

European Union: what is it?

On the evening of Thursday, July 10, after nearly two full days of debate, the European Parliament adopted the resolution on European Union which will form its recommendation to the summit conference later this year. Of those present, 72 per cent eventually voted in favour, including the European Conservative Group — earlier they had tried, with mixed success, to pass a number of moderating amendments. But the 18 Labour Members, sitting in the Socialist Group, abstained. "We recognise," Michael Stewart told the House in his maiden speech, "that we have come into this discussion at a late stage . . . because of a choice which our own party made."

During the debate, there was an acute consciousness on all sides of the need for realism: "in this field, perhaps more than in any other," Peter Kirk (Con/UK) noted, "there is a danger of the best becoming the enemy of the good." Mark Hughes (Soc/UK) pointed out that "resolutions in this august Assembly will not dig coal or harvest wheat"; and the chairman of the Legal Affairs Committee, Sir Derek Walker-Smith (Con/UK) reminded the House that "the corridors of history are littered with the waste-paper of abandoned academic institutions"; or as Danish Communist Jens Maigaard put it, of "endless fireside chats".

The resolution, rapporteur for the Political Affairs Committee Alfred Bertrand (CD/Bel) explained when opening the debate, fell into two parts. In the first he had tried to define "the finality of European Union": what it would do (competences) and how it would do it (institutions). Secondly, he had tried to list the steps that had to be taken immediately if progress towards Union was to be made; and of these the "real test" was whether direct elections to the European Parliament would take place in 1978.

It was on the early clauses of the resolution that most controversy developed. Few outside the Communist Group opposed the whole concept of Union as described (though John Prescott (Soc/UK) challenged "the fundamental postulations put forward in the report . . . that the bigger we are the easier it is to solve problems"). Nor did anyone envisage Europe becoming a unitary, centralised State (though Peter Corterier (Ger), speaking for the Socialist Group, believed that the Union should adopt many of the traditional features of a State, "above all a proper separation between Executive and Legislature"). But familiar differences emerged. For Peter Kirk, the goal "at the end of this long and weary pilgrimage" was "something like Switzerland". For Christian de la Malène (EPD/F) it was "an independent Europe, mistress of her destiny" but which would rest on, rather than transcend the Member States (in sum, de Gaulle's Europe). Gérard Bordu (Com/F) did not reject "the European spirit", but did reject "the spirit of IBM, of Krupp, of Schneider, of the multinational companies which, supported by the Member States, dominate society".

European defence

The greatest trouble, however, was caused by a clause which tried to list the future competences of the Union. First, there was the inclusion of "security policy", which provoked a sharp disagreement within the Socialist Group. Peter Corterier made a distinction between "security" and "defence" in an attempt to satisfy Danish, Dutch and Irish Socialist objections. Did it make sense, he argued, "to waste billions every year so that each country can have its own armaments policy"? Wouldn't this be better done in a European context? Others, however, took more clearcut positions. On one side, Michael Stewart argued that "if a Community defence policy means trying to set up another power bloc self-sufficient in defence, that would be impracticable to do and dangerous to attempt". On the other, Lord Gladwyn (Lib/UK) was firm that "foreign policy can in no wise be dissociated from defence policy, and that is the simple truth". At the vote, "security

policy" was retained.

But then objections were raised that education policy had been omitted. An amendment inserted it. In that case, pleaded Hans Edgar Jahn (CD/Ger), insert Health and Environment policy too. Perhaps in retrospect Parliament wished it had accepted Kirk's observations that "the moment one starts putting down a list of functions one either includes too much or not enough".

In practice, the debate produced a certain clarification of this matter. Leader of the Christian Democrat Group, Hans-August Lucker (Ger) pointed to two essentials of the Union: that it must raise and control its own financial resources; and that its system of law must have precedence over national laws. On the other hand, President of the Commission, Francois-Xavier Ortoli, explained with great clarity that the Union should not be "omnicompetent". Powers should be reserved at European, national, regional and local levels, according to where they were most effectively and democratically controlled.

All for direct elections

On the matter of institutions and on the programme for immediate action there was comparatively little disagreement. Virtually everyone was in favour of direct elections to the European Parliament, though some, like Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Con/UK), did not accept that the date of 1978 was the real test. Likewise, nearly all agreed with Peter Corterier that "we cannot ask the people of Europe to vote for a Parliament that does not really have a decisive influence over European policy". Winifred Ewing, speaking early in the debate as an Independent, was in favour of more Parliamentary power, but was anxious that Scotland should have no less favoured representation than Luxembourg. Several appeals were made to the British and Danish governments to lift their reservations on the elections (and the British Government has said that it will give its

views in the autumn).

On the matter of the proposed "single decision-making centre which will be in the nature of a real European government", there was more controversy. The Conservative Group was concerned — and had some success through amendments in ensuring — that the interests of the Member States would be safeguarded through continual Parliament-Council "concertation", but for Ortoli, there had to be a strong Executive — "and that's not playing ping-pong!".

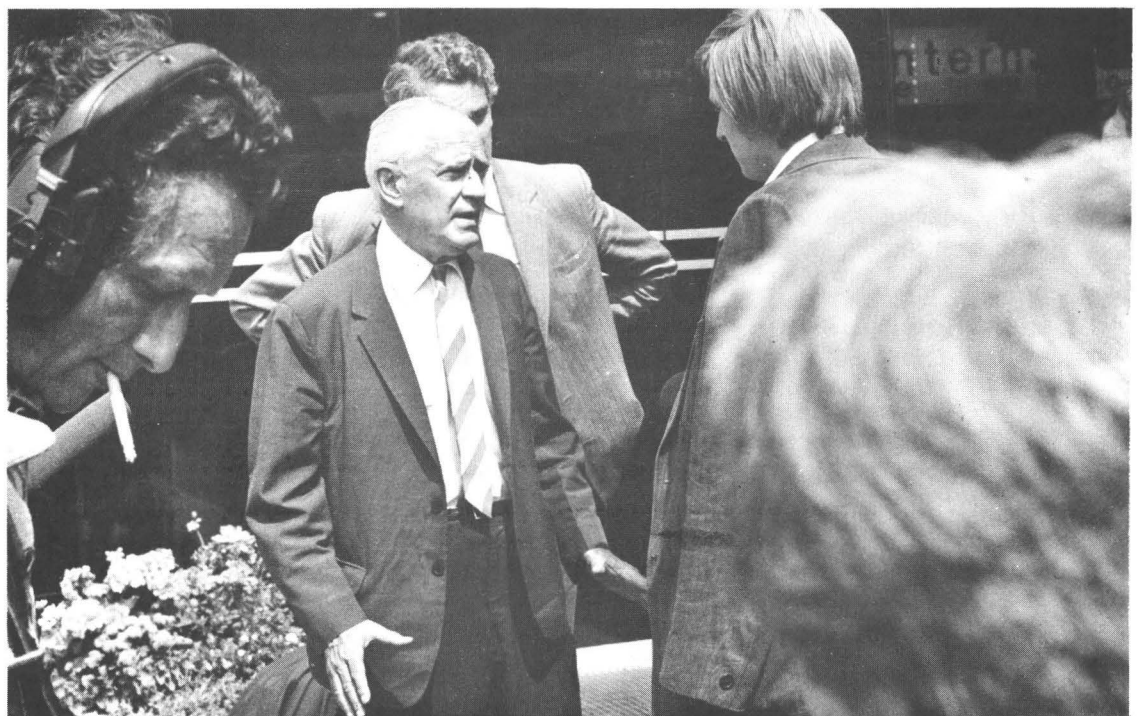
In the end, as Christian de la Malène pointed out, "every text has to be a compromise"; but more important than the resolution, perhaps, was the fact that the Prime Minister of Belgium, Mr Tindemans, who is acting as "rapporteur" for the Summit, had sat through most of the two days. It was he who, in a short contribution to the debate, declared that it was "up to the European Parliament to promote ideas and control their application".

Labour comes, Liberal goes

The July plenary session was noteworthy for the long-awaited arrival of 18 Labour MPs, also that of Mrs Winifred Ewing of the Scottish National Party, and the continued controversy over the Liberal Party's representation.

As the Labour Members were entering the Chamber on July 7 President Spénale was reading out their names and those of newly appointed Danish Members and he concluded — as is customary on such occasions — by asking if there was any opposition to their appointment. This gave the cue for Russell Johnston (Lib/UK) to repeat the British Liberal Party's complaint about having its numbers in the European Parliament halved to one. "As the sole British Liberal in this Parliament I have the task of representing 5¼ million voters by myself . . . more people than the total electorates of Denmark, Ireland and Luxembourg put together," he said.

This was, as it turned out, Russell Johnston's last speech in the European Parliament for that night at Westminster, following yet another failed attempt by the Liberals to retain two seats in the European Parliament, it was decided that Mr Johnston would give up his seat and that Lord Gladwyn would return to Strasbourg, at least for a few months.



French television interviews Michael Stewart on his arrival at Strasbourg.

LOOKING AFTER THE TAXES OF WORKING MEN

"This Parliament must get control of the purse strings," declared William Hamilton (Soc/UK) in a forceful maiden speech on Friday, July 11. Community expenditure was financed by "the taxes of working men" yet there was "a very disturbing lack of public accountability". Public opinion was behind Parliament's fight for "elected representation to control unelected bureaucrats."

Parliament was discussing the Treaty changes necessary to give a statutory basis for strengthened Parliamentary control of Community spending (see European Parliament Reports 3, 5, 6, 10 and 11) and the setting up of a European Audit Court.

Opening the debate, Budgets Committee rapporteur Erwin Lange (Soc/Ger) told the house that since national parliaments were no longer able to exert any control over the Council and the Commission, such control should be exercised by the European Parliament. The distinction between compulsory and non-compulsory expenditure was "artificial". Parliament should have a greater say in the procedure for raising Community loans and in the fixing of the VAT rate for the Community budget. If Council and Parliament disagreed over the latter, the new rate should be fixed by a three-fifths majority vote in Parliament (including more than half the number of Members) or unanimously by the Council, without abstentions. He hastened to add, however, that Parliament was not, as one Council President had suggested, a "spending machine".

For the Budgets Committee Mr Aigner (CD/Ger)

spoke of the need for the Court of Auditors to check the "terrifyingly high number of frauds" in the Community. Together with harmonised national legislation it could save the Community "hundreds of millions of units of account", he said. Parliament should have a say in the choosing of the Court.

How tough should Parliament be with the Council? Dane Knud Nielsen (Soc) argued that Parliament should accept Council's suggestions "without further changes". Danish Members can be reassured about the need for greater powers, replied Mr Dalyell (Soc/UK), because at present national parliaments cannot exercise control nor can national wills be respected. But Michael Shaw (Con/UK) and the European Conservatives thought that Parliament's "hard line" could wait.

On previous sparsely attended Friday mornings the well organised voting strength of the Conservatives had frequently been enough to get their way. But this Friday the addition of Labour Members to the Socialist Group was enough to ensure rejection of both Conservative and Progressive Democrat amendments.

Whisky and wine

"Late at night is a good time to drink wine, but not a good time to talk about it," vice-chairman of the Socialist Group, Jan Broeksz (NL), remarked during a discussion of the Parliament's agenda for the July session. Despite this, the House sat up until past two in the morning of Friday 11 discussing a highly complex report on steps to be taken to meet the current crisis in wine: the "wine lake", and the economic dependence on wine of so many rural areas in France and Italy. One result of the debate was a resolution calling for the elimination of national taxes which "weigh heavily on wine consumption" — for example, the high rate of excise duty charged in the United Kingdom.

"It escapes me," Commissioner Lardinois said during the debate, "why, when excise duties have to be charged in order to meet the cost of social services, these duties must be put on wine and not — just to take an example — on Coca Cola."

Here the British were on the defensive. But earlier, on Wednesday, they in turn had complaints to make about liquor taxes. During Question Time Belgian Liberal Norbert Hougardy had found it "curious" that in France you could advertise traditional French products like cognac, Calvados, rum, cointreau and Grand-Marnier; but not vodka, gin and whisky. Commissioner Lardinois said he would see what he could do. Scottish Conservative John Corrie welcomed this, but wanted to know "what progress had been made on the harmonisation of excise duties on Scotch whisky and other spirits?" "To this question," replied Lardinois, "I can give no answer." But perhaps there is the makings here of a deal.

Don't sit on it

All is not well in Community energy policy, as Commissioner Simonet reported to the House on July 8. Mention of oil sharing quickly brought British members to their feet. Tam Dalyell (Soc/UK) thought this a "delicate" matter especially as it raised the whole question of Community oil-production policy. A forthcoming Parliament report he said, stated that "as large a proportion as possible of crude oil consumption in the foreseeable future should be met from Community deposits". This involved the "gut issue" of the depletion of North Sea Oil. "Many people in Britain would take a more relaxed attitude towards a common policy on North Sea Oil if we were convinced that there was also a common policy to find alternative ways of creating the energy that we shall need from the 1990s onwards". John Osborn (Con/UK) thought that there should be a guaranteed Community oil market with a minimum price "so that the vast funds invested in the North Sea are secure and not

sacrificed to competition from outside".

Mr Simonet, however, was quick to upbraid the British Members for contradicting themselves. They had, he said, an almost psychoanalytic and obsessional passion for their oil and didn't understand Cartesian thought. "You cannot ask others to arrange a system of protection aimed at helping your oil production while at the same time insisting, whenever you are given the opportunity, that you want to keep it for yourselves". "Oil", Mr Simonet went on — as the house broke into applause — "is a bit like the bayonets of which Mirabeau said: 'You can do everything with them but sit on them'."

Another French author, Emile Zola, who described the tough life of miners in *Germinal*, was recalled by Gustave Ansart (Comm/F) during the preceding debate on coal policy. Mr Ansart bridled at the suggestion put forward by Parliament's Energy Committee that it be made easier for migrant workers from outside the Community to enter the coal industry "in the interest of security of supplies". Did Members realise, he asked, that migrants were being thrown to work in conditions resembling those of the last century when child workers were thrown at the feet of the machines of modern capitalism? Tom Ellis (Soc/UK) in the first Labour maiden speech, agreed. "To introduce migrant workers is no more than putting a plaster on the arm of somebody who is suffering from a serious ailment". John Osborn (Con/UK) co-sponsored with Mr Ansart an amendment deleting the migrant workers provision, which was adopted.

At least the Arabs listen

In the past it has proved surprisingly difficult to achieve a "European voice" on the situation in the Middle East; and these difficulties were well reflected in the European Parliament on July 8 and 11, during an emergency debate on the recent bomb outrage in Jerusalem. As Eric Blumenfeld (CD/Ger) explained when proposing a condemnatory resolution, the Community was in a position to take certain practical steps. A Euro-Arab conference on economic and other links was about to begin to which the Palestine Liberation Organisation sent a representative as an "expert". The P.L.O. had openly admitted responsibility for the explosion in Jerusalem which had killed or maimed a large number of innocent people. The Council and Commission should now make it clear that "we are no longer willing to negotiate with an organisation which uses terrorism as an instrument of policy".

There was, however, immediate opposition to the resolution from Peter Kirk on behalf of the Conservative Group. The act, he admitted, had been "a nastiness which I am sure demands the condemnation of all civilised people". Yet "it will be difficult to condemn one specific act of terrorism,

particularly at a moment when the Israeli Government themselves have just given a State funeral to two terrorists who murdered in cold blood a British Minister and his chauffeur — a totally innocent soldier — some 30 years ago". Most important, bringing an end to the Euro-Arab dialogue would mean jeopardising "one of the most fruitful initiatives that the Community has taken".

The debate was adjourned for three days in an attempt to produce a compromise resolution which did not threaten the Euro-Arab Conference, and this was eventually passed with Conservative and Socialist support. But former President of the Parliament, and spokesman for the Liberals, Cornelis Berkhouwer (NL) found it extraordinary that "there is no unanimous opinion of this House condemning a reign of terror". Even the compromise, however, produced strong protests from Arab governments and Council and Commission were subsequently reported to be hard put to it in Brussels to save the conference.

I only want to know

Mr Dalyell (Soc/UK): "I wish to ask an innocent question about something that is baffling some of my colleagues — why Parliament has to meet here in Strasbourg rather than in Brussels where the Commission is. If we are to be serious, as a scrutinizing Parliament, do we not have to make up our minds about this sooner or later — rather than having all those boxes moving backwards and forwards between here, Luxembourg and Brussels?"

New appointments

The completion of the British delegation has meant several changes of responsibility within the European Parliament.

Sir Geoffrey de Freitas (Socialist) joins Lord Bessborough (European Conservative) among the 12 Vice-Presidents of the Parliament. Apart from periodically presiding over plenary sessions, the Vice-Presidents form the "enlarged Bureau" (executive committee), together with the President and the chairmen of the six political groups.

Michael Stewart has been appointed Vice-Chairman of the Socialist Group and Tam Dalyell is a member of the group's bureau.

Sir Derek Walker-Smith remains chairman of the Legal Affairs Committee.

British membership of the Parliament's 14 standing committees is now as follows:

Political Lord Castle (Soc) Lord Gladwyn (Lib) Peter Kirk (Con) Richard Mitchell (Soc) Lord Reay (Con) J. Scott-Hopkins (Con) Michael Stewart (Soc)	Health, Environment Lord Bethell (Con) John Evans (Soc) Lady Fisher (Soc) Jim Spicer (Con)
Legal Sir G. de Freitas (Soc) Sir B. Rhys Williams (Con) Michael Shaw (Con) Sir D. Walker-Smith (Con)	Energy, Research, Technology Lord Bessborough (Con) Tam Dalyell (Soc) Tom Ellis (Soc) William Hamilton (Soc) Tom Normanton (Con) John Osborn (Con)
Economic, Monetary Lord Ardwick (Soc) Lord Gordon-Walker (Soc) Tom Normanton (Con) John Prescott (Soc) Sir B. Rhys Williams (Con)	Cultural, Youth Lord Ardwick (Soc) John Corrie (Con) Lady Fisher (Soc) Mrs E. Kelllett-Bowman (Con) Richard Mitchell (Soc)
Budgets Lord Bessborough (Con) Lord Bruce (Soc) Tam Dalyell (Soc) Peter Kirk (Con) Michael Shaw (Con)	External Economic Guy Barnett (Soc) Lord Castle (Soc) Hugh Dykes (Con) J. Scott-Hopkins (Con) Jim Spicer (Con)
Social, Employment Hugh Dykes (Con) Ralph Howell (Con) John Prescott (Soc) Michael Stewart (Soc)	Development, Cooperation Miss Betty Boothroyd (Soc) Sir G. de Freitas (Soc) Lord Reay (Con) Lord St Oswald (Con) Lord Walston (Soc)
Agriculture Mrs G. Dunwoody (Soc) Ralph Howell (Con) Mark Hughes (Soc) J. Scott-Hopkins (Con) Lord St Oswald (Con) Lord Walston (Soc)	Associations Guy Barnett (Soc) Lord Bethell (Con) John Corrie (Con) Mark Hughes (Soc)
Regional, Transport John Corrie (Con) Tom Ellis (Soc) John Evans (Soc) William Hamilton (Soc) Mrs E. Kelllett-Bowman (Con) John Osborn (Con)	Procedure, Rules, Petitions Sir D. Walker-Smith (Con) (Labour membership to be decided) Mrs Winifred Ewing (Independent) has yet to be nominated to a Committee