TECHNOLOGY, LABOUR RELATIONS AND LABOUR MARKET

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The theme chosen for this working group could also have been termed 'Technology and Society'. Instead, we have opted for the more limited 'labour relations and labour market', as it was felt that in work relations and in work that the implications of technological society and of the 'informatisation de la société' (the title of the leading French report on the issue, by Simon Nora and Alai Minc) will be felt most directly.

The first point that the working group would wish to take up is precisely this one. It can be argued that there are other domains that will experience the effects of technology more dramatically, such as that of the transformation of consumer behaviour, or that of transport, or that of 'medical' consumption. However, it would probably be unwise to dwell too long on this particular point. In all likelihood, the effects will be strong in all domains and there may be a good argument for centering on the work sector in view of the central position that it occupies in Western societies.

A second point that requires clarification is the term 'technology' in the particular context of the interaction between education and work. It is often said that after the 'technological revolution', the near future will witness the 'computer revolution' (the 'révolution informatique'). Its implications for the economy, for the labour market and for society at large are expected to be as far-reaching as those of the technological revolution, but they will come much faster and leave much less time for preparation. From an expensive commodity, available only to the elite of the business world and to central administrations, it is on its way to become an article of mass consumption, accessible to everybody and able to take over many functions in production, in the services and also in people's private lives.

It can be argued that the computer is more than just another technological achievement, that it means a fundamentally new way of dealing with the outside world, that it does not just allow to replace manpower but that it introduces a qualitatively different way of production, requiring from those involved a new way of
thinking, new kinds of planning. In the same vein it is argued that working with a computer requires new modes of thinking, an entirely new relationship to information, qualities that young people seem to develop quite easily.

However this may be, the working group thinks it useful to define somewhat more closely what 'technology' means in the context of work and work relations.

The main theme that the working group has to consider is, however, that of the interaction between education on the one hand and economy, work and work relations on the other. Most educationalists would certainly agree that this represents a double challenge: education must prepare young and not so young people for this future and, secondly, it has a role to play in shaping it. In other words, it should not just react to current or predicted technological developments, but also attempt to affect their nature and course in line with its perception of desirable goals and values that should guide educational and social (but also economic) policies.

The first of these two dimensions corresponds to what manpower planning has attempted to do in the past - or what it should have attempted to do, i.e. to adjust the quantitative and qualitative needs of the economy. Most available forecasts of the implications of new technologies for the labour market are highly speculative and not of much help for educational policy. As a result of the lack of forecasts value-loaded views prevail. Or maybe, they should prevail, in view not only of the lack of precision of forecasts, but also because of the immeasurable social implications of the new technologies.

The workshop would probably not be able to bring together and analyse the very dispersed literature on this aspect of the problem, but a modest amount of stocktaking may be desirable in order to define tentative broad directions. Thus it would be very helpful some clarity could be obtained as to the kind of jobs that are likely to appear and the type of jobs that are likely to disappear as a result of the massive introduction of new technologies. It seems equally important to know, who at present occupies the jobs that may disappear, and who is likely to get those that will appear. The social and educational characteristics of these subgroups must be known for educational policy to be able to exploit this kind of data (or learned guesses, with regard to future developments). Men and women, school graduates with different patterns of achievement and perhaps with different personality characteristics, appear to be differently concerned and affected. (A question that comes to the mind in this context is, for example, who are the ones that most easily and effortlessly by become 'computer freaks'; what about the hypothesis that
learning by computers isolates children from each other, has a-social effects?).

A second, equally important but much larger question is in what way work and work relations (and also work conditions) will be affected by the new technologies. There are work-external aspects to this: reducing working time, problems of control over and access to data ('Datenschutz') and the like, but also work-internal ones, related to the type of competencies and attitudes that will be required. If it is true that the 'computer age' will require new ways of thinking, then this will affect work and work relations in the first place.

The second dimension of the theme, i.e. the role that education should play in shaping the technological future - and, for what concerns the working group, primarily the world of work in the largest sense - is probably even more difficult to handle. Certainly, there is a vast literature about educational objectives and priorities, but equally a low degree of consensus as to the personality characteristics that should be developed in children (or, perhaps, rather an abstract consensus that does not have very much effect on pedagogical behaviour). The present debate about 'quality' in education is revealing in this respect: The equality objective, after having been predominant in educational policies, has been virtually relegated to history. Similarly, competition between pupils has again become a virtue - and one that may be very useful in a future technological society.

It may help to study in some detail what objectives are being pursued by policy makers and educationalists in introducing computer technology in the curriculum and in making schools, teachers and pupils 'computer-minded'.

The theme of 'education and the new technologies' lends itself more than any other theme to comparative education study, because of the eminently 'international' origin of and control over the technological development. The sub-theme for the working group is even more relevant to comparative educationalists, as the developments in the world of work are even more dependent on international influences than those in other domains. Furthermore, the developed countries have taken up the challenge of new technologies for education in different ways and at different speeds. This should provide useful material for comparative analysis.