

INFORMATION

SOCIAL AFFAIRS

PROGRESS REPORT ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SOCIAL ACTION PROGRAMME

70/74

Almost two years have elapsed since the Heads of State or Government meeting in Paris in October 1972 invited the Community's institutions to draw up a social action programme before the end of 1973. The Commission carried out this mandate when it presented a draft programme to the Council of Ministers in October 1973. The Council, after consulting the European Parliament and the Economic and Social Committee, adopted the programme by a formal resolution of 21 January 1974. The Council expressed the "political will" to adopt the measures necessary to achieve a number of objectives in the social field covering the period from 1974 to 1976 and laid down a list of priorities concerning which the Commission will submit the necessary proposals during 1974.

First set of proposals

The Commission had, in fact, submitted concrete proposals for seven immediate actions to the Council several weeks after submitting the social action programme. These actions were:

- 1) assistance from Article 4 of the Social Fund for migrant and handicapped workers;
- 2) an action programme for handicapped workers in an open market economy;
- 3) the setting up of a European General Industrial Safety Committee and the extension of the competence of the Mines Safety and Health Commission;
- 4) a directive providing for the approximation of legislation of Member States concerning the application of the principle of equal pay for men and women;
- 5) the designation as an immediate objective of the overall application of the 40-hour working week by 1975 and 4 weeks annual paid holiday by 1976;
- 6) the setting up of a European Foundation for the improvement of the environment and of living and working conditions;
- 7) a directive on the approximation of the Member States' legislation on collective dismissals.

At the Council of Ministers in Luxembourg on 10 June 1974, the texts of the first three actions listed above were approved and thus became the first proposals of the social action programme to be implemented by the Council. The directive concerning mass dismissals was also on the agenda but at the request of one delegation it was postponed for decision until the next meeting later this year. The other three immediate actions, nos. 4), 5) and 6) above, may also be decided at this meeting as they have been discussed and approved by the European Parliament and the Economic and Social Committee.

Second set of proposals

The Commission had also undertaken to submit to the Council before 1 April 1974 proposals concerning:

- 1) an initial action programme for migrant workers;
- 2) the setting up of a European Vocational Training Centre;
- 3) a directive on the harmonisation of laws for the protection of the acquired rights of workers in the case of mergers and takeovers.

The Commission's proposals for 2) was sent to the Council before 1 April and for 3) after a short delay to allow for consultations with national legal experts. The normal consultation with the European Parliament and the Economic and Social Committee is now proceeding and the Council could be in a position to take the necessary decisions before the end of 1974. It is worth recalling that the Council has committed itself to act on the various Commission proposals at the latest five months after the Commission has informed the Council of the results of its deliberations arising from the opinions of the European Parliament and the Economic and Social Committee, if such consultations have taken place. Otherwise the Council will take action at the latest nine months after receiving the Commission's proposals.

Concerning 1) above, the initial action programme for migrant workers, the Commission submitted a progress report to the Council setting out in detail a number of specific actions which can be undertaken within the existing legal framework. At the same time Vice-President Hillery announced that the Commission, in accordance with the Council resolution, was preparing an action programme for migrant workers and their families to be submitted before the end of the year. A special task force is now preparing the various proposals which will have as aims:

- improvement of the conditions of free movement within the Community of workers from Member States;
- humanising this free movement by providing effective assistance during the various phases. Article 4 of the Social Fund, as mentioned above is now available to assist migrants and their families;

- achievement of equality of treatment for Community and non-Community workers and their families concerning living and working conditions, wages and economic rights;
- consultation on immigration policies towards non-Member States.

Actions between now and end of 1974

In accordance with the Council resolution the Commission between now and the end of the year will be presenting proposals for a further series of priority actions which will include:

- 1) action to achieve equality between men and women as regards access to employment, vocational training and promotion. A directive to strengthen the application of Article 119 of the Rome Treaty concerning equal pay for equal work has already been sent to the Council as stated above;
- 2) an initial action programme for health and safety at work beginning in those sectors where working conditions appear to be most difficult. The Council has already approved the Commission proposals to set up a European Advisory Committee on Safety, Hygiene and Health Protection at Work and to increase the powers of the Mines Safety and Health Commission;
- 3) the legal framework to permit the implementation in cooperation with the Member States of specific measures to combat poverty by drawing up pilot schemes. The Commission has already set up a working group of national experts to advise on future proposals and the results of a seminar held in June will give valuable help in the drawing up of the pilot schemes;

The Council resolution also referred to measures necessary to achieve:

- a) appropriate consultations between Member States on their employment policies and social protection policies and the promotion of better cooperation by national employment services;
- b) the progressive involvement of workers or their representatives in the life of undertakings in the Community and better involvement of management and labour in the economic and social decisions of the Community.

Concerning a), the Commission is actively engaged in promoting such consultations and cooperation in ways which do not require new Council decisions although proposals for such decisions will be made if found necessary.

Concerning b), Commission proposals for giving workers more influence in the administration of firms through the two-tier board system have already been made in the draft statute for a European Company and in the Fifth directive for the harmonisation of company law.

In the context of greater participation, the Commission intends to extend the present system of Joint Committees representing employers and trade unions which have helped in improving working conditions in the sectors of agriculture, road transport, inland waterways, sea fishing and railways. The work of the committees in facilitating collective agreements will be helped by the scheme the Commission has begun for setting up a European index of collective agreements.

A conference planned for the month of November on the subject of "Work organisation, technical development and motivation of the individual" will give the Commission valuable help in drafting its proposals on improving working conditions and assuring greater involvement for workers in the life of undertakings.

A number of other measures, already outlined in the Social Action Programme but not taken up in the Council resolution, will also be presented during this year. They include:

- plans for improving the analysis, forecasting and research on the labour market;
- proposals for an improved system of social indicators.

The Commission sees the Social Action Programme, together with the corresponding Council resolution, as a flexible framework which, while setting the principal objectives for social policy during the next three years, also enables the Commission to react to unexpected circumstances and to take direct action in presenting to the Council the proposals and reports as may be necessary.

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