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Canada in the World

Though it has less than 1 per cent of the world's population, Canada has carved out a wonderful place for itself in many fields of activity. Here, a look at our international eminence and the achievements that contributed to it — and at how admirable Canada appears in the eyes of people elsewhere...

In the depths of the valleys which the Canadian economy has been doomed to visit from time to time, satirists used to ridicule Sir Wilfrid Laurier's prediction that the 20th century would belong to Canada. Now, it seems, our great seventh prime minister may have been right after all.

Who says so? No less an authority than the United Nations. According to the UN, Canada has become the world leader in providing its people with the things that really matter in life.

In August, 1995, it was announced that Canada had for the third time topped the UN Human Development Index. Out of 186 member nations ranked on how they stand in social advancement, Canada came first, immediately ahead of Switzerland and Japan. The HDI is a basket of statistics which determines the extent to which people in a country have a high standard of living, are educated and knowledgeable, and lead lives that are long and healthy. The UN's unbiased counting of our blessings showed that Canadians in general enjoy the best quality of life in all of humanity.

Another objective study by the World Bank last year concluded that, while per capita income in Canada ranks 16th in the world, it actually has the world's second-richest society after Australia. The bank added up investments in human and physical assets in 192 countries to arrive at its comprehensive comparisons of national wealth.

Though the good life is more than a matter of money, money is nice to have, and the majority of Canadians have plenty of it by international standards. The average personal annual income in this country is at least four times higher than the comparable figure worldwide.

In spite of all the economic slumps that have caused so much human distress, Canada has proved a society of rising expectations that has fulfilled its promise to millions. Since 1920, the average Canadian's income in real constant dollars has doubled, redoubled, and more than redoubled again.

As a result, Canadians today possess material goods beyond the imagining of ordinary people in developing countries. They have one of the world's highest rates of ownership of houses — usually good, big, well-furnished houses. The same applies to motor vehicles, recreational equipment, and home appliances. This is a country in which 98 per cent of households have colour television sets, 79 per cent have microwave ovens, 23 per cent have computers, and 52 per cent have gas barbecues.

Those barbecue owners can buy good Canadian beef any time they please without being overly worried about the price of it. Compared to people even in the developed countries of Europe, most Canadians can afford to eat very well — and clothe themselves well, too.

Generally good living conditions help to account for the fact that Canadians are uncommonly healthy. According to the World Bank, only the Japanese live longer on average, while Canada has the world's second lowest infant mortality rate. (Four other countries share the first.)

UN statistics show that Canada's wealth is more evenly distributed than in all but five other countries.

Although no amount of effort has ever been able to eliminate poverty, the near-million Canadian families that now live below the poverty line are greatly outnumbered by families with annual incomes of $70,000 Cdn. or more. In a country where 42 per cent of married women work outside the home, the average family in Canada has an income of over $52,000 Cdn. a year.

Canada is near the top of the list of nations in the percentage of national income spent on socially-desirable endeavours such as health care and education. In fact, more money is spent on learning in this country than anywhere but Finland and Switzerland.

It says something about social mobility in Canada that it has the highest percentage of post-secondary graduates of all industrial countries. According to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 41 per cent of Canadians between the ages of 25 and 64 have college diplomas or university degrees.

In their preoccupation with the present debt crisis and other problems which have brought high unemployment and painful spending cuts, Canadians rarely give a thought to what an extraordinary job has been done in building their economy over the long term. Having begun its life as a nation 129 years ago with little industry or capital of its own, Canada has grown into the world's seventh largest economy.

Conquering the challenges of climate, terrain and distance

It shares membership in the Group of Seven strongest economic powers with the United States, Japan, Germany, France, the United Kingdom, and Italy. With close to 30 million inhabitants, Canada is the world's 29th most populous country, a little smaller than Colombia and a little larger than Morocco. Yet it is in an elite economic league with the historical giants of Europe that have twice its population, at least.

Much of its economic eminence is owed to geography. It borders on the richest market in the world in the United States, which buys 80 per cent of its exports under a free trade pact. A spill-over of American know-how in management and technology has helped to give it an industrial economy as modern as any. It is among the world's most active trading nations, with a solid exchangeable currency. Canadians are thus able to travel internationally in enormous numbers. As consumers, they have access to a vast choice of imported products from virtually everywhere on earth.

Canada's size as the planet's largest land mass after Russia was once considered a handicap by men overawed by its unimaginable reaches and daunting winter weather. But that very vastness was turned to advantage by Canadians as they steadily learned to overcome the harsh challenges of climate and terrain.

Although only about 5 per cent of Canada's land is considered arable, such is its huge totality that agriculture has proved a great boon to its international bank balance. On the boundless prairies, which contain some 80 per cent of Canada's agricultural land, farmers have used Canadian-developed methods to place themselves among the world's largest exporters of grain and oil seeds. Under the western soil is a treasury of oil, gas, sulphur and potash. The valleys of the far western mountains yield huge tonnages of coal for export to Asia. The rugged expanses of the Canadian Shield hold a bonanza of minerals, forest products, and economical hydro-electric power for Canadian industry.

The task of coping with difficult conditions has created a corps of specialists in transportation, communications and civil engineering who now exercise their skills on consulting assignments the world over. Canadians are no longer hewers of wood and drawers of water. Canada's exports include a high percentage of sophisticated products such as aircraft and telecommunications equipment which vie with the best manufactured anywhere.

In recent years, more and more of the nation's energies have been flowing into high technology; it is estimated that between 1986 and 1993, Canadian high-tech production increased by 16 per cent, compared with 1.3 per cent for conventional businesses. Canada has become a big player in the computer revolution. In the past decade, its software industry has been growing at an estimated 25 per cent a year.

Canada's disproportionate stature in the global economy is matched by its stature in high-profile areas such as sports and entertainment. It is one of the few young countries to have invented an international sport, ice hockey. A Canadian working in the U. S., Dr. James Naismith, invented basketball. In international competition, Canadians have collected an astonishing 68 Olympic gold medals since 1920, plus numerous non-Olympic world championships.

Entertainers and musicians from Canada have gained fame on stages, movie and television screens everywhere. Giving the lie to the popular impression that Canadians are congenitally dull, Canada has produced an inordinate number of internationally-known comedians and literary satirists. Canadian-born visual artists like Alfred Pellan and Jean-Paul Riopelle have taken the artistic circles of Paris by storm.

Canada has been an overachieving player in the

big leagues of many other fields. It is one of the few nations to produce a whisky that is appreciated around the world. It is also one of the few to have a police force of world renown, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, popularly known as the Mounties. Americans might not know much about their big quiet national neighbour, but they do consume large quantities of Canadian bacon and Canadian beer.

Canadians have gained distinction in such specialities as marine navigation, fitting for a nation with the longest sea coast on earth, bounded as it is by three oceans. In 1898, Nova Scotia's Joshua Slocum became the first man to sail alone around the world. In 1909, Captain Joseph-Elzear Bernier of L'Islet, Que., discovered several Arctic Islands and claimed the Arctic Archipelago for Canada. In 1944 the little RCMP patrol ship *St. Roch* under Captain Henry Larsen became the first vessel to cross the top of the world via the North West Passage from east to west and west to east.

Canadians are mostly unaware of how many things were invented in their country. Canada is the home of the first practical marine engine, the ocean-going steamship, the automatic fog horn, the oil well, the submarine cable, the paint roller, and the plug-in radio. Canadian inventions such as Abraham Gesner's kerosene, Reginald Fessenden's radio voice transmission, and Armand Bombardier's snowmobile have found applications literally from pole to pole.

Giving the world a formula for non-violent liberation

The global system of time zones was devised by the Canadian engineer Sir Sanford Fleming. The best-known of many Canadian achievements in medical and pharmaceutical research was the discovery by Frederick Banting and Charles Best of insulin. Before this pair did their historic work in the 1920s, diabetes was a sure killer. Banting was awarded a Nobel Prize for his part in the discovery, the first of four such awards Canadians have won in science.

Canadians have proved as innovative in political science as they have been in the laboratory. Their main contribution to world politics was called responsible government, the work of the joint leaders of the province of Canada in the 1840s, Robert Baldwin and Louis-Hyppolite LaFontaine, and of the Nova Scotian politicians J. B. Uniacke and Joseph Howe. They fought long and hard to establish a system whereby the British governors of their colonies were bound to accede to the democratic will of elected assemblies, while defence and foreign affairs remained under British authority. The formula set the pattern for the non-violent devolution of power to the people in colonies throughout the British Empire. As the Empire's first self-governing dominion, Canada went on to serve as a model for the gradual achievement of independence among former British colonies everywhere.

The Canadian Confederation gave rise to Canada's first multinational company, the Canadian Pacific Railway, which linked the country a *mari usque ad mare*, as its motto goes, in one of the greatest engineering feats in history. In later years, CP ships and airplanes "spanned the globe," carrying the name of Canada to points as far apart as Buenos Aires and Manila. Today, Canadian multinational companies are common, competing forcefully with rivals from countries with much longer-established economies.

Not a great power, but a power for good

Canada's present place in international political affairs is far greater than anyone would expect from a country with such a relatively small population. It has carved out a special niche on the world scene not by being a great power, but by being a good power. It has gained rare international prestige by reversing the trend of centuries. Instead of aggrandizing itself by making war, it has done so by striving for peace.

Canada is possibly the only country to have peace, along with order and good government, as its guiding constitutional principle. It is certainly the only country whose best-known landmark is named the Peace Tower. Fittingly enough, it is also the only country in the continental Americas to have achieved nationhood without a revolution. Despite the rebellions in 1837-38 in Upper and Lower Canada and in 1885 in the North West, the most outstanding feature of domestic Canadian history is its tranquillity.

Canada was a partner with Great Britain and the U. S. in the development of the atomic bomb during World War II, building one of only three reactors in existence. A distinctively Canada method of producing nuclear energy later evolved. But Canadian governments have consistently chosen to reserve their nuclear facilities and expertise for peaceful purposes. While scientists in other countries were developing atom bombs, Canadian scientists were developing the cobalt bomb, used to treat cancer with nuclear radiation.

As Canadians who travel abroad are well aware, they belong to what is probably the world's most respected nationality. Canadians have won their superla-

tive reputation at the cost of much blood and treasure freely given in fighting for the right. In their harrowing efforts to liberate the victims of aggression in World War I, Canadians became known as the finest troops on the Western Front. In World War II, Canada was the chief ally of Great Britain during the period up to 1942 when Britain stood alone against Hitler's victorious forces. With a population of barely 14 million, Canada played a pivotal role in winning the war in Europe and on the Atlantic Ocean. Together, the two world wars took 110,000 Canadian lives.

Canadians have been in the front line of keeping the peace in the tempestuous post-World War II era. A Canadian diplomat, Lester B. Pearson, conceived the system of sending international forces to trouble-spots under the United Nations flag. Canadian troops of both official language groups are famed for their prowess in the delicate art of coming between warring parties. In the cause of peace, they regularly risk death, injury, and disease.

The least imperfect nation in the whole imperfect world

Canada's popularity has been reinforced by the financial and technical aid it gives to developing countries. It donates a higher proportion of its gross national product to international aid than many other developed countries with larger economies. Cargo planes bearing the maple leaf emblem and carrying relief supplies are a familiar sight in places struck by disaster. Privately-funded Canadian organizations also do excellent humanitarian work.

Canada's voice in world affairs is amplified by its position as a senior member of the Commonwealth and the Francophonie, the association of French-speaking nations; Quebec and New Brunswick are also members of the latter. Canada is an influential member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, the Organization of American States, and the OECD.

It is known for taking in refugees, a practice which runs deep in its history. Loyalists fleeing the American Revolution were followed by runaway slaves, members of persecuted Russian pacifist sects, and the victims of anti-Semitism in Europe. More recently, refugees from war and oppression in Asia, Africa and Latin America have arrived to take up hopeful new lives.

The refugees have added their numbers to the hundreds of thousands of less desperate immigrants who come every year to what many of them see as the closest thing to the Promised Land. From colonial times, Canada has provided new homes for the landless and the hungry of older societies. The prairie provinces bloomed because of mass immigration. The great economic boom after World War II was partly fuelled by the energy and entrepreneurship of people uprooted from their European homes.

In recent years, immigrants have become the most vocally patriotic of Canadian citizens. Unlike born Canadians, they are not inclined to take for granted the good things of life, Canadian-style. To some, it is a pleasure simply to be in a place where things work: where buses run on schedule, where telephone calls invariably go through, where the roads usually are wide and smooth, the streets are clean, and hot water taps invariably spout hot water. It is a relief not to have to be on constant guard against infectious disease — or against violence on the streets.

Newcomers are often amazed to see middle-class Canadians doing things that only the upper class would have the money to do in their native lands, like taking foreign winter vacations or going golfing or skiing whenever they fancy. People in this country who own cottages enjoy a privilege granted to only a fortunate handful on other continents. To have a pleasure boat and a pretty body of water to float it on would seem a luxury to ordinary people in almost any other country. People from crowded nations cannot get over the accessibility of Canada's natural environment, in all its magnificence.

As impressive as these blessings are, however, they do not get down to the heart of what makes Canada such an enviable place to live in. Its greatest advantages cannot be seen or tasted or felt. They lie in things like civility, in the relative absence of class distinctions, in a reliable justice system, and in high standards of public morality which prevent corruption from preying on the poor and powerless. They lie in equality, in individual liberty, in freedom of expression, in the prospect of living and raising families in an atmosphere in which people of different religious and racial origins can live together without strife.

All that being said, it must also be said in a typically self-effacing way that Canada is no utopia. It still has its inequities, its injustices, its internal tensions, its prejudice. It faces serious economic and political problems, and its very future as a united nation now seems to be hanging in the balance. It is anything but perfect; it is merely, by objective criteria, the least imperfect country on earth.

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