

The inhospitable land of spoiled milk and tainted honey

by Mark Pavilons

Most of us are products (offspring) of immigrants to this great country of ours.

As home-grown Canadians, we have never known anything else but the bounty this land has given us. For those who are multi-generational, their ancestors likely toiled the land, built lives and families here in Ontario.

But Canada is also home to a myriad of cultures and people from all over the world. Unlike America's 'melting pot,' Canada is a welcoming, inclusive mosaic.

And that is the draw, the appeal of this land for many newcomers.

But it's definitely a double-edged sword in today's reality.

As they venture here with little, other than a suitcase or two, they imagine a land bursting with opportunities and success.

But the reality is much different.

A recent poll revealed that roughly 30% of new, young immigrants may leave in the next two years.

The poll, by Leger for the Institute for Canadian Citizenship (ICC), showed 30 per cent of new Canadians aged 18-34, and 23 per cent of university-educated new Canadians, said they are likely to move to another country in the next two years.

While they generally believe Canada provides a good quality of life for immigrants, researchers said Canadians were more likely to have a positive outlook on Canada's prospects for immigrants than the immigrants themselves.

'Canada is a nation of immigrants' and one of the stories we tell ourselves is that we are welcoming to new immigrants, wherever they may be from,' said ICC CEO Daniel Bernhard in a press release. 'But while this may be generally true, new survey data points to the fact that many new Canadians are having a crisis of confidence in Canada' and that should be ringing alarm bells all over Ottawa.'

And here's the rub. The challenges for immigrants is the cost of living in Canada. According to the survey, 75 per cent of new Canadians between the ages of 18 and 34 said they believe the rising cost of living means immigrants are less likely to stay in Canada, a statement with which 46 per cent of Canadians in the same age group also agreed.

The cost of living in Canada has recently jumped at a rate not seen in over 30 years, with economists warning that inflation rates could get even higher. Housing is also becoming increasingly scarce, with record-low mortgage rates propelling Canadian home prices 52 per cent higher over the past two years and fewer rentals available on the market at an affordable price.

Statistics Canada reported yesterday that Canada's debt to income ratio jumped in Q1, rising from 181.7 per cent to 184.5 per cent.

In dollar figures, this means that for every dollar Canadian households had in disposable income in Q1, they had about \$1.85 in debt.

We're all feeling the pinch, from the rising cost of groceries, gas and credit card bills. Car repairs, insurance and every odd and end all add up.

There are weeks when I breathe a sigh of relief, thinking I've got a few bucks extra. But then, it's prom time - hair, makeup, dress,

events.

Our two new puppies need their initial shots.

We need a new screen door. I have an unassembled pergola in the garage, waiting on some help.

I ignore the dash light in my car.

We just had our shingles done, and while I understand that comes with home ownership, I almost cried handing over that kind of money to the installers.

Given all of this, our own graduates, let alone newcomers, are concerned about entering the workforce and earning decent wages.

Most of us already know we have a lack of supply in terms of skilled labour, and even unskilled labour. For the first time in my life, I have seen signs on storefronts, saying they're reducing hours because they can't find help. For the first time in my life, I see empty stores in shopping malls. For the first time in my life, good-paying jobs are vacant.

I don't get it. Any student can rake it in this summer if they want to.

I'm not well versed in what's happening when skilled and trained immigrants seek work here. We've all heard the rumours that doctors from other countries are driving taxi cabs in Toronto. But the provincial government has vowed to expedite credentials for skilled foreign professionals to fill the gaps. This can't come soon enough.

And there's more. The government is offering free tuition for many fields, such as law enforcement and nursing. This the perfect time for young people to take advantage and secure a decent future for themselves.

Dave Scholz, Leger's Executive Vice-President, said in the release: "We need to continue working hard to ensure that we are welcoming newcomers with the resources they need to succeed, and that we continue to be a country that provides opportunity."

Our country saw the biggest first quarter emigration since 2017. Some 13,000 people said good-bye to Canada in Q1 2022, up 42 per cent from the same quarter last year. Q1 is typically a slow quarter, but this was the biggest first quarter since 2017 - a definite outlier.

Emigration from Canada showed unusually high annual growth - the biggest since 2004.

Yes, there's a base effect but a global recession typically produces those. After all, recessions produce new opportunities for those with skill and capital.

Of course, numbers don't tell the whole story, and the economy is still rebounding from the pandemic. But we can't ignore the emigration figures or survey data, both of which point to a bigger problem. Our country is becoming very expensive to live in.

Governments at all levels need to take heed and re-examine some of their priorities.

We need to help everyone - average citizens who toil to make ends meet; new graduates; seniors who struggle every week.

This is not the Canada I remember as a child.

My parents came here with hopes and dreams. I'm sure all of us still have them.

Everyone should be able to make those dreams come true.