

REPORT

European Elections Information Programme

United Kingdom task force at work

Crowded into the converted conference room at 20 Kensington Palace Gardens (sadly denuded of its elegant Empire side-board) seven auxiliary officials of the Parliament and Commission are hard at work. The wallpaper is hidden behind posters, maps, flow-charts, organigrammes, and other such utilitarian decorations. Lights flash and bells ring incessantly. The officials' desks, piled high, are surrounded by stacks of literature and audio-visual machines. Bursts of typewriter fire punctuate endless telephone conversations. The 'task force' running the European Elections Information Programme has started work.

The Scottish and Welsh offices of the Commission, also heavily involved in the Information Programme, are not yet quite so frenetic. But they will be, as they know only too well, after the results of the referenda on devolution on 1 March are known.

In England two temporary offices, headed by Commission auxiliaries, have been set up — one in Birmingham, the other in Manchester — and are up to their eyes.

The urgent need for this joint information programme is underlined by a public opinion survey carried out by

one of the best pollsters in the business. This shows clearly that four out of five electors are interested and concerned — but also that their knowledge of the European Community and its institutions is, not to put too fine a point on it, limited.

There are three main elements in the UK programme. First, there are twelve large touring exhibitions, each accompanied by two hostesses, which will be on display at as many locations as possible in each Euroconstituency until the beginning of May; and sixty smaller exhibitions which will be available in other locations: public libraries, city halls, and so on. Special European Election and all other Commission and Parliament publications are being distributed nationwide; films, and audio-visual equipment are also available on free loan on request. Third: the programme will peak with a series of advertisements in the national and provincial press.

It should be emphasised that the programme provides factual, non-party, and non-partisan information; and that it will come to an end before the start of the electoral campaign by the political parties and their respective candidates.



The headquarters of the European Election Information Programme is at 20, Kensington Palace Gardens, London W8 4QQ (Tel: 01-727 0132), which also has responsibility for English Euroconstituencies 32-66. Under the joint direction of Roger Broad, Head of the European Parliament office, and Anthony Hartley, Deputy Head of the European Commission office, is the head of this central unit, Iain Hamilton.

The Northern office, in Manchester, headed by Walter Sherwin, is responsible for Euroconstituencies 1-22. Address:— 59 Deansgate, Barton Exchange, Manchester M3 2BN. Telephone: 061-832 7578.

The Midlands office in Birmingham, headed by Joseph Besserman, is responsible for Euroconstituencies 21 and 23-38. Address:— C/o Education Department, Margaret Street, Birmingham B3 3BN. Telephone: 021-233 1344.

The permanent Commission office in Edinburgh, headed by Stanley Budd, is responsible for the eight Euroconstituencies in Scotland. Address:— 7 Alva Street, Edinburgh EH2 4PH. Telephone: 031-225 2058.

The permanent Commission office in Cardiff, headed by J. Gwyn Morgan, is responsible for the four Euroconstituencies in Wales. Address:— 4 Cathedral Road, Cardiff CF1 9SG. Telephone: 0222-371631.

Exhibitions and displays are handled by NDI Limited, contact David Williams or Heather Arrowsmith. Address:— Exhibition House, Fountain Street, Macclesfield, Cheshire SK10 1JN. Telephone: 0625-610110.

Distribution of publications and audio visual aids is handled by R. L. Polk and Company, contact Bill Ponter. Address:— P.O. Box 1979, London SE1 5JZ. Telephone: 01-237 4921.

A transparent life

If ever a bureaucracy believed in open government, it is the Commission in Brussels. Some weeks ago the political doves were set a-flutter by the leakage to the Brussels press corps of an opinion poll, carried out for the Commission, of voting intentions in European Parliament elections. It showed the French and Italian Socialists doing very much better than anyone had expected.

Now, political opinion polls are

very strictly controlled in France because, as Liberal Leader Jean-François Pintat explained to the European Parliament on Tuesday 13 February, their publication "can change the behaviour of voters". He demanded that Commission polls be subject to the same restraints, and that the European Parliament should always be able to vet the results before they were published.

That, replied the Commission President, was exactly what had been intended. Unfortunately, however, "we lead a transparent life in the Community institutions", and the

press had got hold of the poll results first. The voting intention question had only been part of the much larger, regular "Eurobarometer" which Parliament had always supported.

Mr Jenkins conceded, however, that the question had been unwise; and promised that future Eurobarometers would not go into voting intentions. This did not stop Socialist spokesman Schelto Patijn (NL) from expressing considerable satisfaction about the poll's result, and promising that their good showing would not make Europe's Socialists complacent.

Flood Aid Mystery

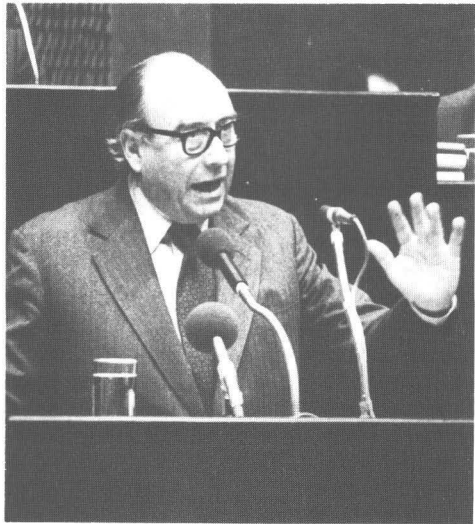
What has happened to the £660,000 which the Community allocated to help with flood relief in East Anglia and South East England in January 1978? So far, maintained Ralph Howell (Con/UK), not a penny seems to have reached the actual areas concerned — making a mockery of the “emergency aid” concept.

Commissioner Brunner, though noting that the British Government had “a certain discretion” as to how the money should be spent, replied that the matter was being taken seriously. A team of three investigators was being sent to Britain to find out exactly what had happened.

“We don't keep quiet”

Under Article 143 of the EEC Treaty the European Parliament is required to discuss “in open session the annual general report submitted to it by the Commission”. This it did on Tuesday 13 and Thursday 15 February.

The main theme of Commission President Roy Jenkins' 42-minute introduction of the report was the



need to regain Community momentum — lost, to some extent, with the current difficulties over the EMS and the CAP. On the world trade front vital negotiations were in progress in the GATT and the preparation for Lomé II. On the internal side a new five-year programme was in preparation to promote a freer flow of goods and to cut paper work.

In the subsequent debate — which gave the House an opportunity to range over every conceivable aspect of Community affairs — the principal spokesmen for the political groups directed particular attention to the role of the European Council (or summit). Wasn't the Commission in danger of becoming merely the secretariat to this body? And, of the

summiters themselves, Conservative leader Geoffrey Rippon (UK) remarked that “so far from looking like the captains of great ships”, they “resemble befuddled sailors rearranging the deckchairs on the Titanic”.

Replying, Roy Jenkins vigorously denied that the Commission was in any way losing its political independence. “We do not keep quiet in the European Council,” he gnomically observed. He also had some comforting words to say about the present difficulties on agricultural policy, which he described as “essentially solvable”.

'Floating Coffins'

Between the 20 and 22 June last year the European Parliament's Regional and Transport Committee, chaired by Lord Bruce (Soc/UK) held a public hearing in Paris into accidents at sea. As his report of the meeting noted, “it seems certain that some time, in the near rather than the distant future perhaps, a further shipping accident involving a large tanker will occur similar . . . to that of the *Torrey Canyon* in 1967 and . . . the *Amoco Cadiz* in 1978.” How right this was became horribly clear — and sooner than even the Committee might have thought — when the *Betelgeuse* exploded in Bantry Bay after Christmas.

On Tuesday 13 February, Parliament as a whole debated the report of the hearing. Lord Bruce opened by pointing out that, although accidents at sea could not be totally avoided, resolute action could considerably reduce the risks. The hearing had made it quite clear that a very large number of ships at sea were “unsuitable for service anywhere” — and their replacement would go a long way to revive the Community's languishing ship-building industry.

The first step was for all states to ratify and enforce existing international conventions. If necessary, the Commission should incorporate them into Community law by putting forward a directive.

Lethal poisons

The “flags of convenience” system came in for strong criticism. John Prescott (Soc/UK), in particular, deplored the procedure whereby ships were registered in certain states to avoid tax; but were declared safe by “classification societies” based in Europe. Evidence existed that these classifications turned out to be false; and Mr Prescott suggested that the old practice of deliberately sending out “floating coffins” in order to claim insurance was far from dead.

He advocated concerted Community action: for example, to close ports to unsafe ships. And Lord Kennet (Soc/UK) also suggested changes in the law on insurance to relate the cover, not to the size of the ship (as present) but to the likely risks from the cargo. It was not just oil, either: lethal poisons were being carried about which could destroy all life in the sea.

For the Conservatives, John Osborn (UK) and Jim Spicer (UK) emphasised the need for proper, Community-funded “sea traffic control”. “Those who control the movement of ships have much to learn from the control of aircraft”, Mr Osborn observed.

This, indeed, is to be the subject of the Committee's public hearing later this month.

Far East links

The Commission is working towards a cooperation agreement with the ASEAN countries, Commission Vice-President Wilhelm Haferkamp told the House on Wednesday 14 February. The establishment of Community representation in Bangkok would be an important step, he went on. The most important achievement was to have created a framework for economic activities such as industrial investment aid for refugees and duty-free imports of ASEAN products. While welcoming such progress, James Scott-Hopkins (Con/UK) warned against jeopardising the relationship Malaysia and Singapore had with the UK. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Soc/UK) was less happy. Many factories established in ASEAN countries took advantage of cheap oriental labour, she said.

Fat and thin cats

On the first day of its February sitting (Monday 12), the European Parliament was down to discuss the Third Annual Report (1977) on the European Regional Development Fund. Not surprisingly, however, Members were anxious to debate the present state of the Fund — dramatised, as it is, by the current conflict over the Budget.

The Regional Committee's report introduced by Fernand Delmotte (Soc/Bel), itself looked more to the future than the past. It noted that the value of the Fund had been falling, in real terms, as a result of inflation; and also that all Member States had in effect been cheating: Community money was not being allocated *in addition* to national grants, but being used to *pay back* national grants. In future, it proposed, the Community should pay Regional Fund Aid direct to the

public and private investor: i.e. cut out the national Exchequers altogether.

In the debate, the Council of Ministers came in for a good deal of criticism for its contortions over future regional spending. It seemed, said Russell Johnston (Lib/UK), as though the British Government in particular was more anxious to limit the powers of the European Parliament than to bring help to Britain's poorer regions. Rival European Election candidate Winnie Ewing (Ind/UK) was also "deeply and bitterly disappointed" about the turn of events. And Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Con/UK and another candidate), warned: "You cannot have peace in your yard while you have fat cats and thin cats."

For the Commission, Antonio Giolitti regretted that the "additionality" question had not been solved, in spite of detailed investigations in 1976. However, he did welcome the establishment of a modest "non-quota" section in the Fund, which the Community could allocate at its own discretion.

The 1979 Budget

Victory for Parliament in the dispute about the 1979 Community Budget (see EPR 53) is now almost complete. The refusal of the British, French and Danish Governments to pay their full share of contributions in February has brought the threat of legal action from the Commission. (And, in the case of Britain, it is difficult to see what possible defence there could be; after all, it was the British vote in the Council of Ministers which increased the disputed Regional Fund spending in the first place).

Parliament's legal right to adopt the Budget has now been considered sufficiently established for the Community's *Official Journal* (No. L/23) to publish it in full.

Meanwhile, steps are being taken to overcome the financial problems created by the dispute, in conjunction with the introduction of the European Monetary System.

China in touch

A few days before the visit of Commission President Jenkins to China was an opportune time for Parliament to probe the attitude of the Commission. China, said Lord Bessborough (Con/UK), had taken the lead in supporting Europe — China has favoured European union for more than ten years — and seeking trade and cultural links. The Community's response had been slow and Europe was losing out to the Japanese.

Recalling his own visit to China Commissioner Haferkamp thought

there was progress; the Joint Committee of the European Community-China trade agreement would be meeting for the first time in April or May. The Commission's resources were, however, limited as regards an expansion of links in the cultural or educational fields. Lord Kennet (Soc/UK) acknowledged that there was progress but pointed to the need for caution when trading with state-trading countries. He welcomed the fact that "the world's oldest unbroken literate civilisation is once again, or perhaps even for the first time, in full touch with our own".

A double edged sword

A new Lomé agreement may still be signed before the end of June 1979, according to French President in Office of the Council of Ministers Mr Bernard-Reymond. The retiring chairman of the ACP Committee of Ambassadors Mr Asante of Ghana agrees; but the final compromise in the current negotiations in Brussels has still to be struck.

Elements of that compromise began to appear when the Joint Committee of the Consultative Assembly of the Lomé Convention (see EPR No 54) met in Bordeaux from 29th January to 1st February. Delegates on both sides agreed that ACP countries, especially the poorest, should be compensated via the EDF as their preferential export position is eroded by the Community's generalised preference scheme; a special system should be found to safeguard ACP industrial raw material exports (to use the existing Stabilisation of Export Earnings System would be too expensive); a new emphasis should be placed on agricultural development; the amount of the EDF should take account of inflation; there should be a co-ordinated ACP-EEC approach to industrial cooperation and investment incentives; and the ACP states should have a greater say in managing financial and technical cooperation.

On human rights, Commissioner Cheysson thought that economic sanctions should not be used within the Convention although regard for human rights was essential. The Committee's ACP co-chairman, Mr Ouedraogo of Upper Volta thought the matter had political undertones and, in any case, human rights were not mentioned in the Treaty of Rome. A reference in the Convention would be "a double edged sword".

Already within the Joint Committee a special working group is looking into the "difficulties" faced by ACP migrant workers and students in Europe.

QUESTION TIME

Microwave ovens

The Commission is shortly to submit proposals to the Council setting out basic protection measures against non-ionising radiation. This covers the dangers resulting from the use of microwave ovens and other microwave apparatus, lasers and ultra violet appliances. (Written answer to Patrick Power (EPD/Ire)).

Day off

French Minister Pierre Bernard-Reymond told Jacques Eberhard (Comm/It) that it was not up to the Council to introduce a public holiday throughout the Community on 8 May to commemorate the victory over fascism. Equally he told Ralph Howell (Con/UK), he could not comment on his view that a victory over Communism would constitute a red letter day.

Cut-price butter

Mr Bernard-Reymond told Thomas Nolan (EPD/Irl) that the Commission authorised national governments to sell butter at reduced prices to citizens in receipt of social security benefits. It was up to Member States to decide whether pensioners could be included in this category.

Drug prices

Commissioner Raymond Vouel told Bob Edwards (Soc/UK) that the Commission was considering setting up a committee to look into drug prices within the context of distortion of competition. He assured Charles Fletcher-Cooke (Con/UK) that the Commission would not be too bureaucratic in its approach.

High spirits in Court

Italy discriminates against whisky — and that's official! The Commission has confirmed in a written reply to John Corrie (E.Con/UK) that wine-based alcohols from the Community are exempt from Italian State alcohol tax whilst those of cereal base are not. As the Italian government has not proposed to remedy this apparent violation of the Rome Treaty the Commission has decided to bring the case before the Court of Justice.

Action on January

Of the 13 "Bills" passed by Parliament in January, seven were approved without amendment. In five cases — VAT refunds, redundant workers, legal position of staff, energy research and sound emission from compressors — Parliament's amendments have been accepted. Only on "alternative energy" does the Commission wish to reject amendments.

Groupies

When the new Parliament assembles in Strasbourg on 17 July, it is possible that quite a few of the 410 Members will be sitting as Independents — that is, will not immediately be incorporated into one of the six political groups. In the case of the UK one thinks of the Scottish National Party (currently represented in the Parliament by Winnie Ewing) and of Unionists from Northern Ireland.

Will these Independents end up in one of the groups? There are pretty strong financial pressures — an authentic group gets it generous staff and other requirements paid for out of the Community Budget.

The existence of other pressures became clear on Tuesday 13 February, when Parliament debated Commission President Jenkins' "State of the Union" speech (see p 2). Parliament's Bureau had agreed that, after Jenkins, only the spokesmen for the groups would speak before the House moved on to other business. After six speeches, Winnie Ewing rose to her feet to speak for the Independents — as she usually does — only to be told that these were not a real group.

And this might have been understandable had the Chair not previously called *two* speakers from the Communist Group: one Italian and one French (presumably to put two entirely different points of view). Only the failure of the Frenchman to turn up prevented two Communist speeches occurring.

So the real solution for the Independents might be to form a group of their own: and then demand that every minority view incorporated be given the right to speak separately.

Lake News

British businessman Peter Dodgson has won a battle to sell his home-produced wine as "Chateau Piddle."

Mr Dodgson wants to use the name in honour of his home village, North Piddle in Hereford and Worcester.

He was refused permission to register his wine as "Piddle" because he was told it was not an accurate description of the contents of the bottle.

Now he has been informed that, although he will not be allowed an official entry in the British register of trade names, he can market the product under the name of his choice (Reuter).

No pass: no lunch

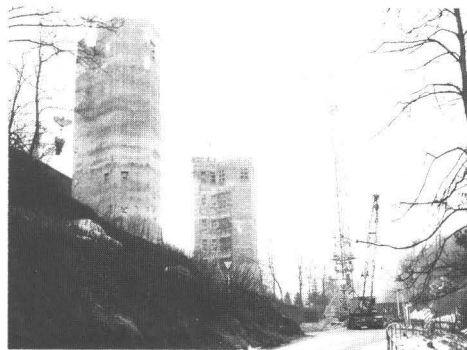
Members of the European Parliament have long ago given up trying to keep the Members' Bar in Luxembourg — even the floor of the House — to

themselves. Control on entry to either is, even for visitors, delightfully relaxed so far.

Not so entry into the canteen. For some time now those wishing to get lunch there out of session have had to run the gauntlet of three uniformed figures, whose business has been to check passes. But there's more to it. Not only those with no pass, but those with the wrong pass (e.g. Commission not Parliament) are excluded.

This, it seems, is part of the war that has broken out with the staff canteen of the Commission building on the other side of the motorway. Parliament staff — who have, by way of variation, been eating in the Commission's Jean Monet building — have found themselves queuing for lunch, only, when in sight of the food, to be turned away by Securitas guards. The Commission have even roped off the stairs and put in a sentry-box!

How's that for inter-institutional cooperation?



They say there's never been anything like it. Up on Luxembourg's Kirchberg plateau, through the worst blizzards of the winter, work has been going on round the clock to get the new European Parliament chamber ready for the 410 directly-elected Members. Latest forecast is that it will be ready by November — and Strasbourg has a real fight on its hands.

Book look

Question Time on Thursday 15 February was all set, it seemed, for a first-class row about Commissioner Haferkamp's expense account. John Prescott (Soc/UK) had an innocent-looking question on the order paper about the Commission's "internal audit system"; but everyone knew that the real subject was an *Economist* article of the week before attacking the Commissioner's alleged extravagance.

But President Jenkins knew this as well as another. His reply therefore took the form of a long prepared statement, reaffirming his "full confidence in Vice-President Haferkamp as Commissioner responsible for External Relations". It was for each individual Commissioner to judge how his representational ex-

penses should be used." Parliament had already asked the Court of Auditors for a report; "I would like to add the support of the Commission to this request".

Books red

This effectively killed the matter. Almost immediately afterwards, however, a much more lively row broke over the head of Commissioner Vredeling. It appears that on 18 October last year a number of books in Italian were seized by the West German customs officials at the Basle frontier post with Switzerland. They were on their way to the Frankfurt book fair; and some dealt with European Communist Parties.

Wasn't this against the Treaties? asked Altiero Spinelli (Comm/It). Surely there were no customs duties to be paid?

No, replied the Commissioner; they had been seized for the non-payment of a fine.

What was the fine for? Because they hadn't been declared.

But, if there was no duty, why *should* they be declared?

At this point, the Commissioner replied that he would consult his colleague, Commissioner Davignon.

As Charles Fletcher-Cooke (Con/UK) put it, the House decided that was "a much more disgraceful affair than I first thought".

Rip van O'Sullivan

The problem of the oldest member of the elected European Parliament (see EPR 54) was nearly solved by the Irish (one would have thought conclusively), according to a story in the 'Irish Times'. Fine Gael, at a party convention in Cork, was apparently all set to adopt "801 year old veteran west Cork politician Mr John L. O'Sullivan" to fight the European Elections in Munster. Cllr O'Sullivan, a former Senator and Dail deputy, not surprisingly "stole the show. . . as his proposer and seconder recalled his long association with Collins, Cosgrave and Garret Fitzgerald's father", (to say nothing of Garret Fitzgerald's grand-father, great-grand-father, great-great-grand-father, and Henry I to boot).

Unfortunately, Mr O'Sullivan eventually stood down to make way for a younger man.

COMMONWEALTH CURRENTS

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K.P.G.