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COMMUNICATION FROM MR VREDELING TO THE
FOURTEENTH MEETING OF THE STANDING
COMMITTEE ON EMPLOYMENT CONCERNING
WORK-SHARING

BRUSSELS, 12 MAY 1978.

The Chairman's conclusions at the end of the extremely fruitful and beneficial discussions at the meeting of the Standing Committee on Employment on 21 March last have been analysed carefully and in great detail by the Commission. This was done partly with a view to finalizing the preparations for the next Tripartite Conference, which is to examine the extent to which work-sharing could contribute to an overall strategy aimed at restoring economic growth and a return to full employment. This analysis should also lead to a swift response to the Committee's formal request for "new ideas and proposals, and means to enable Member States to compare their experience, in the light of the need to combat unemployment and inflation, maintain the Community's competitiveness on world markets and preserve the coherent development of the Community as a whole."

The Commission, in its analysis, naturally bore in mind the interest in work-sharing expressed by the European Council at its meeting of 7 and 8 April, when it stated that "the question as to whether work-sharing measures could play a key role in relieving present serious employment difficulties should be studied further".

Without prejudging the role that should be assigned to work-sharing in an overall strategy to promote employment, the other aspects of which would be determined by current research on other priority topics fixed by the Tripartite Conference of 1977, the Commission believed that point 8 of the Chairman's conclusions at the 21 March meeting should constitute the point of departure: "The Committee realized that the best approach to the unemployment problem was the creation of new jobs through an active economic, employment and investment policy. The Committee admitted, however, that in the present economic situation it would not be realistic, at least in the short term, to expect these policies to absorb current unemployment; consequently, work-sharing policies would have an important role to play in relieving the serious employment problems. The Committee stressed that it was essential to overcome the difficulties that would arise in connection with principles and application, particularly as regards costs, when it came to implementing work-sharing measures acceptable to all parties concerned".

In the light of the above and the views expressed by the different parties concerned at the meeting of 21 March respecting ways in which work-sharing might be implemented, the Commission proposes to explore as soon as possible, with Member States' Governments and both sides of industry, the possibility of Community action in the following areas:

(a) GENERAL SHORT-TERM MEASURES

1. Overtime

Based on a review of the main legal provisions and collective agreements on the question and an analysis of the causes militating in favour of overtime, the Commission will examine the possibility of promoting the adoption of a Community instrument designed to discourage or restrict overtime, if necessary by instituting paid compensatory time off to be taken at an appropriate time.

2. Temporary work

In connection with efforts to increase aid and cooperation between Member States in developing their institutions dealing with the labour market, the Commission should define the role of temporary employment agencies and examine the controls to which they should be subjected.

3. Extension of the right to training

It would be advisable to examine the possibility of promoting the adoption of legislation designed to develop training schemes for young people in the transition from school to full-time work, and stimulate, by the most appropriate means at Community level, the expansion of training leave and continuous training systems in the member countries.

(b) SECTORAL SHORT-TERM MEASURES

1. Shift work

In giving further consideration to shift work, particularly the specific contribution it could make to better work-sharing, the Commission proposes to invite employers and workers from the sectors where shift work is most prevalent to discuss together the advisability of encouraging a reduction in the hours at present worked by shift teams with a view to introducing an additional shift.

2. Improvement of work sharing in crisis sectors

The Commission is continuing its efforts to formulate a coherent social policy for the crisis sectors. It proposes to discuss, in collaboration with Member States' Governments and both sides of industry in the sectors concerned, the contribution that better work sharing might make to improving the employment situation. It is hoped the meetings will lead to the promotion, within the existing spectrum of legal measures or collective agreements, of those proving to be the most effective in the sector concerned.

(c) COMMUNITY INITIATIVE TO MODIFY THE ANNUAL VOLUME OF WORK PER WORKER

The Commission was particularly interested in the statements made by employers' and workers' representatives at the meeting of 21 March as regards the reduction of the annual volume of work per worker. In the next few weeks the Commission proposes to investigate the willingness of both sides of industry to open a dialogue on this possibility.

(d) MEDIUM-TERM INITIATIVES

1. Influence of social security on work-sharing

The Commission has just begun a study of the impact of methods of calculating social security contributions on overtime working. It proposes to go more deeply into the question of the effect that changes in retirement age or the introduction of more flexible retirement systems might have on job creation.

2. Part-time work and equal pay

The Commission proposes to study the measures which should be promoted to ensure that part-time work meets the specific needs and aspirations of certain groups of workers whilst ensuring that it will not impose abnormally high costs on undertakings or the community.

In the same vein, further study should be made of the specific problems created by the growing proportion of women on the labour market.

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The work outlined above, being undertaken by the Commission, is complex and will take a long time. The Commission can only bring it to a successful conclusion with the unfailing cooperation and confidence of the Governments and both sides of industry.

To ensure a sound basis of reciprocal information, the Commission recalls that at the meeting of 21 March it was agreed that "Member States will present the Commission with progress reports on the state of the law at national level".

The Commission will submit the first results obtained at the next Tripartite Conference. It will also report, in the most appropriate manner, on progress achieved in the meantime.