

POPULATION IN THE PRAIRIE PROVINCES

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ONE of the most significant features of our post-war economic policy is the changed outlook toward unrestricted immigration. We continue to speak of our pressing need for a larger population, but we do not seek relief by throwing open the gates to European peoples. In fact, we are beginning to watch the flow of newcomers with considerable care, and to force a reduction in the number of immigrants whenever it appears that our absorptive powers are being strained. This is one of the results of our past experience, and no amount of argument will convince our western farmers or our labour leaders that the present policy of controlling immigration is crippling Canadian development. The arguments of the transportation companies and the agitation of the advocates of Empire settlement are alike refuted by the unemployed who sought work during the past winter. It is useless to speak of the unlimited opportunity for population growth when thousands of men seeking work are unable to find it.

In an earlier article* I pointed out the actual results that had been attained through immigration by Canada and other countries of the new world. I suggested at that time that an immigration quota equal to 1% of our mean population would probably best serve our present needs. Although this figure seems rather conservative in the light of actual immigration movements, it may be that it should be reduced. The development of any country depends upon capital resources and technological equipment. What may be a sound immigration policy for a country like Greece (which absorbed hundreds of thousands of refugees after the war) may be entirely unsuitable for a progressive country like Canada. The present movement toward mechanized agriculture, and the rationalisation of industry, serves to throw more emphasis upon mechanical equipment than upon the labour supply. The amount of labour necessary to raise a thousand acres of wheat in 1914 may be cut in half by the introduction of the combine and tractor. We must shape our immigration policy to conform with the present state of the industrial arts.

All this is plainly speculation; and if my arguments are to carry any weight, I must bring forth some evidence to support my

*July, 1929.

case. For the country as a whole I can secure no data later than the census of 1921, but more recent material is available for the prairie provinces. The census of Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta was taken in 1926, and this enables a study to be made of the five-year period 1921-1926. This period, it may be said, embraces a time of depression in agriculture. But, on the other hand, there are no signs of any great revival in agriculture in the near future. I do not think that there will be any undue exaggeration in tracing the movement of peoples on the prairie provinces during these five years.

The general results of the 1926 census are more or less familiar, although very little comment has been published on them. For our purpose it serves best to treat the three provinces as a single geographical area, in order that provincial differences may tend to balance one another. Thus all the figures that will be presented are the totals for the provinces of Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta.

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1921.....	1,956,082
1926.....	2,067,393
Increase	111,311

The above figures show the general balance sheet for the period 1921-1926. The increase of a little less than 6% has generally been taken to show a net increase in the population of the provinces. Such a conception serves to hide the real changes that took place during the five years, and we must look behind these figures to see the actual movement of the people.

If we analyse the elements of the population for the period 1921-1926, we secure the results given below:

Population Movements, 1921-1926.	
Actual Increase	111,311
Natural Increase	194,000
Immigration	181,000
Emigration	272,000

The features to note in the chart are: first, that the actual increase was less than 60% of what might have occurred had we retained the population of 1921 and the natural increase during the period; secondly, that the number of immigrants was insufficient to balance the number of emigrants. This, of course, gives rise to the interesting question, what would have been the result had

there been no immigration during this period? To the writer there seems to be no way of answering this question, but some indication may be secured by carrying the analysis a little further. We might first discover whether the loss was more severe among the rural or urban population. From the total population in 1926 we must first subtract those under five years of age, for they were not included in the census of 1921. If this is done, we get the following figures:

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	Rural	Urban
1921.....	1,211,264	703,478
1926.....	1,107,733	677,872
Percent decrease...	8.5%	3.6%

The loss of population (other than those aged 0-4) was more than twice as great in the rural section as in the urban. Yet we are told that our immigrants are going on the land! We secured 180,000 during this period, but it seems to have had no appreciable effect on the loss of population from the rural sections. It would seem that either the new immigrants are not remaining on the farms, or that they are taking the place of earlier settlers. It might pay to have no immigration for a period, and see whether the movement still continues.

It is often suggested that, owing to the United States Immigration law, our immigrants simply fill the places vacated by Canadians who enter the United States without a quota. The census of 1926 does not offer any conclusive evidence one way or another. This is due to the large number of Americans who had settled on the prairies before the war, and who returned in the period 1921-1926. In spite of the 180,000 immigrants that we secured in the five years, the number of foreign-born declined by about 3%. If we subtract from the 1926 figures the number of immigrants who came after the 1921 census, we will be able to see what losses occurred among those who were counted in 1921.

FOREIGN-BORN POPULATION OF THE PRAIRIE PROVINCES

	1921	*1926	Decrease
Total.....	795,413	679,305	14.6%
British.....	313,261	268,664	14.2%
United States.....	209,140	157,978	24.5%

It will be noted that no provision has been made for the loss due to deaths during this period. This might amount to 3%. The rest of the decrease was due to the emigration of the population. The loss among those born in the United States amounted to

* Not including recent immigrants.

almost $\frac{1}{4}$ of their number at the census of 1921. We have not given the decrease in the number of Europeans; it will be seen that it must have been less than the British. On the other hand, there are great variations among the different countries, and the figures for the two censuses are not comparable. This decline in population over a five-year period is a significant movement, but it is not suggested that such a high rate is likely to continue for any great time. Nevertheless it demonstrates that the assimilation of peoples in a new country is not an automatic result of their being placed there, but that there are limits to the power of absorbing new settlers.

Turning from the foreign-born elements of the population of the prairie provinces, we shall consider the movements that have taken place among the Canadian-born. The question is whether the loss among the Canadians was greater or less than among the foreign-born. Again we exclude from the 1926 totals that section of the population which was under five years of age.

CANADIAN-BORN POPULATION

	1921	1926	Decrease
Total.....	1,119,329	1,022,522	8.7%
Prairie-born.....	792,220	730,571	7.8%
Ontario-born....	241,086	213,342	11.5%
Quebec-born.....	44,499	39,335	11.6%
Other.....	41,524	39,274	6.5%

There has been no provision made for deaths during this period, but at the same time we have been unable to determine whether there was any movement to the prairies from other parts of Canada. It will be noted that the loss among the prairie-born is less than among those born in Ontario or Quebec. The figures, however, do not give an entirely true picture, because a much larger section of the prairie-born is under the age of 21 years than is the case with the other Canadians. In order to make a more accurate survey, we must estimate the loss among the Canadian-born adult population. Thus if we take the population 20 years and over in 1921, then this group will be 25 years and over in 1926. The result is given in the following table:

CANADIAN-BORN ADULT POPULATION

1921	Population 20 years and over.....	399,206
1926	Population 25 years and over.....	344,138

Decrease in five years..... 55,068 or—13.8%

Unfortunately the data do not permit us to determine what section of the adult Canadian population was prairie-born. The

loss of 13.8% is comparable with the decrease of 14.6% among the foreign-born. It is seen that both sections of the population suffered approximately the same loss. For the latter group the loss is partially made up through immigration, for the former the natural increase of the population adds new numbers each year.

So far we have come no nearer reaching a conclusion regarding the effectiveness of immigration. We have seen the extent of the movement of the different elements of our population, and the losses which they suffered in this five-year period. If it were possible to determine whether or not emigration is related to immigration, and how the balance is maintained, we might save the country the economic burden of moving hundreds of thousands of people to make a net gain of tens of thousands.

Although no one would now maintain that a policy of *laissez-faire* will serve to direct the immigration of people to Canada, there has been no attempt made to establish standards by which our needs might be estimated. Our need for immigrants is, in reality, our need for more labourers—agricultural workers or others. We can recruit our labour force either from the area in which they are needed or from abroad. In the early period of the settlement of the prairies there was no reserve supply of labour available on the plains; so, of necessity, the workers came from other parts of Canada and from foreign countries. As time passed, these settlers reared families, and now we find that the prairie-born children are seeking, in ever-increasing numbers, opportunities to earn a livelihood. So far just the advance guard of this group has reached maturity, but from now on they will play a larger and larger part in the economic system. First we may notice the increasing percentage of Canadian-born adults to the total population of the prairie provinces. In the following table we have given the percentage of Canadian-born males to total male population:

PROPORTION OF CANADIAN-BORN MALES TO TOTAL MALE POPULATION

1911	Canadian-born males formed.....	36%
1916	Canadian-born males formed.....	35%
1921	Canadian-born males formed.....	37%
1926	Canadian-born males formed.....	38%

This means that if we continue our present immigration policy, we shall have to absorb not only a larger number of immigrants but also an increasing number of our own population. This factor, the writer thinks, has been neglected in the discussion of the problem. It is evident that the Canadian-born who will be seeking work during the next decade have already been born, so that we

can make some estimate of their number by seeing how many there are in the age group from 15-19 years.

CANADIAN-BORN 15-19 YEARS OF AGE

	Both Sexes	Males
1916.....	67,477	34,390
1921.....	99,050	50,396
1926.....	150,252	76,059

10-14 Years of age

1926.....	223,724	113,279
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From the above figures we learn that whereas from 1916 to 1921 there were only 34,390 males reaching maturity, in the period 1926 to 1931 there are twice as many. The same thing is seen to be true of the women. In other words, we shall be able to draw upon a larger number of our own population to provide the workers that we need. For the period 1931 to 1936 the number of Canadians reaching maturity will be larger than the number of immigrants that we admitted to the prairies during the five-year period that we have been considering; 223,724 Canadian-born, age 10-14 years, as compared with 180,000 immigrants in five years. This does not mean that we have reached a stage in our economic development when we have no further need of immigration. But it does suggest that the need for immigrants is far less urgent than it appeared a decade or so ago. If the increased mechanization of industry continues, and our birth rate does not fall too sharply, we shall be able to provide for our labour force largely from our native born. What is needed, and what I have tried to enforce, is the necessity of surveying our economic position and then relating the growth of population to the opportunities that are available. As the prairie provinces are called upon to absorb a considerable part of our immigrants, the economic conditions in this area should be one of the determining factors in formulating an immigration policy.