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Immigration

MARSHALL DRAWS REFORM IDEAS FROM BRITISH COMMONWEALTH

A former secretary of labor is recommending an employment-based U.S. immigration policy modeled on the experiences of Australia, Canada and the United Kingdom.

Australia, Britain and Canada have established immigration policies that are “compatible with the value-added principle that foreign workers should complement and not compete with domestic workers.” So should the United States, argues Ray Marshall, secretary of labor in the Carter Administration.

In his new work *Value-Added Immigration: Lessons for the United States from Canada, Australia, and the United Kingdom*, Marshall, now an economics professor at the University of Texas at Austin, tells the reader that Canada and Australia, with nearly twice the share of foreign-born individuals as the United States and a similar long history as nations of immigrants, have a much smaller unauthorized workforce. Britain, a relative newcomer to immigration-related population growth, has about the same share of immigrants and foreign-born workers as the United States.

Marshall concedes that Australia and Britain are islands and that Canada’s only land border is with an even more prosperous country, thus their relative greater success at controlling an unauthorized influx of immigrants may be in part due to geography.

The three countries followed differing paths to policies focused on “importing more skilled workers relative to less-skilled and family-based immigrants.”

Australia and Canada began — as did the United States — with large empty spaces that demanded to be filled by immigrants without distinction. Australia and Canada encouraged the addition of people of British stock, while the United States drew from a broader pot of northwestern Europeans.

In 1967, Canada replaced its immigration system based on family ties and national origin with a points-based system that took into account education, language skills, experience in skilled occupations and the applicant’s actual job prospects (including possession of a job offer).

During recessions, Marshall notes, Canada continued to accept “high levels of immigration” (250,000 entrants or more a year) based on the idea that long-term benefits of immigration stability outweigh short-term drawbacks.

“Canadian experience demonstrates, in addition, that an employment-based migration system must pay attention to the linkages between different parts of the system,” Marshall insists. “For example, the PBS improved the foreign worker selection process, but an antiquated application approval process created huge backlogs that rendered that system inadequate for the needs of dynamic labor markets.”

Eventually, Canada developed a two-step process that allowed temporary immigration with an eventual path to landed immigrant status.

Australians had seen themselves as “a European outpost in the Asia-Pacific region whose citizens and leaders were highly motivated to avoid being inundated by migrants from their heavily populated Asian neighbors,” Marshall writes. It was only in the 1970s that “whites-only” policies were decisively ended, to be replaced with a points system “in order to attract more highly skilled workers, inventors, and entrepreneurs from Asia and elsewhere.”

Subclass Visa

Unlike Canada and the United States, Australia carefully avoided “large-scale, low-skilled temporary indentured worker programs.” Instead, policymakers Down Under opted for “effective alternatives” such as higher wages to attract Australians into those jobs rather than foreigners, family-based immigration, and a Working Holiday Maker program “to attract young, relatively well-educated foreigners for temporary and seasonal jobs for no more than six months for each employer and for no more than one year in Australia.”

The sole exception, the “Subclass 457 visa,” adopted in the 1990s in response to pressure from agricultural, mining, tourism, manufacturing and food-processing industries to admit temporary low-skilled immigrants, has become the nation’s “most controversial migration program,” even though the Canberra government launched it “under carefully controlled conditions.”

Britain is the only country in the lot that is not “a traditional immigration nation” and until the 1990s

had a “zero net immigration” policy, allowing in just enough people to offset continuing emigration, Marshall notes.

Many of the immigrants, mostly nonwhite and from former colonies — migrants once legally termed “patrials” with historical privileges — fueled the flames of British “xenophobia and racism” until the United Kingdom joined the European Community in 1973. The move allowed citizens from other member countries free access to Britain “and signaled that the country would become more European and less Asian and African,” Marshall explains.

Following the Australian and Canadian examples, the Blair government (1997-2007) shifted to an employment-based system to overcome “pressing shortages” of education, welfare and health care specialists. In 2001, a points system was introduced to encourage skills-based immigration. That would have been the end of the story, Marshall writes, except for two unexpected developments.

First was the flood of immigration after the decision to open Britain’s doors to nationals of the eastern European countries that joined the European Union in 2004. Second, was the effect on public opinion of the 2001 race riots in Bradby, Burnley and Oldham and the 2005 jihadist attacks on London’s transportation system.

“Early in 2011,” Marshall notes, “Prime Minister David Cameron attacked British and European multiculturalism which, he said, allowed some groups, especially militant Muslim extremists, to turn young Muslims into terrorists.”

Learn Lessons Well

From this triad of policy twists and turns, Marshall draws the following seven lessons:

- Adopt a “strategic vision for value-added immigration” to improve productivity and innovation and overcome labor shortages, rather than to reduce labor costs, displace U.S. workers “or substitute migration for public and private investments in education and training.”
- Assign high-level federal responsibility for em-

ployment-based migration — “most logically in the Department of Labor” rather than in the Department of Homeland Security, since “employment-based migration is primarily a labor market issue.”

- Establish a high-level commission to regularly recommend measures to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the employment-based migration system.
- Set up a permanent, independent “Commission on Foreign Workers” to provide policymakers “objective, evidence-based, professional advice.”
- Enact “comprehensive immigration reform” of the nation’s “dysfunctional” system.
- Reform temporary foreign worker H-1B, L, H-2, and Exchange Visitor (J visa) temporary worker programs since they “do not promote the national interest or protect foreign or domestic workers very well.”

Another lesson defies being reduced to a bullet.

Marshall proposes a multifaceted set of principles: “(1) admit foreign workers mainly for vacancies that cannot be filled by domestic workers; (2) refuse to allow foreign workers to depress wages and working conditions or displace American workers; (3) refuse to permit the importation of foreign workers to substitute for the education and training of American workers; (4) clarify the enforcement authority for all foreign worker programs; (5) continuously improve the administration of foreign worker programs; and (6) require labor recruiters to be registered and meet minimum qualifications.”

Marshall is adamant that “The costs of the status quo call for action.”

✓ *Value-Added Immigration: Lessons for the United States from Canada, Australia, and the United Kingdom* by Ray Marshall, 248 pages (paper), 2011, ISBN: 978-1-932066-30-2, is available from the Economic Policy Institute, 1333 H Street, N.W., Suite 300, East Tower, Washington, D.C. 20005-4707; (202) 775-8810; www.epi.org.

—Cecilio Morales

About ETR — The *Employment & Training Reporter* is a weekly trade journal covering the field of workforce development with a special emphasis on public sector programs in the United States. Since 1969, ETR coverage of the whole range of U.S. federal, state and local programs has included the Workforce Investment Act, the Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Technical Education Act, education for employment at the secondary and technical levels, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families and work supports, as well as vocational rehabilitation and employment for the disabled.

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