

# Musical Chairs and Revolving Doors: The Transmigration of Economists North American Style

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Canada and the United States enjoy a relationship which is unique among the nations of the world in many ways. They are bound together by both economic and cultural ties. In such an environment it is hardly surprising that a certain amount of transmigration should take place. It might be expected that the migration stream would be larger from Canada to the United States than the reverse, due to the size difference between the two nations and the consequent greater diversity of opportunities in the American labor market.

The present investigators are interested specifically in the movement of professional personnel between the two countries. In an attempt to get a preliminary perspective on the situation, it was decided to explore conditions within their own area of specialization—economics. To date, two studies have been completed. The first dealt with Canadian-born economists in the United States, and the second was a parallel investigation of American-born economists in Canada.<sup>1</sup> For both endeavors, the subject populations were extracted from the Directory of Members of the American Economic Association, Octo-

ber, 1974, *American Economic Review*, Vol. LXIV, No. 5. Parallel survey instruments were mailed to every individual in both populations. The response rate among Canadians was slightly in excess of 50 percent, while that for Americans was in the 58 percent range.

In examining the completed studies some interesting comparisons became evident, and these will be the subject of the present discussion. Both questionnaires were designed to yield three types of information. First, the respondents were asked questions concerning age, marital status, educational background, and other matters designed to develop their profile. Second, they were asked questions concerning career goals and various other considerations which may have elicited the decision to migrate. Finally, they were given the opportunity to add whatever written comments they thought appropriate. The present study will adhere to that informational format.

The first matter to be dealt with was the age of the respondents. All but two of the Canadians had attained the age of 30, with 45 being the median age. The Americans were somewhat younger, with 75 percent of them clustered between the ages of 31 and 45. The peak traffic from Canada occurred during the 1950's and again in the period beginning in 1960 and continuing into the early 1970's. Recent traffic has been minimal. The major flow in the opposite direction occurred during

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<sup>1</sup>"American Economists in Canada—A Reversal of the Brain Drain." Paper presented to the North American Economic Studies Association, Mexico City, December 1978 (unpublished).

the 1970's and coincided with the weakening of the market for professional economists in the United States.<sup>2</sup>

Generally speaking, the Canadians appeared to be more willing to change their citizenship than did their American counterparts. Thirty-two Canadians have been naturalized as opposed to only 13 Americans. The two overall populations were very nearly identical. Such patterns of changes in citizenship are to some extent functions of the length of stay in the host country, but family and educational considerations may also be involved. Of the 32 Canadians who were naturalized, 25 married after entering the United States. Those who married prior to emigrating were more likely to retain their Canadian identity. Seventy-eight percent of the Americans working in Canada married prior to emigrating. This factor has undoubtedly contributed to their retention of citizenship.

Many Americans moving to Canada had started their families in the United States. Fully two-thirds of those reporting children had their first and second offspring prior to entering Canada. Even in the case of a third child, only 50 percent reported that the birth had occurred in Canada. Of the 56 Canadians with children, only 12 indicated that their first was born in Canada. The same figures prevail with respect to the birth of a second child, and only three reported that a third child had been born in Canada. In the case of Canadian-born economists, marriages contracted in the United States coupled with patterns of family formation have undoubtedly served to reinforce original migration decisions. No similar situation exists among the respondent Americans living in Canada. Their family situations may well strengthen their ties to the United States.

<sup>2</sup>"Some reflections of the Loss of Canadian Economists to the United States." Paper presented to the International Atlantic Economic Conference, Salzburg, Austria, May 1979. Forthcoming in *International Migration*.

It was assumed that education would also play a part in the migration process. This was clearly the case for Canadian respondents. Sixty-five of them earned their doctorates in the United States. Thus they received considerable exposure to American lifestyles, gained familiarity and training concerning the American system and, thus, were slanted in the direction of the job market in that country. Doctoral training in economics has become much more readily available in Canada in recent years and this may be a factor which has contributed to the decline in the number of Canadian migrants which was evident during the 1970's. Ninety-five percent of the Americans polled received either masters or doctoral degrees in the United States. Thus their migration decisions were not related to Canadian educational experiences.

In an effort to determine how strong the ties are between the respondents and their mother countries, both groups were asked about their visiting habits. A preponderance of both groups spend time each year in their mother country. All were asked if they had intended to return when they emigrated. Affirmative responses were registered by 68 percent of the Americans and 58 percent of the Canadians.

Both groups of respondents were asked to weight the importance which they attached to various factors which contributed to their decision to migrate. The factors were not rank ordered, and thus the respondents were free to assess their importance in any way they choose. Table I contains a summary of the results of this procedure. Specifically, it identifies the five factors which respondents found most significant. It is interesting to note that both groups, having been presented with a selection of 11 factors, elected the same five as most important. Among the Canadians, the reputation of the institution was the most significant factor. Of the 67 responding to

TABLE I Selected Factors Contributing to the Migration Decision

Factor	Americans		Canadians	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Reputation of Institution	70	69	67	92
Advancement Possibilities	66	86	61	67
Research Opportunities and Support	70	79	62	82
Salary	68	78	62	66
Political Environment	69	54	66	43

Source: Compiled from questionnaires.

that particular question, 92 percent thought it to be important. Of the 70 Americans responding to that question, 69 percent identified it as important, making it the fourth most significant variable in their decision making process. The Americans considered opportunities for advancement to be the most important factor. Of the 66 responses to that question, 86 percent identified it as being important. The Canadians considered it to be somewhat less important. Sixty-one persons answered the question, and 67 percent considered it to be important. It was third in the order of importance in their decision making process. Both populations agreed upon research opportunities and support as the second most significant factor. Seventy-nine percent of the 70 Americans answering the question concurred. Salary considerations were third in importance among Americans and fourth among Canadians. Political considerations were fifth in order of significance for both groups. Fifty-four percent of the Americans answering the question identified it. It was less significant among the Canadians, having been selected by 43 percent of the 66 respondents to the question.

With the exception of the political factor, both populations seemed to be quite pragmatic in their decision making. Career considerations far outweigh personal matters. Given the age of the Americans it is probable that the situation in Vietnam contributed to the significance of the political factor. The

importance of this factor among Canadians is not as easy to explain.

Family ties, business interests, and health considerations were at the bottom of the list for both cohorts, although 26 percent of the Canadians answering the question felt family ties to be important. Surprisingly, 47 percent of 70 Americans identified climate as an important consideration and somewhat less surprisingly, 42 percent of 62 Canadians agreed. Consulting opportunities was the other variable included.

As indicated earlier, respondents were invited to add any specific comments they wished and many did so. By and large the comments were related to the availability of career opportunities and various other economic factors. A definite pattern was evident. The Canadian economists displayed a certain amount of frustration. They expressed a willingness to return to Canada but accused Canadian institutions of being unresponsive to opportunities to hire them. They indicated that they received better initial offers from American institutions and that there were better opportunities for advancement in that country.

The American economists were pragmatic in their decision to move to Canada. They felt that they could get better placements there and that they were joining institutions with growth potential. They also mentioned certain tax advantages which were available to them in Canada. Those, together with the fact that

salaries were higher and rising impressively, contributed to their decision to move. Thus both groups felt that their decisions were career oriented. It is interesting that the Americans did not seem to experience the difficulties that Canadians had in dealing with Canadian institutions. No doubt the time factor contributed to this situation. The Canadians entered the job market earlier, when opportunities were not too plentiful in Canada. When the Americans came into the market, the Canadians were already climbing American career ladders and Canadian universities were expanding. What will

happen when economists trained by those universities enter the market in quantity remains to be seen.

In conclusion it should be remembered that most of the respondents are academicians, who have made career-oriented decisions. There is such a coincidence of factors considered important that it is tempting to suggest that Canada and the United States approach a unified labor market for the professional economists polled. Tendencies in this direction are of course subject to modification due to governmental policies in the two nations.