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EUROPE AND THE MIGRANT WORKER

EXTRACT FROM A SPEECH BY DR. P.J. HILLERY, VICE-PRESIDENT OF THE COMMISSION OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES TO A COLLOQUIUM ORGANISED BY THE INSTITUTE FOR EUROPEAN HEALTH SERVICES RESEARCH, K.U.L., LEUVEN, SATURDAY 13 DECEMBER 1975

In 1959 there were about 1.2 million migrant workers in the European Community of Six Member States. Of these, about half came from outside the Community.

In 1974, the Community of Nine had a migrant worker population of some 6.4 millions, of which only 1.7 million were citizens of Member States. This latter work-force consisted mainly of Italian (about 800,000) and Irish (about 450,000) migrants.

Non-Member countries, were therefore providing the enlarged Community with about three-quarters of its migrant workers. These were mainly the Mediterranean countries of Europe. Among the 1974 figures I note 517,000 Spaniards, 290,000 Greeks, 590,000 Portuguese, 656,000 Turks, 545,000 Yugoslavs, 446,000 Algerians, 190,000 Moroccans, 85,000 Tunisians. The United Kingdom is, of course, a special case with about a million migrant workers from the new Commonwealth states, particularly from the West Indies. This immigration raises serious problems of racial integration which are not prevalent to the same extent in the other Community countries.

The situation of these migrant workers who, with their families and dependents total more than 10 million people, varies considerably from country to country.

Let me compare first the position of migrants from Community countries with that of migrants from non-Member countries. The former benefit from regulations on the freedom of movement for workers and on social security coverage for workers and their families moving within the Community.

The self-employed benefit from the principle of freedom of establishment although access to self-employed activities is of course dependent on specific agreements connected with the recognition of qualifications and diplomas. Much remains to be done in this field, including, for example, the extension of social security to self-employed migrant workers, as already envisaged by the Commission. Nevertheless, the Community's achievement in providing nationals of Member States with more protection than ever before had demonstrated that equality of rights for all European citizens is now a realistic objective.

I am convinced that the best way forward lies in the successive implementation of specific legislative initiatives. An example of this is the Commission's proposal designed to

remove any remaining inequality in trade union rights for Member States' workers which is currently before the Council. I am hopeful that it will be adopted without difficulty later this month.

The current recession has caused the repatriation of many migrant workers and has put pressure on the whole migrant work-force even though Europe's recent prosperity owes them so much. While for the first time in any recession, no massive exodus have as yet occurred it would, however, be unrealistic to believe that this situation can last much longer if present difficulties continue and if a Community approach to employment problems is not forthcoming. It is Europe's responsibility to face up to the challenge of fully integrating those migrant workers already in the Community who do not wish to return to their country of origin and who are contributing to our prosperity. For these workers and their families, all discrimination must be removed, granting equal rights to housing and social security, including the right to transfer the benefits acquired through integration in the host country. In the event of local difficulties, priority should be given to migrants already in the Community for jobs available in another Member State.

Europe's future cannot be founded on a return to the massive unplanned importation by Member States of migrants from Third Countries. Although such migration shows short-term benefits for both importing and exporting countries, it should be subjected to the evaluation and discipline appropriate to its significance as an important exercise in development and cooperation and be programmed to the economic needs of developing regions and countries both within and without the Community.

Measures adopted in 1974 under the Social Fund to assist integrated programmes on internal migration in the Community could serve, in this context, as examples for relations between the Community and Third Countries. The ideal would of course be to conclude agreements on manpower questions between the Community and Third Countries. Community attitudes must be co-ordinated before this can be achieved.

The progressive alternative to mass migration is an effective regional policy within the Community which would complement an organised international division of labour within the wider framework of a new world economic order. This approach is becoming the recurrent theme of international conferences.

The restructuring of patterns of income and economic activity will also have to be faced as the removal of all discrimination against migrants will raise the cost of immigration and question even its economic justification. To ensure economic development and internal stability, we shall have to change our way of growth and not have recourse to an increasingly numerous, non-integrated sub-proletariat. Job attractiveness will have to be increased, at least in the Community. Manufacturing centres with an excess of labour will have to be dispersed.

The health problems connected with immigration should be dealt with both at a medical and a socio-medical level. The lack of precise data on migrants makes it difficult to pinpoint priorities however. We must therefore improve health statistics and study hospitalisation, absenteeism and accidents at work. Industrial hygiene are of particular importance in the case of migrants. Early diagnosis and screening, prevention, adjustments to the job and assessment of vocational skills all play an essential part in the migrant worker's social integration and assimilation into the host society.

The solving of problems relating to migrant workers is, finally, linked to agreement on an overall Community development policy covering prices and incomes, employment, division of labour and migration itself. This involves political choices in a world context and as such will take time - an important reason for starting now. In the short-term, the first three points I mentioned should probably be given priority: prevention of large-scale repatriation, complete integration of migrants already in the Community and a new concept of migration for the future.