



Parliamentary Under
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The Rt Hon John Biffen MP
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NSM
24 April 1986

Dear John,

EC SCRUTINY DEBATE: COMMISSION COMMUNICATION AND DRAFT COUNCIL RESOLUTION CONCERNING A MEDIUM-TERM COMMUNITY PROGRAMME ON EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR WOMEN (4118/86)

The House of Commons Select Committee on European Legislation recommended on 26 February this year (Twelfth Report 1985-86) that the Medium Term Programme on Equal Opportunities for Women put forward by the European Commission and a draft Resolution on the adoption of the programme raised issues of general concern. The Committee did not identify these issues further than in noting that the draft Resolution refers to three draft directives, Parental Leave, debated on 26 November 1985, Occupational Social Security and Self Employed Occupations.

The second equal opportunities programme (1986-90) focuses on action to be taken by member states and by the Commission to improve the application of existing equal treatment legislation; develop training and education programmes to expand women's occupational choice, with special reference to new technology; revise protective legislation which is no longer needed; promote the sharing of family and occupational responsibilities; and modify outdated attitudes towards women through information campaigns, contacts and exchanges. The Commission estimates that annual expenditure from the EC Budget on the programme will rise from £600,000 in 1986 to £1.5 million in 1990 although this will be subject to the normal budgetary negotiations. The draft resolution undertakes to support the broad outlines of the new action programme and invites member states to implement relevant measures put forward by the Commission.

The Select Committee recommended that the Programme and Resolution might be further considered jointly with two equal treatment draft directives previously recommended for debate, namely self-employed occupations (5825/1/84), on which the Home Office lead, and equal treatment for men and women in occupational social security (6871/83) on which DHSS lead. Legislation Committee have already considered a memorandum on the latter by Norman Fowler and agreed to an early debate. We have agreed with the Home Office at official level to seek a joint debate on the action programme and the self-employed draft directive, but I understand Norman proposes to hold a separate debate in May on the social security proposal.

The Resolution on the equal opportunities programme has been discussed at Working Group level in Brussels and is likely to reach final agreement by the Labour and Social Council on 5 June. It is therefore highly desirable for the debate to be held in May. I recommend that it should take place on the floor of the House for an hour and a half after 10 pm, a time and place which would be consistent with the Scrutiny Committee's recommendation.

I suggest that the motion should be :

That this House takes note of European Community documents No. 5825/1/84 a draft directive on the application of the principle of equal treatment for men and women in self employed occupations including agriculture and on protection during pregnancy and maternity and No 4118/86 a Communication from the Commission to the Council concerning a medium term Community programme (1986-1990) on equal opportunities for women and of the Explanatory Memoranda submitted by the Home Office dated 10 May 1984 and by the Department of Employment dated 11 February 1986. This House endorses the Government's commitment to the principle of equal treatment.

In the debate we propose to emphasise that UK policy is already consistent with the main thrust of the programme but that we are seeking to amend the draft Resolution so as to ensure, for example, that it contains no commitment to further Directives or other measures which could be detrimental to job creation.

I should be grateful if Legislation Committee would agree to a debate to meet scrutiny requirements on the two documents being held on the floor of the House in May.

I am copying this letter to members of the Committee, the chairman and members of OD(E) Douglas Hurd, Norman Fowler, Sir Robert Armstrong and the secretaries of L and OD(E).

Yours ever,
Ian

IAN LANG