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PRESS RELEASE

M. Levi Sandri presents Report  
on the Social Situation in the Communities  
to the European Parliament

On 13 March Professor Lionello Levi Sandri, a Vice-President of the Commission, presented to the European Parliament the report covering developments in the social situation within the Community during 1967.

Reviewing briefly the work done in the social field in the course of the last ten years, M. Levi Sandri pointed out that the Community institutions had undertaken, sometimes in difficult conditions but with a fair measure of success, the specific tasks laid upon them by the European Treaties. The most positive results had been achieved in those fields where the Treaties had given the executive bodies of the Communities - Councils, Commissions and the High Authority - the powers necessary to attain specific objectives such as the free movement of workers, social security for migrant workers and the European Social Fund required by the Treaty of Paris, or the aid for readaptation and loans for conversion envisaged in the Coal and Steel Community's Treaty of Paris. It could also be said that in the individual countries the social results of the progressive achievement of European integration have on the whole been decidedly positive. During the years under review there had been an increase in numbers employed and a great decrease in unemployment, at any rate until the appreciable business slump which had recently affected the position but was now being overcome. Wages in the Common Market countries had undergone a sharper overall increase than in most other large industrial countries, and the differences of level between individual countries had narrowed considerably. There had also been an appreciable reduction in the length of the working week and notable progress in the field of social security as a result of the gradual extension of social security benefits to further categories of beneficiaries and of the higher degree of protection.

After analysing the way the very concepts of social law and social policy had evolved, M. Levi Sandri explained the main priorities that the Commission had in mind for its future work in this field.

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The Commission's first aim would be to treat social problems as an integral part of the common and other policies. There were prospects for development particularly in those sectors where the Commission intended to tackle fresh tasks: in industrial policy, energy policy, regional policy and policy on scientific research. Social policy should help provide an answer to one of the major problems which would confront the Member States and the Commission in the coming years, namely that of structural change. The second programme of medium-term economic policy that the Commission would be submitting shortly to the Council would be based mainly on this structural aspect, and it was from this same angle that the common agricultural policy, too, would be breaking new ground. The same went for industrial policy, where stress would be laid on the structural adaptation of enterprises and the general policy on structure. "Change" would also be a key word in connection with the economic and social aspects of regional policy, energy policy and policy on scientific and technical research.

The second priority at Community level would be to find solutions to employment problems, so that the worker, far from becoming a victim of social change, should gain from it. With this aim in view the Commission would review and expand the proposals already put forward for a complete overhaul of the European Social Fund in the light of the possibilities offered by Article 126 of the Treaty of Rome. The reformed Fund would have to take its place in an overall policy on employment and vocational training.

The same concepts had guided the Commission in the choice of priorities for its work on labour relations. Both managements and workers had a decisive role to play in the search for more efficacious solutions to the problems raised by structural change. In all Community countries there was a very distinct trend towards greater collaboration between the employers' associations and the trade unions, and between them and the public authorities. The Commission had always been convinced of the fundamental character of such collaboration, which would make it possible to arrive at a common determination to achieve greater social justice through the control of balanced economic expansion. The Commission would therefore continue to attach the greatest importance to the thorough examination, by both sides of industry, of its guidelines on social policy, not only in the institutions that had been officially established at Community level, but also in bi- or tri-partite working parties set up to tackle specific problems.

The fourth and last sphere to which the Commission proposed to give priority covered the complex of conditions of living. Here particular attention should be paid to social security. The various Governments were confronted with a major problem, that of the heavy increase in expenditure. Difficult choices had to be made and it was possible that in certain situations the authorities would have, for financial reasons, to resort to restrictive measures. Covering deficits in the short or medium term involved possible lines of

action: an increase in receipts, a decrease in expenditure, and participation by the State, which in the final analysis raised the question of who would bear, and in what proportions, the weight of the restrictive measures deemed inevitable. This meant that such measures were conceivable only in the framework of an overall programme where all requirements were fairly balanced and all legitimate interests safeguarded.

M. Levi Sandri went on to refer to other work being done by the Commission. Freedom of movement for workers, for example, must be complete by 1 July of this year and the co-ordination of social security arrangements for migrant workers must be improved and simplified. At the same time the work being done on industrial health and safety would be intensified and widened.

M. Levi Sandri concluded by expressing his conviction that the European Parliament would not fail to support, as actively as in the past, the steps the Commission intended to take in order to give fresh drive to the Community's social policy.

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