Immigration In Canada And Us Essay, Research Paper

Immigration has played a major part historically in the growth of Canada s population. Between 1901 and 1911 alone, Canada received over 1.5 million immigrants, representing 28 percent of Canada s total population at the time. Recently, however, Canada s immigration policies and practices have come under scrutiny and criticism, as increasingly larger numbers of people begin to question whether current progressive immigration policy is beneficial in the long run for Canada and Canadians. Essentially, Canada has begun to question itself whether its current restrictions on immigration are sufficient.

Throughout its history Canada has maintained numerous immigration policies, many not surviving the life span of the government under which they were created. Yet these policies, although highly restrictive, were not in the best interest of the country. Many were established to protect the individual interests of the current government, or they were established in an effort to maintain the government of the time s essentially racist conception of Canada. In fact, it wasn t until 1962 that Canada s essentially all-white immigration policy was abolished.

In 1976 Canada adopted a points-based system, where potential immigrants were assigned various points based on such things as age, education, and net worth. This system was designed to prevent immigrants from being barred entry into the country based on race, religion, or creed. Essentially, those immigrants with sufficiently large personal savings, or with jobs skills listed under the government s General Occupations List, would be awarded more points, thus increasing there chance of being granted admittance into the country.

Recently, the government has adopted new policies to bring this system up to date. Under current proposals, new immigrants would have to demonstrate fluency in one of the official languages. As well, points would no longer be given out based on a potential immigrant s occupation, but their occupation must still appear on the new National Occupational Classification in order for them to qualify for entry. The new system essentially places more responsibility on visa officers abroad to assess an applicant’s eligibility.

Of all the immigrants coming to Canada, most fall under the skilled worker category. These are immigrants who posses work skills which are deemed wanted by the Canadian government s National Occupational Classification. Such skills often include technical skills, in the fields of science and medicine, but also quite frequently labor skills, to fill labor gaps that the current Canadian population either cannot or is unwilling to fill. It has always been the current Liberal government s policy to limit immigration to Canada to 1% of the current population.

Business immigrants are one of the other group classifications under Canada s current immigration policy. Business immigrants are divided into three groups, the “Self-employed”, the “Entrepreneur”, and the “Investor”. One of the other larger groups admitted into Canada are sponsored immigrants. Sponsored immigrants are essentially those who have family already in Canada and can get those family member s to sponsor their immigration application. The Liberal government encourages family relations and development, as it sees family and family life as a necessary facet of an immigrant integrating into Canadian society. With this goal in mind, the current government encourages immigrants to sponsor their family members, provided those members meet the same health and security restrictions applied to all other immigrants.

The other group of immigrants frequently admitted into Canada, and the ones that receive most of the media attention, are refugees. Since World War II, Canada has resettled or granted asylum to over 800,000 refugees and other people in need of humanitarian solutions.

From 1820 to 1930, the United States received about 60% of the world’s immigrants. Population expansion in developed areas of the world, improved methods of transportation, and U.S. desire to populate available space were all factors in this phenomenon. Through the 19th century, the United States was in the midst of agricultural, then industrial, expansion. The desire for cheap, unskilled labor and the profits to be made importing immigrants fueled the movement. Immigrants were largely responsible for the rapid development of the country, and their high birthrates did much to swell the U.S. population. Often, however, immigrants formed distinct ethnic neighborhoods, tending to remain somewhat isolated from the wider culture. Frequently exploited, some immigrants were accused by organized labor of lowering wages and living standards, though other groups of immigrants rapidly became mainstays of the labor movement.

The number of immigrants who came to the United States after the Second World War grew at a steady pace; a total of over 18 million people immigrated during the years from 1946 to 1992, with an average of close to 700,000 a year during the last ten years of that period. But as the US immigrant population increased and began to place a strain on governmental budgets, or was perceived as a threat to cultural homogeneity in some communities, public pressure led Congress to place limits on the numbers who would be welcomed to the American melting pot.

Such limits were rare prior to the end of the Second World War, but did occur as early as the nineteenth century. Just as Canada had restrictions that limited certain races, religions and creed from entering their country, so did America. The first to suffer such discrimination were the Chinese whose immigration into the United States was precluded by legislation passed in the 1880s. Other Asians were restricted through the Immigration Act 1917, and general limits were placed on all immigrants during the 1920s. Restrictions on Chinese immigrants were eased by the USA during the Second World War to promote better relations with its war time ally.

The Immigration Act 1952 reduced restrictions on Asians in general. The Act also removed racial and sexual bars to immigration and naturalization and established preferred categories of immigrants: first, those with high levels of education and then various types of relatives, including parents of US citizens, spouses and children of permanent resident aliens, and, finally, brothers, sisters, and married children of US citizens. Immediate relatives of US citizens were exempt from any limitations.

The Immigration and Nationality Act 1965 eliminated the national origins quotas that had been in operation since the 1920s and embraced an immigration selection system based on family reunification and needed skills . However, the Act did place a ceiling for the first time on immigration from the Western hemisphere while contributing to an increase in immigration from Asia. The lack of restrictions prior to the 1965 Act was due in part to the desire for cheap labor which came from those regions and in part to promote good neighbor relations.

The Immigration Act of 1990 increased the annual ceiling on immigration to 675,000, and reformulated the preference system into family-based and independent migration categories, with the latter including a diversity component to provide for immigration from underrepresented countries. The goals in immigration policies are achieved by granting or denying visas. There are two types of visas: immigrant and nonimmigrant. Nonimmigrant visas are primary issued to tourists and temporary business visitors. Nonimmigrant visas are divided into eighteen main categories, and the number of visas in most categories are not limited. Only a few categories of non-immigrant visas allow their holders work in the United States. Immigrant visas permit their holders to stay in the United States permanently and ultimately to apply for citizenship. An alien who has an immigrant visa is permitted to work in the United States. Congress limits the overall number of immigrant visas, which was 675,000 in 1995. Many immigrant visas are also subject to per-country caps.

The one major and consistent theme that is sharply and clearly defined in each country’s responses to national public opinion polls is that in no country does a majority of citizens have positive feelings about their current cohort of immigrants. The American public expresses positive and approving attitudes toward immigrants who came “earlier,” but expresses negative sentiments about those who are coming at whatever time a survey is being conducted. Thus when asked on a national poll in 1993 – “Was immigration a good thing or a bad thing for this country in the past,” 59 percent said “a good thing,” 31 percent answered “a bad thing” (AIPO, 1993). Then, on the same poll, when asked: “Is immigration a good thing or a bad thing for this country today,” 29 percent answered “a good thing” and 60 percent answered “a bad thing.” (AIPO, 1993).

In Canada, the question “Do you favor an increase, decrease, or keeping immigration at the same level” appeared on national polls in Canada from 1975 through 1993. The responses indicated that while more Canadians favored increasing the level of immigration than did the American public, at the peak they still accounted for only 17 percent of the respondents. Over the full timespan, the responses flipped from a higher percent favoring decreasing the number of immigrants admitted to maintaining them at the “same” levels. The proportion advocating a decrease in immigration varied from 32 to 55 percent.

Canada and the United States both seem to have the same preferences for immigrants. Both countries have made their immigration policies very open to skilled workers, people with high levels of education and business immigrants. Both policies also encourage immigrants to sponsor their families. While Canada s immigration policies are based on a points system, USA s policies are based on Visas. Canada s policies seems to be less confusing compared to USA s ever changing policies with many different immigration acts.

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