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## Most of us would find we're not up to standard for Canada

Harald Bauder

The average Canadian would not qualify for Canadian residence based on proposed immigration standards, according to census data.

In a statistical exercise, the newly proposed selection guidelines were matched with data from the 1996 census to examine how many Canadians would actually qualify to immigrate to Canada as skilled workers. The results indicate the vast majority of Canadians are not good enough for Canada.

According to Immigration Minister Elinor Caplan, the new legislation seeks to attract skilled workers who can outperform the Canadian-born population in the labour market within a few years of their arrival. Caplan disclosed in an interview with The Star that "the hard working, blue-collar immigrants who built this country" are a relic from the past. Instead, she is "looking to bring people here that will integrate and succeed quickly" in the knowledge-based economy.

The higher bar for immigration candidates implies that Canadian workers are lacking the qualities needed in today's labour market. The stricter immigration policy ensures that Canada balances this lack with more desirable human capital from developing countries, whose skills far exceed those of the average Canadian. In fact, most Canadians would be denied entry to Canada under proposed legislation.

Such applicants would be knocked out in the first round. The "skilled worker" category applies only to managers, professionals, technical and skilled traders, and paraprofessionals. Canadians in all other occupations would not even be considered for immigration under the skilled-workers category. Those who do would be subjected to a rigorous point system.

The newly proposed point system awards points on the basis of education, official languages, work experience, arranged employment, age and adaptability. Of these criteria, education, official languages and experience comprise 70 points of a total of 100 points. The minister has suggested that anyone with fewer than 80 points will not be admitted to Canada.

Most people who grew up in Canada speak at least one of the two official languages and, since they are Canadians, they would certainly be considered highly adaptable to Canadian society. They would score much higher in these categories than non-Canadians. In addition, many Canadians already have jobs in Canada and would obtain the 10 points for arranged employment. Canadians would have a large advantage over foreigners who apply for immigration from their countries of origin.

In spite of this advantage, only 26 per cent of Canadian-born men and 20 per cent of Canadian-born women over the age of 18 would qualify for immigration under the proposed skilled-workers program. Only 33 per cent of those in the desirable 21 to 44 age category, which gets the full 10-point age credit, would be eligible to land in Canada.

What do the high standards for immigration reveal about the agenda of our immigration policy?

Caplan makes no bones about it: The skilled-workers program is designed to give Canada a leading edge in a competitive global economy. From a purely economic viewpoint, it would probably be most advantageous to strip all "unskilled" Canadians of their citizenship, expel them from Canada and replace them with the "best and brightest" immigrants the new policy seeks to attract.

Such a policy, however good for the economy, would likely be unpopular among Canadian voters.

The reality that most Canadians cannot live up to the standards of Canadian immigration policy raises some serious ethical issues. There is the fundamental problem of treating people differently simply because they were born in a different country. This differential treatment seems to contradict Canadians' keen sense for justice, equality and democracy.

Also, by tapping the world's "best and brightest," all Canadians can supposedly enjoy the economic benefits that economists predict will trickle down from the immigrants' labour. Whether this will actually happen or not, Canada's gain will be the other countries' loss, and this loss is felt most acutely in the developing world, which loses its best and brightest. This policy of luring skilled workers from poor countries contradicts efforts of the international community to assist these countries.

Much of Canadian immigrant regulation seems to be driven by the selfish pursuit of economic gain, rather than by motivations of democracy and equality. True, thousands of refugees are saved every year from political persecution and admitted to Canada based on humanitarian grounds, and tens of thousands more are happy to unite with their loved ones in Canada through the family-class immigration program. However, through the skilled-workers program Canada recruits the immigrants it deems most suitable for Canada. In this program the paradigm of economic gain overrides the objective of equality that we claim to embrace.

If we continue to drain poor countries of their human capital investments, the global divide between first and Third World will likely deepen. Moreover, if we do not change our perspective on immigration, our greed will render the equality of human beings mere rhetoric rather than a valued principle of our world.

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