

OUR TIME TO LEAD THE IMMIGRANT ANSWER

What would a Canada of 100 million feel like? More comfortable, better served, better defended

DOUG SAUNDERS LONDON

If you were in London 110 years ago to watch the coronation of King Edward VII, it would have looked a lot like the scene of this month's royal jubilee, with one notable exception: In 1902, the route of the royal coach, visited by millions of people, had been transformed into a giant advertisement for immigration to Canada.

The largest public-sector ad campaign in the country's history had led Ottawa to erect giant sheaves of wheat over the Strand in London, to establish recruitment bureaus from Reykjavik to Moscow promising "homes for millions."

Prime minister Wilfrid Laurier made no secret of its purpose: to increase Canada's population tenfold as soon as possible, and thereby turn the country from a sparsely populated colony into a major, independent nation with its own culture, its own economy and its own institutions, capable of influencing and bettering the world, rather than simply being buffeted in the world's tides.

"We are a nation of six million people already; we expect soon to be 25, yes, 40 millions," Mr. Laurier declared. "There are men in this audience who, before they die, if they live to old age, will see this country with at least 60 millions of people."

It was the largest immigration wave we've experienced, three times the rate of today's influx, and arguably the most important human event in Canada's history, ending its colonial culture. But it was a failure: It only doubled Canada's population in the short term, and helped cause it to increase just fivefold in the next century.

Today we need to recognize the fact that, despite what Laurier did a century ago, Canada remains a victim of underpopulation. We do not have enough people, given our dispersed geography, to form the cultural, educational and political institutions, the consumer markets, the technological, administrative and political talent pool, the infrastructure-building tax base, the creative and artistic mass necessary to have a leading role in the world.

Because our immigration rates have remained modest and our birth rate is low, our population will grow only slightly – to perhaps 50 million by mid-century. By that point, the world's population will almost have stopped growing and it will be difficult to attract large numbers of immigrants. At current rates, Canada will have lost its chance to be a fully formed nation.

It is time to act. Canada should build its population to a size – at least 100 million – that will allow it to determine its own future, maintain its standard of living against the coming challenges and have a large enough body of talent and revenue to solve its largest problems. All it takes is a sustained and determined increase in immigration, to at least 400,000 permanent immigrants per year.

The case for 100 million

The moment when the United States stopped being dependent on the ideas, imports and expressions of other countries was exactly when it passed the 100-million mark, shortly before 1920. It was at this point that the U.S. developed the world's first conservation program, the first progressive taxation system and the first great national infrastructure program. It was this population level that turned America into the capital of the modern world.

Whenever Canada's ideal population is studied, the 100-million figure comes up. In 1968, a group of scholars, policy advocates and business leaders formed the Mid-Canada Development Corridor Foundation, which argued that a population of at least 100 million was needed to have a sustainable and independent economy. In 1975, a study by Canada's Department of Manpower found that economies of scale leading to "significant benefits to Canadian industry" would occur only after the population had reached 100 million. And more recently, in 2010, the journal *Global Brief* argued in detail that Canada needs that much population for geostrategic, defence and diplomatic reasons.

What would a Canada of 100 million feel like? Much like today's Canada, but more comfortable, better-served and better defended against ecological and human threats.

If just the narrow strip of land upon which most Canadians live were to develop the population density of the Netherlands or England, then the overall population would be more than 400 million. A quarter of that density would give Canada's southern strip the population density of Spain or Romania, two big countries noted for their huge, unspoiled tracts of nature.

It would turn our major cities into places of intense and world-leading culture – and it would greatly improve their quality of life, as they'd finally have a critical mass of ratepayers large enough to support top-quality public transit, parks, museums, universities and property developments.

The price of underpopulation

Canadians cannot build the institutions of nationhood and the tools of global participation using the skills, markets and tax revenues of somewhere between 21 and 24 million English speakers and eight million francophones scattered more or less sparsely over a area of land encompassing five time zones, several geographic and cultural regions, a dozen political jurisdictions and the second largest land mass on Earth.

The challenge is not simply economic. The greatest price of underpopulation is loneliness: We are often unable to talk intelligently to each other, not to mention the world, because we just don't have enough people to support the institutions of dialogue and culture – whether they're universities, magazines, movie industries, think tanks or publishing houses. Unlike the tightly packed countries of Europe, Canada has multiple, dispersed audiences with different regional cultures – and therefore needs a larger base population, especially in its cities.

Anyone who has tried to do culture, scholarship, public thought, entertainment or political thinking on the national level will recognize the brick wall of underpopulation. There isn't a large enough audience, or market, to support such institutions at a minimal level of quality or scope. That's why all of Canada's major publishing houses are branches of foreign firms. It's the reason why our TV and movies are either foreign- or government-funded and regulated. It's the reason why such important institutions as McClelland and Stewart and Saturday Night magazine failed, even after repeated government bailouts and tax protection. Just not enough audience. It's the reason why our only English-language national newsmagazine, Maclean's, manages to survive (and then just barely) only through as much as \$3-million a year

in federal grants and laws preventing U.S. titles from publishing north of the border. In online media, where such protections don't work, the isolation is more dire.

It's the reason we have only one think tank with more than 100 people on staff, while the United States and Britain have scores of them.

Even if you don't care about culture, politics and thought, you'll pay the price. The economic and fiscal cost of underpopulation was measured last September by Ottawa's Parliamentary Budget Officer. It makes for grim reading.

At current rates of immigration and population growth, the average age of Canadians will soar. Canada's old-age dependency ratio – that is, the proportion of the population dependent on government pension and health-care spending (i.e., those over 65) will more than double from 20 per cent today to 45 per cent of the population in the 2080s.

This will cause GDP growth to plummet, from 2.6 per cent annually to 1.8 and below. Government debt will increase by 3 per cent annually, and Ottawa will either have to raise taxes or cut its spending by a dramatic amount, which estimates show would be comparable to the emergency cutbacks of the mid-1990s. A decent social safety net, world-class foreign-policy and military spending, infrastructure, universities and ecological programs will become unaffordable – unless we can expand Canada's population base sharply in the next few decades.

How to build a bigger Canada

The difference between a stagnant population and a robust one is less than you may think. By increasing Canada's population growth rate of 0.8 per cent per year (based on 250,000 to 300,000 immigrants annually) by 50 per cent, we would have 75 million people in 50 years and 100 million by the end of the century.

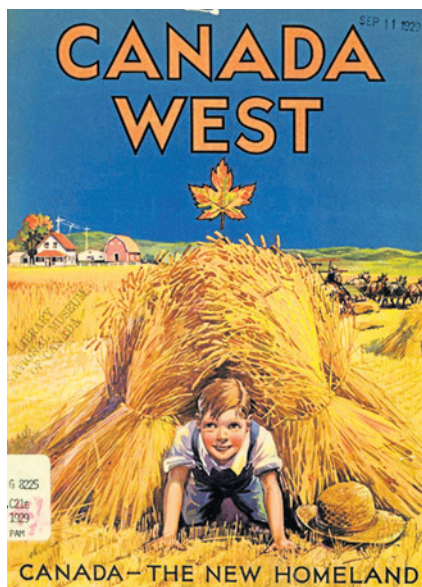
To do this, we would have to attract between 400,000 and 450,000 immigrants per year, or about half the rate (as a percentage of the population) of the Laurier years. Canada's low birth rates (averaging 1.6 children per family) will pull that number down, but that would be counterbalanced by the youth and higher first-generation birth rates of the new immigrants.

It wouldn't last forever – immigrants always merge with their host country's family size within a couple of generations, and the surge of youth and productivity will be temporary. But it would hold us through the 21st century, during which the entire world's population will stop growing, level out, and start falling. Canada should use this moment – now – to start boosting its base population so we are on a world-class footing before the world reaches "peak people" and immigrants become increasingly difficult to attract.

In some ways, that competition has already begun. Australia's government, influenced by the "Big Australia" movement, which calls for a doubling of population, has made entry much easier for its immigrants.

We need a "Big Canada" movement and – given our economic needs, our labour shortages and the continuing pains of underpopulation – this is the time to launch it.

Doug Saunders is a *Globe and Mail* correspondent based in London and the author of *Arrival City: The Final Migration and Our Next World*, winner of the 2010 Donner Prize for writing on public policy.



THE SERIES

For an expanded version of this essay, which concludes *The Immigrant Answer*, as well as the rest of the series and an array of personal stories, visit ourtimetolead.ca

THE INNOVATORS

The Networker: Connecting immigrants is job one

What to Don Curry seemed like a perfect marriage just wasn't happening: Employers in North Bay, Ont., desperately needed employees, yet immigrants elsewhere in Canada were struggling to find jobs.

Mr. Curry recalls the city mayor "telling me he'd have employers come into his office and banging the table, saying: 'I can't find skilled welder fitters. I can't find mining engineers. You gotta do something.'"

So, he did. The capital of Ontario's "near north" made attracting immigrants a priority and turned to Mr. Curry, as executive director of the North Bay and District Multicultural Centre, to help them find jobs.

The result: the North Bay Newcomers Network, whose members started an employers' council in 2009. So now, when an immigrant reaches out seeking employment assistance, the council sets up a meeting with someone in its pool of employers.

How it works: "Go for a coffee, you

chat, and then that banker might put you in touch with three or more bankers," Mr. Curry explains. "Very quickly, you develop a network – and it helps people find jobs."


André Dukhia came first to Toronto looking for employment in tourism – his field back home in Guyana – but found that simply making cold calls on prospective employers bore little fruit.

During a short stay in North Bay while completing an internship, he joined the program, connected with a tourism leader in North Bay and was invited to several industry meetings. Within months, he had an array of contacts, and last year landed a job with Nature and Outdoor Tourism Ontario.

"It was a very practical way of making a network a reality," he says. "Rather than just going to an immigrant settlement service centre where they'd tell you, you should network but they don't have the means for you to network."

Dakshana Bascaramurty






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