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EUROPEAN COUNCIL, DUBLIN

29/30 NOVEMBER 1979

EMPLOYMENT AND SOCIAL POLICY

Brief by Department of Employment

OBJECTIVE

1. To ensure that the Presidency's conclusions do not commit the Community to action on limiting overtime or a shorter working week beyond what was agreed at the Social Affairs Council on 22 November 1979.

POINTS TO MAKE

2. Social Affairs and Finance Councils have gone as far as they can in endorsing Community action on the reorganisation of working time. This is primarily an issue for Industry to regulate according to collective bargaining or other national practice. We attach importance to the dialogue of the Social Partners between themselves. And of them both with governments and the Commission. The Commission should help keep that dialogue going. The overall consideration is to keep up the competitiveness of the Community. That way leads to higher productivity and more jobs. Socially desirable changes have to be paid for. Not in the Community interest to see a breach with the unions, but we should not jeopardise the control of inflation, future economic prosperity and

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job prospects by going further than the resolution agreed.

ALTERNANCE TRAINING (ie sandwich course training)

3. We welcome the results achieved. It is a realistic resolution, and sets the course for a flexible Community approach. It does not lay down rigid guidelines which would be inappropriate and recognises national practices. Proper education and training provision needs to be provided by all our governments. But all face pressures on their resources which are limited. [If raised] We have misgivings about looking to the Social Fund/ to support this form of training. The Fund is already undertaking about as much as it can manage. But we have agreed that its limited use for pilot projects may be considered.

BACKGROUND

4. The Social Affairs Council

The Social Affairs Council met on 22 November. It reached agreement on Resolutions on Work Sharing and Training "in Alternance". Both items arose from the last meetings of the Council on 15 May and are linked also to the European Council's meeting of 21/22 June which took note of a Commission Communication on Work Sharing and asked that "concrete proposals be worked out rapidly."

5. Work Sharing

The Community has for two years or more been discussing ways of reorganising working time to provide more jobs by sharing the available work. The issue is strongly favoured by the ETUC, as part of their pressure for a shorter working week. Employers and Governments, with the exception of the Belgian Government, (which has already made concessions at national level) have been generally resisting. However, the Commission were invited to bring forward proposals covering:-

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- annual duration of work
- restriction of systematic overtime -
- the development of vocational training and alternance -
(sandwich course training)
- flexible retirement arrangements -
- part-time voluntary work -
- temporary work -
- shift work -

It was evident that some other member states as well as the UK were opposed to the promotion of binding instruments in this area. The present resolution was a weaker proposal though still objectionable in that it assumed that Work Sharing measures should be introduced, that limits (undefined) should be applied to the systematic use of overtime and that it failed sufficiently to have regard to the autonomy of industry and the need to settle such matters through the collective bargaining process. The Final Resolution agreed by the Social Affairs Council is less dogmatic about the advantages of work sharing and the types of measure that could be adopted and is a reasonable compromise. The Council could not have said less without risking a breach with the unions.

6. Even so, the ETUC when they see Mr Lynch for the usual eve of summit meeting with the President are likely to say that the Council's action is inadequate. The ETUC are arranging a week of ("educational action") beforehand and Mr Wim Kok, the ETUC President will point to the results of this.

Training in Alternance

7. The Commission's proposal, to improve the employment opportunities of young people proposes the encouragement of systems of training based

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on alternating periods of employment with educational or training activity,
with the intention of assisting transition from school to work and, in general,
breaking down barriers between education/training and employment. The Govern-
ment is currently reviewing education and training for 16-18 year olds and sees
scope for the development of alternance training if it can be applied on a
voluntary and flexible basis. The resolution as agreed by the Social Affairs
Council meets our requirements in this regard. We were not in favour of the
use of the Social Fund to support this form of training. It has already
many more calls than it has resources to meet. But, along with other member
states (France and Italy) who also opposed the use of the Social Fund, we agreed
to a formula which would allow limited involvement of the Fund in supporting
pilot or demonstration projects.

Department of Employment

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