EDITORIAL

INTRODUCTION

As the economies of individual nations become more inextricably entwined, not only do capital flows between countries intensify to an extent that some begin to wonder about the ability of the nation-state to protect the interests and well-being of its citizens, but human capital itself begins to assume a volatility similar to its fiduciary counterpart. Thus, globalization – the process of merging national markets into a planetary version of the same – carries in its wake the inevitable displacement as human capital follows finance capital to those areas where the latter is most concentrated. Among the more outstanding examples of the mobility of human capital are the large concentrations in the Arabian sub-continent of workers coming from South East Asia, India and Pakistan. More recently, though to a far lesser degree, a similar phenomenon has accompanied the dismantlement of the Iron Curtain between the NATO countries and those once part of the Warsaw Pact.

The popularization of the 'global market' as a development with which society, whether modern or traditional, is faced and to which it has an imperative borne out of enlightened self-interest to respond is working its way steadily into all areas of the human and social sciences, even though its consequences for political organization, inter-group relations, labour legislation, social values and, last but not least, education are as yet dimly perceived. Mobility of brains, of course, lies at the heart of 'globalization'. But just as the implications of 'globalization' begin to change the way we look at our own societies and their place in this brave new world, so they also impose new perspectives on the way the 'brain drain' is perceived.

A BAD THING

In its classic setting of a quarter of a century ago, the 'brain drain' tended on balance to be regarded, like King John in that delightful parody of English schoolboy 'howlers' (amazing errors borne out of the individual's imperfect knowledge of history) *1066 and All That*, as 'definitely a Bad Thing'. The reason for this particular interpretation was not hard to find. The sixties saw many countries, especially those in Africa, achieve independence. The move towards *real* independence in the sphere of economic development, as opposed to *formal* legislation setting out the conditions of nationhood, was – and for that matter still remains today – quite a different matter. The need to build up the basic cadres of an administrative and an industrial élite was pressing and paramount. It was a fragile process in which modernization could easily be jeopardized if substantial numbers of the well-qualified left the country. In other areas, it was not so much the affirmation of formal independence which had often been achieved decades earlier as the underlying process of modernization and industrialization that was threatened by the outward migration of talent. Such was the case in South East Asia and in certain Latin American states.

Beneath this particular perspective on outward mobility lay a number of assumptions, some explicit, others more covert. Among the more explicit assumptions was the conviction that the purpose of investment in education revolved around the physical building up of the nation and the forging of a clear national identity. In other words, the goal of modernization lay primarily in giving added substance and viability to a specific geographical entity by creating a national consciousness, by developing the rule of law and by endowing it with the social organization to sustain them. Looked at from this angle, economic development was simply a means to a cultural end, namely, to anchor society around a series of value-allocating bodies and to give those bodies the means, whether in financial or human resource terms, to ensure the most basic of all commodities, to wit, the absence of civil strife, the avoidance of war between neighbours and, where possible, the ability of the individual to seek life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

To be sure, the particular values regarded as a prime necessity differed greatly as did the bodies put in place to uphold them. Varied autochthonous forms of socialism, Marxist-Leninism, a supposedly planned economy, with social and political values transmitted through a single party as well as equally varied forms of parliamentary democracy were the order of the day. Irrespective of the type of political regime in place, all shared a common view on the matter of the 'brain drain'. This view sprang from a basic presumption that economic development acted as a function in nation-building. Consequently, the loss of qualified human resources through migration stood in direct contradiction to that main and overriding purpose. It followed from the priority of developing nationhood that the duty of the individual and qualified citizen was to serve his country by putting his – more rarely her – higher skills at its disposal. Those going abroad were then breaking a species of unwritten moral contract they had incurred by dint, not merely of having studied, but also by dint of having accepted the often considerable support in the form of non-repayable grants or direct and heavy subsidization they had received as students in higher education. Put slightly differently, the brain drain was conceived as the individual's unilateral suspension of the obligations he owed to the collectivity, an argument which is no less current today as Guogang Mu's contribution shows.

A GOOD THING

Such views, though by no means abandoned, tend to undergo a subtle transformation when the issue of the mobility of brains is placed within the general context of an emerging global economy. This shift in focus is important for a number of reasons. The first of these is that the thrust of economic development moves away from nation-building to the construction of international or, to use a Unesco term, regional trading blocs. The second shift in perspective involves a profound reversal of the hitherto dominant relationship between economic means and cultural ends which, we suggested, characterized the two decades of nation-building from the sixties to the early eighties. Placed within the setting of 'globalization', nations – that is different political, social and cultural entities – become the basic building blocs in the forging of a 'world economic order'. The third revision in perspective is no less disquieting since it follows on from this ends/means reversal. Whereas 20 years ago, the definition of the viability of the nation-state depended on its developing and mastering a modern economy, today the measure of its viability lies in the extent to which the nation is able to devote its efforts to becoming competitive within an international economy, in other words, to subordinating where not adapting its cultural, political and historic particularity to international trade that if mastered and dominated by the strong, the cunning and the anonymous is certainly not accountable to anybody else. Failure to accomplish this integration into the 'global' economy carries with it severe and unforgiving penalties in the form of the utter marginalization – the new Iron Law – of those countries which fail. Once again, though certainly not in these exact terms, we hear modernity's equivalent of the terrible cry of classical antiquity *vae victis* – 'Woe unto the vanquished'.

Against this latter-day version of *natio*, *natione lupus*, the mobility of the highly trained takes on a rather different interpretation. Far from being an act of betrayal to the task of nation-building, mobility takes on new connotations which in turn derive from the mercantile ideology which governs the rise of trading blocs themselves. The prime of these is the triumph of individual initiative as against collective responsibility. If one's native heath cannot provide either the facilities or the life style that others are prepared to grant, then voting with one's feet is surely the act of a wholly rational *homo economicus*. Another revisionist view is to see the mobility of the trained not as a loss so much as a vicarious form of participation of the nation's citizens in the global economy. Rather than decrying the disadvantages this might entail for the nation, this perspective plays up the indirect advantages – largely construed in terms of money sent back home by those working abroad. There are, naturally, examples to be found where this source of externally generated national revenue is extremely important, not just for the individual families concerned, but also for the fact that the money of those who have left may, in the medium term, provide a precious source of investment in up-dating the national economy. Finally, there are the hopes, more often dashed than fulfilled, that in the medium term the Prodigal Son will return and bring with him the skills acquired and techniques perfected abroad. These too may be put to good use since, to continue the metaphor, the Prodigal Son returns bringing with him the fatted calf that his father is almost certainly unable to provide. In short, the brain drain is transformed into a species of brain gain since the value added in the form of skills gained abroad has not involved direct cost to the home country. They may even, from an economist's point of view, offset the loss in the original investment incurred when the young person first went West – or North. From there to believing that the mobility of brains, like King Richard Coeur de Lion, is 'a Good Thing' is but a short step.

Clearly, the issue of the mobility of talent lends itself to different and often diametrically opposed interpretations. These interpretations change in function to what is deemed to be the nation's interest, as Tae-Ho Yoo's analysis suggests. But these interpretations are also influenced to a very high degree by the prevailing economic ideology. Equally clearly, since the universities are at the forefront both in defining who is held to be of talent and in providing their basic skills, this topic cannot but be of central concern to them. The universities are also in the delicate position both of upholding the nation's cultural and political values while at the same time being the instrument by which the skills of a country are brought up to a level that allows that country to participate in the emerging world economy.

The seven articles included in the Theme section of this issue were first presented at the IAU Regional Meeting held in Tianjin and Beijing during May 1994. The issues they raise are of abiding concern, indeed, it can easily be argued that with the quickening pace of international mobility, such issues acquire a relevance all the greater because of this speeding-up. In presenting this series of articles before our readership, we would also wish to pay tribute to the generous hospitality and to the stimulating discussion which our hosts in China laid before us.

Guy Neave