

The Freedom to Move

BY OSCAR W. COOLEY AND PAUL L. POIROT

The freedom of the individual to move toward greener pastures, wherever they may seem to be, has been a vital part of the freedom of commerce—the freedom of choice that has constituted the truly distinctive characteristic of “the American way.”

In view of our long experience of near-perfect freedom to move about as each might choose, some of us may not realize the limitations that confront people in many other parts of the world who might like to move toward something better. Many who might choose to enter the United States, peacefully observing our laws and paying their own way, are denied entry. Our community slogans now seem to read: “Welcome to all peaceful and productive newcomers—except foreigners.” And a foreigner here is an individual who has crossed a special political line, supposedly which bounds “the land of the free”!

If it is sound to erect a barrier along our national boundary lines, against those who see greater opportunities here than in their native lands, why should we not erect similar barriers between states and localities within our nation? Why should a low-paid worker—“obviously ignorant, and probably a Socialist”—be allowed to migrate from a failing buggy shop in Massachusetts to the expanding automobile shops of Detroit? According to the common attitude toward immigrants, he would compete with native Detroiters for food and clothing

and housing. He might be willing to work for less than the prevailing wage rate in Detroit, “upsetting the labor market” there. His wife and children might “contaminate” the local sewing circles and playgrounds with foreign ways and ideas. Anyhow, he was a native of

Massachusetts, and therefore that state should bear the full “responsibility for his welfare.”

Those are matters we might ponder, but our honest answer to all of them is reflected in our actions—we’d rather ride in automobiles than in buggies. It would be foolish to try to buy an automobile or anything else in the free market, and at the same time deny any individual an opportunity to help produce those things we want.

Our domestic relationships would be harmed seriously by restraints upon man’s freedom to migrate. But why shouldn’t the same reasoning hold for our foreign relationships?

Fear No. 1: The “melting pot” might fail to assimilate newcomers. This notion has as little merit as the idea that a third-generation Yankee’s digestive tract isn’t capable of assimilating a bunch of carrots grown by a foreign-born Japanese or Italian vegetable gardener. The assimilation of a foreign-

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born person is accomplished when the immigrant willingly comes to America, paying his own way not only to get here but also after he arrives, and peacefully submitting to the laws and customs of his newly adopted country. Freedom to exchange goods and services voluntarily in the market place is the economic catalyst of the American “melting pot.” Christian-like morality is the social catalyst—and if it has come to be in short supply among native Americans, the blame for that shortage should not be laid upon our immigrants.

Fear No. 2: The “wrong kind” of people might come to America. The danger that “a poorer class” might come from Asia or Africa or Southern and Eastern Europe and contaminate our society undoubtedly seems real to any person who thinks of himself as a member of a superior class or race. Such a person, like any good disciple of Marx, is assuming the existence of classes and is convinced that he is qualified to judge others and to sort them into these classes.

Perhaps what is feared is the importation of a new idea of the relationship between the individual and his government. If that has been our fear, it very well might have been justified. For America has been rapidly substituting a socialistic State control for the traditional system of private enterprise. But let us not mistake persons for ideas; the ideas are the root of the problem. Migration of persons is not a reliable measure of the flow of ideas.

Fear No. 3: Immigrants might deprive our own workers of jobs and depress the wage scale. The fear that immigrants might take the jobs of American workers is based on the fantasy that the number of jobs to be filled within our economy is strictly limited. Individuals still do—and undoubtedly always will—entertain unsatisfied desires for more and more goods and services, which industrious and ingenious individuals constantly are producing in response to opportunities. If there is freedom to think, to trade, and to move, then opportunities for new, creative jobs are not limited to the wilderness or a spot of idle land.

The fear that heavy immigration of workers would depress the wages of native workers is an outgrowth of socialist doctrine. Socialism is so concerned with con-

sumption and “equitable distribution” that it neglects the source of production. It fails to recognize that there can be more and more to consume only if capital and tools are first produced to give leverage to the productive power of man.

Can we hope to explain the blessings of freedom to foreign people while we deny them the freedom to cross our boundaries? To advertise America as the “land of the free,” and to pose as the world champion of freedom in the contest with communism, is hypocritical, if at the same time we deny the freedom of immigration as well as the freedom of trade. And we may be sure that our neighbors overseas are not blind to this hypocrisy.

A community operating on the competitive basis of the free market will welcome any willing newcomer for his potential productivity, whether he brings capital goods or merely a willingness to work. Capital and labor then attract each other, in a kind of growth that spells healthy progress and prosperity in that community. That principle seems to be well recognized and accepted by those who support the activities of a local chamber of commerce. Why do we not dare risk the same attitude as applied to national immigration policy?

Our collective abandonment of the economic system of the free market leaves for us the controlled communal life, where everyone wants to be a consumer without producing anything.

The Basic Problem

Our immigration policy merely reflects the existence of this serious internal problem in America. Our present policy toward immigrants is consistent with the rest of the controls over persons which inevitably go with national socialism. But the controlled human relationships within the “welfare state” are not consistent with freedom. Great Britain once thought she could deny freedom to American colonists. And now, her own people have traded their freedom for nationalized austerity. Even a “prosperous” modern America can ill afford traveling that same course. If we do, our community, too, will lose its capacity to attract newcomers. Then we wouldn’t need an immigration policy. But who among us would want to remain in a community where opportunities no longer exist?

