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OPENING ADDRESS

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OPENING ADDRESS

By ERNST MICHANEK

Secretary of State, Ministry of Social Affairs, Labour and Housing, Sweden

MR. PRESIDENT, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,

In a treatise on hours of work and welfare levels, Professor Verdoorn of Leyden has reminded us of the development of working hours during the so-called industrial revolution. Expensive machines were introduced. For economic reasons these machines had to be utilized as much as possible. Consequently long hours were considered necessary for the undertaking. At the same time gas-light was invented and it became technically possible to work at any time of the day or night. The old type of master, a patriarch for his journeymen, gave way to the industrialist, for whom the worker was a kind of machine, which should be utilized to the greatest possible extent. Economic, social and technical conditions combined to the effect that working hours were prolonged, in some cases almost indefinitely.

At that time, and long after, working conditions were determined by factors other than the working man. The worker had to adapt himself to the techniques of production—and if he could not, so much worse for him. I need not recall the horrors of industrial production of passed times, nor remind you that intolerable conditions of work still exist in too many trades and workplaces.

Now we are at the threshold of a new industrial revolution—‘ the revolution of automation ’, ‘ the revolution of the atom ’ or whatever future historians will label it.

But a revolution is taking place not only in the technological field. Perhaps even more important is the change of economic and social conditions, the development which is taking place in the thinking regarding the relationships between man and man, between man and work. I think it is Toynbee who has said that this century will be remembered in future history not so much because of its technological achievements as because for the first time *the wellbeing of all* has now been set up as an objective of practical action of mankind.

One of the greatest achievements of our time is in my opinion the concept of *full employment*. I say ‘ the concept ’, because in most parts of the world we are very far from having obtained full employment—and where attained, its maintenance has turned out to be a great problem.

However, the goal has been put up, and I think we can assure from experience that those who have once reached full employment will fight like lions to secure their achievement.

Another ideological change of our days is the development towards *security*. Indeed it seems just now, that we are more advanced in the fields of social security, income security and job security than in the field covered by the mandate of the Security Council of the United Nations, but in a great many countries governments and organizations are devoting more and more of their endeavours to creating remedies for the insecurity, which has been the curse of mankind for so long if not always.

In recent years the claims regarding full employment have become deeper, more qualified, as it were. The eradication of unemployment is no longer considered as a satisfactory goal of economic and social policy. In this country, as in others, we want to develop unemployment policy into employment policy. What this means I can most simply describe by quoting a resolution, which was adopted by the International Labour Organization last June at its general conference. The ILO, including governments and workers and employers from 100 countries, unanimously called upon the governments “ to adopt the objective of full, productive and freely chosen employment, being understood to mean (a) that there should be work for all who are available for and seeking work; (b) that the jobs available should be as productive as possible; (c) that there should be freedom of choice of employment and the fullest possible opportunity for each worker to qualify for, and to use his

acquired skills and natural endowments in a job for which he is well suited, irrespective of race, sex, creed, age or personal origin ”.

These are not mere words. In Sweden, for instance, we say nowadays that full employment must include opportunities for all—including the handicapped, the old, the married women, the population of remote areas etc.—to make use of their working capacity as far as it goes. Government agencies and employers should join forces in taking care of the willingness and ability for work of everybody. If, in this period of technological change and reorientation of production and, as we see it, of permanent scarcity of manpower, the necessary mobility of labour needs to be furthered by retraining, relocation or other measures of adaptation, this should no longer be the individual's own burden but the concern of Society as a whole. We have *begun* to turn these ideas into practical measures, and we feel sure that we speed up the economic development and the prosperity of the whole population by increasing public expenditure for these purposes—not to mention that we enhance individual satisfaction and happiness.

Likewise, having obtained a high degree of income security by means of general social insurance, it is felt in many quarters, in this country as elsewhere, that it is now time to take a step further, making, as it were, the well-being of the individual a public concern.

There is a word in our political vocabulary—the word of ‘trivsel’—which I am afraid I cannot translate adequately, but what we aim at is the *sense of satisfaction*, which you obtain if conditions are just next to ideal. Another political slogan, which has been used very much in recent years, I think I can translate in the three words “*Focus on Man*”.

It would seem, that this is exactly what *Ergonomics* aim at—to put the individual in focus, to use the new methods and possibilities of modern technology, medicine and psychology with a view to creating a sense of satisfaction, which will produce the happy man and woman *and* the best and most efficient worker.

The thesis of ergonomics is to adapt the work to the individual worker. This seems to me to be quite the opposite of what occurred during the first industrial revolution. At that time the invention of artificial light brought hardship to the worker as it increased his working hours beyond the tolerable limits. Now we use ‘the arts of light’, if I may say so, to ease the strain on the working man. Instead of simply trying to counteract by protective measures the risks of industrial injuries at dangerous and hard work, we set our goals higher and try to create the optimal conditions, where the work is neither dangerous nor fatiguing.

I do not know whether Sweden is a pioneer in the field of ergonomics, although I have the greatest respect for the achievements of our scientists and practitioners in the field of industrial hygiene and other disciplines within the area of ergonomics. I am not sure that the Swedish Government has set any worth-while example as a supporter of your science and its application. I am afraid it is true to say that a great number even among those who ought to know better get puzzled by the terms of ergonomics or biotechnology, although their knowledge of Greek may be sufficient for a literal translation.

But you have come here to give and take, to exchange knowledge and experience, and I wish on behalf of the Government to extend to you all the most hearty welcome to Sweden. We are happy and proud that this country has been chosen as the place for the First International Congress of Ergonomics. The Ministry of Labour and the Labour Market Authorities including the Labour Inspectorate welcome without reservation the educational activities of this conference and the propaganda, in favour of research in the field of ergonomics which your meetings and study tours will produce.

Although I am not an authorized spokesman of the organizations of the labour market I feel entitled to say that my words of welcome are supported by the parties of the Swedish labour market, workers and employers. We do feel that in the field of labour-management relations this country is in the happy position of having set a good example. I should like to recommend to our visitors to study this bipartite cooperation also in the field of ergonomics, which seems to be as good as in other fields of common interest to employers and workers.

Your activities, ladies and gentlemen, are of utmost importance for the workers and the employers in general in their common endeavours to increase productivity and to create satisfactory conditions of work. But no less will be the importance of your findings and your practical experience for those public agencies, which are concerned with the training and adaptation to work of the physically or mentally handicapped and the older members of the labour force—those people for whom ergonomics is the scientific approach not only to making work *human*, but to making work *possible*. Ergonomics will also, I am sure, help our housewives to make their work in our homes easier—and I think our Government agencies working in the field of home economics could benefit very much from your activities.

If I may speak for the general public we should, however, welcome your findings not only because you are helping to make *work* easier and more meaningful, but also because your endeavours will help to make *life* easier and fuller. Having studied a few items of ergonomic research it has appeared to me that those who are interested in increasing the opportunities of leisure should watch very carefully the activities of ergonomists. A few years ago a Swedish tripartite commission, appointed by the Government, unanimously proposed a general reduction of hours of work, which has now been peacefully put into effect. The motives put forward for this proposal were *not* that for reasons of health it would be necessary to reduce working hours. The motive was that the Swedish people apparently wanted to make a *choice* in favour of some more leisure when considering how to make the best use of the fruits of increased productivity, and workers were, generally speaking, prepared to abstain from the corresponding possibilities of wage increases.

Now we are discussing another increase of leisure time. In the meantime—if you will allow me to be just a little human for one minute—the noise of jet aeroplanes, transistor radio sets, racing boats and motorcycles is terrorizing our leisure; smog and motorcar exhaust gases are giving us headaches; our lakes and rivers are flooded by off-flow; our roads are jammed, our short summers are wetter and our long winters seem to be even darker than before; and our neighbours are getting more irritated and making us more irritable, while you, ladies and gentlemen, are making our workplaces clean, silent, air-conditioned, well-lighted, restful, carefully climatized, and managed by well-trained psychologists ready to settle all disputes peacefully.

If we do not make full use of the results of your work for the life outside the workshops, the choice will probably be for *longer* hours at work.

Well—to be serious again—I am sure you will sell the idea of ergonomics to employers, because it is both an economic and a humanitarian matter; to workers, because it is a way to increase productivity without increasing exploitation; and to the general public, because it is a way to make life easier and longer and richer for all of us.

I wish you great success in your important work and a pleasant time in this country of ours.

Thank you.