants", who had latterly fallen to below 20% of total immigration. These would be the people with actual concrete skills and talents, as opposed to those under the "family reunification" category — which, until recently, extended to brothers, sisters, uncles, aunts, cousins, etc., as well as immediate family-members.

Some in the media blamed Marchi for retreating from immigration levels amounting to 1% of the current population, which had been offered in the Liberals' "Red Book" of campaign promises. For some reason, this 1% figure had become established as a virtually scientifically infallible optimum for immigration inflow.

It is important to recognize that Canada's population growth is the highest in the developed world. This is not because of any great strength in the loins of native-born Canadians, but simply because of a high immigration policy which has let in about a million persons, virtually all of them from non-European countries, in the last four years. Canada's population now being at 29 million, the "optimum" 1% would now be 290,000. Less than two years ago, Canada's population was about 27 million. All these immigrants also have children at a far higher rate than native-born Canadians. The latter group is in fact aging quickly, and has reproduced at far below replacement levels.

It was recently reported in the Canadian media that there were some 50,000 unserved deportation orders last year, for Toronto alone. This would suggest that the countrywide total could be about 100,000 per year. Judging by these figures, the number of persons who were accepted by Canada under false or specious claims, along with those who have committed crimes while in Canada, as well as those whose presence is wholly undocumented and thereby could be legally subject to deportation, might well be reaching a million persons. The extent to which illegal immigration is completely unmonitored is indicated by the fact — which the media at one point reported — that many illegal immigrants apparently were receiving income-tax refunds from the federal government.

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The Reform Party's proposals to lower immigration to about 100,000 a year appear extremely moderate in the face of such a huge crisis. (Reform is today's conservative party in Canada, and the only major public-political group critical of high immigration policies.) To restore some kind of stability to the immigration situation, levels of about 50,000 a year (corresponding to those of Liberal Prime Minister Trudeau's last year in office in 1983) would be needed, and possibly, a number of "zero-immigration" years, to allow Canada to catch its breath. Some kind of effective instrumentalities would also have to be put in place for dealing with illegal immigration. As far as the refugee-claims issue, it would seem that merely adhering to the strictly-defined UN criteria (rather than creatively expanding them) would bring about a very substantial reduction in numbers.

It should hardly be surprising to point out that, in the last twenty-five or so years, there has indeed been a bias in Canadian immigration policy — definitively shifting away from traditional sources of immigration, and focusing increasingly on Third World and non-European countries. A colleague of mine who often visited Britain told me that, among the many people he spoke to, the general impression they had of Canada was of a country which was very grudging in its immigration admittance policy. The author has personally experienced the rejection of two tourist visa applications, which had been filed on behalf of Polish citizens, about a year-and-a-half apart. Stories are circulating that one out of 10 such visa applications are automatically rejected on a random basis. (The chances of this happening twice in a row, then, would theoretically be 1 in a 100.) It could be noted here that the Immigration Department, and many other parts of the federal government relating to these matters, are now themselves heavily staffed with visible minorities of comparatively recent Canadian citizenship, who doubtless skew all these various processes to a certain extent. (It could be pointed out further that Canadian citizenship is now available after three years of residence, and that the present-day Canadian citizenship requirements and exam are, quite frankly, a joke.)

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Few people remember today that all earlier immigrants to Canada, mostly Eastern and Southern Europeans, were required, as a condition of their entry, to attest that they would not apply for welfare or other social services until five years after their arrival. Canadian citizenship became available after five, not three years. Persons with criminal records, infectious diseases, and disabilities were simply kept out, and persons committing crimes in Canada were either automatically deported, or deported after completing their jail terms. There was no vast, bloated infrastructure of

cost-free English as a Second Language (ESL) or skills-training or literacy classes, or of multifarious, government-funded social agencies catering exclusively to immigrants. (A good indicator of the extent of this infrastructure is the annual calendar of the Continuing Education Department of the Toronto Public School Board.) The author remembers well that when applying for some computer-skills training some years ago (while he was receiving Unemployment Insurance) he was turned down *flat*. It has also been forgotten, for example, that in the late 1940s, Canada had required veterans of the Polish Armed Forces—who had fought against Hitler since 1939—to work for two years on remote farms, as a condition of their entry. In such a situation, it is not surprising that tensions could easily mount between older white ethnic immigrants (and their children born in Canada) and the new crop of visible minority newcomers.

The Canadian State is probably in its terminal crisis. It lacks effective control of its borders; it has virtually no army (the defense budget is barely 7% of total federal government expenditures — and a further billion-dollar cut is proposed); and it appears to lack proper fiscal accounting of its expenditures. In an attempt to forestall an IMF intervention looming over the horizon, the federal government is proposing a series of comparatively modest budget-cuts. Although real cuts seem unlikely, the budget might well eventually be balanced — at the expense of property-holding pensioners (who also happen to be the least racially-diverse group in the population) — or their heirs. Taxes on RRSP's (registered retirement savings plans — Canada's last large permitted tax deduction), an inheritance tax, and a tax on total assets — are becoming moot. (One financial analyst has actually blamed the deficit on senior citizens.)

II. Quebec Separatism

In its September 1994 provincial election, Quebec, Canada's fractious French quarter, gave a resounding "No" to Canada, by voting in the avowedly separatist Parti Québécois as the provincial government, with a two-thirds majority of seats. (Although in popular vote, because of the peculiarities of the "first-past-the-post" electoral system, the PQ were ahead by less than a percentage point.) Led by the astute and urbane Jacques Parizeau, they just might succeed in taking Quebec out of the Confederation. They are assisted by the Bloc Québécois in the Federal Parliament, which had won 54 Quebec seats in the October 1993 election. A recent, sudden and completely unexpected blow to the Bloc, however, has been the tragic and near-fatal bout of their leader, Lucien Bouchard, with the extremely rare "flesh-eating syndrome" disease. The long march to a Québécois state seems virtually unstoppable and it is hard to imagine that any future Québécois state could be more liberal than Canada today. Some commentators are indeed frightened by a possible return to Québécois "tribalism". It should also be noted that Quebec, outside of West Montreal, is one of the most homogeneous parts of North America.

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Having recently gone out of Toronto for a visit to Central Ontario, the author was appalled by the extent to which the comparatively poverty-stricken countryside depends so heavily on the megalopolis. Everywhere beside the highways one finds pathetic little stands where residents try to eke out a living from the tourist trade. The average house in that area would probably be considered little better than a shack in Metropolitan Toronto. Unfortunately, today Toronto (plus a bit of Vancouver and Montreal) can be said to effectively equal Canada in terms of media and cultural power, in "the manufacture of public consent," and in the concentration of economic resources. (For example, the density of telephone lines in the greater Toronto area is such that it had to be split recently into two separate area codes.) The complexion of Toronto politics - imposed on the rest of the province and country - can be gauged from the fact that, in the recent municipal elections, most of the Left candidates triumphed. They were supported by most visible minorities; by most Southern European white ethnics; by the very large homosexual population, most of whom seem to be of British descent (Toronto is often called `San Francisco North'); and, of course, by large numbers of British Canadians — some voting Left out of self-contempt, others doing so to maintain their privileged bureaucratic and union positions. The Jewish vote was probably split. East European white ethnics seemed to be the only major group not voting for the Left. This is at a time when the leftwing (New Democratic Party) Ontario government is at about 15% popularity, province-wide. One can be quite properly angry that ever-larger numbers of ever-more-dissimilar immigrants are streaming into the megalopolis, eager to enjoy all its amenities including ready-made infrastructures (once so painfully built up, mostly by British Canadians, in a harsh, pioneering environment), and able to wield a disproportionate and ever-increasing social and political influence, while the more homogeneous countryside is reduced to a despised periphery.

III. Multiculturalism

Multiculturalism or multiracialism is often said to be the natural outgrowth of social democracy or the welfare-state. Certainly, the Ontario NDP, by legislating such measures as affirmative-action quotas (called "employment equity") for all employers in the province with over 50 employees (which, it should be pointed out, most definitely includes all universities and other institutions of higher learning) is a strong supporter of such tendencies. It should

also be stressed that the federal, and especially Ontario provincial and greater Toronto area municipal governments, and boards of education, have long practiced *de facto* employment equity, even when it was not in place *de jure*. (Going into almost any government office or high school staff room will quickly confirm this.) Canada's large banks, among the nation's foremost employers — now awash in profits they obtain by such measures as charging service-fees for simple withdrawals — have also cleaved early to employment equity, as visiting almost any bank branch in the GTA will show. The groups designated for preferential treatment in Ontario are women, visible minorities, aboriginal peoples, persons with disabilities, and, somewhat curiously, francophones — who would typically be long-established Franco-Ontarians, about 5% of the population, who even have a distinctive flag to wave, combining the Ontario trillium with the Quebec *fleur-de-lys*. An interesting tidbit to be noted is that in the supporting regulations of the Employment Equity Act, on the map of geographic origins of ethnoracial groups — where a line of division was literally drawn between the designated and non-designated regions — Israel, as a country in Asia, was in the designated part. As all Jewish persons can claim ultimate origins in Israel, they might well end up being considered a designated group in terms of the legislation.

A recent issue of the Toronto *Star*, Toronto's most progressive, largest-circulation, and very profitable daily — reported without a hint of criticism how hundreds of consulting firms, most of them staffed and run by visible minorities, have now gone to work to assist large corporations in putting employment equity policies into practice. The extent of the Toronto *Star*'s toleration of dissent in these matters is indicated by the example of Haroon Siddiqi, their editorial page editor (i.e. the gatekeeper for the only *public* part of the paper), who asserted some time ago that anyone who thought that immigrants should in any way adjust to so-called Canadian norms (he professed his disbelief in such) was a "fascist." He has in fact been put in charge of a multiculturalizing policy at the *Star*, based on the logic that, if the somewhat inflated figure of 40% of Toronto's population are visible minorities, then 40% of the news-stories should deal with visible minorities. (Perhaps this quota of ongoing news-stories could be achieved in a fashion not quite intended by the *Star*!)

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It should be also noted here for American readers that the incredible prominence given to black community issues in Toronto and Canada today is a very recent development without historical roots in this country — unlike the case in the United States, with its intractable historical problems arising from slavery. In fact, Toronto and Canada could have been places where black/white relations developed without negative historical overtones and recriminations, as some of the early multicultural theorists had hoped. The overwhelming influence of the American situation, however, has been such that self-designated black community leaders have eagerly jumped on the victimological bandwagon — following their American cousins step by step — and Canada now has its own equivalents of Al Sharpton, *et al*.

IV. The Denouement

The situation in Canada reinforces the view that social democracy is meaningless and virtually impossible outside of a strongly homogeneous society, with a rooted and commonly-held sense of identity. If the disparate parts of today's multicultural Toronto have so little in common, the "common good" and "public sphere" is meaningless, and social democracy's (and various church groups') exhortative calls for charity, given the current welfare-state and immigration realities, generally amount to the massive transfer of resources from established, native-born Canadians (or from established, earlier immigrants, who had to work hard without any kind of government support) to indigent, and ever-more-numerous newcomers. Ironically, the ultimate result of a multicultural welfare-state is a shrinking of the broad middle classes (the small-property-holders and the working-classes), who are squeezed by a tiny state-managerial, therapeutic, and corporate elite from above, and increasingly large, and increasingly dissimilar, welfare-clientele groups from below. Contemporary Canada, Ontario, and Toronto should therefore properly be seen as hyper-liberal configurations, rather than as truly social democratic or even socialist ones.

In any event, tough times are ahead for Canada and Canadians. Not only is there the severe immigration overload, but there are also the strains of economic globalization. This is the day of the transnational corporation which can easily shift operations from country to country. Canadians may find themselves experiencing not only large Third World populations but also, increasingly, Third World living standards as well. The welfare-state structures so painstakingly built up (such as the vaunted Medicare) might well come crashing down. Also, as the political culture of Canada inexorably changes, there will be less and less of "peace, order, and good government," and more and more corruption, violence, and criminality. The long war waged by liberalism against decent, honest, law-abiding, and hard-working citizens will then come to fruition. Everyone will have to participate in the system of bribery and pay-offs to get anything done; no one will feel safe on the streets or in their homes. The "Brazilification" of Canada will then be complete in every aspect. ■