

CANADA: The nadir of our once great nation



by Conrad Black

It was my privilege last week to meet with a western Canadian group of public-spirited and accomplished individuals who are so concerned by what they see as the general decline of Canada, they believe that a radical change of policy direction is all that will prevent us from becoming a failed state. It was a spirited session, replete with entertaining, if somewhat bibulous but friendly interruptions. In preparation, I had done some updated research and concluded that their concerns were more justified than I had thought even a few months ago, when I last wrote about this subject in this column.

Among the principal points that have arisen are that the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)

now predicts that Canada will be the poorest performing advanced economy in the world until 2060, if it continues on its present path. Under Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's watch, Canada's per capita average incomes increased by three per cent, from \$54,154 in 2016 to \$55,863 in 2022, while that of the United States rose by 12 per cent, from \$65,792 to \$73,565; for a family of four, that is a substantial differential that puts the average American family in a distinctly higher income category than their Canadian analogue. In approximately the same period, cash generated in Canada and invested outside Canada exceeded incoming investments in this country by about \$285 billion. From the onset of COVID in February 2020 until June 2023, the number of private-sector jobs in Canada increased by 3.3 per cent, while public-sector jobs rose 11.8 per cent, and public-sector employees are paid 31 per cent more on average than those in the private sector.

Canada now has 4.1-million public-sector employees, more than 10 per cent of our entire population. If the United States had an equivalent number of government employees, they would total about 33.5-million people. The actual number is around 23 million. Canada's public sector is not markedly more comprehensive or superior to that of the United States in the service it provides to the people it serves. This is a straight case of administrative incompetence. We should have a million fewer jobs on the public payrolls and rebate the money spent on their salaries to the taxpayers.

We are chronically overtaxed: 45 per cent of the average family's income is paid in tax, costing an average of over \$48,000 a year – by far the largest household expense. The tax increases in the latest budget will only aggravate these problems. We are not only overtaxed and underpaid, the principal costs have been grossly mismanaged. Last year, we admitted around 500,000 immigrants, many of which are in a desperate housing scramble. Notwithstanding that the average

American makes more than the average Canadian, the average housing unit in Canada is approximately 40 per cent more expensive than in the United States.

As of 2021, according to Fraser Institute numbers, money invested per employed person in Canada trails the corresponding U.S. figure by 58 per cent, a gap that has been steadily widening over the years. It is not just the United States with whom we are failing to compete. Cramped little countries with almost no natural resources like Belgium, the Netherlands and Ireland have surpassed us in terms of per capita income. If the present trajectory continues, we could soon be passed by South Korea, which was a rubble heap with no industry at the end of the Korean War in 1953, and Israel, which has constantly been at war for its entire history and was a poor and primitive desert at its founding in 1948.

Our uncompetitiveness cuts across almost every field. Health care, once one of the hallmarks of Canada's status as a country distinctive from, and more caring than, the United States, is a shambles. In 30 years, waiting lists have increased from nine weeks to 28 weeks. Of 30 countries with universal health care, Canada's system is the most expensive as a percentage of GDP, has the longest waiting periods, ranks 28th in doctors, 23rd in available beds and 24th and 25th in number of MRIs and CT scanners. It is a disaster that has now stooped to promoting the virtues of suicide through the medical assistance in dying program. It is the purpose of health-care regimes to prolong life, not shorten it.

Throughout its history, it has been the vision and national ambition of Canada to be a superior country: prosperous, just and sensibly self-governing, but not complacent. Many have lamented that we did not receive more attention in the world and didn't cut a more glamorous figure among the nations of the world. But Canadians have always, and rightfully, been proud of being a successful country. We are, for the first time, in danger of losing that status; if the trends of the

last decade continue, this treasure house of a nation – with a skilled, law-abiding and diligent population, with two of the world's most distinguished cultures as its official languages – will indeed be in danger of becoming a failed state.

These material shortcomings are aggravated by deficits in public policy. For more than eight years, we've been thoroughly distracted by a rigid, mindless preoccupation with environmental nostrums, a wildly exaggerated and self-defamatory assault on our history mislabelled as "reconciliation" with Indigenous peoples and an absurd preoccupation with gender issues that has made us a laughing-stock in the world for carrying wokeness to the point of imbecility.

Between 1995 and 2022, fossil fuel use in Canada has increased nearly 59 per cent, and even if we stopped emitting carbon entirely, global emissions would only be reduced by a paltry 1.5 per cent. We have been duped into being ashamed of our resources, making war on our principal industry (oil and gas) and artificially straining the financial condition of a great many of our countrymen needlessly, all in the name of crusading to save the planet. The gender issue is completely bogus: there are two sexes and every adult person has the complete freedom to work out his or her own sexuality, without coercion or invasion of privacy. Agitation for mandatory modification of language according to transitory gender self-identification, like premature sex-change operations, is nonsense.

We have also debilitated ourselves morally, in our own eyes and in the eyes of the world, by promoting the outrageous blood libel that this country ever engaged in any form of genocide or slavery. Slavery was effectively illegal in Canada 40 years before it was abolished in the British Empire. The nadir of this exercise in self-humiliation was the story of murdered Indigenous children in unmarked graves in Kamloops, B.C., for which Canadian flags throughout the world were

lowered for months, and of which no concrete proof of the existence of such graves has been produced.

We appear also to have acquiesced in the practical abolition of the principal language of the country in Quebec, where about 22 per cent of Canadians live. All the federal parties tacitly supported this. We are starting to disintegrate.

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