

Our immigration policy needs a drastic overhaul

No doubt, this column will offend some people. It centres on persons, who, for whatever reasons, want to make Canada their home.

You won't get any beefs from this writer about the positive attractions of Canada.

Canada is a country that represents safe haven from political persecution or repression; a country that allows free flow of thoughts on any number of varied and controversial subjects; a country that allows and recognizes religious tolerance; a country where laws are in place prohibiting discrimination in all its ugly forms.

So what's the problem-you might ask? Is he off again, tilting at windmills only he runs into?

You're damn right I'm off again and totally ticked off about Canada's policy concerning immigrants and supposed refugees.

It is a given that Canada needs people because of our vast expanse of empty spaces.

It is also a given, that because of federal government mismanagement, covering decades, we have population clusters in certain provinces, to the detriment of the rest of the country.

After the First World War, the government of Canada actively advertised in Europe for immigrants. The same thing happened after the Second World War.

Take a drive through the Prairie provinces. I have.

Salt of the earth people, who will open their homes and hearts to lost-they-way or simply weary travellers.

Their names aren't Smith and Jones; most likely Kowalski and Zuberlaw, but they definitely are Canadians and proud to be Canadians.

As things stand now, with an immigration policy more complicated

and convoluted than the solution to Rubick's Cube, no wonder people, and families who have gone through the hardship of immigration and resettlement are ticked-off.

I know of what I write, because I am an immigrant.

I was born in Scotland and emigrated to Canada when I was five-years-old.

I didn't have much choice, you see, because I was short, chubby and liked to follow my mom and dad around.

We were, what was termed in those years, "British subjects."

My father had served as a professional soldier in the British army for 17 years, survived three years in a Japanese prisoner-of-war-camp and chronicled his experiences in two books which were published in 17 languages.

He became involved in social work in Scotland, but felt Canada would provide the best opportunity, in terms of future potential, for his children.

He applied for a position with the Children's Aid Society in Kirkland Lake and when he was accepted-after months of uncertainty in Scotland-left the family to prepare a new home for us in Canada.

It was six months before I saw my Dad again but it was a memorable reunion.

Although I was young, the separation was heart-wrenching-the reunion almost indescribable.

My father followed the rules, as set up then, and despite the hardship, our family survived.

The rules have changed now, and to this writer, to the detriment of Canada.

It seems to me, that no longer do we have people wanting to enter Canada as a way to better their lives and be part and parcel of a productive society.

It is costing Canadian taxpayers millions of dollars because of the

"As I See It"

by
Colin Gibson



wishy-washy policies of the federal government concerning those who wish to enter Canada, enter illegally and are then fed and housed before their cases even get to be heard

You see, no one in power will issue a definitive statement and the bureaucrats involved in the issue are more concerned with their perks and pensions than demanding clear-cut guidelines on how to deal with the problem.

One politician, Scarborough West MP Tom Wappel, the Liberal party's immigration critic, has reportedly brought forth some sensible suggestions on this issue. He will no doubt be bashed from pillar to post and eventually recant his disclosures, but he does offer some solutions to the problem.

The Toronto Star obtained a "leaked copy" of a discussion paper Wappel had presented to the Liberal party dealing with refugee claimants and immigrants and his suggested solutions to the problem.

Basically put, Wappel suggests detaining refugee claimants in closed military camps termed, "Canada Welcome Centres" until their cases are heard by the proper authorities

The suggestion, and other proposals made by Mr. Wappel, make so much sense, it is unlikely the Ottawa mandarins-comfortably

escorted in their obviously sound-proof dachas on the Rideau-will even allow public comment on the volatile issues raised by the Scarborough West MP.

Common sense usually takes a back seat to political expediency in Ottawa.

And it is not good partisan party politics to dwell on controversial subjects that might threaten approval from ethnic voters.

Similarly, who do the politicians think they are fooling in terms "leaked" reports and documents?

It is a political ploy as old as politics itself.

Wappel's discussion paper must have some merit since already, Liberal leader Jean Chretien and deputy leader Sheila Copps are making frantic moves to disassociate themselves from its contents. Another political ploy.

It is estimated 30,000 refugee claimants arrive in Canada annually. They are fed, housed, free to move around, don't pay taxes, often work illegally, are given all the benefits of our welfare system and give nothing to the country in return

It is a well-documented fact that Canada's immigration system is a joke world-wide; just begging to be abused-and it regularly is abused.

Aside from the housing of refugee claimants in closed military camps, Wappel has some other ideas to deal with the problem that warrant attention.

He suggests they should be detained so they can't work or collect welfare- also ensuring their cases are decided faster than the present average yearly time period most cases take.

Claimants would be provided with food, lodging and clothing but would not be able to work outside the centres. They would also be required to maintain the centres.

They would get counselling about

their rights, attend language classes and learn about "Canadian society, laws, values, expectations and everyday life," according to the leaked report.

Those who refused to accept these conditions, until a tribunal ruled on their cases, would be automatically deported.

According to the Star story, Wappel also proposed to eliminate refugee screenings in favor of immediate full hearings; reject any immigrants who test positive for HIV, the virus that causes AIDS; fingerprint anyone who applies to immigrate to Canada and refuse to process anyone who objects; allow sponsors of visitors to post bonds as security to ensure visitors leave the country as promised.

Draconian measures? I think not! Clear-cut suggestions to improve our laughable immigration system? Most definitely.

But don't hold your breath waiting for these suggestions to be implemented.

They will be swept under the rug because critics will suggest the camps will bring back old skeletons from the closet.

The internment of Japanese-Canadians during World War II; German concentration camps; Israeli internment camps for Palestinians.

These excuses won't wash.

The message being delivered is a simple one. If you wish to be a citizen of our country, follow the rules. If you can't follow the rules, we don't want you.

For this reason and this reason alone, Mr. Wappel's suggestions should be given serious consideration.

Or put another way, in terms of immigrants and refugees who wish to make Canada their home.

If you can't hack it, hike it! As I see it, anyway.

Let's get real with basement apartment issue

Now that the new Halton Hills Town Council has been elected, one of its priorities should be the inclusion of a provision in the Town's zoning bylaws permitting basement apartments.

Basement apartments can provide a safe and affordable type of housing - and affordable housing is one goal all newly-elected councillors supported during the campaign.

Town Zoning Officer, Brian Murdoch, would only offer the opinion that there are many illegal basement apartments currently located in Halton Hills.

Others suggest there could be as many as 500 to 1,000 illegal basement apartments in Halton Hills.

These numbers suggest two things: basement apartments are

here to stay; and no one knows for certain how many of the existing basement apartments meet building, plumbing and fire codes.

Given the relatively high demand for basement apartments and homeowners' willingness to meet the demand, despite the illegal ramifications, the Town's politicians should legalize basement apartments in order to ensure the safety of the occupants.

One reason basement apartments are frowned upon is because, being located below ground, they don't provide the quality of life attained living at or above ground level.

This is true only because basement apartments are illegal.

Mr. Murdoch points out a lot of people wanting to establish a basement apartment in their house are reluctant to approach the Town



Ben's Banter
by
Ben Dummett

for the zoning amendment or variance because the request could be rejected in the end.

Despite this potential outcome, however, the homeowner is still required to spend a minimum of \$1,500, but probably a lot more, just to have the Town consider the ap-

plication. It's no surprise most homeowners reject the legitimate route and instead just build the basement apartment.

If basement apartments were permitted in Town, then more people would be willing to establish them legally, meaning more of the apartments would meet building, plumbing and fire codes.

The Town doesn't have sufficient manpower to have people continually scouring the area looking for illegal basement apartments, said Mr. Murdoch.

As a result, Town staff only investigate public complaints concerning possible illegal basement apartments.

Even if Town staff wants to investigate a possible illegal apartment, it's not always possible

because staff doesn't have the legal right to enter an apartment without the tenant or landlord's permission.

It doesn't make sense for the landlord to permit town staff into the apartment knowing it's illegal nor is the tenant likely to permit town staff into the apartment since the person is likely to lose his or her home by doing so.

Mr. Murdoch said when the town does charge someone for operating an illegal apartment, the person is apt to convert the space back into a basement. And then three months later create a new illegal basement apartment.

It's obviously a no-win situation for the town, and the situation will only improve if landlords are not deterred from taking the legal route in establishing basement apartments.

Put the past behind and look to the future

"But, regardless of whether this money is paper, metal or book, it has value only because of one fact - the fact of the possibility that there are goods and services to meet this money's value. Which is another way of saying that it is a country's production, or potential production, which serves as the basis for the value of money in a country." Louis Even, "Vers demain", 15 April, 1961.

"It is true that manufacturing is important; for employment, for trade, for the creation of wealth. But it is not uniquely important, nor is all manufacturing important, nor even is manufacturing necessarily the most important activity in a rich, modern economy." The Economist, 15 November, 1991.

Mr. Even was a Canadian socialist. The Economist is an international conservative magazine. Both statements show

how misguided we are in our moaning about our economy in Canada.

If, just for one moment, we stop looking at the past - when our wealth was created through exploitation of natural resources, agriculture, and, later, manufacturing - and look instead, with an unbiased eye, at the present, we see that our situation is not at all that bad.

Surely, our natural resource base is shrinking, farming is becoming a burden instead of an asset, manufacturing is moving South. So? Our wealth is our infrastructure and the "potential production" of our people. And above "our people" we have total control, we are totally independent from the vagaries of the international markets.

It is in our power to make sure that the potential of our people is fully exploited, through the best possible education and the widest



Another View
by
Carlo Testa

possible freedom to act.

It is in the nature of economic international development that richer countries shed manufacturing activities and, even moreso, reliance on natural resources or agriculture.

The most silly part of our present state of catonic despair is the complaint "that we have no money". As if money would be a relevant factor! The absence of

money is more often than not an excuse for inactivity, for sterile soul searching.

We have the money to provide the best possible education to our population, for retraining and for research. We have money because our infamous national debt is mostly owed to ourselves, so perfectly usable. We lack the resolve to move ahead from a comfortable, if rather dull state of affair - a parody of the "remittance" economy - to a new, more creative and self-assured one. And fortunately we also have examples that we can move, that we are capable of creating wealth out of "nothing" - even if calling our brain-power "nothing" is a bit of a misnomer.

The hundreds of Canadian firms and individuals who sell consultancies across the world, who design communication systems or advise farmers in third world countries, show we

got the "right stuff."

What we lack, right now, is a common sense of purpose and direction, a clear line of action defined by consensus between capital, labor and government.

We keep searching for remedies for old, obsolete activities and we neglect to see the success and potential for more success, in new ones.

Many of us are already doing the right things, jumping with both feet into new markets and new activities. A time of recession, or slow economic growth, is the best time to start new activities.

Sure there are risks. But the biggest risk in life is being born.

We have gone over that hurdle, let us put the past behind us and grab the future/present which is there for us to exploit. Let us do justice to ourselves, we are pretty good, you know?