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Opinion on Chapter III of the Special Message from the Committee of Ministers, dealing with the Social Programme of the Council of Europe

Report

Social, Health and Family Affairs Committee

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Draft Opinion

1. The Assembly has studied with great care Chapter III of the Special Message from the Committee of Ministers, which contains proposals for a programme of action in the social field.

It wishes to convey to the Committee of Ministers its great appreciation of this valuable initiative, which goes a long way to meet the point of view of the Assembly.

2. The Assembly recalls that it has on various occasions expressed its opinion on a common policy in social matters : first in Recommendation 14 of 1951 ; then in Recommendation 27 of 1952 on the creation of a Social Committee, and, most recently, in Opinion No. 5 of 1953. Moreover, it has adopted Recommendations on various specific social questions, such as, for example, housing.

3. The Assembly has, therefore, examined the proposals concerning social questions in the light of these earlier Recommendations and of Opinion No. 5. It has noted that the proposed programme contains a number of items which correspond to a large extent, although not completely, to views expressed by the Assembly, as also some items which are new and based directly on suggestions made by various Governments. The Assembly has, therefore, first undertaken a comparison between the proposed programme and its own views as expressed in various Recommendations and particularly in Opinion No. 5 of 1953. Then it has examined the new proposals separately.

COMPARISON BETWEEN OPINION NO. 5 OF 1953 AND THE PROPOSED PROGRAMME

4. The Assembly notes with satisfaction that most of the ideas contained in Opinion No. 5¹ are also included in the Special Message. It hopes that the establishment of a European Social Charter may be initiated without delay, since it attaches great importance to the creation of such a Charter.

5. The procedure proposed by the Assembly for the speedy abolition of discrimination between nationals of the Members of the Council of Europe in the social field, namely to draw up, as a first step, a comparative table showing the present extent of discrimination, has not been adopted by the Committee of Ministers. The Assembly agrees that the conclusion of the Convention on Reciprocal Treatment of Nationals may go some way to solve this problem. It wishes, however, again to stress the importance of its speedy solution and hopes that the Committee of Ministers will keep this constantly in mind.

The special questions of the social security rights of the families of migrant workers and the conclusion of a multilateral convention on social security are not mentioned in the Special Message. The Assembly understands, however, from the Fifth Report of the Committee of Ministers that these questions are on the Agenda of the Committee of Experts on Social Security. It realises that they are difficult of solution and that it may be an advantage to await the results obtained within the framework of the 'European Coal and Steel Community.

6. With regard to harmonisation of social legislation, there is no particular mention in the Special Message of the co-ordination of legislation in the stage of preparation and the " parallel legislation " referred to in Opinion No. 5. It is, however, possible to interpret the Special Message, and particularly point (c) of the proposed terms of reference of the Social Committee, so as to permit of such action.

7. The question of comparability of social statistics is not included in the social programme proposed in the Special Message. The Assembly can, however, agree with the view expressed in the Report of the Committee of Ministers that this highly technical question should on the whole be left to the technical organizations especially equipped to deal with it. The Assembly appreciates the initiative of the Committee of Ministers in asking the Member Governments to ratify International Labour Convention 63 on Statistics of Wages and Hours of Work.

8. The Assembly appreciates particularly the creation of a Social Committee, composed of senior officials of the appropriate national Government Departments. This will greatly facilitate and stimulate the future social work of the Council of Europe and secure its continuity. The Assembly considers that, on the whole, the

1. In Opinion No. 6, adopted on 23rd September, 1953, the Assembly gave its views on the proposals for a social programme contained in the Memorandum prepared by the Secrétariat-General on the activities which the Council of Europe could properly carry out in the social field. Opinion No. 5 contains the following principal ideas and suggestions: establishment of a European Social Charter ; abolition of discrimination in the social field: as between nationals of the Members of the Council of Europe : harmonisation of social legislation existing legislation as well as legislation in preparation comparability of social statistics establishment of a documentation centre ; establishment of a new Social Committee composed of senior officials in the social administrations of the Member States

proposed terms of reference of the Social Committee are satisfactory, although they differ somewhat from what was suggested, in Recommendation 27 (1952). The main thing is that the new committee should be left a certain initiative to make suggestions of its own to the Committee of Ministers. The Assembly would, however, like to see included in the terms of reference the last item proposed in Recommendation 27 (1952), which reads as follows : " To keep the Committee on Social Questions of the Consultative Assembly as fully informed as possible of the progress of its work. "

It is important that the new committee should work in as close liaison as possible with the Assembly and its Committee on Social Questions. The Assembly, therefore, is of the opinion that joint meetings of the two committees should be held from time to time.

EXAMINATION OF THE NEW PROPOSALS

9. Employment of the older worker

Much consideration has lately been given to this question by Governments as well as by international organizations. It is studied both from the point of view of national economy — to utilise the economic value in skill and experience of older people as long as possible and if socially and economically desirable — and from the social point of view, in relation to the individual worker. It is particularly this latter aspect which, in the opinion of the Assembly, should be stressed by the Council of Europe in its social programme. The possibility should be opened for older workers to continue their work if they so desire, through an appropriate organization of the working processes, so that the skill of these workers can be utilised with due consideration to their physical abilities and without danger of over-strain. They should, however, not be forced to continue their work by any direct or indirect means, such as for example by the raising of the ordinary pensionable age. The question of the retirement age is included in the Agenda of the European Regional Conference which the International Labour Organisation will be convening towards the end of this year. The results of that Conference may, no doubt, be of value to the Council of Europe in its own approach to the question.

10. Full Employment

The Assembly recalls that it has already adopted three Recommendations on a common policy for full employment, namely : Recommendation 25 (1950), Recommendation 5 (1951) and Recommendation 10 (1951). Present trends in world economy seem to give added importance to a well-planned policy of full employment, and the Assembly wholeheartedly supports the further study of this important question.

11. Vocational Training

The Assembly notes that the Committee of Ministers places special emphasis on the vocational rehabilitation of adult workers. The Assembly is aware of the fact that the whole question of vocational training is being studied by various other international organizations. It wishes to draw particular attention to International Labour Recommendation No. 88, concerning the vocational training of adults, including disabled persons. This Recommendation, which was adopted by the International Labour Conference in 1950, contains a special chapter on international co-operation in the training of adults. It might well serve as a basis for the work of the Council of Europe in this field. The Assembly wishes, however, in this connection to stress the importance of vocational training also for young persons. It is of the opinion that the study of the general question should not be limited to vocational rehabilitation of adult workers.

12. Social problem of youth

In the belief that young people — the age-group between school children and adult workers — are in special need of social protection and vocational training, the Assembly emphasizes that this problem is all the more important because in many countries current demographic statistics point to a marked increase in the number of young persons during the next ten years.

13. Adjustment of the individual to the new conditions resulting from the growth of industrialisation

During the Third Part of its Fifth Session, in September 1953, the Assembly placed a similar question on its Agenda and referred it to the Committee on Social Questions. The Motion concerning this was contained in [Doc. 212](#) of the Fifth Ordinary Session, which envisaged a collaboration between national social research institutes for the establishment of a method of research giving particular attention to man as an individual and to the family as such.

The Assembly notes with satisfaction that the Committee of Ministers has decided to await the opinion of the Assembly on this question. It will in due course submit its Recommendation in this connection.

14. Assistance in the event of disasters

Since speed is often one of the decisive factors in the efficiency of such assistance, the Assembly agrees that one should study the possibility of providing for a scheme by which the assistance to a country, victim of a disaster, could enter into operation quickly and automatically, without, however, precluding the spontaneity of action on the part of the peoples themselves.

15. Public Health

It is with particular satisfaction that the Assembly welcomes these proposals. Since the negotiations for the creation of a " White Pool " have so far not led to positive results, it is important that the Council of Europe should realise some progress in that direction.

The Assembly has taken note of the letter of 23rd March, 1954 from the Director of the Regional Office for Europe of the World Health Organisation, and it wishes to express its appreciation of the readiness of that Organisation to co-operate with the Council of Europe. The Assembly agrees that services already existing in the framework of the W.H.O. should be utilised in so far as they can be adapted to the particular needs of Europe. It notes with satisfaction the intention of the W.H.O. to develop such services on a regional basis, and agrees that progress can be made more rapidly within a group of countries having broadly identical health problems.

The Assembly agrees with the procedure suggested by the Committee of Ministers to convene without delay a Committee of governmental experts to study the proposals of the Governments, the reply of the W.H.O. and the Opinion of the Assembly. It would welcome further proposals from the Governments for a wider collaboration in the health field. In this connection, the Assembly would draw attention to its study of the possibilities of an exchange of war cripples, and possibly other invalids as well, for the purpose of medical treatment in other countries.

CONCLUSION

In the light of the above considerations the Assembly approves and welcomes the proposals for a social programme contained in the Special Message from the Committee of Ministers. The Assembly wishes, however, to repeat what it has already stressed on many occasions, namely that certain aspects of the housing problem should also be included in the programme.