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SOCIALISTS DEMAND A COMMUNITY REGIONAL POLICY

John Evans (Labour M.P. for Newton) the Chairman of the European Parliament's Committee of Regional Policy has recently completed work on a Socialist Group policy statement on the "Future of Regional Policy". This work was carried out by him and five other Socialist Members of the European Parliament: Fernand Delmotte (Belgium), Hajo Hoffmann (Germany),

Liam Kavanagh (Ireland), André Guerlin (France) and Mario Zagari (Italy).

Ever since George Thomson began the battle for a regional policy, in 1973, the Socialists have done all they can to support the Commission's efforts. The setting up of the European Regional Development Fund, in spite of its limited resources, was the first step towards such a policy.

The Socialists emphasize that they do not believe that regional problems can be overcome by purely financial means; what is needed is in fact a major political commitment to overcome the widening gap in terms of economic prosperity and security which exists at present between different regions of the Community.

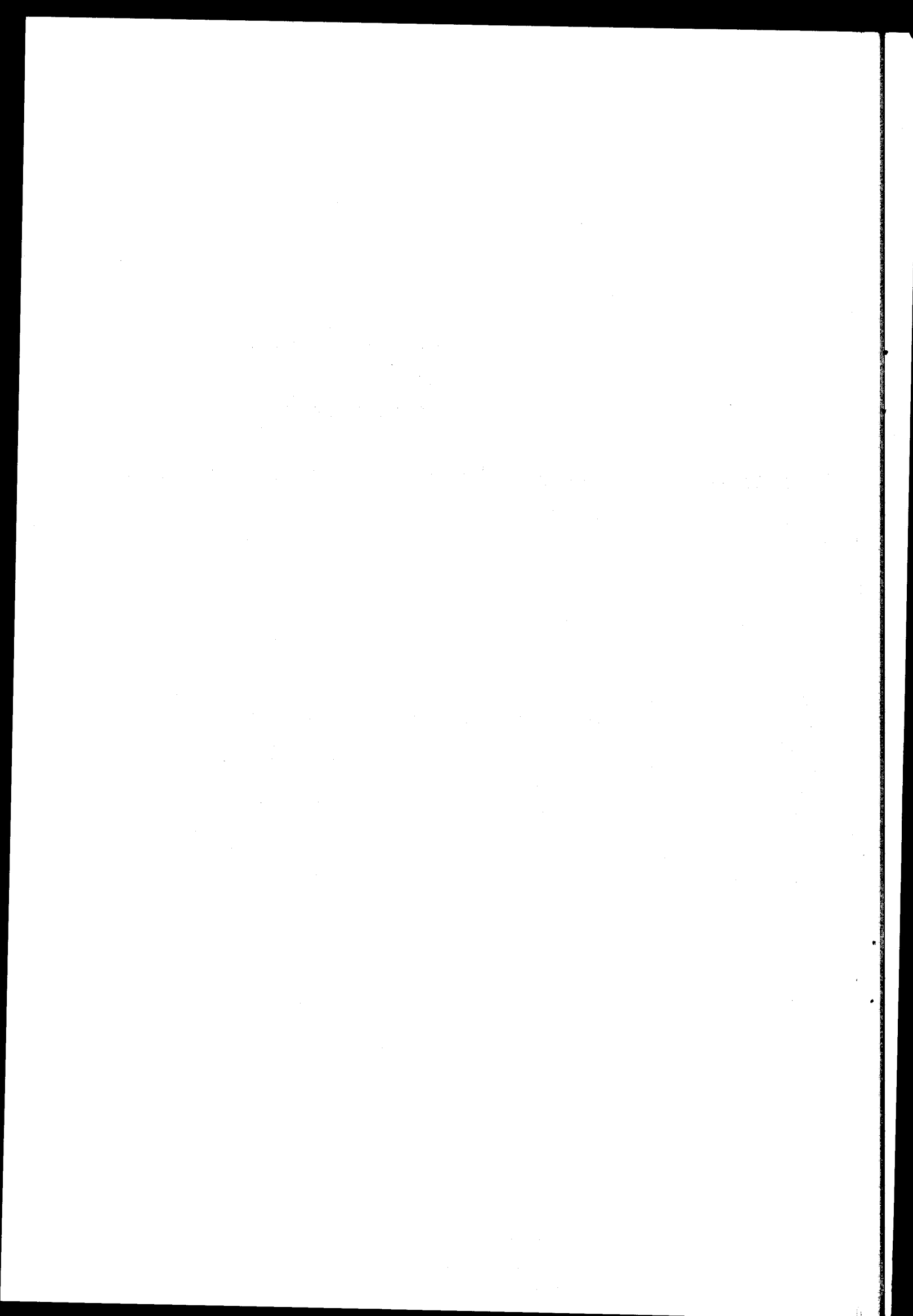
Launching the document, Evans stated:

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Contents

5/77

Socialists demand a Community Regional Policy	1
Hellmut Sieglerschmidt : Wooly European Watchwords	4
Congress of the Danish Social Democratic Party : Towards a Democratic and Socialist Europe	7



"This report is timed to coincide with the opening of the debate in the European Parliament and its Committees on the review of the Regional Policy and on the Budget for 1978.

We all strongly deplore the cut in the allocation for the ERDF from 750 MEUA to 398 MEUA which the Council made in July. The Socialists have served notice that they will be fighting the Council on this.

But we cannot say strongly enough that the size of the Fund is only one aspect of the problem. The Community must adopt a much more consistent and coordinated approach to regional inequality. The Community's very limited funds must be used in a coordinated way. National regional programmes should be developed with an awareness of the Community dimension.

The Regional Development Programmes which Member States are required to send in by the end of this year must be studied by Parliament and the Commission and a planned approach to the whole problem taken up.

We support most of the ideas in the package put forward in July by the Commission and we hope Messrs. Jenkins and Giolitti will fight for the implementation of the package. They should for example implement straight away the proposal for regional impact certificates on all policies. Otherwise cynicism about the purpose and value of the EEC will continue to grow.

As well as coordinating the use of EEC funds and policies the Socialists believe that the possibility of coordinating state aids to industry granted by national Governments should be more urgently studied. Parliament should receive a detailed report on all such subsidies and action should be taken to ensure that there is no waste in resources as the different regions bid against each other for investment.

The problems that would be involved in controlling economic growth in the most developed regions of the Community also deserve careful study. The Group is not for or against any particular ideas on this subject. We believe that the whole subject needs to be properly studied but as Socialists we naturally agree that whilst an inflexible disciplinary approach would not be acceptable, no Regional Policy can be envisaged which does not eventually develop an adequate element of control."

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The document is intended, not only as a guide for parliamentary action this year, but also as a symbol of the political aims of Socialists in Europe during the run-up to elections for the European Parliament.

The document emphasized that Regional Policy is a political problem because failure by the Community to arrest present trends could lead to political disintegration as Governments come under pressure to take protectionist measures or to provide special aids to particular industries or companies. The Socialist Group says that "the growth of regional differences within Member States can lead to a weakening of political unity and further reduction in the Community's political weight. Similarly the development of a Community Regional Policy would be a symbol of the value of the Community for its citizens.

The Socialist Group believes that the Community should concentrate efforts on practical policies to reduce unemployment and regional differences in living standards and opportunities for development. This would be more comprehensible than the adoption of boldly worded communiqués containing no practical goals and followed by inaction and disillusionment. In this sense Regional Policy should be seen as the geographically based element in a comprehensive economic structural policy."

Copies of the above mentioned document on the "Future of Regional Policy" (PE/GS/111/77 fin.) are available from :

European Parliament, Socialist Group - B-1000 Brussels, blvd.de l'Empereur 3

WOOLLY EUROPEAN WATCHWORDS

The European Peoples Party's Political Programme

By Hellmut Sieglerschmidt

As campaigning for direct elections to the European Parliament begins, the strength of alliances forged between EEC political parties with similar policies is being put to the test. They must demonstrate that their organization and programme will enable them to undertake joint action. The difficulties which naturally arise when national parties with different structures work together have to be overcome. As the examples of the Confederation of Socialist Parties of the European Community and the European Peoples Party show, there are two ways of tackling this problem.

The names of the alliances are in themselves significant: whereas the name "Confederation of Socialist Parties" recognises that there is, as yet, no European Socialist party, the Christian-Democratic parties overlook the fact that the same is true in their case - although the differences and tensions between them have been clear enough over the last few weeks (one only needs to recall the plan put forward by Franz-Josef Strauss and the CSU for a conservative EEC alliance with Chirac's French Gaullists and the British Conservatives). There is no European People's Party. It is a federation of parties. Thus the Christian-Democrats pretentiously refer to the summary of their electoral goals as a "programme", whereas the corresponding socialist document is modestly called an "election platform". There would have been nothing objectionable in that, if the policies set out in the "Political Programme" of the Christian-Democratic parties had been sufficiently well-defined to distinguish them from the Socialist election platform. A comparison of the two drafts shows that the opposite is true. Here too, European citizens who fail to study the draft in detail are liable to be misled by the false label. Without submitting the draft to a detailed analysis we need only take a few examples of the language used to show how true this is.

What is meant by the Christian-Democratic call for a "participatory democracy"? The word "participatory" is derived from "participation". Is democracy possible without the participation of the citizens? Certainly not. This call is therefore nothing more than an empty phrase. The elector is not told what the phrase means - if indeed it means anything at all.

The same applies to the "partnership society" which is described as the better path. It is not, however, stated what kind of society this would be.

The Christian-Democrats wish to work for the right to a fair income and the right to good health. That is of course very laudable. In fact the only other thing we need this summer is the right to fine weather. All forms of cultural creativity are to be promoted. All forms? In this case many advocates of this CD Programme ought to have behaved differently towards, for instance, politically "unacceptable" artists and writers. Is such a change of heart possible?

The sense of other proposals in the programme is equally questionable. For example, congested areas are to be "dismantled". Just like that. Anyone who has been seriously concerned with this difficult problem knows that it cannot be solved by draconian methods.

Another example of a woolly, pompous proposal is the call for a council for the defence of human rights. As everyone knows there is a Commission on Human Rights and a Human Rights Committee in the United Nations.

Within the framework of the Council of Europe, the European Commission on Human Rights and the European Court of Human Rights have the task of safeguarding rights and basic liberties. A further institution of this sort would simply complicate, rather than reinforce, the protection of human rights.

The CD Programme contains a number of practical and welcome demands. This is particularly true of the demand that the state should draw up an out-

line plan embracing major economic and social guidelines for submission to Parliament. This comes as a surprise to anyone who calls to mind the views of the leading members of the European Parliament CD Group on this subject. When we remember, for example, that the CDU and the CSU fear the very word 'planning' as much as the devil fears holy water, the question is, when does the opposition in the Bundestag intend to propose outline planning of this sort. Or should one rather anticipate that conservative Christian-Democrats will take steps to have this 'socialist blemish' removed from the programme ?

Otherwise, during the next national elections, many of the parties in the EPP will be obliged to conduct a campaign in conflict with their European slogans.

Congress of the Danish Social Democratic Party
on 17 - 20 September 1977 in Copenhagen

TOWARDS A DEMOCRATIC AND SOCIALIST EUROPE

The 32nd Congress of the Danish Social Democratic Party was held in Copenhagen from 17 to 20 September 1977.

The Congress considered drafts of the new policy statement and working programmes which had been widely debated at branch meetings of the party. More than 700 amendments had been tabled as the result of these discussions.

Events preceding the Congress gave further grounds for optimism - the party had increased its share of the vote from 30 to 37 % at the last elections in February 1977, and membership had risen by approximately 125,000.

The Congress was also of interest from the European point of view, as important declarations on the Party's European policy were included in the new programmes.

Given that there is now a majority in Denmark against membership of the Community, and that a mere 11 % of Social Democratic voters are in favour of direct elections, it is scarcely surprising that the Congress had a very major debate on European Policy.

It was therefore remarkable that the cautiously positive attitude on European cooperation reflected in both draft programmes came out even more strongly in the amendments that were adopted.

The European section of the draft policy programme simply said that its aim was a democratic and socialist Europe which would conduct an open progressive policy in its relations with other countries. To this statement the following amendment, which was adopted by 147 votes to 104, was added : 'Denmark's membership of the Community must be assessed continuously in terms of whether it furthers national and international democratic socialism.'

Although the working programme could not be fully discussed due to pressure of time, there is a fairly comprehensive section on the European policy.

The outline of a Social Democratic European policy is contained in the following statements : 'The Social Democrats do not take the view that the European policy should be developed by changing the Institutions and shifting the balance of power between the Institutions, but by a common will to take decisions on economic policy. This means that the present situation, in which an individual country has a right of veto on questions which it considers vital to its own interests, will be maintained.'

On direct elections : 'The Social Democrats will work to ensure that direct elections to the European Parliament provide increased democratic control over decisions taken in the Community. The Social Democrats will also take the view that such control should be exercised first and foremost by the Folketing and the Market Relations Committee, and in the case of major decisions, will ensure that the Folketing and the public are involved in the decision-making process far enough in advance of the final decision.'

The working programme also includes a declaration of the party's readiness to cooperate in many specific sectors : monetary and regional policy, agricultural policy, fisheries policy, the control of multinationals, minimum standards in employment and social policy matters, foreign trade and development aid.

A resolution on the present political situation was altered to include an amendment calling upon the government and the Folketing to set up an independent commission to make a critical assessment of the economic, social and cultural consequences of Community membership.

Finally, the Congress approved a proposal by the party council for candidates for direct elections to be nominated at a special congress. A proposal that constituency associations should nominate their candidates themselves was rejected by a large majority. Under

the draft law, to be presented in October, one member is to be elected for Greenland, and the rest in 'Southern Denmark', which counts as a single constituency. The party will therefore draw up a list of 20 names.

The Social Democratic European MPs will become non-voting members of the party council and must consult it and the Social Democratic Group in the Folketing before any important decision in the European Parliament. In addition, their work in the European Parliament is to be discussed at least once a year with the party council. European MPs may also take part in meetings of the Folketing group.

The intention here is to meet the concern that the Danish and European policies of the party might begin to diverge if European MPs' relations with the main party bodies were not close enough.

