

THE EMIGRANT

If there is one subject which is dealt with extensively in Ireland is that of emigration. However one would probably have to go back to the last century in order to discover the real rigors of travelling to the States or Australia where it was touch and go if one arrived in the first place and equally precarious to get ~~ones~~^{one's} papers and to get started. Many people died along the way. Like everything else we think that is very much of the past and don't realise that in today's world the very same drama is taking place with other peoples in other places.

I have just been to see a new film which is an extraordinary account of these problems particularly facing ^{America} Central Americans who emigrate to the States. It is a film produced in ~~the States~~ but with its Spanish name 'El Norte' that is 'The North' In Central America that means the US which is of course to the north. The film begins by telling the ~~story~~ story of a typical Indian family in the mountains of Guatemala who have been crushed into poverty and misery by the rich landowners in the area. The people begin to organise in order to claim their land and the repression by the army starts. All the family are brutally murdered except a son and a daughter who decide to flee to 'the North' that is the US. Walking across mountains and woods they arrive into Mexico and there they pretend to be Mexicans arriving eventually to the Mexican US border;

Like thousands of others they try to cross the border but without success until they finally get across by crawling through an abandoned sewage system. Here the film gives some startling insights into the abuse that is given to those attempting to cross by the so called 'coyotes', who are those ~~Mexicans~~ ^h who offer to bring one across for exorbitant sums and then rob the people along the way. The border of course is almost impossible to control as it is thousands of miles long but the Americans have helicopters patrolling constantly and have also tried to isolate the border area so that if people manage to cross they can be picked up afterwards ^{AS} when they move inland: People are sent back in their thousands and ~~the~~ ^{the} Central Americans ~~they~~ are sent back to their own country facing deaths in many cases. They are; I am told, two plane loads of people who are deported weekly ^{FROM} ~~from~~ the US to El Salvador alone, using Mexican aircraft. Protests have been so strong that no US companies want to handle these passengers.

The young couple eventually get into Los Angeles where they begin the typical life of Hispanic illegal immigrants. They are exploited in their work. They have to be careful where they go. The Migration Police 'La MIGRA' as they are known usually keep tabs on cheap employment factories, ~~or~~ ^{on} restaurants or farms carrying out lighting raids. The film illustrates how dramatic the situation becomes because sometimes a mother can be picked up and sent back to Mexico leaving her children ^{or even} ~~sometimes~~ babies abandoned because they get no time even to get their clothes together.

Personally I have known many hispanics who have lived for years as illegals in the States and they really are open to all types of abuses and blackmails. Some learn English others don't, however they all feel they are better off than in their own country. Reagan sometimes in order to try to get some support for his highly unpopular Central American policies talks about the 'brown horde' of refugees (a phrase used by one of his advisers) which will cross the Rio Grande river into the States unless the US sends more arms and military to these places.

The film reaches its climax in Los Angeles when the brother is offered a very good job in Chicago and prepares to leave letting his sister alone. Unknown to him she has got a very serious attack in her work and is taken to hospital in a critical state. A friend comes to give the news to the brother. He has to decide whether to travel to ~~xxxxxxx~~ Chicago or stay with his sister. He eventually stays to be with her turning down as one friend told him the 'chance of a lifetime'.

It is indeed a very beautiful film with a powerful message about the importance of those basic values ~~in life~~ which so many people in the 'rat race' of life are prepared to sacrifice. It has only been released some weeks ago and even though it is not a Hollywood production it is getting a lot of support. Hopefully it will herald in more films which deals with people and their problems giving a message which is truly worthwhile.