

How to Make Immigration Work Better: Countering the Defeatists

Introduction

The dynamics of this Public Policy Forum event will be well served if I disagree wholeheartedly and vociferously with Mr. Stoffman. You have been asked, after all, to sit through two speeches this evening, and the modern world of commentary has become dedicated to conflict as the vital stimulant to hold people's attention, and so for your benefit Stoffman and Broadbent should be battling it out, *mano a mano*.

And I am delighted to oblige.

Here are the two points on which Stoffman and I disagree:

- *He thinks* Canada lets too many people into the country. He thinks Canada does a lousy job at immigration because we choose too many people, and the wrong people, and the result on the ground is more adverse than beneficial.

- *I think* we don't do a good enough job of choosing and settling those people, and that we should fix the selection and settlement problems rather than reduce the numbers.

And, secondly:

- *He thinks* we are saddling Toronto and Vancouver with too many immigrants, which is producing too many adverse effects.
- *I think* that these cities can be better equipped to handle the current numbers, and will continue to thrive as a result.

The bad news is that those are our large differences, and although we have a number of smaller ones, we have a lot more we agree on than disagree. Mr. Stoffman uses a lot of examples in his book and speech of just how bad the situation is, and part of the ferocity of his

argument lies in his choice of examples. I don't always agree with how representative his examples are of the larger situation he is trying to illustrate. But, having said that, I think his book is better than the other two recent books on the same topic, by authors less capable than him of sustaining a reasonable argument.

I want to spend a few minutes looking at some of those areas of agreement, and some of disagreement.

First, we at Maytree agree that Canada can do more for refugees in camps overseas. There are 19 million people in need of protection worldwide. Mr. Stoffman believes that this is where the true refugees are, and we should put our resources at choosing and aiding refugees at those camp locations. We agree that we could beef up our capacity there.

But we don't think that we should abdicate our responsibility to those who arrive at our borders. Just because someone finds the ability to fly to Canada, even paying agents to assist them, does not mean they are not legitimate. Refugees are not necessarily without resources. They tend to be people who pose a threat to authoritarian regimes in their own countries, people who possess power. Among the classes of people who have power, which are often targeted by tyrants, are people in the commercial and academic sectors. They tend to have resources.

They don't always have documents. We could trade anecdotes all day about documents being flushed down airplane toilets, and such. The anecdotes I have to share include a disturbing number of people who, by luck, weren't home when their family was arrested or killed and couldn't go back home to collect anything, let alone documents. Their immediate desire is to find safety, then security. If they then calculate where they can find a high degree of both safety and

security, who is to fault them for concluding that the place for them is Canada? And who is to fault them for finding a way to get here? And who is to fault them for exhibiting ingenuity in that process?

Not me. I am a businessman, and among the values I want to see in people who work for me is ingenuity. And ambition. And determination. I think that is what helps to build good companies.

And good countries.

Which brings us to another point of agreement with Stoffman. We think that skilled immigrants are a benefit to Canada because of those skills they bring, the fact that they are net donors to the public treasury, and that many of them bring a welcome motivation to their participation in the economy.

More than that, though, we at Maytree value them as fellow citizens. We see them bringing diversity, vitality and innovation – vital components of a thriving country. Refugees and immigrants tend to come in waves from different countries at different times, and each group has different characteristics. The amount of time it takes to settle and succeed varies. Our view is that it is too early to pass judgment on most of the immigrants from the 1990s.

What we know is that their general level of education is higher than Canadians. In 2001:

- 82.0 percent of principal applicants in the skilled immigrant class had a university degree
- 45.6 percent of all immigrants to Canada, including dependents over 15, had a university degree [Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2002].

There are reasonable questions one could ask about comparability between Canadian and foreign universities, but these remain powerful numbers.

Apart from meeting Mr. Stoffman's arguments, there are a number of points I want to make this evening. I want to talk about three things:

- the federal Minister of Citizenship and Immigration's Regionalization or Dispersion Strategy
- increased local coordination of settlement, particularly in the large cities
- and the vision of our immigration policy.

Each of these is a matter of policy, and each needs attention.

Let me begin with the point that immigration is about nation building, not head hunting. Let me also make the point that refugees and immigrants are people, and deserve to be treated with respect for their dignity. I know Mr. Stoffman agrees with that.

Dispersion

The federal Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, Denis Coderre, has an idea that immigrants are not dispersed as evenly across the country as they should be, and he thinks it is a matter which he needs to fix. He is not the first to think so. His predecessor, Eleanor Caplan, thought so too. She said once that immigrants should be introduced to the "myriad pleasures" of Canada's towns and villages. Coderre wants to go fur-

ther. He wants to have immigrants introduced to the myriad pleasures by contract. In fact, he wants them tied to the myriad pleasures.

I don't doubt the myriad pleasures. I have been known to enjoy them myself, from time to time, as I am sure many Canadians have. Some of us choose to live amongst them.

More of us don't. In fact, well over 60 percent of Canadians live in our nine largest cities. Canada is one of the most urban countries in the world.

Newcomers to Canada are no different. They choose, overwhelmingly, to come to our large cities. Recent census data show quite clearly that Toronto, Vancouver and Montreal are the major destinations, Toronto receiving 43 percent, Vancouver 18 percent and Montreal 12 percent. These three cities receive almost three-quarters of newcomers.

Why this is so is not a mystery. In those city regions there are large communities of people who share their language, customs and religion. There are programs for settlement; there are large, flexible modern economies that have accessible labour markets; and there are various opportunities. There are also high degrees of acceptance of difference.

The work of Richard Florida, a professor at Carnegie Mellon University who has written *The Rise of the Creative Class*, suggests that modern economies – those based on information and design – thrive in places with a high tolerance for difference. He has produced a number of indices to measure diversity, such things as the number of gays, artists, people holding university degrees, and people born in other countries. He says that the higher the diversity, the more competitive the region in the modern economy.

And it is in the large urban regions, particularly in their downtowns, that these clusters of diversity exist. The modern knowledge and design worker, according to Florida, wants to be in places where being different is accepted, and where the local amenities are flexible and diverse enough to provide something for everyone. That happens downtown.

Downtown Toronto, that is. Or Montreal. Or Vancouver. Not downtown Flin Flon.

I find Coderre's idea bad for two reasons: It is arbitrary and coercive in its treatment of refugees and immigrants, and it is profoundly anti-city. I suspect Mr. Stoffman agrees with me on the first point. He calls Coderre's idea "unrealistic and repugnant."

I suspect such a policy would inhibit settlement, prolong the amount of time the immigrant takes to becoming a productive citizen, and put undue stress on a group of people already undergoing high stress. Canada has had a long enough history of regional subsidy, of attempting to keep the regions running at the same pace. There is a lot of opinion, much of it in the "recipient" regions, that it doesn't work. This policy is more of the same, except it doesn't just move dollars around, it moves human beings. And that is unacceptable.

There is some opinion that we should fight against cities growing ever larger. I don't think this opposition is well grounded. Intensive development makes a lot more economic, social, cultural and environmental sense than sprawling it over the countryside. The modern economy is based in competition between city regions. It is not a case of Canada versus the United States and Europe, but more a case of Toronto versus New York, Chicago, London and

Milan, Vancouver versus Seattle, San Francisco and Hong Kong, and Calgary versus Houston, Dallas and Denver.

The great writer and thinker Jane Jacobs observes that we have too few big cities in Canada, in good part because we have failed to empower the big city regions. As many of you know, Canadian cities are creatures of the provinces, and have no powers which cannot be overcalled or undercut by the provinces. The federal government has in the last twenty years largely abandoned the cities, in contrast to US or European national government involvement in their cities. At the same time, the senior governments generally refuse to give cities revenue raising capacity beyond the property tax and some fees, while downloading responsibilities onto them as a way of balancing federal and provincial budgets. In Canada, cities are reliant on property tax for about 50 percent of revenues, while in the US it is about 15 percent, and in Europe just over 5 percent.

We need, as a country, to empower our large city regions, beginning with Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver. We need to give them expanded capacity to raise their own revenues, by transferring income and consumption tax points, and we need to give them greater powers to develop policy and programs.

Immigration settlement is a perfect example of where cities can be empowered. Toronto would have little difficulty absorbing nearly half of Canada's newcomers if we had greater control of the settlement process. We need greater local input and coordination, not in the process of selecting who gets in, but in how they will be settled.

And I'll say more about that in a minute.

But I want to get back to Coderre's dispersion idea. I don't think that his stated reason for being concerned about concentration is bad: He wants every community to be able to benefit from newcomers. What I object to, and suspect the courts will object to as well, is the coercion, and the prospect of sending newcomers to places ill-prepared to settle them.

My friend Glen Murray, Mayor of Winnipeg, makes an articulate case as to why Winnipeg wants immigrants. He knows that Winnipeg has some work to do to make itself a great place for newcomers, and he wants to do that work. In order to succeed, he needs the participation of the federal and provincial governments. He needs money and some information, so he can develop appropriate policy and programs. Once he has done that, he wants to be able to put Winnipeg forward to newcomers as a viable alternative.

Now, to me, that is the proper way to think about dispersion. Let's take the decision of where the newcomer will go out of the hands of the Minister, and put it in the hands of the newcomer. Let's let the newcomer make this critical decision about his or her life. But, if we value dispersion, let's enable communities to develop an appealing case as to why immigrants and refugees should choose them.

Such a program would not be open to all cities, towns and villages. Realistically, it would be the second tier cities, say those over a half million in population. Those are the places that offer the infrastructure and capacity to effectively absorb a material number of immigrants.

And let's have the courage to say that if 50 percent of the immigrants and refugees still want to come to Toronto, that is not a terrible thing. Let's make sure that Toronto has an even better capacity to settle them effectively than it does now.

Local Settlement Coordination

Which brings me to my second point, the local coordination of settlement. As I've said, Maytree is of the view that it is appropriate for the federal government to determine who gets in. But settlement is experienced locally. It is the local governments in Toronto, Vancouver and Montreal, and to a lesser extent in the second tier cities, which have the longest and richest experience in newcomer settlement. And it is the local agencies that work most directly with newcomers which understand their needs the best. It is time to create a table where that local knowledge can play a central role in the design and delivery of policy and programs.

It is time for new agreements and relationships between the federal, provincial and municipal governments, with a focus on labour market integration.

In fact, we would recommend a more specific arrangement, a Five Corner Agreement involving Human Resources Development Canada, Citizenship and Immigration Canada, the provincial ministries responsible for immigration and for education and training, and the municipal government. A local Settlement Board should be created that would bring to the table the Five Corner partners and other stakeholders such as local educational institutions, occupation regulatory bodies, immigrant settlement associations, professional associations and employers.

This body would be empowered to create policy and programs to meet local needs. The presence of senior governments would ensure that minimum standards were met, and that human rights were protected. Resources would be allocated to the Five Corner Partnership, and they would make specific allocations for settlement programs and agencies.

Here are a couple of examples of what difference more local resource allocation would make. Currently, federal money for language training comes to the Toronto region, and other regions in the country. It funds some kinds of language training, but not others.

In Toronto, we have a need for some funding for specialized, high level, technical language for engineers or technologists, for example. It is not available. On the other hand, there is quite a lot of money available for elementary language training through a plethora of agencies, and some local rationalization and coordination of this delivery would find some economies.

Similarly, in bridging programs for higher-level employment, which is typically a big city issue, there is little money available. A local decision-making body would likely make this a priority, and if the professional licensing bodies are part of this local settlement board, the decision is likely to be better informed.

We think this is something that could be done relatively easily, and it would have tremendous effect on the quality of settlement. It should be done initially in the three large urban regions, and then in the larger second tier cities. It could be done quickly. What it would take to happen is a strong willingness to share among those currently charged with the responsibilities, and we believe that the seeds of that willingness are there. Strong leadership at each level is needed to nourish those seeds

Vision

Finally, I want to talk about “the vision thing.” Vision is important in matters like this. It is easy or hard to back up a point of view with statistics, and we all have our satchel of statistics

and anecdotes. How many immigrants is enough? How many refugees? Is it as many as you can process properly? Is it dependent on an amount of money that you are prepared to spend on it? Is it a number that compares well to that of another country? Which country?

At The Maytree Foundation, we have a point of view. We think refugees and immigrants provide tremendous benefits to Canada, and we think it is important that we settle them as quickly and successfully as possible. We value the diversity, innovation and energy they bring to the country. We think it is a critical public responsibility to create an effective set of processes to land and settle them properly. We think that Canada must not only think about the national interest in selecting who gets in, but must act humanely in protecting people from tyrants. We believe Canada must be prepared to pay a price for its good citizenship in the world community. But we think that price can be an investment in our country’s future.

At the end of the day, we have reaped great benefits from those who came to our shores. I don’t need to list the names of great Canadians who were not born in this country. The odds that a refugee or immigrant will make a positive contribution to the country are pretty good – good enough for a betting man or woman, certainly good enough for an investor. In fact, they flip conventional venture capital odds on their head, and then some.

We are encouraged that recent governments in Canada have had a large vision of immigration, at least in the numbers they are willing to accept. We think they should work better to improve the quality of the processes of immigration and settlement. It will cost additional money to do the job better. That additional expenditure we view as an investment in faster

settlement, which will make newcomers full contributors to Canadian life.

We would encourage the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration to set about the task of fixing our settlement apparatus with vigour and determination. Fix our capacity to work abroad, restructure our domestic capability, and become a champion of immigrants and refugees. In doing so, recognize that they are human beings and not chattels, and that we welcome them as future citizens in the task of building this great country.

Alan Broadbent

Alan Broadbent is Chairman of The Maytree Foundation. He can be reached at (416) 944-2627.

Reference

Citizenship and Immigration Canada. (2002). *Facts and Figures, 2001*. Ottawa: Minister of Public Works and Government Services Canada.

© 2003 The Caledon Institute of Social Policy
Caledon publications are available on line at:
www.caledoninst.org

1600 Scott Street, Suite 620
Ottawa, Ontario, Canada
K1Y 4N7

phone: (613) 729-3340
fax: (613) 729-3896
e-mail: caledon@caledoninst.org