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INFORMATION MEMO

COMMISSION'S SOCIAL PROGRAMME FOR AGRICULTURE⁽¹⁾

1. In July 1958 the Stresa Conference worked out the main lines of a common agricultural policy, demanded for workers in the agricultural sector living standards comparable to those in other sectors and declared that ways and means must be found to achieve the social integration of the farming population.

2. In its proposals of June 30, 1960 for the framing of a common agricultural policy, the Commission stated that this policy should include all the main fields covered by existing agricultural policies. It was considered indispensable to formulate:

- (a) The agricultural structures policy,
- (b) The agricultural market policy,
- (c) The trade policy (to the extent necessary to implement the market policy) and
- (d) The social policy in the agricultural sphere

to be followed in the Community. The proposals thus put social policy on the same footing as the other component parts of the common agricultural policy.

In view of the complexity of social problems in agriculture and their numerous ramifications and interrelations, the Commission was not, however, able to include in its proposals of June 30, 1960 a complete and detailed programme on this matter based on the guiding principles enunciated above, but announced that, after consulting the circles concerned, it would work out proposals for an action programme of social measures in agriculture dovetailed into the Community's general social policy.

In its proposals the Commission nevertheless set out the general principles and main objectives of this social policy for agriculture, which are as follows:

- a) To ensure for all categories of workers in agriculture and their families social protection equivalent to that enjoyed by other categories of workers;
- b) To adapt contractual relations between landowners, farmers and farm-workers to the present state of social progress;

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(1) Summary of the Commission's "Action Programme of social measures in agriculture" (V/VI/COM(63)353 final) recently transmitted for information to the Council of Ministers, the European Parliament and the Economic and Social Committee.

- c) To improve the social situation of agricultural wage-earners, bringing it closer to that of wage-earners in other comparable branches from the point of view of pay, including social benefits, and working conditions, taking into account the special features of agricultural work;
- d) To ensure that children coming from a rural environment have the same opportunities of general education and occupational training as children from other environments, so that they may be on an equal footing as regards the choice of a career, whether in farming or not;
- e) To help young farm-workers wishing to set up on their own account or to change their job in the agricultural sector;
- f) To ensure the best chances of success for those leaving the land to take other paid employment, in particular with the help of the European Social Fund;
- g) To make it possible for farmers and farm-workers to retire when they have reached the normal age for ceasing the active pursuit of their occupation;
- h) To improve and modernize rural housing;
- i) To enhance the social and cultural capital of country districts.

3. The results of the Community's studies and consultations between 1960 and today (Consultative Conference of both sides of the industry in 1961, opinion of the Advisory Committee, work of the Social Committee of the European Parliament) are embodied in this Action Programme which the Commission recently transmitted to the Council of Ministers, the European Parliament and the Economic and Social Committee.

The programme covers the main fields of social policy in agriculture. In addition to the abolition of inadmissible social conditions, it aims at social parity for those working in agriculture. This implies that they should be entitled to a standard of living equivalent to that of workers engaged in comparable work in other branches in the same region and under similar conditions. The achievement of social parity involves substantial improvements, particularly as regards stability and optimum level of employment, general education and occupational training, wages and other working conditions, industrial safety, social security and housing.

It cannot be expected that the complete solution of social problems will follow automatically from economic policy. Hence the need of a social policy for agriculture, which cannot however develop in isolation.

As regards employment, the continual shrinkage of the labour force in agriculture has been very marked in the EEC countries in recent years. In the more or less near future important changes in structures and working conditions in agriculture may be expected.

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It is highly important not only to note these changes but also to foresee them, i.e. to have the clearest possible picture of the manpower needs of agriculture as regards both numbers and skills.

On the basis of the studies on agricultural employment already made, and of those in progress or contemplated, the Commission will aim at improving stability of employment and consequently of earnings in agriculture.

The disparity between agriculture and other branches of activity is of course felt very acutely in the matter of working conditions and, particularly, wages and working hours. Here too, the Commission's initial aim will be to remedy highly anomalous situations. It will endeavour to secure minimum wages in agriculture corresponding to an acceptable minimum social standard. As regards working hours, the example of certain countries which have already modernized their farming shows that the present situation in the Community can be appreciably improved.

Finally, there is the problem of the level of agricultural wages in relation to those in other branches.

The Commission considers occupational training one of the most effective means of raising the standard of living of those working on the land.

It is common knowledge that agriculture is lagging behind not only in the fields referred to above. In the matter of health and safety, much still remains to be done if it is intended to bring about a situation in agriculture equivalent to that in the other economic sectors.

Thus the Commission will pay special attention to the protection of young people and in particular to a prohibition on engaging wage-earners below a minimum age.

Another matter covered in the Action Programme is housing, which is one of the most serious problems in rural areas. Among farm-workers seasonal hands are the worst off in this respect.

The Commission has also dealt with social security questions, which are probably the most highly topical in this field. For some years now the Commission has been studying disparities between the living standards of the farming population and of other sectors resulting from anomalies in social benefits.

In several countries it is thought possible by measures of social security to go a long way towards social parity for the farming population. It goes without saying that the financial basis of such schemes and, more especially, the sources of finance, play a predominant part.

A problem of more particular interest to two Community countries is share-cropping, which is at present under discussion in an ad hoc working party. The Commission intends to work out proposals to solve the problems arising in this field.

It would be quite ineffective to draw up and set on foot an action programme of social measures in agriculture without providing for supervision of the application of the relevant social legislation or reinforcing such supervision where it already exists. This objective is a condition sine qua non if the measures which the Commission proposes to undertake are to be effective.