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EDUCATION: More illiterates than unemployed in the European Community

There were between 10 and 15 million illiterate people in the European Community in 1981 (excluding Greece), according to official statistics. But the real figure is almost certainly higher, since in countries where school education is compulsory governments tend to deny the existence of illiteracy and illiterate people themselves are often reluctant to admit that they cannot read or write, for fear of provoking ridicule.

Contrary to popular belief, illiteracy is not limited to immigrants, nor is it restricted to the Mediterranean regions of the Community. In the United Kingdom, for instance, almost two million adults have never been to school. The term "illiterate" also includes people who either went to school for a short period or simply did not pass the examinations at the end of elementary school. The term also includes those people who have forgotten everything that they learnt.

Illiteracy creates a major obstacle to the effective participation of the individual in society. At an economic level, it means unemployment, as the illiterates can only, at best, hold marginal jobs. Socially speaking, illiterate people are often incapable of recognising or fighting for their rights. Finally, in terms of politics, the exercise of one's democratic rights is practically impossible if one cannot read newspapers.

Illiteracy is, in most cases, a social phenomenon which is most prevalent in the poorest sections of society, sometimes called the "Fourth World". Consequently, education campaigns are not enough to wipe out illiteracy as its causes also have to be eliminated.

These are the main conclusions of a report drawn up recently by the European Parliament's committee on education. The study calls on the Ten's ministers for education to introduce national measures to fight illiteracy and to make Community funds available to support their action.

The report wants the European Commission to coordinate the actions of public and private organisations, to undertake a series of pilot projects and to draw up a study on the nature, extent and causes of illiteracy in the EEC. The Parliament also stresses that special efforts should be made to inform public opinion.

ENVIRONMENT: Keeping track of 34,000 chemicals

Consumer protection is a complicated and painstaking business. One only has to consult a recently published list of chemicals to be convinced. The list contains the names and characteristics of some 34,000 commercial chemical substances known to be on the market in European Community countries in 1981. The compilation and publication of this staggering inventory is not just to satisfy the curiosity of obscure administrators. It is part of an important drive to remove toxic or other potentially harmful products from the market where they pose a threat to the public and the environment. The inventory is part of a European Community regulation adopted in 1979 going into effect in all the member countries to help protect 270 million EEC consumers and their environment.

This regulation will require that any new chemical substances put on the market in the EEC will first have to be registered with the responsible authorities in each country. The first step in such a campaign is, of course, to know what is already on the market. The recent list published by the European Commission in Brussels is the result of questionnaires and surveys, which identified some 34,000 such existing substances. The list goes under the name of the European Core Inventory of chemical substances. It should help authorities, researchers and investigators in the Community and in other parts of the world to track down substances found to have harmful properties.

Equally, it could help identify those which could be beneficial, but which are as yet unknown in some other market. Such information is also a key part of the world-wide environmental and chemical information networks operated by the United Nations to help countries combat potentially harmful products. Manufacturers and importers will have until the end of the year to report any additional chemical substances in existence on the EEC market that should be included in the core inventory. While listing on the inventory is not mandatory, it does mean that substances not on the list will be required to register six months after the final inventory is published.

All this is part of the procedure set in motion by a regulation adopted by all the Community governments to deal more effectively with the potential hazards of the proliferation of chemical substances. Other countries, such as the United States, have adopted even stricter measures, including testing, which may also be considered by the Community in the future.

DEVELOPMENT: Teaching the Third World to teach itself

Every year over a thousand students from Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific (ACP) come to study in the European Community thanks to scholarships offered by the European Development Fund (EDF). This is only a small part of the effort made by the EEC to help the education and training in the developing countries.

Between 1960 and 1981 the European Community spent about £340 million on education projects. About half the amount was spent on the construction and equipping of educational institutions. About 5496 primary schools, 139 secondary schools, 225 professional institutions and 64 higher education establishments benefitted from Community aid over the period.

The other half of the money was used for the training of teachers and teaching personnel. More than 20,000 ACP citizens have received professional training from EEC funds. The majority of scholarships given in the last 5 years were concentrated in the areas of economics (24,5%), technical sciences (24%), education (22,5%) and agriculture (16%).

In 1970, two thirds of the training programmes were based in Europe. Today only 18% of the students who receive an EEC scholarship actually come to Europe, normally to receive specialised training or to complete a practical training course. Absolute priority is given to providing training facilities either in the country of origin or in other ACP countries. The European Commission is also careful to ensure that the students benefitting from their scholarships can be easily integrated into their country's active life.

According to the terms of the Lome Convention, it is the ACP countries themselves who determine the amount of money to be spent on training and education. This can vary between 0.5% of total EEC aid in Tanzania, to 20% in Nigeria. Some countries like Togo, Jamaica and Papua New Guinea, have presented multi-annual training programmes dealing with all the aid instruments included in the convention: scholarships, seminars, the sending of expert missions, supply of teaching equipment, etc. In 1979, the Community contributed to the literacy campaign launched by the Ethiopian government which received a UNESCO prize the following year.

EEC aid is based on the belief that the development of the Third World requires the presence and contribution of educated men and women who are aware of economic, social and cultural problems confronting their country.

AID: Poland welcomes EEC aid

As new clashes in dozens of Polish cities mark the independent Solidarity trade union's struggle to survive, basic necessities are in desperately short supply in Poland and the country faces economic collapse.

But since General Jaruzelski's imposition of martial law on December 13th last year, a massive relief effort has been mounted in the West to ease some of the material hardships that the Poles are suffering. EEC emergency aid worth £4,54 million, channelled through 27 "non-governmental" charities, has formed just part of the flow of food, medicine and other supplies that have filled the convoys rolling eastwards across Europe to Poland.

On arrival most of the aid is delivered to the "charitable commissions" of the Polish Catholic church, which operate in each of the country's 27 dioceses and whose work is coordinated from the southern city of Katowice.

In February alone they recorded deliveries of over 22,000 tonnes of assorted aid, which varied from pre-planned and listed EEC loads to well-meaning private packages containing, as one observer noted "a bizarre mixture of lard, soap, broken chocolate eggs and out-dated medicines - all bundled together".

The sheer need for aid in Poland is staggering. A Polish family of four now needs to spend about 13,000 zlotys a month to buy basic necessities, but the average worker only brings home about 9,000 zlotys. In a working-class area like Cracow's Hedwiga parish, about half of the district's 400 families need some sort of assistance.

In recent months prices have risen on average between 300 - 400%, while wages have only increased by 15 - 20%. Hardest hit have been the old, the sick, people with large families and internees and their dependents.

Of the three to four thousand activists interned following the military crackdown in December, only one thousand have so far been released. Their families only receive 70% of their income, which dries up completely if they are tried and condemned for "political crimes".

Existing shortages look like getting worse despite stringent rationing. As production levels fall and unemployment rises, communications between the four power-centres of junta, Communist Party, government and Soviet-dominated security services, remain chaotic.

Aid experts have asked for an additional £8.52 million in humanitarian aid from the EEC and the International Red Cross has appealed to its Geneva headquarters for another Fr.542 million (£11.97 million) to keep badly-needed programmes alive for another 6 months.

INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS: European Parliament calls for worker participation

One of the most controversial issues in labour-management relations in recent years has been the role of workers in the industrial decision-making process. Despite the positive results some European countries have experienced with the work force sharing certain decisions, the issue still divides industrialists, unionists and political groups. Whilst most trade unionists favour the idea, others regard the concept of worker involvement as contrary to the traditional division of responsibility, as do many industrialists.

The debate recently surfaced again when the European Parliament debated whether worker participation should be adopted in the European Community. The majority of the Parliament voted by 158 to 109 for a plan that would allow businesses in the different Community member countries considerable leeway in choosing what type of worker participation they would prefer. Ironically, the Socialist and Communist groups in the Parliament who were thought to be the most likely to support the plan, voted against it because they thought that it did not go far enough. The wide range of options offered would mean that there would be no unified Community formula, something supported by some but opposed by others who wanted more flexibility to respond to different national traditions and legal systems.

The majority of the Parliament also supported a recommendation limiting the application of worker co-determination to companies with over 1000 employees, a ceiling that many parliamentarians say would exempt too many companies and provide an escape for large firms able to divide their operations into separate entities below the 1000-worker limit. In addition, the Parliament proposal would allow any employee to be elected to the management board, a move which trade unionists say would weaken their role as representatives of the work force.

The Parliament plan however is simply an opinion and the final decision is still up to the Council of Ministers. European Community institutions have been considering the proposals ever since the EEC Commission proposed them in 1972. The Parliament vote, however, recommended major modifications to the initial Commission proposal, which was closer to the position of the Parliament's Socialist and Communist minority.

AGRICULTURE: But what do you actually do for a living?

Anyone who has worked on a farm knows that it isn't a nine-to-five job all the year round. When a farmer specializes in a certain crop, it is almost inevitable that he'll have busy periods and slack periods.

As a result, a fair-sized number of farmers do other part-time jobs. A study in European Community countries in 1975 showed that about 27% of farmers had some sort of other paid employment. An up-date of the poll was made in 1980, but the results are not yet available.

British Conservative MEP Alisdair Hutton, who has been pressing the European Commission on the subject, was recently told that numerous attempts have been made by statisticians to find out what proportion of farmers incomes are derived from part-time jobs, but to no avail.

Germany is apparently the only EEC member state that has detailed information on the subject. In 1981, 40% of 780,400 German farmers with more than one hectare of land had other non-agricultural jobs as well.

EXTERNAL AFFAIRS: Greenland seeks new status

The authorities in Greenland have asked for negotiations on the country's new status in the European Community, following the referendum in which its citizens rejected full membership. The Danish government told other Community member states that the huge, ice-covered autonomous region would like to be associated with the Community under a status similar to that of the French Overseas Departments and Territories. The Danes and Greenlanders would like discussions to begin as soon as possible and hope that they could be wrapped up quickly and without too many complications.

They also hope that a new status does not bring about too many modifications in the economic relationship between Greenland and the rest of the Community. But clearly, there will have to be changes in the Community treaties to take into account the new situation. It was in February that the 18,000 Greenlanders decided that they no longer wanted to be an integral part of the European Community. They joined with Denmark in 1973 and it was the first time in the history of the Community that a member had voted to withdraw.

Owing to Ascension Day EUROFOCUS will not be published next week. Therefore, the following number will be dated May 31, 1982.
