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**Canadian Regional Immigration Initiatives in the 21st Century: A Candle in
the Wind?**

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*Canadian Regional Immigration Initiatives in the 21st Century:
A Candle in the Wind?*

By

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Introduction:

At the turn of the 19th century, regional dispersion of immigrants was a fact of Canada's immigration life. Clifford Sifton, then Canada's minister in charge of immigration, purposely sought yeoman farmers to populate the prairies in the first decade of the 20th century. He and the railroads were very successful from 1896 to 1908 in recruiting eastern and other European farmers (no Asians please) to populate the Canadian prairies. In fact, the policy of regional dispersion was clear. An immigrant was provided with a one-way rail ticket to the prairies and upon arrival in Halifax stepped off the pier into a waiting railway car without touching the ground. However, before Canada's first Immigration Act was signed in 1911, immigrants began to move to urban centers. After 1908, non-farm occupations began to dominate Canada's immigrant flows and these non-farmers headed to Canada's major eastern cities of Toronto and Montreal. As we now enter the 21st century under the Immigration Act of 2002, the source countries for immigrants have changed, the skill levels of immigrants have grown and the selection system has become dramatically more sophisticated. However, one fact has not changed in the last 100 years. Canada's immigrants do not go to Canada. They continue to go to Toronto, Montreal and now Vancouver, as Table 1 illustrates. In fact, in 2000 approximately 80 percent of total immigrant arrivals settled in these three cities.

There exist many facile and more careful explanations of this accelerated movement of immigrants to Canada's three dominant cities. In short, immigrants tend to move where past immigrants moved. This is Ravenstein's law of movement, or the gravity model, which is over 70 years old. In short, imagine Toronto being the southernmost portion of Canada and tip the country on edge, then under this law immigrants, as they enter, simply slide or gravitate to Front Street.¹ It is one thing to state a law of motion with respect to immigrant destination and it is quite another to understand the rationale behind this law.

The objective of this talk is to discuss the rationale for this trend to hyper urbanization of immigration and through this analysis point to policy measures to increase the regional dispersion of immigrants.

¹ The formal law is $M_{ij} = L^n(M_{ij,t-1})$ or the number of immigrants moving from I to j in period t is a function of the number of immigrants that moved in last period. If L is >1 and n is >1 then the movement accelerates at an accelerating pace such as with Toronto.

Table 1: Immigration by Province and Census Metropolitan Area

Census Area	1996*	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001
St. John's			298	315	276	294
Other Newfoundland			97	107	136	110
Total Newfoundland	584	432	395	422	412	404
Total Prince Edward Island	153	151	136	137	188	134
Halifax	2898	2577	1785	1309	1307	1381
Other Nova Scotia	325	328	266	296	285	327
Total Nova Scotia	3223	2905	2051	1605	1592	1708
Saint John			130	162	173	148
Other New Brunswick			599	501	582	653
Total New Brunswick	716	665	729	663	755	801
Québec City	1412	1369	1561	1543	1392	1829
Montréal	24,672	22,516	22,039	24,925	28,085	32,366
Ottawa – Hull (QC)			740	730	674	585
Other Québec	3716	3849	2192	1906	2229	2648
Total Québec	29,800	27,734	26,532	29,104	32,380	37,428
Ottawa – Hull (ON)	5878	5726	5278	6576	7600	8448
Toronto	97,235	96,540	76,364	84,445	108,034	125,061
Hamilton	2843	2562	2053	2751	3112	2767
London	1670	1520	1326	1565	1938	1955
Other Ontario	12,056	11,632	7258	8682	12,828	10,194
Total Ontario	119,682	117,980	92,279	104,018	133,512	148,425
Winnipeg	3359	3214	2481	2995	3675	3742
Other Manitoba	564	557	500	703	935	832
Total Manitoba	3923	3771	2981	3698	4610	4574
Regina	633	559	498	534	671	535
Saskatoon	761	749	693	802	779	776
Other Saskatchewan	430	439	378	389	422	398
Total Saskatchewan	1824	1747	1569	1725	1872	1709
Calgary	7031	6813	6009	6815	8424	10,169
Edmonton	4935	4399	3789	3852	4297	4580
Other Alberta	1932	1693	1386	1395	1548	1622
Total Alberta	13,898	12,905	11,184	12,062	14,269	16,371
Vancouver	46,057	41,093	31,956	32,335	33,084	34,165
Victoria	897	719	748	741	8812	950
Other British Columbia	5067	5730	3264	2979	3354	3151
Total British Columbia	52,021	47,542	35,968	36,055	37,319	38,266
Total Yukon	94	87	62	79	62	67
Total Northwest Territories	97	102	64	65	89	90
Total Nunavut			2	13	7	6
Not Stated	35	23	210	265	142	363
Total	226,050	216,044	174,162	189,911	227,209	250,346

Bartel (1989) summarized three initial forces which lead to the urbanization of immigrants in Canada.

The first is “ports” of entry, near seaports in the past, near airports in the current era. The second is where family and friends (co-ethnics) from earlier migrations have settled. Even if the location choice of the first settler from the ethnic group is purely random among a set of equally attractive locations, once that first settler is established, future settlers are no longer indifferent among destination sites. The third is where the jobs are, that is, where the immigrants are most able to gain employment that makes best use of their skills, or lack thereof. With the passage of time, “ports of entry” and “family and friends” become less central in deciding where to live in the host country, and immigrants tend to disperse to some extent.²

There are several important threads to pull from this quote to address the issue at hand today, namely regional dispersion of immigrants. First, Bartel’s anticipated dispersion of immigrants away from Canada’s three major ports of entry has not occurred. In fact, geographers have a concise way of measuring immigrant or ethnic dispersion. They ask, what percentage of an ethnic or immigrant population must move to approximate the distribution of Canadian-born Canadians across Canada circa 2003? In the case of ethnic Chinese according to the 1996 census, 80 percent of the existing Chinese population would have to be relocated to mimic the regional dispersion of the Canadian-born population. Clearly, Bartel’s hoped-for dispersion over time of Chinese (and other Asian immigrants) has not happened.

Chiswick and Miller (2000) argue persuasively that linguistic enclaves are the glue that prevents this dispersion in Canada. When an Asian immigrant group which is linguistically distinct from its host population enters a country such as Canada that immigrant group faces a difficult choice. It can attempt to learn the host country’s language and open for themselves a wider labour and housing market. On the other hand, the immigrant can shirk from this linguistic task and accept an enclave with cheap ethnic goods (linguistically friendly media and consumer goods) and face lower income and employment prospects. This is no doubt true for older Asian immigrants to Canada.

But why haven’t the more talented immigrants admitted under Canada’s increasingly more stringent “points-assessed” class initially moved in greater numbers to London, Kingston and Windsor or other mid-sized cities? Is it the relatively poor economic opportunities for immigrants in these mid-sized cities or an immigration integration policy with a metropolitan bias or both? Or is it a lack of information or irrational economic behavior on the part of newly arrived immigrants? Is it possible that mid-sized cities offer an economic advantage over Toronto, which the current flow of immigrants are not exploiting?

² This quotation appears in Chiswick and Miller 2000, *Do Enclaves Matter in Immigrant Adjustment?*

Chiswick and others have carefully outlined the urban or enclave bias inherent in the location decision of immigrants and argue that there are costs and benefits of living in or outside of the enclave. The first and major cost of living in an enclave is that the immigrant faces limited labour market opportunities, which generally offer lower wages than are available in a national market. On the other hand, the economic benefits from living and remaining in the immigrant enclave consists of lower consumption goods costs and avoiding the cost of learning a second language. Given this analytical framework, it is important to note that any regional immigration strategy Canada devises must address the mix of costs and benefits that continue to attract non-English (non-French) language speaking immigrants to the immigrant enclaves in Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver.

Regional Dispersion Immigration Policies

Canada has experimented with several forms of modern regional or immigrant settlement dispersion policies since 1980. Some have been more successful than others and I highlight two post-1980 policies to illustrate how an effective strategy can be developed and implemented. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, over 60,000 Vietnamese refugees were settled throughout Canada. This policy of regional settlement was indirect, namely, over 50 percent of the refugees were sponsored by individuals or groups of Canadians and thus required to remain with their sponsors for their first year of settlement. The combination of these limited ties to the sponsor and the relatively large numbers moving to non-Metropolitan locations meant that small but growing Vietnamese communities that developed in the 1980s are still vibrant today.³

There are two principles to extract from this moderately successful regional settlement policy of the early 1980s. First, it was a private initiative. In other words, private sponsors were active in supplying a support mechanism to the recent arrivals. Next, the numbers settled were sufficiently large and concentrated in time allowing a small non-urban ethnic enclave to emerge that fulfilled the economic and social needs of the new arrivals. Finally, government language training was made available to these arrivals in these non-metropolitan locations. In short, it was a carrot and not a stick approach.

³ The program worked as follows. For each sponsored refugee, the government would allow in an official or government-sponsored refugee. The latter group settled in large Canadian cities while the former did not. Abbotsford, British Columbia is a good example of a community receiving large numbers of church-sponsored refugees who ultimately stayed even though Vancouver is only 70 kilometers west of Abbotsford.

Of course, all of this took place before the Charter of Rights was in place, which guaranteed free mobility of all Canadians. Thus, we must look to a contemporary program of immigrant placement to analyze how such a program could operate within the confines of the mobility principle inherent in the Charter of Rights. This program is the temporary caregiver or “Nanny” program. Under this program regional dispersion is not the goal; however immigrant mobility is restricted by employment opportunities. Immigrants gain admission under this program if they have a job in hand and agree to work for a given employer for a period of up to three years. After that time, the temporary nature of the work permit is converted into a permanent landed status and full mobility rights are granted to the immigrant. This program has, on balance, been positive. It has filled a Canadian labour market shortage in a particular occupation, and provided long-term benefits to the temporary workers and their families. However, it has been open to abuse since the workers find it difficult to change employers, and, being largely a female occupation and centered in private living quarters, females are sometimes exploited and sexually abused by their employers. Nonetheless, two principles emerge from this program that are Charter proof. Temporary workers can have mobility restrictions applied to their visas, and secondly, conversion rights to permanent immigrants are essential to attracting large numbers to such a restrictive program.

A second successful temporary worker program with regional dispersion implications involves foreign students working in Canada. Under this program a student can obtain a visa with geographically limited work permit (attached to the university) but only after being accepted by a bona fide university and with guaranteed employment. These student visas are true examples of blending of geographical and occupational restrictions for a temporary visa in Canada. This foreign student visa has been a boon to both students and universities and only lacks clear conversion rights to ascend to permanent immigration status to be the ideal model for a regional dispersion program.

In sum, there are at least two temporary worker programs with limited mobility rights which have proved successful in modern Canada and have had no Charter Challenge.

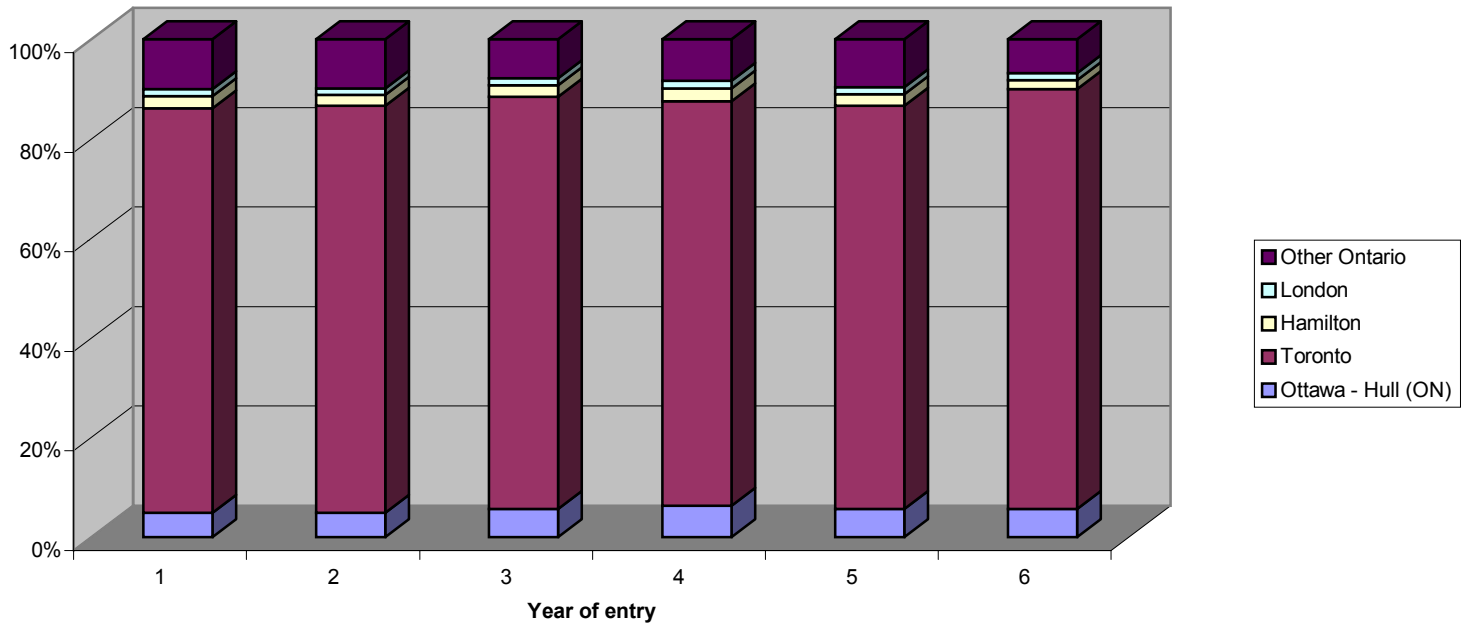
A New Regional Dispersion Policy

If I take the several threads of current successful temporary immigration programs in Canada and marry them to the knowledge of immigrant enclave formation I would suggest the following. Initiate an experiment in which employers in non-Metropolitan areas could offer jobs to prospective immigrants for a wage that exceeds the low income cut-off point in the relevant community. In effect, the employer becomes the sponsor and would act in a similar fashion to universities which hire foreign students. Next, employment must be guaranteed for the life of the mobility restriction, with

the exception of a *force majeure*. During the period of mobility restriction, the temporary immigrant family must be given preferential access to language and/or other publicly financed integration programs. Moreover, conversion of the temporary visa after expiration to a more permanent status (i.e. landed) should be pro-forma with no 14-18 month waiting period to assess the landing status period, which is the current norm for foreign students. Finally, all of the time spent under this temporary visa should count towards the residency requirement for ascension to Canadian citizenship.

In sum, the program I have outlined gathers together all the strands of a Charter-proof and successful regional dispersion program. The number and destination of immigrants is determined by the labour market and not some vague notion of regional needs or rhetorical claims by regions to a rightful share of immigrants. Finally, under this scheme, the temporary immigrant who absorbs the costs of being isolated from an enclave is compensated with generous integration policies and accelerated rights to ascension to citizenship.

The true test of my program is to find out how many applicants on a worldwide basis would apply for a temporary visa as described above when posted on a website board. I would predict there would be tens of thousands of applicants from eastern Europe or China who can no longer enter under Canada's extremely stringent "points-assessed" permanent entry gate.

Figure1: Distribution of Ontarios Immigrants: 1996-2001

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