

Elections in 1978, says Summit

The first direct elections to the European Parliament could take place in barely three years' time - even before the next UK general election. In a key section of the communiqué issued after the Paris summit conference in December, the Heads of Government declared that the Council of Ministers should act on the matter in 1976. "On this assumption," it continued, "elections by direct universal suffrage could take place at any time in or after 1978."

Article 138 of the Rome Treaty states that drawing up the system of election shall be the responsibility of the Parliament itself; and draft proposals are already in existence. A report by Dutch Socialist Schelto Patijn, prepared for the Political Affairs Committee, should be adopted by the Parliament as a whole in January.

Council moving ahead

The Patijn proposals envisage an increase in the size of the Parliament from the present 198 to 550, giving the United Kingdom 116 seats instead of 36. Each country would initially use its own system of election; and the report originally proposed that the first vote should take place "not later than the first Sunday of May, 1980".

But here, as the Irish Foreign Secretary Garret Fitzgerald told the Parliament on December 11, the Council has had "one of its rare moments of moving ahead of the Assembly in European matters". Where Patijn "modestly proposes" 1980 the summit had suggested 1978.

"I have already amended my report," Dr Patijn interjected.

Chicken-egg dilemma solved

The summit also took significant steps towards increasing the powers of the Parliament. "There was a very clear recognition," Garret Fitzgerald reported, "of the undesirability, even impracticability, of having direct elections for a Parliament which has inadequate power. The interrelationship between the powers of Parliament and direct elections was recognised, and the chicken-egg problem that this poses was overcome by saying rightly, that both must be done at once."

The communiqué specifically mentions associating the Parliament more closely with "political cooperation in the construction of Europe"; and extending the powers of the Parliament "by granting it certain powers in the Communities' legislative process".

As Scottish Liberal MP Russell Johnston noted in a rousing speech on December 10, the Parliament is today "the only elected body in Europe with powers and responsibilities, where men and women count ideas of more value than geography". The Community could now be on the verge of a giant stride towards parliamentary democracy.

Note that you may vote"

Would anything hold up this progress? Unfortunately, two countries - the United Kingdom and Denmark - have reservations.

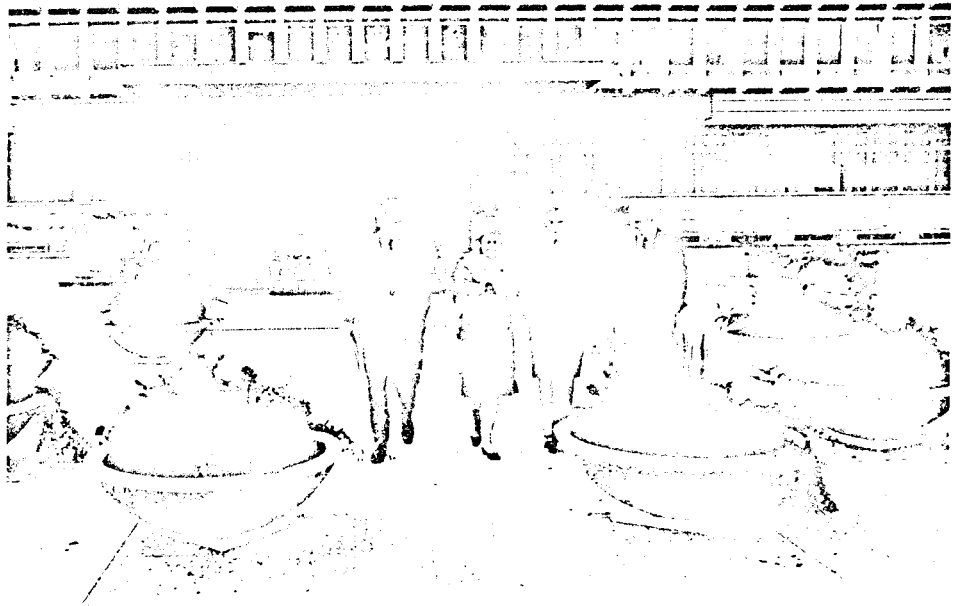
Inserted into the summit communiqué was a statement by the UK delegation explaining that, while Her Majesty's Government "did not wish to prevent the governments of the other eight member states from making progress with the election of the European Assembly by universal suffrage", they "could not themselves take up a position on the proposal before the process of renegotiation had been completed and the results of renegotiation submitted to the British people".

As far as the British voter is concerned, therefore, all will depend on the referendum (or general election) next year. The question then, it could be said, will be "eligite ut eligas".

obtain as a Member of Parliament in Westminster better information in direct dealings here than I can obtain through London Ministries . . ."

Mr Evans stressed the need for a voice for Wales in Brussels as well as in the European Parliament, partly because of the low priority given to Welsh interests by the London Government.

"I have evidence," he said on leaving Luxembourg, "such as the European Parliament debate on the EEC budget, of a real beginning of parliament-



At the European Parliament: Russell Johnston (Lib); Winifred Ewing (SNP); John Brewis (Con); Gwynfor Evans (Plaid Cymru).

SNP and Plaid for the Parliament?

Scottish and Welsh Nationalist members of the European Parliament were foreshadowed after a visit to the December plenary session in Luxembourg by Mrs Winifred Ewing (Moray and Nairn), the Scottish National Party's spokesman on European affairs, and Mr Gwynfor Evans (Carmarthen), President and parliamentary leader of Plaid Cymru. Both returned to the United Kingdom to recommend to their respective parties that they should seek representation in the British delegation to the European Parliament.

Mrs Ewing, in a statement issued at the end of the visit, said that her basic opposition to "the centralist decision-making of the EEC" remained un-watered down and that she was not satisfied that, as presently constituted, the problems of Scotland would be solved more quickly within than without the Community. But, she said, other anti-marketeters - such as the Danish Socialist People's Party (see below) - are represented and the visit had altered her view on the question of using the existing forum so long as the forum was there. "I consider that Scotland's voice as expressed through my party's philosophy would be better raised than not to be heard," she added.

"The European Parliament is not yet solidified, but it is fighting for increasing powers against the other Institutions of the EEC, and appears to be winning the battle. One could say that this Parliament is a rising star and by contrast, Westminster, in terms of power, seems to be a declining one."

"There is a noble aspect to the European Parliament in watching nations once at war sitting in political groups trying to reach concord."

"My contacts have made it clear that I can

tary control over the Brussels bureaucracy. Decisions of importance are being made by the Parliament, which is obviously far more than a talking shop. Though its power is still small I think the Luxembourg Parliament makes decisions of greater importance than does the Westminster Parliament. In fact, though not in theory, Luxembourg does have more control over EEC expenditure than Westminster has over the British Government's . . ."

"The European Economic Community must be transformed from a collection of states into a community of communities. It must consciously give high priority to the defence of European civilisation which does not exist apart from the nations of Europe, but is wholly composed of their national traditions," he concluded.

The anti-marketeter in Europe

When Labour MPs eventually come to the Parliament, like the Scottish and Welsh Nationalists, they may well be surprised to discover that not all Members are European federalists or "ardent Europeans". There are indeed many Members who are intensely critical of the Community, and the Parliament gives many opportunities for such criticism.

Explaining his negative attitude to the budget - and to most other Community proposals - Danish Socialist People's Party Member Jens Maigaard told in a short speech on Thursday, December 12, why he attended the Parliament. "I don't think the Community is a suitable organisation for international cooperation," he said, but continued, "other parties have stayed away. We don't. We have participated." This was necessary, he said, in order effectively to express his party's position and to present the facts of the Community to the Danish people.

al Fund: £130m for UK

ar over the Community purse has now formally passed from the Council of Ministers to the European Parliament. On Thursday, December 12, the Community budget for 1975 was adopted by the Parliament, exercising a power which in previous years rested with the Council. Although the overall fixing of the budget still depends on a dialogue between the Council and the Parliament - beginnings of co-decision - for the first time an international parliamentary body has had and used the power to outvote national governments.

The drama of the occasion was overshadowed because the summit meeting of the nine Heads of Government in Paris had the previous day agreed on regional funds of 1,300 million units of account over a three-year period, including 300 million for 1975, the very sum that the Parliament was preparing to vote into the budget, if necessary over the heads of the ministers. So Parliament was spared the tactical triumph of outvoting the Council of Ministers on that (which would have doubtless led to a lengthy constitutional wrangle) and contented itself with the thought that it was its own insistence on the regional fund that had been in part responsible for the final decision by the nine governments.

As a result, the amount on which Parliament had the last word on this occasion, the first under its new powers, was modest, under two million units of account (about £1m), and aimed at keeping the Community's joint nuclear and other research programmes ticking over. But there

A promise, Dr Fitzgerald

It was not only the summit agreements that were welcomed during a short impromptu debate held on Wednesday, December 9. As the communiqué brought a fresh approach to solving the Community's problems so, significantly, the man chosen to report on the meeting to Parliament was not the current President of the Council of Ministers but the man who takes over that office on January 1, Irish Minister Garret Fitzgerald. And if the Council had been criticised by many Members in the past for its scant regard for making itself available for democratic scrutiny, Mr Fitzgerald, basking in an enthusiastic reception, promised a change. "It is my firm opinion that in the first half of next year, when I shall have the presidency, I will be available to you for as long as you want me to be available," he said.

A telling story

Subsequently the Socialists said they hope that "when Ireland takes over the presidency of the Council from France, relations between Council and Parliament will assume a new complexion. Certainly, Mr Fitzgerald's maiden speech was refreshingly different from the offerings of the French representative, Mr Destremau. Over the past three months, the latter has managed to reduce the European Parliament's Question Time to 'Story Time with Destremau'. Of course every President of the Council is free to do his best to make a fool of himself, but Mr Destremau's performances have been quite outstanding for their lack of interest and sympathy, and on occasions for their stupidity."

Beef stew

Because there is no Community regulation of the mutton and lamb market some member countries are helping to ease the beef glut on their home markets by restricting imports of sheepmeat. This has caused the ire at Question Time (Dec 11) of both John Brewis (Con/UK) and Thomas Nolan (EPD/Irl), who wanted to know why the Commission had so far failed to produce draft rules for this sector, despite an earlier promise to do this by last June. Commission Vice-President Sir Christopher Soames replied that the draft would be completed as soon as possible, but argued that the real problem was to re-establish order in the beef

as another 48 million units (£21m) which the Parliament had voted into the budget in November and which the Council had subsequently accepted, while a cut of a further 20 million by the Council was not disputed by the Parliament. So both Council and Parliament can claim an honourable outcome.

The 48 million which the Parliament's persistence persuaded the Council to accept without further battle was mainly - and significantly as the economic clouds darken - in the social field: another 35 million for the work of the European Social Fund in retraining workers.

Fund in summer

The aim of avoiding supplementary budgets (see EP Report No. 7, December 1974) will certainly not be achieved in 1975, when, according to Commissioner Cheysson, up to five are expected. The first of these, for 300 million for the Regional Fund for the year, will be put forward early in January and the Fund itself should be operative by early summer.

In the event Britain will get 28 per cent of the 1300 million total Fund, provided that, as in the other countries, the projects to be aided are financed as to 85 per cent, and in special cases 70 per cent, from other sources. So the heavy contributions which Britain will seemingly be making to the Community budget in the late 1970s will be significantly offset by the Regional Fund. But Russell Johnston (Lib/UK) criticised the call for "fair" contributions made by the Prime Minister at the Paris summit: "The Community will never work if it is simply operated on the basis that you get back the same amount as you put in. It will never work on that basis at all."

market. But that was part of Mr Brewis's complaint, for beef imports from other Community countries into the UK were continuing while British sheepmeat exports were being blocked.

The subsequent question by James Gibbons (EPD/Irl) illustrated how British and Irish interests can also conflict over the same beef problem. For the Irish Member the problem was to ensure that beef exports from his country to Britain were unhampered. The Commissioner's reply, that the November 29 agreement has introduced more control over market conditions in Britain and that the Commission would ensure that Community rules were respected, did not entirely satisfy Mr Gibbons. Nor, from a different angle, did it satisfy Ralph Howell (Con/UK). His request for a meat marketing board for the whole Community had been rejected by Sir Christopher (to applause in the House), and he now thought the Commission's reply about strict enforcement of the rules on beef difficult to reconcile with what he called it complacency about sheepmeat.

A Chunnel after all?

The Community could help finance the building of the Channel Tunnel. This was stated by James Hill (Con/UK), rapporteur and chairman of the Regional Policy and Transport Committee, introducing a report on permanent transport links across sea straits. While there was a ceiling of 50 million units of account (about £22 m) available for any one project from the European Investment Bank, he suggested that some 200m u.a. could be provided towards four separate projects, such as the British and French shares of the tunnel, the environmental aspect of railway links and an industrial complex. Mr Hill considered that the new Regional Fund could be involved also. Such sea links, argued Mr Hill, were essential to Community development. Among others mentioned in the report were the Messina Straits link between Italy and Sicily, between the Danish islands, and links between Community countries and Sweden. Paul De Clercq (Lib/Bel), underlining the importance of the Community playing a leading role, thought that such large projects, in meeting specific regional needs, would have an important impact on public opinion in demonstrating the reality of European integration. Sir Douglas Dodds-Parker (Con/UK) went further, suggesting that the Channel Tunnel be a Community project, adding that "this tunnel involves not only the United Kingdom and France, but that the whole of Europe from Scan-

avia to Spain could benefit and should contribute on the same scale to this project".

Indexation: don't be fooled

The ravages of inflation on people's earnings and savings were described in a debate following an oral question on the indexation of earnings put down by several members of the European Progressive Democrat group. But while the question sought to have indexation accepted in the Community as a means of safeguarding earnings against inflation many speakers, including Lord Reay (Con/UK) and Thomas Nolan (EPD/Irl) pointed out that inflation has an even greater effect upon savings. Commissioner Gundelach, while not taking a negative attitude, reflected the mood of the chamber when he said "this is not the sole miraculous cure for the problem of inflation". Measures such as indexation "cannot be considered in isolation from general economic and social policy". There were, he said, great divergences between the social and economic systems of the various member states and these differences could not be overcome overnight; instant harmonisation was "just not realistic . . . let us not fool anybody by it". Sir Brandon Rhys Williams (Con/UK) saw a rather different use for indexation - the indexation of taxation.

Ding-dong merrily

Animosity between the Socialists and the European Conservatives has taken a bitter turn. Outmanoeuvred in the absence of a quorum on a slack Friday morning in November during a debate on the laws on yeasts, the Socialists riposted with a statement accusing the Conservatives of acting on behalf of industrial lobbies. "One particularly objectionable amendment [put down by the Conservatives] calls for an increase of the lead content of yeasts by 40 per cent," they alleged, proving that, to the Conservatives, "the health of the European consumer is of less worth . . . than the sympathy of profit-maximising industry . . ."

The European Conservatives rejected the accusation of being spokesmen for lobbies and said that the charge of disregard for consumers' health was "hypocritical humbug". The lead content of yeast had always been higher in Britain than on the Continent, they said, but "there is no known case of anyone suffering any harm in consequence". Indeed, the report on yeasts prepared by a Socialist Member admitted that the experts' advice varied. The Conservative amendments had been tabled because the proposed directive had been drawn up before British and Irish entry into the Community.

Summing up this round: the Conservatives won in November on the procedural side, but lost on December 9 when their amendments were all rejected in a resumed debate.

But battle was resumed later in the week, this time about an "own initiative" report by German Socialist Horst Seefeld for the Regional Policy and Transport Committee about extending Community responsibilities to cover sea transport.

The Conservatives' formal argument was that the extremely wide-ranging report should have been considered by other committees, and moved that it be referred back to the Regional Committee. In an acrimonious exchange Peter Kirk accused the Socialists of conducting a "hate campaign against the Conservatives because they were better able to muster their men than the Socialists," though he softened his words later. But to no avail; the referral back was not carried because James Hill, chairman of the Regional Committee, felt obliged to follow his committee loyalty rather than his political conviction, giving a tied vote.

In the end Mr Seefeld's motion was also thrown out after a short debate in which Mr Hill, now free to speak for himself, made clear that the main cause for Conservative concern was Mr Seefeld's proposals for harmonising working and social conditions on Community ships. These were complex issues with implications well outside the Community.

Summing up round two: the Conservatives lost on procedure but won the day.

Round three next month?