

Federal stats counter myth of a southbound "brain drain"

BY ALEX BUSTOS

OTTAWA (CUP) – There is little evidence Canada is suffering a mass exodus of talented workers to the United States, federal government figures show.

In fact, a large number of educated workers are coming into the country from around the world, contributing to a "brain gain" rather than a "brain drain," the study suggests.

According to the unpublished Statistics Canada report completed last October, approximately 32,800 university-educated people immigrated to Canada annually between 1990 and 1996.

In contrast, only 8,500 Canadians with post-secondary education left each year to the United States.

In other words, every year Canada gained almost four times the number of educated workers than it lost.

"And those numbers are very conservative," said Scott Murray, a Statistics Canada researcher and author of the report. "The U.S. output numbers are overestimated, while the immigration figures are underestimated."

More specifically, the study also showed that more people with master's and Ph.D. degrees immigrated to Canada than left here for the U.S.

The only sector where international immigration did not outstrip emigration to the United States was health.

In a brief paper released last Wednesday, the left-wing Canadian Centre for

Policy Alternatives argued doctors and nurses are moving south of the border because health cuts and salary caps are making it difficult to practice in Canada.

The short paper also stated that fiscal conservatives who demand tax cuts to combat the so-called brain drain are fighting a fictitious battle.

"This [government] study was an effort to inject

reality into the debate on the brain drain," said Seth Klein, director of the group's B.C. office.

But according to a right-wing think-tank, the Statistics Canada study is flawed.

"It is very flimsy mathematics they are employing," said Walter Robinson, executive director of the Canadian Taxpayers Federation.

"The brain drain is real.

Yes, there is a small number of professionals leaving to the United States, but they're impact on our tax base is huge."

Citing a study by the C.D. Howe institute, Robinson pointed out that in 1996, 8,600 highly skilled managers and professionals moved permanently to the United States.

In the same year, roughly 44,000 high-skilled

workers went to work down south on temporary visas.

A high-skilled worker was defined as someone making \$70,000 or more per year.

If you look at the \$70,000 plus tax bracket, argued Robinson, you realize that even though this group makes up only 6 per cent of all taxpayers, they contribute 31 per cent of all tax revenue.



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