

CONV 698/03

CONTRIB 311

NOTE DE TRANSMISSION

du: Secrétariat

à la: Convention

Objet: Contribution présentée par M. Proinsias de Rossa, membre de la Convention
- "Donner à l'Union une véritable dimension sociale"

Le Secrétaire général de la Convention a reçu la contribution figurant en annexe de M. Proinsias de Rossa, membre de la Convention.

Contribution from Proinsias de Rossa, Member of the Convention

“Giving the Union a Genuine Social Dimension”

The decision to establish a Working Group on Social Europe represented a unique and positive assertion of the will of a large number of members of the Convention to ensure that the social achievements of European integration are not undermined by the neo-liberal emphasis on a trade-off between economic efficiency and social justice.

The fact that the social dimension has been addressed by the Convention is of the greatest significance. The initial resistance to the setting-up of the Working Group was based on the idea that social issues were mere details of policy, unrelated to the constitution-writing task of the Convention. The strong view of the participants was that key social issues are at the very heart of the integration process and must be reflected in the values and objectives of the Union, enshrined in the critical opening articles of the Constitutional Treaty.

The report of the Working Group states that “social considerations constitute an essential part of European integration. The EU cannot be a credible force for good in the wider world if it is indifferent to questions of social justice and poverty in European society or to how its citizens are treated at work and in retirement.” It goes on to highlight a range of issues ranging from employment and social security to the problems of retired people in respect of pensions and social services.

Much attention has been directed to consideration of the values and objectives of the Union. These values will guide the direction of overall EU policies in the future. It is essential to recognise that a clear statement of the Union’s values and objectives is required to improve citizens’ understanding of its purpose. Greater understanding can lead to greater support for EU policies, provided that they can see a genuine connection between statements of policy and everyday action.

Three important concepts have been proposed for inclusion among the stated values of the Union – Social Justice, Solidarity and Equality. In particular equality between men and women. These are fundamental. The specific issue of equality between men and women must be dealt with in the Treaty, in either the Values or the Objectives sections.

The stated objectives of the Union, to be included Article 3, must include a commitment to promote ‘Full Employment’ rather than the soft option of ‘a high level of employment’. This implies that the Union, and its Member States, must seek to ensure that everyone who seeks employment can find a good job. It can give a new emphasis to the Lisbon Process with its goal of a competitive, sustainable economy capable of employment creation, social cohesion and social inclusion.

The Equality agenda, and the related aspects of Non-discrimination, require strong endorsement. In an enlarged EU, with the arrival of new Member States with challenging social problems, such principles will be of the utmost importance.

The objective of Social Inclusion – implying effective policies to combat poverty – is also of real significance in a Union which will have a much greater range of economic and social circumstances. Poverty is a denial of human dignity and human rights and runs counter to the fundamental values of the Union. Public opinion demands that fighting social exclusion be given

priority.

Does the publication of a report by a Convention Working Group really mean anything in practical terms. A positive answer to this question has two dimensions:

- 1. The final outcome of the Convention on the Future of Europe, in the form of a draft treaty text, must include clear social commitment on the lines of the recommendations of the Working Group.*
- 2. The statements of values and objectives must become a fundamental commitment upon which future policies and programmes can be built.*

There should be a clear and on-going connection between these statements and the competences, policies and budgets of the Union.

Above all, they must become an assertion of what the European Union is really about and what gives the people of Europe a genuine feeling of belonging. The outcome of the debate in the Convention must go beyond the details of institutional reform to include the essential aspects of social progress.

However high-minded the aspirations – the proof of any statement of social commitment must lie in the adoption and implementation of appropriate policies and programmes. These will require both specific EU provisions, for example through the European Social Fund, and co-ordination of national policies through the evolving mechanism of the Open Method of Co-ordination. The success, or otherwise, of the Internal Market and the Single Currency will be crucially linked to the achievement of the essential social goals of full employment and social inclusion.

The symbolism of the establishment of the Convention Working Group on Social Europe should not be overlooked in any assessment of the Convention's work. It was an indicator of the persistence and strength of the conviction reflected in the final lines of the Group's report that "European policy in the economic and social sphere is aimed at creating conditions for the fullest development of the individual in society in such a manner that the free development of each one becomes a condition for the free development of all."
