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UNEMPLOYMENT: Gone up by 1.1 % in one year

By the end of December 1979, the number of jobless registered at Labour Exchanges throughout the Common Market had reached a total of 6.2 million. This represents a net increase of 2 % on the total for November. If one takes the average figure for the unemployed for 1979, which was 6 million, this is a 1.1 % increase on the figure for 1978. Taken as a percentage of the active population, 5.5 % were out of work in 1978 and 5.6 % in 1979.

However, these figures tend to disguise the differences between the various countries of the Nine. In fact the number of registered unemployed fell in 1979 in Denmark, West Germany, Luxembourg, Ireland and the U.K. On the other hand it rose in the Netherlands, Italy and in Belgium. France showed the steepest rise with a 15.7 % increase.

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Europe's dependence on outside raw materials to keep its industry in production ranges from oil to cobalt. What is the EEC doing to make provision for the great scarcity of basic substances in the 1980's? Our feature reviews the problem ... |

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ENVIRONMENT: consumer must pay for environmental protection

What is the 'value' of clear air, or the 'value' of human life, consumer affairs Commissioner Mr. Richard Burke asked in a debate at the January session of the European Parliament. He said that it was often impossible to evaluate precisely the costs and benefits of legislation designed to protect the environment.

Mr. Burke was answering a question put down on behalf of the European Democrats Group on the economic consequences of EEC consumer protection and environmental protection legislation. The questioners wanted to know whether the Commission took account of the costs to the consumer, to industry and to other interests, of implementing such legislation. One member of the Group, Miss Gloria Hooper, said that the ultimate interest of the consumer was always the price of goods he wanted to purchase. Taking this into consideration, she wanted to know whether the EEC Commission gave enough consideration to the necessity of measures it proposed, to their likely benefit to the consumer and whether the results achieved would be worth the costs of the legislation. Smaller firms, she said, were often particularly hard hit by the added financial burden of having to abide by tough environmental regulations. In his reply, Commissioner Burke began by denying that environmental protection legislation always caused increased costs to manufacturers and therefore were passed on straight away to the consumer. But this, he felt, was not the vital point. Someone inevitably had to pay for environmental damage. If atmospheric pollution, for example, and the damage it caused were not reflected in the price of goods, then it would be the public at large who would pay through ill health or damage to the environment. It was therefore impossible to draw any kind of cost-benefit conclusion regarding the result of any particular piece of legislation.

Speakers in the debate generally agreed with Mr. Burke's remarks. For the Socialists, Mr. Ken Collins, said the European Democrats' question was based on a "false and dangerous assumption". Increased costs to manufacturers or consumers usually resulted in benefits to other parts of society.

Mrs. Christine Scrivener (Liberals) summed up the general feeling of the Parliament when she asked: "Can the cost ever be too high when our health and our environment are at stake?"

So that we can improve "EUROFOCUS" and the general service we try to offer to our subscribers, we should be happy to receive any comments, criticisms or suggestions. If you should use any of the copy a reference to "EUROFOCUS" (and possibly a copy of the final article?) would be much appreciated.

RESEARCH: new system for "Euro-inventors"

Not all the inventions examined by the new European Patent Office in Munich are as eccentric as No. 7881/0020.4, but perhaps among the ones which have just received the new "European Patent" may be some that could change the course of history.

While Janos Zapomel, of Basel, Switzerland, may think his gadget bearing the above serial number is quite out of the ordinary, it is but one of thousands of inventions now coming in to the European Patent Office, which has been opened since 1978 and which has just awarded the first series of European-wide patents. Mr. Zapomel's pride is a little gadget, designed to assist "the rolling of spaghetti on a fork", which may be a great aid to clumsy gluttons but not exactly a tool for the starving masses of the world.

On the other hand, officials at the new European office say that a large number of the inventors applying for a patent are aiming at new techniques or devices for saving energy.

What's more, the new concept of a patent registration that in one process will be valid throughout most of the European Community and other neighbouring countries is proving to be very appealing to inventors -- which range from the lone handyman puttering in his workshop to giant multinational companies. When the office in Munich opened up 19 months ago to begin sifting through these inventors' applications for European protection for their new technology, some 450 inventions a month were coming in for registration. That rate is now up to 1,400 a month and has reached a total of 17,000. When the office functions at full capacity it will be able to handle about 30,000 applications a year.

While the ingenuity of the individual inventor is by no means dead, major industry represents the European Patent Office's biggest client, with 55 percent of the applications. For instance, the giant German electronic firm Siemens puts in about 2,000 applications for patents for new inventions each year.

The work of the Patent Office is then to determine whether some other patent has already been issued to someone else to cover the same invention. The new European system, although the application and European patents cost more than the traditional national patent, is seen as worthwhile for inventors if they want protection throughout the countries covered by the Munich patent.

INSTITUTIONS: European Parliament gets a new gavel

President of the European Parliament Simone Veil is now using a new gavel when bringing Euro MP's to order. The gavel, made from the wood of the Australian black bean tree, was given to the Parliament by Sir Billy Sneddon, Speaker of the Australian House of Representatives, as a token of friendship from Australia. Sir Billy recently paid an official visit to Strasbourg.

ENERGY: In 1979 petrol was not cheap!

The cost to the EEC of its crude oil imports was very high in 1979. As a result of price rises imposed by OPEC, the price of crude went up by 109 % in 1979 over the same period for 1978.

EDUCATION: Still some obstacles to free movement of students

Over the course of the last two decades the chances of European students doing at least some of their studies abroad have greatly increased. However, there are still difficulties to be settled before students can enjoy the freedom to move throughout the nine EEC countries, a freedom at present enjoyed by workers and some professional people. A recent report of the Common Market Commission highlights the fact that EEC governments are still rather reluctant to allow their student population to go abroad to widen their horizons - or at least they are usually unwilling to pay for such an opportunity.

The recognition of foreign qualifications (degrees and diplomas) is adequately covered by several international conventions. The three European conventions of 1953, 1956 and 1959 have been ratified by all the nine present members of the EEC and France and Italy signed a multilateral convention in 1976. Various bilateral agreements are also in existence between certain of the countries.

According to the report the main areas holding up further progress in this field are: the rights that students are given to sign up for foreign courses; the cost of study abroad; the information available and most important the number of places that are earmarked each year for foreign students by universities and colleges. This is where the problem really lies, for the numbers are still very low. For example, West Germany offers 7 % of its total number of university places to foreign students, whilst in Denmark things are a little better with 10 % on offer. In Holland only 4 % are available in certain university faculties, and in Italy new restrictions have recently been introduced on the number of foreign students. France places a strict limit on the places available at the prestigious "Grandes Ecoles;" whilst in the U.K. and Belgium foreign students are required to pay higher fees. Only in Luxembourg is foreign university study actively and financially well supported and this because as Luxembourg has no universities, all higher-level students go abroad. Most of the nine countries offer scholarships and assisted places to certain categories of foreign students, but few offer money to their own nationals to go abroad.

Language knowledge remains a compelling factor in urging students to study in another country. The dominant position of English, French and German in the EEC means that many students would like to perfect these languages at universities of the countries concerned.

TELECOMMUNICATIONS: "Euronet-DIANE" a breakthrough in European information

Computer data bases and banks* will be increasingly used in the next few years as the demand for quick accurate information goes on growing. This demand will become more and more international, particularly among the countries of the Common Market. Since the summer of 1979 a new European research programme has been in operation to allow hospitals, companies large and small and state concerns to obtain direct access to the 130 informatics sources available in the EEC. Scientific, legal, medical and socio-economic sources throughout the Nine will now be freely available, quickly and easily.

The system is called "Euronet-DIANE " and has been organised by the Commission of the EEC with the Post and Telecommunications Services of the nine member countries. The system has several advantages over existing informatics lay-outs. It is quick and simple to use and the costs are reasonable. Also, it allows for the utilisation of a large selection of terminals of different type. The operator need not leave his office for all he will need, by way of equipment, will fit on one desk. There will be a simple terminal machine attached to a telephone coupler and on using the "password" the system will commence working. Contact can then be made with any base or bank in the circuit. "Euronet" will be progressively extended in the future, but at the moment comprises nine access points: London, Paris, Rome, Brussels, Frankfurt, Luxembourg, Amsterdam, Dublin and Copenhagen.

All enquiries about the system should be made to Euronec-DIANE, Commission of the European Communities, DG XIII, Luxembourg BP 1907, LUXEMBOURG.

* Data BASES only supply cryptic bibliographic information for reference whilst Data BANKS hold the facts, figures and detailed information.

THIS WEEK: What's been happening in the EEC this week?

COMMISSION: President Jenkins wound up his Washington visit last Wednesday, 23 January with talks with Mr. Duncan the US Energy Secretary and later with the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

COUNCIL: Fishing Council Tuesday 29 January. No final decision yet on EEC fish agreement.

Tuesday 29 January. Italian President of EEC Council M. Cossiga met Mrs. Thatcher for talks in London to discuss the next European Summit.

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE: The ESC held a plenary session Wed/Thur 30/31 January to discuss energy, consumer credit, additives in medicines and transport.

PARLIAMENT: President Simone Veil declared, Monday 28 January, her feeling that the EEC countries should consider boycotting the Olympic games if the USSR does not remove its troops from Afghanistan.

The problem of imported oil is only the tip of a dangerous iceberg of dependence on foreign raw materials that someday could sink what has been called the "factory ship" of Europe.

By now Europe's almost total reliance on oil produced elsewhere in the world is well-known to the public. But the average person or even European leaders, may be only dimly aware of the widespread needs of Europe's factories for shipments from the outside world and even the potential shortages in commodities ranging from wood to cobalt.

Most take for granted the almost-unnoticed uses of wood products that include everything from paper and furniture to construction materials. Just as the world has become accustomed to paying higher prices and to consuming less oil and other petroleum products, the day could come when our daily lives are also jarred by a scarcity of such raw materials as timber manganese, chromium or any of an astounding list of commodities for which Europe is depending entirely on other countries.

European experts are aware of the potential problems that could arise out of this dependence and are trying to alert everyone concerned, including the public. But the complications encountered in dealing with the oil problem have shown just how difficult it is either to change the ways of modern life or find alternative products or supplies. For instance, the European Commission in Brussels as early as 1975 conducted a study on possible shortages of products that Europe obtained in large quantities from third countries. The Industry Commissioner at that time, Altiero Spinelli, who is now a member of the European Parliament, said there was "very little risk over the next few decades of a general world shortage of raw materials (with the exception of wood, leather, hides and skins and protein-containing substances)." But he added that Europe's dependence on but a few sources for many materials and the tendency of many supplier countries to process their own products at home could "threaten Europe over the long-term with a raw material shortage."

Since that time, the European Commission has launched a multi-pronged effort to develop wood resources inside the nine member countries and to seek additional supplies of timber in countries that are expected to have an abundant supply, such as North America. In addition, it has also sought to encourage increased use of all types of recycled raw materials and greater cooperation between European industries and scrap and waste exchanges as possible sources of new materials.

As another part of this programme now underway at Community and national levels, authorities have been devoting funds for research into the discovery, use and conservation of raw materials. Some research is aimed at manufacturing products, ranging from cars to homes, that use less material or last longer, something that all consumers would probably like to see.

Another safeguard against shortages or escalating prices is the creation of emergency stockpiles of raw materials, such as the United States has done for years and to which other countries like Germany are increasingly giving attention.

But the dramatic fact remains that Europe's industries and economies are highly dependent on raw materials from the outside that they then transform and use in manufactured products which in turn are sold to customers all over the world including those who originally supplied the raw material. Millions of European citizens are involved in this economic cycle on which their jobs and livelihood depend. Should this vital link be broken by shortages, boycotts or other reasons, only Japan, which also serves as a producer of manufactured goods using imported raw materials, would be in a worse position than Europe.

The problem is that the European Community and Japan have few industrial raw materials located within their borders, while other industrialised countries such as the United States, Canada, Australia and South Africa abound with their own domestic supplies of many natural resources.

The European Parliament and Commission have recently again turned their attention towards this potential problem. Commissioner Etienne Davignon told a recent session of the Parliament that his staff had drawn up an inventory of resources of 22 minerals and would also examine other sectors. While preliminary studies indicate there is a reasonable supply of most products around the world, the dependence of the European Community on outside supplies is considered worrisome. It relies almost 100 % on third countries for materials like manganese, chromium, cobalt, platinum, tungsten and vanadium, and to a lesser degree for a whole host of others. Also of concern is the fact that many of these supplies are concentrated in just a few countries, such as the ones mentioned above, plus some developing countries and the Soviet Union.

What Commissioner Davignon said should be done in the future is to encourage greater European investment in mining in the developing world. He has urged on several occasions that both the industrialised and developing countries cooperate to guarantee investments and supplies that could benefit both in a world-wide system of cooperation and interdependence.