

Luxembourg takes over Council

There was a warm welcome — combining both encouragement and warning — for Luxembourg's Prime and Foreign Minister, Gaston Thorn, following his opening statement of policy to Parliament on taking up the six-month presidency of the Council of Ministers. Mr. Thorn's stature politically far outstrips that of his country physically. This was clearly appreciated by Parliament at a time when a number of important decisions on the Community's future are considered imminent. After all, despite some gloom in the end-of-year press, outgoing Italian Minister Adolfo Battaglia had been able to report to Parliament in December after the Rome summit that "something is on the move in Europe!"

Christian Democrat leader Alfred Bertrand (Bel) was the first to stress the significance of Mr. Thorn's dual role of Foreign and Prime Minister: in the former capacity he would have to guide the eight other Foreign Ministers through the Council — particularly with regard to the introduction of direct elections to the European Parliament and their discussions on the Tindemans report — and he would have the unique experience of also presiding over the Heads of Government meeting in March or April.

Mr. Thorn himself said that he would do his best to get the convention on direct elections agreed and added that he hoped the elections would take place "at the same time in all member states of the Community, and not just in seven". He went on to alert Members to "the risks of attempts to divert this process which appear to be threatening from certain quarters".

"It seems to me illogical," Mr. Thorn continued, "to allow the existence of the Communities while refusing to make them more democratic . . ."

No speaker on behalf of the six political groups disagreed. Almost the most enthusiastic of all for democratisation was Leonilde Iotti, speaking for the Italian Communists. Direct elections, she said, could lead to a dynamic process within the Community, but she insisted that as soon as possible Parliament should be elected by the same procedure through all the member states.

Most notes of caution came from French Members: "France, perhaps, more than other countries, is the fulfilled expression of a nation in its structures, its history and its traditions". (Not, as might be supposed, French Gaullist leader of EPD, Christian de la Malène, but the Communist Gérard Bordul). Both argued that Community policies were more important than "institutional constructions" which, in de la Malène's words, "are in danger of becoming an alibi".

British speakers emphasised the need for proper parliamentary powers. "Without the right powers, the directly elected Parliament will be virtually useless", James Scott-Hopkins declared for the European Conservatives, criticising the Tindemans report for wanting more decision-making powers for the Council of Ministers and its civil service. Former Foreign Secretary Michael Stewart, in a

powerful speech from the Socialist benches, called on the Council to deal immediately with the question of Parliament's powers. "It sounds a little paradoxical to suggest that one institution should do its best to increase the powers of another institution at its own expense, but it is only the Council that can do this."

The Tindemans report itself is now being sent into committee so that, with time for reflection, Parliament can give its considered opinion in March or April. Meanwhile, another crucial document is awaited in Britain — the Government's White Paper on direct elections, due at the end of February.



Gaston Thorn addresses the Parliament

Gift-wrapped atom bombs

On Tuesday, January 13, the European Parliament debated what is likely to prove one of the most contentious issues for the world during the rest of this century: the construction and siting of nuclear power stations. As Mrs. Hanna Walz (CD/Ger) pointed out in her detailed report, the Community is going to need a lot more of these if it is to meet its future energy needs. Yet developing technology is making reactors and their waste a growing problem. "This latent danger becomes specially acute in the event of external interference such as sabotage and military action."

The subject, Mrs. Walz noted, was an emotional one — people were tempted to think of nuclear power stations as "gift-wrapped atom bombs". Yet, properly controlled, the

risks were no greater than those involved in coal mines. John Evans (Soc/UK) thought the subject emotive precisely because "the scientists, the politicians, the administrators . . . have not taken people into their confidence". Mr. Hamilton (Soc/UK) pointed out that atomic reactors themselves had a life of between 20 and 25 years. "But when they reach the end of their working life they will require guarding for approximately 100,000 years."

Lord Bessborough (Con/UK) did not believe, however, that Britain (a country with considerable experience of the problem) had faced particular difficulties in such matters as transporting waste, etc.; while Sir Derek Walker-Smith (Con/UK) thought the basic problem was "the imperfections of human nature": everyone wanted nuclear energy, "but produced in somebody-else's neighbourhood".

1976 budget through at last

Parliament had its last word on the 1976 budget just before Christmas — but not the last word on Community spending this year, for the inevitable queue of supplementary budgets which so arouses parliamentary ire, is already forming.

Just for the principle of the matter, as in 1974, Parliament on December 18 finally voted an additional sum over and above what the Council of Ministers had decided. After the November parliamentary sitting, when the House had voted back cuts of 441 million units of account (about £200 million), the Council agreed to put back only about 91 million, and it was left to Parliament to decide on its distribution.

Understandably, Parliament put it back in the very fields where it had wanted the 441 million, voting an extra 40 million for the Social Fund, 33 million for research and 22 million for overseas aid, but making its point by adding back a total of 103 million, or 12 million more than the Council agreed. Honour was then satisfied all round when the President of the Council put in a few phone calls to the member governments and reported back to Parliament that the Council agreed with the extra amount.

Members' criticisms of the whole budgetary procedure are now familiar: the false distinction (except in respect of their own powers) between compulsory and non-compulsory expenditure, the fact that the budget is no budget in a real sense but merely the sum of a lot of uncoordinated spending items, and the economising of those very expenditures — social fund, regional fund, research, overseas aid — which are most crucial at a time of world-wide recession.

John Osborn (Con/UK) carried criticism of this "charade" a stage further, criticising Parliament itself for "making a very great business of spending a little money". The 0.6 per cent of total public expenditure of the Community countries covered by the Community budget was too small and the aim should be 20 or 25 per cent, he said.

At least two other British members, Lord Bruce of Donington (Soc) and Hugh Dykes (Con) took their criticisms to an abstention on the final vote. This by 121 to three, with five abstentions.

Lord Bruce, incidentally, says that he did not "join the Communists" in voting against the budget at the November stage; if anything, he says, they joined him, for he had maintained a critical attitude to the budget through committee and plenary session alike.

Defence report passed

It has taken about two years for the Parliament's Political Affairs Committee report on "the effects of a European foreign policy of defence questions" to move from the appointment of Lord Gladwyn (Lib/UK) as rapporteur to final adoption by the plenary sitting in December. "Had we not had in Lord Gladwyn a driving force," remarked Egon Klepsch (CD/Ger), "we should certainly have fallen by the wayside." Even then, the report came up on a sparsely-attended Monday afternoon (December 15), the more so since most British Members were stuck in a fog at Heathrow (see back page).

The primary cause of this long delay was not so much the report itself as a feeling among many Members, particularly on the left, that the European Parliament should steer clear of defence. As Sir Geoffrey de Freitas (UK) put it when speaking for the Socialist Group, "it involves us in yet another field of activity when we already have more than enough to do . . . Let us put our own house in order first". Fazio Fabbrini (It), for the Communists, likewise did not believe that it was appropriate "to discuss a problem of this kind, in this Parliament, at this time".

To Lord Gladwyn, however, it was quite clear that Parliament had every right to debate defence. "For some years now," he pointed out, "the European Parliament has considered and debated not only matters coming within the sphere of the Treaty of Rome, but also matters not covered by that Treaty, and notably, of course, foreign affairs;" and

"as long ago as April 1973 the Parliament itself decided that foreign affairs cannot in effect be dissociated from defence and security policy". There was nothing in his resolution which prejudiced the position either of NATO or of Western European Union. Moreover, there was a clear economic aspect to the central recommendation of the report: the establishment of an Armaments Procurement Agency. "Some have . . . calculated that if we were able to pool our research and development in respect of the manufacture of the necessary conventional armaments — including, of course, aircraft — we might make an annual saving of no less than £3,000 million."

A common language

Ever since the Council of Ministers' resolution in July 1974 calling for "a fully viable and competitive European-based industry by the early 1980's" in the field of data processing, the Commission has been working on a possible common policy. In September last year Parliament approved (though regretting that they were too modest) a first set of projects. On Monday, January 12 a report by Pierre-Bernard Cousté (EPD/F) came before the House, dealing with five new proposals for action. On the whole, Parliament approved — as Lord Bessborough (Con/UK) remarked of the proposed creation of a new real-time language: "at least we could have a common language for computers, if not for people".

Over the whole debate there hovered the spectre of IBM. As Lord Bruce (Soc/UK) forcefully pointed out, one of the arguments which had helped convince the British to stay in the Community was that common policies could effectively counteract private monopolies; and "IBM are rapidly assuming the position of absolute monopoly power". Mr. Cousté devoted some time to showing how, in the absence of common standards allowing programs and equipment from one company to be compatible with those from another, the most powerful company would inevitably eliminate the rest.

IBM, however, had its defenders. "I wonder," Tam Dalyell (Soc/UK) asked the House, "if colleagues really know that IBM in Europe employs 77,000 of our compatriots . . .?" These people would not welcome deliberate discrimination against their employers. New Conservative Scottish Member Alex Fletcher, in his maiden speech, noted the importance of American computer firms to Scotland: "the per capita investment of that industry in Scotland is second only to that in California". He recommended that the Community would be better rewarded by studying how the small American companies managed to compete with IBM, and by purchasing existing American technology.

There were, indeed, criticisms from all quarters of the financial side of the Commission proposals. The research and development budget of IBM in 1974, Lord Bessborough noted, had been 890 million dollars, 100 million of it on pure research. Yet the Community was proposing to spend only 23 million units of account (i.e., dollars) over five years. Worse, the Council of Ministers had not even sanctioned the expenditure for 1976, making a supplementary budget necessary later on.

Watch on oil prices

With the aim of achieving transparency of costs and prices in the oil market, the Commission has proposed that oil companies should make a return of appropriate information each quarter. Parliament gave a cautious welcome to the idea on Tuesday, January 13, after a careful examination of the problems by Energy, Research and Technology Committee rapporteur Tom Ellis (Soc/UK). The alternative to the Commission's idea — which he christened "Mechanistic Price Reporting" — was "Assessment Pricing", in which a small permanent team would sample prices at various outlets. The Committee had, however, come down on balance in favour of the original proposals. Replying to the debate, Commissioner Simonet gave an assurance that confidentiality would be respected.

Dragon in distress

They push chivalry to extremes in Dorset as Parliament found on December 17 when James Spicer (Con/UK) rode out in defence of the Dragon high-temperature project on Winfrith Heath. What threatened the project's life was that the British Government, which had hitherto paid 37% of the cost, had sought to reduce this to 11%, and failing increased contributions from its partners or obtaining American participation, proposed the project close down. Mr. Spicer wondered how reliable a partner Britain could be considered in other fields if the venture was entirely abandoned. But the general feeling was that, even if the British did the killing, no other government strove officiously to keep the Dragon alive.

Purple passports

In the excitement at the Rome summit about Mr. Callaghan's seat at the Paris energy conference, the decision to have a European passport by 1978 was somewhat overlooked. The subject however, was taken up by the European Parliament on Wednesday, December 17 when Michel Cointat (EPD/F) led a debate on personal Community documents.

The important thing, Mr. Cointat noted, was that "the concierge and the street-sweeper" should have "the European idea constantly present in their handbag or pocket"; there should be European identity cards, family record books, driving licences, "university passports", sports passes and postage stamps. Yes, replied Adolfo Battaglia for the Council of Ministers, they would soon be examining proposals along

these lines.

But there were indications that all will not be plain sailing, even on the passport. Why purple? Mr. Cointat preferred an "opéra mauve". Because, replied Mr. Battaglia to sceptical reactions, "purple is more modern". In fact, the colour issue has all the necessary ingredients of a "cause célèbre". Not only is there a linguistic factor — Community documents in English are colour-coded purple, so that the passport could find itself caught up in the anti-franglais campaign; but, in the European Parliament, purple is also the colour of the European Conservatives.

Fishing — not satisfied

Replying to James Scott-Hopkins (Con/UK) on Thursday, January 15, Commissioner Petrus Lardinois told Parliament that the crisis in the fishing industry was over. This was not well received. Nor was his later explanation of the Commission's basic strategy on territorial limits: essentially, to negotiate, internationally, an EEC 200-mile limit, with national catch quotas within to compensate for losses sustained elsewhere. Mrs. Ewing (Ind/UK) was sceptical whether any international decision would be taken at the Law of the Sea Conference between March 15 and May 5, because another date had already been booked for it to continue. But Mr. Lardinois would not accept her proposal for 50-mile exclusive national fishing limits within the eventual EEC 200-mile limit. He was, however, more sympathetic to John Prescott (Soc/UK)'s suggestion of a conference of North Sea states.

Windscreens

To laminate or to toughen is the question for Europe's motor manufacturers. Horst Seefeld (Soc/Ger) came out strongly in favour of the former as being safer, while the cheaper, toughened windscreens meant that some manufacturers had a competitive advantage at the cost of human suffering. British members were sceptical. Bob Mitchell (Soc) denounced a "mania for harmonisation" and questioned whether there was any need for a common practice at all. John Osborn (Con) expressed his doubts about the safety aspect: under some circumstances laminated glass is more dangerous than toughened glass. So there were several abstentions; but the house endorsed the Commission's case for laminated glass as the European standard.

Farmers and mothers

It might be expected that a Commission proposal on the classification, packaging and labelling of paints would go through Parliament virtually on the nod. On Thursday, January 15, however, Jim Spicer (Con/UK) put up a spirited resistance to the idea that first aid instructions should be put on packages. Experience of practical use on a farm persuaded him that instructions half obliterated by spilt paint, for example, could actually do more harm than good. Lady Fisher of Rednal, however, was having none of it. When children tampered with insecticides, etc., a mother might be grateful for instructions for immediate first aid. At the vote, mothers beat farmers by a large majority.

Question time

Why does the German government impose a kilometre tax on passengers entering Germany on board British buses? A good question; and one which Sir Geoffrey de Freitas (Soc/UK) put to the Commission during Parliament's Question Time on Wednesday, December 17. What did they propose to do to prevent delays "caused by officials' stopping of unscheduled holiday buses, counting the number of passengers, looking at their proposed route and then calculating a cash hand-over in respect of each passenger? How can I justify it to people who write to me . . . claiming that it is contrary to the whole spirit of the Community?"

Commissioner Haferkamp admitted that there was an 11 per cent VAT. It was charged on German and foreign buses alike; and "controls and formalities are unfortunately necessary because we still have different tax systems . . .". But perhaps payment could be arranged in some other way than by handing over cash

CAP fraud

The special "flying squads" set up during 1974/5 to detect fraudulent claims on Common Agricultural Policy funds have already had some success, Commissioner Cheysson told Parliament in December. Some "dubious inter-Community commercial channels" had been revealed; and some £25 million of incorrectly spent money identified. That was all very well, said James Scott-Hopkins (Con/UK) but was existing legislation adequate to bring to court those carrying out such practices? No, replied the Commissioner, and the problem had been brought to the attention of the Council of Ministers. He also promised to look into a particular case cited

by Tam Dalyell (Soc/UK) "whereby a ship was unloaded in Bristol and reloaded two days later, simply to make financial gain through sums paid out under the terms of the CAP".

Air fares

Why are air fares so high in Europe compared with the United States, Lord Bethell (Con/UK) asked the Commission in January. Mr. Scarascia Mugnozza gave three main reasons: because, as international flights, European services are subject to controls and limitations which put up costs; in the USA all operations take place in one language; air traffic is six times as high in the USA as in Europe. Isn't that really the point, Lord Bethell replied, and

Europe building in Strasbourg, due to open next year, will cost Parliament 40 million Belgian francs a year in rent alone (working out at some £20,000 per sitting day), against 11 million francs for the present facilities. This four-fold increase prompted Tam Dalyell to ask the Commission whether it was not time that it made a firm proposal on a seat. President Ortoli was not to be drawn: it was not a matter for the Commission, but for member governments.

Willie on women

Up till now, the twelve female Members of the European Parliament have had no difficulty in holding their own on the subject of women's rights. In recent months, however, they have acquired a



ought we not to get European flights operating as on internal flights? Yes; so the Commission has proposed that the Community define its own air space within which the airlines could operate as if in one country.

Expensive seat

Where should the European Parliament sit? — an increasingly crucial question as direct elections approach; and perhaps by stealth a decision is being taken, for this year for the first time, the balance is tipping in favour of Luxembourg, where 30 sitting days are scheduled, against only 25 in Strasbourg. Moreover, the new Council of

A monastery cell?

new champion in British Socialist Member Willie Hamilton. During Question Time in December he wrung from Commissioner Hillery the admission that, in the Commission's view, "pregnancy was not an illness but a social function"; and at Question Time in January he accused the EEC of "showing all the features of male chauvinist piggery" — though possibly he went too far when (much to the surprise of noted *bon viveurs* like Henri Simonet and Sir Christopher Soames) he accused the Commission benches of looking like "a bit of a monastery cell".

Unofficial Journal

"I am indeed sorry," said Lord Gladwyn a shade bitterly as he rose on Monday, December 12 to introduce his long-awaited report on European defence, "that the Continent should once again have been isolated."

Meanwhile, back at London Heathrow, a Civil Aviation charter plane was starting its fifth hour standing in the fog at the end of a runway with the British delegation to the European Parliament inside. No drinks could be served while the plane was on the ground . . . only short exercise periods were permitted, within bounds strictly delimited by a yellow line on the tarmac . . .

The delegation returned to the departure lounge at about 4 p.m., from where one group — among them Parliament's Research Director John Taylor — set off immediately for Gatwick, and cleverly arrived in Strasbourg that evening. Those who had been booked on British Midland's scheduled flight had already been diverted to Luton, and also got to Strasbourg that evening (making John Corrie and Elaine Kellett-Bowman, who had transferred from British Midland to the charter in the morning, the most fed-up members of the delegation). Some of the younger Members, like Hugh Dykes and John Prescott, headed for Victoria station. Most, however, decided to go home for the night and managed to take off on the Tuesday (despite repeated assertions by the BBC news that Heathrow was closed), arriving in Strasbourg at about the same time as the all-night train travellers.

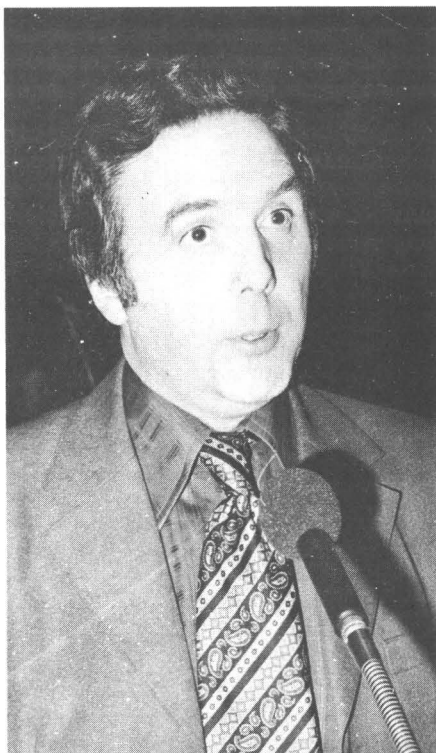
All this might have seemed an isolated misadventure had not much the same kind of thing happened at the end of the November sitting of the Parliament in Luxembourg. On that occasion, most of the delegation had to return by coach via Brussels, and then by plane to Stanstead (despite spirited attempts to make the pilot land at Heathrow). There are now distinct signs that many British Members do not think this is any way to run a Parliament. British Airways Tridents, it was noted in December, seem to manage during fog; and if there are any further happenings of the same kind, it could be a question of a new plane or a new delegation. These episodes have also emphasised — if emphasis were needed — the difficulties of a peripatetic Parliament with three separate meeting places. Some MPs have calculated that they spend more time travelling (or not travelling) than in the chamber or in committee.

Wooring Winnie

Mrs. Winifred Ewing, the Scottish National Party MP who sits in the European Parliament on the independent benches — at her own strong insistence, just to the left of centre — has been approached by the Christian Democrats with a view to her joining their ranks. This follows the earlier hint of a welcome from

the European Progressive Democrats who comprise the French Gaullists, Fianna Fail and the Danish Progress Party. Mrs. Ewing, however, considered the French attitude to Breton nationalists a bar. SNP members wary of Romish influences can take comfort that the CDs include representatives of both varieties of the Dutch Reformed Church, as well as German Protestants.

In from the cold is Henri Caillavet, a Left Radical senator from France, who left the Socialist Group two months ago. He has now moved on from the independent benches to the Liberal Group, bringing their numbers up to 26. But two other Left Radicals remain allied to the Socialists.



New Conservative Member Alex Fletcher, who made his maiden speech within an hour of joining the Parliament in January. He takes on the seat vacated by John Corrie, who now has the hair-raising task of whipping the Scottish Tories in these dangerous devolutionary times.

Trail-blazers

A unique collection of 19 portraits has now taken its place in European Parliament Member Lord St. Oswald's stately home of Nostell Priory in Yorkshire. They show the 18 Conservative and one Ulster Unionist Member who took their seats in the Parliament immediately after British accession to the Community in 1973. All 19 are the work of Yorkshire-born artist Brenda Bury, who has made an international reputation as a portraitist of politicians.

The portraits were unveiled at Christie's on December 22 at a private showing attended by "le tout parti conservateur", including Margaret Thatcher, Edward Heath, and Harold MacMillan, who made a moving dedicatory speech. Half those portrayed have now left the Parliament for one reason or another; but the collection forms a record, in Lord St. Oswald's words of "an unexpungeable piece of history".

Sir Peter

The first honour for services to the European Parliament was awarded on New Year's Day when Peter Kirk, leader of the European Conservative Group, was appointed a Knight Bachelor.

Also named in the New Year's Honours was Lord Walston, a Labour member of the British delegation; he was appointed a Commander of the Royal Victorian Order.

As you were

One Member of the Parliament who can not have been too pleased as he left Luxembourg after the January sitting is Dutch Christian Democrat Willem Schuijt. At the beginning of last year, he was chairman of Parliament's Legal Affairs Committee. Then, in March, he moved to the chair of a newly-created Associations Committee, which replaced the new Joint Parliamentary Committees with Greece and Turkey. Suddenly, on Tuesday, January 13 this year, Parliament was presented with an emergency motion tabled by the leaders of the six political groups, proposing, among other things, that the Associations Committee be abolished and replaced by — yes — two joint Parliamentary Committees dealing with Greece and Turkey. One other Committee, that on Cultural Affairs and Youth, was also axed, the reason being, as Leader of the Socialist Group Ludwig Fellermaier explained, that Members with their double mandate were unable to man fourteen committees properly. Under the new dispensation, it will be possible for every Member to be on two committees.

Despite Willem Schuijt's protests, the new committee structure was rapidly approved under urgent procedure, in the middle of the debate on nuclear power stations.

Réveille!

'Reveille' (of all papers) recently carried the story of a remarkable altercation between European Parliament Members Lords Gladwyn and Gordon-Walker in Luxembourg's Cravat Hotel. Waking early, Lord Gordon-Walker found what he thought to be his bedroom door locked, so began hammering to be let out. It was, however, the connecting door to the next bedroom, where Lord Gladwyn awoke and remonstrated angrily in French. Both rang the hall porter: Lord Gordon-Walker to complain that some Frenchman had locked him in his room, and was now hurling insults; Lord Gladwyn to call for help against a madman who was trying to break in. They are now (according to 'Reveille') the best of friends.

Socialist find

The secretariat of the Socialist Group has now been strengthened by the appointment of a British assistant secretary-general, David Blackman. Until December a lecturer in archaeology at Bristol University, he will take a particular interest for the group in the Community's external relations. A former parliamentary candidate, Mr. Blackman was active in the Labour Committee for Europe during the referendum campaign. Also joining the Socialist secretariat shortly will be Dick Gupwell, at present on the staff of the European Commission.

K.P.G.