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SOCIAL: Women and children first

In unemployment, like at sea, it's been "women and children first" in recent years, with female and younger workers bearing the brunt of the economic crisis.

While unemployment among men increased more than for women in 1980, the rate of unemployment among women of 7.7 per cent was still higher than for men (5.5 per cent of the working population). And young persons under 25 represented 40 per cent of those registered as unemployed in late 1980. If the picture looks bleak for these categories of workers, there are reasons for hope. First of all, figures recently released by the European Commission in its annual report on the Community Social Fund indicates that since 1976 two million additional jobs were created in the member countries, of which 90 per cent for women. Additional information showed that some two-third of women were employed in service occupations in shops, hotels and restaurants, banks and insurance. In the industrial sector, a quarter of the jobs were held by women, with half of those working in the textile, leather, footwear and clothing, electronics and instrument fields.

The Social Fund also channels financial assistance to women, young people and other special categories of hard-pressed workers, as well as to regions or industries.

For instance, it was estimated that the requests filed by Community national Governments for aid from the Social Fund contributed to the training of some 389,000 young persons and the creation of 266,000 jobs for young men and women. These categories also, of course, benefited from some of the funds dispensed in problem regions and industries where they have particular difficulties in finding and maintaining employment. In addition, the report calculated that more than 30 per cent of the beneficiaries of Social Fund financial assistance were women, and an increasing number of programmes is being aimed at assisting women workers.

A first priority was given to assisting women workers find employment opportunities in non-traditional occupations, where the majority of the workers were men. Cited ^{as} examples were special programmes in Germany, France and Italy. In Germany, a programme in Stuttgart was initiated to open up the occupation of cabinet-maker to women. Specific programmes were also generated in France and Italy in such fields as carpentry, painting and decoration, tile-laying, carpet-laying or electricity, welding, machinery, printing, as well as administration and management.

ENERGY: Where are we with the nuclear era?

Some 13 per cent of total electricity production in the European Community in 1980 was generated by nuclear power stations. Last year, the nuclear production of the 10 members attained 150 billion kilowatt hours, or 17 per cent more than in 1979 and nearly 30 per cent higher than 1978.

This increase came largely from five new French nuclear power stations involving a total of seven reactors. However, the declared intention of the new Socialist Government recently elected in France indicates the dropping of any future expansion of the French nuclear production.

If this change is confirmed, France will only strengthen the trend already obvious in most of the 24 member countries of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). The ninth report of its Nuclear Energy Agency in fact underlines a distinct slowdown in nuclear plans.

Outside of the five French stations, only three others were put into commercial service in the OECD in 1980: two in the United States and one in Finland. This deceleration has a number of different explanations, including the general economic decline, a public crisis of confidence in nuclear energy and a number of others.

A total of 193 stations are now in service in the OECD member countries, 18 have been ordered (8 in France which risk being cancelled), four respectively in Japan and the United Kingdom and one each by Germany and Spain. On the other hand, the United States had previously cancelled 16 nuclear stations plans.

The Nuclear Energy Agency forecasts that in 1990, the number of nuclear power stations in the OECD zone will be 408 and that by then nuclear energy will represent 25 per cent of total electricity production. The aim remains relatively limited.

The Community institutions, with the Commission and the Parliament in the lead, see nuclear energy as offering a means of reducing the Community dependence on imported energy, and especially oil. Nevertheless, the EEC countries must also import most of the nuclear raw material they use. In fact, only one Community country ranks among the ten leading uranium producers. This is France, which has 2.1 per cent of the world's known resources, or about 40,000 tonnes. In this light, the accession of Spain and Portugal to the Community could reinforce any nuclear possibilities since they contain significant deposits of uranium.

ENERGY: Preparing for future sources

Most of the world's nations, rich and poor, oil producers and importers, are expected to participate in a special United Nations conference this summer on new and renewable energy sources. The conference scheduled for late August will be held in Nairobi, the capital of Kenya. While there has been considerable talk in recent years about the problems of energy and alternative sources of power, this conference represents the first real attempt to deal concretely with the problem at world level. Previous efforts have been either oriented on theory or hampered by friction between ideology or interests.

Work has been underway for years to prepare the basis for concrete action and follow-up to this important conference. This work includes the establishment of 14 technical working groups which have examined closely the situation, potential and costs of developing certain energy resources ranging from solar and geothermal to biomass and wood. What the conference will seek to do will be to obtain national plans from participants concerning the development of these resources and coordination and leadership for group undertakings of countries interested in certain sectors.

As part of the preparations for this meeting its Secretary General, Enrique Iglesias, recently discussed the participation of the European Community countries. In addition to national participation, the ten Community countries will also be represented in a unified position. Addressing the press following their discussions, Mr Iglesias and the European Commissioner for Energy, Viscount Etienne Davignon, underlined the importance of this conference to all countries. It was noted that for Europe, the development of alternative energy sources represented a small, but absolutely crucial, part of a future programme aiming at greater independence from imported oil. But it was also pointed out that while new and renewable energy sources may represent a small share of energy consumption in the Community and other developed countries, it represents 15 to 20 per cent of the world's total and is as high as 50 per cent of the share of all energy in the developing countries. This role will become even more important in the future when it is considered that the demand for energy in the developing world will surge ahead in the years to come and could put an additional strain on world supplies unless steps are taken now to prepare an expansion of their alternative energy resources. This, of course, will take a considerable amount of financing, planning and international cooperation which has to get underway at this meeting if Europe and the rest of the world is not to face future energy crises which are even more disruptive in the decades to come.

TRANSPORT: Slowing down the connections

One sure way of evaluating the economic performance of a region or city is often the amount of transport traffic going to and from the area. In the past the belching smokestacks of factories were used as measurestick. But with greater concern and more legislation on the hazards of pollution, these no longer display the signs of industrial vitality. In addition, the growth in importance of non-industrial services has also cut down on such obvious symbols.

What remains in one form or another, however, is the number of automobiles, lorries, trains, planes, barges or ships arriving or leaving a region. The passengers or cargo they carry are indicators of the tempo and volume of work in a given setting.

That's why it's no wonder that a recent survey of inland transport systems for late 1980 in the European Community showed clearly a decline in virtually all modes of travel studied. The report just released by the European Commission in Brussels is part of a regular monitoring of rail, road and inland waterway systems set by the Community in a 1978 decision of the Council of Ministers in order to obtain an objective picture of conditions and problems in these sectors.

It revealed that the international transport of goods between Community Member States, except for the United Kingdom and Ireland which were treated separately, via these three types of systems decreased by nearly 6 per cent in the third quarter of 1980 compared with the same period in 1979. Estimates for the last quarter were of an even sharper drop of 6.5 per cent. The experience for road traffic was unchanged or slightly down during the period while railway movement slumped by about 12 per cent and inland waterway about 7 per cent. The over-riding factor since the early summer of 1980 in this decline has been the economic recession, according to the report. Nevertheless, certain types of traffic increased during this period. For instance, all connections with Italy by road increased, and road import contacts to the Netherlands also went up. In addition, road traffic between Belgium or Luxembourg and France and between Germany and Italy moved up considerably by 8 or 7 per cent respectively, reflecting the tone of economic activity, but the biggest jump of all, of 40 per cent, was registered between the Netherlands and Belgium.

The sharpest declines were registered nearly everywhere in rail and waterway transport, which tend to concentrate on large loads of commodities or equipment, which also felt the burden of the recession. Again an exception was the rail link between Germany and Italy, in both directions, although the Germany to Italy direction showed the heaviest increase. Cross Channel traffic mixed with rail transport increased substantially and traffic between Ireland and the United Kingdom and the European Continent also went up.

EDUCATION: Scholarships for orphans

Despite efforts to improve security measures in certain industries where professional risks are traditionally very high, a number of accidents continue to take place every year. This is especially true for the mining and steel industries.

Within the context of the social policy followed by the European Steel and Coal Community, a foundation designed to come to the aid of orphans whose fathers were the victims of such professional accidents - or illness - was set up in 1965. The Belgian trade unionist Paul Finet gave his name to this foundation which is currently chaired by the European Commissioner Ivor Richard.

Just recently the Paul Finet foundation gave about 125 annual scholarships for a total of 1,320,000 Belgian francs to orphans who had done particularly well in their studies. These students can count on the money from the Foundation for the duration of their studies which would, unfortunately have been cut short if such scholarships had not been available.

The scholarships are open to students of 14 years and above, who have followed professional, secondary or higher education and have received good grades. Requests for the school year 1981/82 can be sent as of September this year to the secretariat of the Foundation, Jean Monnet building, rue Alcide de Gasperi in Luxembourg.

CONSUMER: A smell like a pig

Did you know that the meat of from 1 to 2 per cent of non-castrated pigs arriving in slaughter-houses gave off a distinctively unpleasant barnyard smell?

Traditionally, pig farmers have struggled against losses brought about by this natural phenomena by massively castrating pigs not destined for reproduction. But new growing techniques now allow the production of pigs that grow faster and which can be slaughtered before they reach the stage of development when this unpleasant smell arises. In addition, new methods of inspection have recently been perfected which allow the discovery of living animals whose meat is likely to give off this foul smell. This progress in animal husbandry has brought the European Commission to the point of making proposals as early as 1978 aimed at liberalising the trade in fresh pig meat between the European Community Member States. This trade had been severely restricted since 1964 for sanitary reason relating to the smelly problem.

Nevertheless, the Community Council of Ministers, sceptical about the possibility of applying such a viable and objective inspection system, has not yet decided to approve the measure. The EEC Commission has therefore proposed to study the possibility of introducing these new inspection methods as soon as they have been proven to be effective.

DEVELOPMENT: A new model of relations with India

Linked to each other since 1974 by a non-preferential trade agreement, the European Community and India are now poised to enter a era of extended cooperation in the industrial and investment sectors.

Following the signing of the new commercial and economic cooperation agreement in Luxembourg, June 23, India and the European Community are now committed to cooperating in the industrial sector, increasing mutual industrialsector, increasing mutual investments and working together in the scientific technological sectors.

The EEC is clearly impressed by the progress in food self-sufficiency attained by India. Admiration for the success achieved by India in fighting poverty and improving the domestic food situation was also expressed by the European Commissioner for External Relations, Wilhelm Haferkamp. The European Community, he said, would continue to help India in both these areas.

Meanwhile, trade between the European Community and India has grown substantially in recent years. European exports to India are currently valued at 3.2 billion dollars while imports from the country are only worth about 2.5 billion dollars.