

Why Import More Scientists and Engineers?

A Book Review by Wayne Lutton

At a time of record high rates of unemployment and underemployment among scientists and engineers, American businesses and universities continue to bring in tens of thousands of additional foreign professionals and graduate students every year. Many of the professionals and most of the students never go home. And, as David North points out in his new study, *Soothing the Establishment*, they often secure education and job preferences. Further, there are U.S.-based firms that use a steady stream of "temporary" foreign workers, such as computer programmers, instead of hiring American citizens.

Elsewhere, former Senator Eugene McCarthy has talked about the "colonization" of America by foreigners. North confirms that this is taking place in the fields of science and engineering, especially in graduate education. While U.S. citizens are still obtaining degrees in these areas, relatively few go on to earn graduate degrees. This does not mean that they are not capable of doing such graduate work. Rather, few jobs in these fields require a graduate education. And the fields are already saturated with degree holders. As Prof. Norman Matloff of the University of California at Davis noted in his article, "Foreign Nationals Versus U.S. Workers," *San Francisco Chronicle*, March 28, 1995, last year the software industry needed around 40,000 new workers, far fewer than the 51,000 computer science graduates our universities produced (and not accounting for recently laid-off professionals who need re-employment). Yet the number of foreign computer programmers granted work visas in 1994 exceeded 30,000!

A major reason why foreigners are drawn to America for graduate work in science and engineering is because they can often secure full-funding for their education. A few years ago the U.S. Congress decided to reserve the Stafford Program federal loans for graduate education to U.S. citizens and permanent resident aliens. This has not lead to a reduction in the number of foreign students entering U.S. graduate degree programs. Far from it. Rather, American universities simply give them grants, underwritten by American taxpayers and donors to schools, that do not have to be paid back, as do student loans. Says North, "what is never mentioned in academe, is that *the further you are from U.S. citizenship the more likely you are to secure American funding* for your graduate studies in science and engineering. This pattern has prevailed for years."

And foreign-born applicants see American graduate degrees as their path for securing an immigrant visa. North reports that American universities not only pay for their education, but often pay for the foreign students' passports, visas, and travel to the United States.

Who benefits from all of this? Businesses, including some government agencies, who hire "compliant" foreigners at reduced wages and benefits. And many universities, who are keeping graduate programs afloat by filling slots with foreign students, too many of whom then take faculty positions [North suggests that there is indeed discrimination against U.S. citizens in academic hiring]. Without the continuous

flow of foreign nationals, many schools would have to scale back or simply cancel some very expensive academic departments for which there is little genuine need.

North's recommendations for dealing with the situation he describes are modest and include calls for a mandatory two-year return home for those

non-U.S. citizens completing study in this country; that no more than 25% of federally funded research grants for students, stipends, and post-doctoral research posts be permitted to go to noncitizens; revisions in Department of Labor certification for "professionals"; and revisions in the issuance of "temporary" visas. Yet, as North's own research suggests, there appears to be little or no genuine need for *any* foreign scientists and engineers. So why admit them? ■

SOOTHING THE ESTABLISHMENT:
THE IMPACT OF FOREIGN-BORN
SCIENTISTS AND ENGINEERS
ON AMERICA
by David S. North
University Press of America, 1995
184 pp., \$29.50 (hardcover)