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Recession and Guest Workers

When in an economic downturn signs of deepening recession are seen as disturbing signals of an approaching crisis, demands for security of employment may originate from fears and forebodings evoked by preoccupation with the events of the day rather than consideration of longer-term effects which may indeed receive insufficient attention. The call for protection of labour is part of the argument for protectionism! It was put forward a century ago when Germany under the impact of the "Promoters' crisis" (following on a period when company promoters had overstepped the bounds of prudence) changed from free trade to a protective duty system. The present increase in unemployment has understandably induced some apologists for the protection of labour to press their argument in support of their negative attitude to investments abroad and to industrialisation projects in developing countries, as well as to questions relating to the guest workers.

The "guidelines" for the action programme on the employment of aliens which the Federal Government adopted in June, 1973, stated clearly that a "socially responsible consolidation of the employment of aliens must be reinforced over the longer term in all salient political spheres, especially through economic, regional, housing, labour market and development policies". It is greatly to be hoped that "consolidation" will not turn into mere restriction because economic changes which have occurred since then are causing antagonism to the employment of guest workers and building up pressures. In any considera-

tion of the problem of the guest workers emphasis must be put on the fact that the relations with their countries of origin form a part of this "longer-term" aspect. They have a bearing on foreign policy, on external economic policy, as well as on development policy. Most of the foreign workers hail from Mediterranean countries: few of these countries have advanced industrially very far yet, and some — like Turkey — have not attracted any significant German capital investments at all. For this reason they ought to receive more attention for investments in the future. Seen from Turkey, the outflow of guest workers to Germany has been an export of services and incidentally one of the major foreign currency sources. German-Turkish relations would be exposed to a strenuous test if this flow were to be dammed up without any offer of alternative employment opportunities.

In the discussions about a new "economic world order" the Federal Republic must take its stand on firm ground, whatever view one may take of the motives which prompted these discussions. The German side cannot very well insist on principles of good conduct to be observed in international economic relations if it has laid itself open to suspicions that it decides the socio-economic issues involved according to its own transitory interests.

Increased capital aid for the countries of origin of the foreign workers has come up for discussion at various times in recent years. The suggestion that their infrastructures should be improved so as to encourage German firms to set up plants

in these countries and to offer an incentive for industrial investments is not new. In Turkey where a clear priority has for a long time been given to migrant workers as foreign currency earners, more favour has lately been shown for the idea of co-operation as a means of providing employment and increasing production inside the country. As the Turks are in any case turning their eyes to their "wealthy" fellow-believers, the Federal Republic should in collaboration with the oil countries offer them a package including know-how and finance. This would go at least some way to further the desired "consolidation" through expansion in the partner country, and it would not merely be a "shift" of industry to cheap labour but help to develop a Mediterranean industry as a supplier for a Middle Eastern market which is attracting more interest. A German engagement with these considerations in mind would be a safeguard for long-term foreign trade relations and a precautionary move with effects in the future.

Finally it must be borne in mind that there are many guest workers who have a right to be judged not by their "nationality" but according to standards of performance. The consolidation of the employment of foreign workers, which has for several years now been recognized as a necessity, will under the conditions created by the change in economic circumstances still have to be carried out in accordance with the afore-mentioned guidelines. Guest workers who are willing and able to be integrated must be allowed to benefit from the protection of labour.

Günther Jantzen