



Immigration Settlement Must be a Priority

By Dr. Lorne Foster

What separates sociology from chatter is that inferences and conclusions about life are drawn from empirically based observations of actual living people. The analysis of any issue is related to a factual measure (or a measurable fact) of one sort or another – an incidence, an occurrence, a frequency, a degree, a percentage or a proportion. On the other hand, what separates the discursive chatter and vulgar musings of actual living people from sociology, is that many people ignore empirical or concrete reality in order to preserve their partisan beliefs and convictions.

Consider this concrete social fact, for instance: Ontario attracts 60 per cent of the 200 000 immigrants to Canada every year.

Now consider this related social fact In the last five years the Ontario Tories have gutted immigrant settlement services, ESL training and other useful initiatives, fumbled the crisis over the acknowledgement of foreign professional credentials, and slashed programs like adult education and job training that helped integrate newcomers into society

What is the logical inference that comes out of these two merging sets of measurable social facts?

Any sociologist worth his or her salt would have to concur with the late great Bluesman, Albert Collin's, saucy little ditty: "I see the lights are on, but there's nobody home,"

For years, Ontario complained, with some justification, about Ottawa transfer payments for integration and settlement programs going disproportionately to Quebec. But when the feds finally acknowledged the injustice and were willing to negotiate a new agreement similar to the Canada/Quebec Accord, the Ontario government vacillated. Worse, when they were given \$35 million extra in 1995-96, the Provincial Tories sun ply folded the transfer payment into general revenues

In other words, the Ontario government may have got 42 per cent of the popular vote in the election, but it seems to have zero vision So, while it has the potential benefit in perpetuity of 60 per cent of the country's new human resources, it lacks the foresight to formulate a viable human resource strategy and action plan for the future. You do not have to be a sociologist to grasp the fact that denying effective support programs to help new immigrants adjust to Canadian society is foolish and short-sighted. It only adds to our long-term costs, by delaying their advancement to the status of productive taxpaying citizens.

Yet, the action plan for the future in Ontario is not based on a deduction of rational or objective self-interest. Rather it has been reduced to the partisan politics of the scapegoat, or "culpritism" — where the poor are blamed for their poverty, visible minorities are blamed for racism, immigrants are blamed for the lack of jobs, and all of these usual suspects are rounded up at one time or another and blamed for a whole host of debilities within the broader system. These

range from government deficits, to high taxes, to rising crime rates, to declining economies, to the very assault on morality, decency and tradition.

This, of course, leads to undermining immigration settlement and integration delivery systems, as well as slashing social services, axing the employment equity program, killing anti-racism programs, and failing to deliver on the promise to beef-up the Human Rights Commission, and a Disabilities Act to help the 1.5 million Ontarians with various forms of disability.

In the wider context, given the world is now a place where new technologies are continually transforming the economic landscape of modern nations, while world migration patterns and pressures are restructuring their political terrain; the true sociological imagination framing the new globalism is no longer focused on immigration policy~ but rather, post-immigration policy. In order to ensure social and economic well being, governments have to develop population plans that animate the potential skills and talents of their residents and strengthen the infrastructure of the society, in a diverse and ever-changing world. Consequently, the most astute and conscientious observers are now advocating that the Harris government split the cumbersome and overburdened Ministry of Citizenship, Culture and Recreation into two separate administrative entities and ministries with all matters surrounding citizenship and immigration settlement support services representing a separate and exclusive portfolio of their own

Others recognize that the federal government also has a post-immigration role to play beyond funding, in the area of the performance management, and ensuring the quality of settlement and integration delivery systems of the various provincial and ethnic-community service providers in their response to the changing needs of a multiracial and pluralistic society.

These are cogent, sociologically drawn inferences that should be explored. In any case, all efforts should be made to accentuate post immigration settlement programming as a high profile, public policy priority of the first order. Everything else is just chatter