THIRTY-FIVE YEARS OF CANADIAN MULTICULTURALISM 1971-2006 :

Issues, Ideas and Insights : Introduction

Jack Jedwab

Jack Jedwab is Executive Director of the Association for Canadian Studies.

Multiculturalism and Canadian Diversity, 1971-2006

I now turn to this edition of *Canadian Diversity*. Like many other government policies, there is a need to regularly assess their impact and determine what adjustments need to be made to make them more effective in meeting their objectives. Doing this however requires that we properly understand the goals of the policy. It is often necessary to exercise caution when rendering judgments about policies on the basis of a diverse set of expectations and/or varying interpretations about what a policy sets out to achieve. Indeed, it is diverging expectations that are very often at the root of debates over the effectiveness of multicultural policy, which in turn depends on the barometer or criteria against which it is measured. Hence in an era where evidence-based evaluation of policy performance is deemed increasingly critical, it is important to identify those areas where research can help us offer insights in this regard. In her text on avenues for applied policy research (in this edition), Usha George observes that: "As with any policy or program, the outcomes and impacts of the multiculturalism policy have to be assessed through impact assessment and program evaluation. With well defined goals, frameworks and indictors, assessing the success of the multiculturalism policy will be an exciting inquiry of great relevance to Canadian society and polity."

George lays out what might be regarded as a daunting challenge. This edition of *Canadian Diversity* is modestly devoted to taking up the issue by identifying some of the principal themes and questions that are of ongoing concern to the policy and program of multiculturalism in Canada. A number of Canada's leading thinkers on issues pertaining to the agenda of multiculturalism have been invited to respond to various questions that currently dominate debate over multiculturalism. Some contributors have chosen to respond directly to the questions, others to write an essay that reflects collectively on the questions and some have chosen to offer more of a commentary on the themes listed below. The net result of the more than 25 contributions to this edition represents one of the most elaborate assessments of Canadian multiculturalism existing to-date. It is hoped that this collection of responses and commentary will stimulate the ongoing debates around multiculturalism. In this regard, we welcome further commentary around the issues raised here and in forthcoming editions of *Canadian Diversity,* we will put several pages aside for purposes of further discussion around the matters raised here.

Social Inclusion/Exclusion: Racism and Racial Discrimination

Research on social inclusion / exclusion has considerable relevance and is central to the Multiculturalism Program at Canadian Heritage. The issues of hate, racism and discriminatory practices in access to public services, employment and civic participation are a priority. The Ethnic Diversity Survey conducted in partnership with Statistics Canada indicates that 35% of visible minority respondents have at some point experienced discrimination or unfair treatment and an important share believe that racism is an ongoing problem in the workplace.

2017 Projections Data

The demographic projections of the visible minority population in Canada in 2017 have been identified as a key research area. The multicultural character of Canada has evolved between 1967 and 2007 (in qualitative and quantitative terms) and the outlook is for yet further change by 2017 (the 150th anniversary of the confederation). Canada needs to think about how to adjust social and economic programs and policies to meet the changing needs of an increasingly diverse population in light of the 2017 projections. This will require that Canadian cities are well equipped to accom-

modate the rising share of visible minorities Canadians. How will the results in this regard be assessed? What policies and programs are best suited to prevent potential marginalization of visible minorities in major urban centres by 2017?

Applied Policy Research

A central question is how to effectively measure the impact of multiculturalism, both as a policy and in the message it conveys to Canadians. What are the policies and initiatives of other government departments that influence multiculturalism? What type of research is recommended to maximize our understanding of multiculturalism and diversity?

Religion

Religion is increasingly at the center of debates in Canada over multiculturalism and diversity. The wearing of religious symbols and faith-based arbitration has been the object of debates about the accommodation of religious minorities. There are also concerns over the rise of Anti-Semitism and Islamophobia. Understanding religious pluralism in Canada and devising ways to channel the ethos of volunteerism of faith-based communities would help develop programs and services in line with the spirit of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* and the *Multiculturalism Act*. Recent developments on the world stage suggest the need for better understanding of the role of religion and faith-based communities in public life. Approaches and strategies are needed to engage faith-based communities, foster public awareness, and combat religious discrimination.

Security in a Pluralistic Society

Several faith-based and visible minority communities feel the strain of efforts to ensure that Canada remains an open society. How is the balance struck between the preservation of civil liberties and human rights, and the imperatives of national security which have risked the singling out of specific racial, ethnic and religious groups?