

Meeting of Committee of Social Affairs and
Employment of the European Parliament -

22nd January, 1976

Brunel

Speaking Notes of Dr. P.J. HILLERY
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of the European Communities

I am very glad to be able to report to you that during its session on 18th December, 1975, the Council for Social Affairs adopted a proposal of fundamental importance for the social progress of ^{the} millions of women in our Community. I refer of course to the Directive on Equality of Treatment between Men and Women as regards access to employment and working conditions.

This Directive, which complements the Directive adopted in 1974 on Equal Pay, provides for a means for any woman who considers that she has been the object of discrimination based on sex or matrimonial or family status to enforce her rights before the national court and, where necessary, the Court of Justice of the Communities.

This is a very important stage in the development of the social policy of the Community and ^{success} its/is due in no small measure to the whole-hearted support which this Committee has given to the Commission's proposal. The fact that we have had such a satisfactory result is all the more welcome, coming as it does at a time when financial constraints are a difficult obstacle to social innovation.

Another subject of great importance and concern to the Commission and to this Committee discussed at the December Council was Migrant Workers. I am pleased to be able to tell you that the Council adopted a positive Resolution which gives the necessary political background for the progressive development of specific actions to improve the situation of the migrants.

One of these implementing measures was in fact adopted at the December Council itself, namely, a Community Regulation providing for freedom of trade union rights throughout the Community for citizens of the member States.

The Council also agreed to the extension of the decision on the intervention by the European Social Fund on behalf of persons working in the textile sector and the extension of such intervention to cover the clothing sector.

The Council also considered the Commission's Third Annual Report on the new European Social Fund and approved a Regulation dealing with statistics for migrant workers.

While I am pleased to be able to inform you of these very positive results, the Commission regrets to have to say that the Council was unable to agree on the proposals to open the Social Fund to structural adjustment operations connected with the recession, despite the unanimous support of both the European Parliament and the Economic and Social Committee. The Commission will, nevertheless, search for solutions to the problem under the present regulation. Similarly, the exchange of views on the Commission proposal to provide a standard system for the payment of family benefits to workers with family living in a member State other than the country of employment produced no agreements.

Having summarised the results of the Council on Social Affairs of 18th December, I should like very briefly to outline the main aspects of the action the Commission intends to take in the social field this year.

It has always been the Commission's aim that Community social policy should not be limited solely to those areas which are specifically social, but include the social aspects of other Community policies. This aim should be given renewed impetus in 1976 since the remedies to the present situation involve concerted action by those responsible for economic and social policies.

It is in this context of contacts in which the economic and social aspects cannot be dissociated that the Commission intends to prepare the Tripartite Conference and the medium-term economic policy programme, both of which will play a considerable part in certain social programmes linked to future expansion in the Community.

In the field of employment, the Commission will continue to collect and develop current data and analyse problems occurring in the present economic situation, particularly in the context of the programme of labour market studies. The cooperation between employment services will be developed, particularly as regards regular meetings of the Directors-General for Employment. In this context, our support action to national services will continue, particularly for problems of re-training and employment prospects for migrant workers. Lastly, a report will be drawn up by a group of independent experts to pinpoint the main problems of employment over the next few years to assist the Commission in planning future action.

As regards vocational training, the Commission will submit, in June, a recommendation aimed at encouraging the development of further practical vocational training for young people looking for work and, before the end of the year, a recommendation of vocational training for women workers.

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As regards freedom of movement for workers, the Commission will shortly propose measures to be adopted to combat illegal immigration. Other proposals expected to be brought forward this year in implementation of the Migrants' Action Programme will be :

the concertation of migration policies of member States; and

the participation of migrants in local Community life.

The question of social security for Turkish workers will continue to occupy the Commission's attention this year. The Commission's services have also begun the necessary work preparatory to the implementation of the provisions of the Protocol to ^{the} Association Agreement with Turkey relating to freedom of movement of migrant workers.

The Social Fund will continue - where appropriate in close cooperation with other Community financial instruments and particularly with the Regional Fund - to take action on behalf of training and mobility of workers in all the fields which have been opened to it : unemployment and under-employment in developing regions; farmers leaving the land; workers in the textile and clothing industry requiring re-training; persons affected by difficulties in certain groups of undertakings; adjustment of workers to technical progress; migrant workers; the handicapped; unemployed persons aged under 25. The latter action for young people, started in the last months of 1975, will be consolidated and organized on a more selective basis. Furthermore, the Commission intends to carry out as soon as possible the review of all the rules and regulations governing the operation of the Social Fund and will submit proposals to the Council at the end of 1976.

As regards worker participation in the management of ~~the~~ undertakings, the Commission will pursue its work this year on the "European Company" statute and the harmonisation of the structures of limited companies.

The Commission is currently examining the possibility of requiring all multinational companies to regularly inform all representatives of workers in their subsidiaries of the economic and social situation of the company.

In the field of living and working conditions, the Commission plans to take new specific action in the following sectors:

As regards salaries, income and assets, it will prepare a report on the system of encouragement of personal asset formation by workers. A study on the lowest salaries in the Community will also be drawn up in the second half of 1976.

In respect of social protection and security, the Commission will submit proposals aimed at the extension of social protection, particularly in the context of social security, to categories of persons not covered or insufficiently covered, and at the gradual achievement of equality of treatment between men and women in social security.

The first European Social Budget (1970-75) forwarded to the Council in December 1974 and revised at the latter's request, will be available in the first quarter.

Moreover, during this year, the Commission will be evaluating the progress of the poverty programme and considering future developments in this field.

The action programme for migrant workers, the subject of the Council Resolution of 18 December 1975, will be implemented. The Commission will propose the following measures in the second half of the year :

- Consultation between member States and non-member countries in respect of migration policy;

- In the context of work aimed at the granting of special rights to citizens of member States, examination of the possibilities of ensuring the effective participation of all migrants in the life of the local authorities of the host countries.

The conclusions of a report on the situation of workers in the case of individual redundancies will be examined - in the first half of the year - with the representatives of both sides of industry, with a view to submitting proposals to the Council in this field.

In the course of the year, the Commission will also draw up a long-term programme for the social rehabilitation of the handicapped, which will be forwarded to the Council.

The Commission report on the humanisation of work will, however, be submitted to the Council in the first quarter. The problem will then be studied in conjunction with the European Foundation for the improvement of living and working conditions.

As regards health protection, the Commission has undertaken a study on the radiological effect of nuclear expansion, paying particular attention to radioactive pollution on the Rhine, the Meuse and coastal waters, and the risks to which the population would be exposed.

In addition, a number of studies and proposals are in hand on the drawing up of common criteria for ~~manufacture~~ health protection standards for the major environmental pollutants.

The Commission will also propose an action programme on safety, hygiene and health protection at work on the basis of "guidelines" drawn up in 1975. Following work started at the time of the setting up of the Advisory Committee with responsibility in these fields, it will propose measures to remove the dangers inherent in some manufacturing processes in the chemical industry.

Lastly, it will define medium-term research objectives in the social field, using the ECSC Treaty as a basis.

Pursuant to the conclusions of the 1972 Paris Summit, the Commission intends to develop the active participation of both sides of industry in the formulative of Community policies. In this respect, it envisages aid to worker organisations with a view to the creation of a European trade union institute and, at the same time, it plans to develop its relations with both sides of industry in various sectors with a view, on the one hand, to joint consultations on common policies and, on the other, to a greater number of joint meetings in the major economic sectors.

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To complete this brief review of the present situation in regard to the implementation of the Social Action Programme I would like to remind the Committee of a number of important proposals which have already been submitted by the Commission and examined by the Parliament and are now before the Council. These proposals, which will undoubtedly come up at the next Council, relate, respectively, to:-

- the protection of workers' acquired rights in the case of change of ownership of firms; and
- the education of migrants children.