

Goran Lukič

MIGRANT WORKERS¹. HUMAN BEINGS - OR JUST MEANS FOR PROFIT?

Association of Free Trade Unions of Slovenia

The United States stunning economic growth between 1870 and 1920 coincided with the migration of tens of millions of Europeans to America. A study of fifteen European countries finds that a 1 per cent increase in the population through migration is associated with a boost to the economy of between 1.25 per cent and 1.5 per cent. The World Bank reckons that if rich countries allowed their workforce to swell by a mere 3 per cent by letting in an extra 14 million workers from developing countries between 2001 and 2025, the world would be \$ 356 billion a year better off, with the new migrants themselves gaining \$ 162 billion a year. (Legrain, 2007) Logic is clear - free flow of work force is good for the national economies. But what happens, if the same national economies embrace economic growth as “supreme social value”? Would that mean the excuse for the breach of basic human rights every time, when they step in the way of achieving that supreme goal? (Pribac, 2008). Sadly, but the more we are talking about the current social position of migrant workers, the more that seems to be the case. What about the right for decent working and living conditions for migrant workers? What about the right for proper health and safety at work for migrant workers? Answers on those questions are all going in the direction of the core of our article – migrant workers are one of the biggest involuntary hostages of the race for more profit.

This article tries to go behind the positive economic gains on migrant workers so to look into the direct individual costs, which the same migrant workers must face, from their over-representation in so called 3D jobs (“dirty, dangerous, demanding”) and low-skilled occupations to appealing living conditions. But to show the whole scale of migrant workers’ reality, we must put it up against the “legal framework” reality, which is to provide legal protection for migrant workers and look into the gap between them.

The two realities, regarding migrant policies, which we are to confront, are there “**the economic – legal**” reality and “**the migrant workers**” reality.

¹ "A person who is to be engaged, is engaged or has been engaged in a remunerated activity in a State of which he or she is not a national" (International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families, Article 2 (1))

1. THE ECONOMIC / LEGAL REALITY

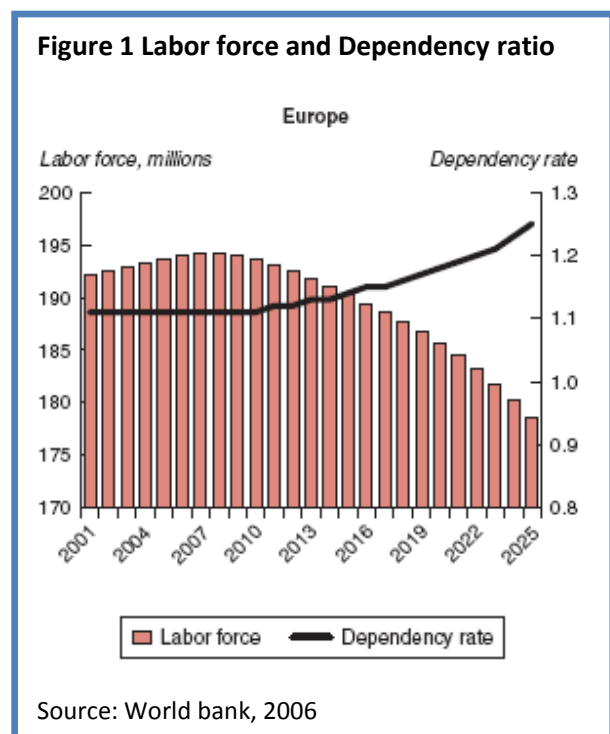
1.1 ECONOMIC VIEW: MIGRATION OFFERS POTENTIALLY HUGE ECONOMIC GAINS

"With the number of migrants worldwide now reaching almost 200 million, their productivity and earnings are a powerful force for poverty reduction«

François Bourguignon, Senior Vice President and Chief Economist, the World Bank, 2006

In the (global) economic perspective, migration flows are found to have strong positive effects. If we look into the World Bank's annual Global Economic Prospects (GEP) report for 2006², with its main theme of remittances and migration, we can find following findings:

- The expected decline in the labor force in high-income countries will increase dependency ratios³, which could add to the benefits from migration.(Ibid.: 25)
- Migrants, natives in destination countries, and households in origin countries would experience gains in income, although migrants already living in high-income countries would see a decline in wages relative to the base case. (Ibid.: 26)
- For the new migrants, the real income gains—cost-of-living adjusted—increase by nearly 200 percent.⁴ (Ibid.: 29)



² Available at:

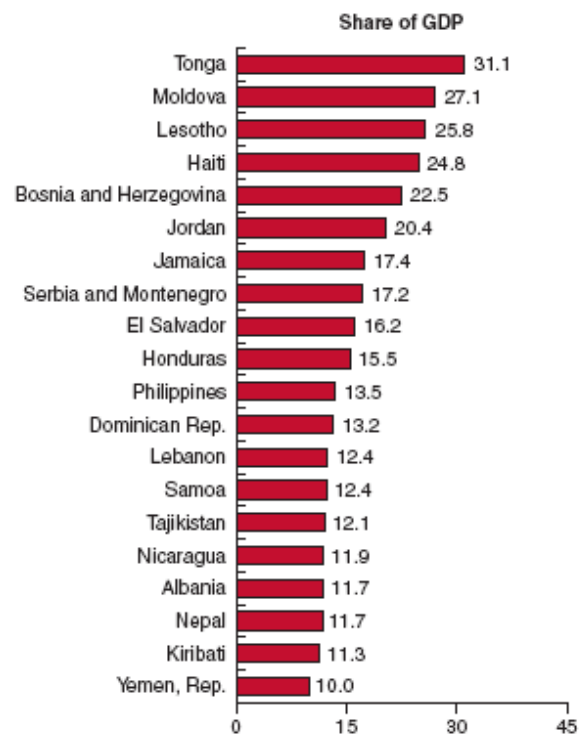
<http://econ.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/EXTDEC/EXTDECPROSPECTS/GEPEXT/EXTGEP2006/0,,contentMDK:20709766~menuPK:1026823~pagePK:64167689~piPK:64167673~theSitePK:1026804,00.html> (22nd May 2008)

³ The largest rise in the dependency ratio will be in Europe. If we focus more narrowly on the number of elderly per worker, every 100 European workers now support 36 elderly people; by 2025 they will have to support 52. (Ibid.: 29)

⁴ Variations in wages paid to migrants from different regions in destination countries are minor, whereas there are very wide variations in wages in countries of origin. For example, the average wage for a migrant in Europe

- The money that migrants send home — remittances— is an important source of extra income for migrants' families and for developing countries: in aggregate, remittances are more than twice as the size of international aid flows. (Ibid.: 13) Remittances received by developing countries, estimated using officially recorded data, rose to \$167 billion in 2005, up 73 percent from 2001.⁵ (Ibid. 87)
- Remittances can improve a country's creditworthiness and thereby enhance its access to international capital markets. (Ibid.: 100)
- International remittances have reduced the incidence and severity of poverty in several low-income countries⁶ (Ibid.: 120)

Figure 2: top 20 remittances – recipient countries, 2004, share of GDP



Source: World bank, 2006; IMF, 2004

1.2 LEGAL PROVISIONS: MIGRANTS' RIGHTS ARE HUMAN RIGHTS!⁷

In 2007 **PICUM**, the Platform for International Cooperation on Undocumented Migrants, a non-governmental organization that aims to promote respect for the human rights of undocumented

in the base year is about \$16,500—with only minor variation across migrants. However, the average wage in Sub-Saharan Africa is only \$470, whereas in the Middle East and North Africa it is \$2,700. Thus, the migrant from Sub-Saharan Africa will gain much more in both absolute and percentage terms than one from the Middle East and North Africa. (Ibid.: 37, 38)

⁵ Migrant remittances are calculated as the sum of workers' remittances, compensation of employees, and migrant transfers (ibid.: 87)

⁶ Remittances are believed to have reduced the poverty headcount ratio by 11 percentage points in Uganda, 6 percentage points in Bangladesh, and 5 percentage points in Ghana (Adams 2005b) (Ibid.: 120)

⁷ Major information source for this chapter will be the document »Undocumented migrants have rights« by organisation PICUM, available at: <http://www.picum.org/> (22nd May 2008)

migrants within Europe, issued an overview of the International Human Rights Framework regarding undocumented workers, entitled “Undocumented workers have rights”. Even though this document is aimed at undocumented workers⁸, it gives us very in dept look into the international legal framework for the protection of the rights of migrant workers.

1.2. 1 INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS LAW (IHRL)

International human rights law consists of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and the seven UN human rights treaties. Together these instruments represent international standards for the respect and promotion of human rights.⁹

Figure 3: IHRL

| |
|--|
| International Bill of Human Rights |
| Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) – UDHR |
| International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966) – ICCPR |
| International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966) - ICESCR |
| Other Core Human Rights Instruments (Thematic or Protecting Specific Groups) |
| International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (1965) – ICERD |
| Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (1979) - CEDAW |
| Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (1984) - CAT |
| Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) – CRC |
| International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families (1990) - ICRMW |

Source: PICUM

⁸ PICUM prefers the use of the term »undocumented migrants« (or alternatively »irregular migrants« as opposed to »illegal migrants«. The use of the term “illegal” can be criticized for three reasons: 1) due to its connotation with criminality, and most undocumented migrants are not criminals; 2) defining people as “illegal” can be regarded as denying them their humanity; and 3) labeling “illegal” asylum seekers who find themselves in an irregular situation may further jeopardize their asylum claims. It has also been argued that “a human being can never be ‘illegal,’ as otherwise the right of everyone ‘to recognition everywhere as a person before the law’ would be violated. (PICUM, 2006; available at:

⁹ Ibid.

PICUM is emphasizing, that all of the EU member states have ratified all of the treaty bodies - **with** the exception of the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrants Workers and Members of Their Families (ICRMW). The ICRMW has not been ratified by any EU member state, despite the opinion put by **European Economic and Social Committee, which calls upon the President of the Commission and the current Presidency of the Council to undertake the necessary political initiatives to ensure that the Member States ratify this convention within the coming 24 months and that the EU also ratify the convention when the Constitutional Treaty authorises it to sign international agreements (EESC)**¹⁰

So the provisions granted in each of the human rights conventions must be considered to be binding for all EU member states.

1.2.2. NON BINDING UN RESOLUTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Besides international Bill of Rights and the core human rights treaties, we have to take into account few other universal instruments relating to human rights of migrants, which are one the one side non-binding, but have *an undeniable moral force and provide practical guidance to states in their conduct* (PICUM)

Figure 4: Non binding UN Resolutions and Recommendations

Declaration on the Human Rights of Individuals Who Are Not Nationals of the Country in Which They Live (adopted by the General Assembly in Resolution 40/144 of 13 December 1985)

Recommended Principles and Guidelines on Human Rights and Human Trafficking - Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to the Economic and Social Council (2002)

Resolution of the UN General Assembly on the Protection of Migrants (2004)

Resolution of the UN Commission on Human Rights on the Human Rights of Migrants (2005)

Source: PICUM

¹⁰ Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on the 'International Convention on Migrants'(2004/C 302/12),
Available at:

<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2004:302:0049:0052:EN:PDF> (22nd May 2008)

1.2.3. INTERNATIONAL LABOR ORGANISATION (ILO)

The International Labour Organization (ILO), founded in 1919, is the tripartite UN agency that brings together governments, employers and workers of its member states in common action to promote decent work throughout the world. (ILO)¹¹

The most important ILO document regarding basic labour standards is ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work (DFPRW) and its Follow-Up (1998).

All Members, even if they have not ratified the Conventions in question, have an obligation arising from the very fact of membership in the Organization, to respect, to promote and to realize, in good faith and in accordance with the Constitution, the principles concerning the fundamental rights which are the subject of those Conventions, namely:

- (a) freedom of association and the effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining;*
- (b) the elimination of all forms of forced or compulsory labour;*
- (c) the effective abolition of child labour; and*
- (d) the elimination of discrimination in respect of employment and occupation*

DFPRW, Article 2

When talking about ILO and the rights of migrant workers, we cannot forget ILO conventions and non-binding instruments that deal with that subject.

Figure 5: Conventions and non-binding ILO instruments

ILO conventions

Convention on Discrimination (Employment and Occupation), 1958 (C111)

ILO Convention on Migrant Workers, 1975 (No.143)

Non-Binding ILO Instruments

Migrant Workers Recommendation, 1975 (No. 151)

Resolution Concerning a Fair Deal for Migrant Workers in a Global Economy, 2004

ILO Multilateral Framework on Labour Migration - Non-binding principles and Guidelines for a Rights-Based Approach to Labour Migration, 2006 41

Source: PICUM

¹¹ ILO web site, available at: http://www.ilo.org/global/About_the_ILO/lang--en/index.htm (22nd May 2008)

1.2. 4 EUROPEAN INSTRUMENTS REGARDING HUMAN RIGHTS

On the European level the main instruments for the protection of the human rights of migrants should be looked within the Council of Europe and the European Union.

Figure 6: European Instruments on protection of migrants

Council of Europe

Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (1950) – ECHR

European Social Charter and Its Additional Protocols (Revised 1996) – ESC

Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (1995) – FCNM

Council of Europe Committee of Ministers' 20 Guidelines on Forced Return (4 May 2005)

Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly Resolution 1509 (2006) on the Human Rights of Irregular Migrants

Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (2005) (CETS No. 197)

European Union

Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union¹²

Council Directive 2000/43/EC of 29 June 2000, Implementing the Principle of Equal Treatment Between Persons Irrespective of Racial or Ethnic Origin

Council Directive 2004/81/EC of 29 April 2004 on the residence permit issued to third-country nationals who are victims of trafficking in human beings or who have been the subject of an action to facilitate illegal immigration, who cooperate with the competent authorities

European Commission Proposal for a Directive on common standards and procedures for returning illegal residents (COM (2005) 391, 1 Sept 2005)

Source: PICUM

¹² The charter has been incorporated into the second part of the draft European constitution, but the constitution itself has not been ratified by the 27 member states of the European Union. The Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union is therefore not a legally binding document.(PICUM)

2. IMPRESSIONS FROM EUROPEAN SLABOUR MAP

So, the migration flow is economically recommendable and legally protected. Is it really legally protected? And who is paying the real price of economic gains of migration flows? Let's review some cases, which justify these questions. Let's look into the world behind economic gains and legal provisions – the everyday world of migrant workers.

ITALY: PUGLIA, province of Foggia

They're at least five thousand people, maybe seven thousand. No one has ever carried out a census. They're all foreigners; all employed as so-called "black workers" the name used to describe illegal, untaxed and underpaid work scams. They are Romanians with or without work permits, Bulgarians, Poles. And Africans: from Nigeria, Niger, Mali, Burkina Faso, Uganda, Senegal, Sudan, and Eritrea. Some have just entered the country illegally on small boats, only a few days ago. They came from Libya because they knew that in the summer they could find work here. It makes no sense to patrol the coasts if Italian businessmen decide to ignore the law.

To protect their affairs, farmers and landowners have created an army of ruthless gang masters: Italians, Arabs, and Eastern Europeans. They lodge their workers in makeshift shacks that are avoided even by stray dogs. Without water or electricity, in disgusting hygienically conditions. They make the men work from 6 AM to 10 PM. And they pay them only - when they pay them - 15 or 20 Euros per day. Complaints are dealt with by beatings with a steel bar. Some workers decided to seek the assistance of the Police, in Foggia: thanks to the Immigration Law named after Umberto Bossi and Gianfranco Fini, they were arrested or expelled from Italy because they didn't have the necessary work permits.

Others ran away. The gang masters searched for them all night long. It was a scene similar to the manhunts in Alan Parker's film, "Mississippi Burning." In the end, some of them were captured and some of them were killed. (Gatti, 2006)¹³

NORWAY: OSLO

Bosnian construction workers were found to be earning just NOK 24 (USD 4.80) an hour on a hotel renovation project when it was raided by police and state labour authorities on Wednesday.

¹³Gatti (2006): I was a slave in Puglia. L'espresso, 4th December 2006.

Availiable at: <http://espresso.repubblica.it/dettaglio/I%20was%20a%20slave%20in%20Puglia/1373950> (23rd May 2008)

The workers were also forced to live on the construction site in miserable conditions, were forbidden to form or join a labour union, and were threatened with firing if they broke any contract regulations. Many were working 300 hours a month, with no overtime compensation.

The firms hiring them allegedly were working with two contracts. In one, presented to Norwegian officials, the firms claimed the workers were being paid more than NOK 135 an hour. The other contained the much lower hourly wages and rules by which the workers were ordered to abide. (Berglund, 2008)¹⁴

SWEDEN: STOCKHOLM

Young British men are being used as 'slave laborers' in Stockholm, police have said. The men are being used in building work, and according to reports they are paid only sporadically and live in squalor.

Swedish television station TV4 has revealed that the men are forced to work fifteen hours a day, and live in derelict caravans without access to food or water. Around 100 British men are said to be working as pavers in the Stockholm area. Swedish police say the incident is "pure slave trading". Jimmy Åberg of Swedish border police described some of the building workers as "street children". Åberg said that many of the youngsters came from difficult backgrounds, had criminal records or had learning difficulties. Many of them don't even know which country they're in, he said. They are recruited with promises of good jobs; when they arrive in Sweden, their passports are confiscated. Escape is near impossible for the workers: "Those whom we have met say that they have been persecuted and subjected to threats and violence," Åberg told TV4. (libcom.org, 2008)¹⁵

IRELAND

Eamonn Rothwell, the Managing Director of Irish Ferries who is trying to sack 543 workers and replace them with migrant workers from Eastern Europe, earned €687,000 last year. In fact he got a pay rise of €35,000 in 2004.

That is approximately €20,000 more than what he intends to pay his "galley slaves" for a whole year. One last statistic - this man who claims that his company needs to replace unionised labour with

¹⁴ Berglund (2008): Crackdown urged on worker exploitation. Aftenposten, 22nd May 2008. Available at: <http://www.aftenposten.no/english/business/article2438923.ece> (23rd May 2008)

¹⁵ Sweden: migrant workers used as slaves. Libcom.org, 29th June 2007. Available at: <http://libcom.org/news/sweden-migrant-workers-used-slaves-29062007> (23rd May 2008)

migrants on slave wages in order to stay competitive earned more than 45 times the wages he proposes to give one of his new workers!

...

"The conditions sought by Irish Ferries for their new workers can only be described as semi-bonded labour. They will slave for 84 hours per week, work for months on end with no break and eat and sleep in their workplace - the ship - for €3.50 per hour. That is a mere €3.50 more than the galley slaves of ancient Rome except, I am sure, if we were around in those days, the galley bosses would have saved us guff about obeying workers' rights". (Joe Higgins, Socialist Party TD) (Boyd, 2006)¹⁶

...

Workers, mainly from Eastern Europe but also from Asia, are lured to Ireland by advertisements seeking "ambitious people" who would like to earn "several times" what they currently earn in their field of work. Often the truth is very different.

One worker who was hired in India, where the average wage is less than €100 per month, to work in a restaurant in Galway was told he would be paid over €1000 a month. It was a different story once he got here. "The day I arrived he [the employer] took my passport and told me that he could not afford €1000 a month, so I would have to work for €80 per week. I also had to work for over 70 hours, starting at 11am and finishing after midnight. I had one day off a week."

Workers are often forced to fork out for their permits, slum accommodation and other extras that employers pile on and illegally deduct from their wages. A lot of migrant workers report that they receive no pay slips. Arek (not his real name), a Polish construction worker said, "he [the employer] told us that only Irish workers needed pay slips. I do not know if I am working legally or illegally but I am afraid I will anger him if I ask". (Fitzgerald, 2006)¹⁷

SLOVENIA: LJUBLJANA

One lavatory for more than fifty workers. People have to wait an hour to get to their turn. 3m² of living space for each resident of dormitory. Not enough warm water for every day showering (resident usually work heavy physical work for more than 12 hours a day!). The owner of the facility

¹⁶ Boyd (2006): Irish ferries' slave labour, the socialist. Available at: <http://www.socialistparty.net/pub/pages/socialist010oct05/1.htm> (24th May 2008)

¹⁷ Fitzgerald (2006): Unions must act! The socialist. Available at: *ibid.*

doesn't provide the heating during the winter. Mattresses are decaying. There is no kitchen with running water or dining room in the whole facility. Cockroaches are all around.

These words are taken from the description of the living situation in one of the workers dormitories in Ljubljana. For that “luxury” the residents have to pay 137 EUR each per month. In another dormitory six people were living on 12m² (**Picture 1**).

But the same migrant workers, which live in these conditions, are also facing low wages - even below minimum wage pay of 566 EUR per month; long working hours – more than 12 hours per

day; insufficient safety at work – 10 out of 27 workers (Inspectorate of Labour of RS) who died at the workplace were migrant workers; constants violations of employment legislation - the employer is not paying social benefits for the worker, /nor for overtime hours...

One of the migrant workers simply said: “Is this EU?”

NETHERLANDS: DEN HAAG

In the Netherlands, there are 70,000 undocumented workers. They are mostly employed in the greenhouses (greenhouse agriculture) where they grow vegetables and in flower fields. One district with a lot of greenhouses is in Westland near Den Haag. There the number of undocumented workers has grown rapidly. In recent years, there are more Bulgarians, Polish and Ukrainians. The bosses no longer want Turkish and Moroccan undocumented workers because they ask for 6-7 Euros/hour while the East Europeans are given only 3-4 Euros/hour.

Undocumented workers in Westland work 12 hours/day, 7 days a week. They pick flowers, tomatoes, paprika, and cucumber. According to OKIA (Support Committee for Illegal Workers), a greenhouse owner saves 20,000 Euros per worker per year.

Picture 1: Room in a private workers' dormitory



Source: Association of Free Trade Unions of Slovenia

The exploitation of these workers has aggravated with the entry of uitzendbureaus. It used to be that workers were hired directly by the bosses. Now they are employed by the uitzendbureaus. These employment agencies earn 5 Euros/ hour/worker. As a result, the migrant workers are exploited twice. First by the boss and next by the uitzendbureau.

Mustafa Agyun in an interview said: "If I can work legally with a work permit, I don't have to be exploited by a uitzendbureau. But now I cannot fight back because I do not exist juridical. Who wants to work for 5 Euros an hour? ... I always have to follow what my boss says. We are the modern slaves of the Netherlands." (Del Pais, 2007)¹⁸

SPAIN: MAGREBI WORKERS

Local agricultural owners have transformed this previously poor area, mostly made up of desert that served as the setting for "spaghetti Westerns", into an oasis that now produces profits of £1,250 million per year. This "economic miracle" was achieved initially through increased productivity and the intense utilisation of the most advanced technology. This multiplied the number of harvests per year, to the point where the indigenous labour force was insufficient. The arrival of immigrants from Africa provided the additional labour required.

For the last 10 years, the agricultural employers have been able to pick and choose from an army of men who stand on the streets, squares and cross-roads every morning fighting to be selected for work that day. The wages paid are verbally agreed each day and the migrants' submission is secured by the absence of any legal contracts. As the only means of survival, many of those lucky enough to have documents claim social benefits to top up their meagre casual wages, but risk prosecution if discovered.

According to the Spanish daily *El Pais*, this "black economy" and the migrant workers' fears of being reported for having no papers enable the employers to maximise their profits. Employers can respond quickly to oscillating food prices (determined at the Amsterdam futures market) — either closing down production for a time, or increasing daily working hours. (Short, 2000)¹⁹

¹⁸ Estrella Del Pais (2007): Situation of migrant workers in Europe, No-racism.net, 25th May 2007. Available at: <http://no-racism.net/article/2156/> (24th May 2008)

¹⁹ Short (2000): Moroccan immigrant workers strike in southern Spain. WSWS, 16th February 2000. Available at: <http://www.wsws.org/articles/2000/feb2000/span-f16.shtml> (24th May 2008)

UNITED KINGDOM

Victor, a former peacekeeper in Bosnia, arrived in the UK from his native Hungary in summer 2007. He had signed up with an agency in Hungary with hopes of working in the UK to learn English, gain experience and earn money. The agency had promised a factory job paying £7.50 per hour, with appropriate accommodation provided. This proved to be a false promise and Victor has since endured sub-standard working and living conditions.

On arriving in the UK, Victor was met by a representative from the agency and driven overnight to the poultry processing factory where he was expected to start work the following morning. He was put in an unfurnished, three-bed roomed house, which he shared with up to 14 other people. There was no fridge and everyone slept on the floor. Victor worked cutting turkey thighs on a production line for 10 hours a day, five days a week. Despite the job involving the use of sharp knives, there was no training (Victor just copied the people next to him). The pay was £120 per week (£2.40 per hour). An 'administration charge' took most of Victor's first weeks' pay and he and his housemates were each charged £8 per day for the minibus trip to and from work. Workers did not have their own safety boots but each morning had to pick out a pair from a big box in the factory before getting changed for their shift.

Victor reports that 90 per cent of the workers at his level were migrants from all over Europe. Although several workers already had bank accounts, all pay was cash-in-hand and they were never given tax forms to sign. The job ended for Victor after he came down with a fever and had to stay at home. After he had been off for a week, the agency told him he was no longer needed. No sick pay was provided. (TUC, 2008)²⁰

2.1 WE LOVE THEM, WE HATE THEM: THE POLITICS OF IMMIGRATION CONTROL

As for the sheer economic exploitation reason, the migrants are obviously very "welcomed" in EU. But if you look the sights in Ceuta, Melilla (Spain), Calais (France) or Patras (Greece) you get the picture that the migrants are the state enemy no.1.

According to the following [press review](#) at least 12,160 people have died since 1988 along the [European frontiers](#). Among them 4,379 were missing in the sea. 8,455 migrants died in the Mediterranean sea, and through the Atlantic Ocean towards Spain, and 1.594 lost their life trying to cross Sahara desert in order to reach Europe.

[FORTRESS EUROPE](#)

²⁰ TUC Commission on Vulnerable Employment (2008) Hard Work, hidden lives. Available at: <http://www.vulnerableworkers.org.uk/2008/05/full-report-of-the-commission-released/> (25th May 2008)

If we put the sequences of these two logics around, we get a very sad not just exploitation, but also violence chain; many of these undocumented migrants first face state violence and if they get through that phase, they face – employers’ violence. We shouldn’t be surprised, when one of them asks: is it worth it?

SPAIN: CEUTA, MELILLA

Picture 2: Ceuta border fence between Spain and Morocco



Source: [WIKIPEDIA](#)

Thousands of Africans live rough in makeshift refugee camps in the hilly woodlands of Ceuta, preparing their desperate nightly assault on Ceuta’s border defenses. Only a lucky few succeed in breaching them. At a cost of some \$ 200 million, the Spanish government has erected two six meter-high barbed wire fences punctuated by watchtowers and fitted with noise and movement sensors, spotlights

and video cameras.

“I tried to climb over the fence. I tried cutting through it. But every time I got through; I got caught by the Spanish police” Lasso Kourouma recalls.

...

“I survived by eating the rubbish that Europeans throw away. Eventually the Moroccan army chased us away” (Legrain, 2007: 25)

Violence against migrants trying to cross from Morocco to Spain is escalating, according to a report published in September 2005 by Medecins Sans Frontieres. MSF doctors treated 2,544 migrants for violent injuries – such as gunshot wounds, beatings and attacks by dogs when trying to escape Moroccan security forces – between April 2003 and August 2005. (Ibid.: 27)

GREECE: EASTERN BORDERS

The eastern borders of Greece, which are also the exterior borders of the European Union, are almost redrawn by detention camps. These camps are usually former warehouses (on the islands of Mitilini, Chios, Samos, Kos, Rhodos, and Evia and in the town of Volos, central Greece). Moreover, police stations in most areas near the borders, as well as in the centre of Athens (Alexandras Avenue, Exarchia, Omonia, and Piraeus), are used as detention centres for migrants.

Picture 3: Migration settlement, Patras, Greece, 23rd January 2008



Source: [INDYMEDIA](#)

Detention spaces for "illegals" are as a rule lousy and most of the time detainees have no communication with the outside world or access to lawyers, nor the possibility to apply for asylum. Lately access by NGOs and other organisations or collectivities has been forbidden in most of the centres. A friend from Syria told us characteristically: "For three months I didn't go out, I didn't breathe clean air. I've been in jail in Syria and Turkey but it was nothing like this. And they talk about Europe..." (Libcom.org, 2006)²¹

FRANCE: CALAIS

It is midnight, and eight hooded figures slip around the side of a freight truck at a gas station on the outskirts of this northern French port. They wait in the orange half-light while one tries the locked

²¹ Libcom.org (2006):An examination of the holding centres for illegal migrants in and around Greece in so called Fortress Europe, 22nd May 2006. Available at: <http://libcom.org/news/article.php/greece-immigrant-detention-camps-270506> (25th May 2008)

truck door. It doesn't give, and seconds later the figures vanish among the dozens of semi-trailers at this, the last truck stop before England.

The smugglers blend in with the hundreds of Afghans, Kurds and Eritreans huddled in makeshift camps around Calais and other northern French ports facing England, even if they sleep in hotels and have an air of confidence with their more expensive clothes. Often, they are compatriots of the migrants, said a volunteer who works with migrants and insisted on anonymity.

Picture 4: Shelter burned by the police in the Garaness woods



Source: [INTERNATIONAL HERALD TRIBUNE](http://www.ihf.com)

The passage is rough: Britain says that it thwarted 18,000 illicit attempts to get to England last year. Truck drivers often take matters into their own hands, beating stowaways for damaging their loads.²²

3. INSTEAD OF CONCLUSION

Let's face it: there is a huge gap between the positive economic numbers, legislative protection regarding migrants and their reality. Why? If the answer really lies in the hierarchy of these variables, which means that the "economic growth" is understood in the perspective of There Is No Alternative Syndrome, then we must face consequences. And the consequence is the creation of parallel worlds; visible worlds of prosperity and sustainable economic figures; and invisible worlds of exploitations system – which is the tragically the driving force hidden behind the polished economic figures of the first worlds. And yes – we are responsible for that economic-social scenery.

²² Brothers (2008) : A port without shelter: Clandestine migrants stuck in 'jungle' by Calais; International Herald Tribune, 28th April 2008. Available at: <http://www.ihf.com/articles/2008/04/28/europe/calais.php> (25th May 2008)

I always call them the hidden workforce... They're never working on the counter or the till. They're always in cleaning, distribution, manufacturing jobs where the public don't see them... hotels, food preparation... I call them the silent workforce.

(UK Trade union organiser)