



Who Should Get In? Rethinking Immigration Priorities

29 October 2001

Pier 21, Halifax, Nova Scotia

Moderator

- **Costas Halavrezos** Host, Maritime Noon, CBC Radio 1

Panel

- **Naomi Alboim**, Visiting Fellow, School of Policy Studies, Queen's University
- **Jeffrey Nguyen**, Cultural Health Interpreter, North End Community Health Centre, Halifax
- **Lee Cohen**, Immigration and Refugee Lawyer, Halifax
- **Linda Almaria Hamilton**, Manager, Professional Practice and Policy Services, Registered Nurses Association of Nova Scotia
- **Terence Corcoran**, Editor-In-Chief, Financial Post

The Maytree Foundation's second public discussion on the question of "*Who Should Get In?*" was held at Pier 21 in Halifax.

After a brief introduction about the context of the discussion by Costas Halavrezos, Naomi Alboim opened the panel presentations with a brief outline of the facts around immigration, and who *does* get in to Canada today. She cited statistics around the actual numbers of people arriving in Canada, by immigration category, level of education and country of origin. She spoke about the need to contextualize the question of *who should get in* within the framework of why we need immigration. She wondered whether the economic migrants that Canada does not let in, may in fact be "this generation's pioneers;" i.e. those who will contribute enormously to the social, economic and cultural fabric of Canada because in the long run they will make loyal citizens.

Jeffrey Nguyen then spoke to the realities of the refugee experience and the long-term human impact of persecution, being uprooted and delayed family reunification. He addressed the challenges that refugees experience in resettling and starting a new life in Canada. In this context, he also illustrated the impact of stereotypes, and debunked myths related to the economic and social contribution of refugees and their children to Canadian society.

Linda Hamilton continued the discussion, beginning with her own story of immigrating to Canada as "the easiest thing" that she had done. However, this part of her story was juxtaposed by the challenges of settlement and racism that she described, and which she connected to the growing barriers to employment and licensure for immigrants today. Finally, Linda spoke about the critical role of family reunification as a key part of a forward thinking immigration policy that anticipates the broader impacts of family, community and identity.

Lee Cohen spoke about the need for Canadians to see the human experience in refugee issues, and provided graphic examples of the humanitarian imperative to respond. He also talked about the demographic and economic need to increase immigration, particularly in response to current

concerns around terrorism. He argued that in order for Canada to be able to protect itself from terrorism, it needs more resources to meet the duties already delegated by current legislation, and an increased tax base can only be sustained through increased immigration. In closing, with respect to eradicating terrorism, he called on a more pro-active role in the distribution of wealth and the establishment of a universal culture of human rights.

Finally, Terance Corcoran suggested that there is a simple answer to the question of *who should get in* – that is, *whoever* wants to get in, short of criminals. He argued that the government should get out of the business of deciding who gets into Canada, and that employers should have more say.

A fuller summary of the proceedings, including questions and comments from the audience will be available shortly on the Maytree Foundation website.