

International Migration as an Obstacle to Achieving World Stability

Current migration policy tends to run counter to the interests of both the country of origin and the recipient country

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Overview [as provided on John Tanton's website by its editor]: *In 1975 John Tanton's essay entitled "International Migration" placed third in the Mitchell Prize competition. The award was given during the Limits to Growth Conference in the Woodlands, Texas. The Conference was sponsored by The Club of Rome, the University of Houston, and Mitchell Energy & Development Corp. The paper became the cover story for The Ecologist, in July, 1976. This essay is the earliest formal record of John's initiating thoughts on immigration reform. The movement needed a readily reproducible handout. It now had one. This essay planted the seed from which immigration reform germinated. While his subsequent writings reveal a deeper insight, none is more prescient or pivotal.*

View the John Tanton video interview on the Mitchell prize essay.

http://www.johntanton.org/video/jt_video_2006_3.html

[Abstract]. The migration of the educated elite from the less to the more developed countries of the world is actively encouraged by the receiving nations; but exploitation of their human resources is as damaging to the under-developed nations as the exploitation of their material resources. At a different level migrant workers seeking employment in countries richer than their own are at the mercy of the host nation's economy. When growth rates fall and job opportunities are scarce, they are the first to be discharged, and consequently to become a burden on the welfare of the receiving country. When controls are tightened, frustrated hopes of better opportunities lead to an increase in illegal immigration.

This paper was originally given at the Limits to Growth Conference 1975 and won third place in the Mitchell Prize Competition.

Introduction

Continued population growth is now widely recognized as a major component of the social, economic and environmental problems facing mankind. The inevitability of some form of stationary state is gaining wider acceptance. In contemplating the possible forms of a stationary state, it seems certain that one of its attributes must be human populations of relatively stationary size. Further, the spatial distribution of human populations is importantly related to such phenomena as urban areas insufficiently dense for mass transit, and the loss of prime agricultural land to

development. Migration from the rural to the urban, and from the urban to the suburban, has many associated problems. Age structures in many regions result in high dependency ratios. The huge size of some populations units even if stationary, would make their management difficult. The environmental literature has extensively discussed these and other aspects of the population problem.

Conspicuous by its absence from the environmental literature, however, is the role international migration plays in the demographic and other problems facing mankind.

This omission is perhaps due in part to oversight. So much stress has been laid on the role of reducing births in controlling population growth, that the role of international migration in perpetuating populations growth has largely escaped notice. Agencies such as the U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare issue reports on births, deaths and resultant natural increase as part of their vital statistics, but make no mention of the contribution of immigration to the country's population growth. Even the papers laying out the ground rules for the Mitchell Prize defined a population of constant size as one where the birth rate equals the death rate, ignoring the migration factor in regional or national population growth. Migration also proves to be a factor in global population growth, surprising as that may seem at first glance. International migration has also escaped attention

because it has been the province of sociologists and economists, who have generally shown little concern about population and environmental problems. Conversely, those interested in environmental and population problems tend to be drawn from the physical and biological sciences, disciplines not traditionally touching the migration question. Complexity of the topic is another barrier. The U.S. Immigration and Nationality Act runs to 179 pages, and is said to be second in length in federal law only to the Internal Revenue Code.

Fear may well be another factor suppressing the discussion of international migration in environmental (and other) circles. I have often encountered otherwise thinking people who reject out of hand the consideration of immigration questions, as being too sensitive or controversial. This visceral reaction is understandable, as most of us have immigrant roots, and we feel compromised. It is, however, no more inconsistent for the offspring of immigrants to consider the limitation of immigration than it is for the products of conception to plan to limit births, or the beneficiaries of past economic growth to consider its limitation. An aversion to discussing immigration is also understandable in light of the seamy history surrounding past efforts to limit immigration. These were marked by xenophobia and racism, and gave rise to the likes of the Know-nothing political party, and the Ku Klux Klan. Other -isms of past debates that we seldom hear today include jingoism and nativism. The subject was often highly emotional and divisive (2). Any person who attempts discussion of immigration policy will soon learn as has the author that the situation is unchanged in this regard.

These difficulties must be overcome. In the inevitable stationary state to which man is consigned by the finiteness of our globe, the growth of both human numbers and material consumption must eventually end. We can now see that the inevitable stationary state may actually be an improvement over our present one and perhaps should be actively sought, rather than postponed as long as possible.

Similarly, international migration on its current scale is destined to end in the near future, owing to the same finiteness of the globe. As the principal countries currently receiving immigrants - the United States, Canada, Australia - reach or surpass the limits of population which they can support, they will likely move to curtail immigration. As with the coming material equilibrium we should ask whether this is a good or a bad thing. Is the end of significant international migration an evil to be deferred as long as possible, or could it be a benefit to be welcomed and encouraged with all deliberate speed?

It is time for environmentalists to deal with this important question. They will need to acquire knowledge in a field new to them, conquer its difficulties, and deal with controversy as they have so

often in the past. Otherwise a whole new set of problems will catch us unawares, and the achievement of material equilibrium will be significantly delayed.

Historical Background and Demography

A short historical background is advisable to provide a common basis for considering the international migration question. These notes generally follow Davis (3).

As civilization advanced and cities developed, the dominant pattern of migration through the 1700s was from less developed to more developed areas, and from the rural to the urban. Nor was all of this migration free, for slavery was a common source of energy for developing civilizations.

These patterns persisted until the middle 1800s, when in Europe populations began to press hard upon the resource base and environment. Timber resources had become depleted and epidemic diseases such as the potato blight fed upon monocultures which had developed to support increasing populations. Grave difficulties were avoided as the less developed world of that day - North America, Latin America and Australia - opened to comparatively easy migration at about the same time. Steamships came into use, lessening the difficulty and danger of the voyage (4). Excess population was exported and resources were imported, lessening pressures in Europe.

The twin factors of the "push" to leave home and the "pull" of opportunity abroad thus served to reverse the historic trend of migration. People began migrating from the then developed world to the less developed in massive numbers. Between 1840 and 1930 at least 50 million persons emigrated from Europe. In the past 100 years, 25 million have emigrated from Italy alone, a huge movement when compared with its present day population of 55 million. This trend of migration continued in pulses of varying strength through 1950, with the recipient countries developing and in some cases surpassing the countries of origin in their stage of development.

Since the end of World War II, the flow of migrants from the developed countries of northern Europe has slowed, and the historic pattern of migration from the less to the more developed countries has returned. The poorer countries around the Mediterranean Sea, and those of Latin America, Africa, and Asia are now supplying increasing numbers of migrants. Times have changed, however. This present day migration must be viewed in the context of the massive populations and overpopulation of many of the sending and receiving countries. There are no remaining virgin continents waiting to be peopled or to have their resources exploited.

What is the current scale of international migration?

There have been very large movements of people since World War II. More important than the current scale are the trends and causes of migration. These promise large increases in migration pressures in the future if conditions continue to deteriorate in the less developed countries.

In Europe, since the end of World War II, more than 10 million "guest workers" have migrated from southern Europe and the Mediterranean area into northern Europe, to participate in and facilitate the economic recovery and prosperity which followed World War II (5,6). This phenomenon has reached its zenith in Switzerland, where migrants make up 30 per cent of the work force (20).

In North America, the United States has a current population growth from natural increase of about 1.2 million persons per year, supplemented by about 400,000 legal immigrants. (Emigration is estimated at 37,000 yearly by the Bureau of the Census.) Legal immigration thus increases the U.S. rate of growth about one-third over what it would otherwise be. More than 55 per cent of these legal migrants now come from the less developed countries (7). In addition, a new phenomenon of the last decade - large-scale illegal migration - adds an inaccurately known though apparently large number. Estimates range from 800,000 to 1 million or more yearly, most of whom come from a wide variety of less developed countries (8). Combining the lower estimate of 800,000 for illegal immigrants with 363,000 net legal immigrants, immigration accounts for about 50 per cent of the current annual population growth of the U.S. Continued to the turn of the century, these rates of immigration will account for the addition of an estimated 15 million (for legal) (9) and 40 million (for illegal) (10) persons to the U.S. For comparison, natural increase at replacement level fertility will add 38 million by the year 2000 (11). Similar situations exist in other major industrial nations.

The United States situation may be contrasted with its developing neighbor to the south. Mexico has 59 million people, an annual growth rate of about 3.2 per cent, which dictates a doubling time of 22 years. Forty-six per cent of its population is under 15 years of age (12), posed to enter a labor market in which unemployment/underemployment may be as high as 40 per cent (13,20). Mexico's natural increase is 1.8 million persons per year - 50 per cent larger than that of the United States, which has nearly 4 times as large a population. Differentials in per capital GNP across the border are perhaps 10 to 1 (14), a ratio of averages which doesn't take into account that income distribution is generally more unequal in less developed countries (15).

Mexico is one source of illegal migrants to the U.S. The driving force behind the migration northward is the great disparity in employment opportunity and income between the two nations. This differential promises to

increase with time, not so much from economic growth on the American side, as from a lack of economic growth on the Mexican side, relative to its high rate of population growth.

Conditions similar to those in Mexico exist throughout the rest of Latin America, which as a whole had a 1974 population of about 325 million, a 2.7 per cent annual growth rate, a doubling time of 26 years (12), and generally high underemployment/unemployment rates. Asia and Africa have similar situations. There is obviously a great storm brewing. Any scenario for the future should take into account these massive pressures to migrate from the less to the more developed countries, whether legally or illegally.

So much for the historic setting of the immigration dilemma and the numbers involved. The phenomenon of international migration touches many other aspects of human life, and significantly affects the prospects for achieving material equilibrium. Let us look at some of these effects.

Effects on the Country of Emigration

The sociological and economic analysis of international migration has focused heavily on the effects of immigration on the recipient country, and the immigrant as a person. Let's look at the largely neglected effects on the country of origin, and those individuals who are left behind. The damaging effects of the "brain drain" have long been argued. The term originally applied to the migration of highly skilled persons and students from the war-torn yet developed countries of Europe to North America. Concomitant with the recent shift to migration from the less developed nations of Asia, Latin America, and Africa, this transfer of highly skilled persons has continued and even accelerated (16).

This new form of the brain drain has a more profound impact. It is now the developing nations that lose not only some of their most talented citizens, but also the scarce capital which has gone into their rearing and training. They also lose the very persons on whom campaigns of social and economic development must be based; those with the highest expectations, the greatest initiative and intelligence, and those most dissatisfied with conditions at home. Educational systems continue to produce persons with skills inappropriate to the level of development of the country, often perpetuating patterns handed down from colonial times. Pressure to change the system is relieved as its products leave the country (17).

While there is widespread discussion in the developed countries about the effect on the less developed countries of exploitation of their material resources, there has been little concern in the same circles about the exploitation of their human resources. These are perhaps the scarcest and most valuable resources of

all. The policies of the developed nations which perpetuate the brain drain, whether so intended or not, in effect are a new and subtle and highly effective form of colonialism. The brain drain helps ensure that the less developed nations will stay that way. Thus they will not become competitors of the more developed nations for raw materials and for markets for manufactured goods.

The loss of physicians and health workers in particular retards the development of birth control programs in the less developed countries (18). Resultant population growth further hampers their development efforts. Emigration also tends to remove persons of productive age, leaving behind the children and old people, aggravating the already high dependency ratios of the less developed countries (3). The dollar value of the "brain drain" from the less developed nations to the United States has exceeded its foreign aid to some of these same countries (17,19).

This is a form of "reverse" foreign aid. It is another example of the poor of the world subsidizing the rich. It is one more reason that the disparity in incomes between the developed and less developed countries is so large. One of the most effective forms of aid which the developed nations could give to the less developed ones is to stop appropriating their human resources.

The term "brain drain" should not blind us to the fact that most who emigrate, whether or not technically skilled or educated, have high motivation. These persons are an important key to develop at home if they are given the tools to work with.

Traditional analysis holds that these deleterious effects are in part balanced by remittances from migrant workers in the developed nations, and that this may be one of the more effective forms of foreign aid, instilled as it is at the bottom of a social structure. However, developing nations dependent on such payments are doubly vulnerable to the conditions in the developed countries. As rates of growth decline and employment falls, foreign workers are often discharged. The less developed country loses not only the foreign exchange, but often gets the unemployed worker back home as well. This is true whether the decline in the developed nation is unintended, as in Europe today, or planned, as in the transition to a stationary state. Stationary state planners in countries with large foreign worker populations will have to pay particular attention to these effects.

The value of remittances has been questioned by Jonathan Power in an excellent analysis of costs of migration to the country of origin (20). He contends that such monies are spent mainly on consumer goods, often imported, and not on financing development. In the end, trade deficits are increased. Native agricultural systems are undermined. Sights are set on emigration, and enterprising families are lost to the economy of the less developed country.

Effects on the Countries of Immigration

Let us now take a look at brain drain and related migration phenomena from the standpoint of the developed country, and in the context of the quest for the stationary economic state.

Brain drain effects. In recent times the countries of immigration - The Statue of Liberty's pronouncement notwithstanding - have actively sought out the skilled persons of the world as immigrants. The clear purpose has been to stimulate and facilitate perpetual economic growth and development, a purpose only recently challenged as a social good. The 1952 McCarran-Walter Immigration Act set aside 50 per cent of U.S. visas for those in the professions, who would "substantially benefit prospectively the national economy, cultural interests or welfare of the U.S." (21). There is no mention of the effect on the country of origin. There is little doubt that the infusion of highly skilled persons has been an effective economic stimulant (19,20), just as the ready supply of cheap labor provided by earlier immigrations was one of the essential factors in industrial growth.

At the same time that international migration is raising the dependency ratios of the developing nations, it reduces this ratio in the developed nation. The developed country gains highly motivated, ambitious, and hardworking persons whose goal is personal economic growth. All these factors stimulate growth.

On the pathway to stabilized world material consumption, the developed nations must not only consume absolutely or at least relatively less, but also some provision must be made for improving the living standards of the world's poor. The international migration of skilled persons has tended to increase the gap between the less and the more developed countries: its cessation is one step which would move us toward a more stable and less disparate world.

Internally, the importation of skilled persons delays the modernization of educational systems in the more developed countries as well as those of the less developed country. For instance, doctors are imported, rather than trained. This denies opportunities for upward mobility to native citizens, particularly minorities. In the United States, there are more Filipino than black doctors (9).

The developed countries have promoted skilled migration because of a faulty analysis of where their interests lie. They have asked what is good for their own country, ignoring the effect on the country of origin and on the world as a whole. It is as if the analysis of purse snatching ended with a determination of what was good for the thief, and ignored the effects on the victim. We need a new, broader, and world view of what is good for the developed countries. It must look not only at short-term advantages, but also at the

long term price to be paid in world instability for further increases in their prosperity, especially if a portion of that increase comes at the expense of the world's poor.

Illegal immigration is at least a step-child of the brain drain, for it is increasing the economic disparity between nations that is the chief impetus behind this phenomenon. There is a measure of retribution about to be meted out, however, for some of the steps that will be required for the developed countries to control illegal migration promise to very directly affect some of their most cherished liberties and freedoms. These will likely include Orwellian measures ranging from considerable restrictions on movements across international borders, to the carrying of identity cards to establish one's right to social benefits, a job, and to be in the country. Thus will the residents of the developed countries most directly experience the effects of rampant population growth and the dire economic straits of the less developed nations.

Resource effects should be considered. Immigration helps to perpetuate the population and economic growth of the developed nations, which, in turn, will tend to increase their draw on the world's resources. Further population growth in the food exporting countries will likely consume more agricultural land, decreasing their food production capacity. At the same time their domestic food consumption will increase. These changes will decrease the amount of food available for export. These are deleterious changes for both the developed and the underdeveloped nations.

Demographic implications for the developed nations were outlined in the historical section using the U.S. as an example. To the extent that legal migrants from the less developed countries bring their traditionally high fertility patterns with them, the estimates for their increase are understated, for the presented data assume replacement levels of fertility. The developed countries lose some of the benefits of their declining fertility, to the extent that averted births are replaced by immigrants. Since the mean age of migrants is in the early twenties (7), and since the bulk of the post-World War II children are just entering this same age range, immigration adds further to the existing distortion of age pyramids caused by the excessive births of that period. This is another move away from stability.

Socioeconomic problems should not be side-stepped, though mentioning them immediately opens one to charges of the various -isms. Migrants tend to concentrate in urban areas where jobs and their relatives are found. In the U.S., with the resident population at replacement level fertility, immigrants will account for 23 per cent of all urban growth between 1970 and 2000. They thus add to already massive urban problems. Immigrants concentrate in a few states and cities, impacting these areas in particular (9).

Illegal immigrants tend to take jobs at the bottom of the socioeconomic scale, and thereby help to perpetuate some of the resource consumptive practices of the developed nations. Without this input of inexpensive labor, the developed society will have to choose between improving the pay and working conditions to have the job done, or going without (20). The former course would tend to level incomes, the latter would decrease consumption. Either course is desirable en route to a stationary state. As Daly has pointed out, "The rich only ride their horses - they do not clean, comb, curry, saddle and feed them, nor do they clean the stables" (22). Without someone to do the servile tasks, consumption is perforce limited by a lack of time, for the individual must do his own maintenance work. I judge this a more healthy situation both physically and ethically.

By taking jobs at the bottom of the socioeconomic scale, illegal migrants compete for jobs with the disadvantaged and highest unemployment sectors of society: minorities and teenagers, and minority teenagers in particular. This again helps to prevent leveling of incomes, and frustrates their ambitions.

The achievement of material equilibrium, and many of the emerging qualitative environmental goals of the developed countries, will require a great unanimity of values and purposes among their populations. These are unlikely to be shared by the bulk of illegal immigrants who migrate looking for personal economic growth. As with the developed countries in their early stages, and the developing countries today, the ethic of environmental quality will doubtless come a poor second to economic growth. Any language barriers will increase the difficulties. These factors will weigh against the achievement of a stationary state.

The World View

There is evidence that countries which traditionally export a large proportion of their excess population postpone necessary internal demographic changes which would make such emigration unnecessary (3). Thus emigration facilitates a segment of continued world population growth, which might otherwise be avoided. In the special case of Italy, it is interesting to speculate upon possible changes that could have occurred in the Roman Catholic attitude on birth control-related matter, if emigration had not relieved its population pressures. Such changes, if they had been brought about several decades ago could have markedly ameliorated the population problems many nations face today.

Internal migration moves people from less consumptive lifestyles to more consumptive ones - the chief reason behind migration is the hope of improving one's economic position. It thus contributes to increasing world consumption. The change needed in the world today is just the opposite: reduction of

excessive and wasteful lifestyles. The resources required to support the migrant in his new, more affluent lifestyle could support many more of his former countrymen in their less consumptive lifestyle (23).

As we approach the stationary state, throughput must be minimized, for people as well as material goods. Demographically, this implies low birth and infant mortality rates, and long life expectancy, with births equal to deaths. It also necessarily means minimal throughput from migration, with low levels of immigration equal to emigration.

The world population problem cannot be solved by mass international migration. If the developed nations took in the annual growth of the less developed nations, they would have to accommodate 53 million persons yearly. This would give them an annual growth rate of 6.3 per cent, and a doubling time of 11 years (3). In the face of this impossibility, the main avenue open for the developed nations to help the less developed ones is to restrict their own growth, and seek to apply the resources thus conserved to the solution of the problems of the less developed nations.

Conclusions

It is time to take a fresh look at international migration in the light of the need to slow the economic growth of the developed nations, rather than stimulate it, and in turn to promote the economic growth of the less developed countries, at least to some minimal acceptable standard. Current migration policy pushes both considerations in the wrong direction, and stimulates overall population growth as well.

As certain portions of the globe deal with their problems more effectively than others, they will stabilize more quickly. This will doubtless increase their attractiveness, especially if other regions are not making progress or are even slipping backwards. This will increase pressures for international migration which, if it is allowed, will tend to destabilize those regions otherwise approaching stability. Thus international migration will have to be stringently controlled, or no region will be able to stabilize ahead of another. If no region can stabilize ahead of another, then it is likely that no region whatsoever will be able to stabilize in an orderly and humane fashion. A more hopeful scenario calls for some regions stabilizing at an early date, and then helping others to do so.

Given the demographic and development situation of the world, the control of international migration will be one of the chief problems the developed countries will face in approaching equilibrium conditions.

Immigration may be good for the vast majority of the migrants themselves. They find new economic opportunities and in the special case of refugees, new

freedoms. It emerges, however, that their migration in the main runs counter to the real interest of both the countries of origin and the recipient countries, and the world as a whole. This is true whether the analysis is conducted in the traditional growth framework, or in the context of the stationary state. What first appears as a new area of conflict between the interests of the individual and those of society, is really a conflict between the interests of the individuals who migrate and those who do not. It is time for the larger and longer range interests of the latter to prevail. We need in particular to give more weight to the interests of the unseen countrymen of the immigrant who are left behind, to live with the conditions the migrant might have helped to change.

Future historians may well record such a broadened examination as one of the factors that led to the end of the age of international migration, one of the alterations that will necessarily accompany the transition to a stationary state.

The question we face is not whether immigration should be restricted, for it has been for decades in all countries. Rather, the question is, what restrictions are appropriate to today's world? Re-examination of this question is made easier by the realization that current limits are arbitrary in their origins. Many were set decades ago without consideration of population, resource, environmental, and other facts that can and should be taken into account today.

Happily, it is possible to envision a world in which international migration could become free and unfettered. Appropriately, it is the world of a stationary state, in which people in different regions are in equilibrium with resources, and in which there is a reasonable chance in each region for self-fulfillment, matched with social equity. Under these conditions, international migration could be unfettered, because there would be little incentive to move. Contentment with conditions at home, coupled with man's strong attachment to things familiar, would serve to keep most people in place. While the freedom to migrate at will is incompatible with the physical realities of today's world, it is one of many things that can be restored as man achieves balance with his environment.

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