

Women of Europe

Jacques Santer

...Women's pioneering role in the changing world of work...

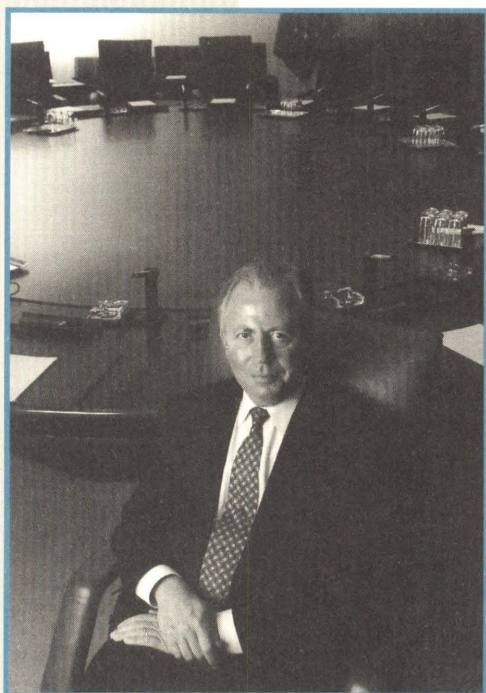
Boosting employment is one of the major challenges facing our societies today. In his special message to readers, European Commission President Jacques Santer highlights the decisive role women have to play in bringing about the necessary changes to adapt the European model of society to today's reality. In

"Action for Employment in Europe: A Confidence Pact" (see article page 2), President Santer recommends a concerted effort by all actors - the EU institutions, national governments, employers and trade unions - to build new forms of work organisation. This question is

also examined in another document just published by the Commission, a Green Paper (see article page 4) on the Information Society, one of the key factors shaping work and lifestyles.

I take great pleasure in addressing you through the pages of the *Women of Europe Newsletter*. This month, you have chosen to discuss employment, a topic which is of enormous current interest, given the unacceptable level of unemployment in Europe today.

You know that we regard the fight against unemployment as our priority in the Commission. You have also been informed about the Confidence in Employment Pact which I launched at the



Jacques Santer

Source: C.E.

last European Council in Florence. I have taken this initiative because I am convinced that we must all adopt a single strategy to respond to changes in European society. We must set aside national differences to combat the endemic scourge of unemployment.

You have rightly questioned what contribution women have made to the Pact and its view of future society. I will answer as follows - if we can say that Europe has advanced women and their rights, we can also say that women have made a major

contribution to Europe. It can even be said that women have played a pioneering role in arriving at our new understanding of employment structures.

Your experience at work is currently at the heart of our thinking and the social dialogue. I make particular reference to the recent agreement on parental leave and on-going negotiations relating to flexibility in work practices.

The essential and central theme of the Pact (i.e. how work is conceptualized) is of direct concern to women and has been so for much longer than for the majority of men. Women were the first to take advantage of legislation providing for part-time work and leave of absence. Your desire to balance work and family life has led you to develop alternatives to traditional organizational structures.

In addition to its attempt to reduce structural unemployment, this new conceptualization of work is a sign of a revolution in thinking. On a more general level, don't we notice a greater wish for an improved quality of life at work, in leisure, in the environment and even in our spiritual lives? Don't men appear to be increasingly involved in child education and family life? I sincerely believe so, and have noticed this movement from the quantitative to the qualitative with a sense of optimism.

Let us take another example - the Euro. You are aware that it will help European growth and defend your purchasing power against the dollar and yen. You all know, however, that the success of this project depends, to a large extent, on the individual's acceptance of the currency. This is because everyone, including the majority of women, will be affected by this change on a day-to-day basis.

Thus, when the Commission launches information campaigns on the Euro, it takes the essential step of addressing women and showing them in concrete terms how the single currency will alter their daily lives.

I would like to end with the following message - we must adapt our European social model to reflect the prevailing climate. I am sure that, while preserving social values and the human dimension, your model is one of the ways which will allow society to evolve. This is why the *Women of Europe Newsletter* is a forum in which the challenges posed by social change and your individual views deserve to be discussed. ●

Jacques Santer

President of the European Commission

employment pact

Joining forces in a common effort for jobs

It was to encourage confidence in the EU's ability to deal with joblessness, that President Santer proposed his "Action for Employment in Europe: A Confidence Pact." Faced with some 18 million people out of work, the confidence pact is a call to employers, trade unions, and governments to join forces to create jobs and reshape work organisation.

President Santer consulted Member State governments and the social partners before finalising the details of the Pact. By June, a paper was adopted by the European Commission outlining a full package of proposals to make the Pact a reality. The paper urges EU Member States to work together to reduce budget deficits, control inflation, complete the internal market, reform employment, education and training systems, promote small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and local employment initiatives (LEIs).

Many of the proposals contained in the paper are not new. They represent a repackaging of measures proposed over the last few years by the Commission in a piecemeal fashion. These include a proposal to invest additional funds in infrastructures and in particular in Trans-European Networks (TENs). This request for funding has just been rejected by the ECO/FIN Council.

The paper opens with a warning that persisting unemployment "is undermining European society and placing millions of men and women in precarious situations." It said "a climate of confidence must be restored."

Anticipating future demands

President Santer believes that a go-it-alone strategy by Member States has fewer chances of success than his proposed concerted effort because of the growing interdependence between EU Member States.

There is increasing pressure on governments to anticipate the changes that are heralding tomorrow's society. These will affect work and lifestyle, the environment, technology, education and training, demographic shifts and the globalisation of the economy.

Member States were criticised in the paper for their slowness to complete the building of the internal market and for not ensuring that the benefits that have resulted

are distributed evenly. SMEs, for example, which currently provide the majority of new jobs in the EU, are not "exploiting the potential of the internal market to the full" compared to larger companies. The Commission wanted specific action to support SMEs, including easier access to risk capital.

Paying for past errors

The first set of proposals in the Commission paper concentrate on producing the right macro-economic climate to create jobs, urging lower interest rates, restrained

tems that the Commission proposes changes that are central to the way Member States function today. President Santer emphasised the need for administrative reforms as well as "behavioural changes".

In the EU, two thirds of labour market expenditure, that is 200 billion ECU, is directed to supporting the unemployed and those who retire early. The paper states that although such spending is important to alleviate poverty, it is "no longer sufficient". It urged a better balance between the need to provide a high level of social protection and the need to invest in job-creating policies.

A part of welfare benefits, where possible, should be used to promote job creation measures, suggested the Commission, rather than amounting to "passive expenditure to compensate for joblessness." This should include a bigger training effort which targets not only the unemployed but those in employment.

Taxation systems also need re-examining in relation to benefits systems, urged the Commission, to avoid "the exclusion trap by offering a real advantage from a return to work while preserving a safety net for the jobless."

The Commission called for a decentralisation of employment systems because it is the local level which is increasingly the most "appropriate" one to activate employment policies. As part of this, the

Commission is now selecting pilot regions and towns to participate in a territorial employment pact which will join together all local forces in a common effort to create jobs.

"Flexisecurity" is introduced

The search for a balance between existing systems and future demands was also sought as far as work organisation is concerned. Work in tomorrow's world will demand flexibility and security, said the Commission, inventing a new concept "flexisecurity". This means flexibility in individual working time coupled with employment security for employees. This is why the Commission would like to see "European Standardisation" of what it calls "atypical forms of work". It urged the social partners to reach a framework agreement on this.

Some 50% of those in employment, many of them women, work in jobs considered to be atypical, such as part-time work. As many as 80% of new jobs being created in the EU



Source: CREW/RUDI DE RECHTER

Photo taken from the Women of Europe Dossier on the Information Society

wage policies and lower indirect labour costs. These are the policies implied by Economic and Monetary Union (EMU). The paper said that the adaptations being introduced to meet the convergence criteria for the EMU are "the price society must pay for past errors."

Spending cuts are suggested by the Commission instead of tax increases. But it said that these should not endanger spending in human capital investment, research and development, innovation and infrastructures. Innovation is vital to maintain growth, competitiveness and jobs. But, the Commission admitted, the EU lagged behind its main competitors in this sphere because "it shows less aptitude" than others for quickly turning new ideas into technical and commercial successes.

Balancing social protection and new jobs

It is on the reform of employment sys-

today are in this category. The Commission promised a Green paper on the organisation of work and working time later this year.

Lack of confidence "is sapping our energy and curbing investment for the future", said the Commission. "The best way of combating the general malaise is to prove by action that Europe is on the march" to create employment. It can do this, believed the Commission, by mobilising all actors involved (Community institutions, national, regional and local authorities and the social partners) through the proposed employment pact.

Social dialogue partners react to the Employment Pact

Member state governments welcomed the European Commission's Employment Pact as a basis for discussion on how to boost European economies and mould them into more flexible models that can better respond to today's economic and social needs. But all agreed that the package of proposals was only a first step. Work is now underway to look at the details of the proposals to secure agreement on what is feasible at a EU level and what is better left to be dealt with at a national or even level.

Employers and trade unions also gave

support to the Pact saying it was crucial step in generating confidence. But there were differences as to their priorities.

The *ETUC* (*European Trade Union Confederation*) argued that wage restraint in recent years had not produced more jobs. It wanted to see new investment in employment creation at EU level to accompany the completion of the internal market and European Monetary Union.

UNICE (*the Union of Industrial and Employers' Confederations of Europe*) saw the priority as the need to reduce non-wage labour costs, improve labour market flexibility and competitiveness through the completion of the internal market. It considers that it is national governments rather than EU institutions that still hold the key to job creation.

UEAPME (*the European Association of Craft, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises*) put its focus on supporting small businesses which have created nearly a million jobs in the last three years.

The Pact was criticised for lacking a clear gender perspective by Penny Clarke responsible for equal opportunities at the *ETUC* in an interview with *Women of Europe Newsletter*. She chaired the working group

on the Employment Pact set up by the EU's Advisory Committee on Equal Opportunities for women and men. She had the job of putting together the Committee's opinion on the Pact.

"Employment and equal opportunities were identified as the EU's paramount tasks at the Essen summit. These two priorities need reconciling", she said. The Pact focused too much on increasing the quantity and not the quality of employment. "For women, the quality argument should be at the forefront. This will lead to more and better jobs for both women and men."

Penny Clarke also warned of the dangers of flexibility, one of the cornerstones of the Pact. "Flexible often means cheaper, a pseudonym for less protected. What is needed is improved social security, access to training, career development and promotion for all non-standard workers."

She said a strong equality dimension should comprise the adoption of specific measures to improve women's employment, a systematic integration of a gender perspective in all discussions and decisions concerning the Pact and a full participation of women in this decision-making. ●

parliament

Committee on Women's Rights

Disagreement continued within the Parliament on whether sex-based actuarial data such as life expectancy should be used, as is the case now, to calculate occupational social security benefits. At the Committee on Women's Rights meeting in October, the report by Helena Torres Marques (PSE, P) on the Commission's proposal to strengthen the directive on equal treatment for women and men in occupational social security schemes was again discussed. Social Affairs Commissioner Pdraig Flynn said the Commission agreed with the Committee that sex-based factors should not, in principle, affect the pension entitlements of women and men. But, he added, the Commission had been unable to persuade the European Court of Justice of this notion which also went against Member States' understanding of the proposal. He said it would be impossible to persuade Member States to impose on the insurance industry and on employers a method of calculation which is opposed by the majority of European actuaries.



Astrid Lulling
Source: European Parliament

men and women in access to employment and vocational training proposed after the European Court of Justice's ruling in the Kalanke case (see *Women of Europe Newsletter* No's 61 and 57). Astrid Lulling (PPE, L) drawing up the Committee's report, warned of the dangers of amending this directive as proposed by the Commission. She said this could open the door for a wide interpretation of the law limiting current possibilities for positive action. An opinion by Maria Sornosa Martinez (GUE/NGL, ESP) on amending staff regulations of EU institutions to provide for equal treatment of men and women was adopted with amendments aiming to strengthen measures to promote positive action for women working in EU institutions.

The Commission's code of practice on the implementation of equal pay for work of equal value (see *Women of Europe Newsletter* No 64) was welcomed by Paola Colombo Svevo (PPE, I) who said it was a step forward in ensuring equal pay. However, other Committee members expressed their concerns about the Code's legal status in Member States with Sue Waddington (PSE,

UK) calling for a standardisation of the code within the EU.

The Committee approved a report by Nel Van Dijk (V, NL) calling for measures to be taken to protect minors in the EU against sexual exploitation. The report emphasises the need for children to be informed of their rights and the legal recourse available to them and it urges Member States to set up children's helplines. The Committee also wants to hold a hearing in January to launch a EU-wide campaign for zero tolerance of violence against women.

A report by Francisca Bennasar Tous (PPE, ESP) on the demographic situation in the EU was adopted with further amendments which seek to ensure proper social protection for women, particularly part-time workers, to create better conditions for women to reconcile family and work responsibilities and to ensure care for the elderly does not fall exclusively on women's shoulders. ●

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People First: Living and working in the Information Society

Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), are transforming everyday life and the way EU citizens learn, earn and organise work. The European Commission launched in September a public debate on the challenges ahead in a Green paper called *People First: Living and working in the Information Society*. The paper had its first public airing at a seminar held in Dublin on 30 September and 1 October on the information society which was jointly organised by the Commission and the Irish Presidency

The Information Society is already here, said the European Commission. The speed of introduction of ICTs may vary between countries, regions, industries and even enterprises but all are undergoing "an historic period of technological change" which is "both different from and faster than anything we have seen before".

Policies must ensure equitable access to the information society, said the Commission, and a fair distribution of the potential for prosperity between different parts of the EU and between citizens.

The Commission wants its Green paper to be a starting point for dialogue. It tackles many of the points raised in its proposed Pact for employment (see article page 2). All interested parties have been invited to send their comments on the paper by 31 December 1996. At the Dublin seminar, the Commission promised to examine these comments and put forward action proposals by early 1997.

Will these technologies not destroy more jobs than they create? Will people be able to adapt to the changes in the way they work? Will the complexity and cost of new technologies not widen the gaps between the industrialised and less developed areas, between young and old, between the information rich and the information poor? These are the main questions being asked by people concerning the Information Society, the paper said.

New jobs, old skills

The Commission urged caution against the claim that the Information Society is destroying more jobs than it is creating. It

said the introduction of ICTs "does not seem to have changed the rate of job creation, if anything, growth has become slightly more, not less job intensive."

Where ICTs are having a major impact, is on skills requirements, explained the Commission. Education and training will need a major overhaul to keep pace with technological development.

There is an urgent need, it said, to transform and upgrade the skills of those already in work. Nowadays, most training targets the young unemployed and not workers with obsolete skills or those who have lost their jobs after working 10, 20 or 30 years. Most are offered income support until a new job turns up or early retirement. "But new jobs, demanding old skills, are not turning up. The workforce is ageing, and the technology is getting younger," the Commission warned.

A new world at work and at home

As part of this transformation, a new industrial and enterprise culture is also developing. It is characterised by flexibility, trust, commitment and ability to anticipate and "harness change". It requires more decentralised and

network-oriented organisations and "broader based skills and new production processes to respond to constantly changing market demand."

This will bring fundamental changes in the organisation of work and home life as boundaries between work and leisure, work and learning, employee and self-employed become less-well defined. It will involve a radical rethink of current labour law and social protection systems, said the Commission. It means finding a new balance between flexibility and security. The "standard model of full-time, workplace-based employment of indefinite duration, can no longer respond entirely to the needs of a more knowledge based production of goods and services." The Commission said that the concept of security should be broadened. It should focus more on a "security based on employability and the labour market, rather than on the security of the individual workplace".

The Commission emphasised that finding this new balance also meant paying attention to the issues of equality "and how to

ensure that change enhances efforts towards both the desegregation of the labour market and improved reconciliation of working and family life for both women and men."

Democracy enhanced

The Information Society is expected bring closer the "all inclusive society," the Commission said. It can contribute to revitalising local communities and supporting regional and local development as more people will be able to work from or near home and increased services will be delivered at local level.

It can enhance democracy and lead to greater participation by citizens in the shaping of social and economic life. But to achieve this, it means low cost access, networked information services and the skills to access these services. It also means equipping people to understand and "relate" to the changes brought about by ICTs in areas as diverse as democratic representation and retail services, learning and leisure, care and culture.

Realising the full potential of the Information Society also raises important questions about the availability, affordability and accessibility of ICTs. The Commission said that designers and providers of ICTs should keep this in mind to ensure there is true universal access. It also urged that women are closely involved in this process and in the design and specifications of ICT products.

The Information Society, concluded the Commission, "represents the most fundamental change in our time, with enormous opportunities for society as a whole, but with risks for individuals and regions. The way we develop it must reflect the ideas and values which have shaped the EU." That is, cultural diversity, political democracy and a market economy which includes a social model built both on competition between enterprises and solidarity between citizens and the Member States. ●

Comments on the Green Paper should be sent before 31/12/1996 to:

People First

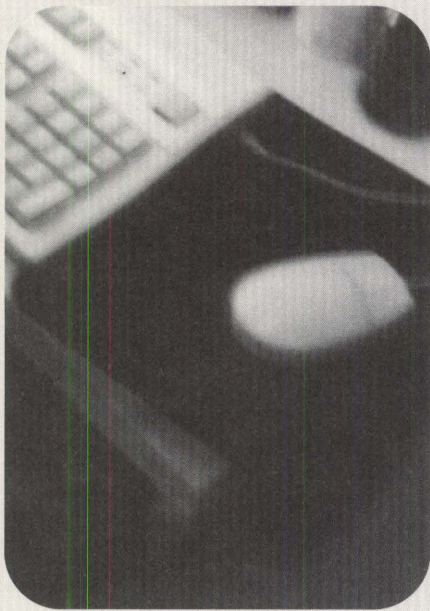
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Copies of the Green Paper are available from the Commission's ISPO Web server at:

<http://www.ispo.cec.be/infosoc/legreg/docs/peopl1st.html>

Further reading:

the latest Women of Europe Dossier,
The Information Society: a Challenge for Women
is now available in all official EU languages
from DG X, Information for Women Section
(see address below).



Source: CREW/RUDI DE RECHTER

Photo taken from the Women of Europe Dossier on the Information Society