

INTERNATIONAL CATHOLIC MIGRATION COMMISSION

HEADQUARTERS: 11 RUE CORNAVIN, GENEVA, SWITZERLAND

In Italy:

GIUNTA CATTOLICA ITALIANA PER L'EMIGRAZIONE

VIA OVIDIO, 10 - ROME



THIRD INTERNATIONAL CATHOLIC MIGRATION CONGRESS

ASSISI, SEPTEMBER 22 - 28, 1957

WORKING GROUP: II.....

TITLE OF REPORT: STATEMENTS MADE BY GERMAN EMIGRANTS
ON QUESTIONS OF INTEGRATION

by Rev. Friedrich Fröhling, S.A.C.
(Germany)

Statements Made by German Emigrants on
Questions of Integration

by Rev. Friedrich Fröhling, S.A.C. (Germany)

For any community of people questions of integration become a problem only when large numbers of immigrants have to be received in the community.

It is quite a natural reaction if a community considers that its existence and its peace are endangered by the immigrants and takes measures of defense, attributing at first all burdens and troubles to the newcomers. Through wise legislation and open-minded people in the community, difficulties should be prevented from arising in the integration of the great numbers of immigrants and should be overcome by the community as well by the immigrants themselves.

For the immigrant, integration is a problem connected with difficulties which sometimes call upon all his inner resources whether he came to the country alone or with a big group of people; for in any case he finds himself confronted with a naturally grown community which has al

ready found its own mode of life and rhythm of work and has developed its own ways of thinking and reacting. It is up to him to penetrate this wall and to adapt himself without losing his identity to the life of that society, saving at the same time all the valuable things he brings with him for the new community.

It therefore seems to be of the utmost importance for all those dealing with the solution of integration problems on the levels of legislation or social and religious care to take cognizance of those problems which cause most difficulty for immigrants.

From the numerous letters written to the General Secretariat of St. Raphaels-Verein by former emigrants, there emerge some critical points of difficulty common in nearly all countries which can only be overcome with much effort.

An outline of those points may suggest some ideas for solutions which can be brought about either immediately or after the necessary legal foundation has been created. It may also contain some hints for creating a better understanding of the immigrant in a community where he

is to be accepted as an important element.

For the sake of objectivity we have chosen out of the great number only the most representative letters and omitted all those at either of the extremes, negative or positive.

1) Reception

In the first place an immigrant gives a report of his reception, for it is at the port of immigration that for the first time he comes in personal contact with the immigration country, its people and its authorities.

Letter of November 11, 1951

"... After the customs clearing we went to the stand of our organization. It should be emphasized that it was the Salvation Army which cared most of all".

Letter of December 2, 1951

"... I arrived in ... on December 9 last year. Four members of the Kolping association were waiting for me at the station. At the Kolping house I found good accommodation and I like it very much".

Letter of December 3, 1951

"... The organization ... was not too good. We noticed it already when we were leaving the boat. Only one person spoke German. Those who did not speak English were lost".

Letter of January 16, 1952

"... On December 8 we arrived in ... We were passed quickly and kindly by immigration officials. Then we went for the first time to the city".

Letter of March 3, 1952

"... Arrival in ... on October 10. The services of the ... were good. The first day we were sent to a hotel. We had a good time and an opportunity for recreation. After six days we continued the trip. We were called for by car. Everything possible was done for us".

Letter of August 31, 1952

"... Father ... called for us here at the station and helped us like a good friend. He looked for a home with us, helped us buy some furniture and assisted us in every way. Thus the arrival was not so difficult for us and we got off to

a good start".

Letter of April 27, 1953

"... The reception here in ... was a hearty one. Hats off to the authorities. Everything was well organized. The long journey, too was very well prepared and the food supply for the train was especially excellent".

Letter of March 3, 1954

"... The immigration formalities had been settled by the commission which had already come aboard in ... The railway officials were extremely kind in taking care of the passengers".

Letter of June 24, 1956

"... The arrival in ... was well organized. Still on the ship, we were informed about all details of debarkation; a short film was shown and thus nothing could go wrong. At the pier we were at once received by our organization which gave us any necessary instructions. Only half an hour after arrival I was able to meet my brother. This was an indescribable moment and I am sure that I will never forget it".

Letter of September 30, 1956

"... We were received in ... by two gentlemen. One of them was very kind and eager to help, the other was just the contrary. He was disobliting with the German emigrants".

Letter of February 13, 1957

"... After a flight of 30 hours in stormy weather we arrived in ... In ... a gentleman waited for us and accompanied us to the station. In ... the parish priest and a parishioner welcomed us and drove us by car to our home".

The excerpts from these letters show clearly the effect which the reception in the immigration country has upon the immigrants. After leaving the ship, they are overwhelmed by their new surroundings. They feel at a loss to know what to do, and they are grateful for assistance offered to them. A well organized and smoothly run reception is certainly most important in view of the shortness of time and the great number of newcomers. But it is not enough. Reception must be arranged not only technically but also personally by inhabitants of the immigration country, who, if possible, are able to greet the newcomer in his language.

The newcomer feels safe if a representative of his church takes him under his protection as soon as he enters the country.

However, reception occurs not only in the port of immigration but also at the point of destination. The following letter refers to this second occasion.

Letter of June 22, 1954

"... Three special trains were ready to take us to the places of destination. We arrived at eight o'clock on Tuesday morning and then for many of us the great disillusion began, especially for those who did not speak English. We left the train and were "on our own". Everybody thought that somebody would come to tell him where to go, or that there would perhaps be an organization at the station to give some information. Nothing of the kind! There was only a conductor who made us leave the station by shouting: "What the hell are you waiting for? Let's go! Get a move on you!" This was not in the spirit of the "Auf Wiedersehen" played by the band on Columbus quay in Bremerhaven. But we had arrived in another world. What did we really expect"?

At the port of immigration the migrant is still a

member of a group of migrants. At the place of destination, however, he must rely completely on himself, and here he feels his loneliness most.

2) Language

In the letters of the emigrants it appears to be a particular difficulty to know the language of the immigration country.

Letter of November 3, 1953

"... If an immigrant comes to a town and is able to explain to some person of that town that he is looking for a room, he will certainly find one within one hour. Unfortunately, however, many Germans arrive here without knowing one single English word".

Letter of November 3, 1953

"... People of many occupations are needed. But only very few people get jobs for which they are qualified because of their poor knowledge of the language".

Letter of March 3, 1954

"... The greatest difficulty for all immigrants is the

language. All of us are of the opinion that the methods of teaching languages in Germany are insufficient for our purposes. It is hard to learn English here. For every sentence you do not understand you have to pay hard".

Letter of June 24, 1954

"... I was driven to despair. I did not know what to do. I moved from one place to another like a madman. At last I went to a hotel and offered to the manager to do any work whatsoever. And there I had a chance. He appreciated very much the fact that I knew English and he found me a job as night-porter in a hotel here".

Letter of October 3, 1954

"... As I told you already in my first letter, the most important thing is to make oneself understood. I should say that it is indispensable to have a sufficient knowledge of English or French. No matter what you have learned and what certificates you present, without knowing the language you will be treated like somebody who is deaf and dumb and whose abilities are limited. Many people believe that once they are here they will learn the language within one or

two years. To tell the truth, I would not like to suffer from misunderstandings and inconveniences for two long years".

Letter of January 31, 1957

"... Salesmen were very much in demand at that time, but since I do not speak English well, it was of no advantage for me".

Letter of March 5, 1957

"... One of the most difficult problems is the language. You can tell everybody wanting to emigrate that he should learn at least the most necessary things in advance. We are getting along rather well and that is because our neighbors are English and go to a lot of trouble for us. Our little Digna, too, learned the English language quickly at school and was one of the best at the end of the year. The teaching methods, however, are different from those in Germany".

It is quite true that the emigrants know that in the immigration countries other languages are spoken and that in theory they should try to learn the language of the

country of destination as soon as possible. Repeatedly the counselling offices give out the urgent advice to prospective emigrants to learn the language of the immigration country. Nevertheless, emigrants (as well as people dealing with them) are constantly complaining that they do not or only insufficiently know the language of the immigration country.

Unfortunately, up to now only very few inquiries have been able to be made on the numbers of emigrants who really tried to learn the foreign language in the home country and on why their self- instruction may have had bad results. There may be many reasons. After making the decision to emigrate, a person is so busy - physically as well as mentally - with the material preparations, that he hardly has time for intellectual or linguistic preparation. During that time of preparation most try to earn as much money as possible in order to be financially well equipped. They think that financial security is the best means for the success of their plan.

Furthermore, it may be said that the majority of emigrants are persons whose education ended after elementary school. In the course of years they have often lost the

ability to acquire theoretical knowledge. They only learn by practice. Language training is often therefore hardly possible for them.

However, the general attitude may also be the reason for the insufficient linguistic preparation. It is remarkable that in small countries such as Switzerland, the Netherlands, Belgium, Denmark, etc., the percentage of those knowing another language besides their mother tongue is much higher than in Germany. It might be said that those peoples have more or less developed a general readiness to learn foreign languages. For the German, his mother language was quite sufficient in the large territory in which he lived. Very seldom was he obliged to deal with foreign people. Thus the natural talent for learning foreign languages easily was not developed. The same observation seems to be true for the vast regions where the English language is spoken. There, too, the percentage of those speaking several languages is very low. The fact, that the German lacks the inner readiness for speaking foreign languages represents probably a great difficulty for his integration in the country of immigration. The inability to speak to the citizens of the immigration

country entails many complications for the immigrant. The following report gives a good idea of this situation.

"... Not to understand the language means not to understand the mentality of the people in the new country. It makes it difficult to get a job in one's own field, to know people and to understand the different mode of life in that country, simply because question and answer are not possible. From this there results automatically a negative attitude towards everything, only because it is new and incomprehensible ... And the feeling of inadequacy caused by the fact that one does not understand the language manifests itself in criticism of the conditions and often of the most insignificant things".

It would be a fine task for government and local authorities to arrange courses in the language of the country, not only in the big cities but also in small places and to use in such courses a method adapted to plain folk. They could furthermore influence the general attitude of people in the immigration country, above all that of employers, so that the immigrant may meet with more understanding with regard to his difficulties of language.

3) Problems of Occupation

It is decisive for the integration of the immigrant that he have the right working place. On this point, too, letters from migrants provide information.

Letter of August 22. 1951

"... I would like to tell you that in a factory. All kinds of brushes are made here. I have a good salary. I work five days a week. In those five days I earn 55 dollars".

Letter of December 2. 1951

"... Here you can rent farms half and half. That means that one gets half of the crop. One does not need money for it, only the working power. Machinery and everything is there. Or one can buy the farm. The banks give you the necessary money if they see that deal with reasonable people fond of work. We have already decided to rent a farm after one year when we have acquired the necessary knowledge".

Letter of December 2, 1951

"...Only after Christmas was I able to start work with

a roofing firm. Unfortunately I could only work two days a week at most because of bad weather. Then my boss found me a job in a factory with a friend of his. In spring I was supposed to come back. In the factory I worked 40 hours per week and I received the net amount of 55 dollars. It was not much but I was satisfied. After only two weeks a member of the Kolping association procured a job for me in a metal working plant. I have been working there for four weeks now. I like it very much. I have the possibility here of becoming a toolmaker".

Letter of December 28, 1951

"... I have a job with the local railway company here and I earn enough for us to live very well, although now in the beginning we still have many things to buy".

Letter of December 21, 1953

"... I am working in a meat packing plant. In this plant people work very hard, as everywhere here. It is only nine hours a day but don't ask what they are like. Here you cannot apply European standards with regard to pace, laboriousness, working methods or techniques. Your full power and rapidity is required. I would like to mention

the following as an example: To prove my qualifications in the beginning I was put on the conveyor in the slaughter house where I had to cut off pigs' tails. It sounds so ridiculous but it is bitter reality. This work requires only one cut, but I sweat blood. My hands and my arms became insensitive. I did not feel the knife in my hand, and this lasted for three hours until all 600 pigs had passed the conveyor belt. It went on like that for weeks and then they knew that I had the necessary tenacity and perseverance. In the course of time one gets used to every thing, and today I can only smile at these things".

Letter of February 12, 1954

"... My husband starts working at half past four a.m. and keeps busy until seven p.m. Nevertheless he does not do enough and every thing he does is criticized".

Letter of June 22, 1954

"... Now to the labor exchange: for one week I was desperately looking for work. In vain! Everywhere the same answer: "I'm so sorry". At many places you see even from afar a plat with the nice words: "No help wanted"! But I have the advantage of speaking English. The Employment Office does not do very much. At the Immigration Office up to 15 jobs are offered

per day. I got up at 4 o'clock in the morning in order to be the first. Well, I was really lucky. The Immigration Office had some announcements from firms which were looking for "cheap" manpower. I received a letter to the firm and a city map and off I went. The firm gave me a job for 90 cents per hour. Nobody who has been here for some time works for so little money. After four weeks of work I can say, however, that my boss will not drop me. After only a fortnight I was earning \$1. - and now I get \$1.25. In my opinion it is stupid to insist on staying in the trade one has learned. It does not matter what you do. In the first place here you need a reputation and the best one is having worked at one place for a long time".

Letter of November 7, 1954

"... Unfortunately I must tell you that I was very disappointed about this country. Nobody here bothered with us. The Immigration Departement which was supposed to procure jobs for us had nothing available. Every up to 100 men queue up in front of that office looking for assistance or work. Only in a few cases is there any help. Most of them run into debts and have much trouble in paying off.

Letter of February 10, 1956

"... Everybody has work here. Work is 40 hours per week. We like it very much. Everybody works and wherever we go everything is nice. That gives much pleasure".

Letter of February 12, 1956

"... One week ago my wife finished her studies as a nurse. During that time, I myself studied the official government publication on weights and measures and passed the examination as adjuster and repair man for steelyards and thus today I am registered businessman in...

Letter of February 17, 1956

"... We have now settled down here and are happy in our flat and in our profession. My husband has already finished his second semester at an international banking institute which he attends evenings, and both times he came off very well so the bank reimbursed him the money for the courses. We both have already had salary increases and we are very satisfied".

Letter of January 25, 1957

"... As a mason I get a net salary of £ 22.-- per week;

that is more than 200 marks. My passage, amounting to £ 192.--, was repaid already in the fourth month."

These reports show that the immigrants have to look for work themselves and they feel "at home" when they have found a job giving them sufficient means to live on. Besides their efforts to get a job, they must adapt themselves to completely different methods of work and attitudes towards work. For most of the German emigrants work is not merely a means of earning money but it is a profession which is supposed to influence and to enrich also their inner life. This attitude ought to be appreciated in the immigration countries as a valuable gift which the immigrant brings with him.

In this field, too, there is much room left for the assistance work of organizations. In many cities Catholic organizations and ecclesiastical authorities have already established employment services, saving much trouble for the immigrant.

4) Housing

The German emigrant feels "at home" when he and his family are able to find or work towards getting an apartment

or house of their own. This is proved by many letters.

Letter of December 3, 1951

"... For the time being we are living in a little furnished house where we have two rooms and a kitchen. After Christmas we will move to a bigger one in a better place, with three rooms, garden, stable, etc. Before moving I shall redecorate everything, of course, on time payment".

Letter of Marche 16, 1952

"... We live alone in a small house and again we have every thing we left in the homeland, for our Mr. ... has given us all the furniture for an apartment".

Letter of May 4, 1952

"... In the afternoon we moved to our house. It is made of wood, has a veranda and five rooms. We have to fetch the water from a well. But it is warm here. We have to get accustomed to the climate as so many Germans have who been living here for many years and have not died yet".

Letter of November 12, 1953

"... The house cost £ 2,500.--. We paid a first installment

of £ 1,000.-- and now we have still to pay £ 1,500.--."

Letter of Holy Thursday 1954

"... During the first few weeks and months my wife felt very miserable here and I could not justify to my family living separated from them during the whole week on the prairie. So I had to stop working there, and after one week of unemployment I found another job which was, however, not as well paid. Then our son was born and has brought us much pleasure up to now. Thus there was additionally the problem of housing. Up to then I had two small rooms directly under the roof. If you look in a newspaper to study the housing advertisements you always find "no children" or "not more than one child". After trying a lot of things without success I went to the parish priest and he told me at once: "The best you can do in order to live without trouble is to build a basement, for if you really want to rent an apartment you have to pay about \$70.- per month". I got another credit of \$2,00.- and then I started the construction work. It was not easy. I had to put off the creditors and there were days and nights when I wished that I had not started the whole business. But I think that now the worst is over. We now

have a living room, a master bedroom, one for Roswitha, one for Winfried and Andreas, a kitchen and a bathroom. Now we can lead a family life as we want are used to. It is marvellous. We feel well and we all are happy to live here. My wife, too, has settled down now. She participates in the club life of the local Catholic Women's League. I am a member of the Knights of Columbus. Roswitha has been attending kindergarten for three months and is enthusiastic about it".

Letter of Frebruary 12, 1956

"... until we succeeded after three months in finding a house which corresponded more or less to our purse and to our wishes".

Letter of May 6, 1956

"... A fortnight after the arrival of my fiancée we got married in the Catholic church here, and we were lucky enough to be married by a German priest. I may say that my young wife likes it very much here and that we both are very happy to be united al last. We are on the way now to building our own home in the near future".

Letter of May 14, 1956

"... Almost every month we are able to buy a piece of furniture for our home and it is beginning to become really comfortable".

Letter of August 1956

"... We have already settled down here in such a way that we bought land near..."

Letter of February 14, 1957

"... On February 18 it will be 16 months since we got here. We are very glad to have our nice large apartment. It is a pity that you cannot come to see us here. For Christmas we bought a television set, so we now have nice entertainment at home. We have not yet bought a car because we gave first consideration to our home".

Letter of March 5, 1957

"... It is also very difficult to find housing. People here do not want children and if you finally find something, it is so expensive that you cannot afford it".

Such reports as these show the important role of the

housing problem in the process of final integration of of the immigrant in the country of destination. If the immigration country is interested in making the immigrant feel at home and become a permanent citizen of the country, it should find ways to help him find adequate housing as soon as possible - and not mere accomodations. It should also create possibilities for an immigrant to acquire a house of his own. The methods to be applied by the immigration country cannot be determined by the emigration country.

5) Relations with the Church

The integration of the immigrant is only complete if his soul, too, feels at home; that means, if his religious demands are satisfied.

Letter of December 28, 1951

"... Catholic life here in this town is very active. We have a very nice church here, the only hospital is managed by Catholic doctors and nuns, and there are a Catholic kindergarten, elementary school and high school".

Letter of January 17, 1952

"... The city of... is probably the center of Catholicism.

In every office of the local authorities you find a crucifix. There are also other agreeable surprises of that kind. However, this is not true for the religious care of immigrant. The priest does not understand the language of the immigrants. He knows even less their mentality, their troubles and their needs".

Letter of April 16, 1953

"... We are getting on well here. There is only one sore point and that is that we are not in a Catholic region. Every Sunday we are driven by car to Mass, but we have children aged 7, 14 and 16 who need religious instruction. We ought to prepare the boy of 7 for first confession, but how? We do not yet know English sufficiently well, and if we teach him in German he cannot make himself understood to the priest. Our farmer is very strict about his religion, but we have not yet been able to make out what he is. Then too the girl of 14 and the boy still need religious instruction. The elder boy works with another farmer who takes him to his church. Will this be good for him in the long run? We do want to remain Catholics and to educate the children as good Catholics. Please, could you give us advice?"

Letter of September 20, 1953

"... The landscape around... was beautiful and the solitude did us much good. The only thing missing was the church".

Letter of February 12, 1954

"... The children go every Monday to ... to a Catholic convent and they return on Friday. The nearest church is two hours away; We can go there to Mass on Sundays. I am very worried that the children do not have any religious instruction. The family where we work belongs to the New Apostolic Church and they show their anti-Catholic feelings".

Letter of March 10, 1954

"... Since the religious conditions are also alright we cannot complain of anything".

Letter of March 21, 1954

"... The religious care on the ship was very good, whereas since the arrival in... no Catholic priest has cared for the Catholics".

Letter of October 11, 1954

"... The german Catholic community here in the post-war

Letter of December 1, 1956

"... The interior of the Catholic church here looks just like one in Germany and there is usually a Mass for German-speaking people from 9 to 10 o'clock. with German sermon and hymns".

If the government and local authorities of the immigration countries do their utmost in efforts to remove the difficulties arising in the integration of immigrants, the ecclesiastical authorities should all the more see that everything is done that the immigrant faithful get all the assistance they need to lead a happy religious life. Some immigration countries have achieved important things in this field, others are still far behind. But if the human soul real not find a home in the new country, one surely cannot speak of real integration. In the Constitution, "Exsul Familia", principles have been set up which are to guarantee that religious care is given to the new immigrants in their mother tongue, not in order to preserve the language but in order to guarantee the maintenance of religious life and the active participation at Mass. It is certainly very much in the interest of the emigration countries that the emigrant faithful be able

to maintain their faith.

It may appear strange that the emigrants do not mention other questions arising in the integration process, for instance legal, social and sociological questions. Probably these questions only turn up in a later stage of integration. It is quite natural that first of all the immigrants have to overcome the difficulties concerning their livelihood, i.e. those which turn up in the first few years. In those years the immigrant is still in a stage which does not allow him to draw the attention of the immigration country to his problems. This is why just during those first years he needs help most.

+++++++