

Germans Seek Foreign Labor For New Era Of Computers

The New York Times

April 9, 2000, Sunday, Late Edition - Final

Copyright 2000 The New York Times Company

Distribution: Foreign Desk

Section: Section 1;; Section 1; Page 4; Column 1; Foreign Desk; Column 1;

Length: 652 words

Byline: By ROGER COHEN

By ROGER COHEN

Dateline: BERLIN, April 8

Body

Vinod Kymar, the political counselor at the Indian Embassy here, is a puzzled man. Never in his many years in Germany has he read so much about his country in the press, nor found so much of it to be nonsense.

"High technology seems to have suddenly become synonymous with India here," Mr. Kymar said. "But the Germans are waking up about a decade late. The United States has already taken the cream of our talented computer people. All that remains for the Germans are leftovers."

India's occupation of center-stage in Germany's political debates began a few weeks ago with an apparently offhand remark at a trade fair from Chancellor Gerhard Schroder. He said his country urgently needed new talent in its high-technology sector and should be prepared to give residency documents, or green cards, to brilliant Indians.

The remark reflected a serious issue: underfunded, state-run German universities have been very slow to adapt their traditional curricula to reflect the explosive growth of Internet-related industries. In all of Germany, there is just one newly created chair in e-commerce, at the Goethe University in Frankfurt.

As a result, in a country with more than four million unemployed, there are an estimated 75,000 to 100,000 jobs vacant in the booming Internet sector, with few Germans apparently qualified to fill them. Hence the Social Democratic chancellor's sudden infatuation with Indian software engineers.

"We urgently need new programmers and developers for our projects, but we generally find the German education with its focus on heavy philosophical concepts does not turn out the people we want," said Amelie Heinrichsdorff of Acotec, a start-up software company based in Berlin. "We think globally and would like to hire talent wherever we can."

The dot-com view of the world is still far from that of Germany's opposition Christian Democratic Party. When the government began drafting a law to allow up to 20,000 foreign computer specialists into Germany with green cards, an outcry erupted.

Jurgen Ruttgers, a leading Christian Democrat, produced a campaign slogan in Germany's largest state, North Rhine-Westphalia, saying, "Children instead of Indians." Chancellor Schroder described the posters as "indecent and economically damaging."

Germans Seek Foreign Labor For New Era Of Computers

Later, Mr. Ruttgers refined his message slightly, urging, "More education instead of more immigration." He was supported by the substantial wing of his party that remains deeply opposed to the idea of Germany as a "land of immigration," despite the fact that more than seven million foreigners live here.

But the difficulties of the Christian Democrats' anti-foreigner message became evident when Dieter Hundt, the head of the powerful employers' federation, lambasted Mr. Ruttgers' campaign as "poorly thought out and miserably populist."

The sight of big business and conservative Christian Democracy tearing each other to shreds is novel in Germany. But then this is a time of substantial political and cultural shift, with the Social Democrats adopting many pro-business measures and many **Germans** developing a sudden infatuation with the Internet. Yet even the government's methods appear marked by bureaucratic hesitations of old.

Walter Riester, the Social Democratic **labor** minister, has proposed limiting the stays of the **new** green-card immigrants to an initial period of three and a maximum of five years. He also wants to shape the proposed law so that jobs would be offered to foreigners only after an extensive search has been made for a qualified German.

But Antje Radcke, a leader of the Green Party, which is the junior partner in the coalition government, said such proposals were far too cumbersome. "If we should have learned one thing from the experience of the 'gastarbeiters' who started coming here in the 1960's, it is that attempts to try to limit the stays of people are doomed to failure."

<http://www.nytimes.com>

Classification

Language: ENGLISH

Subject: PASSPORTS & VISAS (89%); POLITICAL PARTIES (89%); GERMAN CHANCELLORS (89%); DEMOCRACIES (78%); CONSERVATISM (78%); TYPES OF GOVERNMENT (78%); TECHNICIANS & TECHNOLOGICAL WORKERS (77%); UNEMPLOYED PERSONS (75%); POLITICAL DEBATES (73%); EMBASSIES & CONSULATES (73%); ENGINEERING (72%); CURRICULA (72%); **COMPUTER** ENGINEERING (71%); BUSINESS & PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS (69%); PUBLIC SCHOOLS (68%); ELECTRONIC COMMERCE (67%); IMMIGRATION (65%); TRADE SHOWS (54%)

Industry: **COMPUTER** SOFTWARE (89%); INTERNET & WWW (89%); ENGINEERING (72%); **COMPUTER** ENGINEERING (71%); SOFTWARE DEVELOPMENT & ENGINEERING (69%); SOFTWARE MAKERS (69%); PUBLIC SCHOOLS (68%); ELECTRONIC COMMERCE (67%)

Person: GERHARD SCHRODER (58%)

Geographic: BERLIN, GERMANY (79%); NORDRHEIN-WESTFALEN, GERMANY (92%); FRANKFURT AM MAIN, GERMANY (79%); GERMANY (99%); INDIA (93%); UNITED STATES (79%)

Load-Date: April 9, 2000