



WHO IS TO BLAME ?

That the European Community is in a state of crisis everyone seems agreed. Not so clear is the question: who is to blame? The search for root causes - and scapegoats - absorbed most of the European Parliament's attentions at its curtailed sitting in Luxembourg from 13 to 15 May.

At the Parliament's April sitting, the front-running culprit had been Britain. This time it was Italy, whose unilateral action in imposing 50 per cent import deposits earlier in the month seemed to strike at the foundations of the Common Market.

As in Britain's case, however, most speakers were anxious not to place all the blame on a single member state. "The Italian measures." Ludwig Fellermaier (Socialist, Germany) declared, when opening the debate on the subject "are part of a wider 'process of re-nationalisation' of the European Community's economic policy ... It would be wrong, too easy and too cheap, to put the Italian Government in the dock alone." France, for example, had been equally guilty earlier on in the year in taking the franc out of the 'snake in the tunnel'.

Did the blame, then, lie with the Council of Ministers? Certainly the the Council's inability to take decisions received enough criticism. In Tuesday's debate on the Commission's annual report for 1973 Lord Gladwyn (Liberal, UK) noted that the Parliamentary 'rapporteur', André Rossi (Liberal, France), had made 20 comments that were "condemnatory", 16 that were "hortatory", 19 which "took note" and only 10 that expressed any satisfaction. It was significant, Peter Kirk (UK) added, when speaking for the Conservatives, that the "condemnatory" passages nearly all referred to the Council of Ministers rather than to the Commission. The positions taken by the leaders of the member states,

Conservatives back Labour terms

A question at the centre of the government's terms for renegotiation - contributing to the Community budget on a fairer basis - was the subject of a division during voting on the Rossi report resolution. An amendment tabled by Rafton Pounder (UK) on behalf of the European Conservative Group, called for contribution to the Community budget to be based on GNP. While either VAT or GNP were preferable to tariffs for the raising of revenue for the budget, he argued, fair apportionment of the cost could only be achieved by taking into account the respective GNPs of member states. Under the system of 'own resources' proposed to run from 1975 Britain, for example, was due to pay some 19% of the budget in 1977 when her GNP amounted to only 16½% of total Community GNP. Was this fair? But the point did not find general support in the Assembly, the amendment being narrowly defeated.

declared Tom Normanton (European Conservative, UK) in the same debate, were "parochial, selfish, myopic and narrow-minded". Even Wilhelm Haferkamp, speaking for the Commission, hoped that the Council would be more positive, and would soon show a new ability and willingness to act.

EUROPEAN SCHIZOPHRENIA

The governments of the member states, however, did not go undefended. Replying to the debate on the Italian trade measures, Dr Hans Apel, serving chairman of the Council, asked the Parliament to look more closely into the true causes of the crisis. The difficulties faced by the Italian Government had been caused by inflationary pressures, had they not? And, these, in their turn, were they not the result of rising national budgets? But such rising expenditure was less and less what Finance Ministers wanted to do, and more and more the consequences of what national Parliaments voted for. "If this is so, European Parliamentarians in Luxembourg can't stand back and criticise, and then at home support rising public expenditure, the source of inflation," Dr Apel concluded. "I call that European schizophrenia."

Dr Apel also hinted that the Commission itself was not without responsibility. Addressing his remarks directly to Commissioner Haferkamp, he pointed out that the Council had decided to settle the Italian question under Article 108(3) of the EEC Treaty (giving the Commission right of initiative). "The hour of the European Government - i.e. the EEC Commission - has now come. You should be happy that the Council, while momentarily unable to take decisions itself, has given you the chance to show what you can do!"

Specific criticism of the Commission's record in the Italian affair came with Wednesday's debate on the Commission's economic guidelines for 1974, introduced by a last minute report from Jean-Eric Bousch (Progressive European Democrat, France). Speaking for the Christian Democrat Group, Harry Notenboom (Netherlands) pointed out that when the Commission had produced its common policy document earlier in the year, the need to act under Article 108, as far as Italy was concerned, was already obvious. Instead, Italy had been obliged to take emergency measures unilaterally under Article 109. "Think of the damage we could have avoided!" Speakers in the earlier debate, too, had found in the Commission a "lack of initiative" in meeting the common problems in the Community.

MOTION OF CONFIDENCE

At least the Conservative Group, however, rallied to the Commission's defence. The Commission's powers, Peter Kirk pointed out during the debate on the 1973 annual report, were very much more circumscribed than public opinion believed them to be - or even than some Members of the Parliament appeared to believe. "We are not here as a Parliament attacking the Commission, except on the one issue of the Parliament's Budgetary powers." (The Parliament's resolution referred to "serious shortcomings of the Commission's amended proposals" in this field.) "With regard to what the Commission does with its powers we are highly satisfied." Indeed an amendment to the resolution was proposed by John Brewis on behalf of the Conservative Group, specifically expressing confidence in the Commission. This was passed - but, as

Jean Durieux (France), leader of the Liberal Group, noted, it was possible that rejection might constitute a motion of no confidence in the Commission.

The Commission also found a powerful defender in its President, F-X Ortoli, who replied on Wednesday to the economic policy debate. The Parliament seemed preoccupied with what the Commission hadn't done; but perhaps, instead, it should draw up a list of what had been done, and disseminate this among the European electorates. The Commission had even drawn up, in May 1973, a small list of suggestions to improve the Parliament's own procedure: the holding of 'three-way' debates with the Council and the Commission; more 'public hearings'; the adoption of non-controversial reports without formal debate; and an annual report by the Parliament, which would be debated in national parliaments.

TROTSKYITE KIRK?

Three days' debates, then, saw the buck moving smoothly round the table: from individual member states, to the Council, the national governments, the Commission, the national parliaments and to the European Parliament itself. What of the future?

Jean Durieux, presenting the Rossi report, suggested three targets: democratisation of the Community; a return to Community monetary discipline, together with a regional and energy policy; and an effort to speak with one voice in the world. Peter Kirk, for the Conservatives, believed that what was needed was "a great leap forward" from "a rather inefficient industrial free-trade area" and international cooperation to truly supra-national solutions; while Jens Maigaard (Communist, Denmark) believed that Kirk, though quoting Mao, showed signs of "classical Trotskyism" - "regardless of circumstances, the world revolution is about to start".

Perhaps the most optimistic speech of the whole week, however, came from Conservative Chairman of the Parliament's Regional and Transport Committee, James Hill (UK). There was a danger, he said, of the Parliament becoming "a Chamber of crumblers". "We have had an unfortunate series of events ... of course there is going to be frustration. But is this very different from national Parliaments? We must get out of the habit of talking ourselves into a depression."

The Community had succeeded in a number of ways. Though awaiting implementation, there was a regional policy, which was seen as a ray of hope in such places as Northern Ireland. Likewise a policy was emerging, as a result of hard work by the Commission and the Parliamentary Committee, in transport - an industry even larger than agriculture.

Indeed, the conclusions reached in all three major debates - for all their wealth of recriminations - were hopeful rather than otherwise. There was perhaps a feeling that all would be well once the political upheavals in France and Germany, which had so devastated the Parliament's sessions for two months, had given stability back to at least two Community governments.

From the debates

Worse for the British farmer?

One aspect of the Italian Government's recent measures to restrict imports and reduce inflationary pressures is of particular concern to the United Kingdom - the consequences for the European beef market. British members of the European Parliament returned to this point repeatedly during Tuesday's debate on the Italian question.

Apart from the energy crisis, James Scott-Hopkins (European Conservative, UK) pointed out at the beginning of the debate, Italy's main deficit was in the trade of meat. The restrictions would "have very difficult and dangerous results which will reverberate throughout the rest of the Community".

Italy's beef mainly came from Holland and Germany; and at present there was very little space available in Europe for beef to go into cold store. "The logical result is this - that if there is no market in Italy for our German colleagues' meat or our Dutch friends' veal it will have to find other markets; the other immediate market which springs to mind is, of course, the United Kingdom." With no intervention buying allowed, there would be a tremendous break in the market. "Then, of course, our beef farmers, who are having the greatest difficulty at the moment, will find it even worse."

The long-term danger, as John Hill (European Conservative, UK) later made clear, was that future domestic supplies would be jeopardised, as was the case with Italy. The meat pouring into Italy had undoubtedly deterred Italy's own producers, which had again aggravated her balance of payments.

Moreover, whatever the balance of supply and demand, "a good deal of this distortion of trade is coming from the operation of monetary compensatory amounts ..." These were not part of the CAP, but stemmed from monetary arrangements that different countries felt themselves compelled to make. John Brewis (European Conservative, UK) pointed to the danger that supplies from other member states "will be flooded on to the British market with a subsidy in the form of an MCA".

What were the answers? James Scott-Hopkins posed two alternatives. "Either you stop all third country imports of beef and veal into the Community for a limited space of time - if you do that you are, of course, asking member states to break their contracts ... or you are going to have to find some method within the Community of disposing of fairly large quantities of spare meat and meat products at low prices - maybe to the armed services, maybe to old people, hospitals and so on."

John Brewis, in addition, asked Commissioner Lardinois: "could we not use the EAGGF funds in a more flexible way, perhaps as a temporary loan to pay the surety so that the normal flow of the meat trade to Italy is not disrupted more than necessary?" Temporary individual carcass subsidies could also be paid out of EAGGF funds; and the Commission could look carefully at traders' profit margins.

The producer society

Unable to decide what to buy, urged to buy what he doesn't want, unable to choose between different makes of the same product, unable to judge quantity or quality against price, misled by packaging. This grim picture of the consumer entangled in today's consumer- or producer-society emerged from a debate on a report on proposals for consumer information and protection, presented by Parliament Vice-President Giovanni Bersani (Christian Democrat, Italy) on behalf of the Committee on Public Health and the Environment. A strongly worded resolution which both welcomed and sought to strengthen the Commission proposals on the setting up of a three year preliminary action programme was carried unanimously.

The report had set the tone of the debate by suggesting that as much television time should be spent on objective consumer information programmes as on advertising. The importance of safeguarding the interests of the consumer was also underlined when Commissioner Scarascia Mugnozza replied to the debate arguing that just as the citizen had the right to participate in the Community through universal suffrage and elections to the European Parliament so he had a right to adequate consumer information. Apart from proposing Community action, the Commission could also fulfil a useful role by bringing to the notice of one country models of legislation from another. The next day the chamber carried an amendment to a section of the Rossi report, dealing with agriculture and food prices, tabled by James Scott-Hopkins (European Conservative, UK) which recognised the need to take account of consumer as well as producer interests.

James Hill (European Conservative, UK) pointing out that he came from the first country to have a Minister for Consumer Affairs, said that legal protection did not mean that a government would mollicoddle the consumer. There was also the danger of harmonisation for harmonisation's sake. Outlawing "poultry dressed in the New York manner" would prevent the British consumer enjoying his Christmas turkey, for example.

Enough to drink

Drinking water was the subject of a debate on Monday 13th, introduced by Augusto Premoli (Liberal, Italy), 'rapporteur' for the Committee on Public Health and the Environment. A resolution adopted by the Parliament expressed general approval of Commission proposals for a directive on the quality of surface water for the abstraction of drinking water.

But saying that dealing with surface water, and then only that prior to the point of extraction was not going deeply enough into the problem, James Scott-Hopkins (European Conservative, UK) accused the Commission of lacking courage. In Europe as in the United Kingdom there was a shortage of drinking water despite a heavy rainfall. Water supply from one area to another, recycling, chemical additives, pollution - these should be the questions to be tackled rather than merely setting parameters for pre-extraction surface water. He advocated the setting

up of European water authorities. Luigi Noè (Christian Democrat, Italy) also spoke of the water shortage.

In reply, Commission Vice-President Scarascia Mugnozza said that the views expressed in the debate highlighted a political problem - how far the member states were prepared to go beyond the letter of the Treaty.

A future for the past

The crisis in Europe is not only economic and material but also cultural. The product of thirty centuries of man's creative and imaginative genius is now being threatened and impoverished by a variety of natural and human factors. This was the message from Lady Elles (European Conservative, UK) on Monday evening (May 13) introducing a report on behalf of the Cultural Affairs and Youth Committee on the motion for a resolution submitted by the Liberal and Allies Group on the protection of Europe's Cultural Heritage.

The deterioration of Venice, the toll of the second world war, the destruction of frescoes in a Roman palace to install a kitchen range, Etruscan pots turning up in Washington: these were just some of the examples of the threat to this heritage mentioned by speakers in the debate, strongly supporting the motion. Augusto Premoli (Liberal, Italy) suggested that one way to make people more aware was to hang works of art in hospitals, schools and hotels where many would see them for the first time. Michele Cifarelli (Socialist, Italy) thought there should be more exchanges of works of art for viewing. Jan Broeks (Socialist, Netherlands) said that it was not enough for governments to sign conventions - far more money should be spent.

Replying to the debate, Commission Vice-President Scarascia Mugnozza (deputising for Ralf Dahrendorf) said the Commission completely accepted the Parliament's resolution and in its role as the Community's driving and coordinating force would do everything possible in following up its recommendations. In particular, the Commission recognised the need for compiling a list of the works of art and antiquities which were scattered all over Europe. Protection of the heritage was of the utmost importance - "to be able to hand down something valuable to our children".

Question Time

Foreign policy and defence

How long will it be before foreign policy and defence questions which affect the Community, at present discussed by ad hoc meetings of foreign ministers, are brought within the ambit of the Community's institutions? Sir Douglas Dodds-Parker (European Conservative, UK) and Lord Chelwood (formerly Sir Tufton Beamish, European Conservative, UK) pressed the serving chairman of the Council of Ministers, Dr Hans Apel, hard for an answer, but without much luck.

"Does the Minister realise that this reply is highly unsatisfactory and shows that no progress has been made ...?" Sir Douglas Dodds-Parker remarked. "I can only agree with the questioner," Dr Apel replied, "... but then, the state of the whole Community is unsatisfactory, so,

naturally, the answers are unsatisfactory." "When," Lord Chelwood interposed, "can we look for some action instead of double-talk ...?" Dr Apel could make no promises. "No good purpose is served at all," he retorted, "by scolding the Council of Ministers, by criticising the institutions of the Community, making demands. The Council of Ministers reflects the difference of opinion and tensions which are brought into it from domestic politics." "We are all Members of national parliaments," Dr Apel concluded. "Make sure that in your own domestic field, as in mine, matters are tackled in a European perspective."

Portugal

A question for Schelto Patijn (Socialist, Netherlands) on future Community relations with Portugal produced a fine display of question-time tactics from Commissioner Sir Christopher Soames. Talks had been held with the Portuguese socialist leader Mario Soares, "but I cannot go further into saying what was talked about at that private meeting". Russell Johnston (Liberal, UK) wanted a Community initiative; Sir Christopher believed, however, that it would be "premature and foolish of me to talk at this point in time about what may be the situation under a new administration in Portugal which we have not seen in action".

Law of the Sea and fishing rights

Sir Christopher was able to reveal more, however, in reply to a question from John Brewis (European Conservative, UK) about the Commission's attitude towards the forthcoming law of the Sea conference at Caracas. "Our concept here is that the 12-mile territorial water limits should stay but that fishing rights should have a greater degree of control - shall we put it that way? A greater degree of control over fishing rights, with a view not only to ensuring the rights of the coastal state but also to give the coastal state an obligation with regards to preservation of fish stocks and the like, should be extended to 200 miles; but this would not, in our view, mean that no other nation would be entitled to fish within this 200 miles."

It was now up to the Council of Ministers to reach a common position on the basis of the Commission's memorandum - though John Brewis thought the Council had left this to "very later in the day indeed," in view of the fact that the Caracas conference was due to open on June 20.

Expenses—the last word

Members arriving in Luxembourg for the May session found themselves faced with the indignity of signing the attendance register right under the President's nose. This was the highly effective answer to allegations that some members (none British) had been signing in for colleagues, while others had been signing in and collecting expenses for whole sessions when only attending on one day. In addition to signing under the gaze of the chamber, the press and public galleries, members must now wait until the final day of a session before collecting those expenses.

European committees at Westminster

Both Houses of Parliament have set up committees to oversee European Community legislation, following the recommendations made by the Foster Committee for the Commons and the Maybray King Committee for the Lords.

The aims of the committees are to assist Parliament to identify those elements of draft Community legislation which are of particular legal or political importance to Britain, and to recommend what further action is required of Parliament. The committees may take evidence from ministers and other persons as necessary.

Announcing on May 2 the establishment of the Commons committee - the European Secondary Legislation Committee - Mr Edward Short outlined the other measures proposed to keep the House in touch with European developments, notably:

- Ministerial oral statements to accompany the monthly written forecasts of Council of Ministers business;
- Twice-yearly government reports to Parliament on Community matters in general;
- Two-day debates on these reports;
- Four further days of debates on Community matters;
- A special place for Community questions in the question-time rota.

Mr Short stressed that the committee and the other recommendations do not rule out further measures being adopted if proved necessary. The question of appointing an additional Law Officer to concern himself with Community matters is being also kept under review.

The present composition of the committee is sixteen - eight Labour, seven Conservative and one Liberal. Only the last, Russell Johnston (Inverness), is also a member of the European Parliament. John Davies (Conservative) is the chairman.

The House of Lords' European Communities Committee of 17 has similar functions, with Lord Diamond (Labour) as chairman. It too has a broad political balance, and the peer members of the European Parliament have been invited to attend its meetings. The Lords will also introduce other opportunities for European information and debates into their sittings. (See also the Luxembourg symposium, below.)

The future of parliaments

The growing complexity of modern government, the increasing resort to executive action based on delegated legislation and the practice of governments to decide policy in consultation with such outside bodies as trade unions and industrial representatives are among developments which cause disquiet to parliamentarians. But can parliaments adequately adapt to these changes and what further strains are being put on the traditional parliamentary role by European integration?

To seek answers to these questions over 100 parliamentarians from the Community's nine national parliaments and the European Parliament, parliamentary officials, national and European, and academics met at a symposium in Luxembourg on May 2-3.

Before the symposium were papers on each of the national parliaments, and others on the general problems of parliaments today, on cabinet responsibility, on different aspects of the European Parliament, and on the prospects for forming European political parties.

Author of the paper on Westminster is John Mackintosh, one-time Professor of Politics at Strathclyde University and Labour MP for Berwick and East Lothian in 1966-74.

Taking what some participants at the symposium considered to be an excessively pessimistic view of the role of the House of Commons, Mr Mackintosh's main criticism focuses on the inadequate weapons of control over the executive with which British MPs equip themselves.

THE WESTMINSTER ARENA

He describes the two main schools of thought about Westminster. The first maintains that the House is a political arena where supporters and critics of the government conduct their struggles, and that through this process the government comes to understand the political and public response to its policies.

The 'parliamentary reformers' on the other hand (amongst whom Mr Mackintosh is numbered), while not denying the value of the arena theory, argue that, under modern conditions, it is insufficient. The civil service lacks "an adequate countervailing power which could question its methods as well as its policies and take up grievances and approaches to particular problems irrespective of the overall merits of the government. In addition, in the process of legislation, it was important that some organised body represented the unorganised, the citizens, the taxpayers and consumers ,.."

"It was therefore necessary for Parliament to develop a variety of different methods of scrutinising, in addition to its main activity of defending and attacking the Cabinet."

The main method proposed by the reformers in the 1960s was the formation of a series of select committees, and several - in Mr Mackintosh's view - half-hearted attempts were made in this direction. Easier arranging of emergency debates and the Expenditure Committee survive, but the select committees on particular fields of policy have been abandoned. This was because, the author argues, the ablest MPs were more concerned to join than to restrict the executive and most MPs agree that the primary task of the Commons is to fight the party battle.

Nor is Mr Mackintosh satisfied with the select committees which have been set up in each House to oversee draft legislation (see page 8). Because the Commons has no specialised committee system to back up the European committee Mr Mackintosh argues the majority of draft EEC regulations cannot be gone over properly and they will have to be accepted by the House in the same way as it accepts the British executive's delegated legislation.

THE COMMONS' INABILITY

"Also, and perhaps worse, the House has no machinery for examining EEC policy where no legislative proposals are being made so that it cannot come forward and point out to the British Government where initiatives ought to be taken, where regulations are not 'political' just because nothing is being done and opportunities are being missed. In this again, the proposals mirror the Commons' inability to make positive proposals

on domestic matters and the House's position as an agency for defending or attacking the policies emanating from the executive. But what the Commons would do under such a procedure (probably better than other national parliaments) is to stage a limited number of highly dramatised clashes on disparate EEC proposals which were open to attack. A weakness of this, from the Community point of view, is that while this approach on domestic matters always finds the executive defending its own policies and backed by a majority of loyal MPs, on EEC matters, there may be attackers but no defenders as the Government may deny responsibility or keep saying simply 'this is the best we could get'. The result which is often negative enough even in national politics may be to focus attention on those Community policies least suitable for Britain while failing to highlight those that are beneficial."

Another British contributor to the symposium, Donald Chapman, a politician turned academic (Labour MP for Northfield, Birmingham, from 1951 to 1970 and now at the Centre for Contemporary European Studies, University of Sussex), shares some of Mackintosh's views. He argues that much of the complaint about the decline of parliament stems from a false view of what parliaments are for. It is a mistake, he believes, to conceive of parliament as being an alternative executive, following and examining every aspect of governmental policy, and in effect coming to justify that policy. Instead, a parliament should understand that it would be more effective by abandoning the false ambition of providing such an alternative executive and pursuing its true vocation, as he sees it, of representing interests in the body politic and of criticising and influencing the executive.

Historically, he instances in this role the gradual abandonment of the policy-initiation role of the US Congress and its development as a critic and investigator of executive (i.e. presidential) action, of which we currently have dramatic example.

CONFEDERAL EUROPE INEVITABLE?

In the European context, Mr Chapman stresses how the 'High Authority' concept of integration has gradually evolved into a confederal phase which he expects to continue for a long time to come - certainly until well after 1980. He is undismayed, for he is confident that the European Parliament has already gradually extended its influence over both the Council of Ministers and the Commission.

Whatever the limitations written into the founding treaties, the European Parliament is now consulted about all aspects of Community policy; it has direct relations with the Council, while the Commission now has a closer and more understanding relationship with the parliamentary committees. The parliament's influence is real if rarely spectacular, Mr Chapman avers.

As a result, those who see the Commission emerging as the European Government in embryo' are mistaken. "The gradual building of democratic power over the executive is proceeding most strikingly in the case of the Council, which shows no sign of 'withering away'. It is little use pleading that this is contrary to what the Treaty intended. The Council, in fact, is adopting the role of a confederal and collegial executive, with Commission technicians (originally given initiatory powers so as to keep up the momentum towards union) holding the departmental portfolios in economic affairs. The Council and Commission are both becoming responsible to the Parliament."

In this framework the author argues that the new powers which the Commission in 1973 proposed that the Parliament should from 1975 onwards are "quite revolutionary", particularly in regard to the power of co-decision with the Council and in determining the budgets for such future common policies as the overseas and regional development funds and environmental control.

But, he warns both as a former politician and a present academic, parliamentarians both European and national should act as representatives, not as Ministers manqué. The committees, for example, should avoid getting involved in too much detail, and should develop their antennae about public or group opinion on Community developments by holding frequent hearings with interested parties in the member countries.

Direct elections

One regrettable feature of the April and May sittings of the European Parliament - and one that has angered the press as much as Members - has been the vulnerability of the agenda to the domestic politics of member states. With German, French and Italian Members absent for various reasons, the May provisional agenda had to be drastically cut, and the sitting itself shortened to two days.

From the point of view of the Parliament's own prestige, Sir Douglas Dodds-Parker (European Conservative, UK) told the chamber on Tuesday, this procedural instability was dangerous. "Parliament should meet as scheduled and keep to its agenda." But recent experience also demonstrated, he went on, the shortcoming of the 'dual mandate' for European Parliamentarians. It strengthened the case for direct elections.

The Political Affairs Committee of the European Parliament is in fact already far advanced in drawing up a new Convention for the holding of direct elections. The responsible 'rapporteur', Schelto Patijn (Socialist, Netherlands) has held wide consultations with political and academic circles in various countries, and is likely to present his draft conclusions to the Committee before long. On May 9 he visited London, and attended a meeting of the all-party direct elections working party of the European Movement.

The introduction of direct elections was also one of the subjects discussed at the Symposium on the Future of Parliament in Luxembourg on May 3. Working Group 3, under Mr Patijn's chairmanship, discussed a paper by Prof. Richard Rose of Manchester University which dealt largely with the possible outcome, in terms of parties, of direct elections under various systems. He concluded that neither the number of seats in the Parliament, nor the relative weight accorded to member states would fundamentally affect the balance between the parties: Christian, Liberal or Socialist. Under any scenario, there would still have to be a coalition.

More generally, the group agreed with the conclusions which are already emerging as the main principle of Mr Patijn's report: that there should be the maximum of flexibility on the initial phase of direct elections, with discretion for member states in such matters as system of election and continuation of the dual mandate.

UNILATERAL ACTION PROPOSED

Quite separately from the European Parliament's own initiative (under Article 138(3) of the Treaty), draft bills have also been tabled in the Parliament of two more individual member states to hold direct elections, unilaterally, under Article 138(1). (The Parliament's composition is currently governed by this article. It requires Members to be nominated from Members of national Parliaments.)

The first of these is Britain. Lord O'Hagan, who sits as an independent Member of the European Parliament, has tabled in the House of Lords the 'Representation of the People (European Communities) Bill', which would provide for the direct election of Britain's current delegation in 36 'combined constituencies',

The boundaries of these constituencies would be fixed by a permanent Boundary Commission, which would produce its recommendations nine months after the Bill was passed. Voting would take place on the same day as the General Election for Westminster.

The two most controversial aspects of the Bill, however, are the system of election and the arrangements which would have to be made to accommodate the 'dual mandate' under 138(1).

Lord O'Hagan proposes that voting should be under the system of the 'alternative vote': ... "that is to say a vote - (a) capable of being given so as to indicate the voter's first and second choices among the candidates at the poll, and (b) capable of being transferred to the second choice ..."

Secondly, all those who are elected Members of the European Parliament and who are not Members of the House of Lords (Peers are able to stand) will become 'extra' Members of the Commons "with the rights and privileges attaching to a member of the House of Commons other than the right to vote in divisions ..."

Whether this Bill will become law is a matter of conjecture. In the other Member State, where a similar initiative has been taken, however, the chances of implementation are good. The Belgian Bill, which provides for direct election of the Belgian Delegation to the European Parliament on October 10, 1976 - that is, the same day as the 1976 communal elections - is supported by the Government and by a majority of MPs. The proposal differs from the O'Hagan proposal, however, in restricting nomination to existing Members of the Belgian Parliament.