

STATEMENTS AND SPEECHES



CANADA

INFORMATION DIVISION
DEPARTMENT OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS
OTTAWA - CANADA

No. 64/2 THE CONTRIBUTION OF IMMIGRANTS TO THE CANADIAN ECONOMY

An Address by the Honourable René Tremblay,
Minister of Citizenship and Immigration,
to the Richelieu Club of Hull, Quebec,
on March 17, 1964.

...I shall attempt today to highlight some of the contributions of immigrants to the national economy in various fields of endeavour.

Immigration policy followed since the Second World War may be summarized in four essential points:

1. To increase the population of Canada;
2. To facilitate the admittance of immigrants likely to become good citizens;
3. To plan the immigration movement so that it does not make any fundamental alteration in the character of the Canadian nation;
4. Finally, to regulate the number of newcomers to the absorptive capacity of the Canadian economy.

It would, of course, take too long, in view of the time allotted to me here, to analyze each of those four principles and to estimate to what degree they have been applied. I shall dwell only on the last, but not before I recall that 2,244,500 immigrants have entered the country since the end of the last war. Those immigrants have proved themselves worthy of the confidence and welcome given them by their country of adoption. Over 450,000 post-war immigrants have chosen to settle in the predominantly French province of Quebec. Among them we find several thousand Dutch people, known for their love of the land, who have become happy farmers in the St. Maurice Valley, the Lake St. John region, the Eastern Townships or Bois France. We also find Belgians, as exuberant as we, who, in Quebec, Montreal and elsewhere, have shared with us the delights of their cuisine. We find French people, of course, who, in more than one sphere, including goldsmithing, cabinet making and gastronomy, have brought us the secrets of their talents. There are also Portuguese, who have become market gardeners in several counties of the province, while they learned with laborious patience to speak our language. And we also find Hungarians, 27,000 of whom were brought among us by the tragic wave of the Budapest revolution. Many a doctor, engineer,

International development is the great imperative of our generation. It is an immense task which lies ahead of us. It is vital that we set our objectives high and pursue them vigorously. If we do, I have no doubt that we possess the resources and the skill to do much to eradicate hunger, poverty and disease throughout the world before the end of the present century.

But the Government cannot do this work on its own. It will require voluntary organizations and private individuals and business corporations and universities, all working in partnership, all marching towards the goal of raising the living standards of the developing countries. Fundamental to the attaining of these goals will be the creation in Canada of a wide measure of public support and understanding. We must become citizens of the world, exhibiting the concern for people and communities far from our shores that you have exhibited in this city and which you are commending this evening.

This is our challenge. Toward this end we must put forth our maximum efforts. There is no doubt in my mind that our generation will be judged in history on the success or failure of our efforts in this greatest human adventure of all time.

S/C

For twelve years, the Bick family from Holland engaged in market gardening on a modest scale in a rural district of Ontario. One day they had the idea of growing vegetables to make pickles. And so the Bick Pickles Company was born. In the very first year of its existence, 1959, it employed 140 workers in the production of a million crates of pickles in 33 varieties.

If we cast a glance at the Province of Quebec - this province which is of particular interest to us - we feel everywhere the same impetus applied by newcomers to the economy of our country.

At St. Hyacinthe, a Belgian, W.E. Hecké, operates a door and window factory valued at over half-a-million dollars. When he became the owner 12 years ago, he invested \$200,000 of personal capital in the business.

Hecké is one of the 19,000 immigrants who, in the course of the last 14 years, have either established their own business enterprises or bought their own farms. Richard Segieth is another. He is one of the 2,200 Germans who have gone into business since 1950. In his native country, Segieth was a cabinet maker. After his arrival in Canada in 1953, he worked for four different furniture manufacturers before establishing his own firm in Iberville. The German cabinet maker was assisted financially by a Canadian businessman; and today his industry is highly successful. Most of the furniture he produces is made of beautiful teakwood imported from South Africa.

Everywhere in Canada any number of commercial establishments reflect the initiative and talent of immigrants of various ethnic origins. French, Swiss, Belgian and Italian people, whose culinary talents are renowned in all the large cities of Europe and America, have, in the post-war period, established many restaurants that are the delight of Canadian gourmets.

In the industrial field the majority of New Canadians in the Province of Quebec have been outstandingly successful. May I name, in passing, the St. Lawrence Ceramics, an achievement of a German chemist, Gesbert Boch, who produces tile for sale not only in Canada but also in the United States.

The St. Laurent Cement Works, also located in Quebec City, began operations with a few million dollars of Swiss capital. Among the lesser industries, but quite as worthy of mention, is the nursery started only five years ago at Champigny by the Belgian, Jean Speth. The three Spanish cabinet makers, Juan, Francisco and Agajuto Pelegrin, who came from Barcelona in 1957, have also established their shop on a solid basis in the St. Sacrement quarter of the city. Another Spaniard, Aurelio Hernandez, descended of an ancient line of craftsmen, has splendid pieces of religious goldsmithing now decorating several Canadian churches.

In Montreal, two Italian brothers, Jean and Flavio Rodighiero, who came to Canada in 1951 with a few hundred dollars, launched a construction enterprise now valued at some \$75,000. During the busy season, the Rodighiero firm employs approximately sixty workers, one half native born Canadians and the other half New Canadians.

accountant, chemist, draftsman and cabinet maker among them place their qualifications and ability at the service of the Canadian economy.

The Italians have also arrived in great numbers and have brought with them talents acknowledged in many fields, such as building enterprises, tile and mosaic work, restaurant operation, expert cooking, etc. Others have settled on farms and have made a success of their agricultural work in Canada.

Likewise, a goodly number of Germans and Austrians, some 310,000, chose to immigrate to our continent between 1946 and 1963. They have proved to be not only excellent farmers and able industrialists but also competent draftsmen and workmen.

A New Kind of Immigrant

There is no need to pursue this enumeration in order to show that the immigrants of our time differ radically from those who came to Canada a quarter of a century ago. The vast majority have some means; most of them also have a trade or profession. We should be remiss, however, if we saw in the newcomers nothing but workmen, labourers and small businessmen. Many have become prosperous operators of enterprises in our country and our province. They have created, here and there, new industries which are already playing a noteworthy part in our economy. A glance around may suffice to convince those who are still sceptical.

In British Columbia, a group of New Canadians of Ukrainian origin have perfected a method of drying wood. They have also introduced a system of cutting and grading which increases the value of construction lumber in that province by a few million dollars. In British Columbia also, Leon Koerner established a large sawmill which provides work for some 4,500 men. This generous Czech also set up the Leon and Thea Koerner Foundation for the development of culture and welfare; and he gave thousands of dollars to the University of British Columbia.

In Vancouver, three Austrian immigrants founded the Canadian Forest Products, Limited, and have made it one of the largest lumbering concerns on the Pacific Coast, an industry employing over a thousand people.

At Kitimat, in Ungava and in the Northwest regions, hundreds of New Canadians, engineers, technicians or other workmen, are contributing to the development of those frontier areas of our country.

At Grand Bend, Ontario, a Belgian farmer, Gérrhard Vanden Bussche, drained a large marsh, which is now well adapted to market gardening.

All of us know the name of the Bata firm, formerly famous in Czechoslovakia for its footwear manufacturing techniques and its industrial relations. This firm, now transplanted to a little Ontario town, has borrowed a bit of its name, Batawa.

I could go on at great length with a list of the various achievements our country owes to thousands of newcomers, but I think I have sufficiently convinced you of the point I set out to make. I prefer to show you, now, the contribution of immigrants to the professional life of Canada.

Professions and Trades

Of the 2,245,000 immigrants who arrived in our country during the past 17 years, 116,399 men and women practised a profession, while 263,480 worked at a skilled trade. Engineers particularly, who had long been scarce in Canada, were an important element in that unprecedented period of expansion between 1947 and 1957. In fact, immigration has provided us with 19,070 engineers since 1946. All were welcome in one sphere or another of Canadian activity.

Can we imagine the general bewilderment if Canada announced overnight that 5,900 doctors and 18,000 graduate nurses were being sent back to their native land? Yet, that is the approximate number of physicians, surgeons and graduate nurses who have arrived in our country since the close of the war. We have also received 5,023 laboratory technicians, 16,581 professors and teachers, not to mention 4,800 accountants, 11,260 draftsmen, 3,180 chemists and thousands of other skilled workers of every category.

The majority of the newcomers are in the age groups which place them, so to speak, at the starting-point of the most fruitful period of their career. The adult immigrant brings with him training and experience which he owes to his country of origin but which are no less valuable assets to his adopted country. All of this substantiates the claim that a great number of immigrants, by their scientific and technical knowledge, have played a part of vital importance in the development of post-war Canada.

Time prevents me again from making an excursion into that interesting field in which so many other enterprises and many more names would deserve mention. The fact remains that our country must continue to expand even beyond its considerable development of the past years. It needs more than 19,000,000 people to populate its vast domain of 3,500,000 square miles.

In the economic sphere - of particular interest to us here - practically the same considerations militate in favour of immigration. In an under-populated country, expenditures for the administration of governments, research, education and transportation systems are high, because they are shared by a population too small in numbers. The cost of production keeps rising because the industrial markets are still too limited for many mass production techniques. We are right, therefore, in thinking that a still greater increase of the Canadian population could mean only a greater development of our economy. Production and consumption, the investment of capital and trade, cannot fail to be stimulated by the results of a well-balanced immigration policy.

Production and consumption are not the only fields in which immigrants contribute to Canada. As I said at the beginning of this talk, a goodly number participate in the creation of employment, either by founding new enterprises or by investing capital in various industries.

I have already listed for you a few of the establishments that owe their existence to the initiative and financial contributions of post-war immigrants. I shall not resist the temptation to mention a few more, if only to make you forget for a moment the dry and often stodgy aspect of statistics.

In the metropolis, a thriving concern is the ribbon factory established by an enterprising and persevering New Canadian, Thomas Karass, who arrived in Canada from Hungary in 1948, with \$28 in his pocket. A former textiles engineer in his country and descended from a family of manufacturers, he soon followed his natural calling. Just as he had done in Budapest, he organized a small workshop in the basement of a house in Montreal and there installed the equipment which he had brought from Hungary. Today, with looms and machines entirely new and improved, Mr. Karass not only makes cotton tape, but with improved processes he has placed on the market different kinds of ribbon, fibreglass, rayon, nylon, linen, etc. The firm of the former Hungarian engineer now bears a well-known name, the Canadian Ribbon Tape Company, and the market for his products extends from Montreal to Vancouver and from London to Caracas.

And, if we go out of Montreal once again, to take a look at the neighbouring province, we shall find in Niagara a frozen-foods industry that owes its existence to a Dutch immigrant, Mr. Teunissen, who arrived in Canada in 1950. This one-time farmer decided to start a business in frozen chicken pies. The enterprise was a great success. To the original chicken he added turkey and beef pies. For his supplies, Mr. Teunissen had to sign contracts with some 40 farmers in the district. Today, it is estimated that 1 million chickens are consumed annually in that industry, which employs 75 people.

Mr. Teunissen's enterprise is only one of the thousands of similar concerns created in Canada by post-war immigrants. It shows that any immigrant of whatever category, industrialist, skilled worker, professional man or farmer participates in the economic activity of our country as a producer or a consumer.

That is not a new phenomenon, however. For centuries, Canada's development has progressed through the arrival and settlement of immigrants in our land. English, Scottish, German and French people were among the pioneers who colonized our country. We have reason to think that the children and grandchildren of immigrants who arrived in Canada, 100 years ago, to people the Prairie Provinces are just as attached to this country and are quite as proud of it as the farmers of Quebec, who for generations have succeeded one another on the same piece of land, or as the farmers of Ontario who have always occupied the same plots of land since they were granted to them by the Loyalists at the end of the eighteenth century.

And if we come closer to our times, to follow the steps of immigrants who have come to Canada since the last war, it is to observe the same faithfulness to work, the same resourcefulness as was in their predecessors. We may also see the same attachment of these New Canadians to their adopted country.

We should be remiss, therefore, if we did not have confidence in these thousands of new fellow-countrymen, and particularly if we did not willingly welcome them. We have no right to overlook the prediction made in the last century, that the twentieth century would belong to Canada. Already, the spectacular advances of the last 50 years have remarkably justified that optimistic forecast. We must continue to realize the immense opportunities of our country with its wealth of natural resources and the beauty of its climate.

However, a wonderful soil, a favourable climate and unlimited resources, although they are invaluable factors in the economy of a country, do not build the nation itself. It is the population which uses and develops those resources which give them their full value. There is no denying the fact that Canada owes a large measure of its present development to the immigrants, to those men and women who have pushed back its frontiers, cultivated its fields and made possible the extraordinary expansion of its industries. And our country will still need, for many years to come, the contribution of these industrious and steadfast workers, if it is to achieve the remarkable destiny envisioned by those courageous pioneers who first wrested the soil from the forest.

It remains for us to welcome with warmth and cordiality those who come here seeking material security, happiness and peace. As His Eminence Paul-Emile Cardinal Léger once said: "We have no right to keep for ourselves alone a half-empty country". Our continent is immense; our sympathies must be commensurate!

S/A