

Aims and means of a European social policy

Resolution of the Economic and Social Commission (Brussels - 7 November 1997)
adopted by the Brussels Central Council (12 December 1997)

The Economic and Social Commission, chaired by Mr. Olivier Giscard d'Estaing, met in Brussels on 7 November 1997 and once again examined the aims and means of a European Social Policy.

At a time when the reduction of working time is on the agenda in several countries, the commission wishes to point out the relatively weak impact such a reduction, which may well have been justified in the past, would have on unemployment, particularly in the light of experience to date. It stresses the dangers of a regulation that fails to take account of specificities and hence the need to conduct negotiations at sectoral and company level.

On this occasion, it wishes to emphasise

- ◇ on the one hand, the growing interdependence among our economies and the concern that social disparities should not adversely affect the smooth operation of a competitive economy and, on the other hand, the need to tackle the employment problem, bearing in mind that society is subject to and will continue to be subject to fundamental structural changes.
- ◇ the fact that national legislation should look to that of other member countries for inspiration, seeking to align with those that ensure the optimum social conditions compatible with economic possibilities.
- ◇ that the national government authorities and the Community Authorities should lay down the general framework and goals of such a social policy, while specific measures should be taken through collective bargaining in each sector and/or at company level. An approach of this kind would have the major advantage of prompting a range of formulae able to promote diversity in the ways work is organised without detriment to its quality.
- ◇ the usefulness of such guidelines, in the face of the current discussions on negotiations on working time, on the eve of the European Jobs Summit.

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