POST-WAR IMMIGRATION TO CANADA

JOHN BARNETT

ACTIVE advocates of an aggressive post-war immigration policy for Canada consist largely of industrialists, financiers, and commercial and business men, while the opponents of such policy are chiefly labour leaders and farmers. The opinions of both groups are based largely on existing conditions, as they see them, in their own businesses or vocations. Both groups argue, as they have ever done, in broad assertions which are true, or appear so, as general propositions.

Farmers in dread of over-production, and Labour fearing unemployment and lower wages, are strongly against the admission of virtually any immigrants, until our existing population is in a definitely assured and satisfied economic position—which is beyond ordinary human sight. On the other hand, the business man with a narrow internal market, in sparsely settled country, and confronted with higher debts and heavier taxation, cannot see how we can possibly make progress or even carry on unless we secure quickly a larger population.

There is undoubtedly a great measure of truth in both contentions. We are a very sparsely settled country. We badly need a larger internal market so that we shall be less dependent on the export of the produce of our farms and factories. Our railways, utilities and municipal undertakings cannot carry on economically in many cases without a larger population.

It is, however, self-evident that we lose heavily if we import immigrants who are mentally defective, criminally minded, or who have decidedly lower moral and social standards. It should be equally clear that immigrants who do not become self-supporting within a reasonable time, without displacing our own people and lowering existing living standards, are a burden and not an asset.

Canada has had a long and varied experience in handling immigration, in mass groups and individually, of many different types, races and nationalities. Governments, Churches, land-selling Companies and Railways severally and jointly have all had a hand in our past immigration activities. We have had periods when the flow grew to a real river, and times when it dwindled to the merest trickle. We have had periods of un-

mistakable success, and others of as clear failure. Sometimes immigration has helped materially our growth and development; at other times it seems to have injured us. There are many periods in our history where it is impossible to say whether its effect was good or bad, as the tangible results appear to have been negligible.

Before we formulate any policy on post-war immigration to Canada, this great past experience should be thoroughly analyzed in an effort to determine when, to what extent, and why our immigration activities of former periods have been successful or otherwise. Unfortunately we have never attempted such an analysis, and there appears little effort to do so now.

The United Empire Loyalist migration of nearly one hundred and fifty years ago, while not large numerically, was the most important infusion of new blood that this country has ever had. It is the main foundation-stone of English-speaking Canada. Most of these migrants remained with us, opening up new country and providing the ground-work from which other settlements arose.

Following the close of the Napoleonic War, owing to it and to the dislocation caused by the industrial revolution in Britain, for more than a quarter of a century swarms of immigrants (many state-aided and some on their own resources) streamed across the Atlantic to the New World. An appreciable portion of these came to and settled in the Maritimes, in the Eastern Townships of Lower Canada and in Upper Canada. A very large proportion of these people settled down, opened new lands and built new communities. Their descendants are to be found now in every Province in Canada.

There are many defects in the statistical records of later years, the seventies, eighties and even nineties. It is clear, however, that from 1869 to 1890 there was a steady but unspectacular growth in immigration—particularly British immigration.

Starting at approximately 25,000 in 1870, the total immigration rose to 133,000 in 1883, and continued at a high level until the depressed nineties, when there was a heavy falling off,. It did not rise again substantially until about 1903. On account of uncertainties and irregularities in recording migrations from the United States, these total figures are very unreliable, and exaggerate greatly the true flow of immigration.

The figures on British immigration are much more reliable,

and indicate much more accurately the true flow. They show clearly a steady growth through the seventies and eighties. The high point was reached in 1883, when 45,000 British immigrants came to Canada. In 1896 this had dropped to 12,000, and in 1897 to 11,000. European immigration was 12,000 in 1882, and dropped to three and four thousand a year in the nineties.

Canadian immigration history of the present century may be roughly divided as follows:

1. The period from 1903 to 1913, sometimes called "The Golden Decade", the most active in our history: in the last year, 1913, some 412,000 immigrants were recorded as entering Canada.
2. The First Great War and immediate post-war years, 1913 to 1921, when owing to the conflict migration practically ceased.
3. The period from 1921 to 1930, during which a determined effort was made to enlarge our population by immigration.
4. The period from 1930 to the opening of the present world conflict, which was largely a time of economic depression, when immigration languished and almost disappeared as it did in the depressed nineties. In the nineties immigration died of its own accord, while in the thirties Government restrictions intervened. The results were the same in both depressions,

Despite changes in conditions both here and abroad, much can be learned by studying intensively the earlier migration movements. However, in a short review such as this is, it is possible only to consider briefly the character and results of the two active immigration periods of the present century, namely the Golden Decade 1903, to 1913 and the post-war period 1921 to 1930.

In both periods we received large numbers of British and Continental European migrants. The aggregate figures for the ten years 1903—1913 are approximately 1,218,000, while for the corresponding ten years 1921—1930 they were very little less—1,083,000. So far as mere numbers go, we had a large and ample flow of British and European immigration in the last post-war period. What became of them, where they went and what they accomplished, are things that are not so clear. Certainly the census figures of subsequent years do not indicate that any large population gain resulted therefrom. They opened up practically no new settlements, and built no

new towns or communities. The vacant unoccupied lan they took up was negligible. Considerable numbers eventually established themselves in mining camps—principally in Northern Ontario and Quebec. It is possible, though by no means certain, that our immigration activity stimulated a more rapid mining development.

Large numbers established themselves in our industrial and trading towns and cities. Some became factory workers; others clerks and helpers in commercial concerns; many others established small businesses of their own. The relief rolls of the depression thirties, east and west, are full of the names of new immigrants who came to us in the post-war period. In addition we deported in the four years 1931 to 1934 more immigrants than in the 23 years from 1903 to 1925. The immediate wastage was very large. All over Canada, and especially in the West, many immigrants moved on and out soon after their arrival in Canada. Large numbers used, Canada merely as a stepping-stone for surreptitious entry into the United States. Others, particularly British, Swiss, Dutch and Scandinavians, returned after comparatively brief sojourns in Canada to their home lands.

The Golden Decade, from 1903 to 1913, on the contrary, produced abundance of evidence of where our immigration went to and what it accomplished. In the Prairies alone it furnished occupants for some 150,000 farms, and an additional substantial number in British Columbia, all carved out of previously undeveloped territory. It furnished substantial personnel for thousands of new towns, villages, hamlets and mining camps. As in the post-war period, considerable numbers drifted to the expanding eastern industrial centres, or to the United States or, disappointed, back to their countries of origin. Relatively, however, the drifting percentage was small. The great bulk stuck to development work, and found and made a place for themselves in bringing new land under cultivation, in building roads, railways, cities, towns and communities.

There is another marked difference between the two periods which may have had a very great bearing on the relative tangible and intangible results which were obtained. In the Golden Decade we had a definite objective before us. We wanted immigrants for a specific purpose—namely to occupy and settle a definite geographical section of the country. In the last post-war period we had no clear-cut objective. We sought immigration, in a vague general belief that immigration of

itself had value. We had no exact geographical area where we knew clearly that we needed immigrants. We had no specific task or work for which we knew we required additional and outside new blood.

It is also worth nothing that the Golden Decade was preceded and accompanied by a vigorous and extensive internal migration development. Most of the early new settlements of the prairies at the beginning of the century were made by newcomers from the eastern provinces. The writer went west in 1897 on one of the first harvester excursions to leave the Maritimes. These excursions, from that year on, carried thousands of future homesteaders. In 1897, 1898, 1899, 1900 and 1901 most of the new western settlement was carried on, by eastern Canadians. British immigration in 1897 was only 11,000 souls. Continental European immigration was only 5,000. British and overseas foreign immigration got really underway only after 1901, long after Sir Clifford Sifton's land settlement policy was started. Immigration land settlement was founded on and grew out of a fast-developing internal Canadian migration.

All our past history shows clearly that an immigration policy that is concretely and visibly successful and worth while must be founded on and grow out of undertakings in which our own people play their part, which they endorse and underwrite by their own participation—individually and by groups. If our policies of location, establishment and development are not good enough to attract a reasonable participation of our own citizens, it is of no use to make them the basis of an immigration policy.

So far as direct public expense is concerned, our Golden Decade immigration was carried out at low cost. The direct administrative expense of our last post-war effort, on the contrary, was heavy. Taking typical years in each period, we find that our direct expenditures on Immigration staffs and services were:

1906 . . . . . $ 842,688
1926 2,328,931

To the expenses of 1926 must be added considerable sums charged to other appropriations such as the Land Settlement Branch of Soldier Settlement. In no period of our history did Government, Railways and other agencies maintain and pay for as many agents, representatives, and soliciting and locating agencies for European and British immigrants as in the period between 1921 and 1931.

These figures and such statements do not tell the whole

story, however. There is a belief that state-aided settlement is a new and at best a questionable device, which originated with us at the close of the last World War. This is not so. State-aided land settlement and resource development are as old as our earliest settlement. It is not too much to say that no large-scale immigration or settlement policy has ever been carried on in Canada without state aid—either direct or indirect.

There is no doubt that one hundred and sixty acres of open prairie land free was a most potent factor in stimulating the flow of migration first from eastern Canada to the West and eventually from all America and Europe. But it took more than this to make the policy successful in its operation. At the commencement mos tof the new settlers had to be "grub-staked", or financed while they were getting a start. Even open prairie land will not produce a living for a family until at least three years after the land has been occupied. Bush lands require a much longer period.

As the flow progressed and increased, more and more migrants arrived with capital to finance their operations. Nevertheless the majority of the overseas migrants throughout the entire period were without financial resources, and required "grub-staking" and the means of getting started.

This necessary financial support was not provided in any large measure by direct government assistance during the Golden Decade. Essential financial support was provided by railway, provincial and municipal construction projects. The *Canada Year Book* is authority for the statement that between 1900 and 1912 a billion and a half dollars of foreign capital was invested here, in public and quasi-public development. The era of intense railway building was under way in the nineties with the McKenzie-Mann enterprizes, followed soon by the Grand Trunk Pacific and the thousands of miles of branch lines constructed by both great systems.

These enterprizes with the accompanying municipal and provincial developments, enabled every settler to go to work for a wage as soon as he was located. He had immediate and nearby employment for himself, the adolescent members of his family and his equipment. He also had a good active nearby market for his farm by-products, eggs, milk, butter, etc., which are all the settler can hope to sell in the early days of settlement. With the eventual nationalization of both the Grand Trunk Pacific and Canadian Northern, most of the railway debt

became government debt, so that in the end the financing of the new settler was done by public-financed construction work. The free homestead policy, attractive as it was, would never have succeeded without the accompanying, and mainly precedent, provision for financing and grub-staking the new settler.

Historical, population and immigration records provide sound reasons for believing that those periods in which the immigrant was aided indirectly have been much more productive of national benefit and development than have the periods where the immigrant was supplied with direct grants, either by loan or by gift, in order to effect his establishment. There is much evidence, from very early days down, that settlements financed by public loan or grants have largely failed as development enterprizes. This is intelligible. A new settler or immigrant can be financed by providing him with labour opportunities on public or semi-public development undertakings such as railways, roads, dams, surveys, power lines, land clearing, etc., without injury to his morale, energy and initiative. However, the moment direct government loans or grants are made to the individual, discontent, indolence and incapacity begin to appear, which in the end make such immigration, in too large measure, burdensome and dangerous.

There is strong evidence in all periods that a much greater degree of economic success has been obtained where the father has been able to precede the dependent members of the family. Exceptions to this are numerous; nevertheless, all available records show that the settlement of whole families with limited or no personal finances is beset with difficulties, and requires disproportionately heavy financial and social assistance. Family settlement was a marked feature of the last post-war period, whereas in the Golden Decade relatively much larger numbers of adults were admitted, who first established themselves and then brought out their families.

These most recent immigration periods have one thing in common: neither added anything substantial to the population and progress of the three Maritime Provinces. The Golden Decade was a period of severe emigration for these provinces. The strong tide of immigration to Canada left no worth-while residue with them, but instead carried away with it to Western Canada tens of thousands of their young people. In the 32 years from 1901 to 1932 immigration to Canada totalled 4,837,000 of which only 211,000 or less than 4½% indicated any intention of going to the Maritimes. Population records show that

only a trifling number of this small percentage made any pretence of staying there.

The same is true of the last post-war period, although at this time a very great effort was made by both Federal and Provincial Governments to divert a fair proportion of the newcomers to the Maritimes. Large sums were spent on special Maritime advertising, and on maintaining special agents at home and abroad. In New Brunswick, at least, special lands and buildings were acquired and set apart for the reception of immigrant families. Loans and special grants were made available for British, Danish and Scandinavian newcomers. Railways, churches and many local organizations assisted in many ways. All this effort failed to induce in any appreciable degree an immigration flow, and the few who were brought generally were unwilling to remain.

The present-day advocates of an active post-war immigration policy argue that sparse population, elderly owners of farms, the possibilities of specialized intensive agriculture are conditions favourable to carrying on successfully an active large scale immigration policy in all parts of Canada. Theoretically this seems sound, but the fact remains that in past years none of these "favourable conditions" have been good enough to bring immigrants to the Maritimes.

These Provinces have not been thickly populated, and the rural communities have been thinning out steadily for at least forty years. They have much unoccupied land with good soil; they have many vacant farms. In no section of the country are there so many elderly farmers who have no one to carry on when they are gone. They have many large farms capable of subdivision. They have an abundance of water, cheap fuel and building materials. They have good local markets for specialized local agricultural products. Their climatic and scenic advantages are far superior to those on the prairies. Their social and educational advantages are not surpassed by any and are equalled by few sections in Canada. Nevertheless, none of these favourable conditions have been good enough to attract and hold any appreciable part of Canada's past flood of immigration. The immigrant was apparently looking for something more—something the Maritimes could not, or would not, supply.

With the day of the free prairie homestead gone, and with the era of huge railway construction a thing of the past, most of the rest of Canada is in the same position that the Maritimes

have been in for well over forty years, respecting obviously attractive settlement and development opportunities for new immigrants. To have a successful post-war immigration flow anywhere into Canada, we must now supply in all Provinces that something which was evidently lacking in the past in the Maritimes.

History makes it abundantly clear that a successful immigration movement must be founded on an existing prosperity and expansion within our borders which are good enough to attract and hold our own ambitious young people. Our immediate post-war problem of employment and re-establishment must be overcome, and enlarged opportunities must be created for our ambitious young people, before we can hope to attract or hold desirable immigrants from abroad.