

This PDF is a selection from an out-of-print volume from the National Bureau of Economic Research

Volume Title: International Migrations, Volume I: Statistics

Volume Author/Editor: Walter F. Willcox

Volume Publisher: NBER

Volume ISBN: 0-87014-013-2

Volume URL: <http://www.nber.org/books/fere29-1>

Publication Date: 1929

Chapter Title: Part I: Proletarian Mass Migration, XIXth and XXth Centuries

Chapter Author: Walter F. Willcox

Chapter URL: <http://www.nber.org/chapters/c5127>

Chapter pages in book: (p. 77 - 84)

PART I

PROLETARIAN MASS MIGRATION, XIXTH AND XXTH CENTURIES

1. Introduction

International migration as measured by current official statistics began soon after the end of the Napoleonic Wars. The longest series in the following national tables commence, for the countries of immigration, with Canada (1816), United States (1820), Brazil (1820), and New South Wales (1825); and for the countries of emigration with the British Isles (1815), Austria (1819) and Norway (1821). Thus, within a decade after Waterloo national emigration statistics had been set up in several countries of Europe and national or colonial immigration statistics in parts of North America, South America and Australia. The roots of these mass movements, which began to be systematically recorded about a century ago, run far back into the earlier period of colonization but the present study does not demand a survey of migration in that pre-statistical period.

The account starts, then, with the Treaty of Paris which had settled the colonial possessions of the European Powers, and although there were subsequent discoveries and subsequent changes in the ownership of colonies, the colonial period may be regarded as then closed. The settlement of North America, from the first English colony in Virginia in 1607 and the first French, Dutch, and other agricultural colonies, was carried out by separate groups formed or organized for each attempt, although frequently assisted by the authorities at home or abroad, and was quite different from the migration movement of modern times.

The latter has been a regular mass movement, composed of disconnected individuals or families not forming a coherent association on either side of the ocean.

Modern emigration is not due to Governmental policy and is not a national undertaking, but results from the spontaneous decision of individuals on the ground of personal motives. Even when the current appears to be a collective whole, it is seen on closer investigation to be only a very loose association of interested individuals. The typical modern emigrant goes overseas with certain hopes, often without a definite plan, and takes his place among previous

emigrants with little regard for ties of relationship, national peculiarities or his own previous occupation. The typical representative of mass emigration in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is the proletarian—an industrial or agricultural worker without means, though previously in many cases a small holder of land. Among the mass are also to be found now and then, as the occupational statistics show, capitalists and intellectuals as well as shipwrecked lives and persons without occupation.

The total number of international emigrants to all countries since the beginning of the nineteenth century cannot be precisely determined, since the statistics do not as a rule begin until the migration movement has assumed significant proportions.¹ The statistics of European intercontinental emigration and the immigration statistics of overseas countries show about the same totals. For the years 1820-1924 the latter figure is about 55½ millions, while the total recorded emigration from Europe for 1846-1924 amounts to 50 millions. When one remembers that immigration as a rule is more completely recorded than emigration, these totals indicate that no important series of figures are missing.

In the first half of the nineteenth century the largest emigration was from Great Britain and Germany, while that from other countries, notably France, Scandinavia and Switzerland, was a small part of the whole, although large perhaps in comparison with their own populations.

During that period emigration continued to be directed principally towards territories where the emigrant found racial connections, language, religion and institutions similar to those of his mother country. It was in such places that he might hope for the most rapid accomplishment of his plans. The citizens of the United Kingdom thus went in large numbers to the United States or to British possessions. But other considerations, such as economic conditions, forms of government, legislation or mere curiosity, strongly influenced the decisions of individuals. For example, during the years 1820-1840, Germans migrated to Brazil, Argentina and Australia, in larger numbers than to the United States; emigration to the United States did not assume its importance again until the 40's. The world movement thus took on an international character.

The economic motives and political causes of this great movement

¹Friedrich Kapp states in his *European Emigration to the United States*, New York, 1869, p. 4, that even for the United States from 1777 to 1815 immigration had been very slight. See also p. 374f, United States: General Notes.

of migration are partly to be found in the conditions of the countries of emigration and immigration, and partly in the improvement of transportation.

Until about 1850 the movement was determined mainly by conditions in European countries. Emigration was practically confined to persons who were driven to it by economic, political or religious circumstances in the mother country. The new lands beyond the sea were not well known or attractive, and no one knew what fate awaited him there. Moreover, the high cost of the journey and grievous conditions in the emigration ports and on board ship were added deterrents, while transportation by land was extremely troublesome, so that many persons never reached the port of embarkation. The emigrants were exposed on a long voyage to starvation and disease. It was not uncommon for 1 to 10 per cent of the emigrants to perish either on board ship or soon after landing.

Nevertheless, at the beginning of the nineteenth century there was a fairly large movement, but not until the 40's did it become a mass movement of European populations and that principally because the legal obstacles to emigration had been gradually removed.

Everywhere serfdom was coming to an end. One of the results of the French Revolution was the freedom of the individual to migrate within and from his country. Increased capitalistic production through the use of machinery and cheap raw material from overseas involved everywhere an increase in population which provided labor for overseas territories. Industrial production was stimulated by technical improvements, and under favorable conditions it attracted from the land increasing numbers of unskilled workers. The recurring depressions of the economic cycle involved periodical unemployment. One relief measure was emigration, sometimes spontaneous but frequently assisted by the authorities.

The number of emigrants was increased by the impoverishment of agriculture. Countries where large estates and a tenant system prevailed suffered severely from the periodical depressions. This appeared in Ireland and Germany, whence numerous agricultural workers went to the United States and Canada, particularly in the years between 1840 and 1860 as the result of depressions and bad harvests. Agricultural emigration was also increased by the introduction of free trade. In countries where small holdings prevailed, as in southern Germany and Switzerland, the progressive subdivision of the land frequently led to considerable emigration. Certain political disturbances, such as the despotism in Germany

after the Napoleonic period and the democratic revolution in 1848, induced large sections of the middle classes to seek a livelihood in the New World.

In earlier centuries overseas production was determined mainly by the needs of the home population, but in the nineteenth century a change took place which may be attributed to the improvement of transportation. The natural wealth of the overseas countries came to be exploited without limit and this called for the introduction of a large supply of labor which was available in Europe.¹ Since the slave trade in African Negroes had been abolished as the result of the growth of civilization reinforced by the unproductive nature of compulsory labor under modern technical conditions (coolie labor, introduced to replace the Negro slaves, was found equally unsatisfactory), the interests of the new overseas states and of the European colonial powers concentrated on population problems. The United States were in the most favorable position for bringing in an unlimited number of European immigrants. They had at their disposal a tremendous amount of land, liberal agrarian legislation, and capitalistic industry which started during the Napoleonic Wars and continually offered more and better possibilities of employment. A large westward movement from the Atlantic seaboard took place and expanded the possibilities of employment. The laws for the protection of passengers on board ship, beginning with the statutes of 1819, also encouraged immigration.

The British colonies adjusted their political and economic life to serve the permanent interests of the settlers. The theoretical views of Gibbon Wakefield concerning the settlement and self-government of the colonies were realized in the Dominions, particularly in Australia. Wakefield opposed the free distribution of Crown lands among settlers without capital. He expressed the view that settlers must not only possess capital before they became independent landowners, but also should have acquired knowledge of the local needs of overseas agriculture. He therefore called for the immigration of masses of workers who were to take employment in the colonies for a period, until they had saved some money. They should then pay for land. The sums paid for the land were to go to a fund for paying the expenses of transportation of other workers. Previously, this system had often been approximately realized in the form of "indentured servants." In Canada, up to the end of the nineteenth

¹The first year in which more than 100,000 immigrants arrived in the United States was 1842; in 1854 the number reached 425,000.

century, the policy of free land prevented its adoption. In the Australian colonies, however, it was introduced with such results that the deportation of convicts became superfluous. As soon as these colonies had a sufficient free population, self-government based on the English parliamentary system could be introduced. This had been proposed for Canada by Wakefield and Lord Durham (1837) and was completely realized in 1867. Just as Upper and Lower Canada, New Brunswick, Newfoundland, and Prince Edward Island were then united in a federation, so the South African possessions were made into a union after the Boer War and the Australian States into a commonwealth in 1900. In the course of further developments, the Dominions gradually became autonomous States co-ordinate with the mother country in a personal union under the King of England (1926). Great Britain thus succeeded in retaining these territories and uniting them into a commonwealth which offers the British extraordinary opportunities for migration and livelihood (Empire settlement).

The predominance of the British among emigrants of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is easily understood from the causes of emigration already set forth and because the movement was to some extent assisted by the State. Protection of emigration by the state was also first established among the British. The number of emigrants from Great Britain between 1815 and 1924 was about 19,000,000, according to the passenger statistics, which after 1860 included about one-fifth more than the number of actual emigrants; Germany was next with about 6,000,000.

While English emigration has continued up to the present time except for brief intervals to be the most extensive, German emigration in the second half of the nineteenth century was reduced to a minimum by the strengthening of the economic position of the country and the lack of German colonies. Scandinavian and Swiss emigration also reached their peak in the 80's.

Certain investigators have claimed that the Germanic races are particularly inclined to emigrate. Calvo remarks: "The south of Europe appears as a whole less inclined to expatriation than the centre and the north, that is to say, with the exception of Austria, perhaps more apparent than real, the races of Germanic stock are, when the climate is suitable, more migratory than the Latin races."¹ But as soon as the same causes of emigration began to press on the countries of southern and eastern Europe as had for-

¹Calvo, *Etude sur l'émigration et la colonisation*, Paris, 1875.

merly influenced the northwestern peoples, a great movement of emigration from them set in, encouraged by the extraordinary demand for labor in overseas countries.

The center of gravity of emigration, during the last two decades, has moved away from the industrial western States to the southern and eastern agricultural States of Europe, notably Italy, Austria, Hungary, and Russia.

This was greatly assisted by the multiplication of steamships and the changed technique of navigation. After 1870 sailing vessels practically ceased to be used for transporting emigrants.¹ Several groups of commercial interests in the carrying trade arose which, by an elaborate and complicated system of agencies, drew the attention of peoples who hitherto had known little of emigration to the attractive conditions in overseas countries. As soon as German emigration declined, the great steamship companies were keenly interested in drawing the high wages in America to the attention of the agricultural proletariat of European countries in which the system of large estates had brought about unsatisfactory conditions of wages and life (Italy, Hungary, Galicia, Russia).² Satisfactory terms of transportation offered them the prospect of realizing within a few years their ideal, the possession of a small piece of land free from rent.

After one generation had migrated, the further current was affected by the same causes as had formerly appeared in the countries of northwestern Europe: relations between those who had remained at home and those who were prospering abroad (letters, remittances, etc.). In spite of the defence measures adopted by the countries of emigration, the movement soon amounted to hundreds of thousands annually.

More recent emigration was affected of course, apart from the recruiting devices of those commercially interested (steamship companies and agents), by the prospect of a better livelihood and a higher standard of living (economic, political and moral), and by

¹According to the statistics of the port of New York, the proportion of sailing vessels was 96.4 per cent in 1856 and 3.2 per cent in 1873.

²I. Ferenczi. *Unemployment and International Migrations of Workers* (Report to the International Committee of the International Association on Unemployment), Jena, 1913, p. 31.

The prevalence of large estates and the splitting-up of small holdings had brought about a bad state of affairs in agriculture in those countries, just as they had in Ireland and Germany. The number of agricultural wage workers had been swollen by the decrease of the peasantry and by the large number of employees dismissed by the owners of medium and large estates. The extension of the use of machinery in agriculture and the disappearance of cattle had greatly limited the possibility of employment and more intensive types of cultivation appeared only to a moderate extent.

the attractive reports of persons who had already emigrated—imponderable psychological factors. But all these causes of agricultural emigration are insignificant compared with the fundamental fact that the peasant population could not find employment either in agriculture or in industry, adequate to assure them an annual income which would satisfy their standards.

It was not so much the difference between money wages or real wages at the start which induced hundreds of thousands of agricultural workers to cross the frontiers every year, but the possibility of a permanent livelihood, an increased annual income and considerable savings afforded by foreign agricultural or industrial areas.

Earlier legislation (Passenger Acts) actually encouraged emigration or immigration, but the influx of aliens on a lower cultural and economic level aroused in the older elements of the population in immigration countries fears for their own standard of living, and in the Governments fears about their assimilation. This brought about in the United States after 1882 an increasingly strict selective legislation (exclusion of persons incapable of earning a living). Then came the political experiences of the War, after which drastically restrictive immigration laws were passed. This legislation not only limited the scope of international migration throughout the world, but also changed its direction except in so far as it was likewise checked in other immigration countries where similar tendencies prevailed. This anti-migration tendency has also recently appeared in the European countries of emigration and immigration, notably in Italy.

In spite of post-war conditions, which were inimical to emigration and immigration, in spite of the disappointment of hopes that emigration might be a general measure of relief in Europe,¹ and in spite of the legislation hostile to migration on both sides of the ocean, the fact that there is on one side a thickly populated territory with an intensive economic regime, and on the other side whole continents with small populations and great economic possibilities is bound to lead to increased migration. The more orderly conditions become in the new countries, the more widespread the knowledge of their circumstances, the more rapid, secure and safe the means of communication, and the closer the relations between the inhabitants of the old and the new countries, the more complicated and fluctuating will be the whole migration movement. A survey of modern inter-

¹*Idem, Assistenza ai Disoccupati ed il Problema dell' Emigrazione, Nuova Antologia, Roma, 16 luglio, 1924.*

national migrations is rendered difficult by the fact that most countries are to an increasing extent countries both of emigration and of immigration. A rational international regulation of this phenomenon, serving the interests of all alike, will be possible only on the basis of precise and comprehensive international statistics. The national and international tables together with our historical sketch of migration movements show to what extent this task has been accomplished with respect to the intercontinental and continental currents, and how much still remains to be done.

The picture of nineteenth-century migration would be incomplete if it were confined to the movement of European races. One of the characteristics of modern migration is the participation of the colored races in overseas movements and the increasing exchange of workers between the countries and continents inhabited by them. The Spanish colonies in America after the proclamation of their independence, as well as the English and French colonies after the emancipation of their Negro slaves, were compelled to make up for the lack of labor by calling in cheap workers from all parts of the world. Laborers were required who were suited for working in tropical climates. Resort was had to the system of "indentured laborers," which had already served in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. This system of labor contracts for long periods brought workers from four principal areas: the Spanish and Portuguese islands of the Atlantic Ocean, African islands and the African continent, India and China. This type of semi-slavery was seen, in the course of time, to be unsatisfactory and it led to social disturbances and racial antagonisms. The British colonial world and the United States at the end of the nineteenth century closed their doors more and more to the immigration of alien races, and a strong movement also arose in the Asiatic countries of emigration against the exportation of "indentured laborers," so that this current was practically limited to movements within the continent of Asia.