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1. EEC Commission Member Discusses Industrial Democracy with Italian Unions

Finn Gundelach, Member of the European Commission held a meeting in Rome in October with representatives of the joint organisation of the three national centres CGIL, CISL and UIL, to discuss the matters of principle involved in the proposals of the Commission on participation by workers in the management of firms.

The Italian trade union leaders mentioned their reserves on the question of codetermination and stressed their preference for global negotiations with firms, that is, a constant confrontation on all the problems of the firm, including the type and the localisation of investments.

However, the Italian representatives, bearing in mind that their position was a minority one within the European Trade Union Confederation, declared their readiness to discuss the new proposals of the Commission, enunciated by Finn Gundelach, in the appropriate European bodies with a completely open mind.

2. Progress on Community Social Action Programme

In January 1974, the Council of Ministers of the Community adopted a social action programme for the period 1974-1976 and set out certain priorities within this programme. The Commission has already submitted a good number of projects to the Council, and the state of progress at November 1974 is set out in the following paragraphs.

Three items were approved by the Council of Ministers on 10 June 1974:

- 1) assistance from Article 4 of the Social Fund for migrant 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 Commission.

Five items have passed through the European Parliament and the Economic and Social Committee and are ready for decision by the meeting of the Council of Ministers to be held in mid-December 1974:

- 1) a directive providing for the approximation of legislation of Member States concerning the application of the principle of equal pay for men and women;
- 2) the designation as an immediate objective of the overall application of the 40-hour working week by 1975 and 4 weeks annual paid holiday by 1976;
- 3) the setting up of a European Foundation for the improvement of the environment and of living and working conditions;
- 4) the setting up of a European Vocational Training Centre;
- 5) a directive on the approximation of the Member States' legislation on collective dismissals. (This idea had been on the agenda of the June Council but at the request of one delegation a decision was postponed.)

It is expected that a directive on the harmonisation of laws for the protection of the acquired rights of workers in the case of mergers and takeovers will be ready for decision by the Council early next year.

The Commission is now finalising its proposals for an action programme for migrant workers, which has as its aims:

- improvement of the conditions of free movement within the Community of workers from Member States;
- humanising this free movement by providing effective assistance during the various phases. Article 4 of the Social Fund, as mentioned above is now available to assist migrants and their families;
- achievement of equality of treatment for Community and non-Community workers and their families concerning living and working conditions, wages and economic rights;
- consultation on immigration policies towards non-Member States.

The next items which will be put forward by the Commission concern:

- 1) action to achieve equality between men and women as regards access to employment, vocational training and promotion. A directive to strengthen the application of Article 119 of the Rome Treaty concerning equal pay for equal work has already been sent to the Council as stated above;
- 2) an initial action programme for health and safety at work beginning in those sectors where working conditions appear to be most difficult. The Council has already approved the Commission proposals to set up a European Advisory Committee on Safety, Hygiene and Health Protection at Work and to increase the powers of the Mines Safety and Health Commission;
- 3) the legal framework to permit the implementation in cooperation with the Member States of specific measures to combat poverty by drawing up pilot schemes. The Commission has already set up a working group of national experts to advise on future proposals and the results of a seminar held in June will give valuable help in the drawing up of the pilot schemes.

3. HUMANISING WORK IN THE COMMUNITY COUNTRIES

A conference on work organisation was held by the European Commission on 5, 6 and 7 November in Brussels. We give below a summary of the findings presented at the closing session by Michael Shanks, Director-General for Social Affairs in the European Commission.

1. Many factors are behind attempts to improve working conditions. First of all, the educational levels now reached in our countries have as a consequence that working conditions which were considered acceptable four or five years ago are today unacceptable. Secondly, a substantial proportion of the dull and dirty jobs in the Community are being done at present by migrant workers; this is not a situation which can go on, and the quality of the jobs now being done by migrant workers should therefore be improved.

Thirdly, technology can now be placed at the service of man; it is possible now to move away from Taylorism and traditional concepts of work organisation.

Relations between employers and employees are undergoing reorganisation in order to shape new working conditions.

- 2. The most important agents of change are, of course the employers and trade unions; next come individual initiatives which have been developed mainly in the Scandinavian countries; finally governments often set up new institutions to promote research, experimentation or exchange of information, or even propose new legislation.

Among the constraints which could impede changes in working conditions, the most important derives from the new role which the different parties concerned will henceforth be called upon to play - managers, middle managers and supervisors, who will have to get used to new, less hierarchical, structures; workers, who will have to accept new responsibilities and disciplines; engineers and technicians, who actually create the working environment, and so on. A further constraint which has to be mentioned is the economic one. We should ask ourselves whether we need to do anything to remove the competitive penalties which social innovators may face in a common market.

- 3. What can the European Commission do to improve working conditions in the Community? Various suggestions were put forward:

Firstly it would seem that a European Foundation is essential in this context, and should constitute a major instrument for Community action in this area.

Secondly, the Commission could employ a sectorial approach, encouraging experiments in many bodies of the joint committee type, which exist in some industries. Thirdly, it might be possible to bring investment incentives into action in the social sector, either through the European Investment Bank, or the European Social Fund.

Finally, the Commission could contribute, as it has already done in calling this conference, to the creation of a climate of public opinion. This could be done, for instance, by meeting with both sides of industry to decide what should be the aims of work humanisation in the Community.

- 4. All these suggestions, and many others, were put forward during the conference. It is obviously too early for the European Commission to draw any conclusions, in terms of action. It proposes to study the ideas and recommendations expressed and to work out specific proposals for Community action.

4. JOHN CARROLL, VICE-PRESIDENT OF THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE

John Carroll, Vice-President of the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union and Executive Committee member of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions, was elected Vice-President of the Community Economic and Social Committee at its first meeting in October 1974.

Other international functions of John Carroll are membership of the Central Committee of the International Metalworkers' Federation and membership of the Executive of the International Federation of Building and Woodworkers.

The new President of the Committee is L. Canonge, from the French cooperative sector. Alfons Lappas, Member of the Executive of the German trade union federation DGB, had been President during the last two-yearly exercise.

5. TOWARDS A FILM INDUSTRY JOINT COMMITTEE

Representatives of employers and workers in the film industry met in Brussels on 14 and 15 October 1974 under the auspices of the European Commission, to discuss the feasibility of establishing a joint committee serviced by the social affairs directorate-general. They took note of the Community social action programme and pointed out that "the examination of the social policy of the EEC must be linked to the prior solution of the major problems which affect the survival of the film industry, notably: relations with television and problems of teledistribution; tax harmonisation; harmonisation of film support; competition of state enterprises with the technical cinema sectors; Community film public register."

The resolution adopted was signed for the film producers' federation CICCE, the European Federation of Technical Cinema Industries and the European Union of Film and Television Workers.

6. ETUC EXECUTIVE AGREES ON EUROPEAN SOCIAL CONFERENCE REPRESENTATION

At its meeting in Brussels on 25 October 1974, the executive committee of the European Trade Union Confederation agreed on a formula for representation of trade unions at a Community social conference bringing together employers' organisations, trade unions and governments under Community auspices.

The conference had been held up since June 1973 because of the claims of certain supervisory workers' unions outside the mainstream of the movement for representation on the trade union side. Under the new formula a small extra category of representation has been added.

It is hoped to hold a first conference on 16 December 1974, for a preliminary discussion of pressing social problems in the Community countries. The tripartite standing committee on employment, which has not met since the enlargement of the Community, will also be reactivated.

7. EUROPEAN FOOD AND DRINK WORKERS' UNIONS APPROVE NEW STATUTES

At a meeting in Luxembourg on 7 and 8 November 1974, the European Committee of Food, Drink and Catering Workers' Unions adopted new statutes. This body is the successor organisation to the committee of unions of the six countries of the original Community. The new Committee has affiliates from the nine countries of the enlarged Community and its new statutes permit the affiliation of unions from other West European countries.

Food and drink workers' unions from Belgium, Netherlands and Luxembourg, which hitherto formed part of a World Confederation of Labour European Committee, were accepted into affiliation. (The Committee has long had in its ranks a union belonging to the French WCL affiliate CFDT).

8. EUROFIET OFFICE WORKERS IN INDUSTRY ADOPT AN ACTION PROGRAMME

Trade union claims concerning salary structures, annual holidays, female workers' rights, flexible worktime harmonisation and international recognition of diplomas and qualifications, salaried inventors' rights and job classification were included in an action programme adopted by a European conference of salaried employees in industry (Brussels, 14 and 15 November 1974).

The conference was organised by the European Regional Organisation of the International Federation of Commercial, Clerical and Technical Employees (EUROFIET). Fifteen unions took part in the conference, which was presided by George Doughty of the British Amalgamated Union of Engineering Workers.

A resolution on inflation laying emphasis on the need to sustain economic activity and for international and national measures to control the activities of multinational companies was adopted.

The conference affirmed that all supervisory staff except for those with the highest authority in an organisation should be members of the appropriate trade union.

9. CONTROVERSY OVER CODETERMINATION IN THE GERMAN FEDERAL REPUBLIC

The discussion on codetermination in the German Federal Republic has come into the European headlines again through an expert opinion published by the American Chamber of Commerce. An opinion prepared by a Berlin international law specialist and sponsored by the American Chamber of Commerce in Frankfurt, comes to the conclusion that the introduction of parity codetermination in firms in Germany which are partly or wholly under U.S. ownership would constitute a partial expropriation. In addition such a law would contravene the German-American trade agreement of 1954 and accordingly would have to be considered as contrary to international law.

Criticism in Germany focussed on the fact that the opinion, to whose financing not only U.S. firms but also a number of well-known German firms had contributed, was sent to federations and official instances just before a session of the Parliament Social Committee at which employers and unions were to give their views on the draft new codetermination law of the Federal Government.

In a first reaction the German trade union federation DGB described the efforts of U.S. business circles to prevent the introduction of qualified codetermination in large firms as an attack on the sovereignty of the Federal Republic and its legislative organs. It was clear that the introduction of parity codetermination was more urgent than ever, for through codetermination such abuse of economic power could be avoided.

Speaking on this subject to the tenth ordinary congress of the printing and paper industrial union in Hamburg, the DGB President, H.O. Vetter, emphasized that the Federal Republic could not be allowed to become a colony of U.S. capital. German Unions very much approved of U.S. investments and trade with the U.S.A., but, he added, "We must make it clear that the Federal Republic is no banana republic and that colonialism in Europe is dead".

H.O. Vetter described as characteristic the praise by well-known industrial leaders and politicians for the action of the American Chamber of Commerce. These politicians were the very ones who were fond of talking about a sell-out of national interests.

He called on the Federal Government to react energetically against all attempts by U.S. firms to exercise influence on national legislative procedures.

10. UNION LEADER TO PRESIDE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE OF FRANCE

Gabriel Ventejol, confederal secretary of the French trade union organisation Force Ouvrière, has been elected president of the Economic and Social Committee of France. This is a full-time post, and its occupant is in the line of succession to the presidency of France in emergency situations.