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## Parliament 'no' to fats tax

The dairy lobby failed in a renewed attempt on Monday December 13 to get the European Parliament behind the Commission's proposed tax on margarine. On a formal roll-call (unusual in itself, and doubly unusual on a Monday), the tax was rejected by a margin of seven votes.

The proposal — intended to balance the levy on butter surpluses — had been bitterly denounced by many Members during the September session; and had a rough ride through the Agriculture Committee (which changed its own view at successive meetings when attendance altered). But it was the final report presented by Jan de Koning (CD/N1) on December 13 which provided the first real occasion for MEPs to stand up to be counted.

Literally; for apart from the usual show of hands, the voting procedures provides also for sitting and standing votes and, finally, for a roll call. The first two methods are far from satisfactory and the standing-sitting procedure on that occasion provoked a bitter squabble with Vice-

President Michael Yeats (EPD/Irl) over whether a Conservative amendment had been carried or not. But when it came to the margarine tax names were called and the line up showed a mix between national, constituency and party interest. All the British Members present voted against the tax while all the French, Irish and Danes were in favour. The other nationalities split, with the Germans and Dutch mainly against, the Italians and Luxembourgers mainly in favour, the Belgians split 50-50.

So Parliament made its views known by 41 to 34, with two Dutch abstentions. Perhaps that merely encouraged the Council of Ministers, for once more they could not agree either a week later.

## After Lomé

"Only a few points of discord remain", said Commissioner Cheysson after representatives and delegates from the 58 signatory states of the Lomé Convention and the observer states had attended a meeting of the Joint Committee of the Convention's Consultative Assembly in Lomé, Togo, from December 1-3, 1976. The meeting, to discuss progress and problems in the working of the Convention and prepare for the next plenary Assembly, was also attended by the EEC and ACP Council and Consultative Assembly Presidents, and European Parliament President Georges Spénale (Soc/F); and was chaired by the Joint Committee Presidents Kasongo Mkurdji (Zaire) and Pierre Deschamps (CD/Bel).

If recent meetings of UNCTAD and the North-South dialogue had illustrated the broad differences that exist between developed and developing countries, this meeting served to show that, for some 50 countries at least, there is abundant good will to tackle economic problems together. After considering a report by Lord Reay (Con/UK) which high-lighted certain key questions, delegates discussed and agreed a common approach to solutions in the form of a joint declaration. This will be the basis of discussions during the next plenary session of the Consultative Assembly, to be held in Luxembourg in June 1977. In particular, the Joint Committee welcomed three new ACP members, the Comoro Islands, Seychelles and Surinam Republic and looked forward to the early accession of the Cape Verde Islands, Papua New Guinea and Sao Tome and Principe.

After expressing "satisfaction" with the application of the Lomé Convention provisions, they agreed on the need for the Stabex system of stabilising export earnings to be improved and enlarged; to improve information and consultation; to increase industrial cooperation; to take up the question of sugar price and storage in "a spirit of cooperation"; to seek extension of the special beef arrangements beyond 1977; to request implementation of the Lomé Convention banana protocol and to arrange for regular consultation with economic and social representatives to be coordinated with ILO meetings. The Committee also considered the effects of generalised preferences, regional and inter-regional cooperation, the situation in southern Africa, and how to improve on the "insufficient results" in UNCTAD.



Lomé at work . . . . .



. . . . . and play

## Aggro on Green Pound again

The difference between the Green Pound and the "real" Pound is worth 1.5 billion units of account (£625 million) to the UK in a full year, Commissioner Cheysson told Parliament at Question Time on Tuesday, December 14. Unfair to British and Irish farmers, complained James Scott-Hopkins and Ralph Howell for the European Conservatives; on the contrary, a Green Pound devaluation would be a disaster, replied Lord Bruce (Soc/UK). "Is he seriously asking my country of less than three million people", broke in Charles MacDonald (CD/Ir), "to subsidise his consumers, all 50 million of them?"; which in turn, during the emergency debate held the following day at the Conservatives' request, provoked new Member Frank Tomney (Soc/UK) to say: "it is one thing to kiss the blarney stone. It is another to bring it here with you" — adding that a million Irish people were resident in England.

## Eastern approaches

Has the Community finally got the Russians on the hook? This is the theme behind the Community's three month's notice to East European countries to get their fishermen out of the new 200-mile limit Community waters in the new year. But the Russian fish is wriggling, still refusing to recognise the Community as such (unlike China, Yugoslavia and Romania) and trying to equate its own Comecon organisation with the Community. The Nine are not having any of that: they are not comparable bodies in any way they argue in public, aware - as are the Russians - that this stance has the private support of other East European countries, which prefer bilateral links with the West. But even if the Russians are forced to negotiate fishing rights with the Community, how many gunboats has the Commission?

Meanwhile, in a debate on East-West trade relations on 15 December Council President Brinkhorst reported that the major Community trade surplus with Comecon (reaching \$3.3 billion in 1975) was now declining, while the heavy debts incurred to meet the eastern countries' hard-currency deficits (estimated at between \$26 and \$35 billion) were now stabilising.

## Another non-event

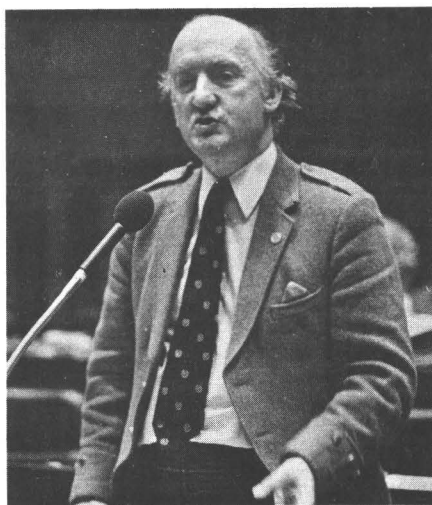
Laurens Jan Brinkhorst told the House nothing that it did not already know about the year's third meeting of the European Council, the institutionalised form that European summit meetings have now taken. But to read, in newspapers, that nothing exciting had happened in The Hague on November 29-30 was one thing. To have the lack of achievement spelled out was almost an act of provocation. Alfred Bertrand, the Belgian ex-miner who leads the Christian Democrat Group, Jean Durieux, French leader of the Liberals and Sir Peter Kirk, European Conservative leader put down a motion recording their lack of enthusiasm, especially as regards the Nine's failure to find common ground for the North-South Conference in Paris. Equally deplorable, they felt, was the lack of any bid to lick the social problems the Community is now facing. Sir Peter Kirk has always had doubts as to the merits of these summits: "It is a melancholy satisfaction to realise that those doubts have now been completely fulfilled", he concluded.

## More news from the fish war

Parliament returned on Friday to the unsolved Community fishing question, and, like the Council (who again failed to agree on the following Monday), were clearly divided. This was despite the strenuous efforts of Mark Hughes (Soc/UK) supported by James Scott-Hopkins (Con/UK) to find a compromise along the lines of the Socialist plan of October (see EPR No. 29). But Irish members still wanted a fifty mile exclusive zone: after all, said Brian Lenihan (EPD) other countries had coal and steel industries — Lorraine, the Ruhr, the Saar; the Irish had fishing. But this only brought a cry of "we too" from

Marcel Vandewiele (CD/Meth) who, together with Niels Kofoed (Lib/Dk) tried to sink the Hughes motion. Despite Altiero Spinelli (It) leading the Communists out of battle (abstaining) and an Irish inshore flanking amendment, they failed, however. Kai Nyborg (EPD/Dk) also saw the debate in military terms but remarked "what a time to table a motion"! What a time indeed — a good traditional British naval tactic. Mustering superior numbers, it being Friday, they just held the majority for Mark Hughes. A fresh battle is expected in January when Niels Kofoed is to present his report.

## "One of nature's gentlemen"



Russell Johnston (in kilt)

For a man speaking from under the shadow of a pending censure motion, Francois-Xavier Ortoli, retiring French President of the Brussels Commission, acquitted himself of his farewell address with something like brio. But then, as every one in the European Parliament seems to agree, he can look back over his four years in office with some satisfaction: the regional fund has been launched, the Lomé Convention signed and the British referendum successfully won. And these are all achievements in which he has played his part, not to mention the piloting through of changes in Parliament's budgetary powers and, awaiting ratification too, a decision that Europe's Parliament shall be elected directly in 1978. As Russell Johnston said, Mr. Ortoli is to be congratulated on what he has achieved and "for the manner in which he has achieved it . . . Mr. Ortoli is a man of tact, efficiency and kindness . . . one of nature's gentlemen".

## Steel, ships, cars and shoes

Issues of fundamental concern to the EEC, namely the flooding of the market with third country goods and the threat of aggravating the unemployment situation, were raised during the debate on John Osborn's (Con/UK) oral question on trade with Japan. All political groups agreed that priority should be given to the limitation of Japanese exports to the Community and for the expansion of the market in Japan for EEC goods. Commissioner Gundelach reported that Japan was to impose export restraints on steel producers. Two other major aspects of Japanese trade, ship-building and car production, were specifically seen in a British as well as a European context. The Japanese ship-building

industry, acknowledged Mr. Gundelach, was adding to the worldwide over-capacity, and subsequent threat of unemployment, experienced in this sector. Although bilateral discussions were about to take place, prospects in this sector were less promising. It seemed, however, from statistics that Japanese car exports into Britain were not increasing.

In order to promote EEC exports to Japan, largely concentrated on the footwear and processed food industries, negotiations had commenced with a view to restructuring the Japanese markets. Japanese testing of EEC cars to be exported to Japan would begin on April 1, 1977.

## Rule changes

On Thursday, December 16, Parliament voted through a number of rules changes, among them the composition of the Parliament's side at any "concertation" meeting with the Council of Ministers. It will:

1. consist of nine Members;
2. reflect the political balance of Parliament as a whole;
3. include the chairmen and rapporteurs from the relevant committees; and
4. be led by the Parliament's President or one of the Vice-presidents.

The "concertation procedure", established on March 4, 1975 (see the Community's *Official Journal* C89, April 22, 1975) is steadily growing in importance. It can be used not only in connection with the Budget, but on all proposals for legislation having financial consequences.

## Political files

At Question Time on Tuesday, December 14, Mr. Mascagni (Comm/It) put it to Francois-Xavier Ortoli, President of the Commission, that questionnaires recently distributed to Commission officials relating to their political views was a pointless infringement of officials' personal rights as upheld by the Treaty of Rome. But Mr. Ortoli cited Euratom regulation of 1958 as the legal basis for the enquiries, which currently involve some 450 officials having potential access to confidential documents.

He stressed that enquiries should continue to be undertaken in coordination with Member States' security forces and that information obtained would in no way constitute a "Berufsverbot" or jeopardise an official's advancement prospects. Parliament did not, however, obtain permission to examine the questionnaire.

## Budgetary powers

The Treaty of July 1975, which formalises Parliament's powers over the Community Budget, has now been ratified by nearly all the nine national parliaments. President-in-Office of the Council Laurens Brinkhorst told Parliament on Tuesday, December 14, that ratification was complete in the UK, Denmark, Luxembourg and Germany. In Belgium it was through the House of Representatives, and in France through the Assemblée Nationale. In the Netherlands both chambers had approved it, and ratification was expected in the New Year, as it was in Ireland. The draft treaty had gone to the Italian Parliament in September. As well as confirming Parliament's power to reject the Community Budget, the Treaty establishes new auditing procedures.



Ortoli's farewell

## Mobilising the disabled

Community finance to develop a standard vehicle for the disabled — a prototype is on the drawing board at Manchester University Institute of Science and Technology — was a possibility raised at Question Time on Tuesday, December 14, by Sir Brandon Rhys Williams (Con/UK). At present though, it doesn't appear to be on. Commissioner George Thomson agreed that the integration of the disabled into the community should be given high priority; but said that the Commission's policy was currently to promote more general programmes, such as a report on what Member States were doing themselves.

## Turkey aid

The Community is to channel ½ million units of account (£208,000), through the Red Cross to help Turkey's earthquake victims, Commissioner Lardinois told Parliament on Monday, December 13. Some 60,000 people in the Van region are struggling for survival in temperatures of -15 Centigrade; and to make matters worse (according to a letter in *The Times*) most of the victims are Kurds who do not even speak Turkish, the official language.

## Steel production curbs

With production curbs in the air (if not actually being spelled out by a Commission which can do this if the steel industry is in a state of "manifest crisis", several Members were anxious to know where the industry stood. Retiring Belgian Commissioner Henri Simonet indicated that the Commission was going to recommend voluntary curbs. This, he hoped, would restore the balance of the market.

## Concertation or collusion?

The 1977 Community budget was finally adopted by Parliament on Thursday afternoon, 16 December, but only after strong feelings had been expressed both on the floor of the House, in the Budgets Committee and between Council and Parliament in a "concertation procedure" meeting. The budget is made up as follows (in millions of units of account):

	mua	£m equiv
Agriculture	6,021	2,508
Social affairs	190	79
Regional fund	400	166
Research energy	236	98
Development aid	270	112
Dual exchange rate	560	233
Administration	386	160
Collection costs	583	242
Reserve	4	1
	8,650	3,599
Other institutions	148	61
Total	8,798	3,660

One hundred and fourteen Members raised their hands in favour once all the final amendments had been agreed on Thursday evening. One of the eight (seven against, one abstention) who did not, however, was the Budgets Committee's rapporteur Lord Bruce (Soc/UK), the abstainer. He did so because, in his view, the final deal done at a meeting between a Parliament delegation and the Council on the afternoon of the day before (Wednesday) amounted to collusion rather than concertation. He protested that

the idea of pressing for only 15 mua (£6.3m) for aid to non-associate countries instead of 30 mua, and 5 mua (£2.1m) for help for disaster victims, which brought the extra the Parliament was asking down from 186 mua to a figure more acceptable to the Council, seemed to have been neatly sewn up in advance in what he called Parliament's "corridors of power".

Referring in particular to a cut of 5 mua (£2.1m) made by the Council in appropriations in the hydrocarbon sector he said that President Spénale had told the Budgets Committee that without this concession to the Council he, as president, could not deliver a quorum in the budget vote. But, with the concession Lord Bruce said he had replied, that he, as Budgets Committee rapporteur couldn't advise people to vote "in a way that is objectionable to his Committee", either. He considered, moreover, that it was time Parliament stood up to the Council and Commission.

It is significant, nevertheless, that for the first time, the Council had come to Parliament for the concertation procedure meeting and not, as previously, the other way round. The final figure agreed still represents in a large measure recognition of Parliament's authority including as it does several major amendments upheld by Parliament against Council's earlier wishes. At the same time it remains well within the limits of Parliament's own powers of discretion (245 mua maximum) indicating a wish on the part of Parliament, as well as the Council to show moderation in the current difficult economic climate.

## Compromise on tachographs

One of the more important reports ever to be presented on a Friday morning — traditionally the preserve of UK Members waiting for the charter plan (see p.4) — was voted through Parliament on 17 December. It concerned the controversial Community rules on commercial drivers' hours — linked, inevitably, with the issue of tachographs or "spies in the cab". The Commission's new proposals will limit time spent continuously at the wheel by lorry drivers to 8 hours, and to 48 hours in any one week; and where there is not a proper "control device", the rules will be enforced by a 450 km limit on distance. Horst Seefeld (Soc/Ger) for the Regional and Transport Committee, welcomed the proposals; and so did Parliament as a whole, with one crucial amendment. As the rapporteur

pointed out, the UK, Ireland and Denmark are due to apply the existing 1969 regulations next year; but these are already obsolete. Hence the urgent need for the new proposals. In the light of the debate, therefore, a Conservative amendment to reject them altogether was withdrawn; and another amendment proposed by Mr. Seefeld himself was inserted which would give the UK and Ireland a possible derogation from the new rules of between one and three years. Commissioner Vouel promised to go into the legal possibilities of such a move; and meanwhile Transport Committee chairman John Evans (Soc/UK) said he would do his best to get the British Transport and General Workers Union to accept tachographs for their own good.

## It's over to you, Jenkins

The European Parliament has two sledgehammers. The first is the power to sack the Commission, the second to reject the budget. Both were to hand during the December session and some Members even thought of handling them. But they are so heavy that they need at least 100 Members to lift and to bring down on their respective nuts.

After the European Conservatives' abortive attempt last June to dismiss the Commission over the mounting powdered-milk mountain, an attempt to dismiss the Commission by the Christian Democrats in December, the very month that the Commission was retiring, was even less likely to succeed. Not that Heinrich Aigner (Ger), the prime mover, lacked a good case. Indeed, the refusal of the Commission to give up — or even to show

— to Parliament's budgetary control subcommittee documents about over-payments for malt subsidies was clearly its own responsibility, whereas it had been able to divert responsibility during the Conservatives' assault on to the Council of Ministers.

But the warning shot went across the Commission's bows and although the motion of censure was formally withdrawn later in the week, President Spénale reported to the house that he would arrange to meet the new Commission as soon as possible in the New Year to discuss the matter. As President-elect Jenkins is reported as intending to put a major emphasis on relations with the European Parliament he will be faced with a major issue of principle hardly before he has unpacked his bags.

# Unofficial Journal

From anti-Marketeer to crusading advocate of an active investigatory role for the European Parliament has been John Prescott's path over the past 18 months. So impressed have been the other Labour Party delegates that they have chosen him as their "convenor" in place of ex-Foreign Secretary Michael Stewart who has resigned from the European Parliament to head the Commons' Select Committee on Poulson corruption allegations. Mr Prescott has made his European mark on two themes: fishing policy, (properly enough for an ex-seaman and MP from Hull); and the multinationals, homing in particularly on the Swiss pharmaceutical company Hoffmann-LaRoche's alleged flouting of EEC law and on oil companies' bribes in Italy.

But he may convene his present colleagues only for a short time, for the 12 Labour Members of the Commons are to put their fate into the hands of their 302 fellows of the Parliamentary Labour Party before the European Parliament's 1977-1978 session opens in March. A new delegation will be elected by the PLP and the worry is that the choice of candidates will be limited as recent by-election results may not encourage Labour MPs to stray far from home. But John Prescott should not worry; at nearly 24,000 his majority is bigger than that of any other British MEP of any party.

## Red Castle

*It seems it takes a British peer to keep the true people's flag flying — at least for John Osborn (Con/UK), who referred during the Japan debate of December 15 to support from "the Social Democrats and Lord Castle".*

## Trouble with numbers

The evening of Thursday, December 16, was a bad day for quora. The Community's 1977 Budget got through all right, despite rumours of threats to block (see p. 2); but when it came to the votes on rules revision, Parliament began to suffer a grave haemorrhage of Members. A hundred or more votes are needed to amend rules, and at first count there were only 98; then Lord Ardwick (Soc/UK) rushed in to cheers; and soon two reports were through with votes of 101 and 105. Burly whips and officials stood menacingly at the exits as Members pleaded to be let out to the airport. But the dam broke while the last rapporteur was making some intricate legal point. Whatever you say, interrupted the President, it's no use — we're below 100. And that was that. "The next rule we've got to look at", commented Sir Peter Kirk (Con/UK) acidly, "is the rule on changing rules".

Later on, though, he might have given even higher priority to Rule 33. The Conservative Group tabled an emergency resolution on the treatment of companies in Ghana; but just before the vote, ex-

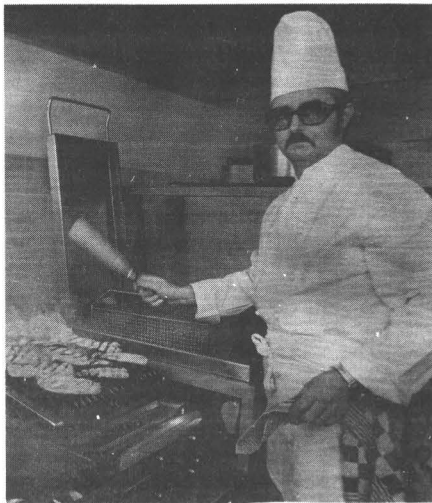
Commissioner Altiero Spinelli (Comm/It) and some Socialist Members leapt to their feet and demanded a count of the House (it appears that if, under Rule 33, ten Members do this, a quorum of 100 is necessary for *all* votes).

Dire threats of retaliation were voiced by the thwarted Conservatives as they left for dinner; but in fact they had the last laugh. The vote was taken at nine the next morning, while the Socialists were still in caucus, and the resolution passed without difficulty.

## Nothing to do with us

*British Members of the European Parliament have had to put up with some embarrassing questions following the publication in the 'Daily Mirror' and other papers of a story about a recent Strasbourg court case. It appears that a British guest at the Sofitel — a favourite resting place for members of the UK delegation — rang the night porter for two extra pillows, and got two call-girls instead: "pillow" being the code word used by the staff for this service. Fruitless explanations in bad French followed, the police were called, and the whole affair ended up in the news.*

*Perhaps this is the place to point out that the European Parliament is by no means the only international organisation using the "Maison de l'Europe" at Strasbourg — indeed that this is the headquarters of the Council of Europe. In any case, if you ask for a call-girl in Strasbourg, what you probably get since the scandal is an extra pillow.*



*There's hope yet for everyone who has slaved in a kitchen over Christmas and the New Year. Recognising the talents of a "specialist", one of the Community unions is calling for Parliament's Chef to be promoted.*

## Five-day week

Was it all a British plot to debate the Commission's bitterly-disputed proposal to tax margarine on the Monday and the equally controversial subject of fishing on the Friday of the December sitting? Hardly, for the Bureau of the Parliament, which fixes the agenda, has only three British out of 18 members. But the fact that two issues on which the British Members of the European Parliament had strong and — for once — virtually unanimous views would be debated at the two extremes of the week worried some

other Members when the order of business was confirmed on Monday 13 December. Jean Durieux (Lib/Fr), seeking to bring the fishing debate forward to an earlier day, commented that in general on Fridays only the British were present, waiting for their plane!

But debated on Friday morning it was, when there were, as forecast, some 20 British MEPs present — notwithstanding the demands of the vote of devolution the previous evening — as against 17 of all eight other nationalities put together.

That same Monday evening too, in the debate on the margarine tax, out of 77 Members present 26 were British, every one of them voting against the Commission's proposal. So, despite the recent calculation in *The Economist* that working hours at Westminster (for the Commons at least) are much longer than in other parliaments, the British MEPs are still more assiduous in their attendance at the European Parliament than some Continental colleagues. Or perhaps they just want to be that much freer of the crack of Westminster whips.

## Where's your bid, Brussels?

*Is Luxembourg learning fast from the French? The new Palais de l'Europe in Strasbourg was built in double quick time and its Chamber adapted to accommodate a Parliament of 410 as well as the Council of Europe. Now rumours are circulating that Luxembourg is planning to erect a "conference centre" alongside the Kirchberg Tower building with "a meeting room adequate for at least four hundred...."*

## Into darkest Europe

West Africa, where the Joint Committee has just met (see p. 1) used to be called "the white man's grave". But it wasn't fever which threatened to kill off the visiting European Parliament members and staff in December; it was modern Western technology — a Sabena charter flight. Before leaving Lomé an oil leak in one 707 engine was discovered. With no hope of a quick repair the British pilot (ex-RAF bravado?) decided to return regardless. So across the Sahara to Paris, the first stop. But when the engine was restarted there it required carpets of foam to douse the resultant flames — an unheralded spectacle for passengers who were still in the aircraft waiting to go to Luxembourg and Brussels. But this wasn't the end of the story. Some were rewarded by Sabena by being billeted in cushioned comfort in the local Sofitel (see above). . . only to suffer the irony of the morning flight to Luxembourg of being diverted to Metz in France. Not to mention the shiver of six inches of snow after the steamy tropics.

## Triumph of faith

*The first hard evidence that European elections in 1978 are really being taken seriously comes from Cardiff: the City Hall Assembly Room and the Sophia Gardens Pavillion have been booked by the Chief Executive between June 8 and 12, 1978 for the election count. (But rumours that head of the Cardiff Commission Office Gwynn Morgan has already been declared the winner are premature).*

**K.P.G.**