

Economic Man's Hollow Victory?

Book Review by Wayne Lutton

In his annual paean to mass immigration, *Wall Street Journal* editor Robert Bartley gave his hearty endorsement to Mexican President Vicente Fox's call for essentially abolishing the border between his country and the United States. Indeed, Bartley reminded his readers that the *WSJ* first called for a constitutional amendment: "There shall be open borders" in 1984 [R. Bartley, "Open Nafta Borders? Why Not?" *Wall Street Journal*, July 2, 2001, p. A15].

The folks at Dow Jones & Company view the United States not as a sovereign nation populated by a citizenry whose interests should be its foremost concern, but rather as simply a part of a global economic order. The *WSJ*'s "solution to the problem of illegal immigration is to make it legal...."

To John Attarian, an economist and historian, the *WSJ* position is evidence of the baleful influence of what he dubs "economism" — the reduction of humans to economic animals and the subservience of human activity to economics. If "economic efficiency" trumps all else, then a particular country and its people have no interests that deserve protection and preservation.

Although it is unfashionable in many circles, Dr. Attarian is a patriot. His concern is: "what is best for my country? Is it good for America to subordinate everything to affluence, efficiency, and profit maximization? To depend upon foreign-born 'human capital?' To pour in immigrants to cut labor costs, even if it impoverishes American labor, and promotes America's Balkanization, and other noneconomic consequences?"

Economism and the National Prospect is an

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expansion of Dr. Attarian's seminal essay of the same title published in *The Social Contract* (Vol. X, No. 2, Winter 1999-2000).

After reviewing the essential characteristics of "economism," the author goes on to consider how its advocates influence current immigration policy debates. Immigrants, both unskilled and select professionals (such as in the computer industry), are seen as a renewable source of cheap labor and profit maximization. That mass immigration may hurt native-born workers, or lead to cultural disharmony and political strife matter little, if at all, to believers in "economism."

In chapter seven, Dr. Attarian deals with the economic unworkability of economism. Leading advocates of economism deny the very concept of limitations. A prime representative of this school is William O'Keefe, Executive Vice-President of the American Petroleum Institute, who proclaimed "There Are No Limits to Growth" and scorned "the bogus

finite resources argument."

John Attarian sees the U. S. economy as "a giant inverted pyramid, piling rising burdens on a narrow, and weakening, energy, environmental and resource base; top-heavy, hideously vulnerable, giving hostages to fortune...Obvious consequences of growthmania and gluttony are resource exhaustion and environmental ruin, which will eventually cause economic decline."

John Attarian challenges us to make a difficult choice. He is confident that Americans can reject "economism." But, like a drug addict, withdrawal will be difficult and not without pain. •

Economism and the National Prospect

by John Attarian
 Monterey, VA: American Immigration Control Foundation
 (PO Box 525, Monterey, VA 24465)
 72 pages, \$6.00

