

Week of September 22 to 27

STEEL: The problems pile up

- The European steel industry's current difficulties are clearly visible through just a few figures. In 1974, the European Community's steel industry employed some 792,000 workers and produced about 155.5 million tonnes of steel. In 1979, the production had fallen to 140 million tonnes and manpower down to 680,000 persons.

About 30,000 jobs have been eliminated since the beginning of this year. European authorities have been actively attempting trying to slow down this slide and to ease the social problems caused by the decline.

On page 3 another problem is examined which particularly affects the steel industry, that of work accidents.

SUMMARY

LEGISLATION	: p.2 Finding out who gets help
SOCIAL	: p.3 Helping take the risk out of working
EDUCATION	: p.4 Ancient legends and new realities
SECURITY	: p.5 Beware of flammable night clothes
AGRICULTURE	: p.5 Some new talk about butter stocks
PARLIAMENT	: p.6 EEC regional development
CLOSE UP	: p.7 <u>The pupils who are not like the others</u>

Eurofocus sums up so-called special education in the European Community, which means the schooling aimed at young handicapped persons and all categories of those children who cannot attend regular classes.

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LEGISLATION: Finding out who gets help

The economic crisis currently buffeting Europe has more and more frequently triggered a need for governments to intervene in private enterprise to try and save firms in difficulty or to help the development of expanding sectors. Nevertheless an effort is also being made to assure that national governments are not completely free to grant aid to anyone under any circumstances.

In fact, European Community institutions are charged with watching that this aid does not distort the interaction of market forces inside the Common market. The European Court of Justice in Luxembourg has precisely handed down a decision underlining the limits on the freedom of action of the European Community member countries.

The decision concerns the Dutch subsidiary of the American company, Philip Morris, the world's second largest cigarette producer. Philip Morris wanted to invest some £ 34.8 million in facilities in the Netherlands in order to increase its production by 40 percent. The Dutch Government was ready to grant it some £ 1.3 million under a national system authorising the government to offer aid to enterprises undertaking investment of more than £ 17 million.

In July 1979, the European Commission in Brussels announced that it considered this aid inconsistent with the Community Treaty provisions on freedom of competition. The Treaty's Article 92 notes that such government aid re-enforces the competitive position of a company and that as a result, Community trade can be affected. Such assistance is therefore considered compatible with the Treaty when it is directed to economically depressed regions, to projects of general Community interest or when there will be no impact on existing competition.

The Philip Morris firm had appealed the decision before the European Court in the hopes of cancelling out the Commission ruling.

But instead, the Court supported the decision and confirmed that the Commission has discretionary power which implies taking economic, social and Community considerations into account. This case is now closed with the firm not receiving the Dutch aid in question.

SOCIAL: Helping take the risk out of working

The trouble-plagued steel industry has not only had to deal with massive increases in unemployment in recent years, it has also been struggling for better results against accidents in its work force.

As an example of the improving conditions, it was indicated that while in 1960, the six member countries of the Community recorded yearly nearly 200 deaths due to industrial accidents among wage-earners in the iron and steel industry, in 1978 there were only 66 such accidents in the Community of nine as a whole, including both wage-earners and salaried staff.

But despite this evidence of greater safety, the European authorities feel that their objectives have not yet been completely achieved. They are still aiming at bettering the accident rate in general and lowering the number of days lost because of such mishaps. A special commission is therefore continuing to conduct studies, gather statistics, organise training sessions, planning advancement in equipment and techniques and holding conferences on accident prevention in the industry.

For example, its compilation of statistics has revealed that most fatalities occur in the so-called "hot" departments of the steel operation, meaning coking plants, blast furnaces and melting shops, followed by the transport sector. But accidents with at least one day's lost time are more likely to be in the melting shop and in the finishing and storage of rolled products department. The gathering of these statistics is not just a matter of curiosity, but are a crucial indicator of what type of safety precautions should be aimed at certain types of work in a way that will continually increase the safety of the men who toil in this crucial industry throughout the European Community.

In EUROFOCUS No.30/80, the subject of recycling of used oil was discussed. We have since been informed that a European Congress on this topic will be organised in Paris from September 30 to October 2 at the Palais des Congrès. All additional information may be obtained from the European commission on regeneration, 44 rue de la Boétie, 75008 Paris. Telephone (1) 563 41 79.

EDUCATION: Ancient legends and new realities

Eurydice is known in ancient Greek legend as the wife whom Orpheus searched for and brought back from the mysterious lower world. The name has again been resurrected to serve as the designation for a new system that will help in the search for information hidden in the sometimes dark depths of knowledge.

This new system has been established by the European Economic Community to help authorities throughout the nine member countries to find out about activities and policies specifically related to education throughout the group. Eurydice is part of the educational action programme approved by the nine governments in 1976 and will assist in the main objective of stimulating cooperation in the field of education. While the action programme is firmly committed to preserving the rich variety and diversity of education activities in the individual member states, it also lays the groundwork for joint cooperation and action in this sector.

While still limited, this cooperation has extended over a widely diversified number of subjects which the Eurydice research and information system will help. The new system, which at first will operate as a clearing house of information through conventional communications but will eventually involve connection through the recently-established Community computer data transmission network, will concentrate on four of these areas of cooperation. In its first phase the Eurydice information network will concentrate on the priority sectors of helping the transition of young people from school to working life, the teaching and learning of foreign languages, the education of migrants and their families and the policies and conditions of admission of students to higher education.

By using this system, educational authorities in the member countries will be able to channel requests for any helpful related information in the other member states. A central unit has been established in Brussels under the responsibility of the European Community Commission which will process the requests and responses for information.

Each country has already designated and set up a focal point of reference for access to this information and documentation about its structures, legislation, statistics and main policy initiatives.

At first, this new service will be concerned with meeting the information needs of policy-makers in each country as an initial step in building greater cooperation in this important field.

SECURITY: Beware of flammable night clothes

If you make it a habit to smoke in bed, you should be aware that most night clothes are easily flammable. This is partly because there is no legislation on the subject in any of the member states of the European Community, with the exception of Ireland and Great Britain. But the European Commission intends in the near future to undertake specific actions against the fire hazards of textiles in its special action programme for consumer protection. It plans to give top priority to the problem of night clothes for children, but has not yet defined the scope and the content of the security measures it will propose.

The question is not as simple as it may seem at first because the use of non-flammable substances sometimes represents risk of toxicity just as, if not more, dangerous than those represented by the flammable material. Already in July 1979, the Community Council of Ministers had to prohibit the use of a non-flammable substance that proved to be dangerous to human health and which was used by American manufacturers for pyjamas sold on the European market.

AGRICULTURE: Some new talks about butter sales

World milk production is expected to increase by about 1 to 2 percent this year, according to recent estimates. Among the leading producers, only the Soviet Union is seen as experiencing a decline of 3 or 4 percent. As for the European Community, its production will increase only slightly, but it's already a well-known fact that it produces a surplus above the needs of its population. Also, the Community is the leading exporter of dairy products in international commerce. It is even expecting an increase of its exports in 1980 in comparison with the previous year.

This increase in exports, accompanied by special measures and the food aid programme to the Third World will nevertheless not be sufficient to reduce the stocks of public butter accumulated in the nine Community countries. By the end of 1980, this stockpile should amount to about 230,000 tonnes, or about the same as in mid-July. The spread of this surplus butter is very uneven, since more than 180,000 tonnes of butter is located in Germany alone. The average age of this butter is about 11 months. And the monthly cost (for an average of one year in stock) is about £ 16 per tonne. So it's unlikely that the problem of surplus butter will cease to be a cause of worry to the European farm authorities.

PARLIAMENT: EEC regional development

Since it was set up in 1975, the Community's Regional Development Fund has handed out some 2,500 million European units of account (*) to the nine EEC countries, according to the fifth annual report on the functioning of the Fund drawn up by the European Commission. The largest beneficiaries of the Fund's assistance have been Italy (916 million EUA), the United Kingdom (655 million EUA), France (428 million EUA) and Germany (210 million EUA). Expressed per habitant, the Irish have received more aid from the Regional Fund than any other member state: 46.1 EUA per head compared with a European average of 11.9 EUA. This is a reflection of the state of the Irish economy, where income per head is three to four times lower than in the wealthiest parts of the Community. The Italians, who are also numbered amongst the less favoured of the EEC citizens, receive surprisingly far less per habitant, 16.2 EUA, than the Irish.

The Commission report also notes that some 79,000 jobs were either created or maintained in industry and service sectors by Regional Fund contributions in 1979. Some 3,000 investment projects were subsidised to the tune of 962 million EUA, out of which 513 million EUA have already been paid out by the Fund.

Taking a look at the geographical concentration of aids from the Regional Fund, the Commission report notes that the situation in 1979 was as follows: in Belgium, 53.1% of the quota available for 1979 was given to Wallonie; in Denmark, 83.6% of fund assistance went to Greenland; in Germany, 58.5% of Fund assistance went to Berlin; in France, 91.9% of Fund aid went to the priority regions of Nord Pas-de-Calais, to the West and South-West, to Corsica and the Overseas Departments; in Ireland, 54.4% of the projects were situated in the west of the country; in Italy, 96% of the Fund's activities were concentrated in the Mezzogiorno and the Friuli-Venezia Giulia struck by the 1976 earthquake; in the Netherlands, 100% of the Fund assistance went to priority areas in the north and the south of the country, while in the United Kingdom some 86.8% of the assistance went to projects in Northern Ireland. Generally speaking, the Commission considers that the attempts to concentrate Fund assistance on priority regions as defined by national systems of aid has had satisfactory results.

The functioning of the Fund, however, has been criticised by the European Parliament's committee on regional policy. In a report presented to the recent European Parliament session in Strasbourg, Giovanni Travaglini (Italian, EPP) denounced what he sees as the main loopholes in the Community's regional development programmes. The main point made by Travaglini is that there should be more participation by the regions in the elaboration of the Community's regional development policy.

(*) The exchange rate of one unit of account (Sept.1980) is 0,589364.

A very special, but frequently overlooked, breed of student

School has just resumed, and for most students it means the traditional books, classrooms and professors. But for some millions of persons in Europe and elsewhere, it means something special.

These are the students receiving what is termed "special education" because they are handicapped or in some way unable to attend regular classes of instruction with other pupils. These special students can belong to a number of various groups depending on their audio, visual, motor or mental condition, but together they constitute such a significant segment of the population, that the United Nations has designated next year as a year of action and reflection on behalf of the handicapped, just as it has in the past devoted years to children or women.

One of the areas that the year will focus on will be the topic of special education for the millions of handicapped persons in our midst. This type of education can involve classroom, remedial or vocational activity. The European Commission in Brussels has indicated its interest in these problems for some years in a number of ways which have included special surveys and conferences as well as assistance to vocational and rehabilitation training. One such activity was the commissioning of a study by Skov Jørgensen, the head of the Danish Education Ministry's special education department, which has just been released. The study is an outgrowth of a decision taken in February 1976 by the European Community Ministers of Education to seek to improve the equality of opportunity in education for handicapped persons and was devoted to gathering information on the different programmes and policies on special education in the Community member countries.

This survey conducted into the various types of special education indicated that at least 1.3 million students followed such instruction in the Community. These figures, however, do not include certain Community countries which do not take a separate census of such special students. But the work does identify the number of mentally retarded, slow, emotionally or socially handicapped, speech defective, deaf, hard of hearing, blind, visually impaired, motor-deficiency, delicate or other special students with learning difficulties.

The survey shows that all countries offer government educational programmes as well as private facilities and that the ultimate goal is to work if possible toward integration into regular education or society. The aim of the study was to improve the exchange of information between the member countries of the Community as a way of helping to develop knowledge and techniques in this field.

Also recently the European Commission's Centre for Development of Vocational Training in Berlin, created in 1975, issued a special report devoted to professional training for the handicapped in the member states of the Community. In this issue, Dr. Umberto Vidali, special consultant in the Commission for the action programme on behalf of professional training for handicapped workers, traced the origin of this plan as a result of a resolution by the Council of Ministers in 1974 which set in motion this special action. Following this resolution, professional readaptation in the member countries of the Community has developed with different degrees of priority but along certain compatible lines and with the aid of the Community. This action is aimed at preparing handicapped persons for either regular work or self-employment. It is noted, however, that, while trained handicapped workers are considered valuable and dependable, they generally have to wait longer than other persons before finding a job and that sometimes the training they have received can be rendered ineffective or outdated if their period of unemployment is too long.

The programmes in various member countries are also outlined in this special report. For instance, in 1979 the British programme covered 12 cities and 300 other geographic points. An appeal to some 55,000 business leaders resulted in the placement of 60,000 handicapped persons that year, compared with 54,000 and 49,000 the two previous years. In France, where there are about one million handicapped between the ages of 16 and 60 years, a modular rehabilitation centre was created in Mulhouse, aimed at training some 400 workers by the end of 1980. Another subject discussed involved the promotion of the hiring of handicapped workers in France. It notes that contrary to the popular stereotypes of the handicapped as either blind or in wheelchairs, these only account for 4 percent or 2 percent respectively of the total handicapped of working age. Other physically handicapped persons represent some 15 percent of that total, the mentally handicapped are another 15 percent, those with frequently non-visible difficulties such as asthma, cancer, diabetes or other afflictions account for another 45 percent and all other mentally ill persons another 20 percent. Germany listed in 1976 about 4.3 million persons or 7 percent of the population as handicapped. Each year some 45,000 handicapped babies are born there while 200,000 adults are forced to leave their job because of illness, accident or signs of impairment.