

ONLY IF IT'S PEACEFUL

"Immigration Symposium"

Ralph Raico, Ed.

Journal of Libertarian Studies 13, no. 2
(Summer 1998)

Most libertarians have in recent years favored "open borders," but this indispensable collection of articles throws that view into serious question. Some of the contributors, e.g., Walter Block, defend free immigration, to one extent or another; but the opponents of this position are well represented and raise vital points.

The dean of libertarian philosophers, John Hospers, raises a key issue in his excellent "A Libertarian Argument Against Open Borders." He states: "When one questioner asks, 'Isn't there a danger that immigrants will enter the country to receive the benefits of the welfare state?' Jacob Hornberger responds, 'Then get rid of the welfare state!' The response, of course, provides no answer to the question asked. What are we supposed to do in the meantime?" (p. 158).

Given the attractions posed by the United States welfare state, open borders spell sure disaster. Further, as

Civil rights laws
and affirmative
action may have
bearing on
the justice
of immigration.

Ralph Raico intimates in his incisive introduction, civil rights laws and "affirmative action" may have considerable bearing on the justice of immigration. Immigrants who are members of favored minority groups may qualify for immediate benefits denied to citizens not included in ethnic groups the state chooses to privilege (p. 136).

But, one may object: an issue of principles is involved. The welfare state and affirmative action may pose severe practical problems; but libertarians have no choice but to accept whatever may be the consequence of free immigration. Are we not committed to voluntary action as our guiding social policy? How can state restrictions of the free movements of immigrants be supported by any self-respecting classical liberal?

The thought behind this objection appears to be: "Although open borders are a recipe for disaster, let us embrace this policy and go forward to chaos." Whether this is the height of wisdom in political philosophy is

perhaps open to doubt. But still, the question remains: what is a libertarian to do?

Hans Hoppe, in "The Case for Free Trade and Restricted Immigration" finds an escape from our dilemma. Libertarians, he argues, are not even in pure theory required to accept open borders. True enough, libertarians must accept "capitalist acts between consenting adults"; but this does not entail that people have an unrestricted right to move wherever they please.

Future libertarian
discussion of
immigration will have to
take this symposium
into account.

Far from it. A free society is not at all committed to "free" immigration: "free in conjunction with immigration does not mean immigration by invitation of individual households and firms, but unwanted invitation or forced integration; and restricted immigration actually means, or at least can mean, the protection of private households and firms from unwanted invasion and forced integration" (pp. 226–27).

Given the problems, both practical and theoretical, posed by open borders, even those reluctant to impose restrictions speak with caution. The

late Julian Simon, the most noted of immigration advocates, stops short of support of a natural right to enter a country. A given population has a "property right in their social and economic organization" (p. 152). This permits them to regulate the number of immigrants, but this is a right that Simon thinks must be exercised with great caution.

Tibor Machan, a long-time defender of a Randian rendition of libertarianism, maintains that prospective immigrants must demonstrate that they have the economic means for self-sufficiency in order to be granted the right to settle in a country.

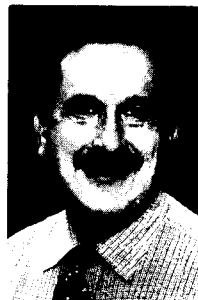
"The general precondition, then, of immigration into a free society is self-sufficiency and voluntary relationship with those who are already there" (p. 200).

In this suggestion, Machan is seconded by Jesús Huerta de Soto. But this eminent Spanish economist goes further. He holds that "under no circumstances should the political vote be granted to immigrants quickly" (p. 195).

Only Walter Block, with characteristic verve, defends the open borders position. Whether he responds adequately to the welfarist concerns of Hospers and others must be left for readers to judge.

Future discussion of immigration by libertarians will, it is safe to say, have to take this fundamental symposium into account. ▀

David Gordon, who writes *The Mises Review*, is a senior fellow at the Ludwig von Mises Institute. He was educated at UCLA, where he earned his PhD in intellectual history, and is the author of *Resurrecting Marx: The Analytical Marxists on Exploitation, Freedom and Justice*; *The Philosophical Origins of Austrian Economics*; and *Critics of Marx*. He is also editor of *Secession, State, and Liberty* and co-editor of H.B. Acton's *Morals of Markets and Other Essays*. Dr. Gordon is a contributor to such journals as *Analysis*, *The International Philosophic Quarterly*, *The Journal of Libertarian Studies*, and *The Quarterly Journal of Austrian Economics*.



----- ✂ ----- PLEASE PRINT ----- ✂ -----

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone _____

I enclose a check for \$ _____ (\$15.95 for 4 issues) or please
charge my credit card: ☐ Visa ☐ MasterCard ☐ Discover

Card No. _____

Signature: _____ Exp.: Mo/Yr _____

Ludwig von Mises Institute, 518 West Magnolia Avenue,
Auburn, Alabama 36832-4528
(334) 844-2500; fax (334) 844-2583; mail@mises.org;
www.mises.org

The Mises Review

Ludwig von Mises Institute
Auburn, Alabama 36832-4528

Non-Profit Org.
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
Ludwig von Mises Institute