



*European Communities
Commission
Press Release*

*20 Kensington Palace Gardens
London W8 4QQ
Telephone: 01-727 8090*

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SHANKS URGES REFORM OF WORK CONDITIONS

Mr Michael Shanks, Director-General for social affairs in the Commission of the European Communities, today (Saturday) defended the Commission's proposals for long-term reform of employment conditions in the Community in the face of what he called a short-term threat to employment.

He said that while there were nine million non-Community migrant workers and their families working in the Common Market, it was reasonable, if jobs were short, to give preference to Community workers.

But jobs which migrant workers were and are doing were those which Common Market citizens shunned.

A consequence, therefore, of relying less on migrant workers in the future would be to improve conditions in the "ghetto industries" of Europe. The need, therefore, for a short-term employment policy in the Community was indeed urgent, but could not be a substitute for longer-term social reform.

Mr Shanks, formerly industrial relations director at British Leyland, was addressing the annual conference of the British Institute of Personnel Management at Harrogate. Together with the Commissioner for Social Affairs, Dr Patrick Hillery, he is the principal author of the Commission's social action programme which has been approved in principle by the Council of Ministers.

Progress already made in putting the programme into action indicated the importance which, in spite of everything, governments, employers, trades unions and the general public attached to a planned programme of social reform in today's explosive and dangerous conditions.

"As far as employment is concerned," he said, "we have to keep our heads. Some people have suggested that in the present circumstances we should forget about the longer-term measures in our programme - the concern for improving worker participation and work organisation, a better deal for women at work, help for the handicapped and so on - and concentrate instead entirely on measures to maintain a level of overall employment.

"I think this would be quite wrong. The threat to employment I suspect, is short-term whereas our programme is for long-term structural improvement. We cannot turn this programme on its head every few months because of changes in short-term employment trends.

"When unemployment increases, the problems of the disadvantaged sectors with whom our social action programme is largely concerned do not become less acute. They become worse."

Mr Shanks drew attention to the clear link between employment policy and immigration policy. Two-thirds of the 12 million migrant workers and their families inside the Community came from outside.

"Not only do we have to ensure them a greater equality as a matter of social justice; we have also to re-examine their role in the European labour market as a whole.

"What degree of priority in the labour market should be given to Community citizens - Italians and Irish, for example - over non-Community people: Turks, Greeks, Yugoslavs, Spanish, Portuguese, North Africans and, in a special category, overseas Commonwealth citizens?

"It is not reasonable having accepted them into the Community to work that one should discriminate between migrants according to their country of origin. But it is reasonable, if jobs are short, to give some preference in the search for jobs to Community countries. This is what happens today, in a crude, uncoordinated way.

"In the last few months Germany, France, the Benelux countries and Denmark have temporarily stopped the recruitment of workers from outside the Community.

"But this is a temporary measure and if it continues indefinitely it will have serious effects on the economies of the Mediterranean countries concerned. So we have to plan, together as a Community and then with the countries that have up to now provided the migrants, what should be done as a long-term solution."

Mr Shanks pointed out then that a consequence of less reliance on foreign migrant workers in unpopular jobs would be more pressure to improve working conditions.

He said he did not, in fact, believe we faced an immediate employment crisis in the Community, rather a weakening in particular sectors. We must deal with the issue sector by sector, with better coordination among countries and better up-to-date information.