remains open to relevant national authorities or other bodies to enter into more or less formal arrangements based on objective criteria in order to facilitate further free movement as long as these are not exclusive in character.


(2001/C 350 E/150) WRITTEN QUESTION E-1373/01
by Carlos Carnero González (PSE) to the Commission
(7 May 2001)

Subject: Store closures and mass redundancies at Marks and Spencer

Marks and Spencer has announced that it is closing down several of its stores in various European countries, including Spain (four in Madrid, two in Barcelona, and one each in Seville, Valencia, and Bilbao), and consequently making huge numbers of workers redundant.

The decision was announced without warning, the Marks and Spencer management having acted without first approaching the staff trade unions.

The company employees in the countries and stores concerned, in particular, and the public in general have reacted with amazement and indignation to a measure inimical to employment that violates the basic principle of consultation between management and labour and manifestly lies beyond the pale of the European social model.

In France, the courts have successfully intervened to prevent Marks and Spencer from implementing its decisions without any form of supervision.

The Marks and Spencer decision is absolutely reprehensible and, moreover, as the Secretary-General of ETUC, Emilio Gabaglio, has pointed out, highlights the need to build a genuinely social Europe. To that end, the EU must, as a matter of urgency, lay down effective rules on worker information and consultation to prevent large employers adopting decisions inspired by untrammelled capitalism such as the one described here.

What steps will the Commission take to defend the European social model and prevent Marks and Spencer from achieving its antisocial aims, thus ensuring that other companies of comparable size will not unhesitatingly take decisions along similar lines in the future? What kind of pressure will it exert on the Council to make it act without further delay to adopt the directive on the right of workers to be informed?

Answer given by Mrs Diamantopoulou on behalf of the Commission
(6 July 2001)

The European Commission attaches the greatest importance to the social consequences of corporate restructuring. This was the central preoccupation of the Commission in the preparation of its proposal for a Council Directive establishing a general framework for informing and consulting employees in the European Community (1) on which political agreement on a common position was reached by the Council of Ministers on 11 June 2001.

This initiative is a key plank of the Community’s response to the social problems resulting from the restructuring of enterprises.

Other measures are planned in this area, however, including the development of the concept and practice of the social responsibility of enterprises; more specific targeting of the active labour market measures, especially those financed by the European Social Fund, on the sectors and regions that bear the brunt of major restructuring operations; seeking to improve the dovetailing of competition policy and social policy and the forthcoming review of the Directive on European works councils.

(1) COM(98) 612 final.