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Living Standards, Scarce Resources and Immigration: An Interview With Labor Economist Vernon M. Briggs, Jr.

Abstract
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Vernon Briggs, Ph.D., a liberal Democrat, comes to immigration reform through an interest in labor economics. He responds to an interest in the underprivileged American citizen. His compassion runs deep.

As revealed in this interview, exposure to John F. Kennedy during college days placed a claim upon his conscience. He has not escaped from this claim during the past 4.5 decades. His support of the underprivileged citizenry has found prolific expression in countless academic journals.

His interest in conferring dignity upon labor is more than academic. It is a passion. And his passion endures.

In this issue, The Social Contract honors the integrity, compassion, resourcefulness, and genius of Professor Briggs of Cornell University.

Keywords
immigration, public policy, illegal immigration, labor law, legislation, labor market, labor supply

Comments
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Living Standards, Scarce Resources & Immigration

An Interview with Labor Economist Vernon M. Briggs, Jr.

INTERVIEW BY JOHN F. ROHE

IMMIGRATION REFORMERS ARE *drawn to the issue by myriad paths. Some arrive with a burning concern over the prospect of a billion person nation in a lifetime. The wildlife and natural heritage of the nation will be irretrievably altered by this expansive footprint. Others are motivated by present concerns over dwindling water reserves, energy, pauperized soils, solid waste, urban sprawl, congestion, and maybe just because our national parks are being loved to death.*

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In this issue, The Social Contract *honors the integrity, compassion, resourcefulness, and genius of Professor Briggs of Cornell University.*

Professor Briggs joined the faculty of the New York State School of Industrial and Labor Relations at Cornell University in 1978 as a professor who specializes in human resource economics and public policy. He received an M.A. degree in 1960 and a Ph.D. degree in 1965 as a graduate student at Michigan State University. The following interview was conducted on April, 30, 2006.

JOHN ROHE: *Good afternoon, Professor.*

VERNON BRIGGS: Good afternoon, John.

JR: *Thank you for taking the time for this interview. Let's start in your early years.*

VB: I was born in Washington, D.C. during the depression in 1937. I grew up in the Washington suburbs of Silver Spring and Bethesda, Maryland.

JR: *How did you come to pursue economics?*

VB: It was the result of attending the University of Maryland where I received my Bachelor's degree in Economics in 1959. I was enrolled in the College of Business and Public Administration. Part of the curriculum for the freshman year was a year long course in European and American economic history. It detailed the evolution of capitalism and its system of free markets. It was followed in my sophomore year by the standard principles of economics courses. I had never heard of the field of economics before taking these classes. But I was fortunate to have had intellectually stimulating teachers. They exposed me to the world of economics. As they taught it, economics was about the way people live; it was about how the scarce resources of a nation are used; how the standard of living of is determined; and how the ensuing income generated from the production of goods and services is distributed

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John F. Rohe *is an attorney in Petoskey, Michigan, with a long-standing concern for the environment. He is a frequent contributor to* The Social Contract.

among the populace. What issues could be more important than these? When my junior year began, I declared my major as economics.

JR: *Do any impressionable events come to mind during your college years?*

VB: Just a few weeks before starting my senior year, I was invited by a college roommate to visit his home in Detroit, Michigan. We drove all night from College Park, Maryland to Detroit and arrived early on a September morning in 1958. At the time, the nation was in a deep recession. The national rate of unemployment was about 7 percent but it was probably twice that in Michigan. As we drove through a downtown part of the city, we came to several blocks where the sidewalks were absolutely filled with people. I couldn't imagine what they were all doing standing there at this early hour. As we drove further, we came to the building that they were waiting to open. It was an office of the Michigan Employment Commission. These people were lined-up to register for unemployment compensation. I'd never seen unemployed people face to face before. These were not statistics; they were human beings and they were all out of work. This was a life-altering experience. Upon returning to the Maryland campus for my senior year, I made a decision to major in labor economics. It is the one sub-field of economics that deals directly with people and their well-being.

Cornell University Economics Professor Vernon M. Briggs, Jr.

JR: *How did you decide upon Michigan State University for graduate work?*

VB: During my senior year at Maryland, I decided that I wanted to continue my studies in graduate school. In those days there was a compulsory military draft. But the nation was at peace so the number of draftees each year was very low. As a consequence, my local draft board was not drafting young men until they were 23. I had just turned 22 so there was not much sense in trying to get a job—even if you could get an interview—only to be drafted a year later. So I went to the Chairman of the economics department Chair, Dudley Dillard, who also taught me my first course in economics. I told him of my interest in labor economics. He noted that, until that time, I had spent all my life in and around Washington, DC. I had little exposure to large corporations or large unions or, for that matter, to employers and workers. He suggested that I do my graduate studies in an environment where I would be exposed, on a daily basis, to labor-management issues. He suggested I consider studying in Michigan. I took his advice and applied to only one school. It was to the Department of Economics at Michigan State University (MSU) in East Lansing. It was located in the middle of Michigan and was adjacent to the state capital in Lansing. At the time, General Motors (GM) produced its popular Oldsmobile cars in Lansing. The city was also where the Reo Motor Company manufactured trucks and the Fisher Body plant produced the under carriages for most of GM's car lines. It was a workingman's town with big business, big labor, and big government.

JR: *How was the Economics Department?*

VB: MSU was in the process of building a strong economics department. It had an exceptionally strong concentration of faculty in labor economics due to its surrounding environment. Attending MSU was one of the most important decisions of my life.

JR: *MSU was a football powerhouse at the time.*

Do you still believe it was the wisest decision?

VB: Yes. Maryland had been a football powerhouse too. But state universities often use athletics as a way to attract the attention of politicians and to maintain the loyalties of alumni. As a consequence they are able to build first-class academic institutions that might not otherwise have been possible. Besides, I love football so it was a bonus to have good sports teams there too.

JR: *How did the MSU administration influence the University at the time?*

VB: MSU at the time had as its president a man named John Hannah. He was an influential educator who was also a Republican during the time when we had a Republican president, Dwight Eisenhower. Eisenhower appointed Hannah to be Chairman of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights. It was at the time that the civil rights movement was just beginning to heat up. Street demonstrations were becoming the preferred tactic to address the overt racial discrimination that was present in the South in particular but could also be found elsewhere too. Hannah sought to make MSU into a laboratory for being a totally non-discriminatory institution of higher learning. No photographs were required when you applied; no mention of race or ethnicity was to be found on any application for admission, or for any campus job, or for any dormitory assignment. Studying there at that time made civil rights a prominent concern of your daily life no matter what your major was. It became a life-long dedication for me.

Human beings are unpredictable. People are subject to the ups and downs of the business cycle and to the changing social conditions in the economy.

JR: *How did MSU influence your ability to relate to the impending economic changes?*

VB: MSU placed me at one of the labor centers of the nation. Human beings are unpredictable. People are subject to the ups and downs of the business cycle and to the changing social conditions in the economy. How do they respond—individually and collectively? Critical times were on the horizon and I was being positioned to study the impact of these evolving issues.

JR: *Your Master's in Economics from MSU was received in 1960. In 1965, you obtained a PhD from MSU.*

VB: Upon completing my Master's degree in August of 1960, my draft number still had not come up. But having earned my M.A., I now knew I could do graduate work and, more importantly, I wanted to continue my studies.

JR: *Did you return to MSU?*

VB: The next month I returned to MSU and enrolled in the Ph.D. program in economics. I was offered a graduate teaching assistantship which meant I was about to find out if I really wanted to be teacher as a life long profession. Universities by this time were about to be changed forever by the coming of the Baby Boom generation (the first wave of whom was due to turn 18 years old in 1964). But already university enrollments were increasing as more and more young people were being encouraged to go on to higher education. It was probably the result of the fact that the G.I. Bill had opened up higher education just a decade earlier to millions of persons who had never ever thought of studying at the college level. Also, the federal government was stressing the need for more advanced study as a national security issue after the Soviet Union had launched Sputnick I in an Earth orbit in 1957.

JR: *What were the student-teacher ratios at the time?*

VB: The expansion of college faculties to teach the onslaught of students was confronted with a problem: the new faculty members had to be recruited from of my generation, born during the depression years of the 1930s and the war years of the early 1940s. During these years the birthrate was historically low and so was immigration. Hence, there were not very many of us to meet the

surging demand. Initially, universities like MSU used graduate students like me to pick-up the slack in the number of professors. So I was hired as a graduate teaching assistant that Fall and was given my own Principles of Economics class. It had 89 students enrolled. I had to learn to teach on the job. That class launched my teaching career. Next year I was promoted to the lofty rank of assistant instructor of economics. It meant I now had two sections of Principles to teach each term.

JR: *Did any particularly influential people affect your decisions during these graduate student years?*

VB: Yes, I was heavily influenced by the presidential election of John F. Kennedy in 1960. Kennedy came to MSU during the campaign and gave an outdoor speech from the steps of the Student Union Building. I was there—probably not more than 30 feet from him. He gave one of his inspirational speeches. As a young and idealistic graduate student, I was enthralled with the ideas of the New Frontier. Things needed to be changed. We needed to address the problems of unemployment and "get the economy going again," there was the space race with the Soviet Union; and there was the challenges of civil rights. After Kennedy's election in November came his inaugural speech which included the famous mantra: "Don't ask what your country can do for you, but what can you do for your country."

JR: *How did you respond to Kennedy's invitation?*

VB: By this time in 1961, the shortage of college teachers was a reality. Public interest commercials on television showed college classrooms full students with only an open briefcase sitting on the desk at the front of the classroom. There was no professor. "Who was going to teach these students?" cried out a voice on the commercials. It may sound very idealistic today, but I decided to answer Kennedy's challenge by becoming a college teacher. I have never regretted it.

Labor Organizer Cesar Chavez

JR: *Many readers of* The Social Contract *would be familiar with your books and writings. Eventually your writings moved into the field of immigration. When did that transition take place?*

VB: In the Fall of 1964 I accepted my first full-time teaching job. It was at the University of Texas at Austin. There I encountered Mexican American students for the first time.

JR: *Did you meet up with leaders in the labor movement?*

VB: In 1966, Cesar Chavez came to Texas to organize farm workers. I was teaching the undergraduate labor economics course. Already some of these students had asked me "why aren't you more interested in the unemployment, discrimination and poverty issues of Mexican Americans here in Texas?" After organizing a march on Sacramento, California the year before, Chavez had turned to Texas. He came to speak at the University in early 1966. Some of my Chicano students asked me to attend his presentation. I did. It was a moving talk and it was very well received on campus. After his talk, my students arranged for me to meet with him that same night and discuss labor organizing in Texas. In the following weeks, Chavez went down to South Texas and began his

march up from the Rio Grande Valley to Austin to publicize his efforts.

JR: *Was Texas as receptive to unions as California?*

VB: Texas labor laws were very anti-worker in every respect. There were very few unions in the state; Texas had a "right-to-work law" (which limits bargaining over union security); there was no state the minimum wage law; and there were severe restrictions on picketing.

JR: *While in Texas, did you become involved with union activities?*

VB: Yes, I became involved with the Farm Workers Assistance Committee. It was designed to support Chavez in his organizing efforts in South Texas. The student group gathered food and other donations which were then driven down to Starr County each weekend. It was and still is one of the poorest counties in all of the United States. On one weekend, it became my turn to drive the 400 miles to deliver these goods to the strikers. On that occasion, I walked on the picket lines and met with the strikers. I spent Friday and Saturday nights with the strikers and the union organizers. This was my first exposure to the border. The center of these efforts was located in a town called Rio Grande City. The city and the surrounding community was 99 percent Mexican American. I went to the actual border at the nearby town of Roma at dawn on Saturday morning—which was just another working day for farm workers. I saw a large bus pick up strikebreakers after they crossed the border, transport them to the job site where the organizing strike was in process, and drive them right through our picket lines. I knew this strike was lost.

JR: *Why?*

VB: The people being picked up were not illegal immigrants. Today they often would be but these people were "border commuters." They were permanent resident aliens ("i.e., green carders") who could have lived in Mexico, yet worked in the U.S. This gave them a real income advantage. It was difficult to organize such workers since they lived in Mexico. It is illegal for them to serve as strikebreakers but there was no one there to stop them. I realized that I was going to have to learn much more about immigration policy and its impact on the labor markets of South Texas. Over the next decade, this region and this policy became the focus of `much of my research.

JR: *This was after the 1965 Immigration Bill was adopted, but before its full implementation in 1968?*

VB: Yes. I supported the adoption of the 1965 Immigration Act.

JR: *In retrospect, your writings would show you have some reservations about the effects of the 1965 bill.*

VB: Well, I supported it because of my interest in civil rights. The Act of 1965 was basically civil rights law.

JR: *Because it terminated the 1924 quota system?*

VB: Yes. It did away with the overt racial and ethnic discrimination embodied in the national origins admission system that had been in effect since 1924. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 had been enacted the year before. It was designed to end overt discrimination in public accommodations and in employment in our internal relationships with each other. The Immigration Act of 1965 was intended to eliminate the overt discrimination in our external relationships with the people of other nations. Nobody dreamed the Immigration Act of 1965 would revive the phenomenon of mass immigration from out of our nation's distant past. But, of course, it did.

JR: *From your vantage point, what has driven immigration policy?*

VB: When public policy began the process of shaping an immigration policy in the late nineteenth century, these efforts focused both on social concerns (i.e., the prospects for assimilation of diverse groups) and economics (the impact on wages, employment and urban living conditions). The unfortunate linking of imagined social stereotypes with legitimate economic concerns of adverse impacts have made the subject of immigration reform controversial ever since. In 1965, reformers were able to free immigration policy from being a social screening policy based on overt

discrimination. But the legislation in 1965 converted immigration policy from being primarily a social policy to becoming primarily a political policy. The national origin system was eliminated. In its place, a system based largely on family reunification (74 percent of the available visas each year) but with some openings for certain workers with certain needed skills (20 percent of the visas) and a small number of humanitarian visas for refugees (6 percent of the visas) was created. It means that the decisions of individual families and of a limited number of employers largely determine who the new citizens of the country will be. The policy, therefore, primarily serves the interests of private parties rather than the nation's interests. This also means that policy making becomes highly political.

JR: *How would the 1965 Act have functioned if the numbers remained low?*

VB: If immigration levels had remained low—as they were when the legislation was passed—there would not be much of a problem. But instead, immigration levels exploded. As a consequence, it is simply impossible today to ignore the economic consequences of a policy that does not incorporate these considerations in its design.

JR: *How did the 1965 Act lead to mass immigration?*

VB: There are several reasons. First, illegal immigration exploded. In retrospect we see that the Act itself had no enforcement teeth in it. The "Texas proviso" was still in the immigration laws. It had not been taken out.

JR: *What was the "Texas proviso"?*

VB: The Texas proviso was adopted in 1952. It allowed employers to hire illegal immigrants with impunity. That's part of the explanation. Then, in 1986, the Immigration Reform and Control Act enacted employer sanctions that made it illegal for employers to hire illegal immigrants. The "Texas proviso" was finally repealed. Unfortunately, however, there has been an unwillingness by successive Administrations to seriously enforce these sanctions. Also, the sanctions are difficult to enforce because of the unwillingness of policy makers to address the identification issue. A thriving industry in counterfeit documents has developed because of the reluctance of Congress to develop some form of verification system that can prove that the people are who they say they are. So, illegal immigration has soared.

The wealth of our nation is embodied in the skills, education and talents of its human resources. Today, our immigration policy is supplying large numbers of poorly skilled, poorly educated, non-English speaking persons.... Our immigration policy is simply incongruent with prevailing economic trends.

JR: *How about the family reunification provisions of the 1965 Act?*

VB: Well, that is the second explanation for the growth of immigration since 1965. The family unification principles written into the Act of 1965 had unexpected consequences. Family reunification allowed the entry of relatives of U.S. citizens who were living outside the country. Immigrants from the Western Hemisphere, including Mexico, had not been included in the aforementioned national origin system when it was in effect from 1924 to 1965. So that when the new family reunification system went into effect, recent immigrants from the Western Hemisphere had many living relatives back in their homelands who now had a preference for entry. So, this led to large numbers of immigrants coming from Mexico in particular, but also from Caribbean and Central America, and some from Canada who had family ties. Many were immediate family members—spouses, minor children, and adult parents of U.S. citizens—all of whom could be admitted without limitations. They were admitted without any concern as to their labor market skills, or educational levels, or English proficiencies.

JR: *Any other factors?*

VB: Lastly, the numbers of refugees and asylum applicants have simply exceeded anyone's anticipation as to what their numbers were going to be.

JR: *After graduating with a Ph.D. from MSU, you taught at the University of Texas at Austin. How did you happen to move back east to Cornell?*

VB: In 1978, I was offered a position at the New York State School of Labor and Industrial Relations at Cornell University. This is the premier school in my field. They have an outstanding library, research staff, and a faculty dedicated exclusively to labor market issues. I accepted it. I reluctantly left Texas. I enjoyed my many years in Texas, but Cornell gave me an opportunity to greatly expand the range and depth of my work.

JR: *Your writings over the years have expressed a deep concern about the effects of mass immigration on the dignity of labor. Did any demographic trends impact the law of supply and demand in labor markets?*

VB: The U.S. labor market was changing dramatically in the 1960s. Baby-boomers were just entering the job market. We had a million more people turn 18 years old in 1964 than in did so in 1963. That high level of annual worker entry continued for the next 16 years. There was really no need to increase immigration in 1965 as there was no shortage of workers at that time or any such prospect on the horizon. There was also the coming of the women's movement over this same time span which no one anticipated. Neither of these two events could be controlled. All public policy could do was respond to their labor market consequences. But the revival of mass immigration could have been prevented. Immigration should be controlled by policy makers but there is a reluctance to do so.

JR: *Were changes in the labor market anticipated?*

VB: I studied under Charles Killingsworth at Michigan State. He was the Chairman of my Ph.D. committee. He anticipated the computer age. He envisioned how new technology would revolutionize the labor market. He predicted that the demand for highly skilled labor would increase and the demand for unskilled labor would decline. That is what human resource economics is all about: the need for public policy to help the supply of labor adapt to the changing character of labor demand over time. It is in this context that immigration policy since 1965 has been clearly out of step with the nation's changing economic needs.

JR: *How should immigration policies change?*

VB: The United States is now in a globalized environment. The ability of the nation to compete is increasingly tied to the skills of the nation's labor force. Immigration should primarily be linked to filling skills gaps in the labor force until the nation's own education and training system can meet those needs. The human capital of the immigrants should not run counter to these needs.

JR: *What are the results of increasing the supply of labor for which there is a diminished demand?*

VB: The wealth of our nation is embodied in the skills, education and talents of its human resources. Today, our immigration policy is supplying large numbers of poorly skilled, poorly educated, non-English speaking persons. Almost 60 percent of the adult foreign-born population have only a high school diploma or less. Many of the schools they attended are of questionable quality. They enter a labor market in which we already have an oversupply of poorly skilled, poorly educated people who are native born. This worsens the economic conditions for those on the lowest rungs of the economic ladder. Our immigration policy is simply incongruent with prevailing economic trends.

JR: *Would you consider yourself to be a Democrat?*

VB: I consider myself to be a liberal Democrat. I do believe there is an important role for government to play in a free market capitalistic system. Government intervention can take-off the hard edges of what would otherwise be a harsh world of "dog-eat-dog competition." I have always been concerned with worker protections and worker rights.

JR: *How do you explain the present situation in Congress? A number of Democrats are seemingly*

not sensitive to the effects of mass immigration on our underprivileged minorities.

VB: Immigration has become a political football for special interest groups. Politicians of both parties have seen it as a vehicle to promote their own survival by pandering to these groups. In no other area of national policymaking are these special interests so entrenched and are politicians so willing to abandon the well-being and the opinions of the people. This issue transcends the normal political divisions.

JR: *How do you explain that Senator Edward Kennedy would favor a form of mass amnesty for so many illegal immigrants today?*

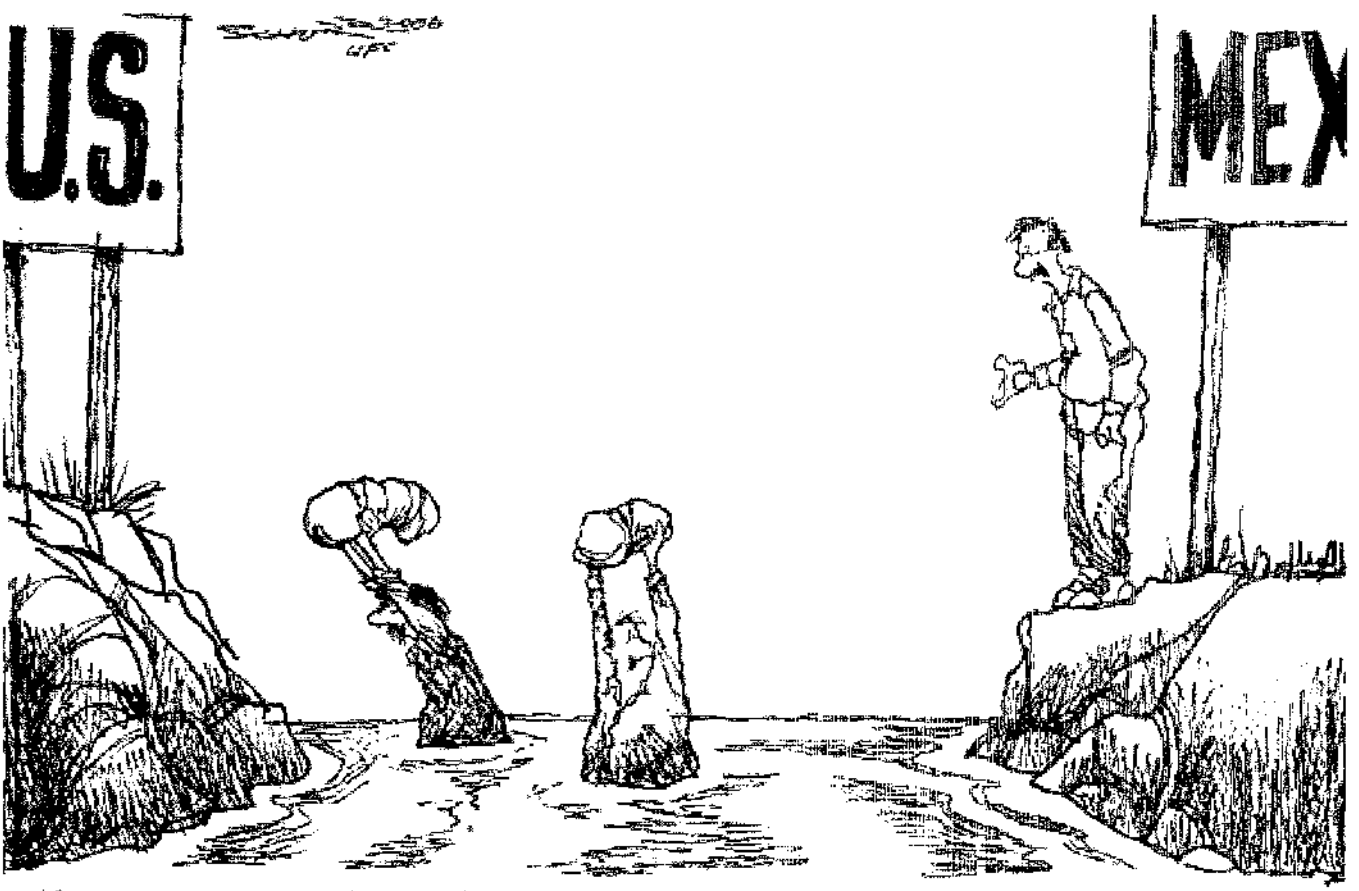
VB: It can only be explained as political opportunism just as the issue is for so many others in Congress. There are certainly few "profiles in courage" being made when it comes to immigration policymaking.

JR: *Why do economists often continue to promote mass immigration?*

VB: It is not true for all economists. A fair number of labor economists have spoken against this over the years. They know that mass immigration affects both wage and employment levels in different sectors of the economy.

JR: *Do any particular economists come to mind?*

VB: The influential "Chicago School of Economics," for example, is the most outspoken advocate of the merits of free market economics. But it has always made immigration an exception to its rule of limited government intervention in labor markets. The "Chicago School" does not favor open borders and or unlimited mass immigration. They understand that free labor migration will only drive down



"I CAN'T DECIDE WHETHER TO CROSS AND TAKE A JOB AMERICANS WON'T DO OR STAY HERE AND TAKE AN OUTSOURCED JOB THEY WILL DO..."

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wages in the United States without raising wages anywhere in the world. Moreover, they understand that immigration policy is an exercise in national selfishness whereby immigration limitations protect the most vulnerable groups in society (the least skilled and poorly educated) and that, if we didn't have an immigration policy, we would have to enact one to protect these people.

JR: *What's driving the business community to promote more immigration?*

VB: They are looking at their self-interests. They simply recognize that mass immigration is a way of driving down wages. Wage suppression makes the economy more competitive in a global setting. No worker, however, would regard wage suppression as a benefit. Lobbying for immigration policies that are design to drive down wages of the lowest paid and poorest people—which is what our present policy does—is an act of pure greed and political influence. It is nothing to be proud of. Moreover, the pursuit of these objectives through the manipulation of immigration policy raises serious questions. Is the United States simply a market place for the exercise of power for private gain by special interests or is it a country whose public policies should be designed to serve the national interests of its people as a whole?

JR: *How has the labor movement historically addressed immigration?*

VB: Historically, the labor movement has always supported more restrictive immigration policies. Their concerns over adverse impacts on workers were all found by subsequent research to be valid. The mass immigrations of the past substantially depressed wages, fostered widespread poverty, and made it virtually impossible to form unions. Inadequate housing, crowded schools, poor public hygiene, widespread crime, and urban slums were often the social by-products of mass immigration.

JR: *How do we explain that labor unions have more recently promoted relaxed borders?*

VB: By the 1990s, the labor movement found itself fighting for survival. Unions can only organize the people that employers hire. Employers have the exclusive right to decide who is going to be employed. Increasingly, unions now find large numbers of illegal immigrants working in various occupations. In agriculture, hotels, restaurants, landscaping, housekeeping, and in parts of the construction industry, you find large numbers of illegal immigrants. Some union leaders have decided to pick up the immigrant agenda as a way to become more attractive to these persons as potential union members.

JR: *Is this helpful to labor?*

VB: I think this is a real mistake. The special immigrant agenda has never been in the best interests of American workers in general. Bad economics should never be seen as being good politics. It never is in the long run.

JR: *What will it take for American labor unions to support American labor?*

VB: I think you have to continue to confront them with the issues. Most American workers favor reduced immigration. Most favor the enforcement of stated policies. Some unions have already bolted from the AFL-CIO. If we were to enforce immigration laws, the illegal immigrants wouldn't be there, and consequently the labor unions could then return to their historic role of pursuing the economic interests of the American worker again.

JR: *Do you see a greater promise with border security, like fences and border patrols, or do you find more hope in employer sanctions?*

VB: We must demagnetize the labor market. The issue is never going to be resolved until we deal with the issue of workplace enforcement. As long as people can illegally come here and get jobs, basically with impunity, or with the prospect of receiving eventual amnesty, they are going to keep coming. Physical barriers and better border enforcement are important. But about 40 percent of illegal immigrants have entered the country with documents—they become illegal when they violate the terms of those visas. So workplace enforcement of bans against hiring illegal immigrants is the only way to comprehensively attack the problem of illegal immigration.

JR: *Do you believe the nation will understand your concerns, like it did in 1924?*

VB: It's clear from the present debate that the public opinion is much more on my side of this issue. All public opinion polls show that the public want illegal immigration addressed as a major issue. They want enforcement. They do not favor amnesty or guest worker programs. I believe there is a groundswell of support from the left, right, and center. People are fed up with the fact that we are not enforcing immigration laws. The public opinion is already there.

JR: *Then why do we still have a problem?*

VB: The problem is with the people leading this country. They have been captured by special interest groups—big business groups, major computer industrialists, agribusiness, and a range of service businesses looking for cheap labor. You also have ethnic, racial, and religious groups pushing their own agenda favoring the entry of more of their own kind.

JR: *What will happen if we are unable to responsibly deal with the issue?*

VB: Eventually, the country will address this issue. I hope it can do so in humane and reasonable ways. If immigration levels—which includes illegal immigration—is not reduced now, we will open up the prospect of more Draconian means in the future.

JR: *By looking through your 21-page bibliography of writings, it's apparent that you have made a lifelong commitment to America's underprivileged people. This commitment comes at a personal sacrifice. How do you maintain balance in life?*

VB: I go to the high country of Colorado with my family every summer. It is simply a way to contemplate, to think, to read, and to be together for a short while with the people who mean the most to me. This allows me to actually learn the things people expect me to know in an environment where the distractions of the modern world are not intruding. We go to an isolated part of Colorado, a beautiful state, high in the mountains, and try to live as close to the natural environment as possible. I am able to focus on re-thinking the issues and doing my writing in an environment with few distractions. In fact, of course, one can't escape the world by running away from it. One has to confront it. I certainly don't advocate escaping. So I come back re-vitalized each fall to work on the issue that I believe remains central to American life today: the state of the nation's immigration policy.

JR: *Our readers might like to know about your family?*

VB: I have been married to my wife, Martijna, for 34 years. We have two wonderful sons. Both live in California where they have come to understand first hand the issues that I have been concerned with for so much of their lives: mass immigration and its effects.

JR: *In closing, I would welcome your thoughts on the purpose of immigration policy?*

VB: Immigration policy should serve the national interest by working in conjunction with emerging economic trends. Quantitative and qualitative controls are quite consistent with being an open society. The survival of the United States as a beacon to the world as to what a society based on liberty and justice can be depends on the effectiveness of these policies. No one has a right to come to the United States just because they want to. Without immigration policy and the enforcement of its terms, the country will cease to be that example for others to emulate. Immigration also introduces other important societal pressures, such as population and environmental concerns. But I try to focus on the areas I know the best; the economic impact of immigration on the American workforce.

JR: *That's a good note on which to bring this to a close. I greatly appreciate your time and your interest. This has been informative for me. Thank you for your thoughtful and thought-provoking writings over many years.*

VB: Thank you, John. I appreciate the opportunity to speak with you. ■