

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

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"Tossed Salad?"

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Dear Peter,

The historian and futurist William Irwin Thompson once described Canada as "a place free of the American Dream and the European nightmare...Canada, like Switzerland, is the peaceable kingdom to which those weary of conflict go to escape the burden of a national destiny." Attractive as it is, this portrayal belies the complications that arise when immigrant groups, including those seeking a safe haven from persecution, maintain close connections to their homeland. It also ignores the perennial efforts of Canada's governing elites to define--for Canadians and the world--just what the national destiny ought to be. Eschewing for the moment Thompson's and many others' luminous accolades, and relying instead on a prosaic mixture of demographic data and what people here say about their country (in the media and on the street), then Canada appears less like Switzerland and more like an empty, tolerant, sometimes whining, mostly well-off and not fully assembled prototype of a world government.

First, the emptiness: as you know, Canada, for all its vaunted, resource-laden territory, has only about 25 million people, the vast majority of whom are collected into largish cities within several hours' drive of the U.S. border, and never very far from at least some manifestations of the American Dream. There is a lot of uninhabited space north of the West Edmonton Mall. (Whether and how much of this area is habitable is

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Since 1925 the Institute of Current World Affairs (the Crane-Rogers Foundation) has provided long-term fellowships to enable outstanding young adults to live outside the United States and write about international areas and issues. Endowed by the late Charles R. Crane, the Institute is also supported by contributions from like-minded individuals and foundations.

another question entirely, one which the Inuit and scientists expert on the greenhouse effect may jointly fashion an answer in due course.) More to the point, Canada's birthrate is declining, and with it (at least by most conventional measures), the prospects for a vibrant and prosperous economic future. Canadian families need on average to produce at least two children in order to maintain the current population; at the present rate of 1.7, the country's population will begin tapering off soon after the turn of the century. "The absolute numbers will decrease by the year 2000 or 2025, assuming moderate immigration and current fertility rates," according to Carleton University professor Elliot Tepper. "It may go from 25 million, edging up to 28 million and maybe peaking at the 30 million mark, and then it's actually going to go down and down and down." [See reference notes on p. 8] As most of Canadian women have joined what statisticians call the labor force and since Canadians as a whole are getting older, any marked increase in the national birthrate is unlikely. The obvious answer to this demographic dilemma is increased immigration.

That's where the whining comes in, a thin but persistent strain of ethnocentric gripe, most easily detected on late-night call-in talk shows, but also evident on editorial pages (in the letters-to-the editor section), and in casual conversation. The whine is often muted but rarely smothered completely by the surrounding sounds of politeness and professionalism. When mere training takes over--the middle-aged white Canadian clerk dutifully serving something up to a "new" Canadian who is not white--tonality betrays what eyes later confirm: a discomfort, a suspicion, a prejudice. Overt discrimination is rare, partly because it can have legal repercussions, no doubt, but mostly because Canadians are taught to be tolerant. Moreover, they are steeped in "multiculturalism", a word which refers both to "the social policy of encouraging retention of group heritages and full participation in Canadian society, and the philosophy or ideology of cultural pluralism." The lesson and verbiage seem to have taken hold; as the prospective Liberal Party leader Jean Chretien puts it: "Diversity is part of our patriotism." But underneath the patriotic veneer are anxieties about where multilculturalism is taking Canada.

The proportion of Canada's population not of British, French or First Nations (native people) origin was about ten percent in 1900 and approximately 25 percent by 1971. More recent census figures present a less clear picture of ethnic balances because they acknowledge that many individuals have multiple origins. At any rate, Canada ranks with France and Australia among advanced western countries with relatively high percentages of immigrants counted as part of its permanent population.

In each of the last five years Canada has allowed between 100,000 to 150,000 foreigners to move in and take up citizenship. The numbers average out, on an annual basis, to about 0.05 percent of the total population, a modest volume by any rational

accounting, and far less than the five percent that Canada took in after World War I or even the two percent that Tepper and others advocate as a minimum to ensure economic growth. But most people "perceive" changes, they don't measure them. The perception of about half of Canadians (if opinion polls are trustworthy) is that the country is being engulfed by a tidal wave of immigrants from the Third World. Such fears have some numerical basis, in that three quarters of new immigrants last year came from Asia, the Caribbean, Latin America, and other areas of the southern hemisphere, whereas thirty years ago fully 95 percent came from Britain, the United States, and countries in northern Europe.

Despite this trend, people with Third World origins are still small in number. If current fertility rates hold steady and if legislated immigration quotas stay about the same, the approximately six percent of Canadians who today fall under the rubric of "visible minorities" (meaning identifiably non-white) will increase to slightly less than ten percent by the year 2000. Contrary to what some Canadians think, immigrants have slightly fewer children on average than non-immigrants do. The proportional increase in non-caucasian newcomers reflects distress in the Third World rather than a wide-open doorway into Canada. (I will address refugee issues in a subsequent newsletter.)

The perceptual problem, if we can call it that, is that most members of Canada's racial minority groups, whether they are recently-arrived immigrants or not, are heavily concentrated in several of Canada's biggest and most densely populated urban communities, notably Toronto, Vancouver and Montreal. Walking down the central streets of these cities would give anyone the impression that Canada is indeed the multicultural mosaic that government pamphlets boast of, but this same variety of skin color and speech patterns and styles of dress apparently frightens and annoys a sizable number of people whose forbears came from Europe--part of an earlier wave of immigrants. One result of these perceptions and fears, and it is a result readily acknowledged by the roughly half of Canadians who favor more liberal rather than more restrictive immigration laws, is an upsurge of racist attitudes.

In the realm of "ordinary" perception, seeing is believing; reading the results of studies that debunk myths about immigrants' breeding habits and their alleged drain on the economy is an onerous, easily avoidable chore. An increase in incidents of racially-motivated abuse has sparked concern among even the strongest proponents of a multicultural society that supportive policies may accentuate the natural tendency of immigrants to gravitate toward ethnocultural "ghettos", and therefore help spark rather than dampen interracial violence. There is also a danger that too much promotion of diversity and too little pressure to assimilate may alienate groups from one another and undermine the forbearance Canadians have learned to

have for newcomers with strange accents and customs from abroad.

Canadians are a tolerant people; they will be the first to tell you so. It is not just cant, or an easy way, given the markedly different historical circumstances, of demonstrating Canada's moral elevation when compared to the United States. Tolerance is enshrined in the Constitution Act of 1982: Clause 27 states that the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms shall be interpreted in a manner consistent with the preservation and enhancement of the multicultural heritage of Canadians. Canada is also the first country to enact national legislation protecting "the freedom of all members of Canadian society to preserve and share their cultural heritages." There is a Standing Committee on Multiculturalism in the House of Commons, and a federal department of multiculturalism and citizenship, the budget for which has grown \$30 million to over \$200 million in just five years.

Prime Minister Mulroney declared recently that Canadians should have the freedom "to retain their respective identities while joining one another as equal partners in a united country." This carefully balanced statement is reminiscent of the national flag debate in the 1960s. The single maple leaf design, signifying unity, won out over a less elegant version with three green leaves on a single stem, one each for the English, the French, and "other" collectivities of Canadians. The rejected pattern had provoked resentment among many groups who felt slighted for having been lumped together in the catch-all third leaf. For a somewhat similar reason many French Canadians resisted the later shift (in 1971) from the "bilingual-bicultural" motif to the emphasis on multiculturalism. They didn't like the implication that they were just another ethnic group, one among many. They still don't. Meanwhile, people in the British North American majority are a bit put-off seeing their tax dollars go to support what sometimes look like little ethnic fiefdoms with unelected leaders and narrowly-defined objectives that do not jibe with Canada's "national interest."

Multiculturalism invites complication and controversy in Canada's foreign relations. Tight-knit and well-organized ethnic associations can exercise considerable domestic political leverage at the ballot box and thus have a disproportionate influence of Canada's ties with their countries of origin. There are lots of cases on record where candidates have openly pandered to such groups in order to win election, and MPs are sometimes called upon by ethnic constituents to intervene in immigration cases involving friends or relatives. Officials in the U.S. State Department are certainly well-acquainted with the power of vocal minorities to sway American foreign policy; what makes Canada different is a well-established domestic policy that in effect encourages emigre communities to steer the government toward their own ends in foreign affairs.

In the past, East European expatriates have actively pushed for a tough stance toward Communist regimes, even when Canadian diplomats and business executives were working hard to build up valuable, large-scale commercial exchanges and distance the country from the hard-line approach taken by the United States. There are some 800,000 Canadians with Ukrainian origins, for example, and groups of them have been relentless in reminding Canadian officials of Stalin's savage reprisals in the 1930s and the continued injustices of Soviet Russian domination. More recently, especially after the massacre in Tiananmen Square, Chinese Canadians as well as students, technicians, and academics from China who are only temporarily resident in Canada have exerted pressure on the Mulroney government, through demonstrations, public correspondence, private meetings and other means, to reduce links between Canada and the regime in Beijing. At the moment, these efforts do not appear to have had much affect: export credits and business ventures agreed to before the crackdown are going through, and new loans will likely be approved. Still, the government appears to have acted amorally at best, and the maintenance of a pragmatic China policy may well do lasting damage to the Tories' public image.

Sometimes the links between ethnic groups in Canada and governments abroad take an uglier twist. For example, in June of 1985 an Air India 747 jetliner bound from Montreal to London crashed off the coast of Ireland after a bomb exploded. All 329 people on board, most of them Hindus from Canada, were killed. This act of terrorism was, and still is, the worst mass murder in Canadian history. No one claimed responsibility, but the bombing was attributed to Sikh extremists living in Canada and striving to create an independent republic (Khalistan) in the Punjab region of India. These Sikhs were allegedly upset with Canada's close diplomatic ties and extensive trade relations with the government of Indira (and now Rajiv) Gandhi. The case is still unresolved, even after a \$60 million nation-wide investigation, and there is a wealth of evidence now coming to light that Indian agents planted the bomb in order to discredit the Sikh community in Canada. Whatever the truth is, the tragedy stirred-up anti-Sikh feeling and cast some aspects of multiculturalism in a bad light. As *Globe and Mail* reporter Robert Matas put it in the first of a four-part series in December of 1987:

Many of Canada's 200,000 Sikh citizens seem caught up in a schizophrenic zeal that has thrown the community into turmoil. The Sikhs have been trying--with considerable difficulty--to integrate into the multicultural fabric of Canada. But a substantial number cannot leave India behind them. They have an overwhelming emotional commitment to the liberation of the Sikh homeland.

Add to this example the conclusions of a Senate report on

terrorism and public safety, made public this June 29, predicting an increase in domestic terrorist activity over language issues, native concerns, "white power" and animal rights groups. The committee said that foreign elements in Canada have shifted toward fundraising, planning, and the use of the country as a safe haven, but that law enforcement officials anticipate a resurgence of home-grown violence. Just as immigration issues arise at the juncture of foreign and domestic policy, so too does domestic and international terrorism intersect in a multicultural society.

There is no doubting the sincerity of purpose behind the multicultural ethic, nor the practical need for a demographically small and politically decentralized country like Canada to garner the allegiance of newcomers by making them feel welcome and secure--part of the mosaic. Actually, the image of the mosaic seems outmoded. However distinct it is from that of a "melting pot" (and therein lies its utility, from a governmental perspective), the metaphor still suggests something old and hard, like the remains of a Roman fresco or an aging museum wall. More importantly, the separate pieces of a mosaic are not supposed to bleed or zuffuse into one another; the unity of the whole is supplied by the neutral mortar surrounding each one. The picture of a diverse assortment of peoples cemented together by a beneficent federal government has made Canada sparkle in the eyes of the world. Now, however, even though 63 percent of Canadians polled earlier this year said they supported multiculturalism, an almost equal number (61 percent) said in a different poll that immigrants should change in order to "blend in with the larger society."

If the surprising number of mixed-race couples strolling the streets of Toronto are any indication, the blending action is well underway, even if it is not exactly what the survey respondents had in mind. Since ethnic names and faces are still largely absent from the bank boardrooms high above Bay Street and the cabinet ranks in the House of Commons, there is no telling the degree to which Third World immigrants to Canada have been assimilated--they still speak for themselves because voters and shareholders have yet to elect them to speak for the country as a whole. For now, anyway, the majority does not seek its leaders from minority groups. At the same time, no one can be certain how long the solidarity of ethnic communities can last, under the atomizing influence of libertarian ideas leaking across national borders worldwide. What are older, established Canadians of British extraction to make, for example, of a strapping teenage Chinese immigrant with a skateboard and headphones, buying a slice of pizza on Younge Street and sporting an oversized t-shirt emblazoned with the phrase "I am what I am." Is this some sort of blasphemy, or an example of the purest form of youthful morality, self-interested but non-discriminatory? Is this where the country is headed?

"Canada has never been a melting pot," wrote someone named

Arnold Edinborough sometime in the past, "more like a tossed salad." This image will probably never catch-on, despite its being colorful, suggestive of good health, and refreshingly light when juxtaposed to bubbling stew pots and hard, flat conglomerates. "Tossed salad" loosens things up without violating the spirited and sturdy vision of one of Canada's first ardent multiculturalists, Sir Wilfred Laurier--"I want the marble to remain the marble, the granite to remain the granite, the oak to remain the oak; and out of all these I would build a nation great among the nations of the world."

This brings me back, straining things a bit, I know, to an earlier statement about Canada being something of an experimental model of a future world government. Surely, "multiculturalism" is vital to any liberal conception of planetary order. Every kind of imperialism--military, economic, cultural--has been disowned, however incompletely and hypocritically. Obviously there is no practical or just way to force earthlings into a common cultural mold. Some sort of loosely federated world state is still conceivable, however, if only because truly global crises require global responses. No matter how far off in time or off the mark the "Star Trek" vision of a multicultural federation may be, I think we would do well now to examine more closely how the lab results turn out in Canada.

Lest you think I have just taken a flight of mere fancy, let me offer one worldly example of something that is perhaps uniquely Canadian and, I hope, portentous in a more general context. According to government figures, 56 percent of metropolitan Toronto's population is made up of ethnic groups formed into 70 distinct communities speaking over 100 different languages. To accommodate such a wide range of people, the city's Central Hospital has introduced the concept of multicultural health care. The hospital was founded in 1957 by two brothers from Hungary, neither of whom could speak English or French. Here is a sampling of what their pioneering efforts since then have produced: nursing care in 30 languages, a multilingual patient library, in-house celebrations of various religious and national holidays, the use of certain folk medicines to minimize the violations of traditional beliefs. The food service is internationalized. Basic carbohydrate requirements may be met with pasta, rice or lentils; patients are free to choose from a panoply of imported spices. Even food temperatures can be calibrated in accordance with cultural preferences; the Chinese, for example, believe in a system of alternating hot and cold foods to help bring about internal equilibrium.

The complexities of such an operation are enough to make one giddy. So, probably, are the costs. The complicated business of fashioning an immigration policy to suit both multicultural and "national" objectives, without undermining racial tolerance on the domestic front or Canada's interests in foreign affairs--that's an even bigger headache. With such things in mind I found

the simple statement of a black Canadian Immigration Court judge quite soothing. She concluded the swearing-in ceremony for a roomful of beaming new citizens, young and old, with these words: "Let us make of Canada a microcosm of what the world should be." If multicultural health care and the power of an ideal can be successfully sustained, I think the salad days in the peaceable kingdom are yet to come.

Cheers,

Stephen Maly

REFERENCES

The population and fertility statistics came from several sources, including: **Facts Canada: 1989**, a useful publication put out by Prospectus Investment and Trade Partners Inc. in Ottawa, the October 8, 1988 "Survey of Canada" in **The Economist** magazine, and a January 7, 1988 story by Neal Hall in the **Vancouver Sun**, wherein Professor Tupper's remarks can be found.

The definition of multiculturalism was taken from a 1988 pamphlet, **Multiculturalism in Canada**, written by Jean Burnet and issued by the Canadian Studies Directorate of Canada's Department of the Secretary of State.

Jean Chretien's brief statement about patriotism appears on page 134 of his 1985 political autobiography **Straight From the Heart**, published in Toronto by Seal Books.

Allegations that the terrorist bombing of Air India flight 182 was actually the work of Indian secret agents are the subject of a 1988 book by Zuhair Kashmeri and Brian McAndrew entitled **Soft Target**, James Lorimer (Toronto) publisher.

The poll results were reported in the July 10, 1989 issue of **Maclean's** magazine, in a cover story entitled "An Angry Racial Backlash."

A more complete description of Toronto's Central Hospital programs (as well as multicultural health care facilities elsewhere in Canada) can be found in the Winter 1988-89 edition of **Canada Reports**, issued by the Department of External Affairs.

Two very recent and interesting television documentaries feature good segments on immigration and multiculturalism. One is CTV's 3-part adaptation of Andrew Malcolm's 1986 book **The Canadians**. The another is part four ("The Immigrants") in the National Film Board-WTVS/Detroit co-production called **Canada: True North**. The judge's remark about making Canada a microcosm for the world comes from this latter source.