

## EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

**REPORT****Agricultural prices –  
Parliament votes****3% increase – except for “mountain” products**

On Thursday 15 March, Parliament adopted its report on the crucial and controversial issue of agricultural prices for the farm year 1979-80. When the voting was over, the resulting opinion – which calls for a 3% overall increase in prices, but a standstill on products “in structural surplus” – was variously described by commentators as “an excellent compromise” and “impossible to take seriously”.

The debate itself, on Tuesday 13, was unusually lively. At this point, the Agriculture Committee report by Albert Liogier (EPD/F), called simply for an across-the-board increase of 3%; and Commissioner Gundelach treated the House to an impassioned plea for the official Commission policy of a price standstill.



Albert Liogier

“We have a quarter of a million tonnes of butter in public store,” he pointed out. “Skimmed milk-powder stocks are below 600,000 tonnes, but only because we are spending vast sums of taxpayers’ money so that we can feed it to animals or give it in food aid. Our total spending on milk market support last year was 3.4 billion EUA (£2,200 million).” The Community had to pay up to an 80% subsidy to export some 3 million tons

of surplus sugar; and about the same to export surplus wheat and barley.

In these circumstances, he would not accept any across-the-board price increase. “Such policies . . . fly in the face of reason”. He ended by telling the House that “we are not really here to be pleasant; we are here as public servants to face the realities as they are . . .”

The Commissioner received strong support for these views from Socialist spokesmen like Mark Hughes (UK) and Lord Bruce (UK). But he did not himself escape attack. Teun Tolman (CD/NL), Kai Nyborg (EPD/Dk) and John Corrie (Con/UK) all pointed out that a price freeze was no guarantee of lowered production. Indeed, all three noted that, on past experience, when farmers found that they earned less for their products, they merely *increased* production in order to maintain their incomes.

On Thursday, Parliament duly adopted the Agriculture Committee report, calling for the 3%. Almost without anyone noticing, however, it also voted for an amendment to exempt from any increase “the prices of products of which there is a structural surplus” – in fact, all those which Commissioner Gundelach had earlier listed. The net effect of all this – though Parliament as a whole did not perhaps realise it – was to bring the resolution remarkably close to the position both of the Commission and even of the British Government.

On the perhaps even more important matter of the MCA system, too, Parliament and Commission were in agreement. The Commission has proposed phasing the MCA’s out over a four-year period; and Parliament thought this “reasonable”. Even the Council has agreed, in principle, though not yet on the timetable.

So perhaps the spokesman for the Budgets Committee, Jim Scott-Hopkins (Con/UK), was being unduly pessimistic at the beginning of the debate when he remarked that “the Council of Ministers, whose representatives I see smiling at me over there, could not care less what we say in this House”.

**Simultaneous  
Elections**

After a short debate, the House of Commons passed the regulations for the conduct of European Elections in the UK late on Wednesday 14 March. Most of the time was spent on points of order; and most interest seemed to focus on the timing of the national General Election.

The Home Secretary told the House of Commons on 14 March that “there is nothing in the present law that says that one cannot hold

an election to one body on the same day as an election to another”. For a UK General Election to be held on 7 June, however, it would be necessary to have “two polling stations, possibly in the same room if it were big enough to accommodate them. There would be two sets of staff, two sets of ballot boxes and ballot papers and separate election expenses returns.”

However, the Home Secretary went on to point out that “there is enough equipment only for the 50,000 polling stations that are used to handle one election at a time.

Therefore, there would be practical difficulties in making such arrangements”.

An alternative, however, would be to “streamline the procedure” so that the same ballot box could be used for both elections. “I am assured that in most polling stations there is plenty of spare capacity in the ballot boxes . . .” As in combined parish and district elections, different coloured ballot papers could be used.

For this to happen, however, electoral law would have to be changed by “a short Bill”.

## Don't change the Rules

If you can't win, change the rules. This, according to the Budgets Committee Chairman Erwin Lange (Soc/Ger), seems to be the current attitude of the Council of Ministers over the Community Budget. Having been fairly outmanoeuvred by Parliament over the 1979 budget (see EPR 53 and 55), the Council is seeking to change the Budget rules (set out in Article 203 of the EEC Treaty).

In a letter to the President of Parliament, Mr Lange argued that a draft resolution, which the Council was proposing to adopt unilaterally, would invalidate all the stages of the budgetary procedure laid down in the Treaties. It would abolish the Council majorities necessary under the Treaty to reject Parliament's draft amendments. "It is impossible to accept that such a resolution is merely a matter of 'internal rules of procedure'," he concluded.

After an urgent debate on the matter on the morning of 16 March Parliament voted its agreement. As former budget rapporteur Lord Bruce (Soc/UK) put it, "the European Parliament has complied religiously and scrupulously with the law ... in conformity with Article 203 ... so far the Council hasn't done so ... the European Parliament must disagree with any endeavour, any step to rewrite the rules."

## Euro-Passport delay

Hopes for the early introduction of a uniform European Passport seem to be slipping. The usual optimism of the Commission is lacking in a written reply to a question by Rudolf Luster (CD/Ger). The Commission had made proposals for the passport to the Council of Ministers within a few months of the Paris Summit Meeting in December 1974. But following initial plans "there has been disagreement within the Council, . . . , and discussions there have made scarcely any progress since February 1977", reports the Commission.

## Small Savers

The Commission is anxious to provide protection for small savers, in particular, by relating income from savings to the cost of living (indexation), Commissioner Christopher Tugendhat told the House on Monday 12 March. It was, however, difficult to distinguish between the responsibilities of the Commission

and those of Member States, he said. Silvio Leonardi (Comm/It) pointed out that the onus for saving was now with the family. Public bodies no longer had the capacity to conserve resources.

## Jobs

The permanent staff of the European Parliament — currently just over 2,000 strong, including nearly 400 translators — is to be increased immediately by more than a hundred. In addition, another 188 posts are to be created, but "blocked" until after direct elections. The increases are to cater for the increased work-load expected when the number of Parliament Members rises from 198 to 410 in the elected parliament.

## A friend in need

A massive balance of payments deficit, 70% inflation, high unemployment, shortage of medical and other supplies and extreme poverty in remoter regions: such was the grim picture of Turkey painted by Members from all sides in a debate on Tuesday evening.

In the light of events in Iran the need to improve the Community's relations with Turkey had recently taken on a new significance, said Hans-Edgar Jahn (CD/Ger). What was needed was a Marshall Plan for Turkey. The Community's Fourth provisional protocol offer of \$600m US was inadequate. The Community would be to blame, said Russell Johnston (Lib/UK), if Turkey succumbed to political and economic chaos. Jim Spicer (Con/UK) reminded the House of the possibility of Turkey joining the Community; "we are not talking about Turkey alone, but about our own way of life", he said. Replying for the Commission, Vice President Haferkamp saw the problem as international.

The Community alone could do little beyond the aid in the fourth protocol, for which preparations were well advanced. But to the Chairman of the EEC-Turkey Joint Parliamentary Committee Frankie Hansen (Soc/Lux) the situation was alarming, the response from the West meagre: "we have a responsibility to help a friend in need".

## Our man in Peking

Late on the night of Wednesday 14 March Commission President Roy Jenkins returned to the House to reply to Lord Kennet (Soc/UK) about the results of his 8-day visit to China. His talks with Chinese

leaders had indicated that there were great opportunities for EEC exports to China.

Within five years the Chinese market would increase from the current 10½ to 25 or 30 billion US dollars a year. This could be a major stimulus to worldwide economic growth and help alleviate Europe's present stagnation and unemployment. The President then listed five steps forward:

1. A meeting between Chinese and Community officials led by Commission Director-General Sir Roy Denman in Peking beginning on 3 May;
2. A Chinese business week to be held in Brussels in 1980;
3. A major trade centre in Peking within two years;
4. Scientific and technological assistance and a scholarship programme.
5. The Commission was proposing that China be included in the Community's generalised preference scheme for 1980 although sensitive products such as textiles could be excluded. There might also be a Community office in Peking.

## Ask Sothebys?

The Community should introduce a standard rate of VAT for works of art, antiques and other second-hand goods; but this tax should only be applied to 30% of the selling price. This was the view put to the House by Commissioner Christopher Tugendhat on Monday 12 March when the House debated the proposed Seventh Directive on turnover taxes. Rapporteur Harry Notenboom (CD/NL) saw the proposal as being of particular benefit to small family firms. To Tam Dalyell, (Soc/UK), who asked whether Sothebys and other representatives of the European art markets had given their opinion the Commissioner replied that the Commission had consulted the London and Provincial Antique Dealers Association.

## Become an MEP

A number of important changes to Parliament's Rules, which will enable the newly elected Parliament at least to get off the ground in July, were adopted by the present Parliament on Monday 12 March.

The changes provide a procedure for ensuring that the 410 elected candidates actually become Members — in order for this to happen, their credentials have to be verified by Parliament. "Parliament", in this exceptional case, is to be embodied in "a temporary special committee composed of the oldest Member and eight Members appointed by lot".



Parliament's Regional and Transport Committee, under its chairman Lord Bruce of Donington (Soc/UK), met in Paris on 19 and 20 March for a public investigation into air safety control. Witnesses from a wide variety of organisations (including Air Vice Marshall Pedder from NATO) gave evidence; and the Committee is now likely to back the International Air Transport Association's call for "Pan-European Air Traffic Management Organisations" and the exclusive use of English in ground/air communication.

## Democracy

Greece should accede to full membership of the European Community on 1st January 1981, Commissioner Lorenzo Natali told Parliament on Tuesday 13 March.

Bob Edwards (Soc/UK) welcomed this as means of maintaining democracy in Greece and this outweighed any financial implications. Indeed, he said, the Community already has a trade surplus with Greece of over 2 billion dollars.

For the French Communists, however, Jacques Eberhard argued that a large part of the Greek electorate was opposed to accession. How, he asked, could Greece benefit from belonging to a Europe beleaguered by inflation, and poverty? For Jim Spicer (Con/UK) this was "double-talk of the worst order". Moreover, Greek membership would enhance democracy and freedom in Europe by giving increased strategic stability.

## Difficult times

The establishment of EMS on 13 March and the creation of the European currency unit (ECU) were welcomed as "Europe on the march" when French President in Office of the Council Jean François-Poncet reported to Parliament two days after the European Council meeting held in Paris on 12 and 13 March.

It had taken place, he said, against a background of a "Europe in difficult times". Besides the "lights" such as increasing growth and a slowing rate of inflation were the "shadows" such as no prospect of decreasing unemployment in 1979, the energy situation and troubled world affairs.

What was the use of such summits? Alfred Bertrand (Bel) for the Christian Democrats criticised their "rehashed communiqués" and

Edgard Pisoni (F) for the Socialists saw a danger in duplicating the work of the Council of Ministers. But Liberal spokesman Jean François Pintat (F) thought that the summit "constituted a clear and impressive demonstration of the Community's ability to find a new way forward."

Reporting the meeting's critical appraisal of the Common Agricultural Policy Commission President Roy Jenkins defined the main problem: "we are not only spending too large a proportion of the budget on agriculture, we are spending too much of it on the financing of the accumulation of predictable surpluses." Many speakers underlined the need for balanced Community action in other fields, particularly employment, social energy, and industrial policy. But to Charles Fletcher-Cooke (UK) of the European Conservatives, interventionist ideology, "put dramatically", would mean "creating a steel mountain or a textile lake to correspond to the butter mountain and the wine lake."

## Hi-jackers

Member States should ratify the European Convention on the Suppression of terrorism and urge associated countries to do the same. Commissioner Guido Brunner agreed on Friday 16 March when the House discussed the problem of hijacking. Rapporteur Charles Fletcher-Cooke (Con/UK) pointed out, however, that while extradition was an effective measure there were instances where this would result in torture or death for the terrorist and prosecution under national law would be more appropriate.

## Energy Label

The Community's priority should be the conservation of energy, Rapporteur Pietro Lezzi (Soc/It) told the House on Friday 16 March; and for this reason he welcomed a Commission proposal that domestic appliances should carry an energy consumption label. John Osborn (Con/UK) warned, however, that the Commission should decide on a consistent unit of measurement. The case was complicated in the case of washing machines, he added, as working speeds varied greatly.

## Striking a balance

The media should tell the European electorate about the budgetary costs of the storage of surplus food, Lord Bruce of Donington (Soc/UK) told the House on Friday 16 March,

when Members debated Parliament's guidelines for the budgetary policy for 1980. After all, he said, the budget was an indicator of Community policy. Rapporteur Martin Bangemann (Lib/Ger) pointed out that the directly elected members would have their own priorities but that it was necessary to have policies for such issues as the relationship of the ECSC levy to the general budget, and the integration of EMS and the ECU. Commissioner Guido Brunner agreed that there was an imbalance in the budget between agriculture and other sectors.

## QUESTION TIME

### India

President Jenkins told Michael Yeats (EPD/Irl) that he was anxious to speed up the process of answering Members' written questions which would undoubtedly increase in volume after direct elections. He was pleased to accept the observation from Tam Dalyell (Soc/UK) that he found it easier to get information from the Commission than from his own government.

### As many meetings

For the Council, Pierre Bernard-Reymond assured Horst Seefeld (Soc/Ger) that contrary to a comment in the German press the French presidency planned to hold Council meetings with the same frequency as previous presidencies.

### Immutable

In reply to questions put by several Members French President-in-Office of the Council, Pierre Bernard-Reymond, reaffirmed that it was up to the nine member governments to reach agreement on the eventual site of the European Parliament. Neither the expense involved, he told Sir Brandon Rhys Williams (Con/UK), nor the exhaustion experienced by officials burdened with the logistics of travelling to Strasbourg, he told Tam Dalyell (Soc/UK), could alter this fact.

### February Bill's

Only six "Bills" were voted on by Parliament in February. In two cases there were no amendments. Parliament's amendments to three of the others have been adopted by the Commission: on trade in power station coal; on the wine market; and on Lord Kennet's (Soc/UK) report on drinking water standards. On the last — transport of goods by road — however, the Commission is maintaining its proposal.

## Postillions struck by Lightning

A new 228-page, six-language, phrase-book — published, believe it or not, by the “Terminology Office” of the European Parliament — looks set fair to revolutionise political Euro-conversation. The phraseology of electoral law in all nine Community countries has been systematically listed, and translated into the six official Community languages.

The result is certainly an eye-opener on international democratic practices. That good old Irish-American word “gerrymander” translates, for the precise Germans, into “Wahlkreisgeometrie”, and for the gastronomically-minded French, into “cuisine électorale”. The Danes apparently have a flourishing breed of “Valgmanipulationers”; (or “riggers” as we would say).

Like earlier and celebrated rivals, the book also provides some interesting turns of English phrase. Members of the Parliament’s “Bureau Elargi” will be surprised — and perhaps flattered — to learn that, in English, they are the “College of Elders”. At the opposite ends of the organisational spectrum appear to lie, on the one hand the “big political formations” and on the other the “local fractions” (sic).

But it is in its translations of voting systems that the book hints at more sinister things. The Rule of Law we know; and even the rule of the majority. But what on earth would the “rule of the largest remainder” be like?

## Easy

*Parliament’s sitting President, former Italian Prime Minister Emilio Colombo, who has just won the Charlemagne Prize for outstanding work towards European unity, was re-elected on Tuesday 13 March to continue in office until the elected Parliament meets in July.*

*So were all the existing vice-presidents. Since last year’s rule changes, one needs the support of at least ten members, or a political group, to stand. And last year’s defeated candidate Winnie Ewing (Ind/UK) was thought to be collecting signatures for another fight this year. In the end, she let the establishment off (at least until July).*

## Cheese war

The Secretary-General of the European Parliament has received an official letter from “UKREP” (the office of the United Kingdom Permanent Representative to the Euro-

pean Communities) about the provision of cheese in the European Parliament’s canteen. It draws attention to the absence there, amid the Camemberts and Dolcelattes, of any Cheddar or “other British regional cheeses”.

The letter stems from a question on the matter in the House of Lords tabled by Lord O’Hagan. Now, the noble Lord comes from Somerset; and he was once an Independent Member of the European Parliament. Today he is the prospective Conservative Euro-candidate for Devon. Parliament staff can therefore look forward, no doubt, not only to Cheddar but to clotted cream as well.

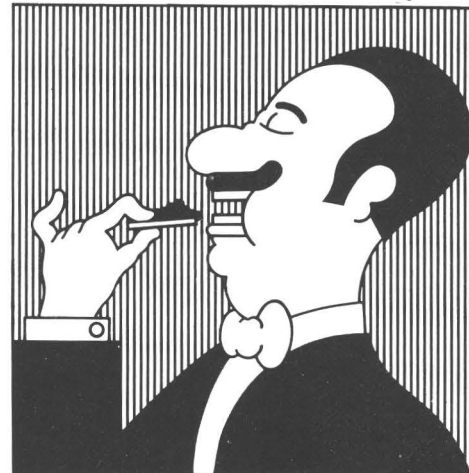
Except that the Secretary-General of the European Parliament, Hans Nord, is also himself a candidate: for the Dutch Liberals. It could be Edam and Gouda as well.

## Burning issue

*Italian Communist member Renato Sandri who had risen during Thursday’s debate on the Paris European meeting, had just broached the subject of Britain and the EMS — “we believe that the United Kingdom is vitally important for the European Community” — when there was a loud report in the Chamber. Startled MEPs resisted diving for cover as sparks showered down from a lighting unit over the Council benches. Satisfied that nobody was hurt, the House gradually regained its composure — only to notice that Mr. Sandri himself had calmly continued his speech and was now discussing agriculture.*

## Eating out in Strasbourg

A special edition (No 58) of the Council of Europe’s staff magazine “Aperçus” which has just reached us contains a remarkably informative and punchy guide to restaurants in Strasbourg. One of the most frequented restaurants gains the accolade “recommended only to



addicts of Alka Seltzer and very hungry dogs.”

But perhaps the clientele are no more discerning than they were in the eighteenth century when, the guide informs us, “an entire table will make do with two or three knives, the Italians have one each, but don’t insist on using it, while the Germans don’t like you asking for theirs.”

It was Shah Nasred-Dir of Persia, however, who taught the Prince of Wales, later Edward VII, how to eat asparagus. “The Shah took one,” the guide tells us, “bit off the end and threw the rest over his shoulder... to the great alarm of the liveried footmen.” Parliament visitors to Strasbourg during the spring asparagus season beware!

## Tele-takeover

*As Budgets Committee spokesman James Scott-Hopkins (Con/UK) was on his feet during the agriculture debate (see p.1) he was surprised to see a television camera homing in — not on himself, but on the speech notes lying in front of him. “I haven’t even got to that bit yet”, he told them.*

*Can this be a trial run for the proposed video-recordings of all the directly-elected Parliament sittings? In the U.S. Congress you can have documents “read into the record.” Maybe the European Parliament will go one better and let you photo them in.*

## Cars, Languages and Parties

Potential future Members of the elected European Parliament — a number of whom were in the visitors’ gallery on Tuesday 13 March — could be seen watching the debate on the “Supplementary draft estimates No 1 of the Parliament for 1979”, (see p. 2 ) with particular interest. When it was finally voted through on the Thursday, they could at least be sure that the money was there for their travel, subsistence and secretarial expenses; some hardware in the form of desks and ten additional cars; and (in a few cases perhaps as urgently) “language courses for Members”.

Seven lines in the Budget, however, remained ominously blank. They were led by “Basic salaries”; followed by “Residence allowances”; “Family allowances” and “Representation allowances”; and then, more somberly “Retirement pensions”, “Invalidity pensions”, and “Survivors pensions”. No doubt, in the latter cases at least, most of the elected Parliament will not need to be in a rush to vote in some figures.

K.P.G.