

Week of September 29 to October 4

CULTURE : A museum for Europe ?

Two European Parliamentarians, Messrs Bangemann and Pedini, from the Liberal and Christian Democratic groups respectively, have suggested that an exhibition on "Europe in motion" should be organised in Strasbourg as the first step towards the creation of a museum devoted to European unification. The exhibition would include copies of important documents concerning the history of European unification, and a run-down of activities undertaken to date by the main European institutions.

A public library, a cinema museum and archives including tape recordings would also be a part of the exhibition. Messrs Bangemann and Pedini feel that such a cultural show would bring the adventure of European unification to all European citizens, but especially youth. Their proposals are currently being studied by the Parliament's committee for young people, culture, education, information and sports.

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Part-time work is beginning to look more and more like a part-solution to our employment problems as well as to the thorny question of the division of roles between man and wife...

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TRANSPORTATION: European traffic patterns inch along...

During your summer holiday, you may have noticed, if you travelled through Europe, that traffic regulations were not identical throughout the countries of the European Community. The speed limits, the amounts of alcohol tolerated, the emergency telephone numbers, and even rules governing the use of horns in cities, priority regulations and parking systems may be widely different. The coordination of these regulations, in addition to making the motorist feel more at home anywhere in Europe, could also probably lead to a reduction in the number of accidents and fines.

One reason why the European Community has yet to propose uniform rules in this important field is that for a long time the coordination of such regulations has been in the hands of other international organisations such as the European Conference of Transportation Ministers, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development and the United Nations' Economic Commission for Europe.

To avoid duplication, the European Community Commission in Brussels has limited itself to coordinating the positions of the nine member states in these other international organs. On the other hand, it has also felt that in the interest of security for passengers and motorists, rules concerning the wearing of safety seat belts should be standardised.

Since 1977 a directive adopted by the Council of Ministers of the Community has regulated the use of seat belts and their functioning, notably specifying that the belts can be adjusted with one hand on a red button of a precise size. The Commission has also felt that more specific demands would probably hamper the search of seat belt manufacturers in their quest for better protective devices.

However, it has just proposed a new measure to enlarge the scope of these regulations-which applied only to private passenger vehicles- to all types of vehicles.

EDUCATION: A helping hand for girls...

The principle of equal opportunity between men and women in professional life is being enforced in more and more countries of the European Community, but there is also growing awareness that inequality should also be combatted at an earlier stage. That's why the European Community Ministers of Education recently cast their attention on the problem at the level of education and vocational training.

They reached an accord whereby the member states would commit themselves to take steps to eliminate all stereotyped roles and divisions of sexual

roles from their educational material. They will also encourage the establishment of specific programmes aimed at stimulating young girls to consider a greater range of professions and to promote a greater awareness on the part of teachers and guidance personnel in such matters.

In addition, the European Commission will also supplement these national efforts through studies, conferences and other projects designed to stimulate an exchange of experiences and analysis of the impact of mixed education, the role of the media and other similar subjects.

Also, conscious of the growth in the practice of hiring au pair girls, and of the possible abuses connected with this development, the Commission intends to request the member states which have not already ratified a European accord on the placing of au pair girls negotiated by the Council of Europe in 1969 to do so as soon as possible.

HEALTH: Reducing asbestos exposure risks

More than 800,000 metric tonnes of asbestos are used each year in the European Community's industrial sector. Most of this asbestos is imported, Italy being the only Community Member State which produces its own asbestos.

Asbestos is used because of its numerous qualities since it does not shrink and does not stretch, is fire-proof and can be used for thermal and electrical isolation. It is used essentially in the construction sector, shipbuilding, car manufacture and the mechanical industry.

Asbestos, however, is responsible for a number of diseases, including certain tumours. It penetrates the human body through inhalation. This is why the presence of very fine asbestos fibres in the atmosphere constitutes a potential health risk for persons who are exposed to them, even if the period of such exposure has to be rather long to provoke such negative effects.

Community Member States have varying legislation on the dangers of asbestos exposure. The European Commission, however, has just introduced a draft directive which aims at harmonising the different national legislations. The directive, designed to reduce the length of asbestos exposure time, will ensure better worker protection within the Community.

AGRICULTURE: Improving the lot of women farmers

Women working in the European Community's agricultural sector are often the victims of economic and social discrimination: they are rarely the owners of the farms on which they work, but are more often "helping wives", whose work is taken for granted despite its economic value. These women farmers put in a whole day's work on the farm, particularly on small holdings, working as hard, if not harder, than actual wage earners. They are, however, rarely rewarded economically for their labours, although it is generally recognised that their role in the daily functioning of the farm is indispensable. From the social point of view, these working women have no access to sickness or maternity benefits enjoyed by other workers.

A recent report on the situation of women in agriculture drawn up by the committee for women's rights set up by the European Parliament, stresses that women farmers often put in up to 47 working hours per week, often working during the entire week.

The role of women in farming is gradually changing. As the number of paid workers on farms decreases, women are taking an increasing part in the actual operation of farms. This includes more active participation in the marketing of produce, accounting, etc. Women farmers today are older than in the past, and they are also better educated than their husbands.

Statistics on women's participation in agriculture in the EEC show the following facts: in West Germany, there are 1.5 million women working in the agricultural sector; in France, women farmers number 1.1 million, while in Belgium they total 11,000. Other countries have failed to provide statistics. The report stresses, however, that these women have no access to professional training facilities and lack social protection. This makes them particularly vulnerable. Their work on the farms is not recognised officially as they are still classified as being "without a profession", despite their contribution to the running of the holdings.

The parliamentary committee wants the European Commission to take action to ensure that women farmers are given adequate legal protection, as well as access to professional training facilities, which would improve the value of their contributions to the operations of the agricultural holdings. As such, the Social Fund should develop its activities to bring education to women farmers. The Commission should also ensure that social security benefits are made available to women farmers, on a par with those enjoyed by other workers.

CONSUMERS: The action on veal is no joke

A joke has been making the rounds in Europe recently about a typical housewife going to her butcher and asking for a cut of veal only to be asked "do you have a prescription?"

Consumers and European Agriculture Ministers, however, have just indicated that they did not consider the recent controversy over the artificial fattening of calves through injections or applications of potentially dangerous hormones to be a joke. Following a European-wide consumer protest, the European Community Council of Agriculture Ministers has just committed itself to adopting effective protective measures to end this practice and protect the safety of the public as soon as possible. The problem arose when consumer organisations throughout Europe complained that either laws preventing the use of these drugs were not being enforced in some countries or that other countries had no such laws. The European Bureau of Consumer Federations (BEUC), which is the central Community-level lobbying organisation in Brussels, immediately urged the European Commission and Council of Ministers to remedy the situation by adopting effective Community-wide measures.

In what has been regarded as perhaps the first major victory for the consumer movement at the Community level, the farm ministers responded quickly. But all those involved also underline the fact that this expression of political will has to be followed up in the coming months with concrete legislative controls that will be enforceable and fair. The ministers also said that the eventual law they will adopt will be comparable to the strictest now in force in a community country rather than the easiest to adopt. In fact, this could also be of help to farmers since some of them in countries with laws on the books which are being enforced have been complaining that they face unfair competition from countries where no regulation is in effect.

The measure ultimately adopted will thus be added to the growing body of Community law designed to give the European consumer better protection or better value.

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The rapid growth of part-time employment throughout the European Community is a phenomenon which has attracted the increasing attention of national and Community authorities. Feeling that part-time employment has become a reality that could help resolve the current unemployment crisis, the European Commission in Brussels has addressed a detailed report on the subject to the Community's Council of Ministers.

This report, which first of all seeks to define the subject, makes a distinction between part-time employment and occasional or temporary employment. According to the Community's Economic and Social Committee, part-time employment is separate from occasional work in that it is based on a degree of continuity, and from temporary work in that it involves a period that is not necessarily limited.

Nevertheless, this definition of part-time employment is far from being the same throughout the different Community countries. In France, the part-time worker is one whose duties cover between 20 and 30 hours a week; in Ireland it is based on at least 20 or 21 hours, while in the Netherlands it covers less than 25 hours.

That's why the Commission is hoping that the Council of Ministers will agree to harmonise the different legislations in force in the Member Countries by establishing uniform minimum standards and by reinforcing the collaboration between the countries, especially concerning exchange of information based on national experience.

What is certain is that part-time employment is becoming increasingly widespread throughout the Community, with the exception of Italy. In certain countries, the percentage of these workers has more than tripled since 1960. In all Community countries there are now some nine million workers employed on a part-time basis. Employers and business leaders have shown themselves to be in favour of this type of work since it has been shown to increase productivity and efficiency, cut down on absenteeism and also reduce the frequency of work accidents.

On December 18, 1979, the Council of Ministers adopted four major principles on part-time work organisation. The first principle contains three essential elements: the freedom of choice for the worker in choosing this form of work, the equality of treatment between men and women and the improvement of the value and conditions of this type of employment.

The second principle states that efforts should be made to examine measures likely to make part-time employment more accessible to certain groups of workers, notably parents of small children and elderly workers.

Part-time workers should also, obviously, benefit from the same social rights

and fulfill the same obligations as full-time workers. That's the third principle adopted by the Council.

As for the fourth principle, it indicates that part-time employment could be envisioned on either a daily, weekly or monthly basis as long as it is adapted to the needs of different types of workers and companies.

In order to apply these different principles, the Council of Ministers this year made a number of suggestions to the member governments, national employment agencies and labour and industry.

But there are still a number of points to resolve concerning the social rights and obligations of these workers, contracts involved in this type of work, the wages paid, social security, gradual retirement, the accomodation of young workers and others. In its new report the Commission proposes the basis for a concerted Community action in these areas.

What is noteworthy is that about 90 percent of the part-time jobs are now filled by women. As a result, the Commission believes that "the ideal solution would be, while preserving the freedom of choice of each worker, to seek simultaneously a gradual reduction and better allocation of the time worked and a better sharing of non-paid or professional family responsibilities inside a household"

The profession of part-time worker will probably continue to be more developed in the private than the public sector. It will nevertheless closely depend on the structure of the local job market and more generally of the social infrastructure. This includes particularly the possibility of child care for women who want to work.

In addition, it might be worthwhile examining certain innovations which have been tested in the United States, such as jobs "in tandem", which involve full-time jobs which are assumed regularly by two workers.