

TALSMANDENS GRUPPE
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**PRESSE-MEDELSE
MITTEILUNG AN DIE PRESSE
PRESS-RELEASE**

**INFORMATION A LA PRESSE
INFORMAZIONE ALLA STAMPA
MEDEDELING AAN DE PERS**

Brussels, 30 May 1980.

EXTRACTS FROM SPEECH BY MR. VREDELING, VICE-PRESIDENT OF THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION
AT THE EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES COMMISSION CONFERENCE, MANCHESTER, 30 MAY 1980.

••• One of my motives in proposing the conference was that almost every Community country now has an organization whose task it is to uphold and promote the principle of equality between men and women in working life. However, as yet there has been little contact or coordination between these "equal opportunities" committees. Cooperation at European level - in the shape of a "European Equal Opportunities Commission" - could be both fruitful and important for the participating national bodies and for the EEC Commission when it comes to devising and carrying out policy in this field. If the Commission could be kept informed of grass-roots thinking and of the wishes being expressed and initiatives being taken at national level, our task of putting forward proposals at European level, would be simplified to a significant degree. On the other hand, the exchange of ideas and experience would also have a stimulating effect on activities at national level.

••• Certain areas of legislation - I am thinking particularly of legislation in the field of social security and taxation - are still permeated with the notion that married woman's station is to carry out her task unpaid and within the four walls of her home. Married women who go out to work are discriminated against, since certain benefits are paid only to the breadwinner. In all Member States the most complicated areas of legislation are those relating to taxation and social security. However, I can assure you that in the years ahead our efforts will be directed towards making progress in this field, in particular by amending or abolishing discriminatory provisions. The Commission will seek to achieve this firstly by keeping a close watch on how the Member States implement the existing Directive on equal treatment for men and women in matters of social security and secondly by paving the way for new measures. As for the relationship between the social security and taxation systems, one of the major difficulties here is the choice of priorities. Studies and consultations will be necessary, but these should never be seen as an end in themselves. The European Community's task is not to produce studies but to produce policies.

The micro-chip threat has also cast its shadow over this conference. The development of new technologies constitutes a real threat to existing jobs.

••• It seems certain, however, that jobs at present held by women will be particularly affected if we allow this trend to sweep over us unchecked. Jobs in the administrative sector - in banks, insurance companies, etc. - a high percentage of which are traditionally held by women, are particularly threatened.

If we wish to avoid a further increase in the very high numbers of women registered as unemployed (6.9% of the female working population in April 1980 compared with 5.1% for the male working population), and disregard figures for concealed unemployment which affects women in particular, further measures will have to be taken.

In the first place, I think that we should discard the notion of jobs being specifically reserved for either men or women. There are very few occupations that can be justifiably reserved for one sex or the other. However, if the relationship between certain occupations and a particular sex is to be abolished we shall need a change of mentality, and not only among employers. Women must convince themselves and come to realize that lorry-driving, wielding a hammer or a trowel, operating a crane, working on a building site or on a canal barge are not exclusively male preserves. I hope that it will be possible for the Social Fund to play a greater role in this sphere. . . .

. . . I have already touched on the subject of technological development. Although it is true that technological innovation poses a threat to existing jobs it is also true that it will encourage the creation of new jobs. Women must adapt to this new situation and be in a position to demand a significant number of these newly-created jobs for themselves. The best solution will be to involve women in the consultations that should be initiated at all levels - including Community level on the way in which this new technology is to be introduced into working life. . . .

.. One of the subjects to which I have been devoting considerable attention over the last few years is work-sharing. I am convinced that the widening gulf between supply and demand on the labour market can only be bridged effectively by measures to redistribute available work. . . .

... The redistribution of paid work should also have a positive effect on the redistribution of unpaid work within the home. It would be a significant and positive social consequence of the measures made necessary by the economic recession and technological development if in the coming decade men and women came to be treated as equals both on the labour market and in the home. . . .

SPEECH BY MR. VREDELING, VICE-PRESIDENT OF THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION AT THE
EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES COMMISSION CONFERENCE, MANCHESTER, 30 MAY 1980

1. I sincerely hope that the fact that I only arrived among you yesterday evening does not lead you to conclude that the work of this Conference does not interest me. Quite the opposite is the case. However, yesterday, I had to attend a meeting of the Standing Committee on Employment where the problem of the employment trend in the Community was on the agenda. You, better than anyone else, are aware of the central importance of this subject for various aspects of the question you have been discussing for the last few days.
2. Both inside and outside of Europe we are going through a very difficult phase at present. In recent days, the papers have once again been full of reports on agricultural prices, the Community Budget and the continuing problem of the United Kingdom contribution to it. I would be the last to deny that these problems are extremely complicated and particularly disturbing, but at the same time I would suggest that the position of women in present day society, the inequality of women's chances of development, the inequality of their position in the working world; represent a more serious problem and one that is more difficult to solve than the question of agreement on the Budget which fills the headlines almost every day. Some convergence in the position of men and women in society is in fact a more fundamental question than the problem of national contributions to a marginal EEC Budget, and this is something that everyone, must admit.
3. I do not believe that many of you are under the illusion that holding this sort of conference, tabling and approving conclusions, etc., is of basic significance for the achievement of that equality for which we have been striving for so long. Discrimination against women, and the fact that they are forced to live out their lives on an unequal level, seems to belong to the very roots of present day Western society. Much more time, much more action perhaps even violent action, will be needed if any significant change is to be achieved.
4. The Danish Minister for Employment, Mr Auken, reported a few weeks ago, at the OECD Conference on Women in Paris, on a survey which had been carried out in Denmark, which is after all a fairly progressive country, dealing with the division of household tasks between couples who were both working.
It emerged that where both partners were working for the same number of hours each day, women spent an average of a further three hours on housework while men spent no more than an average of 15 minutes. I quote Mr Auken's report because it shows very clearly how far we still have to go before we genuinely achieve an equal division of tasks and responsibilities. In the situation which he describes, women simply have two jobs, one paid and one unpaid. The burden of responsibility for housework still rests almost completely on their shoulders.
5. In the course of time more has been written than it has been possible to read on this unhappy social development, on the reasons for it and above all on its results. Some more radical feminist groups are convinced that they know who is to blame: men and male society are responsible for the fact that far fewer girls than boys enjoy secondary and higher education, that a lower percentage of women are represented in the higher professions, and that women are paid less than men for the same work.

Although, by definition, I am not a completely reliable judge, since I am a man and belong to a body consisting entirely of men, it seems to me that it is going too far to expect me to take responsibility on my own shoulders or to allow it to be placed on those of the other members of my sex. All of us, men and women alike, are the products and victims of our past. And this also applies to the organization and attitudes prevalent in our society. At the same time, a promising and even essential sign is that increasingly and throughout broad

areas of the population an awareness is growing that the present division of roles between the sexes, the inequality of function both within the home and in the broader social context is based on nothing more than indefensible prejudices. At the same time, these are prejudices which were and are accepted and followed by the generations that preceded us and even are still followed by considerable numbers of people in our own generation. They were prejudices which were so strong that they formed an integral part of the way of thinking of many people, both men and women. All of us, whether we wanted them or not were given our roles and accepted them.

- 6. I should like to stop for a moment and examine this kind of prejudice since in the past, and still today, it has been and is of such basic importance. In my opinion, the only conclusion that can be drawn from the fact that comparatively very few girls enter secondary and higher education is that many parents and teachers entertain the view (or perhaps I should say the prejudice) that girls should find their purpose and fulfilment in marrying and raising a family. Supplemented if they so wish by a degree of socially useful and necessary work on a voluntary and unpaid basis. This way of thinking has often permanently blighted our lives, and not only the lives of women. There are, of course, also a terrifyingly large number of men who have been victims of the equally unjust social compulsion to pursue a career, with the consequent neglect of their loved ones.
- 7. Bringing influence to bear on the individual and overcoming prejudice is of basic importance. Of much greater importance than the conclusions of this conference and than the results of many meetings at which you and I spend a large proportion of our time. Of greater importance, too, than the work carried out in recent years at European Community level to give some form to equality between men and women. At the same time, what the EEC has achieved in this area is definitely not without its importance. I should like to examine it for a moment.
- 8. The "mother" to all our work in this area - if I can express myself in this way in your presence - is Article 119 of the Treaty of Rome. I am sure that you as specialists in this field are familiar with this Article. But perhaps you do not know how it came to be adopted. The fathers of the Treaty were certainly not devotees before their time of women's emancipation. This Article was adopted purely and simply out of the fear that if women workers were underpaid national industries would suffer a negative effect as regards their competitive position.

Article 109 of the Treaty has formed the basis for our legislative work. The Directive on equal pay, the Directive on equal access to employment and the Directive on equal treatment as regards social security have been approved and in part transposed into national legislation. The Commission has examined national legislation based on the "Equal Pay" Directive. Initially, it was discovered that the legislation in seven Member States contained deviations which necessitated the initiation of the legal procedures provided for in Article 169 of the EEC Treaty. In the meantime, a number of Member States have made the necessary amendments and additions required by the Commission. It is not impossible that the procedure leading to a formal appeal to the European Court of Justice will be initiated in the near future in respect of a few other Member States. The same applies to the "Equal Access to Employment" Directive. Here, too, we have discovered that a few Member States have implemented the provisions of the Directive in their own legislation in an incomplete fashion. I can assure you that we shall not rest until this Directive has also been implemented in national legislation in a complete and acceptable way. The most recent Directive (December 1978) refers to social security. The Member States have until 1984 to implement the Directive in their own legislation. Additional Directives on social security are in preparation. I should also like to inform you that at the present moment I am working on a legislative measure in the area of maternity and parental leave.

9. I think we can agree that the main outlines already exist of a legal structure intended - in theory - to allow women to take and keep their place on the labour market on equal terms with men. But at the same time, like you, I am convinced that there is still an enormous gulf between theory and practice. It is not easy for the individual worker to make use of his or her right to take his or her employer to court if necessary. In too many cases it happens that individual women - even those who are aware of the content of the legislation - are not brave enough to go to court and demand equal pay, for example. I understand this reluctance. What I do not understand is that the natural allies of working women - the trade union movement and also, to a certain extent, the committees and commissions for equal opportunities in the various Member States do not lead a more aggressive policy and aim at making going to court socially and psychologically easier, as well as offer us their good offices in such cases.

10. Mention of these "equal opportunities" committee brings me to one of the themes of this conference. One of my motives in proposing the conference was that almost every Community country now has an organization whose task it is to uphold and promote the principle of equality between men and women in working life. However, as yet there has been little contact or coordination between these "equal opportunities" committees. Cooperation at European level - in the shape of a "European Equal Opportunities Commission" - could be both fruitful and important for the participating national bodies and for the EEC Commission when it comes to devising and carrying out policy in this field. If the Commission could be kept informed of grass-roots thinking and of the wishes being expressed and initiatives being taken at national level, our task of putting forward proposals at European level, would be simplified to a significant degree. On the other hand, the exchange of ideas and experience would also have a stimulating effect on activities at national level. Although the situation undoubtedly differs in detail from one Member State to the next, differences will become apparent in each country between the theory and practice of which I have just been talking. I can imagine that the exchange of information on methods and techniques used to bridge the gap would serve as inspiration to all parties. It can be taken for granted that an umbrella organization in the shape of an equal opportunities commission could count on wholehearted support from myself and the specialized departments for which I am responsible.

11. Over the past few days, discussion has focused not only on the functioning of the equal opportunities bodies but also on a great many other subjects. Some of these subjects have caught my attention in particular.

Certain areas of legislation - I am thinking particularly of legislation in the field of social security and taxation - are still permeated with the notion that married woman's station is to carry out her task unpaid and within the four walls of her home.

Married women who go out to work are discriminated against, since certain benefits are paid only to the breadwinner. In all Member States the most complicated areas of legislation are those relating to taxation and social security. However, I can assure you that in the years ahead our efforts will be directed towards making progress in this field, in particular by amending or abolishing discriminatory provisions. The Commission will seek to achieve this firstly by keeping a close watch on how the Member States implement the existing Directive on equal treatment for men and women in matters of social security and secondly by paving the way for new measures.

As for the relationship between the social security and taxation systems, one of the major difficulties here is the choice of priorities. Studies and consultations will be necessary, but these should never be seen as an end in themselves. The European Community's task is not to produce studies but to produce policies.

12. The micro-chip threat has also cast its shadow over this conference. The development of new technologies constitutes a real threat to existing jobs, both from the point of view of quantity and of quality. No one can say with any certainty at present how many existing jobs will be lost in the wake of the introduction of high-performance technical equipment. Neither can we predict what the quality of the alternative jobs will be, either as regards physical working conditions or the atmosphere at the workplace. It seems certain, however, that jobs at present held by women will be particularly affected if we allow this trend to sweep over us unchecked. Jobs in the administrative sector - in banks, insurance companies, etc. - a high percentage of which are traditionally held by women, are particularly threatened.

If we wish to avoid a further increase in the very high numbers of women registered as unemployed (6.9% of the female working population in April 1980 compared with 5.1% for the male working population), and disregard figures for concealed unemployment which affects women in particular, further measures will have to be taken. In the first place, I think that we should discard the notion of jobs being specifically reserved for either men or women. There are very few occupations that can be justifiably reserved for one sex or the other. However, if the relationship between certain occupations and a particular sex is to be abolished we shall need a change of mentality, and not only among employers. Women must convince themselves and come to realize that lorry-driving, wielding a hammer or a trowel, operating a crane, working on a building site or on a canal barge are not exclusively male preserves. I hope that it will be possible for the Social Fund to play a greater role in this sphere.

At the same time, men will have to learn two things. They will have to learn not to regard the exercise of hitherto specifically male occupations by women as a threat and they will have to understand that jobs that have hitherto been done mainly by women are not by definition less valuable.

I have already touched on the subject of technological development. Although it is true that technological innovation poses a threat to existing jobs it is also true that it will encourage the creation of new jobs. Women must adapt to this new situation and be in a position to demand a significant number of these newly-created jobs for themselves.

The best solution will be to involve women in the consultations that should be initiated at all levels - including Community level on the way in which this new technology is to be introduced into working life. It will be difficult for women to become directly involved in such consultations as long as they have little influence in the trade unions, the employers' organisations and the various government bodies. This is partly why the equal opportunities bodies in the Member States, to which many of you belong, are also concerning themselves with the problems posed by the introduction of micro-chips.

13. One of the subjects to which I have been devoting considerable attention over the last few years is work-sharing. I am convinced that the widening gulf between supply and demand on the labour market can only be bridged effectively by measures to redistribute available work. Such measures cannot be introduced without unpleasant repercussions and a degree of social unrest. This is particularly true if we work on the assumption that although shorter working hours will mean an increase in leisure time they will also reduce the scope for people to increase their material prosperity. However, the provision of jobs for large numbers of people who at present have no jobs and no income would constitute an expression of the mutual solidarity and justice that are so necessary at the present time.

The redistribution of paid work should also have a positive effect on the redistribution of unpaid work within the home. It would be a significant and positive social consequence of the measures made necessary by the economic recession and technological development if in the coming decade men and women came to be treated as equals both on the labour market and in the home.

14. I have noted with interest the conclusions you have reached and I can assure you that I shall devote maximum attention to examining how these conclusions can be crystallized into practical policy measures. I have already told you that there will be a need for your expert knowledge and experience, which will hopefully be made use of in the near future in the context of an equal opportunities body functioning at European level. I believe that the European Parliament which is represented here by a sizeable delegation, also has a significant role to play. The Parliament's task will be to ensure that the Commission carries out the necessary legislative work, consolidates policy to improve the position of women and makes funds available under the Budget.

However, a forward-looking policy of this nature can never be executed exclusively and satisfactorily at Community level. There is also a need at national and even local level for appropriate legislation, policies, facilities, and hence money, if the situation is to be improved.

And when I speak here of provisions and the availability of funds, I am also thinking specifically of support given to the many important initiatives undertaken by the women's movement, the women's centres - needed if women are to become aware of their own identity - and the "women's shelters", needed to take in women and children who are victims of physical and emotional violence and male domination. I regard it as a task of the authorities to provide the necessary finance for this kind of initiative.
15. One of your Chairmen in the past few days - Nel Barendregt - has been running my personal staff for several years now. Almost every day I have discovered that there is a difference in the way in which the two of us approach everyday problems and the ways in which we prefer to deal with them. This confrontation between us has not always proceeded without some tension, but at the same time it has been a very fruitful experience. It is no more than just and reasonable that women, who have their own way of seeing things, and act in accordance with their own identity, should demand their place in all branches of society and should make their voices heard. It is also just and reasonable for men to be willing, more than hitherto, to hand over power outside the family and within the family to devote their time, energy and human warmth.