

## Elections Bill goes through

Direct elections to the European Parliament came an important step nearer on Thursday February 16 when the House of Commons gave the elections Bill a Third Reading by 159 votes to 45. It now goes to the House of Lords. Meanwhile in the European Parliament Danish President of the Council of Ministers, K.B.Andersen, forecast that the elections would be held in the first part of 1979.

The closing debates on the European Assembly Elections Bill in the House of Commons concentrated heavily on two issues: how the European Parliament could be prevented from getting additional powers; and what the elected MEPs should be paid.

The debates of February 2 first settled the matter of how the three Northern Ireland Members were to be elected (Single Transferable Vote was confirmed); and then turned to a new clause which would make any treaty "which provides for any increase in the powers of the Assembly" subject to approval "by an Act of Parliament". As Foreign Secretary David Owen pointed out at the beginning of the debate, this is a "major constitutional innovation" for the United Kingdom. Normally treaties are ratified, under the Ponsonby rules, by Order in Council. But the new clause was necessary in order to allay Members' "legitimate and

passionate concern".

The new clause was duly passed. But the debate revealed that its effect is not as clear-cut as it appears. Was an agreement between Council of Ministers and the European Parliament (such as the one setting up the important conciliation procedure) within the scope of the clause? "My understanding is that it is not", replied the Foreign Secretary. It also turned out that any Act under the clause would be a short, single-clause one, which the House of Commons could only pass or reject: i.e. much like an affirmative order anyway. Finally, it seemed odd that increasing the powers of the *Parliament* required an Act, whereas increasing the powers of the *Community as a whole* didn't (and how could they be separated?) There seemed a lot of justification for Enoch Powell's description of the new clause as "a paper fortress".

On the last day's debate before the guillotine fell — Thursday February 17 — the Commons devoted a lot of time to the matter of MEPs' salaries. Whether through sound frugality or potential envy, most Members seemed unwilling to allow the elected MEPs salaries in the forecast £20,000 p.a. plus range, ("an inflationary precedent" in Barbara Castle's description). MEP Willie Hamilton (Soc/UK) himself announced his non-candidature, giving the reason: "I do not believe that any man is worth that amount of cash to represent ordinary working people".

Foreign and Commonwealth Office Minister Frank Judd summed up the debate by pointing out that the level of salaries was a Community matter, which had to be settled at Community level. The European Parliament itself was empowered to put forward the initial proposal. But then it came to the Council of Ministers.

"In that body, we shall be able to withhold our consent to any proposals on salaries about which we are unhappy. We have made it clear that we shall not accept inflated figures".

One matter which the debates in the House of Commons, and in the European Parliament on the previous day, did a lot to clear up, is the exact procedure and timetable from now on. Home Office Ministers gave indications of how things stand in the UK (see table 1). And Poul Dalsager told the European Parliament the position at Community level. He pointed out that, though the European Council might be able to set a new target date in April, the final date could not be set by decision of the Council of Ministers until legislation was complete in all the nine Member States (see table 2).

### 1. TIMETABLE FOR THE U.K.

Royal Assent	"in the course of the summer"
Boundary Commissions, with one round of written representations	eighteen weeks
Orders before the House of Commons	
Affirmative vote needed on regulations for conduct of elections	"into the Autumn"

### 2. TIMETABLE FOR THE COMMUNITY

European Council (summit) to recommend target date	7 and 8 April
Council of Ministers to consult European Parliament (Article 10 of elections Act)	
All Member States to complete passage of necessary legislation	At earliest "in the course of the summer" (UK)
Council of Ministers to fix date under Article 10.	

### Britain in the lead!

So far, 1978 seems to have been "bush Britain year" in the European Community — we are accused of holding up the Eurobus on everything from fish to direct elections. On Wednesday February 15, however, it became clear that we are ahead in at least one field: that is, ratifying the important treaty which will enable the Community to become self-financing.

This move to "own resources" (in particular the common VAT base) should

have happened at the beginning of the year. Indeed, the 1978 Budget was drawn up on that basis. However, the Budget now has to be amended because only two countries have managed to pass the necessary legislation in time: Belgium and the United Kingdom.

The situation gave the British a rare chance to proclaim their good Community citizenship in Parliament. "This debate clearly should never have taken place", Lord Bessborough (Con/UK) stated. Lord Bruce (Soc/UK) noted that the failure to ratify would cost the Italians some £75

million; and scornfully rejected an amendment proposed by the Christian Democrats (which would have given Italy some of the money later when more ratification came through): "it really does not lie in the mouths of those that break the law to seek to invoke the law".

Commissioner Tugendhat agreed that "it would be wrong to have a whole series of rectifying Budgets every time another Member State applied the Sixth Directive". Instead, the Community should now try again for January 1, 1979.

## President Jenkins looks ahead

Europe's economic problems and the need to strengthen the Community in order to solve them provided the main theme of Commission President Roy Jenkins' annual report to Parliament on February 14.

The past year, he said, had seen some steps in this direction. There was the new Community borrowing power which could underpin new investments and moves to make the Social and Regional funds more effective. And greater co-operation at Community level had brought initial results in the steel and textile industries.

But in addition to such measures there was a need "for a new impetus on a historic scale," said Mr Jenkins, renewing his now familiar plea for faster progress towards Economic and Monetary Union.

Other issues on which it was vital to make progress were energy (by reducing consumption and developing indigenous resources), agriculture (cutting back surpluses and dismantling MCAs), reaching agreement on a fisheries policy, and enlargement. On the subject of direct elections, Mr Jenkins regretted a delay that had been "unnecessary".

There was general support in the House for Mr Jenkins' report — though he also drew criticism for having released it to the Brussels press corps before presenting it to MEPs. Erwin Lange (Soc/Ger) said this was in blatant contradiction to Mr Jenkins' pledge to treat the Parliament as if it were directly elected.

The main themes taken up by speakers in the debate were enlargement and EMU, with most members clearly in favour of pressing ahead with both — despite the view of William Hamilton (Soc/UK) that EMU was too "vague and abstract" an animal to reach the heart of the man in the street. Other MEPs expressed doubts about whether the Community could take the strain of new membership — though it was generally felt there should be as little delay possible. Cornelis Berkhouwer (Lib/NL) called for a clear "yes" to all the applicants.

## Energy after the year 2000

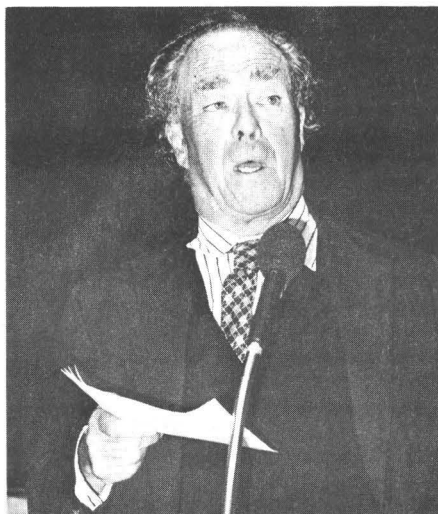
What happens when North Sea Oil runs out? One option for Europe is nuclear energy. But uranium, the present fuel, is itself a scarce commodity. Hence the interest in fast breeder reactors.

As Luigi Noe (It/CD) explained when introducing his report on the subject, fast breeders are 60 times more efficient than the present water or gas cooled reactors in their use of uranium. They do, however, need plutonium, which is produced as a by-product of the other reactors: hence the urgent need for a programme including both.

Tam Dalyell (Soc/UK) pointed out that there was a great deal of public misunderstanding on the matter. Far from creating dangerous waste, the breeder reactors burned it to create energy. But he also called for more information to the public; and a very close attention to safety standards. Lord St. Oswald (Con/UK) pointed to the growing demand for energy from the developing countries: "the world needs fast breeder reactors". Studies had shown that available uranium supplies would last the world for 187 years with fast breeders, giving time for the development of fusion energy.

Commissioner Brunner stressed that fast breeders had the support of President

Carter — an important consideration in the light of the Community's dependence on U.S. uranium.



Lord St. Oswald.

## Thinking small — Parliament debates SMU

Proposals for a Community policy to improve the lot of Small and Medium-sized Undertakings (SMUs) drew widespread support from MEPs in a debate on February 16.

The problems of such firms (which have less than 500 employees) were outlined by rapporteur Harry Notenboom (CD/NL). Among their difficulties are keeping abreast of the latest developments, getting into export markets and dealing with paperwork in order to comply with government regulations.

Much of the debate turned on the theme that "Small is Beautiful". Tom Normanton (Con/UK) said Members were really discussing what kind of Europe they wanted — there was a growing aversion to Bigness which stood for Bureaucracy, Bungling and Bumph. Lord Bruce of Donington (Soc/UK) stressed the social contribution of small firms: "Individual liberty must have its economic base". Patrick Power (EPD/Irl) saw them as an alternative to the dehumanisation of the production line. And there was general

recognition of how such firms, which are usually labour-intensive, can help fight unemployment.

Inevitably, perhaps, there was criticism of the growing weight of multinationals though it was accepted that there was a continuing need for large undertakings in our technological society.

And Bob Edwards (Soc/UK) warned that it was nonsense for MEPs to talk of "the dead weight of social legislation" hampering the activities of small businessmen.

In reply, Commissioner Etienne Davignon emphasised the need to provide help in the form of advice and guidance to SMUs and to make it easier for them to get financial help. But he was against setting up a special body to cater for them — the aim should be to integrate rather than separate them from the economy as a whole.

## Question Time

### Who made whisky dearer?

Commissioner Raymond Vouel told Lord Bethell (Con/UK) that Distillers' decision to increase the price of certain brands of whisky was not contrary to a recent Commission decision which stipulated that the price to the British consumer should not vary according to the place of purchase. He agreed that action was necessary to remove anomalies in laws concerning alcohol advertising. The Commission was also, he said, taking action against three Member States for imposing discriminatory taxes.

### Huis Clos

President Anderson told Sir Geoffrey de Freitas (Soc/UK) that the public could definitely not be admitted to Council meetings. He did not agree with Bob Edwards (Soc/UK) that one meeting a year could be made public, nor with Lord Bethell (Con/UK) that the rules could be changed.

### Still on the move

President Andersen told Ron Brown (Soc/UK) that although he felt an affinity with world travellers only a directly elected Parliament could initiate a new agreement to establish a permanent site for the European Parliament.

### January: 11 out of 12

Parliament and Commission continued to be more or less in step on proposed Community legislation during the first month of this year. Commissioner Burke told Parliament on Monday February 11 that of the twelve "Bills" debated in January, eight had been adopted without amendment; and three had been amended by Parliament, and the amendments accepted by the Commission. Only to one (exchange rates to be applied in the context of the policy on agricultural holdings) had the Commission not accepted amendments.

The successful amendments were on proposals on freedom of supplying services in direct insurance; research into the recycling of paper and cardboard; and a regulation concerning producer groups and their unions.

### More than scaffolding

Commissioner Henk Vredeling told Gwyneth Dunwoody (Soc/UK) on Tuesday, February 14 that the Commission had received no replies from Member States to its questionnaire on the implementation of the directive on equal pay for which the deadline was February 12, 1978. He undertook to send out urgent reminders. He assured Ron Brown (Soc/UK) that he would look into the case of 25 female upholsterers employed by the Ministry of Defence who still were paid £8 less than their male colleagues. The House was disappointed with the Commissioner's reply. Gwyneth Dunwoody felt that the Community already had the scaffolding where equal pay was concerned, what we now needed were the basic facts regarding its implementation. Lady Fisher of Rednal (Soc/UK) pointed out that the relevant article — Art 119 — was written into the Treaty of Rome in order to avoid distortion of competition rather than to achieve social justice.

## Success stories

The European Parliament feels that STABEX, the system set up by the Lomé Convention for stabilizing export earnings, has been a success story and this was the view put forward by Tom Dalyell (Soc/UK) on Friday, February 17. Like other Members saw the operation of the system as a means of promoting the cause of human rights. Could we for instance allow the scheme to sustain the present regime in Uganda? On Wednesday February 15 the House expressed its hope that the Community would endorse the continuation of the North-South dialogue. The Community had done more than anyone else to promote the spirit of co-operation, said Christopher Price (Soc/UK).

## Price Tags

MEPs welcomed Commission proposals to ensure that foodstuffs offered for sale should bear a price tag also indicating the price per unit of measurement ("unit price").

But rapporteur Lady Fisher (Soc/UK) said in a debate on February 16 that the directive should not be confined to foodstuffs. She called for further Commission moves to extend unit pricing to all household articles. And her committee on consumer affairs also wanted prices shown



Lady Fisher.

for all foodstuffs sold in hotels, restaurants, cafes and public houses.

The only major reservations from Members turned on whether the cost of implementing such a programme might in the end be passed on to the consumer — the very person it was designed to benefit.

Commissioner Finn Olaf Gundelach thanked the House for its support and said the Commission would be submitting proposals to cover all household articles in due course.

## Discord on TES

Commissioner Christopher Tugendhat told John Evans (Soc/UK) on Thursday, February 16 that the Commission's main objection to the UK system of employment subsidies was that they were applied intensively to the textiles, clothing and footwear sectors. Other Members felt less indulgent towards the UK, however. Patrick Power (EPD/Irl) urged the Commissioner to take the UK to the Court of Justice over the matter.

## President's statement on the seat

Continuing speculation about the future seat of the directly-elected Parliament, including press reports that the French and Luxembourg governments intend to block the elections themselves unless the present pattern of meetings is sustained, led President Colombo to make a formal statement at the opening of the February plenary session in Strasbourg.

He said that the Bureau of the Parliament and the leaders of the political groups "have never intended, and do not now intend, to call into question the decision of the Governments of April 8, 1965 (on the provisional meeting places of the institutions) nor do they intend to prejudge for the future the final choice of a seat of the Institution."

President Colombo added that he had recently reminded the Council of Ministers that the Parliament was the only institution obliged to carry out its work in three different Community countries because of "the failure of the . . . member states to take a decision on the definitive seat of the Institutions, despite the obligations arising from the Treaties".

Despite the "serious inconvenience" to the Members of the Parliament and the cost in terms of financial and staff resources, the Parliament had always met its obligations under the 1965 agreement. But President Colombo added that the "sole concern . . . remains the need to avoid material difficulties for the directly-elected Parliament".

In these circumstances the Parliament has been holding discussions with the Council of Europe and the Strasbourg City authorities about facilities in that city, with the Luxembourg Government on similar lines (though the recently published proposals for a leaning tower are Luxembourg's own responsibility), while in Brussels plans for providing new conference and office accommodation are expected to be completed shortly.

## Falling out on fish

After the euphoria of the budget debate on Wednesday 15 (see P. 1), Britain was firmly back in the dock when the House turned to Community fishing policy. "There can be no progress", Danish Minister Poul Dalsager said firmly in a statement on behalf of the Council "until the United Kingdom changes its mind on the Commission proposals". Moreover, any more delay would have dire consequences for negotiations with third countries.

John Corrie (Con/UK), Parliament's rapporteur, agreed that the demand for a 50-mile exclusive fishing limit was only "a virility symbol". But he pleaded with the other eight countries to "give us a way out". "British fishermen want to be seen to be given a fair deal". Commissioner Gundelach also emphasised the possibilities of agreement. "Quoting the British Minister a little freely", he said, "I think I can say that his criticism of the Commission's proposals concerns not so much what is in it as what he feels is lacking". It would take "imagination and a considerable amount of goodwill to find a solution . . . ; but nothing is ever impossible and this must not be impossible either . . ."

When the debate was resumed after Question Time, however, it took on a new edge with a speech from leader of the European Conservatives, Geoffrey Rippon (UK). "What does Britain want?" the Commissioner had asked. "I can tell him in a sentence. We want the implementation of the provisions of the Treaty". The Community of Six had nearly wrecked the chances of British membership — and had wrecked Norway's — by bringing in a

fishing policy in the middle of the negotiations. It had therefore been made clear in the Treaty of Accession that transitional measures would not be enough, and that the *status quo* could be preserved for 10 years. "It does not lie in the mouth of anybody to allege that Britain is in breach of any Treaty obligation".

The immediate response from Christian Democrat German Ernst Müller-Herman came in verse!

"Wir können nur die Briten bitten,  
Dass wir genug mit Fisch gelitten"  
he ended; which the interpreters roughly translated:

"We really have to ask the Brits;  
Enough of fish! Just call it quits".

Immediately, however, former Irish Minister Richie Ryan (CD) came in to support Mr Rippon: the British "for the first time in history, were going to fight for the Irish". Back came other Christian Democrats. "We gave you JET, we're subsidising your food", declaimed Hans Edgar Jahn (Ger), "and what do we get in return?" By the end of the debate, Commissioner Gundelach was beginning to look like one of the world's great optimists.

## The Anglo-Irish potato feud

Commissioner Gundelach told Thomas Nolan (EPD/Irl) he hoped the Council would agree on a common market organisation for potatoes by the Spring. But in the meantime, the Commission was pressing on with proceedings against Britain for blocking potato imports from other member states, notably Ireland.

The question of the British restrictions provoked angry Anglo-Irish exchanges in the House. Gerald L'Estrange (CD/Irl) said Irish potato producers were suffering great hardship because of the illegal UK ban. This led an irate Tam Dalyell (Soc/UK) to warn that constant complaints from the Irish about the UK were becoming "a bit much" and the UK might soon have to start playing "tit-for-tat".

Bob Edwards (Soc/UK) called for special Community provision for Cyprus, whose potato producers were also suffering hardship because of EEC rules. But the Cyprus

case only provoked Patrick Power (EPD/Irl) to say that concern in the UK arose because "half of Cyprus" were exiles there. Was there not also a case for special facilities for Ireland "where 40 per cent of our people find themselves depressed and suppressed in a certain part of our country"?

Later on Feb 16 the House returned to the subject of potatoes with a debate on the Charmasson judgement. This required the establishment of a common market for alcohol, sheepmeat and potatoes by Jan 1, 1978.



# Unofficial Journal

It will be remembered that last March the doves of the European Parliament's Bureau were set a-flutter by the decision of Winnie Ewing (SNP at home, but Independent in Europe) to run for the post of Parliament Vice-President. The rules of procedure (Rule 7) do provide for an election; but hallowed tradition has usually provided twelve candidates for the twelve jobs — the result of delicate negotiations between the six political groups.

Certainly, the Rules Committee has remembered; because on Monday February 13 Michael Yeats (EPD/Irl) came to the House on the Committee's behalf with several proposed amendments to Rule 7. Among other things, these would make nomination by a group or at least ten Members necessary before anyone could stand. And, more intriguingly, would eliminate a loophole apparently in the present Rule 7 through which Winnie might be elected as a *thirteenth* Vice-President!

Unfortunately for the Committee however, amendments to the Rules need 100 Members voting in favour. When an attempt was made to get them through on Tuesday, not enough were even present. They had another go on Wednesday — this time harried by Italian



Independent Alfredo Covelli. Same result. So the vote will now have to take place in March.

But it will be a close thing. The voting for Vice-Presidents takes place on the Wednesday March 15. Can they change the rules in time? And even if they do, what happens if Winnie has got her nomination in — under the old rules — in time? (Actually since she got more than 50 votes last time, 10 nominators should in any case be easy).

## *I'm only here for . . . .*

*The days of duty-free liquor at airports — at least for those travelling in the Community — could well be numbered. The Commission has already come up with a draft directive to harmonise the*

*rates of duty in the nine countries; and this could in turn result in the abolition of the travellers' allowance.*

*When the House of Commons debated the matter on January 30, Nicholas Ridley (Con) noted that today "an enormous amount of whisky is carried, either in the possession of passengers or for sale to them, in every aeroplane. This is absurd".*

*"Does not the Hon. Gentleman realise that if we did what he suggests, and abolished duty-free liquor, it would be very much more difficult to recruit Members of the European Assembly?" commented Ian Mikardo (Lab).*



*European essay competition winners from Wales with MEP Tom Ellis at Strasbourg.*

## *. . . . the ride*

But with all that snow about in February, something was bound to happen to the smooth transport of the British delegation to the European Parliament to and from Strasbourg. It did. Virtually all the Conservatives went back on the Thursday to vote through the direct elections Bill (see P. 1). But the others found themselves hanging around Strasbourg airport for a few hours waiting for men with long brushes to dust the snow off the charter plane.

Not long after take-off, there was a sudden outburst of ear-popping. The outer layer (there are three) of the plane windscreen had shattered. The interior had to be depressurised to prevent worse, and we were landing at Luxembourg. No we weren't. After all, we could go on to Britain. Everyone was happy.

No-one was quite so happy, however, when it was discovered that Heathrow wouldn't accept the plane (if it had been MPs from any other country, one suspects, runways would have been cleared instantly and a brass band hastily assembled). The party had to go on to Stanstead again.

So Lord Murray retired from the European Parliament by travelling from Strasbourg to East Germany via Stanstead and taxi.

## *Fooling some of the people*

*From the menu in the "L'Espace" restaurant at Strasbourg airport (where a number of the stranded had lunch):*

*Côte de porc charcutière*

*Veal cuttlet*

*Schweinecotelett*

## *Edelweiss and Iris in peril*

All in all, British Members might be forgiven a little *Schadenfreude* at the possibility that transport might become more difficult for their Continental colleagues. As it happens, the European Railway Timetable Conference has been debating for some years now the fate of two key trains — the "Edelweiss" and the "Iris", both trans-European Expresses, which run daily between Zürich and Brussels and back. The final decision will be taken in Edinburgh in September.

The point is that Edelweiss and Iris are by far the most convenient link between the Community's main institutional seats: Brussels, Luxembourg and Strasbourg. They have a symbolic role. Commissioner Burke told Parliament on Monday February 13 that the Community was not asking for exceptional treatment compared with other rail users (the trains, of course, make a loss); but that the Community was keeping a careful eye on the matter.

Losses or no, commented Parliament Vice-President Michael Yeats (EPD/Irl), "the TEE trains . . . are about the only ones on the line between Brussels, Luxembourg and Strasbourg which run to time".

## *Eurobeer, Eurobread; and now*

*Question 8 (from Mr Dalyell (Soc/UK) to the Commission) on the European Parliament Order Paper for Tuesday February 14:*

*"Will the Commission make a statement on their proposal to the Council for the holding of Uranium stocks on a Community and on a national basis?"*



*Labour Party regional organisers visit Strasbourg in February.*

## *New Socialists*

The Labour delegation to the European Parliament underwent its annual election during February and as a result gains three new members at the March session. Christopher Price (Lewisham West) withdrew after a year's membership and is being replaced from the London area by George Cunningham (Islington South and Finsbury). The other changes were involuntary. John Evans (Newton), a member since the Labour delegation came to the Parliament in July 1975, is replaced for the north-west region by Alan Fitch (Wigan). This means, too, that the Parliament's Regional Policy, Regional Planning and Transport Committee will need to find itself a new chairman. Lord Murray of Gravesend, an MEP since October 1976, gives way to Lord Kennet.