

Populating far-flung lands

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Abstract

Migration is seen as one of the great challenges of the modern world, and is often regarded in negative terms. However, in the 19th century people were migrating in immense numbers, yet this was defined in positive terms, and actively encouraged. The issues experienced by Empire-building countries such as the United Kingdom were related to finding enough people willing to migrate to its new lands on the furthest side of the world, Australia and New Zealand; these new lands desperately needed populating. Three years after the first settlers arrived, one new city reported a total population of just 1149, despite land and employment being available; similar stories came from other areas. Many of the problems in attracting new settlers were that most showed a preference for going to America. This paper investigates ways in which governments proposed solutions for encouraging migration to areas which were not considered ideal destinations. The findings show that migration choices can be manipulated by a combination of incentives, testimonials, selection criteria and targeted marketing. It also indicates that migration decisions are not made without careful consideration over a period of time.

Key words: Migration, British Empire, population, 19th Century, Antipodes

Introduction

During the latter part of the 19th century there was a huge global movement of people. It was a period of Empire building and the British Empire was the most powerful and influential of its time, but it faced challenges in populating and encouraging migration to its most distant colonies. With the most favoured destination being America, there had to be careful consideration of how to promote migration to the Antipodean countries of Australia and New Zealand. This paper looks at international migration within the framework of the British Empire. It was a time of industrialisation, of improvements in technology, and of population growth around the world; in the United Kingdom the workforce grew from 5 million to 13 million between 1841 and 1911, and most of these people were finding employment in the new industries (Daniels, 2003). All countries had to compete for workers and the receiving countries had to consider various incentives

to attract these workers. The British Empire was spread across the world from Australia to Africa, from India to North America and was “the largest and most diverse empire the world had ever known” (Lieven, 2003:89).

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It was an empire based on trade, and Lieven argues that because its colonies were inhabited by white English-speaking settlers with a common culture, they had many advantages, in particular access to investment from London. Administrators were needed in Africa and India and they formed part of the migration pattern, but the new colonies had land which needed to be developed. The discovery of gold and the transportation of convicts all brought people to the furthest lands, but it took government manipulation to stimulate migration to areas where people were required. English investors put money into railways and steamships, therefore the United Kingdom was able to dominate in manufacturing, especially to British colonies and to North America (Mosk, 2001). Emigration from the United Kingdom was also highest of all nations up to the 1880s, and many of these people were skilled and promoted growth in the new countries (Mosk, 2001).

Migration Destinations

However, although these empires enabled and encouraged people to move around the world, the global population continued to grow at great speed, from 270 million to 460 million over a period of 60 years from 1850 (Woodruff, 2005), so the large numbers leaving did not have an effect of depopulating the sending countries. In the United Kingdom it was in the rural areas of England and Wales that the loss was most felt; more than 4 million people migrated internally to the cities, and the 1851 census showed higher numbers living in towns than the countryside for the first time in recorded history (Long, 2005). In the ten years between 1901 and 1911 some 129,000 moved into the small area of the South Wales coalfields, a rate of growth that was higher than anywhere in the world except the United States (University of Wales Swansea, 2002). Therefore, although the population might not have been diminished by global migration, it created a demographic change.

It has always been accepted that people do migrate towards where there is work and Feldman (2007) notes that all the factors which can be attributed to international migration are also apparent in internal migration; the understanding of one

leads to the understanding of the other. In family economics, sons and daughters who had nothing to inherit were forced into leaving home and seeking work in the urban areas (Feldman, 2007) in order to survive. Moving to cities allowed migrants to improve their socioeconomic position (Long, 2005). Equally, a British worker could increase his standard of living even more by moving to the United States, Canada, Australia or New Zealand (Baines, 1998).

There is also the view that migration may have been a staged process, whereby people moved from the countryside to the cities and then to overseas destinations (Long, 2005). However, Baines (1998) sounds a word of caution in his findings that it was mainly urban unskilled workers who migrated internationally, and argues that there was no indication that they had previously migrated from rural areas. There also seems to be evidence that the urban migrants had better prospects whether they moved or stayed in the rural areas (Long, 2005); they were not the ones who were the most destitute. By self-selection they were the ones who worked better in the urban labour market (Long, 2005).

When it came to international migration, there is no doubt that the United States was the most popular destination; it offered many opportunities to those seeking work and it attracted large numbers from Europe. It was more accessible than the Antipodean colonies, and migrants would by choice go to the closest foreign province (Ravenstein, 1889). There was also the fact that America was more established and it was becoming cheaper and easier to travel as the century progressed. From the 1880s the American economy needed workers for the increasing number of factories and these were predominantly unskilled labourers. The majority of migrants settled in cities. America was a cheaper option also in terms of the amount of outlay migrants were expected to provide for the journey, and it was less risky than a longer voyage (Arnold, 1981), as there was only one ocean to cross.

Within the British Empire, there was Canada, which should also have been an attractive destination according to accessibility. However, Canada was a rural economy in contrast to the United States,

and many of the schemes bringing migrants to Canada resulted in the same migrants consequently making their way to the United States where they could find work in the cities. In this way Canada lost up to 70% of its newcomers, especially groups like the Irish, and although this improved as the farmlands were developed and railways made travel easier, Canada could never compete with the United States in terms of economic opportunities (Belanger, 2001).

This industrialisation of America is given as the reason for its growth at the expense of Australia, which initially had more resources (Carter & Sutch, 2004). In the nineteenth century America had ten times the population of Australia and could both market and exploit its resources accordingly. Carter and Sutch attribute this advance to America starting out earlier in migration but they also point out that the British had a preference for America, especially in the mass migration at the time of the Irish famine. This preference was supported by the shorter journey time, the promise of better conditions and the accessibility of America. Nevertheless, Ireland was still sending out migrants

to Australia although in 1857 only 18% of Irish emigrants were making their way to Australia compared to 76% going to America (The Illustrated London News, 1858).

If Australia had a problem attracting migrants because of the timing of its establishment, then New Zealand had even more of a problem. It had several factors against it, namely the distance, the lack of industrialisation and the size. Nevertheless, many people saw these as positive factors and New Zealand was promoted as a place for middle class families (The Illustrated London News, 1874). But New Zealand was desperately short of labour and it was not until Julius Vogel took charge as Premier in 1873 that recruitment started to improve (Arnold, 1981), and this was mainly through his assisted passages scheme, aimed at the working classes needed to help build the railways and infrastructure of the country. Passages

In some cases agreements were set up so that investors could move people to where the work was by offering free passage

in return for working a certain number of years at a lower wage to pay back the original investment. These contracts varied according to the cost of passage and recruitment and five year contracts were normal for the British colonies by 1851. Assisted passages were used to good effect in populating Australia (New South Wales State Archives) and New Zealand. When the colonies needed labour, there had to be incentives to encourage migration, and free passage allowed the poorer working classes to be targeted. Australia also used a bounty system to get young families and women there, offering low cost passage, and commission paid to friends and shipping companies for providing migrants (New South Wales State Archives).

The Australian government spent much time debating ways of attracting migrants to the country and they came up with ideas of distributing publicity materials to the places where working class people might gather (Hayden, 1971), but even the politicians were aware that they needed to do much more than give out information. The pamphlets might have helped publicise the colony, but they did not actually produce the people. Direct financial assistance was still required (Hayden, 1971). New Zealand also used publicity by promoting their assisted passages. In 1871 the Immigration and Public Works Act set up under Julius Vogel allowed central government to select migrants according to numbers and type requested by the provinces (Arnold, 1981). Free passages were then offered to both agricultural and general labourers who were sober, industrious, of good moral character, of good mind and in sound health who were wanting to work (Phillips, 2007). Advertisements and posters were placed everywhere.

Isaac Featherston was put in charge of immigration and he set up an organisation in London; not only did he have a complete staffed office to direct a professional advertising campaign, but he employed fulltime agents as well as over a hundred part-time local agents, such as school teachers, booksellers and estate agents, to recruit by distributing promotional materials and application forms (Arnold, 1981). The demand from New Zealand was high, and

Featherston was asked to provide 13,000 emigrants in 1873; the demand was not met at this time because of competition from North America and as the British labour market was buoyant (Arnold, 1981), those seeking to move for economic reasons did not feel the need to migrate in order to find work. When the required numbers did not appear, a decision was made to offer free transport from their homes to the port plus free requirements for their journey (Arnold, 1981). Over the three winter months of 1872 – 1873 there were 673 emigrants, but the following year over the same period, there were 4,973 emigrants (Arnold, 1981), thanks to this decision.

Hardship in the home country, poor conditions, and unemployment might have contributed to migration but, even when there were opportunities for alleviating all of these, it was still not easy trying to persuade people to leave. Consequently the government considered a referral system whereby those who had already migrated were encouraged to write positively about their experiences and new lives, and nominate others to join them. This scheme resulted in larger proportions of Irish migrating to Australia (Hayden, 1971) and also to New Zealand (New Zealand Ministry for Culture and Heritage) where relatives and friends already living in the countries nominated others to join them. Hatton & Williamson (1994) argue that the vast majority of young, single individuals without government assistance were helped by previous migrants resident in the receiving country.

Motivating Individuals

Yet even within the political manipulations, there still needed to be consensus from the individuals themselves and therefore the governments both of the sending and receiving countries had to consider various inducements and incentives to make the idea of migration more attractive to more people. There were special initiatives to encourage young single women to the colonies. These were successful in boosting numbers, especially when incentives such as free passages were on offer. On the longer overseas journeys to Australia and New Zealand, the women

migrants were either married, and travelling with husbands or to husbands who had previously migrated, or they were single and describing their occupation as in domestic service. The requirement for single women was much in excess of supply. Because of the scarcity of women in the colonies, governments tried to think up ways of directing females to these areas. One scheme under Earl Grey was to take young Irish orphans from the workhouses and send them to Australia (Fitzpatrick, 1994).

However, all the inducements and incentives of the time must have been considered in line with what the motivations for migrating were perceived to be. From the recruitment campaigns for New Zealand, there seems to have been a lot of persuasion used. One agent described how he gave presentations which included showing wonderful posters of the plentiful food available for everyone in New Zealand (Phillips, 2007). Motivation was likely to have been a combination of factors, not least the effects of clever marketing coupled with attractive inducements such as free passage. The campaign of nominating selected people was used to good effect, and this helped with lessening the risk involved both for the migrant and the receiving country. When nominating, that person guaranteed the financial well-being of the incoming migrant, thus ensuring the state was not going to be responsible for funding when they arrived.

The motivation for migration is still not understood, particularly when viewed from outside the given time or place. As previously mentioned, there were economic gains to be made by migrating, but whether these were the main reason people chose to do so has not been defined. If there were such economic benefits available, then one has to question why more people did not take advantage of the opportunity to migrate. Economic factors are likely to be one of several causes, but this may not even have been a factor in some cases where the middle classes were migrating. Baines (1994) concedes that most studies have only been able to infer motivation from ages, occupations and marital status, and he suggests that only detailed studies of

individual and family behaviour over the whole life cycle are likely to throw more light on motivation.

Internal migration might also seem to be easier from today's point of view, but Baines (1994) wonders if this might not be a true assessment of how people in the nineteenth century viewed it; to them emigration might well have been an easier choice. Correspondence in *The Times* (1870) would seem to support this; there were complaints that the Poor Law Board could sanction funds to enable emigration to a British colony but not to help people move internally to find work.

Criteria for Migration

Despite the chronic labour shortage, there were certain criteria for migrating to the colonies. For New Zealand, Wilson (2006) reports that for the first migrants in 1850 there was an age limit of 40 years and the migrants had to provide their own tools. In addition they had to supply testimonials as to their qualifications, medical certificates and certificates from ministers of their parish, countersigned by a Justice of the Peace (Wilson, 2006). The Rev Harry Jones (1875), who was rector of St George's-in-the-East in Whitechapel reported that he "frequently had to sign the papers" of those setting out from London to New Zealand. But there were also policies set up to exclude certain kinds of immigrants and these were mainly targeting the non-European races who had flooded into both Australia and New Zealand following the gold rush period when a criterion for literacy in a European language was included in New Zealand's Immigration Act of 1899 (Roy, 1966).

Furthermore, Roy (1966) finds that New Zealand applied even stricter criteria than Australia to ensure that not only were its migrants White, but also British White.

Looking at the passenger ship records of the *Orient*, which sailed from London to Sydney in 1891 (National Archives), the criteria can be seen clearly when the list of steerage passengers is analysed. All emigrants travelled steerage, as opposed to the cabin passengers, who were regarded as colonists. There is no information given regarding occupations of colonists, but the mix of ages and gender is

not dissimilar to that of the steerage passengers. According to the ship's manifest, there were 379 passengers in total on the *Orient*, 205 of them being in steerage, all destined for Australian ports. It is seen that a majority of 84% fell within the 18 – 35 age bracket, and 76% were single, a pattern other research has found (Hatton & Williamson, 1994). The gender division was 58% male and 42% female. An examination of the occupations of the men in steerage shows that 40% were unskilled labourers, 17% were farmers and 42% were skilled tradesmen: and all the emigrants fitted these required occupations. In keeping with the criteria for Australia, selecting British and Europeans only (Birrell, 1994), all were English apart from one steerage passenger and two foreign cabin passengers, who appeared German and Italian according to their names.

An earlier ship, the *James Nicol Fleming*, which set sail from London to Dunedin in 1874, highlights the different criteria for the New Zealand ports. An analysis of its passenger list (Hocken Library) shows the emphasis on families, which was exactly what the country wanted. Recruitment posters of the time showed well-dressed family groups around tables laden with food. Whereas the *Orient* had just forty four children on board, the *James Nicol Fleming* carried one hundred and sixty six, of whom two were born on board: there were sixty two families on the ship. As with the *Orient*, 84% of the migrants fell into the 18 – 35 age bracket, in keeping with the 80% found by other researchers (Phillips, 2007), but only 52% were single. The gender split was 64% male and 36% female, despite the large number of families, but this was still higher than the average to America. There were few single women, most of them in domestic service. The occupations of the male migrants shows 32% were agricultural labourers, required for the farming communities of rural New Zealand, and 24% general labourers needed for manual work. Most importantly, the percentage of skilled tradesmen was 38%, as these were the ones needed to direct the infrastructure of the new country.

All the emigrants had to report to an Emigrant Depot in advance of boarding the

ship. Health checks were to be carried out to ensure no contagious diseases were carried on board. According to Jones (1875) the emigrants in these depots were well fed; he remarks on the free passage to New Zealand, apart from the £1 per adult required for “bedding money”. This was approximately the weekly earnings of a working class man. Sleeping arrangements at the Emigrant Depot were not comfortable but ensured the emigrants were prepared for the voyage ahead. Jones (1875) reports that from May 1874 to August 1875 more than one thousand emigrants per month were leaving for New Zealand. They were surely welcomed.

Discussion and Conclusion

Empire building in the 19th century made the overseas countries more accessible and people were needed there, hence the requirement to direct migrants to where the demand was greatest. Within the British Empire the focus was on developing Australia and New Zealand, the furthest lands. Population growth meant fewer jobs available in Britain, industrialisation changed the nature of the work on offer, but advances in technology, especially transportation, made it safer and cheaper to travel. All of these should have made migration an obvious choice for those on lower wages, unemployed or insecure in their current employment.

The American economy in particular had an increasing demand for workers, especially unskilled labourers for its factories. It was able to accommodate large numbers and there was less risk for new migrants both in making a short voyage across the Atlantic, and in knowing that there was an established system for migrant workers. In contrast, other countries had to compete with America for migrants to grow their economies, but the more distant lands of Australia and New Zealand had difficulty in attracting people because of the long journey involved and the additional costs. Assisted

passages were brought in to encourage migration to these countries and, certainly in the case of New Zealand, it did work, with a seven-fold increase in the year-on-year

number of emigrants. A nominations system was introduced and involved existing settlers in recruiting friends and family, while well planned advertising campaigns with a network of agents across the United Kingdom helped promote emigration to the British colonies. Analysis of passenger ship records shows that recruitment agents were active in certain areas and that they did ensure that the migrants met the targets and criteria requested. This targeted marketing appears to have had an impact on the quality of the migrants introduced to Australia and New Zealand.

Women were welcome in the new countries where demand was higher than the supply, and many took the opportunity of migrating either for economic reasons or to find a husband. With such active encouragement from emigration societies (Bate, 1869), there was a high percentage of women on the ships to Australia and New Zealand. There were strict criteria for potential migrants regarding moral behaviour and work ethic, and the colonies insisted that they only wanted younger people who would be able to contribute to the economy, in addition to populating the country. Families were particularly encouraged to New Zealand and many had very small children accompanying them. It can be seen on the passenger lists that the majority of migrants were under thirty five years old and findings from various studies show that the calibre of these migrants was high, they were more likely to be self-selecting, and they were well-informed, literate and skilled.

Despite the need for increasing the population, migration was carefully controlled. It may be considered that assisted passages opened possibilities for a wide range of migrants; however, even these came with restrictions. Potential migrants were already being vetted by the application of a so-called bedding fee, which ensured that only those who were able to save money were selected. This also served to deter those who may have looked on a free passage as something that was available for all; in this case the payment required meant that more value was being placed on the migration process and gave out a message that migration needed to be carefully

considered by applicants. For a young couple, putting aside two weeks' income for the bedding fee was a sacrifice and in most cases would have required advance planning. This may contribute to the discourse on motivation for migration as it indicates that migration decisions may be made much earlier than perceived.

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