

All of the Committee's witnesses emphasized the positive aspects of immigration to the development of Canadian society. They noted the important contribution made by immigrants, who bring skills to Canada, create new jobs, invest money, augment consumer demand, and enrich the cultural environment.

Nevertheless, all witnesses noted that immigrants tend to settle in the major urban centres because they perceive the best economic opportunities to be there. In addition, they are attracted to areas of high immigrant concentration because they can often find accommodation and work with family members and friends. On the issue of how Canada might encourage people to move to non-metropolitan areas of Canada, most witnesses responded that the problem is really one of regional economic development and did not present any viable solutions.

Although, most witnesses felt that our present immigration levels were not placing an undue strain on the country, several, however, informed the Committee of potential social pressures, especially if the economy were to slow and job opportunities decline. Most emphasized the importance of government programs to assist immigrants to adapt and integrate, including language classes, education, training, employment assistance, temporary economic assistance, employment equity, and effective anti-discrimination laws.

When witnesses were asked their opinion on optimum immigration levels, none suggested reducing current levels. Although the witnesses were somewhat tentative in their answers, most suggested that Canada could absorb from between 150,000 to 200,000 immigrants per year without social or economic difficulty. Only two witnesses suggested 250,000 per year, provided, however, the increase were gradual.

THE REALITY

It is important to note that although a figure of 200,000 would appear to be a significant increase over the announced level of 150,000 - 160,000 for 1989, and the announced level of 165,000 - 175,000 for 1990, in reality, actual landings have been exceeding planned levels and are now approaching 200,000 per year. This may be compared with the figure of 84,302 in 1985. Moreover, planned levels for this year do not take into account the large number of people who will be landed as a result of the refugee claimant backlog clearance program.

Even using a conservative figure of approximately 200,000 for this year, immigrant landings will have in fact increased by some 137 percent over the last five years. This represents very rapid growth and a relatively high level historically. In fact, immigration