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## Foreign labour problems

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# Foreign Labour Problems

Those welcome during the boom — West Germany's guestworkers — in these days of unemployment often meet with rejection and attempts to get rid of them. Most Germans don't understand why two million foreigners are still employed in the Federal Republic, and since it is now quite obvious that in spite of the reviving business activity the army of the more than one million unemployed Germans will dwindle but slowly, the antipathy against foreign labour is steadily growing.

Instruments for alleviating this situation somewhat were sought and found. In autumn 1973 an embargo on immigration of workers from non-EC-countries was promulgated and since November 1974 all German labour offices have been strictly adhering to the rule not to fill any job vacancy with a foreigner as long as a German is available. Another effective instrument is an agreement between the Federal Government and the Lands directed against foreign preponderance, which is now on probation for a year already. Originally this agreement was meant to limit the social consequences for individual congested centres of foreign labour. Now, however, it is drastically used for improving the chances of the German unemployed — long before the assumed critical "social margin" of a 12 p.c. share of foreign labour has been reached. According to this new agreement the authorities of the Lands may also declare regions to be overburdened settlement areas if a 6 p.c. margin has been exceeded. This already applies to about 30 concentration areas.

That not even more cities and regions took this measure is the merit of the guestworkers strongest ally — i.e. industry. True, in Cologne the stout opposition of the Ford-works did not help although this firm strongly depends on foreign labour. Of last year's 3,000 additional workers taken on by Ford, only 25 p.c. were Germans. But also the Ruhr-coal mines, the foundries, the catering trade and agriculture are permanently short of labour because they cannot get enough guestworkers.

Indeed all experts realise that the equation "job equals job" is not right at all. There is no convincing economic substantiation in favour of reducing the number of guestworkers in Germany. Since the activities mainly performed by foreigners and those mainly by Germans are complimentary, a purposive reduction of foreign labour might even lead to a structural unemployment of highly qualified Germans unwilling to adapt themselves to

lower positions. The inflow of foreigners caused large-scale labour transfers. German workers moved increasingly to more attractive jobs leaving the comparatively unattractive ones to the guestworkers. Between 1961 and 1973 more than 3 mn workers became employees and civil servants, every second of them shifted into service-rendering occupations — 1 mn with public authorities. 1.5 mn vacancies thus created in industry have been filled with foreigners, mainly in industrial sectors basing on mass production. Another proof that their activities are complimentary.

But other highly important aspects should not be ignored in this context. Already now, and in spite of the immigration stop, because families were brought together and owing to their high birth rate, about 120,000 more foreigners are living in West Germany than in 1973. According to official statistics they amount to 4.1 mn men, women and children. And when probably at the end of this year the Association Agreement between Turkey and the EC will become effective, Turks will enjoy free movement in all EC-countries. Although at first they will get residence and work permits only after having got a job, the final quota is still being negotiated in Brussels and subject to political considerations, too.

One of the most serious problems is juvenile unemployment hitting already now young foreigners much harder than German youth. Their starting chances in Germany as well as in their homelands are impeded due to the fact that more than two thirds of them, owing to the language barrier, and in spite of being intelligent, cannot pass even the primary school. And the number of these children is steadily growing while the number of *Kindergartens* and suitable teachers does not increase. All the more incomprehensible is therefore the new children's allowance regulation according to which the full rate is only paid for children living in West Germany. Small wonder that foreign fathers let their families come, too. New deliberations should immediately take place in this context in order to change this situation as soon as possible. For, experts are already fearing that juvenile unemployment might soon be followed by juvenile delinquency caused by the hopeless situation of these young people.

Should the present recovery turn out to become a lasting boom, many of these problems might temporarily appear to be less urgent. But what about the next recession? *Hubert Höping*