6 Multiculturalism in Europe and North America

THE WIDER CONTEXT OF THE PROBLEM OF MULTICULTURALISM

The problem of multiculturalism in Europe and North America has to be understood within a wider world context involving the changes which have gone on since 1945 and since 1989 in the relations between the so-called first, second and third worlds. After 1945 the process of uneven economic development led to large-scale migration within and to the countries of the first world, including Western Europe, The United States and the economically advanced settler-dominated territories of the former European empires, such as Canada and Australia. This migration process was halted in Europe after the early 1970s except for family completion as far as workers were concerned; Japan came to join the first world countries as a centre of economic growth; and, as capital went in search of labour rather than bringing labour to it, new intermediate areas of economic growth came into existence, most obviously in oil-rich countries of the Middle East, and in the Pacific rim. The so-called second world consisting of the Communist countries remained outside this migration system except for small numbers of political refugees, until after 1989, when the breakdown of Communism produced economic and political collapse, forcing

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many of the citizens of these countries to flee from political disorder or to grasp the better economic opportunities which opened up to them in Western Europe and North America.

This chapter is concerned with a part of this total problem, namely that of the place of various immigrant, refugee and quasi-refugee communities who settled in the economically advanced countries of Europe and North America. These countries grew rich and concentrated on their own prosperity, leaving large parts of Asia, Africa and Latin America to constitute the new Third World marked by increasing relative poverty. It is this gap which constitutes the major political problem of the world today. Migration, however, had left the advanced and economically successful countries with their own internal problem of the place which immigrants and their children were to occupy within their political, economic, social and cultural systems.

Nation States and Migrant Communities

The nation states within whose territories immigrants had settled were based upon capitalist economies, even though these were modified by the creation in varying degrees of welfare states, and, on the political level, upon some sort of multi-party democracy. So far as their ethnic and cultural composition was concerned they also saw themselves as having national cultures, even though these cultures may have emerged from earlier migrations. The European nations had long historic traditions, while in the more recently constituted societies of North America the earliest immigrants had succeeded in imposing their languages and cultures. This did not of course exclude the possibility of two or more ethnic or national groups sharing in this domination, as in the case of Belgium, Switzerland and Canada, or of some regionally located groups being accorded a degree of autonomy or even of struggling for independence, as in the cases of the United Kingdom and Spain.

The various migrant groups had their own social, cultural and religious points of reference external to the countries in which they settled. They could not, however, be understood as nationalist groups, or even as diasporic communities, necessarily intending a return to some homeland Zion. Unlike the ethnic nationalist groups which re-emerged in the post-Communist world, they were not