

REPLY TO RICHARDS' ESSAY ON CANADA'S POPULATION

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First, a few details. I do not think we are in disagreement on the "role of research for policy development". That is, I did indicate that the "values and priorities of the political community" are an important aspect of the decision-making process. And, of course, it is also possible to do research on values. Also, in saying I would focus on Canadian issues, this was in the sentence that also said I would not pay attention to research done by Canadians on policy questions in other parts of the world. Of course, issues of population growth and immigration cannot be considered in isolation from other parts of the world.

The main issue raised is that low fertility is to our benefit in the context of greater scarcity of resources. That is, because of greater "density", defined very broadly of course, it makes sense to orient reproduction towards quality so as to maximize the chances of successful reproduction. While I acknowledge that much of Canada is difficult to inhabit, my own "judgment call" would be that we are some distance from this "density". Richards says that "individual young couples sense the approaching limit in the form of...rising costs and rents, scarcer accommodation, scarcer jobs and higher morbidity for the less fortunate". Where is the evidence of this? To my knowledge, the evidence shows most things getting better. For instance, Statistics Canada's low-income line has changed markedly since it was first established. In 1959 it involved families who spent more than 70.0 per cent of their income on food, shelter and clothing, but in 1978 it involved families spending more than 58.5 per cent on these essentials. In spite of the "shifting cut-off" the proportion of families classified as low income decreased from 25.3 per cent in 1961 to 14.0

in 1983. As another indicator, average family income increased by 28 per cent in constant dollars between 1970 and 1980. It is true that unemployment rates are higher, but that is partly an artifact of the generosity of unemployment insurance. I have not seen any evidence of "higher morbidity for the less fortunate". If so, morbidity for the more fortunate must be decreasing considerably because life expectancy is certainly continuing to increase, from 72.9 in 1971 to 75.5 in 1981.

I quite agree that in this complex world, it is best to go for quality rather than quantities of children. But our reproduction is being undermined by those people who do not have any children, this is neither quantity nor quality. Also, is the average family that strapped that it cannot raise two or three quality children? In other words, I rather disagree with the point of view wherein our lower fertility is a function of greater economic hardships (which Richards calls density-dependent controls) and an attempt to go for higher quality children. In my assessment, low fertility is more a function of an increasing "individualism" wherein children, and for that matter stable marital relationships, are themselves seen as too "costly" in terms of reduced personal freedom.

Another consideration is that of one's situation relative to other societies. Here, it is useful to look to France, which has had the unique experience of having embarked on the fertility transition early and thus of having had for some time fertility lower than its neighbours. Interestingly, there is a strong consensus, in both academic and policy circles, that low fertility has undermined the status of France in the world. Since France has "been there", in terms of low fertility, should we not at least pay attention to French reflections on this experience? Low fertility has in fact reached the political agenda in a number of European countries that did not have anything like the postwar baby boom of the New World.

On immigration, we seem to be in agreement in arguing for more openness. It is also true that low fertility makes hospitality toward immigrants easier. But surely there is some limit here. If immigration goes beyond absorptive capacity, the whole nature of the society is changed. Surely there needs to be a sufficient "native born" receiving society. Along similar lines, it is an interesting suggestion that "cultural purity is unwise". But does that mean, as the author suggests, that we should let *franglais* flourish? That a language be open to creative input from outside is one thing, that it lose its basic identity through excessive adoption of elements from the dominant language of the world is another. This would undermine cultural variety itself, and thus the very basis of the "hybrid vigour" which Richards wants to preserve.