

INFORMATION

S O C I A L P O L I C Y

SEVEN IMMEDIATE STEPS TOWARDS A EUROPEAN SOCIAL POLICY

51/73 A

The EEC Commission has approved and sent to the Council of Ministers a Social Action Programme, as requested by the Paris Summit Conference in October 1972. This Programme proposes seven actions to be undertaken immediately, the rest in 1974-76.

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A. INTRODUCTION

The Paris Summit Conference of the Heads of State or Government, held in October 1972, decided that the Community should adopt a comprehensive Social Action Programme by 1st January 1973. The leaders of the Nine "emphasised that they attached as much importance to vigorous action in the social field as to the achievement of economic and monetary union". They added that "economic expansion is not an end in itself. Its firm aim should be to enable disparities in living conditions to be reduced. ... It should result in an improvement of the quality of life as well as in standards of living."

The EEC Commission, after extensive consultations with the member states, the European Parliament, the Economic and Social Committee, trade unions, employers and other interested parties, has submitted to the Council of Ministers, for action by the end of 1973, proposals for a Social Action Programme.

The Commission's proposals consist of some 40 different actions, to be undertaken in 1974-76, aiming at:

- full and better employment
- improving living and working conditions
- giving trade unions and employers a greater say in the social and economic decision-making processes within the Community.

The Commission has selected seven specific actions as being of particular immediate importance and has asked the Council of Ministers to act on them before the end of 1973. These seven actions are not priorities. They are points on which the Community is in a position to take action before the end of the year.

B. THE SEVEN IMMEDIATE ACTIONS

1. 40-hour week and 4-week annual paid holiday

Objective: To fix, as an immediate objective, the attainment of the 40-hour week by 1975 and a 4-week annual paid holiday by 1976 in all sectors of employment throughout the Community.

Present

situation: The general trend throughout the Community is towards the 40-hour week. Sometimes this is achieved by legislation, sometimes by collective agreements between trade unions and employers. But progress in certain sectors lags far behind others.

Similarly, the 4-week annual paid holiday is being attained in some countries far more rapidly than in others.

This trend, which has recently gained momentum, is a welcome indication of a steady and progressive improvement in what are perhaps the most important aspects of the working conditions of wage-earners.

The time has now come for a Community initiative in this field, to insure that workers in all industrial branches, as well as in agriculture and in the tertiary sector, benefit from this upward trend, and thereby establish minimum standards for all workers throughout the Community.

These targets are relatively modest and command widespread verbal support from the Social Partners.

Means:

- a) The Commission will invite the Council of Ministers to obtain a general commitment from the Member-States to attain the 40-hour week by 1975 and the 4-week annual paid holiday by 1976.
- b) The Commission will invite the European representatives of the trade unions and employers to start negotiations at the European level to realise these objectives.

2. Equal Pay

Objective: To ensure that the principle of equal pay for equal work is fully implemented throughout the Community.

Present situation: The Treaty of Rome committed the member States to apply by the mid-1960's the principle of equal pay for men and women. But a recent report on how this principle was being applied in reality by the six original EEC member States has shown up a number of serious and persisting infringements.

Means: As an immediate step towards ensuring that the principle of equal pay is implemented, the Commission is preparing a new Community agreement on the matter.

At a later stage, the Commission intends to take a number of other initiatives including:

- a) proceedings against those member States which have not yet complied with the formal and direct obligations imposed on them by the Treaty of Rome.
- b) an invitation to employers and unions to meet at a European level to negotiate a European framework agreement, aimed especially at eliminating the misuse of job classification systems.
- c) to prepare, before the end of 1973, a report on the situation in the three new member countries, as a supplement to the report mentioned above.

3. Mass Dismissals

Objective: To improve the protection of workers' rights in the case of mass dismissals.

Present situation: Following a number of Commission reports and discussions in the Council of Ministers and in the Standing Committee on Employment, a draft directive for harmonising provisions prevailing in the member States was submitted to the Council by the Commission in November 1972. The Council requested the opinions of the European Parliament and the Economic and Social Committee, which were issued respectively in March and June 1973.

Means: The Commission will shortly submit an amended proposal to the Council, for action before the end of 1973.

4. Social Fund aid for migrant workers and handicapped workers

a) Migrant Workers

Objective: To help improve the social and human conditions under which migration takes place and attain the ultimate goal of equality of treatment between national and foreign workers throughout the Community.

Present situation: The phenomenon of migration is not only a direct result of Community policies; it also has a strong influence on manpower policy, industrial and regional development, and even housing and social security policy within the Community. The Social Fund is already used to a limited extent to finance projects facilitating the mobility of workers. A wider role for the Social Fund in this field is necessary on account of the exceptional growth in migration movements, particularly "spontaneous" movements.

Means: The Commission proposes that it should be enabled to give help from the Social Fund to operations for the vocational training, removal and reception facilities, etc. of migrant workers and, in addition, the training of social advisers, the education of the children of migrant workers, the training of specialised instructors and housing aids.

This action by the Social Fund is an immediate step in improving the conditions under which migration takes place. But the ultimate goal of equality of treatment of migrant workers and their families calls for a much more comprehensive programme. The Commission is preparing a number of other initiatives in this respect in the fields of social security, social services and housing projects. It will also examine the important question of the full participation of migrants in their living and working environment. The Commission has set up an ad hoc group of high level representatives of member States to assist it in planning an overall strategy.

b) Handicapped Workers

Objective: To help the social and vocational integration of handicapped persons.

Present

situation: The Social Fund already gives help on a limited scale to varied national projects in favour of handicapped workers, In view of the increasing number of handicapped workers who can benefit from rehabilitation, there is an urgent need to ensure a better adaptation of manpower supply and demand in the Community and to give the handicapped population fresh motivation by enabling them to contribute usefully to economic life. The Social Fund must, therefore, be able to help finance the measures taken in each country to this end.

Means:

The Commission proposes that handicapped workers be entitled to assistance from the Social Fund with the aim of:

- a) ensuring that adequate facilities for vocational adaptation and re-adaptation are widely available in a group of approved centres, a list of which will be drawn up every year by the Commission on proposals from the member States;
- b) developing at local and regional level vocational adaptation and re-adaptation measures ensuring lasting co-ordination between the services involved and not isolating handicapped persons from other social groups.

5. Action programme for handicapped workers in an open market economy

Objective: To create the necessary conditions for the extensive development of vocational retraining for the disabled to enable the greatest number of handicapped workers to be fully integrated into society and earn their own living in normal circumstances.

Present situation: Encouraging progress has been made in some member States in the field of rehabilitation. However, the uneven distribution of facilities and trained personnel, the shortage of suitable jobs available and the lack of co-ordinated research and systematic information of new developments means that many handicapped workers are unable to develop their potential capacities and are obliged to live off social security.

Means: The Commission is proposing to the Council of Ministers a 6-year Action Programme on the employment of the disabled in the open labour market. The programme contains three types of action:

1. Collaboration between model rehabilitation centres for an intensive programme of common research and instruction on modern retraining methods.
2. Community support for selected short-term training projects in local centres to demonstrate the validity of methods worked out under Part I.
3. Technical and financial assistance for initiatives, arising out of actions under Part 2, likely to result in the creation of permanent centres.

The Commission is setting up a new consultative body, the European Committee for the Rehabilitation of Disabled Persons, to help it co-ordinate this programme. The Committee will be composed of governmental experts, representatives of disabled persons' associations and of official co-ordinating bodies, together with representatives of the employers and trade unions.

6. Industrial Safety

a) The General Safety Committee

Objective: To promote a Community policy of industrial safety and better environmental conditions at work.

Present

situation: Co-ordination between national safety authorities at the Community level has, until now, been unsystematic, apart from the highly successful but purely sectoral Mines and Steel Industry Safety and Health Commissions. There is general agreement on the need to set up a permanent body, in the field of industrial safety in general, with the aim of promoting the harmonisation of safety regulations throughout the Community and the co-ordination of research and information. There have been also widespread demands for further work on drawing up European codes of good practice.

Means:

The Commission proposes to set up a General Safety Committee. The Committee's field of reference will cover industrial medicine, safety, hygiene and environmental conditions. The Committee will have the specific task of helping to prepare and implement a Community safety policy, together with a general mandate to exchange information on research and new safety measures, to coordinate national activities in the field of safety, and to assist the Commission in the preparation of draft regulations. Working parties will be set up for various industrial sectors, in particular to continue drawing up European codes of good practice.

The General Safety Committee will be composed of:

- two governmental experts from each country to be nominated preferably by the National Safety Inspectorates. This group will have certain specific responsibilities in particular the liaison between national authorities and the activities of the Committee.
- representatives of employers and trade unions.

b) Extension of the Mines Safety and Health Commission

Objective: To extend the terms of reference of the Mines Safety and Health Commission to cover the whole field of underground and open-cast mining.

Present

situation: The Mines Safety and Health Commission was set up in 1957 to follow developments in safety in coal mines, propose studies and research, exchange information and forward proposals to the Governments. It is logical to extend the scope of this Commission, which has been very successful, to cover the full range of activities for which the administrative bodies in mines are responsible.

Means: The Commission proposes that the Commission's terms of reference be extended to cover the whole field of underground mining immediately, and to cover open-cast mining by 1976.

7. European Foundation for improving the environment and living and working conditions

Objective: To promote research into the factors which are changing the structure of society and the style and conditions of life and work in the Community, with a view to clarifying the long term policy options and thereby assisting decision-making at national and community level.

Present situation: This type of prospective research is being undertaken on a limited scale in various institutions in Europe. The importance of such research is bound to grow in the future, as more and more attention is paid to the underlying social and environmental factors that bring about new demands and new priorities in social organisation. The need for a Community-level approach to these issues has been widely recognised and brought to the forefront by the Council of Ministers of Social Affairs. The European Parliament and the Economic and Social Committee have already expressed a favorable opinion on the issue. The recently approved Programme for the Environment included a proposal for a European Foundation for the Environment and the Commission has decided to integrate the two concepts in order to avoid duplication.

Means: The Commission proposes the creation of a European Foundation to promote longterm research in accordance with the aims of the social and environment policy of the Community. The Foundation would operate as a clearing house, disseminating information, co-ordinating, directing and financing research carried on in research institutes in the Community, and maintaining contacts with developments outside the Community.

The studies will be concerned, on the one hand, with the analysis and the interpretation of the needs, both material and non-material, present or future, of post-industrial European society, and, on the other hand, with the quantitative and qualitative factors required to satisfy these needs, the constraints which limit their fulfilment and the types and forms of social organisation conducive to this end. The problems involved in improving working conditions will occupy a special and privileged place in the research programme and in its structure and organisation.

In the field of working conditions, for example, the following issues among others could be examined:

- promotion of the human element in industry (participation, career structures, etc.),
- the organisation of work (shift work, monotonous and repetitive work, flexible schedules, absenteeism, labour turnover, automation),
- industrial safety and health,
- specific problems of certain categories of workers,
- problems related to work but external to the firm (transport, leisure, staggering of holiday periods, flexible retiring age).

Some of these issues relate directly to the specific initiatives proposed by the Commission, in the field of job enrichment in particular and on many other issues in the Social Action Programme. The Foundation will play a vital role in continuing and developing research initiated by the Commission.

The Foundation (as at present envisaged) would have a small staff headed by a Director nominated on a contractual basis. The governing body would comprise representatives of member governments, the relevant services of the Commission, employers and trade unions and also the officials of the Foundation. The Foundation would be financed in part by an annual contribution from the Community Budget. A report on activities and a Financial Report would be submitted annually to the Community institutions.

D. CONCLUSION

Such are the seven actions that the Commission is proposing to the Council of Ministers for immediate action. It is now up to the Council to assume its political responsibilities and to meet the commitments entered into by the Paris Summit Conference.