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THÈMES CANADIENS

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LOSING A PIECE of Ourselves

BY Raymond Blake

ALTHOUGH CANADA CEASED BEING A RURAL SOCIETY A LONG TIME AGO, MANY OF THE REMAINING RURAL COMMUNITIES ARE IN DANGER OF DISAPPEARING. WITH THE DEPLETION OF MANY OF THE RESOURCES SUCH AS FISH AND MINERALS AND THE TREMENDOUS CHANGES IN AGRICULTURE, MANY COMMUNITIES HAVE SIMPLY LOST THEIR REASON TO EXIST. WHETHER IN NEWFOUNDLAND, CAPE BRETON, THE GASPÉ, ACROSS THE PRAIRIES OR IN BRITISH COLUMBIA, COMMUNITIES THAT HAVE DEPENDED ON THE RESOURCE SECTOR ARE VANISHING. THIS ISSUE OF *CANADIAN ISSUES/ THÈMES CANADIENS* EXAMINES THIS IMPORTANT CANADIAN PROBLEM.

The demise of individual communities in Canada is nothing new, but what we are witnessing today is the widespread disappearance of much of rural Canada. If we continue at the current rate, fishing villages on both coasts will largely disappear, as will many farming communities throughout the country; many mining communities face a similar fate. What we are seeing, then, is the disappearance of a way of life in Canada. Yet this transformation is occurring without much alarm or notice.

The essays in this issue attempt to bring the matter to the attention of Canadians. Anthony Davis, Johanne Castonguay and Mel Baker examine the plight of fishing communities on the east coast. Dan Edwards and Cheryl Wilson offer the perspective from the west coast. The interview with Ingeborg Boyens and Judy Piercey's story of saving the grain elevators tell of the changes in the Prairie West. Stephen High provides a general overview of the impact of industrial closures on Canadian communities. David Frank examines the vision of a pioneer in the mine workers' unions who believed that there were alternative forms of resource development. John O'Donnell reminds us that culture born of a proud spirit can survive even as industry falters. Pat Chamut shows that the future is bright for a few of those engaged in the resources sector, while Rick Beaton explores efforts underway in Cape Breton to shift the economy in new directions.

Yet, as Len Evenden warns in his concluding editorial, even as communities across Canada are being transformed there is no indication of what the final outcome will be for the people living there. As Mel Baker notes, most of the young people have left the fishing villages of Newfoundland, a trend that is all too apparent in farming communities as well. Evenden urges us to pay 'due attention to the concerns that new patterns of consumption of the nation's spatial resources are bound to produce, including the impact that such exploitation may have upon the lives of those who already inhabit these lands.'

This is not happening and one consequence of apparent apathy towards the demise of rural communities is a widening divide between urban and rural Canada. A vast majority of Canadians are now maturing without any connection whatsoever with the rural parts of the country. Too frequently, it seems, the attitudes towards our rural cousins have hardened. It is not difficult to find Canadians who complain about the supposed transfer of wealth from the urban centres to support farming or fishing or mining communities in rural Canada. Even premiers from predominately urban provinces have been known to utter such criticisms in recent months.

How important is 'rural' to a society like Canada that has become increasingly urbanized? It is something we should think more seriously about.

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