

Brain Drain Is Hampering Development in LDC's

The continuing exodus of trained scientific and medical personnel from the less developed countries, or LDC's, is widening the gap between rich and poor nations and stymieing efforts of developing nations to build up their own scientific and technical establishments, according to a report recently completed for the House Foreign Affairs Committee.*

"Brain drain" was a much-discussed phenomenon during the 1960's, when European university graduates were grabbing their diplomas and hopping the first plane to America. Now the report, part of an extended study on the interactions of science and technology with United States foreign policy, notes that while postwar migration of professionals from other advanced nations to the United States has tapered off, the years since the mid-1960's have seen a steep rise in immigration of the scientific and technological elite, particularly in the medical and health professions, from LDC's. The influx of scientists and engineers has leveled off somewhat in the 1970's owing to federal cutbacks in aerospace and defense spending. But foreign medical graduates are still coming over in droves, drawn by the shortages and inefficient utilization of medical manpower in the United States.

The study says that brain drain is an inevitable symptom of "structural maladjustments in the economies of developing countries," and its principal cause "seems to lie in the inability of the LDC's to create an *effective demand* for professionals despite the presence of an almost *unlimited need*."

Training Doesn't Match Demand

LDC's for the most part have failed to train manpower to meet their particular needs. The Philippines, for example, produce "an enormous surplus of doctors, while the disciplines of science and technology, so necessary for balanced national development but held in low esteem, are virtually ignored." And in India, where the "brain drain remains a sore and lively issue in relations with the United States," the report says, "neither government nor industry . . . can absorb even half of the 600,000 graduates each year who move into the job market."

"Lacking in most LDC's are the elementary necessities for the development of science and technology: adequate governmental funding for research, institutions to carry on research, a sufficiency of laboratories and equipment, journals and learned societies to disseminate findings, and most important, a scientific tradition." And with indigenous graduate training conspicuously lacking, "the United States has become a graduate school for most of the developing world." Not only do students become attached to the intellectual stimulation and financial rewards to be found in the United States, but the new skills they acquire are often marginally relevant to the needs at home. For example, the types of medical professionals needed in LDC's are general

practitioners and public health specialists, but doctors who continue training in advanced nations are likely to get into specialty areas for which their countries as yet have little need.

The report contains statistics showing, ironically, that in some cases the monetary value this country gains from foreign-born professionals often exceeds that of the foreign aid given to their home countries.

In a sense, says the report, "brain drain is a hidden problem for American foreign policy. And though expressed concern may have diminished in the past decade, the problem persists, along with the conditions that produced it, while the consequences appear to be worsening because the problem is no longer between the United States and the developed industrial nations of the West. Rather it is between the United States and the emerging LDC's. An unequal relationship has evolved. The gap between rich and poor has been widening, not closing. The poor continue to subsidize the rich with expensively produced professional manpower."

The report doesn't have anything particularly new to recommend, although it does emphasize that juggling immigration quotas and requirements is not the answer and would violate America's commitment to the principles of international educational exchange and liberal immigration policies.

Halting the influx of doctors would be the easiest, it says, because this could be accomplished domestically by training enough doctors to fill the positions now occupied by foreigners. As for the larger problem—eliminating the "push," or indigenous circumstances that make emigration desirable to the foreign professional—the answer is always the same: economic development. Since the "scientific-technological infrastructure" essential for development requires shutting off the brain drain, a vicious circle is apparent. To break this circle, advanced nations must supply more developmental assistance. The report asserts that the United States in particular will have to move beyond its neoisolationist tendencies—which have come about as a result of disillusionment with the Vietnam war, the balance of payments crisis, and general feelings that past programs haven't worked very well—and develop a "new and broader self interest" based on the recognition of global interdependence.

The report warns that brain drain "is one of those enduring, if low-profile issues that has a great potential for mischief in this Nation's future relations with the LDC's," because "brain drain and development are principles in contradiction: one cannot have it both ways—an LDC cannot develop without an educated elite."

Amusingly enough, there is one pocket of LDC's that doesn't seem to have much trouble getting its foreign-trained experts to come home: the Arab oildoms. Saudi Arabia's minister of petroleum affairs, Ahmad Zaki Yamani, principal negotiator over the future of Middle Eastern oil resources, sharpened his skills at Harvard Law School. Indeed, "the United States has played a primary role in educating many of the young Arab oil elite."—C.H.

* *Brain Drain: A Study of the Persistent Issue of International Scientific Mobility*, available from Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 20402. 272 pp. \$2.15.