

Approaches to Refashioning Refugee and Immigration Policies:
Canada and Sweden Compared

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In both contemporary Sweden and Canada, the issue of immigration has become a major public concern. Like other social policy questions including health care, welfare and education it has become a central feature of the present public debate over the future directions of the Swedish and Canadian societies. The press and media are filled with stories of growing unease on the part of native-born Swedes and Canadians toward newly arrived immigrants and refugees. Perhaps at no other time in these countries' recent pasts have Swedes and Canadians been as concerned over the questions of who they are and how the welcoming of new members into their community is likely to affect their collective identity and purpose.¹

In many ways, the issue of immigration policy has burst forth into the arena of public debate without extensive forewarning. While growing concern and unease over the size and impact of immigrant arrivals have existed on the edges of Swedish and Canadian political debate for the past two decades, it has only been in the past few years that it has emerged as major public policy question. This transformation has coincided with the coming to power of the Liberal Party in Canada and the return to government of the Swedish Social Democratic Party. While it would be hard to argue that the Social Democrats or Liberals precipitated this change in public attitude, nonetheless, it is clear that immigration has been a key public policy issue that the two governments have had to address since the outset of their most recent electoral mandates. While their effectiveness in dealing with immigration concerns has been mixed, at best, it is quite apparent that the policies they have developed in this area are likely to be the focus of intense public interest at the time of the next national elections.²

As was the case with other areas of social policy, the Liberals of Canada promised in the election of 1993 that their proposed initiatives in the area of immigration policy would be distinctive from those of the preceding Conservative government. The Liberals committed themselves to work toward creating an effective policy that would be in tune with the economic and social needs of Canada not only in the last decade of the twentieth century but well into the first decades of the next century. They suggested that they would establish an acceptable balance between external pressures requiring a continued relatively open approach to immigration and internal forces which called for a more restrictive orientation. They also promised broad and inclusive public participation in any immigration policy review that would be undertaken. Now, nearly four years into the Liberals' electoral mandate, it is unclear whether these commitments have been honoured.

The Social Democrats of Sweden took a similar stance in the national election of 1995. Surprised by the extent to which existing national policies on refugee recognition and resettlement had engendered a negative response in 1991, the Social Democrats took a position calling for a re-examination of established policies and practices. They promised as a consequence, that while Sweden would continue to be a haven for true political and social refugees, the nation would no longer be viewed as having an "open door" towards new arrivals who were simply seeking access to improved economic opportunities or the benefits of the mature social welfare state. While the Social Democrats re-affirmed their commitment to see Sweden operate as a true "multicultural society", they also emphasized the fact that the nation could not continue to receive the full number of foreign refugees desiring to make Sweden their

permanent home. In the future, Sweden would take more of an active role in "assisting" refugees to return to their native lands. Like the Liberals in Canada, however, it is not clear in the wake of the Social Democrats electoral victory in 1995 whether these "new initiatives" in refugee policy have been fully implemented in Sweden.

The Nature of the Inquiry

This paper examines the recent debate over the direction of Canadian and Swedish immigration policies. It focuses its attention on both public and private discussions regarding the types of new immigrants to be welcomed to these countries. It considers the relationship between how Canadians and Swedes conceive of their own societies and their respective willingness to admit new members into them. The argument put forward is that changing opinion regarding the desirability of a multicultural society is having a profound impact on contemporary immigration policy and thinking in both Canada and Sweden.

The paper begins with a brief overview of past patterns of Canadian and Swedish immigration policies and sentiments. It looks at attitudes both before and after major policy reforms of the 1960s and 1970s. It considers these in the light of the concurrent development of public conceptions of Sweden and Canada as "multicultural societies." The study then moves on to discuss immigration policy formulation during the 1980s and 1990s. It examines government efforts to highlight both "economic" and "social" dimensions of immigrant and refugee reception. It also considers public reaction to such initiatives. In this latter regard, some comparison is made to present public attitudes within the other countries in North America and Europe.

The paper turns next to a discussion of the contemporary debate on immigration in Canada and Sweden. It first gives specific attention to Ottawa's professed desire to have a thorough review of past policy and practice in reaction to growing public uneasiness with current immigration numbers and patterns. It reviews the character of the government-sponsored "immigration consultation" sessions that were held during the summer of 1994 and the public's response to them. The paper outlines and evaluates the various suggestions for policy reform that were discussed at these public forums as well as the actual policy changes set forth by the Department of Citizenship and Immigration in its white paper of November of 1994. It also considers the most recent policy pronouncements made by the Department in its 1996 Annual Report to Parliament. The essay then moves on to consider similar developments in Sweden.

The paper concludes with an assessment of Canada's and Sweden's current commitment to being both immigrant-receiving societies and multicultural communities. It considers whether in the coming decade Canada and Sweden are likely to revert to more conservative policies and attitudes or, on the contrary, are likely to embark on a new path of recognizing their growing immigrant and multicultural identities. It focuses specific attention on the current governments' dilemma of attempting to reconcile generous and embracing election promises made in 1993 and 1995 with the far more critical and restrictive public sentiments of 1997. Some additional comparison is made between the choices faced by Canadian and Swedish decision-makers and those confronted by policymakers in the United States and Europe.

Canadian Immigration Policy Prior to 1993

Although Canadians have been receiving immigrants and incorporating them into their society for nearly one hundred and thirty years, it has only been in the last few decades that formal government policies have been adopted to direct these processes. In the case of both immigration and multiculturalism, the phenomenon existed prior to any organized public thought or approach to it. This reality has had a tremendous impact on the type of policy approaches that have been advanced over the decades.³

Prior to the Second World War, Canadian immigration policies had consisted of a general *laissez-faire* attitude bolstered by occasional legislation directed at restricting the entrance of certain "undesirable" classes of immigrants.⁴ Throughout much of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, there existed a generally positive disposition in much of Canada toward immigrants and the contributions they were making to the building of the new country. However, no founding "immigrant myth" developed in Canada comparable to that which established itself in the United States and directed subsequent public policy in that country. Instead, immigration in Canada was seen simply as a reflection of normal economic and social pressures within society.⁵ Thus hundreds of thousands of immigrants were generally welcomed at the turn of the century in response to the opening of the Canadian West. Equally significant, however, was the restriction of new arrivals to Canada in the late 1920s and 1930s as a result of major downturns in the economy and concern over the ethnic and social backgrounds of would-be immigrants.

It was not until 1947 that the Canadian government undertook a formal review of the type of on-going immigration policy it should adopt in the wake of post-war dislocations in Europe and elsewhere. At that time, Prime Minister King emphasized the fact that settlement in Canada

should not be conceived as a fundamental right open to all. Instead, he indicated that it should be viewed as a privilege extended by the Canadian people when domestic social and economic conditions allowed. King stressed the fact that immigration to Canada had to be linked to the "absorptive capacity" of the country. In his mind, this "absorptive capacity" was to be determined as much by the ethnic or racial origins of potential immigrants as their overall numbers. He noted in his statement in the House of Commons that: "The people of Canada do not wish, as a result of mass immigration, to make a fundamental alteration in the character of our population. Canada is perfectly within her rights in selecting the persons whom we regard as desirable future citizens."⁶

This attitude was enshrined in the subsequent 1952 Immigration Act. Its provisions called for a steady growth in the number of immigrants admitted to Canada, but still on a highly selective basis. Emphasis was given to recruiting European immigrants who possessed workplace skills that were needed in the post-war expansion of the Canadian economy. The 1952 legislation gave the Minister of Immigration and his officials extensive powers to set regulations which would reflect the "absorptive capacity" of the country. At the discretion of the minister, individuals or groups might be excluded on the grounds of nationality, geographic origin, peculiarity of custom or for being "unable to become assimilated." For all intents and purposes, such regulations allowed for the continuation of pre-war bias against non-white immigrants, especially Asians.⁷

It was not until 1962 that such racially exclusionary policies were dropped from the Canadian immigration code. Even then the decision came reluctantly and only through the

continued prodding of non-white members of the Commonwealth. Harold Troper has noted in this regard that: "It might be argued that Canada backed into a non-racist immigration policy. The motivation was less to court non-white immigration than it was to improve Canada's international image and bring immigration legislation into line with domestic human rights policy more generally."⁸ In this case external pressures won out over domestic bias.

The elimination of overt barriers to non-white immigrants in the 1960's increased the number of applicants from Asian, African and Caribbean countries. By the end of the decade nearly twenty-five per cent of immigrants being admitted to the country came from these areas. Policy reviews in 1966 and 1973 further expanded opportunities for Third World citizens to come to Canada--either as independent or sponsored immigrants or as refugees. During a period of relatively liberal admission practices their numbers increased dramatically. By 1985, non-European immigration had grown to a level of representing sixty per cent of the total number of applicants admitted to the country in that year.⁹

Throughout this period of time, national immigration policy failed to emerge as an issue of partisan debate within Canada. During the policy reviews of 1966 and 1973 all of the major political parties took pains to present themselves as pro-immigrant. While both government and opposition called for greater attention to be paid to employment criteria in the selection of would-be immigrants, each remained as strong advocates of family reunification and sponsored immigration. Until the late 1980s nearly all political leaders also expressed support for a liberal refugee policy. They also continued to voice an unshakable belief in immigration being a key to economic and social growth of the nation. As late as 1992, the Conservative government of Brian

Mulroney set as its goal an annual admission target of 200,000 immigrants--this at a time of severe economic recession. Despite unease among the general public, Canadian political leaders, for the most part, were solid supporters of an open and inclusive national immigration policy.¹⁰

Swedish Immigration Policy Prior to 1995

Sweden, unlike Canada, has not had a prominent history of immigrant reception over the past several centuries. While in earlier periods Sweden was home to a variety of European immigrants, during much of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries the nation was more of a source of immigration than an immigrant-receiving society. During the period between 1850 and 1920 there was a major outflow of Swedish immigrants to the farmlands and forests of Canada and the United States. This pattern of out-migration continued, on a smaller scale, right up until the start of the Second World War.¹¹

It was not until the 1940s that Sweden became a significant immigrant and refugee receiving society. As a consequence of wartime dislocations, large numbers of Nordic and Baltic refugees sought entrance into Sweden and for the most part were readily accommodated. After the war, the Swedish government encouraged the recruitment of workers from other Nordic and European countries to meet expanding labour needs of Swedish industry. In 1954 it helped to negotiate and sign a Common Labour Market Agreement between the Nordic States which allowed for the free movement of workers across national borders within the region. During this period of time some 250,000 new immigrants settled in Sweden.

Like other European countries in the 1960s, Sweden experienced a steady flow of immigrant labour from the south. Workers coming primarily from Yugoslavia, Greece and Turkey sought ready employment in both the industrial and service sectors of the Swedish economy. Until the mid 1960s, this movement was greeted with broad indifference by the government, the labour unions and the general public. Only when annual arrival rates peaked at 30,000 in 1966 did the Social Democratic government of the day impose the requirement of a labour permit for all would-be non-Nordic immigrants. The basic prerequisites for securing such a labour permit (arbetstillstånd) became an employer's guarantee of an existing job and housing as well as the recognition by the labour union that all domestic labour sources had been exhausted. In few circumstances were all these prerequisites met. As a consequence, by the early 1970s immigration flows to Sweden from outside the Nordic region decreased to small trickle. While in the decade of the 1960s some 235,000 immigrants settled in Sweden, no more than 150,000 came in the 1970s.¹²

Since 1972 labour immigration to Sweden has virtually ceased. From 1984 to 1994 an average of only 200 persons per year (less than one percent of the total number of non-Nordic immigrants) were granted uppenhållstillstånd (residence permits for labour). Government attention has shifted from the needs of immigrants to the needs of political, social and economic refugees that have become the major component of Sweden's present "foreign" population.

In 1969, a new government agency, the Swedish Immigration Board (Statens invardrarverk) was established to address a growing number of issues and problems associated with the arrival of new immigrants and refugees. During the subsequent four years, the Board

and the newly created Commission on Immigration investigated the need for public measures to be taken on behalf of new immigrants and ethnic minorities. Finally, in 1975 the Swedish Parliament passed new legislation addressing immigrant and refugee concerns. As with the Canadian case, such efforts were undertaken in a positive and generally embracing social and political environment. Immigration and refugee issues had yet to become an area of divisive debate within the country.¹³

Multiculturalism Conceived and Reconsidered--Canada

The development of government policy toward multiculturalism in Canada has taken place with only limited coherence and focus. Although Canada was founded on the basis of a bilingual and bicultural pact between French and English, the impact of other immigrant groups was felt very early in the evolution of the society. It was clear by the opening of the prairie provinces at the end of the nineteenth century, that Canada would have a multicultural character. References to a "cultural mosaic" entered early into the literature on immigrant settlement in the twentieth century.¹⁴

It was not until the 1960s, however, that federal government began to speak of the need for a multiculturalism policy. It came almost as an afterthought to the work of the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism during the same decade. Concerned that western Canadians did not see themselves fully within the context of bilingualism/biculturalism, the Liberal government of the day began to promote a policy of "multiculturalism" that might embrace citizens outside of the two founding races.¹⁵

In late 1971 Prime Minister Trudeau announced the new policy in the House of Commons. Its call for financial support for a diversity of ethnic cultures, traditions and languages within Canada was roundly supported by all of the federal political parties--although none seemed to have a very clear idea of the parameters of such a program. As Andrew Cardozo has observed: "The understanding and development of the policy remained sadly shallow at the political level. All parties appeared to actively or tacitly support multiculturalism because it seemed to be the right thing to do and because one's position on it could result in gaining or angering the ethnic vote."¹⁶ For nearly a decade, the multiculturalism program continued fully supported by the political establishment, however, without a firm direction or purpose.

In 1988 actual legislation on multiculturalism was passed by the Canadian Parliament. It created a formal federal program of action and vested responsibility for its implementation within a new Department of Citizenship and Immigration. Many critics have suggested, however, that such actions contained more symbolism than substance. Apart from regular photo opportunities at which program officials were seen dispensing funding for race relations seminars or ethnic literature colloquia, no core identity or purpose emerged for the initiative. As a consequence, when budget-cutting exercises were undertaken by the Campbell government in 1993, the multiculturalism portfolio was dropped from the cabinet. Some suggested that its absence would not be missed.

Similar attitudes towards multiculturalism were visible in Sweden during the same era. Although the number of immigrants and refugees coming to Sweden in the 1970s and 1980s were not as large as those arriving in Canada, their impact on their host society was equally significant. For the first time in their national history, growing numbers of Swedes began to consider themselves as part of a multicultural community. The emergence of significant visible immigrant and refugee populations in urban centres like Stockholm and Malmö was twinned with the recognition of existing internal minorities like the Sami in the north and long-term resident Finnish immigrants. Government policies of the day began to speak of the need to formally recognize the contributions of each of these multicultural groups to the past, present and future evolution of their society.¹⁷

As part of its endeavour to recognize the particular needs and contributions of the new immigrants and refugees, the Swedish government of the day sponsored a series of educational, social and economic initiatives on their behalf. These included the provision of Swedish language and culture instruction to all new arrivals and the offering of second language instruction for refugee children within the school system. It also included government support and funding for immigrant associations, immigrant language newspapers, the purchase of foreign language literature for public libraries and the setting aside a time on Swedish television and radio for multicultural programming.

All of this was done in the name of a social policy which stressed three goals: **equality** between immigrants and Swedes, **freedom of cultural choice** for all immigrants, and **cooperation and solidarity** between the native Swedish majority and the various ethnic

minorities of the country. In the confident days of the late 1970s and early 1980s, it appeared that immigrants and refugees were being readily incorporated into a multicultural "people's home."¹⁸ In 1975 resident aliens were accorded the right to vote and run for office in local and regional elections. In 1986 an Ombudsman Against Ethnic Discrimination was empowered to investigate acts of discrimination in the workplace and within other areas of community life.

However, much like the experience of Canada, this sudden recognition of a multinational identity within Swedish society tended to be more symbolic than real. Legislation was revised and politicians made speeches calling for greater ethnic, religious and linguistic toleration and acceptance but the roots of multiculturalism did not spread widely or deeply. By the mid-1980s a series of anti-immigrant and refugee protests by nativist groups began to appear in both urban and rural centres of the country. Although by no means as virulent as the "anti-foreigner" campaigns in either Germany or France of the same period, the Swedish protests tended to politicize the immigration/refugee issue and raise serious doubts as to whether the average citizen of Sweden was as accepting of the idea of multiculturalism as their political leaders had assumed.¹⁹

The 1993 Canadian Federal Election

As had been the case in previous federal campaigns of the past two decades, the issues of immigration and multiculturalism did not elicit major public debate in 1993. This is partly because other concerns--predominantly those of employment and the debt--occupied much of the public discourse. Equally important, however, was the conscious decision of the three established

political parties not to make these potentially divisive issues matters of partisan debate. In the campaign literature which the Liberal, Progressive Conservative and New Democrat parties produced, each called for a continuation of fairly open immigration and refugee policies--albeit with some concern expressed over the need to monitor the expenses associated with the various programmes. The Liberals and Conservatives contested with one another over who could be the most generous in their recommended admission targets. The Liberals "won" by promising to set an annual target of one percent of the existing Canadian population.

In the case of the Liberals, a specific list of proposed policy initiatives were set forth in their campaign Red Book. These included continued commitments to the settlement of both independent and family class immigrants and refugees. They called for reforms to the Immigration and Refugee Board, an expansion of second language training opportunities and the broadening of admission criteria based on humanitarian and compassionate grounds. They noted that the Liberal Party had been long associated with a "progressive" approach to immigration policy. In their minds this meant bringing forth an immigration policy that "balances humanitarian considerations with our demographic and economic needs."²⁰

Each of the established parties also endorsed the goal of a "multicultural Canada"--leaving the precise meaning of the term to be established by the individual voter. Each indicated that if they were given power they would expand opportunities and services in the area. Again the Liberal Party in its Red Book out-promised both the Tories and the NDP. They noted that one of their priorities, if elected, would be the creation of a Canadian Race Relations Foundation--a campaign promise that the Mulroney government had failed to deliver in 1991.²¹

Only the new Reform Party adopted a critical stance toward both immigration and multiculturalism policies of the day. Preston Manning and his campaign colleagues on more than one occasion railed against "abuses" within the federal immigration and refugee programs--citing both inefficiencies within the system as well as "wrong-headed" policy formulation. They suggested that new immigrants and refugees were often taking advantage of federal and provincial health and welfare programs and that their growing numbers created unnecessary job competition for native-born Canadians.²²

The Reform Party candidates were equally strident with respect to existing multiculturalism initiatives. Many of their candidates questioned the need for programs which encouraged "ethnic separation" rather than the building of a single Canadian identity and community. Furthermore they indicated that multiculturalism programs were a waste of taxpayers money and should be a priority item in any future budget-cutting exercise.²³

For the most part, the established political parties professed to take little notice of the criticism directed against immigration and multiculturalism policies by Reform. Some of their candidates indicated that such attacks were racist and divisive in character and lowered the general tone of the election debate. A significant segment of the electorate, however, responded favourably to much of the Reform message. Its members suggested that Reform was merely voicing some "home truths" concerning the level of ethnic and racial tensions in the society that had been exacerbated by too embracing policies.

The result of the 1993 election campaign was the coming to power of a Liberal majority government. A significant dimension of this election victory was the capturing of most of the key

"ethnic" ridings in Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver. As a consequence, the Liberals not only spoke in support of immigrant and multicultural issues, but they now had a fair number of MPs from these communities. One of the rising stars of these new "ethnic" MPs was Sergio Marchi from Toronto who was appointed to the post of Minister of Citizenship and Immigration.²⁴ Another was Sheila Finestone from Montreal who was named as Secretary of State for Multiculturalism.

Riding the tide of this overwhelming electoral victory, the new Liberal policy planners in Ottawa sought to outline almost immediately a series of new policy initiatives that were to distinguish themselves from their Conservative predecessors. Armed with their now familiar election Red Book, they endeavoured to present their vision of a new, vigorous and innovative Canada that was to replace the Mulroney malaise. The reforms that they sketched were to be based upon attempts to address broad areas of Canadian economic and social policy. Action was required and it would not be held hostage to either a hesitant bureaucracy or public.

The Swedish Election of 1991

Almost at the same time that the Swedish government was proclaiming the nation's commitment to multiculturalism in its social policy, the first signs of growing public dissatisfaction with a prescribed inclusive refugee policy were manifesting themselves in both urban and rural segments of Swedish society. Starting in the mid 1980s a series of anti-immigrant and refugee protests took place in communities such as Stockholm, Malmö, Växjö and Sjöbö. This unrest was precipitated, in part, by worsening economic conditions in which high

unemployment and rising social welfare costs were linked by some politicians and opinion leaders to growing numbers of refugees within Sweden. Public unease over the situation was further accentuated by regular press accounts of assorted social, economic and criminal concerns linked to the presence of new arrivals within Swedish society. Public opinion surveys of the time revealed that nearly half of the Swedish public felt that there were "too many foreigners" within the country.²⁵

In an effort to respond to this growing public unease over the reception of large number of foreign refugees the Social Democrat government took action in late 1989 and introduced more stringent regulations governing the admission of new refugee claimants to Sweden. This decision, as it became known, insisted on the strict application of the letter of the United Nations Convention on Refugees in making all entrance decisions. It also called for expanded assistance for local communities "hosting" all new and existing refugees.

However, these latter actions on the part of the Swedish government were perceived by the general public as being both inadequate and coming far too late to address their concerns over refugee arrivals. In the general election of 1991 the Social Democrats were criticized by their political rivals for being far too passive on the issue and having no clear vision as to how their refugee and multiculturalism policies were transforming the character of Swedish society. The New Democracy Party--a new protest party akin to the Reform Party in Canada--became the focus of such public criticism of existing public policy in these areas. Its leaders promised that, if elected, they would endeavour to push for major reforms in refugee policy in the next parliament.²⁶

The results of the 1991 Swedish election gave the New Democracy Party significant public support for its initiatives in this area. While it is clear that public approval for the party was not exclusively based upon its criticism of Social Democratic refugee and multiculturalism policies, it was evident to all that the New Democracy Party had effectively seized upon an issue area of growing public concern. Over the course of the subsequent parliament, New Democratic deputies introduced a series of private members bills calling for dramatic alternations in established policy on both refugee reception and the development of multiculturalism policies. One of these bills called for a national referendum on the whole immigration issue and noted in its preamble that: "Ordinary Swedes are asking themselves why more immigrants are being taken in, when jobs are in short supply, the economy has collapsed, crime is on the increase and foreigners sitting in jail are being granted Swedish citizenship."²⁷ While each of these bills were soundly defeated in parliament they nonetheless served notice on the government that public enthusiasm for an embracing national refugee policy had come to an end.

The Canadian Immigration Policy Review of 1994

It was clear from the outset, that the new Liberal Minister of Immigration believed that his party had been given a mandate by the Canadian people to broaden the nation's commitment to receiving immigrants and refugees from abroad. Within the first few weeks of having been named to the Cabinet, Sergio Marchi was granting interviews to press and media outlets across the nation. In these discussions he spoke proudly of his own immigrant roots and of the government's intention to honour its Red Book commitments to the immigrant and multicultural

communities of the country. In particular, he indicated that the new Liberal government intended to honour its pledge of establishing a one percent annual immigration target for the nation. He also suggested that the Liberal government would also continue to provide financial support for immigrant and refugee settlement. He reiterated his strong personal belief that the arrival of new immigrants within the society should not be viewed in any way as a threat to the Canadian community, but rather should be seen as making an important contribution to the future social and economic growth of the society.²⁸ With this in mind, he promised an immigration policy review that would be in keeping with this positive assessment.

Such an up-beat vision regarding the prospects for welcoming new immigrants to Canada was severely challenged, however, within weeks of Mr. Marchi's pronouncements. During the final months of 1993, a series of immigration and refugee "scandals" were featured on the front pages of Canada's leading newspapers and journals. Many of these focused on alleged immigrant welfare abuse. Additional reports of crime and violence on the part of newly arrived residents were also published. So too were critical stories regarding the government's existing policies and procedures for screening and admitting new immigrants and refugees. The Reform Party seized upon these allegations and claimed that the new Liberal government had "lost control" of the immigration and refugee screening processes.²⁹

Taken aback by such negative publicity and commentary, Minister Marchi moved ahead, nonetheless, with his intended review of Canadian immigration policy. In making his announcement in February of 1994 he endeavoured to strike a moderate tone in which he promised both a careful and frank assessment of existing goals and practices while at the same

time suggesting that his department had no intention of backing away from its key election promises. Specifically, he noted that the new Liberal government was prepared to establish a target of 250,000 new immigrants to be admitted to Canada in 1994. Marchi also announced that the Red Book's pledge to allow refugee claimants to work in Canada while their claims were being processed would be immediately implemented.³⁰

As part of his overall statement to the House of Commons, the Minister announced that he was initiating an eight month "consultation process" in which his department hoped to hear the views and opinions of both experts and average citizens regarding the type of immigration and refugee policy that Canada should establish for the next ten to fifteen years. He indicated in his remarks that while Canada would certainly have to give greater attention to job skills and other economic criteria in selecting future immigrants, the government was not abandoning its traditional commitments to family reunification and refugee settlement programs.

This policy review process began in March of 1994 with a planning session held in Montebello, Quebec, which had been organized by the Public Policy Forum. In addition to the Minister and senior departmental officials, some thirty individuals from across Canada representing business, labour, education, law enforcement and social services attended. The stated purpose of the meeting was to identify key immigration policy issues to be examined during the course of the review process as well as to determine an appropriate consultation method that would both inform Canadians and stimulate productive public discussion of those issues.

It was a commonly held belief among those attending the Montebello meeting that it was desirable to reach a fairly quick consensus on the general direction that any immigration policy reform might take. It was believed that if the assembled opinion leaders could agree upon a desirable course of action, then the broader public's growing unease over immigration issues could be abated. While professing the need to maintain an open mind regarding the variety of opinions that circulated within this particular policy arena, it was clear that the participants really did not want to open their policy discussions to the full array of policy proposals that were beginning to surface. They felt the need to press ahead with the general initiatives sketched in the Liberal Red Book and to resist the temptation of responding to the political taunts of the Reform opposition. This was the strategy they adopted and the policy approach they pursued during the summer of 1994.

After some extended discussion at Montebello, it was determined that a list of ten policy questions should provide the focus for the policy review. The questions addressed such concerns as the integration of newcomers into Canadian society, the establishment of clear criteria for the selection of immigrants and the fostering of improved inter-governmental cooperation in the administration of immigration policy.³¹ It was agreed by those in attendance that a number of working groups should be established to study these policy questions and provide views and recommendations to the minister by the early summer of 1994. The membership of these working groups would be drawn from the bureaucracy, academia and various non-governmental organizations.

This activity was followed up by a series of public "town hall" meetings held across Canada during the months of June and July. Usually co-sponsored by the Department of Citizenship and Immigration and local immigrant and multicultural groups, these gatherings became a prime opportunity for the Liberal government to outline its central beliefs regarding the admission of newcomers to the nation. Most of the meetings became forums for the celebration of the cultural diversity of the country rather than opportunities for any critical assessment of Liberal policy goals.³²

Throughout the month of May, Minister Marchi conducted a series of bilateral discussions with representatives of the provincial governments with the goal of encouraging greater federal-provincial cooperation in the formulation of Canadian immigration policy. These initial meetings were followed up in July and September by group sessions with provincial and territorial Deputy Ministers whose portfolios covered immigration matters.

After a busy summer of study and discussion, the immigration policy review culminated in a national conference that was held in Ottawa in mid September. The gathering was entitled: "Canada 2005--A Strategy for Citizenship and Immigration." At this meeting, several reports from the expert working groups were considered, as well as the opinions of the Canadian public that had been offered at the various consultation sessions that had occurred across the country. Participants at the conference were also afforded an opportunity to provide their own comments and observations. This commentary was added to the previously tabled reports and public testimony and forwarded to the Department of Citizenship and Immigration for its consideration.³³

Throughout all of these discussions, the Minister and his department emphasized their willingness to listen to a variety of policy perspectives and opinions. Nonetheless, it was clear that Minister Marchi and his close advisors had a distinct preference for considering those viewpoints that were aligned with the positive and inclusionist vision of immigration which they espoused and which had been outlined in the Liberals' Red Book. During the entire policy review process, the critics of an inclusionist immigration policy were given few opportunities to present proposals at odds with established departmental thinking. Not only were the ten policy issues that were chosen for study largely inclusionist in their character, but those who were invited to provide expert testimony regarding them were mainly of an inclusionist orientation. Likewise, many of the public consultation sessions were organized and conducted by pro-immigrant and pro-government entities. While occasional voices of dissent were heard, they were not listened to in any great degree by those who had initiated the policy review.

Canadian Policy Pronouncements

Some two months after the national immigration policy conference in Ottawa, the Department of Citizenship and Immigration announced its new immigration policy strategy. Entitled Into the 21st Century: A Strategy For Immigration and Citizenship the document sought to outline the overall goals and priorities of the Liberal government in this vital policy area. Under broad headings which highlighted various economic, social and humanitarian goals, the department reiterated its commitments to an inclusionist national immigration policy.³⁴ In defending these priorities, Minister Marchi noted that they were not simply his own policy

preferences but those of the Canadian people as a whole. He noted that the policy themes being presented were the direct outcome of "a dialogue with more than 10,000 people from every walk of life and from every part of the country."³⁵ In his presentation of the new immigration policy strategy, Marchi contended that he and his department were simply setting forth the views of the Canadian public.

Such an assessment was, perhaps, more wishful than real. Throughout the period of the immigration policy review critics from a variety of political orientations and perspectives had criticized the minister and his department for their failure to respond to growing public concern over the size and composition of existing immigration flows to Canada. Instead of conducting a thorough review of Canada's immigration options, these critics suggested that Marchi and his advisors had taken on the role of "cheerleaders for established policy." The Reform Party's immigration critic, Art Hanger, regularly accused Marchi of not listening to the "real voice of the people" and to their continuing concern over crime and welfare issues related to immigration. Academic observers like James Hathaway of York University and Don De Voretz of Simon Fraser University suggested that Minister Marchi's proposed policy guidelines amounted to little more than "smoke and mirrors"--a continuation of existing policy under new labels.³⁶

Aware of such accusations, Marchi tabled concurrently with his department's policy review document, his own annual report to Parliament on immigration planning for 1995. This document entitled A Broader Vision: Immigration and Citizenship Plan 1995-2000 represented a modest effort on the Minister's part to respond to his critics.³⁷ In the report he outlined five specific areas in which the Department of Citizenship and Immigration would be changing its

regulations and practices so as to meet the public's demand that immigration be more in tune with "Canada's social and economic objectives."³⁸ These changes included reducing the number of immigrants admitted under family reunification provisions, changing the structure of the point system used to evaluate prospective immigrants in order to emphasize the importance of job and language skills, broadening the opportunities for independent, economic immigrants, and investigating more thoroughly crime and welfare abuse cases tied to new immigrants. In addition, Marchi announced in his annual report that while the government remained committed to its one-percent goal regarding overall immigration to Canada, it would be setting new targets for 1995 at some 50,000 less than those for 1994.

To many observers, Marchi appeared to be backing away rather rapidly from the recommendations of the policy review that he, himself, had sponsored. In the face of rising public concern over the direction of national immigration policy, the minister seemed to hesitate and then reverse his course--sensing a changing political tide. While not admitting that his efforts at policy renewal would be placed "on hold," the consequence of his actions in late 1994 was to consign the immigration policy review to political limbo.³⁹

Since the unveiling of its policy review documents in Fall 1994, the Department of Immigration and Citizenship has become far less visible and vocal in outlining its positive vision of the national immigration experience. While on occasion it still publicly defends the creative potential of new arrivals in Canada, much of its most recent efforts have been directed toward blunting the attacks of its policy critics. Toward this end, the Department in the Fall 1995 announced a series of new actions designed to respond more quickly and aggressively to cases

involving crime or welfare abuse on the part of landed immigrants and refugees. It has also called for the establishment of an immigration processing fee to be collected from all individuals seeking permanent admission to Canada. These initiatives, while silencing some conservative detractors, has caused an uproar among many pro-immigrant advocates and ethnic-based lobbies. They suggest that actions like the immigration processing fee are anti-immigrant and discriminatory in character. They note that such regulations are reminiscent of the infamous Chinese "head tax" enacted by Parliament over a century ago.⁴⁰

In the year following the release of the Department's white paper on immigration, the Minister of Immigration occasionally sought to champion some of its chief policy pronouncements. In his statement to the House of Commons on November 1, 1995 Minister Marchi noted that only a year earlier a clear path for a revised Canadian immigration policy had been established and it was his intention to "faithfully follow that clear path."⁴¹ He indicated that this policy path had been developed from "extensive consultation with Canadians from all backgrounds and all walks of life" and represented a creative balance between economic and humanitarian concerns. He argued that the established policy path represented a "map to the future--it is a chart which will guide us into the tomorrow and the day after tomorrow."⁴²

In his statement, the Minister again outlined his Department's agenda for action. He noted that while the overall number of arrivals to Canada would be increased for 1996, a greater percentage of these individuals would be independent economic immigrants. (Please refer to Tables 1-3 of the Appendix for specific details of these changes.) He also noted that while the Liberal government remained firmly committed to a policy of family reunification, it would

continue to promote an immigrant selection policy that gave priority to educated and skilled workers over elderly or distantly-related dependents. Admission of refugees to Canada would continue, but at levels not to exceed those of 1995.⁴³

In response to some of the criticism that had been levelled against the Department, Minister Marchi indicated that new efforts at reform would be undertaken in the area of provincial and territorial consultation, the operation of the Business Immigration Programme and the functioning of Immigration and Refugee Board. He reiterated the Department's commitment to ensure that Canadian immigration policy was fashioned in a manner that 1) enriched Canada's social fabric; 2) supported economic growth; 3) realized Canada's humanitarian mission; 4) ensured fair access and the rule of law and 5) served Canada better.⁴⁴ In a final rhetorical flourish, the Minister noted that: "Canada's position in the world today is testimony to the undeniable fact that immigration has served our nation well. There is no reason why immigration can't continue to give Canada that strength and dynamism in the future."⁴⁵

Most Recent Developments in Canadian Immigration Policy

The significance of immigration policy to the future of Canadian society has taken on a somewhat new profile in the wake of the Quebec Referendum of October 30, 1995. In his remarks to his supporters that evening, Premier Parizeau pointed to the immigrants within his province as one of two main forces which had brought about his political defeat. In the following weeks, the future of Quebec--with or without an immigrant dimension--became a major topic of political discussion both inside and outside of the province. Like the Reform

Party before it, the Parti Québécois suddenly focused public attention on the need to define the objectives of Canadian immigration policy.⁴⁶

Like many other aspects of its response to the 1995 Quebec Referendum campaign, the Liberal government in Ottawa was somewhat tardy in responding to this new need to focus on national unity as a defining dimension for Canadian immigration policy. While Minister Marchi contributed his voice in support of a united Canada during the waning days of the referendum campaign, he made no mention of the contribution of immigration to the national unity question during his final policy statement to the House of Commons--barely two days after the referendum. Either this significant linkage was not recognized, or else it was deemed to be too politically sensitive at that time.

It is clear, however, that the national unity dimension of Canadian immigration policy has belatedly come to the attention of the Liberal government. Not only have the rhetorical and symbolic importance of immigration and multiculturalism been recognized as crucial to building a distinctive Canadian unity in the face of the Quebec separatist challenge, but the Chrétien policy advisors seem intent on making immigration a central plank of the bridge that will continue to connect eastern and western Canada. As such it was not surprising to see that with the Cabinet shuffle of early part 1996, the leadership of the immigration/citizenship and multiculturalism portfolios were transferred to major political figures from Quebec and British Columbia.⁴⁷

Swedish Immigration Policy Reviews in the 1990s

Throughout much of the 1990s, the Swedish government--like its Canadian counterpart--has endeavoured to make revisions to an immigration and refugee policy that nonetheless has remained relatively unchanged in its overall character and direction. While the decade has witnessed some new government initiatives to limit the growth and reduce the cost of refugee resettlement, the overall commitment of the Social Democrats to their belief that Sweden should be a welcoming home to political and social refugees has remained relatively unshaken. While the government of the day has allocated additional resources to encourage "economic refugees" to remain in their respective homelands, the same government has continued to provide relatively generous social and economic support for those immigrants who have made their way to Sweden. While examples of government-initiated deportation actions are more frequently reported by the press and media, it is far from clear whether the government has decided to "crack down" on its sizable alleged immigrant population.⁴⁸

With the collapse of the New Democracy Party in the 1995 Swedish election, the most prominent critic of the government policy in the area of immigration and multiculturalism has been removed from the political scene. While there have been occasional outbursts of criticism of government actions in these areas from the other more established parties, the Social Democrats have experienced a relatively comfortable political arena in which to make their modifications of established policy.

This does not mean, however, that all public unease over the direction of Swedish refugee and multiculturalism policies has entirely disappeared. In local and regional political forums the issues remain as continuing concerns. Sweden, like much of Europe today, has also experienced

occasional outbursts of anti-immigrant violence and agitation on the part of racist and fringe political groups.

Like Canada, however, what is perhaps most disturbing about the present "evolution" of Swedish policy formulation in these areas is the relative disjuncture between elite bureaucratic thinking and mass public concern. As several analysts have noted there continues to be an unwillingness on the part of government policymakers to recognize that fact that there exists a wide variety of public views on the desirability to continue to follow established policies on immigration and multiculturalism. As Göran Rosenberg has noted: The fact remains that the elite ideology shunned public opinion and shunned the task of reconciling political and moral commitments with economic realities. Instead of being confronted, the issues and the political choices were swept under the carpet."⁴⁹ As long as this inward looking approach to public policy formulation continues, there is always the danger that unheaded public dissatisfaction over immigration can burst forth into more virulent racist attitudes and opinions.

An Assessment

It is not an easy matter to determine the extent to which Canadians and Swedes of the contemporary era are truly committed to being members of an immigrant-receiving and multicultural society. On the one hand, much is made of the positive contributions and growing visibility of the "new immigrants" within their communities. On the other hand, it is equally apparent that this greater presence and stature on the part of immigrants and refugees has engendered some hostile reaction on the part of nativist groups. Both of these trends seem to

have contributed to the evolution of national immigration policies in both countries over the past decade.

In the most recent period, the Swedish and Canadian governments of the day has wrestled with the reality that the general public seems quite uncertain as to how wide a door should be opened to new arrivals. The original vision of an inclusionist, welcoming society set forth in the 1960s and 1970s has lost some of its appeal and promise in the 1990s. While still responding to external calls to validate principles of human rights and non-discrimination in their immigration policy formulation, both governments are feeling increasingly hard-pressed to respond to internal pressures to tailor their policies in a manner that is more sensitive to domestic social and economic criteria.

In such a charged atmosphere, the two governments have attempted to reconcile their "noble sentiments" toward immigration and multiculturalism with a harsh political reality. The virtues they have championed in the past are now not as widely held among the Swedish and Canadian public. As a consequence, government leaders have attempted to choose their steps carefully, alternately committing themselves to broadened immigration/refugee targets while at the same time advancing new measures to deal with the crime and welfare abuse issues associated in the public's mind with these new arrivals. It is a policy approach often characterized by some as "two steps forward--one step back."

Instead of establishing a broad vision and direction for its immigration and multiculturalism policies, the Liberal and Social Democratic governments have elected to settle for half-finished portraits of the type of society they would like Canada and Sweden to become in

the first decades of the new century. Without a firm and focused program of action of their own, they may have abandoned much of the policy field to their right-wing critics and political adversaries.

Ironically, the decline of the new Liberal immigration policy initiative in Canada can be attributed, in part, to the early demand of its most fervent supporters that the policy be enacted with all speed and vigour. In pushing for a policy review within the first few months of the Liberal government's mandate, Minister Marchi and his advisors believed they were "seizing the initiative" and pulling public opinion along with them. Unfortunately, this was not the case and in hindsight it is apparent that their rush to establish new policy initiatives alienated some potential political supporters. While professing to desire an ongoing dialogue with the Canadian public on immigration goals and priorities, it is clear that the new Minister of Immigration had some very firm ideas on the direction and content that policy in this area should take. Much of the policy review process that was followed in the summer of 1994 was directed toward affirming the minister's views. Alternative perspectives were not encouraged and far too often interpreted as attacks upon the minister's caliber of leadership.

In Sweden, a similar unwillingness to "take the pulse" of public opinion and sentiment has been evidenced on the part of leading policy-makers in the field. Their attitude that "the Ministry knows best" is likely to continue to undercut any effort to build a broad public consensus on policies relating to refugees and multiculturalism.

It is quite clear that during the remainder of their electoral mandate, both the Swedish and Canadian governments will need to improve their performance in shaping and implementing a

comprehensive immigration and refugee policies. With issues related to immigration and multiculturalism achieving new political salience within both countries, neither government can afford to contest another election with only partially formulated and articulated plans.

Notes

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3. Manuel Garcia y Griego, "Canada: Flexibility and Control in Immigration and Refugee Policy" in Wayne A. Cornelius, Philip L. Martin and James F. Hollifield, eds., *Controlling Immigration: A Global Perspective*, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1994), pp. 119-140.
4. Freda Hawkins, *Canada and Immigration: Public Policy and Public Concern*, (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1972), 71-88.
5. Howard Palmer, ed., *Immigration and the Rise of Multiculturalism*, (Toronto: Copp Clark, 1975), 4-7.
6. Canada, House of Commons, *Debates*, May 1, 1947, 2644-7.
7. Hawkins, Chapter 11.
8. Harold Troper, "Canada's Immigration Policy Since 1945," *International Journal*, 48 (Spring 1993), 266.
9. *Profiles of Canadian Immigration*, (Ottawa: Employment and Immigration Canada, 1986), 20.
10. Brian Bergman, "Points of Contention: Myths and Facts About Immigration", *Maclean's*, vol. 107, no. 6 (February 7, 1994), 35.
11. See Stephen Castles and Mark J. Miller, *The Age of Migration*, (London: Macmillan Press, Ltd., 1993) and Tomas Hammar, *European Immigration Policy: A Comparative Study*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).
12. Tomas Hammar, "Citizenship, Aliens' Political Rights and Politicians' Concerns for Migrants: The Case of Sweden," in Rosemare Rogus, ed., *Guests Come to Stay*, (London, Westview Press, 1985), 85-107.
13. Lise Blomquist, "Second Generation Issues are the Most Important Policy Today," *Social Change in Sweden*, Vol. 4, no. 15 (January 1980), pp. 1-8.
14. V. Seymour Wilson, "The Tapestry Vision of Canadian Multiculturalism", *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, vol. 26, no. 4 (December, 1993), 651-52.
15. Charles S. Ungerleider, "Immigration, Multiculturalism, and Citizenship: The Development of Canadian Social Justice Infrastructure", *Canadian Ethnic Studies*, vol. 24, no. 3 (Fall, 1992), 14-16.
16. Andrew Cardozo, "On Guard for Multiculturalism", *Canadian Forum*, vol. 73, no. 828 (April, 1994), 16.
17. Charles Westin, "Equality, Freedom of Choice and Partnership: Multicultural Politics in Sweden," paper presented at the Conference on Cultural Pluralism in Societies of Immigration, Jerusalem, March 1995.

18. Mark Mitchell and Dave Russell, "Immigration, Citizenship and the Nation-State in the New Europe," in Brian Jenkins and Spyros A. Sofos (eds.) Nation and Identity in Contemporary Europe (London: Roulledge, 1996), pp. 67-68.
19. Bernd Baumgardt and Adrian Favell (eds.), *The New Xenophobia in Europe*, (London: Kluwer Law International, 1995).
20. Liberal Party of Canada, *Creating Opportunity: The Liberal Plan for Canada*, (Ottawa, 1993), 86-88.
21. Peter O'Neil, "Multi-million-dollar Investment in Multiculturalism Questioned", *Vancouver Sun*, February 25, 1994, A4.
22. Jerry Collins, "'Make The User Pay'--Critics Say Government Should Stop Funding ESL", *British Columbia Report*, vol. 6, no. 8 (October 24, 1994), 18-21.
23. Robin Burnet, "Blame It On Multiculturalism", *British Columbia Report*, vol. 5, no. 30 (March 28, 1994), 20-23.
24. Allan Thompson, "How Whiz-Kid Organizer Made It From Weston to the Cabinet Table", *Toronto Star*, December 15, 1993, A25.
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29. Andrew Dreschel, "Most Canadians Favour Melting Pot to Multiculturalism", *Vancouver Sun*, January 17, 1994, A5.
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34. Citizenship and Immigration Canada, *Into the 21st Century: A Strategy for Immigration and Citizenship*, (Ottawa, 1994). The five policy headings of the report were: 1)

Enriching Canada's Social Fabric, 2) Supporting Economic Growth, 3) Maintaining Strong Support For the Family, 4) Realizing Canada's Humanitarian Mission, 5) Fair Access and The Rule of Law, and 6) Serving Canada Better.

35. Ibid., 3.

36. Larry McCallum, "Little Merit in Marchi's Reforms", *British Columbia Report*, vol. 6, no. 26 (February 27, 1995), 16-17. See also Don L. De Voretz (ed.), *Diminishing Returns: The Economics of Canada's Recent Immigration Policy*, (Ottawa: C.D. Howe Institute, 1995).

37. Citizenship and Immigration Canada, *A Broader Vision: Immigration and Citizenship Plan, 1995-2000, Annual Report to Parliament*, (Ottawa, 1994), 36.

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39. Anthony Wilson-Smith, "Debating the Numbers: Ottawa Acts to Dampen Public Concern Over Immigration," *Macleans*, vol. 107, no. 45, 22-25.

40. Lila Sarick, "Increase in Fees For Immigrants Called Now 'Chinese Head Tax'", *Toronto Globe and Mail*, March 1, 1995, A6.

41. Honourable Sergio Marchi, M.P. Statement to the House of Commons, November 1, 1995, Department of Citizenship and Immigration, p. 1.

42. Ibid.

43. Ibid. See also: Lila Sarick and Paul Koring, "Rise in Immigration Level Planned" *Toronto Globe and Mail*, November 2, 1995 and Lila Sarick, "Ottawa Tightening Rules on Family Reunification," *Toronto Globe and Mail*, December 15, 1995.

44. *A Broader Vision: Immigration Plan, 1996 Annual Report to Parliament*, Department of Citizenship and Immigration, November 1995 p. 5.

45. Marchi, Statement to the House of Commons, p. 5.

46. Anthony Wilson-Smith, "A House Divided," *Macleans*, Vol. 108 no. 45 (November 6, 1995) 14-16.

47. Quebec MP, Lucienne Robillard, was appointed as Minister of Citizenship and Immigration and British Columbia MP, Hedy Fry, was appointed Secretary of State for Multiculturalism. See Anthony Wilson-Smith, "Fighting Back," *Macleans*, Vol. 109 no. 6 (February 5, 1996) 10-14.

48. Rosenberg, 211.

49. Rosenberg, 214.