

## Is There a Need for a Population Policy Program in Finland?



**P**opulation Policy refers to actions that influence birth rate, mortality and migration, and consequently the number and demographic composition of the population.

At present Finland has a population of 4.97 million, and it is predicted to reach its peak within a few years, according to a forecast made by the Central Statistical Office of Finland, this at about 5.03 million. After the turn of the millenium the population is expected to start decreasing rapidly. According to the same forecast, in 2050 we shall number less than 4 million (assuming that our immigration and population policy remain unchanged).

There seem to be two alternatives as far as Population Policy is concerned:

- a) the decreasing population model, and
- b) the model for maintaining the present population.

The impact of decreasing population will begin to appear within the 1990's. A forecast made by Ministry of Labor indicates that the demand for manpower will increase by 7000 per year but the supply only by 3500, which means that the predicted manpower shortage will increase during the current decade by about 35 000. The social and health services will, according to current plans, create about 70 000 new jobs during this decade. Our present and predictable labor supply is not enough

to cover this. Streamlining the bureacracy, the reduction of social security and a considerable increase in voluntary work may be the only means of meeting the challenges of a society with a decreasing population.

The alternative model is for the maintenance of the population at its present level, by increasing the birth rate and/or immigration. It is very difficult to raise the birth rate, however, despite promises to triple child allowances or to improve the Children's Home Care allowances. The reforms relating to family policy will, no doubt, have an impact on the welfare of families, but hardly on the number of children.

The liberalization of immigration is the easiest and most feasible way to maintain the present population. Supposing we allow immigration to make up for the future decrease in population it would mean about 25 000 new immigrants annually. Migration studies indicate that the share of returnees is about 40 % of the immigrants; thus annual net immigration would be about 15 000 new immigrants remaining permanently in the country.

If the latter alternative is chosen in Finland, the immigrants would in all probability come from the eastern neighboring countries such as the Soviet Union, Poland, etc. Finland is due to join the European

Economic Space (EC + EFTA) by the end of 1992. Within the European Community, the mobility of labor is relatively free; it is evident, however, that there will be no immigration pressure in Finland from the EC countries, due to the fact that they are reasonably uniform as to their economies. Therefore, there are no major migration resource countries. The economic ideology of the Community is to circulate capital rather than labor.

In my opinion Finland should recognize her responsibility for the Estonian population: under no circumstances should immigration from Estonia be encouraged (compare the recruitment of Finnish labor to Sweden in the late 1960's). It is a fact that any Estonian worker moving to Finland would be replaced by a Russian in Estonia: in other words, an egoistic immigration policy in Finland will have the effect of exacerbating the demographic tension in Estonia.

### Conclusion

Finland is in urgent need of a population policy. This needs to be drafted by a parliamentary committee, in order to ensure follow-up by the executive.

The program should include the following points:

- Which alternative should be chosen for Finnish Population Policy: the diminishing population or the maintenance of the present population?
- What social policy measures are implied by the policy model chosen?
- The program will need to include cultural questions relating to future immigration. If we want to maintain the present level of population, we shall have to free immigration from restrictions. In this case, educational and cultural ques-

tions connected with the immigration will require careful consideration. Immigrants, like the present groups of refugees, will need instruction in the Finnish language, but we know from the experience in other countries that immigrants (especially children) will also need teaching which is held in their native language (even if this is not a subject in the curriculum), in order to support contacts between the generations and to help to create a natural identity and a well-balanced personality for the young immigrants.

- The administration of migration matters is at present divided in Finland between several ministries and departments. Although the immigration to Finland is, in international terms, relatively insignificant, this system does not function properly. One reform model could be the Swedish one, which has already been carried through; under this migration affairs have been concentrated under one central office (Statens Invandrarverk), which operates under the Swedish Ministry of Labor. Proper attention to administration is an essential element in a population policy program.

Finland is facing increasing pressure relating to immigration. Expertise in this field is available; the biggest hindrance at present to development in these matters is the lack of initiative among the politicians. Active involvement in migration problems is not a source of easy political credit.

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