

ADDRESS BY M. LEVI SANDRI

in Strasbourg

on 15 April 1964

European democracy, social policy and role of the trade unions

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Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would first like to thank you very sincerely for this invitation to take part in the third European Conference of Christian Trade Unions. I consider it a very great honour to be able to address you at the opening of this conference.

Other Community obligations - the Council of Ministers is sitting today in Brussels - have prevented President Hallstein and other colleagues of mine from being present. But I have the pleasure of conveying to you their cordial greetings and their best wishes for the success of your work. I wish to add my own greetings and wishes as the member of the EEC Commission responsible for social affairs.

Your meeting is taking place at a critical moment in the process of European integration - or rather during one of the many critical moments which have been and will be experienced in this process. At present we are on the eve of the Kennedy Round negotiations, we are in the middle of discussions to fix certain agricultural prices, and we are seeking agreement to merge the executives before the end of the year as an essential step towards the merger of the Communities. As you see there is no lack of problems - and I have only mentioned the main ones that are exercising us at the present time.

In connection with one of these problems - the merger of the executives and the Communities -, attention has been drawn repeatedly to the need to strengthen the democratic character of the developing European Community. More and more proposals and suggestions have been put forward of late. There is talk of widening the powers of the European Parliament, of direct election - either totally or in part - of the Parliament and of extending the powers of the Economic and Social Committee.

It is clear, as I had occasion to say recently during a similar meeting of the Unions, that it will not be possible to speak of a truly democratic Community until we have an elected European Parliament putting into power a responsible European Government.

In the meantime we must use other means and systems to infuse an increasing measure of effective democracy into Community life. I think people are inclined to attach too little importance to the part that can be played in this context by the two sides of industry, in particular by the workers' organizations. Europe must not consist only of meetings between heads of governments or ministers; it must not be a Europe of technocrats and boards of directors - it must be a true human Community, made by man for man. All present-day development must be directed towards the individual, who should enjoy, thanks to such development, improved possibilities of advancement, which will help him in his turn to contribute in greater measure to the well-being of society. If we want European integration to succeed, we must have the co-operation of all sectors of society, especially of the great mass of workers who, through their trade unions, must be able to co-operate effectively and more and more closely in European development. In my opinion it is high

time that, in addition to the European Parliament and the Economic and Social Committee, machinery for co-operation should be set up to enable the organizations on both sides of industry to play, as effectively and as fully as possible, their part in the construction of Europe.

From those remarks you will realize that I attach great importance to your activities and discussions, and to the results of your conference which will reflect the feelings, needs and aspirations of the great masses you represent.

Since I am responsible for social affairs, I shall naturally be particularly interested to hear what you say on the subject.

I have read your Secretariat's report; its judgment on our social policy seems to me to be very realistic and to give a true picture of the interplay of national and Community forces.

I recognize that so far work has been concentrated on the strict implementation of certain provisions of the Treaty which lay down or permit precise courses of action; and we must admit that, despite obstacles and difficulties well known to many of you, substantial progress has been made in this sphere. On the other hand, in sectors where the Treaty gives freer play to initiative by the Community institutions, such initiative has been kept within relatively modest bounds in consequence of a combination of circumstances which have been very well summed up in your Secretariat's report.

This kind of situation is not peculiar to the social sector. In other spheres where the Treaty has not set precise time-limits we are faced with similar situations for the simple reason that the European spirit of 1964 is not that of 1951 or 1957. But if such a situation is prolonged in the social sphere it will certainly be alarming. We all know that European integration must be achieved progressively but harmoniously. And we also know - as we have stated and heard stated on numerous occasions - that social aims are of special importance to integration as a whole. We must therefore prevent any delay that would be harmful to the whole process of integration from arising and persisting in the social sector.

For this reason, each of our Community institutions must do its job thoroughly - must do everything laid down or permitted by the Treaty and explore all the possibilities of the system to the full, so that each institution faces its own responsibilities squarely. On behalf of the EEC Commission I can assure you that such is its precise intention and that it will continue to advance along the lines indicated in its Action Programme for the Second Stage.

In these activities we of the Commission hope you will be with us at all times; we look to you for continued enlightenment and support - a contribution that must be intensified in the common interest: the information you supply to your national organizations, so that their activity may be influenced and guided more and more by Community problems and decisions; and the information and support you give to the institutions themselves and to the governments, so that the close co-operation in social matters referred to in Article 118 of the Treaty may be achieved on an increasing scale and lead,

progressively but effectively, to the levelling upwards of living and working conditions which is one of the most important objectives of the Treaty of Rome. I believe that for this purpose it will be found necessary to reorganize and strengthen your organizations at Community level. If you want Europe to emerge as a supranational body, you too will have to adopt a more solid form of organization on a Community scale by creating true European confederations. If the pattern of co-operation to which I alluded can become more and more close-knit by calling on all who have a voice in social matters to work together, each according to his own responsibilities, the results we shall be enabled to achieve will perhaps be greater than would have been possible if the Treaty of Rome had defined the Community's social policy less imprecisely and less vaguely. It would not be the first time that a gap in the law - or a treaty - enabled men of good will to attain more substantial results on the social and human plane. Of course, men of good will they must be, men resolved, in this particular case, to act in the interest of the European cause, which is identified with the cause of workers since it is the cause of freedom and peace.

Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen, I can assure you that my sympathies are all with you, that you can count on my whole-hearted support, and that I shall not fail to study the results of your Conference carefully. In so far as they fall within my province and I have the means to do so, I shall make every effort to further its aims. I wish you every success in your labours, which will no doubt contribute to the achievement of a harmoniously integrated democratic Europe, a human and social Europe for which we are working day in day out, you as much as we, a Europe to which we can worthily devote all our energies.