

European Community Struggles with Migrants

Turkish people-smugglers highlight issue

by William Dickinson

Chances are you haven't heard much about *East Sea*, the rusty freighter that ran aground in mid-February near the French Riviera. Turkish smugglers packed at least 910 Kurdish men, women and children into the hold of the 90-foot ship, with a one-way destination in mind. The captain and crew fled by lifeboat after leaving the boat facing land, the propellers turning, so that it could not drift away. A color photograph of the ship in my local paper gave rise to a question: Is this a clear but terrible view of tomorrow, not just for Europe but for the United States?

The sudden appearance of the refugees, 480 of them children, threw France for a loop. Politicians began squabbling about what to do: welcome the Iraqi Kurds or ship them back, probably to Turkey. This was France's first experience with such a mass wave of illegal immigrants. The fear is that it will not be the last. One conservative former minister argued that if the Kurds were accepted on French territory, "We will open the floodgates." But a government spokesman asked: "You don't want to throw them into the sea, do you?"

The Kurds first were taken to military barracks, but later set free while authorities considered their claims for political asylum. According to BBC News Online, French officials reportedly told the refugees that they might want to head for Britain because it would give them "much better treatment." This provoked a response from Jack Straw, Britain's Home Secretary, that the U.K. had

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power to send back to France any of the Kurds who crossed the Channel. A whiff of panic is in the European Community's air. A day after the *East Sea* grounding, 200 Africans in four boats landed illegally in Spain.

What's happening on Europe's Mediterranean coast these days was foreshadowed more than a quarter century ago in a eerily prophetic novel, *The Camp of the Saints*. In Jean Raspail's apocalyptic story, a flotilla of 100 rusty steamers heads north from the Ganges, carrying hundreds of thousands of impoverished people so desperate that they are willing to risk everything in the hope of reaching the south coast of France and a better life. Five more fleets from Africa, Asia and India join them. Sheer numbers threaten to overwhelm France's resources and culture.

But politicians dither, torn between their humanitarian instincts and the knowledge that the country itself is at risk. Who will give the order to sink the boats? In the end, the ships disgorge their human cargo. In time, all of Western Europe is overrun. Raspail's book caused a sensation, and he became a literary pariah. In an afterword to a new edition published in 1985, Raspail described the vision he had that led to the book:

They were there! A million poor wretches, armed only with their weakness and their numbers, overwhelmed by misery, encumbered with starving brown and black children, ready to disembark on our soil, the vanguard of the multitudes pressing hard against every part of the tired and overfed West. I literally saw them, saw the major problem they presented, a problem absolutely insoluble by our present moral standards. To let them in would destroy us. To reject them would destroy them.... So-called Christian charity will prove itself powerless. The times will be cruel.

Is it premature to suggest that Western Civilization itself is eroding under the pressure of uncontrolled,

perhaps uncontrollable, immigration from countries with different religions, cultures and political systems? To be sure, most immigration to rich nations takes place in less dramatic ways than boats. A few people at a time slip across porous borders. Others enter legally as tourists or students and stay on, using one stratagem or another. Still others enter first as refugees fleeing civil war or oppression and then don't go home when the emergency ends.

Humanitarian impulses war against hard reality. The compromise seems to be that we will make some effort to prevent illegal entry. But if someone succeeds in getting here, even in the dark of night, we will let him stay. In the wake of the recent Salvadoran earthquake, President Bush assured the 1 million Salvadorans "temporarily" in the United States that they would not be forced to return home anytime soon. Those who went back to help relatives were guaranteed re-entry to the United States.

The crazy patchwork of laws and regulations often means we have no prospect of limiting immigration at all. Policies are concocted on the spot to fit political advantages, with bizarre outcomes. Cubans who manage to *land* on American soil are accepted as refugees; those who are intercepted at sea are returned. But if you are Haitian, it won't do any good to reach U.S. soil; you will be returned in almost every case.

Lax immigration laws and the inexorable tide of illegal immigration drive up population and the demands on public schools, roads, natural resources, national parks, public services of all kinds. Each new arrival inherits an infrastructure built up over several hundred years. Americans are generous. But it is one thing to know that we are sharing our wealth. It is another if the new arrivals are so numerous that our progeny end up sharing their poverty.

Pro-immigration spokesmen charge that immigrants are being "scapegoated" for domestic problems traced to rapid population growth. But numbers do not deceive. U.S. population, now 281 million, is projected to grow to 400 million by 2050. Sixty percent of U.S. population growth at present is due to immigrants and their children. One out of every 10 workers is an immigrant. Even if you believe that the cultural challenges can be met through assimilation, imagine the pressures posed by 120 million more people within the lifetimes of your children or grandchildren.

At a minimum, citizens deserve a healthy national debate on where we are going with immigration policy. Neither party seems willing to oblige. Immigration barely surfaced during the presidential campaign. Feelings run so high that most exchanges end up in recrimination and personal attack. But facing up to the issue will become unavoidable. World population, now 6 billion, is growing at the rate of 1 billion every 16 years. Ninety percent of this growth is in poor nations. Anarchy, poverty and desperation will spread. Hundreds of thousands of displaced people will be looking for the next "East Sea" to carry them to distant shores. The times will, indeed, be cruel. •

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