

Canada's Policy of Mass Immigration: hoary myths & unasked questions

Madeline Weld

Per capita, Canada takes in more immigrants than any other Western country. In 1990, Brian Mulroney's Progressive Conservative government began to take in about 250,000 immigrants each year, regardless of economic conditions. This policy was continued by his successors, both Liberals and Conservatives. Canada has taken in over 4 million newcomers since it was initiated. It has had major impacts on our cities, on our society, and on our environment.

But try finding a good discussion about immigration. An actual discussion that is, where people assess immigration policies from different perspectives. The vast majority of media coverage treats our current policy of "mass immigration" as morally unassailable or as something we just have to accept, like the Earth orbiting the sun. No national leader has ever questioned the policy. At the time of writing, with an election in the offing, the leaders of 3 of the 4 national political parties (Conservatives, Liberals, New Democrats) are calling for an increase in levels of immigration. The Green Party essentially ignores the issue; its leader says the Alberta Tar Sands are a much more serious problem, and has previously said that immigration produces economic benefits and promotes diversity.

Let's crunch a few numbers. While our intake of immigrants and refugees has been a bit less than 1% of the population (now 33 million), that figure is often cited as a target. In fact, Liberal immigration critic Maurizio Bevilacqua is proposing to immediately increase intake to 330,000 a year. An intake of 1% of the population leads to a doubling time of 70 years. That means that Canada's population would be about

66 million in 2078 and 132 million in 2148. How would the infrastructure of our cities cope with such a population and what would be the environmental impact?

In our free and open society that prides itself on free speech, one shouldn't ask such questions. In his 2004–2005 annual report (released November 2005) and at a news conference relating to it, Ontario commissioner for the environment Gord Miller addressed the impact of 4 or 5 million more people in southern Ontario a few decades hence. "This is a vast number of people settling in an already stressed landscape. Will the resulting demands for water, sewer systems and roads leave our natural heritage areas intact? Will there be enough natural lands left over to support biodiversity?" his report asks. Miller was immediately accused of being anti-immigrant. He was asked by reporters whether he was calling for a curtailment of immigration. When the answer was no, he was asked whether he was saying that immigrants should move to northern Ontario (no), whether the era of the single family home is over and whether immigrants shouldn't dream of having their own house (no). Though he'd said earlier that it wasn't his job to dictate where people should go, after some hounding he told one reporter that immigrants could move to northern Ontario as a solution to the Greater Toronto Area's overcrowding. This clip was played multiple times on all local news channels. The CBC aired a response by city councillor Maria Augimeri calling for Miller's resignation. Said Miller, "If people actually read the report, [they'll find that] the only thing in it about immigration is that it's another element of population growth and that it's under



federal control. That's it." (1)

The character lynching endured by Miller for daring to address the issue of rampant population growth in southern Ontario is revealing of the state of public discourse (if we can dignify it with that name) on immigration in Canada. First, his accusers felt no obligation to offer a single fact-based refutation to the concerns he expressed. Second, he himself did not dare to suggest a reduction in immigration, although that would have been totally reasonable based on the environmental impacts of population growth described in his report. Third, if people from northern Ontario are leaving for economic reasons, does it make sense to send immigrants there? And fourth, if high population density has already caused extensive environmental damage in southern Ontario, is it a good idea to go down that route in northern Ontario which, based on climate and agricultural potential, is less able to support a large population?

The subject of immigration to Canada is addressed from an almost completely ideological and emotional perspective with no serious analysis of the real benefits versus costs to Canadians. It is based on the paradigm of perpetual economic growth and all tied up with our official embrace of multiculturalism and diversity as well as our feelings of guilt for real and perceived wrongs toward immigrants in the past.

Because the policy of mass immigration to

Canada, pursued or endorsed by all national parties, supports a veritable industry and because this misguided policy has insinuated itself into our concept of ourselves as a tolerant society such that those who challenge it do so at their own peril, dots whose relationship to one another should be blindingly obvious remain unconnected in the media, in public discourse, and in government policies. It is not only political parties who can't connect the dot of bringing in over one million newcomers every four years to the dot of trying to reduce Canada's greenhouse gas production. The silence of environmental organizations on the relationship between population growth in Canada and greenhouse gas production and other environmental effects has been deafening. In their mail-out literature soliciting donations, environmental organizations either completely ignore population growth as the driver of urban sprawl, habitat loss, species extinction, water shortages, gridlock, and other problems they are allegedly concerned with, or treat it as something inevitable. I have never received a letter from any organization questioning the government policy of relentlessly promoting the growth of Canada's population through immigration. Evidence for this cognitive dissonance is provided by the fact that environmental organizations nominated Mulroney as Canada's greenest prime minister for his efforts to reduce acid rain and greenhouse gases, and ignored the

fact that he initiated the “tap wide open” immigration policy that has been pursued to this day and has put the rate of Canada’s population growth on the fast track (2).

Because we live in what I call an age of hysteria, I feel compelled to emphasize that the aim of this article is to analyze Canada’s policies on immigration. It doesn’t mean that I am anti-immigrant, that I want to entirely shut the door on immigrants and refugees, or that I think people from other cultures and ethnic backgrounds are less worthy as human beings. I am saying that, for about two decades, Canada has been pursuing a policy of increasing its own population by something approaching 1% each year through immigration, that this policy is having a major impact on Canada’s environment, economy, and society and that it should be subjected to public scrutiny and discussion. Boosterism, emotional appeal, human interest stories, and unsupported statements about our need for immigrants should not be allowed to sideline a factual analysis on the impact of continuous very high levels of immigration on Canada. What I propose to do with this analysis is to (1) briefly look at the global and Canadian realities in terms of the impact of human population growth on resources and the environment, (2) list the principal arguments used to justify Canada’s current immigration policies, and (3) examine how those arguments hold up to scrutiny.

1. Human population growth and the environment: globally and in Canada

Something is amiss with the state of planet Earth. Human activity is bringing about the sixth great extinction of species, with the current rate of species extinction estimated to be 1000 times above background level. About 50% of the world’s forests have been cleared and 25% of coral reefs have been destroyed. Over one billion people lack access to clean water, a number that is anticipated to rise steeply. All the world’s fisheries are being fished at or beyond capacity and the number of large fish caught has declined by 90%. Despite the fact that much more land

has been put to agricultural use in recent decades at the expense of wildland, the number of people that must be fed per hectare of arable land has risen from 4 in 1950 to 8 in 2000 and is anticipated to be 14 in 2050. Humans have in some way impacted about two-thirds of the global land surface outside of Antarctica (and one could say that it has been impacted by climate change) and 41% of the oceans’ area have been strongly affected by human activities relating to climate change, fishing, pollution and shipping. Human activity through the use of fossil fuels is driving climate change. We are running out of said fossil fuels and there is no alternative energy source with the density and versatility of oil. Yet, much like immigration levels to Canada, the annual increase of about 80 million people and the projected human population of 9.2 billion are accepted as an inevitability.

Traditionally, Canada has thought of itself as “underpopulated.” The idea that a country or area is underpopulated is primarily a reflection of human anthropocentrism. The perception of Canada as underpopulated persists despite the fact that Canada’s population increased six-fold during the twentieth century (compared with “only” a four-fold increase in the world population). People still refer to Canada’s “vast open spaces” as if the best thing that could happen to these vast open spaces would be to fill them with people. But putting humans there would require a great deal of energy to heat their houses and to transport their food—as little could be grown locally and hunting can support only a small population. Furthermore, immigrants don’t go to those mythic vast open spaces—almost all settle in Canada’s twelve largest urban centres, and in particular in Toronto, Vancouver, and Montreal. The habitable parts of Canada are already experiencing serious problems associated with their rapid unplanned growth: urban sprawl, loss of inner city greenspace, garbage disposal problems, traffic congestion, and smog. The Ontario Medical Association estimates that there are close to 6,000 premature deaths and 17,000 hospital admissions in Ontario each year caused by

smog. Energy sufficiency in that province is also a concern and future shortages are anticipated.

Environmentally, the trends in Canada are going in the same direction as those globally. The most recent appeal (August 8, 2008) sent to me by Nature Canada says that during the last 40 years, the populations of common terns, boreal chickadees, and evening grossbeaks have dropped by 71%, 70%, and 78%, respectively. The letter also says that of the 428 species of birds that regularly breed in Canada, 60 are at risk of extinction. Overall there are now close to 500 endangered species (plants, fish, reptiles, mammals, birds) in Canada.

But we're not just paving over wildlife habitat, we're paving over our own food supply. The amount of class 1 farmland in Ontario converted to urban use increased from 6% in 1971 to 11% in 2001, the comparable numbers in Alberta are 2% and 6%. Furthermore Alberta, which is now destroying its environment at a breathtaking pace in the mad extraction of tar sands oil, might be facing much more severe drought conditions through global warming and may lose much of the glacial melt that currently irrigates its agricultural land. Water shortages on the prairies caused \$5 billion in economic damage in 2001. The western pine beetle has devastated British Columbia's forests and has crossed the Rockies into Alberta. The east coast cod fishery collapsed and other fisheries (fish and crustacean) in Canada are showing signs of stress. Climate change is anticipated to affect all aspects of the Canadian economy but to have the greatest impact in the north, where its effects are already being felt most strongly.

From an environmental perspective—Canadian and global—there is absolutely no evidence that Canada is underpopulated. Canada is one of

the highest per capita users of energy and producers of greenhouse gases in the world. Bringing people to Canada from almost anywhere else in the world increases their carbon footprint even if their relative standard of living in Canada is low.

Canada's leaders know, or ought to know, that the pursuit of growth is harming Canada. In 1998, I came across a newspaper clipping from 1991 describing a confidential government document which said that environmental degradation in the Third World was so severe that North-South conflict over the issue is virtually

certain, that global warming would have devastating consequences globally and in Canada, and that Canada could expect to have increasing numbers of environmental refugees. The article said the document was prepared by the "Canadian Intelligence Committee" with input from Environment Canada, the Defence Department, and External Affairs. My quest to obtain the document is a story in itself. After months of futile enquiries at the departments named, I was

directed to the Privy Council Office. My Access to Information request was rejected by the PCO. Following a complaint with the Information Commissioner's office, I obtained a copy that was about one-third blanked out. Fortunately I had a diligent officer, and finally, in December 2000, he obtained a copy of the document that was only about 10% blanked out. The confidential document was called "The environment: marriage between Earth and mankind" (3). The letterhead on the first page (deleted in the first release) indicated it was from the Intelligence Advisory Committee. As my Information Commission officer had predicted, the report, while blunt, contained very little information that an

Humanity has the stars in its future, and that future is too important to be lost under the burden of juvenile folly and ignorant superstition.

Isaac Asimov

interested person would not be able to find from publicly available resources, including the internet.

The report states that “Controlling population growth is crucial to addressing most environmental problems, including global warming” (p. 9). The report says that with the emergence of global environmental problems which threaten their own self-interest, developed countries will have to engage in policies in which resources are transferred to developing countries to promote environmentally sound development. “This can be seen as one aspect of paying the bill for our past environmental damage caused by rapid economic growth” (p. 11). With respect to Canada, the report says that “It is, because of its harsh climate and long distances, the most energy-intensive of the free-market industrialized nations. Canada is endowed with vast water resources, but with 90 percent of its population concentrated within a band up to 100 miles of the USA border, water resources in these areas are already being utilized to their fullest. Polluted water has become an everyday concern. ... Although Canada’s population is not large in world terms, its concentration in various areas has already put stress upon regional environments in many ways. Canada can expect to have increasing numbers of environmental refugees requesting immigration to Canada, while regional movements of the population at home, as from idle fishing areas, will add further to population stresses within the country.” There are chapters painting a bleak picture of the environmental situation in different countries and regions of the world.

There is no way that a reasonable person could interpret the report as promoting population growth in Canada, through immigration or otherwise.

2. Arguments used to justify Canada’s immigration policy

The arguments used to justify Canada’s immigration policy are ultimately based on growth – the sacred doctrine of our economic system. Like all sacred doctrines, the paradigm of perpet-

ual growth which has guided Western economies for a few centuries is not receptive to challenges based on facts. So when in 1972 a document was published challenging the idea that there can be infinite growth on a finite planet, it was met with resistance, and ultimately sidelined. The document, commissioned by the Club of Rome, was called *The Limits to Growth* (4). Using computers (a novelty at the time), *Limits to Growth* (LTG) examined the evolution of the whole world’s economy using a mathematical model that kept track of a large number of variables and their interactions as the system changed over time. Based on a number of scenarios with different assumptions, LTG’s authors concluded that, unless specific measures were taken, the world’s economies would collapse within 100 years (i.e., by 2072). About 10 million copies of LTG in 30 languages were sold. Despite creating a big stir, LTG’s message was ultimately ignored. According to an article by Bardi (2008), the Italian economist Giorgio Nebbia identified four primary sources of resistance: those who thought that the message threatened the growth of their businesses and industries; professional economists who saw LTG as a threat to their dominance in advising on economic matters; the Roman Catholic church; and the political left in the Western world, who saw LTG as a scam of the ruling class (5). The message of LTG was distorted and ridiculed. Conveniently for LTG’s detractors, the oil crisis of the early 1970s, which helped get LTG’s message across when it was first published, seemed to be over by 1980.

Canada’s blind adherence to the growth doctrine is reflected in the fact that all administrations have ignored the findings and recommendations of the confidential document prepared for Mulroney’s Privy Council. The denial of the concept of limits is reflected in the term “sustainable growth,” a mutation of “sustainable development.” One even hears the argument that the environment must be protected so that economic growth can continue. And one way to promote economic growth is with population growth. Since Canadian women are falling down on the

job, producing on average only 1.5 babies, we are told that we have to turn to immigration.

The economic arguments for immigration are repeated often and emphatically and totally without analysis. They seem to be meant to scare us into acquiescence. How can we question Canada's immigration policies when our country is facing a looming labour shortage (the alliteration itself has a fine ominous ring to it). We are warned that by 2011, a few short years hence, ALL (!!) labour force growth in Canada will be due to immigration. Nobody explains why it is essential for the Canadian labour force to keep growing—it seems to be taken as a given that it will be a disaster if it doesn't. Another favourite bugaboo is Canada's aging population—soon there will too many old people supported by too few working people. The buzz word here is the dependency ratio, the number of people not working (including children and retirees) over the number of people in the workforce.

3. Assessment of the arguments used to justify Canada's immigration policy

The widespread perception that there would be no population growth in Canada without immigration is false. Women of the baby boomer generation have small families, but they constitute such a large cohort that population growth in Canada would continue until 2030 in the total absence of immigration. Of course, the rate of growth would be much lower. And that's not good enough for developers, bankers who like mortgages, and others who benefit from growth.

No one says specifically that more people would benefit the environment. When our alleged need for immigrants is being promoted, the arguments given are always economic ones or fuzzy ones, like promoting diversity. The economic arguments implicitly assume that the economy is separate from the environment. In fact, as pointed out by economist Herman Daly, it is a "wholly owned subsidiary of the environment."

But if we go along, for the moment, with the

fiction that we can "save the environment" in the face of continuing population and economic growth, how do the economic arguments stack up on their own merits?

I think that nobody would deny that the Fraser Institute, based in Vancouver, British Columbia, is focussed on the economy. It may therefore come as a surprise that some of the best arguments demolishing the reasons usually offered to justify Canada's very high intake of immigrants have come from the Fraser Institute. Fraser Institute Fellow Martin Collacott has written a number of papers on Canada's immigration policy, including "Canada's immigration policy: the need for major reform" (2002) and "Is there really a looming labour shortage in Canada, and if there is, can increased immigration fill the gap" (2003). (Papers from the Fraser Institute can be found by following the links at <www.fraserinstitute.org>.) The following are some of the relevant pieces of information assembled by Collacott in his papers:

- a 1991 study by the Economics Council of Canada found that in the past century, the fastest growth in real per capita income occurred at times when net migration was zero or even negative;
- a 1989 report issued by Health and Welfare Canada called Charting Canada's Future noted that, according to the OECD, there was no correlation whatsoever between population growth and economic growth in its 22-member community;
- a 2000 United Nations study concluded that immigration can only serve as a tool to arrest the aging of the population if carried out at levels that are unacceptably high and ever-increasing;
- Statistics Canada released 2001 census data in July of 2002 showing that the population was aging and that immigration, even at very high levels, would have little impact on the average age of the population;
- a 2002 survey by the Canadian Labour and Business Centre found that only a very small percentage of managers and labour leaders

in the public and private sectors regard the hiring of foreign-trained workers as very important in resolving the problem of a specific shortage of skills from time to time, instead they looked overwhelmingly to solutions involving the existing workforce, such as upgrading the skills of current employees, hiring young labour market entrants, and phasing in retirement policies.

Things have not changed since the above studies were published. According to Statistics Canada's analysis of the 2006 census, the median earnings of Canadians (in inflation-adjusted 2005 dollars) have increased by 0.1% since 1980. Not only that, but the earnings of the poorest fifth fell dramatically in that time, by 20.6%, while the top 20% of earners saw their incomes rise by 16.4%.

The finding that population growth through immigration does not translate into economic benefits was also made by a cross-party committee of the British House of Lords (Lords Economic Affairs Committee), which published its findings in March 2008. The House of Lords' panel said that the British government's claim that immigrants were boosting the economy was a misleading measure, and that a better one would be the impact on income per head of resident population. The Committee said that some groups, including the low-paid, young people seeking jobs and some ethnic minorities may have suffered because of competition for work from immigrants willing to accept low wages and poor working conditions (which is in agreement with US economist George Borjas, who estimated that immigration reduced US workers' salaries by 5% in 2006). The House of Lords Committee also predicted that a continuation of the high rate of immigration would result in a 10% increase of house prices over what they would have been without immigration by 2028.

In June of this year, I attended a one and one-half day conference on immigration held in Montreal by the Fraser Institute. Virtually every paper presented challenged the Canadian government's immigration policy. Several speakers presented data showing that overall immigrants

receive in services and benefits far more than they pay in taxes. (Milton Friedman's remark "Mass immigration and the welfare state are incompatible" was cited by at least 2 presenters.) Economist Herb Grubel of Simon Fraser University and a Fraser Institute fellow calculated that the 2.9 million immigrants who came to Canada between 1990 and the end of 2002 received \$18.3 million more in government services and benefits in 2002 than they paid in taxes. Other presentations addressed the fact that, despite the government's economic arguments, only 20% of immigrants are selected on the basis of their skills, the remainder are family class, refugees and humanitarian cases. Six million offspring of the boomer generation will soon be entering the labour market and may be facing stiff competition for jobs. In big city ridings, members of parliament spend most of their time dealing with immigration questions. To keep the dependency ratio at 0.2 (retirees/workers), one would need to raise the population to 165 million by 2050, or take in 7 million immigrants each year. Productivity will only increase if immigrants are more productive than the existing population, but recent immigrants have been less productive. The performance of recent immigrants has been deteriorating according to the 2006 census and recent cohorts of immigrants haven't been catching up to native born Canadians in their earnings. This could lead to the creation of an economic underclass.

Conclusion

One question that we should be asking is: Is all this growth really improving the lives of Canadians?

The economic arguments used to justify Canada's immigration policy are contradicted by every major study and by census data. A large percentage of immigrants from recent decades have not succeeded economically. Only 20% of immigrants are selected on the basis of their skills (most are family class and the definition of family is very extensive indeed). Nevertheless, by seeking to attract the most educated people from

developing countries, we deprive those countries of the people that could best promote development and in whom they may have invested many resources (eg. by subsidizing their education). Canada's immigration policy has an adverse impact on the environment, not only from the paving over of wildland and farmland in Canada but from the net increase in global greenhouse gas production caused by moving people to Canada, because in Canada, their greenhouse gas production will almost always increase.

It is clear that Canada's immigration policies are not designed for the benefit of ordinary Canadians, who are not even considered to be "stakeholders" by the government. Canada's immigration policies are beholden to the growth and immigration industries and designed to get the immigrant or visible minority vote in swing ridings in urban areas. There is also credible evidence that our immigration policy is influenced by organized crime. Donna Jacobs of the Ottawa Citizen describes the struggles of diplomat Brian McAdam to expose infiltration and corruption at the Canadian consulate in Hong Kong in the early 1990s (6). The consulate was far too cosy with members of organized crime gangs connected to the Chinese Communist party, the Triads, who were buying visas and smuggling their members to Canada. McAdam's reports to Foreign Affairs were ignored, and he was eventually called back to Canada and eased out of his job. A joint CSIS and RCMP investigation into Chinese criminals and the Communist government's program of acquisition, espionage and political influence, called Operation Sidewinder, was launched in 1995. It supported McAdam's allegations. A few days after Sidewinder's final report was sent to CSIS in 1997, Sidewinder was shut down. CSIS disbanded the team and directed the investigators to destroy every document. The Sidewinder team destroyed hundreds of pages of McAdam's research, his books and his reports. The Sidewinder team leader was demoted after submitting the report and resigned.

So far, immigration has never been a major issue in Canada. Despite the evident environ-

mental impact of Canada's immigration policy, the lack of economic success of many newcomers, and the appearance of what might be called an economic underclass, Canadians have not yet begun to ask serious questions of their politicians nor to demand a more intelligent and objective coverage from their media. It is time they woke up.

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