

# The Growing Influx of Guest-Worker Children (November 8, 1974)

## Abstract

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The federal government attempted to save money by instituting a new policy whereby guest-worker children who remained in their home countries would receive less assistance than guest-worker children who accompanied their parents to the Federal Republic. The attempt backfired; male workers who were already living in the Federal Republic started bringing over their wives and children in greater numbers, solely because dependents residing in Germany received higher benefit payments than those who remained back home. The policy also undercut the foreign-worker recruitment ban that had been in effect for a year, since the wives of guest workers relocated to the Federal Republic with their children and sought work on the already flooded labor market.

## Source

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### An Invasion of Guest-Worker Children? Savings that Can Get Expensive

Bonn's negotiators, sworn to strict frugality in view of the expected budget deficit, registered yet another success when Turkey became the last of five countries—after Spain, Portugal, Yugoslavia, and Greece—to approve a new child-allowance agreement that is supposed to help save the federal government roughly two billion marks a year. From now on, those children of guest workers who remain in their home countries will receive less assistance than those who reside in the Federal Republic. Although these agreements have yet to take effect, more and more people are already wondering whether the savings effect hoped for in Bonn will actually materialize.

Only two days after the signing of the treaty in Ankara, *Hürriyet*, a mass-circulation newspaper published in Istanbul, hit upon a drastic formulation of what this agreement might mean for the Federal Republic in the coming months: "Germans, hold on tight, here come the Turkish kids!" To eliminate any doubt about what was meant by this, *Hürriyet* illustrated its headline with a picture of a Turkish mother, who, surrounded by suitcases and boxes and accompanied by her swarm of four children, waits for her flight to Germany.

The announced Turkish invasion isn't all that unlikely. The *Diakonisches Werk* [i.e., outreach ministry] of the Protestant Church, which specifically dedicates itself to aiding foreigners, had already issued warnings about this in early October. "There are reports that foreign workers have already started bringing their children to the Federal Republic solely on account of the higher child-benefit payments." Similar observations were made by the Confederation of German Trade Unions (DGB), which—according to Hans Maier, head of the department for foreigners at the DGB's Munich chapter—noted that the new child-allowance regulations had caused "considerable agitation" among guest workers, so much that the union deemed it necessary to publish internal talking-points for guest-worker meetings.

## Committees and Slogans

According to Bonn's new child-allowance agreements, which are scheduled to take effect on January 1, 1975, those children of guest workers who reside in Germany will receive the same child-benefit payments as German children, while those children who remain in their home countries will be granted considerably less assistance. The federal government's justification: because the cost of living in the

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guest workers' home countries is lower than in the Federal Republic, the assistance doesn't need to be as high.

This policy has not been without repercussions. The new assessment system for granting differential child-benefit payments had barely been introduced when so-called Foreigner Committees started forming all over the Federal Republic and demanding "social justice for all" with identical rallying cries. In many places, people fearfully observed that these Foreigner Committees usually exhibit strong leftwing tendencies, that they intend to start joining forces quickly at the federal level, and that they have moved completely beyond the control of the DGB or similar organizations. Özegär E., a Turkish member of the Foreigner Committee in Munich says: "Now we're taking matters into our own hands. We don't want to let ourselves be discriminated against and tossed away any longer." Foreigner Committees and union officials agree that this new movement would attract even more support "if there weren't so many people who are afraid of losing their jobs."

The DGB and the church organizations also see other potential consequences of the new child-allowance policy. Maier of the DGB says, "If guest workers start bringing their children to the Federal Republic in greater numbers to receive the full child-benefit payment, then we'll be faced with totally new social problems." At the *Diakonisches Werk* in Stuttgart people also believe that the related costs for new apartments, kindergartens, after-school care, schools, and similar facilities will ultimately be higher than the amount the federal government wanted to save by instituting differentials in child-benefit payments.

### **Less Generosity?**

Already, about 70,000 resident children of guest workers descend annually upon the German labor market after completing school, and apprenticeships—already scarce—are becoming even scarcer by the year. The situation, according to the DGB, will get even worse in the future. If all the Turks presently living in Germany were to bring over all their children, this alone would cause their ethnic group to grow by about half a million. Because children up to sixteen years of age do not require a residence permit, German authorities are not really in a position to prevent these family reunions. José Moll, editor of Spanish-language programming for foreigners at Bayerischer Rundfunk (Bavarian Broadcasting), is concerned that, given this prognosis, the federal government might very well see the need to drastically restrict what has thus far been a quite generous policy on family reunions, and that this could lead to new social problems.

The final consequence of the new child-allowance policy: family reunions will undermine the foreign-worker recruitment ban that has been in place for a year, because the labor market will be flooded not only by young people but also by their accompanying mothers. Maier, head of the department for foreigners at the DGB, fears that these family latecomers "will accept illegal employment" if they fail to find proper work. Maier is even more pessimistic about the prospects of the unemployed sons and daughters of guest workers: "Under certain circumstances they could form a reservoir of criminals."

Nonetheless, people in the federal labor ministry "are convinced that people are just stirred up right now and that emotions are being aroused that won't be followed by actions." However, attorney Herbert Becher, advisor to the bishops of the Catholic Church, has already hinted that the German Federal Constitutional Court should rule on the new child-allowance regulation if it is ratified by the parliaments in Bonn and the guest workers' countries of origin.

Source: Christian Schneider, "Eine Invasion von Gastarbeiterkindern? Eine Einsparung, die teuer werden kann," *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, November 8, 1974. Republished with permission.

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Translation: Allison Brown

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