

EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

In the same period of the mid-1970s that the United States and Canada were overhauling their immigration laws in reaction to growing difficulties in controlling immigrant workers, a very similar process was underway on the opposite side of the Atlantic. During the late 1950s and 1960s the importation of foreign labor into the countries of Northern Europe, primarily from the countries of the Mediterranean Basin, expanded the labor force and made possible a rapid accumulation of capital. Although the programs of labor importation were generally much more centrally organized than in the United States (illegal immigration played a smaller role)(1) the object of the importation was the same: the acquisition of a malleable labor supply whose low wages could be pitted against local workers to hold down the average cost of labor. However, after 1969 there were a number of policy shifts toward tighter control that led to the almost simultaneous decision in 1974 by most labor importing countries to block further importation of permanent immigrants from the Mediterranean area -- a dramatic turnaround from the earlier pattern.

As a result of this blockage, over the period of December 1974 to December 1978, there were substantial reductions of the foreign work force in several countries. In West Germany the number of employed foreign workers dropped by 460,000. In France the number fell by 165,700. In Switzerland the reduction was 105,000 and in Austria, 45,600. Looking only at known data (which is far from complete) we can see that more than one million workers were returned to their countries of origin between 1974 and 1978, alone.(2)

From the point of view of the sending countries the partial data available shows that the size of these return flows have also been substantial. Of the 600,000 workers returning to the major source countries between 1974 and 1975, the first year of turnaround, some 235,000 returned to Italy, nearly 200,000 to Spain, 100,000 to Turkey and 60,000 to Greece. According to Yugoslav authorities that country saw a reverse flow between 1974 and 1977 of some 400,000. Thus, not only have a great many workers been affected by these policy changes, but their return and the inability of others to leave, has constituted a substantial problem for their home countries' governments which have often seen migration as both a safety valve for local pressures and a source of foreign exchange from the remittance of wages.

The following article by Yann Moulrier and Pierre Ewencyk explores this important shift in the strategies of European capital in dealing with the labor market and the new class composition it engendered in Northern Europe and in the Mediterranean area. Their analysis represents an important update of studies written before the turnaround, as well as an attack on current European Leftist views of these policy changes and of immigration in general.

The Left views they wish to combat attribute this policy shift solely to the changed needs of capital accumulation in the wake of the oil crisis and global recession of 1974-75. According to this "water faucet" line of reasoning (also frequently used in the U.S.) the *expansion* of immigration was the simple result of capital accumulation and the *contraction* of immigration was the response to the collapse of accumulation in the 1974-75 recession -- which could itself be explained by the "internal laws of capitalist development" -- (e.g. M. Castells' "falling rate of

profit").(3) Against this sort of view *they argue that the reversal of immigration policy should be grasped instead as capital's response to its growing inability to control the labor power it had set in motion.*

Through a close examination of the actual pattern of policy changes they show that the shifts toward tighter control began well before the economic downturn of the mid-1970s and came in response to a wide variety of difficulties with the immigrant labor force. The high and growing numbers of workers were presenting a problem of scale of management (numbers ranged from hundreds of thousands in countries such as Belgium or Switzerland, to millions in Germany and France) largely because increasing numbers of workers were ignoring governmental plans and reorganizing themselves according to their own autonomous proclivities. This political recomposition took the form of 1) moving regionally (or between industries) in defiance of government planning, 2) refusing to move (especially by supposedly "temporary" workers) and 3) making militant demands on the state for social expenditures, higher wages, better housing, etc. In short, there was a collapse in the control of workers in production and in their reproduction as a segment of the working class.

Moreover, the growing difficulties directly involved the "source countries" as well as the receiving countries. Along side the much-heralded *benefits* to source country governments of inflows of workers' remittances and of a safety-valve in conditions of high unemployment, were a series of closely related *problems*. These included the inflationary effects of those remittances and the difficulty of converting them into investible capital via savings, together with the increasingly widespread experience of workers' families receiving *money income with no local connection to work*. Along with the experience of returned workers, this was bringing new models of consumption and *new sets of needs* that could not be met locally -- a new variation on the theme of "frustrated rising expectations." The authors suggest that this pressure can be seen as one factor behind the growing Third World demands for a New International Economic Order (e.g. Group of 77). Particularly marked in Algeria, a major supplier of labor to France, this factor contributed to the remarkable ban on immigration by the Algerian government in 1973. (That government claimed the ban was to protect its citizens from racist attacks in France.) Thus the increased mobility of labor accompanying the expansion of immigration is seen as leading to destabilizing effects in all the countries concerned.

Moulier and Ewencyk also argue that once the cutoffs of 1974 were imposed, the blockage of further outmigration and the returns home have contributed to the increasing political destabilization in the Mediterranean area: upheavals in Turkey, Portugal, Spain, Italy, Tunisia, etc.

Central to this analysis is the perception of the *subjectivity* of the immigrant workers in these developments. In their critique of the vision of "unlimited supplier of labor" shared by the Left and many mainstream economists, Moulier and Ewencyk insist on the absence of a qualitative appreciation of the behavior of these workers. Rather *homo economicus* they declare, than the usual view of passive victims of unequal development. As against such commentators as Castle and Kosack, they emphasize the well developed circuits of information and solidarity within which the workers learn of the alternative conditions of employment.(4) The workers, they argue, move about quite consciously in search of "more favorable conditions of class confrontation" -- of better wages, of better social wages, of better conditions of struggle in general. This autonomy and qualitative differentiation of "supply" must be taken into account

in any analysis of labor markets. Furthermore, much of capitalist technological development can be understood as both facilitated by and as a response to these pressures. Drawing on such recognition of the working class destabilization of the Post-WWII patterns of immigration, they argue that the situation in Europe leading up to a policy reversal after 1972 was similar to the situation in the U.S. in 1924 when internal class conflicts led to the cutoff of most permanent migration. *We* can also see from the articles by Flores and Ramirez the similarities with the class relations of North America in the 1970s.

In the last part of their article, they sketch the character and implications of the new structures of capitalist control implemented in Europe after 1974: slow growth, austerity and the stabilization of demand through fiscal crisis, a new balance of responsibility between the nation state and international organizations like the IMF, and especially the new "micro-physics" of labor market utilization of immigrant and local workers.

The new series of constrictions on freedom of mobility of foreign workers appears to be having many effects including a rapid expansion of permanently illegal, undocumented workers - either workers who enter without papers or those such as wives and children who are allowed in, but legally excluded from the labor market. Thus there is a rapid growth of illegal employment such as domestic black work or the home-work of the diffused factory. Against these changes immigrant workers continue to develop new forms of struggle.

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¹In France a large percentage of migrants were at first illegal but then had their status "regularized" by the government. Rarer in Europe but common in the US was the continuously undocumented worker.

²These statistics as well as those in the following paragraph are taken from: A. Lebon and G. Falchi, "New Developments in Intra-European Migration Since 1974" *International Migration Review*, 14(4), Winter 1980.

³M. Castells, "Immigrant Workers and Class Struggles in Advanced Capitalism: the Western European Experience," *Politics and Society*, 5(1) 1975, pp. 44-45.

⁴S. Castles and G. Kosack, "The Function of Labour Immigration in Western European Capitalism," *New Left Review*, No. 73, May-June 1972, p. 14.