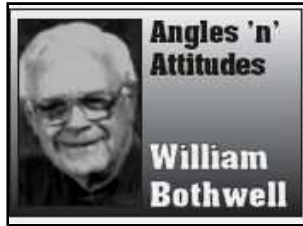


Angles 'n' Attitudes

Who stands on guard?

William Bothwell



Since the first aboriginal people crossed the Bering Strait from Asia and their descendants made their way across the continent, to the time of the most recent arrivals, immigration has been basic to the growth and character of Canada. Some newcomers do not stay long.

Two questions are being asked. 1) Are we becoming a cost-to-coast to-coast condominium in which diverse and isolated groups of people live but seldom meet? We all know large buildings in which hundreds of people come and go without either seeing or speaking to one another. Such places are store-houses not neighbourhoods.

2) Is this country a revolving door through which people enter only soon to leave again? I have friends who joke that they met one another in a turnstile and have been going around together ever since. Contrariwise, statistics show that naturalised 'New Canadians' leave us to live elsewhere at triple the rate than do native-born Canadians.

The implications are far-ranging. Canadian citizens have the right to return at any time.

They may have contributed little to our national life or economy but their right to come back puts pressure on our health care and welfare systems.

There are 2.8 million of them. Collectively they could be called our missing province of Expatria. It represents 8% of our population. About 60% of them live in the U.S., the U.K., Australia or Hong Kong. One of them, a 'Pakistani-Canadian', currently living in Chicago, is accused of masterminding a plan to murder employees of the Danish newspaper that in 2005 published cartoons of the prophet Muhammad, one of them with a bomb in his turban.

It may seem to be a democratic free choice for recent immigrants to give little thought to their Canadian rest stop before decamping. The egress has, of course, been going on for years. One of my Scottish great-grandfathers had a brother who after a few years in Toronto moved on to California. My grandfather had brothers who spent most of their adult lives in Michigan and Ohio. Their descendants whom I have met share the irritating notion that "America" consists solely of the U.S.A. and that that is the only really free country in the world.

As we allow more and more foreign ownership of our industries and resources, see our professional and managerial classes lured south of the border, our expatriate 'province' will continue to grow. Many of them will return only to the family summer cottages or for medical services to which their Canadian citizenship entitles them.

Just under half of the population of Toronto, to the violence and shallowly-rooted communities of which we in Dufferin County are closely tied, are still essentially aliens in this country. Even if 25% of them or theirs leave to return home or to live elsewhere the cultural and political impact of those who remain will be considerable. Long-time Canadian women give birth to an average of only 1.5 living children. Immigrants, at least in the first generation, are more fertile. That is particularly so of the large, 'visible minority' which is a very small minority in the nearby metropolitan area.

Ronald Reagan said in 1976 that God clearly intended the Americas to be the meeting place for immigrants who cross the Atlantic and the Pacific oceans. Where that left Australia and New Zealand was not mentioned but, down there as up here, the challenge of the immediate future will be to meld people who have a very different understanding of the delicate balance between law and personal freedom in to a peacefully integrated society. That problem deserves more frank and open debate.

The recent April 2009 amendment to the Canadian Citizenship Act became law almost surreptitiously. It restores Canadian nationality to who were forced to renounce it when they became citizens of another country. It also grants it to their children. The process is not automatic; they must apply for it.

One such was Will Wilkinson, a self-styled "thoroughgoing American" who lives in Iowa. Now, just where is that? Mr Wilkinson is also a 'libertarian' member of the Cato Institute which would abolish all governments and borders. Meanwhile, he has decided to be "a so-called lost Canadian", to sport a Maple Leaf on his backpack when that is advantageous, to keep a Canadian passport handy and to stop disdaining Canada's "socialistic health care system", at least until his real homeland has its own.

Whether people like Wilkinson are other beavers in our lodge or camels with their heads in our tent is the question. His Saskatchewanborn father but long ago pledged allegiance to the Stars and Stripes. Does not that rebel state, born in a revolution that denied the civil rights of United Empire Loyalists, demand absolute and exclusive loyalty and reject any challenge to its independent sovereignty?

The 'Iowa-Canadian' said in a piece in the September "Atlantic" magazine, "I qualify as a Canadian through a weird technicality". Most genuine Canadians have little understanding of and are little informed about the immigration muddle that has recently been made 'muddlier' by the federal government.

When have changes to our immigration policy been adequately discussed in the press or in newsletters we get from our elected representatives?

Auditor-general Sheila Fraser said a week or so ago that there are major problems with Canada's immigration system. Ottawa is making changes with little attention given to their long-term consequences. The Temporary Foreign Workers Act allows in low-skill workers without keeping track of them. Employers use it to bring in relatives who would otherwise not be far down the waiting line.

Peter C. Newman said years ago that a new Canadian citizen should first have been required to cross the country by car, bus or train. That odyssey would remind one that, despite constitutional indigestion, we are part of a national miracle that we should all see with glowing hearts.

It was said up top that two questions are being asked about our immigration policy. Opposite the armed 'Homeland Security' border bulldogs, who stands on guard on our side of the border crossings and at our ports of entry?