

## Address given by Lady Priscilla Grant of Monymusk at the Congress of Europe (The Hague, 8 May 1948)

**Caption:** On 8 May 1948, Lady Priscilla Grant of Monymusk, British Conservative MP, proposes to the members of the Economic and Social Committee at the Congress of Europe in The Hague that a committee be set up for the organisation of European emigration and draws attention to the desperate situation of the homeless.

**Source:** Archives du Mouvement européen international, Bruxelles. Congress of Europe (May 1948), Vol. III. Economic and Social Committee, pp. 56-57.

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### Lady Grant

At this late hour I shall be very brief. I should like to suggest the following amendment: that there should be inserted in line 56 of the English draft and in line 66 of the French draft the words: "there should be established an Emigration Commission to organise the European emigration".

This is perhaps just carrying a little further the suggestions which have already been put before you in that very sincere and very able speech, full of information, which came from General Morgan. I feel that the establishment of an Emigration Commission would carry a little further and would extend and amplify, the existing organisations which deal with these problems which you all know are very diverse. Surely we in this room who have plenty of experience of this refugee problem know perfectly well that it is so vital and so vast that ought to be treated at the highest level, because only so can you get the speed of action which is necessary to deal with it. Needless to say, when we consider this great problem of refugees it is obvious that we can only organise anything to ameliorate their condition in the closest consultation and agreement with our European territories overseas. As far as the United Kingdom is concerned, that particularly applies to our great self-governing dominions and to our Commonwealth generally.

I would put to you that as a foundation for this commission it is important that we should examine very closely indeed the great problem of skilled and unskilled male and female labour. According to the International Refugee Organisation there are over three million people seeking employment, yet Europe can apparently only absorb one-third of this number. We all know that what Europe is crying out for is skilled labour and in many cases there is a surplus of unskilled labour. We find, for instance, that in Italy there are one and a quarter million who are available for emigration seeking employment but who are largely unskilled. We find in Germany that there are over 500.000 women seeking employment but who are also largely unskilled. This audience to-night, comprising as it does largely a male assembly, may well consider that the place of the woman is in the Home but after two great wars we have come to the conclusion that the situation where the breadwinner has gone, and the woman is put in a position where she has to support the family. Should she not also be given the greatest opportunity for training herself for a career where she can, in honour, support that family which otherwise would have been the job of the husband had he been there? I would suggest that this question of vocational guidance ought to be examined not only on a narrow nationalistic basis, but on a far higher international scale, because only by doing so will we really give background to our great Emigration Commission which I put before you to-night.

I do feel very strongly that this problem of our refugees perhaps gives us one of the first opportunities as a Congress of Europe to do something really constructive to show our unity. Some people say it is a "small problem", but I would not say it was a small when you have two hundred million people who are homeless and without work. I would submit that the degradation of unemployment and the insecurity of the homeless has a greater significance and far wider repercussions than just material want, because it is the psychological disturbance of the insecurity and the frustration which creates elements upon which it is impossible to build a united or a creative Europe.

The longer I have sat in this Committee this afternoon - and it has been a long session - I have thought more and more how impossible it is for us to discuss any economic considerations without also at the same time considering the political and the cultural aspects of our human life as well. Surely this problem of the refugee is at the root of many of our troubles in Europe. When we talk about and consider high finance and material necessities, ought we not to remember that the fundamental importance of our gathering here is to ensure that every individual is given the right to work - in fact the right to live!

Mr. Winston Churchill in his great speech yesterday spoke to us about the curse of the modern age - fear. I submit to you that fear is always with those who are homeless and who are without the dignity of labour.

Therefore when we discuss a refugee organisation we are trying to fulfil the fundamental aims of this

Congress which are to recreate the basic unity of society - family life. Until this Congress can base its conception of unity upon the single family unit, it is going to be confronted with a shiftless population without aim or object who will be a prey to discontent and to those creeds of Totalitarianism which have caused so much horror and devastation in the past. People who are not Communist will turn that way if Western democracies can give them no hope of home or work. I suggest therefore, that by setting up an Emigration Commission we shall set on the highest plane the problem of how we shall give to these individuals home and work at the earliest opportunity, and by so doing we shall make it possible for us to stand up to the evil things which are approaching us in Europe from the East. By giving back to the individual some sense of self-respect we shall also inculcate in him a sense of responsibility to himself, his family, the community and to his race.

I would ask you very seriously to consider and, I hope, accept the amendment that "An Emigration Commission shall be set up at the earliest opportunity to consider European emigration."