

Week of 23 to 28 March

COMMISSION : A "hive" of activity

Lest the public believe that the 11,000 men and women who hustle and bustle in and out of the European Commission buildings daily sit behind their desks and twiddle their thumbs, the following should tell the real story.

Between January 1977 and March 1981, the "busy bees" in the European Commission produced a formidable sum of 2,840 proposals, drafts and recommendations.

Don't forget that each of these written documents represents the fruit of many long and arduous hours of research and thought. Of the total, 2,242 have been adopted by the Council of Ministers, 109 withdrawn by the Commission and 489 are still awaiting approval.

The Commission regularly checks the backlog of proposals and updates them where necessary ...

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ENLARGEMENT : Negotiations with Spain stepped up

Greek membership of the European Community, coming eight years after the United Kingdom, Ireland and Denmark joined the EEC, marks the first step in the Community's southward expansion towards the cradle of European civilisation.

Portugal and Spain put in their requests for membership of the EEC on March 28 and July 28, 1977 respectively. Taken together, these two countries have a population of some 45 million people and their accession to the EEC will bring the total Community population to 315 million. But the Community's enlargement to include Spain and Portugal is expected to be a lengthy and difficult process, particularly because of the gap in development between the two candidate countries and most members of the Community. Negotiations with Spain are currently being conducted within the framework of a ministerial conference which held its seventh session in Brussels on March 16. Spain is linked to the EEC through a preferential agreement signed in 1970 with provisions for the progressive elimination of tariffs by the two sides.

The latest EEC-Spain encounter came just days after the abortive military coup d'état in Madrid. The ministerial meeting stressed the need to step up negotiations in order to ensure the survival of Spanish democracy. Gaston Thorn, the President of the European Commission, underlined that negotiations should be speeded up in order to fulfil the hopes of the Spanish people. He noted that a number of technical problems should be solved in the coming months. The European Parliament, for its part, adopted a resolution condemning the coup d'état and welcoming the devotion to democratic processes shown by the political forces, trade unions, and the Spanish people. The Parliament also stressed the responsibilities of the Community in maintaining and reinforcing democracy in Spain and urged the competent institutions to take the necessary measures to accelerate accession negotiations.

Lorenzo Natali, the EEC Commissioner for enlargement, stressed, however, that the Community should solve its internal problems before thinking in terms of a new enlargement.

It is clear, however, that a Europe of Twelve will soon be a reality.

COMPETITION : A chapter in the computer war

The computer market in recent years has experienced a steady and spectacular growth that experts are predicting is far from over since the computer is apparently expected to invade virtually all aspects of our everyday life. The economic stakes represented by this computer market are enormous and are leading to a ruthless struggle for survival among the large manufacturing companies.

Among these, the American giant IBM is the best placed in this competitive commercial race. But the European Commission in late 1980 concluded an investigation during which it found evidence indicating that the firm was abusing its dominant power and violating European Community laws on competition.

In this case, the Commission is basing its argument on Article 86 of the Treaty of Rome, which defines four types of activities that are held to be incompatible with the principles of the common market. This investigation into the IBM operations, the complaining companies and the users of IBM or competing products, was launched after complaints by several other firms.

At the end of this in-depth probe, the Commission retained several accusations against IBM and communicated them to the firm. Following a certain period of time during which the company will have an opportunity to reply to the charges, the Commission will make a final decision which can be appealed before the European Court of Justice.

For the time being, the Commission is refusing to make any detailed declarations concerning the violation of Community rules which it believes it has detected. All that is known is that the charges include the inclusion of a minimum central memory in the price of certain products, the furnishing of information on interfaces to competitors and certain logical problems. Although this jargon does not mean a great deal to the general public, its conclusion could have a profound effect on the organisation of one of the most important industrial markets of our time.

CONSUMERS : Nitrates and nitrites; twin hazards for mankind

Nitrates and nitrites are salts used primarily as medicines or as fertilisers. But the public is unlikely to be aware that the red colouring of tinned meat, of ground meat and of a large number of sausages is the result of the use of these ingredients. These substances possess a number of virtues since

they not only add colour to meat , but also help preserve it and add to its flavour.

But there are also some negative aspects to the use of these products in meats, and in general food production as well, and they are major ones. A number of experiments conducted on animals have proved that these substances are linked to the formation of cancerous tumors. They attack primarily the oesophagus, the pancreas, lungs, the liver, bones and the skin. Few portions of the anatomy are left unscathed.

In a written question addressed to the European Commission, Mrs Squarcialupi, an Italian Communist member of the European Parliament, asked what measures have been taken to regulate the use of nitrates and nitrites and to substitute less harmful procedures for their use.

In its reply, the EEC Commission answered that it is aware of the problem but that it has not yet proposed a specific measure related to the problem. Nevertheless it notes that it has asked the Scientific Committee on Food Products, an advisory group it created in 1974, to conduct a study on the problem of the presence of these substances in foodstuffs. When it has obtained the results of this study, the Commission will judge whether special Community measures are required.

In addition, it also underlines that research is underway in Europe and elsewhere to find new products to substitute for nitrates and nitrites or to reduce their use to a minimum in the event that replacements are not developed.

#### EMPLOYMENT : When the 10 Community members exchange workers

Since 1973, the Member States of the European Community have regularly exchanged civil servants from their employment or personnel services. This practice has allowed the officials to familiarise themselves with the job placement systems used in the other member countries as well as the regulations involved. This exchange of information and ideas sometimes leads to problem-solving, from which could spring ideas for the current employment crisis. During a series of meetings organised in Rome and sponsored by the European Commission on March 3-5 in collaboration with the national employment administrations, the results of this experiment were weighed up and it was decided to continue it for at least a year.

ENERGY : The second generation of energy savings

Following an initial surge of progress in economising energy by tightening up on its uses and obvious wasteful practices in the years after the first oil price crisis Europe is finding the next phase to be more challenging. In fact, most of the savings were realised during the first, short two-year time span in 1974 and 1975. Some 3 percent was saved in the first year and another 4.5 percent in 1975, only to find that a meager 3.3 percent was conserved between 1975 and 1979. One of the main reasons for this deceleration was the fact that the next wave of energy-saving requirements was not so easy and needed a larger influx of capital, something which has been in short supply in recent years.

A recent report by the European Commission notes that Belgium, Italy and Luxembourg have not even adopted an overall energy-saving plan to which all Community countries agreed in the drive towards greater independence from oil imports. This study also notes that the application of energy-saving plans is also a haphazard thing. Some countries have not yet enacted special standards for new buildings. The Commission says that it may seek uniform standards for all Community countries sometime this year.

Another important area requiring action is the automobile industry, where agreements have already been reached for policies on the petrol consumption performances of new vehicles. But even stricter requirements will be needed in the future.

Similar compacts for energy savings will also be required in other sectors that are heavy consumers of energy. For instance, only France, Germany and the Netherlands have taken effective measures to promote the rational use of energy in agriculture and fishing, both of which are major users of energy.

There are also wide differences between these three same countries, plus Denmark in the lead and the others lagging behind in the amount of public expenditure devoted to energy saving projects.

A much greater effort will be needed in the future, requiring some £ 270 billion (500 billion ecu) in the decade from 1981 to 1990, the report states. Some 47 percent of that will be devoted to electricity production, either conventional or nuclear power, and also on the transport and distribution networks. About 21 percent will go to petroleum resource development, 18 percent on some energy savings, 8 percent on coal and 3 percent each on new energy sources and on improvements of urban heating systems, including the use of domestic waste for such purposes. But major commitments in funds will have to be made to accomplish this next important phase in the battle for energy security.

YOUTH : Experiments in vocational training

There are more than three million young persons under 25 unemployed in Europe and concern about this dramatic situation has preoccupied Europe's leaders for some time.

At the recent European Community summit meeting in Maastricht, the 10 EEC Prime Ministers and Presidents underlined the worrisome level of unemployment in general, but particularly among the young. The issue has the highest priority in all countries, but the problem remains a stubborn and worsening one. Everywhere, young people just out of school and with little or no professional training are finding it harder than ever to enter the job market. In an attempt to cope with this disruptive social ill, many agencies have been created to provide various forms of professional training. One little-known institution of the European Community focusing on this subject is the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training, which has its headquarters in Berlin. Created just a few years ago, the agency has just released a study it conducted into five youth training centres in the United Kingdom, Denmark, Germany, Ireland and the Netherlands. These operations shared a number of characteristics but in some ways were radically different from each other. The purpose of the study was to attempt to draw up a set of objective criteria for monitoring the effectiveness of such projects, to study the various structures and techniques and their results and also to share this information with the participants and similar centres in other countries. The Berlin Centre undertook this study because of the fact that population projections indicate that the problem will get worse since the percentage of the labour force under 25 will continue to increase at least until 1985 and because, in the Centre's words, "we are faced with a job market in which it is becoming increasingly difficult to find work demanding no qualifications or requiring no skill training".

The centres studied were :

- Intaskill, an engineering-orientated training workshop established in an old factory building in Birmingham, where about 30 persons at a time are taught how to work with various types of machinery and equipment.
- Nyt Arbejde (Kolding), which is almost entirely composed of Danish women over 18 with no formal training who work on a fish farm, a greenhouse market gardening venture or in the production of animal feed from waste food from local hospitals.
- Jugendsozialwerk, a large training centre in Cologne, Germany, for some 300 boys and nearly 100 girls, many of them children of foreign workers, which also provides recreation and counselling.
- The Henrietta Place workshop for itinerant young men in Dublin described as the "most severely deprived group represented in this study".
- De Putgraaf vocational training school at Heerlen, near Maastricht in the Netherlands, which is one of 20 such projects sponsored by the Ministeries of Education and Social Affairs.

IN BRIEF ... IN BRIEF ... IN BRIEF ... IN BRIEF ... IN BRIEF ...

#### Expansion of EEC-UK trade

Britain's integration into the European Community has been improving daily, ever since the country joined the EEC in 1973. Between 1973 and 1979 the United Kingdom's exports to the other EEC countries increased at an average of 23 % per year. The share of exports to other member states in the country's overall exports rose from 32 % in 1973 to 42 % in 1979. Compared with total intra-Community trade, British exports rose from 9 % in 1973 to 12.5 % in 1979.

During the same period, British imports from other Community Member States grew at an annual rate of 2 %, rising from 33 % in 1973 to 41 % in 1979.

#### STATISTICS : Delays in census

On November 22, 1973, the Council of Ministers adopted a directive providing for the synchronisation of the population census held in each EEC Member State. It was also agreed that EEC countries would undertake a new census during the period March 1 to May 31, 1981.

While several Member States are undertaking such a census, others appear unable to do so within the deadline. The Commission has now recommended an extension of the deadline for Italy, allowing it to prolong the date of its next census by about six months because of serious administrative difficulties. Similar derogations have been accorded to France, and the Netherlands have also put in a request.

#### EMERGENCY AID : Aid to El Salvador

The European Commission has just decided to accord emergency aid worth £ 217,459 to the population of El Salvador, currently the victim of mass terror. The aid package will be channelled through the International Red Cross which will also distribute 1000 tonnes of cereals, 200 tonnes of milk powder and 120 tonnes of butteroil.

The Commission is currently looking for other efficient and neutral non-governmental organisations which could be asked to handle the distribution of additional food aid.