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Multiculturalism and Immigration Policy in Canada: the Last Twenty-five Years

"The Canadian experiment is to see if people who are different can live together and work together, to learn to regard diversity not with suspicion, but as a cause for celebration." (Berger 1981 p. 262.)

Since the end of the Second World War 6.7 million migrants have settled in Canada, thus accounting for the major reason why Canada's population has increased so dramatically. Between 1961 and 1991 the Canadian population rose from 18 million to 27 million people. Since that same period saw a declining birth rate from 28.3 per 1000 in 1959 to 15.7 per 1000 in 1976, we must look elsewhere to account for this population increase. (Finkel et al. 1993, p. 513.) Declining infant mortality and increased life expectancy were certainly contributing factors but levels of immigration were the major cause for population increase.

Immigration in the 1970s averaged 180,000 people per year rising to 200,000 in the 1980s and 250,000 per year in this decade. Consequently by 1991 approximately 1 in 6 Canadians had been born abroad. (Finkel et al. 1993, p. 513.)

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The effects of immigration are not felt equally across the nation. About 94 percent of recent immigrants have settled in Ontario, Quebec, British Columbia and Alberta. Of those, most headed for Canada's major cities: Toronto, Vancouver and Montreal. One-third, for example, have wound up in Metropolitan Toronto. By 1991 38 percent of the residents of Toronto and Vancouver were foreign-born.

Such percentages resemble those found in Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta in the years prior to World War I when the first major wave of non-British, non-French immigrants hit Canada's shores. This dramatic change to the nation's ethnic makeup of that time contributed to the Balkanization scare (Canada as a "Tower of Babel") and the resultant policy of anglo-conformity meant to assimilate these newcomers into British Canadian ways.

Canada — a nation of migrants

Canada has always been a nation of migrants from the arrival of the aboriginal peoples over the Bering Sea land bridge some 10,000 years ago through the arrival of the French in the seventeenth century, the British after 1763 and then the non-British, non-French about a century ago. What is new then is not the fact of immigration but the place of origin of immigrants. In the decade and a half after 1945,

96 percent of immigrants came from Europe (a lot of it resulting from post-war dislocation), the United States and Australasia.

Immigration to Canada from other parts of the world was discouraged or prohibited during this time. Then in 1962 and 1967, coinciding with a similar U.S. act passed in 1965, less discriminatory "colour blind" Immigration Acts were passed. The result was a dramatic shift in the country of origin of Canada's immigrants. By 1985 only 70 percent were coming from the traditional sources of immigration while 18 percent were arriving from Asia, 5 percent from South and Central America and 3 percent from Africa including South Africa. And the trend continues with fewer and fewer immigrants coming from the traditional sources and increasing numbers, aided by family reunification provisions of the Immigration Act, coming from the four other areas of the world.

Quite literally the face of Canada is changing. For example, 20 percent of the population of Metropolitan Vancouver is now from Asia with Chinese and South Asians predominating. Such immigrants have come to be referred to as Canada's "visible minorities".

Concept of the national identity

Among other things, the new ethnic makeup of Canada's population has presented serious implications for how we are to define ourselves as a nation. The demographic breakdown reveals less than 40 percent of British origin, slightly more than 25 percent of French origin (mostly concentrated in Quebec), and about 36 percent non-British, non-French, including 1.5 percent Native Indian and 0.1 percent Inuit. These figures in themselves preclude a continuation of pre-

vious well-established concepts of Canadian society.

Since national identity is something invented, constructed, contested, and constantly changing, the evolution of these concepts should not surprise us. Using broad strokes, we can recall that the majority of Canadians outside Quebec until the late nineteenth-century considered Canada a white, Protestant, British country. Around the turn-of-the-century because of a grudging acceptance of Roman Catholics, Canada was seen as a white, Christian, British-Canadian country. By the end of the Second World War, thanks to increased secularization and growing Canadian nationalism we divested our British ties and the centrality of Christianity in our national identity. But we were still a "white man's country" because of discriminatory legislation and public practice towards our aboriginal population and Japanese, Chinese and East Indian citizens.

In the 1960s thanks to the Lester Pearson government in Ottawa and the Quiet Revolution in Quebec, there was a serious move exemplified by the *Report of the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism* to shift the focus of our identity from the no-longer-valid British factor to the "two-nation" concept, that is, that basically Canada was composed of two nations, British and French. The passage by the Trudeau government in 1969 of the Official Languages Act making French and English state languages marked the culmination of this effort.

Officially multiethnic, multiracial and multireligious

To underline the thrust of the "founding peoples" perspective, one might quote from the 1969 B and B Commission as

follows: "since those of British and French ethnic origin are the main groups in Canada, it is appropriate that the British and French cultures dominate in the public schools." (Royal Commission... 1969, p. 137.)

These developments might have pleased the French minority in Canada, but they did not please large segments of the non-British, non-French population who by the 1971 census made up 26.7 percent of the nation's population. Thus, largely because of pressure from these people the Trudeau government in 1971 moved on to acknowledge officially the multiethnic, multiracial and multireligious nature of Canada by declaring the nation to be a bilingual state in a multicultural society or, more accurately, "multiculturalism within a bilingual framework." (Trudeau 1971, p. 8546.)

Standing in the House of Commons in October of that year Prime Minister Trudeau announced that "there cannot be one cultural policy for Canadians of British and French origin, another for the [ab]original peoples and yet another for all others. For although there are two official languages, there is no official culture, nor does any ethnic group take precedence over any other. No citizen or group of citizens is other than Canadian, and all should be treated fairly." (Trudeau 1971, p. 8545.) Thus was inaugurated Canada's policy of multiculturalism, which became the newest way of conceiving our national identity.

How to support, how to share?

Initially, in the 1970s, the policy of multiculturalism was essentially a policy of integrating immigrants into Canada. The ministry responsible for implementing the policy established a programme of government aid to support ethnic organi-

zations, including cultural centres, festivals, both ethnic and multicultural publications, and even a series of official histories (the Generation Series published by McClelland and Stewart) of some twenty ethnic groups. Aid was also allotted through the various provincial ministries of education to aid so-called heritage-language instruction, both in and outside school hours. In this way there was a tacit acknowledgment that for ethno-cultural groups to survive in Canada attention would have to be paid to language retention. These became known as programmes in non-official languages.

The groups to take greatest advantage of these multicultural programmes were those of European origin and relatively long residence in Canada. Ukrainian-, Italian- and Polish-Canadians were representative ethnic groups who utilized federal government support to build cultural centres and foster mother-tongue language instruction. Ironically then, these support programmes had the effect of contributing to ethnic retention or boundary maintenance, not the sharing of cultural manifestations as envisaged in the hoped-for establishment of multicultural centres. The main exception to this was the creation of annual multicultural festivals which drew public attention and participation in cities like Toronto, Winnipeg, Calgary and Thunder Bay.

Although originally a federal government policy, multiculturalism required considerable provincial government support to be successful nationwide. Since so many aspects of the policy had a base in culture and education, it followed that the overall success of multicultural programmes depended to a great degree on how much support each provincial government, which retained exclusive control over education, was willing to lend. Some provinces were from the start,

or became, strong supporters of multiculturalism. Those were Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta and British Columbia (where a new Multiculturalism Act was passed in 1993).

Quebec with its primary concern about the promotion of the French language and "Québécois culture" wanted little to do with federal multicultural policies. In Quebec the term "cultural pluralism" was preferred to "multiculturalism". The "two-nations" definition of Canada, now discarded elsewhere in Canada, was much closer to the hearts of most Québécois. After all, the original ethnic duality (French-English) accounts for 90 percent of the population of Quebec where close to four out of five citizens are of French origin. Similarly, multiculturalism made little impact on Atlantic Canada where, once again, about 90 percent of the population finds its origins in the traditional French-English duality.

Not only for white ones

The second stage in the evolution of federal government multiculturalism policy can be dated from the late 1970s. This coincided with a growing awareness of the numbers of non-white immigrants by then entering Canada from Asia and the Third World as a result of the liberalization of Canadian immigration policy. By the end of that decade more non-Europeans entered Canada than did Europeans. These immigrants headed for the most part to large cities where their presence became evident both at work and on the street.

This influx reawakened latent fears and hostilities toward non-white immigrants. Immigrants of South Asian origin (from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and East Africa) and Blacks from the West Indies were made the targets of assaults

and vandalism. Attacks even occurred on schoolgrounds. West Indian immigrants in Toronto and Montreal complained of job and housing discrimination and of police harassment.

This provided the background to the shift in government policy from using multiculturalism as a way of meeting the wishes and concerns of migrants originating from Europe to one of using multiculturalism to combat racism, to reduce prejudice and discrimination directed against visible minorities, and to assist the sometimes difficult adjustment into Canadian society of large numbers of visible minorities from Asia, Africa and the Caribbean. Such policies were put into effect by the Multiculturalism Directorate operating out of the Department headed by the minister responsible for multiculturalism. (A Department for Multiculturalism was not created until 1991). Typical of the studies done by the Directorate at this time intended to focus on problems of prejudice and discrimination was the 1984 parliamentary report entitled *Equality Now: Report on Visible Minorities in Canadian Society*.

But already there were significant signs of a new tolerance emerging among many Canadians following in the wake of revulsion against Hitler's racism, the decline of close ties to Britain, and the impact of the American civil rights movement of the 1960s. This trend was exemplified and encouraged by the passage of provincial human rights bills and codes and the establishment of both provincial and federal human rights commissions. By 1975 every province had established a human rights commission and the federal government followed suit in 1977. Simultaneously, all provinces except Prince Edward Island established a provincial ombudsman's office where

complaints from the public against administrative action could be investigated and remedies proposed.

The Charter of Rights and Freedoms

The third stage in the evolution of multiculturalism flows directly from the preceding one and coincides conveniently with the passage of the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* in 1982. The decade since is the era when Canadian governments have sought deliberately to replace public intolerance with tolerance of ethnic and racial diversity. In contrast to the 1970s emphasis on what amounted to cultural retention and boundary maintenance, multicultural policies now sought from Canadians a genuine respect for difference and for being different.

The Charter, made part of the Constitution Act, 1982, replacing the British North America Act (1867), guarantees fundamental freedoms, democratic rights, mobility rights, legal rights, equality rights (including the protection of the multicultural heritage of all Canadians), and language rights (including minority language education rights). But as Walter Tarnopolsky reminds us, "many human rights are better promoted through administrative agencies [such as those mentioned above] than through the courts." (Tarnopolsky 1985, p. 846.)

Efforts are now bent towards overcoming Canada's history of intolerance and racism towards ethnic minorities and native people. Whether it be head taxes against Chinese immigrants, the exclusion of Sikhs, anti-Semitism in the 1930s, or the internment of Japanese-Canadians in World War II, Canada has a chequered history to overcome. First Canadians must come to grips with this heritage and then continue to take steps to overcome it. Aided by provincial human rights

legislation, efforts are directed at ending discrimination in employment, housing and schooling, at ensuring that visible minorities are properly represented in the police forces, among fire fighters, and in the media, and at enabling equal access to all levels of public education.

Equality — will it be enough?

Multiculturalism has always had its critics, chief among whom have been French Canadians who would much prefer a "two nations" definition of Canada and who reject Trudeau's contention about the equality of ethno-cultural groups in Canada. Generally speaking, French Canadians refuse to be seen as "just another ethnic group."

Aboriginal Canadians also oppose a policy they had no part in forming and which, by advocating the equality of all ethnic groups in Canada, might threaten their traditional rights, for example, their land claims. For them, multiculturalism is a policy designed for recent migrants not native peoples.

Proponents of traditional integration patterns, namely anglo-conformity or the "melting pot", the standard American model of nation-building, also criticize the unwelcome effects of multiculturalism. The late sociologist John Porter, for instance, saw multiculturalism as detrimental to social and economic progress and to the liberal attainment of equality of opportunity. Put bluntly, "ethnicity combines with class," he argued, "to reduce social mobility and opportunity." (Bullivant 1981, p. 65.) Emphasis in schools on language retention and sharing cultural values was in his view no way to contend with "the culture of science and technology", nor "with a universalistic post-industrial way of life." He considered multiculturalism to be a

means of diverting the non-British, non-French from political and economic affairs into cultural activities to the detriment of upward social mobility. "Many of the historic cultures," Porter continued, "are irrelevant to our futures. Opportunity will go to those individuals who are future-oriented in an increasingly universalistic culture. Those oriented to the past are likely to lose out." He asked rhetorically: "From the point of view of the Indians, does promoting their own culture help them toward equality in the postindustrial society?"

While acknowledging that self-concept may be enhanced by strong ethnic identification, Porter feared that ethnic communities might become "a permanent compensation for low status, or as psychic shelters in the urban industrial world." (Porter 1979, p. 132-33.)

The fact of the matter is, however, that the formerly fairly rigid relationship between class and ethnicity has been weakened over the last two decades. In other words, the ethnic hierarchy in Canada which Porter immortalized in his extremely influential book *The Vertical Mosaic* (Toronto, 1965) is beginning to collapse. An Ukrainian Canadian is currently governor-general and a first-generation Chinese Canadian is lieutenant-governor of British Columbia. The Reichmanns, Jewish immigrants, mingle among Canada's economic elite. Aboriginal Canadians assert their claims to land and self-government with more vigour than ever, and play a prominent role in constitutional negotiations.

Does it not promote ethnic isolation and political tensions?

Other critics posed questions such as the following. Does multiculturalism not contribute to the fragmentation of the na-

tion, a nation already split between French and English and Balkanized to some degree by regional differences and strong provincial governments? Does it not promote forms of ethnic isolation, even "ghettoization", and thereby promote not heal inter-ethnic rivalries? And further, does it not serve to create international tensions between Canada and the various countries of origin? For example, some Sikh-Canadians favour the creation of an independent Khalistan to be carved out of India; Arab-Israeli strife has an immediate impact on Canadian Jews and Arabs; in the past Canadian Croats and Serbs fought bitterly over issues having their origin in Tito's Yugoslavia. Thus Old World hatreds and prejudices, like those of the Orange Order in nineteenth century Canada, were imported here, and in essence their discussion sanctioned by multiculturalism's philosophy.

Opposition to multiculturalism also has political roots. Many have considered multicultural grants as bribes for "the ethnic vote". Both federal and provincial governments have been accused at election time of playing to the ethnic vote by recourse to such grants and policies. And for that matter, the argument runs, how much in tune are ethnic leaders with the communities they are said to represent? Are these spokespersons simply opportunists, often serving as pawns for government officials and political parties in return for perks and political appointments, such as to the Senate or government boards.

In answer to the above, the proponents of multiculturalism defend their position in one of three ways. First of all, ethnic diversity or pluralism is both a historical and social reality in Canada since we have been and remain a nation of immigrants. With the former British or Anglo-

Saxon majority no longer in a position of dominance, to define. Canada around concepts of anglo-conformity or melting pot is simply not viable.

Multiculturalism helps integration

In fact, in one sense our multicultural origins even challenge the notion of the two-nations framework. Aside from the original diversity of native Indian tribes, there were historically three different French communities in Acadia, Quebec, and the West. There were Germans in Nova Scotia and Blacks in Upper Canada, Nova Scotia, and British Columbia. The "British" were subdivided into Highland and Lowland Scots and migrants from England and the United States (the Loyalists). And then the Irish came in the mid-nineteenth century. As historian J.M. Bumsted puts it, "Recognizing the presence of multiple cultures helps make it possible to integrate the native peoples into the historical development of Canada in a way not comprehensible to earlier generations of historians." (Bumsted 1991, p. 374.) The lack of a single "British" culture is a basic explanation for the survival of pluralism in Canada today.

Nor is the two-nations definition made popular in the 1960s and now resurrected by Bloc Québécois leader Lucien Bouchard a valid way for Canadians to identify themselves. Such a definition may suit francophone Québécois, but it fails to satisfy non-British, non-French citizens nor anglophones generally because there is no clearly distinguishable English-Canadian culture as a counterpart to Québécois culture. Whereas there may be a "French nation" in Canada there is most certainly no English one.

Secondly, multiculturalism has widespread political support in Canada. Since

1971 all three political parties in the House of Commons have supported the policy. It is also an official policy in most provinces and actively promoted in Ontario, the prairie provinces, and British Columbia. Only the new Reform Party, now with 52 members of parliament, has announced its opposition to both federal bilingualism and multiculturalism.

Canadians — predecessors of equality and mutual respect

Finally, multiculturalism is a set of universal social values based on an ideal of equality and mutual respect among ethno-cultural groups. For Canadians it is a way of defining themselves in a different way from the United States and the nation-states of Europe, like Germany, who still cling to a nineteenth century definition of nationhood based on alleged ethnic homogeneity based on a shared common descent, cultural, linguistic, and biological.

After all, pluralism is becoming the norm today in nation-states around the world. Israel, The Netherlands, South Africa, Russia and the United States exemplify this. Even formerly homogeneous nations such as Spain, France, Germany and Sweden face problems of ethnic diversity. So in forging a policy of multiculturalism Canada could well be in the vanguard of the modern late twentieth century nation-state.

A positive corollary of the ideology of multiculturalism is the tolerance among people that it seeks to promote. Such tolerance can be a source of strength for the nation. Where people are content with their identity — ethno-cultural, class, region — the nation stands the best chance of social and economic progress and continued stability. Instead of fragmenting Canada, this serves paradoxically to

strengthen — not weaken Canadian unity, making for happier social and individual relations. Tolerance of diversity, then, becomes a culturally unifying principle of social organization.

By the end of the twentieth century Canadian national identity had evolved through several stages: anglo-conformity, melting pot, mosaic, two-nations to multiculturalism. The last was the antithesis of the nineteenth-century European nationstate based on a homogeneous ethnicity. Instead, diversity and multiple identities became the watchword. As the historian Maurice Careless has asserted, "the very expression of a limited identity is a manifestation of Canadian identity itself." (Careless 1980, p. 8.) Or as Northrop Frye has put it, the

essence of "Canadian" is "the tension between the political sense of unity and the imaginative sense of locality." (Frye 1971, p. iii.) Thus, both nation and individual citizens have many identities simultaneously which vary from individual to individual. There is no preordained list of characteristics which all citizens are expected to conform to. Instead there are multiple facets of identity. Or to echo Trudeau's sentiments offered over twenty years ago: "National unity, if it is to mean anything in the deeply personal sense, must be founded on confidence in one's own individual identity." (Trudeau 1971, p. 8546.) And this quite simply forms the basis of the policy of multiculturalism.

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