

Time to start thinking with your bloody heads

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Canada needs to dramatically cut back on its immigration numbers until the housing crisis and the damage it's doing, especially in Vancouver, is resolved. And it's the left that should be taking the lead.

It was an NDP Federal Council meeting in Ottawa many years ago. Jack Layton was showing off his candidates for a forthcoming federal election, one of whom was a well-known Toronto Greenpeace campaigner. This was quite a catch, underscoring the NDP's environmental credentials to the cost of the Green Party and, Layton hoped, helping to reduce the Green Party's splitting the left-wing vote.

The candidate was entertaining questions off to the side after a Council session. I wickedly put a problem to him, to see what he would say. Canada was a northern country with a cold climate, whose homes and buildings had to be heated, I explained. We were already a high per-capita user of energy. Did it make environmental sense to have a high rate of immigration in the circumstances – higher than most countries and with ever-increasing numbers – bringing people to a cold, northern country from places where less energy would be required?

Instead of giving me an answer, he lashed out. "I'm not going to answer that question," he replied. "I know what you're trying to do," or words to that effect. What I remember most vividly weren't the words, but how categorical and belligerent was the tone.

This isn't a good sign, I thought. Sure, it was a mischievous question – and aren't mischievous questions the ones that need to be asked? – but not to field the question at all, or even consider there might be a rationale for reducing immigration to Canada in circumstances, revealed to my mind a troubling blind spot, the kind of dogmatic and closed response that can only diminish a political party....and diminish environmentalism.

Fast forward to the 2017 federal NDP leadership campaign. I dropped by a Vancouver campaign stop by Niki Ashton held in a small shop in the Downtown Eastside, in a riding as left-wing as they come in Canada. The crowd was largely young. Niki, whom I liked, said the usual things about the need to eliminate homelessness and the overbearingly high cost of housing, a serious and pressing problem in the neighbourhood. It was a typical enough statement for an NDPer, but I considered it patent hypocrisy, since it didn't deal with the pressure that large and increasing immigration numbers were putting on housing, housing prices, and land prices in Vancouver.

If you had 35,000 to 40,000 new people arriving in Vancouver each and every year – and there would be far more in the future – the housing pressure was going to be unrelenting, and homelessness, as well as the punishing cost of homes for others who aren't wealthy, would never be solved, for all of the policy ingenuity

(what about Vienna?) one might come up with. It certainly wouldn't be solved in the near or intermediate term.

So I asked a question again. How are you going to reduce the escalating cost of housing in Vancouver without lowering the ever-increasing immigration numbers and their pressure on the market? I made it clear I wasn't referring to the refugee quota, the humanitarian component of immigration. You could double the refugee quota and still substantially reduce the overall immigration rate.

"That's xenophobia!" somebody in the crowd shouted. Rumbles of approval from the rest.

"There's no room for xenophobia here," somebody else volunteered indignantly. More rumbles of approval.

"There are some complexities, which we'll deal with when we come to power," Niki said demurely. At least, unlike the Toronto Greenpeacer, she didn't fly off the handle and did say something.

A couple of months later I was standing in a line outside the York Theatre, a heritage location on lower Commercial Drive, awaiting the opening of the doors for the official Vancouver leadership debate. A couple of NDP veterans, people who had been through the wars, were in front of me. I knew them – I also go back a ways – and we got to chatting. I mentioned how absurd it was not to tackle the pressure that immigration numbers were putting on housing when the immigration category that presumably really mattered for left-wingers, the refugee quota, need not be touched and could even be increased.

You're forgetting something else, one of them said. Many of the immigrants we're getting are privileged, not the downtrodden of the world. Having a good education and being able to speak English or French help get people in, skewing the immigrant demographics upscale. By the same token, we're taking educated and skilled people out of countries that need them more than we do.

I remarked wryly that one didn't talk aloud about that in the NDP. They shrugged, saying without having to say that they weren't going to bother to talk about it out loud themselves, either.

Mind you, many immigrants fall into a low-wage trap – another story.

The B.C. office of the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA), in an analysis of the housing problem, did identify the level of immigration as a significant contributing factor, second only to foreign participation in the housing market – foreigners buying up properties as investments. The CCPA, however, never subsequently tackled the immigration factor, as if it weren't worth following up on even when tax measures were taken by B.C. to cool the other relevant factor, foreign buying. at least by a degree or two. Cutting back immigration even on a temporary basis – give ourselves a breather – until we closed the housing gap and broke the housing bubble, was off the table as well.

Nobody on the left, it seemed, would address the issue, much less address it squarely. Meanwhile, the housing affordability crisis, in Vancouver and Toronto, grew with a vengeance. The addition of yet more and more people, and still more people, at the same time, has become a sort of madness.

Some things are indeed taboo. On the other hand, irrational taboos are meant to be broken.

Buddy, can you spare a shack?

The historical failure of the left to face up to the increasing level of immigration as a factor in making housing unaffordable for many, if not most, in Greater Vancouver has long bothered me.

Over and above a general egalitarian concern with unaffordability, I've had a personal interest, knowing a couple of people on disability allowance whose housing options are highly restricted. The impact of the spiralling cost of housing only hit me in the gut, however, on reading an interview with writer and poet George Bowering in the *Vancouver Sun* protesting that young creative people – writers and artists in particular – could no longer afford to live in the city.

Bowering and I are of the same generation and we've long had our own houses, in my case going back 55-odd years. The current generation of young writers and artists, however – and even in later life most are of low or modest income - are just plumb out of luck.

“These are my people being driven out of the city,” I said to myself. “My people,” I repeated the phrase again, for there I was, too, young, poor, and with playwriting aspirations. This was in the 1960s and 1970s, however, when there was room for me and my crowd in town and no housing crisis. Vancouver in those decades, moreover, was an extraordinarily creative cultural place. No longer.

In 2019, the Eastside Cultural Crawl Society published a report on higher rental costs, “A City Without Art,” on artists being displaced or otherwise giving up on Vancouver. “Pricedemic” is what they call the relentless rise in the cost of space, its declining availability, and artists being evicted.

It's a class thing. Not just wealthy offshore house- and condo-buyers but also hundreds of thousands of others from elsewhere are now being added continuously to Greater Vancouver, quite a few wealthy or high-earning as well, adding pressure in turn to the cost of housing, with writers and artists being squeezed out because the housing interstices and studio space of an open city are no longer there or are increasingly impossible to find.

And what's a city without its writers, artists, and poets?

The figures for buying a house or condo, or renting, give a glimpse of what has happened.

The average price for a condo in Vancouver, based on February-March 2023 sales, is now in the \$892,000 range. For a townhouse it's \$1.4 million. A detached house cost an average \$3.0 million. The median price for a detached house, perhaps a more accurate reflection of the market, is lower, at 2.35 million. For all three categories (houses, townhouses, condos) taken together, the median price is \$1,516,000. For Greater Vancouver, extending eastward to the Fraser Valley and west to Bowen Island, the median price, including tiny condos in the mix, is \$1,185,000. In Shaughnessy – Rosedale would be a Toronto equivalent – the median price for a detached house was \$7.7 million and for all housing taken together was \$5.2 million.

This is consistent with patterns in U.S. cities where higher urban densities are associated with worse housing affordability.

Rental rates follow the same pattern, increasing relentlessly. A particularly large increase was noted last fall. Rent for one-bedroom housing in Vancouver, across all housing types, as of October 2022, was \$2,575, the highest in the country and an increase in a year of 17 per cent. For two-bedrooms it was \$3,521, a year-to-year increase of 16 per cent. The annual increase in average hourly wages of employees in B.C., by comparison, was only 3.4 per cent for the same period.

House rentals of 4-5 bedrooms to accommodate large families are in a much higher range, \$5,000 and up, requiring large household incomes to accommodate. The highest listed 5-bedroom house in Vancouver in late March 2023 was \$17,800 a month.

Okay, we've always had upscale neighbourhoods and less costly "working class" neighbourhoods. In this case, however, those who are doing well but aren't wealthy and so are unable to manage purchasing a place in a neighbourhood which their parents were able to afford, are moving into those less costly neighbourhoods and pushing modest- and low-income people further out, that is, if the upwardly mobile person or couple doesn't decide to move to Calgary instead. I know of a downtown lawyer, for example, no doubt earning considerably more than most people, moving with his growing family into the Main Street area, formerly as working class as it comes, because he could not afford anything on the west side. This isn't untypical, and each such purchase by someone in the upper middle-class cohort helps to price out ordinary wage-earners.

House rentals in the former working-class neighbourhood have followed the same trajectory.

Mind you, we've known for a long time that in Vancouver proper we've slowly been creating a city for the well-heeled, rather than a city with a mixed and diverse population favoured by urban planners. Based on median income and median prices, Vancouver is the third least affordable place in the world, after

Hong Kong and Sydney, according to the latest figures available (for the third quarter of 2022), from Demographia International. Toronto is ninth.

RBC Economics, illustrating the point, reported late last year that, at the end of the third quarter, 2022, a buyer, in order to qualify for a mortgage on the purchase of a typical home in the Vancouver area, needed to earn a minimum of an “astounding” \$268,000. That was at the peak of the cycle, but even a major decline won’t change the dynamics. The annual income requirement the previous year, the end of third quarter 2021, was \$200,000 – a mere \$200,000 – just as depressing and impossible for most.

Notwithstanding that here and there, especially in non-profit projects, some rental housing is provided below market, adjusted to income, along with supported housing and market-rate housing in the mix, the dominant trend, especially for purchase, is towards unaffordability for most, who are then forced to live further and further out with often punishing commuter times. Add to that the environmentally punishing automobile commuting distance, hardly mitigated by the expansion of rapid transit.

Those moving out aren’t even necessarily low income. A University of British Columbia professor, no doubt with an income well above the median, is featured in a newspaper article after buying a house in Maple Ridge at the eastern end of Greater Vancouver while UBC, where he works, is at the western end. That’s a long way to commute, and a lot of gasoline or electricity used up, and a lot of time out of his life. It also violates the ideal of being able to walk to work. No doubt he could have chosen something else, but he wanted a house with a yard for his family and Maple Ridge is what it came down to.

A Metro Vancouver growth plan through to 2050 inadvertently underscores the point. An urban analyst at Simon Fraser University, Alex Boston, has pointed out the plan will be adding the equivalent of a medium-sized municipality in its farthest edges, where people will have to drive the most.

Home ownership, for many people, is slipping out of reach in the suburbs as well, in this way, and to a degree even in the exurbs like the Fraser Valley as far away as Chilliwack, as “people move from Vancouver to Surrey, Surrey to Abbotsford, [and] Abbotsford to Chilliwack,” as one realtor explained it.

The rising prices in the suburbs and exurbs outside Vancouver proper follow a national pattern. A Bank of Canada study covering Canada’s 14 major census metropolitan areas (CMAs) through to the end of 2021 showed prices increasing even more in the suburbs than in downtowns. Covid played a role, as more people began working from home, which isn’t surprising. What is surprising, however, is the extent of the gain, with housing 80 kilometres from city centres only 11 per cent less expensive than in the city centres themselves, as different from a 37 per cent discount in 2016.

Don’t be misled by the rhetoric about “compact housing,” either, if the above phenomenon of suburb and exurb pricing isn’t enough of a caution. It’s not that compact housing isn’t a good idea, it’s that no matter how much compact housing

you might build in these circumstances, the spread will continue. The idea of compact housing, after all, is that you eliminate the spread, stopping and tearing down suburban housing, turning the land back to agriculture, and reducing commutes. (The only place I know where anything like that has happened was in declining neighbourhoods in Detroit following an extraordinary decline in population and the inability of the city to properly support all of its neighbourhoods, leading ultimately to bankruptcy. Urban farming replaced derelict buildings here and there. You can't call that compact housing, however just making the best of abandonment.)

Geographical history, then, has reversed itself. In the olden days, workers lived close to their work – the mine, the sawmill, the paper factory. The owner or the manager lived up the hill at a distance, although not necessarily very far away. Now, in Vancouver and no doubt Toronto as well, that's been turned upside down, with the average worker facing longer and longer commutes.

This is where we've arrived. On the one hand: a city largely for the rich with the convenience of preferred location. On the other hand, others who find that so much of their income is going to their mortgage or their rent that they don't have the discretionary spending for much else, and yet others with longer and longer commutes that eat into their discretionary time, including the time to participate in any democratic exercise. Nor is this to mention a low-wage underclass whose spending options have long been severely limited.

Think of Thomas Piketty's analysis of wealth and class and how the disparity with the majority of people grew so large over time. Now imagine a geographical, urban metaphor for it, with differences in housing and location also growing larger and larger over time, and you have a Vancouver slowly losing its demographic diversity, as I've already noted.

The vector of home owners relative to renters with modest incomes increases the inequality further, with owners' home value appreciating while renters keep paying more and more indefinitely without anything to show for it. A normal pattern would have the renters save for a down-payment on a home, but both lines in the vector militate against it: The ever-increasing cost of buying raises the amount for a required down payment, while the ever-increasing cost of renting reduces the ability to save for the down-payment to begin with.

Well known veteran Vancouver newspaper columnist, Pete McMartin, described it as a "coming class war" – "the huge gulf between owning a home and renting one, a gulf [that] will not only bedevil the next generation, [but] will grow wider in generations to come."

Multiple home ownership, with homes being bought as rental investments, adds another wrinkle to the trend towards inequality. McMartin touches on this, too, pointing out that "multi-property owners held between 29 and 41 per cent of the housing stock in Ontario, B.C., Nova Scotia and New Brunswick circa 2019 and 2020, and the transfer of that kind of wealth will be life-changing for generations."

He noted that his children will eventually inherit from himself and his wife, including the value of their home, but what about the others who aren't so lucky?

McMartin cited Tsur Somerville, director of the UBC Centre for Urban Economics and Real Estate, on the underlying implications.

That's the thing I'm most worried about: the division between the landed owner occupying class and everybody else. And in this economy, the rich are getting richer.

You can't have a democracy where there is a stark, huge difference in the wealth and opportunity for one group where their parents are homeowners and wealthy and between the people who are not. Our society is based on the idea that you have a reasonable opportunity for self-improvement — you know, pulling yourself up by your bootstraps. But you can't pull yourself up by your bootstraps if your boots are nailed to the floor.”

Earnest attempts to offset the trend are no match for the pressure of so many new people. NDP leader Jagmeet Singh, in the last federal election, for example, promised 500,000 “affordable” homes over 10 years, or 50,000 a year on average, and this was considered an extraordinary commitment, even on the part of someone with no chance of actually becoming prime minister. At an average family size of 2.5, this would accommodate 125,000 people annually, a figure which now appears to be almost incidental, given 450,000 to 500,000 additional people annually from immigration alone, not even counting other international arrivals.

This isn't to mention, either the severe backlog that needs to be looked after, especially for those most in need. A disability spokesperson in Vancouver, for example, commenting on the last federal election campaign, complained bitterly about the lack of attention given to badly needed affordable housing for the disabled, and particularly for the indigenous disabled whom he personally represented.

Not a word, though, from Singh or from such community spokespeople about reducing our high immigration levels for a while to reduce the pressure on availability and costs, nor about reducing the number of foreign students and temporary foreign workers which also contribute to that pressure.

Justin Trudeau, almost single-handedly with his inflated immigration numbers, has imposed a virtually intractable housing problem on the Lower Mainland and has done so with smug assurance, ignoring the downstream effects, because nobody politically has taken him on over it.

Culture of cities: Vancouver nears the tipping point

The pressure on housing, stoked by the high immigration levels, also affects the culture of cities. The planning imperative is no longer what kind of city or cities we would like to have, but how to create more housing. Whatever side of the debate about high-density you may be on – are we going to have high rises everywhere in the end or are there other options? – the debate has become largely academic. The pressure for housing, and the high prices now deeply embedded in the cost of land, dictate the answer.

One of the first instances of what this meant for community planning involved the small suburban city of Port Moody, at the eastern end of Burrard Inlet. The plan called for removing up to 65 per cent of the existing tree canopy and putting up mid-rises of nine to 14 storeys where only three to six storeys were allowed. The B.C. minister responsible for housing at the time, David Eby, told the City of Port Moody to get with it, as if blocking the development would be immoral. More housing is crucial, Eby explained. This made sense from where he sat, but what about Port Moody's community plan and sense of itself?

That, now, is routinely dismissed as NIMBYism whether it is or not, as if localism and community, and municipal government which is their political expression, should be disregarded. Some change is good and some bad; some necessary and some not so. The change here, though, is becoming more and more forced and mechanical, with community planning set back on its heels.

Eby moved on from his unhappy message to Port Moody to all the other municipalities in Greater Vancouver, lecturing them for not doing enough to match zoning to population growth and hinting that if they did not shape up, the province might have to intervene, albeit he'd rather not be forced to do so. "Eby wields the hammer," read the newspaper headline reporting on his speech on the subject.

Watch out what you wish for.

The pressure on community planning, if not by a hammer, then by a vise, was building all the while, as plans for more high rises and massive projects touched off controversy and protests. Vancouver, for example, approved the "clearcutting," as urban historian Michael Kluckner put it, of a huge swath of mid-town – 36 streets by 15 streets, or 540 city blocks altogether (the Broadway project). Not everything would go down – the Vancouver General Hospital complex and some major office buildings, for example, are within those boundaries – but quite a lot will. In the same vein, the Squamish First Nation, along with a private developer (and an Ontario pension plan), is erecting 11 highrise towers, some of them 59 storeys high, on a narrow piece of land in Kitsilano, about as plain case of overdevelopment as one could imagine (Señákw). And so on, with more and more to come.

Critics of these developments – and there is a lot to criticize, both conceptually and in detail – were inevitably accused, by proponents, of NIMBYism and, in the case of Señákw, racism.

The first victim of the pressure of immigration on Vancouver, in these developments, is the organic growth of a city and its neighbourhoods, and the quality and diversity of life that goes with it. Bureaucratic decision-making, with the routinized steps of online public consultation (the context and the questions bureaucratically devised) and speaking opportunities at council meetings (whose arguments can be ignored), takes over. In the case of Seákw, lying outside of Vancouver's jurisdiction, the plan surfaced more or less as a *fait accompli*, although up to 10,000 residents are envisaged. The absence in the plan of land for a school or community centre – essential amenities – and building an access road through a valuable public park (non-Squamish land) were apparently considered neither here nor there.

Kluckner has been particularly scornful, comparing mega-projects like the Broadway plan to the ones Vancouver rejected in the 1960s and 1970s, which at that time involved a notorious proposal for a thruway through Strathcona and Chinatown into the heart of downtown, and which was promoted by the master planners and establishment of the day. The rejection, due to fierce protest, and the consequent saving of neighbourhoods, helped make Vancouver a great city, one admired elsewhere in North America.

Move forward, now, to today's mega development projects. Kluckner comments: "With the extreme arrogance of architects and planners, they're saying, 'We can build a city. We can just do it, because we know what we're doing,' as opposed to a city being this thing that evolves slowly....[where] some old things remain and some new things are built, and it evolves in an incremental way."

Former planner Yvonne Harris talks of demolishing trees and sound to create heat islands of concrete, steel and glass, following an "unlivable" strategic regional plan. Luthar Wiwjorra, a retired urban designer and architect, remarks that "Vancouverism," the nickname for Vancouver's brilliant urban model, "is vanishing in the shadow of condo towers, rampant greed and over-densification." He condemns the "anesthetized esthetic" being produced by the "same steel and glass frontages, facing each other up to 50 storeys high along city streets," with the population already living in Vancouver "seen as a disposable mass." "There will never be enough density," he argues, "no city in the world can win that particular race."

As long as the numbers from inflated immigration continue, however, all this discussion, whether on target or not, falls by the wayside. The unaffordability crisis from the population pressure fills the air like a virus and infects everything, smothering intelligent resolution. Patrick Condon is an internationally known professor of sustainable urban design at UBC. In 2021, he came out with a book called *Sick City*, covering mostly developments elsewhere, but the metaphor is apt, now, for Vancouver as well. In such an infected city with the virus all around, dysfunctional aberrations are inevitable. Developers who, in even healthy cities, are often prone to be pushy, realize they can go even further – lobby and finesse extra margins and rezoning even more than usual – and sometimes get away with it, which adds to the incentive.

A developer brings forward a proposal for downtown Vancouver that not only requires rezoning, but also conflicts with city policies and rules, in their case a policy restricting residential development in the central business district. “The proposal significantly contravenes council approved policy and disregards the public trust and policy framework established by council,” the staff report says. No matter. Citing the need for more rental housing, the developer airily dismisses the planning staff as “a bureaucracy just looking at their big policy bible, saying ‘No, no, no, thou shall not pass.’”

Another proposal “significantly deviates” from height limitations set out in the city’s view protection guidelines, casting shadows on an important shopping street in violation of existing rules and interfering with views of the downtown skyline and the North Shore mountains. No matter on that one, too. Why not test the community’s rules in the circumstances?

Or take a Langley case, where a developer of six-storey apartments, in accordance with the official community plan and after the project was sold out, then decided to apply for rezoning an additional piece of the site for a 45-storey tower. You might call it chutzpah, but it’s really a case of taking advantage of the virus in the air.

Or take Seákw. Even a project where the land is under control of a First Nation requires social license. Notwithstanding reconciliation and the social license it provides, can you imagine the developer behind the scheme, Westbank Corp., bringing forward the Seákw overbuild in a healthy Vancouver unaffected by the pressure around it? Or even the Squamish Nation trying it on its own, without regard to the surrounding impact?

Or take a West Vancouver example. A developer is building high rises at a transportation bottleneck – the north end of the Lions Gate Bridge. A density transfer, providing for extra density, has been approved, the project trading on the shouting for affordable housing for people working in the municipality, although most of the housing will likely be affordable only for those with better-than-average incomes, like teachers, firemen, and police officers. After construction has begun, and notwithstanding the extra density, the developer then applies for an additional five storeys each in the two towers (ten storeys overall). Of the 298 homes, only 11, owned by the district itself, will be for supportive housing. The approval goes through, like a mudslide through a fence.

Vancouver proper itself, though, is the saddest case, because of how great a city it has been. The Vancouver of demographic variety, that generates liveliness and a mix of classes, lifestyles, outlooks, and ideas, has now been on the road to destruction for some time. It may just be at the beginning of that road historically speaking, taking the long haul into account, but that’s where the current road leads.

There are other considerations, too, having to do with highrises when lower profile buildings lend themselves more to quality of life, especially for families. Then there’s the high “embodied” carbon emissions of concrete-intensive and glass high rises compared to low-rise building of six stories at most. According

to a Wikipedia entry (List of tallest buildings in Vancouver), Vancouver has more residential highrises per capita than any other city on the continent.

Maybe Vancouver – the Vancouver with its unique ambiance and its demographic mix – is further down the road to destruction than we think.

Waiting for affordability: waiting for Godot

Such projects, for all their size, are not going to resolve the unaffordability crisis, either. To right the balance in the housing mix and defuse the crisis, most of the new housing should be below market. Otherwise, Vancouver even more so than now will be just a playground of the rich. The opposite to righting the balance, however, is built into these developments.

Take, for example, the giant Oakridge Park luxury project – 3,323 “homes” covering more than three million square feet, of which only 13 per cent, however, fall in the “affordable” category, with the rest going to luxury buyers, including offshore buyers, who presumably had bought before the current restrictions.. Similarly, a 39-storey tower going up at Broadway and Granville, with 223 units – in effect, the first part of the Broadway plan – has designated only 20 per cent for “below-market” rents, which would qualify as affordable. (Then, again, the City of Vancouver’s redevelopment policy, itself, requires only 20 per cent affordable.) Ditto for Sínàkw, nicknamed by one wag as the Burrard Beast: Only 20 per cent of their units at most will be “affordable,” (although, even then, not affordable for lower household incomes).

Another developer, seeking City of Vancouver approval for a huge 47-storey tower downtown, grandiosely boasts of its provision for below-market “workforce housing,” affordable for households with earnings between \$39,200 and \$78,500 a year. Based on the median household income in the city of \$82,000, perhaps 40 or 45 per cent of city households would currently fit in the developer’s special category. To reflect this same ratio in new housing, we’d be looking at, let’s say, 40 per cent of units at least in that category in the projected tower. To make up for the shortage of affordable housing relative to more available, but more expensive, housing, the allocation to the special affordable category should be even greater, say 75 per cent, just to pick a figure. Instead, it’s only 21 per cent, and the question arises, too, of how big those units would be relative to the rest of the tower.

An officer of a development company whom I know has argued that developers are under pressure themselves – the cost increases in the industry, on top of other requirements, has made making money, especially in Vancouver, extraordinarily difficult. Whether it’s the developers’ lack of elbow room or their maximizing profit that is at work, however, affordable housing in their projects remains limited and raising building heights remains a regular stratagem.

Vancouver and also Greater Vancouver, of course, have high-rise towers after high-rise towers, and housing prices are still sky-high. Patrick Condon has

pointed out that Vancouver itself has added more housing units per capita than any city in North America over the last 30 years, yet housing prices have increased faster than in any other North American city. Adjoining municipalities like Burnaby, Coquitlam and Surrey also have seemingly endless new high-rise towers – over 45 storeys is a growing fashion – and hence added capacity, while affordability only gets worse...gets worse in the metropolitan area which is already the third least affordable city in the world.

Pushing the rock up the mountain

Meanwhile, David Eby, now premier of B.C., is doubling down on the municipalities to allow for quicker growth of housing, in an all-out effort to fix the housing problem. The irony is that, like Sisyphus, he is not going to be able to push that particular rock up to the top of the mountain, no matter how hard he tries. The pressure on the cost of land of so many new people will keep pushing the rock down.

So will the accelerating effect of just trying to meet the construction requirements, where costs have gone up radically – 45 per cent in the last five years in Greater Vancouver and a whopping 77 per cent in the GTA. Between the two factors – land and construction – the cost of providing housing in Greater Vancouver has probably more than doubled in the last 10 years, increasing at a rate of 15 per cent annually in the last two or three years alone, making both public and private initiatives vastly more costly, and militating against truly affordable new housing.

To make matters worse, the volume of new households generated by the large immigration numbers is outstripping the economy's ability to accommodate them and existing residents at the same time. The Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation, in a report October 2022, concluded that B.C. would have to double the number of attainable housing starts to get the supply to where it needs to be by the end of the decade. Ontario, which is the largest immigration destination in Canada, is even in worse shape, likely to see more new households formed than houses built in that time. The author of the report, a CMHC economist who should have seen things coming, allowed that he was surprised by the severity in the two provinces.

Dan Hiebert, professor emeritus of geography at UBC, recently explained that Canada would have to build 1.36 million more houses and apartments right off the bat, pronto, just to reach the average homes-to-population ratios of the OECD. Extra housing to accommodate the flood of new arrivals would be on top of that.

And if that weren't enough, Justin Trudeau keeps on increasing the number of immigrants, hiking it from 400,000 plus annually to half a million. When Eby began the frantic drumbeating for new housing, the figure for new immigrants arriving in Greater Vancouver was an estimated 30,000 to 40,000. That had already changed by the end of 2021, when the *net* inflow of people to B.C. that year was 100,797. Of that, 33,356 people came from other Canadian provinces and territories. The remaining 67,141 were from abroad, the largest number of whom would have ended up in Greater Vancouver. Not all of them would have

been immigrants; net non-permanent residents like “temporary foreign workers” and net foreign students would be in the total.

In the subsequent year, that is 2022, the inflow into B.C. from international migration increased to 150,783, of whom 98,763 were non-permanent residents. Canada’s population overall increased by 1,050,110 people, almost all – 96 per cent – from international migration.

Eby has mentioned what lay behind what he was facing – the federal immigration policy. No wielding of the hammer on that one, however. The new housing minister, Ravi Kahlon, has belatedly gone as far as arguing with Ottawa that immigration should be tied to housing availability, but without his tackling the underlying premises that are impelling Trudeau and company – without even following through openly on his own argument – he hasn’t, as of this writing, made much headway.

The taboo is great.

Nor is Eby the only one who shies away from speaking directly to the root issue. Almost everyone, with some exceptions, publicly tearing their hair out over housing unaffordability or what the attendant pressure is doing to Vancouver, avoids mentioning the “i” word as something that needs to be tackled first and foremost, in the same way that everyone, except a little boy, wouldn’t say out loud that the emperor had no clothes.

A routinized political left stuck in its incestuous trap

The circumstances are all too obvious. The number of outsiders coming into B.C. and especially Vancouver is making housing for many unaffordable, now reaching a crisis point. The attendant high cost of buying a home, at the same time, is further entrenching inequality. The pressure is also steamrolling community planning and slowly destroying the culture of the city. There’s a parallel impact on health care, as I’ll discuss later. The logical, and necessary, first step is to vastly reduce the numbers coming into the country, while protecting the humanitarian element, namely the refugee quota.

The taboo being what it is, however, no political leader, federally or provincially, has stepped up to the plate, effectively vitiating a proper *political* discussion and challenge.

Why hasn’t the left faced up to this issue and given it political voice – shown leadership on it and debunked extraneous and diversionary arguments? Douglas Todd, a liberal *Vancouver Sun* columnist and feature writer, who came to prominence as a writer on religion as it happens, has taken up the immigration beat as well and, in literate and well-researched items, has questioned our silence on the negative impact of the large and rising immigrant levels, especially when it comes to housing prices.

This, for a humanitarian liberal like Todd, took independence of mind, but he has stayed with it and has continued to unpack the issue.

The left, by contrast, is in its own incestuous trap on the subject, witness the cries of “xenophobia” I ran into when I simply questioned the impact of the level of immigration on the housing crisis.

What’s more telling, though, is the left’s failure to understand what underlies immigration to Canada and the current numbers. It’s not humanitarianism, but economics. That it might be dubious economics doesn’t discourage its promoters. Indeed, immigration to Canada has always largely been economic. The argument is that immigrants boost the Canadian economy and are even needed to keep the Canadian economy going.

Immigration Minister Sean Fraser was quite straightforward about this in a statement to Reuters late in 2021: “Canada needs immigration to create jobs and drive our economic recovery,” he said, point blank, as if simply saying so made it true. And as the Reuters reporters commented, Canada, in following this policy, targets high-skilled immigrants who bring in money as well – and, the reporters also noted, compete for desirable housing in the process.

Fraser has since doubled down on his message box, again without in fact making the case and again without addressing housing affordability and additional pressures on health care.

Nor is Fraser, with his boosterism, alone. NDP leader Jagmeet Singh, in that 2017 Vancouver NDP leadership debate I mentioned, said exactly the same thing, that we’re dependent economically on immigration. Since then, the need for immigrants to keep the economy going has become a mantra, repeated casually at large – an “economic imperative,” a *National Post* columnist called it, for example – to which has recently been added a sub-mantra: the need for immigrants to fill unfilled job positions. It’s economics, and unquestioned economics, again.

Economics, though, has been a leading rationale for immigration to Canada all along, going back to the days when Chinese labourers were brought to Canada to help build the CPR.

When I was a federal NDP candidate in what was then Vancouver-South Burnaby, in 1997, I decided I had better get a handle on immigration, although it wasn’t a primary interest of mine. My riding had a lot of Indo-Canadians and Chinese-Canadians, and I had a couple of Indo-Canadian organizers on my team for whom immigration was on their minds; they were first-generation immigrants themselves.

The only expert I could find who had done serious work on the issue, however, was an economist at SFU. This puzzled me. Wasn’t the supposed humanitarian rationale of immigration important? At least, that’s how we thought of it on the left. Wasn’t the demographic mix of immigrants important? The economist, instead, carefully tracked the overall economic benefit of immigration or the lack

of it. For example, did the taxes paid by immigrants outweigh how much they drew on government spending? (At the time, I recall, they marginally did, although as family reunification proceeded, that began to change.) His justification of immigration levels was based on such considerations.

I gradually came to realize that an economist specializing in immigration wasn't so misplaced an expert after all. Immigration as a function of labour is the norm ("labour" meant here to include highly sought-after professional skills as well as low-wage labour).

It's important to realize that open immigration to serve economics isn't left-wing at all. The free movement of labour is a part of classical right-wing neo-liberal doctrine, complementing free trade. If community is harmed or destabilized by the application of the doctrine, whether by free trade or inflated immigration levels, "So what?" says the market-doctrine right-winger, "it's the market at work. You shouldn't object."

It's not surprising, then, that one of the instrumental influences behind hiking the level of immigration to Canada and hiking it again was the federal Advisory Council on Economic Growth, circa 2017, replete with neo-liberals and nobody as awkward as even a pale socialist or environmentalist to show any dissent. The Council was chaired by Dominic Barton, a former McKinsey and Company management-consultant senior executive. McKinsey also provided the council's research and resources, for free, ensuring the framing of the Council's work was in line.

In a scathing article on both Barton and McKinsey, November 2022, *National Post* columnist Terry Glavin goes into McKinsey's "corporate depravity" and Barton's role as the firm's global managing director from 2009 to 2018. Glavin cites a recent book on McKinsey, *When McKinsey Comes to Town: The Hidden Influence of the World's Most Powerful Consulting Firm*.

The Advisory Council on Economic Growth, under Barton, recommended, among other things, annual immigration to Canada of 450,000. (Glavin, himself, wrote that the 500,000 figure later announced by the federal government came from the Council.)

Another recommendation by the Council was that Canada aim for 100 million people by the end of the century. This was without reference to the environment. The connection between another 60-odd million people in a northern, and also high-consuming, country and its impact on global warming and the environment is not part of the neo-liberal frame. The doctrine on this score – justifying immigration for economic reasons outside of the environmental context – is no different, schematically and ideologically, than justifying increased oil sands production and otherwise boosting the oil patch overall for economic reasons.

The 100-million target now has a custom-made lobby, the Century Initiative, co-founded by Dominic Barton and, as in the case of the Advisory Council, with untrammelled neo-liberal connections, in particular to BlackRock, an American multi-national investment company based in New York City.

There's a further irony underlying these other ironies. The economic rationale for immigration – the majestic declaration that newcomers are the key to the future, the very mantra – is faulty taken by itself.

In previous times, aggressive immigration policy in Canada at least had a larger purpose. I'm thinking of the vigorous immigration policy of Minister of the Interior Clifford Sifton at the turn of the last century, with immigrants from continental Europe to help populate the West. One could even argue that the Chinese labour for the Kamloops-Port Moody (Vancouver) section of the CPR was for a greater purpose – a transcontinental railroad binding the nation together and protecting British Columbia from an American takeover.

What we have today, on the other hand, is just distortion of the B.C. economy (through inflated real-estate and construction industries), distortion of the community (through the severe shortage of affordable housing in Greater Vancouver and, I'm guessing, the GTA as well), and yet-to-be-calculated environmental harm. Metro Vancouver, and with it, British Columbia as a whole, are economically addicted to residential construction.

It's false to claim that increased immigration is essential to the Canadian economy in any ordinary sense; the evidence doesn't sustain that and it doesn't meet the standard of common sense.

Let's take the economic argument for inflated immigration – that it's needed to keep the economy going – piece by piece and deconstruct it.

Theoretically, it's simply nonsense. There is nothing to stop a stable-population economy, or one with a slowly growing population, from functioning well. Indeed, it's arguable that the more stable a population, the more focus can be given to employment engagement, training and education, and downstream allocation of the workforce in order to produce the maximum economic, social and environmental payoff per capita and, at the same time, enhance the quality of life.

It also begs the theoretical question of whether Canada – and every country in the world – needs to keep compounding its population growth forever and ever, until Doomsday, if they wish to prevent their economies from falling apart. The world's population, then, would have to increase to 15 billion people, and then 20 billion, and so on, just to keep economically afloat – a notion that we know is absurd.

In the here and now, the argument for inflated immigration to Canada is also a counterproductive notion, economically speaking, because it measures by mass rather than by per capita economic performance and quality of life. Canada (using the International Monetary Fund measure, including Hong Kong with its own entry) is 24th in the world rankings of GDP per capita, adjusted for purchasing power parity (PPP), as of 2022. Denmark, which has strictly limited immigration, is 10th. Iceland, quite isolated, is 15th, Norway 6th, Switzerland

5th, the U.S. 8th, and so on. All the Scandinavian countries are higher than Canada, but so are Austria and Taiwan. Singapore is second.

In 1986, just prior to immigration to Canada spiking, Canada was 15th; we've lost nine places since. Our GDP per capita in 1986, again adjusted for purchasing power parity, was 89 per cent of the American one; since then it has fallen to 77 per cent.

Perhaps more instructive are the IMF's projections through to 2027, where Canada is projected to fall to 28th place, and will also have lost, once more, a few percentage points to the U.S., which itself is predicted to fall a few places in the IMF rankings next to others. By way of explanation, the OECD has Canada dead last, among the 38 OECD members, in GDP per capita growth 2020-30 (and also dead last for 2030-60).

The above are average per capita figures for each country. They don't take into account inequality. The Scandinavian countries, all of which have higher GDP per capita than Canada as I've mentioned, also have a much more egalitarian distribution of income and wealth, which translates into a relatively much larger, more robust, and healthier middle class.

Don Wright, former deputy minister to B.C. premier John Horgan and a Harvard-trained economist, takes this one step further, in a recent paper for the *Public Policy Forum*. Wright points out that by counting on immigrants and foreign workers for low-wage jobs, average per capita income and what goes with it (from quality of life to per capita tax revenue) are lowered and the professed desire to help the middle class is betrayed. He references stagnant real wages, its direct relationship to housing unaffordability, and the coincidental ascendancy of neo-liberalism. Raising the per capita standard of living should be the goal, he argues.

He goes on to debunk the argument of the open-ended need for more and more labour. "When businesses complain about having difficulty finding enough workers," he writes, "what this really means is that they cannot easily find the workers they want at a wage they want to pay. But, within reasonable limits, this is a good thing. It forces employers to pay higher wages, provide better working conditions and drives the creative destruction that leads to higher productivity, more valuable products and better business models."

A subsequent study, in *Policy Options*, by three labour economists at McGill, University of Waterloo, and Carleton respectively (Fabian Lange, Mikal Skuterud, and Christopher Worswick) elaborated on the argument, focusing in particular on the economic case against low-wage temporary foreign workers.

The city of Vancouver illustrates how increasing the growth of population doesn't mean increasing economic well-being on a per capita basis, which is the measure that counts ("It's GDP per capita, stupid," Wright quips, in his otherwise academic analysis).

In measuring economic well-being, one has to take into account, at the same time, Vancouver's extraordinary cost of housing next to the rest of the country. *Vancouver Sun* columnist Daphne Bramham pointed out last October, 2022, that in Gatineau, Quebec – which, at 38th in median household income, was one notch above the city of Vancouver – homes cost \$332,000 and rent was \$900 a month. In Halifax, 40th in the median-income list just below Vancouver, homes were \$348,000 and rent, in the same census report, was \$1,170. In Vancouver, the median housing purchase price (including condos and townhouses) was \$1.45 million and rent was \$1,570, using the same comparative measures.

The economic well-being of Vancouverites, and especially of renters, continues to decline relative to others, and relative to others abroad, hindered rather than helped by the scale of immigration inflows.

Trudeau talks politically about fighting for the middle class, but his immigration policy effectively works against Canada and especially Greater Vancouver having a large and healthy middle-class base.

The law of unintended consequences, or rather the consequences of naivety, are at work in another way: the Vancouver Board of Trade has pointed out that B.C. businesses are having difficulty attracting talent because of the alarming cost of housing.

The sub-mantra that we need inflated immigration levels to fill unfilled jobs nevertheless keeps resurfacing, cited as a given by both so-called experts and by politicians when desperate to rationalize the consequences like the housing crisis. David Eby himself, just before being sworn in as B.C. premier, mentioned it by way of explaining why he needed to act aggressively on housing, implicitly accepting the federal Liberals' rationale for so many new people.

It overlooked how the necessary adjustment in the labour market would happen, per Don Wright's thesis, as if there were no alternative to the neo-liberal ideological fix behind the excessive immigration level currently. Remember "TINA" – "There Is No Alternative" – the sardonic description of Margaret Thatcher's neo-liberal ideological dogmatism? We're getting a variation of the same neo-liberal TINA mantra now, but on the Canadian immigration question.

Well, here is the alternative, as would happen in a normal economy, spelled out in a few easy steps. Jobs are posted and if they're more important relative to other jobs, the market or public allocation rises until they're filled. (We have a current living example of the phenomenon: the B.C. government dramatically adjusting upwards the compensation of general practitioners, in order to attract more doctors and medical graduates into general practice.) At the same time, other jobs that cannot compete, because they're relatively unimportant or not important at all, so that they don't have sufficient competitive draw on the market or on public revenue, disappear. (We have innumerable living examples of that, too, with the ongoing creation and destruction of private businesses; 57 per cent of new businesses fail within 10 years). Over time, one ends up with a far more productive economy and a far more appropriate economy that dynamically follows market demand and public need.

There is no better time than now to get started on framing public policy accordingly.

How mad mantras work

Mantra, however, overcomes reason. It's not just that Immigration Minister Sean Fraser and the rest of the Liberal cabinet keep repeating the mantra – that inflated immigration is necessary for the economy. It's that, with the NDP incapacitated by its cultural trap, there is no political pushback, so the mantra incrementally entrenches itself.

An opinion piece in the *Vancouver Sun* early in 2022 illustrates how this entrenchment works. It was written by a former newspaper columnist. What caught my attention was the devastating case the writer made about immigration numbers and the housing crisis. Canada's housing gap was "massive," he declared. We're well on our way to creating a permanent class of Canadians who will never be able to own a home of their own on a normal salary. He called the number of people coming to Canada "staggering" for a country of 37 million. He documented the quite dramatic shortfall in building starts. He made it clear that Ottawa's injection of \$14 billion into fast-tracking affordable housing construction wouldn't be enough by itself (and given the cost of building new housing, it would in fact fall far short).

He went even further. He noted Canadians are going into debt as never before to buy a home, further driving up prices and keeping affordable housing out of reach. He then went still further, articulating a "deeper problem," a sort of "national malaise" being generated in future generations by what was happening. He cited a poll showing that 80 per cent of Canadians ages 18-28 worry they can't afford a home in their city, and 50 per cent have given up ever owning a home. He suggested, if we were to avoid not having enough homes for millions of Canadians in the near future, that Canada would have to rely on the "Minister of Everything," cabinet minister Chrystia Freeland, with the housing file, to become a "Super Developer" – akin, presumably, to Superman flying through the sky and laying low the bad guys with kryptonite. The comic-book metaphor unintentionally suggested in turn that the prospect of Freeland and the federal government going "POW!" to the housing crisis was itself comic-book fiction.

It was about as evocative a case as could be made for cutting back on immigration, at least until the country's housing crisis was resolved and we had recovered some semblance of normality. Did he say that, however? Not on your life. That's not how fictitious mantras work. The federal government's policy of stoking economic growth through immigration was "purposeful" and "smart," he said. He had no trouble with the immigration numbers, he said, being an immigrant himself. The Canadian economy is clearly benefitting from our growing population, he said.

Or take Sean Fraser, asked by a reporter about the link between the immigration numbers and the housing crisis. Expanded immigration, Fraser replied, will bring

in workers who will build more housing (and presumably solve the problem), about as smarmy and silly an answer as one could imagine. It of course hasn't worked so far; logistically it's an extraordinary fantasy (the immigration system doesn't work with that kind of laser-like perfection, far from it), and all that aside, new workers and their families themselves require housing and health care, not to mention the needs of all the other immigrants that are part of the aggregate inflow. The problem compounds itself. Nobody, however, called Fraser on it, whereby his simply repeating the mad mantra was enough to make it pass as wisdom.

Nevertheless, the public, in an inchoate way, is connecting the dots. A Leger poll November 2022 found that 75 per cent of Canadians were very or somewhat concerned that boosting immigration to the 500,000 mark would result in excessive demand for housing as well as health care and social services.

A Leger spokesperson suggested the government might need to do a better job explaining the benefits of immigration to average Canadians. It was an unusual remark from a polling firm because effectively it says the government is right and Canadians are irrational, which bias is definitely non-U for a pollster, but another indication of how the mantra works and permeates minds.

It's also off-base in another way: The government has in fact inculcated into Canadians, over and over again, just how great and important boosting the immigrations numbers is and made vocal opposition to the notion difficult. What's surprising, in the circumstances, is that the public seems to have a mind of its own.

Breaking the addiction

Reducing immigration would also involve, as it happens, slowly weaning ourselves in B.C. from what has become, without our paying too much attention to it, an economic overreliance on the real estate and construction industries, one created by the pressure of excessive immigration and other foreign arrivals – the “turbocharging” of population growth and housing demand, as a business economist described it.

The metaphor “addiction” for real estate and residential construction in B.C. is now common parlance among observers of the industry. The B.C. economy has become malformed.

Let's start first with the real-estate industry, both a progenitor and intermediary of housing construction. About 20 per cent of B.C.s GDP is reliant on real estate, almost twice the figure for Alberta, and well over the 13.5 per cent across the country, which itself is a significantly higher percentage than in the U.S. The allocation to residential construction and related costs is on top of that, so that almost a third of B.C.'s GDP is swallowed up by housing.

The knee-jerk reaction of Trudeau and company to unfilled jobs is that we need immigrants to fill them – a faulty logic, as Don Wright has explained. It's also, strategically, exactly backwards. Yet more immigrants means yet more housing required, which means feeding the addiction and eating up still more of the labour force, distorting the B.C. economy further.

Keep in mind, too, that the extra indebtedness resulting from the inflated costs of home acquisition and of rents means a diversion of spending and investment for productive uses. It's already happened, with B.C.'s international exports falling from 34 per cent of GDP in 2000 to 23 per cent currently. An economist at the B.C. Business Council notes that a tremendous amount of B.C. money is going into housing-related consumption, but investment dollars are not flowing strongly enough into such things as new machinery and equipment and intellectual property rights, although those sectors can add much more to the "economy's future productive capacity" and, potentially, to increasing stagnant wages.

Breaking an addiction is never easy, exactly because it is an addiction. Unlike most addictions, however, in this case there is a ready, common-sense instrumentality for doing it: reducing Canadian immigration to a barebones level while maintaining the refugee quota, and incrementally making the same adjustment for foreign students and foreign workers, at least until the housing crisis and the threat to urban planning are resolved.

To summarize: The inflow of immigrants and foreign workers at their current excessive level is not necessary for our economy to prosper. The claim that it's necessary is a neo-liberal legend, bubbling away because nobody has had the wit to challenge Trudeau on it. We can see, however, with a bit of distance, it's just an outlandish idea. Indeed, on a per capita economic basis, and in matching work most productively to market demand and public need, our excessive immigration level has a counterproductive effect.

Health-care crisis and other downstream effects

Once this is understood, and only when it's understood, can we get a proper handle on what a sane immigration policy should look like and what the costs of our current excessive immigration level truly are.

I've mentioned some of those costs already: the disastrous spiking, in the B.C. Lower Mainland and other centres in B.C., of housing prices and rents; the deepening of inequality to which this lends itself; the invidious attack on the quality of life in the future by the bullying of community planning; the progressive loss of demographic variety in Vancouver proper and spreading into neighbouring municipalities; the corresponding damage to the urban ecosphere in which writers and artists can flourish; the burden on all of us, in higher taxes or lost services, for the ramped-up cost of land and buildings for public housing; the environmental folly of bulking up population in a northern country.

We're also, with our minds now open, able to look at other connected crises fully in the face. Take, for example, the crisis in medical care. Roughly six million Canadians don't have access to a family doctor, up from 4.6 million just a few years ago in 2019. In B.C. taken by itself, an estimated 700,000 to 850,000 people, or 14 to 17 per cent of the population, don't have a general practitioner. Another comparison: OECD data shows the number of doctors per capita in Canada is well behind that of peer countries like France and Germany.

Proof Point, an RBC online public-policy bulletin, estimates that we'll be short 43,900 doctors by 2028, and another 29,351 doctors short to reach the OECD average.

We don't need statistics, however, to inform us we're in difficulty. The reality is omnipresent.

To aggravate the situation, recruiting and retaining health-care staff, for Greater Vancouver in particular, has become more difficult because of the shortage of affordable housing.

Is there a connection to 300,000 immigrants per year coming to Canada annually, and then 400,000 a year, and soon to be 500,000 a year, plus 808,000 foreign students ("study permit holders"), plus 777,000 temporary foreign workers (as of the end of 2021, with more now), on the one hand, and people without a doctor, on the other? Immigrants and foreign workers and students aren't medically invisible; they use medical and elder-care services, too, and so they should. Their policy-generated excessive numbers, however, can't have helped but contribute to the crisis, yet no prominent politician that I know of has even asked the question of whether there's a connection, much less if an adjustment to the immigration numbers should be made accordingly.

Facilitating the qualification and entry into practice of foreign-trained doctors, which is now being stepped up, will only fractionally remedy the shortage (foreign-trained doctors already represent 30 per cent of practitioners in Canada). Moreover, unless such doctors entering the country, and nurses as well, are genuine political refugees, we're taking them from other countries that have trained them and need them even more than we do, not exactly a defensible policy – the last thing to which humanitarian left-wingers should be a party. It constitutes an aid program from needy countries to rich ones, as has often been pointed out.

Ditto for nurses. B.C., a single province and only the third largest by population, had 5,200 nursing vacancies last spring and estimates it will need 26,000 new nurses by 2032. Among other initiatives, attracting foreign nurses has become a major focus – wrong-way foreign aid again.

Training more doctors and nurses ourselves, in the meantime, takes time, for which at least a breathing space with lesser immigration numbers just makes common sense.

Or take the current brouhaha about the rising cost of living. Inflation proper has suddenly become a big issue, with endless discussion about rising grocery and gasoline prices, oligopoly in those two sectors, the impact of the war in Ukraine, price gouging and greedy profiteering, the breakdown in the supply chain triggered by Covid, slow-downs and financial adjustments in China – you name it – but they pale in comparison to the burden placed on working families and the marginalized by compounding house prices and rents. This takes us back to our inflated levels of immigration in turn.

None of this can be properly discussed, or discussed at all, until we bury for good the neo-liberal legend that we need immigration to keep our economy going.

Trade in foreign students

The trade in foreign-students, with its rising numbers, has contributed to the spiralling cost of housing in the same way as the high general immigration level, and has been rationalized ideologically in the same way.

Canada, at its pre-Covid peak in 2019, had 642,000 foreign students. British Columbia alone had 145,000, most of them in the Vancouver area. Ontario had 307,000. The two provinces' part of the total for the country, moreover, was far above the ratio for their part of the Canadian population as a whole. They were also the regions suffering from crises of affordability in their housing sectors. The trajectory of the foreign-student numbers also followed in time the trajectory of the affordability problem, tripling in the decade to 2019. Is there a correlation? You would have to be an exceptional contortionist to argue there wasn't any.

We're now not just back to the previous record level, but have now far surpassed it, with 808,000 foreign students (study permit holders) in the country.

Cutting back the number of foreign students to what it was before the spiral began, and freeing the housing accommodation they have taken up, would meet an appreciable part of the federal NDP's target of 500,000 in 10 years all by itself. Of course, no such change is going to occur, for crudely economic reasons having nothing to do with humanitarianism or international fellowship.

When I was a university student, at Queen's University, albeit in another era, foreign students were few, but really meant something culturally. I myself remember just three, in the Faculty of Arts: from Britain, the Netherlands, and India respectively, the latter student becoming a close friend. I can picture the faces and vividly remember the personalities of all three, more than sixty years later. The Britisher was an exchange student, and that, too, had a deeper meaning – of reciprocity and cross-cultural sharing. Indeed, when one learned of a foreign student in those days one first thought of an exchange student; that was how the interaction and sharing often occurred.

There was also, going back in time, the classic cases of foreigners from third-world countries coming to study in the West in order to take their newly acquired training back home with them. Perhaps most important of all were those studying

administration and law, picking up, at the same time, an understanding of citizenship and “human regard” that underlay constitutions, the rule of law, and commerce in a modern country.

Foreign students now, on the other hand, are just another industry, like construction or pulp and paper, and the commercial rationale for it is quite explicit and well understood – to enable high schools, colleges and universities to “sustain themselves financially...[to generate] revenues to fund their operating expenses,” as one website dedicated to immigration has put it. The description, mind you, is missing a few key qualifying phrases on the industry’s rationale, for example (1) funding university operations “in the style and with the executive compensation to which their administrators would like to be accustomed”; (2) “without having to compete for public funds along with others”; and (3) “without adjusting by restraining spending in line with domestic student numbers.” Not mentioned, either, are the foreign students who are simply contributing to private operations and not in any way helping the revenue flow of public education.

There’s a starkly mercenary underside to the foreign-student industry, too: the recruiting agencies who, like immigration consultants, feed in the trough the Canadian government has provided for them. The large number of foreign students in Canada isn’t something that has happened spontaneously, but is the result of aggressive and organized recruiting by thousands of agents in what has been described, variously as a “dirty business” and “trafficking in students.” The trafficking, predictably, has become progressively more sophisticated, rationalized, and capitalized as its money-making prospects were seized upon. It now involves “aggregate recruiters” – “venture capital-backed companies [that] work on a simple, disruptive model: sign up thousands of agents and hundreds of colleges and universities, then act as the go-between, making it easier and cheaper than ever for institutions to sign up students at scale.”

The above citation comes from an eye-opening article in the September/October 2021 issue of *The Walrus* magazine, “The Shadowy Business of International Education,” by Nicholas Hune-Brown.

Later, in October 2022, the CBC’s *the fifth estate* ran an item on just how sordid the trade in foreign students can be and the phenomenon of public colleges, particularly in smaller or northern communities in Ontario, partnering with private colleges for foreign students in Toronto, and splitting the take in fees. One such private college in Toronto had an enrolment of 4,900 students whereas its two-storey building had a capacity of just 420. The public college, remote from Toronto, benefits by the windfall revenue while Toronto ends up with still more foreign arrivals and the pressure they add to Toronto’s cost of housing.

When the largest part of the foreign-student trade was with Chinese students, the families they came from were mostly well-heeled and where, among other things, in Vancouver, expensive houses were sometimes bought in students’ names or the names of their mothers who accompanied them. With the best part of the trade having shifted to India, more and more cases are cropping up of less-endowed families, including those in rural areas, falling to the unscrupulous salesmanship of recruiters and sometimes literally mortgaging the farm to send a child here.

The foreign-student industry is not, in fact, needed in Canada. It's just a convenient evasion of responsibility that leaves governments, their tax regimes, school administrators, universities, and university personnel off the hook. It's a choice we're making. On the one side, well-heeled university and college administrators; profit-driven and sometimes profit-obsessed owners and managers of the private colleges in the trade; well-heeled and undertaxed wealthy Canadians, often using tax-avoidance measures at the cost of the public purse and of greater funding for public universities and colleges; often well-heeled foreign families back home who can easily afford to pay the shot for their offspring studying in Canada; aggressive agents and recruiting companies, and some well-heeled venture-capital investors also extracting money from the pot.

On the other side, well downstream, are working Canadians, especially in Vancouver and Toronto, faced with oppressive increases in housing costs to which the high number of foreign students contribute. Keep in mind, also, that when demand outstrips supply, even a small fraction in extra demand can play a large role in boosting prices.

The left, in making the choice in favour of the former rather than the latter – for that, indeed, is what they have done, by their silence – betrays its own values.

You'll notice I haven't yet mentioned the alleged net benefit to Canadian students, in the way of lower tuition fees because of the higher tuition revenue from foreign students. It depends on how any net benefit is calculated. First, foreign students in unaffiliated private colleges don't benefit Canadian students at all. Second, one needs to subtract from the gross profit in the trade the outlay in recruiting commissions, relatively minor in percentage terms but still significant (according to the Ontario auditor general, Ontario's public colleges paid more than \$114 million in commissions to recruiters in 2020-21). Third, the increase in foreign students incrementally requires an increase in physical plant and those costs. Fourth are the additional administrative costs; the inflow needs to be managed. Fifth, the larger size of Canadian schools can't help but generate, over time, larger compensation to executives, from presidents down. Sixth is the loss of economy measures that may have been taken were there not such additional gross revenue.

Whatever the final net revenue is, however, it would pale next to the externalities: the trade's contribution to the spiralling cost of housing in Vancouver and Toronto; the parallel additional cost attached to public-housing initiatives, and the cost of any physical expansion of university and college campuses, plus the added tributary costs of the housing squeeze like intractable homelessness and, with many of the homeless, the justice-system and health-system costs that go with it.

And the final irony: The excessively high cost of housing, to which the trade in foreign students has contributed, is now boomeranging on the foreign students themselves. The *Vancouver Sun* ran an item last fall on a foreign student finding it impossible to find housing at a rent she could afford. This also affects out-of-town Canadian students: While they might gain in a lower tuition, they will lose in the higher cost of housing. For example, and I admit that it's just anecdotal, I

know of a disabled University of Victoria student from the semi-rural Sechelt peninsula who has not gone back to school this last fall. The difficulty of finding suitable housing at a manageable price, on top of the disability which she also has to manage, was just too much for her.

This isn't to mention just how mercenary and sordid much of the foreign-student trade is.

There have always been foreign university students in Canada and Canadian students abroad, especially at the post-graduate level, as part of the academic mix. The foreign-student industry, however, is a different, and crassly neo-liberal, animal.

Using the year 2000 as a benchmark, based on study-permit holders, the number of foreign students in Canada should be cut back 85 per cent. That would still give us 123,000 visiting foreign students, quite a large number in itself. Using an earlier, more natural academic mix as a benchmark, the reduction called for would be even greater.

The CCPA, for its part, isn't connecting the dots. The CCPA's *Monitor* magazine special issue on inflation (September-October 2022) notes that "students are finding it increasingly difficult to find affordable housing while also dealing with the rising cost of living." The rising cost of housing, though, is in itself, by far, the most important element of the rising cost of living, and not just for students. *The Monitor* doesn't, however, explore the role that the large and ever-increasing number of foreign students plays in contributing to the unaffordability of housing for low-income students.

The same issue reported that in B.C., low-income households spend 80 per cent of their income on rent. There wasn't even the shadow of a hint, however, that lowering the excessive level of immigration, at least temporarily, might be advisable in the circumstances – might at the very least be considered.

The taboo rules.

A coda on foreign students: Some of them, because of the rising cost of housing to which their numbers have contributed, are now showing up in food banks in Greater Vancouver, at the same time the foodbanks, for the very same causative reason, are being overburdened, with record client volume including, for the first time, significant increases in users who are employed. The mechanical neo-liberal government response has been to lift the limit, for foreign students, of 20 hours per week of paid work, effectively making them part of the temporary foreign workers program, with its negative impact, in turn, on wage levels in the low-wage stream.

At the same time, restrictions on temporary foreign workers proper (TFWs) have been loosened and that, together with the greater use of the International Mobility Program (IMP), where no labour-market impact assessment is required, has meant their numbers have skyrocketed. From 2000 to the end of 2021, TFWs (including IMPs) increased seven-fold, from 111,000 to 777,000, and unlike the olden days,

they're not all agricultural workers in rural areas; most in fact wouldn't be. A TFW working in Vancouver or Toronto needs to live somewhere, adding to the pressure of housing just like anyone else.

The federal government has now decided to allow TFW spouses and working-age children to work here, boosting the numbers further without any balancing measure. More telling, the government has ended the moratorium on the hiring of temporary foreign workers in regions where the unemployment rate exceeds six per cent, amounting to a confession that the main purpose of the program isn't to fill labour gaps but to keep wages down.

These developments, including the provision for longer stays, give the lie to the "temporary" in "temporary foreign workers." As more and more people have realized, from economists to those trying to protect TFWs from abuse, the use of TFWs is now a permanent business strategy to minimize labour costs rather than a temporary measure to address a temporary shortage. The United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Oman, and Qatar, please welcome Canada to your ranks.

Now you see community, now you don't

Why is Justin Trudeau so fixated on increasing immigration exponentially when doing the opposite, in the circumstances makes such ordinary, practical sense? How can he so blithely crank up housing unaffordability in Vancouver and Toronto and its negative social consequences, levered by the ascending immigration inflows?

It's not because of humanitarianism. Refugees make up only about 15 per cent of immigration totals, based on the years 2017-2021, although, presumably, the recent influx of Ukrainian refugees will temporarily raise that percentage. The largest immigration category by far is "Economic," the actual formal name of the category. Economics, further, is always cited by the government as the rationale for the high immigration targets.

Newspaper columnist Terry Glavin attributes Trudeau's fixation to his being enamoured of the "next big idea"- the projection of 100 million Canadians put forward by ex-McKinsey operative Dominic Barton and the neo-liberal advisory council on economic growth that Trudeau appointed.

It helps that the political left, which should be taking him on, is silent on the issue, so that Trudeau's naivety and pretensions are protected.

None of that adequately explains, however, Trudeau's indifference to the consequences. It's as if he were missing a social gene.

Trudeau was once cited by a *New York Times* reporter as saying, "There is no core identity, no mainstream in Canada. There are shared values — openness, respect, compassion, willingness to work hard, to be there for each other, to search for equality and justice." Canada, Trudeau said, "could be the first post-national state."

This goes back to his father's antipathy to Quebec nationalism, but takes it to a neo-liberal extreme where open borders for money, goods and services, and labour are the rule, which is what a post-national order means. It's akin to Margaret Thatcher's declaration, reflecting her neo-liberal convictions, that "there's no such thing as society."

Therein lies the missing clue.

The upshot in this case is that adequately meeting the need of Canadian citizens for affordable housing, an expression of a cohesive community, is overridden by the pressure of outsider numbers caused by Trudeau's unremitting fixation on boosting immigration.

Nor is a post-national state going to bring us equality and justice, for all of the prime minister's words. The gap in the affordability of housing, and perhaps most of all in the ability to buy a house, only accentuates inequality.

Nor is that the only dimension of inequality and the causes underlying it. True equality and justice, for example implementing a thoroughgoing wealth tax Thomas-Piketty style, requires a cohesion in society that can only come from deep feelings of community, in turn only possible at a country-wide level in the social solidarity of a nation state. The same goes for the cohesion that's going to be required to make the collective sacrifices coming down the pike if we're to save the planet environmentally.

This is all the more the case with the ethnic mix we have in Canada. Our sense of belonging to a particular nation together needs to be reinforced rather than downplayed and dismissed.

Left-wingers know this. Unlike Margaret Thatcher, they see community rather than unrestrained markets as the leading instrumentality of people living together – or, as Karl Polanyi might have put it, we're primarily social animals, not economic ones. By the same token, left-wingers also look to the nation state as a defence against detached and impersonal globalization holding sway.

Let's not forget the bitter lesson that Polanyi articulated for us in *The Great Transformation* – that allowing adherence to market dogma to take precedence over people's sense of community and its obligations, and generating social dislocation in the process, leads to fascism. It was to explain this rise of fascism that Polanyi wrote the book in the first place, going back to before the Industrial Revolution.

In Polanyi's historical narrative, which ended in the interwar period, the operative factor, dictated by market ideology – in that interwar period leading to fascism – was adherence to the gold standard, which forced the economies of several countries to the wall. The crisis in housing affordability in Canada has the same feel to it. The market dogma at play in this case is the free movement of labour underlying immigration's economic category. The early signs: an edginess and disaffection in many low-income young people – a cohort that in B.C. would

normally vote NDP federally or perhaps Liberal, but many of whom now, astonishingly if you didn't realize what was happening, are talking Conservative and Poilievre. It's hard to imagine fascism coming to Canada, but would we really be all that surprised if Poilievre pulled a Trump, as he effectively did with his support of the so-called, misnamed "truckers' protest" in Ottawa?

There's yet another dimension to Trudeau's perspective on the immigration question to keep in mind. Complementary to his neo-liberal downgrading of the nation state is a downgrading of the integrity of citizenship. The mentality, and the ideology behind the mentality, are the same in both cases.

On that one, unfortunately – the integrity of citizenship – left-wingers in Canada have been missing in action, and for the same reason that they have been silent about the inflated immigration numbers: taboo and sloppy, self-indulgent thinking. One is reminded of Tommy Douglas's maxim: "The trouble with socialists is that they let their bleeding hearts go to their bloody heads."

Take the late (except in Quebec), but not lamented, Immigrant Investor Program, where an applicant with a certain wealth and willing, also, to lend the federal government a certain amount of money interest-free for five years, was granted, with their family, immediate and unconditional permanent resident visas and eventually became eligible for citizenship. The interest earned on the loan was then to be redistributed among the provinces, by the federal government, to fund economic growth, giving the program a certain economic gloss.

The Harper Conservative government belatedly canned the program two-and-a-half decades after it was established. A related "entrepreneur" program, open to scam from the beginning, was eliminated at the same time. The government's explanation: the investor "immigrants" were not maintaining sufficient ties to Canada and ended up paying significantly less taxes than other economic immigrants in the long term; the program also produced limited economic benefit for Canada.

None of this was a surprise for anyone who understood human nature.

The fundamental problem of the program, though, was quite different. It allowed people to buy citizenship – a mercenary commercialization of the underpinning of a community. The program was treated by applicants that way, too. "A breezy path" to citizenship, an immigration consultant shop described the scheme. Nor was this breezy path marginal. When the program was wound up, 65,000 applications were left in the queue.

The NDP, through all those years, barely uttered a murmur about the program.

The dealing in foreign students as a way of selling citizenship is a little less direct, but essentially no different. Wealthy, and sometimes not so wealthy, families send children to Canada ostensibly for education but often, primarily, to establish a beachhead for their own citizenship and the later citizenship of family members.

Nobody who knows the scene has any illusions about this. “The entire system...is built around the false premise that education...is the primary aim for most students,” *The Walrus* article explains. “Everybody knows it’s just a pathway to PR [permanent residency],” a student from India comments. “That’s what the government is encouraging. That’s what the agents are selling. Any way you slice it, everybody is in on this.”

The trafficking, then, is not just in foreign students but also in passports.

Maybe the most egregious example of undermining the integrity of Canadian citizenship is “birth tourism,” where pregnant Chinese women come to Canada, most prominently to Richmond BC, to deliver their baby, automatically making the baby a Canadian citizen. “And it’s 100% legal,” trumpeted a Hong Kong news outlet.

As one might predict, this one, just like the foreign-student industry, has generated a growing marketing and brokerage business promoting the scheme and indulging customers with all-in services, including “birth houses” (26 of them at one count), plus boasting of the downstream financial and citizenship benefits of having a “Canadian” child. The only task required of the pregnant woman: producing the money.

This isn’t to mention the problems of unpaid bills (and other public costs) and the pressure on hospital capacity for local residents. At one point, a quarter of all deliveries at Richmond General were birth tourism. “That’s not a hospital anymore,” commented a well-known local personality, radio talk-show host, and an immigrant himself, Jas Johal. “It’s a passport mill. ... It’s open season. ... It fundamentally mocks our system.”

It’s a dubious business, in short, and doesn’t lack for critics, but don’t expect to find the federal NDP among them. On the contrary, Jagmeet Singh accused those who raised the issue of being guilty of “division and hate.”

Such accusations are a familiar Singh, and Canadian left-wing, reflex deriving from their more general mindset about immigration.

Ditto for the mindset behind Singh’s declaration that Canada needs immigrants to keep the economy running. At root, this is not just a statement about economics. Implicit in the declaration is that Canadians by themselves, including all our immigrants to date and children of immigrants, are incapable of effectively keeping an economy going on our own. We don’t have what it takes, it seems; we need others. Call it a case of reverse xenophobia: putting down Canadians. Mind you, the neo-liberal legend about economic necessity, advanced by Sean Fraser speaking for Justin Trudeau *et al.*, says the same thing in spades.

If Singh had said we had a humanitarian obligation to accept refugees from around the world, it would have been a different matter.

The left in Canada should be taking the lead in debunking the phoney legend that immigration is economically necessary for the country, but unfortunately Singh

and his caucus are so buried in their lazy orthodoxy on the subject, such an idea, it appears, would never occur to them, much less go as far as being discussed.

Just too many people

As I've argued, Canada should severely cut back on its immigration numbers and similarly on the numbers of foreign students and so-called temporary foreign workers, and I'm loath to risk distracting attention from that focus.

Still, my original question, the one having to do with global warming, needs at least to be touched on: Why are we bringing more and more people into a northern country with such a high per-capita use of energy, not to mention of the earth's other resources as well?

A Port Moody letter writer in the *Vancouver Sun*, Derek Wilson, with a longtime interest in sustainability, put the question in plain terms. The net inflow into B.C. in 2021 of 100,000 people, forming about 40,000 households, may emit upwards of 720,000 tonnes of new greenhouse gas emissions annually. The province at the same time, however, is committed to reducing GHG emissions by 40 per cent by 2030. "If provincial population growth and achievement of climate targets are incompatible," Wilson asks, "then how does the provincial government propose to resolve this dilemma?"

The 720,000 extra tonnes of GHG emissions are, of course, only for the increase in population in the one year, 2021. At the same rate of population increase, with the overall Canadian immigration target being jacked up even higher, the extra GHG emissions from population increase in B.C. will hit 7,200,000 tonnes *annually* by 2030, just from the population increase in a decade.

Add to that the extra "embodied" GHG emissions, over the lifetime of buildings, from the construction of concrete and glass high rises, which Vancouver and neighbouring municipalities have turned to in order to increase housing.

Those particular B.C. questions, however, aren't the most important global-warming questions stemming from population increase. The predominant climate question is "What are we going to do with the world just having too many people (of which the pressure of emigration is a by-product) and why are we avoiding the subject?"

This avoidance defies elementary reason.

William Rees, a professor emeritus at UBC, is the ecological economist who, together with one of his PhD students, developed the concept of "ecological footprint" analysis by which to estimate what populations the ecosphere can sustain while respecting the environment and the need for "ecological security." Rees, together with an American system analyst Megan K. Seibert, calls for a "radical societal contraction and transformation," including a global one-child strategy, "to reduce the global population to the *one billion or so people* [my italics] that can thrive sustainably in reasonable material comfort within the

constraints of a non-fossil energy future and already much damaged Earth.” (See “Through the Eye of a Needle: An Eco-Heterodox Perspective on the Renewable Energy Transition” published in the journal *Energies*, July 2021.)

For context: The world’s population has just passed the 8 billion mark and isn’t expected to peak until it hits close to 10 billion – the lowest estimate I’ve seen is 9.73 billion – before it begins to decline. (China’s population has already begun to decline, but then China, in the last 40-year period alone, added a net 400 million people, more than the entire population of the U.S.).

Rees allows that two billion, rather than one billion, might be an acceptable target in the circumstances, and he has cited “one to two billion” in the past, but the longer the current burden is placed on the ecosystem of the planet, the less capacity it will have in the future, and time is running out.

Stephen Emmott, a renowned U.K. computational scientist, arrived independently at the same general conclusion. Emmott, in 2013, came out with a book, *Ten Billion*, analyzing the impact of this population growth. He concluded that we have already gone past the point of the earth’s carrying capacity. The degradation of the earth’s ecosystem is such that we have entered into a vicious cycle, with the threat of mass extinction. When Emmott’s book was written, we were only at 7 billion.

We can’t expect, either, that technological change is going to save the planet. There is a growing literature that alternative energy paths for the future and other stratagems are themselves unsustainable, inadequate to the task, or just plain wishful thinking, including much ballyhooed hydrogen and dematerialization, and the prospects for nuclear fusion.

There’s another problem for the “what-me-worry-about-population?” school. A decline in birth rates, in their argument, will come about through rising standards of living and modernization – the “economic-development and poverty-eradication” track. That in turn, however, means an ever-increasing use of resources, including energy, and the additional emission of greenhouse gases.

Once you take the step of facing the need to control global population your perspective changes on virtually everything else. Talk about reducing emissions, useful and necessary as such a reduction might be, without however talking about reducing the world’s population, is seen, now, as extraordinarily naïve. Stopping the resurgence of coal, a key focus at Glasgow (COP26), without facing the need to reduce the world’s population, is so much blah, blah, blah, setting aside that Glasgow didn’t even get agreement on phasing out coal. And so on.

The perspective also frames many international events differently – events like civil strife, ethnic discord unto genocide, and population movements, including the flow of migrants to borders where they are met, effectively, with guns, whether held by Hungarian soldiers or U.S. border guards. Such events beg the question of what role overpopulation plays in what, on the surface, seems to be caused by something else.

There's a need here for a whole new journalistic and academic discipline: tracing strife, tension, barbarity, and population movements to overpopulation.

Crowds of migrants, often with children, far from home, with scarce resources, at unfriendly borders or in small boats crossing the Mediterranean or the English Channel, or wading across the Rio Grande River, is dystopian by its nature, but also foreshadows much more profound dystopia to come. Stephen Emmott once mentioned asking a highly intelligent young scientific colleague of his what the colleague might do about the ecological disaster we're facing. "Teach my son how to use a gun," the young man replied.

This brings me back, again, to Canada, a country supposedly committed to global survival. Externally, Canada should be focusing first of all on reducing the world's population, through instrumentalities like aiding women's liberation and birth control. The U.N.'s sustainable development goals (SDG) have just such objectives: universal quality primary and secondary education, including the elimination of gender disparities, by 2030, and corresponding universal access to "sexual and reproductive health-care services" [read "meeting the need for contraceptives"], including family planning.

A 2020 article in *Lancet*, the British medical journal, projects that if those objectives were met, the world's population would decline to 6.29 billion by 2100, seemingly dramatic, but just roughly where it was only 20 years ago.

The chances of those instrumental objectives being reached by 2030, and of achieving the 2100 demographic result, are miniscule to nil as things stand. Canada, for its part, has hogtied itself on the issue. You can't very well preach such doctrine to other countries and expect to be listened to when you yourself are bulking up your population – indeed, aiming to more than double it to 100 million – and doing so for putatively quite selfish economic reasons, as our politicians never seem to tire telling us, mistaken as their economic calculation might be.

The root ecological problem for Canada is even more basic, however: the high energy and other resource use that any increase in Canada's population represents. The measure for the burden we place on the planet, or "ecological footprint" (EF), is average productive hectares (gha) – the annual amount of biological production for human use and human waste assimilation, per hectare of biologically productive land and fisheries. The per capita EF in wealthy countries is approximately 6.0 gha, in Canada's case, amplified by our climate. Our proportional share, globally, would be 1.6 gha per capita. Low-income countries average 1.0 gha per capita. From both a global and domestic point of view, the logical immigration policy for Canada, ecologically speaking and everything else being equal, would be for Canadians to emigrate to low-income countries.

This isn't, of course, going to happen. At the very least, though, we should stabilize our population, and that means cutting back immigration dramatically.

The profound irony is that Canada should be doing that anyway, for its own social and economic reasons.