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Week of: October 3rd

Foreign Pros Continue To Flock to the U.S.

By Carlos Tejada
Staff Reporter of The Wall Street Journal

From [The Wall Street Journal Online](#)

Rajiv Khanna, an Arlington, Va., immigration attorney, saw demand for temporary workers from overseas soar in the 1990s. Now, with the labor market weakened, he estimates his workload has fallen 75%.

But "there's still demand out there for the right kind of people," Mr. Khanna says. Medical personnel, programmers and civil and mechanical engineers are still popular, he says.

Despite a slack labor market, filings suggest that Microsoft Corp., Oracle Corp., International Business Machines Corp., KPMG LLP and dozens of other big technology and consulting concerns are still searching for talent overseas and are sponsoring workers on temporary H-1B visas. Universities and medical centers also top the list. Most companies won't confirm an actual number sponsored.

Of course, the vast majority of the nation's 8.1 million job seekers don't have the skills for most of those positions. But the hard times have emboldened longtime critics. "The number of H-1Bs being brought in is very high," says LeEarl Bryant, president of the U.S. chapter of the Institute of Electrical and Electronic Engineers. Ms. Bryant says overseas workers are taking jobs that can be filled by her members. The H-1B status allows foreign professionals to work here for up to six years.

The Immigration and Naturalization Service hasn't disclosed the identities of the most active H-1B filers, saying it isn't required to under the law. But

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the Labor Department's data on labor condition applications, or LCAs, provide a clue.

Employers must file an LCA before they can receive an H-1B. But they also file dozens of ultimately unfulfilled LCAs, or file them even when the worker moves to another city. For example, consulting firm Aquent LLC filed about 350 applications in the fiscal year ended Monday. The firm says it sponsored two overseas workers, while hiring an additional 15 who were already in the U.S. "There are way too many Americans without jobs," says Ross Fernandes, an Aquent area manager, adding they "would be our preference."

Microsoft, Oracle and IBM top the list of LCA filers, but they won't say how many workers are involved or what they believe are the skills lacking in the U.S. Baylor College of Medicine in Houston says it sponsors 150 H-1B holders among faculty, scientists in training and research technicians. "We have to literally scour the globe for some of these people," says Michele Stelljes, senior immigration adviser.

Meanwhile, Mr. Khanna, the attorney, says H-1B activity hit bottom this year and won't anytime soon reach its 1990s peak. "My mother said I should go to medical school," he laments.

TAFT-WHAT? An old union bugbear comes out of hibernation.

Dust off those labor-law textbooks. Union leaders fear President Bush will use his power under the Taft-Hartley Act to ask a federal court to send locked-out West Coast longshore workers back to work. Since 1978, the last time the 1947 law was invoked, it has been forgotten by many. "If I taught a labor law class, I wouldn't teach it," says Michael LeRoy, a University of Illinois labor professor who this week provided historical information to the President's Council of Economic Advisors.

Herbert Northrup, professor emeritus of the Wharton School of Business and a labor expert, is no fan of unions but believes the Taft-Hartley process makes both sides intractable. "But that's not in the experience of these young people," says Mr. Northrup, 84 years old. "There aren't many of us old buzzards left."

STILL HIRING: Among 431 companies surveyed, 23% say they are aggressively courting workers with skills essential for success in their industries, says human-resources consulting firm Watson Wyatt Worldwide. Only 7% are aggressively seeking those without critical skills.

THE DAILY GRIND: Richard Sanger, a 25-year-old guitar technician currently on tour with the rock band Goldfinger, sets up equipment, tunes guitars and takes it all apart when the show ends. The tour this year includes stops in New Zealand and Japan. His Jersey City, N.J., home "is where I collect my mail," he says. Roadie pay ranges from \$300 a week for small bands to more than \$2,000 a week for big national acts, he says.

THE CHECKOFF: About 20% of the 2,886 killed while on the job in New York and elsewhere on Sept. 11, 2001, were born outside the U.S., the Labor Department says.



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