

INFORMATION

SOCIAL POLICY

The Balance-Sheet for 1973

57/74

For the Commission the social year has been dominated by the preparation of a Social Action Programme in response to the mandate laid down by the Heads of State or Government at the Summit Conference in Paris in October 1972.

The first step was the drawing up in April of guidelines of a Social Action Programme in which the Commission set out its basic ideas and philosophy. These guidelines served as a basis for discussion with other Community Institutions and the social partners.

These discussions not only corresponded with the spirit of the Summit Communiqué but were of great assistance to the Commission in concentrating on proposals in its final programme that were not only imaginative and ambitious but, perhaps even more important, relevant to the important social issues of our Community.

This work was completed in October and the draft Social Action Programme setting out the Commission's priorities and its timetable of work over the period 1974-76 was examined by the Council of Social Ministers on 11 December 1973. At this meeting the Council approved of the substance of the Commission's programme and decided on a Resolution, which was adopted by the Council on 21 January 1974.

The Council Resolution noted that the Commission has submitted during the last quarter of 1973 its proposals for a group of seven actions which make up the first stage of the three year programme. These relate to :

1. assistance from the European Social Fund for migrant workers and handicapped workers ;
2. an action programme for handicapped workers in an open market economy ;
3. the setting-up of a European general industrial safety committee and the extension of the competence of the Mines Safety and Health Committee ;
4. a Directive providing for the approximation of legislation of Member states concerning the application of the principle of equal pay for men and women ;
5. the designation as an immediate objective of the overall application of the principle of the standard 40-hours working week by the end of 1975, and the principle of 4 weeks annual paid holiday by the end of 1976 ;
6. the setting-up of a European Foundation for the improvement of the environment and living and working conditions ;
7. a Directive on the approximation of the Member states' legislation on mass dismissals.

Furthermore the Council Resolution also noted that the Commission intends to submit three further proposals in the first quarter of 1974. These will include a first action programme for migrant workers, a proposal to set up a European Vocational Training Centre and a draft Directive on the harmonization of laws with regard to the retention of workers' acquired rights in the case of changes of ownership of companies and particularly in the case of mergers.

The Council also decided to select eight priorities for which the Commission is due to submit further proposals before the end of 1974. These include a comprehensive programme for migrant workers, proposals relating to a common vocational training policy and the establishment of a programme for the progressive involvement of workers in the life of firms. Furthermore the Council has also called on the Commission to draw up before the end of 1974 a programme of pilot studies as means of combating poverty which could be undertaken in the course of 1975 and 1976.

The Council of Ministers has undertaken to act on each Commission proposal necessary to implement each part of the programme within five months of the normal consultation procedures with the European Parliament and the Economic and Social Committee, or, if such consultations have not taken place, at the latest nine months from the date of transmission of the proposals to the Council.

Towards the end of the year the development of the energy crisis posed a threat to employment and living standards in our Community. Its existence has highlighted even more the need for the continuing social progress outlined in the Social Action Programme. The Commission has been requested to make a report on the situation and its possible effect on employment which could serve as the basis of concrete proposals.

The Commission's activities in the social field were also marked by the implementation of the new European Social Fund which came into operation for the first time in 1973. The scope of this Fund was increased not only to take account of the enlargement of the Community but also to provide increased financial assistance to regions or industries in difficulty.