

*Conf. on Exchanges April '86.*

REMARKS OF JOHN HUME MP MEP AT THE  
CONFERENCE ON EXCHANGES  
IN THE ROYAL DUBLIN HOTEL DUBLIN  
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The Founding Fathers of the European Community recognised the importance of encouraging the exchange of young workers between the Member States, and they made provision for it in the Treaty of Rome. Article 50 of the Treaty states that "Member States shall, within the framework of a joint programme, encourage the exchange of young workers".

The first joint programme was adopted in May 1964, the second programme in July 1979 and the third programme - which is the current one - runs from December 1984 to December 1989. The broad provisions of that exchange programme are known to most of you. The European Community will, under the programme, provide 75% of travel costs, and a standard amount for subsistence, accommodation etc which varies, according to the length and nature of the programme, from 100 to 180 ECU's per week. Certain 'innovative' and 'language' exchanges can attract a little more support.

The Agency for promoting such exchanges in the South has been AnCo, and in the North the Central Bureau for Educational Visits and Exchanges, though in some cases agencies from other states have promoted exchanges of Irish workers, and many Northern groups have applied through AnCo. In general the participation of the UK in this programme has been very low. However, the North of Ireland has a much higher rate of participation than regions in Britain. And the Republic participation has been on a higher level too; in fact, AnCo is the third largest promoter of exchanges in the Community.

The Third Programme which was adopted in December 1984 has one significant difference from the previous programmes. The Third Programme provides for exchanges not just of young workers in employment, but also of young unemployed who are actively seeking employment and have completed training courses. This provision makes it possible for young unemployed trained workers to broaden their experience, their knowledge of working conditions and opportunities elsewhere, and has the potential of increasing their employment prospects. It is, therefore, potentially an important development.

However, in spite of the provision of the founding fathers of the Community, far too few resources have been made available for exchanges. Only 3.3 million ECU's have been set aside for the current programme. With such a

tiny budget, only 1500 exchanges were arranged in the whole of the EEC in 1985, and it is unlikely the members can be much higher this year. Such a small programme cannot possibly make a really significant impact. Not only has the Community not made sufficient provision for exchanges; the member governments have made little or no provision at national level.

We have to be realistic in the present economic climate. With social services being slashed in the north, with mounting unemployment budgetary constraints everywhere in the EEC, we have to take careful note of priorities for the available cash.

Yet there is an important place for exchanges in the scheme of things, and within reasonable limits greater resources ought to be made available both at EEC and at national level. The most crippling and debilitating aspect of the current economic crisis is the huge level of unemployment. If that problem is to be effectively tackled, then every available resource must be thrown into the struggle. The most important resource we have is the skill, the energy the enterprise, the ingenuity, the imagination of our workers. Everything which develops those skills, encourages enterprise, sparks imagination or stimulates ingenuity must be promoted. I believe strongly that unemployment can only be conquered by the development of these latest qualities in our workforce. In the last ten years over 60% of the new jobs in the United States have been created in small undertakings employing less than 10 people. I believe that is the trend of the future. The day when we could hope that the big multinationals would solve unemployment with a series of massive plants employing thousands of people are gone. Small is beautiful! And in solving the unemployment problem it is small scale enterprises which are going to be our main hope.

The importance of exchanges should be seen in that context. Exchanges enable young workers to develop and refine their work - skills. Exchanges promote a greater awareness of the problems common to the world of work everywhere in Europe. Working in other countries enriches experience, promotes the generation of new ideas, encourages the adoption of these ideas to one's own environment. For that reason I believe they are an important aspect of our effort to break out of economic stagnation.

There is currently a proposal before the Council of Ministers for a Youth Exchange Scheme which would be much broader in scope than the present Young Workers Exchange. The "Y E S for Europe" Scheme as it has become known will apply to the 16-25 age group and will be open to anyone, employed or unemployed

students, youth groups, sporting groups. It is too early yet to say exactly what shape it will take, but it is hoped that decisions will be made before the end of this year. The fact that Commission and Council are thinking in these terms suggests that the impulse to create a real community in Europe is still strong, and that exchanges of workers, of students, of youth groups, all have an importance in furthering that course, which was the basic aim of those who brought the EEC into being.

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