

Larry Auster is a New York-based writer, the author of *The Path to National Suicide: An Essay on Immigration and Multiculturalism* published in 1990 by the American Immigration Control Foundation (AICF).

NOT AN OPEN-AND-SHUT CASE

By Lawrence Auster

Immigration has emerged as a potent national issue in recent months as California Governor Pete Wilson's vocal concerns about the budgetary costs of immigration, plus Patrick Buchanan's restrictionist campaign platform, have compelled a reluctant media to recognize the growing anti-immigration sentiment in this country.

According to a recent Gallup poll, almost two-thirds (64 percent) of the American people say they would be more likely to vote for a presidential candidate who favored tougher laws to limit immigration. The restrictionists have complaints on several fronts. They argue that uncontrolled immigration — now at one and a half million people per year — is driving down wages and taking jobs, creating chaos along our southern border, causing an explosion of demand for social services at a time when state and local governments are being forced to slash budgets, swelling U.S. population growth (the highest in any industrialized nation) and exacerbating environmental problems, expanding the clientele of race-preference and multiculturalism lobbies, and threatening to turn America into a permanently fragmented society.

But notwithstanding the increasing unease felt by a majority of the country about current immigration policy, open immigration retains the status of a religious faith among the nation's political elites. The mainstream press, though it mentions immigration more frequently these days, automatically dismisses the restrictionist side. Opinion-makers prevent a true debate on the issue by labelling immigration critics as racist, lumping the views of Mr. Buchanan (and even the blandly moderate Pete Wilson) with those of former neo-Nazi David Duke.

Another way of foreclosing debate is to say that the restrictionists' stated concerns about immigration are not what they claim to be, but are a cynical political ploy — a way of scapegoating economic problems onto immigrants. "Is immigration merely being used as a scapegoat for the current recession by Mr. Buchanan, Mr. Duke, and Gov. Wilson?" asks John Dillin in the *Christian Science Monitor*. "Or is the growing level of immigration a legitimate issue that deserves wider attention among the public?"

'EXPLOITING THE ISSUE'

But having raised the possibility that immigration is a legitimate issue, Mr. Dillin immediately proceeds

to crush it, filling his article with quotes from liberal academics who say that criticism of immigration is nothing but scapegoating. "Duke and Buchanan are exploiting the issue," says one, "beating up on immigrants, most of whom are non-white, to make a subtle racial appeal to voters." "The immigration issue is phony," says another, "because immigrants take jobs that Americans won't take." "Immigration is a 'Willie Horton issue' says a third, "a way of blaming problems on someone of another race."

"That omission [the impact of large numbers of immigrants] made the restrictionist movement seem like a hysterical reaction to a non-existent threat, rather than an understandable response to a real problem."

Statements like these, repeated constantly in the media, spread the message that criticism of immigration is simply off-limits to intelligent and decent people.

In charging that restrictionist sentiment is a pathology that is not to be taken seriously on its own terms, journalists are drawing on the conventional wisdom of the social scientists. In his 1955 classic, *Strangers in the Land*, historian John Higham traced the anti-immigration movements of the late 19th and early 20th centuries as a projection of economic problems and other social distresses onto the immigrants. Unfortunately, Mr. Higham told only half the story — leaving out of his otherwise exemplary account the huge and unsettling impact of immigration on American society during the peak periods of nativist fervor. That omission made the restrictionist movement seem like a hysterical reaction to a non-existent threat, rather than an understandable response to a real problem.

THESIS REVISED

Recently, however, Mr. Higham has significantly revised his thesis:

We cannot ignore the fact that the two crises (of anti-immigrant feeling) — the crisis of the 1850s and the crisis of the 1920s — erupted at the peak of the greatest waves of immigration

in American history. Several leading American cities in 1860 were half foreign-born. Not only the dramatic growth of the immigrant population but also the militancy of its leadership was unnerving. In the early 20th century, southern and eastern European workingmen — often under revolutionary leadership — were in the vanguard of the largest strike wave the United States had seen up to that time.

Mr. Higham concludes:

Recovering tolerance and civic harmony depended in both instances on a period of relief from heavy immigration, during which an inclusive national enterprise could bring old and new Americans together.

In other words, what John Higham described in his earlier work as nativist hysteria he now admits was a normal reaction to social upheavals caused in part by massive immigration; he further admits that when those problems were eased by reducing immigration, so was the "hysterical" response.

The point is that immigration restrictionism cannot be simply dismissed as "scapegoating," "exploitation," or any other symptom to be analyzed by the social psychiatrists, but that it is exactly what it claims to be — fear of excessive immigration and its social, cultural and political consequences. It is a view to be accepted or refuted on its own merits.

But here the open-border pundits resort once again to evasion. Even if the immigration issue is legitimate, they say, the way that restrictionists deal with it is not. For example, Jim Hoagland in *The Washington Post* speaks of how France's Jean Marie Le Pen "has cleverly exploited the real social and cultural problems posed by immigration (italics added) to legitimize xenophobic, anti-Semitic and racist appeals to voters caught in an economic squeeze." The implication is that there exists some "acceptable" way to speak critically about the immigration problem without "exploiting" it. But since that advice comes from the very people who have never spoken about immigration except in glowing cliches, and who have always stigmatized anyone who did find fault with it, one wonders what this "nonexploitive" way of discussing the issue might be.

FULL SPEED AHEAD

What the pundits really mean, of course, is that any serious criticism of immigration will not be allowed. That is, it's all right to acknowledge that "some" problems exist, as long as one concludes — despite those problems — that immigration must proceed full speed ahead. But if one raises the same problems as proof that immigration ought to be reduced, well, that's "exploitive."

"...it's perfectly acceptable for liberal educators to observe that immigration is creating unprecedented ethnic and cultural divisions in our society — so long as they conclude that this is a wonderful 'challenge'..."

This Orwellian double-think is a recurrent feature in the immigration debate. For instance, it's perfectly acceptable for liberal educators to observe that immigration is creating unprecedented ethnic and cultural divisions in our society — so long as they conclude that this is a wonderful "challenge" that we can meet by embracing "multicultural" education and a radically revamped national identity. It's OK for author David Rieff to declare that immigration has turned Los Angeles into a Third World city — so long as he calmly accepts that fact and urges his readers to do likewise. And no one minds when Mark Lagon and Michael Lind, writing in the neoconservative journal *Policy Review*, warn that growing ethnic separatism might cause the United States to break up into "several distinct nations" — since Messrs. Lagon and Lind immediately add the politically correct caveat that "tighter restrictions on immigration will not be the answer." But when a restrictionist like Pat Buchanan notices the very same facts — that massive Third-World immigration is turning us into a radically different and divided country — and logically concludes from those facts that immigration should be reduced — then Mr. Buchanan is attacked for being "crabbed," "ungenerous" and "xenophobic." (Now that the Buchanan campaign is fading, the press is only too happy to revert to its usual stand of ignoring immigration as a national political issue.) When it comes to dealing with the negative effects of immigration, only lip service (or complete surrender) is permitted.

TRICK IS NOT TO TALK

Yet even the half-dose of honesty described above is too much for some mainstream opinion-makers, who fear any open discussion of immigration-related problems. To be truly politically correct, the trick is not to talk about immigration at all — a modus operandi specifically recommended by the *Los Angeles Times* in a recent editorial.

The *Times*, while conceding the validity of Gov. Wilson's complaints about the crippling financial costs of immigration, nervously warned that the governor "could easily be misinterpreted as trying to *blame* immigrants for the budgetary problems." And how was he to avoid that danger? "What Wilson should do," the *Times* editors declared, "is discuss the troubling trend in state demographics." As Dan Stein of the Federation for American Immigration Reform pointed out in a letter to the editor of the *Times*:

Discussing demographic trends in California without talking about immigration is like discussing the American trade deficit without mentioning Japan. Never before has any mainstream publication gone on record as urging an elected public official to engage in deliberate obfuscation.

The above exchange gives an idea of how the immigration issue, fiercely guarded by racial taboos and the "nation of immigrants" ideology, has paralyzed the American mind. We, the ordinary people and the leaders of this country, need to start treating immigration as we would any other political question, weighing its benefits as well as its disadvantages, and then acting accordingly. But in order to do that, we must first stop thinking of immigration as some sort of secular god. ■