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EXTRACT FROM A SPEECH BY VICE-PRESIDENT HILLERY
AT THE EUROPEAN SEMINAR ON THE EVALUATION
OF VOCATIONAL TRAINING, HOLLY ROYDE COLLEGE,
UNIVERSITY OF MANCHESTER, ON MONDAY, 13 JANUARY 1975

We are witnessing an unprecedented expansion in vocational training facilities in all the Member States of the Community. In Britain, our host country for this week, direct public expenditure on training has gone up from £30 million in 1968 to £85 million in 1974, with the number of government training centres rising from 13 in 1963 to over 50 in 1971. In France, the number of trainees helped by public expenditure has almost doubled from 560,000 in 1969 to 920,000 in 1974. This explosive growth could just as easily be illustrated by figures from the other Member States where direct public expenditure on vocational training now runs at between one per cent and two per cent of the national budget.

Data on public expenditure is only the tip of the iceberg. To training provided or supported by the state we must add the greatly expanded in-company training activities of industry and the spread of university courses with a direct vocational orientation.

The importance of training springs from the recognition of the necessity of an active employment policy. Several factors have contributed to this recognition. Firstly, the pace of economic growth and development since the war has called for a high level of labour mobility - both professional and geographical. It has been estimated that at least one worker in eight will change his profession in the next ten years and that over two million Europeans will leave the land over the same period.

Secondly, there has been a recognition of the right of every worker and of every category of worker to be trained and given employment to the full extent of his or her own capacity and talent. This is exemplified in Germany's employment promotion act of 1971 or the French laws on the organisation of permanent vocational training. These give each individual the statutory right to undertake training courses with the assistance of state grants.

The growing participation of women in employment has called for a system of training suited to their particular needs. It is recognised in all the Member States that much has still to be done to improve the employment position and opportunities of certain groups - in particular women, migrant workers and the handicapped. As Commissioner for Social Affairs I have initiated Community measures to encourage the Member States to tackle the most urgent problems facing these underprivileged groups.

Clearly effective programmes of vocational training will also have a very important role in these developments.

Thirdly, there has been an increased understanding of the significance of vocational training in fulfilling other economic and social goals. For example the achievement of planned regional development calls for carefully thought-out vocational training in order to adapt the manpower and the womanpower of the regions to the needs of incoming industries and enterprises. Again, the high levels of employment, which we have enjoyed until recently, entailed high levels of inflation, caused to some extent by specific manpower shortages. An active manpower policy, involving vocational retraining, has contributed substantially to reducing inflation while still enabling a high level of employment to be enjoyed. Faced as we are with growing inflation, unemployment and the structural changes caused by the rise in the price of energy and raw materials, the need for an active and vigorous manpower policy becomes even more crucial. Vocational retraining is not a pass-time for the unemployed; it is a prerequisite for continued economic development.

The Commission of the European Communities has kept abreast and sought to initiate, supplement and extend vocational training.

Through the European Social Fund it has been intimately connected with the training effort in the different Member States, with the defining of common training needs and with the coordination of national training policies. The growth of the Fund has been remarkable to the point where it now has an annual budget of some £150 m. and where in 1973 Social Fund monies going to Britain, for example, represented 40% of direct spending on vocational training by the British Government. The introduction of the Regional Fund will give the Commission a further instrument in combatting employment problems.

The Social Fund gives special emphasis to the training of workers from less developed regions, to agricultural and textile workers, and to programmes for the handicapped and migrant workers. The overriding policy aim however is to assist genuinely promotional and innovative programmes as well as raising standards of training provided.

In this context I am pleased to refer to the recent decision of the Council of Ministers to establish the European Vocational Centre as proposed by the Commission.

The role of this Centre will be to coordinate research into various aspects of training and carry out its own specific projects. It will also organise courses and seminars and will establish a selective documentation centre on vocational training. The Centre will be managed by a Committee composed of representatives of the Commission, the Member States and the trade unions and employers. This will be the first time that the social partners will be involved in the active management of a European institution. This is a very welcome development.