

445.22



IMMIGRANTS: A PEOPLE IN WAITING

They are a people, almost another "state", but lack the dignity and rights of real citizens. The immigrants in Europe are still a foreign and unpopular body. But now things are changing, slowly.

In Brussels they call them the EEC's "tenth member country." They are 10 million strong, which makes their number greater than the populations of some real member countries. They are the five million immigrant workers and their five million dependants.

They are in the Community and yet in many ways not part of it.

The man in the street is generally ill-informed about them and tends to be naturally prejudiced against them because of their different culture. He assumes they are taking the bread out of the mouths of his fellow nationals, while governments

do not conceal the political desirability of being able to deal with this large and disposable workforce according to the fluctuations of economic circumstances.

It is 25 years since the big post-war movements of immigrants—now reduced to a trickle by the recession—yet the same structural problems of housing, welfare and education exist and the social tensions arising from the failure to encourage and facilitate the integration of immigrants into the social fabric have not gone away.

Some countries have tried to avoid finding a remedy by eliminating the root of the problem. With the onslaught of the economic crisis, Switzerland and Germany determined to repatriate their surplus "guest workers"; Switzerland by refusing to renew work permits, Germany by means of incentives. France tried to bribe immigrants to go home, but less successfully.

Countries are now looking for less brutal and more flexible solutions to the problem, well aware of the outlook for the demand and supply of labour in the late 1980s. From 1985, for instance, the annual influx of young people on to the labour market will actually start to drop off, according to an OECD expert in Paris.

Governments, international organisations and trade unions are all resolved to find an acceptable solution to the problem. But busy as they are carrying out research, making recommendations and even taking some positive steps, it remains to be seen how effectively they handle the matter.

Ordinary citizens. The virtual freeze on migration from outside the EEC practised by all member states—there is no restriction within the Community, legally at least—means that immigrants have been living in their adopted countries for at least five years, and many for 10 years or more. John Vigors, who is in charge of the action and co-ordination programme for immigrant workers at the EEC Commission, acknowledges their grievance: "The longer they stay, the more strongly they demand to be treated like ordinary citizens." The call for equality is more insistent among ▶



those of the "second generation"—children who resent being isolated from the society in which they were born and which is the only one they know.

But it is particularly hard for the poor and underprivileged among them. "They start off handicapped, since their parents and relatives are barely literate and hardly speak any English," observe officials at the Runnymede Trust, a charitable educational foundation in London.

Bernard Gillardin, training director of the Association for the Reception and Education of Immigrants in Paris, points out the hardships of doing evening classes after a hard day's work: "It is a painful effort that discourages even the most enthusiastic." Yet evening classes remain the rule everywhere except in Sweden, where the law provides for 240 hours of language learning during working hours, paid at regular job rates.

Many firms do what they can. Some provide them with housing (such as Volkswagen in Wolfsburg), or organise language classes (like BMW in Munich). BMW's public relations manager, Horst Avenarius, says that when the courses were given by qualified teachers, "the workers were intimidated", but that now they are given by their own foremen, who speak the language of the factory, many more immigrants attend these classes.

Migratory chain. Some 600,000 foreign workers returned to their native countries in 1974 and 1975, according to an OECD estimate. The general slowdown in emigration

that this figure indicates, means that governments have the opportunity to set about seriously improving immigrant's living conditions and educational opportunities, especially professional training. Moreover, they are also looking at prospects for promoting the harmonious repatriation of immigrants through what the OECD calls the "migratory chain".

It depends, of course, on the co-operation of their native countries, who have been hitherto quite happy to profit from their emigrants' remittances. But they are now discovering the valuable potential these workers represent for their own development.

For one thing, they are now trying to channel these remitted funds into more productive areas with a view to financing the repatriation of emigrant workers. The sums involved are considerable: Germany's guest workers remitted a total of DM6 billion (£1.6 billion) in 1978. France's immigrant workers are expected to send home between FF 18 and 20 billion (£2-2.3 billion) in 1980. That means a significant contribution to invisible earnings and an aid toward financing imports for developing countries.

More importantly, however, it means finance for agricultural and industrial development. One unsuccessful attempt in Turkey to initiate agricultural co-operatives has not deterred other ambitious programmes. For example, 80 000 Turkish immigrants in Germany have set up their own investment company, with the support of the

Stealing jobs? How many Europeans would accept the unpleasant, badly paid jobs that are mainly filled by immigrant workers in most EEC countries these days?

In but not of Europe		
Country	Immigrant workers (000)*	% of labour force
CH	493	16,4
B	370	10,2
D	1 889	9,5
F (a)	1 584	7,3
A	189	6,0
S	225	5,4
NL	115	3,7
GB (b)	866	3,5

* 1977 figures. (a) 1975
(b) 1976. OECD estimates

German ministry for economic co-operation.

Marginal effect. Some European governments are financing special training courses for immigrant workers, in consultation with their native countries, to facilitate their repatriation. An early example was the 1976 agreement between Croatia and Baden-Württemberg, which provided free welding courses for 50 Yugoslav workers each year and guaranteed them jobs back home afterwards.

France is trying to organise similar programmes. In the past year it has arranged training for 485 foreign workers, mostly North Africans, who were due to return home afterwards at their native country's expense.

These initiatives have only a marginal effect at the moment since they are limited in scope but they will probably become a lot more important in future. The Netherlands has already gone one step further than most in giving direct development aid to the native countries of its foreign workers—five Mediterranean countries and the Cape Verde Islands.

But overall it will be a long time before immigrant workers can live and work without the threat of being uprooted for reasons of political or economic expediency. They will continue to be shunted around between the developed and the underdeveloped world until freedom of movement becomes a universal liberty, instead of the privilege of the affluent west.

Anna Attisani ●