

Context (II): 'A Changing Canada'³

A NEW CANADIAN IDENTITY?

According to some, Canada has outgrown the 'two founding peoples' model, or the notion that Canadian cultural identity is drawn solely from Britain and France. A new Canadian identity has developed from the diversity of immigrant origins, particularly in large cities and Western Canada, where neither British nor French-origin Canadians form a majority of the population. This has resulted in a distinctive political culture, as shown by the emergence of what has been called a "demotic society."⁴ Reflecting a similar trend taking place in other immigrant societies, a "demotic society" can be defined as a broad centrist consensus in which democratic discourse is shaped primarily by debates within parties rather than between parties. This largely urban phenomenon is shared to some degree with the United States, Britain, France, and to a some extent the less heterogenous European Union member states.

Generational change has also had a profound impact on Canadian identity. Compared to earlier generations that could draw on such 'national' symbols and events as World War II, the FLQ crisis, and the Canada-Soviet hockey series, the younger generation is a "profoundly rootless" generation. Canadians between the ages of 25 and 35 have been living in a Canada characterized by trade agreements, sophisticated electronic communication, cutbacks to education, health care and other social services, and the corporate branding of marketable 'Canadian' symbols. However, despite their rootlessness, young Canadians long for a sense of community based on the values of a compassionate society committed to social justice.

As a result, a significant gap has emerged between the country Canadians (particularly young people) desire, and the realities of a society caught in the grip of the negative effects of economic globalization, cutbacks to social spending, and government policies motivated by pressures from the United States. Civil society must effectively mobilize in order to bring about the necessary changes to close this gap.⁵

Canadian Identity vs. Globalization

Contrary to the view that globalization is eroding Canadian identity, it can be argued that a re-

³For further detail on 'A Changing Canada,' consult online video presentations from the Retreat, available at www.ecommons.net/ccfpd-europe, including: Satya Brata Das (*Immigration, Demographics and the New Canadian Identity*); Andrew Nurse (*A Changing Canada: Canadian Culture*); Myrna Kostash (*The Next Canada*), and comments from Evan Potter and Haroon Siddiqui.

⁴Satya Brata Das, *Immigration, Demographics and the New Canadian Identity: Presentation for Thinkers' Retreat: Futures for Trans-Atlantic Relations*, available in online text and video at www.ecommons.net/ccfpd-europe.

⁵Myrna Kostash, *The Next Canada: Presentation for Thinkers' Retreat* available in online video and text at www.ecommons.net/ccfpd-europe.