

ADDRESS BY

DR. PATRICK J. HILLERY,

VICE-PRESIDENT OF THE COMMISSION OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES,

TO THE ANNUAL MEETING OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES OF THE

PAUL FINET FOUNDATION, LUXEMBOURG,

ON FRIDAY, 29 OCTOBER, 1976 AT 11.00 a.m.

(Vice-President Hillery is President of the Foundation which was created in 1965 to help the children of disaster victims in the coal and steel industry to continue or complete their education).

Ladies and Gentlemen,

INTRODUCTION:

It seems no time at all since last October when we met both for our annual meeting and to commemorate the 10th Anniversary of the Foundation. Like most years, it is one in which the things remembered most have either a political or a personal significance and today's meeting reminds us of both aspects of the past twelve months.

Undoubtedly the major event of the year for the European Community was the agreement that direct elections to the European Parliament should become a reality and that the first elections should be held in 1978. I am, therefore, particularly glad to welcome here today Miss Astrid Lulling, who was a member of the European Parliament from 1965 to 1974, and who accepted our invitation to speak on the political significance for Europe of the decision on direct elections. Luxembourg is "home" for the Paul Finet Foundation and we consider an address by a leading citizen of Luxembourg to be an important part of each of our meetings. Miss Lulling as Bourgmestre de Schiffange and a member of the Chamber of Deputies is one of Luxembourg's most distinguished citizens.

I am also glad to welcome among us today those young men and women who represent the Foundation's scholarship holders. The success of our scholarship holders is one of the most lasting memorials there can be to those who lose their lives in the coal and steel industries. Another memorial must, of course, be our continuing determination to prevent loss of life in these two major industries on which the development of our Community has been based. Unhappily, the past year has again seen a number of serious accidents and I should like to remember here today that sad loss, particularly the bereaved families of the most recent tragedy at Merlebach.

I welcome here today Mr. John Baker of the British Steel Corporation who is present for the first time since his appointment as a member of the Board of Trustees. An absent friend is Mr. Francois Vinck, who was among those who helped to establish the Paul Finet Foundation and who has so often himself presided at these meetings. He is unfortunately prevented, through illness, from being here today and I am sure you will join with me in sending him greetings and wishing him well.

Finally, in this introduction it gives me great pleasure to thank all those who by their work and goodwill have contributed to making 1976 another milestone in the history of the Foundation. The Commission values their involvement and dedication as I have valued it as President of the Foundation.

PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS

Given such a representative audience and the themes of today's agenda may I, before we proceed to the next item, present one view of the general context in which the European Community finds itself today.

Clearly today's world is one which faces many serious problems. Economic problems which worry everyone : statesmen, housewives, workers, employers. Political problems which at times seem to threaten the most stable democracies. Social problems which express themselves as poverty and under-privilege in the midst of plenty. Technological problems which seem to make man the victim of scientific progress rather than its master.

Among those who search for solutions to these problems there is neither that consensus which comes from the certainty that solutions may be found or from the confidence of determined leadership. This seems true of almost all our relationships, global and international, Community and member State.

Given such uncertainty and this lack of confidence, the best way forward often seems to lie in encouraging a wide-ranging debate in which all may participate. The virtue of this approach is its commitment to replace confrontation by consultation. It underlines the single truth that even the smallest local problem in today's complex world must involve in its resolution the interest of everyone touched by it.

THE TRIPARTITE APPROACH

In terms of the European Community and of the development of Community social policy, it is my philosophy that this approach of consultation and solidarity is the one most likely to succeed. I think one must admit, however, that at times this philosophy is not entirely adequate or satisfying. For example, important as it is that the Social Partners should be involved in the making of economic and social guidelines with the Community Institutions and National Governments, this process can at times seem to inhibit the taking of initiatives which, while clearly not the answer to an overall situation, could, nevertheless, offer some comfort and hope to those most seriously touched by a crisis situation.



PERSPECTIVE AND TIMESCALE

It seems to me that there are problems of both perspective and timescale involved here. Because the employment situation is the product of global recession, the concentration on the search for a global solution may have distracted us too readily from tackling the local expressions of that recession. In fact, because of the human problems which sustained periods of unemployment pose, particularly for young men and women, I believe we should now look more deeply at the way in which individual enterprise creates new jobs.

In terms of time scale, some of our problems may spring from the failure of institutional leadership to keep pace with the extraordinary changes of environment brought about by scientific progress, education and communication. The world with which today's leaders and administrators must deal is a world which found little place in their school or university text books, and yet it will still be a considerable time before the generation whose first awareness was of a post-colonial, nuclear age becomes a powerful voice in politics. Surely there must be wider recognition that new aspirations and new technologies demand new concepts of appreciation and understanding. Those of us who hold positions of authority at a governmental level have a responsibility to be more open to new ideas and the thinking of a younger generation. Particularly we must recognise that it is not enough to make decisions in favour of change. Once a change is decided on it must be implemented as quickly as possible. Educational systems, for example, in which it takes 10-15 years to introduce a new curriculum or teaching method are obviously doomed to failure.

CONCLUSION: THE DEMOCRATIC FRAMEWORK

In raising such questions I am conscious that I, in turn, can offer no easy answers. My instinct, however, is that we are moving into a period where some of the tensions and difficulties we face may be resolved by a deeper exploration of the hierarchy of relationships between individual enterprise and regional prosperity, regional prosperity and national partnership, national partnership and Community solidarity, Community solidarity and global equity. This approach will, I believe, prove to be in harmony with the uniquely liberal and humane virtues of the Western democracies.

Democracy in the member States of the Community, in Scandinavia, and on the North American continent, is based on a belief in the value of the individual and in the possibility of a society at peace with itself because free men and women capable of genuine esteem for each other can accept the discipline of what we know as the rule of the law.

Whatever our contemporary difficulties, and whatever the future may bring, this belief in the value of the individual and in an acceptance that the best protection of the right to liberty lies in freely-elected institutions is the surest guarantee of that continuing extension of dignity and justice which must be the fundamental aspiration of the democratic way of life.