

## International local authorities?

"To the devil with the legal difficulties, get a move on," Parliament told the nine governments in urging more drastic and concrete action to break down the boundaries between member countries. Notwithstanding Commissioner George Thomson's explanation of the difficulties, and the certainty that both Commission and Council would reject its proposals, Parliament on November 18 voted for the report by Horst Gerlach (Soc/Ger) recommending new local government authorities which could operate on both sides of the Community's internal frontiers.

There are 17 such trans-frontier areas where local initiatives are hampered by political and legal differences, all of them on the European mainland except for the most tragic of all — the north of Ireland. Yet, although almost all are geographically central to the Community, they have many of the problems of its really peripheral regions.

Full cooperation between the citizens on both sides of the frontiers concerned, Mr Gerlach explained, was handicapped because of legal incompatibilities. Moreover, relations between local authorities on different sides was held to be engaging in "foreign policy" by some central governments. Until there was a European economic union, he agreed, there had to be frontier checks, and incomes would differ from one side to the other, but the Community could do much to improve matters now.

The instrument he commended to the House was a new legal form — the European Joint Authority — which would have powers to organise jointly such mundane matters as ambulance and other health services, and gas, water and electricity supplies. This at least would save duplication.

Regional Affairs Commissioner George Thomson was sympathy itself. The objectives of the report he could not fault, but he had to point out formidable legal difficulties. Firstly, public utility supplies did not come under the Community Treaty and secondly, and more difficult still, under whose law would the EJAs operate? Was it conceivable that a Member State would permit its citizens living in a frontier region to be subject to the law of the neighbouring country if the EJA happened to have its headquarters there?

As it was, in 14 of the areas concerned joint committees

existed and were working well, while the Commission had just begun a study of the Donegal-Londonderry area's problems. But, protested Michael Herbert (EPD/Irl), any cooperation that had taken place had been mainly due to local initiatives: "it can be generally stated that national governments do not encourage any form of cross-border cooperation". Commissioner Thomson agreed: "... the problem doesn't lie around me. It lies, if anywhere, in the national capitals."



Commissioner George Thomson. At the end of the year he leaves the Commission and is returning to the UK where he has been elected chairman of the European Movement.

## European elections

So European elections are in the Queen's speech after all — though the crowded legislative programme makes it still a matter of uncertainty whether the Bill will get through in time to meet the May/June 1978 deadline. The third, and final report of the House of Commons Select Committee on the elections emphasises once again that meeting the target date "is dependent upon the first enabling bill dealing with the most urgent matters receiving the royal assent by the end of February 1977".

The Select Committee's report deals with a number of detailed, but important matters that will have to be included in any Representation of the People Bill introducing European elections. Of these, the most controversial is the franchise.

The Committee recommends that United Kingdom nationals working in other Member States of the Community, and their spouses, should be entitled to vote in European elections. The difficult problem of which constituency they should vote in is solved by making it a requirement that "they or their spouses should have resided in the United Kingdom". The vote is by proxy in "the district in which he was last resident". This, it is estimated, would add some 270,000 voters (possibly marked "E" voters on the electoral register) to those entitled to vote in national elections. But more surprisingly, the Committee also recommends that "the franchise should be extended to all United Kingdom nationals...

wherever they are living". How many will this add to the register? Presumably all recent emigrants to Australia, New Zealand, Canada, etc. A perusal of the Committee's minutes show that the report originally advocated giving the vote only to UK residents in Community countries, but that the Conservatives, having a temporary majority on the Committee on November 9, voted through the wider franchise.

The report also recommends that:

1. Peers and clergymen should be able to stand.
2. Nominations should be signed by ten electors per Westminster constituency covered by the European seat.
3. Deposits should be £150 per Westminster seat covered (£1,200 — £1,500).

The Committee comes out at this stage against any formal links between Members of the European Parliament and Westminster. Instead it believes that, initially, it is in the field of informal links that the most useful contacts will be made. Accordingly, it believes that "it would be sensible to make available to representatives some of the amenities available in Parliament to Members of both Houses". But it does incline in the direction, at a later stage, of a joint Grand Committee of both Houses and the Parliament Members, or links via House of Lords reform.

As for finance and broadcasting arrangements, the report makes no firm recommendations. Interestingly, however, the Members of the European Parliament are referred to as "representatives". Perhaps Europe is to follow the United States model after all?

## Excitement on fishing grows

After October's close vote on fishing (see EPR 29), Parliament returned to the subject on Wednesday, November 17, conscious that not very much had changed on the matter which had caused most controversy: the rights of different countries within the Community's 200-mile limits. As to the 200-mile limit itself, however, the Council of Ministers has now decided to bring it in at the beginning of next year; and this has led to the opening by the Commission of negotiations with, notably, Iceland. John Prescott (Soc/UK), indeed, put on record that he thought "the Commission have done a good job up to this stage; and I think also that the Commission are probably better suited to deal with this problem than any national government..." — adding that this "might seem a peculiar idea to be coming from the lips of myself". No doubt encouraged by this, Commissioner Lardinois proved in

fighting form when the House turned to fishing policy within the limits. What was wrong with a 12-mile exclusive zone for coastal states? It might seem small, but half the total catch was fished within these limits. Members should concentrate their minds on preserving fish stocks — "it is already five minutes to midnight". Nor did the debate change his mind. "Twelve out of fourteen Members have spoken in English", he noted at the end. "I will try to answer in English. I hope I can do it very briefly because although I will use the same arguments as I did two hours' ago, I hope they will sink in better if I use the English language." Parliament will be returning to the subject in December with both a Conservative Group resolution and a report from the Agriculture Committee. And as Marcel Vandewiele (CD/Bel) remarked, "every sitting, this subject becomes more and more exciting".

## Community is \$7 billion in the red

Commissioner Willy Haferkamp told Parliament the Community is now much worse off than in 1973, the year of the oil crisis. The EC surplus then was nearly \$2 billion; today the deficit was \$7 billion. The number out of work had soared from 2 million to 5 million. And the cause, said Mr. Haferkamp, was the cost of energy.

He warned the OPEC countries not to undermine the chances of economic recovery by increasing oil prices again now. To do so could trigger off protectionist measures and leave those developing countries which have no raw materials in an even worse predicament than they are in now. Oil producing countries and oil consuming countries are dependent on each other: "for the world's economy to collapse would affect everyone", he said.



Commissioner Haferkamp

## Nine now acting as one

"The common foreign policy side of the Community is in extremely good health and improving day by day" said Sir Peter Kirk (Con/UK) in Parliament's debate on how the Nine are shaping up to acting as one. Council President Max van der Stoel had told the House of the Nine's achievements in working together at Helsinki, at the UN, in trade talks in the Euro-Arab dialogue.

What no one questions now is that the Nine should act as one. What many Members did criticise, however, was the Nine's failure to go even further. Renato Sandri (Comm/It) criticised the Community's performance at Nairobi,

Pierre Deschamps (CD/Bel) and Lucien Radoux (Soc/Bel) questioned whether the Community was making the most of its opportunities to "use its good offices", and Lord Bethell (Con/UK) was worried as to whether the implementation of the Helsinki agreement was being properly monitored. But these criticisms apart, the drift of the debate was that foreign policy cooperation is one of the Community's success stories. As Sir Peter said: "Congratulations are in order to the ministers and I for one, though I spend most of my time attacking them, will never grudge congratulations when they are in order."

## Why is there no Ulster MEP?

Why there is no MP from Northern Ireland in the European Parliament evoked a clash of views between British and Irish Republic Members on November 18. Michael Herbert (EPD/Irl) accused the British Parliament of "disfranchising" 1½ million people in "the north of Ireland" since the 1974 general election, and appealed to the British Parliament to remedy the situation. Sir Peter Kirk (Con/UK) threw the ball over to the Northern Irish Members of the House of Commons. After Rafton Pounder, a member of the European Conservative Group in 1973-74, had lost his Belfast seat in the first 1974 general election, Sir Peter had approached the Ulster Unionist Coalition MPs at Westminster, offering

them a seat among the Conservative delegation to the European Parliament. The offer had been declined. He had then approached an individual UUC MP, whose request to the UUC to join the European Parliament delegation had itself been turned down. Sir Peter continued that at the time he had also spoken to a member of the opposition in Northern Ireland about the problem (though without being able to guarantee a seat in the Conservative Party's quota); he too had felt unable to accept the offer. At this point Tam Dalyell (Soc/UK) added that when the Labour Party did send a delegation to the European Parliament in July 1975 it too had made a certain effort but was unable to help.

## Smokescreen

Secret decisions behind locked doors to smoke-filled rooms were once again the target of Alex Fletcher (Con/UK) in a question to Council President Max van der Stoel at Question Time on Wednesday, November 17 (see also Unofficial Journal, page 4). In particular, the Edinburgh MP wanted to know if each month the President would inform MEPs whether their recent legislative decisions had been agreed unanimously, by majority vote, or by a majority with some abstentions. Mr. van der Stoel gave nothing away: the Council's decisions are published in the *Official Journal*, there are press releases issued after each Council (Kirk: "... designed more to conceal than to reveal..."), and the Ministers concerned are always accountable to their national parliaments.

Fletcher, and quoted the Minister's own deputy last July on the unsatisfactory nature of the press communiques... "we always get a sympathetic hearing... but never any action". Ludwig Fellermaier (Soc/Ger) turned the screw even harder, reminding Mr. van der Stoel of the time when — not yet a minister — he had agreed with Members on the matter.

Parliament President Georges Spénale finally intervened in a rare though not unprecedented fashion to sum up the feeling of the House: "... in other words, ... from the Council, which is a Community institution, we can only obtain a fragmented answer... the replies from our ministers in our national parliaments do not always agree one with another... Once we have a directly elected Parliament this will be absolutely intolerable".

## Unfair UK competition?

Are the French getting worried about competition from UK wine? Pierre Lagorce (Soc/F) was moved to ask the Commission whether UK wine-growers respect European legislation. In a written reply, the Commission says they do, adding that UK wine from only 100 hectares is unlikely to jeopardize wine sales from 1,283,000 hectares in France, 1,155,000 in Italy, 95,600 in Germany, and 1,283,000 in Luxembourg. According to the Commission's figures, Belgium may be 'outclassed', though, with only 7 hectares.

## A pressing need

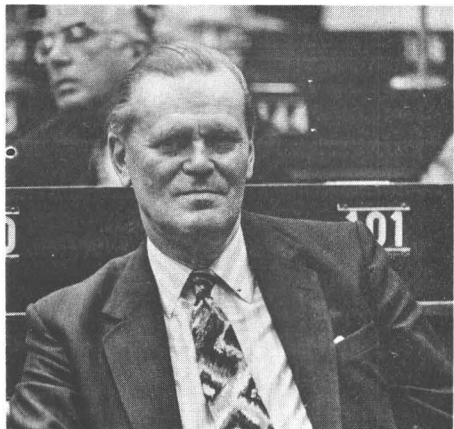
Full implementation of the long-delayed programmes for modernising and restructuring Europe's farms — market and price policies are not enough: this was the firm message from Parliament to the Council and Commission when it debated on Wednesday, November 17, a report by Cornelis Laban (Soc/NL) on agricultural reform. The Mansholt structural reform reserves of some £250 million (equivalent) were "simply lying there and not being used", said Mr. Laban. Andre Guerlin (Soc/F) noted that "on this subject that is often controversial" there was a large measure of agreement not just in his group but across the Committee. Community Farm Policy, he said, since the adoption of the 1972 reform directives, had failed. It had not succeeded in guaranteeing less-favoured farmers sufficient income and had widened the gap between the different farm categories. There was, pointed out Mr. Laban, no lack of funds for structural reform. After all, each year the Member States spent some £4,000 million (equivalent) on agriculture.

## Beef and veal

Proposals for the extension for 18 months of favourable arrangements for imports into the EEC of beef and veal mainly from Botswana, Madagascar, Swaziland and Kenya was welcomed by Parliament on Friday, November 19. The extension will bring stability and security to production in those countries.

## Mental atrophy

"I don't know whether there is a kind of mental atrophy that periodically inflicts itself upon members of the Council of Ministers. I don't know whether they are mesmerised by the oratory and the dominant personality of Mr. Lardinois. I don't know how Mr. Lardinois is able to secure the collegiate compliance of the Commission with this colossal waste of public funds." So Lord Bruce (Soc/UK) on Friday, November 19, weighing into the cost of storing surplus skimmed milk. The Community was willing to put up 80 m. units of account each year, he noted, only an eighth of which went in storage charges,



Lord Bruce

the rest in interest charges to "finance houses". It would *pay* the Community to give the milk away in food aid.

## Last will and testament

Parliament's legislative power, at present, depends on persuading the Commission to change its proposals at some stage before the Council of Ministers' final decision — as it can do under Article 149 of the EEC Treaty. But just how much *does* the Commission listen to Parliament? We should know more after the December 13-17 sitting, when the outgoing Commission will be asked to give a full "testament" of its relations with Parliament. Normally, the Commission reports on "action taken on the advice of Parliament" at the beginning of each session; but on Tuesday, November 16, Commissioner Lardinois' statement lasted exactly 80 words, and even Parliament President Spenale intervened to say this was really not good enough.

### Parliament sittings in 1977

Jan.	10-14, Luxembourg
Feb.	7-11, Luxembourg
Mar.	7-11, Strasbourg
April	18-22, Strasbourg
May	9-13, Strasbourg
June	13-17, Strasbourg
July	4-8, Luxembourg
Sept.	12-16, Luxembourg
Oct.	10-14, Luxembourg
Oct.	24-26, Luxembourg
Nov.	14-18, Strasbourg
Dec.	12-16, Strasbourg

## Japan debate for December

There was perplexity and dismay among Members on Monday evening, when John Osborn (Con/UK) withdrew his question for debate on trade with Japan. Mr. Osborn's reasoning was that trade talks with Japan were still in progress and that December would be a better time. So it was agreed; but fellow Conservative Tom Normanton had a question down to the Commission on Wednesday, November 17, about Japanese ballbearing imports into Europe. He got some satisfaction from Commissioner Gundelach: an investigation under the anti-dumping rules had begun on November 9 and would be concluded as quickly as possible. And textiles too? asked Mr. Normanton for the benefit of the textile industry delegation in the gallery. Wherever there was clear evidence of unfair trading

by foreign countries the Commission would act, Mr. Gundelach assured Members.

It was on the same day indeed that the nine governments collectively warned Japan that it would have to open up its own markets or face reprisals. So although Parliament had no full debate on the problem in November, it will have some good meat to chew on in December.

Mr. Gundelach made clear in reply to another question, however, that fair trading rules apply to member countries as well as to outsiders. The Commission had just sent a "reasoned opinion" to four member governments (including Britain) about their "gentleman's agreement" with the USA and Japan on export credits. He hoped a Community approach could be found for this problem.

## Is there no heart in Hertz?

The free movement of labour is one of the basic tenets of the European Community — indeed, one of a Community citizen's civil rights. But conflicts of principle can arise. In an emergency debate on Tuesday, November 16, Ole Espersen (Soc/Dk) told Parliament about some thirty employees of the Hertz rent-a-car company in Denmark who were paid 800 crowns less than the minimum wage agreed with the unions. They had threatened to strike; at which Hertz had called in staff from outside Denmark. Was this not, he claimed, a blatant abuse of free movement, and what was the Commission going to do about it?

For the Conservative Group — interestingly — Erhard Jakobsen (Dk) agreed: the multi-nationals should not abuse free movement, though that principle should be maintained. But Commissioner Brunner did not think the Commission should do anything: the fault, if any, lay in the trade unions organisational powers across national frontiers; and the debate concluded with other suggestions, such as a boycott of Hertz by the Community's own institutions. At the vote, though, Espersen was supported by Communists, Socialists and Conservatives; the rest abstained.

## Decision lag on JET site

Under Rome Treaty Article 175, the European Parliament can take the Council to Court if it fails to take the decisions needed to keep the Community moving. And Commissioner Guido Brunner's advice is that Parliament should do so if the Council fails to decide on where the Joint European Torus project (better known as JET) should be carried out. But Parliament is as reluctant to advise as to where JET should go as the Council is to decide.

Gerd Springorum (CD/Ger), Chairman of the Energy Committee, put down a motion urging a decision on the siting of JET and possible sites were suggested: John Osborn (Con/UK) said either Culham in Oxfordshire or Garching in Germany would do although he preferred Culham, a view

shared by Lord Bessborough (Con/UK). An amendment tabled by Dutch Socialists Cornelis Laban, Schelto Patijn and Willem Albers, which would have had Parliament endorse the Commission's preference for Ispra, was defeated.

The general view — expressed by Silvio Leonardi (Comm/It), Luigi Noe (CD/It) and Marcel Vandewiele (CD/Bel) — was that nationalism should not stand in the way of a decision, as it has done for a year.

Meanwhile the funds are budgeted, the staff is there and work is ready to commence on a programme which has the ultimate aim of utilising a new source of energy: the energy released by the fusion of the nuclei of light atoms, the energy source of the sun.

## Vets' medicine

Directives to open up the Community market in veterinary medical products are on their way, Commissioner Simonet assured Parliament on Friday, November 19. The first step — ensuring the same standards, data and documents when granting authorisation for marketing such products — was duly approved by the House; though it voted to add medicated feedingstuffs, serums and vaccines. Next step: to make authorisations issued in any one country valid throughout all.

## Spinchiller out

Investigations in eight Community countries have revealed that the 'Spinchiller' method of freezing poultry could constitute a health hazard; so the Commission is proposing to ban it, with the general agreement of the trade. Parliament at first wished to bring forward the date of

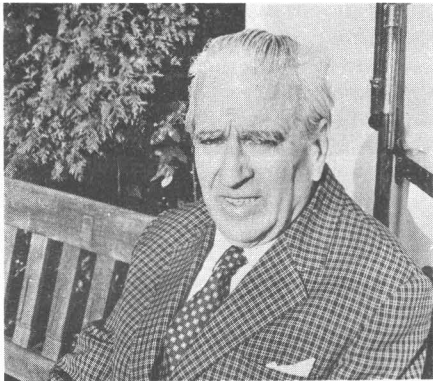
the ban to July next year; but after Jim Spicer (Con/UK) had argued that the House should practice "the art of the possible", the date originally fixed by the Commission — the beginning of 1977 — was accepted.

## Solidarity on Sterling

Was not a question by Michel Cointat (EPD/F) about Community aid to sterling ill-timed, asked Mark Hughes? While Lord Ardwick remarked that it was surely both too late (because Britain was already negotiating with the IMF) and too early (because those talks had not ended). Mr. van der Stoep steered skilfully between the rocks; there had been no request for medium-term aid by the British Government nor any proposal on this matter from the Commission. But he assured Lord Castle (Soc/UK) that there was certainly a spirit of concern and solidarity about Britain's situation among her Community partners.

# Unofficial Journal

After all the inspired press articles and ministerial comments, hopes of a major British initiative in Community affairs in the New Year (when the UK assumes the presidency of the Council of Ministers) must already be frustrated. But one faint hope was aroused in the breasts of EP Members at Question Time in November: perhaps British Ministers will set an example of brevity. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Soc/UK) was responsible when she asked the President of the Council (then in the form of Dutch Foreign Minister Max



Frank Tomney

van der Stoel), if he was going to give "non-answers, could we please have brief non-answers". The House had already taken 65 minutes to reach only the sixth question on the order paper; and at the end of the 1½ hours available for both Council and Commission questions, only 14 out of 28 had been dealt with.

Mind you, Mr. van der Stoel had had to cope with 22 supplementaries, 14 of them from British Members! And how far are Tony Crosland and David Owen disposed to follow Mrs. Dunwoody's advice?

An alternative, perhaps, will be available from the December sitting, since Parliament at last succeeded on Wednesday, November 17, in passing the Willie Hamilton report, which extends Question Time to two monthly sessions, each of 1½ hours maximum. Is there not, though, a possibility that Parkinson's Law might also apply here, and that spoken words will expand to fill the time available? Appropriate New Year's resolutions for Commissioners Jenkins and Tugendhat, Ministers Crosland, Owen, Silkin, *et al*, and all the Members of the House would be: brief replies from Council and Commission, supplementaries not speeches from Members.

## **Straßbourg OK**

So the possibility that Parliament might never use the brand new Palace of Europe in Strasbourg — due to be opened by Giscard d'Estaing in January — has evaporated. Hard bargaining has reduced the rent to a fraction of what was originally asked; and in 1977 Parliament will once again be sitting more days in Strasbourg than in Luxembourg — 30 to 28 (see page 3). The first week there will be in March, when elections take place for

Parliament's President and the Vice-Presidents. Competition could well be keener than usual, when the potential candidates discover the facilities that go with these offices in the new building.

## **Stewart's shoes**

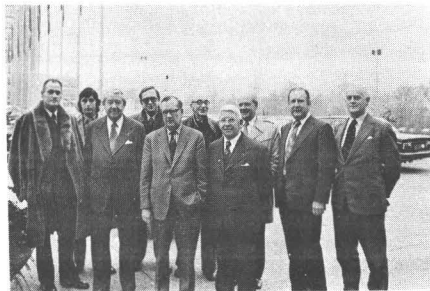
The London Borough of Hammersmith retains its Member of the European Parliament. Following the departure of Hammersmith (Fulham) Member Michael Stewart to chair the House of Commons' investigation into the Poulson affair, a number of London Labour Members were possibilities to fill the vacancy, including Lord George-Brown's brother, Ron Brown, and chairman of the House of Commons Select Committee on European elections, Sydney Irving. But in the end the mantle has fallen on the Member for Hammersmith (North), Frank Tomney. It's no doubt felt that he will find the rigours of European commuting as nothing to those he's been experiencing back home.

Meanwhile, all 18 Labour Members have been engaged in picking one of their number to succeed Michael Stewart as "coordinator" (the term "leader" is disliked). Nonetheless, with his three decades of Westminster experience, Mr. Stewart managed shrewdly and calmly both to coordinate and to lead a diverse group still scarred, when they arrived in July 1975, from the previous month's referendum battle. The four candidates are Lord Bruce, Mark Hughes, Bob Mitchell and John Prescott. A puff of white smoke is expected in early December.

## **Getting weaving**

Leaders of the European Community's textile industry — six from the employers' organisation COMITEXIL and three from the trade unions' organisation CISL — visited the European Parliament in November: the first visit of its kind. The

Photo by London Express



joint deputation, which was led by employers' president Alan Clough and TU president Karl Buschmann, met Commissioners and (if only briefly) Members of the Parliament from every political group.

## **No monolithism here!**

Following the Italian elections, the Communist Group in the European Parliament has risen to 17, equal to the Conservatives and Progressive Democrats (and it would actually have overtaken them had it not lost the one Dutch Member, Wessel Hartog). To celebrate, the Group held a packed press conference on Thursday, November 18, attended by the large new Italian contingent. The occasion was engagingly

free from the kind of monolithic unanimity for which Communists have a reputation; indeed the conference developed into a lively debate between the various viewpoints within the Group on European elections. Former Commissioner and life-long federalist Altiero Spinelli was passionately in favour; French



Communist press conference

Communist Marie-Therese Goutmann equally firmly against. For the Group's leader, Giorgio Amendola, there were "no objections in principle", and the Italians as a whole were even more strongly committed. It will be interesting to see whether a "European Communist Party" will be fielding candidates when the time comes . . . .

## **Libs. and Dems.**

. . . . because the chances are now quite strong that a "European Liberal and Democrat Party" will be doing just that. At its Congress in The Hague from November 5-7, the Federation of Liberal and Democratic Parties of the Community finally sorted out its difficulties over membership, and now consists of 13 parties from eight of the nine Community countries (Ireland is the odd one out). Perhaps the most significant development has been the inclusion of the French Independent Republicans as a full member; some of the more left-wing parties had at first objected, and the I.R.'s themselves had been flirting with (among others) the Conservatives. Liberal Party political broadcasts in 1978 could now have a new appeal if given by the multi-lingual I.R. leader: Giscard d'Estaing.

## **Qwerty or azerty?**

No, Albania has not applied for membership of the Community, but German Socialist Horst Seefeld did wonder if a decision by the European Commission to order all new typewriters with "azerty" typefaces was an attempt to discriminate in favour of the French language?

Oh, no, no, no, the Commission explained. It is introducing new electronic equipment for its computer system. In order not to have six different types of "golfball" (for the six languages) it decided to standardise on a development of the azerty keyboard (although an international keyboard, closer to English and German usage, already exists). In any case, the Commission argued, it only takes two weeks to get used to the new keyboard, and the Commission's secretaries may keep to their existing machines if they want to.

Zlich is cqlculqtqd to give the poor co,puter q nezvous breqkdozn.

**K.P.G.**