

## The Guest Workers and The Guest Worker Program

Theodor Blank (1905-1972): He was a German politician. Starting of as an apprentice for union members, he became a union administrator. The union he was a part of was banned in 1933, by Nazi Germany. Getting, but never completing, an education, he reached the rank of 1<sup>st</sup> lieutenant in the German military during WW2. He rejoined the labor union movement then got elected to the Bundestag in 1949. He was part of the secret rearmament preparation for a new German military. He served as minister of labor starting the guest worker program, inviting temporary immigrants to do work that would boost the German economy. This would start large-scale acceptance of immigrants in Germany. He died in 1972.<sup>1</sup>

The One Millionth Guest Worker is a document announcing the one millionth guest worker. The justifications, its challenges, its success, and future of the guest worker program. Written and given by Theodor Blank, it became a symbolic document of Germany's transition to accepting large-scale immigration. It also mentions issues of integration and culture that would become political issues because of immigration and the not-so-temporary stay of the guest workers.



Guest workers pose for a picture before departing

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<sup>1</sup> Wikipedia-Autoren. (2003, April 14). *Theodor Blank*. [https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theodor\\_Blank](https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theodor_Blank)

The German economy experienced an economic miracle after WW2, under the leadership of Konrad Adenauer (r. 1949-1963). One of the causes of the economic miracle was the availability of workers for construction and reconstruction in post-WW2 Germany. Once reconstruction was finished, the new high skilled and low skilled labor force in combination with up-to-date rebuilt facilities continued the economic expansion. To continue the economic expansion, the Labor Minister, Theodor Blank, encouraged guest workers to come to Germany temporarily to work low-skilled jobs. And these guest workers would frequently stay, changing German society and culture.

Konrad Adenauer was the 1<sup>st</sup> Chancellor of Germany from 1949 to 1963. A member of the Christian Democratic Union, the conservative political party, he oversaw the German economic miracle, the rapid growth of the German economy, advocating and trying to implement the “social market economy,” an economy that would care for everyone needs without socialist policies. After the rebuilding phase of recovery, the German economy continued to grow with a combination of low and high-skilled labor. But by 1961, Labor Minister Theodor Blank foresaw that the economy could not continue its growth rate without more low-skilled labor.<sup>2</sup> So Germany implemented its guest worker policy, eventually employing millions of immigrants.<sup>3</sup> These immigrants were supposed to be temporary guest workers, staying for a limited amount of time, before returning home. While some did go home, most didn't.<sup>4</sup>

The life of the guest in Germany was affected by their life circumstances in their home countries and the treatment they received in Germany. The immigrants were majority male, young, poor, uneducated, low-skilled, and unable to speak German. A minority were also illiterate. Unable to get secure or well-paying jobs in their home countries, the guest workers accepted jobs in Germany for more money than they would staying in their home countries, send remittances back to their home countries and families, and eventually, return. This population was made of Turks, Yugoslavs, Greeks, Portuguese, Spanish, Italians, and other foreign countries. An example of a guest worker is Antonio Rodrigues da Sa. He was designated the one millionth guest worker, representative of Germany's immigration policy successes. Not just personally, he was a man with a wife and two kids who took the job to provide for them. But

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<sup>2</sup> Wikipedia-Autoren. (2003, April 14). *Theodor Blank*. [https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theodor\\_Blank](https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theodor_Blank)  
“GHDI - Document.” [https://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub\\_document.cfm?document\\_id=849](https://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=849)

<sup>4</sup> “GHDI – Document.” [https://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub\\_document.cfm?document\\_id=850](https://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=850)

also, as part of German policy goals. “Using the celebration to highlight the program’s indisputable success, these officials emphasized the crucial role of the guest workers in the triumph of the economic miracle. “Without their collaboration,” declared the president of the Employers’ Association of the Metal Industry, “this development is unthinkable.” The thrust of the message was that West German prosperity directly depended on foreign laborers such as Rodrigues and that recruitment was working out well for all involved.”<sup>5</sup> And he was given a celebratory entry into West Germany to show generosity to him and gratitude towards guest workers, on the part of the Germans. A second problem was when these guest workers didn’t return to their home countries. Germany was richer than their home countries, so the guest workers lived in Germany without a program to integrate them. So they frequently didn’t learn German, lived in poor areas, and couldn’t get German citizenship. Their children couldn’t get German citizenship either because Germany didn’t have birthright citizenship. So, the children may have even lived much more German lives than Turkish, Portuguese, Greek, or Yugoslav, but did not have the rights of a child of German ancestry. By the 1990s, this problem would be partially solved by the acknowledgment that Germany had become a nation of immigrants, so citizenship was conferred onto them with multiple citizenship acts.<sup>6</sup>

The German Guest worker program was a success for its goal, continued economic growth, but cause other problems, like integration, and citizenship. So, when an estimated one million guest workers arrived, a notice was put into the federal registry by Theodor Blank. It explained the situation before the program, the program’s effects, its benefits, problems, future, and solutions to anything. But it also made a moral statement of how this change would not be allowed to revert to a Nazi style view of them, but more tolerant and incorporating them, if they stayed.

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<sup>5</sup> “The Guest Worker Question in Postwar Germany.” Accessed, Dec. 6<sup>th</sup>, 2024. [https://assets.cambridge.org/97805218/70009/excerpt/9780521870009\\_excerpt.htm](https://assets.cambridge.org/97805218/70009/excerpt/9780521870009_excerpt.htm)

<sup>6</sup> Marcuse, Harold, Lecture, UCSB, Dec 5<sup>th</sup>, 2024

## Annotated Bibliography

Theodor Blank “Eine Million Gastarbeiter. Eine nicht unerhebliche Voraussetzung für das Gedeihen der deutschen Wirtschaft” [“One Million Guest Workers: An Essential Prerequisite for the Success of the German Economy”], in *Bulletin* (Federal Press Office), no. 160, October 30, 1964, p. 1480. Accessed through German History Documents and Images (GHDI) on Dec. 6<sup>th</sup>, 2024.

The original document. The 1 millionth guest worker document is an announcement of the one millionth guest worker but also a symbolic document of the changes the German government chose to make and of the foreseen and not foreseen effects of the guest worker policy.

Wikipedia-Autoren. (2003, April 14). *Theodor Blank*.

[https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theodor\\_Blank](https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theodor_Blank)

The German version of this Wikipedia article explores the life of Theodor Blank in detail. His birth, circumstances, early political career, Nazi interlude, and post-war career up to death. His political views are an archetype of the social market economy, a capitalist economy that creates social welfare that became dominant in post-war Germany, undercutting the Social Democrats socialist economy advocacy.

*60 years Almanya | DOMiD | Documentation Center and Museum of Migration in Germany*

DOMiD | Documentation Center and Museum of Migration in Germany. <https://domid.org/en/news/60years-almanya/>

This is a collection of individual accounts of migrant laborers about their lives as guest workers. It is also a collection of photos and the lives of these migrants over time and cultural changes caused by them.

Udo Sautter, *Deutsche Geschichte seit 1815 [German History since 1815]*. Tübingen, 2004, p. 40. Accessed from German History Documents and Images (GHDI), Dec. 6<sup>th</sup>, 2024.

This document is the total amount of immigrants accepted into the FRG and then united Germany by country. The total amount of immigrants increases significantly after the early 1960s, when the German Guest Worker Program started.

“The Guest Worker Question in Postwar Germany.” Accessed, Dec. 6<sup>th</sup>,

2024. [https://assets.cambridge.org/97805218/70009/excerpt/9780521870009\\_excerpt.htm](https://assets.cambridge.org/97805218/70009/excerpt/9780521870009_excerpt.htm)

An article about the history of guest workers and precedence of guest worker problems and unprecedented ones.

“Memoirs in My Suitcase.” Pitt Rivers Museum. <https://www.prm.ox.ac.uk/event/memoirs-in-my-suitcase>.

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