

EMBARGO

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# COMMUNAUTÉS EUROPÉENNES

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Speech delivered by Dr. Patrick J. HILLERY,  
Vice-President of the Commission of the European  
Communities, at the ILO, Geneva on 9 June 1975.

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Permit me, Mr. President, to congratulate you on having been elected to your high post of responsibility at this Conference. It is an important Conference, not least of all because workers in many parts of the world are feeling the effects of an uncertain international economic climate and look to the ILO for guidance and reassurance. I am sure that, as in the past, this Conference will not fail them.

The European Community has not been spared the cold winds of economic reality. Every Member State has now drastically changed growth patterns, unemployment levels are high and the prospects of new employment are not at all clear. In this context one can question if the Social Action Programme of which I spoke last year is still valid. The answer is Yes.

While the Community is vigorously seeking for answers to the problems posed by slow growth and inflation, we remain convinced that there is no justification to delay the implementation of the Social Action Programme.

It is a programme for social action for the European Community based on principles which are valid in times of growth or in times of recession.

This has in fact been underlined by the reaffirmation of the importance at both the Paris Summit of Heads of Government and the Tripartite Conference of the Council, Commission and European Social Partners.

In a few days time the Council of Social Ministers will be holding their third meeting since that programme was launched and will consider a further series of measures designed to improve the lot of workers in the Community.

Furthermore the Community has not ignored the plight of the four and a half million currently unemployed in the Community of which more than a third are young people.

It is the task of the recently revived Standing Committee on Employment and the sectorial meetings which it has engendered to seek commonly acceptable solutions to employment problems. A substantial increase in the size of the European Social Fund will be needed, along with the Council of Minister's approval for the use of Article 4 of this fund in long term employment actions for young people and other categories of workers suffering the worse effects of the employment situation.

You can judge from what I have said, Mr. President, that we in the Commission still maintain sure faith in the momentum of social progress and our ability to tackle problems.

However, we do not have a monopoly on progress, and I note with great pleasure, Mr. President, that the ILO is pressing ahead with work on the proposed Convention and Recommendation concerning migrant workers.

At the 59th Conference last year I spoke of our efforts in this field and I now welcome the opportunity of describing what advances we have made since then. Permit me, though, to stress first of all the importance we attach to the degree of mutual cooperation established between the Commission and ILO departments on this question.

The Commission departments are well-represented here at the Conference, an indication that we intend to continue and intensify the useful and valuable cooperation which has marked our work to date.

To some observers it might appear that it is a sheer duplication of effort to have the International Labour Office and the Commission of the European Communities both working on migrant worker problems at the same time. Far from it. The mutual concern of our two organisations is of a parallel nature; while the ILO's activity in this field is broad and far-seeing, the Commission can be more specific and submit concrete and realisable proposals for the approval of the member States.

However, it will not go unnoticed that the central theme for both the ILO proposed Convention and the Commission's proposed Action Programme contain the same basic principles. As you might know, in addition to the Action Programme, the Commission was asked by the European Parliament to submit concrete proposals for creating a Statute of rights for migrant workers.

The Commission will shortly respond to the European Parliament with a paper setting out the basic principles concerning the living and working conditions of migrants. These could take the form of a Charter, possibly constituting a sort of 'code' which should inspire the legal systems of each of the member States.

The Action Programme itself embodies basic principles like the equality of opportunity and treatment for migrant workers, as it refers to equality for all migrant workers, encompassing those from outside the Community's frontiers as well as those from within. It has become increasingly apparent that most of the migrant workers in the European Community are no longer from Member countries, and that it was becoming intolerable for these workers from Third Countries to be excluded from most of the benefits of the Community while having to fulfil the obligations of working and residing in the Community.

The Action Programme therefore speaks of "the progressive elimination of all discrimination against them in living and working conditions once they have been legally admitted to employment in the Community." That is to say they should benefit from all degrees of equality excepting those governing the freedom of movement for labour and access to employment.

The Action Programme for Migrant Workers and their families was submitted to the Council in December 1974. It has already been approved by the Economic and Social Committee, and the European Parliament's discussions on it are proceeding. It is, however, only the first step to achieve equality, one which lays down the areas where action must be undertaken; improved freedom of movement for Community nationals, social security, vocational training, social services, housing, education of children, health, information and statistics, civic and political rights, illegal immigration and the coordination of migration policies.

All these individual points will clearly have to be elaborated in the appropriate Community instruments in order to achieve this equality of opportunity and treatment which migrant workers have earned the right to.

The theme of equality is also one which runs through another subject of consuming interest for both the ILO and the Commission; equality for women. Were Mrs. Pankhurst alive today I have no doubt that she would be amazed at the progress the world has made in building on the foundation stones of the suffragette movement.

She would be among the first to welcome the ILO's concern for equality of opportunity and treatment for women workers as well as the Commission's own work in this field.

Last year I briefly mentioned equal pay, and I am happy to report that the Council of the European Communities adopted a Directive on Equal pay at their meeting in December last year. Our next step is to tackle the more fundamental problem of the equality of treatment, including access to employment, vocational training, promotion and working conditions, along with a host of other problems afflicting women at work.



In February of this year the Commission sent a Communication to the Council of Ministers on this subject along with a draft Directive designed to abolish discrimination in the field of employment, and we hope that this will be adopted by the Council in the coming weeks. Once again, we welcome the discussion which will take place at this Conference.

We shall at least have the satisfaction of knowing that International Women's Year has helped concentrate the world's attention on this section of the working population, which is all too often dismissed as peripheral. Let us not forget that in some Community industries over half the working population is female and that a large proportion also have family responsibilities.

It is also true that some families would face grave problems were it not for the woman's income; we must therefore seek solutions which will relieve these women of the stress of being breadwinner, mother and housewife. We are convinced that action at Community-level will help achieve this.

It was particularly heartening for me to read of the concern in the Director-General's report for a more human working environment and the need for safer and healthier working conditions. This is also a continuing preoccupation of the Commission; I say continuing, as safety and health have long been subjects for discussion in bodies such as the Joint Committees of workers and employers representatives meeting under the auspices of the Commission.

But increasingly the need has been felt for a global approach to safety and health questions, which is why the Council of Ministers decided last June on the creation of an "Advisory Committee for Safety, Hygiene and Health Protection at Work", as well as extending the competences of the "Mines Safety and Health Commission."

In April of this year the Commission drew up its "Guidelines for a Community Programme for Safety, Hygiene and Health Protection at Work," which will provide the basis for the Advisory Committee's first discussions and help the Commission develop an overall strategy for health and safety at work.

I might point out that in this vein the Commission's Joint Committee for the social problems of agricultural workers organised a Community-wide safety week for agriculture in September last year to publicise the growing risk of accidents in agriculture.

However, as we know, a more human working environment goes beyond health and safety as important though they may be. The extent to which workers are happy with their work, and therefore in a state of mind to be productive, depends on a multitude of factors ranging from the temperature on the factory floor to the organisational structure in the firm.

It is a question of growing interest in the Community which is why in December of last year the Council of Ministers approved the setting up of a European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions. The operations of this Foundation will reflect very clearly two basic Community aims; firstly the obvious one of improving living and working conditions, especially man at work and his environment in general, and secondly the aim of participation.

The Administrative Board of the Foundation will be made up of representatives from Member governments, employers and Trade Unions in equal parts plus the Commission. We consider this participative element to be of major importance in helping the Foundation to pursue realistic objectives.

The Foundation is only a part of the Community's involvement in humanizing the working environment. One of the obligations for the Commission under the Social Action Programme is to present the Council with an Action Programme for workers aimed at the humanization of their living and working conditions.

With a view to drawing up this programme, the Commission held a Conference in November last year entitled "Work Organisation, Technical Development and Motivation of the Individual." The results of that conference will help the Commission to define areas in which the Community could play an active rôle, and the action programme should be in the Council's hands before the end of the year.

One of the obvious ways of ensuring that people make the most of their working lives is to provide the training necessary for them to progress and optimize their skills. Vocational training and guidance has been a major activity of the European Community for many years and I referred in my speech last year to its approach to vocational training and the rôle we hoped the embryonic European Vocational Training Centre would play.

I can now report that the Vocational Training Centre was given the Council's blessing in December last year and is at present in the process of being set up. Once again, the principle of participation has been enshrined in the composition of the Administrative Board, with the same quadripartite representation as established for the Foundation.

We look forward with great anticipation, Mr. President, to the development of a close working relationship between the European Centre and the ILO's own Institute in Turin. Much fruitful work can be achieved when the framework for closer cooperation on vocational training has been cemented together.

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The full weight of the Centre's facilities, including the most advanced teaching technology will be brought to bear on assisting the Commission to develop specific actions in vocational training, particularly for migrants, women, handicapped workers and young workers.

At the moment the Community is experiencing great upheavals in the employment market due to the economic situation. It is plain that some sectors or activities will not be able to maintain the same level of employment as they have in the past, while other developing sectors will lack skilled labour. The readaptation of workers from one sector to another will not be easy, but the problems could be tackled more rationally if the Community had a common approach to policy on vocational training, vocational guidance and career development.

The Centre should certainly help the Community to develop its own form of consensus on these questions and enable full and better employment to be pursued more vigorously. The interests of employers and workers, not to mention those of society as a whole, are best served in providing skills for workers and skilled workers for the jobs available.

Mr. President, the points of contact between what I have said and the ILO's own work are clear and should provide the basis for much valuable cooperation in future. I was particularly glad to notice the title of the Director-General's report "For more human work." Some would maintain that by its very nature work is inhuman. I am not one of them.

Work is an essentially human occupation, but I suppose an inhuman element developed the day the division of labour was first thought of, when one cave-man agreed to be a farmer while his neighbour opted to be a hunter. We have now reached a point where many factors govern peoples attitudes to work and whether they actually enjoy the activity which takes up often more than half their waking hours.

We should have an overall picture in our minds, but I think we are right in tackling these factors individually, breaking down discrimination and inequality, providing good training and a better, safer working environment. The world would be a very dull place indeed if work reduced us all to molecules in a well ordered but colourless system. We all have a responsibility in ensuring this does not happen.