5 Citizenship and Migrant Workers in Western Europe

Zig Layton-Henry

CITIZENSHIP AND MIGRANT WORKERS

The scale, extent and diversity of postwar immigration to Western Europe has confronted advanced industrial democracies with a number of political challenges which are so far unresolved. Firstly immigration has caused a substantial rise in the foreign populations of West European states. Large communities of foreign citizens have been established in the major urban and industrial centres of Western Europe and as yet, these show little sign of following the path of previous immigrants by integrating, assimilating and becoming naturalised citizens of their new countries of work and residence. There are at least 15 million foreign citizens resident in Western Europe, most of whom have lived and worked in their country of residence for 15 years or more. They are members and in many respects subjects of the European countries where they reside and work but they are not citizens. Contemporary conceptions of membership in, and citizenship of, a modern state may thus have to be reconsidered to take account of the postwar migration and settlement of these foreign migrant workers.

Secondly, postwar immigration has transformed Western European states into multi-cultural and multi-racial states with substantial non-European minorities. This has reduced the welcome extended to these immigrants. Many European states have considered themselves to be homogeneous nation-states even though all have included indigenous and other minorities. Postwar immigration has thus challenged the ideas these states have had about their national identity and who should or should not be included as members of their national community. Thirdly, the permanent settlement of millions of foreign immigrants who are excluded from political participation challenges the liberal democratic values and institutional procedures so greatly prized in these multi-party democracies.
It is the argument of this chapter that, while a clear distinction can be drawn between people temporarily or illegally resident in a state and those who are permanently resident, it is less easy or satisfactory to distinguish between citizens and non-citizens who are permanent residents. Foreign permanent residents enjoy most of the rights and duties that citizens have with the major exception that they lack voting rights in local and national elections, though recently some European countries have extended local voting rights to permanent residents. In many respects permanent residents are, in fact, members of the state where they reside, work and bring up their families. They pay taxes, contribute to the life of their local communities and have a high degree of legal protection and security. They are increasingly valuable members of ageing European societies. In spite of their permanent settlement they are reluctant to give up their previous citizenships and national identities and to naturalise. Nevertheless, citizenship should be extended to them in recognition of their membership of Western European societies.

POSTWAR MIGRATION TO WESTERN EUROPE

There are no recent European parallels to postwar immigration. European migration in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was largely a massive exodus to North America and to colonial territories around the world. Migration to Europe generally involved Europeans returning from other continents. Internal migration within Europe tended to be on a modest scale and between neighbouring countries with similar cultures. Significant intra-European migrations in the nineteenth century involved Irish immigration to Britain, Polish immigration to Germany and, at the end of the century, Jewish migration from the Russian empire. These migrants did face resentment and hostility from people in the countries in which they settled, but with one major and horrendous exception, they were eventually accepted and assimilated. The exception is, of course, the Holocaust. Jewish communities all over Nazi-occupied Europe were exterminated during the Second World War. The example of the Holocaust shows how distinctive minority groups may be vulnerable to scapegoating and terror by majorities under such conditions as economic recession, invasion and war.

Those immigrant communities which were integrated successfully were involved in a ‘one-sided’ process of assimilation. It was ‘one-