

Washington Report

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Workers' Skills in Europe¹

In the United States, a high point in the integration of economic and manpower policy was reached in 1964. In an unprecedented move, taxes were cut to accelerate economic expansion and thereby to reduce unemployment. At the same time, President Johnson in his annual manpower message called for an active manpower policy to complement our new national attack on poverty. This manpower policy seeks new attitudes and efforts geared to the three fundamental goals: (1) to develop the abilities of our people; (2) to create jobs which will make the most of these abilities; and (3) to match people and jobs.

These objectives generally parallel those of several Western European countries, which have come very close to attaining them. This report reviews manpower policy and programs in five of these countries: France, Great Britain, the Netherlands, Sweden, and West Germany.

Developing Skills

Training of adults for new or changing vocations has become a permanent

part of the manpower administration of each of the countries. In some of the countries, the manpower authorities are also either wholly or partly responsible for the vocational counseling of youths still in school and for placing them in jobs where they can receive training when they are ready to leave school.

There is a wide variation in the source and volume of training, methods of instruction, and the standards for admission. However, one feature is uniform: all of these countries pay liberal training allowances as related to worker's earnings.

France

In France, most adult job training is given in more than 100 training centers, most of which are operated by a tripartite organization under the aegis of the Ministry of Labor. Training is open to employed workers who wish to improve their skills as well as to the unemployed. The criteria for admission, however, screen out most prospective trainees who are over 35 years of age. Instruction is concentrated in the more skilled, technical, and semi-professional occupations, and accel-

1. For a copy of the complete report, "Developing Workers' Skills in Five Western European Countries," write to Dr. Vernon Sheblak, U. S. Department of Labor, Office of Manpower Policy, Evaluation and Research, 1730 M Street, N.W., Washington, D. C. 20036. Ask for Manpower Research Bulletin No. 11.

erated training methods permit the completion of most courses within a year.

Netherlands

The adult vocational training centers in the Netherlands are operated by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Public Health and the directors of the centers are aided by an advisory committee of employers and workers and by experts in vocational training. The Netherlands has been one of the pioneers in the use of programmed instruction material and a trainee is permitted to enter a course at any time and to work at his own pace. The Netherlands also has the highest upper-age limit for trainees of any of the countries studied. The demand for graduates of the Dutch training centers is predetermined from forecasts based on past employment trends.

Sweden

Sweden recently stepped up the pace of training and over 1 percent of the Swedish labor force is now being trained annually. Instruction is being given in a wide variety of occupations, many of them in trade and services. The Labor Market Board chooses the occupations in which training is to be given and cooperates with the educational authorities in developing the program of instruction, but the Ministry of Education either gives the instruction or arranges with a private training institution to do so. Training is open to adults who have been displaced or who are threatened with the loss of their jobs. The length of training varies with the occupations, and most trainees can enter a course at any time.

Great Britain

Great Britain is now developing a new plan of industrial training under

the Industrial Training Act of 1964. This act makes each industry responsible for developing and financing a training program to meet its specific needs. Forecasts of manpower and training needs for each industry are essential to the new British training plan. As a part of this developmental work, the Ministry of Labor, in consultation with the industry and the trade unions involved, is reviewing the duration of apprenticeship in various trades and the use being made of new training techniques. The Government training centers in Great Britain are in the forefront of new training developments.

Germany

In Germany, greater emphasis is given to on-the-job training and the apprenticeship system. It is customary in white-collar occupations as well as blue-collar trades to serve an apprenticeship, generally 3 years. One of the chief Government contributions to training is the partial financing of central training workshops to permit broader training than would otherwise be possible of apprentices who are employed in smaller establishments. Also, liberal grants and loans support private courses for skill development.

Youth Employment

None of the European countries studied has, in recent years, experienced serious unemployment of youth, although France, the Netherlands, and to some extent Great Britain and Germany, have begun to have sizable proportions of young people entering each year. All of the countries have increased their emphasis on education, and Sweden, Germany, and France have added one year to compulsory schooling.