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YUGOSLAV ENTERPRISES HIRE FOREIGN WORKERS

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Summary: According to Yugoslav officials, one of the country's biggest shipyards in Rijeka intends to employ welders from southern Italy. Despite a high unemployment rate, some branches of Yugoslav industry cannot find the necessary qualified workers and specialists. In the past Yugoslav tourist enterprises have employed waiters and cooks from East European countries. Now, for the first time, workers from Western Europe will be hired by Yugoslav industry.

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According to Mika Spiljak, the President of the Council of the Yugoslav Confederation of Trade Unions, there will be no formal or legal opposition to the employment of foreign workers coming to work in Yugoslav enterprises. (1) Speaking at a press conference, Spiljak elaborated on his statement with the announcement that one of Yugoslavia's biggest shipyards, in Rijeka, intends to employ welders from southern Italy. He anticipated that, in the future, there will be more such cases, and the number of foreign workers in Yugoslavia will increase.

Spiljak touched upon the question of foreign workers in Yugoslavia in connection with the problem of unemployment. He said that the employment bureau has registered 734,527 unemployed, while at the same time, the national economy has 400,000 unfilled jobs and must cope with a shortage of labor. In his opinion there are really only 21,000 unemployed in Yugoslavia at present -- those receiving social welfare because of their status, and for whom there is really no work. (2) Spiljak also said that many Yugoslav workers register at the employment bureau for social benefits, and most do not want to leave the cities or undergo vocational retraining to qualify for work in demand.

As a matter of fact, regardless of the real figures of unemployment in Yugoslavia, in many branches of the country's economy there is evidence of a labor shortage. Because of the rapid development of the Yugoslav economy, some branches have a labor surplus, while others cannot find the qualified workers and specialists they need. In addition, there is the problem of labor mobility and the refusal of many to leave the more comfortable life in cities for the sake of a job. As a result, there are about 30,000 graduates, professional tradesmen, merchants, and economists, waiting for a job, while the tourist industry cannot fill thousands of other posts. (3) In Belgrade alone, there are 1,500 unemployed physicians, while at the same time there are over 3,200 vacant positions in the Republic of Serbia for doctors. In all Yugoslav cities, thousands of agronomists, foresters, geologists, veterinarians, and so on are hoping for jobs at the places where they reside. (4)

A similar situation also exists in some branches of the Yugoslav industry. Part of the country's qualified workers have departed for West European countries looking for higher earnings. This has hit the tourist industry above all: tens of thousand of Yugoslav waiters, cooks, and other catering personnel have left for Switzerland, West Germany, and France, in order to make more money. It is, therefore, not surprising that, in order to replace them, foreign workers are employed by Yugoslav hotels and restaurants. Several hotels on the Croatian littoral (south from Rijeka) employed more than 300 waiters and cooks recruited from Czechoslovakia, Poland, and Bulgaria during

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- (1) Tanjug in English, 10 November 1978.
 - (2) According to the statistical monthly Indeks, November 1978, there were in July 720,000 unemployed persons and 60,000 unfilled jobs in Yugoslavia.
 - (3) Politika (Belgrade), 6 November 1978.
 - (4) Ibid.

the 1973 summer season. (5) They were hired on the basis of a collective contract, and their earnings are fixed by the respective national offices which negotiated their hiring. Some of the cooks and waiters from East European countries working in Yugoslavia are on a job-training program, and their employment usually lasts from 75 to 90 days in a season.

The Yugoslav shipyards were also hard hit by the exodus of their best specialists to Western countries. One of the largest shipyards in Split took a half-page advertisement in the Zagreb weekly Vjesnik u Srijedu to announce the hiring of 750 qualified welders, fitters, technicians, and engineers. (6) It was all in vain, for only a small fraction of the workers needed was filled by the labor market, since the best shipyard workers were leaving for West Germany and the Netherlands. Now, it seems that the Rijeka shipyard is going to hire qualified workers in southern Italy, where, particularly, in the Naple area, thousands of qualified workers are unemployed. The City of Rijeka and its shipyard are in a good position to meet the expectations of the hired Italian workers. Before World War II, the whole area belonged to Italy, and the majority of the population still speaks or understands Italian. Even more important is the fact that Rijeka is the most prosperous urban area in Yugoslavia; its per capita social product amounts to about 4,500 dollars which is double the Yugoslav average. Wages and salaries in Rijeka enterprises are about 50 per cent higher than in other Yugoslav cities, and the whole area has a good economic and social infrastructure. The Rijeka area is at present the biggest building site in the country and includes the Yugoslav pipeline terminal, a huge oil refinery, and the petrochemical factory complex built jointly with the American Dow Chemical Company. By the end of 1980, about 3,000 million dollars will be invested in this region. By the end of 1980 highly sophisticated, modern industry. No doubt, Rijeka can make good use of Italian welders, and it can be anticipated that other qualified Italian workers and specialists will also be hired in the near future.

As the example shows, Yugoslavia, which is strongly tied to the market of the European Economic Community, is starting to develop mutual labor exchanges with its Western neighbors. So far, this has gone in one direction only: it was Yugoslavia which exported its labor surplus to the West. Now, it seems that Yugoslavia will also import labor from some Western countries, thus completing the cycle of economic exchanges to its own benefit.

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(5) Vjesnik u Srijedu (Zagreb), 22 August 1973.

(6) Ibid., 12 February 1975.

