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PRESS RELEASE

"The great principles upheld by the International Labour Organization - freedom to work, freedom to form trade unions and priority for social objectives - are also upheld by the six countries of the European Economic Community and fully recognized on the plane of Community organization."

This was the main theme of an address delivered this morning in Geneva at the 47th meeting of the International Labour Conference by EEC Commissioner M. Lionello Levi Sandri.

M. Levi Sandri pointed out that some of the EEC's social objectives, such as free movement of workers, social security of migrant workers and the Social Fund were specific, while others were of general scope and fell within the wider objectives of the Community.

The machinery needed to attain specific objectives was already in action; the steps taken recently by the EEC Commission and those to be taken in the near future concerned more general objectives.

The Commission's first concern was an employment policy under which full use could be made at all times of available manpower. Remarkable progress had already been made. Between January 1958 and December 1962 annual average numbers in employment rose from 69 500 000 to 72 500 000 while the annual average of unemployed dropped from 2 800 000 to 1 500 000. Nevertheless there were still regions with excess manpower and at the same time scarcities of skilled labour. This was why the EEC Commission attached importance to a long-term policy of establishing regular forecasts on the manpower situation with the help of Governments and of both sides of industry.

The coexistence at regional level of skilled manpower scarcities and surplus labour called for action, first on the regional plane and secondly in the vocational training field. The EEC Commission was seeking means to ensure close co-ordination at European level between social policy and regional policy, the social aspects of which were of fundamental importance. M. Levi Sandri added that in the general principles of a common policy on vocational training recently adopted by the Council they now had a basis for thorough-going Community action. The Commission, aided by a tripartite advisory committee, would propose all common action required to achieve the objective of optimum employment. Stress would be laid on the importance of forecasting qualitative and quantitative needs and approximating training levels. This must be done jointly with other action such as the establishment of Community pilot centres. However, rising living standards and even assured employment would mean little if they did not go hand in hand with improved protection against risks for the workers.

This was why the EEC Commission attached particular importance to problems of social security - and the European Conference of last December was an obvious illustration of this.

The EEC Commission was not content with the indisputable improvement in working conditions due to the drive inherent in the Common Market, but considered that a genuine Community social policy must be promoted. This policy aimed at harmonizing social systems and was planned in such a way as to respect national idiosyncracies but also with an eye to the further advance which must be the goal of the convergent action of all concerned.

Certain priorities had already been laid down and they concerned problems which were also engaging the attention of the Conference: the working week, hygiene and safety, protection of women and young people and, on a more general plane, the right and practice of collective bargaining.

"But," added M. Levi Sandri, "there is another field which claims the attention of the International Labour Organization and of EEC: the field of wages policy or, more generally, incomes policy in which economic and social factors are closely interwoven and any too exclusive preoccupation with economic factors is to the detriment of social needs but, conversely, neglect of economic necessities would finally hamper social advancement. At EEC level it appears increasingly necessary that the general lines of wages policy should be concerted between both sides of industry and the Governments with a view to stimulating expansion, curbing price rises and improving the distribution of national income." Professor Levi Sandri concluded by recalling the responsibilities which the European Economic Community had assumed towards the developing countries. "The feeling of ever closer and stronger solidarity at world level leads us to take an active part in all endeavours for greater liberalization of trade and in particular to intensify relations with the associated African States and Madagascar. Great strides have been made in the way of technical co-operation during the first years of the Common Market but the procedures under the new Association Convention between the EEC and these States will make possible in the future more lasting achievements consonant with the importance of the objectives, among which the advancement at all levels of African and Madagascan cadres ranks very high."