

# FROM OUT-MIGRATION TO IMMIGRATION: THE CHANGING POLICY LANDSCAPE

BY MICHAEL CLAIR

*Immigration has risen close to the top of the public policy agenda in Newfoundland and Labrador over the past few years. This is all the more striking considering that the issue was almost invisible in the province a few short years ago. Prior to this, when most people in the province spoke about human migration, it was out-migration that dominated policy discussions. The problem of out-migration was so important that provincial elections were decided on the basis of which party could best retain citizens, especially those citizens living in rural areas.*

For most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, employment growth in Newfoundland and Labrador was sluggish. There were notable exceptions: during the Second World War, when military activity led to the construction of American bases; during the late 1970s, when the 200-mile exclusive economic zone was implemented; during the 1970s and 1980s, when the public service grew exponentially. Still, since 1949, the unemployment rate in Newfoundland and Labrador has hovered in the double digits.

In addition to encouraging out-migration, the lack of employment opportunities also acted as a damper on immigration. After all, why would immigrants come to a province where there were so few job opportunities, and so much competition for every job vacancy?<sup>1</sup>

But recently the debate concerning human migration has turned around completely. Instead of worrying about too many people leaving the province, policy discussions now deal with the need of attracting new arrivals. In order to understand how this amazing turn of events occurred, it is important to look at two factors: the global and national trends related to human migration, and the particularities of Newfoundland and Labrador.

## **The Global and National Trends**

Internationally a number of factors have created an environment of unprecedented mobility in the world. New trading blocs, such as the North American Free Trade Agreement and the

European Union, have made it easier for persons with specialized skills to move across national boundaries. As well, the disparity between rich and poor countries, complemented by increasing globalization of economies (with the concomitant improvement in international transportation networks), has made it easier for economic refugees to move from the developing world to the developed world. And military conflicts across the developing world are forcing many individuals to seek refuge in the more stable developed countries. Because of its thriving economy, stable democracy and reputation for multiculturalism, Canada is a prime destination for each type of migrant. A recent international survey ranked Canada fifth in popularity as an immigration destination, after the United States, Spain, Australia and New Zealand.

Developed countries that are adjacent to developing countries, such as the United States, Spain and Italy, take a dim view of immigration, since, to them, it equals unwanted, illegal economic refugees who place an increased burden on social programs. Other developed countries, such as Australia, New Zealand, the Nordic Countries and Canada, see immigration as an essential strategy for future sustainability. The latter are all expected to experience negative population growth in the coming decades.<sup>2</sup> As a result, these countries are now competing against each other for immigrants, hoping to attract the most qualified to their jurisdictions.

In Canada, the pressure for increased immigration is coming from several sources. Rural communities are concerned about their decreasing and aging populations, employers' groups are concerned about the looming skills gap in the country, humanitarian organizations see Canada as a safe haven in a dangerous world, and the growing number of new settlers in the country wish to sponsor family and friends to their new home.

Traditionally, immigrants to Canada have come from Western Europe; however this is quickly changing. Immigrants today are more likely to come from the developing world, especially from those countries with well-developed educational systems, such as in Eastern Europe, South Asia or the Far East. As a result, many immigrants to Canada prefer to move to Montreal, Toronto or Vancouver (the so-called "MTV" cities), where there are already large kindred communities, and where immigrants feel they can integrate more comfortably into Canadian society. In moving to large urban areas, their behavior mirrors that of many Canadian-born citizens, who are also moving in large numbers from rural areas to the cities.

### **The Newfoundland and Labrador Situation**

It could be said that the demographic factors affecting Canada are exacerbated in Newfoundland and Labrador. The population of the province is on average older than the national population, which means that more people are leaving the workforce than in the rest of Canada, and fewer young people are entering it. As well, a greater percentage of the population of the province lives in rural areas, as compared with other provinces. As a result, the global trend towards urbanization is affecting this province even more.

In 2007, the province passed a significant milestone: for the first time in memory, there were more people leaving the workforce than entering it. It is estimated that as the baby-boomers retire from the workforce over the next ten years, 30,000 jobs will become vacant and will need to be filled by younger employees.

This would be bad enough if the provincial

economy was content simply to maintain the status quo, but Newfoundland and Labrador is poised to undertake large-scale resource development projects requiring considerable manpower. These plans include the expansion of iron ore mining operations in Labrador West and the construction of a hydroelectric dam on the Lower Churchill River, a liquid natural gas terminal, a hydrometallurgical facility to process nickel, new offshore oil fields such as the recently-finalized Hebron development, and other large projects. It is estimated that these new

constructions ventures could create several thousand new jobs over the next fifteen years. And while many of these jobs would disappear once construction is completed, new employees would be needed to operate the various facilities as well as work in the spin-off industries.

Unless the vacancies created by retirements and openings produced by new construction projects can be filled, the economy of the province will

stagnate. So where will the workforce come from to replace retiring workers and to build these large-scale undertakings?

First, it will be important to retain the existing workforce that is already in the province, and to prepare the school-age population of the province for the jobs that will be created here. This means providing relevant training programs, offering competitive salaries, and creating attractive working conditions.

A second strategy will be to entice expatriate Newfoundlanders and Labradorians back to the province. It may prove relatively easy to attract them back, since they probably have some residual loyalty – in addition to family members – in the province.

The third tactic is to attract new immigrants to the province. These may be citizens of other provinces or of other nations. Since there are relatively few barriers to labour mobility within Canada, the real challenge will be to attract immigrants from other countries. And, although Canada is known as a country of immigrants, and has long taken initiatives to encourage new settlers, Newfoundland and Labrador is late in

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taking a pro-active role in immigration. As a result, of the 214,500 new immigrants to Canada between January and October 2006, only 400 came to the province (or 0.2 % of the national total). What's more, it is estimated that some of these have already moved or will be moving to other parts of Canada.

So Newfoundland and Labrador has a double dilemma in attracting new arrivals. In the first place, it must compete for immigrants, who may choose from among several countries as to where to relocate. And in the second place, it must compete with the MTV cities for those immigrants who wish to settle in Canada.

### **Governments (and Universities) Are Taking Notice**

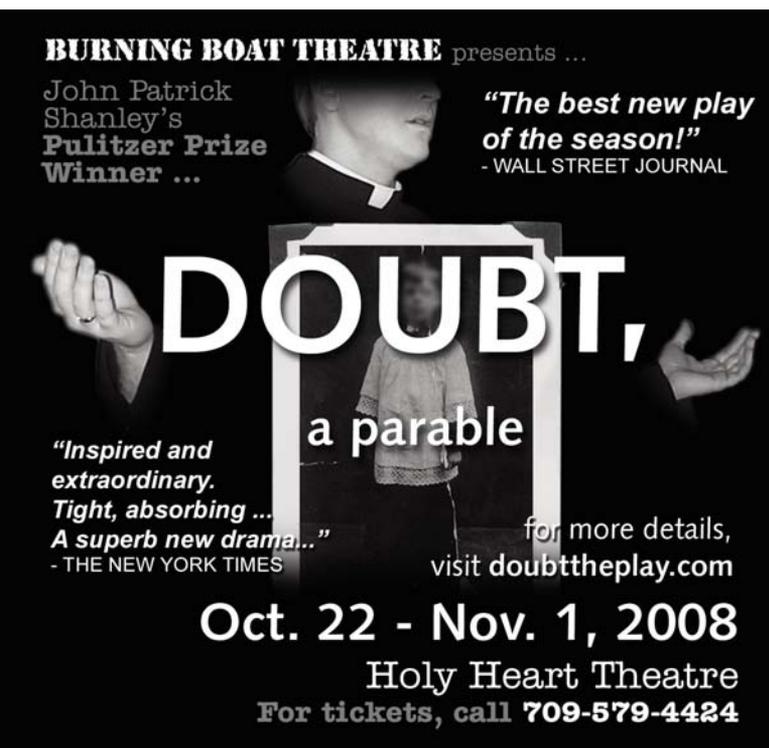
The changing nature of immigration has not gone unnoticed by governments. In Canada, all three levels of government have a role to play in immigration. The Federal Government is responsible for admitting permanent immigrants, foreign students, visitors and temporary workers who can help Canada's social and economic growth. As well, it resettles, protects and provides a safe haven for refugees, and helps all newcomers to adapt to Canadian society and to become Canadian citizens.

The Provincial Government is responsible for determining the labour needs of the province and for facilitating the entry of those workers (and their families) who can contribute to the economic and social growth of the province. The Province, through its newly created Office of Immigration and Multiculturalism, also actively recruits new immigrants by attending emigration fairs in source countries and by producing pamphlets, websites and other promotional materials to entice immigrant candidates to select Newfoundland and Labrador as their new place of residence. As well, the Provincial Government is responsible for such issues as housing, medical care, regional development, entrepreneurship, and education.

Universities, in turn, have positioned themselves as gateways for the most desirable types of immigrants, that is, those who are highly educated, mobile and marketable. Memorial University of Newfoundland is recruiting students at both the undergraduate and graduate levels, with the hope that some of them will remain in their adoptive country after graduation. Memorial is already attracting hundreds of foreign students, with plans to attract many more in the coming years, in the hope that some will stay on in the province.

Local governments play a key role in helping new immigrants settle in their communities. As mentioned earlier, most new immigrants to the province are expected to come from non-traditional source countries. This means that their mother tongue is not likely to be English (or French), nor is their religion likely to be Judeo-Christian, and they may come from a culture with very different concepts of personal space, family, community, relationship with authority, and even relationship with nature. A person coming from another culture could perceive Newfoundland and Labrador as exotic and foreign, and as a place where it will be difficult to integrate. The creation of "welcoming communities" will be essential in retaining immigrants and in creating a nucleus that can then be used to attract others from the same culture.

The issue of fitting in may be even harder for refugees, many of whom will have experienced traumatic situations and may have been denied a basic education. As opposed to skilled workers or their families, it may take more time and more effort to integrate refugees fully into society.



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## What Needs to be Done?

The economics of the global labour market are changing. In many developed countries, there will soon be more jobs available than there will be people to fill them. These countries are already competing with each other to attract the most qualified candidates. And those candidates attracted to Canada will be able to choose from a variety of possible new homes. If the economy of Newfoundland and Labrador is to grow as anticipated, we will need to focus more resources and energies in attracting qualified people.

One important challenge is the recognition of foreign credentials. How can we ensure that people with the proper skills are assessed objectively? Especially in the regulated professions (e.g., medicine, dentistry, engineering, law, etc.), how can we ensure that credentials acquired in remote universities and colleges are equivalent to those that would be acquired in Canada?

Another is improving the flow of information between the various parties involved with the labour market. How can employers in the province inform potential employees overseas of the skills they need? How can immigrants overseas make potential employers in the province aware of the skills they possess? How can potential employers inform the Provincial Government of their skills gaps, so that these can be addressed by recruitment efforts overseas?

Finally, how can communities in Newfoundland and Labrador become more welcoming to new immigrants, so that they feel at home and decide to stay in the province? What can communities do to avoid the racism, ghettoization and marginalization that have plagued other provinces and other countries?

These are all important tasks to be tackled in this new age of immigration. 

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<sup>1</sup> Of course, even during this period, there continued to be immigrants coming to the province, many of who were professionals – for example, in health care, academia and the Federal public service – but their numbers were generally much smaller than for those leaving the province.

<sup>2</sup> Statistics Canada predicts that one hundred per cent of Canada's population growth will be attributable to immigration by 2025.

## Summer motel

I can't help laughing, having handed all our money to the woman at the front. We're both of us penniless now, 'til we haul ourselves to Gander later. I'm buoyant

with the idea of 'motel,' thrilled by the honesty of it, the lack of frill. No make-believe nostalgia. Neighbours' kids fly past, cry out. They're sea-birds, coarse and shrill,

disturbing the bright surface of the pool. They perch on broken bits of coloured foam, fling water at each other. A small, cruel colony of cousins, friends while they're away from home.

We eye our room with wonder and delight, stand in the doorway, watch the children fight.

– Andreae Prozesky