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CHAPTER X

SUMMARY

The problem under discussion in the foregoing chapters is the relation of seasonal and cyclical fluctuations in employment to seasonal and cyclical fluctuations in migration, with particular reference to immigration into, and emigration from, the United States. The major issues may conveniently be recapitulated in two questions—namely:

- (1) To what extent are fluctuations in migration attributable to fluctuations in employment?
- (2) To what extent, in turn, are fluctuations in migration an ameliorating influence, and to what extent an aggravating factor, in employment and unemployment fluctuations?

Similarities in Fluctuations of Employment and Migration.³

With reference to the first of the above questions, the facts presented in the preceding chapters show clearly that there are both strong cyclical and seasonal movements in immigration and emigration and abundant evidence that when immigration is not restricted the character of the cyclical variations, at least, is closely similar to the cyclical variations in employment opportunity in the United States. A fairly close similarity is also found in the seasonal movements. The seasonal peak in immigration is in the spring, well-timed for the summer increase in those outdoor activities in which many new immigrants ordinarily find employment; and the maximum emigration is reached in the late fall and early winter when jobs are becoming relatively scarce. Similarly, a period of depression in the United States is ordinarily accompanied or closely followed by a decline in immigration and an increase in emigration; and a period of prosperity, by an increase in immigration and a decline in emigration. This statement is not, of course, to be interpreted as signifying an invariable rule. For this and the other tendencies noted below, there have been various exceptions and qualifications mentioned in the more detailed analysis in the sep-

arate chapters which it is impracticable to repeat here in detail but to which some weight must be given in interpreting the significance of the tendencies here set forth. However, the various irregularities and exceptions which have been noted are by no means adequate to impair seriously the validity of the general conclusion that there is a close relation between cyclical and seasonal fluctuations in employment and the corresponding fluctuations in migration.

That this correspondence is more than a mere coincidence is suggested by the fact that, particularly for the cyclical fluctuations, there are a priori reasons for expecting that migration would be sensitive to employment conditions, and also by the further fact that when the migratory currents are separated into their several elements, it is found that it is just those elements which one would expect to be swayed in their choice of the particular time of arrival and departure by variations in the prospect of employment which do show, in fact, the closest correlation with employment conditions. The movements of those immigrants who have no gainful occupation are decidedly less responsive than the movements of the working element to cyclical and seasonal variations in employment.

Significant Differences in Cycles of Employment and Migration.

A close scrutiny of the cyclical movements of employment and migration reveals the fact that despite the general similarity in the appearance of the curves representing these series, there are also noteworthy differences. First, there are irregular fluctuations in immigration which cannot be readily explained merely by reference to the course of industrial activity. The relatively slight amount of immigration during the industrial activity of the war period affords an obvious example.

In the second place, even where the fluctuations of the several series are obviously interrelated, there are differences in the time at which the changes occur, in their relative violence, and in the number of persons directly affected. A recognition of these differences is essential to a clear understanding of the problem.

Frequently the turns in the migration movement lag behind the corresponding change in employment, indicating that the passage of some time is required before the full effect of a change in employment is felt upon migration. The extent of this lag varies in different cycles, and is also frequently found to vary on the downturn and the upturn of the same cycle.

In a few instances the effect of a change in employment conditions

is not seen for almost a year afterward, but in other instances the fluctuations in employment and migration appear to be substantially concurrent. The more common lag in the migration fluctuations is from one to five months.

Relative Violence of Cyclical Fluctuations.

On the whole, the changes in migration are more erratic and more violent than those in industry. The seasonal variation in migration is more marked and the amplitude of the cyclical movements is, as a rule, greater than that of the corresponding fluctuations in employment. This comparison, however, refers to deviations in terms of percentages, and not to the number of persons affected by fluctuations in employment and migration respectively. An industrial depression usually brings a sharp decrease in immigration; but, owing to the larger total number of persons involved, a decline in employment which in percentage terms appears relatively less than the concurrent decline in immigration, may affect a much larger number of persons. However, as explained more fully in Chapters V and VI, numerical comparisons between migration and employment are most appropriate when cumulative migration is compared with changes in the number employed.

Effect of Migration upon the Cycle in Employment.

The demonstrated sensitiveness of immigration and emigration to employment conditions may lead to an exaggerated estimation of the efficacy of migration as a safety-valve for an overcrowded labor market in depression periods. We have seen that depression retards immigration and accelerates emigration, but the weight of evidence is, not only that these compensating movements are often not numerically adequate to decrease the number of workers in this country in a period of depression, but that, on the contrary, even in periods of low employment net immigration is sometimes steadily adding to the supply of workers. While immigration falls off materially when employment is slack, it never ceases entirely, and a considerable number of new workers arrive even during a depression period. True, there is at the same time an exodus, a movement which occasionally has exceeded immigration in volume, but, judging from the few depression periods for which complete statistics are available, there is, when the entire duration of the period of dull employment is considered, always a net immigration. (See Directors' footnote "a", p. 120).

Furthermore, there is no complete clearing house system for employment; and even if the outgoing stream equals the incoming in volume, the time lost in adjusting the new immigrant to a job aggravates the unemployment situation.

The International Aspect.

Particularly if the needs of two or more countries—the country or countries of emigration and the country or countries of immigration—are taken into consideration, it becomes evident that migration as it occurs is not, and scarcely can be, a consistently beneficial factor in its relation to cyclical unemployment. We have seen that to a large extent low employment occurs concurrently in the country of emigration and the country of immigration. In such periods it becomes virtually impossible for migration to ameliorate employment conditions in the one country without aggravating them in the other. If the emigrant leaves when industry is slack in his old home, he arrives in his new home when unemployment is likewise prevalent; and if he arrives when employment conditions are good, he ordinarily leaves his former home when the opportunities for employment are at their best.

Possible Indirect Effect Upon the Severity of Business Cycles.

Our analysis would be incomplete if we failed to mention the not inconsiderable probability that the inflow of large numbers of new workers into the United States in times of prosperity has been a factor in increasing the intensity of boom periods and consequently the severity of the subsequent depression. Our analysis is not of a nature to prove directly the relation just suggested; it merely indicates the existence in periods of prosperity of a large volume of new additions to the labor supply, which would make possible an intensified expansion of industry and, by tending to keep wages down, render less effective one of the possible checks to such expansion—namely, rising costs of production.

A further probable effect of migration which is suggested but not directly demonstrated by the data under examination is the aggravation of the turnover in industry, whether immigration is balanced by emigration or not; for it is constantly necessary to fit the new arrivals into jobs vacated by the departing aliens or by native workers crowded into other occupations, aside, of course, from those instances where the new arrivals take up work for which no labor force has previously been organized.

Summary.

In brief, whatever may be the basic causes of migration, there is a close relation between the cyclical oscillations of employment and those of immigration and emigration, and a moderately close resemblance in the respective seasonal fluctuations, with considerable reason to believe that this similarity, particularly in the cyclical oscillations, is due to a sensitiveness of migration to employment conditions.

With reference to the extent to which migration is responsible for seasonal unemployment, the facts presented in the preceding chapter lead us to be cautious in stating the general tendency. Prior to the Great War, the distribution of net migration was moderately well adjusted to seasonal changes in employment in those industries in which the newly arrived immigrants most frequently engaged. Hence, unless the availability of immigrant labor accounts in part for the development of seasonal tendencies in production—a point which cannot be proved, or at least has not been proved, by our method of analysis—it is not clear that unrestricted immigration materially aggravated the seasonal variations in unemployment.

However, after the introduction of the quota principle of restriction, with provisions which tend to modify the seasonal movement in immigration, it would appear that although the flow of immigrants is reduced in volume its distribution by months is now less likely than formerly to be well adjusted to the seasonal variations in employment.

As to cyclical fluctuations in unemployment, it would appear that, directly at least, migration is probably not a primary cause of such variations in unemployment; and that in some instances it is an ameliorative influence, in that in limited portions of depression periods it is withdrawing more workers than it is contributing. More frequently, however, it is a contributory factor to the evils of unemployment. This conclusion is based in part upon the fact that the timing of migration changes to cyclical changes in employment is imperfect; and secondly, upon the fact that the peaks and troughs of industrial activity frequently coincide in the countries of immigration and of emigration, in which case migration cannot be well adjusted to conditions in both countries. Also, although a decline in employment is usually followed by a decline in immigration, the incoming stream does not dry up entirely, and in those portions of depression periods in which there is a net immigration—

a not uncommon phenomenon—migration is feeding into industry more men than it is taking out. Lastly, the very fact of a known source of additional labor available through increased immigration in boom periods probably has lessened the pressure for regularization of industry.