

What Kind of City Do You Want, Mr. Mayor?

In search of a compassionate immigration policy

by Roy Beck

New York Mayor Rudolph Giuliani's pronouncements this week in favor of the present high levels of immigration seem to make for good local politics. But they provide a poor model for Congress to follow in designing a logical and compassionate national immigration and urban policy.

A new city report stoked the mayor's enthusiasm for the national policy of allowing nearly one million foreign workers and relatives to enter the country each year. Narrowly focused on demographic changes, the report claims that if it had not been for the heavy influx of immigrants in the 1980s, New York City would have lost 9 percent of its population instead

Roy Beck is Washington editor of THE SOCIAL CONTRACT and author of The Case Against Immigration: The Moral, Economic, Social and Environmental Reasons for Reducing Immigration Back to Traditional Levels (W.W. Norton). This op-ed appeared January 11, 1997 and is reprinted by permission. © 1997, The New York Times Company, distributed by New York Times Special Features/Syndication Sales.

of gaining 3.5 percent.

That apparently proves to Mr. Giuliani that unfettered immigration helps maintain good housing and a healthy economy. Yet the mayor's vision seems limited. Yes, immigrants have contributed to New York's economy and have revitalized some poor neighborhoods. But at current levels, the influx is not the total economic boon that the mayor claims it is. Immigrants also raise the city's costs in many areas, including Medicaid, schools and housing.

Has the mayor forgotten the overcrowding of the city's schools that caused such disruptions last fall? The districts with the most crowded schools — for instance, District 24 in Queens — were largely those with high numbers of immigrants. The Board of Education has projected that by 2003 almost 400 schools would have to be built at a cost of \$10 billion to accommodate new immigrants.

Worse, Mr. Giuliani's promotion of unfettered immigration comes at the expense of other residents. William Frey, a sociologist at the University of Michigan, has documented that blue-collar workers, facing

competition for fewer and fewer relatively well-paying jobs, have fled cities with the highest levels of immigration.

Things are even tougher for low-skilled blacks. Katherine Newman, a Columbia anthropologist, found in a 1995 study that black teenagers in Harlem consistently lose minimum-wage jobs to immigrants. For instance,

"Worse, Mr. Giuliani's promotion of unfettered immigration comes at the expense of other residents."

fast-food restaurants hired 38 percent of Latino and Asian applicants but only 13.6 percent of African-Americans.

In this brutal labor climate, large numbers of welfare recipients will soon have to compete for those same jobs. Wages, already depressed because of the large pool of cheap labor, could fall even lower.

And despite Mr. Giuliani's conceit that immigration affects only New York City, this population growth puts enormous pressure on the rest of the region. As more residents leave the city in search of uncrowded

schools and better housing, the suburban sprawl gobbles up more open space and worsens air and water pollution.

Mr. Giuliani's stance is also contradictory. He claims that immigrants are an economic plus — then chastises the federal government for not providing more welfare to legal immi-

grants. If the immigrant tide was the unqualified boon that Mr. Giuliani claims, then New York City, which attracts 20 percent of all newcomers, should not need the federal aid.

Finally, one wonders what kind of city Mayor Giuliani wants to build. By heralding immigrants as the city's saviors, the

mayor seems to suggest that New York City cannot attract and retain middle-class residents. That resignation, more than anything else, could condemn New York to a depressing future of constantly searching for poor immigrants to replace its fleeing citizens.

TSC

The Anti-immigration Immigrants

Some are angry at activists who profess to speak for them

by Yeh Ling-Ling

It worries me that many Chinese immigrants with only a grade-school education are much more knowledgeable than most American Ph.D.s and politicians about the adverse impacts of mass immigration.

This past July, I was on a Chinese-language talk show in San Francisco discussing the urgent need to cap legal immigration at 100,000 a year for the next five years.

Soon after my appearance, at least 10 Chinese immigrants called me at my office. They said many Chinese immigrants are

Yeh Ling-Ling is a Chinese immigrant and founder of the Diversity Coalition for an Immigration Moratorium, which is based in San Francisco.

furiously at Chinese activists for promoting immigration, welfare and racial tensions "for their own self-interests."

Despite the fact that most of them have little education, these callers said that continuous immigration will drive down wages and/or make it very difficult for our unemployed to find jobs.

Many of their acquaintances have been out of work for many years. They also know of cases where U.S.-born children could not start school early in September because no classrooms were available. They asked why our politicians have not halted all immigration for several years until we solve our existing problems.

Some recounted that when they came to the U.S. some 15 or 20 years ago, our cities were not so congested. Life then was

much better and easier. One mentioned that some employers even came to her brother offering him well-paying jobs with great benefits. Now, she says, employers are "cheap" and "choosy" because too many people are hungry for work, and immigration only increases competition among job-seekers.

One unskilled immigrant pointed out that most of our manufactured products, such as garments, shoes and sporting goods, are imported.

She expressed great concern: "Overseas workers are getting those manufacturing jobs, but at the same time, we are importing immigrant workers by hundreds of thousands a year. What is the future for American workers and our children?" Julian Simon is one of the American Ph.D.s who claim that immigrants "revitalize our neighborhoods."