

Lecture given by M. François Vinck  
to a visiting party of delegates  
from the Labour Committee for Europe  
-----

POWERS AND ACTIONS OF THE HIGH AUTHORITY IN THE SOCIAL FIELD

Unlike a Government, the High Authority cannot formulate and apply any real social policy nor modify it according to requirements or circumstances.

In fact, the essential characteristic of the social actions of the High Authority is that their aims and methods have been clearly defined by the Treaty establishing the European Community for Coal and Steel.

This is why it is accurate to speak of the social aspects of European integration and not, if words are to have a strict meaning, of any social policy at this level of government.

The general mandate of the High Authority, as defined in the first articles of the Treaty, forms the basis of its social actions.

According to the terms of these articles, allowance must be made for social matters in all decisions.

The Treaty never neglects the social implications of economic decisions - and this perhaps is its most original feature from our present standpoint.

Nevertheless, the text of the Treaty of the European Coal and Steel Community gives only little scope for direct action in the social field.

This is due to two facts :

- The first one is that the E.C.S.C. integrates only the steel and coal industries of the member countries; that means that only about 10 % of the working population of all six countries are covered

by the Treaty;

- The second reason for this restriction is the fact that the bargaining for higher wages and better working-conditions must remain the untouchable right of the trade-unions and employers.

I propose that we examine the articles of the Treaty, which give the High Authority the possibility to further social progress and - with practical examples of our work in the Labour Problems Department - I will try to show you what is being done in the social field.

1. First of all there is article 3, section e of the Treaty, which describes the social aims of the E.C.S.C. : "The Institutions of the Community shall promote the improvement of the living and working conditions of the labour force in each of the industries under its jurisdiction so as to harmonize those conditions in an upward direction". Although this postulate is very general, the High Authority was able to take action on the basis of this paragraph in two fields and these are : housing programmes for miners and steel-workers and a programme of vocational training.

- a) One of Europe's major problems when the Community began was the general shortage of housing. In mining districts especially the shortage was acute and housing standards very low. Some miners spent as many as five hours a day simply in travelling to and from work and the journey meant unnecessary tiredness for the men as well as extra-costs for the employers. Poor housing also meant greater absenteeism and a quicker turn-over in mining recruits, some of whom left the industry after little more than a year. This delayed the building up of a skilled labour force. It may even have contributed, through miners' inexperience, to accidents in the pits. For both social and economic reasons, therefore, more housing was an urgent necessity.

Although the High Authority certainly does not claim to have solved the housing problem, it made a good start in tackling it in two separate ways :

- In the first place, it has raised special funds to make direct low interest loans to housing projects. These loans supplement other sums raised for the purpose by the national and regional authorities responsible for official building programmes. That means that they act as a spur to the raising of cheap money on the ordinary capital market. Up to now the construction of about 71,000 dwellings has been considered with the aid of credits of the High Authority. Of these, some 49,000 have been completed and are occupied; 40 % of the dwellings have become property of the workers, the other 60 % are being rented. By completion of the 5th loan programme, now considered, some 100,000 dwellings will have been financed by 1964 with aids coming from the High Authority alone, amounting to about 150 millions of dollars.
- Alongside these loan programmes, the High Authority is running a series of experimental housing programmes aimed at reducing the cost of building, but at the same time maintaining minimum standards throughout the Community with allowance for local and climatic variations. The first of these experimental programmes aimed at the building of 1,000 dwellings is already finished. Two other experimental programmes have been launched. The aim of the second programme is to assemble experience on the standardisation and normalisation of construction elements and the third one will deal with the building of special blocks of houses with all public and social utilities.
- b) As far as vocational training is concerned, the High Authority has endeavoured during the past years to assist the industries of the Community to develop, intensify and improve vocational training.

The exchange of experiences is the main instrument of the High Authority in this field. Thus far, 3 Commissions have been established : one for the steel industry, another one for coal mining and the third one for iron-ore. They are composed of experts of trade-unions and employers' organizations. Besides the work of the Commissions, the High Authority organizes congresses and seminars on specific problems of vocational training and it has also set up a pool facilitating the exchange of teaching aids and means.

The High Authority has undertaken its action in 3 phases :

- from 1953 until 1956 its action was concentrated on the vocational training problems of mines and steel process workers;
- during the second phase the training of supervisors and training instructors was examined;
- since 1960 emphasis is being put on both preparatory and follow-up training for workers and managerial personnel alike. This has become necessary because of the introduction of new types of plants and new production processes in the iron and steel industry and of the steady advance of mechanisation and electrification of pits.

2. The next article which is of interest to us, is article 46, 3rd paragraph saying :

- a) Point 4 : "....(4) at the request of the interested Governments (the High Authority shall) participate in the study of the possibilities of re-employing, either in existing industries or through the creation of new activities, workers unemployed by reason of the development of the market or technical changes".

Studies on the economical and social conditions in the following areas have been undertaken :

- Limburg, in the Netherlands
- Lower-Saxony, in Germany
- Liguria, Piombino and Umbria, in Italy
- Commeny and Decazeville, in France
- Charleroi, Centre and Borinage, in Belgium.

- b) Point 5 of the same paragraph is of great importance for the work of the High Authority in the social field. It says : ... (5) (the High Authority shall) "gather any information required to assess the possibilities of improving the living and working conditions of the labour force in the industries under its jurisdiction, and the risks menacing their living conditions".

On the basis of this text and in connection with articles 2 and 3, it was possible for the High Authority to publish a fundamental documentation on various social topics. For example a monograph was published on the development of wages in the member countries, a comparison of real wages was undertaken, a comparison of social security systems, comparisons on the hours of work, of vacations, different aspects of labour legislation. As the social development in the different member countries differs considerably, a great deal of care and work have to be put into these studies. All the more, these monographs have to be absolutely objective. For this reason, these documents are submitted before publication for examination to Commissions composed of experts of the trade-unions and the employers' organisations of the six countries of the Community. We have six Commissions of this kind. Three for wages and social security and three for terms of employment, not counting the various working parties. Besides there is a study group, composed of six university professors, which is working on Labour Law.

This contact with the professional organisations of the member countries makes it possible for the High Authority to present the problems directly to the interested circles and thus enables it to contribute to the harmonization of living and working conditions of the labour force in the industries under its jurisdiction. It is then the task of the trade-unions and employers' organizations, on the basis of the objective material furnished by the High Authority, to bargain out the working conditions in their respective countries.

3. On the basis of article 55, paragraph 1, which states : "The High Authority must encourage technical and economical research concerning the production and the consumption of coal and steel, as well as workers' safety in these industries. To this end, it shall organize all appropriate contacts among existing organizations", the High Authority was able to act in the field of medical research and accident prevention.

Up to now it has employed four methods to fulfil this obligation :

1. the financial promotion of research work;
2. the promotion of co-operation among researchers and the research centres;
3. the publication of the results of the research work;
4. the provision of documentary material.

The High Authority is establishing these research programmes, which in all amount to 8 million dollars, after having consulted the competent government experts, the workers' and employers' associations and a research committee, which is composed of medical experts on industrial health and hygiene (other programmes are in preparation for 6 million dollars).

The High Authority is coordinating existing research programmes, both by means of meetings of experts in Luxembourg and by means of a special "publication pool" whereby abstracts of all relevant studies published in the six countries are centralized, translated and distributed to scientific institutes through the Community.

In this connection I must also mention the work of the Mine Safety Commission. The origin of the Commission dates back to September 6th, 1956, shortly after the disaster at Marcinelle (in Belgium, where 262 lives were lost), when the Special Council of Ministers decided to convene a conference on Safety in Coalmines. This conference published a number of reports and recommendations and the Council of Ministers decided in May 1957 to set up a permanent commission to follow development with regard to safety in coalmines and to ascertain action taken by each country to put into effect the recommendations of the conference and such proposals as the Council might find necessary to advance.

4. Now I come to another very important topic in the action of the High Authority, that is the readaptation of workers, linked to the reorganization and redevelopment of industries.

Fortunately we experienced no mass-unemployment since the creation of the Community. But this does not mean that the Common Market has caused no pockets of local or temporary unemployment.