

The Labor Minister Welcomes the Millionth Guest Worker (October 30, 1964)

Abstract

Only four years after the start of systematic recruitment, Labor Minister Theodor Blank celebrated the arrival of the millionth “guest worker” [*Gastarbeiter*] and described these foreign workers as essential to the success of the West German economy. Here, he expresses his hopes that migrant laborers would become a permanent part of the workforce.

Source

One Million Guest Workers: An Essential Prerequisite for the Success of the German Economy

Almost one million guest workers are employed in the Federal Republic. Thus, one million people from other countries help keep our economy in gear and running at full throttle. From year to year, our economy has become increasingly dependent on the help of guest workers. Today they are an essential prerequisite for the success of the German economy.

These one million people in German workplaces contribute to the continued growth of our production, the maintenance of stable prices, and the preservation of our prestige on the world market. The role of guest workers in the labor market will certainly become even more important in the coming years. The desire for foreign labor is still strong in many sectors of our economy. Our own labor pool, if we can believe the statistics, will shrink even more in the coming years. The much-talked about shifts in the age structure of our population will also reduce the size of the next generation. Only twenty-two percent of our population is under fifteen years of age. This figure puts the Federal Republic in second-to-last place in Europe. This situation alone makes it clear that we will continue to depend on foreign labor in the years to come.

But recruiting and placing guest workers also entails considerable difficulties. This is most noticeable in Italy. Today the Federal Agency for Employment and Unemployment Insurance is already making a sustained effort to find new workers on the peripheries of Europe, in places like Spain, Portugal, Greece, and Turkey. If we want to keep our economy in gear, we are dependent on guest workers. Therefore, I would like to take this opportunity to warmly thank our helpers from abroad for the contributions they have made thus far.

It is no longer possible to imagine economic life in the Federal Republic without guest workers. They are fully entitled to partake of the social benefits available in the Federal Republic. Without a doubt, they are also doing their best to meet the high demands—in terms of both quantity and quality—placed on the German economy, both at home and abroad. Good wages and their own frugality give foreign workers an opportunity to support their dependents. Additionally, through their work here, they can also acquire valuable skills that can benefit their own economies when they go back home.

To be sure, it is sometimes difficult to get settled [here], to adjust to different socio-economic conditions, the rhythm of work in Germany, foreign surroundings, and different customs and habits. And at times there is surely friction with colleagues and other Germans. I would like to urgently appeal to my German compatriots to show understanding for the difficulties faced by guest workers and to avoid rash

criticisms of their customs and habits.

It is my wish that it will become easier for them to adjust to life here. The federal government is doing everything it can to continue to improve the situation of foreign workers and to satisfy their wishes as far as possible. We are particularly concerned with bringing their families over. I have no illusions; it will take some time for this to be achieved. But I can assure guest workers that we will do everything we can to make their lives here as tolerable as possible. The DM 200 million in loans granted by the Federal Agency for Employment and Unemployment Insurance for the building of workers' residences has already proven a valuable source of assistance. The Nuremberg office has allocated another DM 50 million in loans for the construction of family apartments for guest workers.

We are interested in having the guest workers stay with us for an extended period of time. Statistics show that this expectation is justified. Two-thirds of the guest workers employed here at the end of 1963 had already spent a year or more in Germany. Almost one in four had already worked here for three years. Seasonal workers have largely become permanent workers. We welcome this because it enhances stability, makes it easier for guest workers to settle in, and ensures smooth operations in companies.

We will not remain idle in the remaining areas either. The tried-and-true system of social security in the Federal Republic is largely available to guest workers as well. They receive the same legal and social protection as their German colleagues. Most of them get child benefits based on German standards. Under certain conditions they can even become members of the [factory] works council [*Betriebsrat*]. In the future, the federal government will continue working toward the cultural integration of guest workers into our community. Here we welcome the valuable work of the churches. Press and radio are making an effort to provide information to guest workers in their native languages in order to build a permanent bridge between them and their home countries. The federal government is grateful for these initiatives.

Sometimes we hear about worries that the growing number of guest workers will lead to being overrun by foreigners [*Überfremdung*]. These worries cannot be taken seriously. Proportionally speaking, the one million guest workers still constitute a very small fraction of the roughly 22 million people employed in our economy. A little over four percent of all the men and women employed in German workplaces come from other countries. I would also like to point out the example of Switzerland, which employs about 800,000 guest workers and has had good experiences and results. For me, the fact that the one million workers enjoy their work here and enjoy living in Germany is proof that we will also continue to work and thrive together in the future. The guest workers here have given us proof that European integration and the coming together of people from very different backgrounds and cultures in friendship is a reality. And for that we owe them our gratitude.

Source: Theodor Blank, "Eine Million Gastarbeiter. Eine nicht unerhebliche Voraussetzung für das Gedeihen der deutschen Wirtschaft," in *Bulletin* (Federal Press Office), no. 160, October 30, 1964, p. 1480.

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