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Canada's Immigration Policy

Citizens interested in immigration have had an opportunity of reading and studying the views of two men who between them have had more to do with the immigration policy of Canada than anyone else. One of these men, Sir Clifford Sifton, in an address before the Toronto Board of Trade, would have the government carry out the policy laid down by him in 1896 and carried out by the Department of the Interior during the period he was minister of that department. His policy, which was based on the assumption that agriculture was the basic industry of the Dominion, was to secure agriculturists only—preferably the man with the “sheep skin and a strong wife,” to use his own term—and plant them on the free lands of the North-West. Having done this he would have them to work out their own social salvation. It is true there was a system of selection, but that system was entirely one of physical fitness; neither mental nor moral fitness was considered at all. The result is that there are to-day many foreign agricultural communities in the North-West where the living conditions are no better than the conditions under which they lived when in Europe. What is more the people who make up these communities know not Canada — her national aspirations and her standard of citizenship. The point is that the government, having taken the responsibility of bringing over these European peasants, to till the soil, should have gone further and instilled into their minds something of the Canadian spirit and standard of living. It is possible that in Sir Clifford's day Canada could not afford to be finicky about the quality of her agricultural immigrant, but when he prescribes the same policy for the future, he is beside the mark.

The other gentleman who has given his views on immigration is Col. J. S. Dennis, the head of the colonization department of the C. P. R. Now Col. Dennis has had his nose to the immigration grind-

stone for over forty years, and to him the question is purely an economic one so far as it affects Canada in general, and that territory through which the C. P. R. runs in particular; though let it be said at once that from the first this great railway organization has shown remarkable vision and intelligence in the colonizing of its lands and in the developing of the communities located on or near its railway lines.

In a recent address before a number of Montreal organizations Col. Dennis maintained that if Canada is to continue her march of progress she requires a larger population, not only to till the soil but to develop her vast natural resources, and he urged the “establishment of a well considered and aggressive colonization and development policy” of immigration with the avowed object of increasing the population by 10,000,000 in ten years. These are tremendous figures and no doubt such a high immigration could be economically absorbed, provided it was intelligently distributed. The question is, would it be wise to attempt such an immigration under our present system? To this there can only be a negative answer.

If Canada were to attempt to people her lands and her cities under her present immigration policy by 10,000,000 immigrants within ten years (most of whom by necessity would be foreigners), it would spell failure, because she has no intelligent system to economically absorb the immigrants that flock to her shores. The consequence is that the cities and towns are congested with foreign men and women whose standard of living is so low that they are a continuous menace to our community life. And no country can develop along these lines. Surely it is about time for Canada to change her immigration policy and we would urge the Dominion Government to appoint a commission, made up of men and women who know something of the subject, to thoroughly investigate the problem—and then act.