

Action for the Community's migrant workers

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LUCIEN JACOBY, a member of the Commission's directorate of employment, social affairs and education, explains the educational and vocational problems which arise from free movement within the Community.

Mobility of the labour force in the community poses two major problems: school education and vocational training. A committee consisting of representatives of the governments, employers and trades unions has been formed to assist the Commission to ensure worker mobility within the Community.

Special emphasis is laid on the vocational training of employees and the education of their children.

A resolution passed by the Community's Council of Ministers in 1974 gives priority in the social sector to the institution of an action programme for migrant workers both from the Member States and from other countries. The plan which the Commission put forward in December 1974, calls for concerted action to help the children of migrant workers and emphasizes the importance of language classes and vocational training.

Since 1974 the European Social Fund has been able to help member states which incur additional expenses in their efforts to provide suitable education for the children of migrant workers. The Fund also assists in action programmes designed to improve training facilities

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ties for social workers and teachers who work with migrant families and their children.

Every year the Social Fund contributes towards educational courses and training schemes which help some 80,000 schoolchildren, 3,000 teachers and social workers, and 150,000 adult migrant workers.

The education and vocational training of migrant families and their dependants are guaranteed by law. A Community regulation has laid down the rules concerning the mobility of migrant families within the Community. The regulation stipulates that 'migrant workers from other member states must be given the same opportunity to visit schools, training colleges and re-training centres, with equal rights and under the same conditions, as the nationals of their country of residence.'

Furthermore, 'children of an EC citizen who works, or has worked, in another member state must have the same rights with

LUCIEN JACOBY, a member of the European Commission's directorate of employment, social affairs and education, explains the problems that arise from free movement within the Community – and how they could be dealt with

regard to school education and apprentice or vocational training as the citizens of that state, as long as these children are resident in the country in question.' Finally, the regulation requires that 'the member states should support all efforts designed to ensure that such children are able to make the most of their education at the above-mentioned institutions.'

In July 1981 a directive came into effect providing for the school education of the children of migrant workers in the European Community. It requires that the host country offer some form of introductory teaching for migrants in the (or an) official language of the country concerned. Such teaching should be geared to the needs of foreign children. The host country is also bound to provide special training facilities for teachers who work with the children of migrant families.

In addition, the directive calls upon host countries to cooperate with the migrants' nation of origin to ensure that instruction is provided in the native language and culture of foreign children. So far the directive is legally binding only with regard to the dependent children of citizens of EC countries who are working, or have worked, in other member states. But the Community has announced its firm intention to extend the provisions of the policy to all groups of foreign children.

Introductory educational training for migrant children, which is absolutely vital for their later development at school, is no longer left to the discretion of the individual school authorities. It has become an acknowledged right, enforceable by the Community courts.

The requirement that member states offer instruction in the native language and culture of the migrants' home country is designed to help immigrants to retain their national identity. It is a positive step towards better international relations within the Community. What's more, the presence of the children of migrant families has ensured that the EC languages are now taught at schools in the

major industrial centres of Europe.

At present some ten pilot projects are in operation in France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Luxemburg, Great Britain and West Germany. They are being run as part of an action programme on the education of migrant workers and their dependants. The programme covers such areas as introductory educational training, instruction in the language and culture of the home country, intercultural education, teacher training, and the development and promotion of special teaching aids. These projects are now being evaluated.

Such measures are comparatively new. But the trend towards inner-European migration on a large scale dates back to the decade 1960-70. The education authorities have responded very late to the radically changing school population. Today this population is multi-lingual and has a great diversity of cultural backgrounds.


In industrial regions, for example, the children of migrant workers now represent 30 per cent-40 per cent of the total number of chil-

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dren at school. Although immigration from non-EC countries has been halted, the number of foreign school-children is still rising steadily, as a result of both the reuniting of families and the high birthrate.

The vast majority of immigrant children have great problems at school. Their entry into working life is therefore correspondingly difficult. There are two million foreign children at school in the member states, which mean that around 200,000 leave every year.

Only half of them are able to move on to vocational training, and of these only a few participate in full-length training programmes. The rest can only contribute to the rise in unemployment: they have little chance of getting a traineeship or a job.

The Commission intends in future to take action in nursery education. It has become clear that foreign children who visit a nursery school from the age of three are easily integrated into the educational system of the host country. Again, more foreign teachers are to be appointed to instruct migrant children in their native language and culture. The Commission also recognizes that it is irresponsible to allow 40 per cent of young foreigners to be excluded from vocational training because of their lack of success at school. 

The Community's lesson for Ireland

To many people abroad the image of Ireland, created and nurtured by newspaper headlines and dramatic television news clips, is one of interminable conflict between two communities whose traditions, cultures and religions seem destined to keep them for ever apart.

The hatred and violence which, to outsiders, appear to pervade everyday life, have frightened off foreign investment and tourists. Security requirements have involved both the British and Irish governments in enormous expenditure. The damage done to the general economies of both sides of the border is incalculable.

For all that, the image which the Irish people's fellow citizens in the European Community have of the troubled island is, to a large extent, a misleading one. Only a minute fraction of either the Protestant or Catholic communities is involved in violence. The vast majority of the population tries to lead a normal life in the shadow of the violence, which gives its perpetrators an impact out of all proportion to their numbers or political support.

While the violence tends to exaggerate the differences which divide the communities, and makes it more difficult to resolve them, it cannot be denied that these do exist – between the Catholic and Protestant communities in Northern Ireland, where the Protestants are in a two-to-one majority, and between Northern Ireland and the Republic south of the border, where the population of almost three and a half million is 95 per cent Catholic.

Both the Dublin and London governments are working together in an attempt to break old political moulds and to bring about a measure of reconciliation. Alongside these efforts, various individuals and organisations have been working quietly, among them a group which owes its origins to the ideals and achievements of the European Community.

Cooperation North was founded in 1979 by a group of prominent individuals in the Republic who felt that a fundamental cause of the island's political problems was a lack of understanding between the communities on either side of the border. They decided to set about resolving this, by encouraging increased trade and industry and improved social and cultural links.

'Images are potent,' says Dr Brendan O'Regan, chairman of Cooperation North, 'and in this island they are too often distorted. These distortions damage all of us. We must do all we can to substitute facts for myths.'

With financial support from the four main banking groups – two based in Dublin and two in Belfast – the organisation, which emphasises its non-political nature, has sponsored a flow of familiarisation visits in both directions across the border for public repre-

Bringing old enemies together as partners has worked in the EEC. It could also help to end sectarian conflict in Ireland, writes PETER DOYLE

sentatives, businessmen, journalists, youth organisations and the like. It has also established an independent trading company to encourage trade between North and South.

Backed by funds from the European Commission in Brussels, Cooperation North has carried out a series of important studies on the potential for cooperation between border communities in such areas as agriculture, tourism and energy. It has also prepared proposals for a feasibility study to be carried out on the establishment of a cross-border industrial zone, as well as educational projects which (it hopes) will attract funding from the Community as well as from both governments.

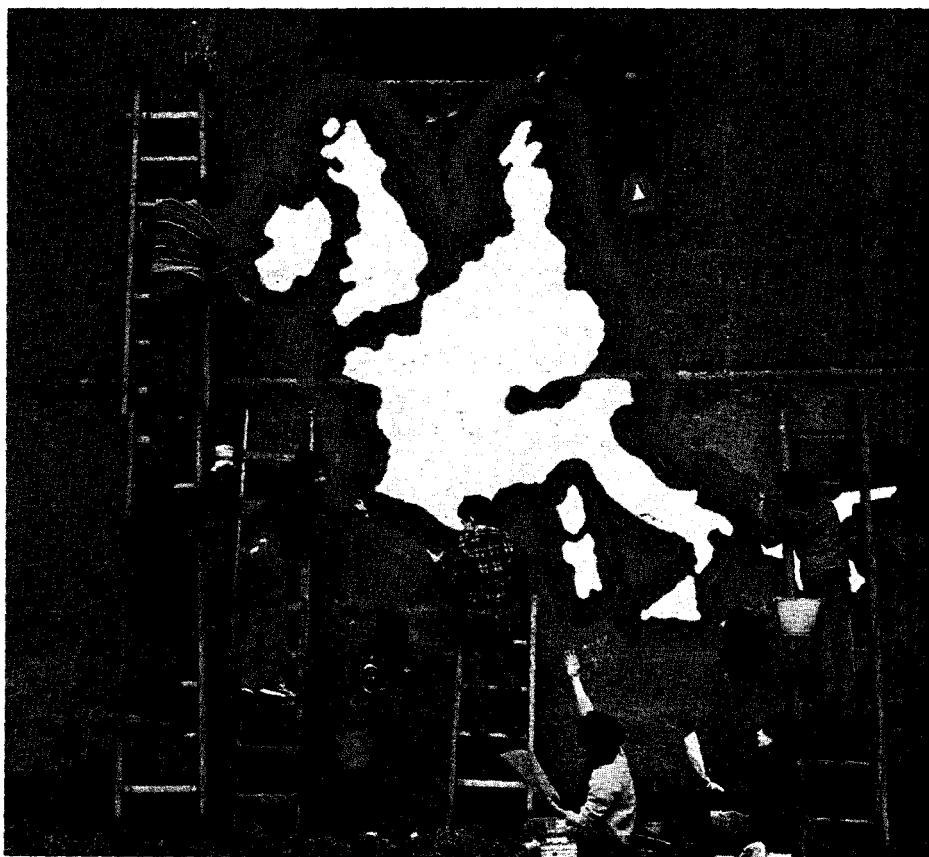
It is no accident that, soon after it was

established, Cooperation North should have looked to the Community as well as to the London and Dublin governments for support. The Community has already given substantial backing to studies on communications, tourism, drainage and the fishing industries in the border areas, as well as direct grants from its Regional, Social and Farm Funds. The Community has also served as the model for the organisation.

Says Dr O'Regan: 'Perhaps the basic aim in the establishment of the European Community was the creation of an economic framework which would end for ever the long-standing enmity between France and Germany. Surely there is a lesson for us in this experience.'

'If two countries as powerful and diverse as these, with all their history of conflict, can use the best of both traditions to build a future for themselves and their children, surely we on this small island can appreciate the futility and the waste of destructive conflict.'

Dr O'Regan adds: 'I believe that we can move now, and try to give expression in practical terms to the aims which, in a wider context, inspired the founders of the Community.'



This is the front cover of 'About Europe' – an up-to-date, 24-page account of the European Community just published in Brussels. It is available, free of charge, from EC Distribution Department, PO Box 22, Weston-super-Mare, Avon BS24 9EW.