

POOR DOCUMENT

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Canada's Immigration Problem

THE U. S. QUOTA LAWS—A POLITICAL EXPEDIENT—PIONEERING OPPORTUNITIES FOR BRITISH SETTLERS

ARTICLE 7.
By C. W. Peterson.

THE passing of the "quota laws" south of the line was regarded in Canada as a social measure—an "anti-alien" demonstration. It naturally had a tremendous, and most unfortunate, effect on public opinion. Our bureaucracy, encouraged by some of our patriotic societies, gleefully seized upon it as a precedent for similar action in this country. Our present "party-closed-door" immigration policy is the practical result which furnishes a characteristic sample of our usual, unintelligent imitation of United States legislation. While the press of that country has, for propaganda purposes, talked a great deal about "100 per cent Americanism," the existing balance between native and foreign stock there could hardly have given any special cause for apprehension.

Between 1880 and 1885 the proportion of foreign native percentage increased from 10 per cent to 30 per cent. During the succeeding 40 years, in spite of the wide open door, it only increased from 30 per cent to 35 per cent. It is also generally admitted that the crucial test in assimilation afforded by the occurrence of the Great War created no considerable problem with the foreign population. This is a remarkable tribute to the loyalty, good sense and self-restraint of the foreign immigrant element of that country, and I feel certain that the popular verdict was the same in Canada in respect to the attitude of this class during that historic period.

U. S. QUOTA LAW

The quota law across the line is not in any sense to be regarded as a general indictment of the foreign population. It had a distinct political background. As a social measure it was not specifically directed against an influx of agricultural people from Eastern and Central Europe and it is well for Canada to remember that the door was not even partly closed until the population there exceeded the hundred-million mark. The U. S. quota laws were primarily designed to stem the tide of a threatened flood of immigration from Latin countries. Secondly, it became a political necessity to protect the United States farmer from the menace of agricultural over-production in order to render effective a high protective tariff against foodstuffs. Thirdly, the policy was generally acceptable to labor as constituting a measure of protection calculated to promote a high wage scale. Neither of the first mentioned conditions exist in Canada and our policy of rather discouraging peasant immigration is, in view of our present state of underdevelopment, therefore, as absurd as it is destructive to progress.

A TIMELY STEP

However widely individuals may differ as to the merits of the civilization that has developed south of the line during the past century, we cannot possibly escape the conclusion that the United States stands today as a powerful, prosperous commonwealth, whose citizens enjoy an average standard of living far above that of any other country, except perhaps our own. In the eyes of almost the entire world the country easily represents the modern El Dorado. This has been accomplished largely through the "open door" policy, which was consistently maintained for over a century.

If we, while jealously preserving our British institutions and traditions, could attain the same material results as our neighbor did, within a similar period, we should apparently have ample cause for self-congratulation. That we can do so following an opposite policy in regard to immigration is open to very serious doubt.

In view of the present well-balanced, economic situation in the United States the closing of the door to further immigration is without question an eminently sound and timely policy on economic grounds, entirely aside from the political motives behind it. No rational reason whatever could be urged why the United States should deliberately add to her present adequate population, being now quite able to undertake human wastage from natural increase and a limited immigration. Clearly a stationary, or perhaps very slowly increasing, population is obviously now the most advantageous situation for our neighbor. For Canada, in view of her undeveloped condition, to embrace exclusion policies at this time is, however, ridiculous in the extreme. The two cases are diametrically different.

"MARGINAL" LAND PROBLEM

Approximately one-third of Canada's estimated area of arable land is today alienated and occupied, though not fully developed. If we credit the people who selected this land with ordinary common sense, we must conclude that it contains the cream of our vast, arable area. No agricultural country on earth would, in its virgin state, contain so large a proportion of high quality land as one-third of its arable area. We must, therefore, admit, and anyone conversant with the facts will readily support such a conclusion, that our present unutilized, arable area falls distinctly within the category of medium to inferior lands.

To obtain a true picture of our real colonization problem, we must realize that the bulk of these lands come within the term "marginal." An examination of them would at once reveal the fact that nine-tenths are below par in quality. They are located in areas where the rainfall normally is insufficient to produce satisfactory agricultural results, or they are heavily treed, are low lying, stony or have thin soil or exhibit other undesirable features. They are, in fact, culls. Most of these lands present a problem in human labor, and are marginal only until reclaimed by hard pioneering effort, when they will graduate into the class of more or less productive clearing, digging out of stones, drainage or similar unavailing and time-consuming labor, unproductive for the time being.

A depressing number of Canadians, Britishers and Americans have failed,

which apparently can best be done by encouraging a large influx of people from the United Kingdom and Ireland. As, however, we cannot and should not, move agricultural people from there in volume, we must strive to open the way for urban Britishers and also assiduously promote and enlarge the work of the admirable agricultural training schools for overseas settlers in Great Britain. We could also advantageously remove or relax some of our existing restrictions against British immigration, notably the offensive and somewhat impertinent, "sailing permit" regulation for unaccompanied women and the expensive medical examination system. We should also speed up our machinery for interesting settlers from Northern and other "preferred" European countries. We cannot have too many of them.

PROBLEM OF ASSIMILATION.

It is a fact that the social and political effect of a great movement of people

into a new country, with standards and language differing from the domestic population, is not very serious where such people are settled in rural areas. Lack of urban contact will doubtless retard the process of assimilation, but, on the other hand, the countryside exercises a vastly smaller influence on national life than the urban communities. Peasant settlements are, during the earlier stages, unobtrusive to a high degree. These people do not seek to exercise any directing influence in national affairs. And it is well that they should not until ready to contribute intelligently to the social and political life.

LAND SITUATION IN WEST

I do not wish to convey an erroneous impression in regard to the western land situation. Excellent farms, at prices vastly below those prevail-

ing in older civilizations, are readily available although it must be admitted that the free homestead of good quality and within reach of transportation is practically a thing of the past. Those who travel the agricultural portions of Western Canada are often puzzled to explain the presence of large areas of first-class unoccupied lands around most of old-settled communities. Such lands are generally well served with transportation, educational and other facilities. Their settlement would materially ease the burden of those already in occupation in various ways and could give rise to no new public liability for the extension of services.

The ownership of such lands has generally passed from the crown and is in the hands of all sorts of companies, individuals and municipalities. The area is estimated at over 18 million acres. These lands are available at very reasonable prices and on favorable terms. Here is an opportunity

for community effort and the various provincial governments might well take the lead in a movement towards a general "stock-taking" of these undeveloped resources, by promoting the formation of "Land Settlement Committees" in smaller towns with the special object of colonizing these lands and making them productive.

We have also an enormous area of occupied and partly developed lands in the hands of domiciled farmers who would welcome an opportunity to reduce their holdings and get part of their properties into the hands of newcomers. The incidences of local taxation and labor problems have created a tendency towards the smaller farm operated on a more intensive basis. We need not, therefore, anticipate the slightest difficulty in meeting the requirements of new settlers from the United Kingdom, the United States and Northern Europe who could not be interested in settling upon lands remote from transportation, educational or

social, or upon a class of land requiring pioneering effort of the more strenuous sort.


The next article of this series will appear in Saturday's issue.

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