

Week of September 7 to 12

S U M M A R Y

P.2. AGRICULTURE : The price of eggs

Europe's hens are currently paying the price for the competition of European eggs. New EEC proposals designed to put an end to the suffering of these hens have been introduced.

P.3. ENVIRONMENT : Plans to reduce the cloud of pollution

New norms aimed at controlling atmospheric pollution have just been introduced by the European Commission. However, azote oxydes continue to escape such control.

P.4. ECONOMY : Indexation - handle with care

When prices and salaries increase at the same rate as consumer prices, the economy suffers. European States vary in their reaction to the problem. The Commission has called for moderation while awaiting firmer measures.

P.5. CONSUMERS : Pilot project on behalf of security

1982 will see the start of a study to promote consumer safety which will look at accidents in the home and which will put the spotlight on dangerous products. In this way it is hoped to cut down on these accidents.

P.5. COURT OF JUSTICE : The sins of some members

The European Court of Justice has a difficult task : ensuring the respect of Community law by EEC countries. Italy appears to be the most undisciplined Member State, while others have shown more moderation.

P.6. SOCIAL : A better deal for immigrant children

A Community directive designed to facilitate the integration of immigrant children in the host country will soon enter into force. According to the EEC, the children of migrant workers should be given all facilities to preserve their national culture, language and heritage.

P.7. TRANSPORT : Conserving energy in road transport

The European Parliament's committee on transport has urged Member States to increase energy measures, by adopting such procedures as "taxi-stop" and "car pools", etc.

This newsheet is published in six languages (English, French, German, Dutch, Italian and Danish) by the Directorate-General for Information of the

Commission of the European Communities,
Rue de la Loi 200 - 1049 Brussels um.
Tel. 736 60 00 - Telex 21877 COMEU B.

Its contents do not necessarily reflect the official views of the Community institutions.

Editor : Will. J. Reckman



AGRICULTURE : The price of eggs

The European egg is considered to be in solid shape these days, largely on the basis of the fact that hens produced 3.96 million tons in 1979, or about 15 percent of the world output. As a result, European Community exports exceed imports. Inside the Community market, the Netherlands and Belgium lead the ranks of the exporting countries. The Federal Republic of Germany, on the other hand, is the leading importer of eggs.

The reasons for this high level of productivity in Europe is connected with progress in sanitation and technology, but also with the intensive industrial growing system practiced nearly everywhere throughout the Community. The relative stability of prices which have resulted in recent years have also been a benefit to the consumer.

On the egg market, unlike many other agricultural markets, there is no system of guaranteed prices for producers and the occasional surpluses directly affect their incomes. Hens are probably the first victims of these market forces, since the intensive production system which is the price of competitiveness frequently causes unnecessary suffering for the birds. Currently, some 226 million hens, or about 80 percent of the total, are housed in battery units in the Community, that is living in rows upon rows of cages. The living space for each hen has been reduced to an average of between 400 and 450 square centimetres. In most European countries there is no specific legislative regulation governing living conditions. Danish laying hens seem relatively better off than their counterparts elsewhere in Europe since they enjoy at least a guaranteed minimum living space.

The European Commission wants to set a reasonable guaranteed minimum space for each hen which does not jeopardize the competitiveness of the European egg. If the standards are too high, the producers will pass on the added cost to the consumer, which would give an added advantage to other competing countries that do not have similar rules.

The Commission has proposed that a minimum of 500 square centimetres should be available for each animal and its eating space should measure 12 centimetres in width, instead of a current average of around 10. Below this limit, the chicken coop becomes intolerable, causing an increase in aggressive behaviour and in the mortality rate. Beyond it, the cost of the investments required becomes too high for the producers. The Commission would like the new standards applied gradually, beginning in July 1983, to enable producers to update their equipment.

ENVIRONMENT : Plans to reduce the cloud of pollution

While the economic crisis in the automobile industry has stimulated some calls for a relaxation in previously-adopted environmental regulations and requirements, serious planning is continuing in Europe to provide adequate protection for the public against pollution from automobile emissions. For years, experts, governments and the public have been aware of the hazards represented by the carbon monoxide and nitrogen oxides being emitted by motor cars. Governments have responded by adopting restrictions on the amount of harmful substances which can be contained in fuels and released through automobile exhausts. At the European Community level, the first directive on the subject dates back to 1970, when the Member States agreed to joint limits on the emissions of carbon monoxide and hydrocarbons by motor vehicles. Since then, the European Commission in Brussels has adopted a number of other directives restricting the emission of nitrogen oxides as well, and has repeatedly reduced the limit values for all three pollutants.

In recent months, however, the automobile industry, especially in the United States, has pressed for an easing of such restrictions on the grounds that they increase the cost of manufacture and discourage buyers who are more and more reluctant to buy for other reasons as well.

In answer to a recent parliamentary question, the European Commission has indicated how it is trying to provide more environmental protection while bearing economic factors in mind as well. The Commission is currently preparing to incorporate into Community law a fourth reduction in the limit values for motor vehicles agreed to by European governments within the United Nations' Economic Commission for Europe. In addition, the German government outlined its ideas about a further reduction in such pollutants at a recent meeting of Community Environment Ministers, and the Commission says it will follow these up.

The Commission also indicated that it is aware of the research being conducted by European firms to develop lead-resistant catalysts. However, according to the Commission, information so far received indicates that the tests on the practical effects of these catalysts are still below expectations, since only carbon monoxide and hydrocarbon pollution has been reduced, but not nitrogen oxides. The catalysts will not reduce pollution to zero and the introduction of lead-free petrol would not change the situation. It adds that, in the future, the environmental acceptability of automobiles should be considered on an equal footing with questions of energy saving, road safety and economic merits as part of an over-all approach.

ECONOMY : Indexation -- handle with care

Sometimes rigid and automatic, or sometimes partial or even illegal, the indexing of salaries and prices is regarded in widely different ways in the various European countries. The European Commission in Brussels has just issued a warning to the Member States against the dangers of such machinery in an economic crisis. In addition, the existing disparities run counter to the degree of economic and monetary policy harmonisation desired among the Community members.

Currently on the agenda in various European countries, the subject of indexation is also a topic of discussion and concern for European trade unionists. In fact, the indexing machinery regulates in a large part the salary negotiations in Belgium, Luxembourg and Italy, where the linkage between salaries and consumer prices is carried out automatically. Such a liaison represents a serious danger in the current period because of the increase in oil prices which bear little relationship to allocation of salaries and profits. In Denmark and the Netherlands, the indexing system is only partial and is set in motion every six months on the basis of a special index. It is also limited in France to the minimum wage and represents a safeguard for persons with low incomes. Finally, in Greece and Ireland, it takes the form of compensation and is applicable only when price increases pass a certain threshold. The Federal Republic of Germany is the only country in Europe where the practice is prohibited by law and the country's historical experience with the staggering rate of inflation that followed the great depression in the 1920s is probably a factor in the Government's attitude.

It is generally felt now that indexation contributes to the two major problems of inflation and unemployment by encouraging a spiral of prices and at least partially endangering existing jobs while discouraging new job creation.

As a destabilising economic factor, the indexing system can add to the deterioration of the competitiveness of Member States and help perpetuate the differences that exist in the European Monetary System.

As a result, such indexation systems are on a hot issue and the European Commission has asked Member States to use them with moderation, limiting salary adjustments to two a year and limiting their impact to an agreed level, such as the average Community inflation rate, for instance.

An extensive debate on the subject is expected to be launched soon, but even a partial change in existing systems is certain to meet considerable opposition.

CONSUMERS : Pilot project on behalf of security

Daily life has been the beneficiary of technical progress which has been made on a large number of products which are widely used but which have represented a certain risk to the consumer. While a considerable amount of attention has been focussed in the past on road accidents and other types of hazards, the truth is that the number of home accidents has been reaching worrying levels.

In the hopes of protecting the consumer and safeguarding his health, the European Commission has recently indicated that it will begin a 30-month pilot project in the beginning of 1982 aimed at identifying products which are dangerous to the consumer.

An information network will be established that will permit coverage of some 320,000 cases per year. Each accident will be examined closely and precise information will be gathered in collaboration with hospitals and doctors. This data will seek, for example, to ascertain the location of the accident, the circumstances and also the identity of the products involved. The aim will be to determine the frequency of accidents associated with certain products or locations.

At the end of the investigation, dangerous products will be the target of new European Community regulations and might possibly be removed from the market.

COUPT OF JUSTICE : The sins of some members

From time to time, there are inevitable instances when European Member States or companies fail to comply with basic obligations in the Community treaties, which is why the Court of Justice is always vigilant.

In 1980, the number of procedures initiated for infractions of Community law increased to 240 from 200 the previous year. It is also expected that this trend will probably continue because of a tendency toward unilateral action by national governments.

Most of the infractions dealt with problems concerning the free movement of goods, but others such as environmental law, the right of establishment or social affairs are also becoming more frequent. Out of 28 cases actually brought before the Court of Justice, 21 dealt with non-application of certain Community laws, 10 of those in Italy, 6 in Belgium, 2 in France and Luxembourg and 1 in Germany. Four cases were dropped when Member States complied with the law.

SOCIAL : A better deal for immigrant children

Are the children of migrant workers living within the Community doomed to forget their national language and cultural heritage ? Or can something be done to help these children - over two million in the Community, according to recent estimates - in their efforts to integrate smoothly into the school system of the host State, without losing their cultural identity ? The challenge has been taken up by the European Community.

In a directive which entered into force in July this year, the Community deals specifically with the language and cultural problems facing the children of EEC migrant workers. EEC Ministers have expressed hopes, however, that the same principles will be applied to the children of workers from non-EEC countries.

The directive focusses on three basic facilities which should be offered to immigrant children by all EEC countries.

Firstly, the emphasis is put on ensuring the smooth integration of immigrant children into their new school environment, by teaching the new language of the host country. Secondly, provisions are made for providing training for the teachers in charge of immigrant children. Finally efforts will be made to promote the teaching of the mother tongue and culture of the country of origin, in cooperation with the country of origin. This, according to the directive, should be part of the normal education process.

The European Commission has given its support during the past five years to a number of pilot schemes designed to help improve the initial reception of the immigrant children, the teaching of the language and culture of the country of origin, the training of teachers and the development of teaching materials.

These pilot schemes have been carried out in most Member States, notably in Odense (Denmark), Leiden (the Netherlands), Luxembourg, North Rhine Westphalia, Brussels, Marseille, Paris, Bedford and London.

TRANSPORT : Conserving energy in road transport

Conserving and economising energy has been a top priority in most countries ever since the 1973 oil crisis. Since then, oil has become even more expensive and more difficult to find. The transport sector is most directly affected by this new phenomenon.

The European Community depends to a large extent on imports to meet its energy requirements. Oil represents about half of the EEC's total energy consumption.

Given the fact that world oil reserves are shrinking at an alarming rate and will not be able to meet all world energy requirements within a few decades, the need for conserving energy becomes all the more acute, particularly in the transport sector.

The transport sector currently absorbs about a fifth of total energy consumption in the EEC, and about 30% of oil consumption. 23% of the oil is used by the road transport sector.

The European Parliament's special committee on transport has analysed the reasons for the high level of energy consumption by this sector.

Experts feel that current oil consumption in the transport sector could be cut by 30% (instead of the current 20%). This rather ambitious objective could be obtained by modifying certain "bad habits", according to the report.

Suggestions made by the report include the following : improvements in the construction and equipment of automobiles, modifications in driving habits (unnecessary braking, sudden accelerations and starts, high speeds, etc.). The report stresses that the introduction of additional speed limits in the road transport sector could lead to the conservation of between 2 to 5% of energy. Two years ago, the Community's major car manufacturers agreed to undertake a voluntary 10% reduction in energy consumption for all cars produced in their plants by 1985. In the coming years, individual drivers could be persuaded to change their habits.

"Taxi-stop", a relatively new concept, could gain popularity in the coming years. People could also be encouraged to use the "car pool" system more frequently. Studies show that such pooling of resources could permit the conservation of substantial amounts of energy. It would also encourage more social behaviour ...