

Intentionality and instruments: Making multiculturalism work

VAGUE INTENTIONS

To paraphrase Butch Cassidy, it's not the multiculturalism that'll kill you, it's the discontents. The Canadian discourse, at least as reported in our media, has a lot of discontents, and we now have a federal government which traffics in them freely. One of them is multiculturalism.

Multiculturalism is closely linked to immigration, which has been a critical building block for Canada. A lot of the discontents we have with multiculturalism are in fact discontents with immigration, and derive from the fact that we have had both a vague intention around multiculturalism and weak instruments to implement it. The multiculturalism policy itself and the Act that embeds it are more aspirational than directive, and don't offer a great deal of clarity. A clearer intent for immigration and a more effective instrument for immigration, settlement, and integration would mitigate many of the discontents around multiculturalism.

TWO GREAT PERIODS OF IMMIGRATION

We have had two great periods of immigration, at the start of the 20th century and in the 1960s and early '70s.

Prime Minister Laurier worried that the unpopulated prairie was vulnerable to being settled and claimed by the United States, so he tasked Clifford Sifton from his cabinet to solve the problem. Sifton set about attracting cold weather farmers, targeting those in the northern US and northern Europe. He used land grants, credit, rail and storage infrastructure to facilitate marketing crops, and a variety of other incentives. In less than a decade, Canada's population increased by over 50 percent.

Prime Minister Pearson's man was Tom Kent, a policy oriented former jour-

BY ALAN BROADBENT

Alan Broadbent is chairman and CEO of Avana Capital Corporation.

A lot of the discontents we have with multiculturalism are in fact discontents with immigration, and derive from the fact that we have had both a vague intention around multiculturalism and weak instruments to implement it.

nalist who became his senior adviser and then first deputy minister of the new Department of Manpower and Immigration. In addition to being involved in most of the extraordinary policy development of Pearson's government, Kent was responsible for the development of the point system for evaluating potential immigrants. By assessing applicants in terms of the qualities that Canada wanted (education, youth, work experience), this system changed a formerly exclusive intake which had favoured British and European immigrants and had focused on keeping people out. According to an IRPP report by Genevieve Bouchard, the 1952 immigration act "allowed refusal of admission on the grounds of nationality, ethnic group, geographical area of ori-

gin, peculiar customs, habits and modes of life, unsuitability with regard to the climate, probable inability to become readily assimilated, etc." Kent's point system upped the diversity dimension dramatically, which led to the multiculturalism policy within a decade.

Both Sifton and Kent, and their prime ministers, saw immigration as a deliberate tool in nation building. In Sifton's case, he knew who he wanted and he set out to get them. He changed the immigration department by putting officials on commission, rewarding them according to how successful they were in attracting immigrants. And he launched one of the first great marketing campaigns. It was said that you could not go to any farming village or down any country lane in northern Europe without seeing a Canadian recruitment poster on a wall or post. And he knew that he had to create incentives to attract farmers and to retain them. He had to help them succeed.

In Kent's time, Canada didn't need to attract immigrants, but had to decide between the many who wanted to come. Kent linked the point system to labour market attachment, the most critical settlement success factor. Kent's system was colour-blind: you got points for six factors—for example, your education and ability to speak English or French—but it didn't matter where you came from. Since the system was implemented in 1967, there has been increased diversity in the races of immigrants. The idea was that if you selected immigrants properly, you would dramatically increase the likelihood they'd succeed.

The Sifton and Kent efforts shared intentionality and instrumentality. They had a strong intent to choose the best immigrants to meet the needs of the country in their time, and they developed the instruments to do it. In both cases

the underlying concept was building Canada by attracting new citizens—people who would settle into the economic, social, and cultural life of the country.

THE TWO THEMES OF DISCONTENT

At most other times in Canada's history, particularly since 1900, we've had discontents that centre on two themes: they'll take our jobs and they'll worship their own god.

They'll take our jobs is based in the belief that the economy is relatively finite and inflexible, and with high unemployment rates among "Canadians," immigrants would just become a burden on public budgets. This fear ignores entrepreneurship, the ability to create new value and wealth. Tell an entrepreneur that you want to bring in a million immigrants, and they'll say, "Goody, more customers!" Tell a beleaguered public official, trade unionist, or policy wonk, and they'll see shortages and costs, even if they run a transit system which will get lots of new riders or a university which will get new students.

And *they'll worship their own god*, eat their own food, wear their own clothes, and otherwise engage in behaviour absolutely different from that the British brought from Britain and the French from France. It will, we are still warned, ruin everything this country was built on!

So we have discontents, and we have young people with history degrees running programs to tell us Canada is failing because we haven't memorized our prime ministers in order of appearance, or our provincial capitals from east to west. They urge us to have public education campaigns to stop the ebb of our history and our values along with it. Without it, they say, we'll wake up one day with a theocracy and dietary laws.

ENRICHED LIVES

Not everyone has discontents about immigrants and multiculturalism, of course. A Pew Trust poll a few years back found that Canada was one of three

The way to defeat the discontents before they kill you is to be intentional and instrumental in the embrace of multiculturalism and immigration.

countries in the world where a majority of the population favoured immigration: the US was 53 percent, Australia 55 percent, and Canada a whopping 75 percent. We tend to like the idea in theory, and from what one can see of life on the streets of our cities, where most of the immigrants live, we seem to like it in practice. Most of us tend to know and work with Asians, Africans, South Asians, and people from around the planet. Most of us seem to have our lives enriched in this way.

But what about our values? Canada is a nation of laws, with one of the most dynamic legal systems in the world. Our basic values are expressed in the body of law, and they get tested every day across the country as we challenge each other and push the boundaries of the present. Through our legal system we test behaviour and thought, and through our appeals process we turn important

questions over relentlessly. And our parliaments change the law, to make sure that it expresses current consensus. We change it to allow women to vote or gays to marry. Our values are robust and secure.

The Harper government has all but abandoned immigration and multiculturalism as an instrument of nation building. It views immigrants as cogs in a machine, as their burgeoning temporary worker program shows. It is an approach that has failed everywhere else, where it has created an underclass of workers in hiding, who don't want to go back to where they came from, but cannot surface and act like citizens for fear of prosecution and removal. These days, multiculturalism seems simply a way for political parties to segment voting blocs.

MAKING INTENTIONAL AND INSTRUMENTAL CHOICES

Nations have choices to make, and immigration can be seen as a liability or an asset. Liabilities need to be limited, to have boundaries put around them, constraints imposed, and costs tallied. But assets are invested, and given every chance to succeed, because they will pay dividends for a long time into the future. How you choose makes all the difference to how you behave, and to the sum of your discontents.

The way to defeat the discontents before they kill you is to be intentional and instrumental in the embrace of multiculturalism and immigration. More Sifton, more Kent, fewer amateur historians. 🍀

Realizing the potentials continued from page 43

The experience of social exclusion and discrimination can be a critical factor in generating such isolation. Also, the regular flow of new immigrants into the community and the resulting increase in the size of the community may make it possible for many individuals and families to function well within the community.

In addition to promoting equality, it would be important to foster interchanges among Canada's cultural groups in cultural, economic, and social areas

of activity. These are challenging tasks, but they are important steps to assuring all groups that they are fully Canadian, and that we can be as united as our multicultural ideals assert. 🍀

* This paper is based on *Multiculturalism and Social Cohesion: Potentials and Challenges of Diversity* by Jeffrey G. Reitz, Raymond Breton, Karen K. Dion, and Kenneth L. Dion, with the collaboration of Rupa Banerjee and Mai Phan, published by Springer 2009.