

CHAPTER 8

CYPRIOI MIGRATION TO BRITAIN: CONCLUSION

The purpose of this First Part of the study has been to establish the number and characteristics of post-war Cypriot migrants to Britain, and to analyse the factors influencing the pattern of the migration. It has been calculated that between 1945 and 1966 some 75,000 Cypriots emigrated from Cyprus to Britain, while some 5,000 of these returned to their home island. The net movement of Cypriots to Britain during the period was therefore some 70,000 persons. Approximately four-fifths of these were Greek-Cypriot by ethnic group and one-fifth Turkish Cypriot, the same proportions as in the population of the island itself. The majority of the migrants were found to have been young adults, and the sex-ratio among the migrants overall was found to be relatively even. Many migrants travelled as family groups (though not always simultaneously), while those young persons who were single tended to come to join close relatives already resident in Britain. The previous occupations of migrants were very varied: most men had work experience outside agriculture, but skills (if any) were of the traditional craft type.

A variety of factors, when considered one by one, appeared prima facie to have had some kind of influence upon the migration. Regulation of migration by Governments, which was considered first, did not seem to have any marked influence upon the overall rate of movement until the very end of our period in 1965, when a change in the regulations covered by the Commonwealth Immigrants Act 1962 resulted in the ease of entry of Cypriots to Britain being much reduced. But the regulations of both Governments, first that of Cyprus and later that of Britain, had effect on the character of the migration, encouraging or facilitating family movement and kinship connections, and thus helping to produce the relatively even sex-ratio.

The other factors which were examined and which appeared to be of some significance were political, demographic and economic conditions in Cyprus, and economic conditions in Britain. The feasibility or attractiveness to prospective migrants of certain other possible destinations than Britain was also considered, but except in the case of Australia these had not proved viable alternatives. Political conditions in Cyprus did not seem to have been a major direct cause of migration; demographic conditions, too (though for different reasons), were not in themselves determining factors. Yet both these sets of circumstances seem to have played some part in giving rise to migration: political conditions through their effect on the economy of the island from the mid-1950s onwards, and population pressures through their conjunction with the post-war economic situation on the island.

Indeed, as regards the immediate causes of emigration from Cyprus during the post-war period, there is every indication that for the most part these were economic: economic conditions prevailing both in Cyprus and Britain. In the first place, the Economist Intelligence Unit survey of Cypriot immigrants in London (already cited) found that the majority gave economic reasons of one kind or another for migrating: most specifying employment prospects rather than financial aspects. Secondly, in the two preceding chapters quite close correlations have been revealed between the rate of migration and economic conditions in the respective countries. But which of these various circumstances have been the more important in determining the varying trend of Cypriot migration during the post-war years?

The trend in annual Cypriot emigration to Britain was found to be significantly correlated with both agricultural production (see Figure 6.1) and with unemployment (see Figure 6.2) in Cyprus. The chief feature of the correlation with agriculture was the tendency for year by year changes in agricultural output to be reflected in inverse changes in the annual rate of migration: this was most marked in the case of cereal production, the staple crop for much of the island's peasantry. The extent of change was also to some degree correlated, but this was less striking, except perhaps in that the worst setback in production occurred in 1960, the year of maximum migration. Overall, however, the post-war trend for migration to increase in scale was not correlated in the same inverse way with production, for the latter tended also (if erratically) to rise during the period. It appears, therefore, that as regards their

disposition to emigrate, Cypriots were more sensitive to annual fluctuations in the level of production, than to its overall trend. Yet if one were to correlate agricultural production per head, then in view of the steady increase in population during the period, the correlation overall would likewise be an inverse one. Agricultural production therefore does seem to have been a variable to which potential emigrants from Cyprus were appreciably sensitive.

Such pressure on agricultural resources on the island could well have been relieved by the availability of opportunities in the area of wage employment. This was probably the case during much of the 1950s, though the increase in emigration between 1953 and 1955 during a period of low unemployment suggests that opportunities overseas were more attractive. However, towards the end of the decade when unemployment rose to unprecedentedly high levels, such relief was no longer available, and likewise unprecedentedly large numbers of Cypriots emigrated. It should be noted, however, that their departure does not correspond exactly with the emergence of high unemployment, but postdates it somewhat. This lack of precise correlation between changes in the labour situation in Cyprus and the level of emigration to Britain indicates that while conditions in Cyprus may have disposed Cypriots towards emigration, other factors must have been responsible for the changes in the rate of actual departures occurring when they did.

It is the labour situation in Britain (see Figure 7.1) which appears to have played the determining role, though, since each of the major increases and set-backs in the trend of Cypriot migration is correlated with a fall or rise in the level of unemployment in Britain (at least up to 1965). The three occasions of notable increase in the level of migration occurred simultaneously with the three 'booms' in economic conditions in Britain, at the beginning and middle of the 1950s, and at the beginning of the 1960s. So it seems that, while economic conditions in Cyprus may account for the predispositions of Cypriots to emigrate, and for minor variations in the level of their migration, it is conditions in Britain that account for the major variations in the movement. Moreover, it was the conjunction of very marked predisposing factors in Cyprus (agricultural failure, high unemployment) and attractive conditions in Britain (strong demand for labour) that produced the extremely high level of migration in 1960 and 1961: neither before nor since has there been such a concurrence of influential circumstances all acting the same direction.

After 1961, the equivalently sharp decline in migration seems adequately explained in terms of the changed economic circumstances in both countries. Both the pressure to depart from Cyprus and the attractiveness of conditions in Britain were simultaneously reduced. It has already been argued that it is these economic circumstances, rather than the imposition of controls on the entry of immigrants into Britain in mid-1962, that account for this decline in the rate of migration. Indeed, the economic circumstances in the respective countries seem to have continued being the arbiters of the migration rate until 1965, when (as has been shown) the administration of immigrant entry into Britain was changed to as to limit Cypriot admission to relatively small numbers.

Yet this correlation year by year between the economic circumstances in the two countries is not of itself a sufficient indicator of the explanation of the whole phenomenon of Cypriot migration to Britain during the post-war period. In spite of their circumstances, Cypriots could have remained at home rather than depart in increasing numbers; they could also have gone elsewhere than Britain.

First, how is it that since the war Cypriots have been so inclined to look outside their home country for solutions to the economic difficulties? In part, the post-war disposition of Cypriots to emigrate must be seen simply as a continuation of a pre-war tradition of long standing: a tradition which in the 19th century took Cypriots to nearby Mediterranean countries, and in the early 20th century in modest numbers to every continent in the world. (1) There is no doubt that in the case of the Greek Cypriots (2) such emigration was very much the expression of a 'spirit of adventure', a cultural ideal which is especially appropriate to young manhood among Greeks. It is perhaps significant that even among the Cypriot immigrants interviewed in the survey conducted by the Economist Intelligence Unit in 1961, some 4 per cent said they had emigrated to Britain simply out of a 'desire to travel', and that a further 7

per cent did so out of a 'desire to see Britain' (3). Among the actual statements of respondents were the following:

"That's very difficult to say. You see, no man can say why he moves from place to place It's a power within us."

"Did you ever read Homer? I expect you did at school. One book is Ulysses, the Odyssey I am a modern Ulysses, like to see countries, like to see people, like adventure." (4)

While in no way is it being suggested that this 'adventurous' element is sufficient to account for all Cypriot migration, it is by no means wholly absent, and was certainly important in initiating the traditional disposition of Cypriots to emigrate overseas.

It was the 1939-45 War itself, however, that opened Cypriot eyes extensively to the prospects of life in other countries. Well over 10,000 Cypriots served in the Britain Armed Forces during the war (5), travelling widely and meeting fellow-servicemen from all parts of the Commonwealth and the United States. The Cyprus to which they returned did offer increasing economic opportunities, both as regards jobs and standard of living, but it contrasted poorly with the life seen or heard of overseas. Cyprus had, and still has (apart from Nicosia), no large towns or cities offering the rich life and opportunities characteristic of those in the more economically developed countries. It is difficult on the island to put behind one the peasant life, and yet - especially for young servicemen or workers in the towns - it is not difficult to come to feel alienated from the villages. First with the War, and then with the development programme of the British Military Authorities on the island, young Cypriots became increasingly separated from the traditional mode of livelihood, and at the same time aware of alternative opportunities elsewhere to which they could aspire.

It is important to establish these more basic predispositions of Cypriots following the War, for they are not just economic ones but represent the broader social outlook characteristic of a post-war generation of islanders. It is for these reasons especially that Cypriots reacted to economic circumstances by emigrating from the island, and did so increasingly through the mid-1950s in spite of quite favourable economic conditions on the island (though these were to some extent counterbalanced by the depressing atmosphere of the Emergency period).

Yet Britain in particular offered more than general social and economic opportunities. Not only was Britain by far the most accessible of the few countries open to Cypriot migrants, but the presence of an established Cypriot settlement was in a literal way 'attractive', especially for those who already had kin within it. The expansion of Cypriot economic enterprise in Britain provided quite specific opportunities, and indeed new labour was positively 'recruited' from Cyprus in many instances (the expansion of business being largely dependent on it). This 'pull' exercised by the existing Cypriot settlement in Britain was also of importance in developing emigration as a solution to Cypriot problems, and helps explain too why Britain was so predominantly the chosen destination.

Fine weighting of these various factors is not of course possible. It is appropriate, however, to consider them not only in relation to one another, but also as related elements in a single system. Not all can be so located, but most may undoubtedly be seen as aspects of the whole pattern of development and change in the colonial system as it affected one country in Britain's erstwhile Empire. It is possible only to touch on this issue here, but there can be little dispute that for the most part the social and economic conditions that have so disposed the Cypriots towards emigration have been a direct outcome of Britain's colonial 'policies' as regards Cyprus. Furthermore, Britain's role as the 'receiving country' for Cypriot migrants, and the kinds of opportunities available to Cypriots in the services sector and in the inner city housing areas might also be explained in terms of the interrelations and dynamics of the one social and economic system, with its home and colonial facets. But for satisfactory treatment, these hypotheses need consideration on a broader comparative basis, which would not be in place in this study.

Footnotes

- (1) For the destinations of Cypriot emigrants between the wars, see references in the Colonial Reports.
- (2) There is no evidence of emigration by Turkish Cypriots on any significant scale prior to the war.
- (3) Studies on Immigration from the Commonwealth, Economist Intelligence Unit, 1962, Vol. 2, p.11
- (4) Information made available by Mass Observation.
- (5) The Middle East, Royal Institute for International Affairs, 3rd Edition, 1958, p.150; cf. Cyprus: A Rampart, Committee for Cyprus Autonomy, London, n.d. (?1942), p.26, where it is stated that 17,000 Cypriots served overseas.